TEKOA: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL PROFILE

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A host of literary associations cluster around the ancient site of Tekoa, which is located in the edge of the Judean Wilderness, a few miles to the southeast of Bethlehem. These may be roughly subsumed under three headings, viz., the Biblical period, the time of the Jewish wars, and the Christian era till the twelfth century A.D. Its written history begins with the period of the Conquest, in which it is noted that Ashur, Caleb's half-brother, was the father, i.e., the founder, of Tekoa.¹ Various documents from the period of the Maccabees, and of Bar Kochba, mention the part it played in those troublous times, but by far the largest extant material is from the pens of Josephus, Jerome, Eusebius, Paula, and more recent pilgrims and visitors, as Conder, Pococke, Wilson, Robinson, and Fosdick.

There are some 14 Biblical references to Tekoa, and at least one from the Apocrypha. In David's heyday, one of his loyal "mighty men" followers was "... Ira the son of Ikkesh of Tekoa (2 Sam. 23:26; 1 Chron. 11:28), whose responsibility as an army commander was shown by the size of the force he led—twenty-four thousand men (1 Chron. 27:9). In David's darker days his son Absalom was banished, and a scheme was arranged by Joab to bring him back to the family circle. A wise woman of Tekoa played the leading role in this successful effort (2 Sam. 14:2-4, 9). The Babylonian Talmud answers the question: why to Tekoa (to fetch a wise woman)? Rabbi Johanon commented: "Because they were accustomed to olive oil, wisdom could be found among them!2 Several references to the famed quality of olive oil from Tekoa are known: the Mishnah—"Tekoa comes first in its quality of oil;" Alfred Edersheim remarks that Tekoa produced the finest quality of oil in the period after the last Jewish war; and the Babylonian Talmud, in other passages: "Tekoa...famous for the abundance of its olives," "Tekoa, a Palestine town famous for its oils,"5 and most interesting of all, says that the Hebrew word for Tekoa (Teqoa'), means "oil." Arab geog-

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^{1.} I Chronicles 2:24; 4:5.

^{2.} Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein (translation editor), The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Kodashim, Vol. I, Menahoth, (London: The Soncino Press, 1948), pp. 427, 517.

^{3.} Ibid.

^{4.} Alfred Edersheim, History of the Jewish Nation, (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1896), p. 261.

^{5.} Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein (translation editor), The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin, Vol. II, Baba Bathra, (London: The Soncino Press, 1935), p. 627.

^{6.} *Ibid*.

raphers and writers of the medieval period give passing reference to its oil, but state that its honey was so excellent as to have become proverbial.7,8

Fortifications at Tekoa were constructed by Rehoboam, in a chain of defenses to the south of his capital: "Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and he built cities for defense in Judah. He built Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, Beth-zur..." (2 Chron. 11:5-7). Some time later, king Jehoshaphat also made use of the defensive position of Tekoa, when he met and defeated a coalition of invaders from east of the Dead Sea, in a battle in the wilderness of Tekoa, just below the ancient fort.9 The continued military usefulness of this position appears in Josephus' statement: "And when I was sent by Titus Caesar...to a certain village named Thecoa, in order to know whether it were a place fit for a camp..." (Margoliouth's revision). 10 Several travellers described the fortress as a castle, e.g., the Anonymous Pilgrims (11th and 12th centuries), notes: "Twelve miles from thence [Bethlehem] is Abraham's castle, which is called Thocor" [footnote says 'Tekoa, probably a copyist's error. The castle was at Hebron, where Abraham himself, Isaac and Jacob are buried together with their wives.] Also, "In Bethlehem and the parts adjacent Herod ordered the innocents to be slain, and the greater part of them lie buried to the Southward three miles from Bethlehem and two miles from Tekoa."11 In the 18th century the explorer Richard Pococke described the remains of a large castle, at the northeast corner of the area of the ruins, which he is careful to distinguish from the church.¹² Thomson's well-known The Land and the Book states "the only noteworthy remains are those of an old castle near the top of the ridge, some square towers, the foundations of a Greek church, and ruins of houses built of square stones, some of which are bevelled."13 A reference published in 1866 refers to a watch tower on Tekoa used by the Ta'amirah Bedouin.14 It would seem that the site has always been important, not only to the defense of the approaches to Jerusalem, but of the surrounding area as well.

