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The Nabataeans in History

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What is possible to write the history of the Nabataeans was done about twenty years ago by Glen W. Bowersock in his *Roman Arabia*. Recent research, excavations, inscriptions and other finds have changed the picture to some degree, but in general, Bowersock's treatment is still the best history of the Nabataeans available today. I neither want to repeat this nor give just an overview, but like to discuss a few of the problems[1]. The history which can be reconstructed from Greek and Roman sources is more or less the history of the contacts of the Greeks, Romans and Jews with the Nabataeans and it is their view of the Nabataeans. It is so to speak a history of Nabataean foreign affairs and this is only one part of their history. There is no Nabataean literature. The few, longer Nabataean inscriptions, coin legends and other archaeological evidence do not really fill the gap. Being a tribal society of nomadic tradition the Nabataeans could have had an oral tradition. This 'history' cannot be reconstructed.

There are more problems involved in writing a history of the Nabataeans. The period which can be described best is the first century B.C. and the first century A.D. This is supported by rich archaeological evidence. In A.D. 106 the Nabataean kingdom was transformed into *provincia Arabia*. The Nabataeans lost their influence in the area. The history of the second and third centuries A.D. is no longer a history of the Nabataeans, but of the Roman *provincia Arabia*, although the Nabataean population and their culture survived into the Late Roman period.

The step into history

What happened before the first century B.C. and what happened before 311 B.C. when the Nabataeans are undoubtedly mentioned in historical sources for the first time, is still unknown. I do not want to speculate on the origins of the Nabataeans, the area they occupied, and the date of their origins[2]. In my opinion, all suggestions given so far are problematic to indicate where one should look for the

[1] I would like to thank the organizers of the conference for all the help they offered and especially for the wonderful opportunity of this conference. Many colleagues gave me value comments on my paper, I express my thanks to G. W. Bowersock, S. Dar, D. F. Graf, H. Gitler, J. F. Healey, N. Kokkinos, M. C. A. Macdonald, K. D. Politis, P. Parr, J. Patrich, I. Shatzman, and F. Zayadine. M. Neujahr and K. D. Politis kindly proof-read the English of my draft; any remaining mistakes are mine. The article was transmitted in 2002 and up-dated February 2004.

[2] Cf. Milik 1982; Knauf 1986; Graf 1990; with some critics Macdonald 2000, 47–48; Hackl-Jenni-Schneider 2003, 15–19.

origins of the Nabataeans. All that can be said with certainty is that the Nabataeans are known in the sources since the fourth century B.C. Up to that time the Qedarites, the dominant Arab tribe of the Persian period, controlled the south from the Hejaz and all of the Negev into southern Palestine with a local center at Lachish. The Qedarites are known as the immediate neighbours of the Achaemenid province, Yehud, from biblical and other sources[3]. They must have controlled the frankincense trade in their realm.

It now seems that there is some evidence for the time when the Nabataeans appeared in history and when they became the main traders of frankincense from the Arabia peninsula to the Mediterranean World. Aramaic ostraca finds indicate that the Persian province Idumaea must have been established before 363 B.C.[4]. The historical context was after the revolt of the Pharao Hakoris and King Euagoras from Salamis in 385/80 B.C. For some reason the Qedarites joined the coalition against the Persians[5], probably after Hakoris won the Mediterranean coast around 383 B.C., and when Euagoras needed help to resist a new attack by the Persians in 381 B.C. After the Euagoras revolt was put down it is assumed that a reorganisation of Arabia took place by the Persians before the Persian campaign against Egypt in 373 B.C. Beside the establishment of Idumaea, which meant the loss of a large territory, the Qedarites obviously lost of their privileges of the frankincense trade. It can be assumed that they were replaced by the Nabataeans[6]. Arabia did not become a Persian province and enjoyed still a large degree of autonomy. It might be that the Nabataeans lived in the Hejaz or lived in southern Jordan and therefore were chosen by the Minaeans or the Persians to become their middlemen and by this rose to influence and power in the area. On the other hand it has been argued that the Persians lost their interest in the former area of the Edomite Kingdom after about 400 B.C., which allowed the Nabataeans to gain importance in this area[7]. All these changes contributed to the process by which the Nabataeans gained control of the frankincense from Dedan to Gaza. Gaza, the final destination of the frankincense route was granted special status as a Persian garrison[8]. It allowed the Persian King to control both the incense trade as well as the routes to Egypt by water and overland.

There seemed to be other evidence for this early period of the Nabataeans, the so-called Philisto-Arabian coins and some theophoric names. Both groups turned out to be of no such relevance. One of the consequences of the reorganisation of the area seems to be the introduction of coinage minted at Gaza, the so-

[3] Knauf 1985a, 96–108.

[4] Lemaire 1999.

[5] Diod. Sic. 15.2.3–4.

[6] Nabataeans are listed as traders of the frankincense route in the younger sources and not the Qedarites. Concerning the relationship between Qedarites and Nabataeans I do not follow the assumption of Knauf 1985a, 106–108 who takes the Nabataeans as a subtribe of the Qedarites. The punishment of the Qedarites would loose its sense, if the privilegies were turned to a subtribe in such a tribal system. Furtheron, there are differences between the Qedarites and the (later) Nabataeans concerning language, religion, trade routes etc.

[7] Knauf 1988, 76–77.

[8] Mildenberg 1990.

called Philisto-Arabian coins[9]. These coins are divided into two groups of minting authorities by Mildenberg, the first he attributed to city of Gaza, the second to regional non Persian rules of northern Arabia[10]. He described some heads on the coins as portraits of bedouins[11], among which one would expect Nabataeans following the above considerations. There is more than one problem with this interpretation and with the identification made by Mildenberg. It is not easy to trace a particular prototype; some of the 'portraits' seem to belong to a completely different context. At present, these coins do not contribute to the understanding of the Nabataeans.

