

ARCHÆOLOGICAL AND EPIGRAPHIC NOTES ON  
PALESTINE.

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8. *Betomarsea-Maioumas*, and "the matter of Peor" (Numbers xxxv, 18).—As I have already explained (p. 239), M. Büchler seems to have successfully proved that the locality which appears in the mosaic map of Mâdeba under the puzzling name of Βητομαρσεα ἢ καὶ Μαιουμας represents the site whereon the tradition of the period placed the famous scene of the whoredom of Israel with the daughters of Moab.

We may henceforth take the following facts as certain:—

(1) Βητομαρσεα is the exact transcription of בית מרזח, *Beit Marzeah*, "the house of the Marzeah"; (2) the Marzeah was a great popular Syrian festival, of a more or less licentious character; (3) the Talmudic-Midrashic texts use this very expression (*Marzihim* in the plural) to designate the impure rites of Baal Peor, into which the children of Israel, when encamped at Shittim, allowed themselves to be initiated; (4) finally, the word *Maioumas*, which is given on the map as equivalent (ἢ καὶ) to *Betomarsea*, is nothing more than the Greek term for the orgiastic *Marzeah*, beloved by the Syrians, a term which the *Midrash* and the *Talmud* knew very well in its Greek form (Μιουμας) and used themselves as the proper equivalent of *Marzeah*.

Although the question appears to me to be thus solved, and very ingeniously solved, as touching the main point, there are still some matters which require to be cleared up or completed.

In the first place, to begin with, there is a topographical difficulty, which M. Büchler has perhaps passed over too lightly. He thinks that the position assigned to Betomarsea in the mosaic map agrees well enough with that given to Baal Peor by the current tradition, and especially by Eusebius's Onomasticon (opposite to Jericho, 10 miles above Livias).

We may be permitted to hold a different opinion on this point. Even taking into account the liberties, sometimes considerable, which the mosaic map takes with regard to the relative position of various places, one must admit that Betomarsea, on the contrary, does not appear at all in the district in which one would look for it, assuming what it is supposed to stand for. It is undeniable that it is brought, I think purposely, very close to Kerak ([Χαρ]αχ Μωβα), at a comparatively enormous distance from Jericho, and also very far from the region of the map, now destroyed, where Mount Nebo and its environs, including Mâdeba itself, should figure.

How are we to explain such an anomaly as this, which according to the strict rules of criticism might form a grave objection to the conjecture, an excellent one in my opinion, of M. Büchler? I incline to believe that in this matter the maker of the mosaic map merely followed an intentional variant of the local legend of Mâdeba, which was careful to put away, by transporting it to a distance, a memory which was injurious to the good fame of the country, and clashed with the other glorious memories of which it was proud. The country quite simply got rid of this place of ill fame, to the benefit or the detriment of its neighbours further to the south. Folklore usually employs these rough and ready methods, and in the present case we must not forget that the reputation of the town itself was in a manner at stake, where this grandiose map was constructed, intending, perhaps, as I have endeavoured to prove, to illustrate the vision of the Holy Land as seen by Moses from the top of Mount Nebo.

Be this as it may, I shall point out a curious enough fact, although belonging to a relatively late period, in which one may perhaps find some evidence of the topographical variation of the legend. An ancient Jewish writer, who knew Palestine well, having sojourned and travelled there for many years, Esthori ha-Parchi, a contemporary of Abu'l Feda, when describing the land of Moab from north to south, expresses himself thus, after mentioning Dibon, the Arnon, and Rabbat: "From Argob (corr. *Arnon*) you proceed to the *hill point of Pisgah*, i.e., Moab, called *El Kerak*; two days south from

Pisgah is Mount Seir, called El Shaubek." <sup>1</sup> Here then we find Pisgah identified with Kerak itself. This is as good evidence as the localisation of Peor by our map in the neighbourhood of that town; one may even say that it is very nearly the same fact stated in different terms.

Here is another observation. The Sifre and the parallel passages quoted by M. Büchler say that at the time of the fornication of Israel the Ammonites and the Moabites set up tents and booths, kept by their loose young women, from Beth ha-Yeshimoth to the *Mountain of Snow*. The *Mountain of Snow* (טור תלגא) is the name ordinarily given by the Talmud and the Targums to Mount Hermon. As M. Büchler justly points out, it is inadmissible<sup>2</sup> that an agadist in the second century A.D. should have made such a senseless statement as that this kind of fair, with its various attractions, should have extended as far as Mount Hermon. Assuredly he did not mean that mountain. But, in that case, what are we to understand by this? M. Büchler has made no answer to this question, which, nevertheless, has an interest of its own. I am disposed to think that the reading תלגא, *talga*, "snow," is the result of a copyist's error, and I wonder whether the original reading may not have been פסגא = פסגה, *Pisgah*; the emendation would be sufficiently in accordance with the rules of palæography (ת = ש, ל = ס [triangular]), and even the great fame of Mount Hermon would have sensibly helped to alter the original word. We thus find ourselves exactly in the place which we want, and, whatever fantastic variations there may be in details, the Talmudic tradition, a different one from that local tradition which grew up in the course of succeeding centuries at Mâdeba from the interested motives which I have conjectured, agrees well with the topographic data which appear in the Bible narrative, and the conclusions at which modern criticism has in general arrived: Beth ha-Yeshimoth = Sûeimeh; Nebo and Pisgah = Neba and Siâgha.

<sup>1</sup> Zunz, in "The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela," by Asher, vol. ii, p. 405.

