

PREFACE

When, as a graduate student, I began systematically to study the rabbinic materials about Joshua ben Hananiah, my goal was a critical biographical study of this important first century master and an historical assessment of his role in the creation of rabbinic Judaism. A reputed disciple of Yohanan ben Zakkai and purveyor of his counterfeit coffin beyond Jerusalem's boundaries; the apparent catalyst, if not agent, of the ouster of Gamaliel II; an alleged emissary of the Jews to Rome; senior colleague and perhaps teacher of 'Aqiba; Joshua lived at the center of events decisive in Judaism's history, and the study of his life and career seemed an ideal entry into the world of rabbinism's formation. The program of that exercise was straightforward. The task was to cull Joshua's traditions from the various rabbinic documents, to use the then newly developed techniques of critical analysis to sunder rabbinic literature's homogeneous facade, and to produce, if not a biography, at least a comprehensive historical picture of the man behind the sources. The project's principal focus was on the discovery and description of the historical Joshua, and that perspective informed my doctoral dissertation, an analysis of Joshua's early legal rulings, which was to be the first stage of the work. Subsequent examination of Joshua's materials and attention to the results of Jacob Neusner's research into the history of Mishnaic law made the assumptions which had shaped my approach to the problem seem naive and self-serving and forced me to rethink the enterprise of rabbinic biography. This in turn shifted the focus of the inquiry and prescribed the substantive reworking and wholesale rewriting of sizable portions of the dissertation.

The dissertation phase of this study was directed by my teacher, Jacob Neusner. For more than two years, week after week, he listened with uncommon care and sufferance, scrutinizing every word, as I read and re-read my work in his graduate seminar at Brown University. His penetrating and insistent criticisms did more than merely correct my errors; they educated my taste and strengthened whatever capacities I had for critical judgment and independent reflection. It was Jacob Neusner who introduced me to the critical study of rabbinic literature, and the analyses in this book build on methods and insights he alone developed. He cannot, however, be held accountable for what appears in the pages below, nor should he be. For in the course of guiding my graduate education, he willingly gave me all he had to give, together with the freedom to

make it my own. His support since that time has been resolute and unsparing, and his personal generosity made the publication of this book a reality. These are the gifts of a genuine teaching scholar, and for them, as well as for his continued friendship, interest and encouragement, I am deeply grateful.

Learning does not take place in a vacuum, and I have been the beneficiary of three important educational contexts.

The faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, Brown University, created an environment of competence and professionalism in which scholarship thrived. Professor Wendell Dietrich, then graduate advisor, helped to give my educational program intelligent and practical direction. Professor Ernest Frerichs, now Dean of Brown's Graduate School, taught me important lessons about good undergraduate teaching and offered generous and wise counsel on a number of matters, academic and otherwise. Professor Horst R. Moehring kindly took time from his sabbatic leave to read the dissertation and serve on the dissertation committee, and Dr. David Goodblatt, now of Haifa University, also took time, in a very difficult year, to read and comment on the work.

The members of the graduate seminar in which earlier versions of this work were presented offered consistent support, saved me from numerous errors and, in general, diminished the normal pressures and anxiety of graduate education. The useful insights of Professors Gary G. Porton, University of Illinois, Baruch M. Bokser, University of California at Berkeley, Tzvee Zahavy, University of Minnesota, Jack N. Lightstone, Concordia University, Joel Gereboff, Arizona State University, Charles Primus, University of Notre Dame, B. Barry Levy, McGill University and Dr. Shamai Kanter, Temple Beth El, Rochester, New York, I acknowledge with gratitude. The fellowship of that learning experience cannot be duplicated and, happily, has not been dissipated by either time or distance.

Colleagues at the University of Rochester have been more than generous in their willingness to discuss various aspects of this project, and they consistently have provided fresh and interesting perspectives on the work. In particular, Professor Barbara I. Sobieszek helped to clarify the basic focus of the inquiry, and Professors Dean A. Miller and Fitz John Porter Poole showed me the relevance of particular rabbinic preoccupations which at first glance seemed impossibly arcane. My thanks go as well to Professors Harmon R. Holcomb, Donald R. Kelley, Thomas Spence Smith and Neil F. McMullin, and, at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, to Professors Beverly R. Gaventa, Charles M. Nielsen and Werner Lemke for valuable suggestions and conversations.

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Some of the analyses below appeared in my "Redactional Techniques in the Legal Traditions of Joshua ben Hananiah," in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, edited by Jacob Neusner (Leiden, 1975), Part IV, pp. 1-17, and parts of the Introduction, in a slightly different form, were printed in my "What's In A Name?—The Problematic of Rabbinic Biography," in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice*, edited by W. S. Green (Missoula, 1978), pp. 77-96.

Part of the research for this study was carried out while I held a Mellon Foundation Faculty Fellowship, awarded by the College of Arts and Science, University of Rochester, in the Spring semester of 1976; I am grateful for the University's support.

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Finally, as the Fifth Commandment testifies, there is in the nature of things no certainty about the regard sons ultimately will come to have for their parents. The dedication of this book to my father and mother, William and Joan Green, is meant not only to thank them, however inadequately, for all they have done for me, but also to express my respect for the kind of people they are and my admiration for the dignity and the fundamental human decency which define the lives they lead.

The Program of Religious Studies,
Center for Special Degree Programs
University of Rochester

W.S.G.