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The Arts and Crafts of the
Mishanic Times.

Arthur S. Montaz.

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Mishna

Talmud

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Preface.

This thesis is not an archaeological treatise as the name would suggest, but is rather a descriptive sketch of the various kinds of arts and crafts existing in the Mishnaic Times, and the attitude of that age towards arts and crafts and towards labor in general. To write about the archaeology of a certain period one must have concrete objects to deal with like the findings of ancient Palestine, Babylonia, Egypt, etc., or at least some historic descriptions of the articles and utensils that were used in that period. But of the Mishnaic period there has not been found anything by the excavations that would throw light on the arts and crafts existing in those days; nor does contemporary histories furnish such material ^{which} from we could reconstruct a picture of the arts and crafts. We do find however, mentioned in the Jewish literature of those times, numerous objects almost of every kind, furniture, vessels, utensils, and different kinds of manufactures, almost as many as we have today, but we don't know what they looked like, what character they had, whether they were typically Jewish productions or adaptations of foreign models, or a combination of the two. For this we need

subject, or some findings
a definite description of the original ~~which~~ which ~~were~~ preserved
through the centuries in the bosom of the earth.

The material I have gathered help to reconstruct a picture of the Jewish life as a healthy normal people who were busy working, doing all sorts of labor which a nation or community needs for its sustenance. Above all every item of data I have gathered is going to show how dignified and highly esteemed the laborer and labor were. The study of the law was indeed a primary matter, but to know a trade with it was of great importance. Any one who studied the law without having a trade his study was of no value. To the family of Gamliel we owe the saying: "Fair is the study of the law if accompanied by a wordly occupation as the joining of those two annihilates sin; and all the study of the law that is not supported by business will become of none effect and will be the cause of sin."
(aboth i, 10)

The Valuation of Labor in
the Mishnaic Times:

The impression of the world about the Jewish people is that, as a race, they have a natural inclination for barter trade and commerce. Every Jew whatever his life's occupation be is potentially a financier. And the matter of fact is that the Jews take to commerce in whatever scale he is able to undertake, to the pushcart as well as to the banking and the speculating in the ~~market~~ ^{stock exchange} of commerce in all the lands of the world, a fact which is neither to be proud of nor to be deplored. But while this is true, it would not prove that the Jew is by race or birth a financier. He chose commerce as a means for a livelihood because this ~~because this~~ was the only thing that was permitted to him in the oppressed European countries. For as soon as a nation permitted him to hold land, he threw away his pack and closed his shops and became a farmer. In Austria that fact occurred.

The Zionists who have built up these new colonies in Palestine with their sweat and blood, out of a barren desert forty blooming colonies that are able to support their inhabitants prove that the Jew, even two-thousand years having been

torn away from the soil and normal life, still possesses that fire and love for the soil and labor (which is the heritage of a healthy people dormant in his veins. Given the necessary conditions and that spark will blaze up with an energy and force that will transform deserts into fertile prairies and barren rocks into viney ards and orchards.

The recent conquest of Palestine by the British forces will no doubt bring great results and transformations in the life of the Jewish people. If Palestine will be granted to the Jews as their home land, a fulfillment of the dreams of the Zionist, which is very likely to occur, the Jew is going to prove ^{to} ~~for~~ the world his power as a first class farmer, artisan and laborer. The Jew excelled his neighbors in all other fields of activities which were accessible to him, but he has not yet shown his full powers when in contact with mother soil, and especially when he will be in contact with a soil which is historically traditionally, sentimentally his own.

"The Jewish nation has ever been an industrious people second to none in energy, strength and ingenuity and rest-

less activity. Agriculture and handicraft were their main occupations until their dissolution as an independant state; and only in consequences of their dispersion and the forced restriction placed upon their energy have they become people of barterers and traders, thus taking the place of the ancient Phoenicians."

