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Semantic Hermeneutics of the Food of the People of the Book According to Exegetes through the Verse 5 of Surah *al-Mā'idah*

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Abstract

This study critically examines a range of interpretative works on the Qur'anic verse, "This day, [all] good foods have been made lawful for you, and the food of those who were given the Scripture is lawful for you." (al-Mā'idah/5) By employing a comparative and analytical approach, the research explores the evolution of ijtihad and hermeneutics as applied to this key verse, which lies at the intersection of legal rulings, social ethics, and interreligious relations. The investigation traces the diverse exegetical traditions, from classical Tafsir by scholars such as *al-Ṭabarī*, *Ibn Kathīr*, and *al-Rāzī* to contemporary interpretations, and examines how historical, cultural, and doctrinal contexts have shaped juristic reasoning. In doing so, it reveals the verse's critical role in establishing legal pluralism and fostering interfaith dialogue, thereby contributing to social cohesion and the development of inclusive legal frameworks. The study is guided by research questions that address the focus on the People of the Book, the historical and social catalysts for legal recognition, the influence of various jurisprudential schools, and the broader socio-political implications of these interpretations on religious pluralism and citizenship. Ultimately, this research contributes to current debates on the nature of Islamic legal thought and its capacity to inform modern discussions on multicultural governance and civic coexistence.

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Introduction

The present study aims to provide a critical analytical and comparative study of various interpretative works on the verse: "This day, [all] good foods have been made lawful for you, and the food of those who were given the Scripture is lawful for you." (al-Mā'idah/5)

This verse has long attracted the attention of exegetes, jurists, and social theorists because it operates at the intersection of legal rulings, social ethics, and interreligious relations. Our study is driven by the need to understand not only what is being legislated in the verse but also how the interpretative process, through *ijtihad* (juridical reasoning) and hermeneutics, has evolved over time. In doing so, we seek to illuminate the broader dynamics of Islamic legal thought and its response to changing historical, cultural, and social circumstances.

The verse in question is central to discussions about food law and, more broadly, the social and legal structure of early and later Muslim societies. The explicit mention of the "Food of those who were given the Scripture" (i.e., the People of the Book) signals a deliberate engagement with the religious "Other" and hints at a normative framework aimed at facilitating coexistence among diverse communities. Historically, this has been interpreted as an indication of the flexibility and pluralism embedded within Islamic law, a point that becomes particularly compelling when juxtaposed with the later development of doctrinal and jurisprudential schools.

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The key points of this verse have included the development of the interfaith dynamics that establishes an early precedent for interreligious tolerance by recognizing the legitimacy of practices from Judeo-Christian traditions. This recognition not only had ritual and dietary implications but also contributed to the social cohesion of multi-religious communities under Islamic governance. In addition, this verse has a crucial impact in developing legal pluralism and social order. Beyond food prescriptions, many scholars have argued that this verse which lays the groundwork for a comprehensive social system characterized by tolerance, security, and moderation. This system has historically enabled the formation of diverse societies where different religious communities could coexist with a shared sense of citizenship

The scope of our research has two primary objectives:

1. **Tracing the Evolution of Interpretation:** "We aim to show how the process of *ijtihad* has developed with respect to this verse, particularly how different interpretative traditions have engaged with its semantic and legal dimensions. By examining works from various schools of thought, without necessarily adhering to a strict chronological sequence, we hope to capture the intellectual diversity and methodological richness that has marked the exegetical discourse."
2. **Assessing the Socio-Political Implications:** "By situating these interpretations within their broader historical and cultural contexts, we intend to explore how juristic reasoning not only addressed legal and ritual questions but also contributed to the formation of social systems that promoted religious pluralism and civic coexistence."

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To accomplish these objectives, our study employs a multi-layered methodological approach:

- **Comparative Textual Analysis:** "We will analyze a diverse set of interpretative works, ranging from classical tafsir literature (e.g., those by *al-Ṭabarī*, *Ibn Kathīr*, *al-Rāzī*, and others) to contemporary scholarly interpretations. This analysis will focus on both the literal and contextual readings of the verse, paying close attention to the semantic nuances of key terms and the linguistic context."
- **Thematic and Contextual Mapping:** "Rather than following a strict chronological progression, we will organize our study around central themes, such as the legal status of non-Muslim practices, the evolution of interfaith dialogue, and the doctrinal underpinnings of legal pluralism. This thematic approach allows us to appreciate the rich tapestry of thought that has emerged from a non-linear engagement with the text."
- **Historical and Social Contextualization:** "Each interpretative work will be examined against its historical backdrop. Factors such as political alliances, social stratification, and the prevailing intellectual currents will be considered to understand why certain interpretations gained prominence over others. In particular, we will explore how historical events, such as treaties with Judeo-Christian communities or moments of interfaith conflict, have influenced the juristic reasoning behind the acceptance of the food of the People of the Book."

To guide our study, we have formulated the following research questions:

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1. Why is there a focus on the food of the People of the Book in this surah, and how did interpreters engage with it in terms of sequence? This question will examine the exegetical rationale behind highlighting the dietary practices of People of the Book. It involves understanding both the linguistic emphasis in the verse and the broader socio-political context that necessitated such an inclusion.
2. What are the key historical and social factors that led to the consideration of the food of the People of the Book as lawful for Muslims, while excluding other religions? Here, we explore the specific circumstances, such as diplomatic, economic, or communal needs, that might have influenced early Islamic jurisprudence to make explicit distinctions between different religious communities. We will analyze how historical events and cultural exchanges shaped these interpretative decisions.
3. Did the doctrinal, jurisprudential, and intellectual schools have a role in shaping the interpreters' readings of the verse, and how did their influence affect the process of interpretation, making their works diverse and rich? This question directs our attention to the internal dynamics of Islamic legal theory. We will consider how different schools (e.g., Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali) and intellectual traditions have contributed to the multiplicity of interpretations. In doing so, we aim to reveal the interplay between doctrinal commitments and hermeneutical choices.
4. Did the interpreters, through their diverse interpretations of the verse, establish social systems that ensure freedom and religious pluralism, thus reinforcing the principles of citizenship and co-existence among individuals in a single society? Finally, this inquiry assesses the broader societal impact of these interpretative efforts. By linking textual exegesis

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with social theory, we will evaluate whether and how these interpretations have influenced the development of inclusive social policies and legal frameworks that support religious freedom and civic integration.

This research is positioned at the nexus of Islamic jurisprudence, hermeneutics, and social theory. By critically engaging with a key Qur'anic verse through multiple interpretative lenses, our study aims to contribute to the ongoing debates about the nature of legal pluralism in Islam. Moreover, by emphasizing the socio-political dimensions of legal interpretation, we hope to offer insights into how classical exegesis can inform contemporary discussions on religious coexistence and multicultural governance.

Through our detailed investigation, we aspire to reveal that the diversity of interpretative approaches is not merely a matter of theological debate but is intimately connected to the lived experiences of communities navigating the complexities of interfaith and intercultural relations. In doing so, this study seeks to underscore the enduring relevance of classical interpretative traditions in addressing modern challenges related to citizenship, identity, and pluralism.

1. The Semantic Implications of the Word "Yawm" (Today) in the Verse

Interpreters have provided various explanations for the meaning of the word "Yawm" in the verse, linking it to the preceding verses at the beginning of the surah. They assert that it serves as an affirmation and introduction to what follows, with the reason for mentioning "Yawm" being understood from the reference to "Yesterday." The repetition of the permissibility of good things, despite it being stated in the previous verse, and its introduction with "Today" signifies God's favor upon the

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believers by permitting the food of the People of the Book (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1997: 5, 203).

