

The dietary laws of the Jews.

This thesis has so far endeavoured to examine the way in which restrictions placed upon dietary intake have time and again acted as a mechanism for the construction and subsequent strengthening and reinforcement of notions of ethnic, religious and cultural identity. Those individuals or groups that chose to regard particular foods as taboo or superfluous to existence (apart from those instances of temporary fasting for religious or purificatory purposes, such as Eleusis, the Haloa or the Thesmophoria) frequently placed themselves in a position that lay outside, or contrary to, 'mainstream' society (if we may speak of such a thing).¹ The refusal to consume certain foodstuffs was a stance that was often associated with behaviour that could be deemed as deviant or aberrant, perhaps implying a tacit (or even explicit) rejection of societal norms. It is as if these dietary decisions were able to represent not just a mere negation of contemporary practice. Rather, they could suggest an agenda for revolutionary change. The critical repudiation of prevailing cultural behaviour could be accompanied by a concomitant desire for ideological innovation.² Thus, for example, the practice of vegetarianism could have the potential to be viewed as a critique of the theological sensibilities that stressed the intimate connection between the slaughter and consumption of certain animals, and religious worship. This non-carnivorous ideology sought to reinterpret the exposition of the relationship between the mortal and the divine, previously expressed in the division of the animal carcass during the sacrificial ceremony. It is difficult to say with any real certainty whether these choices were always intended to be provocative on a larger scale.³ If the restrictions that were imposed were intended only for personal improvement (be that moral or physiological), or for a social group that was relatively modest in size (perhaps with similar justifications, as a technique for exerting authority, or for instilling a sense of personal behavioural discipline), then such prohibitions need not have been intended to be prescriptive for

¹ See page 162, 174.

² For example, the Platonic reconfiguration of society, or the vegetarian diet of the philosopher elite as suggested by Porphyry or Plutarch.

³ Porphyry advocated a vegetarian diet only for a few (the intelligentsia), not for society as a whole; Porph. *Abst.* 2.3.1-2.

society as a whole. These dietary doctrines may never have been intended to be adopted by all persons.⁴ It has already been noted that those who espoused a vegetarian credo often emphasised the fact that such a diet was unsuitable for all. For example, it was conceded that a meat-free regimen was more apposite to the philosopher who led a relatively sedentary existence, rather than to those who were obliged to indulge in strenuous physical activity.⁵

It has also been noted that, on occasion, restrictive diets have been used as a convenient (if not always accurate) label to characterise much larger ethnic or social groups. Just as modern-day Italians are popularly thought to be incorrigible adherents of a diet consisting of pasta and little else, dietetic cultural stereotypes abounded in antiquity. For example, the Syrians were frequently referred to as abstaining from fish, owing to the veneration in that region for the goddess Atargatis (also known as Derceto or Astarte), whose cult venerated the creature.⁶ This blanket description may have been no more than a lazily deployed cliché, but it does illustrate that there was a willingness to characterise ethnic groups solely in terms of diet (and dietary negation, at that). Food is used as a form of anthropological tool. In the Graeco-Roman world, one race seems to have been most associated with dietary restriction (at least in the popular imagination): the Jews. Their dietary discipline was enshrined in the form of codification in the pages of their sacred writings, and was but one component of a table of behavioural laws that pious Jews were required to obey. These regulations were scrupulously delineated so that they were unambiguous in meaning. This clarity ensured that misunderstandings were eliminated, and could not prove a hindrance to a correct adherence to the sacred law.

Prior to an examination of the features of these directives in greater detail, a caveat should perhaps be issued. This thesis will concentrate upon some of the cultural practices of the Jews as they manifested themselves in the Diaspora communities outside, rather than within, Judea. The reason for this focus is largely twofold. Firstly,

⁴ See page 171, note 3.

⁵ Porph. *Abst.* I 27.1.

⁶ See page 163-164 . Diod. Sic. II 4.2-4; Lucian *Syr. D.* 45. Fearsome retribution was promised against those who dared to harm the sacred fish that inhabited the ponds at her temples: Plut. *De superst.* 170D; *Syll.*³ 997.

the existence of a geographically scattered community, united by a mutual set of directives for living, enables us to test the effectiveness of these regulations.⁷ The Jewish religious laws were exacting and may have been arduous to respect, especially when individuals and groups found themselves geographically distant from their (spiritual) homeland and the focussing influence of the Temple. A set of laws that may have proved reasonably unproblematic to observe in communities that were largely or exclusively Jewish in composition may have been much more troublesome to obey in a social milieu in which Jews were in a definite minority. Secondly, since the purpose of the dietary laws appears to have been both as a means of social cohesion for the Jewish community, and as a method of tracing a bold line of demarcation between Jew and Gentile, it is principally (although not exclusively) in the context of the Diaspora that one may see this in operation and its subsequent consequences. It is the cultural and ethnic friction that occurred between the Jews and other groups that enables an adequate analysis of issues of identity to take place.

It will also be a feature of this thesis that the practice of ritual fasting is, if not completely ignored, then relegated to a secondary position. This is not to deny that these occasional periods of complete dietary abstention were a significant element of the Jewish religious experience. The Jews fasted for various reasons: for atonement, as a mark of grief or for the purgation of sin.⁸ However, it was not a quotidian element of Judaism, and seems to have been practised only in exceptional circumstances.⁹ As Grimm notes:

Fasting in wartime is aimed at gaining God's direct intervention or guidance. Fasting is connected with other ritual expressions of repentance, such as weeping and public confession, and was often followed by sacrifice, a custom that may have become ritualised in the Temple sacrifice of sin-

⁷ See Williams (2000), 306: '...Diasporan Jewry is of far greater relevance to the issues of culture, identity and power in the Roman empire [than the Jews of Judea]'

⁸ Grimm (1996), 20-24; also Grimm (1995), 225-40.

⁹ The actual number of fast days in the Jewish calendar are relatively few, commemorating catastrophic or exceptional events in the history of the Jewish people, including the obliteration of the Temples, the fall of Jerusalem, and *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement; Sigal (1988), 250; Jacobs (1995), 164.

offering.¹⁰

It was an affirmative, not a nihilistic act. Its aim was not death, but the achievement of a direct divine intervention. It was a temporary, not an absolute practice. It was not an attempt to subdue bodily functions, or even to mortify and eradicate the flesh. This impulse towards chastity, virginity and the annihilation of sexual urges was a characteristic of later Christian dietary asceticism, not of Judaism. If the concern of this investigation is to establish causal links between the perception and formation of identity and the imposition of food restrictions, it would seem to be fruitful to focus upon regularly recurring elements of behaviour, rather than allowing oneself to lend disproportionate significance to extraordinary (in its true sense) acts of dietary self-denial.

The other reason for passing over the subject of Jewish fasting is that it seems unlikely that it would have been a source of serious cultural friction between Jews and Graeco- Roman peoples, as Dillon notes:

fasting was a common enough purity rite in Greek religion, but particularly associated with Demeter and her fasting after the disappearance of Persephone.¹¹

One of the most notable occasions for religious fasting was the second day of the Athenian Thesmophoria, known as the *Nesteia* (νηστεία). Our best evidence for this is Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*.¹² There is also a passing reference in the *Birds*.¹³ Plutarch, in his essay on Isis and Osiris, posits that this is done in imitation of Egyptian rites.¹⁴ This was a temporary fast, lasting for one day. Longer periods of abstinence were a feature neither of Judaism nor of Greek or Roman religion. Hence, fasting does not

¹⁰ Grimm (1996), 22. As Grimm notes, however, it is a facet of Jewish practice that preoccupies many authors in antiquity; Grimm (1995), 226. See page 188, notes 83 and 84 for further discussion of this.