When Isreal was on its own soil we don't find any special preference for that kind of trade which subsists not in the sale of native but foreign products. We find nowhere among Jewish people when we look backward as far as possible beyond the Christian centuries and forward to about five hundred centuries a love for commerce. "Hate not toilsome labor" we read in Eccles 7:16 "nor husbandry which the most high has created". In the sixty three tracts which constitute the Talmud scarcely a word occurs in honor of commerce, but such to point out the dangers attendant upon money making and a wandering life. "Wisdom", says Fabbí Jochanan with reference to Deut. 30:12, is not found in Heaven", that is, it is not found with those who are proud; "neither beyond the sea", that is, it will not be found among traders nor among merchants. (Erubin 55a). The reason is apparent; the unsteady life, always

speculating on gain nourishes a materialistic spirit preventing one from becoming a thoroughly religious character.

Thus on examining the different sayings of the Talmud we find honored the more labor and handicraft perhaps more than any nation or people. Christianity considers dignity of labor as one of the four cardinal principles laid down by Jesus, but nowhere has the New Testament emphasized so plainly and so distinctly the dignity and value of labor as the Talmud has done: "Then the Holy, blessed be He", says a passage in the Talmud, pronounced his sentence on fallen Adam, he burst into tears at the words, "Thorns also and ~~th~~istles shall it bring forth to thee" and exclaimed "O, Lord of the Universe! shall I eat with the ass out of the same manger?" But when God added, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" ^a he was comforted. The life of man is no longer paradisaical, and his own maintenance is, as the Talmud says in the same passage, often as hard to him, as is her labor to a woman, ~~yea~~ hard as it was the controlling of the sea when a miracle of God rent its water asunder in the midst." (Pesachim 118a). "Love labor" was a maxim of Hillel's teacher Shemaya who may have died shortly before Je-

she was born. (Aboth i, 10). "Great is labor" says another, for she honors her Master." (Nedarim 49b). Some even went so far as to permit labor on the Sabbath when there was a question of necessity. "Make a working day of the Sabbath only be not dependent on people." (Pesachim 112a).

No labor even of the humblest degree was considered a disgrace "Let a man compel himself to the most repulsive labor rather than be dependent upon others." (Bethra 110a). "Skin dead animals by the wayside and say not I am a priest or I am a man of distinction and work is objectionable to me." (Pesachim 113b; Bathra 110a) "There is no trade," says the Talmud, "which the world can spare, but happy is he who had in his parents the pattern of a business of a superior character. (Kiddushin 82b)

Labor was not only considered honorable but it was compulsory on every one to know a trade "When a man teaches his son no trade it is as if he bought him up to highway robbery." (Kiddushin 29a) Here is a deep-psychological truth underlying this statement. And only when one had tried to do some physical labor realizes it. All the different callings in life whether they are of the ~~of the~~ artistic or scholastic nature do not make the life of the individual so wholesome and happy as

when they are accompanied by physical labor. This is the reason why we find some of the greatest scholars, philosophers and even poets and artists die in the asylums, heartbroken and disappointed, disillusioned and melancholy, sick body and soul, a great many years before they die. There are many ~~causes~~ ^{causes} ~~reasons~~ to account for in each individual case but the one common to all is the fact that they were lacking the joy, the vigor, the wholesome health, which labor brings to man, as the Talmud so keenly felt it and as emphatically expressed it. To this effect we find another expression belonging to the family of Gamliel. "Fair is the study of the law if accompanied by a worldly occupation, as the joining of these two annihilates sin; and all the study of the law is not supported by labor will be the source of sin." (Aboth 110) Judah Hanasi the editor of the Mishna who sprang from the same family in which the dignity of patriarchs was for centuries hereditary called Rabbi Jose ben Meshullam and Rabbi Simeon ben ~~Minashe~~ the holy congregation, because they devoted one third of the day to study, one third to prayer and one third to labor. (Aboth) All labor calling for physical exertion was regarded an honor. All the teachers would carry their own chairs on their shoulders for the college. (Nadarim 49b).