The purpose of this repetition is to confirm that this ruling remains in effect with the completion and establishment of the religion, as it was a pre-existing matter, and nothing from it had been prohibited before (Ālūsī, n.d.: 6, 64). Furthermore, the word "Today" also signifies the time of the perfection and completion of religion. In this verse, it appears in the form of a response to a question: "What is lawful for us?" with the answer beginning with "Today." (Qurtubī, 1971: 3, 51)

However, Ṭabāṭabā'ī explicitly states that the verse is a clear or near-clear proof of the permissibility of consuming the slaughtered meat of the People of the Book. He questions how some could still inquire about its permissibility when verses, both Meccan and Medinan, had been repeatedly revealed on this matter, affirming its lawfulness. Moreover, these verses were preserved, recited, studied, and acted upon (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1997: 5, 214).

According to some interpreters, the word "Today" also alludes to the time of the Prophet's (PBUH) life, serving as a glad tiding of the spread and dominance of Islam, the perfection of the religion, and the completion of divine blessings. At that time, lawful foods had already been permitted to Muslims. *al-Qurtubī* states:

"Today, good things have been made lawful for you" means: "Today, I have perfected your religion for you, and today, I have made lawful for you the good things. The repetition serves as an emphasis, meaning that the good things you inquired about have been made lawful for you. These good things had already been permitted to Muslims before the revelation of this verse, so this

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serves as an answer to their question: "What has been made lawful for us?" (Qurṭubī, 1971: 3, 51)

It has also been said that mentioning "**Today**" refers to the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), just as one might say, "These are the days of so-and-so," meaning this is the time of his emergence and the spread of Islam. Thus, with this, your religion has been perfected, and good things have been made lawful for you.

The author of *al-Manār* raised an objection regarding the connection between the permissibility of good things and the various interpretations of the word "Today" in the verse. He also dismissed the widely accepted view among interpreters that "Today" refers to the Day of 'Arafah during the Farewell Pilgrimage. Instead, he argued that the term should be understood as referring to the "Day this surah was revealed," since it explicitly outlined all types of prohibited impurities—including carrion, blood, and other forbidden substances—that the Arabs had previously deemed lawful in pre-Islamic times. Additionally, the verse negates the prohibition of *Baḥīra*, *Sā'iba*, *Wasīlah*, and *Ḥām* (specific categories of animals the Arabs traditionally considered sacred and forbidden to eat), affirming that they are among the pure foods from livestock. He explains:

"One might question how the permissibility of good things could be linked to that day if it refers to the Day of 'Arafah during the Farewell Pilgrimage, given that their permissibility had already been mentioned in some Meccan surahs, such as *al-A'rāf*. The response is that while good things were generally lawful, it was only on the day this surah was revealed that Allah explicitly forbade various impure substances included under the category of carrion, as mentioned in the previous verse. Since the Arabs had

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previously considered them lawful, and since the surah negated the prohibition of *Baḥīra*, *Sā'iba*, *Wasīlah*, and *Hām* —animals the Arabs wrongly deemed forbidden—this declaration clarified in full detail the status of lawful foods and permanently established their ruling. This, then, is the intended meaning of the verse. Some have also suggested that it serves as an introduction to what follows." (Rashīd Riḍā, 1960 AD/1380 AH: 6, 177)

Ibn Ashur explained the reason for linking the word "Today" in this verse to what was mentioned in "Today, the disbelievers have despaired of your religion" (*al-Mā'idah*/3) and "Today, I have perfected your religion for you." (*al-Mā'idah*/3) He clarified that this is because it was the day of a general proclamation, stating:

"... Apart from the aspect of restricting the occurrence of the act to that specific day, which does not apply here—since the permissibility of good things was already established and none of them had been previously forbidden—what made that day significant was that it was the day of a comprehensive and public proclamation. This is similar to the phrase "And I have approved Islam as your religion" in its connection to the mention of "Today," as previously discussed. The relevance of mentioning this right after "Today, the disbelievers have despaired" and "Today, I have perfected" lies in the fact that this, too, is a great favor—because issuing rulings in a comprehensive manner is a blessing that facilitates understanding and learning in religion." (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984: 6, 119)

al-Biqā'ī highlighted the relevance of the word "Today" in the verse by linking it to the preceding references in the surah. He explained the significance of its repetition, considering the different contexts and the

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time of revelation, emphasizing the greatness of the blessing it conveys—one that includes security, unity, and stability, despite the Arabs' previous feelings of fear, weakness, and division. He pointed out that this "Today" signifies the completion of divine favor and carries a different connotation from the earlier mention of "Today" in the surah's opening verses. He states:

"Thus, Allah Almighty repeated the mention of the time when these verses were revealed, drawing attention to the magnitude of the blessing it represents—by recalling their present state of abundance, security, unity, and harmony, in contrast to their past condition of scarcity, fear, and division. He reiterated the opening of the previous verse to emphasize the greatness of this blessing and to indicate that the time of permissibility is intended to establish permanence and stability—since it coincides with the day of the completion of divine favor, making it distinct from the earlier today mentioned at the beginning of the surah." (al-Biqā'ī, 1984: 6, 24)

From these various interpretations of the word "Today" in the verse, we have observed that the exegetical efforts were not conflicting but rather closely aligned in their attempt to convey its semantic significance. Most scholars considered the meaning of "Today" to be deeply connected to the historical, social, cultural, and religious contexts of Arabian society at that time. The themes of the completion, perfection, and universality of religion, along with its dominance over previous faiths—especially the scriptural religions—were central to the interpreters' explanations of "Today" and its context in the surah. They emphasized that among its key connotations are the comprehensive divine blessing and the establishment of unity—two factors that foster

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security, stability, and social cohesion while strengthening both individual and communal relationships. These meanings also work to eliminate fear, division, and conflict within the Muslim society. This aligns with the universal objectives of all monotheistic religions, which call for the flourishing of the world and the well-being of humanity.

2. The Semantic Implications of the Word "*Ṭayyibāt*" (Good Things)

The word "*Ṭayyibāt*" appears in the Quran in various forms and contexts due to its profound significance, which is directly and closely tied to human well-being and livelihood (al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, n.d.: 464). Analyzing Quranic exegeses reveals that interpretations of this term are largely similar, emphasizing its connection to human behavior and innate nature in all aspects of life.

According to some interpretations, *Ṭayyibāt* refers to everything that the soul finds pleasant and that human nature enjoys. It signifies all things that are wholesome and agreeable to human nature upon consumption, providing both delight and lasting benefit. This principle serves as the foundation for the permissibility of things in Islamic law (al-Andulusī, 2010: 2, 100-101). In his Tafsir (exegesis), *al-Ṭabrisī* mentions multiple meanings of the word *Ṭayyib*, depending on the context in which it appears. It can mean something delightful, permissible, or pure. He explains that reason and Islamic law serve as the criteria for determining what the human soul dislikes and rejects, as well as what it naturally accepts and approves of. He states:

"*Ṭayyib*" refers to that which is pure and free from any impurity that may taint or diminish its quality. It is categorized into three types: "The delightful (*Musta-ladh*), the permissible (*Jā'iz*) according to Islamic law, and the pure (*Ṭāhir*), meaning that which is neither

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impure nor contaminated. The original meaning of the word in the Arabic language refers to that which is delightful. However, it has also been used to describe what is pure and permissible by way of analogy, as reason and Islamic law deter from things that the soul dislikes and naturally turns away from." (Ṭabrisī, 1961: 1, 459)

In another context, the author of *Al-Manar* links the meaning of "*Ṭayyib*" (good/pure) to taste and the beneficial nourishment it provides to humans. He contrasts it with terms that healthy natural instincts reject and find repulsive, such as "*Khabā'ith*" (impurities), due to their incompatibility with reason and natural human disposition. He also highlights how this distinction influences a person's behavior in worship, stating:

"*Ṭayyib* refers to what is pleasant to the taste and provides beneficial nourishment. In financial matters, it applies to wealth acquired lawfully and through mutual consent in transactions. In contrast, *Khabā'ith* (impure) foods are those that sound human instincts find repugnant and distasteful, such as carrion and spilled blood. Reason also rejects them due to their harm to the body, such as pork, or due to their harm to faith, such as meat sacrificed in devotion to entities other than Allah." (Rashīd Riḍā, *ibid*: 6, 170)

Ibn al-'Arabī connected hunting and the food of the People of the Book to the broader category of "*Ṭayyibāt*" that Allah has permitted for Muslims. He classified them as absolute *Ḥalāl* (permissible), emphasizing that this ruling was reiterated in the Qur'an to dispel doubts, remove objections arising from corrupt thoughts, and avoid unnecessary debate and excessive discourse. He states:

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"This is definitive proof that hunting and the food of the People of the Book fall under the category of *Ṭayyibāt*—the pure and wholesome things that Allah has made lawful. This is absolute *halal*, and Allah repeated this ruling to eliminate doubts, remove objections arising from corrupt thoughts that lead to unnecessary questioning, and to prevent lengthy and excessive discourse." (Ibn al-‘Arabī, 2002: 2, 45)

From the exegetical interpretations of the term "*Ṭayyibāt*" (wholesome things), we observe that scholars have consistently attributed positive meanings to this concept, linking it to human nature (*Fiṭrah*). They emphasize that human well-being is at the core of the Qur'anic discourse, and that the meanings associated with *Ṭayyibāt* carry positive implications that influence human behavior and strengthen one's relationship with the Creator. By defining *Ṭayyibāt* as what is naturally pleasing, beneficial, and lawful, interpreters highlight its role in guiding individuals towards a balanced, ethical, and spiritually fulfilling life. The concept underscores divine wisdom in legislating what is pure and permissible, ensuring both physical well-being and moral integrity.

3. The Semantic Implications of "The Food of the People of the Book (*Ṭa'ām*)"

The Qur'anic exegetes unanimously agree that the term "*Ṭa'ām*" (Food) in this verse primarily refers to slaughtered animals (*Dhabīḥah*). This interpretation was upheld by the early scholars of Islam, including Ibn Abbas, Abu Umamah, and Mujahid, among others. *Ṭabarī* confirmed this consensus, stating that the "food of the People of the Book" in this verse specifically means the meat slaughtered by them (*Ṭabarī*, 1971: 4, 440). *Ibn Kathīr* further explained that, by logical implication, the verse also indicates that the food of non-People of the

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Book (i.e., followers of other religions) is not permissible for Muslims.

He stated:

"This implies, through the principle of contrasting meaning (*Mafhūm al-Mukhālafah*), that the food of those outside the People of the Book—i.e., followers of other religions—is not lawful for Muslims." (Ibn Kathīr, 2016: 2, 21)

However, *Qurṭubī* made an exception for foods explicitly forbidden to Muslims, stating that such items remain prohibited, even if they come from the People of the Book (*Qurṭubī*, *ibid*: 3,51). On the other hand, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* referenced a Zaidi interpretation, which differed from the mainstream understanding. According to some Zaidi scholars, the term "*Ṭa'ām*" (Food) in the verse does not refer to slaughtered meat but rather to bread, fruits, and other foods that do not require ritual slaughter (*Zakāh*). He quoted:

"I came across an insightful commentary by one of the Zaidi scholars, in which he stated that scholars and jurists have differed on the meaning of food in this verse. *al-Qāsim*, *al-Hādī*, and *Muhammad ibn 'Abdullāh*, along with a narration from *Zayd*, held that the slaughtered meat of the People of the Book—and of all disbelievers—is not permissible, based on the verse: "Except that which you (Muslims) have properly slaughtered" (*al-Mā'idah/3*), which is a direct command to Muslims alone." (*al-Rāzī*, 1981: 11, 149)

This Zaidi perspective suggests a stricter interpretation that excludes slaughtered meat from what is deemed lawful; arguing that only food not requiring religious slaughter is included in the verse. This debate highlights the diverse exegetical approaches in interpreting the "Food of the People of the Book," with most scholars favoring the view that it

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refers to lawful slaughtered meat, while a minority opinion restricts its meaning to non-meat food items. On the other hand, scholars of Quranic exegesis have differed in interpreting the meaning of the word "*Ṭa'ām*" (Food)—whether it is unrestricted in meaning or specifically linked to the phrase "*Ahl al-Kitāb*" (People of the Book). In the Arabic language, when the term "*Ṭa'ām*" is used without specification, it generally refers to wheat in particular. *Ibn Manẓūr* states in *Lisān al-'Arab*:

"When the people of Hijaz use the word "*Ṭa'ām*" in an unrestricted sense, they mean wheat specifically, and based on this interpretation, Abu Sa'id's hadith on Zakat al-Fitr was explained as *a Ṣā' of Ṭa'ām*, meaning a Ṣā' of wheat." (Ibn Manẓūr, 1992: 12, 364)²

Following this linguistic interpretation, *Ibrahim al-Qummī*, in his exegesis of the verse, stated:

"By their food is meant grains and fruits, but not the animals they slaughter, as they do not mention the name of Allah over them. Then he added: By Allah, they do not deem your slaughtered animals lawful, so how can you deem theirs lawful?" (al-Qummī, 2014 AD/1435 AH: 1, 240)

Similarly, in Shia exegeses, if the word "*Ṭa'ām*" appears without being linked to another phrase, it is interpreted as referring specifically to wheat. This supports the linguistic scholars' explanation that "*Ṭa'ām*" in the verse refers to wheat and similar grains, thereby excluding the slaughtered animals of the People of the Book. From a Shia perspective, the verse cannot be used as evidence to permit consuming their

² It was reported from Abu Ishaq Al-Zajjaj: *Ṭa'āmuhu* (his food) refers to everything that is watered with his water and grows because it sprouts from his water. The plural of *ṭa'ām* (food) is *aṭ'imah*, and the plural of the plural is *aṭ'imāt*.

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slaughtered animals, as the intended meaning of "*Ṭa'ām*" in this context does not include meat but is restricted to wheat. (al-Qummī, *ibid*) However, when "*Ṭa'ām*" is specified, it generally refers to anything that is eaten. Its association with "*Ahl al-Kitāb*" indicates a connection, meaning the food they prepare, whether through cooking or slaughtering (Ibn 'Āshūr, *ibid*: 6, 119).

The author of Tafsir *al-Manār* refuted the Shia interpretation that "*Ṭa'ām*" exclusively means wheat, arguing that this is not the predominant usage of the term in the Quran. He states:

Allah Almighty states in this surah, *al-Mā'idah*: "Lawful to you is game from the sea and its food as provision for you and for travelers." (al-Mā'idah/96) No one claims that the "Food" from sea game here refers to wheat or grains. Similarly, Allah says: "All food was lawful to the Children of Israel except what Israel had made unlawful for himself before the Torah was revealed." (Āl 'Imrān/93) No one interprets "Food" in this verse as referring exclusively to wheat or grains, since nothing from them was ever prohibited for the Children of Israel—neither before the Torah nor after it. By definition, "Food" originally refers to anything that is consumed—whether tasted or eaten. Allah describes the water of the river in the story of *Ṭālūt*: "Whoever drinks from it is not of me, but whoever does not taste it is of me." (al-Baqarah/249) Likewise, He says: "And when you have eaten, disperse." (al-Aḥzāb/53)

Here, "Eaten" clearly refers to consuming food, not just grains. Grains themselves are not typically subject to permissibility or prohibition. It is meat that falls under such rulings, whether due

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to a physical reason—such as an animal dying naturally—or a spiritual reason—such as being sacrificed to other than Allah. That is why Allah says: "Say, I do not find within what was revealed to me anything forbidden to be eaten by one who wishes to eat it, unless it is a dead animal, spilled blood..." (al-An'ām/145)

This prohibition exclusively concerns animals, clearly specifying what is forbidden. Anything beyond this requires explicit textual evidence. Allah was particularly strict regarding the practices of the Arab polytheists, such as consuming carrion in its various forms and offering animal sacrifices to idols, to prevent early Muslims from following these customs out of habit (Rashīd Riḍā, *ibid*: 6, 176).