<sup>2</sup> However, M. Neubauer ("Géographie du Talmud," p. 39) has passed over this difficulty.

As for Peor, one is greatly tempted to follow Colonel Conder in placing it beside 'Ain Minyeh. Anyhow, I see no necessity for separating, as he would do, this place, the scene of the episode of Balaam, from the scene of the impure rites of Peor, by putting the latter at Shittim, that is to say, at the very camp of the Israelites, in the valley of the Jordan<sup>1</sup>; it is more natural to suppose that the guilty parties allowed themselves to be enticed<sup>2</sup> into the sanctuary of Baal Peor itself. If we admit this view of the matter, may we not make something out of the suggestive enough name in this connection of *Tal'at el-Benât*, "the ascent of the girls," which is borne at this day by the conspicuous knoll adjacent to 'Ain el-Minyeh and its ancient monuments of unhewn stone? This spot, at which tradition perhaps fixed the memory of the loose conduct of the girls of Moab, is not more than seven miles from Mâdeba, to the south-west.

Finally, there is one remaining point which I think that I ought to press. As I have before incidentally noted (*Quarterly Statement*, p. 239, note 4), I had already shown elsewhere that the Phœnician word מְרוּחַ, which hitherto had remained uninterpreted, is closely connected with the identical Hebrew word, and in the two Phœnician inscriptions in which it occurs must bear the meaning of "sacred festival," "great religious feast." The appearance of the Moabite *Marzeah* gives this interpretation an unexpected confirmation, at the same time that it receives a certain amount of light from it itself.

The great Punic Tariff of Sacrifices ("Corp. Inscr. Sem.," No. 155, l. 16), after having settled the conditions of offerings made by individuals, begins to speak of those made in common by collective groups which it defines as curia, phratia, and *marzeah elim*. This last group, I stated, must represent one of those associations, so common in classical antiquity, whose

<sup>1</sup> The dramatic incident of Zimri and the Midianite woman Cozbi, whom he brought into his own tent, and consequently into the camp at Shittim, was an isolated case and an exceptional one, as appears from the context itself. Compare Numbers xxv, 6 to 18.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers xxv, 2.

members assembled for their religious "agapes" or love feasts, which, when we take into consideration the temperament and the sensual rites of Eastern peoples, might easily degenerate into orgies *ad majorem dei gloriam*. The Punic *Marzeah* was a regular thiasos. Now, it is striking to observe that the Biblical expression **בֵּית מְרוּחַ** (Jeremiah xvi, 5), which is accurately represented by the transcription *Βητομαρσεα* on the mosaic map, is appositely rendered in the LXX version by *θίαισος*.<sup>1</sup> Probably the Punic *Marzeah* resembled the Moabite *Marzeah* in its least commendable features.

The second example of the Phoenician word *Marzeah* occurs at the beginning of the great Decree of the Phoenician community of Piræus: **בִּים 4 לַמְרוּחַ בִּשְׁת 15 לְעַם צֶדֶן**, "the fourth day of *Marzeah*, in the fifteenth year of the people of Sidon."<sup>2</sup> It has been generally believed that in this formula of date compared with those which we already know, *Marzeah* could only be the name, hitherto unknown, of one of the months in the Phoenician calendar. I expressed some doubt as to this view, pointing out that in that case the name of the month, if it were really a month, ought to be preceded by the determinative word **יָרַח**, "month," a word which is never absent from the ordinary formulæ. On one hand, this omission is significant; on the other, the new meaning which I had been brought to attribute to the word **מְרוּחַ** in the Punic Tariff of Sacrifices led me to the conclusion that the *Marzeah* of the Decree of the Piræus was perhaps not the name of a month, but rather the name of some great Phoenician religious solemnity which lasted for at least four days, and, recurring at fixed periods, might consequently serve as well as the mention of a month to determine a date precisely: "the 4th day of the *Marzeah*," and not "of *Marzeah*."

With regard to this extremely important question of the great periodical festivals, either annual or quadrennial, celebrated by the ancient peoples of Syria, I shall confine myself to referring the reader to my special essay on this

<sup>1</sup> Although from the Hebrew context it seems rather to refer to some funeral ceremony.

<sup>2</sup> The year 96 B.C.

subject<sup>1</sup> ("Recueil d'Archéologie Orientale," vol. iv, pp. 289–319: "Le droit des pauvres et le cycle pentaétérique chez les Nabatéens"). It will be enough for me here to mention this fact, which connects the Phœnician *Marzeah* yet more closely with the Moabite *Marzeah*, pointing out that they had really the character of a great religious institution of extreme popularity among the Semitic races.

In the special essay just quoted, I think that I have succeeded in proving the existence among the Syrians of a great quadrennial festival, regulated by a pentaeteric cycle (= a period of four years), which, singularly enough, coincides chronologically with the Olympic cycle, year for year. I have endeavoured to give reasons for this coincidence. I may add that the year 15 of the Sidonian era in the Phœnician Decree of Piræus, that is to say, the year 96 B.C., agrees exactly with the first year of the 171st Olympiad, and consequently with one of the festival years of the Syrian pentaeteric cycle. We may infer from this that the Phœnician *Marzeah* was perhaps not an annual feast, but that it too was a quadrennial one. Can this also have been the case with the Moabite *Marzeah*, or at any rate with that alluded to in the Talmudic tradition and the tradition of the mosaic map?