These sentiments about labor were expressed by the Jews in a period when the world at large had indulged in a luxurious and so called highly cultured life at the expense of slavery. Greece and Rome could not foresee a working economic system without slavery. Plato could never grasp the injustice in an economic system that has slavery, while the Hebrews did not object in having slaves but their economic system was not built upon it. Even the Mosiac Law provided for the Hebrew slave to be freed on the seventh year, as it is stated that all men are the servants of God, and therefore no servant can enslave his fellowmen. In the Talmudic times we still find a higher ethical sense developed in regard to slaves. The reason is no doubt because of the high appreciation and valuation of labor that took on in those days. Domestic servants were treated as members of the family and the death of a good servant was lamented in the following way: "Alas for the good and faithful servant who knows himself profitable in all his works." (Berachoth 16b). He was not a mere commodity or a machine which is to turn a certain amount of work and therefore could be treated inhumanly. "Beware" says the Talmud, "to eat fine bread and to feed thy servant upon black bread, to sleep on cushions while he lies on straw, espec-

ially when he is thy countryman and coreligionist: for whoever acquires a Hebrew servant acquires with him a master over himself.."

And this was not a fanatic or superstitious motive of valuing so highly the man who labored. It was the deep recognition and understanding to estimate the human energy and production. Labor is the product of the human element among all the natural products and therefore highly priced and most sacred as it was conceived of by the ancient Jews especially by those of the Mishnaic times. Highly honored as it was, the study of the law, yet the working man engaged in his work was not obliged to rise even before a sage. (Kiddushim 33a; Chullah in 54b). In our own times with all our progress and advancement we have greatly underestimated the value and sacredness of labor and the laboring class. It is true we have no more slaves today, but the laboring class is yet enslaved, yet a tool, a machine, a commodity in the grip of the capitalist, or else there would not have been the economic question of capital and labor. It will take a long while yet, perhaps centuries, and perhaps milenia before the world will come to realize its sacredness as a human product, its blessing that brings to every individual whoever participates in it in the measure as the

Jews of the Talmudic age have realized.

It is remarkable to notice that the Talmudic period *had a keener* sense of appreciation for labor than the Biblical period. "Jesus ben Sirah in his proverbs which were written about 200 B.C. and translated into Greek by his grandson about 125 B.C. speaks in terms of honor of practical occupation, as for example, those of the farmer, the workman, and the artificer, but holds them incompatible with the pursuits of those studying the law. He depicts the work of the farmer the mason and carpenter, the smith and potter, in order to show that their calling when pursued with great zeal, **l**eaves them no time for study, and they, therefore, can neither become sages or representatives of the people nor magistrates. "Without this shall not a city be inhabited but they shall not be sought for in public council, nor sit high in the congregation; they shall not sit on the judge's seat, nor understand the status of the covenant. They shall not bring to light instruction and judgement." (Eccles. 38:24 seq). When we compare this with a similar discussion in the Talmud of the second century A.D. we find the tenor of the decision entirely different. "How can the scripture say," (Deut. 11:14) "Thou shalt gather in thy corn while in another place it is said," (Josh. 1:8) 'This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth?'

"Is it possible to carry out both imaginations simultaneously? Rabbi Ishmael drew the difference that the study of the law and work for the daily necessities are incompatible, and that the one must be accompanied to the other."

Therefore whatever ~~it~~ may be said about this Mishnaic period, as it has been said already namely, that it was a period of rigorous legalism, a period of decline in prophetic vision, a period of hair splitting argumentation and scholasticism but this fact must be recognized that it had understood and estimated the value of labor to its highest degree. It spoke of the arts and crafts in a sublime and romantic language. We don't meet in any other ancient literature or folk lore expressed such love and adoration for the arts and crafts as it is expressed in the Talmudic literature of the age we are dealing with; the Talmud says: "And God so ordered things that every artisan loves his trade so that no trade should disappear from the world." In other words it is the will of God that every man manipulate some manual labor of which the world may have a use. We therefore find a great many of the Tannaim were tradesmen. I will only mention a few because they are too numerous to mention them all. There are over a hundred Rabbis whom the Talmud men-

