

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS—II. WADI MURABBA'AT

WADI MURABBA'AT

Some account of the remarkable discoveries in the Wadi Murabba'at in January and February 1952 has already been given in these pages.¹ A full account of the exploration and discoveries (which followed upon the original discovery of the caves by the Ta'amire Bedouin the previous October) has been presented by Père De Vaux² and certain interesting documents published.³

Four caves, situated in a most inaccessible place, were explored, and were found to contain remains dating back to the Chalcolithic period (4th millenium B.C.)—fragments of wood, bone, flint and rough pottery, which pointed to the practice of hunting and primitive agriculture. These remains were most prominent in the first two caves. There was evidence of a small settlement, the reason for which was unknown, in the Middle Bronze Age (18th–17th century B.C.), and again in Iron Age II (8th–7th century B.C.). Occupation of the caves was intense during the Roman period; large Roman jars or vases (none exhibiting the characteristic cylindrical form of the Qumran jars), iron and bronze weapons and tools, implements of wood, stone, leather and bone, were found. Twenty coins dating from this period were unearthed: three of the Roman procurators under Nero (A.D. 58–9), one from Ascalon (probably A.D. 84–5), one from Tiberias (struck under Hadrian, A.D. 119–20), nine of the Second Jewish War (A.D. 132–5), and two bronze pieces bearing the stamp "Legio X Fretensis". Finally, there was what the excavators call an Arab "visitation" in the 13th or 14th century A.D.: a coin of the Omayyads was proof of this. One last coin "of more recent date" was found.

Mss were abundant: of papyrus, leather, parchment, even paper, besides ostraca, or inscribed potsherds. The texts exhibited the greatest variety—Biblical texts, phylacteries, profane letters, contracts, literary and historical works, administrative, civil and military documents. The languages used were Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin and Arabic. The complete inventory of these mss, arranged in chronological order, is as follows:

1. Earliest in point of time is a small palimpsest papyrus (measuring

¹ See *Scripture*, v (1953), pp. 112–13; vi (1953), pp. 17–21.

² "Les Grottes de Murabba'at et leurs documents", in *Revue Biblique*, LX (1953), pp. 245–67).

³ "Quelques textes hébreux de Murabba'at", *ibid.*, pp. 268–75.

roughly 7 in. × 3 in.) in Hebrew. The newer text contains certain names, e.g. Hoshea, Shemayahu, Yo'ezer, with signs appended; the older text, almost completely obliterated, seems to have been a letter, as the customary form of greeting and introduction can just be made out. Both texts are written in the ancient Phoenician script, and everything points to the conclusion that this script is really "archaic", not just "archaising", or imitating the archaic, as might be true for the Leviticus fragments of Qumran (IQ). For the Qumran fragments were religious and Biblical, whereas these are profane; moreover, the script greatly resembles that of the famous Lachish ostraca (early 6th century B.C.), and the proper names retain their ancient form; finally, archaeology shows that the caves were occupied in the 8th–7th centuries B.C. The papyrus may, then, be credibly dated in the period of the decline of the Monarchy before the exile, say, towards the close of the 7th century B.C.

2. By far the most important finds consist of a long series of documents deposited in the caves at the time of the Second Jewish War, documents which, by and large, provide us with more historical information about this little-known period of Jewish history than all previous sources taken together.¹ They are, in fact, the first written documents of these Jewish insurgents that have come down to us.

In *Greek* we have two *papyrus* contracts, one, much torn, containing references to dowry and inheritance; the other, dated A.D. 124, relates to the reconciliation of husband and wife, Eleos and Salome by name; Palestinian place-names, e.g. Herodion and Gofna, are mentioned. Also on *papyrus* are two fragments in calligraphic script, the one a literary composition (probably religious), the other a historical work, treating, apparently, of the reign of Herod the Great, for it contains the names of his sister Salome and his wife Mariamne. Both these fragments have been also inscribed on the reverse in a cursive hand.

Also in *Greek* are *leather* and *parchment* fragments, apparently portions of administrative acts, civil or military; Jewish names (e.g. Josephus, Jesus, Saul, Simon), with signs and numbers appended, figure in the texts.

