



Religious Diversity: What or How? Towards a Praxeology of Early Modern Religious Ordering*

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Scholars of the pre-modern history of religion have increasingly sought to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of religious diversity. Building on these advancements, this paper argues that our comprehension of this phenomenon is intricately linked to our presuppositions regarding religious groups and their boundaries. By challenging the conventional notion of groups as closed, authentic, and consistently coherent collectives, it advocates for a praxeological approach. Drawing on sociological theories and microhistorical studies, with a particular focus on early modern sources related to Jewish communities, it proposes a transition from inquiries about “what” the groups are to an examination of “how” they have been constructed in both temporal and spatial dimensions. Thus, by viewing religious groups and their ordering as dynamic and process-related, this approach aims to deepen our understanding of religious diversity in the early modern era as an analytical and empirical category.

Keywords: early modern history, religious diversity, praxeology

As noted by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, any attempt to construct a comprehensive theory of society capable of adequately and empirically capturing its complexity necessitates a departure from several fundamental assumptions. Among these is the prevailing notion that groups and their boundaries are relatively fixed structures which can be viewed as tangible entities with determinable memberships and delineated borders – often at the expense of any understanding of their relational dynamics.¹ It is crucial to acknowledge that Bourdieu articulated these insights decades ago, engaging with the

* The questions and methodological considerations explored in this essay arose over the course of regular discussions on the formation of religious groups within the context of the DFG-research group *Polycentricity and Plurality of Premodern Christianities* in Frankfurt. I am particularly indebted to Birgit Emich and Alexandra Walsham for their invaluable comments on my study in this context, which have greatly enriched the theoretical framework of this study.

1 Bourdieu, *Sozialer Raum und “Klassen,”* 9. The text is an expanded version of a lecture given by Pierre Bourdieu at the opening of the *Subrkamp Vorlesungen für Sozial- und Geisteswissenschaften* in Frankfurt in February 1984, 9.

prevailing intellectual milieu of his era. Specifically, he challenged the simplistic conceptualization of social classes as historically predetermined categories, thus countering the prevalent notion of societal structure as an objective reality. His overarching objective was to transcend this perspective in favor of a theoretically robust framework informed by empirical evidence and capable of adequately addressing the intricate complexity of its subject matter.²

If one adopts this objective and attempts to offer an assessment of religious diversity in the early modern period through a historiographic lens, the imperative remains pertinent. It is incumbent on us to scrutinize how our interpretation of religious ordering intersects with our conceptualizations of religious groups and their boundaries. If one embarks on scholarly inquiries into the histories of Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and other faiths, there is an inherent risk of presupposing a predetermined structure to these religious groups and their demarcations. When we posit the existence of these groups as entities, we assume their cohesion as a collective and, moreover, we presuppose the ‘authenticity’ of their respective religious practices. Heeding Bourdieu’s critique of the compartmentalization of societal structures, such as the presumed objectivity of historical classes, we must take an epistemological step back. This entails examining the foundational assumptions inherent in historiography concerning religious groups and exploring analytical frameworks capable of transcending the complexity of these groups (and the processes through which they are posited and thus created in the secondary literature).

It is worth highlighting that over the past few decades, there has been a fruitful dialogue between historiographic and sociological approaches,³ along with extensive reflections on the complexity of religious organization in the pre-modern era. This paper contributes to a specific development recently articulated by Sita Steckel, who has synthesized past and current debates around an originally sociological concept of societal differentiation, thereby fostering an interdisciplinary perspective particularly applicable to the history of religions in the Middle Ages.⁴ The genesis of these discussions lies in historiographical

2 Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Simultaneously, the broader issue at hand was also tackled by Niklas Luhmann. In particular, his insights on the topic can be found in a collection of his essays, which have been translated into English and edited by William Rasch: Luhmann, *Theories of Distinction*.

3 In German-speaking and French-speaking academic circles, the dialogue between sociology and history has a longstanding tradition, particularly since the 1970s. Some notable classic works that exemplify this intersection include Bourdieu and Lutz, “Über die Beziehungen zwischen Geschichte und Soziologie in Frankreich und Deutschland”; Wehler, *Geschichte und Soziologie*.