9. *The Hebrew Mosaic of Kefr Kenna*.<sup>2</sup>—In the course of last year an extremely interesting archæological discovery was made at Kefr Kenna, an Arab village in Galilee, which an ancient and possibly true, though much disputed, tradition identifies with the famous Cana of the Gospels.<sup>3</sup> It consists

<sup>1</sup> See also *ibid.*, pp. 226–237: "Le Phénicien Theosebios de Sarepta et son voyage à Pouzsoles."

<sup>2</sup> See the illustration in the *Quarterly Statement*, p. 251.

<sup>3</sup> Among the testimonies of a date anterior to the Crusades, that of Antoninus of Placentia alone can be regarded as sufficiently explicit to be able to sway the balance in favour of this identification. He distinctly places the Cana of the Gospels between Diocæsarea (Sephoris) and Nazareth, at a distance of three miles from the former town (Theodosius reckons it five); he states that he saw there two of the water pots wherein was wrought the miracle of the changing the water into wine, and also that he carved his parents' name in the sanctuary. It is a pity that we have not been able to find this commemorative inscription, which would have settled the question. I may remark

of a large mosaic pavement containing a fairly long inscription in ancient square Hebrew characters. It is the first inscription of this kind which has been found up to the present day. There is, indeed, the great mosaic of Naron,<sup>1</sup> in Tunisia, which assuredly once adorned the floor of an ancient Jewish synagogue, as is proved by the characteristic symbols<sup>2</sup> and inscriptions which it contains<sup>3</sup>; but all these inscriptions are in Latin, whereas that at Kefr Kenna is in Hebrew.

This mosaic was discovered by the Franciscans in the course of some researches made by them in the interior of a chapel, which they built some years ago at Kefr Kenna, on the ruins of an ancient basilica which is partly covered by their convent. Father Ronzevalle, of Beirût, has been good enough to send me a photograph from which the engraving given above on p. 251 has been made. Although the photograph is good enough in itself, the deciphering of the text is, nevertheless, an arduous task, owing to various circumstances. The letters, which are photographed obliquely, are out of shape because of the perspective.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, they have been somewhat carelessly executed by the maker of the mosaic, perhaps of Greek extraction, who may not have been very familiar with this sort of writing, and merely reproduced mechanically a model text which he could not read. Finally, the mosaic has suffered much from the injuries of time and the hand of man. In spite of all these difficulties I think that I have, nevertheless,

in this connection that, in 1885, in the ruins of an ancient church of the Panaghia at Elatea, in Phœcis, a large slab of grey marble was discovered bearing a Greek inscription in sixth-century lettering, which runs thus:—"This stone comes from Cana of Galilee, where Our Lord Jesus Christ turned the water into wine." This stone must have been brought to Greece from the Holy Land by some pious pilgrim who was more or less contemporary with Antoninus.

<sup>1</sup> At Hammâm Lif, near Tunis. See "Revue Archéologique," 1883, pp. 157 and 234; 1884, p. 273, Pl. VII-XI.

<sup>2</sup> Seven-branched candlestick, lulab, &c.

<sup>3</sup> "Sancti Sinagoga Naron . . . arcossinagogi," &c.

<sup>4</sup> One can realise the extent of this distortion of the letters by the angle formed by the lines of the border and of the intercolumnations, which, of course, must be parallel in the original.

made out pretty satisfactorily all that is left of this precious text. In order to clear up the doubts which still remain about certain points it would be necessary to have access to an exact copy of it, but this I have not hitherto been able to obtain.

The inscription originally contained at least two columns, I and II, separated by a vertical line, and set, perhaps, in a large frame with triangular lappets, of which I think I can still discover some traces at the right hand extremity. This is my reading:—

II.	I.
..... 5	דיבר לטב יוסה בר 1
..... (יש) 6	תנחום בר ביטה ובנוי 2
.. [לה] 7	ד עבדין הדה טבלה 3
..... (ל) 8	תהי להון ברכתה 4

In pious remembrance; Yôseh (= Joseph) the son of Tanhûm, the son of Bitah (?), and his sons, who have made (?) this TBLH; which will be for a blessing for them. . . . This T[BLH ?] . . . blessing for<sup>1</sup> (?) [them, or: for ever?].

The writing is the square Hebrew alphabet of the first centuries of our era; the language is the Hebrew with a tendency to the Aramaic, sometimes far from correct, which was also in use amongst the Jews at the same period.

The initial formula is well known; it is applicable to an *ex voto* as well as to an epitaph, and if I am not mistaken we have here to deal with the former. Observe the Aramaicised form דיבר = זכר "remembrance": the *yod* is somewhat of a surprise; perhaps this spelling has been influenced by the vocalisation of the Hebrew form זכרון, and also by the wish to distinguish this word from its double זכר = "male."

The two first proper names, יוסה and תנחום, are certain, and they are common Jewish names of the period. The identity of the abridged popular form יוסה, Yôseh, with יוסף, Joseph, has long been established beyond the reach of doubt,

<sup>1</sup> Or perhaps better, ברכתה, "the blessing," as in line 4.