¹¹ Dillon (2002), 113.

¹² Ar. *Thesm.* 949; 984. See Detienne (1977), 99-122; Burkert (1985), 242-246; Wilkins and Hill (2006), 97-98.

¹³ Ar. *Av.* 1519.

¹⁴ Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 378E. Also see Harrison (1922), 129.

necessarily feature as a badge of cultural identity or of ethnic demarcation that would antagonise mainstream thought in the Graeco-Roman world.

It should also be noted that the dietary laws of the Jews were merely one facet of a number of regulations that governed the way in which a Jew was meant to live his or her life. There were numerous other regulations that may have had a greater or lesser importance to their existence than the dietary directives. It may be necessary to examine briefly some of the most prominent of these other precepts, in order to be able to assess accurately and evaluate the role that the dietary laws played. To state them briefly, the principal tenets of the Jewish behavioural edicts (at least as they were recognised by the numerous Greek and Latin commentators) were a belief in a single god, the aniconic nature of their worship of this deity, the practice of circumcision (male rather than female), the observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest, and submission to strict dietary legislation. To these may be added occasional periods of fasting and ritual ablutions. It is these edicts *in toto* that collectively defined the Jewish experience, even if in the eyes of external observers, some of them appeared of greater significance (or at least to be more noticeable) than others. For this thesis, the obvious focus of attention will be the dietary code, and indeed, this would have surely been one of the more conspicuous and concrete physical manifestations of their credo to outsiders. Yet, even this may present difficulties. In spite of their seemingly transparent codification, the dietary regulations were a complex entity, and, in fact, the intricate details of this regimen were, for the most part, ignored by commentators from the Gentile community. The opinions expressed within the extant texts generally tended to focus upon the Jewish abstention from swinish flesh, and chose to disregard both the axioms that stipulated the type and species of animal that were permissible to Jews and the stringent legislation that governed the process of slaughter. They also disregarded the rules that indicated the circumstances in which certain foodstuffs could be combined with each other. As will become apparent, the concentration on pork abstention and the status of the pig within the Jewish *mentalité* by the Graeco-Roman writers was perhaps entirely comprehensible; less so was their apparent refusal to engage with the dietary laws in their entirety. It is only by doing so that the guiding rationale behind them and their intimate relationship with the notion of Jewish self-identity will become evident.

It will be necessary at this stage to briefly describe these decrees that directed Jewish diet. These laws were set down in their holy writings, in the Old Testament

books of *Deuteronomy* and *Leviticus*.¹⁵ The stipulations laid down in these writings were, simultaneously, specific about which animals were allowed to be consumed, and general, in the sense that they provided information about the types and species of creature that were deemed acceptable that allowed for the subsequent discovery of new *genera* of animals. These could then be located within the system of dietary classification. The laws were divided into prohibitions and allowances pertaining to creatures of the land, those of the sea and those of the air. Of the first category, those judged to be permissible were those animals that possessed cloven hooves and chewed the cud.¹⁶ In order to be acceptable to Jewish sensibilities, animals had to fulfil both prerequisites; one or other was held to be insufficient. In *Deuteronomy* are listed the animals that it was permitted to consume. These included the ox, the sheep, the goat and the antelope, amongst others.¹⁷ Both *Deuteronomy* and *Leviticus* emphasised the fact that certain animals were prohibited because they may have possessed cloven hooves or chewed the cud, but did not have both qualities. Examples of such creatures included the camel, the hare, the badger and the pig.¹⁸ They are forbidden to Jews because they are deemed ‘unclean’ or ‘impure’.¹⁹ The Greek renders it thus:

ἀπὸ τῶν κρέων αὐτῶν οὐ φαγέσθε καὶ τῶν θνήσιμαίων αὐτῶν
οὐχ ἄψεσθε ἀκάθαρτα ταῦτα ὑμῖν.²⁰

Interestingly, the law expressly forbids not just the ingestion of the flesh, but also any physical contact with the cadaver. Pollution, it seems, may be spread by touch as well as by taste. A similar concern with the hazard of contamination with illicit foods is shared by commentators on the Pythagorean bean taboo. Both Empedocles and Callimachus, cited by Gellius, emphasises the importance of not touching beans.²¹

¹⁵ *Deut.* 14; *Levit.* 11.

¹⁶ *Deut.* 14, 6; *Levit.* 11, 3.

¹⁷ *Deut.* 14, 4-5.

¹⁸ *Deut.* 14, 7-8; *Levit.* 11, 4-8.

¹⁹ *Levit.* 11, 8.

²⁰ *Deut.* 14.8: ‘Of their flesh you shall not eat, nor will you touch their corpses: these are unclean to you’.

Of the aquatic creatures, only fish that possessed scales and fins were allowed to be eaten. A lengthy list of forbidden birds was cited. The inventory's guiding rationale seems to have been the elimination from the diet of flesh eating birds, such as the eagle, the vulture and the kite.²² Winged insects were also considered to be illicit, apart from a few, such as the locust and the grasshopper.²³ Also disallowed were animals that had died of natural causes, and a rather strange embargo against boiling a kid in its mother's milk, usually understood to indicate that meat and dairy products were not to be mixed, neither in their preparation nor in their consumption.²⁴ It is stressed that impurity may arise if any clothes or cooking utensils come into contact with these prohibited substances.²⁵

Beyond the continued emphasis that the restricted foods are unclean and carry the stain of pollution, no explanation is provided as to why this dietary legislation should be obeyed (unless it is evident to all that pollution and impurity is *per se* an undesirable state). The fact that they are directives from God may have been sufficient justification, and no further reasons were required. Nonetheless, in other, later texts, there was some attempt to suggest the reasons that lay behind these divine orders. Philo maintained that the creatures whose flesh was forbidden in the sacred texts were, in fact, the tastiest and the fattest (εὐσαρκότατα καὶ πιότατα).²⁶ Their prohibition was designed to prevent their being a temptation towards the sin of gluttony, which threatened to imperil both soul and body (δυσίατον κακὸν ψυχᾶς τε καὶ σώμασιν).²⁷ The most delectable of these creatures of the land was the pig, and those fish that lacked scales were the tastiest denizens of the deep.²⁸ The dietary laws were established in

²¹ See page 119-120. Fr. 141, Diehls; Fr. 128, Schn.; Gell. *NA* IV.xi.2-9.

²² *Levit.* 11, 13-19; *Deut.* 14, 11-18.

²³ *Levit.* 11, 20-23; *Deut* 14, 19-20.

²⁴ *Deut.* 14, 21. However, Deuteronomy states that it is acceptable to give it to a stranger or sell it to alien peoples.

²⁵ *Levit.* 11, 24-40.

²⁶ Philo *The Special Laws* IV, 100. For Philo, see Goodenough (1962).

²⁷ Philo *The Special Laws* IV, 100.