tions who were both artisans and bore artisans' names; three Rabbis at least were tailors, Abba, Chanan, Judah. Another Judah was a baker and a third a perfumer. Rab Joseph turned the mill, Rab Shesh^h dragged beams highly praising this diaphoretic labor (Gittin 67b). Another famous teacher who lived in voluntary poverty was Judah bar Illai, a copper by trade who dwelt in the town of Usha in Galilee, and who carries to college the cask on which he used to sit on when lecturing. (Jost-Geschichte der Judenthums und seiner Sekten). A certain Pichas was cutting stones when the stone mason was informed of his election to the high priesthood. (Sifra ed. Malbrim 132, b). And thus we meet in the Talmud with a great many scientists and professionalists as well as tradesmen; the physician Theodas (Nazir 52a); the astronomer Samuel (Mezia 85b); the architect Abba Joseph (Midrash on Ex. XIII) the surveyor Ada (Erubin 56b) the scribe Meir (Gittin 61a); the money changer Chana (Chulbin 54b); the grave digger Abba Saul (Middah 24b); the fisher Ada and José (Moed Katan 11a; Jer. Berachoth IV, 3).

To handicraft belongs the honor that the founder of Christianity sprang from an artisan's house. The first king of Israel was taken from behind the plough, the second

king of Israel was called from the sheepfold and the prophet
of Nazareth was called from the carpenter's shop.

The Architecture and the Sculpture
of the Mishnaic Times.

Even though the data and material is scarce and meager from which to form a good conception of the arts and crafts of the Mishnaic period we still have some data, description of the Temple in the Mishna and in the Talmud, and there are also a good deal of remains of the Temple and other structures of the Herodian period uncovered by the excavations which would help to reconstruct the picture of the architecture and sculpture of that age. However, it is somewhat incorrect to speak of Jewish art. Whether in Biblical or post-Biblical times, Jewish workmanship was influenced if not altogether guided by non-Jewish art. Roman architecture was invoked in the building of Herod's Temple just as Phoenecian architecture was in the construction of those of Solomon and Zerubbabel (IKviii 13; Ezra iii, 7).

Egypt had become to the Israelites a school of science and arts, the influence of which was felt long afterwards. Already in the same time before the captivity we meet with numerous trades developed into separate callings. Smiths and locksmiths, carpenters and masons have distinct names.. Fullers and potters we find in their

separate quarters, " In Alexandria we find distinct trades-unions among the different artisans. In the synagogue the men did not sit together haphazard, but the workers in gold and silver, the nail and needle smiths, the coppersmiths and the weavers had each their proper station and seats, and if a poor craftsman came in he seated himself among his fellow workmen, who maintained him until he found employment. (Succa 51b) "

This caste and class distinction while it does not harmonize with the spirit of the later Tannaim, who valued so highly the artisan it shows the strong influence of Egypt upon the Jews, for Egypt was the cradle of caste and class distinction. So when we come to analyze some specimens of Jewish art we must not expect them to be typically Jewish for there ^{was} ~~is~~ no Jewish art ⁱⁿ ~~of~~ the ancient days expressed in architecture and sculpture. They have borrowed most of the original expressions, from the other nations and modified them in their own way, put some finishing touches which makes them in a way Jewish as we shall see when we take up the Temple of Herod and some remains of ancient Synagogues.

Jerusalem had very few ancient monuments; for until

the time of Asmoneans the Jews had remained strangers to all the arts. John Hyrcanus had begun to embellish it and Herod the Great made it splendid. The Herodian constructions in their grand styles, their perfect execution and the beauty of their materials (Josephus, Antiq, XV, 8-11; Wars V, 5-6) vie with the most finished work of antiquity. A great number of tombs of original taste were erected about this time in the neighborhood of Jerusalem. Tombs of Judges and Kings-Asa, Zechariah, Jehoshafat, (Compare the description of the Maccabees at Modin I Mac. XIII, 27). The style of the monuments was Grecian adopted to the customs of the Jews and considerably modified to accord with their rules. The sculptured forms of animals which the Herods had sanctioned to the great disgusts of the purists ^{were discarded and replaced} by leaf-work and flowers. The taste of the ancient inhabitants of Phoenicia and Palestine for massive stone structure cut out of solid rock seemed to be revived in those singular tombs hallowed in the cliff, in which Grecian orders are so strangely applied to an architecture of cave dwelling.

