THE JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, Vol. 100, No. 1 (Winter 2010) 95–110

"Why Do You Refuse to Eat Pork?" Jews, Food, and Identity in Roman Palestine

JORDAN D. ROSENBLUM

THE COMEDIAN WOODY ALLEN once said, "Why pork was proscribed by Hebraic law is still unclear, and some scholars believe that the Torah merely suggested not eating pork at certain restaurants."[1] Allen's humorous observation about the dietary practices of some modern American Jews points to the resonance of a particular culinary abstention—the prohibition against pork. Comments about this dietary regulation, however, are far from a modern phenomenon. Both Jewish and gentile discussions about the absence of pig from the Jewish table survive from antiquity. While Greek and Roman sources consider the absence of pig to be a marker of Jewish cuisine (and thus Judaism), early Jewish and rabbinic sources see the *presence* of pig to be a marker of non-Jewish cuisine (and thus *not* Judaism). As such, beginning in antiquity, pork becomes a perspectival marker of Self and Other with respect to Judaism.

According to the anthropologist Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, for food to function as a metaphor of "Self," it requires "two interlocking dimensions. First, each member of the social group consumes the food"—to which I would add, or does *not* consume the food—"which becomes part of his or her body. The important food becomes *embodied* in each individual. It operates as a *metonym* for being part of the self. Second, the food is"—or is *not*—"consumed by individual members of the social group who

Earlier versions of this essay were presented at Yale University and University of Wisconsin-Madison. I would like to thank those audiences for their comments, as well as Steven Larson, Michael Satlow, Daniel Ullucci, and the anonymous reviewers at *JQR*.

1. Woody Allen, *Getting Even* (New York, 1971), 67.

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eat the food together."[2] By refusing to eat pig, Jews are never able to ingest Romanness and thus can never truly become Roman. On the other hand, according to some rabbinic sources, because Romans eat pig they are, as such, embodied as pigs. Once again, to quote Ohnuki-Tierney: "The beauty and purity of *we* are *embodied doubly in the body of the people and in the food that represents them*, and, conversely, the undesirable qualities of the other are embodied in *their* foods and foodway."[3] The act of eating pork is thus understood as embodying, but the individual and corporate body that this practice creates is construed as positive by Roman sources and negative by early Jewish and rabbinic sources.

Although often mentioned among other practices (for example, circumcision) and in connection with other peoples (for example, Egyptians), Greek and Roman sources consider the absence of a single menu item to be one of the key markers of a practice-based Jewish identity.[4] Early Jewish and rabbinic sources second this opinion, using the ingestion of pig as a symbol for the Other and the noningestion of pig as a symbol for Self. This essay explores how these ancient sources construct identity around a specific dietary practice.[5]

GREEK AND ROMAN SOURCES

Zooarchaeological remains suggest that pork consumption in ancient Palestine increased significantly during the late Hellenistic and Roman periods.[6] Pork is one of the most common meats associated with the residents

2. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities through Time* (Princeton, N.J., 1993), 129–30, original emphasis.

3. Ibid., 131, original emphasis.

4. On food as identity in tannaitic literature in general, see Jordan D. Rosenblum, "'They Sit Apart at Meals': Early Rabbinic Commensality Regulations and Identity Construction" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2008).

5. It is worth noting that, based on the nature of our extant literary evidence, the practices described and/or prescribed in these texts should be understood as constructing a specific Roman or Jewish identity. The extent to which one can generalize about *all* Romans and Jews living in Palestine during the period of composition and redaction of these texts is uncertain.

6. See Billy Grantham, "A Zooarchaeological Model for the Study of Ethnic Complexity at Sepphoris" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1996); Brian Hesse and Paula Wapnish, "Can Pig Remains Be Used for Ethnic Diagnosis in the Ancient Near East?," in *The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present*, ed. N. A. Silberman and D. Small (Sheffield, 1997), 238–70; and Justin Lev-Tov, "'Upon What Meat Doth This Our Caesar Feed . . . ?': A Dietary Perspective on Hellenistic and Roman Influence in Palestine," in *Zeichen aus Text und Stein: Studien auf dem Weg zu einer Archaeologie des Neuen Testaments*, ed. S. Alkier and J. Zangenberg (Tübingen, 2003), 420–46.

of Rome in particular.[7] Extant literature further buttresses the material evidence. For example, the assumption that pigs are quintessentially Roman led Varro, writing in the 30s B.C.E., to comment, in a context unrelated to Jews: "Who of our people [i.e., Romans] cultivates a farm without keeping swine?"[8] Varro's comment implies that the practice of swine herding is ubiquitous among (at the very least, wealthy, elite) Romans.[9] Suggesting a connection between farm and plate, Apicius's famous (though not unproblematic) cookbook includes a wide variety of recipes for pork.[10] The pig was also one of the four most commonly sacrificed animals throughout the Roman Empire (along with the bull, the sheep, and the goat). This point is not inconsequential, as sacrificial rituals culminate with a banquet, wherein the offering was communally consumed. Further, the pig plays a prominent role in an important sacrifice for the city of Rome itself: the *suovetaurilia*. The *suovetaurilia* is an offering to the deity Mars consisting of a pig (*sus*), a ram (*ovis*), and a bull (*taurus*). This sacrifice is offered as part of public and private purification rituals. In particular, it is a key component of the act of consecrating land to the Roman gods.[11] Therefore, the very process that transfers private land to the Roman public and its gods requires a purification ritual involving a pig. Obviously, the idea that a pig could serve any role in a purification ritual is anathema to their Jewish contemporaries.