and we find many examples of it in this very district of Galilee.<sup>1</sup>

In the group of letters . . . ברבי, which follow the patronymic Tanhûm, one might at first be tempted to see the title of *beribbi*, or *beribi*, which is often borne by the Jewish doctors. I have found many examples of it in the Jewish cemetery at Joppa.<sup>2</sup> But one would be inclined in that case to expect to find the usual spelling ביריבי, בירבי; moreover, in this case one would not know what to make of the remaining letters. It appears to me, therefore, more natural that one should find in this a third proper name, preceded by the word בר, "son," and continuing the genealogy. This name, ביטה ? בוטה ?<sup>3</sup> recalls that of ביטה, *Bitah*, *Bîto*, which appears in the ancient Jewish catacomb at Venosa,<sup>4</sup> and seems to be nothing more than a transcription of the Latin word *Vita* (vulgarly spelt *Bita*),<sup>5</sup> "life," which is itself the translation of a very common Jewish name הייא,<sup>6</sup> היים, *Haiya*, *Hiya*, *Hayim*, &c. (same sense), and has also given rise to the barbarous proper names of *Bitus* or *Bittus*. One may be somewhat surprised, it is true, at meeting in the midst of Galilee with a name so deeply impressed with a western stamp. But this fact will seem less surprising after

<sup>1</sup> See Renan's "Mission de Phénicie," pp. 767, 768, 770, 779, 856a, 871b. I am tempted to see a new instance of this name in a fragment of a monumental inscription from an ancient synagogue at El-Koka, copied by L. Oliphant (Pal. Exp. Fund *Quarterly Statement*, 1886, p. 76). Unfortunately, the copy is a very inadequate one. Still, I think that I can read in it, after an initial formula analogous to that of our mosaic, and ending like it with לטב ("in good . . ."), the name of יוסה, "Yôseh," followed by בר, "son of," and of a patronymic name beginning with . . . חל, or perhaps . . . הל (= הלל, Hillel?).

<sup>2</sup> Clermont-Ganneau, "Proceed. of the Soc. of Bibl. Arch.," March, 1884, and "Recueil d'Archéologie Orientale," vol. iv, p. 141. Compare Βηρεβί.

<sup>3</sup> The second letter seems a little long for a *yod*, and might possibly pass for a *vav*; but this appearance, perhaps, is owing to an accidental disarrangement of the mosaic cubes which appears to have happened at this place.

<sup>4</sup> Ascoli, "Iscrizioni di antichi sepolcri giudaici del Napolitano," No. 21; cf. Nos. 15, 18, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Compare the name of *Bîta*, belonging to a woman, perhaps a Jewess, in an inscription at Gallipoli ("Corp. Inscr. Græc.," 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Compare the name יאס, transliterated *Éias* (pronounce *Ias*) in a bilingual inscription in the Jewish cemetery at Joppa, which I have explained elsewhere ("Recueil d'Arch. Orient.," vol. iv, p. 143).

a few moments' reflection on the uninterrupted connection which existed between the Jewish communities dispersed after the captivity, from one end to the other of the ancient world. It is, after all, quite within the bounds of possibility that our Joseph of Galilee should have had a grandfather born in a Latin-speaking country.

Observe, at the end of line 2, the Aramaicised form, **בניו** = **בנוהו**, "his sons," instead of the classical Hebrew form, **בניו**.

Line 3 must contain the essential part of the inscription, that is to say, the word, preceded by the feminine demonstrative article, **הרה**,<sup>1</sup> which defines the actual work performed by the author of the dedication, together with his children. Unfortunately, this word is indistinct; the third letter is the most doubtful one, and its true value depends on the greater or less whiteness of one little cube of mosaic. Here is an important verification which must be made by examination of the original. It seems as though this word, whatever it may be, must be repeated under the same conditions, that is, preceded by the same demonstrative pronoun, **הרה**, in the second column (at the beginning of line 7). But this repetition does not give us the least assistance, for the word is entirely destroyed after the second letter.

If the reading, **טבלה**, to which I incline, be admitted, we have yet to decide the meaning of the word. There is, indeed, in Rabbinical Hebrew a substantive identical in form, **טבלה**, **טבלא**, which is the transcript of the Latin *tabula*,<sup>2</sup> all of the meanings of which have been preserved in the Hebrew. The expression "this *tablah*," might therefore possibly mean the mosaic itself, the whole of which formed a sort of *tabula tessellata*. But it is also possible that **טבלה** is derived from another Semitic root, **טבל**, "to plunge into the water, to bathe." **טבילה**, **טבילתא**, **טיבולא**, &c., "bath," more especially the

<sup>1</sup> For **הרה**, with a Hebraicised spelling of the Aramaic form. We find the same approach to the Hebrew form further on, in **ברכתה** for **ברכתא**.

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew transcript was not made directly from the Latin *tabula*, but indirectly from the Hellenised form *ταβλα*.

lustral bath for cleansing from ritual impurities, and also the actual baptism to which Jewish neophytes were subjected. In this case the expression would refer, not to the mosaic pavement itself but to some building or hall connected with a synagogue, some Jewish baptistery,<sup>1</sup> of which our mosaic possibly adorned the floor. I shall presently revert to this puzzling question, which gives rise to others yet more puzzling.

In line 5, the reading and the translation which I have given depend upon letters which are partly conjectural, and indistinct in the photograph. The formula which I have thus obtained has the advantage of agreeing with that which may be read without a shadow of doubt upon a column of an ancient Galilean synagogue at El Jish (Gischala).<sup>2</sup> The word ברכתה seems also to reappear in our column II, l. 8, in a new formula which, perhaps, marks the termination of the inscription, provided that it be not continued in one or more other columns which have been altogether destroyed.

Whatever our interpretation of the obscure word TBLH, the key-word of the inscription, may be, the first and most natural idea which occurs to us is assuredly that this mosaic, which anyhow has nothing of a funerary character, belongs to one of those ancient synagogues which have been proved to

<sup>1</sup> Note that, in this respect, naturally on the hypothesis that Kefr Kenna would be the authentic representative of the Cana of the Gospels, St. John tells us that the six famous "waterpots" or *hydriæ* of stone were actually used for "the purification of the Jews," *κατὰ καθαρισμόν τῶν Ἰουδαίων* (St. John, ii, 6).