To students of Biblical literature the most interesting references are probably those relating to the prophet Amos, whose eighth century

James Hastings (ed.), A Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. IV (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1902), pp. 692, 693.
 Isidore Singer (ed.), The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. XII (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1906), p. 76.
 II Chronicles 20:20-25.

Flavius Josephus, The Great Roman-Jewish War: A.D. 66-70; and The Life of Josephus, (New York: Harper Torchbooks 1960), p. 306.
 Aubrey Stewart (trans.), Anonymous Pilgrims, I-VIII (11th and 12th centuries), Vol. II. (London: Palestine Pilgrims Text Society, 24 Hanover Square, W., 1899),

pp. 5, 62. 12. Richard Pococke, A Description of the East, Vol. II, Part I. (London, W. Bowyer, 1745), p. 41.

^{13.} William M. Thomson, The Land and the Book, (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1881), cf. pp. 304, 317, 330-332, 339.

^{14.} William H. Dixon, The Holy Land, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1866), p. 245.

home was at this ancient town. He was "...among the shepherds of Tekoa..." (Amos 1:1). The context implies that it was a difficult place in which to make a livelihood, well stated in the words of Louis Finkelstein: "...that stony land, which to this day is unable to provide the inhabitants with their daily needs," and Amos refers to himself as "...a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees...(7:14). The difficulty of growing fruit is today illustrated by the effort of one of the landowners, Sheikh Abu Sa'alim, who has planted numerous fruit trees, which have a stunted and difficult development, but are growing, and producing some fruit. After fulfilling his work at Bethel, and having been rebuked by the high priest Amaziah, according to tradition, Amos returned to Tekoa, where he lived until his assassination. In Vol. XII of Burchard of Mt. Sion, we read: "It was the city of the prophet Amos, who was also buried there; whom Amaziah, King of Jerusalem, struck by night through his temples and slew him."15

There is an extremely strong tradition locating the tomb of Amos at Tekoa, and usually in association with the Byzantine church built in his honor as a memorial, called "The Propheteum of Amos." Several of the references are to a cave as the tomb location (e.g., Isaac Chelo, A.D. 1134),16 which would correspond with the usual grotto under the church structure, and a few traditions place the tomb at some distance from the site. Pilgrims to Palestine, beginning with Paula in the 4th century (and possibly Helena at an earlier date), and especially during the Middle Ages, visited Amos' tomb as a part of their standard itinerary. Eusebius mentions the tomb of Amos as being at Thecua. "Theko (Jos. 15:54a), kai nyn Thekoe esti para ten eremon Ailis polis to erin ousa phygadeterion, hothen en Amos ho prophetes." The Greek is Eusebius', and the Latin is Jerome's translation: "Theco usque hodie iuxta desertum ciuitatis Aeliae uicus ostenditur, unde et Amos profeta fuit."17 Jerome asserted that the tomb of Amos was shown at this place.¹⁸ The Crusaders evidently came en masse to see the sepulcher; in the 12th century John of Wurzburg and Fetellus state that the Tomb of Amos was shown there,19 and even as late as the 14th century it was still shown.

Tekoa had strong connections with prophets, and in a sense became a center of prophetic associations. A rabbinic tradition concerning another minor prophet was reported by Fetellus, in his Description of Jerusalem and the Holy Land (Vol. V), who says: "Four miles from Bethlehem is Thecua, of which was Amos the prophet, whose body lies there in a tomb. From its confines (the tomb of Amos) Habakkuk was

19. Hastings, loc. cit., pp. 692, 693.

^{15.} Aubrey Stewart (trans.), Burchard of Mount Zion, Vol. XII (London: Palestine Pilgrims Text Society, 24 Hanover Square, W., 1896), pf. pp. 55, 62, 65, 89, 90.