A continuity from Edomites to Nabataeans is often stated, but there is a gap of some centuries between Edomite and Nabataean settlements[12]. There does not seem to be any more Edomite settlement in Edom after around 400 B.C. Nabataean settlement of Edom barly started before the second century B.C., but took place mainly in the first century B.C. and first century A.D. Petra with some finds of the second half of the third century B.C. is at the beginning of this process[13]. Nevertheless, Bartlett is not completely wrong in assuming a kind of continuity from Edomites to Nabataeans[14], but in a more complex development. Those Edomites who had not left their homes to go merging with the Idumaean population, probably returned to a nomadic life and may have joined tribes in the Hisma or other desert areas[15]. Could these parts of the regional population have preserved the memory of Qaus, venerated by Nabataeans as Qos four hundred years later? Or is Qos passed on to the Nabataeans by the Hellenistic Idumaeans, among whom Qos was a prominent deity? One way or another there is a continuity.

Petra in 311 B.C.

One gets the impression from the famous report of Hieronymus of Cardia about Petra and the Nabataeans[16] that Petra in 311 B.C. was not yet the seat of the tribe and certainly not the religious center of the Nabataeans. Therefore, one should not misinterprete the site during this period. It may be described as a camp site

[9] Gitler 2000; Mildenberg 2000.

[10] Mildenberg 2000, 382–283 pls. LVIII–LX. Cf. Knauf 1985b, 24–28.

[11] Mildenberg 2000, 385, 390–391 nos. 71, 75, 79, 80, 83, 85. Nos. 71, 75 rather portray the Great King or Persian officials because of the *kidaris*. No. 80 is of greater importance. The obverse could show a ruler, a male head crowned with a diadem. Contrary to Mildenberg it is not a cap, because the curls overlap the diadem. The reverse shows a warrior riding a dromedary. He sits in the so-called shadad-saddle and is clad with a sword. There is a thymiaterion in front of him. Therefore one may assume a warrior deity of the desert people rather than a fighting king. Any name and context given to the rider and the ruler remain hypothetical.

[12] Hart 1986; 1987a–b; Schmid 2000a, 109.

[13] Wenning 1987, 200–201.

[14] Bartlett 1979; but cf. Bartlett 1990.

[15] Knauf 1988, 76–77; Knauf 1995.

[16] His report is found in the Geography of Diodorus Siculus 2.48–49; 19,94–100.

with a few people in charge of the frankincense stores and the herds of dromedaries in the surrounding area.

Concerning the year 311 B.C., instead of the common 312 B.C., one should follow the reconstruction of Errington 1977 and Winnicki 1989 describing the activities of the *diadochs* in Syria in the years 312 to 311 B.C. They date the battle at Gaza between Demetrios Poliorketes and Ptolemy in the autumn instead the spring of 312 B.C. Demetrios lost and went back to Tripolis in Phoenicia. Ptolemy established his interest up to Sidon. In the following spring of 311 B.C. Antigonos Monophtalmos occupied the Phoenician coastal cities. From here he sent two expeditions against the Nabataeans, the first under the command of Demetrios, the second under Athenaios. Both campaigns which were intended to subjugate the Nabataeans, or at least to bring back booty[17], failed. The information comes from the above mentioned Greek officer and historian Hieronymus of Cardia, who led a third expedition to the Dead Sea.

Concerning the identification of 'Petra' (in Greek literal 'the rock') by Diodorus Siculus is debated among scholars[18]. The continuity of the place-name seems to be a good argument to identify the famous Petra with the 'Petra' in the ancient report. If one looks for the easily defendable rock with only one access where the Nabataeans tried to hide their goods, as described in the report, Umm al-Biyara is the best candidate[19]. Nevertheless, this identification does not seem to be correct if one takes the data of Diodorus seriously. In chapter 95 he gives the distance of 2,200 stades from the district of Idumaea, that is about 250 miles. This is often misstated as it is thought that the figures are wrong. But Diodorus did not describe the distance between Gaza and Petra[20] (about 130 miles), but rather the distance from Phoenicia to Idumaea. The situation is more clear in chapter 98. After plundering 'Petra' Demetrius tried to go as far as possible before camping near the Dead Sea at a distance of 300 stades to 'Petra', that is about 34 miles. The distance from the famous Petra to the Dead Sea would be about 74 miles. The distance reported in Diodorus locates the site of Khirbet es-Sela^{c}. Therefore the 'Petra' of Hieronymus and Diodorus should be identified with Khirbet es-Sela^{c}[21]. The site also fits the description in Diodorus as a natural refuge with an easibly defendable ascent.

The early material found so far at the Petra we know today identifies this site as one of various places to store goods by the Nabataeans. Gradually this site became more established. This may be due to the fact that the plateau of Khirbet

[17] It might be that the Greeks noticed the Nabataeans and their wealth for the first time during the conquest of Gaza in 332 B.C., although the sources mention only Arabs (Arrian 2.25–27; cf. Plutarch, Alexandros 25.6; Pliny, Hist. Nat. XI.33.62). The rumour about their wealth could easily have influenced these later campaigns.

[18] Starcky 1966, 886–900, 943; Lindner-Hübner-Gunsam 2001, 273–275. This discussion is connected with the debated identification of Old Testament Sela (= rock) in the Edomite mountains.

[19] Horsfield 1938,3–4. I do not agree with Knauf 1997, 21–22, who identified "Petra" with Jebel el-Hubtha.

[20] The attacks of the Greeks on 'Petra' did not happen during the siege of Gaza.