The majority of Greek and Roman texts that comment upon the Jewish aversion to pig can roughly be divided into two categories: as making either "casual reference" to or providing "ethnographic explanation" for this peculiar culinary behavior.[12] To offer but one example among many, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus notes:

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7. For a brief overview of the Roman meat trade, which references the prominence of pork (both domesticated pig and wild boar), see Joan Frayn, "The Roman Meat Trade," in *Food in Antiquity*, ed. J. Wilkins, D. Harvey, and M. Dobson (Exeter, 1996), 107–14. In contrast to the Roman evidence, according to mBK 7.7 (ed. Albeck, 4:39), Jews are forbidden to even raise pigs anywhere (i.e., this law does not apply just to the land of Israel). Amoraic literature offers an "historical" interpretation of this prohibition (bBK 82b; yTa'an 4:5, 68c).

8. *On Agriculture*, 2.4.3.

9. See Peter Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (New York, 2002), 17.

10. See Barbara Flower and Elisabeth Rosenbaum, *The Roman Cookery Book: A Critical Translation of* The Art of Cooking *by Apicius for Use in the Study and the Kitchen* (Toronto, 1958), 113, 115, 117, 127, 135, 143–45, and 157–69.

11. For example, see *CIL* VI:2107, ll. 2–13 (*ILS* 5048); Cato, *On Agriculture* 141; Tacitus, *Histories* 4:53.

12. Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1997), 69–77.

> This is the conflict between Jews and Syrians and Egyptians and Romans, not over the question whether holiness should be put before everything else and should be pursued in all circumstances, but whether the particular act of eating swine's flesh is holy or unholy.[13]

Here, Epictetus makes a casual reference as part of his larger Stoic polemic about the importance of virtue above all else[14]—simply noting that Jews, Syrians, Egyptians, and Romans disagree over whether or not one can eat pig.

While this text, along with several others, including the Greek Magical Papyri, displays awareness that the Jews are not the only ancient group with a pork taboo,[15] this peculiar culinary behavior is associated especially with the Jews. In fact, the trend of identifying the abstention from pork as a specifically Jewish foodway increases diachronically, culminating in the Roman satirists, as we will see below. Alongside circumcision and Sabbath observance, the prohibition against pork is considered one of the clearest identifiers of what a Jew does and, as such, who is a Jew. As if anticipating modern social anthropology, some ancient authors sought social explanations for these behaviors. For example, Tacitus suggests:

> To establish influence over the people for all time, Moses introduced new religious practices, quite opposed to those of all other religions. The Jews regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand, they permit all that we abhor . . . They abstain from pork, in recollection of a plague, for the scab to which this animal is subject once afflicted them.[16]

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13. Arrianus, *Dissertationes*, I.22.4 (ed. M. Stern 1:542). All Greek and Latin translations are from Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem, 1976).

14. As my colleague Daniel Ullucci points out to me, "His polemical point is that these people are foolish to think what they eat matters when only virtue matters—a classic Stoic trope" (personal communication).

15. E.g., Egyptians: Sextus Empiricus, *Hypotyposes* 334:222 (ed. M. Stern 2:159); Celsus Philosophus, *The True Doctrine* 41 (ed. M. Stern 2:286); Phoenicians: Porpyrhy, *De Abstinentia* I.14 (ed. M. Stern 2:433–34); Syrians: Damascius, *Vita Isidori* 227 (ed. M. Stern 2:675–77); Greek Magical Papyri: PGM IV:3007–3086, intended for people possessed by daimons, includes the instructions not to eat pork alongside the fact that the charm is Hebraic in origin. Yet, it should be noted that the Greek Magical Papyri also reflect a knowledge of a pork taboo in Egyptian culture (see PGM I:105).