^{16.} Hastings, loc. cit. Hastings, to: Cal.
 Hastings, to: Cal.
 Eusebius (von Lic. Dr. Erich Klostermann), Das Onamastikon der Biblischen Ortsnamen, (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1904), pp. 98, 99.
 Jerome (trans. by Aubrey Stewart), The Pilgrimage of the Holy Paula, (London: Palestine Pilgrim's Text Society, 1 Adam St., Adelphi, 1885), p. 10.

borne by the angel to Babylon..."20 Isaiah was also thought by some to have been buried there. A tradition of the area as a burying place of the prophets remains strong among the local inhabitants till this day. E.g., one of the "tombs" of Jonah is shown in a small mosque not far from Tekoa, and of course the locality is near the Plains of Mamre, and Hebron, with its Abrahamic associations. Again, the literature makes several references to Tekoa as a favorite rendezvous of the prophets, e.g., Fetellus says "...in Thecua many of the prophets used to meet together to discuss divine things."21 This is interesting in view of its later known significance as a center for Christian Church leaders and a large monastic population in the adjacent wilderness. Perhaps the latter fact gave rise to an etiological reference to the prophets' usage. A Jewish study center located there is also noted in the literature. "Rabbi Simeon's Academy in Tekoa" is referred to as a place for the study of the Torah (Babylonian Talmud).22

Tekoa figured in both wars of the Jewish period. The Maccabeans, Jonathan and Simon, fled to the wilderness of Tekoa for refuge, as described in 1 Maccabees 9:13—"And Bacchides knew it, and he sought to slay him, and Jonathan and Simon his brother, and all that were with him, knew it; and they fled into the wilderness of Tekoah, and encamped by the water of the pool Asphar." Josephus also refers to this in his Antiquities of the Jews (XIII, 1, 2-3). [During the second lewish war, there are references to Tekoah by Bar Kochba, in some of his letters.] The site and area was always noted as a place of refuge for rebels, fugitives, and hermits. Probably David knew it as such during his years in the wilderness, fleeing from the wrath of Saul. The cave of Adullam is located quite near to Tekoa. Jeremiah lifted his voice, "Flee for safety....Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and raise a signal on Bethhaccherem; for evil looms out of the north, and great destruction (6:1)." The prophet is evidently suggesting Tekoa as a well-known place of refuge. The ascetic movement, represented by literally thousands of hermits and monks, discovered in the wilderness a place of refuge from the world, and the temperamental Ta'amireh Bedouin, oriented toward solitude and independence, have found it to their liking. The wilderness has a dichotomy of friendliness to those who learn to know and respect it, and who conform to its demands; and of tragedy and terror to those who cannot adjust, or to those unprepared individuals, perhaps fleeing from their own conscience. The most tragic death of Bishop James L. Pike provides the latest footnote to an hostile wilderness.²³

1970), pp. 70-105.

^{20.} Aubrey Stewart (trans.), Description of Jerusalem and the Holy Land by Fetellus, Vol. V, (London: Palestine Pilgrim's Text Society, 24 Hanover Square, W., 1897), pp. 35, 36.

^{21.} Ibid. Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein (translation), The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Mo'ed, Vol. I, Shabbath, (London: The Soncino Press, 1938), p. 748; Seder Mo'ed, Vol. II, Erubin, p. 630; Seder Kodashim, Vol. I, Menahoth, pp. 427, 517.
 Diane Kennedy Pike, "The Desert Ordeal of Bishop Pike," Ladies Home Journal, Vol. LXXXVII, No. 1 (January, 1970), pp. 105-109, and No. 2 (February, 1970)

Politically Tekoa has always been a part of the Bethlehem District. The Septuagint (LXX) adds to Joshua 15:59 a list of eleven cities of Judah which have been lost to the Hebrew text. Administratively, this arrangement appears to have continued throughout the Davidic and Solomonic period, as well as during the time of the later kings of the Hebrew era. It is interesting to note that this arrangement still continues, having a usefulness during the British Mandate, and subsequent to the six-day war (June, 1967), the occupied area is being administered by the military Governor in Bethlehem. During the period of Persian control, Tekoa was an administrative center for the area (cf. Ezra 2, Neh. 7).