²⁸ These would have included the dolphin, the porpoise and various species of whale. Although the dolphin was infrequently eaten in the Graeco-Roman world, usually for religious reasons, it seems strange that if its flesh was as delicious as Philo suggests, it was not eaten on a more regular basis by those who did not respect or revere this creature. See page 154 for dolphin eaters.

order to ensure that the Jewish people led an abstemious and virtuous life.²⁹ Philo believed that Moses had intended the legislation to achieve a mean that lay somewhere between extreme frugality and sheer luxuriousness.³⁰

Before we examine the implications of Philo's elucidation of this dietetic regime, let us firstly consider his explanation for its genesis. Foods were forbidden because they had the potential to lead to temptation into luxury and gluttony, a venal sin. The proscription of the very finest flesh was intended to promote frugality and a degree of asceticism. Such an impulse towards abstemiousness, and the causal linking of gluttony with vice (be it effeminacy, moral laxity or corruption) was not a phenomenon that was linked solely with Judaism. It was offered as one of the putative explanations for food restrictions amongst the Pythagoreans.³¹ It was also suggested as the reason for the apparent simplicity of the diet of the Homeric heroes in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.³² Given this semblance to strains of ascetic philosophical thought in Graeco-Roman culture, it is tempting to view Philo's explanation as one likely to appeal to the sensibilities of a literate and learned non-Jewish readership. In fact, Philo proposes soon afterwards an alternative explanation, perhaps betraying an anxiety about convincing his readership of the logical principles of the dietary laws.

Philo proceeds to catalogue the animals deemed acceptable to the Jewish palate, as enumerated in the book of *Deuteronomy*. The number is ten, regarded as a perfect and sacred number.³³ Philo, once again appealing to rationalist principles, refers to the adoption by Moses of rigorous mathematical formulation in order to arrive at his conclusion (ἀεὶ γὰρ τῆς ἀριθμητικῆς θεωρίας περιεχόμενος).³⁴ Then he reveals his new reason for the dietary laws: the division of animals was based upon whether they were deemed to be clean (this reason is self-evident from the texts of *Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy*: it is the only justification given there). Philo reiterates the criteria for

²⁹ Cf Ath. *Deip.* 9d.

³⁰ Philo *The Special Laws* IV, 102. The two extremes of behaviour are represented by, on one hand, the Spartans and, on the other, the Ionians and the Sybarites.

³¹ Diog. Laert. *Pythag.* VIII.13.

³² Pl. *Resp.* III.404bc; Plut. *Quaest. conv.* IV 4.668F. Ath. *Deip.* 9d. Philo looks at Moses in a similar way to the way Diogenes Laertius treats Pythagoras and Athenaeus looks at Homer; as a paragon of archaic virtue and as a model for virtuous living.

³³ Philo *The Special Laws* IV, 105.

³⁴ Philo *The Special Laws* IV, 105.

dietary purity that was laid down in the Biblical texts:

Βάσανον δὲ καὶ δοκιμασίαν τῶν δέκα ζώων ὑπογράφεται κοινῇ
κατὰ διττὰ σημεῖα, τό τε διχληεῖν καὶ τὸ μηρυκάσθαι·
οἷς γὰρ ἢ μηδέτερον ἢ θάτερον αὐτὸ μόνον πρόσεστιν, ἀκάθαρτα.³⁵

Philo then moves on to providing a justification for these laws. The term ‘unclean’ or ‘impure’ seems to be used not in the sense of physical filth (despite the exhortation to avoid actual contact with the offending items or, indeed, anything that has touched them). Rather, Philo seems to be talking in terms of spiritual and moral pollution (in terms of viewing purity as honouring only Jehovah). The parting of the hoof into two is viewed as representing the fact that life has a double aspect, one of vice, the other of virtue. They are diametrical opposites. An uncloven hoof would mean that somehow good and evil spring from the same source. The division between the two would no longer be distinct. Hence the ban placed upon the flesh of creatures whose hooves remain unparted.³⁶ The chewing of the cud is given a similarly symbolic interpretation. The process of digestion is an allegory of the transmission of knowledge from teacher to pupil and the comprehension and retention of that knowledge.³⁷

These improbable metaphorical rationalisations are applied to the other dietary regulations. Scaleless fish represent souls that are devoted to luxury and pleasure, whilst those possessing scales and fins are associated with self-restraint.³⁸ Prohibited reptiles (either those that propel themselves along upon their bellies, or those that have four legs or many feet) are similarly viewed through this allegorical lens; they epitomise the sins of passion and gluttony.³⁹ The birds that were outlawed were those regarded as

³⁵ Philo *The Special Laws* IV, 106: ‘He outlines as a general touchstone a test of the ten animals, according to two signs; being cloven-hoofed and the chewing of the cud. That which has neither of the two belonging to it, or only one, is unclean’.

³⁶ Philo *The Special Laws* IV, 108-109.

³⁷ Philo *The Special Laws* IV, 108-109.

³⁸ Philo *The Special Laws* IV, 110-112. This is similar to the hierarchy of animals in the *Timaeus*. See page 88, note 44; Pl. *Ti.* 91d-92b; Gilhus (2006), 86.

³⁹ Philo *The Special Laws* IV, 113-115.

carnivorous and that preyed upon other animals.⁴⁰ The remaining discussion of the laws concerns the embargo upon the carcasses of animals that have died of natural causes, or have been killed by other animals, and the ban upon consumption of blood and fat (blood because it is the essence of life, and fat because it was the richest part of the animal and was thus associated with superfluity and extravagance).⁴¹

The explanations advanced by Philo interpret the Mosaic laws concerning diet in several ways. They maintain that they have as their basis mathematical principles.⁴² They are precepts to encourage abstemiousness and moderation, and they are necessary directives to ensure that a state of purity is maintained.⁴³ The division of foods into clean and unclean is based upon concepts of spiritual corruption and physical contamination. This exegesis seems to shy away from the sanction of divine authority, although the Biblical texts are explicit that these are divine commands. It seems inconceivable that Philo somehow imagined that his Gentile readership would balk at the notion of the sanctity of divine authority (surely a readily comprehensible concept to both poly- and monotheists).⁴⁴ Philo does not state that they are divine commandments that are not susceptible to reason that should be obeyed absolutely and without question. They are presented, rather, as the Mosaic attempt to achieve terrestrial temperance for the adherents of Judaism. This was a theme that was certainly not limited to the Jews, and abounded in both Greek and Latin literature. This thesis has examined the way in which both groups within the context of Graeco-Roman culture (a nebulous term, used advisedly) and also other races imposed both temporary and absolute interdictions upon certain foods. The Pythagoreans avoided certain foods, such as the broad bean, various fish, particularly the mullet, and animal flesh, and later commentators saw in these rules similar symbolic analyses as those proffered by Philo in his justification of Jewish dogma. Some saw an explicit relationship existing between the precepts of Judaism and Pythagorean philosophy:

⁴⁰ Philo *The Special Laws* IV, 116-118.

⁴¹ Philo *The Special Laws* IV, 119-125.

⁴² Cf page 178, note 34. Philo is clearly well versed in Greek philosophy.

⁴³ It is unclear whether Jews, through their diet, aspire to reach a state of purity, or whether they are already pure and their diet is intended to prevent contamination.

⁴⁴ What may have disconcerted Greeks and Romans was a strong, unambivalent monotheism with written laws.