16. *Historiae* 5:4.1–2 (ed. M. Stern 2:25). Tacitus further notes, "They sit apart at meals and they sleep apart, and although as a race, they are prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women; yet among themselves nothing is unlawful. They adopted circumcision to distinguish themselves from other peo-

According to Tacitus' pseudohistorical reading, Moses constructed a contrarian identity for the Jews, specifically designated as "not Us." As Cristiano Grottanelli aptly observes, "An ancient and consistent series of porcine *topoi* . . . was used by Greek and Romans to answer the difficult question: 'What is the identity of the Jews?' by answering the apparently more specific, and thus seemingly easier question: 'Why do Jews avoid eating pork?'"[17] The fact that several Roman authors honed in on a culinary difference between themselves and Jews and then used it to emphasize the differences in general between Romans and Jews is unsurprising, as numerous cross-cultural studies attest to the prevalence of food as a key discursive site for boundary formation.[18]

In comparison to the majority of sources that either make "casual reference" to or offer an "ethnographic explanation" for Jewish abstinence from pork, the Roman satirists, writing in the first century C.E. and following, offer a distinct perspective.[19] From Petronius's comment about Jews worshipping a "pig-god,"[20] to Juvenal's contention that, in Palestine, "a long established clemency suffers pigs to attain old age,"[21] to the significantly later Macrobius's preservation of an Augustus quip, that he would, "rather be Herod's pig than Herod's son,"[22] Peter Schäfer concludes that comments about Jewish abstinence from pork are more prominent in Latin texts than in Greek texts and that, while most of these are neutral or simply ethnographic in tone, the Roman satirists—particularly Petronius and Juvenal—"use the motif of the pig with an anti-Jewish bias."[23] Louis Feldman agrees with this general principle, noting:

> The Romans, in particular, were fond of pork, as we see from the fact that Latin has more terms to refer to swine than to any other animal.

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ples by this difference" (5:2; ed. M. Stern 2:26). On skin disease as the Jewish reason for abstention from pork, see also Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 5.3 (ed. M. Stern 1:556).

17. Cristiano Grottanelli, "Avoiding Pork: Egyptians and Jews in Greek and Latin Texts," in *Food and Identity in the Ancient World*, ed. C. Grottanelli and L. Milano (Padova, 2004), 82, original emphasis.

18. To offer just a few excellent examples: Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study of Comparative Sociology* (New York, 1982; repr. New York, 1996); Ohnuki-Tierney, *Rice as Self*.

19. Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, 77–81.

20. *Fragmenta* 37, line 1 (ed. M. Stern 1:444).

21. *Saturae*, 6.160 (ed. M. Stern 2:99–100).

22. *Saturnalia* 2, 4:11 (ed. M. Stern 2:665), which dates to the fifth century C.E.

23. Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, 193, 81.

> Indeed, the abstinence from their national dish must have struck the Roman nationalists much as a deliberate abstention from roast beef would have affected an English citizen in our day who believes that patriotism and roast beef are somehow connected.[24]

While I am unsure of the empirical basis for Feldman's claim that Latin has more words for swine than any other animal, his overall point about the connection between pork consumption and Roman identity is well taken. In short, the Latin satirists bring into relief two main points: (1) the absence of pig from the Jewish table is assumed knowledge on the part of several authors (and their audience, as the satirists' ability to mock this behavior depends upon the audience's ability to get the joke); and (2) this peculiar culinary practice is considered to be an identifiable marker of "Jew" and "Roman."[25]

JEWISH AND RABBINIC SOURCES

When the Roman emperor Gaius reportedly asks the famous Alexandrian Jew Philo "Why do you refuse to eat pork?" his question, which inspired the title for this essay, is met with laughter by those present.[26] Despite the rational answer provided by Philo and his embassy, the fact that Gaius's question is considered humorous underscores the role that the practices

24. Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* (Princeton, N.J., 1993), 167. See also Erich S. Gruen, who states: "In general, then, the Jews' exclusion of pork from their diet provoked perplexity, much misinformation, and a lot of amused disdain" (*Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* [Cambridge, Mass., 2002], 51). Feldman's assertion about the connection between the English and roast beef is supported by Claude Fischler's observation that "Roastbeefs" is a slang term to refer to the British ("Food, Self and Identity," *Social Science Information* 27.2 [1988]: 275–92, 280).

25. A humorous modern analogue can be found in a television advertisement for Dunkin' Donuts. To mock the implied elitism of Starbucks customers, a jingle recites gibberish Starbucksian-jargon for ordering a beverage and then exclaims: "My mouth can't form these words./My mind can't find these words./Is it French or is it Italian?/Perhaps Fritlain?" The great irony of these ads, that the product being sold by Dunkin' Donuts and ordered in "English" is a latte (and hence, a word of Italian origin), is presumably ignored by this advertisement's target demographic: namely, those who think that Starbucks is too elitist and, hence, that Dunkin' Donuts is the coffee of the working class. For an interesting discussion about Dunkin' Donuts, Starbucks, and class identity, see Mike Miliard, "Thinkin' about Dunkin': How One Little Post-War Doughnut Shop Became Synonymous with Boston's Identity," *Providence Phoenix*, March 9–15, 2007, 69.