Among the *Semitic* texts are Biblical fragments, all of leather. There are various short fragments of *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Deuteronomy*, which bear traces of violent handling; e.g. the fragment of Gen. xxxii–iv is just a long narrow strip torn from across three columns of an original scroll. Another fragment exhibits an empty column,

¹ These sources are the coins struck by the insurgents, the traditions of the Rabbis (not all historically trustworthy), and the brief details given by the Roman historian Dio Cassius and the Christian, Eusebius. They are all brought together and discussed in a recent work in Hebrew by S. Yeivin (*The War of Bar Kokhba*, Jerusalem 1952).

followed by the opening lines of the first column of the book of Isaias (I.4-14). A complete phylactery was found, in two separate pieces, both inscribed in tiny, yet very clear letters. The larger portion, a thin, irregular strip of leather, contains in order the three texts Ex. XIII.1-10 and 11-16 and Deut. XI.13-21. The other piece, about one-fifth the size, contains the *Shema* (Deut. VI.4-9). Both strips were folded and then wrapped in parchment torn from Greek MSS, and the whole placed in a little bag, which is how they were found. With regard to the texts, it is known that the Rabbis prescribed the use of these four Biblical texts, but there was some dispute as to the order in which they were to be written. Eventually it was agreed that the *Shema* should be placed between Ex. XIII and Deut. XI. It will be recalled that the phylacteries found in the sixth cave of Qumran (6Q) also contained the Decalogue.

These Biblical texts are in full conformity with the Massoretic tradition, not only as regards the actual readings, but also in their orthography. For example, it was a rule of the Massoretes that, at the end of an "open section" (division of the text), a blank space should be left; this was usually the rest of the line, but, if the space left was less than would suffice to contain three words of three letters each, then the following line was left completely blank too. This is exactly the case with the fragment containing Ex. VI.7-9,¹ where verse 9 marks the close of such an "open section".

Semitic texts comprise also profane documents, private and administrative, on papyrus. Among these are an Aramaic contract dated in the 6th year of an era not yet determined, several fragments of contracts or letters in cursive script, not yet read, and a number of incomplete copies (with slight variations) of a Hebrew text in which the date is given according to the era of "the liberation of Israel by the ministry of Simeon ben Koseba, Prince of Israel". There are two letters from Ben Koseba himself (one of them has been published and is discussed below), and fragments of another letter possibly from the same source, together with a letter of "two administrators" (also published, and treated of below), and many other fragments not yet properly assembled and deciphered.

Ostraca dating from the same general period are fifteen in number, mostly Hebrew, but a few in Greek; as a rule, just a few letters or a single name are legible on each—but there is one large fragment which contains a list of proper names in Hebrew, beginning with Simeon

¹ *Revue Biblique*, LX (1953), p. 268 and plate XII a. The fragment of Isaias mentioned above is reproduced in *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, LXXXIV (1952), plate XXVIII, 3, and the phylactery, *ibid.*, 1. The smaller strip of the phylactery is also reproduced three times enlarged, in *Revue Biblique*, *loc. cit.*, plate XII b.

and followed immediately after by Eleazar, i.e. the leader of the Second Jewish revolt, and the Priest who figures together with him on coins etc. (*vide infra*).¹ On a large fragment of an amphora is inscribed the first part of the Hebrew alphabet, each letter being written twice (*cf.* the ostraca inscribed with the whole alphabet found in Khirbet Qumran in 1953).

3. The third group of documents comprises MSS of the 2nd century A.D. dating from after the Second Jewish War. There are two Greek papyrus MSS: one, apparently, a certificate of debt, dated "under the consulship of Stativius Severus" (i.e. A.D. 171), the other incomplete, in which occurs the name of the Emperor Severus (A.D. 180-92). Finally, there are fragments of a Latin document, which may be dated by its upright minuscule script to the middle of the 2nd century, and in which occurs the reading "C. Julius . . ." and the words "januarius, heredibus . . .".

4. From the Arabic period come several paper fragments, including one complete oblong piece of cotton paper, written on obverse and reverse. (It may be mentioned in passing that paper, originally a Chinese invention of about the 2nd century A.D., was introduced into Western Asia and then into Europe by the Arabs from the 7th century onwards.)