Therefore, from these discussions, we can conclude that the mainstream Sunni exegetes interpret "Food of the People of the Book" as primarily referring to their slaughtered animals, based on linguistic and contextual analysis. For the Shi'a scholars, relying on a strict linguistic interpretation, argue that "food" refers only to grains, not slaughtered meat. Then author of *al-Manār* refuted the restricted interpretation by demonstrating that Qur'anic usage of "Food" is broad and includes all edibles, particularly meat. Thus, the dominant view remains that the verse permits the consumption of meat slaughtered by the People of the Book, unless there is an explicit reason to prohibit it.

al-Biqā'ī, in his exegesis, considered that the term "Food" in the verse refers to "comprehensive food," which may not be limited solely to slaughtered animals. Its status does not differ between People of the Book and others due to the Muslims' need for it and because followers

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of other faiths were allowed to remain upon their religion under the jizya tax. He states:

"Since the reason for permissibility is the Book (scripture), and there was no need to mention those who received it, the verb was formulated in the passive voice: 'those who were given the Book'—meaning, from what they slaughter. The term food was used in a broad sense to include both slaughtered meat and other foods, even though the main intent is slaughtered meat specifically. Its status does not change whether from the People of the Book or others, explicitly affirming the intended meaning: "It is lawful for you"—meaning, its consumption is permitted due to your need for it and due to their permitted co-existence under the jizya." (al-Biqā'ī, 1984: 6, 24)

However, *al-Biqā'ī* takes a more expansive approach to the interpretation of *Ṭa'ām Alladhīna Ūtul Kitāb* by arguing that the verse permits all types of food from the People of the Book, not just their slaughtered meat. This view aligns with the idea of practical necessity and coexistence, ensuring that Muslims can engage with other communities without dietary restrictions becoming an obstacle (al-Biqā'ī, *ibid.*).

After the consensus among scholars of *tafsir*—except for the Shi'a—that the term "Food" in the verse refers to slaughtered animals, they differed on what the term "Food" encompasses. Does it include the entire slaughtered animal, or is it restricted to what is permissible from it? *al-Tha'ālabī* mentioned in his exegesis that the majority opinion holds that "Food" refers to the entire slaughtered animal. However, he also cited a group that restricted the meaning to only what is lawful from the slaughtered animal, meaning what is permissible for them to eat,

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excluding what is forbidden to them, such as *Tarf* (certain fat portions) and pure fat (al-Tha'ālabī, 1997: 2, 346).

Ibn 'Aṭīyyah provided a more detailed explanation of the term "Food," distinguishing between types of food based on human intervention. He categorized them into two types:

- Food that requires no processing, such as wheat and fruit, which remain unchanged regardless of ownership.
- Food that involves human intervention, where its preparation is unrelated to religious beliefs, such as baking flour into bread or pressing olives for oil. Avoiding such food when prepared by a non-Muslim would be due to a sense of repulsion (*Ibn 'Aṭīyyah*, 2001: 2, 158).

Ibn Juzayy al-Gharnāṭī agreed with *Ibn 'Aṭīyyah* regarding food that does not involve human intervention—such as grains and fruits—stating that it is permissible for Muslims by consensus. However, when it comes to food that requires processing, such as bread-making, oil pressing, and cheese production, where there is a possibility of impurity being involved, he considered it forbidden, stating:

Ibn Abbas prohibited it because he considered "Their food" to refer specifically to slaughtered animals and because it could be impure. However, the majority of scholars permitted it, as they viewed it as included in the general meaning of "Their food." This applies when the presence of impurity is merely possible. However, if it is certain that impurity has been used—such as wine, pork, or carrion—then it is absolutely prohibited. *al-Turtushī* even wrote a treatise on the prohibition of Christian cheese, stating that it contaminates the seller, the buyer, and the equipment used, as Christians make it using rennet from carrion.

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The same ruling applies to oil when it is known that they store it in containers made from carrion (al-Kalbī, 1995: 1, 227).

While the general ruling permits consuming food from the People of the Book, scholars introduced conditions to avoid impurities. They assumed that natural foods are always lawful, but processed foods depend on how they were made. Only Christian-made cheese and oil were major points of contention due to potential impurity.

The commentators have explained that when the term "Food" (*Ṭa'ām*) is mentioned in a general sense, it includes all permissible foods that humans consume, except for those explicitly prohibited—such as carrion, blood, pork, animals that have been strangled, fallen, or gored to death, as well as anything repugnant to human nature, such as wine. However, Shiite scholars interpreted the word "food" in this verse to refer exclusively to wheat, believing that any slaughtered animal upon which the name of Allah was not invoked is explicitly forbidden by the verse: "And do not eat of that upon which the name of Allah has not been mentioned, for indeed, it is defilement." (al-An'ām, 121) They argue that the People of the Book do not mention the name of Allah when slaughtering their animals, as they deviate from pure monotheism. On the other hand, the majority of exegetes believe that restricting the term "Food" to the People of the Book in this verse serves as proof that they are considered monotheists and that social interaction with them is necessary within human society. Moreover, the term "food" appears in various contexts throughout the Qur'an, indicating that its meaning is not limited to wheat alone.

4. The Significance of the Legitimacy of Slaughtering (*Zakāh*) in Islam

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The author of Tafsir Al-Manar, when discussing the concept of the word "*Ṭayyibāt*" (*good and pure things*) and its connection to the legitimacy of ritual slaughter, laid the groundwork to demonstrate how the Qur'an seeks to establish an Islamic society free from the impurities of polytheism. He emphasized the importance of distancing Muslims from the pre-Islamic pagan practices, which were in conflict with human nature and man's relationship with his Creator—such as offering sacrifices to deities other than Allah, consuming carrion, and slaughtering animals while invoking the names of their idol, as he states:

"...The reason for the legitimacy of ritual slaughter (*Tazkīyah*) is to avoid eating carrion like the polytheists. The reason for the strict requirement of invoking Allah's name when slaughtering or hunting is to distance Muslims from the practices of the polytheists, who used to offer sacrifices to deities other than Allah—whether by mentioning the names of their idols during slaughter or by placing the offerings on altars dedicated to them. This command serves to replace those false names, which they and their ancestors had invented without any divine authority, with the name of Allah alone, thereby purifying Muslims from all traces of polytheism." (Rashīd Riḍā, *ibid*: 6, 177)

On the other hand, Al-Qasimi affirmed that the term food in the verse is linked to the ruling on hunting and slaughtered animals mentioned earlier and that it falls under the same category. However, the slaughtering of the People of the Book differs in significance from that of Muslims, which is why they were specifically mentioned in the verse. He states:

"...Since the preceding verses discuss the rulings on hunting and slaughtering, it is more appropriate to interpret this verse in the

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same context. The rest of the food does not differ based on who prepares it—whether a follower of the Book or otherwise—but slaughtering does. Therefore, the specific mention of the People of the Book indicates that ‘their food’ refers to their slaughtered animals." (al-Qāsimī, 1978: 4, 75)

Then al-Qurṭubī explained that the act of slaughtering (*Dhibh*) requires religion and intention, and since it falls outside of analogy (*Qiyās*), Allah granted a concession to this nation regarding the slaughtered animals of the People of the Book. He also questioned whether their slaughter applies to what was forbidden to them or not. The answer, with detailed explanation, presents two viewpoints: The one states that their slaughter applies to the entire animal, including what was permissible and forbidden for them, since the key factor is the act of slaughtering itself and its conditions, which were met. Thus, it is considered universally applicable to all edible meat. The second opinion limits the permissibility only to what was lawful for the People of the Book. Anything that was forbidden to them is not affected by their act of slaughtering. Consequently, the term "Food" in the verse refers only to certain parts of the animal, excluding specific elements such as certain fats and specific portions of meat. He states:

"The act of slaughtering (*Tazkiyah*), as we mentioned, is what requires religion and intention. Since the logical analogy (*Qiyās*) would suggest that their slaughtered animals should not be permissible—just as we say that their prayers and acts of worship are not accepted—there was a difference of opinion among scholars regarding whether their slaughtering applies to what was forbidden to them or not. There are two main views on this matter: "The majority of scholars hold that their slaughtering

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applies to the entire animal, whether it was permissible or forbidden for them, because the key factor is that it was slaughtered properly (i.e., according to their religious practice)." A group of scholars argued that only what was lawful for them is lawful for us, meaning that what was prohibited for them remains prohibited, and their act of slaughtering does not make it permissible. This second group prohibited certain parts of the slaughtered animal, such as specific fats and special portions of meat, and restricted the meaning of the term "Food" in the verse to only some parts of the animal. Meanwhile, the majority interpreted it more broadly, applying it to all edible parts." (al-Qurtubī, *ibid*: 3, 52)

The author of *Tafsir al-Manār* explains the *Qiyās* (analogy) mentioned by *al-Qurtubī*, which states the obligation of the slaughtering process (*Tazkīyah*) and its conditions by comparing the slaughtering practices of the People of the Book to those of Muslims. He emphasizes that he interpreted the verse in its general sense, making it inclusive of all types of food, including hunted game, as he states:

"What *al-Qurtubī* meant by *Qiyās* is the comparison of their slaughtering practices with their general conditions, which differ from ours. This is why many scholars have argued that Allah intended 'food' here to mean slaughtered animals, despite their agreement that other types of food are permissible. However, these scholars have maintained that non-slaughtered foods were not the intended meaning of the verse—because their permissibility was never in doubt. The preferable view is to interpret the verse in its broadest scope, covering all types of food that some might suspect to be prohibited, since it is handled

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and processed by the People of the Book, who do not follow the same dietary precautions as Muslims. Likewise, their slaughtering practices differ from ours in certain conditions. Based on this reasoning, the verse also includes their hunted game, which is the strongest interpretation." (Rashīd Riḍā, *ibid*: 6, 177)

The commentators unanimously agreed that ritual slaughter (*Zakāh*) is a legislated practice intended to prevent Muslims from consuming carrion, which was a common practice among polytheists and disbelievers in their food. Additionally, it serves to distance them from offering sacrifices to idols, which is considered an act of *Shirk* (associating partners with Allah). Islam, therefore, mandated ritual slaughter as it requires both faith and intention. The food of the People of the Book was not exempted from this ruling, even though their slaughtering methods differ from those of Muslims, because they are considered monotheists who follow a revealed religion. Thus, the verse was interpreted in its broadest sense, permitting all food of the People of the Book, except for what is explicitly forbidden in Islamic law.

5. The Interpretative Meanings of "Those Who Were Given the Book"

The scholars of Quranic exegesis differed regarding the meaning of "Those who were given the Book" in the verse. Who are they? Are they the Jews and the Christians? What about the Magians, Sabians, and Samaritans—are they among those who were given a scripture or not? And based on this, is there a difference in the ruling on their slaughtered animals? Ibn Ashur states:

"Those who were given the Book" are the followers of the Torah and the Gospel, whether they were directly called by Moses and Jesus

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(peace be upon them) to follow their religion, or whether they adopted it by choice. Moses and Jesus both primarily called the Children of Israel, yet some Arabs converted to Judaism, such as the people of Yemen, and others embraced Christianity, such as the tribes of *Taghlīb*, *Bahrā'*, *Kalb*, *Lakhm*, *Najrān*, parts of *Rabī'ah*, and *Ghassān*. These groups are considered People of the Book according to the majority of scholars—except for Ali ibn Abi Talib, who held that the slaughtered animals of Taghlib Christians are not permissible, arguing that they adhered to nothing from Christianity except drinking wine." (Ibn 'Āshūr, *ibid*: 6, 120)

In the meanwhile, *al-Qurṭubī*, quoting *Ibn 'Abbās*, stated:

"Those who were given the Book" refers to the slaughtered meat of the Jews and Christians, which is lawful for Muslims, just as Muslim food is lawful for them. The Prophet (PBUH) ate from a sheep that a Jewish woman had presented to him, and the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) used to eat from the food of Christians in the Levant without any objection." (Ibn 'Āshūr, *ibid*: 6, 120)

5.1. The Temporal Factor in Defining "Those Who Were Given the Book"

The author of *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl* introduced a temporal criterion to determine the meaning of "Those who were given the Book." He argued that:

"The lawful meat is that of the Jews and Christians, as well as anyone from other nations who adopted their faith before the mission of Muhammad (PBUH). However, those who converted to Judaism or Christianity after his mission do not fall under this

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ruling, and their slaughtered meat is not permissible." (al-Baghawī, 1989: 3, 18)

5.2. The Ease in Social Interactions with the People of the Book

Ibn 'Āshūr emphasized the spiritual and social leniency found in the Qur'anic verse "The food of those who were given the Book is lawful for you" and its connection to the verse "Today, all good things have been made lawful for you." (al-Mā'idah/5) He explained:

"The verse was conjoined with 'Today, good things have been made lawful for you' because this permission was a divine favor, given the frequent interactions between Muslims and the People of the Book. Had their food been prohibited, it would have created significant hardship for Muslims." (Ibn 'Āshūr, *ibid*: 6, 119)

This ruling acknowledges that daily interactions, shared meals, and cohabitation naturally arise between Muslims and the People of the Book. Therefore, a clear legal ruling was necessary to regulate such matters, ensuring ease and removing hardship. The Qur'an established these rulings with wisdom and mercy, distinguishing the People of the Book from adherents of other religions when it comes to food consumption, while stipulating certain conditions.

6. The Historical and Political Context

al-Biqā'ī shared a similar rationale, linking the permissibility of their food to the inevitability of Muslim interactions with the People of the Book, particularly after the Islamic conquests. He stated:

"Since interaction with the People of the Book was inevitable following the conquests foretold by the Truthful One (PBUH), and since Allah had preordained these events, the danger of religious temptation (*Fitnah*) in such interactions had been minimized. Thus, the ruling on their food and women was made

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more lenient."

(al-Biqā'ī, ibid: 6, 24)

Similarly, the author of *al-Manār* referenced the consensus of early scholars, affirming that the "People of the Book" refers specifically to Jews and Christians. He further justified this ruling by contrasting the People of the Book with the Arab polytheists, stating:

"The People of the Book were farther removed from consuming carrion and performing sacrificial rites for idols compared to the Arab polytheists. Additionally, the religious policy of Islam was to take a strict stance towards the Arab pagans, ensuring that none remained in the Arabian Peninsula unless they embraced Islam. However, the approach towards the People of the Book was more lenient, as a means of winning their hearts. *Ibn Jarīr* even narrated that *Abū al-Dardā'* and *Ibn Zayd* were asked about animals slaughtered for church rituals, and they ruled them permissible to eat. The Prophet (PBUH) himself ate from a lamb that a Jewish woman had gifted him (even though it was poisoned), and the Companions would consume the food of Christians in the Levant without any objection. No opposing view has been reported." (Rashīd Riḍā, ibid: 6, 176)

Therefore, it is very crucial to say that this discussion among scholars shows the following points:

1. The People of the Book primarily refer to Jews and Christians, though some debated whether it includes converts to these faiths after Islam's emergence.
2. The permission to eat their food was granted to ease social interactions, recognizing that Muslims and the People of the Book would inevitably share meals and cohabit.

