

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

1. Terminology of Genital Mutilation, Circumcision, Superincision, and Infibulation
2. Worldwide Prevalence
3. History and Origin
4. Genital Mutilation in the Abrahamic Religions
 - a. Judaism
 - i. Normative Position
 - ii. Scripture, Justification and Reasoning
 - iii. *Brit Milah* ceremony
 - iv. Opposition and *Brit Shalom*
 - b. Christianity
 - i. Normative Position
 - ii. Scripture and Denominational Views
 - iii. Opposition
 - c. Mandaism
 - d. Islam
 - i. Normative Position
 - ii. *Aḥādīth* and *Sunnah*
 - iii. Opposition
 - e. Druzism
 - i. Disagreement
 - f. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormonism)
 - i. Normative Position, Scripture, and Practice
5. Genital Mutilation in Persian Religions
 - a. Zoroastrianism
 - b. Yazidism
6. Genital Mutilation in South Asian Traditions
 - a. Hinduism
 - b. Jainism
 - c. Buddhism
 - d. Sikhism
7. Questions

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

1. Terminology of Genital Mutilation, Circumcision, Superincision, and Infibulation

There are many kinds of genital mutilation, and the exact form varies from place to place, culture to culture, and religion to religion. Genital mutilation, whether male or female, is loaded language, and those who advocate for genital mutilation use different terminology.. However, all the forms of genital mutilation that I will discuss are mutilation, since they are all permanent, irreversible, painful, medically unnecessary, and dangerous surgical procedures, usually forcibly performed on unconsenting children who are too young to opt into the procedure.

The most common type of genital mutilation is circumcision. Circumcision is the form of genital mutilation practiced in Islam, Judaism, and the United States of America. Circumcision is the excision of the prepuce, often called the foreskin and clitoral hood, respectively, are the sensitive tissues that cover that protect the glans penis and the clitoris from mechanical irritation and dryness. Without the prepuce's protection, the glans penis or the clitoris undergo keratinization and become dry¹. In males and females, the prepuce of the penis and the prepuce of the clitoris are homologous, developing from the same tissue. Often, the frenulum, an erogenous elastic tissue band under the glans penis that connects the prepuce to the vernal mucosa, is removed. The prepuce's phimotic ring and the frenulum are the most sensitive² parts of the penis to touch.³

¹ Warren, J. (2010). Physical Effects of Circumcision. In: Denniston, G., Hodges, F., Milos, M. (eds) *Genital Autonomy*:. Springer, Dordrecht. [doi:10.1007/978-90-481-9446-9_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-9446-9_7)

² Taylor JR, Lockwood AP, Taylor, AJ. The prepuce: Specialized mucosa of the penis and its loss to circumcision. *British Journal of Urology*. 1996;77(2):291–295. doi:[10.1046/j.1464-410X.1996.85023.x](https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1464-410X.1996.85023.x). PMID 8800902.

³ Sorrells ML, Snyder JL, Reiss MD, Eden C, Milos MF, Wilcox N, Van Howe RS (April 2007). "Fine-touch pressure thresholds in the adult penis". *BJU International*. **99** (4): 864–9. doi:[10.1111/j.1464-410X.2006.06685.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-410X.2006.06685.x). PMID 17378847. S2CID 24584511.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

Superincision, often called the dorsal slit, is a different type of genital mutilation. It is the traditional and dominant form of genital mutilation in the Phillipines,⁴ where it is called *tuli*⁵, and in the Pacific Islands. It is exclusively performed on males.

Infibulation is the rarest form of genital mutilation. Historically, men practiced it too, tying the foreskin closed, for example in Ancient Greece,⁶ where it was called *κυνοδέσμη* *kynodesme*, but nowadays it is almost exclusively applied to women. In the modern world, infibulation is the most common form of genital mutilation for women in the Horn of Africa, specifically Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Somaliland, and Sudan.⁷ During female infibulation, the vagina is sewn shut, with just a small hole for menstrual discharge. It is usually accompanied by circumcision, the removal of the clitoral prepuce, and often excision of the labia as well. Like other forms of genital mutilation, infibulation is painful and may carry serious health risks.

⁴ Barney, Charles Norton (September 1903). "[Circumcision and Flagellation among the Filipinos](#)". *Journal of the Association of Military Surgeons*. **XII**: 158

⁵ de Morga, Antonio (1609). *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas (translated into English, edited and annotated by E. H. BLAIR and J. A. ROBERTSON, first published in English in 1868, this edition 1907)*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Arthur H. Clark Company. [Archived](#)

⁶ Schmidt, Michael (2004). *The First Poets*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. p. 263.

⁷ Yoder, P. Stanley; Khan, Shane (March 2008). "[Numbers of women circumcised in Africa: The Production of a Total](#)" (PDF) (39). USAID, DHS Working Papers: 13–14.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

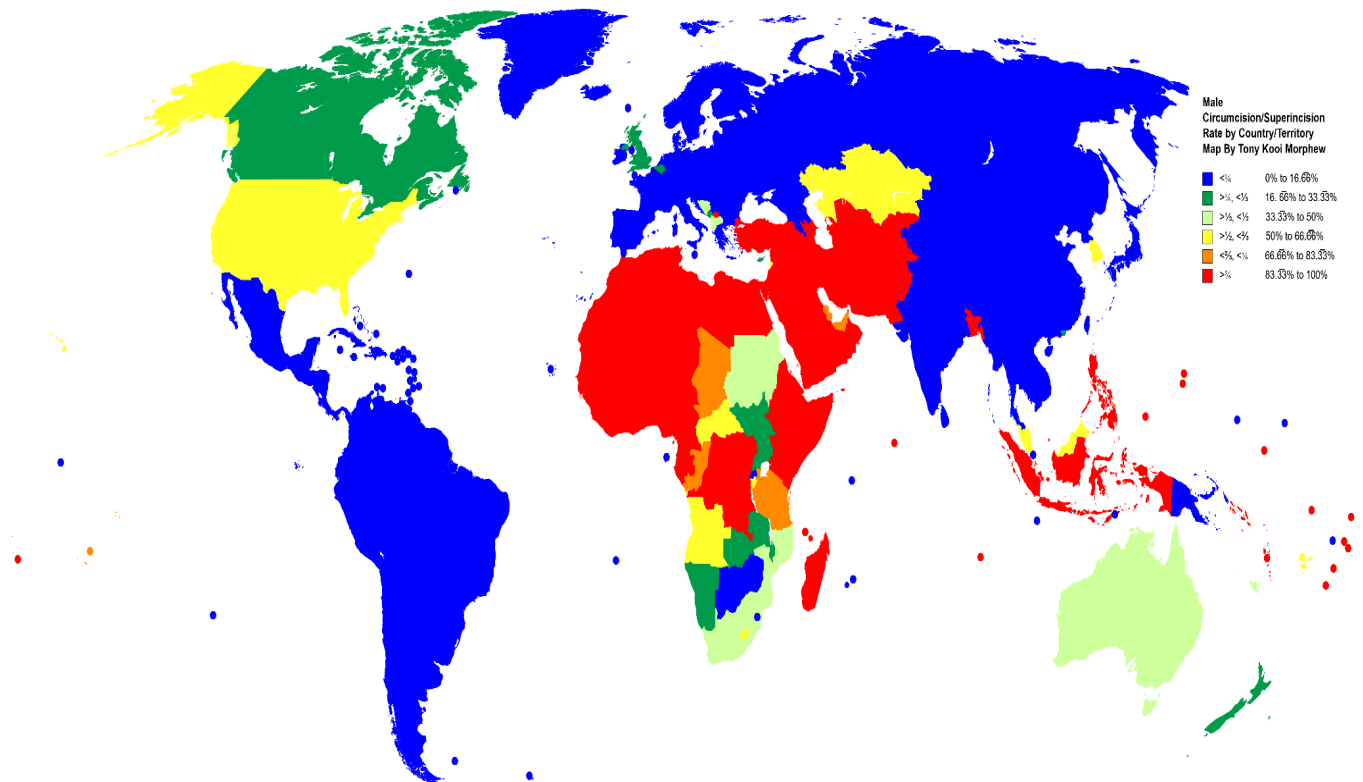
Tony Kooi Morpew

29 November 2022

2. Worldwide Prevalence

Most people, men and women,⁸ with mutilated genitals are Muslim. Globally fewer than one in three men have been subjected to circumcision, and of those who were, more than two-thirds of are Muslim,⁹ with the vast majority of the remainder being from Africa or the USA.

I have created a map to visualize the data from some papers¹⁰:



⁸ Rouzi, Abdulrahim A. (2013). "Facts and controversies on female genital mutilation and Islam". *The European Journal of Contraception & Reproductive Health Care*. **18** (1): 10–14. doi:10.3109/13625187.2012.749982. PMID [23286241](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23286241/). S2CID 207523575

⁹ Weiss H., Polonsky J., Bailey R., Hankins C., Halperin D., Schmid G. *Male Circumcision: Global Trends and Determinants of Prevalence, Safety, and Acceptability*. Vol. 35. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, UNAIDS; 2008.

¹⁰ Morris BJ, Wamai RG, Henebeng EB, Tobian AA, Klausner JD, Banerjee J, Hankins CA. Erratum to: Estimation of country-specific and global prevalence of male circumcision. *Popul Health Metr*. 2016 Apr 4;14:11. doi: [10.1186/s12963-016-0080-6](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12963-016-0080-6). Erratum for: *Popul Health Metr*. 2016;14:4. PMID: 27051352; PMCID: PMC4820865.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

While the map shows the stark regional variation in male genital mutilation prevalence, it fails to adequately explain the cultural and religious factors that determine a country or territory's rate of superincision or circumcision. In countries like Belgium, which is dark green, an outlier from the rest of Europe, it is almost exclusively Muslim men who are circumcised, and in the United States, for example, the prevalence of circumcision varies widely from place to place and between racial groups: in Puerto Rico fewer than one in six hundred twenty-five men are circumcised¹⁰, while according to the CDC¹¹, of the male babies born between 2002 and 2007 in the United States of America, the percentage forced to endure genital mutilation against their will was differed drastically regionally. 65% of newborn boys were subjected to nonconsensual genital mutilation in the Northeast, 79% in the Midwest, 58% in the South, and 32% in the West. Between races and ethnicities, there is also a big difference in circumcision prevalence in the United States, with most non-Hispanic black and/or white American males being circumcised, but most Asian- or Hispanic/Latino-American men having intact natural penises.

The island of Mayotte was not mentioned in the paper, but Islam is the dominant religion on the island, and circumcision is common. The islands of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Réunion were not mentioned in the paper, but circumcision is exceedingly rare there.

¹¹ https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/circumcision_2013/circumcision_2013_table.pdf

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

In South Korea, newer data are hard to come by, but the circumcision rate has been decreasing, and in 2012, 14–16 males had a circumcision rate of 56.4%¹², so on the map they are counted between one-half and two-thirds.

The CDC say the rate of newborn male circumcision dropped from 64.5% to 58.3% from 1979 to 2010 in the United States,¹³ so the US is counted in my map as between one-half and two-thirds. Australia's circumcision rate is probably between one-third and one-half, as only about 10% of male babies born in the eighties or later had their genitals mutilated, though it was common before then.¹⁴

¹² Kim D, Koo SA, Pang MG. Decline in male circumcision in South Korea. *BMC Public Health*. 2012 Dec 11;12:1067. doi: [10.1186/1471-2458-12-1067](https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-12-1067). PMID: 23227923; PMCID: PMC3526493.

