In each of the tractates translated and commented on so far, the material is presented in a very meaningful and logical arrangement. Thus four great complexes can be discerned in Zebahim dealing with the problem of intention in sacrifice, concrete prescriptions in regard to the sacrifice of cattle and birds, prescriptions for the altar, and with the question of the position of the altar, as well as of sacrifices offered outside the Temple.

Menahot is also divided into four complexes (intention in food offering, preparation of the food offering, special kinds of food offerings, vows in connection with food offerings) and shows an evident dependence on Zebahim; moreover, the problem arises here for the first time of a tractate which in its statement says practically nothing more than what is asserted in the Bible. Hullin is above all interesting because the main development of its subject obviously did not take place until after the conclusion of the Mishnah tractate (cf. b.Hullin). That is to say, the problem is posed here in particular clarity of why the tractate or the whole Mishnah respectively was redacted between 170 and 200, or, formulated differently, of the relationship between the Mishnah and later rabbinic tradition literature. The tractate is divided into two great complexes (rules of slaughtering unconsecrated animals for use at home or in the Temple; rules on the preparation of food, principally for use at home), wherein the inner logic of the extensive second section remains this time largely obscure. Chapter 9, which seems as far as its subject is concerned not to belong to Hullin, displays (chiefly in the "formularly patterns" of the apodoses) close associations with Uqsin and perhaps fits in better there than in Tohorot. Bekhorot is again arranged in four complexes (firstborn of animals; slaughtering a firstling by reason of blemishes; firstborn of man; the tithe of cattle), the last of which forms a thematically independent unity, attached here as an Appendix (R. Sarason — again with the help of formal criteria! — gives an illuminating reason for why this is so, p. 142, no. 1).

Much of what has been achieved in the analysis of the individual tractates will acquire its real worth only when the whole Seder is completed. Volume 6, of which the articles, "From Scripture to Mishnah: The Origins of Mishnah's Fifth Division" (JBL 98, 1979, pp. 269-83) and "Map without Territory: Mishnah's System of Sacrifice and Sanctuary" (HR 19, 1979, pp. 103-27), already provide a foretaste, should then prove especially interesting.

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This work was begun as a doctoral thesis in the mid 1960s and was published in 1974. Its appearance was hailed by Roman historians as one of the first attempts to put rabbinic evidence to sophisticated use for the understanding of general Roman history. Enthusiasm for the attempt was justified but has not led Romanists to espouse S.'s conclusions since very few can feel competent to assess the worth of the arguments put forward. S. assumes a detailed knowledge of both rabbinic texts and
numismatics and presents his case in an exceedingly indigestible form — which serves as at least partial excuse for the lateness of this review.

S.’s aim is ambitious. He seeks to correct conventional Roman numismatic history by applying the evidence of rabbinic texts. To this end he employs wide reading (hence huge footnotes) and subtle arguments. The effect, unfortunately, is not as momentous as might be hoped: the ordinary account of orthodox numismatics is little changed and when S. does disagree with it he is likely to be wrong.

Nonetheless there are valuable things to be learned. S.’s examination often sheds light on obscure passages in talmudic texts. His discussion of some specific terms (e.g. dinar and maneh) is cogent and useful in a confusing field and should prevent scholars going wildly wrong at least in the scale of wealth to which a text refers. Reasons for the shifting emphasis on gold and silver as current coin (as opposed to ‘produce’) in Baba Metzia are explained cleverly and persuasively in terms of the metal content and availability of imperial silver issues. S.’s insistence on the variation in average prices and wages in different areas of the Empire (and therefore in Palestine in comparison to Egypt) is salutary, though more collation of wages to prices would have been useful since that was the real indicator of living standards. Discussion of price relationships between different commodities is interesting and could be profitably followed by analysis of the degree of reliance on imports in the Palestinian economy.

All of which made the book well worth writing but falls far short of S.’s claims for what he is doing. The problem is that, although rabbinic evidence can occasionally fill in some of the minor gaps in the numismatic record [e.g. re the continued currency of early imperial issues (p. 136)], no such evidence can ever be sufficiently weighty to alter that record significantly. What really matters with coins is the precise date and the precise value, and that is not something that rabbinic texts are ever likely to tell. As a result S. falls prey to the temptation to abuse the texts that are his main source. When a clear text contradicts the accepted view of numismatists he is content to redate it, invoking the general unreliability of attributions (p. 140); when a text is unhelpful he is prepared to rewrite it to fit in (p. 53). When rabbinic texts are lacking entirely or simply confused he is depressingly prone both to wishful thinking and to appeals to pure numismatics, not always to be trusted (e.g. pp. 60-63).

Perhaps the book would have worked better with more limited aims. The rabbinic texts must be related to their place as well as their time. Hoard analysis shows that as many local city as Roman imperial issues were in circulation in Palestine till the mid third century. The fluctuations of this local coinage and in particular its demise in the middle of S.’s period ought to be a prime feature of his study. He (like the rabbinic texts?) is almost completely silent on the matter. Again, S. is convinced that the monetary troubles that he chronicles must have meant disaster for Palestinian Jews, though the archaeology of their stronghold in Galilee could have warned him to the contrary. Few people, apart from the Roman state, kept their wealth in the form of silver coin. Few, therefore, apart from the State, stood to lose heavily by its debasement. S. correctly notes the exceptions — those seeking loans would find them harder to obtain when the debt was expressed in silver monetary terms and so could be devalued (p. 87) (but, as S. says, gold remained stable) and beggars receiving the rapidly diminishing value of the standard amount of charity were bound to suffer until that amount was raised (p. 159). The rest of the population might grumble but it could, and did, manage well enough.

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