The church period is well represented in the literature concerning Tekoa. There are many references to the various church buildings and monasteries, and one can gain some idea of its importance from these descriptions. An intriguing legend is reported in the eighth century account of St. Willibald's pilgrimage to the Holy Land (The Hodoeporicon of St. Willibald, Vol. III): "Having prayed there, they went on, and came to a large town, which is called Thecua, to the place where the infants were once slain by Herod. There is now a church, and there rests one of the prophets." "From thence they went to Thecua, where the children of the age of Christ were slain by Herod, and Nathanael, hidden by his mother under a figtree, escaped; and our Lord said to him: "When thou wast under the fig-tree, I knew thee."24 It is not clear whether Nathanael was one of the infants at Bethlehem when Herod slew the children, or whether the fig-tree under which his mother hid him, so escaping slaughter, was at Bethlehem or at Tekoa, but that he escaped to the latter place is certain, and that this experience was the background to Christ's statement was widely held, as indicated in the foregoing, and other references.

The Propheteum of St. Amos in Thekoa finds frequent reference (e.g., Michael Markoff, John Kitto, Richard Pococke, Edward Robinson, Isidore Singer, Peter Thomsen, William Thomson, C. W. M. Van de Velde, and Col. Charles W. Wilson).²⁵ The descriptions given by these writers essentially coincide with those of other travellers, as noted further along in this paper. A monastery was built in the early part of the 6th century A.D. by Mar Saba (St. Saba), which, in contradistinction

Pococke, op. cit., p. 41.

Edward Robinson (see Note 29).

Singer, op. cit., p. 76.

Peter Thomsen, Loca Sancta, (Halle A. S., Verlog von Rudolf Haupt, 1907),

C. W. M. Van de Velde, Journey Through Syria and Palestine, Vol. II, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1854), pp. 30-31. Colonel Sir Charles W. Wilson (ed.), Picturesque Palestine, Sinai, and Egypt, Vol. I, (old work, n.d., but post-1832, for he mentions Robinson), p. 141.

^{24.} Aubrey Stewart (trans.), The Hodoeporicon of St. Willibald, Vol. III (London: Palestine Pilgrim's Text Society, 24 Hanover Square, W., 1897), pp. 23, 47.

^{25.} Michael Markoff (see Note 26). John Kitto, The Land of Promise, (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1851), pp. 83-84.

to the Laura (Mar Saba), was called Laura Nova (New Monastery). Soon after his death it became the scene of fierce conflicts between the Monophysites and the orthodox element. The Vita Euthymii states that in A.D. 454-458 "Marcian and Romanus...established coenobia, the former in the region of the holy Bethlehem, the latter by the village Thekoa." The Vita Euthymii refers to "...Romanus the founder of the monastery by Thekoa..." and the Vita Sabae, gives these extracted statements: "...St. Saba learning...his deserter disciples...were going for their Communions each Sunday to the Propheteum of St. Amos in Thekoa...so the divine old man went down to them with craftsmen and all necessaries, and spending five months with them he built them a bakery and a Church, which he furnished and consecrated in the 69th year of his age [508 A.D.]."26 A recent study by Virgilio Corbo, published in the Italian language Franciscan journal, La Terra Santa [The Sacred Earth], discusses "La Nuova Laura," and identifies it with Khirbet Tina, located in a wadi adjacent to the Tekoa tell. Fr. Barnabas Meistermann, in his 1923 Guide to the Holy Land, tells of the Monophysite monk, Marcian, and his friend, Romanus, who founded a monastery or laura at Thecua, and that Marcian destroyed the laura in 484. Many of the descriptions from these early writers refer to the outstanding baptismal font, and often to other features of the building complex. From William of Tyre we learn that in A.D. 1144 Queen Melesinda gave the site of Tekoa to the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in exchange for property at Bethany.²⁸ (Another writing states that this was done by King Fulco).29 An obscure reference by Robinson states that Mar Saba also established a convent at this religious center.