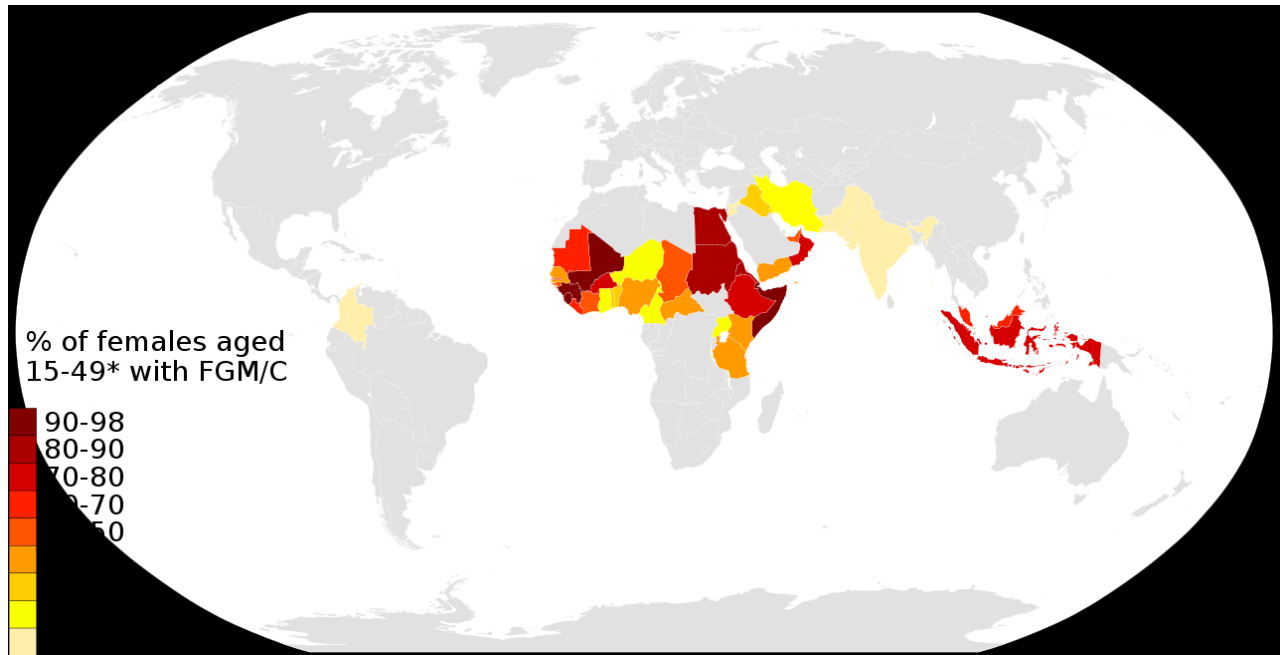
¹³ https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/circumcision_2013/circumcision_2013.htm

¹⁴ Richters J, Smith A, de Visser R, Grulich A, Rissel C. Circumcision in Australia: prevalence and effects on sexual health. *Int. J. STD AIDS* 2006; 17: 547–554.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022



There are less data available on female circumcision than male circumcision, but [this map](#), though missing many countries' data, shows a similar pattern, a strong positive correlation between African countries and/or Muslim countries, and genital mutilation.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

3. History and Origin

Genital mutilation has a long history. Male and female circumcision originated in Africa during the Paleolithic.¹⁵ The Semitic peoples of Northeast Africa, the Levant, and the Arabian peninsula have been practicing circumcision for millennia, the same regions and cultures that have always had a cultural (and now religious) aversion to swine. Egyptian mummies from 4000 BCE show evidence of having been circumcised.¹⁶ In the fifth century BCE, Herodotus wrote that Egyptians and Ethiopians practice male circumcision and Xanthus of Lydia attested that the Egyptians also practiced female circumcision. A second-century BCE papyrus from Tathemis Serapeum's Ptolemaios archive at Memphis shows that a girl named Tathemis, was scheduled to be circumcised. In Egypt, both male and female circumcision were practiced throughout history, including the modern day.¹⁷

Herodotus reported that Egyptians, Colchians, Ethiopians, Phoenicians, the Syrians of Palestine, and “the Syrians who dwell about the rivers Thermodon and Parthenius, as well as their neighbours the Macronians and Macrones” all practiced circumcision.¹⁸

¹⁵ Cox, Guy; Morris, Brian J. (1 January 2012). "[Why Circumcision: From Prehistory to the Twenty-First Century](#)". *Surgical Guide to Circumcision*. Springer Science & Business Media. doi:[10.1007/978-1-4471-2858-8_21](#). ISBN 978-1-4471-2858-8. S2CID 160513261.

¹⁶ Dobanovački, Dušanka; et al. (2012). "[Surgery Before Common Era \(B.C.E.*\)](#)" (PDF). *Archive of Oncology*. **20** (1–2): 29. doi:[10.2298/AOO1202028D](#). S2CID 53008076.

¹⁷ Huebner, Sabine R. (2009). "[Female Circumcision as a Rite de Passage in Egypt—Continuity through the Millennia?](#)". *Journal of Egyptian History*. **2** (1): 156–166. doi:[10.1163/187416509X12492786609249](#). S2CID 161573169.

¹⁸ Herodotus (29 November 2005). [The History of Herodotus](#). ISBN 1-4165-1697-2.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

With the writing down of the Torah, the ritual of genital mutilation was codified as a religious obligation, though it had been practiced by the Jews and all the people in the region for centuries.¹⁹

Circumcision only became an important sign of the covenant as a marker of Jewish identity during the Babylonian Exile, since before, everyone with whom the Jews were in contact was also circumcised.²⁰

In pre-Islamic Arabia, like in other Semitic cultures, genital mutilation was already common for both men and women²¹. Like in Judaism, Muhammad's *aḥādīth* on genital mutilation were used to codify and justify a pre-existing cultural practice. With the spread of Islam, male and female circumcision spread to far-away places like Morocco, Tajikistan, and Indonesia, where genital mutilation was previously unheard of.

¹⁹ Glick, Nansi S. (2006), "[Zipporah and the Bridegroom of Blood: Searching for the Antecedents of Jewish Circumcision](#)", *Bodily Integrity and the Politics of Circumcision*, Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, pp. 37–47, doi:[10.1007/978-1-4020-4916-3_3](#), ISBN 978-1-4020-4915-

²⁰ Karris, Robert (1992). *The Colledgeville Bible Commentary: Old Testament*. [United States](#): Liturgical Press. p. 57. ISBN 9780814622100.

²¹ Doyle, D. (October 2005). "[Ritual male circumcision: a brief history](#)". *The Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*. **35** (3): 279–285. ISSN 1478-2715. PMID [16402509](#).

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

a. Judaism

i. Normative Position

According to the Torah and Jewish religious law codified in the Talmud, circumcision, called מילה *milah* in Hebrew, is mandatory for all male Jews and their slaves, as a commandment from God that Jews are obligated to perform on their sons on the eighth day after their birth.²² The Talmud says the only boys who are exempt from this commandment are those who had two brothers die as a result of their circumcisions, with half-brothers not counting, according to Maimonides. Most Jewish men, of whom more than three-fourths live in the United States of America or Israel, underwent circumcision, but there is a long history of opposition to the practice within liberal and progressive Jewish movements.

The main explanation for God's covenant of circumcision (read the section on explanations and justifications) given throughout history by Jewish scholars is to control sexuality,²³ reduce lust, and prevent excessive pleasure for men and women.²⁴

Female circumcision is not mentioned in the Tanakh or Talmud, and is thus not a מצוה *mitzvah*. Jews from the Horn of Africa, known as the Beta Israel, mutilate all their children's genitals, not just their sons, and have done so for centuries, if not millennia.²⁵ Shaye Cohen

²² Glass, J. M. (January 1999). "Religious circumcision: a Jewish view". *BJU International*. Wiley-Blackwell. 83 (Supplement 1): 17–21. doi:10.1046/j.1464-410x.1999.0830s1017.x. PMID 10349410. S2CID 2888024.

²³ Darby, Robert (2013). *A Surgical Temptation: The Demonization of the Foreskin and the Rise of Circumcision in Britain*. University of Chicago Press. p. 205. ISBN 9780226109787.

²⁴ Yanklowitz, Shmuly (2014). *Soul of Jewish Social Justice*. Urim Publications. p. 135. ISBN 9789655241860.

²⁵ Grisaru, N.; Lezer, S.; Belmake, R. H. (April 1997). "Ritual female genital surgery among Ethiopian Jews". *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. **26** (2): 211–215. doi:10.1023/a:1024562512475. PMID 9101034. S2CID 32053425

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

writes “Aside from the Beta Israel of Ethiopia (the so-called Falashas) ... no Jewish community, in either ancient, medieval, or modern times, is known to have practiced female circumcision.”²⁶

ii. Scripture, Justification and Reasoning

זאת בריתי אשר תשמרו ביני וביניכם ובין זרעו אחריה המול לכם כל-זכר: וגמלתם את בשר ערלתכם והיה לאות ברית ביני וביניכם: ובן-שמנת ימים ימול לכם כל-זכר לדורתיכם יליד בית ומקנת-כסף מכל בן-זכר אשר לא מזרעו הוא: המול יליד בית ומקנת כסף והיתה בריתי בבשרכם לברית עולם: וערל י זכר אשר לא-ימול את-בשר ערלתו ונכרתה הנפש ההוא מעמיה את-בריתי הפר:

“This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.” (Genesis 17:10-14, KJV)

Genesis has an apocryphal story explaining the origin of the tradition of genital mutilation and religiously codifying the already-present practice, as explained in the history section. In Genesis 17:10-14, God tells Abraham that he must cut off the foreskin of all his male children and slaves eight days after they are born. If they do not, they are to be cut off from their people. According to [Mishneh Torah, Milah 3:3:8](#), no matter how much a man studies the Torah and how many good deeds he does, if his penis appears to be intact and natural, he will have no place in the world to come.

Then, in Genesis 17:23-27, as commanded by God, Abraham proceeds to cut off the tip of his own ninety-nine-year-old penis, as well as those of his slaves and that of his thirteen-year-old son Ishmael. The same Hebrew word כרת *karat* meaning ‘to make a covenant’

²⁶ Cohen, Shaye J. D. (2005). *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant In Judaism*, Oakland: University of California Press, p. [59](#)

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

also means ‘to cut off a body part’,²⁷ and is from the same root as כָּרַת *karet*, meaning ‘extirpation’ or ‘cutting off’, a severe punishment prescribed by God for serious sins, like that of not cutting off a baby’s foreskin.

וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִמּוֹל בְּשָׁר עֶרְלָתוֹ:

“*And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.*” (Leviticus 12:3, KJV)

The main explanations and justifications given Jewish scholars have given throughout history for God’s commandment to circumcise eight-day-old babies is to control²⁸ sexuality²⁹ by reducing men’s and women’s sexual pleasure, making sex quicker, preventing excessive lust, though others have used different arguments, such as marking to separate ‘us’ from ‘them’, simple whataboutism or simply saying it is a commandment from God, and thus must be followed.

In [Midrash Tanchuma, Tazria Siman 5](#), when Rufus Turnus asks Rabbi Akiva why God makes his people cut off babies’ foreskins when he could have just made them be born without them, the Rabbi defends the tradition with a whataboutism argument, saying that God’s word is pure and that God created babies to be born with umbilical cords too. It is easy to spot the fallacy in the umbilical cord argument.

וכן מכונות התורה – הטהרה והקדושה – רצוני לומר: בזה הרחקת המשגל ולהשמר ממנו ולמעטו בכל אשר יוכל – כמו שאני עתיד לבאר

“*The Law is also intended to give its followers purity and holiness; by teaching them to suppress sensuality, to guard against it and to reduce it to a minimum, as will be explained by us.*” ([Guide for the Perplexed 3:33:3](#), trans. Friedländer)

²⁷ "Circumcision." Mark Popovsky. *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*. Ed. David A. Leeming, Kathryn Madden and Stanton Marlan. New York: Springer, 2010. pp. 153–154.

²⁸ Earp, Brian (June 7, 2020). "[Male and Female Genital Cutting: Controlling Sexuality](#)". *YouTube*. [Archived](#)

²⁹ Pangle, Thomas (2007). *Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham*. Johns Hopkins University Press. pp. 151–152. ISBN 978-0801887611.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

The Ramban Maimonides gives more logical reasons for circumcision, ones that can be supported by evidence, writing that it reduces sexual pleasure for the man and the woman with whom he has sex and that it is a mark of Jewishness, separating the in-group from the out-group. Maimonides also explains why the tip of the boy's penis must be cut off while he is still young since at that point the parents do not love him enough and he is only eight days old. He writes if the parents were allowed to wait until the boy is two or three years old, then the father's love for the child would cause him to neglect the law and the child would obviously not want to go through with the painful ceremony ([Guide for the Perplexed 3:49:22](#)).