26. *Legatio ad Gaium* 361. In fact, Philo notes that the ensuing laughter annoys the emperor's servants, who consider it indecorous.

of pork abstention and ingestion play in Jewish and Roman identity in these texts.[27] Philo's reputed interaction with Gauis points toward a key difference vis-à-vis pork and identity in Roman versus early Jewish and rabbinic sources. While Roman texts either casually note or mock the Jewish pork taboo, these sources neither describe explicit interactions with particular Jews nor transform the pig into a metonym. Early Jewish and rabbinic sources, however, do both.

The pig plays a central role in early Jewish texts describing the loss of Jewish autonomy over Jerusalem. In these sources, the pig is used to mark the imposition of foreign control upon Jews in Jerusalem. Several texts from the Second Temple period equate the ingestion of pork with the submission to foreign domination. 2 Maccabees 6.18–7.42 records that, presented by Antiochus IV with the option of either eating pork or being tortured and killed, both the scribe Eleazar and a family of eight (seven brothers and a mother) choose death. *4* Maccabees elaborates extensively on these two tales, devoting almost the entirety of its text to them (chapters 5–18). Antiochus's alleged decree calling for daily pig sacrifice on newly established altars throughout the region is presumably another instance of forcing Jews to ingest pork, as animal slaughter inevitably leads to individual or communal consumption of the sacrificial victim.[28] Philo reports that, during a pogrom in Alexandria in 38 C.E., mobs captured Jewish women and force them to eat pork.[29] Those who ingest the pig meat—thus symbolically submitting to Egypt's Roman prefect Flaccus (and, by extension, to Rome) via an act of ingesting the metonymic food of the empire—are let go; those who follow the example of their ancestors in 2 and *4* Maccabees are tortured.[30] Regardless of the veracity of these accounts, the underlying assumption is that compelling Jews to ingest pork directly equates with compelling Jews to become acceptable Romans.[31] While these various Jewish authors might embel-

27. *Legatio ad Gaium* 362. For Philo's philosophical defense of the pork taboo in Mosaic law, see *De Specialibus Legibus* 4.101, 106–108 (cp. *Letter of Aristeas* 153–55). The veracity of Philo's claim is irrelevant; either way, the fact remains that Philo's audience presumably understands why Gaius's court would laugh at this question. Humor in the form of irony perhaps also plays a part in Mark 5.1–20 (= Matthew 8.28–34; Luke 8.26–39), when Jesus casts unclean spirits out of a man and into a herd of swine (unclean beasts!).

28. 1 Macc 1.44–50; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 12.253; 13.243; cp. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* XXXIV–XXXV, 1:3–4 (ed. M. Stern 1:183).

29. *In Flaccum* 95–96.

30. The gendered component of this series of texts as a whole deserves further attention. However, it is beyond the scope of this current project.

31. In a perhaps coincidental note, the tenth legion of the Roman army (the Legio X Fretensis)—*nicknamed "the boar"*—participated in the Roman military

lish (or even simply invent) historical facts, the very fact that they consider the forced consumption of pork to be a practice that affects Jewish identity highlights the fact that, at least for some Jews, the ultimate moment of Jewish submission to external rule is the ingestion of pork. In that instance, the Jew loses a key component of the rhetorically constructed, practice-based Jewish identity. Rather than risk the complete collapse of that identity, both Jewish and non-Jewish texts state that at least some Jews would rather die than eat pork.[32] However, as David Kraemer correctly reminds us, it is unclear from these sources whether pork was actually abhorred by Jews significantly more than other nonkosher animals such as, for example, the camel (an animal which I will soon discuss), or whether pork was simply the most common nonkosher meat that a Jew in Roman Palestine would encounter and, as such, was the most obvious (and hence, over time, metonymic) food from the vantage point of both Jews and non-Jews.[33]

Rabbinic texts expand greatly on the connection between pig and foreign domination.[34] In particular, rabbinic sources cement the metonymic

response to the Great Revolt (e.g., Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.269–70 [which discusses the legion's military prowess]; 6.237–43 [which notes that the commander of this legion took part in talks about the fate of the Temple]). I thank Tessa Rajak for bringing this to my attention.

32. According to Schäfer (here commenting on the passage from Diodorus): "The most radical way to annihilate these *nomima* [i.e., perceived Jewish misanthropy and xenophobic laws] would be to do exactly what the Jews most abhor: to sacrifice sows and to eat their flesh. The sacrifice of a pig in the Temple and the eating of pork are seen here as the most extreme perversion of the Jewish religion in order to exterminate once and for all their *misanthropia*. The prohibition against eating pork is the embodiment of *misanthropia*; once the Jews eat pork, they have given up their *misoxena nomima* [xenophobic laws] and will become like any other nation" (*Judeophobia*, 67). Thus, if there is an historical kernel to any of these stories, it would then also buttress my claim that non-Jews viewed the abstention from pig as a central practice that constructs Jewish identity.