λέγεται γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐκεῖνος πολλὰ τῶν παρὰ
ῥουδαίοις νομίμων εἰς τὴν αὐτοῦ μετενεγχεῖν φιλοσοφίαν.⁴⁵

Animals could be regarded as hallowed, either being earthly manifestations of divine beings (as in the case of the attitude of the Egyptians towards animals) or being considered as under the guardianship of these divinities (the Syrian ban on the eating of fish, associated with the worship of the goddess Atargatis, or, for example, the Latin taboo on the woodpecker, possibly sacred to Mars).⁴⁶ The crux of the argument of this thesis is that there existed a number of instances of abstinence from foods in antiquity. Temporary abstention was not unusual in Graeco-Roman culture, but dietary abstention as a defining credo was predominantly associated with the Pythagoreans and the Jews. People would have been aware of those who did not eat certain foods, or even occasions when religious scruples required that they themselves should refrain from certain foodstuffs. If dietary restriction was not a ubiquitous phenomenon, it would, at the very least, not be entirely unknown to many people (at least in cosmopolitan urban areas, or amongst those who were well travelled; knowledge of alien practices would have been far less prevalent in smaller, isolated communities).⁴⁷ The notion that foods could be pure or impure would hardly have been remarkable, although perhaps more readily acceptable would have been the concept of the temporary perils of food pollution: the idea that a foodstuff could be rendered taboo for a limited period, as the result of its connections with particular religious rituals.⁴⁸ The temporary abstinence from certain foods by initiates of the mysteries of Eleusis has been noted elsewhere in this thesis, and at the beginning of this chapter, attention was drawn to the one day fast as part of the festival of Thesmophoria.⁴⁹ The absolute character of the Jewish regulations and their rigidity may have been somewhat alien, but, in general, they should have provoked little surprise or comment from external commentators. The fact that they did lies in one

⁴⁵ Hermippus of Smyrna *De Pythagora* apud: Joseph. *Ap.* I, 165: ‘It is really said that that man carried over many of the laws of the Jews into his own philosophy’.

⁴⁶ Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 268.

⁴⁷ See page 27-29.

⁴⁸ See pages 119-120; 162.

⁴⁹ See page 174.

particular element of the laws-the abstention from the flesh of swine, rather than as a result of conceptual objections to the laws as a whole.

Mary Douglas has undertaken a rigorous analysis of these dietary rules.⁵⁰ She notes that scholarly interpretation has typically regarded them as absolute instructions to enforce discipline, or as metaphors for sin and virtue.⁵¹ She summarily dismisses these arguments, as well as the view that advocates a wholly separatist sentiment on behalf of the Jews; a quest to eradicate completely exotic and extraneous influences that could possibly taint and corrupt both the adherents of Judaism and the faith itself.⁵² Her solution is to focus upon the concept of holiness:

The only sound approach is to forget hygiene, aesthetics, morals and instinctive revulsion, even to forget Canaanites and the Zoroastrian Magi, and start with the texts. Since each of the injunctions is prefaced by the command to be holy, so they must be explained by that command.⁵³

Douglas believes that the solution lies in notions of completeness and perfection, and in efforts to eradicate pollution (both deliberate and inadvertent). Some animals may be a source of this impurity. Removal of impurity is of primary importance, for, as Neusner notes,

uncleanness is taken as a sign of separation from God, and purity is a prerequisite for approaching God.⁵⁴

Douglas' thesis sees in the laws a system

to establish a separate, holy, and supernatural world, which is given

⁵⁰ Douglas (1966), 54-72.

⁵¹ Douglas (1966), 56.

⁵² Douglas (1966), 61-2.

⁵³ Douglas (1966), 63.

⁵⁴ Neusner (1975), 21.

concrete expression in the taboo.⁵⁵

Douglas' interpretation of the dietary code has much to commend itself, although she perhaps goes too far in her desire to discount the impulse towards cultural separation. As will be seen, despite a willingness on the part of the Jews to establish some form of socio-economic integration within Gentile communities, there still existed a powerful Jewish tendency to resist cultural conformity and to maintain a gulf between themselves and non-Jews. This was not always an impulse that was derived from their religious dogma; it may be attributed in part to natural cultural anxieties and, to a certain degree, xenophobic sentiments. Such feelings may, of course, be equally attributable to members of the Gentile community. Douglas fails to recognise that the dietary laws could be interpreted as stimulating and inflaming pre-existing ethnic inclinations towards separation and ghettoization. Thus, the dietary laws are not merely an attempt to retain a state of purity; they are also an exhortation to ethnic division.

Other components of Jewish dogma may have been as comprehensible to Gentiles as they were to Jews themselves, and could be assimilated into a system of knowledge pertaining to foreign customs and ideologies. In some senses, similarity between Jews and Gentiles may have been greater than their differences, rendering the former less conspicuous than might first appear. Cohen addresses the problem of discriminating between the Jews and other ethnic groups in an ancient context.⁵⁶ His assertion is that many of the methods used to isolate and identify social and ethnic groups were simply not applicable when attempting to differentiate between Jews and Gentiles, especially in large, heterogeneous urban environments. Jews did not habitually wear different clothes, adopt distinctive hairstyles or necessarily converse or write in a different language.⁵⁷ Cohen asserts that the Jews of the Roman empire, certainly of the eastern provinces, would have spoken Greek as a common language. It would seem logical that Jews living in other areas, perhaps in the west, would have possessed at least the rudiments of the vernacular. Jews living in Rome or Italy must surely have acquired enough Latin to attempt basic communication. Jews did not possess distinctive names or

⁵⁵ Lobban (1994), 58.

⁵⁶ Cohen (1993), 1-45.

⁵⁷ Cohen (1993), 8.

occupations. They may have lived in neighbourhoods that were characterised by a predominantly single ethnic group, but it does not appear that *only* Jews inhabited these areas, nor they were solely confined to them. Philo refers to the topographical division of the city of Alexandria:

πέντε μοῖραι τῆς πόλεως εἰσιν, ἐπώνυμοι τῶν πρώτων στοιχείων
τῆς ἐγγραμμάτου φωνῆς· τούτων δύο Ἰουδαϊκὰ λέγονται διὰ
τὸ πλείστους Ἰουδαίους ἐν ταύταις κατοικεῖν· οἰκοῦσι δὲ καὶ
ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις οὐκ ὀλίγοι σποράδες.⁵⁸

The predominantly Jewish character of these districts (or, for example, the area now known as Trastevere in Rome) may appear to constitute a plausible argument for a segregationist policy (either self-administered or imposed by the political authorities). Cohen sees not a systematic ghettoisation of the Jews, rather a series of what he labels ‘ethnic neighbourhoods’, a natural and organic process whereby those of similar cultural and ethnic origins tend to live in close proximity to each other, both in order to promote and protect their collective interest, and because they feel at ease in such surroundings.⁵⁹ These neighbourhoods may have been predominantly characterised by a majority ethnicity, but not an exclusive one. These areas were most probably multicultural in constitution. However, if an area were populated for the most part by Syrians, or Egyptians, or Jews, that area may have been thought of (by outsiders) as being *exclusively* peopled by them. Those living in a Jewish area, but who were not Jewish, may have been thought to be so, merely by association. Cohen’s argument is that in the communities of the Diaspora, at least superficially, Jews were mostly indistinguishable from Gentiles. Philo notes that, during the pogrom against the Jews in Alexandria during the reign of Caligula, many women were mistakenly arrested as Jews, implying that the difference between Jews and others was not immediately apparent to non-

⁵⁸ Philo *In Flacc.* 55: ‘There are five parts to the city, named after the first letters of the written language, of these two are called Jewish because the majority of Jews dwell in them. In the others, not a few live scattered about’.

⁵⁹ Cohen (1993), 28.