<sup>2</sup> Renan, *op. cit.*, p. 777 (Pl. LXX, No. 3): תתת לה (or להון?) ברכתה, "may blessing be upon him (or them?)." According to Renan, this inscription alluded to an "ark" (אֲרוֹן); in spite of his unwillingness to believe it, it may nevertheless be better to read and translate it הַזֶּה, "this."

Now that I am dealing with this matter of Hebrew inscriptions in Galilean synagogues, I shall avail myself of the opportunity to say that the much-discussed inscription at Kefr Bir'im (*op. cit.*, p. 764, Pl. LXX, No. 2) should, perhaps, read simply: — אֶלְעָזָר בֶּר יוּדָן . . . "Eleazar son of Youdan." The name *Youdan* is well known in the Talmudic Onomastics, and I have found several examples of it, in Hebrew and in Greek, in the Jewish cemetery at Joppa. As for the beginning of the inscription, which is so hard to make out, perhaps we should take the second letter for an *ain*.

With regard to the inscription at Safed (*op. cit.*, p. 782, Pl. LXX, No. 4), it seems to me to begin with the words . . . נִקְבְּרָה בַּיּוֹם, "was buried on the xth day of the month of Elul, in the year . . ." It is only an epitaph, and, I think, of very recent date.

exist in various places in Galilee.<sup>1</sup> Their construction dates from the earliest centuries of our era (probably the second or third). Here one might stop, and perhaps it would be wisest to say no more.

However, on thinking the matter over, I have conceived some doubt on this point, and this doubt arises, in the first place, from the substantive and hitherto unique fact that our Hebrew inscription is executed in *mosaic*. In none of these ancient Galilean synagogues, relatively numerous though they are, has any trace of the existence of mosaic pavements been discovered; all of them are paved with slabs of stone. Sir Charles Wilson, who has made valuable studies of these synagogues, remarks particularly ("Special Papers," p. 296) that "their floors are paved with slabs of white limestone." It appears that this was the general rule.<sup>2</sup> One may say that in Syria mosaic pavements, with ornaments and inscriptions, are peculiar to Christian architecture of the Byzantine period. *A priori*, therefore, according to the rules of true criticism, we ought to refer our mosaic, with its Hebrew inscription, to this epoch. But then, on the other hand, if we connect it with a Jewish synagogue, we involve ourselves in serious historical difficulties. One can easily understand that under the Roman emperors of the third century, who showed themselves tolerant, and in some cases decidedly favourable towards the Jews,<sup>3</sup> who recognised and

<sup>1</sup> At Kefr Bir'im, Kasyûn, Nabartein, el-Jish, Meirôn, Tel Hâm, Kerâzeh, Irbid, Sufsâf, &c. For an account of these synagogues, see Renan, *op. cit.*, p. 761. He inclines to the third century of our era as their general date. See also the important researches of Wilson, Kitchener, Conder, &c., in the Palestine Exploration Fund "Memoirs," in 4to form, and the "Special Papers," pp. 294-305; *Quarterly Statement*, 1878, p. 32 *et seq.*, p. 123 *et seq.*; 1886, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> I shall mention in this connection a curious enough passage in the work of the Jewish geographer Esthori ha-Parchi (Asher, "The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela," translated by Zunz, vol. ii, p. 432), who, speaking of the ancient synagogue of Yâkûk, says:—"We also saw there a synagogue with an ancient pavement . . ." It would be interesting to see in the original Hebrew text, which I have not at hand, what were the exact terms used. I shall point out incidentally that our Jewish writer (*op. cit.*, p. 401) also saw at Beisân the ruins of an ancient synagogue which does not seem to have been noticed by modern explorers (unless it be the building with three niches which is cursorily mentioned in the "Memoirs," vol. ii, p. 109).

<sup>3</sup> Especially Antonius Pius and Alexander Severus.

confirmed the privileges of the Patriarchate of Tiberias whose spiritual and even temporal power, at least in financial matters, extended over all the Jewish communities of the West—one can understand, I say, that in their days the Jews had perfect liberty to construct, in the chief towns of Galilee, the fine synagogues whose ruins we admire and which were paid for by rich offerings brought from afar by the activity of the *Apostoli*. But as soon as Christianity rose to the dignity of a State religion, as soon as Constantine ascended the throne, things were entirely altered. Then throughout the whole extent of the Holy Land churches and basilicas blossomed forth. All that we know of this epoch and those which succeeded to it proves to us that Christian fanaticism would never have willingly thenceforth suffered the building of new synagogues in Palestine, especially on a site connected with one of the most important events recorded in the Gospels, that is, if Kefr Kenna does indeed represent Cana of Galilee, which witnessed the first miracle performed by Jesus. We are thus led into a most embarrassing dilemma: on the one hand, our mosaic, with its Hebrew inscription, certainly seems to have belonged to a synagogue; on the other, by the very fact of its being a mosaic, it should belong to a period at which it is hard to admit that Jews could have received permission to erect in the Holy Land a public building for the practice of the ceremonies of their religion.