33. David Kraemer, *Jewish Eating and Identity through the Ages* (New York, 2007), 31.

34. While it is slightly beyond the purview of this article, which focuses on Rome, ingestion of pig is used to demarcate ingestion of otherness (vis-à-vis rabbinic Judaism in general) beginning in tannaitic literature. Thus, according to tHor 1.5 (ed. Zuckermandel, p. 474), a Jew who eats pork is explicitly labeled an "apostate." This viewpoint has a biblical precedent, as apostate Israelites are described in Is 65.4 as eating "the flesh of swine, with broth of unclean things in their bowls" (text emended based upon the *kere*). Further, in several instances, to be a non-Jew means to eat pig. For example, Mekilta d'Rabbi Ishmael *Nezikin* 18 (ed. Horowitz-Rabin, p. 311) refers to converts as previously having "pig-meat between [their] teeth." These newly minted Jews are imagined as having

association between the pig and Rome. One notable example appears in the midst of rabbinic recollections of the first century B.C.E. fratricidal battle for succession between Hyrcanus II (the elder brother) and Aristobulus II, wherein pigs are used as weapons in war.[35] According to the first-century C.E. Jewish historian Josephus, these two brothers fought over succession to the Hasmonean throne, vacated by the death of their father Alexander Yannai. In an ill-conceived strategy, they both appealed to Rome. In 63 B.C.E., Emperor Pompey arrived on the scene and, deciding to back Hyrcanus II (who had originally held the position of high priest and, upon his father's death, was named his heir, prompting his brother's attack), captured Aristobulus II in Jerusalem and took him back to Rome. Hyrcanus II once again became the high priest but was deprived of the title of king. Thus began Roman rule over Palestine.[36]

In the Babylonian Talmud, this intrafamilial battle for succession is retold. However, the role of Rome is now played by a pig:

> Our rabbis taught: When the kings of the Hasmonean house fought one another, Hyrcanus was outside [the walls of Jerusalem] and Aristobulus was inside. Each day, they would lower to them *denarii* in a basket and send up to them [animals for the] continual offerings. There was an old man there who was learned in Greek wisdom who spoke to them in Greek.[37] He said to them: "As long as they carry out the Temple service [i.e., perform sacrifices], they will not be delivered into your hands." On the next day, they lowered to them *denarii* in a basket, and

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celebrated their last day as non-Jews by engaging in the gentile culinary practice par excellence. While this may be a hyperliteral reading of this passage, the underlying point remains that pork is the paradigmatic cuisine of the non-Jew. Unless otherwise stated, all Hebrew translations are my own.

35. There are also Greek and Roman references to the usage of pigs in warfare, particularly to break sieges by war elephants. Apparently, pigs scared elephants, creating confusions and stampedes (e.g., Aelian, *On Animals* 1.38; 16.36). For a discussion and additional references, see Adrienne Mayor, *Greek Fire, Poison Arrows, and Scorpion Bombs: Biological and Chemical Warfare in the Ancient World* (New York, 2003), 200–203. I thank Nancy Evans for this reference.

36. See Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 14.4–78. On Josephus's depiction of this civil war, see Daniel R. Schwartz, "Josephus on Hyrcanus II," in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period: Essays in Memory of Morton Smith*, ed. F. Parente and J. Sievers (New York, 1994), 210–32.

37. Literally: "with Greek wisdom." On Greek wisdom and language in rabbinic literature, see Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Life and Manners of Jewish Palestine in the II-IV Centuries* C.E. (New York, 1942), 15–28; reprinted in Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine/Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1994).

> they sent up to them a pig. When it reached halfway up the wall, it stuck its nails into the wall and the land of Israel quaked [for] four hundred *paraʾangʾ* [= Persian miles] by four hundred *paraʾangʾ*. At that moment, they said: "Cursed be the one who raises swine and cursed be the one who teaches his son Greek wisdom!"[38]

In the midst of the fratricidal war for succession, the pig's actions mirror those of Rome. The allusion to Rome in the form of a pig is often missed by scholars, who simply read this rabbinic story in concert with the account in Josephus, discussed earlier, neglecting the important literary function of the pig in this narrative.[39]

This allusion is even more explicit when one looks at the Palestinian Talmud's version of these events. Although Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II are not specifically mentioned, Rome does appear in this account:

> Said R. Levi: "Also during the days of that Evil Empire [= Rome], they would lower to them two baskets of gold and they would send up to them two lambs. At the end [of the siege], they lowered to them two baskets of gold and they sent up to them two pigs. They did not reach halfway up the wall when the pig stuck [its nails] in the wall and the wall shook and [the pig] jumped forty *paraʾangʾ* from the land of Israel. At that moment, the sins [of Israel? of the brothers? of Rome? the text is unclear here as to whom these sins refer] brought about both the suspension of the continual offering and the destruction of the Temple.[40]

In this text, the actions of Rome ("that Evil Empire") directly lead to the later siege of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. The parallel makes allusion to the earlier incident with Aristobulus II but seems here conflated with the later attack—Rome is depicted as breaking the siege with a pig. Rome's secret weapon in times of war with the Jews is to deploy the very animal that functions as a metonym for Rome itself.