The Temple formed a marvelously imposing whole of which the present harem with all its beauty can scarcely give us any idea. The Temple with its courts no doubt

occupied the side of the mosque of Omar and the harem or sacred enclosure around the mosque. The embarkment of the harem is in parts well known as the place where the Jews gather to weep at the very substructure of Herod's Temple (Hist. of Israel V, 246-249).

The courts and surrounding colonnades served as daily gathering places for a considerable crowd so much that this great space was at once temple forum, tribunal and university. All the religious discussions of the Jewish schools, all instructions in the ritual even lawsuits and civil possessions, - in short all the activity of the nation was centered there (Mishna Sanhedrin X 2; Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 41a; Rosh Hashanna 51a) Here was a perpetual clashing of arguments; an arena of disputes resounding with sophisms and subtle questions.

The periods of the feasts brought vast crowds to the city. Lodged in parties of ten to twenty persons in one chamber, the pilgrims invaded every quarter and lived in that careless huddled state in which orientals delight (Josephus Wars 11 XLV, 3 VI IX, 3)

The Temple like all much frequented places of devotion presented no very edifying spectacle. The ritual

services entailed a multitude of very repulsive details, especially business transactions, in consequence of which actual shops were established.

It was at this period under the Herodian dynasty that architecture reached its height in Palestine. As a builder Herod made a deep impression upon the Palestine of his day. After the battle of Actium the city of Samaria had been presented to him by Augustus. Herod transformed it into a Graeco-Roman city of the most magnificent type. Its name was changed to Sebaste, the Greek for Augusta in honor of his patron. On the top of the hill was built the huge Roman Temple, the ruins of which have recently laid bare by American excavators. The city was encircled by a colonnade twenty yards wide and over a mile long, with pillars sixteen feet in height. A beautiful natural theater was built on the northern slope of the hills overlooking the fertile plains. Splendid public buildings made it one of the glories of Herod's kingdom. He also transformed Straton's Tower on the Mediterranean coast into a Graeco-Roman metropolis and named it Caesarea in honor of the emperor. On a comparatively level plain rose a temple, theater, amphitheater and palaces in marble. Since it was intended to be the

the seaport of both Samaria and Judea, a great breakwater two hundred feet wide was constructed out of the huge stones. The harbor opened to the north, thus protecting ships from the prevailing south west wind. At strategic points throughout his kingdom he fortified natural strongholds such as the high conical hill east of Bethlehem known as the Herodian. In Athens and in other cities outside his kingdom Herod reared magnificent public buildings.

Herod's Temple:- In many ways the crowning achievement of Herod's zeal for building was the great temple which he reared in Jerusalem. The temple area was first extended to the south so that it was double its former size. A viaduct and four gates connected it with the central and western part of the city. Two large gateways also let up from the ancient city of David in the south. The entire temple area was encircled with a double row of huge marble columns. On the south side of the court were four rows of lofty columns with Corinthian Capitals. The sanctuary itself which stood on its original site in the northern part of the temple area on a platform of native rock was surrounded by an inner group of elaborate buildings, approached by splendid gateways on the north east and south. In front of the comparat-

tively small temple structure was reared a large porch, one hundred cubits high and one hundred cubits broad which brought it into harmony with Herod's huge construction.