4 Steckel, *Differenzierung jenseits der Moderne*, 307–51.

reflections on differentiation theory, which, in essence, conceives society as a system consisting of various subsystems, such as politics, religion, medicine, law, and so forth, each driven by its own functional dynamics of communication.⁵ Notably, this form of societal complexity was originally construed as an inherently modern phenomenon. Consequently, differentiation theory, understood as a theory which applied specifically to modernization (explicitly constructed in contrast to pre-modern society), served as a catalyst for historical debates.⁶ Historians of pre-modern period have consistently argued for an approach that acknowledges the societal and historical complexity of pre-modern times. As Sita Steckel aptly phrases it, there is a call to perceive pre-modern societies “as dynamic entities”⁷ and thus necessarily to engage with primary sources in order to capture the nuances of historical dynamics faithfully.

In light of contemporary scholarship on pre-modern religious dynamics and pluralities, the notion that differentiation theory applies exclusively to processes and moments of modernization appears increasingly difficult to substantiate.⁸ Instead, current discourse emphasizes methodological endeavors by historians aimed at crafting conceptual frameworks that effectively capture the empirical intricacies of religious organization in pre-modern contexts. Building on this premise, this paper argues that our understanding of religious ordering is intricately tied to our presuppositions concerning religious groups and their boundaries. It therefore adopts an epistemologically reflective approach, seeking to illuminate the historical and societal complexities surrounding religious groups as early modern phenomena. Drawing on sociological theories, microhistorical studies, and early modern sources related to Jewish communities in particular,⁹ it proposes a shift from inquiries about the essence of these groups to an examination of *how* these groups have been constructed and how, as constructions, they behaved both temporally and spatially. By conceptualizing religious groups

5 Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, 595–865.

6 Oexle, “Luhmanns Mittelalter,” 53–65.

7 Steckel, *Differenzierung jenseits der Moderne*, 351.

8 Steckel, “Hypocrites! Critiques of Religious Movements and Criticism of the Church”; Brauner, *Polemical Comparisons*; Weltecke, “Über Religion vor der ‘Religion’”; Pietsch and Steckel, *New Religious Movements Before Modernity?*; Jaspert, *Communicating Vessels*.

9 The ideas presented in this essay are informed by reflections derived from my ongoing book project, which examines the significance of religious practices associated with food, eating, and fasting in delineating the boundaries between diverse religious communities circa 1600. This project investigates various religious groups, including Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Greek-Catholic communities. Selected cases drawn from this research endeavor serve as the bedrock for the theoretical discussions in this essay.

and their organization as dynamic and process-oriented, this approach aims to enrich our understanding of religious diversity and the complexity of the notion of diversity itself as both an analytical and empirical category in the study of the early modern era.

To accomplish this goal, this paper begins with an exploration of the regulatory constructions of religious boundaries (I) followed by an in-depth examination of these boundaries from a bottom-up perspective. This examination considers the intricate interplay among the religious, economic, and medical spheres. Specifically, the paper employs the paradigm of religiously coded food and eating practices (II) as an analytical perspective from which to elucidate these dynamics. Within the chosen praxeological framework, it is imperative to acknowledge that any attempt to draw delineations among the societal spheres of religion, economy, and medicine necessitates recognition of the analytical nature of such categorization. This analytical division is crucial to any conceptual approach to the study of interactions that transcend individual subjectivity and structural objectivity. This allows for an understanding of these interactions as outcomes of both individual choices and structural dispositions.¹⁰ Additionally, it is necessary to perceive these spheres and their logics not as static compartments but as dynamic and contingent phenomena, exerting influence within every unique configuration of interactions.¹¹ Translated within the context of this paper, praxeology entails the meticulous reconstruction of how religious group formation may be either compromised or strengthened, depending on varying societal contexts and problem references across different fields. This paper seeks to elucidate how these patterns can be extrapolated into broader conceptual frameworks.