There would be but one way by which we could reconcile these opposites, and that is to suppose that the mosaic of Kefr Kenna may have been executed during the short period of respite from persecution, and even of reaction against Christianity, represented by the reign of Julian. We know how much this emperor favoured the Jews out of hatred to Christianity. If he entertained the plan of allowing them to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem, much more would he have permitted them to build synagogues at other places in Palestine, and the idea of seeing one erected, by way of an outrage to one of the most cherished of Christian traditions, on the very site of the Cana of the Gospel, could not fail to please him. On this hypothesis it would be easy to explain how a Jewish building came to be constructed

in the taste and according to the prevailing style of the period by adorning it with one of those mosaic pavements which were just then coming into fashion in Syria. But it is less easy to explain how it was that the Christians, who became absolutely masters of the situation after the disappearance of this final and short-lived official adversary of their faith, should not have utterly abolished the very last traces of the Jewish abomination which defiled the ground of one of their chief sanctuaries. No doubt our mosaic has been damaged, but, on the whole, a considerable portion has been preserved, which could not have been the case on this hypothesis.

These considerations, and others which it would be tedious to enumerate, have led me to ask myself whether, in spite of appearances to the contrary, the author of the dedication may not possibly have been a converted Jew, and whether the mosaic may not have belonged to a Christian church. I will not conceal the paradoxical effect which such an hypothesis may have, or the objections of all kinds to which it would give occasion. But, in face of all these difficulties, we are compelled to consider this theory and see whether it is really so incompatible with probability.

St. Epiphanius, who was, as we know, himself of Jewish<sup>1</sup> origin, and who was an eye witness of the official triumph of Christianity on the accession of Constantine, tells<sup>2</sup> us in detail a story which is curious from every point of view. It is that of a personage who was in two respects his co-religionist, having been, like him, born a Jew and converted to Christianity. This was one Joseph of Tiberias, who at the end of his days fixed his abode at Bethshean-Scythopolis, where St. Epiphanius had personal relations with him. Joseph was considerably older than St. Epiphanius, seeing that he was 70 years of age at the time when the latter knew him, that is, in A.D. 356. Consequently he must have been born about the year 286. The account which St. Epiphanius gives us of him offers, therefore, every guarantee of authenticity and exactitude.

<sup>1</sup> Born about A.D. 310, at a village in the neighbourhood of Eleutheropolis.

<sup>2</sup> St. Epiphanius, "Adv. hæres.," collection Migne, tome 41, columns 410-427.

This Joseph originally, before his conversion, held a high position at Tiberias under the Jewish patriarch Ellel (Hillel), who resided in that town, which was the real capital of what remained of the Jewish nation. He was one of the *Apostoli*, the assistants of the patriarch. Already secretly inclined towards Christianity in consequence of a train of circumstances too long to enumerate, he was sent to Cilicia by the patriarch Judas, Hillel's successor, to proceed, according to custom, to the collection of offerings from the Jewish communities. In Cilicia his vocation for Christianity was confirmed under the influence of a certain Christian bishop, so much that his co-religionists were scandalised at his public apostasy, and cast him into the Cydnus to drown. He barely escaped with his life from the waters of the river; this escape from drowning was for him a regular baptism. He definitively abjured the faith of his fathers, and embraced that of the Christians. Therein he also served his own interests from a temporal point of view. He was received with open arms by Constantine, who loaded him with honours and favours, and went so far as to bestow upon him the dignity of Count, with all the advantages and powers appertaining to that position. Like all proselytes, our newly-made Count of Tiberias displayed the ardour of a neophyte; he appears to have made it his special business to persecute his former co-religionists. With this object he asked and obtained from the Emperor authority and probably also pecuniary means to build churches in Galilee, in the very midst of this last focus of Judaism. Here it would be well to quote St. Epiphanius literally:—

“He received authority to build a Christian church at Tiberias<sup>1</sup> itself, and also at Diocæsarea, Capernaum, and other towns.” (Col. 410, § iv.)

“He asked nothing (of the Emperor, who was willing to give him whatever he chose) beyond the great favour of being given authority by imperial edict to build churches for Christ in the

<sup>1</sup> St. Epiphanius describes in detail the circumstances which took place during the construction of this church at Tiberias, which was built by Count Joseph on the walls of an unfinished temple, the *Adrianeion*, in spite of the opposition of the Jews of the town, who wished to make it into a public bath.

Jewish towns and villages, where no one had previously been able to build, none, either Greek, Samaritan, or Christian, being tolerated amongst them. His chief churches were built at Tiberias, Diocæsarea, Sepphoris, Nazareth, and Capernaum, where the Jews used to keep careful watch against any foreigner whatever dwelling among them." (Col. 426, § xi.)

"He also built churches at Diocæsarea and other towns." (Col. 427, § xii.)

From these passages arises a conjecture which temptingly presents itself to mind, though I state it, nevertheless, with the utmost reserve. Among all these churches of Galilee, built by the zeal of Count Joseph, to whom Constantine had given plenary power, may there not have been one at Kefr Kenna? I do not wish to go so far as to say that the Yoseh of our inscription, whose name is the same as that of our Joseph of Tiberias, is identical with him, although indeed this might be maintained, for we do not know the name of the latter's father. But the example may have been contagious; others of his co-religionists, finding substantial advantages in it, may have imitated the conversion of the Jewish ex-Apostolus, and may have seconded him in his enterprise of multiplying churches throughout the land of Galilee. If the author of the mosaic at Kefr Kenna would be a converted Jew, this would explain well enough the singular fact that a Hebrew inscription should appear on a mosaic which one may call Christian, both by definition and by situation. If we grant the object aimed at by Count Joseph and his possible imitators—direct action against the local Jewish element, possibly with further purpose of making conversions—the use of the Hebrew language, the very language of those against whom this sort of crusade was undertaken in an architectural shape, would be quite justified; nothing could have been more suitable to impress these stubborn champions of the Jewish zealotry in Galilee.

