Herodes is well-attested in the region; cities like Ptolemais, Tyre and Antioch have similar monograms on their coins. On top of this, among the monograms he cites, only those of 107/6, 99/8 and 49/8 give the name of the moneyer as HP or HPW. The rest either lack the initial *eta* or have elements incompatible with the suggested reading. One monogram of the year 109/8 reads ΔIO, another consists of the letters Λ, I and O (p. 130); the monogram on the coin dated MA (41=64/3 BC) reads ΔΩ (p. 132).

Most of the male heads on Ascalonian coins of the first century BC are identified by the author with Antipater and Herod. No explanations are given why these identifications are the only ones possible. On p. 133 he suggests that the 'old bearded' Antipater appears on coins of year 56 "upon his promotion by Caesar to the position of *epitropos* of Judaea". Coins of the year 56 belong to 49/8 BC, while the promotion of Antipater occurred in 47. A "reasonably young portrait" on coins dated 63 (42/1) and 64 (41/40) is identified with Herod the Great (p. 134). The man on the former is bearded, the latter has a trident behind his shoulder. A young deity with a trident behind his shoulder appears on an Ascalonian coin struck in 106/5 BC (*BMC, Palestine* pp. liv-lv, pl. XL, 18), long before Herod was born. Therefore, the chances that the coin dated 64 shows the king rather than the same deity are not very great.

These and earlier examples may give some idea about the ways in which the author often presents his arguments. It goes without saying that an inadequate treatment of the evidence compromises not a few of his theories. It would be unjust, however, to think that all suggestions found in the book are of no value. There are some of definite interest, as for instance the suggestion that the Parthians may have destroyed Maresha because it was the centre of Herod's activity in Idumaea (p. 100). As for Kokkinos' major conclusions, that on the role of the Herodian dynasty in the Judaean affairs of the first century AD may well deserve serious consideration.

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Hayim Lapin, *Early Rabbinic Civil Law and the Social History of Roman Galilee: A Study of Mishnah Tractate BABA' MEṢI'A*, Brown Judaic Studies 307, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995. x + 368 pp.

In view of the paucity of direct evidence for ancient economic history, the historian of Palestine and surrounding regions should certainly welcome any attempt to bring rabbinic sources to bear on questions of this sort. A particularly promising candidate for such investigation is the Mishnaic (and Talmudic) tractate *Baba Meṣi'a*, which deals with such legal topics as lost and found property, bailees, sale and hire. Rabbinic sources, however, are not necessarily amenable to such exploitation. The difficulties involved in moving from academic discussions, embedded in literary texts with complex redactional histories, to life in the real world have been extensively discussed in recent years. Much of the discussion has been generated by Jacob Neusner, who in his more recent writings has treated rabbinic texts as ideological or

philosophical essays, of great interest to the historian of religious ideas but almost totally devoid of evidentiary value for the economic or social historian.

Hayim Lapin's study is devoted primarily to a two-fold analysis of Mishnah *Baba Meṣi'a*: as a literary text and as evidence for social and economic history. The bulk of the book is composed of two lengthy chapters, one of which is devoted to each of these lines of inquiry. The author is highly sensitive to the problems involved in exploiting rabbinic texts for such purposes, but argues contra Neusner — in my view convincingly — that 'any description of an economic system, however utopian, is fundamentally influenced by the economic notions of its authors, and indeed reflects upon the social and economic world of these authors' (p. 29). If anything, I would say Lapin has been overly influenced by Neusner's wholesale scepticism about the reliability of rabbinic materials and their usefulness for various purposes; as a minor example, I would describe the character of the Mishnah not as 'fictional' (ibid.) but as prescriptive. I am also troubled by the restricted focus of the study: although Mishnah *Baba Meṣi'a* is treated very thoroughly, attention is focused almost exclusively on this small sample of text, to the exclusion both of all other Mishnah tractates and of all other works in the rabbinic corpus. Although the author does make use of these materials from time to time (mostly in the notes), the decision to restrict their role to such an extent is questionable, and the author never offers a sustained argument to justify it.