וכן ה'מילה' אצלי אחד מטעמיה – למעט המשגל ולהחליש זה האבר כפי היכולת עד שימעט במעשה הזה... עם מה שהתבאר מתועלת העור ההוא לאבר ההוא, ולא נתנה 'מצוה' זו להשלים חסרון הבריאה, רק להשלים חסרון המידות. והנזק ההוא הגופני המגיע לאבר ההוא – הוא המכוון, אשר לא יפסד בו דבר מן הפעולות שבהם עמידת האיש ולא תבטל בעבורה ההולדה, אבל תחסר בו התאוה היתרה על הצורך. והיות המילה מחלשת כח הקושי, ופעמים שתחסר ההנאה, הוא דבר שאין ספק בו – כי האבר כשישפך דמו ויוסר מכסהו מתחלת בריאתו, יחלש בלי ספק. ובבאור אמרו החכמים ז"ל: "הנבעלת מן הערל קשה לפרוש". זהו החזק בטעמי 'המילה' אצלי...

“As regards circumcision, I think that one of its objects is to limit sexual intercourse, and to weaken the organ of generation as far as possible, and thus cause man to be moderate... This commandment has not been enjoined as a complement to a deficient physical creation, but as a means for perfecting man's moral shortcomings. The bodily injury caused to that organ is exactly that which is desired; it does not interrupt any vital function, nor does it destroy the power of generation. Circumcision simply counteracts excessive lust; for there is no doubt that circumcision weakens the power of sexual excitement, and sometimes lessens the natural enjoyment: the organ necessarily becomes weak when it loses blood and is deprived of its covering from the beginning. Our Sages (Beresh. Rabba, 100:80) say distinctly: It is hard for a woman, with whom an uncircumcised had sexual intercourse, to separate from him. This is, as I believe, the best reason for the commandment concerning circumcision...” ([Guide for the Perplexed 3:49:20](#), trans. Friedländer)

Philo Judaeus says the same thing as Maimonides,³⁰ that מילה *milah* is performed to “mutilate the organ” to get rid of “all superfluous and excessive pleasure.”

³⁰ Philo of Alexandria; Colson, F.H. (trans.) (1937). *Of the special laws, Book I (i and ii), in Works of Philo*. Vol. VII. Loeb Classical Library: Harvard University Press. pp. 103–05. ISBN 978-0674992504.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

Rabbi Isaac ben Yedaiah concurs, with the same justification as the other two scholars for male genital mutilation: to prevent the woman from becoming too enamored with the normal penis and reaching orgasm before the man, which can be avoided with circumcision. According to him, if a man's penis is intact, the man will not ejaculate soon after insertion, and he and his lover will be too consumed by lust, so the woman might reach orgasm and enjoy the sex, thus God commanded us to cut off the tips of our sons' penises. He provides a horrible scenario showing what will happen to a man if his penis is not mutilated and remains natural.

“A man uncircumcised in the flesh desires to lie with a beautiful-looking woman who speaks seductively to attract him... She too will court the man who is uncircumcised in the flesh and lie against his breast with great passion, for he thrusts inside her a long time because of his foreskin... thus she feels pleasure and reaches an orgasm first. When an uncircumcised man sleeps with her, and then resolves to return to his home, she brazenly grabs him, holding on to his genitals and says to him, “Come back, make love to me.” This is because of the pleasure that she finds in intercourse with him... They are united without separating, and he makes love twice and three times in one night, yet the appetite is not filled... The sexual activity emaciates him of his bodily fat, and afflicts his flesh, and he devotes his brain entirely to women, an evil thing... But when a circumcised man desires the beauty of a woman, and cleaves to his wife, or to another woman comely in appearance, he will find himself performing his task quickly, emitting his seed as soon as he inserts his crown. If he lies with her once, he sleeps satisfied, and will not know her again for another seven days. This is the way a circumcised man acts time after time with the woman he loves. He has an orgasm first; he does not hold back his strength. As soon as he begins intercourse, he immediately comes to a climax. She has no pleasure from him when she lies down on when she arises, and it would be better for her if he had not known her and not drawn near to her, for he arouses her passion to no avail, and she remains in a state of desire for her husband, ashamed and confounded, while the seed is still in her “reservoir.” She does not have an orgasm once a year except on rare occasions, because of the great heat and the fire burning within her...”³¹

The justifications that Maimonides, Philo Judaeus, and Isaac ben Yedaiah provide for circumcision, namely reducing men's and women's sexual pleasure, as well as decreasing

³¹ Rabbi Isaac ben Yedaiah. Translation in: Marc Saperstein. *Decoding the Rabbis: A Thirteenth-Century Commentary on the Aggadah*. Cambridge, Mass, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1980: pp.97-98.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

intravaginal ejaculation latency time, are supported by evidence. A study demonstrates that women report significantly less vaginal lubrication after their partners undergo circumcision.³² In a study of 5552 people, women with circumcised spouses reported incomplete sexual needs fulfilment ~36% more and reported ~41% increased frequency of sexual function difficulties relative to the wives of husbands who did not undergo circumcision. Women with circumcised husbands were four times more likely to report dyspareunia (painful sex) than women whose husbands had unutilated penises.³³ Studies also show that circumcised men report less pleasure and are significantly more likely to have penile discomfort and ejaculatory problems.³⁴

Rabbi Isaac ben Yedaiah's claim of circumcision solving the problem of the man not ejaculating soon after penetration is supported by science too: multiple studies³⁵ have shown a strong positive correlation between premature ejaculation and circumcision.³⁶

³² Cortés-González JR, Arratia-Maqueo JA, Gómez-Guerra LS. Tiene algún efecto la circuncisión en la percepción de la satisfacción sexual de la mujer?. *Rev Invest Clin.* 2008 May-Jun;60(3):227-30.. [PMID: 18807735](#).

³³ Frisch M, Lindholm M, Grønbæk M. Male circumcision and sexual function in men and women: a survey-based, cross-sectional study in Denmark. *Int J Epidemiol.* 2011 Oct;40(5):1367-81. doi: 10.1093/ije/dyr104. Epub 2011 Jun 14. PMID: [21672947](#).

³⁴ Bronselaer, G.A., Schober, J.M., Meyer-Bahlburg, H.F., T'Sjoen, G., Vlietinck, R. and Hoebeke, P.B. (2013), Male circumcision decreases penile sensitivity. *BJU Int*, 111: 820-827. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-410X.2012.11761.x>

³⁵ O'Hara K, O'Hara J. The effect of male circumcision on the sexual enjoyment of the female partner. *BJU Int.* 1999 Jan;83 Suppl 1:79-84. doi: [10.1046/j.1464-410x.1999.0830s1079.x](#). PMID: 10349418.

³⁶ Tang WS, Khoo EM. Prevalence and correlates of premature ejaculation in a primary care setting: a preliminary cross-sectional study. *J Sex Med.* 2011 Jul;8(7):2071-8. doi: [10.1111/j.1743-6109.2011.02280.x](#). Epub 2011 Apr 14. PMID: 21492404.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

iii. The *Brit Milah*

In Judaism, the circumcision is called *בְּרִית מִילָה* *brit milah* or in *bris-* in the Ashkenazi pronunciation, as the letter tav without dagesh underwent the High German Consonant shift in Yiddish, and is now pronounced as a voiceless alveolar sibilant instead of a plosive.

The *bris* is performed on the eighth day after the baby's birth, with days beginning and ending at sunset. A *bris* is traditionally performed in the morning, but it may be performed whenever in the light hours of that day ([Mishneh Torah, Milah 1:8](#)).³⁷

Most influential Rabbis, such as Eliezer Waldenberg, Moshe Feinstein, and Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg all rule that part of the commandment of circumcision is for the child to experience pain, so the child must not be sedated during the ceremony, and Rabbi Shmuel Wosner asserts that circumcision must be painful for the child, citing Psalms 44:23.³⁸ However, it is traditional to give the child a drop of wine to soothe him.

The circumcisor *מוֹהֵל* *mohel*, was traditionally required to be a trained adult Jewish man, even though [Mishneh Torah, Milah 2:1](#) says that if an adult man is not present, any Jew, even a slave, child, or woman, may perform the *bris*. More progressive Jewish movements began to allow female *מוֹהֵלוֹת* *mohalot* in the mid-eighties.

Before the baby is held down and mutilated, blessings are recited. ([Mishneh Torah, Milah 3:1](#)) Then, the baby is held down, while the *mohel* uses a special knife to pry under and cut off the baby's foreskin. Then the *mohel* tears off and rips away the preputial epithelium with the nails, which evolved to be fused to the penis until puberty. This dismemberment of the preputial

³⁷ "[The Circumcision Procedure and Blessings – Performing the Bris Milah – The Handbook to Circumcision](#)". Chabad.org.

³⁸ Rabbi Yaakov Montrose. *Halachic World – Volume 3: Contemporary Halachic topics based on the Parshah*. "Lech Lecha – No Pain, No Bris?" Feldham Publishers 2011, pp. 29–32.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

epithelium is called פריעה *priah* in Hebrew. The removal of this mucus membrane causes the frenulum to be ripped off with it. The final stage is called מציצה *metsitsah*, in which the *mohel* places his mouth directly on the bleeding wound of the child's penis, where the amputated foreskin would be protecting it, and sucks the blood off.

Because there have been numerous deaths and many transmissions of herpes due to the contact between the mouth and the bloody wound, some Rabbis in the modern era perform מציצה *metsitsah b'peh* with a sterile tube between the infant's bleeding penis wound and the mouth of the *mohel* to reduce the risk of infecting the baby.³⁹

כיצד מוהליו. חותכין את כל העור המכסה את העטרה עד שתגלה כל העטרה. ואחר כך פורעין את הקרום הרך שלמטה מן העור בצפרן ומחזירו לכאן ולכאן עד שיראה בשר העטרה. ואחר כך מוצץ את המילה עד שיצא הדם ממקומות רחוקים כדי שלא יבוא לידי סכנה. וכל מי שאינו מוצץ מעבירין אותו. ואחר שמוצץ נוהג עליה אספגנית או רטייה וכיוצא בזה:

How is the circumcision performed? The foreskin that covers the crown of the penis is cut off until the entire crown is revealed. Afterwards, the soft membrane that is beneath the skin should be split along the mid-line with one's nails and peeled back to either side until the flesh of the crown is revealed. Afterwards, one should suck the place of the circumcision until all the blood in the further reaches is extracted, lest a dangerous situation arise. Any *mohel* who does not perform *metzitzah* should be removed from his position. because of the danger to which he exposes the children. After one has performed *metzitzah* one should apply a bandage, a compress, or the like.

([Mishneh Torah, Milah 3:2](#), trans. Touger)

Formerly, the *brit milah* was not as severe as it is now, but in the second century, Rabbinical Judaism made the circumcision requirements stricter, including the complete excision of the inner preputial epithelium, *priah*.⁴⁰ *Priah* was not always part of the *bris*, rather it is an innovation. The editors of the *Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, note that *priah* was added by the rabbis, in order to “prevent the possibility of obliterating the traces of

³⁹ [Metzitza Be'Peh – Halachic Clarification Regarding Metzitza Be'Peh, RCA Clarifies Halachic Background to Statement of March 1, 2005](#). Rabbis.org.

⁴⁰ Berenbaum, Michael; Skolnik, Fred, eds. (2007). "[Circumcision](#)". *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Vol. 4 (2nd ed.). Detroit: Macmillan Reference. p. 732. ISBN 978-0-02-866097-4.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

circumcision”⁴¹ This is because many⁴² Jewish⁴³ men⁴⁴ of the time were stretching their remaining penile skin over the glans in an attempt to restore and regain some of the functionality and appearance of their missing prepuce.

David Gollaher concurs, writing that the rabbis invented *priah* to keep men from trying to restore their foreskins, as was custom of the time: “Once established, *priah* was deemed essential to circumcision; if the mohel failed to cut away enough tissue, the operation was deemed insufficient to comply with God’s covenant,” and “Depending on the strictness of individual rabbis, boys (or men thought to have been inadequately cut) were subjected to additional operations.”⁴⁵

⁴¹ Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi & Wigoder, Geoffrey (1997) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴² Kohler, Kaufmann; Hirsch, Emil G.; Jacobs, Joseph; Friedenwald, Aaron; Broydé, Isaac. "Circumcision: In Apocryphal and Rabbinical Literature". *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Kopelman Foundation.

