

PREFACE

I intend this study as a contribution to our understanding of the worldview of early rabbinic Judaism, as it is expressed in Mishnah and Tosefta, the earliest extant literary sources of rabbinism. Mishnah is a collection of detailed rulings on various matters pertaining to the whole range of everyday life. In its precise ordering of cultic and communal relationships, M. makes a larger statement about the cosmos, the human realm, and reason which pervades them both. As I see it, the task of the student of early rabbinic Judaism is to characterize these ordered relationships, to examine their inner logic, and to ask, What is their *cosmic* meaning? This requires a systematic analysis of the entire document, tractate by tractate, paying careful attention to the details out of which the larger picture emerges. Here I examine Tractate Demai, which sheds crucial light on the Mishnaic law of tithes, the centerpiece of *Seder Zera'im*. Specifically, Demai indicates those points at which the Mishnaic conception of tithing is idiosyncratic to a particular group within Israelite society (the *haberim* and their rabbinic continuators), and suggests the larger connection between the law of tithing in *Zera'im* and the law of purities in *Tohorot* (since both areas express and develop the concerns of these same groups).

I wish to examine in particular the structure and history of the ideas in Demai, and to explore the implications of those ideas for the history of the formation of rabbinic Judaism and the developing structure(s) of its worldview. But these ideas have been transmitted to us only in literary sources, Mishnah and its accompanying Tosefta, which are exceedingly complex. Specifically, the various concepts in M.-T. have been formulated and redacted in highly formalized and formulaic language, which both clarifies and obscures their meaning. For this reason, my study begins, in the present volume, with a systematic literary and substantive commentary to the tractate as a whole. Only after confronting in minute detail the literary and hermeneutical problems of the sources can I deal, in a subsequent volume, with the structure and history of their ideas. The following commentary, while an intellectually valid project in its own right, should additionally be read as part of the larger study which I have described here.

The present volume is a revised form of my doctoral dissertation (Brown University, 1977). It is deeply satisfying for me to express my

gratitude to all of my teachers and colleagues who took part in the genesis of that study. First and foremost among these is Professor Jacob Neusner, Brown University, in whose graduate seminar the work took shape. His keen analytical insights, profound curiosity, and steadfast support, both inside and outside the classroom, constantly prodded (and prod) me to surpass myself. The result is a manuscript far better than would otherwise have been the case. As my teacher, colleague, and dear friend, I treasure his association. Professors Ernest S. Frerichs, Brown University, and Jakob J. Petuchowski, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, served as readers for the dissertation. I continue to learn much from them both, and benefit from their insights. All of my teachers and colleagues in the Department of Religious Studies at Brown University, both present and past, together have fashioned a supportive environment of intense intellectual vigor, creativity, and excitement in which this project was undertaken. Professors Wendell S. Dietrich, Horst R. Moehring, John P. Reeder, Jr., Sumner B. Twiss, Jr., Stephen Gero, John Giles Milhaven, Donna M. Wulff, Carl G. Estabrook, B. Barry Levy (now of McGill University), David R. Blumenthal (now of Emory University), and William S. Stafford (now of Virginia Theological Seminary); and Mrs. Lois D. Atwood, our administrative assistant, have all contributed in manifold ways to the work.

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This work is dedicated to my parents, to whose loving and steadfast devotion I owe everything, and always shall.

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