Community of Law(s): Plurality and Polyphony of Regulations

Crucial to the construction of religious collectives in Judaism is the foundational concept of a chosen group the members of which adhere to the commandments of their God. A comprehensive collection of laws (*mitzvot*), prohibitions, and precepts, derived from the oldest sources, was manifested in writing in antiquity. At least since the destruction of the Temple, Judaism has primarily been a law-based religion: *halakha* has been and remains far more central than any profession

10 Bourdieu, "The Objectivity of the Subjective," 135–42.

11 Bourdieu and Wacquant, "The Logic of Fields," 94–114.

of faith (and here sees the crucial difference in the construction of belonging in Christianity). These norms address a wide range of topics and spheres, extending to the main matters of daily life. Though commonly translated as Jewish Law, *halakha* literally signifies the *way to proceed* or the right way to behave. Synchronized behavior, both in law and in practices, is constitutive for religious boundaries. Another fundamental aspect of group building is individual/personal belonging, which in the case of Judaism is not solely a result of following these norms of law but is primarily attributed to descent from a maternal Jewish line. This form of belonging includes or implies commitment to religious law. These two understandings of belonging (a definition of belonging on the one hand and the obligations of belonging on the other) initially provide a rather clear picture for what is addressed in this paper as a religious group. However, insights from early modern sources prompt further questions.

In one of his writings published in 1593, Reb Chaim¹² lamented the behavior of his Jewish contemporaries: “And the rabbis have warned us not to be like the peoples of the lands, neither in our words nor in our deeds nor in our dress, but this is not heeded now in our sinful state, as many members of our community seem to mingle with them [*goyim*]¹³ and be like them [*goyim*], and they [members of our community] defile themselves with wine from their [*goyish*] feasts.”¹⁴ This passage underlines contemporary violations of religious norms but also speaks to the blurring of boundaries between Jewish and Christian groups. This blurring, crucial to the argument of this paper, occurs through daily practices and interactions.

The entire tradition of rabbinic literature and commentaries, developed over centuries in reaction to the practical need to adapt the (in principle) unchangeable norm of *halakha* to local and regional circumstances,¹⁵ reminds us to approach cases of violation of religious law beyond the sheer concept of deviance. As is asserted in one of the communal records, “[E]very Jew knows the law, and no [special] ordinance is needed.”¹⁶—so confirm one of the communal records. Yet the same record demands daily vigilance and control, prescribing sanctions and

12 Reb Chaim, full name Chaim ben Bezalel (בצלאל בן חיים), born 1520, studied in Lublin by MahaRSChAL (Salomo Luria). One of his classmates was Moses Isserles. Chaim ben Bezalel is the brother of the famous Judah Loew von Prag (Maharal). He died in 1588, so the book cited was published after his death.

13 *Goyim* = *Non-Jews*, in the context of pre-modern history also translated as *Christians*.

14 Chaim ben Beza'el, *Sefer ha-H'ayyim*, fol. 39r.

15 Baumgarten, “Daily Commodities and Religious Identity?”

16 Wettstein, *Kadmoniyot mi-Pinqas' ot yeshanim le-Qorot Yisra'el be-Polin*, 19. Cited on the basis of the translation by Cygielman, *Jewish Autonomy in Poland and Lithuania*, 93.

penalties for cases of violation.¹⁷ Community members belong to their collective by birth, which requires commitment to Jewish law. This clear demarcation of a group remains intact, as community leaders simultaneously count on the possibility of norm violations and, therefore, refer to and rely on regulations.

In the late sixteenth-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,¹⁸ Jewish communities received permission from the political establishment of the country to arrange a relatively autonomous communal administration, with organs at both the local and the supranational levels.¹⁹ Interestingly, Jewish autonomy was facilitated by the political establishment of the Commonwealth not because it entertained some notion of tolerance or religious diversity but rather due to the need to find a way to collect taxes from the growing Jewish diaspora in the country.²⁰ Among other provisions, this autonomy included the exclusive prerogative to regulate communal matters related to *halakha*.²¹ From the late sixteenth century onwards, communities and their organs produced an enormous amount of minute books (*pinkassim*)²² addressing different aspects and problems of daily life from the perspective of Jewish law. One crucial part of these regulations concerned religiously coded practices explicitly linked to religious differences, such as dress and attire in this example from 1607: “men and women shall not clothe themselves with the garments and immorality of non-Jews [...]; children of Israel are to be distinguished by their clothing.”²³ In the context of the religiously coded practices of attire, exceptions were or could be made for travelers (for security reasons) or those close to the political establishment and/or court (as a form of symbolic communication).²⁴ This practice of making (or not making) exceptions offers an example of how religious