[21] Zayadine 1999, 89–90; Lindner-Hübner-Gunsam 2001 (description of the site).

es-Sela^{c} was difficult to reach, as opposed to the valley of Petra, where the Umm el-Biyara could have served as a refuge[22]. For the Greeks the 'capital' of the Nabataeans remained to be a 'Petra', a rocky site in the mountains of Edom. They did not care about the changes in that area as they had no other knowledge about it before the second century B.C. The Nabataeans, on the other hand, had names for both sites. *Raqmu* was the name for the Petra we know today[23]. The Greeks had no problem to connect their 'Petra' with Raqmu, the 'capital' of the Nabataeans since the second century B.C. Probably they did not even realised that the name shifted from one site to the other.

The account of Hieronymus of the way of life of the Nabataeans is more idealistic than it seems at first. One can romanticise the wild and freedom-loving nomads of this account. But here a more general picture of nomads was constructed by using common topoi[24]. The account should be read with caution. There is no reason to deny the nomadic nature of the Nabataeans. Archaeological evidence demonstrates that the Nabataeans lived predominantely in tents and possibly in rock-cut caves until the Augustan period, when they started to build houses[25]. Petra should be seen as a great tent site for a long time during the earlier periods.

Petra, the seat of the tribe

There are a few inscriptions referring to Nabataean traders or Nabataean slaves in the Hellenistic world[26]. The oldest reference for *Petraioi* is probably an inscription from Miletus from the middle of the third century B.C.[27]. Others belong to the second half of the second century. A few literary sources of the Hellenistic period[28] show some Nabataeans at different places in the third and second centuries B.C., but do not contribute to the question of the sedentarisation of the Nabataeans, rather illustrate their nomadic way of life. The sedentarisation of the Nabataeans or at least of parts of Nabataean society is understood as a longer process which started when Petra was chosen to become the seat of the tribe, that is the residency of the royal family and the nobility of the tribe. Dealing with a tribal Arab community in a process of transition from nomadism to sedentarism which follows traditions other than Greek poleis, this kind of sedentarisation does not mean urbanisation, but representation of the upper class. Living in tents did not exclude luxury. A royal court was established at Petra, and became known as the capital of the Nabataeans in the Greek world[29]. Among the earliest evidence

[22] So far no finds from the earlier Hellenistic periods are reported from Umm el-Biyara.

[23] The Nabataean name of Khirbet es-Sela^{c} remains unknown.

[24] Hornblower 1981; Graf 1990, 51–53.

[25] Stucky 1992, 139; Kolb 1997, 62–63; 2000, 229–230.

[26] Cf. Wenning 1987, 22–23; Roche 1996.

[27] Rehm 1997, no. 140/37 (cf. no. 174).

[28] Papyri of the Zenon archives, Poseidippos of Pella, Agatharchides of Cnidus in Diod. Sic., 1/2 Macc.

[29] Cf. Josephus, AJ 14,1,4.

for it is an inscription from Priene. The city of Priene in Asia Minor sent an embassy to Petra in about 129 B.C.[30]. Petra also seems to be mentioned in Chinese sources in 126 B.C.[31]

The regional and local deity Dushara[32] became the tutelar deity of the tribe, of many tribal clans and of the Nabataean dynasty. Whether the name Dushara is related to the mountains of Edom or describes a deity of the wilderness is debatable[33]. Being the deity of Petra, the seat of the tribe, Dushara became the most prominent of the deities venerated by the Nabataeans. Petra became the political and religious center of the Nabataeans living either at Petra or elsewhere in the Nabataean realm. Nabataean clans assembled at Petra for their festivities. The area around the center of the city is full of such places and the clans buried their dead under the protection of Dushara in the famous rock-cut tombs at Petra[34].

The transfer of the tribal seat to Petra and the gradual emergence of the capital might be dated into the second half of the second century B.C. when there is more archaeological evidence[35]. Stucky dated the beginning of a tent settlement at Az-Zantur to the end of the second century B.C.[36]. Nabataean pottery and coins developed not much before 100 B.C.; the need for these indicates a growing population. One should not forget that this development would be the background for the struggle between the Nabataeans and the Hasmonaeans concerning territories on the east of the Dead Sea and Jordan River.

The Nabataean tribe settled at Petra sometime before 96 B.C. when Dushara is mentioned in the oldest dated Nabataean inscription at Petra in the Bab as-Siq sanctuary. The well-hewn large triclinium of the Bab as-Siq sanctuary[37] indicates that one could expect such rock-cut living-rooms, cultic cellae, triclinia and tombs some decades before, though there are no archaeological criteria identifying such early rooms and tomb façades. The same is true for the dating of the betyls, the aniconical representations of Nabataean deities at Petra[38].

The First Century B.C.

The earliest concrete genuine Nabataean works of arts are coins and pottery. What is typical for the beginning of Nabataean art is a direct, though simplified imitation of Hellenistic prototypes. This can be demonstrated in coinage[39] as well

[30] Hiller von Gaertringen 1906, 84–91 No. 108, V 168; cf. Bowersock 1983, 22.
[31] Discussed by Graf 1996, 209.
[32] Macdonald 1993, 345; AAE 2000, 48.
[33] Dyma 1999; Healey 2001, 85–107; Wenning 2003b.
[34] McKenzie 1990; Wenning 2003c.
[35] Wenning 2003d.
[36] Stucky 1992, 137–139.
[37] Cf. McKenzie 1990, 170f.; Zayadine-Farajat 1991, 275–278.
[38] Cf. Wenning 2001.
[39] Wenning 2003d, 145–147. Cf. coins of Aretas II; Kushnir-Stein-Gitler 1992/93 with convincing early dating against the late dating by K. Schmitt-Korte.

as in pottery[40]. While in minor art this kind of influence is more obvious, in monumental art, particularly the tomb façades, eastern traditions continued and adopted Hellenistic forms relatively late, but then culminated dramatically in the Khazneh, an almost pure Alexandrine style façade of the third quarter of the first century B.C.[41]. Social institutions adopted Hellenistic forms and behaviour as well, as can be seen from later coin legends and titles in inscriptions. Among the social elements where Arab and ancient Near Eastern traditions and Hellenistic institutions converged is the banquet/symposium and the *marzeah*, an assembly of a particular group to carry out the veneration of their tutelar deity or to have a memorial meal[42]. Nabataean society remained a tribal organisation and the sheikhs/kings of the tribe seem to have followed the behaviour of Hellenistic eastern kings only within the constraints the tribal rules allowed them[43].