The wall which enclosed the two forecourts of the temple was forty ells high and was pierced by nine lofty gateways eight of which were provided with folding doors overlaid with gold and silver while the eastern one had folding doors constructed wholly of Corinthian brass, but all the more richly decorated. This was called the Nicanor or the "Beautiful Gate." (Acts 3:2)

The Temple was also internally decorated, not only by the overlaying with gold and silver but also with massive works wrought in these precious metals. The whole Temple was aglow with dazzling light, reflected partly from the plates of gold with which it was overlaid on all sides, and partly where there was no gilding from the lustre of the purest marble. From above, it bristled with golden spikes, which we would take as lightening rods, but which were really designed to prevent the birds from alighting on it. (Middoth V,6).

Inside no iron was used, and the altar of burnt offering was built without the use of an iron tool, since "that which shortens life of men should not be lifted upon that

which lengthens it. (Midith 111, 4).

"In decorating the Temple no scope was found for the painter's pencil but it appears that on the eastern gate the sculptor had chiseled at least one bas-relief representing, it is said, the Persian metropolis Susa. All the more busily were other artisans employed, not only artificers in plain gold, silver and copper, but also weavers, knitters, and robe-makers, whose business it was to make the curtains which separated the holy places of the temple and the vestments of the priests. According to the statement of Simeon the assistant of the high priest who had seen the curtain of the Holy of Holies, it was woven of seventy two twisted plaits; each plait consisted of twenty four threads-six white, six scarlet six blue, and six gold-these were the four remarkable colors. (Shekallim VIII, 5).

When Alexandrian workmen repaired the brazen cymbal of the temple the work had to be undone in order to evoke the former sweet sounds. When they repaired the large mortar in which the spices for incense was bruised, this work also had to be undone in order to produce an aromatic perfume as had formerly been obtained. Palestinian workmanship therefore, carried off the prize (Erachin X, 6).

One of its masterpieces was an organ with one hundred different tones; not a water organ, (hydraulic) but a wind organ with pipes whose powerful sounds it is said could be heard as far as Jericho. (Erachin 10a; Tamid 111,6).

There was a special inspector who had charge of water works. In the temple was not only a physician especially devoted to bowel-complaints, and whose practice was by no means small, since the priests were obliged always to go barefoot on the stone pavement, but also an inspector of foundations, a master of the vestry, a lamp trimmer, an overseer of the curtains-i.e. the skilled weaver whose duty it was to keep them in repair (Shekalim VI) and were assisted in their labor by women, (Kethuboth 106a).

The most prosperous mechanics under the Herodians were those who were employed on the building of the Temple from the year twenty B.C. to about two years before the fall of Jerusalem, about a period of sixty years. There were more than eighteen thousand laborers. The work was given out to the ell-measure and completed according to an ell of somewhat greater length so as to avoid both the possibility and appearance of unfaithfulness in holy things. (Kelim XVII, 9) The workmen did not lose anything by this

arrangement for the wages were very high. Wages were not only paid weekly, but also daily, and he who worked only one hour in the day was immediately paid.

When on the completion of the Temple thousands having been thrown out of work, Agrippa I employed them by paving the streets of Jerusalem with white marble. Under his government handicraft saw its good days. He could enter into the feeling of the trades^{man} and artisan, since before his star was in the ascendancy, he had occupied the office as agronomon-i. e. controller of the market at Tiberias- an office which he had received from the husband of his sister Herodias who interceded in his behalf."

Thus what ~~ver~~it may be said about the Herodian, dynasty namely that it was a lineage of wicked, atrocious kings, alien to the Jewish spirit and to Judaism, that they were trying to imitate Rome in every respect, but one thing must be said to their credit, and that is, that they had a love and admiration for the beautiful and the splendid. Indeed, they were a wicked lot of rulers who counterfeited the very essence of Judaism. The state of Judea could no longer remain in that state it had to come to a crisis. To a cataclysm out of which a new Judaism be reborn a revival

product which is even greater than any of the greatest statues or pantheons of Greece or Rome. Anything that is expressed in marble or on canvas will in time disintegrate and weather away, but that which is expressed in the soul and heart of man will last forever. To Israel art was not for art's sake but for life's sake, and life was not for earthly life's sake, but for a higher eternal life's sake.