38. bMen 64b (= bSot 49b; bBK 82b).

39. E.g., Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart*, 11 vols. (Leipzig, 1897–1911), 3:710–11. Contrast, however, Ernest Wiesenberg, "Related Prohibitions: Swine Breeding and the Study of Greek," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 27 (1956): 213–33, 220–21.

40. yBer 4.1, 7b (ed. Schäfer and Becker 1.1.106; = yTaʿan 4.8, 68c [ed. Schäfer and Becker 2.9.258]). The attribution of this tradition to R. Levi, a rabbi from the transitional generation between tannaim and amoraim, explains why the Babylonian Talmud considers it a *baraita*.

This association is further highlighted by a linguistic shift in this passage. While the basket sent up includes two pigs, it is "the pig" that sticks its nails into the wall, shaking the land of Israel and, ultimately, destroying the Temple. At this moment, the pig has shifted from a mammal to a metonym. Further, we once again encounter an instance where a pig is substituted for a sacrificial offering at the Temple. Although the pig does not reach the altar in any of the Palestinian or Babylonian versions of this tale, it nevertheless serves as both a defiling replacement for appropriate Temple sacrificial offerings and as a sign of Rome's new policy of direct rule over Palestine. In what has been, and will continue to be, a leitmotif throughout this essay, the presence of pig in the Temple area is symbolic of foreign domination.

In another rabbinic text, a pig is aimed and fired directly at the Temple altar. While discussing its version of the famed encounter between Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai and the Roman general (and soon to be emperor) Vespasian, which is the legend of origin for rabbinic Judaism and the founding of its academy at Yavneh, *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* records the following events:

> A catapult was brought to [Vespasian], and drawn up against the wall of Jerusalem. Boards of cedar were brought to him, which he set into the catapult, and with these he struck against the wall until he made a breach in it. A pig's head was brought and set into the catapult, and this he hurled toward the [sacrificial] limbs which were on the altar. It was then that Jerusalem was captured.[41]

Rome here literally hurls its figurative identity on top of Jerusalem. Once the pig's head flies into the Temple space, the identity of that space immediately changes.[42]

Several targumim—Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible that vary in date, provenance, and degree of literal translation—display awareness of, and interact with, these rabbinic traditions. In the Aramaic *Targum Sheni* to Esther 1.3 (ed. Sperber, p. 179), for example, the primacy of the pork taboo over and against another nonkosher animal—the

41. *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* A4, 69–73 (ed. Schechter, pp. 23–24); cf. B7, 3–11 (ed. Schechter, p. 20). This account differs from the Yavneh legend that appears at bGit 55b–57a, which lacks any mention of a pig. For a recent assessment of the history and historicity of the Yavneh legend, see Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, 2004), 151–201.

42. In comparison, this textual moment is marked in bGit 56b by General Titus having intercourse with a prostitute on a Torah Scroll.

camel—makes an even stronger argument for its overdetermined symbolic function:

> When the gate of the Temple saw defiled people standing in front of it, it shut itself and did not want to open. All the Chaldean armies came and they brought with them 360 camels loaded with iron axes, but the outer wall of the Temple swallowed them up. But they did not want to open until *prʊtnwʊ*[43] [a difficult, and probably corrupt, name discussed below] came and slaughtered a pig and sprinkled some of its blood upon the Temple, and [thus] defiled it. After being defiled, it opened itself.

Apparently, the Temple gate is impervious to the presence of 360 nonkosher camels, but not to the blood of a single pig. While the manipulation of blood is clearly an issue in this text, one wonders if the blood of all 360 camels would have been as efficacious as the blood of that one pig.

Although this passage in *Targum Sheni* is set in the time of the Babylonian siege on Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C.E., three factors suggest a Roman context instead. While each of these points may not be strong enough to support an argument on their own, I argue that, taken together, the cumulative weight of the evidence suggests a Roman context. First of all, there are the similarities with the passages in *Avot ∂'Rabbi Natan* and the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds. A second argument can be made from the enigmatic character *prʊtnwʊ*, who performs the same pivotal role played by the old man learned in Greek in the Babylonian Talmud. Scholars have suggested a variety of possible emendations, including Fronto, who was a member of Titus's supreme council of war, and Paternus.[44] While the identification of this name is further confounded by the fact that there are five different variations for its spelling in five different manuscripts, it seems plausible that *prʊtnwʊ* is a corruption of a name with Latin origins. Third, it is not uncommon for Babylon to serve as a code word for Rome, as we see, for example, in *4* Ezra 3.2 and 2 Baruch passim. This connection is possibly furthered by the Aramaic translator, who created *Targum Lamentations*. In the Hebrew Bible, Lamentations 2.9 mourns the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, stating: "Her gates have sunk into the ground;/He has destroyed and shattered

43. For the manuscript variants on this name, see Bernard Grossfeld, *The Two Targums of Esther*, vol. 18, *The Aramaic Bible* (Collegeville, Minn., 1991), 119, n. iiiii.

