

EHZ-inquiry: Is the consumption of carmine allowed?

Consuming carmine is allowed.

However, from an animal-ethical perspective and due to health reasons, consumption is not advisable.

Explanation:

Cochineal-scale insects live on a specific species of Central American cactus. They are mainly bred and collected on plantations in Mexico. In order to obtain carminic acid, the female lice are first washed in vinegar, dried and finally boiled. The solid carminic is then crystallized with aluminum salts and hence, the red carmine color is produced. This is a matter of the carminic acid that is extracted and not of the blood of the animals.

1. Sunni law schools have different views on whether one can eat insects or not. The root of dispute about this goes back to the interpretation of the Qur'anic term "khabith" .

For instance, in Surat al-A'raf, Verse 157 it says:

*"They are the ones who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whose description they find in their Torah and the Gospel. He commands them to do good and forbids them from evil, **permits for them what is lawful and forbids to them what is impure/repulsive** (→ "**khabith**" **خبِيث**) and relieves them from their burdens and the shackles that bound them. Only those who believe in him, honor and support him, and follow the light sent down to him will be successful."*

The Hanafi school of religious law (Madhab) holds the opinion that the repulsive can be grasped by healthy human reason and a "genuine" sense of taste and rates insects as repulsive. The Shafi'i and Hanbali Madhabs hold the opinion that obnoxious and repulsive things should be judged by what the Arabs felt to be obnoxious and repulsive at the time of the Prophet (pbuh). The Maliki Madhab generally believes that insects are edible.

As Islam is a global religion and practiced in many eating cultures, in our opinion it is unreasonable to start from a healthy sense of reason when feeling and judging on what is repulsive and disgusting, or to determine what is forbidden and permitted based on a certain eating culture. This also seems to be the approach of the Maliki Madhab, who allow the consumption of insects, of course as long as they are not poisonous.

2. Apart from the question on whether it is Islamically legitimate to eat insects, a complete change of state (istikhala) of the lice to crystal-powdered carminic acid can be detected in the production of carmine.
3. Like many other foods, carmine is said to have allergenic properties. According to the EU Food Protection Ordinance, however, there is no significant health hazard, but relevant studies indicate that sufferers of allergies should avoid the substance.