One should not overemphasise the Hellenistic influence on the Nabataeans in the late Hellenistic period. No doubt, the Nabataeans were hellenized by the end of the second century B.C., but as far as this development is reflected in the arts, Nabataean culture seems to gradually change by about the middle of the first century B.C. One cannot speak of a substantial Hellenisation before the last third of the first century B.C. The development of an unique Nabataean style in the arts follows the same gradual transition phases[44]. Characteristic Nabataean art can be found from the Augustan period onwards.

Often the coins of Aretas III, minted at Damascus during the years 84–72 B.C.[45], are seen as evidence for a greater Hellenisation of Petra. It is doubtful, though, that this conclusion can be made on the basis of these coins. They continue in style and legend of his predecessors coins. The coin legend calling Aretas 'Philhellenos' might reflect a legitimate story that he took the crown of Coele Syria to help the people of Damascus because he was chosen as King of Coele Syria by the citizens of Damascus. First in line was Aretas the legal successor of the Syrian King Antiochus XII Dionysus who was defeated and killed by the Nabataeans in the battle of Motho. Aretas did not establish a Nabataean power at Damascus, but continued the policy of his Seleucid predecessors and acted as King of Coele Syria[46]. It is difficult to establish what benefit the Nabataeans gained from his rule at Damascus. Aretas defeated Alexander Iannaeus but did not get back any 'Nabataean' cities or areas occupied by the Hasmonaeans. He could not stop him to conquer cities east of the Jordan, such as Pella. It is interesting that the Damascus coins did not appear at Petra under Aretas III. Here,

[40] Schmid 2000a, 110–125, 133, 147–150, 157.

[41] Cf. Schmid 2000a, 157–158; Schmid 2000b, 486–492; Wenning 2003d, 150–161 (with new photographs of the reliefs).

[42] Cf. Wenning 1997, 181–182; McLaughlin 2001.

[43] Wenning 1997, 179–181. See below the description of a banquet by Strabo. Cf. furtheron the critics of Macdonald 1991 on the understanding of the Nabataean society as a Bedouin state by E. A. Knauf.

[44] Schmid 2000a, 24, 37–38, 147–150, 157–159; Wenning 2003d.

[45] Meshorer 1975, 12–16 pl. 1; Schmitt-Korte-Price 1994, 93–94.

[46] Cf. Bowersock 1983, 25.

the peculiar imitations of Hellenistic coins of Aretas II continued. True Nabataean coins did not appear before the reign of Obodas II in 62–60 B.C.[47].

During his last year, Aretas III had to accept Roman sovereignty. Even the Nabataean kings kept their autonomy until A.D. 106. The decision of how to organise the Roman East was taken by Pompey in 63 B.C. with the new *provincia Syria* and the client kingdoms of the Hasmonaeans and Nabataeans. The realisation to make the Nabataeans Roman clients was concluded when M. Aemilius Scaurus undertook an expedition against the Nabataeans in 62 B.C. and accepted their submission together with a large amount of money from Aretas III before reaching Petra[48]. In 58 B.C. Scaurus issued a coin at Rome to commemorate the subjugation of Aretas[49].

Malichus I (59–30 B.C.) being mostly a loyal client to Rome (aside from the alliance with the Parthians in 41/40 B.C.) supported the triumvir Marc Antony, the legal Roman representative in the East. The love-affair of Antony with Cleopatra VII and her attempts to recreate a Ptolemaic empire is well-known. She demanded great parts of the Roman East. Antony did not grant her as much, but nevertheless gained territory in 34 B.C. This probably included the lucrative balsam groves on the Dead Sea shores and the control of the Red Sea, which was more strategic for Nabataean trade. Cleopatra made the Herodian and Nabataean kings to fight each other in order to weaken them. The battles resulted with a major defeat of the Nabataeans near ‘Amman in 31 B.C. causing the Nabataeans to accept Herod as their *prostates*, their overlord[50]. But little resulted of this defeat as Octavian’s victory of Actium and the death of Antony and Cleopatra completely changed the situation.

The Augustan period

Octavian confirmed the autonomy of both kings. He changed not the previous border between the two kingdoms apart from the fact that he gave the important harbour city of Gaza to Herod and allowed him to keep the conquered city Esbous. At that time he did not cut off other Nabataean territories. In 23 B.C. Herod became protector of the Batanea, the Trachonitis and the Auranitis, and in 20 B. C. of the Gaulanitis, areas which were of greater interest to the Nabataeans and settled by Arab tribes[51] if not partly by Nabataeans. The Herodian protector-

[47] The existence of this king is much debated. The numismatic evidence seems to support the assumption (cf. Wenning 1993b, 32–33; Schmitt-Korte-Price 1994, 96–97) and as well the Tell esh-Shuqafiya inscription (Fiema-Jones 1990), if the crucial number in the dating, year 18 or year 14 of Cleopatra, can unambiguously be read as ‘year 18’ as it seems.

[48] After 62 B.C. Aretas III is not mentioned in the sources. One should not exclude the possibility that Aretas III lost his crown by decision of the tribal assembly because of these events. Obodas II followed him in 62/61 B.C. Kokkinos 1998, 95 note 40 prefers to lower the reign of Aretas III to 60 B.C., directly followed by Malichus I in 60/59 B.C.

[49] Schmitt-Korte 1991, 145–146 nos. 67–70.

[50] Cf. Bowersock 1983, 40–43.

