The Priestly Gift of Mishnah

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PREFACE

This study systematically analyzes Tractate Terumot (heave-offering) in Mishnah and its corresponding document, Tosefta. My purpose is to investigate the nature of the world view revealed in these texts, that of nascent Rabbinic Judaism. This is accomplished through interpreting the laws which the framers of the tractate composed, and ultimately by ascertaining the meaning those rules had in the world in which they were promulgated. Study of Tractate Terumot thus is intended as basic in the work of interpreting Mishnah and the form of Judaism which that document richly represents.

My goals are reached through a fresh translation of and commentary to the tractate. This exegetical work aims at discerning how the men who produced the tractate understood the law of heave-offering. I claim to explain the meaning these laws conveyed to those who, in late-second-century Palestine, redacted them into the tractate before us. This goal excludes from consideration several possible questions. For example, while some of the tractate's rule might be older than their present redactional context, no attempt is made to identify such rules or to discover the sense they might have had prior to placement in that context. Likewise do not take into account the role which the laws of heave-offering played in the later history of Rabbinic Judaism. While valid in their own right, each of these tasks stands outside of the purpose of this study, discovery of the meaning of Tractate Terumot as an essay created in a particular historical setting, by a specific group of redactors.

My translation and exegesis are carefully designed to limit the meaning which I derive from the tractate's laws to that intended by their original framers. To do this, both translation and exegesis pay close attention to the disciplined mode of literary formulation which characterizes the tractate as a whole. My purpose in this is to show that the way in which the tractate's framers stated their laws offers an important key to the meaning they hoped those laws would convey. The translation, first, reproduces both the substance and the formal and syntactic traits of the Hebrew text. These features may then guide the actual interpretive work. The result is that I am able to specify the single legal point which each pericope is designed to emphasize. Careful literary analysis, combined with an understanding of the conceptual content of the law, thus leads us to the meaning of the pericope's rules.
A second step in interpretation is viewing as a whole the larger structure of laws to which the individual pericope contributes, and within which that pericope has its larger importance. This work is carried out in introductions to the individual chapters of the tractate. These introductions delineate the underlying principle expressed in each of the tractate's several thematic units, and indicate the role of individual pericopae in stating and investigating that principle.

With the tractate's pericopae fully explained, it is possible to identify the central issue addressed by the tractate as a whole. This is the particular aspect of the topic of heave-offering which generates the tractate's discussion. It therefore accounts for the formulation of specific questions to be addressed, as well as the selection and organization of particular themes. By identifying this issue we come to understand the chief concerns which motivated and guided the formulators of the tractate. These concerns, in turn, may be viewed in light of the historical context in which those redactors worked. This reveals the message which they wished to convey in their own day, to their immediate audience. This analysis, the result of my exegetical work, is found in the introduction to the tractate. In this way the reader may easily judge my larger conclusions against the data provided by the individual pericopae of the tractate. Within that same introduction, I provide a full account of the methods used in the translation and commentary, and of the theoretical considerations which determined those methods.

In addition to Mishnah, I have translated and discussed all of Tosefta Terumot. Tosefta is an important tool in interpreting Mishnah, for it is the only commentary which employs the tractate's own formal characteristics and conceptual framework in elucidating its individual rules. I therefore present the pertinent materials from Tosefta after the pericopae of Mishnah to which they relate, and indicate briefly how Tosefta's discussion deepens our comprehension of the central point or issue under discussion in the tractate.

I gratefully acknowledge my debt to teachers and colleagues who shared in the unfolding of this study. Foremost among these is Professor Jacob Neusner, Brown University, under whose direction this commentary was both conceived and written. Any merit this work may have is due to his constant attention, criticism and
support. For his guidance and friendship, offered both inside and outside of the classroom, I shall ever be thankful.

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This book is dedicated to my parents, Richard W. and Eileen S. Peck. Their constant love, understanding and support is the source of all that I ever have done, and ever shall.

Alan J. Peck

Providence, Rhode Island
22 September 1980
12 Tishre 5741
A present for my grandfather, on his seventieth birthday.