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3. The ruling was a strategic approach in Islamic governance, differentiating the strict treatment of Arabian polytheists from the more lenient approach towards the People of the Book to encourage peaceful coexistence and potential conversion.
4. Early scholars widely accepted the permissibility of consuming the meat of the People of the Book, including animals slaughtered for their religious rituals, as evidenced by the actions of the Prophet (PBUH) and the Companions.

This ruling reflects Islam's balance between legal rigor and social pragmatism, ensuring religious purity without imposing undue hardship on daily life.

The scholars of Quranic exegesis restricted the meaning of "Those who were given the Book" to the true adherents of Judaism and Christianity—those who had not apostatized after the prophetic mission and were not outsiders who had merely adopted Judaism or Christianity, whether from the Taghlib tribe or any other group. In this context, *al-Tha'ālabī* states:

"There is a difference of opinion regarding the phrase 'those who were given the Book.' Some scholars held that only the *true adherents* of these religions are included, excluding those who had merely adopted Judaism or Christianity. However, the majority of scholars, including *Ibn 'Abbās*, *al-Ḥasan*, *'Aṭā'*, *al-Sha'bī*, *'Ikramah*, *Qatādah*, *al-Zuhrī*, *al-Ḥakam*, *Ḥammād*, and *Mālik*, among others, ruled that the slaughtered animals of all Christians, whether from the Taghlib tribe or any other, are permissible, as well as those of the Jews. They interpreted Allah's statement: "And whoever among you takes them as allies is one of them" (*al-Mā'idah/51*) in this context." (*al-Tha'ālabī*, 1997: 2, 346)

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However, some scholars restricted the ruling to *born* Jews and Christians, excluding converts. The majority (including many classical scholars) saw no difference, arguing that any Christian or Jew, whether from *Banū Taghlib* or otherwise, is included in the ruling. This distinction arose due to concerns over religious authenticity—whether converts retained *genuine* scriptural traditions or had diverged. Thus, the broader ruling aligns with the Qur'anic principle of ease in social interactions, affirming the lawfulness of consuming their food.

However, Ibn 'Atiyyah, in his interpretation of the word "Were given" (*Ūtū*), clarifies that the true adherents (*Ṣurahā'*) refer to those upon whom the Torah and Gospel were revealed, as well as those who were originally Muslim but later apostatized to Judaism or Christianity—except for the Taghlib tribe of the Arabs, because they were not truly Christian. This exception is based on an explicit statement from Ali (may Allah be pleased with him). *Ibn 'Aṭīyyah* states:

"The scholars differed regarding the phrase 'were given.' One group held that the permission applies only to the slaughtered animals of the true Israelites (*Banū Isra'il*), upon whom the Torah and Gospel were revealed. This group prohibited the meat of the Christian Taghlib tribe of the Arabs and all those who were merely outsiders to these two religions. Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) used to prohibit the slaughtered animals of the Christian Taghlib tribe and would say: "They have not adhered to anything of Christianity except for drinking wine." (*Ibn 'Aṭīyyah*, *ibid*: 2, 159)

What has been understood from this interpretation that those who were given the Book" primarily refers to the Israelites who received the Torah and the Gospel. Ex-Muslims who converted to Judaism or Christianity

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are included in this category. *Banū Taghlib* was excluded because their Christianity was seen as *nominal* rather than *genuine*. This interpretation is stricter than the majority opinion, which allowed the slaughtered meat of all Christians and Jews. Thus, *Ibn 'Aṭīyyah's* stance reflects a more cautious and restrictive approach compared to other scholars who broadly permitted all Jewish and Christian slaughtered meat.

al-Qurṭubī, when comparing *al-Shafi'i's* stance with that of the majority opinion regarding the phrase "Those who were given the Book," explains that it applies to all converts to Judaism and Christianity—except for the Taghlib tribe, as they did not uphold any part of Christianity except for drinking wine. He states:

"As for the slaughtered animals of the Christian Taghlib tribe and all those who were merely converts to Judaism and Christianity, Ali (AS) prohibited the consumption of meat from the Taghlib Christians, since they were Arabs. He would say: "They have not adhered to anything of Christianity except for drinking wine." This was also the opinion of *al-Shafi'i*. Accordingly, the prohibition does not apply to the slaughtered animals of true Christians among them. However, the majority of scholars held that the meat of any Christian—whether from *Banu Taghlib* or otherwise—is lawful, as is that of any Jew. Ibn Abbas supported this view, citing the verse: "And whoever aligns with them among you, then he is one of them." (*al-Mā'idah/51*) He argued that even if the Taghlib tribe's Christianity was solely based on their association with Christians, their slaughtered animals would still be lawful." (*al-Qurṭubī, ibid:3, 53*)

It is quite clear that *al-Shāfi'ī* and *'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib* took a stricter stance, rejecting the legitimacy of *Banū Taghlib's* Christianity. The

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majority of scholars (including *Ibn 'Abbās*) permitted eating the meat slaughtered by all Christians and Jews, even converts. The debate centered on whether mere association with Christianity (without strict adherence) was sufficient to classify someone as "From the People of the Book." Thus, *al-Qurtubī*'s discussion highlights a fundamental juristic debate: "Does legal classification depend on identity, or on actual religious observance?"

In interpreting the phrase "those who were given the Book," *al-Ālūsī* excluded the Sabians, stating that they consist of two groups:

- 1) A group that reads the Psalms and worships angels.
- 2) A group that does not read any scripture and worships the stars. He concluded that the latter group is not among the People of the Book. However, *Abū al-Su'ūd* suggested that this phrase could include the Magians and the Sabians along with the Jews and Christians, raising the question of whether their slaughtered animals should be considered lawful or not.

He explains:

"According to him, the ruling on the Sabians is the same as that of the People of the Book. However, his two companions (i.e., Abu Hanifa's students) distinguished between two types: one group reads the Psalms and worships angels, while another group does not read any scripture and worships the stars—the latter are not considered among the People of the Book. As for the Magians, they were treated like the People of the Book in the matter of paying the *jizya* (tribute tax), but not in the permissibility of eating their slaughtered animals or marrying their women, based on the Prophet's (PBUH) statement: 'Treat

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them according to the same custom as the People of the Book, except for marrying their women." (al-Ālūsī, *ibid*: 6, 65)

According to these interpretations it is clear that *al-Ālūsī* excluded the *Ṣābi'ah* entirely, distinguishing between those who read the Psalms and those who worshipped stars. *Abū al-Su'ūd* suggested that the *Ṣābi'ah* and *Majūs* might be included among *Ahl al-Kitāb*, but with restrictions. The *Majūs* were treated partially like *Ahl al-Kitāb* (for tax purposes) but were forbidden in terms of intermarriage and slaughtered meat. This debate reflects a broader juristic discussion on how to categorize non-Muslim religious groups in Islamic law. Abu al-Su'ud also mentioned the legal rulings adopted by the Shafī'i and Hanafī schools based on Ali's ruling (AS). He stated:

"This was the opinion adopted by Imam al-Shafī'i, and it was the view of the majority of the *Tabi'un*. It was also the position of Abu Hanifa (may Allah be pleased with him) and his companions. According to him, the Sabians are treated like the People of the Book." (Abū Al-Sa'ūd, n.d.: 2, 13)

Meanwhile, *al-Qurtubī* explained the stance of scholars regarding the Magians and whether it is permissible to eat their food. He clarified that the Magians are not considered among the People of the Book, according to the well-known view among scholars. However, he also pointed out that it is permissible to eat the food of those who have no scripture, as long as it does not involve slaughtered animals that require proper ritual slaughtering (*Zakāh*). He stated:

"As for the Magians, the scholars—except for a few dissenters—are in agreement that their slaughtered animals are not permissible to eat, nor is it permissible to marry their women, because they are not considered People of the Book, according to

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the well-known scholarly position. However, there is no issue in consuming the food of those who have no scripture, such as polytheists and idol worshipers, as long as it does not come from their slaughtered animals and does not require ritual slaughtering. The exception is cheese, due to the presence of rennet from dead animals. If a child's father is Magian and the mother is from the People of the Book, then according to Malik, the child follows the ruling of the father. However, according to other scholars, if one of the parents is from a group whose slaughtered animals are impermissible, then the child's slaughtered animal is also impermissible." (al-Qurtubī, *ibid*: 3, 52-53)

According to this discussion scholars of jurisprudence have considered the *Ṣābi'ah* were debated into two opinions : "First, The Hanafis treated them like *Ahl al-Kitāb*. Second, other scholars excluded them from this category. But The *Majūs* (Zoroastrians) were not considered *Ahl al-Kitāb*. Their slaughtered meat and intermarriage were prohibited. And their general food was permissible unless it required slaughter (*Zakāh*). Also Children of mixed marriages followed the father's ruling in *Mālikī fiqh*, while other scholars prohibited their slaughtered meat if either parent was non-*Ahl al-Kitāb*."

Then, the author of *Al-Manar* explains that the verse emphasizes that the People of the Book were originally monotheists, but polytheism crept into their beliefs due to their interactions with idolaters from polytheistic religions. He states:

"Since the People of the Book were originally monotheists, but the influence of polytheism infiltrated their faith through those idolaters who joined their religion, and since they did not strictly separate themselves from their past, this situation could have led

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to strictness regarding eating with them and marrying them. Just as there was strictness in prohibiting the consumption of the slaughtered animals of Arab idolaters and the marriage of their women, Allah clarified in this verse that we should not treat the People of the Book the same way as polytheists in these matters. Thus, He permitted us to eat their food and marry their women." (Rashīd Riḍā, *ibid*: 6, 177)

According to *Rashīd Riḍā*, *Ahl al-Kitāb* were originally monotheistic but were influenced by polytheism over time. Islam differentiates between *Ahl al-Kitāb* and idolaters, allowing intermarriage and consumption of their food. This ruling serves as an exception to the strict prohibitions on interacting with Arab polytheists. In addition, the author of *al-Manār* raises the question: Is the scholarly debate about the permissibility of eating the food of the People of the Book focused on anyone who follows the Torah and the Gospel, regardless of the state of their scriptures, their circumstances, and lineage? Or is the key factor whether they followed the scripture before it was altered and changed, and whether they are original adherents, such as the Israelites among the Jews? He suggests that jurists tend to delve deeply into such matters and often lean toward strictness with those who differ from them, which is why this became a subject of debate and interpretation. He states:

"The apparent meaning of the Qur'anic text, along with the Prophetic tradition and the practice of the Companions, indicates that this issue has no basis and no place for debate. Allah, the Almighty, explicitly permitted the consumption of the food of the People of the Book as they were during the time of revelation. This ruling was among the final revelations of the Qur'an, and at that time, the People of the Book belonged to various nations.

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Allah had already described them—both in this surah and in previous revelations—as those who altered their scriptures and forgot a portion of what they had been reminded of. None of these facts changed at the time when jurists later formulated this debate." (ibid: 6, 176)

Ibn 'Āshūr mentioned the wisdom behind permitting the consumption of the food of the People of the Book, emphasizing that they follow a divinely revealed religion that prohibits impurities and unclean things, unlike the Magians (Zoroastrians), polytheists, and idol worshippers. He states:

"The wisdom behind granting this concession to the People of the Book is that they adhere to a divine religion that forbids impurities, avoids filth, and follows established religious rulings that are presumed to be respected and upheld. These regulations are based on divine revelation, unlike the practices of polytheists and idol worshippers. As for the Magians (Zoroastrians), they do have a book, but it is not of divine origin. Among them are the followers of Zoroaster—these are the ones subject to scholarly debate. However, the Manichaean Magians are permissive in matters of faith and law, making their status no different from that of polytheists and idol worshippers—or perhaps even worse." (Ibn 'Āshūr, ibid: 6, 120-121)

However, the permissibility of *Ahl al-Kitāb*'s food is based on their adherence to a divinely revealed system, ensuring a fundamental level of purity. Magians remain disputed, while idolaters and permissive sects like the Manicheans are categorically excluded from this concession. On the other hand, the author of *al-Manār* discussed the reasoning behind the Shiite prohibition of consuming the food of the

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People of the Book, which they base on their association with polytheism. He examined this by comparing the Quranic verse:

"The first point: When the term *absolute polytheism* appears in the Quran—whether as a description or as a classification of a certain group of people—it does **not** include the *People of the Book*. Instead, they are considered a distinct category separate from polytheists. This is evident in the verse: "Those who disbelieved among the People of the Book and the polytheists were not to be parted from their disbelief until there came to them clear evidence." (Surah al-Bayyinah/1) Similarly, in Surah al-Ḥajj/17, the Quran differentiates between various groups, stating: "Indeed, those who have believed those who were Jews, the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, and those who associated others with Allah..." This confirms that the People of the Book are not grouped under the term "Polytheists." The second point: If we assume that the term *polytheists* in Surah al-Baqarah/221 is general, then we must acknowledge that it has been either specified or abrogated by the later revelation in Surah *al-Mā'idah*, as scholars unanimously agree that it was revealed afterward. The practical application of this ruling can be seen in the case of *Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān*, one of the most knowledgeable Companions. He married a Jewish woman, and none of the Companions objected to it, proving that such marriages were deemed permissible." (Rashīd Ridā, *ibid*: 6, 179-180)

The Quran clearly differentiates between polytheists and the People of the Book. The ruling in Surah *al-Mā'idah*/5, which permits eating the food of the People of the Book and marrying their women, overrides any

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generalization in Surah al-Baqarah/221. The Shi'a argument that the People of the Book are included among the polytheists—based on Surah al-Tawbah/31—is incorrect, as the Quran consistently distinguishes between them. Islamic historical practice further supports this distinction, as evidenced by the companions' actions. Thus, The Shi'a prohibition on the food of the People of the Book is not based on a correct interpretation of the Quranic context.

The exegetes have presented various and closely related interpretations to clarify the semantic meanings of the phrase "Those who were given the Book" and its connection to the permissibility of consuming their food, particularly their slaughtered meat. While they unanimously agree that the term in the verse refers to Jews and Christians, they also emphasize that these groups are not classified as polytheists, explicitly countering the Shi'a argument on this matter. However, the exegetes excluded the Magians, the Sabians, and the Samaritans from being considered People of the Book, leading to a scholarly debate over the permissibility of consuming their food and meat. They also discussed who exactly is meant by "the People of the Book" in this verse—whether it refers to all those who follow the Torah and the Gospel or only specific groups. Another point of discussion among scholars was who among the Magians are debated regarding the permissibility of their food and which group among the Sabians reads the Psalms and worships angels as opposed to those who worship the stars. Additionally, exegetes unanimously excluded Arabs who had converted to Judaism before the advent of Islam from being classified as People of the Book, and they agreed that the Banu Taghlib tribe did not adhere to any true Christian teachings except for the consumption of alcohol, as explicitly stated in the sources. The wisdom behind this discussion was to establish the

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permissibility of consuming the food of the People of the Book based on their monotheistic beliefs, which prohibit impurities and unclean foods and uphold divinely revealed regulations regarding slaughtered animals—unlike idolaters and the Manichean sect of the Magians, who followed beliefs contrary to divine guidance.