In previous articles, certain general conclusions bearing on Jewish history and Hebrew script and on the text of the Old Testament, have been suggested on the basis of these documentary discoveries from the Wadi Murabba'at. The Wadi Murabba'at itself was apparently an outpost of the insurgents in the war of A.D. 132-5; in fact it was the headquarters of Yeshua ben Gilgola, one of Bar Kokhba's lieutenants. It was eventually taken by the Romans and pillaged—it was very likely they who tore the biblical scrolls—and then turned into a military outpost (hence the Greek papyri and the small Latin text). As regards Hebrew script, these dated Semitic documents of Murabba'at provide a most useful term of comparison for judging the date of the Qumran and similar MSS—the Qumran script is clearly older. The complete conformity of the Murabba'at biblical fragments with the Massoretic tradition points to the stabilisation of the Hebrew text early in the 2nd century A.D. (see the conclusion of my previous article). Several types of "hand" may be distinguished in the Semitic non-Biblical texts: a calligraphic hand (for literary texts), a style used in official documents, and a cursive script employed in letters and daily private use. Another interesting point is the employment of the language of the later Jewish Rabbis, referred to as "Mishna Hebrew", in certain

¹ Father De Vaux also mentions a Hebrew text of 12 incomplete lines, in three fragments, which may be the same as this text (*loc. cit.*, p. 261; *cf.* p. 292).

documents, e.g. the letter of the "two administrators" mentioned below. It follows that this type of Hebrew was not simply an artificial language of the Scribes, as many believed, but was used—in preference to the current Aramaic—if not in daily use, at least in official documents of the time.

LETTER OF TWO ADMINISTRATORS

The first of two documents from Murabba'at published in the *Revue Biblique* is the so-called "Letter of Two Administrators", which throws interesting light on daily life during the Jewish Revolt of A.D. 132–5. It is complete, written on a piece of papyrus measuring approximately 6 in. × 8 in., in clear regular script, apart from the six signatures at the end, which vary, owing to the different hands. The language is relatively pure "Mishna Hebrew". The following version is substantially that of Père De Vaux in *Revue Biblique* :

"The administrators of Beit Mashkô—Yeshua and Eleazar—to Yeshua ben Gilgola, chief of the army, greeting ! Be it known to you concerning the cow that Joseph ben Ariston wants to buy (?seize Heb *laqah*) from Jacob ben Juda, who lives in Beit Mashkô, that it really belongs to him (i.e. Jacob), as everyone knows.

What is more—alas !—the gentiles are drawing close to us. I would have gone up and rendered you assistance—yet, because you ever send good news, I did not do so.

Farewell to you and all the house of Israel !

Yeshua ben Eleazar wrote this.

Eleazar ben Joseph wrote this.

Jacob ben Juda—for himself.

Saul ben Eleazar, witness.

Joseph ben Joseph, witness.

Jacob ben Joseph, witness."

This letter—undated—is an official statement¹ by the two Jewish administrators or prefects² of the town of Beit Mashkô, which, during the period of the Second Jewish War, came under the civil and military jurisdiction of Yeshua ben Gilgola, whose headquarters were in the Wadi Murabba'at. The exact location of Beit Mashkô has not been determined, but it was very likely situated in Nabatean country to the south of Juda (for many Nabatean place-names end in

¹ Other commentators speak of a "juridical testimony" (*sefar eduth*), a technical term found in the Mishna : vide O. H. Lehmann and S. M. Stern, in *Vetus Testamentum*, III (1953), pp. 391–6, cited in *Biblica*, XXXV (1954), p. 134.

² "Parnasim", prefects of Jewish communities, according to the Mishna : cf. Lehmann and Stern, *loc. cit.*

ð). If so, it follows that Yeshua, in his capacity as civil governor and military chief, was responsible for a wide area, and hence that Bar Kokhba's revolt was far-reaching and achieved temporary control over an extended territory.

In the first part of the letter, these two officials testify, in the presence of three witnesses, whose signatures are appended,¹ that a certain cow is really the property of Jacob ben Juda (who also signs). Two possible reasons may be assigned for this official testimony. Perhaps Jacob was about to sell the cow to Joseph, when he learnt that someone at Ben Gilgola's headquarters had claimed it as his own. On the other hand, taking the Hebrew verb *lqh* in the general sense of "take", it could be that Yeshua himself, thinking that the cow did not really belong to Jacob, but had been seized by him in the fortunes of war, wished to commandeer it for his troops. However that be, the document reveals a somewhat disturbed state of affairs during the last year or so of the Jewish Revolt.