17 Ibid.

18 On the origins of these communities, see Kulik and Kalik, “The Beginnings of Polish Jewry.”

19 Heyde, “The Beginnings of Jewish Self-Government in Poland”; Kalik, *Office Holders of the Council of Four Lands*; Kalik, *Scepter of Judah*, 9–21; Kaźmierczyk, *Żydowski samorząd ziemski w Koronie*; Teller, “Laicization of Early Modern Jewish Society”; Schorr, “Organizacja Żydów w Polsce od najdawniejszych czasów aż do r.” 734–75; Baron, *The Jewish Community*; Goldberg, “The Jewish Sejm”; Ettinger, “The Council of the Four Lands”; Goldberg, *Sejm Czterech Ziem*, 12. Recently: Katz, *The “Shabbos Goy.”*

20 Kalik, *Scepter of Judah*.

21 Cygielman, *Jewish Autonomy in Poland and Lithuania*, 13.

22 Teller, *The East European Pinkas Kabal*.

23 Halperin, *Pinḡas Wa’ad Arba’ Aratsot*, cited on the basis of Bartal, *Pinḡas Wa’ad Arba’ Aratsot*, 17, no. 50 (1607).’

24 On symbolic communication and the construction of religious identity in the early modern Italian context, see Cassen, *Marking the Jews in Renaissance Italy*.

practices not only co-shape boundaries but also, when deemed reasonable or necessary, temporarily prioritize them.

The changeability and adaptability of norms and therefore of boundaries, depending on contexts of interactions, will be important topics in the discussion below, particularly in the context of religiously coded practices related to food. The phenomenon of Jewish autonomy, in step with the actual practices of a regulatory framework, can be seen as another layer of collective demarcation of the group through adherence to a distinctive concept of law, along with religiously coded and regulated practices and fundamental norms of *halakha*, as mentioned above.

The limitations of this regulatory framework were many. As mentioned earlier, one of them was that regulations could only concern matters related to tradition. Moreover, Jewish authorities could exercise forms of governance over their community members but not over Christians or members of other religious groups.²⁵ As interactions usually went beyond religiously defined communal spaces, regulatory organs and authorities regularly faced challenges in any attempt or effort to implement their orders broadly.

Furthermore, from the perspective of Jewish law and communal regulations, it is essential to stress the historically and societally given polyphony and disparity of regulations, emanating from different institutions and parties, motivated by diverse considerations, and situated in conditions of particular power relations. Rural and urban areas, for instance, were distinct in this regard. While the status of Jewish leaseholders (*arendarzcy*) was of importance in the latter,²⁶ the regulatory constellations in the cities which enjoyed Magdeburg rights in its various forms were particularly significant. Guild and craft unions present another regulatory setting, primarily in context of the economic organization of the groups. Additionally, a special aspect of different urban districts being admitted to different groups merits consideration. Moreover, the status of Jewish communities in different places in the Commonwealth was subject to privileges issued by kings, resulting in different economic or social latitudes for different communities, which sometimes shared the same city, as is the case in L'viv/Lwow/Lemberg,²⁷ which was home to two Jewish communities, one in the inner parts of the city and one on its periphery. Furthermore, the regulatory attempts by Christian, mainly Catholic institutions and organs towards the

25 Cygielman, *Jewish Autonomy in Poland and Lithuania*, 13.

26 Kalik, "Szlachta Attitudes towards Jewish Arenda in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries."

27 Kapral, "The Jews of Lviv and the City Council in the Early Modern Period", 79–100.

Jewish community also merit consideration.²⁸ This briefly outlined plurality of regulatory frameworks and their dynamics and interdependencies are certainly topics that warrant further exploration and therefore cannot be exhaustively presented here. Yet it is crucial to keep this complexity in mind, along with the layers of Jewish law-related regulations, as we move towards a bottom-up study of interactions, focusing on one particular example of religiously coded norms and practices concerning food and eating.

The Logic of Fields: Between Religion, Medicine, and Economy

“A cooked root of this plant, called in Polish *kosaciec* [קאזאצער], in Latin *irys* [...], as well as a salve made out of it, with added pork lard, softens gastric ulcers; with rose oil and a little vinegar mixed together, it is good for headaches; if mixed with honey and white hellebore, it removes stains from a face.”²⁹ This recipe for improving health and treating ailments such as ulcers comes from a medical advisory published in Krakow in 1613. The language of the text is Yiddish, a vernacular which allows us to assume that this advisory was intended for daily use by members of the Jewish community. Hence, it is even more striking that this recipe included pork lard, which was prohibited by Jewish law.

