

Forbidden: A 3,000-Year History of Jews and the Pig

Jordan D. Rosenblum

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Scholar Jordan D. Rosenblum's fascinating text *Forbidden* is a history of how the pig became the litmus test for Jewish identity.

In accordance with biblical dietary laws, the pig is only one non-kosher animal out of many. Still, it became the animal that represents Jewish identity for practicing Jews, digressing Jews, and antisemites alike. This book traces the story of how the pig assumed this defining role in Judaism, beginning with exegesis that reflects the pig's original comparative insignificance while also reflecting on the sophisticated intricacies of the sparse language of the Bible. From there, the book chronicles the entwined history of the pig and Judaism as a religion.

Herein, Jewishness as an identity is seen across millennia and around the globe. The book dedicates one chapter to each time period from the ancient world onward. The topics are complicated, but the language is light and matter-of-fact. And the ample illustrations reflect the role of the pig in Jewish culture and in antisemitic propaganda.

The book is meticulous about identifying the turning point when the pig went from obscurity to infamy in Judaism, citing the Roman occupation of Judea two thousand years ago as the nexus of the issue. Rosenblum argues that, via a unilateral dialogue that never included Jews themselves, the Romans wracked their brains to understand the perceived problem of Jews refusing to eat pork, a meat that they themselves savored. Outsider focus on Jewishness versus pork continued through the Middle Ages, when antisemitic images, as of the Jewish sow, became commonplace.

Forbidden is an enlightening historical exposé of the remarkable transformation of the pig from an obscure animal in Jewish dietary laws to the center of what it means to be Jewish.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (September / October 2024)

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