44. For references, see Wiesenberg, "Related Prohibitions," 228.

her bars." In *Targum Lamentations*, this verse is rendered as: "Her gates have sunk into the ground because they slaughtered a pig and brought its blood over them" (ed. Brady, p. 149). While this verse is usually understood as referring to Antiochus IV's siege of Jerusalem,[45] in which he reportedly sacrifices a pig upon the altar, it is equally plausible that *Targum Lamentations* refers to the actions of Rome, which, as we have already seen, is accused of duplicity utilizing the pig as a warfare tactic *explicitly* at the gates of Jerusalem. The final support for reading Babylon as standing in for Rome in this context is a text that, much like *Targum Sheni*, conflates the narratives in *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* and the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds. According to the Judaeo-Persian Apocalypse of Daniel:

> Day by day the besieged placed a *dareikon* [= a Persian coin] in a basket, lowered it with an attached cord over the wall into the camp of Nebuchadnezzar, and thus purchased a sacrificial lamb. One day the Chaldeans found out for what purpose the lambs were purchased. Henceforth, they sold them no lamb but deceived them. Instead of placing a lamb into the basket to be pulled up over the wall, they placed a pig therein. As it was half way up, they shot at it with arrows. When in consequence its blood squirted out to the wall, it split in twain.[46]

The two separate accounts have now merged, wherein the familiar scene of pigs replacing suitable sacrificial offerings that are sent up during a siege is combined with the efficacious magical power of pig's blood for bringing down the walls of Jerusalem. It seems clear from this passage that two separate stories told about the actions of Rome are conflated and recast into a first Temple setting in order to accord with the reputed context of the biblical book of Daniel.[47]

The connection between pork and non-Jews culminates in several midrashic texts that explicitly identify the pig with Rome (and Romans). If

45. See Christian M. M. Brady, *The Rabbinic Targum of Lamentations: Vindicating God* (Boston, 2003), 45. On Antiochus' siege, see, e.g., 1 Maccabees 1.29–62.

46. Translation by Wiesenberg, "Related Prohibitions," 228 (for additional references, see 228, n. 70).

47. Another possible, but in my opinion much less plausible and much more convoluted, interpretation of the passage in *Targum Sheni* is to understand the Chaldeans as indeed representing the Babylonians and *prwtnws* alone as representing the Romans. In this interpretation, the Babylonians would not have fully succeeded in destroying the Temple (it was rebuilt, after all), but the wily Romans accomplished this dubious deed—by means of the pig. However, I believe that the interpretation that I offer is both more straightforward and more plausible.

to be Roman meant, in some sense, to eat pork, then the pig makes a seemingly logical symbol for Rome: after all, "you are what you eat."[48] Besides the occasional gibe—such as the suggestion that the Roman emperor Diocletian was originally a pig herder in Tiberius[49]—this motif predominantly appears in exegetical commentary. Here I will cite two examples. First, commenting on the naming of Esau in Gen 25.25, R. Yitzchak notes, "You have given a name to your pig, so I shall name my firstborn."[50] In addition to accenting the fact that Israel is the firstborn, this text compares Esau—the rabbinic code name for Rome[51]—to a pig. Rome, although never mentioned, is twice indexed, through both its reputed ancestor, Esau, and through the symbol of the pig. It should be noted, however, that the connection between Esau and the pig may appear in Jewish texts as early as the Hasmonean period, as we likely encounter it in 1 En 89.12 and Jubilees 37.20.[52]

Second, Genesis Rabbah 65.1 (ed. Theodor and Albeck; 2:713) suggests that the true character of Rome was revealed in the Hebrew Bible only by Asaph (a Levite to whom Psalms 73–83 are attributed) and Moses. According to this logic, Asaph's "statement" in Ps 80.13–14 refers to Rome. The base text states: "Why did you breach its [Judah's] wall so that every passerby plucks its fruit,/wild boars[53] gnaw at it, and creatures of the field feed it?"[54] Since pig is a stand-in for Rome, it seems

48. Cross-culturally, it is a common practice to label others by what they eat (or, by what one perceives them to eat). For a discussion, see Fischler, "Food, Self and Identity," 280–82.

49. GenR 63:8 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, 2:688). This comment itself comes in the midst of an exegesis of a base text. However, I separate this because it is a tangential side note and does not directly address a specific base verse.

50. GenR 63:8 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, 2:692).

51. On the connection between Esau and Rome in general, see Gerson D. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 19–48.

52. For discussion, see David Bryan, *Cosmos, Chaos and the Kosher Mentality* (Sheffield, 1995), 115–18; Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1909–38; repr. Philadelphia, 1979), 5:294, n. 162. On the dating of this pericope from Jubilees, see James C. VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (Missoula, Mont., 1977), 230–41. For a collection of references to pigs in rabbinic literature in general, see Sacha Stern, *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings* (New York, 1994), 57.