⁴³ Schultheiss, Dirk; Truss, Michael C.; Stief, Christian G.; Jonas, Udo (1998). "Uncircumcision: A Historical Review of Preputial Restoration". *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins. **101** (7): 1990–8. doi:[10.1097/00006534-199806000-00037](https://doi.org/10.1097/00006534-199806000-00037). PMID 9623850.

⁴⁴ Law, Josh (2017) "Reverse Circumcision in Hellenistic Judaism: The Case for a Gender Critical Reading," *The University of Mississippi Undergraduate Research Journal*: Vol. 2 , Article 1. Available at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/umurjournal/vol2/iss1/1>

⁴⁵ Gollaher, David (2001). *Circumcision: A History Of The World's Most Controversial Surgery*. United States: Basic Books. pp. 1–30. ISBN 978-0465026531.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

iv. Opposition and *Brit Shalom*

Even though circumcision is pretty clearly required by God in the Torah, many progressive, secular, and cultural Jews are opposed⁴⁶ to forced, painful, non-consensual,⁴⁷ and dangerous genital mutilation of children, and this opposition has existed for more than eighteen decades. This is far from a mainstream view, but is not uncommon among Reform and Reconstructionist Jews.⁴⁸

Starting in the 1840s, many Central and Eastern European Jewish philosophers and doctors began to criticize and oppose genital mutilation. Veniamin Portugalov, a Russian Jewish physician, called circumcision (*brit milah*) barbaric and advocated for its abolition.⁴⁹

Nineteenth century Reform Jewish leaders described the *brit milah* as “barbaric” and advocated against it.⁵⁰ The Society for the Friends of Reform, spoke out against genital mutilation and argued that the *brit milah* is not a *mitzvah*, rather an earlier throwback to primitive religion.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Oryszczuk, Stephen (28 February 2018). ["The Jewish parents cutting out the bris"](#). *The Times of Israel*. Jerusalem.

⁴⁷ Kimmel, Michael S. (May–June 2001). ["The Kindest Un-Cut: Feminism, Judaism, and My Son's Foreskin"](#). *Tikkun*. **16** (3): 43–48

⁴⁸ Goldman, Ronald (1997). ["Circumcision: A Source of Jewish Pain"](#). *Jewish Circumcision Resource Center*. Jewish Spectator.

⁴⁹ Epstein, Lisa, ["Circumcision"](#), *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, Yale University Press.

⁵⁰ Shamash (2007). ["The Origins of Reform Judaism"](#). *Jewish Virtual Library*

⁵¹ Gollaher, David (February 2001). "1, *The Jewish Tradition*". *Circumcision: A History Of The World's Most Controversial Surgery*. New York City: Basic Books. pp. 1–30. ISBN 978-0-465-02653-1.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

Many famous Jews of history and today did not have their sons' prepuces cut off, like Theodor Herzl, who instead left the decision up to his son himself.⁵² There are numerous famous Jewish men with normal, intact penises, like Wolfgang Lotz.⁵³ Many Jews from the Soviet Union, especially the irreligious ones, were never subjected to circumcision.

The Orthodox Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik points that Jewish men with foreskins are no less Jewish than Jews who violate other commandments.⁵⁴

Many Jews do not follow most of the *mitzvot*, and a common argument among those opposed to genital mutilation is why they follow one rule from God to inflict harm and pain on a baby, when they do not follow most of the other rules from God. Many Jews who choose⁵⁵ not to cut off part of their sons' genitals against their will opt for a non-violent,⁵⁶ safe ceremony like the *brit milah* but without the blood, calling it a *brit shalom*⁵⁷ בְּרִית שְׁלוֹם, meaning 'covenant of peace'.

⁵² Desmond, Stewart (1974). *Theodor Herzl : artist and politician* (1981 ed.). London: Quartet Books. ISBN 0-7043-3352-X. OCLC 9361934.

⁵³ Jewish Virtual Library. (n.d.). Wolfgang Lotz. Retrieved November 30, 2022, from <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/wolfgang-lotz>

⁵⁴ Judith Bleich, "The Circumcision Controversy in Classical Reform in Historical Context", KTAV Publishing House, 2007. pp. 1–28.

⁵⁵ Ahituv, Netta (2012-06-14). "[Even in Israel, More and More Parents Choose Not to Circumcise Their Sons](#)". *Haaretz*

⁵⁶ Silvers, Emma (2012-01-06). "[Brit shalom is catching on, for parents who dont want to circumcise their child](#)". *J. The Jewish News of Northern California*. San Francisco Jewish Community Publications Inc.

⁵⁷ Greenberg, Zoe (2017-07-25). "[When Jewish Parents Decide Not to Circumcise](#)". *The New York Times*. ISSN 0362-4331.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

b. Christianity

i. Normative Position

The vast majority of Christian men and women have un mutilated genitals, though male circumcision it is practiced by many in the United States of America and Africa, female circumcision is practiced by many in Africa, and preputial superincision is practiced by most Christians in the Philipinnes and on some Pacific Islands⁵⁸. Ellen Gruenbaum writes: “Christian theology generally interprets male circumcision to be an Old Testament rule that is no longer an obligation ... though in many countries (especially the United States and Sub-Saharan Africa, but not so much in Europe) it is widely practiced among Christians.”⁵⁹

In Africa, female circumcision, and very rarely, infibulation, is practiced by some Christians, such as the Copts in Egypt, the Orthodox in Ethiopia, and Protestants and Catholics in Sudan and Kenya.⁶⁰

ii. Scripture and Denominational Views

Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew, of course, was circumcised according to Jewish custom, eight days after he was born (Luke 2:21–24). Jesus only mentions circumcision in passing in most Christians’ canonical New Testament, never saying it is good or bad, though in the extra-canonical text of the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus speaks against circumcision.

⁵⁸ R. Peteet, John (2017). *Spirituality and Religion Within the Culture of Medicine: From Evidence to Practice*. Oxford University Press. pp. 97–101. ISBN 9780190272432.

⁵⁹ Gruenbaum, Ellen (2015). *The Female Circumcision Controversy: An Anthropological Perspective*. University of Pennsylvania Press. p. 61. ISBN 9780812292510.

⁶⁰ Papademetriou, George C. (2011). *Two Traditions, One Space: Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Dialogue*. Somerset Hall Press, p. [138](#). ISBN 978-1-935-24406-6

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

Paul, himself a circumcised Jew, uses the very derogatory and negative word κατατομή ‘mutilators’ to describe those who circumcise, warning Christians to beware of them and calling them dogs and evildoers. This parallels his warning of circumcisors as ψευδάδελφος *pseudadelphos* “false brothers” (or “fake bros”) in Galatians 2:4.

βλέπετε τοὺς κύνας, βλέπετε τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας, βλέπετε τὴν κατατομὴν. ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἔσμεν ἡ περιτομή, οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες καὶ καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες

“Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—” (Philippians 3:2-3, NIV)

Around 50 AD, the Council of Jerusalem ruled that Christians are not required to mutilate their own penises or their sons’, and that the covenant of circumcision was totally null and void.

Καί τινες κατελθόντες ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἐδίδασκον τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ὅτι ἐὰν μὴ περιτμηθῆτε τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως, οὐ δύνασθε σωθῆναι. γενομένης δὲ στάσεως καὶ ζητήσεως οὐκ ὀλίγης τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Βαρνάβῳ πρὸς αὐτοὺς, ἔταξαν ἀναβαίνειν Παῦλον καὶ Βαρνάβαν καὶ τινὰς ἄλλους ἐξ αὐτῶν πρὸς τοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ πρεσβυτέρους εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ περὶ τοῦ ζητήματος τούτου. οἱ μὲν οὖν προπεμφθέντες ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας διήρχοντο τὴν τε Φοινίκην καὶ Σαμάρειαν ἐκδιηγούμενοι τὴν ἐπιστροφὴν τῶν ἐθνῶν, καὶ ἐποίουν χαρὰν μεγάλην πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς. παραγενόμενοι δὲ εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ παρεδέχθησαν ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, ἀνηγειλάν τε ὅσα ὁ θεὸς ἐποίησεν μετ’ αὐτῶν. ἐξανέστησαν δὲ τινες τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς αἰρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων πεπιστευκότες, λέγοντες ὅτι δεῖ περιτέμνειν αὐτοὺς παραγγέλλειν τε τηρεῖν τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως. Συνήχθησάν δὲ οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἰδεῖν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τούτου. πολλῆς δὲ ζητήσεως γενομένης ἀναστὰς Πέτρος εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς, ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, ὑμεῖς ἐπίστασθε ὅτι ἀφ’ ἡμερῶν ἀρχαίων ἐν ὑμῖν ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεὸς διὰ τοῦ στόματός μου ἀκοῦσαι τὰ ἔθνη τὸν λόγον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου καὶ πιστεῦσαι· καὶ ὁ καρδιογνώστης θεὸς ἐμαρτύρησεν αὐτοῖς δοὺς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον καθὼς καὶ ἡμῖν, καὶ οὐθὲν διέκρινεν μεταξὺ ἡμῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν, τῇ πίστει καθάρισας τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν. νῦν οὖν τί πειράζετε τὸν θεόν, ἐπιθεῖναι ζυγὸν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον τῶν μαθητῶν ὃν οὔτε οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν οὔτε ἡμεῖς ἰσχύσαμεν βαστάσαι; ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ πιστεύομεν σωθῆναι καθ’ ὃν τρόπον ἰσχυροί.

“Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.” The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.””(Acts 15:1-11, NIV)

Even after the Council of Jerusalem, circumcision was still an issue among some Christians, so Paul wrote to the Galatians, warning them not to do it, and even wishing that those who advocate for circumcision would go the whole way and cut off all of their own penises, not just the tips, in Galatians 5:12!

Τῆ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἠλευθέρωσεν. στήκετε οὖν καὶ μὴ πάλιν ζυγῷ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε. Ἴδε ἐγὼ Παῦλος λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐὰν περιτέμνησθε, Χριστὸς ὑμᾶς οὐδὲν ὠφελήσει. μαρτύρομαι δὲ πάλιν παντὶ ἀνθρώπῳ περιτεμνομένῳ ὅτι ὀφειλέτης ἐστὶν ὅλον τὸν νόμον ποιῆσαι. κατηγορήθητε ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ οἵτινες ἐν νόμῳ δικαιοῦσθε, τῆς χάριτος ἐξεπέσατε. ἡμεῖς γὰρ πνεύματι ἐκ πίστεως ἐλπίδα δικαιοσύνης ἀπεκδεχόμεθα. ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ οὔτε περιτομὴ τι ἰσχύει οὔτε ἀκροβυστία, ἀλλὰ πίστις δι’ ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη.

“Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” (Galatians 5:2-6, NIV)

ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ Τίτος ὁ σὺν ἐμοί, Ἕλλην ὢν, ἠναγκάσθη περιτμηθῆναι·

“Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek.” (Galatians 2:3, NIV)

ὅσοι θέλουσιν εὐπροσωπῆσαι ἐν σαρκί, οὗτοι ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι, μόνον ἵνα τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μὴ διώκονται. οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι αὐτοὶ νόμον φυλάσσουσιν, ἀλλὰ θέλουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι ἵνα ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ σαρκὶ καυχῶνται. ἐμοὶ δὲ μὴ γένοιτο καυχᾶσθαι εἰ μὴ ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι’ οὗ ἐμοὶ κόσμος ἐσταύρωται καὶ γὰρ κόσμῳ. οὔτε γὰρ περιτομὴ τί ἐστὶν οὔτε ἀκροβυστία, ἀλλὰ καινὴ κτίσις.

“Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.” (Galatians 6:12-15, NIV)

ἢ Ἰουδαίων ὁ θεὸς μόνον; οὐχὶ καὶ ἐθνῶν; ναὶ καὶ ἐθνῶν, εἴπερ εἷς ὁ θεός, ὃς δικαιοῦσει περιτομῆν ἐκ πίστεως καὶ ἀκροβυστίαν διὰ τῆς πίστεως.

“Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.” (Romans 3:29-30, NIV)

περιτετημημένος τις ἐκλήθη; μὴ ἐπισπάσθω. ἐν ἀκροβυστίᾳ κέκληται τις; μὴ περιτεμνέσθω. ἡ περιτομὴ οὐδὲν ἐστίν, καὶ ἡ ἀκροβυστία οὐδὲν ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ τήρησις ἐντολῶν θεοῦ.

“Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts.” (1 Corinthians 7:18-19, NIV)

νυνὶ δὲ ὁ θεὸς ἔθετο τὰ μέλη, ἐν ἑκάστῳ αὐτῶν, ἐν τῷ σώματι καθὼς ἠθέλησεν.

“But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.” (1 Corinthians 12:18, NIV)

Εἰσὶν γὰρ πολλοὶ ἀνυπότακτοι, ματαιολόγοι καὶ φρεναπάται, μάλιστα οἱ ἐκ τῆς περιτομῆς, οὓς δεῖ ἐπιστομίζειν, οἵτινες ὅλους οἴκους ἀνατρέπουσιν διδάσκοντες ἅ μὴ δεῖ αἰσχροῦ κέρδους χάριν.

“For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain.” (Titus 1:10-12, NIV)

All together, the New Testament makes it very clear that Christians ought to be aware of circumcisors and have no reason to circumcise themselves or their sons.⁶¹ Female circumcision and other forms of genital mutilation are never mentioned.

⁶¹ Adams, Gregory; Adams, Kristina (2012). "Circumcision in the Early Christian Church: The Controversy That Shaped a Continent". In Bolnick, David A.; Koyle, Martin; Yosha, Assaf (eds.). *Surgical Guide to Circumcision*. London: Springer-Verlag. pp. 291–298. doi:10.1007/978-1-4471-2858-8_26. ISBN 978-1-4471-2857-1.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

The Catholic Church, by far the largest Christian denomination, with over half of Christians being Catholic, has a long history of opposition to genital mutilation. During the Council of Florence in the fifteenth century, the Catholic Church under Pope Eugenius IV declared circumcision to be a mortal sin.⁶²

“[The Holy Roman Church] firmly... asserts that after the promulgation of the gospel they cannot be observed without loss of eternal salvation. Therefore it denounces all who after that time observe circumcision, the [Jewish] sabbath and other legal prescriptions as strangers to the faith of Christ and unable to share in eternal salvation, unless they recoil at some time from these errors. Therefore it strictly orders all who glory in the name of Christian, not to practise circumcision either before or after baptism, since whether or not they place their hope in it, it cannot possibly be observed without loss of eternal salvation.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church forbids amputations of body parts for non-medical reasons as contrary to the moral law, a prohibition under which all forms of genital mutilation, including circumcision, fall.⁶³

Nisi praescriptiones habeantur medicae ordinis stricte therapeutici, *amputationes, mutilationes vel sterilizationes* directe voluntariae personarum innocentium legi morali sunt contrariae.

“*Except when performed for strictly therapeutic medical reasons, directly intended amputations, mutilations, and sterilizations performed on innocent persons are against the moral law.*” (Catechism of the Catholic Church §2297)

⁶² Eugenius IV, Pope (1990) [1442]. ["Ecumenical Council of Florence \(1438–1445\): Session 11 – 4 February 1442; Bull of union with the Copts"](#). In Norman P. Tanner (ed.). *Decrees of the ecumenical councils*. 2 volumes (in Greek and Latin). Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press. ISBN 0-87840-490-2. LCCN 90003209.

⁶³

https://web.archive.org/web/20221012064417/https://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism_lt/p3s2c2a5_lt.htm#II.%20Observantia%20dignitatis%20personarum

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

Many Catholic scholars⁶⁴ and clergymen⁶⁵ have written and spoken out against genital mutilation, including male circumcision. In the Catholic medical textbook *Medical Ethics*, the Jesuit Father Edwin F. Healy writes:

“MUTILATION IS AN ACTION (an excision or the equivalent) by which an organic function or the use of a member of the body is intentionally destroyed either partially or wholly...” (Chapter IV)

“Unless there is a positive indication for circumcision, the operation should be omitted... too many physicians practice routine circumcision... would not be justified unless there were present a compensating reason.” (Case LV)⁶⁶

Despite the Catholic Church’s clear teachings against circumcision, millions of Catholics mutilate their children’s genitals and in countries where genital mutilation is common, it will continue.

In contrast to the Catholics, the Anglican Communion has a culturally biased double standard about genital mutilation: that male circumcision is acceptable, except “crude” (traditional) forms⁶⁷, though not required, but female circumcision is wrong, trying to prevent

⁶⁴ Lang, D. (2012). Elective Child Circumcision and Catholic Moral Principles. In *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* (Vol. 12, Issue 1, pp. 99–128). Philosophy Documentation Center. <https://doi.org/10.5840/ncbq201212177>

⁶⁵ <https://www.catholicsagainstcircumcision.org/to-circumcise-or-not-to-circumcise/>

⁶⁶ Healy, E. F. (2011). *Medical Ethics*. Loyola University Press. ISBN: 9781258192921

⁶⁷ <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/55340/111.pdf>

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morpew

29 November 2022

just the latter⁶⁸. This culturally imperialistic and sexist⁶⁹ double standard⁷⁰ for the removal of homologous tissue on different bodies⁷¹ has been pointed out, dissected⁷² and criticized⁷³ many times.

iii. Opposition

Despite Paul's many warnings against it and the clear language of the New Testament, a few churches do require genital mutilation as a condition for membership, in countries where the practice is already well-established, such as the Nomiya church in Kenya⁷⁴ and some evangelical congregations in the United States, like one in Missouri, have made infant male circumcision a

68

<https://www.anglicannews.org/features/2015/08/escaping-fgm-and-reconciling-families-in-tanzania.aspx>

⁶⁹ Zoske, J. (1998). Male Circumcision: A Gender Perspective. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 6(2), 189–208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106082659800600205>

⁷⁰ Ball, Casey L., "Orientalism and the UN: Deconstructing the Double Standard in Policies of FGM/C" (2018). 2018 Symposium. 23. https://dc.ewu.edu/scrw_2018/2

⁷¹ The Brussels Collaboration on Bodily Integrity (2019) Medically Unnecessary Genital Cutting and the Rights of the Child: Moving Toward Consensus, *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 19:10, 17-28, DOI: [10.1080/15265161.2019.1643945](https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2019.1643945)

⁷² Evans M. Circumcision in boys and girls: why the double standard? *BMJ* 2011; 342:d978 doi:10.1136/bmj.d978

⁷³ Adikibi A. Female circumcision: double standards. *Pract Midwife*. 2012 Dec;15(11):27-8. PMID: 23304864.

⁷⁴ Mattson CL, Bailey RC, Muga R, Poulussen R, Onyango T (2005) Acceptability of male circumcision and predictors of circumcision preference among men and women in Nyanza province Kenya. *AIDS Care* 17:182–194.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

central tenet of their faith,⁷⁵ religiously codifying a pre-existing cultural tradition among their white and rural community, two American demographic groups in which genital mutilation is very common.

Other Evangelicals connect it to God's will: during a speech to the the Promise Keepers in Anaheim, California in May 1994, Jack⁷⁶ Hayford, a Charismatic Baptist preacher, told Christian men that God wants them to get the tips of their penises cut off:

“One of the other beliefs that Jack Hayford promotes stems from ... a vision of [Jesus] seated in heaven, ... Jesus told Hayford why God required circumcision in the Old Testament. “God wants to touch your very identity as a man,” Hayford explained to the group, in an effort to encourage adult circumcision on those men who had not yet experienced the ritual. “He wants to reach out and touch your secret and private parts. This enables Him to better perform surgery on the heart. God wants to touch man's creative parts.”

The presence of this doctrinal revisionism is evidenced by the fact that among self-identified Christians in the United States of America, Evangelicals and Mormons have by far the lowest rate of intact, natural penises.⁷⁷

Many Christians in the United States of America who were subjected to genital mutilation and plan to do the same to their children believe that their experience had nothing to do with religion, and many American Christians continue to mutilate their children's genital in

⁷⁵ Bigelow, J.D. (1999). Evangelical Christianity in America and its Relationship to Infant Male Circumcision. In: Denniston, G.C., Hodges, F.M., Milos, M.F. (eds) *Male and Female Circumcision*. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-585-39937-9_10

⁷⁶ Barbara Victor, "The Last Crusade, Religion and the Politics of Misdirection" Constable & Robinson Ltd, London, 2005, ISBN 1-84119-955-9, p 178

⁷⁷ Fayre Milo, Marilyn; C. Denniston, George; Hodges, Frederick Mansfield (2007). *Male and Female Circumcision: Medical, Legal, and Ethical Considerations in Pediatric Practice*. Springer Science & Business Media. pp. 173–177. ISBN 9780585399379

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

spite of Paul's (and often their own denomination's) teachings against it. However, it is impossible to cut (pun intended!) religion apart from circumcision, because the original reason for genital mutilation in the United States of America was to prevent masturbation,⁷⁸ the fear and opposition to which all stems from religion, specifically Christianity in this case. Both female and male circumcision were introduced to the Christians of the United States of America in the late nineteenth century with the goal of preventing masturbation. Later, medical justifications were invented to justify and thereby preserve a cultural practice. These are often cited to this day.

In the early nineteenth century, many American Christians promoted male and female circumcision as a preventive and curative tool against the evil of masturbation, supported and often funded by churches crusading against this terrible sin. Edward Dixon, a New York surgeon who made it his life's duty to prevent onanism (masturbation) declared in 1845 that circumcision prevents masturbation.⁷⁹ M.J. Moses, once the President of the American Pediatric Society, declared in 1871 that Jews are immune to masturbation because of circumcision.⁸⁰ J.M. McGee concluded circumcision promotes sexual self-restraint "by diminishing the pruriency of the sexual appetite."⁸¹ In 1891, the Dr. Remondino wrote that if circumcision had not been done, "the expressionless, listless infant would have grown, in time, into a masturbating,

⁷⁸ David L. Gollaher, From Ritual to Science: The Medical Transformation of Circumcision in America, *Journal of Social History*, Volume 28, Issue 1, Fall 1994, Pages 5–36, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh/28.1.5>

⁷⁹ Dixon EH (1845): Ch. IX: Phimosis and Circumcision, in: *A Treatise on Diseases of the Sexual Organs*. New York: William Taylor. pp. 158-65.

⁸⁰ Moses MJ. [The Value of Circumcision as a Hygienic and Therapeutic Measure](#). *NY Med J*. November 1871; **14**(4): 368-74.

⁸¹ Genital Irritation as a Cause of Nervous Disorders. Mississippi 1882 Valley Medical Monthly 2:103–5

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

feeble-minded, idiotic creature, as many others, so situated, have done before it.”⁸² Maximillian Landesberg, a Philadelphia doctor, claimed that circumcision cures eye and vision problems that many doctors of the time said were caused by masturbation.⁸³

Masturbation at the time was seen as a dangerous evil and a sin, and claims that circumcision prevents masturbation were widely circulated among medical professionals and the public. In 1901 in the *American Practitioner and News*, Dr. Earnest G. Marks wrote, “An advantage of circumcision is the lessened liability to masturbation. A foreskin leads the child to touch it to produce pleasurable sensations from the extremely sensitive foreskin leading to masturbation.” In 1914, Dr. Abraham Wolbarst wrote *Universal Circumcision as a Sanitary Measure*, in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, “It is a well known fact that the foreskin is a frequent factor in masturbation, not alone in children but in adults as well...Circumcision has become recognized as a most effective remedy.” In 1896, Dr. R.N. Tooker wrote a popular book, *All About The Baby*, in which he told mothers to have their sons’ genitals mutilated and that it was “advisable in most cases.” in order to prevent “the vile habit of masturbation.” Female circumcision was promoted in the for USA the same reason as male circumcision, to prevent masturbation, the motive for which was deeply steeped in the Christian view of masturbation as sinful. Removal of the female prepuce, the clitoral hood, analogous to the male foreskin, was historically common and medicalized in the United States of America for the same reasons of male circumcision: to prevent masturbation and other diseases and disorders.

