

CARRION

MAYTA

Mayta, a noun deriving from the root *m-w-t*, carries the same meaning as the masculine form of the word, *mayt* or *mayyit*, all of which denote something that is dead (see DEATH AND THE DEAD). Linguistically, *mayta* usually refers to animal and *mayyit* to human corpses (Zabīdī, *sub m-w-t*), although the latter can also signify a ‘mortal being’ as in Q 39:30. As a technical term, *mayta* refers to animals that die or are killed without being ritually slaughtered (*tadhkiya*) (Fayrūzabādī, *Baṣāʾir* 4:538), or an animal “whose soul departed without having been slaughtered” (*mā zāl rūḥah bi-ghayr tadhkiya*) (Rāghib), that is, which died of natural causes. Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) writes: “Linguists and jurists [defined *mayta* as] that whose soul departed from it (*fāraqah*) without having been slaughtered. All [*mayta*] is prohibited except fish and locusts, which are permissible by legal consensus of the Muslims” (Nawawī, *Tahdhīb*). Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) offers the nuance that the word *mayta* only applies to land animals and birds that are permissible to consume (*Tafsīr*, *sub* Q 5:3), while Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) applies it also to animals that are impermissible to eat even if ritually slaughtered (e.g. feline predators) (*Tafsīr*, *sub* Q 5:3).

The word *mayta* appears six times in the Qurʾān. In Q 6:139 it refers to a pre-Islamic Arab practice concerning stillborn livestock; in Q 49:12 it features in a figurative reference to the act of backbiting (*q.v.*). With the meaning of ‘carrion,’ *mayta* occurs four times (Q 2:173; 5:3; 6:145; 16:115), in passages prohibiting the consumption of blood (*dam*), the flesh of swine (*lahm al-khinzīr*), and anything sacrificed other than to Allah (*wa-mā uḥilla bihi li-ghayri Llāh*) (see BLOOD; FOOD AND DRINK; LAWFUL AND UNLAWFUL). Since two of these verses were revealed before the Hijra (Q 6:145; 16:115) and two after (Q 2:173; 5:3), the prohibition of consuming carrion is understood to date from the beginning of the Prophet Muḥammad’s mission, upon him blessings and peace (Rāzī, *sub* Q 16:115).

Q 5:3 lists ways in which animals may die in order to be considered *mayta* (Rāzī, *sub* Q 16:115): those that have been strangled (*munkhaniqa*) or beaten (*mawqūdhā*), have fallen from a cliff or into a well (*mutaraddiya*), have been gored by another animal (*naṭīḥa*), or have been scavenged or hunted by predators (*mā akala al-sabūʿ*) (Ṭabarī, *sub* Q 5:3). Elsewhere, the Qurʾān refers to carrion as filth (*rijs*, Q 6:145). The same verse includes another category of animals

already killed that are also impermissible to eat: that which is immolated for other than Allah (*mā uḥilla li-ghayri Llāh bihi*) and those ritually immolated by the pre-Islamic Arabs on stone altars as an ostensible means of attaining nearness to Allah (*dhubiḥa ʿalā al-nuṣub*); the Qurʾān refers to these practices as *fīsq*, a gross moral offense (*maʿṣiya*) (Q 5:3; 6:121, 145). Since such animals were not slaughtered according to Islamic ritual prescription, their meat was also classed as carrion. The verse then makes an exception, permitting for consumption what has been ritually slaughtered (*illā mā dhakkaytum*) (Ibn Qudāma, 13:314), defined as the cutting of the jugular vein (Zamakhsharī). Therefore, if an animal is injured through one of the above causes yet proves still to be fully alive, it remains lawful for human consumption if its life is then terminated by ritual slaughter (Ibn ʿAshūr and Ṭabarī, *sub* Q 5:3).

Jurists discuss other kinds of meat that are also considered to be *mayta*. For instance, animals slaughtered or hunted by people who are not Muslims, Christians, or Jews are impermissible to eat—again with the exception of fish and locusts, since they are not subject to slaughter (Ibn Qudāma, 13:296-298). Likewise, animals slaughtered but not according to the ritual prescription would fall under *mayta* (Jaṣṣāṣ, Rāzī, *sub* Q 2:173), as would an animal hunted by someone in a state of pilgrim sanctity (*iḥrām*) (Ibn Qudāma, 13:338). A limb severed from an animal while it is alive is also deemed to be *mayta* (Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat al-muṭtahid* 2:203).

There are exceptions to these legal proscriptions. The Qurʾānic verses state that anyone who is compelled (*fa-mani-dṭurra*) to consume carrion is forgiven, whether this arises through coercion (*q.v.*) or due to starvation (Ṭabarī, *sub* Q 2:173). According to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), some jurists, including him, held that by the same rationale using carrion to treat an illness or as part of a medicinal compound is also permissible (*Tafsīr*, *sub* Q 2:173). The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, said: “Two kinds of dead meat (*maytatān*) and two kinds of blood (*damān*) have been permitted us. The two kinds of dead meat are fish and locusts; the two kinds of blood are the liver and spleen” (Ibn Mājāh, Aṭʾima). Based on this and numerous other reports, fish and locusts do not need to be ritually slaughtered for lawful consumption (Qurṭubī and Rāzī; Zamakhsharī, *sub* Q 2:173). The spleen and liver are here considered as “blood” because the blood does not drain from them after slaughter (Jaṣṣāṣ, *sub* Q 5:3).