The hypothesis, I admit, is a fragile one. It would be somewhat strengthened if Cana figured in the list of the places where Count Joseph's activity was displayed. This town does not appear therein, but we must remark that St. Epiphanius's

list is not complete, and that Cana may perhaps be potentially comprised in the phrase of which he twice makes use, "and other towns and villages" (*καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις*). If this were the only objection, one might answer it by calling another witness, whose testimony, although indirect and of much later date, yet is of a kind which nevertheless could fill up the blank left by St. Epiphanius's silence, or rather by his regrettable brevity. This testimony is that of the Byzantine historian Nicephorus Callistus.<sup>1</sup> This fourteenth century compiler, echoing the legend which prevailed in his time, attributes to St. Helena the building of a series of churches whereof certainly many are not the personal work of the mother of Constantine: the Anastasis and the Cranion on the site of the Passion, at Jerusalem; the church of the Nativity, at Bethlehem; that of the Ascension, on the Mount of Olives; that of the Virgin, at Gethsemane; that of the Shepherds; that of Bethany; that of St. John the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan; that of Elijah the Tishbite, on the mount. Further, in Galilee, on the shores of the Lake of Tiberias, it is always St. Helena who was the builder of the church of the Dodekathrônion, on the place where Jesus fed the 4,000 men, and other churches on the principal places in the district of Capernaum which are connected with the Gospel narrative; one at Tiberias itself, another on Mount Tabor, another at Nazareth, and lastly *another at Cana of Galilee.*<sup>2</sup>

It will be observed that among these churches of Galilee, with the building of which St. Helena is credited, several are identical with those due to the initiative of Count Joseph, whose work was done at precisely the same period and in the same country. The list given by Nicephorus Callistus, when reduced to its real historical meaning, may be regarded as the complement of that given by St. Epiphanius, and if this be true, then the alleged building by St. Helena of the church at Cana ought really to be attributed to Count Joseph and virtually comprised among the "etc., etc.," of St. Epiphanius.

<sup>1</sup> Nicephorus Callistus, Migne's collection, vol. cxlvi, column 113.

<sup>2</sup> *Κανῆ δὲ τῆς Γαλιλαίας, ἐνθα ὁ τοῦ Κανανίτου Σίμωνος γάμος ἐγένετο, καὶ ἐξ ἀδύλου βοτρῶν οἶνος ἐπηγάζετο, οἶκον ἱερὸν ἰδεῖματό ἕτερον.*

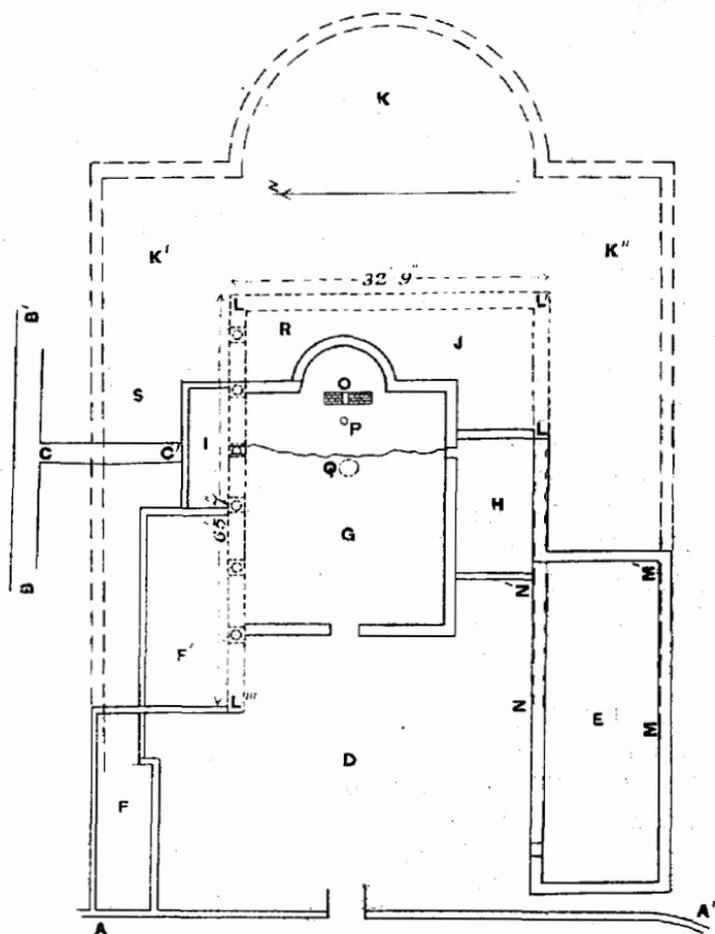
So then we are brought again to the hypothesis, whose strong and weak points I have already discussed. I cannot myself come to any certain decision; I leave to others the task of weighing the pros and cons. I shall content myself with adding that on the supposition that our mosaic had a Christian origin, it may be worth while, in order to explain the mysterious word TBLH, to bear in mind the existence in Christian Aramaic of a similar if not synonymous word, **טבליתא**, *tablita*, meaning "altar" (strictly the *table* of the altar). The two other interpretations of which I have spoken, either *tabula*, alluding to the mosaic itself, or "baptistery," remain still possible ones; the latter, indeed, would become exceedingly interesting in case we have to do with a church and not with a synagogue.