53. The *ayin* (ʿ) in *hazir mi-yaʿar* is suspended, making this verse "a textual peculiarity which occasions homiletical comment" (Judah Goldin, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* [New Haven, Conn., 1983], 207, n. 34).

54. JPS translation.

logical to these midrashic rabbinic authors that the "wild boars" gnawing at the remains of Judah in Ps 80 refer to the future actions of Rome.[55]

Moses' supposed allusion to Rome in this passage is a little more convoluted:

> Moses said: "And as for the pig, although it has split hoofs [with the hoofs cleft through, it does not chew the cud; it is impure for you]" [quoting Lev 11.7 and Dt 14.8]. Why is he [i.e., Edom] compared to a pig? Just as the pig when it lays down puts forth its hooves as if to say "I am clean," so too does this Evil Empire commit robbery and violence [while] giving itself the appearance as if holding court. So Esau all forty years hunted[56] married women, ravished them, and when he reached the age of forty, he presented himself to his father, saying: "Just as father married a woman at the age of forty, so too I shall marry a woman at the age of forty."[57] (GenR 65.1)

This text sees Moses' specific comments about pig as relating to the duplicity of Rome: just as the pig appears externally kosher, so too Rome looks fair and just externally due to its law courts. However, like the pig, Rome's true character is hidden. Its acts of violence and thievery, much like the nonruminate digestive system of the pig, belie its external appearance and define it as Other.[58]

Since Esau is also associated with Rome, the majority of these perico-

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55. See GenR 65.1 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, 2:713); LevR 13.5 (ed. Margulies, 2:291). For the same exegesis, but without the reference to Asaph or Moses, see *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* A34, 19 (ed. Schechter, p. 100); bPes 118b.

56. According to Gn 25.27, "Esau was a skillful hunter." While commenting on this biblical verse in GenR 63.10 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, 2:693), Esau the hunter is compared to Rome: "He hunted people by their mouths [i.e., by trapping them in their words, which are tacitly compared to the actions of Roman prosecutors]. [He would say:] 'You did not steal. [But] who stole with you?' 'You did not kill. [But] who killed with you?'"

57. On Esau's father Isaac marrying at the age of forty, see Gn 25.20. In the parallel to this text in LevR 13.5 (ed. Margulies, 2:291), the ending differs. Rather than discussing Esau's activities both prior to and on his fortieth birthday, the text states: "It once happened that a certain governor in Caesarea put to death the thieves, adulterers, and sorcerers. He said to his counselor: 'I myself did these things in one night.'" See also, further in LevR 13.5 (ed. Margulies, 2:294), where Rome, in the form of a pig, is accused of slaying righteous men.

58. The pig is also deployed as a symbol of the Other when, in EstherR 4.5, Vashti is compared to a pig and contrasted to the "holy nation" (i.e., Jews).

pae are located in Genesis Rabbah.[59] While most of these midrashic texts utilize the pig similarly to other early Jewish and rabbinic sources—namely, as symbol of foreign domination and as an historical allusion to Rome's military actions in Jerusalem—at least one midrashic tradition goes so far as to equate the physiology of the pig with the corporate body of Rome; though both appear kosher, beneath their skin is hidden a deception.

CONCLUSIONS

This essay has explored how a single food item—pork—is used to construct a practice-based identity in Roman and early Jewish and rabbinic sources, which is echoed and enriched by literary tropes. While the same culinary item was on the rhetorical plate, the significance of ingestion or abstention was shown to be perspectival. Over time, the practice of refusing to ingest pork becomes viewed as a distinctly Jewish one, which leads to the marshalling of the pig in anti-Semitic tropes throughout the medieval and modern periods.[60] This explains, for example, the otherwise incomprehensible pejorative term for a Portuguese or Spanish Jew who converted to Christianity during the time of the Inquisition but secretly practiced Judaism: *marrano*, meaning pig.[61]

While Roman texts either casually note or mock the Jewish pork taboo, only Jewish sources describe explicit interactions with particular Jews and/or transform the pig into a metonym. What was a culinary peculiarity—and thus, following a cross-cultural pattern, a marker of distinctiveness—for Romans becomes a more significant locus of boundary formation and embodiment in early Jewish and rabbinic texts. Though not the only border line between Romans and Jews, the presence or absence of pig on a table helps in part to inscribe the borders of the table as social borders.

59. The story of Esau appears in Genesis 25–36.

60. See Claudine Fabre-Vassas, *The Singular Beast: Jews, Christians, and the Pig*, trans. C. Volk (New York, 1997); Isaiah Shachar, *The Judensau: A Medieval Anti-Jewish Motif and its History* (London, 1974).

61. For references and discussion, see Fabre-Vassas, *The Singular Beast*, 119–25.