The second part of the letter, in fact, suggests a state of affairs towards the end of Bar Kokhba's short-lived reign, when the Roman legions were beginning a determined move into the Judean highlands. It is written in the first person singular; apparently only one of the officials is speaking, probably the one who was also military governor—unless we can conceive the two officials acting as one. He had heard rumours of the approach of the Romans ("gentiles"), and hence wished to send reinforcements from his outpost to the garrison at Murabba'at; but, since Yeshua had given no intimation of danger in his regular dispatches, he had refrained from doing so.² A customary salutation closes the letter, and then follow the signatures of the two officials, of the individual Jacob ben Juda, and of three witnesses, each in his own handwriting—eloquent testimony to a fairly general knowledge of writing at this period. The script in these signatures exhibits the greatest possible variety; some letters are like those of 1QIsa or the Nash papyrus, others like those of 1st century A.D. inscriptions, others resemble Nabatean, Arabic, or even medieval Jewish script!

¹ Lehmann and Stern (*loc. cit.*) explain that the first two witnesses were those required by Jewish Law. The third was added to testify either that the contents of the document were true and accurately recorded, or that the signatures appended were genuine.

² Lehmann and Stern (*loc. cit.*) so render this document that it all refers to the one subject of the ownership of Jacob ben Juda's cow. They translate ". . . Be it known to you that the cow which Joseph ben Ariston is about to receive from Jacob ben Juda . . . that it is his, from the spoils. Moreover, if the Romans were not near to us, I would have gone up and urged you in this matter, lest you say I did not go up to you, on account of . . . (reason uncertain: probably "notwithstanding my strength"). Peace on you and on all the house of Israel!"

LETTER OF SIMEON BEN KOSEBA

Of the two letters of the leader of the Second Jewish Revolt found in Murabba'at, the first¹ is in a legible script, which, however, betrays the hand of one not accustomed to writing. The other (not yet published) is in a different hand altogether, that of a skilful writer, probably Bar Kokhba's secretary. Moreover, since the concluding signature of the first letter is in the same style as the body of the epistle, the whole must come from the hand of the great leader himself—a conclusion confirmed by the urgency of the message it contains. The letter is written on good papyrus, about a third the size of the letter of the Two Administrators, but the document is slightly damaged at the bottom, and there is a thin vertical slit to the right which cuts out one or two letters, most of which, however, can be restored fairly plausibly. Bar Kokhba writes to his subordinate Yeshua ben Gilgola, the same chief of Murabba'at to whom the previous document was addressed :

“From Simeon ben Koseba to Yeshua ben Gilgola and the men of your company, greeting ! I call heaven to witness against me that, if you do not break off (relations) with the Galileans whom you have liberated each and all, I will have you clapped in irons (lit., will put fetters on your feet), as I have done already with Ben Aphlul.

Simeon ben Koseba, Prince of Israel”.

This remarkable letter, penned by the hand of the great Jewish leader himself, was obviously written in haste and in anger. After a brief opening salutation to Yeshua and his “staff-officers”, Ben Koseba administers a stern rebuke to his subordinate. He takes an oath, calls heaven to witness, “heaven” being a circumlocution for God, commonly met with in 1 *Maccabees*, in the Talmud and elsewhere.² He swears he will deal drastically with Ben Gilgola, even as he has dealt already with a certain refractory Ben Aphlul, if he does not obey orders. The reason for his anger is indicated in line 4, the exact interpretation of which is uncertain, on account of the somewhat compressed style and the fact that one letter of the verb is missing. It reads literally, “and break off (supplying *q* to give the verb (*w*)*psq*)”³

¹ J. T. Milik : “Une lettre de Siméon Bar Kokheba”, in *Revue Biblique*, LX, (1953), pp. 295-304.

² *cf.* the expression “kingdom of heaven”, for “kingdom of God”, in St Matthew's gospel. A fuller form of the oath, invoking “heaven and earth” is found in Deut. iv.26, in some of the Qumran texts and in the Talmud.