Chapter 2, entitled 'Mishnah Tractate *Baba Meṣi'a*: Literary and Redactional Problems', is devoted to an attempt to identify earlier sources utilized by the redactor(s) of the tractate as we have it, and to analyze the types of techniques employed in their redaction, which Lapin describes as 'a complex process of redaction that worked with two somewhat contradictory principles: to transmit material with a great degree of conservatism, retaining the language, style, form and content of the sources, but at the same time to gloss, correct and above all organize and group the material' (p. 116). Not all the specific analyses offered are equally convincing (I think, for example, that the author tends to see tensions or contradictions between portions of the text somewhat too often, although he is scrupulous about pointing out other possible understandings), but more than enough of them carry conviction to make the author's basic point. One interesting feature of this chapter is the section (pp. 67-83) which focuses on pericopae formulated in what the author calls the 'nominative absolute (article+participle)' pattern, i.e. those which open with a scene-setting '(the) one who does X'; Lapin argues strongly that at least some of these series constitute sources which antedate the redaction of the tractate as a whole.

Chapter 3, 'Institutions and Relationships in Mishnah Tractate *Baba Meṣi'a*', was apparently intended to be the heart of this study, but the author remarks ruefully that 'ultimately... we are on firmest ground in taking the Mishnah as a legal and religious program' (p. 121). In fact, the sorts of conclusions about economic history which can be drawn from the tractate surveyed may seem rather banal to the reader familiar with rabbinic literature (which is not to say that other authors have not been able to get them wrong). The author sketches the role of money, markets, and moneychangers as depicted in the sources and describes the Mishnah's rules for relationships such as those between buyer and seller and those between lessor and lessee. Not surprisingly, Lapin finds that the economic world pictured by the Mishnah is one which would have been familiar to non-Jewish contemporaries, to judge both from

literary and from documentary evidence. The sketches are well drawn but the author feels the need to apologize repeatedly for his sources' failure to present a more detailed picture or to describe actual practice (a situation especially characteristic of the Mishnah, which might have been alleviated by including Talmudic sources within the scope of this study). Many questions to which the economic historian would like to find answers are addressed neither by the rabbinic sources nor by the available documentary ones, as Lapin rightly points out.

When he attempts to stretch the limits of the available sources, Lapin sometimes seems to be skating on thin ice. For example, he argues throughout (following Neusner) that the issues addressed by the Mishnah, at least in this tractate, reflect the concerns of a prosperous landowning class; but the evidence offered in support of this assertion appears rather flimsy. Thus, a concern with the fair operation of markets and protection for consumers would presumably have worked to the advantage of manual and skilled laborers or craftsman as well as of 'landowners' (see p. 147). Similarly, while it may be true that owners of agricultural land in Roman Palestine frequently rented urban dwellings (although we have no evidence for this, see pp. 221-2 and n. 228), I see no reason to assume that if the Mishnah is concerned with protecting the rights of lessees of houses, this 'reflects the interests of landholders' (see pp. 227-32). Another example is the argument from the Mishnah's silence concerning dependent labor. Lapin says (p. 217): 'That such contracts existed seems likely, but it is impossible to prove from the Mishnah itself'; in fact, he offers no evidence from any source for the existence of such contracts, but nevertheless speculates about the reasons for the Mishnah's failure to mention them. (A similarly structured discussion of another topic appears on pp. 222-3.)

A long appendix contains an edition of Mishnah *Baba Meṣi'a* based on MS Kaufman, an English translation and notes dealing with textual, philological, interpretive and legal issues. The translation is careful and competent (although there are occasional slips); the textual notes are almost too generous in their detail. In summary, this is a solid piece of work, which reveals a good deal both about the usefulness and about the limitations of the Mishnah as source material for social and economic history.

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David Shotter, *Nero*, Lancaster Pamphlets, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, xvii + 101 pp.

Ein weiteres Bändchen in der Reihe der Lancester Pamphlets soll 'students preparing for advanced Level Examinations' die Gestalt Kaiser Neros nahebringen. Bei der fast generell gegenüber Nero feindseligen Überlieferung muß der Historiker mit besonderem Nachdruck versuchen, hinter die Verzerrungen, Halbwahrheiten oder völligen Verfälschungen der Tradition zu sehen. Shotter tut dies mit Erfolg, vielleicht mit zu großem Erfolg. Denn er präsentiert einen Kaiser, der in vielfacher Hinsicht relativ rational handelt, dessen Modell, von Seneca entwickelt, Augustus und Claudius war. Nach Augustus wurde zunächst die innere Politik in Rom gestaltet, für die Provinzen aber folgte Nero (oder sollte man nicht besser sagen: Seneca und Burrus?) dem