Jews.⁶⁰ The predicament of reliable identification remains. However, it was possible to discern concrete evidence of Jewish allegiance. The principal hallmarks of behaviour of those who professed to be Jews included specific food laws, monotheistic aniconic worship, observance of the Sabbath, and circumcision. However, these customs were not conclusive in themselves, and some were not exclusive to the Jews. For example, Herodotus refers to the Egyptians as being practitioners of circumcision. Initially, he states that they were the only proponents of this custom, but later modifies this, stating that other races, such as the Ethiopians and the Colchians, adopted the practice, with the Phoenicians and the Syrians of Palestine following suit.⁶¹ Thus, circumcision may have been regarded as being an alien practice, associated with the nations of the east, but not specifically with the Jews. Latin authors, however, seem to have regarded it as a peculiarly Jewish procedure. Horace refers to the ‘*curtis Iudaeis*’.⁶² Martial seems to have been particularly fixated upon the phenomenon. He makes a reference to ‘*reuitarum...Iudaeorum*’⁶³ Elsewhere he talks of his circumcised Jewish slave (‘*servos Iudaeum nuda sub cute pondus habet*’).⁶⁴ He also talks about a man whose circumcised penis was accidentally revealed to all whilst at the exercise ground (‘*verpus erat*’).⁶⁵

Using circumcision to identify Jews was problematic for another reason. It could only occur in circumstances where full or partial nudity may have taken place; in a medical context, during sexual intimacy, at the baths or when exercising. It is difficult to say with any great certainty whether Jews and Gentiles mixed freely at the baths. Also, circumcision as a method of detection obviously worked only in the case of the male of the species. Tacitus was of the opinion that circumcision was one of the techniques employed by the Jews to keep themselves separate from other races.⁶⁶ This physical statement of dissimilarity implies not just a display to outsiders, but a technique for recognising each other (as, perhaps, even the Jews themselves had trouble in the accurate identification of each other, or perhaps that others attempted to feign

⁶⁰ Philo *In Flacc.* 95-96.

⁶¹ Hdt. II.36; 104. Also Goldstein (1939), 356.

⁶² Hor. *Sat.* I, 9:70.

⁶³ Mart. *Epig.* VII,30:5.

⁶⁴ Mart. *Epig.* VII,35:3-4.

⁶⁵ Mart. *Epig.* VII, 82:6.

⁶⁶ Tac. *Hist.* V, 5:2.

Jewishness for nefarious purposes). Observance of the Sabbath could only be noticed on one day in seven, and monotheistic strains of thought were not exclusive to Judaism (although perhaps Judaism was the most forceful in its absolute denial of other gods) and besides, were not a visual outward indication of adherence to Judaism (unless the Jew were asked to make obeisance to a pagan deity and subsequently refused). Monotheism was probably not a subject that would have been raised in casual conversation.⁶⁷ Some have insisted that this aspect of Judaism disconcerted or repelled the Greeks and the Romans.⁶⁸ It is not evident that such condemnation was by any means universal.⁶⁹ After all, it was only the insistence of Caligula that Jews sacrifice to him and not simply on his behalf (something that neither Augustus nor Tiberius had chosen to enforce) that had provoked such a crisis and forced the issue to the forefront.

So, finally, we come to food, considered by some to be one of the most palpable marks of Jewish identity:

We know from pagan polemic that observance of some food taboos was one of the most widespread, conspicuous, and ridiculed aspects of Judaism'.⁷⁰

The observation was earlier made that many authors chose to ignore other facets of the food laws and concentrate upon just one: the abstinence from pork.⁷¹ It was a geographically widespread phenomenon, at least according to Josephus.⁷² In general, it seems to have been greeted with a mixture of baffled incomprehension and scorn (although some writers, including Plutarch, did, at least, make some attempt to discover the origins of the taboo). Much of this has to do with ancient attitudes towards this particular animal. Pork was ubiquitous, gracing both the tables of the wealthy and the poor.⁷³ For Goldstein, the ancient attitude is characterised by ambiguity, and vacillated

⁶⁷ See Athanassiadi and Frede (2001). A conference on this topic was held at the University of Exeter 17-20 July 2006. A publication is forthcoming.

⁶⁸ Daniel (1979), 54.

⁶⁹ Strabo 16.2.35; Varro apud August. *De civ. D.* 4.31. Also Daniel (1979), 55.

⁷⁰ Zuesse (1974), 21

⁷¹ See page 175.

⁷² Joseph *Ap.* 2.282.

⁷³ See page 66. Also Dalby (2003), 268-9; Wilkins and Hill (2006), 147- 149 for the importance of the

between disdain and enthusiasm.⁷⁴ According to Daniel, the esteemed status of the pig within Greek and Roman culture resulted in the Jewish classification of the swine as an ‘unclean’ creature being regarded by the former with utter incomprehension.⁷⁵

Latin authors, in particular, seemed to have derived particular pleasure in satirising this food taboo. Not all the mockery was particularly malicious in character. Some of it was simply the result of an opportunistic delight in wordplay and punning. Plutarch, in his life of Cicero, recalled the latter’s play on words when conducting the case against Verres, the propraetor of Sicily. The joke hinged upon the name of the disgraced senator and the Latin word for boar, and a connection with Jewish dietary practice.⁷⁶ In a similar vein, Macrobius reports the witticism of Augustus, who is alleged to have commented that it would have been preferable to have been Herod’s pig than his son. This jest manages to encapsulate the ruthlessness of Herod, the longevity of a pig’s life in Jewish society and a similarity between the Greek vocabulary for ‘son’ (υἱός) and ‘pig’ (ὕς).⁷⁷ Other observations were rather less benign. Juvenal’s disgust at Jewish customs is evident throughout his satirical writings. He too remarks upon how, in a Jewish community, a pig may survive until old age (‘et vetus indulget senibus clementia porcis’).⁷⁸ Elsewhere, he implies that the Jewish mentality likens the eating of pork to the act of human cannibalism.⁷⁹ Philo notes the scoffing of Caligula at the practice, although his jest seems to have been born of a cruel and sardonic wit, and a desire to belittle the Jewish delegation from Alexandria, rather than emanating from any deep anti-Semitic sentiment.⁸⁰ It is noted, both by Jews themselves, and by others, that the dietary laws could be taken extremely seriously. Sextus Empiricus refers to Jews who

pig in Graeco-Roman culture.

⁷⁴ Goldstein (1939), 359.

⁷⁵ Daniel (1979), 56, note 64.

⁷⁶ Plut. *Cic.* 7.5.

⁷⁷ Macrobius *Sat.* 2.4.11.

⁷⁸ Juv. *Sat.* VI, 160.

⁷⁹ Juv. *Sat.* XIV, 98. A similar remark is made by Galen; Gal. *de al. fac.* K663. Galen’s observation pertains to the apparent similarity of human flesh to that of swine, rather than adopting a censorious attitude towards pork eating.