⁸² History of Circumcision, Philadelphia, F. Davis, (1891) p. 269

⁸³ Landesberg M. [On Affections of the Eye Caused by Masturbation](#). *Medical Bulletin*. April 1881; 3(4): 79-81

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

Rodriguez writes “surgical interventions on the clitoris have long been made in the name of health.” (p.179) Surgical interventions on the penis, such as the analogous excision of the prepuce have also been made on penises in the name of health.⁸⁴

John Harvey Kellogg, of cornflakes fame, a committed anti-masturbation crusader, made it one of his life goals to promote male and female circumcision to prevent the evil of masturbation.⁸⁵ He wrote:

“A remedy which is almost always successful in small boys is circumcision, especially when there is any degree of phimosis. The operation should be performed by a surgeon without administering an anaesthetic, as the brief pain attending the operation will have a salutary effect upon the mind, especially if it be connected with the idea of punishment, as it may well be in some cases. The soreness which continues for several weeks interrupts the practice, and if it had not previously become too firmly fixed, it may be forgotten and not resumed... In females, the author has found the application of pure carbolic acid to the clitoris an excellent means of allaying the abnormal excitement, and preventing the recurrence of the practice in those whose will-power has become so weakened that the patient is unable to exercise entire self-control. The worse cases among young women are those in which the disease has advanced so far that erotic thoughts are attended by the same voluptuous sensations which accompany the practice. The author has met many cases of this sort in young women, who acknowledged that the sexual orgasm was thus produced, often several times daily. The application of carbolic acid in the manner described is also useful in these cases in allaying the abnormal excitement, which is a frequent provocation of the practice of this form of mental masturbation... Many of the measures suggested for the treatment of males are, however, entirely applicable to this class of cases in women.”

Kellogg was not alone in hoping the pain would teach children not to touch their own genitals, another doctor wrote:

“For this purpose, if the prepuce is long, we may circumcise the male patient with present and probably with future advantage; the operation, too, should not be performed under

⁸⁴ Sarah W. Rodriguez, Rethinking the History of Female Circumcision and Clitoridectomy: American Medicine and Female Sexuality in the Late Nineteenth Century, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, Volume 63, Issue 3, July 2008, Pages 323–347, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhmas/jrm044>

⁸⁵ Kellogg JH (1888): Treatment for Self-Abuse and Its Effects, in: *Plain Facts for Old and Young* (archive URL). Project Gutenberg (ed.). Burlington, Iowa: F. Segner & Co.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

chloroform, so that the pain experienced may be associated with the habit we wish to eradicate.”⁸⁶

In 1958, an American doctor wrote “Then come the symptoms of irritation, scratching, irritability, masturbation, frequency and urgency... The same reasons that apply for the circumcision of males are generally valid when considered for the female.”⁸⁷ Female circumcision was being promoted to “enhance” wives for their husbands and prevent divorce in the United States as late as 1959.⁸⁸

When society’s fear of masturbation subsided after the 1960s, and the American medical establishment no longer warned of masturbation’s supposed damage to the body and mind, a different justification for circumcision was needed, and one was invented.

Karen Erickson Paige writes: “The current medical rationale for circumcision developed *after* the operation was in wide practice. The original reason for the surgical removal of the foreskin, or prepuce, was to control ‘masturbatory insanity’ – the range of mental disorders that people believed were caused by the ‘polluting’ practice of ‘self-abuse.’”⁸⁹

Nowadays, though no medical society in the world recommends infant circumcision for medical reasons, the supposed benefits are touted by some, specifically those in the USA, as a justification for the mutilation of children’s genitals.

⁸⁶ Athol A.W. Johnson. On An Injurious Habit Occasionally Met with in Infancy and Early Childhood. *Lancet* 1860;1:344-345.

⁸⁷ McDonald C. F. Circumcision of the female. *GP*. 1958 Sep;18(3):98-9. PMID: 13574328.

⁸⁸ Rathmann W. G. Female circumcision, indications and a new technique. *GP*. 1959 Sep;20:115-20. PMID: 14436410.

⁸⁹ Paige KE (May 1978). ["The Ritual of Circumcision"](#). *Human Nature*: 40–8.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

A study has shown a reduction in the risk of urinary tract infection in circumcised boys, but those are easily treatable with antibiotics, and “195 circumcisions would be necessary to prevent one admission for UTI”,⁹⁰ but other studies have shown the opposite: an increased risk of urinary track infection after circumcision.⁹¹

Circumcision indeed reduces of penile cancer a little bit, since removing any body part means it cannot become cancerous: if everyone had their left breast cut off, it would drastically reduce the breast cancer rate. Penile cancer is incredibly rare, occurring in men less often than breast cancer. Less than one in one hundred thousand men will be diagnosed with penile cancer, and of those who are, their average age at diagnosis is sixty-eight, with eighty percent happening

⁹⁰ To T, Agha M, Dick PT, Feldman W. Cohort study on circumcision of newborn boys and subsequent risk of urinary-tract infection. *Lancet*. 1998 Dec 5;352(9143):1813-6. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(98)02392-7. PMID: 9851381.

⁹¹ Menahem S. Complications arising from ritual circumcision: pathogenesis and possible prevention. *Isr J Med Sci*. 1981;17(1):45-8.

Cohen HA, Drucker MM, Vainer S, Ashkenasi A, Amir J, Frydman M, et al. Postcircumcision urinary tract infection. *Clin Pediatr*. 1992;31(6):322-4.

Goldman M, Barr J, Bistrizter T, Aladjem M. Urinary tract infection following ritual Jewish circumcision. *Isr J Med Sci*. 1996;32:1098-102.

Amir J, Varsano I, Mimouni M. Circumcision and urinary tract infection in infants. *Am J Dis Child*. 1986;140:1092.

Amir J, Alpert G, Reisner SH, Nitzan M. Fever in the first year of life. *Israel J Med Sci*. 1984;20:447-8.

Harel L, Straussberg R, Jackson S, Amir J. Influence of circumcision technique on frequency of urinary tract infections in neonates. *Pediatr Infect Dis J* 2002;21:879-80.

Prais D, Shoov-Furman R, Amir J. Is ritual circumcision a risk factor for neonatal urinary tract infections? *Arch Dis Child*. 2009;94:191-4.

Toker O, Schwartz S, Segal G, Godovitch N, Schlesinger Y, Raveh D. A costly covenant: ritual circumcision and urinary tract infection. *Isr Med Assoc J*. 2010;12:262-5.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

in men over fifty-five ([Penile Cancer Facts](#)). This means thousands and thousands of men would have to get their foreskins cut off for the prevention of one case of late-onset cancer.

The same Abraham Wolbarst who claimed circumcision prevents masturbation, also claimed it prevented venereal diseases,⁹² a claim repeated to this day. Circumcision has been shown to have no significant impact on the risk of gonorrhea, chlamydia, genital herpes simplex virus infections, human papillomavirus, or chancroid. However, having no foreskin to protect the penis is associated with an increased risk of non-specific urethritis, genital discharge syndrome, and an increased risk of contracting an STI.⁹³

Many studies have shown that circumcision positively correlates with a statistically significant increased risk of syphilis⁹⁴ and other STIs.⁹⁵

⁹² 6. Wolbarst AL. Universal circumcision as a sanitary measure. JAMA. 1914;LXII(2):92-7.

⁹³ 67. Van Howe RS. Genital ulcerative disease and sexually transmitted urethritis and circumcision: a meta-analysis. Int J STD AIDS. 2007;18:799-809.

Van Howe RS. [Sexually transmitted infections and male circumcision: a systematic review and meta-analysis](#). ISRN Urol. 2013:109846

⁹⁴ Tobian AAR, Serwadda D, Quinn TC, Kigozi G, Gravitt PE, Laeyendecker O, et al. Male circumcision for the prevention of HSV-2 and HPV infections and syphilis. N Engl J Med. 2009;360:1298-309.

Mehta SD, Moses S, Parker CB, Agot K, Maclean I, Bailey RC. Circumcision status and incident HSV-2 infection, genital ulcer disease, and HIV infection. AIDS. 2012;26:1141-9.

⁹⁵ Frisch M, Simonsen J. Non-therapeutic male circumcision in infancy or childhood and risk of human immunodeficiency virus and other sexually transmitted infections: national cohort study in Denmark. Eur J Epidemiol. 2021 Sep 26; <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10654-021-00809-6> .

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

Some studies in Africa show an association between male circumcision and reduced HIV transmission risk, but there are more effective and safer ways to prevent HIV contraction than circumcision, and the evidence is not that strong.⁹⁶

If circumcision truly significantly reduces STI transmission as some circumcision proponents claim, then the USA and Africa would have a lower STI rate than Europe and East Asia, but the opposite is true, though this comparison is obviously confounded by other factors, such sexual behavior, condom usage, and access to healthcare.

Circumcision persists as a tradition in the USA among Christians because of its immense cultural weight and conformity pressure, not for any medical⁹⁷ benefits.⁹⁸

⁹⁶

www.doctorsopposingcircumcision.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Birx-letter-WHO-HIV-PEPFAR-circumcision-06-29-20.pdf

⁹⁷ Freedman AL. The Circumcision Debate: Beyond Benefits and Risks. *Pediatrics*. 2016 May;137(5):e20160594. doi: 10.1542/peds.2016-0594. Epub 2016 Apr 6. PMID: 27244839.

⁹⁸ Frisch M, Aigrain Y, Barauskas V, Bjarnason R, Boddy SA, Czauderna P, de Gier RP, de Jong TP, Fasching G, Fetter W, Gahr M, Graugaard C, Greisen G, Gunnarsdottir A, Hartmann W, Havranek P, Hitchcock R, Huddart S, Janson S, Jaszczak P, Kupferschmid C, Lahdes-Vasama T, Lindahl H, MacDonald N, Markestad T, Märtson M, Nordhov SM, Pälve H, Petersons A, Quinn F, Qvist N, Rosmundsson T, Saxen H, Söder O, Stehr M, von Loewenich VC, Wallander J, Wijnen R. Cultural bias in the AAP's 2012 Technical Report and Policy Statement on male circumcision. *Pediatrics*. 2013 Apr;131(4):796-800. doi: 10.1542/peds.2012-2896. Epub 2013 Mar 18. PMID: 23509170.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

c. Mandaism

All forms of genital mutilation are strictly forbidden in Mandaism, and Mandaeans do not cut off any part of their genitals or those of their children.⁹⁹ They consider the practice of circumcision wrong and abhorrent.¹⁰⁰

A man who has had his prepuce cut off is prohibited from serving as a Mandaean priest.¹⁰¹

c. Islam

i. Normative Position

Different schools of Islam and different scholars have different opinions on the obligatoriness of male and female circumcision, though almost all mainstream scholars agree that both male and female circumcision, called *khitan* ختان or ختنة *khatna* in Arabic, are *sunnah* and thus a tradition to be emulated.¹⁰²

The founders of three of the four major Sunni schools, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (Ḥanbalī), Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu‘mān (Ḥanafī), and Mālik ibn Anas (Mālikī) all maintain that circumcision is not obligatory for men or women, but is still positive since it is *sunnah*, the Prophets’ tradition.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Drower, Ethel Stefana (1937). *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*. Oxford At The Clarendon Press.

¹⁰⁰ Schmidinger, Thomas (2019). *Beyond ISIS: History and Future of Religious Minorities in Iraq*. Transnational Press London. p. 82. ISBN 9781912997152.

¹⁰¹ Deutsch, Nathaniel (1999). *Guardians of the Gate: Angelic Vice-regency in the Late Antiquity*. BRILL. p. 105. ISBN 9789004109094.

¹⁰² Kueny, Kathryn (2004). "[Abraham's Test: Islamic Male Circumcision as Anti/Ante-Covenantal Practice](#)". In Reeves, John C. (ed.). *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*. Symposium Series (Society of Biblical Literature). Vol. 24. Leiden: Brill Publishers. pp. 161–173. ISBN 90-04-12726-7. ISSN [1569-3627](#).