7. The Disagreement Regarding the Legal Ruling in the Verse: "It Has Been Made Lawful for You"

The disagreement among interpreters remains regarding the legal ruling on "The food of the People of the Book," with opinions varying between permissibility, prohibition, and disfavor. *al-Qāsimī* stated: "The closest opinion is that it is permissible, as their action makes it food, and because the People of the Book were specifically mentioned." (*al-Qāsimī*, *ibid*: 4, 50) The response to this was: "They were specified to avoid the assumption that their food, which they did not properly slaughter, is prohibited." (*ibid*.)

al-Qāsimī also mentions that "this verse implies the absolute permissibility of the slaughtered meat of the People of the Book, even if they mention a name other than that of Allah." (*ibid*.) He supported this by citing *al-Sha'ibī* and 'Aṭā' when asked about a Christian slaughtering in the name of Christ, to which they replied: "It is permissible, for Allah has allowed their slaughtered meat while knowing what they say." (*ibid*.) Additionally, *al-Qāsimī* strongly criticizes those who deny the permissibility of consuming the meat slaughtered by non-Muslim subjects (*dhimmi*), arguing that such a stance reflects a weak understanding of Arabic language and Islamic legal evidence, basing his argument on the noble Prophetic tradition. He states:

"As for the meat slaughtered by *Ahl al-Dhimma* (non-Muslim subjects), the Quran explicitly indicates its permissibility through

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this verse. Those who claim that food does not include meat have fallen short in their research, neither consulting linguistic sources nor considering the clear legal evidences that explicitly state that the Prophet (PBUH) ate from the slaughtered meat of the People of the Book. This is evident in the well-known incident where he ate from a cooked sheep prepared by a Jewish woman, which was poisoned—a story too famous to require further mention. The claim that their meat is prohibited has no basis other than mere doubts and unfounded assumptions, which afflict those who have not firmly established themselves in the knowledge of Islamic law." (al-Qāsimī, *ibid*: 4, 78)

In the same context, Ibn al-Arabi agreed with *al-Qāsimī* in interpreting this verse, believing that the permissibility of the food of the People of the Book is absolute, even though it does not meet the Islamic conditions for *Zakāh* (ritual slaughter). He said:

"I was asked about a Christian who twists the neck of a chicken and then cooks it—can one eat with him or take it as food from him? I replied: It is permissible to eat it because it is their food, as well as the food of their priests and monks, even though this is not considered proper *Zakāh* (ritual slaughter) according to us. However, Allah has permitted their food for us unconditionally, and whatever they regard as lawful in their religion is also lawful for us, except for what Allah has explicitly refuted. Our scholars have said: They give us their women in marriage, and it is permissible for us to have relations with them—so how could it be prohibited to eat their slaughtered animals when eating is of lesser significance than marriage in terms of permissibility and prohibition? End of quote." (Ibn al-‘Arabī, *ibid*: 2, 45)

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On the other hand, Al-Baghawi stipulated that the prohibition of the food of the People of the Book depends on the necessity of being present and hearing whether or not they mention the name of Allah during the act of slaughter. He cited *al-Ḥasan*'s statement: "If a Jew or a Christian slaughters an animal and mentions a name other than Allah, and you hear it, do not eat. But if you are not present, then eat, for Allah has permitted it for you." This view was also held by the companions Ali, Aisha, and Ibn Umar, as well as by *Tāwūs* and *al-Ḥasan*, who based their stance on the verse: "And do not eat from that upon which the name of Allah has not been mentioned, for indeed it is defilement." (al-An'ām/121) (al-Baghawī, 1989: 3, 18)

However, *Ibn Juzayy Al-Gharnāṭī* clarified the point of contention in determining the legal ruling regarding the meaning of "Food" in the verse. He questioned whether it refers specifically to their food or not and categorized the differing views into three positions: permissibility, prohibition, and dislike (*Makrūh*), saying:

"As for food, it is divided into three categories. The first is slaughtered animals, which scholars agree are included in the meaning of the verse. They permitted all slaughtered animals by Jews and Christians but differed on whether what is prohibited in their religion is permissible for us or not, with three opinions: permissibility, prohibition, and dislike (*Makrūh*). This difference is based on whether such food is considered part of their food or not. If 'their food' refers to what they themselves have slaughtered, then it is permissible. However, if it refers to what is lawful for them to eat, then it is prohibited. The opinion of dislike (*Makrūh*) is a middle ground between the two views." (al-Kalbī, *ibid*: 1, 227)

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In this context, Imam 'Abdul Mun'im al-Khazrajī excluded certain foods of the People of the Book that might contain impurities, such as alcohol and pork, which led to differing opinions. The majority held that such items were part of their food, while Ibn Abbas maintained that the food permitted for us refers specifically to their slaughtered animals. As for anything suspected of containing impurities, it must be avoided.

We have observed in this discussion that the issue of the legal ruling on the food of the People of the Book has become a subject of debate among exegetes through their works. Most of them permitted Muslims to eat the meat slaughtered by the People of the Book because Allah has allowed it for Muslims, knowing that they may not always witness the slaughtering process. Therefore, they required that either a Muslim be present at the time of slaughter or that the Muslim has no knowledge of whether the slaughterer mentioned the name of Allah or not. They unanimously agreed that it is not permissible for a Muslim to consume the meat of an idolater who worships idols, a Magian who worships fire, or someone who follows no religion. As for what Ibn al-Arabi mentioned regarding the general application of Allah's words "It is lawful for you", interpreting the permissibility in the verse as absolute, he intended to clarify that any food belonging to the People of the Book is lawful for Muslims, regardless of whether it is permissible under Islamic law or not. The purpose of this absolute permissibility applies to what is permitted in their religion and does not necessarily conform to Islamic law. On the other hand, the exegetes explained that it is forbidden for a Muslim to eat the meat slaughtered by the People of the Book if it is known that the slaughterer invoked a name other than Allah over it. This type of meat is prohibited, as indicated in Allah's words: "And that which has been dedicated to other than Allah." (al-Mā'idah/3)

Khaled Troudi**Conclusion**

Through our study of the semantic meanings of the verse 5 of Surah *al-Mā'idah*, it becomes evident that the majority of exegetical works have concentrated on delineating the permissibility, disapproval, and prohibition of consuming the food of the People of the Book. These interpretations reveal that the verse not only removed earlier restrictions on engaging with the People of the Book but also paved the way for enhanced interfaith dialogue. By permitting the consumption of their food, the verse alleviated potential hardships for Muslims and facilitated smoother interactions with these communities, thereby reinforcing the bonds of social order.

Scholars have long recognized the People of the Book as an integral component of the Muslim society, drawing upon deep theological and historical ties. This recognition is rooted in the shared monotheistic heritage, with both Muslims and the People of the Book deriving their faith from a common divine revelation. Even in the presence of doctrinal differences and historical distortions, Jews and Christians are viewed as closer to Muslims compared to polytheists or idol worshipers. This proximity underscores a deliberate effort to foster pluralism within the community—one that values diverse religious identities and promotes balanced, moderate legislation.

Furthermore, by permitting the food of the People of the Book, Islamic law has contributed significantly to the establishment of a social order grounded in tolerance and inclusivity. This ruling not only validates the legal and social rights of religious minorities but also creates a framework that supports their active participation in society. It encourages interfaith dialogue by establishing mutual respect and

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understanding, and by removing barriers that might otherwise lead to social division. In this manner, the verse has been instrumental in cultivating a pluralistic society where diverse communities coexist harmoniously, guided by principles of tolerance and shared citizenship. In essence, our investigation confirms that the exegetical focus on this verse has far-reaching implications. It demonstrates that Islamic legal thought is deeply committed to fostering pluralism, enhancing interfaith dialogue, and ensuring a robust social order through the promotion of tolerance. This interpretation not only safeguards the religious, political, social, and economic rights of the People of the Book but also reinforces the broader objectives of Islamic law to create a just, inclusive, and cohesive society.

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