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PREFACE

It is with great pleasure that we present this volume of essays to Prof. Israel Eph'al, respected colleague, teacher and friend, who will celebrate his 75th birthday this year. A festschrift is above all a joyous endeavor, except perhaps for the editors who have the problem of timing its preparation and presentation with a landmark in the honoree's life or academic career. We are well beyond the date of Prof. Eph'al's official retirement in 2002; but then he is not one for the inactivity of retirement. He has remained active by teaching voluntarily ever year since and continues to take in conferences and colloquia in Israel and abroad. Consequently, the present volume becomes an offering of appreciation for his continuing contributions to the Hebrew University and for his ongoing research in the history of the ancient Near East.

Those familiar with Israel Eph'al's research interest in the Arab tribes who inhabited the deserts surrounding ancient Israel will have no difficulty in identifying the inspiration of this volume's title and its cover design. And what more evocative image of desert-dwelling nomads is there than the camel? The two-humped camels appear on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III where they depict part of the tribute of Egypt rendered to the Assyrian king. These Bactrian camels were seemingly a rare commodity in Assyria and cause for public curiosity. More familiar and certainly more practical were the dromedaries that plied the trade routes of the Near East carrying "treasures on camels' humps" (cf. Isaiah 30:6). Borrowing a theme from the Second Isaiah who foresaw great riches flowing into the New Jerusalem – "a multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense" (Isaiah 60:6) – the essays in this volume are small gifts presented to Israel Eph'al, accompanied by wishes that he may enjoy many years of good health and fruitful scholarship in the comfort of rebuilt Jerusalem.

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