The most fascinating descriptions of Tekoa have reached us from the accounts of, or written by, pilgrims and visitors through the ages. They tell of the forbidding desert wilderness, with its wadis and mountains; its "thirsty, chalky marl," and its caves, cisterns, and tombs. Paula, a Matron of Rome, is one of the earliest to visit the holy places, in A.D. 382. In her Letter of Paula and Eustochium to Marcella, about the Holy Places, (A.D. 386), she speaks of her visit to Tekoa. Jerome, a geographer in his own right, lived at Bethlehem, and who made a detailed study of the location of ancient sites, gives us valuable information in several references, arising out of his probably numerous visits to Tekoa. St. Willibald's travels in the eighth century have already been referred

^{26.} Michael Markoff, and D. J. Chitty, "Notes on Monastic Research in the Judaean Wilderness, 1928-1929." *Palestine Exploration Fund*, Quarterly Statement for 1929, (London: the Fund's Office, 2 Hinde St., Manchester Square, W.), pp. 171-174.

^{27.} Virgilio Corbo, "la Nuova Laura," La TerraSanta, (Gerusalemme: Anno XXXVIII, N. 4—Aprile, 1962), pp. 109-113.

^{28.} Hastings, loc. cit. 29. Edward Robinson, Biblical Researches in Palestine, Vol. II, (Boston: Crocker

[&]amp; Brewster, 1841), cf. pp. 27-29, 176, 181-4.

30. Aubrey Stewart (trans.), The Letter of Paula and Eustochium to Marcella, about the Holy Places (A.D. 386), (London: Palestine Pilgrim's Text Society, 24 Hanover Square, W., 1896), pp. iv, 15.

to. He gives a detailed description of his journey, and the places seen. In more recent times the well-known explorers, Pococke, Conder and Kitchener, and Edward Robinson, 31 have all given quite full treatments of their visits to the site.

Foremost in all these descriptions are references to the ruins scattered abundantly over the broad, flattish top of the hill. Pillars, columns, bases, bosses, city plans, foundation, houses, and a "confused mass of square and bevelled stones" are constantly referred to. Several mention quantities of small cubical stones, from mosaic floors (tessarae) in certain areas. In addition, attention is given to the great numbers of caves, grottoes, and "rock-cut tombs distributed over its slopes, as well as the ubiquitous cisterns found everywhere." Harry Emerson Fosdick counted 70 altogether on the occasion of his visit in the early 1920's.32 The water supply also comes in for attention. Capt. Conder described it: "Near the top of the site there is a spring, and below are wells; the main supply of water is, however, sulphurous...." By all odds, however, it is the baptismal font that draws most observations. E.g., Conder describes it: "There is also a very fine octagonal font about 4 feet high and 4 feet, 3 in. in diameter, of inscribed circle; on every other side is a design. Two of these designs represent crosses, a third is a wreath, the fourth is formed by two squares interlaced diagonally to one another . The font is of good reddish stone"; Fosdick, "...a finely preserved baptistery..."; Kitto, "...a large baptismal font of rose-coloured limestone, verging into marble"; Robinson, "...a baptismal font of...in the midst of the ruins of a Christian Church." Pococke adds, "...in it there is a deep octagon font of red and white marble...." A recent article by Fr. P. B. Bagatti in the Franciscan journal La Terra Santa describes the Tekoa baptismal front, and a series of lamps from the site that indicated from their inscriptions that they were used in the baptismal rites.33 St. Cirillo of Jerusalem explained the ceremony accompanying the administration of the baptism at the beginning of the 4th century, and in all probability this continued through the 6th century at the Propheteum of Amos. Briefly, it went as follows:

- 1) the renunciation of Satan (in the atrium of the Church)
- 2) immersion in the font, or basin
- 3) going up out of the basin into the church

The first step, renunciation of evil, was done in darkness—to help the candidate in the realization of wickedness; then at the going up out of

For references to Pococke and Robinson, see note 25. See also: Capt. C. R. Conder, and Capt. H. H. Kitchener, The Survey of Western Palestine, Vol. III, (London: the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1 Adam St., Adelphi, 1883), pp. 368-369.
 Fosdick, A Pilgrimage to Palestine, (London: The Garden City Press, 1928), pp. 152-156.
 P. B. Bagatti, OFM, "Antiche Lucerne Battesimale," La Terra Santa, (Gerusalemme: Anno XXXIX, N. 6,—Guigno, 1963), pp. 165-168.