Food-related prohibitions and precepts constitute a significant part of *halakha*, dating back to biblical times.³⁰ Along with other functional aspects, these norms of a different kind have been used to create religious differences, i.e. to draw boundaries between Jewish and non-Jewish groups, not least due to the visibility and observability of practices related to food preparation and consumption.³¹ For instance, Leviticus 11: 44–47 includes verses regarding pure and impure (i.e. edible and inedible) animals, linking this differentiation to the fundamental religious distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish groups, exemplified by individuals in 1 Maccabees 1:12–63 who chose death over consuming pork during the Seleucids persecution.³² If pork and pork products

28 Kalik, “Patterns of Contacts between the Catholic Church and the Jews in Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the 17–18th Centuries: Jewish Debts.”

29 *Sejfer derech ejc ha-chajim*, printed in Yiddish in Krakow 1613, cited on the basis of Geller, *Sejfer derech ejc ha-chajim: Przewodnik po drzewie żywota*, 207–8.

30 For a detailed analysis of food in Judaism, see Diemling, “Food.”

31 Weltecke, “Essen und Fasten”; Freidenreich, *Foreigners and their Food*, 44; Teter, ““There Should Be No Love between Us and Them.””

32 Diemling, “Food,” 347.

remained strictly prohibited, how can it be explained that they were mentioned in a book explicitly addressed to a Jewish audience?

An accurate analysis of a specific type of this source sheds light on the entire tradition of translations of medical works from diverse European languages into Yiddish from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth, which was one fascinating phenomenon of early modern knowledge transfer in Europe.³³ *Sejfer derech ejc ha-chajim* presents one such translation of a then widespread type of *regimen sanitatis salernitanum*,³⁴ which allegedly explains the puzzling reference to pork lard. The recipe could include foodstuffs that were prohibited by *halakha* because it was not derived from a text related to the Jewish tradition in the first place. Nevertheless, the question of retaining the passage in the translation intended for daily use by members of Jewish communities would still require explanation.

However, upon comparing the original version and the Yiddish one, we discover the latter to be an interesting case of symbioses, combining translated passages and passages added later. Remarkably, the cited passage was authored and included by the translator. Therefore, the inclusion in the recipe of an item that was prohibited by religious law still demands some explanation. From the perspective of differentiation theory (as well as field theory), one possible interpretation would be that texts written primarily as medical or health advisories related to a different form of authority than, for instance, those written from an explicitly religious perspective. And again, as mentioned in the introduction, this analytical division does not equate to empirical reality but is to be understood as implicitly incorporated in communicative and interactional structures as an option.

Confirming this perspective, rabbinic literature and commentaries traditionally addressed the issue of recommending a considerable range of items prohibited by religious law but apparently in daily use for medical or other purposes. In several recipes of *Sejfer derech ejc ha-chajim* which included pork lard, prescriptions were linked solely to external bodily parts, and thus the lard was not intended for consumption. It could be used as a salve, for instance, but still was not to be eaten. One such example regards a treatment for chickenpox among children. The recipe recommends combining a drink made from winter cress with a lard salve: “[O]ne must know and keep in mind that if giving bitter things [to drink], one must make a suppository from a stewed honeycomb or

33 Jánošíková and Idelson-Shein, *New Science in Old Yiddish*.

34 Geller, “Yiddish ‘Regimen sanitatis Salernitanum.’”

to grease the anus with fresh pork lard, so that worms can move faster from bitter to sweet.”³⁵ This differentiation in internal and external use of forbidden items may have something to do with traditional rabbinic adaptations of *halakha* to particular regional or societal circumstances. An impressive number of commentaries and rabbinic texts argue about the use of pork and lard in the context of medical, economic, or social contexts. For example, one early modern commentary³⁶ notes that the lard of an impure animal is considered unsuitable for sale or purchase by religious law, with certain exceptions. Selling lard intended for consumption is strictly forbidden, but its use for daily purposes (such as lighting a fire) is permissible. Additionally, exceptions may be made in cases of physical suffering: “[T]here is no permit for using lard for lubrication, except in cases of suffering; however, for a healthy person and for pleasure, it is not allowed [...]”.³⁷ This reflects a pragmatic approach taken by religious elites. It indicates that the normative perspective of religious law cannot always be directly applied to daily life situations. Instead, it must be adapted and regulated differently according to various societal contexts.