[51] Cf. Schottroff 1982; Macdonald 1993; Wenning 1994; Knauf 1998.

ate of these regions meant there was a kind of Jewish-Roman buffer zone between Syria and the Arab groups to the east, and the south[52], and the control of Nabataean trade into Syria to the displeasure of the Nabataeans[53].

These events did not affect the Nabataean art, though the fall of the Ptolemaic kingdom in 30 B.C. probably did. There might have been an interest in Alexandrian art for a longer period. The Khazneh may be part of this as it can be assumed that Alexandrian influence became one prominent factor after the fall of the Ptolemaic kingdom when Alexandrian artists were seeking employment. During this phase the formulation of Nabataean type column capitals, the Isis-niche from the Wadi Siyyagh dated to 26/25 B.C.[54], the dual-portraits of king and queen on the coins of Obodas III (since 29/28 B.C.) and possibly somewhat later wall-paintings and Alexandrine prototypes among the sculptures and the terracotta figurines[55]. How the great building projects and their decorations are influenced by Alexandrian influence[56] needs more study. If the first phase of the so-called 'Great Temple' was indeed an *oecus corinthius*, a peristyle building and a monumental reception hall[57], such influence is possible[58].

While an approach towards Hellenistic forms continues over a longer period amongst Nabataean artifacts, by the last third of the first century B.C. a new style was created, which is today called 'Nabataean'. This new style affected all genres of art but culminated in the great cultic and public buildings of the Augustan period in the centre of Petra which have been described as a conception of a new Nabataean identity[59]. Such a splendid new style of monumental art can be found elsewhere in the Roman East of that period[60]. Concerning Petra, the expedition by Aelius Gallus into Arabia Felix in 25/24 B.C. reactivated the frankincense route for the Nabataeans to an extent not seen before, and created immense wealth. The acceptance of temples and figural sculpture by the Nabataeans, and living in built structures, exhibiting of wealth and a hospitable royal court with many foreigners, as described by Strabo, is not only embedded in the overall

[52] Bowersock 1983, 50; Kasher 1988, 160–161, map 15.

[53] There are three aspects to understand this decision. The main reason as given by Josephus is that Augustus gave the areas to Herod, because he trusted in Herod to bring peace to the area (Josephus, AJ 15.10.1) and because Herod was highly regarded by him (Josephus, BJ 1.20.4). On the other hand, Rome did not agree to the Ituraean-Nabataean demands concerning the regions (cf. Kasher 1988, 157–160). At least, concerning the date 23 B.C. it should not be excluded, that the decision is to be taken as a concealed punishment of the Nabataeans after the failure of the Aelius Gallus expedition into Arabia Felix in 25/24 B.C. Because of the vague circumstances no official measures were taken in the first years after the expedition (Bowersock 1983, 49). Later, Syllaeus, the Nabataean advisor, was accused of treachery concerning the expedition and was beheaded at Rome for this (Strabo, Geogr. 16.4.23–24).

[54] Merklein-Wenning 1998.

[55] Wenning 2003d, 161–164.

[56] Cf. McKenzie 1990, 85–104, 124–126; Tholbecq 1997, 13–14 (cf. his contribution to the conference).

[57] Cf. Förtsch 1996, 83–87.

[58] Schluntz 1998, 221–222; Wenning 2003a.

[59] Freyberger 1998, 25, 103.

[60] Freyberger 1998, 26, 121–123.

cultural development of the east during this period, but seems to be a product of the particular political and economic situation of the Nabataeans.

Strabo on the Nabataeans

Strabo is the main literary source for some of our insights into the social and cultural order of Petra and the Nabataeans during this period[61]. Postdating the execution of Syllaeus in 6 B.C. the report of the Nabataeans seems to be written before 3/2 B.C.[62]. Strabo was told about that by his friend, the philosopher Athenodorus of Tarsus[63]. His report is very illuminating. On the other hand, one must be cautious with particular information of Athenodorus, who does not understand the tribal aspects of Nabataean society very well. For example, if he admires the Nabataean government because the Nabataeans were not engaged in lawsuits with one another, contrary to the many Romans and foreigners at Petra, he seemed not to know that the judicature was the responsibility of the king and tribal organisations, usually during the great assembly of the tribe.

Athenodorus describes King Obodas as a man who did not care much about public and particularly military affairs, a trait, as he remarks, common to all Arabian kings. Attributing his prejudice to a misunderstanding of how the Nabataean King held court and left the handling of public affairs to his vezir, he influenced old[64] and current scholarship describing Obodas as a weak and lazy king[65]. The great building programme at Petra and elsewhere in the Nabataean Kingdom and other developments which took place under Obodas, contradict such a statement as these activities cannot be attributed only to Syllaeus, inspite of his ambitious.

According to Strabo the Nabataeans publicly fined anyone who has diminished his possessions. This again reflects tribal law. While herds of camels or sheep might belong to a family, pasture land and water rights are owned by the tribe. A single member of the tribe was not allowed to give up part of it. The tribal assembly could punish members violating the law and honour all who contribute to assets of the tribe[66].

Athenodorus claims that the Nabataeans did not have many slaves since they were served by their relatives; once again reflecting an element of tribal structures. Concerning slaves Athenodorus may be correct since various inscriptions indicate that there were some slaves, though their number seems rather small.

In this context Athenodorus describes the Nabataean King as *demotikos*, acting as the man of the people (often incorrectly translated as ‘democratic’),

[61] Strabo, Geogr. 16.4.21–26.

[62] Cf. Bowersock 1983, 55.

[63] Probably Athenodorus, son of Sandon, and not the older Athenodorus Kordylion. He was one of the teachers of Octavian.

[64] Josephus, AJ 16.7.6.

[65] Bowersock 1983, 46, 50.