⁸⁰ Philo *Leg.* 361-362.

preferred to perish rather than consume pork.⁸¹ During the Alexandrian pogroms, suspected Jewesses were coerced into tasting pork, in order to assay their religious identity.⁸²

Clearly, one must allow for a certain amount of literary distortion and hyperbole, as well as a degree of sheer ignorance. Such unfamiliarity with the rationale behind Jewish customs is illustrated by those who sought to amalgamate the observance of the Sabbath with the custom of fasting.⁸³ The number of references to this phenomenon has led some scholars to question whether they are factual errors, or whether, in fact, Jews *did* fast on the Sabbath in antiquity.⁸⁴ There is no real undertaking in these texts to engage with the reasons behind the pork prohibition. It was viewed as an opportunity to exploit ethnic stereotypes and to play to some of the prejudices of the popular imagination. A few authors did make strenuous efforts to approach the subject in a more scholarly and less partisan manner. Epictetus remarks upon the fact that different races held diverse beliefs about culinary matters, and thus Jewish food laws were just one manifestation of naturally conflicting dietary ideologies that existed between races. The Jews, Syrians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans all disagreed over the merits (or otherwise) of eating pork.⁸⁵ Such observations do not necessarily condemn the Jewish viewpoint, merely confining themselves to indicating that it is of a contrary nature to other beliefs about the matter. Plutarch also attempted a sober appraisal of the matter, and took the analysis a little further, attempting to engage constructively with the topic. In the *Table Talk*, he ponders whether the genesis of the pork prohibition lay in feelings of reverence towards the pig by the Jewish people, or in an attitude of disgust and abhorrence. If the beast were venerated, then this would be no more surprising than the attitude of the Egyptians towards some animals; their priests were supposed to have held as sacred the cat, the crocodile and the dung beetle.⁸⁶ However, it was posited that it was not so much that the animal was worshipped as a divinity in itself by the Jews; rather it

⁸¹ Sext. Emp. *Pyr.* III, 23.

⁸² Philo *In Flacc.* 94.

⁸³ Suet. *Aug.* 76. Also, Martial's reference to the stench of the breath of female observers of the Sabbath (*ieiunia sabbatariorum*); *Epig.* IV.4.

⁸⁴ See Michael (1924), 122-4.

⁸⁵ Epictetus apud Arr. *Epict. diss.* I, 11:12-13; 22:4.

⁸⁶ Plut. *Quaest. conviv.* IV.5. 669-670.

was afforded respect because the pig, by snuffling in the soil with its snout, gave birth to the art of ploughing. This was regarded as a plausible explanation, even more so given that the Egyptians were prone to revering animals for reasons that were far less worthy.⁸⁷ And, after all, if the Jews had hated the pig, it would logically have followed that they would have attempted to harm or kill the animal. The contrary argument is also presented (placed in the mouth of Lamprias): that Jews abominated the beast because it was physically filthy, and carried disease:

τὸ δ' ὕειον κρέας οἱ ἄνδρες ἀφοσιοῦσθαι δοκουσῖν, ὅτι μάλιστα
πάντων οἱ βάρβαροι τὰς ἐπὶ χρωτὸς λεύκας καὶ λέπρας
δυσχεραίνουσι καὶ τῇ προσβολῇ τὰ τοιαῦτα καταβόσκεισθαι πάθη
τοὺς ἀνθρώπους οἴονται, πᾶσαν δ' ἕν ὑπὸ τὴν γαστέρα
λέπρας ἀνάπλεων καὶ ψωρικῶν ἐξανθημάτων ὀρώμεν, ἃ δὴ, καχεξίας
τινὸς ἐγγενομένης τῷ σώματι καὶ φθορᾶς, ἐπιτρέχειν δοκεῖ
τοῖς σώμασιν. οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ θολερὸν περὶ τὴν δίαιταν
τοῦ θρέμματος ἔχει τινὰ πονηρίαν.⁸⁸

Plutarch was not the only observer to make the connection between the pig and leprosy. Tacitus makes a remark in a similar vein:

sue abstinent memoria cladis, quod ipsos scabies quondam turpaverat,
cui id animal obnoxiam.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Plut. *Quaest. conviv.* IV.5. 669-670. He refers to the Egyptian deification of the blind field mouse, owing to that culture's reverence for the dark over the light.

⁸⁸ Plut. *Quaest. conviv.* IV.5. 670F-671: 'The people [the Jews] seem to eschew the flesh of the pig, because, on the whole, the barbarians especially find unpleasant white leprosy of the skin and they believe that men are attacked by these things by contagion. Now we see that every pig is covered under the stomach with infectious and scabrous lepra, which, if there is some bodily damage and instability, seems to overrun the body. Not only this, but also the dirtiness of their mode of life produces a poor quality in the creature's meat'. Leprosy is a major concern of *Leviticus* 13 (perhaps reflecting a greater prevalence of the disease in the Middle East than in Greece or Rome?). See Manchester (1984), 167-169.

⁸⁹ Tac. *Hist.* V.4.2: 'They abstain from pigs, in memory of a scourge, because the scab to which this animal is susceptible, once had afflicted them'.

These observations attempted to engage with the notion of ‘uncleanness’, but seem to concentrate upon the perceived physical filth of the pig: its appearance, its environment and its dietary habits. Tacitus’ above remark also contrives to link the Jews themselves with corporeal filth and disease. The concept of spiritual pollution is largely ignored or disregarded. Tacitus is often considered to be the most vituperative Latin critic of the Jews and his writings often bristle with hostility towards them. The crux of his criticism is that the practices and customs of the Jewish people were an inversion of those of the Romans. The custom of circumcision, and the insistence upon separate foods and dining apart from Gentiles was interpreted as a form of hostile cultural secession. The company and institutions of others were spurned for intermingled reasons of antagonism and superiority. They demonstrated, in the eyes of others, a desire to repudiate the rest of the community and to pursue an aggressively isolationist policy in certain respects (as far as such a thing were possible in large urban multicultural environments), even though ethnic purity lay at the very heart of Judaism and was enshrined in its written laws. What drives Tacitus to apoplexy, even surpassing his outrage at their impulse towards autonomy, is their militant proselytism that has succeeded in seducing Roman citizens into abandoning their cultural and familial allegiances, renouncing traditional gods and familiar customs and converting to the Jewish faith.⁹⁰

This picture of the division of Jews and Gentiles into two clear and distinct groups is somewhat misleading. Just as the Gentiles cannot be regarded as a single homogeneous entity, thus the Jews may be subdivided into smaller groups. These groups all had their own peculiar stance on dietary matters, some adopting stricter and more fundamentalist postures on the issue. From Josephus we learn of the subdivision of the Jewish people into three main groups: the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes.⁹¹ There often occurred segregation *between* these sects. The notion of a unified Jewish community is a false one. The Essenes were particularly austere, and only ate together (in fact, they ate no other food than the one common meal that they shared on a daily basis). Similarly, the Pharisees also ate in their own groups. If we seek to assert the importance of dietary restriction as a technique for achieving social cohesion within groups, we have to accept that this may occur on a micro level, but for larger groups, it

⁹⁰ Tac. *Hist.* V.5.2; Diod. Sic. 34.1.2.

⁹¹ Joseph. *Vit.* 10-11. For the nature of these sects, see Baumgarten (1973), 93-110.

may prove a source of division. This is perhaps a natural result of differing interpretations of religious texts, with sects competing with each other to achieve greatest fidelity to the perceived religious truth.⁹² It is entirely conceivable, given the fragmentation within their own ranks, some Jews may have felt closer to Gentiles than to other members of their own faith.