On the one hand, religious boundaries influenced or expressed by norms related to food are established according to religious law. On the other hand, on a practical level (including the level of discourse), attributions, demarcations, and interdependencies of these boundaries could vary based on the logics of the various societal fields. This is illustrated in another passage from *Sejfer derech ejc ha-chajim*, where advice on improving digestion suggests following a practice among non-Jews (*goyim*), specifically Christians, who during Lent ate nuts after consuming fish to mitigate mucus production.³⁸ While this practice may be seen as something to emulate, it simultaneously remained a clear marker of religious difference in religious texts. Notably, also figures writing from different Christian perspectives (and in various epochs of the pre-modern era) emphasized the functional distinctiveness of the Jewish feast, set in contrast with the Christian practice of fasting on Saturday. This can be illustrated exemplarily with the words of the influential Jesuit Piotr Skarga (1536-1612): “Why do we fast on Saturday? [...] Firstly, in order to turn away from the Jews and reject their Saturday feast,

35 *Sejfer derech ejc ha-chajim*, cited after, Gweller, *Sejfer derech ejc ha-chajim: Przewodnik po drzewie żywota*, 233–37.

36 Ashkenazi, *Yoreh De'ab sign*, 117.3.

37 Ibid.

38 *Sejfer derech ejc ha-chajim*, cited after, Gweller, *Sejfer derech ejc ha-chajim: Przewodnik po drzewie żywota*.

which, like other feasts, was only prescribed until the resurrection of Christ. [And] [b]ecause fasting contradicts the feast.”³⁹

Daily practices were undoubtedly influenced by religious law and forms of exercising control, yet they were presumably influenced to the same degree by the logics of societal fields. In Jewish moral literature, observations about economic activities in trade, such as the one from the city of Vilnius/Wilno, where the Jewish community would trade with Christians using impure poultry, reveal instances in which community leaders lost control over such situations.⁴⁰ There are numerous regulations in the communal minute books regarding this matter in different regions of the Commonwealth. Solomon Kluger sought to arrive at compromises by drawing a distinction between trade in pork, which was forbidden, and trade in pork lard, which according to Kluger was allowed.⁴¹ This separation of meat and lard is striking. It invites us to consider whether lard was one of the very basic products in the region, common in general society, and therefore hard to avoid in daily life. It was used to prepare medications and, as evident from the passage cited above, to make soap and candles, and it was a great preservative for other foods or products. Kluger offered an explanation as to why his use of lard was justifiable: “Because I have complete evidence from one of the proselytes who told me how his father was negotiating the sale of olive oil, and that he himself brought oil from the state of Italy; and he could not transport it so far in barrels of wood without mixing it in lard until it was squeezed and stayed inside without taking out any drop.”⁴² Boundaries, which could be easily drawn in theological or polemical texts, seem to have been revised in moments of actual interaction.

From the perspective of religious law and its representatives, such as Rabbi and preacher Solomon Kluger (Rabbi Solomon ben Judah Aaron Kluger), the behaviors presented obviously fell in the category of deviant behavior and had to be controlled and punished. Yet from an analytical perspective, these behaviors can be seen as forms of adapting to norms in everyday interactions, which were governed by the logics of the social fields to which these interactions belonged.

39 Piotr Skarga, *O jedności kościoła Bożego pod iednym pasterzem. Y o Greckim od tej iedności odstąpieniu. Z przestroga y upominaniem do narodow Ruskich, przy Grekach stojących: Rzecz krotka, na trzy części rozdzielona, teras przez k(siedzą) Piotra Skarge, zebrań Pana Iezusowego, wydana. «Proszę, Oycze, aby byli iedno, iako y my iedno iestemy» (Ioan. 17). W Wilnie, z drukarni iego ksziażęcy miłości pa(na) Mikolaia Chrysztopha Radziwiła, marszałka w(ielkiego) kxię(stwa) Lit(ewskiego) etc. Roku 1577, 233–34.*

40 Hōkhmat, *Sha'ar Isur VeHeter*, 69.

41 Kluger, *HaElef Lekha Shlomo*, 189.

42 Isserlis, *ShUT HaRaMa*, 53.

One could simultaneously appear to be a member of the religious community and be included, socially⁴³ or economically,⁴⁴ as a member of general society.