[66] Tribal rules of modern Bedouin societies might be different, cf. Henninger 1989, 83–138.

because the king himself serves his guests at communal meals. It is important to note the context in which this is said[67]. Athenodorus mentions banquets of groups of thirteen people, each banquet with two girl-singers, organised by the king in a magnificent style. The custom was that no one drink more than eleven cupfuls, each time using a different golden goblet. This indicates that it was a particular event with clear and possibly formal or ritual regulations. In the next sentence Athenodorus speaks about the account that the king has to give in the tribal assembly (*demos*), where even his mode of life is scrutinised. This fits very well with the position of the tribal leader, in spite of any title, to be *primus inter pares*. He is supported by the nobility of the tribe. Even though leadership is dynastic, the king depends on the nobility. He will be jugded by a successful rule and he must give benefits to the nobility. Along with positions and estates, and sharing in trade profits, he has to give communal meals in a magnificent style at his own cost. Here he acts as the *rab marzeah,* personally serving his guests, to show them that he is of no higher rank than them. A similar institution is known from the Graeco-Roman world, where a *symposiarches* or a *quinquennalis* headed an association. This was an important social element but does not seem to be a *demotikos* in the sense Athendorus indicated the Nabataean custom.

Athenodorus correctly describes that Nabataean cities such as Petra had no protective walls. This was not on account of the *pax Augusta*, as he states, but according to the tradition of tent sites and Arab-Semitic settlements[68]. When he declares that the land produces no horses, and camels afford the service they require instead of horses, he probably mixed it with his impression of caravans. From literature concerning battles as well as from archaeological evidence, it is known that riding horses was common amongst Nabataeans[69].

Another prejudice of Athenodorus was to characterise the Nabataeans as businessmen and traders, but not very good warriors. Indeed, the way they used the desert for military tactics was quite different from the Roman way of trying to win on the traditional battlefield or by laying siege to towns. The Nabataeans required a strong military power to protect their trade routes and caravans. They fought many battles against Hasmonaeans and Herodians. They participated in Roman armies as clients and at least as a dromedary unit after A.D. 106. Therefore one should be cautious to see them as such bad warriors[70]. Petra itself was not the place to show much of a military presence as opposed to Rome and other Roman capitals and cities, such as Caesarea.

Athenodorus describes Nabataean dwellings as houses built of stone and being costly. The new excavated wealthy mansion of az-Zantur IV[71] seem to be later than the houses visited by Athenodorus at Petra, but it becomes clear from

[67] Wenning 1997, 180–181.

[68] Cf. a tent site at Oboda (Negev 1983, 46, fig. p. 73) and the open settlements of the first centuries B.C./A.D. in the Decapolis and the Hauran (Wenning 1994, 12–14).

[69] Cf. Macdonald 1997, 74–75, who suggested that Athenodorus/Strabo could have received this information from Aelius Gallus.

[70] Graf 1994.

[71] Kolb 2000; Kolb 2001; Kolb-Keller 2001.

the source, that at his time there must have been more than one such house. Living in built houses had become a normal dwelling form. Athenodorus does not mention tent or cave dwellings which also must have existed, and which were also costly to decorate. It might be that he only liked to compare these rich Nabataean mansions with houses he was familiar with. Nevertheless, his statement is important for the dynamic changes which had taken place at Petra within only a few decades[72].

A well-known misunderstanding is Athenodorus' statement that the Nabataeans regard their dead as dung burying their kings beside dung-heaps. He confuses the similar-sounding words for dung and tomb[73]. No archaeological evidence indicates such a custom which Athenodorus claimed. On the contrary, most Nabataeans or at least the nobibilty of Nabataean clans are buried in huge rock-cut tombs with large façades. Among them are the Khazneh and the so-called Urn Tomb, which may be royal. There are also hundreds of shaft tombs and simple graves (some of which are of later date). There is nothing dishonourable amongst the many burials.

Athenodorus listed locally produced and imported products. Local products included gold, silver[74] and most of the aromatics, despite the fact that Nabataeans were actually trading, and not producing these. Imports are brass, iron, purple garb, styrax, crocus, costaria, embossed works (*toreuma*), paintings (*graphe*) and moulded works (*plasma*). In at least one case, *plasma*, that is sculptures, Athenodorus is again wrong. There are various Nabataean sculptures at Petra worked in the local sandstone pre-dating A.D. 106[75].

In general, Athenodorus described more what he believed to see than reality. It is apparent that he was so proud of his own Greek culture be superior, that he was asthonished to find such a rich culture among a people he considered barbarians. Nevertheless, his report describes Petra as a splendid part of the Graeco-Roman world during the late first century B.C. without any unusual feature, characterised by the previous reports of Hieronymus of Cardia.

The enigma of the Nabataeans in the Hauran

Good relations between Hasmonaeans and Nabataeans during the second century B.C. are reflected in the Books of Maccabees as indicated above. This concerns the Hauran and the Galaaditis. At that time Bosra was not yet a Nabataean settlement. There is little information about other Arab tribes in the Galaaditis and Moabitis. It seems that the Moabitis, Ammonitis and Galaaditis were neither settled nor controlled by Nabataeans. Probably the Nabataeans did not expand north of Wadi el-Hesa or of Wadi el-Mŏjib before the Hasmonaeans started to occupy territories in Coele Syria east of the Jordan during the late second/early

[72] Stucky 1992, 137–139; see above.
[73] Wright 1969.
[74] Rosenthal-Heginbottom 1997.
[75] Hübner 1997; Weber 1997, 114–121; Wenning 1999; Wenning 2004.

first century B.C. That does not mean that the Nabataeans could not have used the old 'Kings's Highway' to reach Syria with their trade-goods beside the more important route through the great Wadi Sirhan to the east. But the early presence of Nabataeans in the Hauran probably did not resulted in this trade. There is no reason to assume an immigration of Nabataeans into the Hauran from southern Jordan in the third century B.C. The evidence for Nabataeans in the Hauran from the well-known Zeno papyri from 259 B.C. cannot be taken to state the presence of Nabataeans in the region as a regular part of the population[76]. Probably these Nabataeans lived like others, as nomadic groups in the region. What seems to be remarkable, is the fact that the early sources call these groups 'Nabataeans'. Nevertheless, it is difficult to see any dominant role of the Nabataeans in the region at this time.