³ E. Vogt suggests the reading *ps*, i.e. “strike (the Galileans)”, which would favour even more strongly Milik's second interpretation. (*Biblica*, XXXIV (1953), p. 421).

from the Galileans whom you have liberated, every one". This could mean, "break off your quarrel", cease quarrelling, be reconciled with the Galileans. These would be Galileans who had fought for Bar Kokhba in their native territory, and, after the failure of operations there (as mentioned in the Talmud and Dio Cassius), fled south to Judea, where they were rescued from the Roman legions by Ben Gilgola. Then, as so often, disagreement and quarrels broke out between Judean and Galilean, leading to a kind of local "schism", which Bar Kokhba wants to see mended as soon as possible. On the other hand—a view that Milik favours—these "Galileans" might be none other than Christians, Jewish Christians of Palestine. We may imagine that, at the beginning of the revolt in A.D. 132, the Christians assumed an attitude of neutrality (as in the First Revolt of A.D. 66), but the swift initial success of the insurgents, culminating in the capture of Jerusalem, prevented their taking flight to non-Jewish regions (as they had fled to Pella before the catastrophe of A.D. 70). So they carried out literally the advice of their Master, "then they that are in Judea, let them flee to the mountains" (Mt. xxiv.16), and took refuge in the Wilderness of Judea, to the west of the Dead Sea. Unfortunately for them, it was this very region that remained under the control of the insurgents till the very end of the war. For some time, however, they remained unmolested—simply exchanging the rule of Imperial Rome for that of a Jewish military government, which issued its own coinage, inaugurated a new "era" dating from the capture of Jerusalem ("era of the liberation of Israel (Jerusalem)") and drew up its contracts and official documents in the name of "Simeon, Prince of Israel".

In the third year of the Revolt (A.D. 134-5)—from which period this letter, and most of the other MSS of the insurgents seem to date—the Emperor Hadrian drafted in new legions, and brought the best general of the Empire (Julius Severus) from Britain to command them.¹ The Romans began a determined advance into the Judean mountains (*cf.* the previous letter of the two administrators), and Bar Kokhba, on his side, sent round his agents with orders to organise resistance everywhere, and to prevail on all Jews, by violence if need be, to fight for Israel and for himself, Israel's "Messiah". It is a matter of history that the influential Rabbi Aqiba had saluted the Jewish leader as the Messiah, the "Star" of Balaam's prophecy (Num. xxiv.17)—hence his popular title, "Bar (Ben) Kokhba", literally, "Son of a Star" (*vide infra*). A star is also represented above the Temple on coins of the Second Revolt bearing his name. On the same coins, as in this letter and other documents of Murabba'at, he assumes the title "Prince of Israel",

¹ It is said he even visited Palestine in person. For this and other details of the Revolt, see G. Ricciotti, *Histoire d'Israel*, II., pp. 575-81.

which also has Messianic significance.¹ Christians were face to face, then, with a difficult situation ; as Jews, they had no particular sympathies with Hadrian's legions, yet, precisely because of Bar Kokhba's Messianic pretensions, they could not—without denying their Master—throw in their lot with him. It seemed, indeed, as if the "end of times", foretold by Jesus, was at hand—for there were "signs" of wars and rumours of wars, flight, persecution, false prophets and false Messiahs. That Bar Kokhba did, in fact, persecute the Christians is stated by Eusebius and Justin ; the latter says in his *Apology*, I, 31, "For even in the late Jewish War, Barcochebas, the ringleader of the Jewish revolt, commanded that Christians should be dragged to cruel tortures unless they would deny Jesus to be the Christ and blaspheme Him". Some of Bar Kokhba's lieutenants—Ben Aphlul and Ben Gilgola, in the present instance—evidently sheltered the Christians from his agents ; hence his fierce anger against them.

True, there is no historical evidence of the use of the term "Galileans" to designate the Christians before the time of Julian the Apostate (4th century). Yet there seems no reason why the expression should not have been so used (with a suggestion of contempt) by the Jews of Judea, in the restricted milieu of Jewish circles. Certainly the apostles were known and spoken of as "Galileans" on the Day of Pentecost (Acts II.7), and a similar term, "Nazarene", was used by the Jews who accused Paul before Felix's tribunal (Acts XXIV.3) ; it is also found in the Talmud.