From this perspective of interactions, for instance, entangled labor relations among Jewish and Christian populations represent complexity.⁴⁵ Jewish communal minute books shed light on these contexts frequently and regarding different aspects. Jewish households often hired maids who were Christian, which led to regulations concerning the responsibilities and prerogatives of the employers and their employees. A protocol from 1607, for instance, reads, “[Jewish] women are to remain vigilant [יהיו נזהרים, sic!], in preserving and salting the meat themselves [...], and by no means [having it be salted] by their non-Jewish maidservants; and they should also be careful when cooking the food, for it happened many times that they [the non-Jewish or Christian maidservants] [...] added something forbidden.”⁴⁶ The household was hardly observable from the outside, so the responsibility to watch over religious others became an issue, alongside the obligation to adhere to the law. Similarly, Jewish slaughterers (*shohet at im*) were frequently reminded of the rules of kashrut, and the possible sanctions and penalties for violations were stressed, such as suspension of one’s license (*hazaka*).⁴⁷ Licenses which permitted someone to engage in Jewish food production and trade, which included the production of butter and cheese and the supply of dried fish (which were popular in this region), were issued and could be suspended by local rabbis. They were thus one common instrument of regulation.

Working relations which brought members of different religious groups together were complex and involved various levels of negation and compromise. As mentioned above, Solomon Kluger complained about trade in non-kosher products in the city of Vilnius/Wilno, pointing out that these forbidden practices had become frequent, especially the consumption of non-kosher products by non-Jewish employees of Jews, even though this was prohibited by religious law.⁴⁸ This must have been a major issue, as Polish and Lithuanian *pinkassim* from the sixteenth century onwards are filled with complaints about violations in

43 Kalik, “Fusion versus Alienation”; Teter, “There Should Be No Love between Us and Them.”

44 Teller, “Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Economy”; Heyde, “The Jewish Economic Elite in Red Ruthenia in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries.”

45 See: Kalik, “Christian Servants Employed by Jews,” 259–70. Kaźmierczyk, “The Problem of Christian Servants,” 23–40.

46 Halperin, *Pinqas Wa’ad Arba’ Aratsot*. Cited after: Bartal, *Pinqas Wa’ad Arba’ Aratsot*, 16, no. 45 (1607).

47 E.g. Michałowska-Mycielska, *Pinkas kabalat bockonskiego* (1714–1817), 12.

48 Hōkhat, *Sha’ar Isur VeHeter*, 69.

cases involving food provided for Christian employees. As in the cases involving Jewish households, in this context we are also dealing with complex matters. An example from the Krakow community of 1590 shows clearly that suspicion had fallen on Jewish merchants traveling to the city of Gdansk as oxen drivers and grain transporters of having bought pork for their non-Jewish workers on the road, which constituted a violation of religious law.⁴⁹ Much as a clear distinction was drawn between the two communities through the very observable difference between the Jewish feast on the one hand and the practice of fasting on Saturdays among Catholics on the other (as noted by the aforementioned Jesuit Piotr Skarga), the importance of time in the customs through which difference was expressed was also underlined in the context of interreligious labor relations. In the same minute book from Kraków, there are multiple warnings regarding the prohibition of doing agricultural works on a Saturday. Members of the Jewish community were not only prohibited from engaging in this kind of work on Saturdays, they were also prohibited from letting their Christian employees fish⁵⁰ or plow or engage in any other activities in the field,⁵¹ under a penalty of a fine of 50 red zloty. The same temporal aspect of religious diversity (religious belonging linked to particular working days and feasts) frequently appears in the context of Jewish tavern keepers, who sometimes unlawfully served guests, primarily Christians, on the Sabbath, thus showing a stronger commitment to profits than to the law. Communal regulations, as we see here, were therefore not based on the law as an abstract norm. Rather, they were systematically driven by very specific situations and interactions.