the water into the church, the lamps were lighted, to symbolize the new life in Christ, the Light of the World. The lamps were essential to the entire act. They all carried inscriptions, some in Hebrew and some in Arabic. In general, these referred to Christ, as Light; and to Elijah, who was translated in a blaze of light. Several other designs occurred: as ladders, the semi-cross, with axe, and small branches, all with vital meaning. In all, a nice epigraphic repertory, and useful information on this aspect of early Church practice. The baptismal font is described with some attention given to the symbols on four of its eight sides. The fleur-de-lis is used here, and it has been pointed out that this well-known design, usually attributed to the French, was actually of Near Eastern origin, probably Arabic, and was likely taken to Europe by the Crusaders.³⁴

Richard Pococke adds a word concerning the ruins of another large church, "dedicated to Saint Pantaleone, located on the summit at the southern end of the tell." Evidently Tekoa was settled by a group of Christians as late as Crusader times, who ministered to those who came, and was finally sacked by a party of Turks from "beyond the Jordan" in A.D. 1138, and never occupied since that time.

During the Medieval period there were published numerous maps of the Holy Land.³⁵ Inexact, fanciful, and pictorial though they were, it is certain that they represent a body of knowledge concerning the relationships of various locations in Palestine, together with some information to be extracted from their pictorial content. A comparative study of numerous examples leads to the conclusion that there is considerable unanimity in the pictorial representations of the various church structures at different sites. In other words, a fixed pattern of buildings is identified with the same sites throughout. This also applies to Tekoa, where a similar complex of religious buildings runs as a theme through these thumbnail sketches. While no certain conclusions can be reached from this kind of data, it has a legitimate comparative value, and suggests search for additional information from ancient maps and art.

Current information has to do with quantities of pottery reported to have come from the site and tombs of Tekoa. Fr. Sylvester Saller of the Franciscan School of the Flagellation in the Old City of Jerusalem, published a description of Tekoa pottery finding its way to the Flagellation Museum in 1957. ("Jerusalem and Its Surroundings in the Bronze

^{34.} Yaakov Meshorer, Military Antiquities Governor (Israeli) of the West Bank, and Professor of Archaeology, Hebrew University, Jerusalem—in a personal communication to the writer.

^{35.} E.g., Sebastian Muenster's Map of the Holy Land, "Map of the Territory of Judah and of the Dead Sea," (Basle: Henri Petri, pub., 1544):

Thomas Fuller, A Pisgah-Sight of Palestine and the Confines Thereof. (London: Engraver, John Goddard).

Age.")³⁶ In this he reports a collection of vessels from the Intermediate Bronze (E.B.-M.B.) Age. While he is quick to point out that "we generally view such information with a good deal of skepticism," it is true that reports of MB pottery from Tekoa keep coming to our attention, and it is fascinating to consider the possibility of this earlier occupation of the site. Paul Lapp, in a recent (1966) work—The Dhar Mirzbaneh Tombs,³⁷ also describes E.B. I and II pottery, as well as M.B. II through the Byzantine period alleged to have come from Tekoa. Recent excavations (1968) produced quantities of Iron II pottery, from the 8th to the 7th centuries B.C. A report is scheduled for publication in the near future, entitled: Excavations at Tekoa: 1968.

The literary references given above represent only a beginning of the study of the historical and cultural background of Tekoa. Intriguing possibilities keep coming to attention, as the full decipherment of the Bar Kochba letters, the unofficial excavations of a sometime French Consular official a few decades ago, the archives of the monastery of Mar Saba, and similar sources, to say nothing of hints of a Roman road from Tekoa to the Dead Sea, and a complex of surrounding sites, and ancient ruins to be explored. Tekoa, the "city of oil" has a rich treasure yet to be revealed!

^{36.} Sylvester Saller, OFM, "Jerusalem and Its Surroundings in the Bronze Age," Studii Biblici Franciscani Liber Annuus XII (1961-1962), pp. 153, 164.

^{37.} Paul Lapp, "The Dhar Mirzbaneh Tombs, Three Intermediate Bronze Age Cemeteries in Jordan," Vol. IV, Publications of the Jerusalem School, (New Haven, American Schools of Oriental Research, 1966), pp. 67, 74.