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David M. Freidenreich. *Foreigners and Their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. xvii + 325 pp. $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-25321-6.

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Food Polemics and the Crafting of Religious Identity

Freidenreich's book, a revision of his doctoral dissertation, argues that just as sharing food is an expression of hospitality and acknowledges a common humanity, a refusal to accept or share food is a sign of rejection and hostility. This refusal may stem from commensality restrictions that prohibit sharing meals with certain groups, or from preparer-based regulations that prohibit eating food made by certain others. Religious injunctions that demand such separation construct a powerful sense of difference. Accordingly, this study "focuses on laws regulating the involvement of religious outsiders in preparing or sharing food" (p. 6). Such foreign food restrictions prove very useful for thinking about the relationship between Us and Them and, in many ways, these restrictions function similarly to prohibitions on sexual intercourse with outsiders: that is, they seek to establish non-porous boundaries in the service of self-definition. Nonetheless, Freidenreich admits, religious texts and scholarly interpretations that result in foreign food restrictions do not tell us much about the degree to which food rules were actually followed. Therefore, his study "is a history not of social reality but rather of intellectual imagination" (p. 10). Through the intellectual imagination religious authorities across the three traditions that provide the basis for his work–namely, classical and medieval Judaism, Christianity, and Islam–have constructed imagined or hermeneutical foreigners through their discourses on food. Although Freidenreich's study does not extend beyond the later Middle Ages, he demonstrates convincingly the various ways in which religious authorities employ foreign food restrictions as a way of classifying humanity, differentiating those that are "not-Us, anti-Us, like-Us, or unlike-Us" (p. 25). The classifications and the food restrictions that illustrate them survive into the twenty-first century in some parts of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim worlds. Freidenreich's book, then, is an important contribution that will prove valuable not only for the ancient or medieval historian, but also for scholars engaged in a comparative investigation of contemporary religious cultures.

In fourteen chapters, Freidenreich explores chronologically the development (and utility) of foreign food restrictions for the construction of religious and social identity. Freidenreich begins with biblical and extra-biblical or Talmudic Jewish sources, and then turns to early Christian sources and their medieval reinterpretations. A similar pattern is followed in chapters that examine Islamic communities, beginning with Qur'anic sources and then passing on to *hadith* materials (which produce quite distinct outcomes for Sunni and Shi'ite communities).

His final three chapters present case studies. In the first, he explores medieval Islamic and Christian legal discussions concerning the acceptability of meat that has been butchered, but rejected, by Jewish butchers. In the second, he investigates medieval discussions of foreign foods that help to determine Islamic and Christian classifications, arguing, for example, that although Sunnis recognize in principle the permissibility of the foods of Scripturists (that is, People of the Book), both Sunni and Shi'ite authorities express concern that Christians, when slaughtering meat, invoke the name of Jesus, or fail to drain the blood from butchered meat as required by the Qur'an, thereby rendering their meat unfit for Muslims.

Similarly, patristic and early medieval Christian authorities generally reject the dietary laws of the Jews and proclaim that Christians have been "freed" from these laws. Thus Augustine asserts that true Christians regard all foods as pure, and, as a result, are themselves intrinsically pure. In contrast, he avers, Manicheans and other heretics distinguish pure from impure foods, a judgment that stems from a heretical understanding of Jesus. Later Gallic attacks on Jewish food practices, Freidenreich argues, assume that the Jews' dietary practices

embody their rejection of Christ. Therefore, despite a rejection of theologically based dietary restrictions, Christians should avoid meals with both Jews and heretics. By contrast, no Christian authority expresses concern about commensality with pagan gentiles (p. 117). Indeed, Christian resentment directed toward Jews leads to a sharp distinction between Jews and gentile pagans: Christians may eat with the latter, but not with Jews, since pagans do not condemn Christian foods and because they are less threatening, theologically, than Jews. A tendency among medieval Christians to view Muslims as "judaizers" will proscribe commensality with them as well. As a result, Christian interpreters, despite having been "freed" from biblical dietary laws, produce food rules that are as restrictive as those of Jews and Muslims.

In his last chapter and final case study, the author cites the sixteenth-century *Shulhan Arukh* to summarize rabbinic prohibitions on consuming or deriving benefit from wine made by gentiles, reflecting a system that classifies humanity into binary categories (Jews/monotheists and gentiles/idolaters). Even though medieval Jewish authorities recognized that Muslims and Christians do not offer idolatrous libations, most continued to regard them as idolaters, for practical purposes, with severe consequences. Jews viewed abstention from foreign wine as important to construct the social and religious boundary between Jew and gentile. The importance of this boundary may have only increased as Jews came to recognize Christians as monotheists, and therefore as not so different from Jews themselves. Thus, even when Ashkenazi rabbis acted against the community's economic interest, the rules they crafted prohibiting gentile wine served a social purpose.

In all, Freidenreich's book is a fascinating and useful examination of texts in which religious authorities reflect upon food rules to enforce separation between (or among) rival religious communities. Because his interest is comparative, his work does not focus upon strictly *internal* developments that influence food rules.[1] For example, he does not explore the significance of dietary rules in cenobitic or eremitic Christian communities of late antiquity or the Middle Ages, nor does he consider Lenten prohibitions that prohibited red meat or dairy products even for Christian laypeople. In the same way, he does not investigate internal medieval Jewish attempts to explain to Jews themselves the laws of *kashrut* by invoking contemporary medical theory or kabbalistic mysticism. Neither does he explore medieval handbooks on hygiene and diet (*regimina sanitatis*), which circulated among Islamic, Jewish, and Christian intellectuals. This is not necessarily a shortcoming. I merely point out that his interest lies elsewhere.

He does assert perhaps a bit too categorically, however, that medieval Christian authorities established a clear demarcation between Jews and gentile pagans, concluding that Christians may always eat with latter, although not with the former. But some medieval documents reflect ecclesiastical concern over specific meats associated with pagans as well, regardless of who prepared or butchered them. Thus, Pope Gregory III in 732 declared eating horsemeat–a food associated with pagan gentiles–an abomination. Similarly, some Christian authorities expressed concerns over the hare, which was sometimes condemned because it was perceived to be an especially lubricious animal, and therefore its avoidance as food became a symbol of one's moral character.[2] And, finally, some Christian penitentials from as late, perhaps, as the ninth century, continue to recommend the practical benefit of Jewish dietary rules, in contrast to a more general theological condemnation. These instances notwithstanding, Freidenreich's book remains a very fine study.

Notes

[1]. For which one may consult David Grumett and Rachel Muers, *Theology on the Menu: Asceticism, Meat and Christian Diet* (London: Routledge, 2010).

[2]. Bruno Laurioux, "Le lièvre lubrique et la bête sanglante. Réflexions sur quelques interdits alimentaires du haut moyen âge," in *Anthropozoologica. Second Numéro spécial: bulletin de l'Association l'homme et l'animal, Société de recherche interdisciplinaire* (Liège: Anthropozoologica, 1988), 127-32.

[3]. See Rob Meens, "A Penitential Diet," in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*, ed. Miri Rubin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 144-50.

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