To arrive at a satisfactory solution of the problem we need beforehand two pieces of evidence which we have not got. Does Kefr Kenna, or does it not, represent the Cana of the Gospel? And, are the remains of the ancient building within which the mosaic was found sufficiently distinct to enable us to prove whether they belong to a synagogue or to a church?

As for the first question, the topographical one, I have nothing to add to the many contradictory essays of which it has formed the subject up to the present time; it is rather the solution of the problem which we are engaged with which will enable us to settle this question.

As for the second question, the archaeological one, I have as yet only insufficient data. They are not, however, entirely valueless, and I think it is useful to set them forth here, while awaiting the result of the more exact investigations which, let us hope, will be eventually made on the spot. I owe them to an obliging communication from Father Paul de S. Aignan, which reached me after I had written the above pages. He has been good enough to send me a sketch of the place (*see* next page), with some interesting explanations which I shall sum up as accurately as possible and comment upon.

A first glance at this sketch seems to show the existence of three churches of different periods, regularly orientated, and, as it were, inscribed one within the other, being formed by successive curtailments of the size of the original building. G is the



A—A', Street. B—B', Alley. C—C', Alley. D, Courtyard of the Franciscan Convent. E, Small convent. F, F', Schools. G, Chapel built by the Franciscans. H, Vestry. I, Back vestry. J, Remains of an older church. K, K', K'', Suggested plan of the original building successively reduced to J and G. L, L', L'', Walls of old church. L—L''', Old colonnade. M—M', Remains of a very thick wall with a side door. N—N', Thick wall with less carefully dressed masonry. O, Original entrance to the crypt under the altar of the existing chapel. P, Lustral basin or font (?). Q, Mosaic, with Hebrew inscription. R, S, Isolated fragments of mosaic pavements.

----- Old church.

- - - - - Original and much larger building, according to Father Paul de St. Aignan.

present chapel, built by the Franciscans, within a church of greater size, J, which, though it bears visible traces of having been remodelled by the Crusaders, seems nevertheless to belong to an earlier date than theirs. This church, again, is enclosed within the original one, whose dimensions were considerably greater, K, K', K''. I desire to state here that the plan of this latter building is to a great extent conjectural,<sup>1</sup> and is based upon the existence of scattered traces as to the meaning of which opinions may differ; the apse, K, especially, is, I imagine, purely conjectural. If its existence, with the normal orientation to the east, should be confirmed, it would strongly sway the balance in favour of the Christian origin of the mosaic.

The presence of fragments of mosaics, which has been proved at the point R, within the circuit of J, and at the point S, beyond its circuit, and consequently within the conjectural circuit of K, is a very important fact, provided that we can ascertain that these fragments of mosaic belong to the same period as the central Hebrew mosaic. Observe also the bases of the ancient range of columns, L-L', which one is tempted to regard as marking one of the (three?) aisles into which the supposed building, K, might have been divided. One of the capitals of these columns has been found; it appears that it is of the Corinthian order, and of good workmanship.

I now come to the discovery of the Hebrew mosaic, which is situated at Q, that is to say, almost in the middle of all this entanglement of buildings, for the modern chapel, G, and the intermediate building, J, seem on the whole to have been placed in what must have been the central aisle of the great conjectural church, K. The excavation which led to this discovery was begun as far up as the present altar, O, at a spot where the remains of an ancient wall had previously been noticed. The remaining courses of this wall were cleared of earth, and at a depth of about 5 feet there was found the threshold of a door which must have led into a sort of crypt extending toward the west. The explorers consequently dug in that direction,

<sup>1</sup> It rests chiefly on the discovery of two fragments of thick walls, parallel to one another, shown at M-M' and N-N'.

and near the spot P they found, in the middle of a kind of chamber, "an urn, or rather a fairly large basin," probably of stone, although the material is not specified. I need not enlarge on the importance of this object as bearing upon the various questions which I have already discussed. At this point the digging had to stop in consequence of certain material difficulties. For the present they contented themselves with sinking a shaft a little further to the west, near the point Q, and it was there that they had the good fortune to come just down upon the Hebrew mosaic which forms the subject of this essay.

Such is the present condition of these explorations from an archaeological point of view. It would be most desirable that they should be renewed at the earliest possible date, and that they should be conducted in a methodical manner.

I may add that during some building operations undertaken some 20 years ago (I imagine in the region marked E) they found a sculptured lintel of a door, with vine leaves and grapes, which has unfortunately disappeared. This subject of decoration might equally well belong to a synagogue as to a church, so that as far as this goes the question still remains undecided. The same applies to the ornamentation of another sculptured lintel, whose existence on the same spot in the seventeenth century is attested by a document which has been pointed out to me by Father Paul de S. Aignan. Father Mariano Morone da Maleo,<sup>1</sup> who, as I have already often had occasion to remark elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> was so singularly well-informed on the archaeology of the Holy Land, says that he saw sculptured above a door at the entrance to the ancient ruined church of Kefr Kenna three vases in which he wishes to see the waterpots of the marriage of Cana in Galilee.<sup>3</sup> It is needless to say that this subject of vases belongs as much to the symbolic decoration of Jewish as of Christian art.

<sup>1</sup> "Terra Santa nuovamente illustrata," i, p. 362.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, "Archæological Researches in Palestine," vol. i, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> "Come anche nell' intrare notai sopra una porta tre hidrie scolpite nella pietra viva in memoria del miracolo qui operato."