Furthermore, supranational organs of Jewish autonomy also issued regulations to address violations of dietary laws, emphasizing the importance of maintaining religious boundaries between groups. This indicates that such problems occurred across regions and communities as a whole. A decree issued by the Council of Lithuania in 1628 provides an example. Local religious elites were ordered to warn all members of all communities in all the synagogues not to trade with Christians in non-kosher carcasses and other forbidden foods and also not to buy such items for their non-Jewish employees.⁵² Community leaders attempted to prevent and punish violations of these regulations, enforcing the dietary laws in order to maintain religious demarcation between the groups.

49 Statutes legislated by rabbi Meshulam Webush of Kraków in 1590: 922.13 (p. 486).

50 Ibid., 922.10 (p. 486).

51 Ibid., 922.11 (p. 486).

52 Dubnow, *Pinqas ha-Medina o Pinqas Wa'ad ha-Kehillot ha-rashiyot biMedinat Lita*, 34, no. 138 (1628).

However, religiously regulated practices related to food in particular were not solely about religious constellations. They also intersected with trade and economic interests, social relations, medical and health practices, and so forth. These various spheres of activity can and should be separated, yet on the level of actual interactions, they remained entangled and contingent.

By presuming the stability of early modern religious groups and the singularity of their boundaries, we tend preemptively to attribute authenticity to the very notion of groups as discrete entities, and we therefore are compelled to understand violation of group norms as deviance. Yet, if we shift our perspective from a religious one (which the former one is) to an analytical one, new questions arise. Is it possible that pork was cheaper than other meats, and thus there may have been significant economic incentives to buy non-kosher products for workers? Or perhaps roast pork was simply tastier and more filling? And was pork lard just a great preservative for food and a substance for healing practices? Yet, at this point and from an epistemological perspective, it is less important to find an explanation for these practices or give answers to these questions than it is simply to ask the questions themselves. This would mean not letting a normative, religiously burdened perspective appear in place of an analytical one, which could offer new perspectives on structural contingency and complexity.

Conclusion

Religious groups and their delineations are profoundly influenced by theological and legal frameworks. Despite demonstrating a historical propensity for fluctuation, whether through fragmentation or consolidation, religious collectives endure in the context of this form of ordering as relatively stable structures. Moreover, the formation of these groups is significantly influenced by religious practices and their accompanying regulatory mechanisms, which simultaneously serve to distinguish them externally while fostering internal cohesion. In this context, an interplay among shifts and enduring features is observable across temporal and spatial dimensions. Furthermore, within the realm of societal interactions, an additional framework emerges wherein a complexity of norms, regulations, and practices recurrently find expression in distinct forms. These diverse frameworks contribute to the establishment of religious boundaries, which can vary significantly. Additionally, the pace and frequency with which these boundaries undergo change within each framework may differ markedly.

Praxeology, as advocated for use in this paper, presents a perspective that transcends the simplistic dichotomy between the normative dimensions of theology and law on one hand and practices and interactions on the other. This perspective underscores that the analytical approach to understanding early modern group building should not be constrained by either of these frameworks. Rather, it urges a comprehensive consideration of the inherent complexity within these layers, recognizing their potential polyphony and incongruence in the early stages of assumption building.

These considerations have implications for the framing of religious diversity as both an empirical and analytical category. When beginning from a theological or law-related perspective, one may tend to perceive religious plurality solely as a sum of different groups. While historically valid to some extent, such an approach tends to accentuate only a specific aspect of the broader spectrum of religious ordering. These perspectives often underscore the apparent clarity and stability of religious collectives and their boundaries, notwithstanding their potential for variability. What remains concealed is the ambiguity inherent in what we define as religious groups. This ambiguity extends beyond mere proximity or boundaries of collectives and examines notions of deviance, when religious norms, perceived as definitions or forms of belonging, are individually or collectively transgressed. This paper considers these latter aspects of group formation and their conceptual underpinnings.

Consequently, if we seek to arrive at an understanding of religious diversity as both an empirical and analytical category, we must appreciate the complexity of ordering. Such an understanding must account for the coexistence of static and dynamic collective boundaries, both temporally and spatially, as well as the contingency of their manifestations in various interactional contexts.

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