If we are prepared to accept that there probably existed a hierarchy of dietary austerity within the Jewish community (if we are now able to speak of such a thing), we may postulate that perhaps the food laws were neglected by some in the Diaspora. Barclay assumes that such laws would have been both undesirable and unworkable in such a context, and would have been fairly rapidly discarded, perhaps more acknowledged in spirit rather than deed.⁹³ He also alleges that any Jew who wished to achieve any degree of acceptance or assimilation within the community would have been unable to sustain any form of dietary separatism, owing to the importance of reciprocity in the forming of personal and business relationships.⁹⁴ However, Barclay's argument is flawed, in that it assumes that Jews would have *wished* to assimilate. Much of the antagonism directed towards the Jews appears to have concentrated upon their desire to maintain a distance between their own customs and those of others. Unless we are to assume that all Gentile references were nothing more than generalisations that were not based upon actual observations, it must be assumed that a sizeable proportion of the Jews of the Diaspora actually did practice at least some of the dietary laws.⁹⁵ It seems likely that the textual references to Jewish dietary behaviour concerned all groups of Jews rather than just the stricter sects, such as the Essenes. Adherence to the laws may have, for some, only occurred on an intermittent basis, rather than daily. Perhaps the laws were only observed on special sacred occasions. Barclay does appear to recognise some of the inherent defects of his argument, and notes that hostility to Jewish

⁹² One may compare this to Christian monastic orders, who would have been divided into the monks themselves and lay brothers. In antiquity, the most obvious parallel is with the Pythagorean ἀκουσματικοί and μᾶθηματικοί, advocating different levels of abstinence; see pages 98-99.

⁹³ Barclay (1996), 435.

⁹⁴ Barclay (1996), 435.

⁹⁵ It is possible that Greek and Latin texts may have exaggerated the assiduousness of Jewish adherence to their dietary laws if the author was writing in an anti-Semitic vein, and felt that such hyperbole better served to illustrate his motif of Jewish separatism.

dining arrangements was indeed widespread, thus implying that there existed a strong fidelity to these laws.⁹⁶ Sanders makes the intriguing assertion that Jews in the Diaspora may have been inclined to shun foods of a Gentile origin, not merely from religious scruples. He believes that such voluntary dietary detachment stemmed from a need to distance themselves from the contaminating and corrupting influences of Gentile society.⁹⁷ It is almost as if the purity laws are regarded as insufficient to protect against outside contamination. An aversion to alien foodstuffs thus may have sometimes been derived from individual prejudice and apprehension towards the belief systems and cultural practices of other ethnic groups, rather than because of the dictates of their own religious dogma. Of course, it is not so easy to separate the two impulses, and to see where religious solidarity ends and bigotry begins.

If the laws were not obeyed assiduously, it may not have been through a lack of will, rather the number of obstacles that were placed in the way. The stipulations of the laws required the individual to carefully scrutinise the origins of his or her food, in order to ensure that it had not previously been a part of a pagan ritual. Perhaps one could have paid lip service to such investigations, and not look too closely into the provenance of their foodstuffs. If there were no explicit link to pagan sacrifice, perhaps this would have been sufficient to make the assumption that it had not been tainted in this way (innocent until proven guilty, as it were). This is very much the pragmatic approach urged by Paul to Christians in his letter to the Corinthians.⁹⁸

It would seem logical to suppose that Jewish food requirements would have been handled 'in house', that is by Jewish butchers and tradesmen who were deemed to possess the required knowledge to procure the permitted animals and to ensure that they were slaughtered in accordance with the purity ordinances. It seems likely that non-Jews would not have been trusted to be sufficiently scrupulous in ensuring that the correct meat was butchered in the approved way, and was entirely free from blood contamination. More probable is the fact that a Gentile presence in this particular system of slaughter would have invoked significant implications with regards to ritual purity. Hostility or indifference on the part of the Greek and Roman authorities would have

⁹⁶ Barclay (1996), 436-7.

⁹⁷ Sanders (1992), 216. See Sanders (1992), page 520, note 13.

⁹⁸ I. *Corinthians*. 10.1-33. See Sanders (1992), 216.

made such dietary arrangements difficult, if not impossible. However, we do possess evidence that the authorities were prepared, at least sometimes, to assist the Jews in these matters. From Josephus, we learn of a decree, passed in the first century BC in Sardis, stating that the officials of the city market should ensure that food that was suitable for Jewish consumption was made available:

ὅπως τε τοῖς τῆς πόλεως ἀγορανόμοις ἐπιμελὲς ἦ καὶ τὰ
ἐκείνοις πρὸς τροφήν ἐπιτήδεια ποιεῖν εἰσάγεσθαι.⁹⁹

As Zeev's commentary on this passage makes clear, not only does this seem to indicate that in Sardis, the Jews were adhering to their dietary laws, but also that the necessary procedures to procure the special foods were enshrined in local law.¹⁰⁰ The decree does not describe these procedures in any detail. Presumably, they concern not only the types of animal, but also the way in which they were slaughtered. Perhaps the decree was meant to ensure that the restrictions upon activity imposed by Sabbath observance were taken into account. This would mean that food would be available on a particular day (or perhaps that food would be held back, so that others would not take food in their absence). Of course, this decree is but one instance of pro-Jewish dietary legislation by the Roman authorities, and we are unable to infer from this that such consideration was an empire-wide phenomenon. Perhaps the Jews of Sardis felt the need to lobby actively for such rights to appear as law, as they were unable to achieve their ends informally. Other communities may have arranged things differently. Perhaps elsewhere, no special provision was made for Jews at all.

It is also possible that a service industry may have built up around the provision of these special items (although, as previously stated, if non-Jews were involved, purity may have been perceived to have been compromised). A passage in the elder Pliny seems to point to a special type of *garum* that was manufactured to take into account Jewish requirements. Unfortunately, Pliny becomes rather confused about the issue:

⁹⁹ Joseph. *AJ* XIV, 261: 'and that those that are in charge of the markets, shall take care that such sorts of food as they [the Jews] think necessary for life may be brought into the city'.

¹⁰⁰ Zeev (1998), 224. Also Sanders (1992), 215-216; 520, note 12.

Aliud vero est castimoniarum superstitioni etiam sacrisque Iudaeis
dicatum, quod fit e piscibus squama carentibus¹⁰¹

Pliny appears to be under the misapprehension that the only types of fish that Jews were permitted to consume were precisely the species that were forbidden to them. Nonetheless, it at least appears to indicate that some sort of provision was made for special foods to be manufactured especially for Jewish consumption. Whether these foods were manufactured by Jews or Gentiles is unclear. Pliny's observation may be entirely mistaken, but, significantly, he is willing to acknowledge that there was rather more to the dietary laws than mere pork abstention. Such was the power of the connection of the latter with Judaism that it seems that any person or group that chose not to eat this meat (for whatever reason) ran the risk of being accused of being a Jew. A passage in a letter of Seneca reveals how he himself had encountered such a problem during his early life:

In primum Tiberii Caesaris principatum iuventae tempus inciderat:
alienigena tum sacra movebantur et inter argumenta superstitionis
ponebatur quorundam animalium abstinentia. Patre itaque meo rogante,
qui non calumniam timebat sed philosophiam oderat, ad pristinam
consuetudinem redii.¹⁰²

In AD19, Tiberius ordered the expulsion of the Jews from Rome, for reasons that are still not entirely evident.¹⁰³ There was a real danger of being forced into exile if one

¹⁰¹ Plin. *HN* XXXI,95: 'But another [type of *garum*] is actually devoted to superstitious abstinence and Jewish worship, which is made from fish without scales'.

¹⁰² Sen. *Ep.* CVIII, 22: 'The time of my youth happened in the early part of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. At that time, foreign rites were being initiated, and abstinence from certain animals was regarded as evidence of these superstitions. Accordingly, at the request of my father, who was not afraid of legal prosecution, but who hated philosophy, I returned to my previous habits'.