¹⁰³ Wensinck, A. J. (2012) [1986]. "[Khitān](#)". In Bosworth, C. E.; van Donzel, E. J.; Lewis, B.; Heinrichs, W. P.; Pellat, Ch. (eds.). *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Vol. 5. Leiden

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

Their *ulema* agree with them, with the exception of the Ḥanbalīs. Disagreeing with their *madhab*'s founder, most Ḥanbalī jurists rule that it is obligatory under *shari'a* to mutilate one's sons, but not one's daughters.¹⁰⁴ The Shāfi'ī jurists rule that it is mandatory for everyone to undergo circumcision and force it upon their children, regardless of sex.¹⁰⁵

In contrast to many schools of Sunni Islam, within Shī'a Islam, circumcision is considered obligatory for men.¹⁰⁶ There is a *fatwā* issued by scholars of Islam in the United States, saying that though female circumcision is recommended in Islam and is *sunnah*, it should not be done in countries where it is illegal.¹⁰⁷ The prevalence of genital mutilation varies by community within the Muslim world: male circumcision is very common in all Muslim countries, but because of differences in Islamic schools' rules on female circumcision, it is only common in some Muslim countries. Female circumcision is rare in Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Syria, and Libya, but very common¹⁰⁸ in Mali, Mauritania, Chad, Somaliland, Eritrea, Djibouti,

and Boston: Brill Publishers. pp. 20–22. doi:[10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4296](https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4296). ISBN 978-90-04-07819-2.

¹⁰⁴

https://www.just.edu.jo/~mafika/733_reproductive%20endocrinology/Islam%20and%20Circumcision.htm

¹⁰⁵ <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/9412/circumcision-in-islam-compulsory>

¹⁰⁶ Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh, Sami A. (1994). "To Mutilate in the Name of Jehovah or Allah: Legitimization of Male and Female Circumcision". *Medicine and Law*. World Association for Medical Law. **13** (7–8): 575–622. PMID [7731348](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/7731348/).; Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh, Sami A. (1995). "[Islamic Law and the Issue of Male and Female Circumcision](#)". *Third World Legal Studies*. Valparaiso University School of Law. **13**: 73–101

¹⁰⁷

<https://www.amjaonline.org/fatwa/en/1639/is-female-circumcision-an-obligatory-practice>

¹⁰⁸ Female genital mutilation/cutting: a call for a global response. End FGM European Network, U.S. End FGM/C Network and Equality Now (March 2020).

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

Egypt, Malaysia, Sudan, Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Guinea, and Indonesia,¹⁰⁹ among others. In some countries like Iraq, some communities such as the Kurds practice female circumcision, while others like the Iraqi Arabs do not.¹¹⁰

ii. *Aḥādīth and Sunnah*

There are many *aḥādīth* (narrations of what Muhammad said and/or did) that are relevant to genital mutilation. The Prophet Muhammad himself was circumcised, as was traditional in that region for millennia, and this tradition of genital mutilation was spread around the world, from Indonesia to Morocco to places it had not previously been known, spreading along with Islam through conquest, trade, and proselytizing.

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ فُرْعَانَ، حَدَّثَنَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ بْنُ سَعْدٍ، عَنِ ابْنِ شِهَابٍ، عَنْ سَعِيدِ بْنِ الْمُسَيَّبِ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ - عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ " الْفِطْرَةُ خَمْسٌ الْخِتَانُ، وَالْإِسْتِحْدَادُ، وَتَنْفُ الْإِبْطِ، وَقَصُّ الشَّارِبِ، وَتَقْلِيمُ الْأَطْفَارِ "

Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said "Five things are in accordance with Al Fitra (the tradition of prophets): to be circumcised, to shave the pelvic region, to pull out the hair of the armpits, to cut short the mustaches, and to clip the nails." (Sahih al-Bukhari 6297)

أَخْبَرَنَا قُتَيْبَةُ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو عَوَانَةَ، عَنْ أَبِي بَشِيرٍ، عَنْ طَلْقِ بْنِ حَبِيبٍ، قَالَ عَشْرَةٌ مِنَ السُّنَّةِ السَّوَاكُ وَقَصُّ الشَّارِبِ وَالْمُضْمَضَةُ وَالْإِسْتِنْشَاقُ وَتَوْفِيرُ اللَّحْيَةِ وَقَصُّ الْأَطْفَارِ وَتَنْفُ الْإِبْطِ وَالْخِتَانُ وَحَلْقُ الْعَانَةِ وَغَسْلُ الدُّبُرِ . قَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ وَحَدِيثُ سَلِيمَانَ النَّيْمِيِّ وَجَعْفَرَ بْنِ إِيَّاسٍ أَشْبَهُهُ بِالصَّوَابِ مِنْ حَدِيثِ مُصْعَبِ بْنِ شَيْبَةَ وَمُصْعَبِ مَنْكَرِ الْحَدِيثِ .

"It was narrated that Talq bin Habib said: "Ten things are from the Sunnah: Using the Siwak, trimming the mustache, rinsing the mouth, rinsing the nose, letting the beard grow, trimming the nails, plucking the armpit hairs, circumcision, shaving the pubes and washing one's backside." (Sunan an-Nasa'i 5042)

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ خَالِدٍ، حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الرَّزَّاقِ، أَخْبَرَنَا ابْنُ جُرَيْجٍ، قَالَ أَخْبَرْتُ عَنْ عُنَيْمِ بْنِ كَلَيْبٍ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ جَدِّهِ، أَنَّهُ جَاءَ إِلَى النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالَ قَدْ أَسْلَمْتُ . فَقَالَ لَهُ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " أَلْقِ عَنْكَ شَعْرَ الْكُفْرِ " . يَقُولُ أَحْلِقُ . قَالَ وَأَخْبَرَنِي آخَرَ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ لِآخَرَ مَعَهُ " أَلْقِ عَنْكَ شَعْرَ الْكُفْرِ وَأَخْتِنُ " .

"Uthaim b. Kulaib reported from his father (Kuthair) on the authority of his grandfather (Kulaib) that he came to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.): I have embraced Islam. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said to him: Remove from yourself the hair that grew during of unbelief, saying "shave them". He further says that another person (other than the grandfather of Uthaim) reported to him that the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said to another person who accompanied him: Remove from yourself the

¹⁰⁹ Clarence-Smith, William G. (2008). ["Islam and Female Genital Cutting in Southeast Asia: The Weight of the Past"](#) (PDF). *Finnish Journal of Ethnicity and Migration*. **3** (2): 14–15.

¹¹⁰ <http://www.stopfgmmideast.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Infographic.pdf>

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

hair that grew during the period of unbelief and get yourself circumcised.” (Sunan Abi Dawud 356)

Classical Arabic has the same words for male and female circumcision *khitan* ختنة or *khatna*, so all the mentions of circumcision could apply to men and women. However, some are explicitly in reference to female circumcision. It is clear when Muhammad's third and youngest wife speaks of her circumcised parts meeting his circumcised parts that they are both circumcised.

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو مُوسَى، مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْمُثَنَّى حَدَّثَنَا الْوَلِيدُ بْنُ مُسْلِمٍ، عَنِ الْأَوْزَاعِيِّ، عَنْ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ الْقَاسِمِ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ عَائِشَةَ، قَالَتْ إِذَا جَاوَزَ الْخِتَانَ الْخِتَانَ فَقَدْ وَجِبَ الْغُسْلُ فَعَلْتُهُ أَنَا وَرَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَأَغْتَسَلْنَا . قَالَ وَفِي الْبَابِ عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ وَعَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عَمْرٍو وَرَافِعِ بْنِ خَدِيجٍ .

“Aishah narrated: "When the circumcised meets the circumcised, then indeed Ghusl is required. Myself and Allah's Messenger (p.b.u.h.) did that, so we performed Ghusl.” (Jami at-Tirmidhi 108)

حَدَّثَنَا أَصْبَغُ قَالَ: أَخْبَرَنِي ابْنُ وَهْبٍ قَالَ: أَخْبَرَنِي عَمْرُو، أَنَّ بَكِيرًا حَدَّثَهُ، أَنَّ أُمَّ عَلْقَمَةَ أَخْبَرَتْهُ، أَنَّ بَنَاتِ أَخِي عَائِشَةَ اخْتُنْنَ، فَقِيلَ لِعَائِشَةَ: أَلَا نَدْعُو لَهُنَّ مَنْ يُلَهِيهِنَّ؟ قَالَتْ: بَلَى. فَأُرْسِلَتْ إِلَى عَدِيٍّ فَأَتَاهُنَّ، فَمَرَّتْ عَائِشَةُ فِي الْبَيْتِ فَرَأَتْهُ يَتَعَنَّى وَيُحْرِكُ رَأْسَهُ طَرْبًا، وَكَانَ ذَا شَعْرٍ كَثِيرٍ، فَقَالَتْ: أَفَّ، شَيْطَانٌ، أَخْرِجُوهُ، أَخْرِجُوهُ.

Umm 'Alqama related that when the daughters of 'A'isha's brother were circumcised, 'A'isha was asked, "Shall we call someone to amuse them?" "Yes," she replied. 'Adi was sent for and he came to them. 'A'isha passed by the room and saw him singing and shaking his head in rapture - and he had a large head of hair. 'Uff!' she exclaimed, 'A shaytan! Get him out! Get him out!'” (Al-Adab Al-Mufrad)

حَدَّثَنَا سُلَيْمَانُ بْنُ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ الدَّمَشْقِيُّ، وَعَبْدُ الْوَهَّابِ بْنُ عَبْدِ الرَّحِيمِ الْأَشْجَعِيُّ، قَالَا حَدَّثَنَا مَرْوَانُ، حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ حَسَّانَ، - قَالَ عَبْدُ الْوَهَّابِ الْكُوفِيُّ - عَنْ عَبْدِ الْمَلِكِ بْنِ عُمَيْرٍ، عَنْ أُمِّ عَطِيَّةِ الْأَنْصَارِيَّةِ، أَنَّ امْرَأَةً، كَانَتْ تَخْتُنُ بِالْمَدِينَةِ فَقَالَ لَهَا النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " لَا تُنْهَكِي فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَحْطَى لِلْمَرْأَةِ وَأَحَبُّ إِلَى الْبَعْلِ " .

“Narrated Umm Atiyyah al-Ansariyyah: A woman used to perform circumcision in Medina. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said to her: Do not cut severely as that is better for a woman and more desirable for a husband.” (Sunan Abi Dawud 5271)

Muhammad's instruction not to cut severely was probably in reference to the Horn of African custom of pharaonic circumcision, also known as infibulation. This *hadith* has been understood as a prohibition of infibulation, and thus female circumcision in Islam is mostly the same as male circumcision, consisting of the removal of the same part, the prepuce, which is homologous between the two sexes.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

i. Opposition

There are many Muslims who are opposed to genital mutilation,¹¹¹ but like in Judaism, the opposition is not mainstream and is definitely a minority opinion.¹¹²

The religious criticism of the practice focuses on the authority that the Qur'an, which never mentions circumcision, has over *aḥādīth*, if the two conflict, the Qur'an takes precedence.¹¹³

Muslims opposed to genital mutilation claim the *aḥādīth* in support of circumcision are unreliable and cite the many verses of the Qur'an in which it says that God created humans perfectly. They ask: how can one improve on God's creation of the human body when the Qur'an says God designed people perfectly and shaped their bodies perfectly in the womb, without any faults?

صُنِعَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنْفَعَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ إِنَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَفْعَلُونَ...

“...the making of Allah Who has perfected everything; He is indeed All-Aware of what you do.”
(Qur'an 27:88, trans. Fadel Soliman)

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ وَبَدَأَ خَلْقَ الْإِنْسَانِ مِن طِينٍ

“Who has perfected everything He created. And He originated the creation of humankind from clay.” (Qur'an 32:7, trans. Khattab)

اللَّهُ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمْ الْأَرْضَ قَرَارًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَصَوَّرَكُمْ فَأَحْسَنَ صُورَكُمْ وَرَزَقَكُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ ذَلِكُمْ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُم فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ

¹¹¹ Alahmad G, Dekkers W. Bodily integrity and male circumcision: an islamic perspective. J IMA. 2012 Mar 20;44(1):44-1-7903. doi: 10.5915/44-1-7903. PMID: 23610746; PMCID: PMC3516177.