Coming now to the signature at the end of the letter, it seems that the form of the Jewish leader's name—Ben Koseba—given here in his own handwriting, and found elsewhere in the documents of Murabba'at, is undoubtedly the original and correct one. The form given in the Talmud, "Ben (Bar) Kozba (or Koziba)"² is apparently a phonetic spelling, based on hearsay. The name given in Christian sources, Bar Kokhba (Greek, Cochebas) is simply the Messianic title ("Son of a Star") whereby he was saluted by his soldiery in the course of the holy, apocalyptic war—a title sanctioned, too, by Rabbi Aqiba. The etymology and signification of "Ben Koseba" are uncertain. "Ben" (Aramaic "Bar") does not necessarily signify "son of" in the literal sense. It sometimes refers to place of origin (e.g. Ben Daroma, mentioned in Rabbinic sources as one of the leaders of the Second

¹ On the Messianic sense of these titles, as shown in the documents of Qumran and elsewhere, see my previous article. Associated with Bar Kokhba in his Messianic claims, was "Eleazar the Priest", named on coins and on an ostrakon found at Murabba'at—he was probably his uncle, Eleazar of Modin, mentioned in rabbinic sources.

² Kozba seems to be the original form. Koziba (Kozeba), apparently an Aramaicised form of the Hebrew participle *kozeb*, i.e. liar, would be a defamatory form used by later Rabbis to express their contempt for the "Messiah" who had failed.

Revolt), or even designates simply "bearer of such-and-such qualities", like the title "Boanerges" ("sons of thunder") applied to James and John, sons of Zebedee, in the Gospels. Milik prefers this third signification, not only for Ben Koseba, but also for Ben Aphlul and Ben Gilgola.¹

To sum up, this valuable letter sheds new light on Ben Koseba's movement, its extent and organisation; it gives us the original form of the leader's name, obscured in the Talmud, and complicated by Christian references; it gives us, almost certainly, Ben Koseba's own handwriting; and finally, as Milik does not hesitate to affirm, it is "the most ancient archaeological document testifying to the presence of Christians in Palestine".²

It will also be remembered that, according to preliminary reports mentioned in a previous article,³ other material dating from the time of the Second Revolt was found by the Bedouin in caves situated in a region not yet certainly identified, in August 1952. As stated, this material comprised coins, Biblical fragments (including *Genesis*, *Numbers* and *Psalms*, fragments of a parchment roll of a Greek text of the minor Prophets (the new "recension" according to the Hebrew), a complete phylactery, a series of Nabatean papyri (under study by Abbé J. Starcky), and, finally, a Hebrew letter addressed to Simeon Ben Koseba, and two Aramaic documents dated "in the third year of the liberation of Israel in the name of Simeon ben Koseba". The full description and publication of these new documents will be awaited with interest.

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¹ Koseba, Milik thinks, would derive from a root (*Kusbara*), common to many languages, and meaning "coriander seed". Gilgola might derive from a similar word meaning "eyeball"—hence, "one with protruding eyes"!

² Other archaeological documents are uncertain and problematic, e.g. the Talpiyoth ossuaries, found by Sukenik near Jerusalem in 1945, on one of which was a crude cross, accompanied by two Greek words meaning "Jesus, woe" ! or "Jesus, alas" !

³ See *Scripture*, vi (1953), p. 20.

ADDITIONAL NOTE

Since this article was written, several treatments of the "Letter of the Two Administrators" have appeared from the pens of Jewish scholars. Though differing in detail of translation, all emphasize the strictly legal character of the document, and agree that it treats of one matter only, viz. the ownership of the cow; the legal attestation was despatched in lieu of a personal visit to Ben Gilgola, which the approach of the Romans rendered impractical.

Other translations of Bar Kokhba's letter have appeared: it has been suggested that the crucial phrase should read, ". . . if a single one of the Galileans whom I rescued, is harmed . . ."

A further legal document from Murabba'at has been published in *Revue Biblique*. It is in Aramaic, and concerns the sale of a house for eight silver denarii (about £1 of our money): the boundaries are stipulated, the whole house, "all the stones, beams and bricks from the roof to the ground," is made over, but not the courtyard adjoining. Finally, the document is countersigned by the seller's wife, who renounces all her claims on the property!

J. Starcky has published one of his Nabatean documents (see last paragraph of article), which testifies to the close relations existing between Jews and Nabateans before the First Revolt of A.D. 66-70.