¹⁰³ Suet. *Tib.* 36.; Cass. Dio LVII,18; Joseph. *AJ* XVIII,81ff; Tac. *Ann.* II,85. See Gruen (2002), 29-36. for a discussion of the possible reasons for this expulsion. Merrill (1919), 365-372. The Jews were subject to numerous exclusion orders in the first century. They were expelled for a period during the reign of Claudius; Suet. *Claud.* 25. Also Slingerland (1992), 127-144.

were to be mistaken for an adherent of the Jewish faith. The rationale for the expulsion appears to have been the result of a period of general cultural anxiety, rather than a pointedly anti-Semitic sentiment, either emanating from the citizen body or from the political authorities. After all, Egyptian cults were subject to a similar decree, as were astrologers. If we are to believe the accounts of Dio and Josephus, the impetus for the crackdown was the success of the Jewish campaign of proselytism.¹⁰⁴ Seneca's remarks about the dangers of religious misidentification because of his vegetarian diet should be seen in the context of a period of persecution of many foreign cults, not just Judaism. Evidently, there was much confusion and suspicion surrounding behaviour that may have been perceived to have been associated with these alien sects.

Thus far, this exploration of the ramifications of the Jewish dietary laws has ignored the potential relationship between the existence of the Diaspora Jewish community and seditious activity in Jerusalem. It would seem natural that conflict between Roman forces and Jewish resistance forces may have resulted in a rise in prejudice and hostility towards Jews in other lands. Perhaps the hostility and mockery that is to be found in the writings of so many Greek and Roman writers was the result, not of a reaction to the customs and beliefs of this group, but to the insurrection of a race who would simply not succumb utterly to Roman authority. This seems rather implausible, as unless they were reporting the periodic expulsions of the Jews from Rome, the military campaigns against them or the imposition of extra taxes, the writings tend to be in an anthropological or satirical vein. They are observations that reflect upon the peculiar habits and behaviour of a group that was forced to scatter itself across the world, living in the heart of foreign communities, working and paying taxes, yet had many customs and beliefs that were designed to distance themselves from other groups. Such a paradox continues to fuel similar questions in modern societies about issues of multiculturalism, immigration and ghettoisation. Anti-Semitic writings in antiquity interpreted the elements of the Jewish religion as illustrations of 'otherness'.¹⁰⁵ These regulations were regarded as 'wrong' on two levels. Firstly, they were dissimilar to the customs and traditions that constituted the 'norm' in Graeco-Roman culture (I use this term advisedly), and thus were inherently mistaken. Secondly, they bore at least a

¹⁰⁴ Gruen rejects this position; 31.

¹⁰⁵ Which, of course, they were designed to be, as outlined in *Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy*.

superficial resemblance to the protocol of other 'inferior' nations, particularly the Syrians and the despised Egyptians. In popular imagination, it is easy to imagine how, somehow, the Jews became amalgamated with the Egyptians and other eastern races in an indistinguishable blur of animal idolatry, genital mutilation and dietary phobias.

I would not necessarily contend that the Jewish dietary laws were the most significant element of their own perception of self-identity. The religious laws were a complex and well-defined system for maintaining a state of purity, a state that was absolutely necessary to assert their distinctive and unique relationship with God. Dietary purity went hand-in-hand with circumcision, ritual bathing, the observance of the Sabbath, temporary fasting, and prayer as a means to achieve this condition. However, the dietary element has one particular aspect that renders it especially noteworthy, and it is an aspect that is shared with other practitioners of dietary restriction in antiquity. This thesis has advocated the view that it is probable that the major part of the population ruled by the empire must have existed on a subsistence diet, at the mercy of climate, pestilence and military conflict. In such an environment, when food would have been a scarce and valuable commodity, to shun what some would consider essential for the continuation of life would have been considered a perverse stance to adopt. The Jewish system entailed the elimination from the diet of many foodstuffs, some of them regarded as either some of the most ubiquitous or the most flavoursome. In the eyes of outsiders, such discipline rendered the gastronomic life of the Jews a barren wasteland, both annoyingly problematic and unspeakably dour. It made the procurement and preparation of meals a laborious and time-consuming task, and one that was prohibited completely on the Sabbath.¹⁰⁶ It prohibited one of the most popular and widespread of meats. They seemed to negate one of the most important functions of food in the ancient world: as a means of social cohesion. Of course, as has already been noted, the act of eating within Jewish culture did promote social unity, but given the existence of ideologically diverse sects within Judaism, such cohesion could only have occurred at family level, or between members of the same sect. The connections that were formed by a shared pattern of eating within Judaism were not cross-cultural. The laws simultaneously united and repelled (outsiders).

¹⁰⁶ Augustus did make provision that Jewish observance of the Sabbath did not hinder their ability to receive the grain dole; Philo *Leg.* 158. Also Gruen (2002), 28-29; 266 note 85.

In this sense, the Jewish culinary experience serves to reinforce, several times each day, Jewish cultural and religious selfhood. The act of satisfying each pang of hunger was a regular reminder of the urge to achieve absolute purity. Each mouthful and swallow was a persistent *aide de memoir* to worship God piously and to follow his commandments. The view of Jewish identity that dietary laws presented to others was of an otherness that was stubborn and contrary. Jewish piety was looked upon as mere primitive superstition, their self-perceived holy status seen as arrogance, their refusal to accept other gods or acknowledge the divinity of the emperor as both unreasonable and seditious. Their diet was a pointless and illogical anomaly.

Jewish dietary laws may be viewed as almost the epitome of the way in which dietary restrictions may be seen to influence the way in which ancient identity was constructed. A strict regime of behavioural rules ensured that purity was not compromised. In this sense, they were a set of regulations with a positive end. For Gentiles, however, one of the most prominent features of these laws was the sense of negation. The laws seemed designed to squeeze every last drop of pleasure out of life. It talked of the foods that one was forbidden to eat. Food was treated not as a possible source of delectation, but as a potential threat. An unguarded moment could lead to a mouthful of an illicit food. One swallow could result in perhaps irrevocable contamination. To someone like Tacitus, these food laws were an atrocity perpetrated against Roman sensibilities; a hostile act that wilfully shut out the world, and enjoined the Jews to retreat into a hermetically sealed cultural bubble. And yet, this isolationism was not absolute, for Jews actively participated in the economic life of the city. The Jews were an enigma to a culture that was relatively comfortable with the way radically diverse peoples could peacefully co-exist under the shelter of the umbrella of Roman authority. The cultures could sometimes merge, producing new hybrids. Romans and Greeks were perfectly willing and able to accept each other's gods. Egyptian, Syrian and other foreign divinities could establish cults within the heart of Rome and the other major cities of the empire. New fruits and spices could be imported from distant lands, as could exotic new creatures.¹⁰⁷ Culinary isolation should have become extinct; the Jewish food laws were thus an anachronism. Far from being an affirmation of life, they appeared to be a repudiation of it.

The fascination with the Jewish diet seems to have provided a way for Greek and Roman observers to attempt a partial penetration of the mysteries of Jewish culture; a paradoxical and sometimes incomprehensible entity. They both fascinated and repelled. They were a people that elected to live in a form of cultural seclusion, estranged in some ways from the host culture, deep in the heart of sprawling multicultural urban areas. They sought, through complex mechanisms of behavioural control, to eradicate pollution (both physical and spiritual) from their lives, in order to achieve communion with God. The irony was that they chose to do this, not in remote and isolated communities, but in the midst of those who could prove the most likely source of contamination.

¹⁰⁷ Dalby (2000).