The situation changed dramatically in the early Roman period. During the last 20 years there has been a discussion of the so-called 'Nabataean evidence' from the Hauran in the early Roman period in terms of differences in language, art and culture from the evidence in Arabia Petraea[77]. What was described as 'Nabataean' in the past should be characterised better as 'Hauranite'. The inscriptions are currently labelled as 'Aramaic'[78]. The differences are greater than can be explained as regional features alone, and rather, point to a separate development and different traditions, among them the stronger being Aramaic[79]. Although one cannot and should not exclude Nabataeans being among the Hauranite population, it seems that according to the inscriptions there was a greater activity of various tribes, clans and groups arriving in the Hauran and moving in the area in the first century B.C. It may be assumed that some clans invaded the Hauran directly from Aramaic-speaking areas of Mesopotamia or the Persian Gulf or somewhere with strong Aramaic influence. While the Nabaṭu of the south formed a kingdom based on the frankincense trade, the Hauranite people lived as more independent smaller tribes and clans or became partly settled benefitting from the fertile land. One of the first greater settlements was Qanawat.

In 23 B.C. the southern Hauran was cut off from the Auranitis which was given to Herod by Augustus. It is not very difficult to describe the border between the two parts[80], but more difficult to understand this division. One reason might be that the southern part was far less fertile. Another reason could be that the south did not yet have a settled population in the late first century B.C. The northern Auranitis developed under stronger Hellenistic and Roman influence; inscriptions are dated according the reigns of the Roman emperors. The south

[76] Graf 1990, 54.

[77] The interpretation of Wenning 1987, 25–51 (regions B–F) is outdated by the new researches in the Hauran; cf. Dentzer 1985/86; Macdonald 1993.

[78] Scholars have just started more systematically and profoundly to establish regional differences of the 'Nabataean' and other languages of the Near East and started to discuss the consequences of that for the history of the 'Nabataeans'. Cf. Macdonald 2000; Healey, this conference.

[79] The Aramaic tradition was emphazised by J.-M. Dentzer 2003.

[80] Cf. Dentzer-Feydy 1988, Fig. 1.

was also closely connected with the Nabataean kingdom, at least since Malichus II, when inscriptions are dated according the reigns of the Nabataean kings[81]. The people living in the south between Bosra and Umm el-Jimal with cultic centres at Salkhad and Bosra, seek support and agreement with the Nabaṭu, then the most important Arabic tribe of the Near East. Probably this was not accidental. According to epigraphical evidence one can almost be sure that one of the tribes living here, the Rawahu, was related to the Nabataeans[82].

Nabataeans and Jews

In view of the of the 'World of the Herods and the Nabataeans' a few remarks on the relationship between Jews and Nabataeans should be added. The main source is Flavius Josephus. He describes the many conflicts the Nabataeans had with the Hasmonaeans and the Herodians. They had also some family relations. Often and following the literary sources, the conflicts have been emphasised in modern scholarship[83]. Contrary to politics and conflicts there were close interactions in neighbourly relations, trade exchange, activities in real estate and intermarriages.

At the beginning the good relations between the two peoples during the second century B.C. are reflected in the Book of Maccabees[84]. Petra was the destination of many who try to flee persecutions in Jerusalem, among them the Jewish high priest Jason in 168, Herod the Great in 40 and Hyrkan II in 30 B.C. Masada was chosen as the refuge for the Herodian Dynasty not only because it was distant from Jerusalem, but also because it was the nearest route to Nabataea crossing the Lisan peninsula. One reason to seek exile amongst the Nabataeans was the fact that Herodian and Nabataean royalty were related and that there had been a history of good relations for many years. The rich Idumaean noble man Antipater, the father of Herod, had married a Nabataean princess, Kufra/Kypros[85]. Their children were sent to Aretas III during the war with Aristobulus II. The Nabataean king supported Hyrkan II and Antipater in the siege of Jerusalem in 65/64 B.C., which was stopped by the legate of Pompey. Antipater put 300 talents at Aretas' disposal to avoid the invasion of M. Aemilius Scaurus in 62 B.C. Nevertheless, when Herod fled the invading Parthians in 40 B.C. and attempted to seek refuge at the Royal court at Petra, he was not accepted as a refugee by Malichus I for political reasons. This resulted in a break-down in the good relationship between both rulers.

Later, one finds Syllaeus, the vizir of Obodas III, at the Herodian court seeking to marry Salome, the sister of Herod. Herod set the condition that Syllaeus had to became Jewish, an impossibility for Syllaeus, making him an enemy of Herod. On the other hand, Herod's son Antipas married a Nabataean

[81] CIS II 174 from A.D. 50/51.
[82] Macdonald 1993, 358f.
[83] Cf. among others Kasher 1988; Kokkinos 1998.
[84] 1 Macc. 5.25; 9.35.
[85] Josephus, BJ 1.8.9.

princess, a daughter of Aretas IV, possibly Phasaelis[86]. After many years Antipas disowned his wife in A.D. 33/34 when Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip developed a passion for him. Phasaelis escaped from Machaerus to her father's court. Aretas IV took revenge with a great military victory over Antipas in A.D. 36.