¹¹² Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh, Sami A. (1994). "To Mutilate in the Name of Jehovah or Allah: Legitimization of Male and Female Circumcision". *Medicine and Law*. World Association for Medical Law. **13** (7–8): 575–622. PMID [7731348](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/7731348/).; Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh, Sami A. (1995). "[Islamic Law and the Issue of Male and Female Circumcision](#)". *Third World Legal Studies*. Valparaiso University School of Law. **13**: 73–101

¹¹³ <https://www.quranicpath.com/misconceptions/khitan.html>

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

“It is Allah Who made the earth a place of settlement for you and the sky a canopy. He shaped you in the womb, perfecting your form. And He has provided you with what is good and lawful. That is Allah—your Lord. So Blessed is Allah, Lord of all worlds.” (Qur’an 40:64, trans. Khattab)

خَلَقَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ وَصَوَّرَكُمْ بِالْحَقِّ فَاَحْسَنَ صُوْرَكُمْ وَاِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيْرُ

“He created the heavens and the earth for a purpose. He shaped you in the womb, perfecting your form. And to Him is the final return.” (Qur’an 64:3, trans. Khattab)

الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمٰوٰتٍ طِبَاقًا مَّا تَرٰى فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمٰنِ مِنْ تَفٰوُتٍ فَاَرْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ هَلْ تَرٰى مِنْ فُطُوْرٍ

“He is the One Who created seven heavens, one above the other. You will never see any imperfection in the creation of the Most Compassionate. So look again: do you see any flaws?” (Qur’an 67:3, trans. Khattab)

There have been some *fatāwā* issued in opposition to female circumcision as well, but these have generally been issued in parts of the Muslim world where the practice was already rare, and of course, there are even more who have issued *fatāwā* in support of genital mutilation.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh, S. A. (2012). *Male and female circumcision: Religious, medical, social and legal debate*. Createspace Independent Publishing Platform.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

b. Druzism

i. Disagreement

Though I searched and searched, I could not find a normative position on genital mutilation among the Druze. For them, it is controversial and a source of disagreement and contention. Some Druze mutilate their sons' penises, while others do not.¹¹⁵ They have no tradition of mutilating their daughters' vulvas.

Betts writes:

“There are many references to the Druze refusal to observe this common Muslim practice, one of the earliest being the rediscoverer of the ruins of Petra, John Burckhardt. “The Druses do not circumcise their children.””¹¹⁶

But others, like Ubayd, say the opposite, that male circumcision is a long tradition among the Druze and is commonly practiced.¹¹⁷

Daniels writes that it is neither compulsory nor of religious significance in Druzism, but that some Druze decide to mutilate their sons' genitals anyway, presumably to carry on the tradition in which their own penises were mutilated, but not for religious reasons, just cultural.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ "[Druze](#)." Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life. . *Encyclopedia.com*. 29 Nov. 2022

¹¹⁶ Brenton Betts, Robert (2013). *The Sunni-Shi'a Divide: Islam's Internal Divisions and Their Global Consequences*. Potomac Books, Inc. p. 56. ISBN 9781612345239.

¹¹⁷ Ubayd, Anis (2006). *The Druze and Their Faith in Tawhid*. Syracuse University Press. p. 150. ISBN 9780815630975

¹¹⁸ Jacobs, Daniel (1998). *Israel and the Palestinian Territories: The Rough Guide*. Rough Guides. p. 147. ISBN 9781858282480

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

c. Mormonism

i. Normative Position, Scripture, and Practice

The Mormons, who call their church ‘the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’, self-identify as Christians, but this is not recognized by mainstream Christianity. Like Christians, they believe in the New Testament, but also have additional scripture and different beliefs.

Mormons do not require circumcision as a religious ritual. In the Book of Mormon, it is written:

“...little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them; and the law of circumcision is done away in me.” (Moroni 8:8)

Mormon clergymen have also made it clear that genital mutilation is not one of the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.¹¹⁹

Though The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not require male circumcision for their religion, it is still commonly practiced by Mormons in Utah and promoted by arms of the Church, such as the cited article from the LDS-owned *Deseret News*. Thirty-nine percent of boys born in Utah in 2010¹²⁰ had their penises mutilated without their consent, and fifty-four percent of those born in 2005, with huge variation between groups, “about 90 percent of Caucasians and 2 percent of Hispanics”, according to pediatrician Karen Lantz.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Christofferson, D. Todd. “The Doctrine of Christ of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Accessed October 18, 2022. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2012/04/the-doctrine-of-christ?lang=eng>.

¹²⁰ Leonard, W. (2012, August 23). Study: Declining circumcision rates could lead to increase in health care costs, disease. *Deseret News*. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://www.deseret.com/2012/8/23/20431531/study-declining-circumcision-rates-could-lead-to-increase-in-health-care-costs-disease>.

¹²¹ Westly, M. (2007, May 4). A majority of Utah parents opt for circumcision for their infant sons. *Daily Herald*. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://www.heraldextra.com/news/2007/may/04/a-majority-of-utah-parents-opt-for-circumcision-for-their-infant-sons/>.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

In the *Deseret News* article, a Mormon woman says she hired a *mohel* to mutilate her son's genitals, saying:

“The religious view helped me to remember that it was something God asked at one time, and therefore, at least for me, I thought of it not as something that was abusive or horrific — because I can't see God requiring something that is inhumane for his children, in their desire to covenant with him,”

5. Genital Mutilation in the Persian Religions

a. Zoroastrianism

None of the Zoroastrian religious texts, neither the Avesta nor the Zoroastrian Pahlavi, mention anything about genital mutilation.¹²² Zoroastrians generally do not mutilate their children's genitals, and there is no tradition of it.¹²³

b. Yazidism

Genital mutilation is not required in Yazidism, but some Yazidis mutilate their children's genitals anyway to conform with the customs of the regions in which they live.¹²⁴

¹²² Häberl, Charles (2009). *The Neo-Mandaic Dialect of Khorramshahr*. Otto Harrassowitz Verlag. p. 4. ISBN 9783447058742.

¹²³ Ebrāhīm Šakūrzāda & Mahmoud Omidsalar, “Circumcision,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, XV/3,; available online at <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/circumcision> (accessed online at 29 November 2022).

¹²⁴ Parry, O. H. (Oswald Hutton) (1895). "[Six months in a Syrian monastery; being the record of a visit to the head quarters of the Syrian church in Mesopotamia, with some account of the Yazidis or devil worshippers of Mosul and El Jilwah, their sacred book](#)". London : H. Cox.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

6. Genital Mutilation in the South Asian Religions

a. Hinduism

There are no references to genital mutilation among Hindu texts, because the practices of male and female circumcision arrived in South Asia along with Islam long after the writing of Hindu scripture, but there are calls to maintain and honor the body's integrity. The vast majority of Hindus have normal, unamputated, genitals. Hindus do not practice genital mutilation, and the prevailing opinion of Hindu scholars¹²⁵ is that the medically unnecessary excision of any body part, including the prepuce, is wrong, since the body is designed by the Parabrahman. Reverend Swami Satchitananda said:

“There is no mention of circumcision in any Hindu literature, as least as far as I know. Personally, I feel circumcision is against nature. If God wanted that skin to not be there, it would have been very easy for God to not have put it there. If you believe in nature and in God, you must accept it. Otherwise God must be a fool, and we are more intelligent than God.”¹²⁶

In South Asia, checking for a circumcision scar and lack of foreskin has been used to identify Muslim men during religious violence.¹²⁷ Among Indian Hindus, circumcision is looked down upon, and considered a “musalmani operation”.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Clarence-Smith, William G. (2008). ["Islam and Female Genital Cutting in Southeast Asia: The Weight of the Past"](#) (PDF). *Finnish Journal of Ethnicity and Migration*. **3** (2). Archived from the original on 2009-03-06.

¹²⁶ Tandavan, Doctor (February 1989). ["Routine Circumcision is Unnecessary"](#). Hinduism Today. Archived from [the original](#) on 2003-07-07

¹²⁷ Chandhiok N, Gangakhedkar RR. The new evidence on male circumcision: an Indian perspective. *Reprod Health Matters*. 2007 May;15(29):53-6. doi: 10.1016/S0968-8080(07)29309-7. PMID: 17512375.

¹²⁸ Sahay S, Nagarajan K, Mehendale S, Deb S, Gupta A, Bharat S, Bhatt S, Kumar AB, Kanthe V, Sinha A, Chandhiok N. Community and healthcare providers' perspectives on male circumcision: a multi-centric qualitative study in India. *PLoS One*. 2014 Mar 10;9(3):e91213. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0091213. PMID: 24614575; PMCID: PMC3948789.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morphew

29 November 2022

b. Sikhism

The Sikhs do not mutilate any of their children's genitals, and they believe doing so is wrong and unjust.¹²⁹ Sikhism is very critical of genital mutilation of both men and women, as a violation of children's rights and as a mutilation and desecration of God's creation.¹³⁰

Bhagat Kabir criticizes the practice of circumcision in the following hymn:

ਸਕਤਿ ਸਨੇਹੁ ਕਰਿ ਸੁੰਨਤਿ ਕਰੀਐ ਮੈ ਨ ਬਦਉਗਾ ਭਾਈ ॥ ਜਉ ਰੇ ਖੁਦਾਇ ਮੇਹਿ ਤੁਰਕੁ ਕਰੈਗਾ ਆਪਨ ਹੀ ਕਟਿ ਜਾਈ ॥੨॥ ਸੁੰਨਤਿ ਕੀਏ ਤੁਰਕੁ ਜੇ ਹੋਇਗਾ ਅਉਰਤ ਕਾ ਕਿਆ ਕਰੀਐ ॥

"Because of the love of woman, circumcision is done; I don't believe in it, O Siblings of Destiny. If God wished me to be a Muslim, it would be cut off by itself. If circumcision makes one a Muslim, then what about a woman?" (Guru Granth Sahib 477)

c. Jainism

Jain canonical texts do not mention genital mutilation, since it was unheard of in South Asia at the time of the texts' writing. I searched, but did not find any discussion of circumcision/genital mutilation in Jainism, but I did find that the Jain do not mutilate their children's genitals.

¹²⁹ ["Guidelines for health Care Providers Interacting with Patients of the Sikh Religion and their Families"](#) (PDF). Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council. November 2000. Archived from [the original](#) (PDF) on June 16, 2007.

¹³⁰ Devinder Chahal (2013). John Peppin; et al. (eds.). [Religious Perspectives on Bioethics](#). Taylor & Francis. p. 213. ISBN 978-9026519673.

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morpew

29 November 2022

d. Buddhism

The Buddha had an intact, normal penis, as all the men of his time and area did. Because the practice was foreign to South Asia and unheard of at the time of the texts' writing, there are no mentions of circumcision or other forms of genital mutilation in the earliest Buddhist texts.

Some Buddhists traditionally value foreskin. The Digha Nikaya, in the 'Discourse of the Marks' (*Lakkhaṇa Sutta*) lists the thirty-two characteristics of a great man.¹³¹ The same signs of great men are named in *Brahmāyu Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.¹³² The tenth of these signs is *kosohitavatguyho* in Pali, meaning "male organ contained in a sheath", translated by some as "retractable penis".

Buddhism teaches that the body and mind are mutually dependent and values the body as a tool for following the Buddhist path, teaching that one must honor their body and keep it whole.¹³³

The vast majority of Buddhists, regardless of which school, have normal and intact genitals. There is not, and never has been, a tradition of genital mutilation in Buddhism.

¹³¹ Shaw, Sarah. *Buddhist Meditation: An Anthology of Texts from the Pali Canon*. 2006. p. 114

¹³² Epstein, Ronald (2003), *Buddhist Text Translation Society's Buddhism A to Z* (illustrated ed.), Burlingame, CA: Buddhist Text Translation Society, p. 200

¹³³ Wilson, Liz (2004), "Body, Perspectives on the", in Buswell, Jr., Robert E. (ed.), *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, USA: Macmillan Reference USA, pp. 63–66, [ISBN 0-02-865910-4](#)

Genital Mutilation and World Religions

Tony Kooi Morpew

29 November 2022

7. Questions:

Thanks for reading! I have some questions:

Will you have your children's genitals mutilated? If so, why?

How should governments balance people's right to practice their religion with the right of a child to have his/her whole body and not have medically unnecessary, permanent, and painful amputations of any of its parts?