Despite personal relationships between the dynasties and nobilities, and probably other people, there seems to be little evidence for Jews in the Nabataean Kingdom and for Nabataeans in the Herodian Kingdom. And there does not seem to be much evidence that one side had much influence over the other. Rather, both looked for Graeco-Roman ideas and monuments, and both were shaped partly in the same way by this cultural influence. This was lately demonstrated by a comparison of architectural features of dwellings[87]. What Jewish evidence can be found is a Jewish(?) name at Petra[88], a tomb of a Jew at Hegra from A.D. 42/43[89] and some other Jewish names and Hebrew graffiti in the neighbourhood of Hegra[90], though not precisely datable, but probably later than the tomb. Looking into the Herodian Kingdom, not a single Nabataean inscription is found there. Nabataean coins have been found at 24 sites[91], but this cannot be taken for an exclusive presence of Nabataeans. There are only a few places where Nabataean pottery is recorded[92]. Eight places are listed with pseudo-Nabataean pottery from the Herodian period made in Jerusalem[93]. It is interesting to see this imitation of Nabataean pottery. We can only speculate as to what it means[94].

The main source for an intermingling between Jews and Nabataeans are the documents from the well-known archive of Babatha from A.D. 93 to 132, concerning the latest phase of the Nabataean Kingdom and the first decades of *provincia Arabia*. Her property near Mahoza[95] was situated in the Nabataean territory southeast of the Dead Sea, the greater area in which the Khirbet Qazone Nabataean cemetery[96] is situated. While the burial customs are different, the type of the graves of the Khirbet Qazone cemetery are of the so-called 'Qumran type' and demonstrate that the same regional features can be found on both sides of the

[86] Kokkinos 1998, 229–232, 268.

[87] Cf. Kolb 2000, 277–283, 295–296; Kolb 2001.

[88] Starcky 1965, 48 no. 12. There is no proof, that this name cannot be Aramaic/Nabataean. The context of the inscription does not support the interpretation as a Jewish name.

[89] Healey 1993, 95–97 no. 4 (A.D. 42/43).

[90] Jaussen-Savignac 1909/1914, inscriptions nabatéennes nos. 172bis, 315, 386, 387 and Hebrew inscriptions II 641–644 nos. 1–8; T. J. Milik in Winnett-Reed 1970, 163 nos. 1–2 (Hebrew); Noja 1979, 288–314.

[91] Not limited to the Herodian kingdom there are 45 sites in Israel with Nabataean coins known to me. An article about these coins and others from Jordan with a stratigraphical context is in preparation.

[92] Cf. Wenning 1987, 134–137.

[93] Jerusalem, Jericho, Herodium, Masada, Qumran, Ein Feshka, Nahalat Yehuda, Sepphoris(?) and Nabataean Oboda; cf. Schmid 2000, 115–116.

[94] Schmid 2000, 116.

[95] Cotton-Greenfield 1995; Yadin-Greenfield-Yardeni-Levine 2002. It has been suggested that Babatha may have been an Idumaean Jewess (Kokkinos 1998, 294).

[96] Politis 1998.

Dead Sea[97]. The archive also demonstrates that border zones are strongly subjected to the process of contacts and exchanges.

From Kingdom to Province

Milik assumed that Rabbel II transferred his capital from Petra to Bosra in the Hauran[98]. Most scholars agree with this position though the arguments are not the strongest[99]. Changes in the frankincense trade routes resulting in less income for the Nabataeans happened earlier and did not necessitate the transfer of the capital nor a change towards agriculture instead of trade[100]. The greater importance of agriculture in the first century A.D. can be explained by an increasing sedentarisation, a growing population and the expanding kingdom. There is no reason to assume a decline of Petra or in Nabataea during the reign of Rabbel II as Petra flourished as city. The thesis of the transfer is based mainly upon a single Nabataean inscription, later Roman coin finds and the assumption that Bostra was the capital of the new *provincia Arabia*. A Nabataean inscription from Imtan of A.D. 92/93 was read as saying Dushara is 'the god of our lord who is in Bosra'. Other inscriptions indicate that the formula is related to the god who is in Bosra, not to the king.

Concerning the latest phase of the Nabataean kingdom I have put forward the idea of a religious and possible national (re)novation under Rabbel II some years ago[101]. This programme I connected indirectly with the end of the Nabataean kingdom by conquest and occupation by Rome instead of a peaceful annexation or heredity[102]. It is not very likely that Rome acted in this way because of the death of Rabbel II, moreover the assumption of the death of the last Nabataean king in A.D. 106 is totally hypothetical[103]. If Bostra was the capital of the new province[104] or just the garrison town of the *legio III Cyrenaica* is debatable[105]. The new *provincia Arabia* was officially accepted as '*adquisita*' only five years after the occupation of the former Nabataean Kingdom. Petra probably remained the administrative center of the new province as '*metropolis Arabiae*'[106].

[97] Zangenberg 1999.

[98] Milik 1958, 233–235.

[99] Cf. Wenning 1993a, 94–95; Fiema 2003.

[100] The *Periplus* of the Red Sea, dated to the middle of the first century A.D. demonstrates that the trade was still running well; cf. Bowersock 1983, 70–71. Another result of the changes in the trade seems to be a more intensive contact with the Golf area since the Augustan period; cf. Schmid 2000, 129–130. Further arguments by Fiema 2003, 39–43.

[101] Wenning 1993a, 86–93.

[102] Cf. as well Schmid 2000, 139–146.

[103] Wenning 1993a, 97–98.

[104] Based on an inscription from Madeba from A.D. 108 before the official recognition of the province; cf. Milik 1958, 244; but Fiema 1988, 112; Fiema 2003, 44.

[105] Bowersock 1983, 82–86; Sartre 1985; Fiema 1987; Fiema 1988; Fiema 2003, 44–47.

[106] The title is found in inscriptions and coins legends since A.D. 114. Furtheron, Petra seems to have been the *caput viae* for the *Via Nova Traiana*, cf. Graf 1995, 242–243; Fiema 2003, 45–46.

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