



Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 21-29
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THE NABATAEANS AND LYCIANS

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Received: 24/11/2007

Accepted: 10/12/2007

Abstract

Archaeological discoveries in Nabataean major places such as Petra and Hegra (Madain Saleh) reflect a clear exogenous influence. This study will therefore try to study the possible Lycian influence upon the Nabataean cultural achievements especially in terms of the content of the tomb inscriptions and the design of the tombs.

KEYWORDS: Nabataeans, Lycians, Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions, Nabataean architecture

INTRODUCTION

It has been argued by several scholars that the Nabataeans had contacts with several people such as Charcenians, Indians, Chinese and the Egyptians and these contacts were inevitable and influential (for more details see Gogte 1990:300-1; McKenzie 1990:99). This is confirmed by the discovery of various Nabataean archaeological materials in many places outside Nabataea, such as in Sidon (CIS II 160), Antioch (Wenning 1987:23), Puteoli (CIS II 158), Cos, Delos and Miletus (Roche 1996:79; Schmid 1999:279,283), Southern Arabia (Potts 1991), and other places.

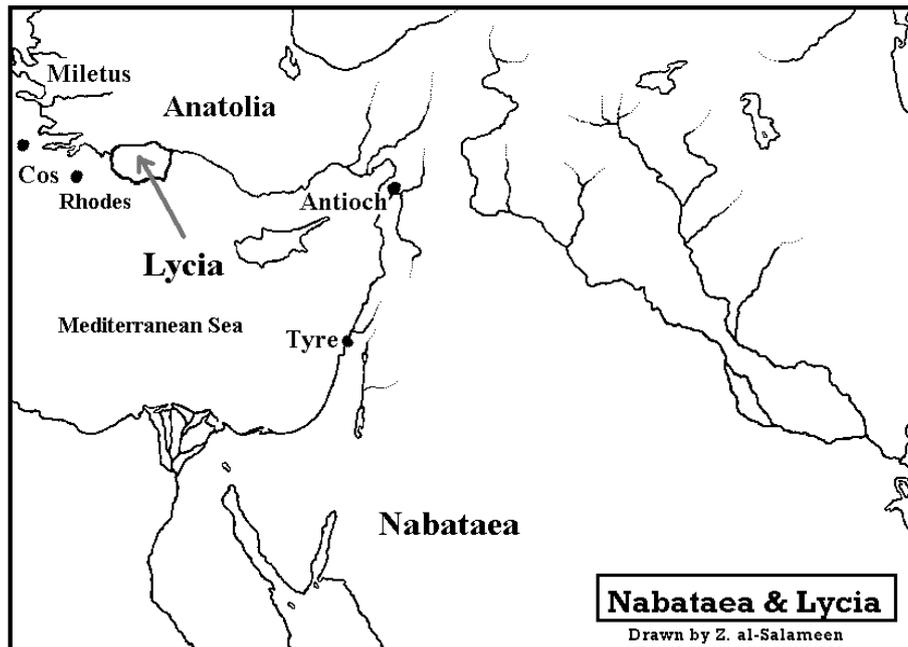
Unfortunately, we do not have enough historical sources to shed light on the non-political Nabataean contacts with the surrounding contemporary civilizations¹. There are limited historical references to the Nabataeans' possible foreign relations. Strabo, for example, in his *Geography* refers to the existence of foreigners inside Nabataea. He said that there were "many Romans and many other foreigners sojourning there, and that he [not Strabo but one of his friends] saw that the foreigners often engaged in litigation, both with one another and with the natives, but that none of the natives prosecuted one another and that they in every way kept peace with one another" (XVI.4.21). Strabo

mentions that "litigation" was behind the foreigners' existence in Petra but there might have been other motivations beside litigation such as commerce. Pliny hinted to Nabataean activities outside Nabataea. He said that Furat, a town on the bank of the "Pasitigris", was subject to the king of Charax: "this is resorted to by people from Petra, who make the journey from there to Charax, a distance of twelve miles by water, using the tide" (VI.XXXII.145).

Historical chronicles do not provide enough examples of cross-cultural marriages between Nabataeans and other cultures. The only Nabataean cross marriage is mentioned by Josephus who says that Herod Antipas married the daughter of the Nabataean king Aretas IV (9 BC-AD 40) and after a lengthy marriage, Antipas divorced his wife and married Herodias (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.109).

In 2003 the author had the opportunity to discuss the Nabataean relations with other people with professor John Healey who hinted that there was a possible link between the Lycians, who inhabited the southwestern parts of Anatolia by the early first millennium and spoke an Indo-European language and the Nabataeans, who had settled in the northern part of Arabia around the fifth-fourth centuries B.C. (for the geographical locations of Nabataea and Lycia, see, Map 1). This paper will try, therefore, to comprehend this possible link archaeologically. Before we proceed we should identify the Lycians and Nabataeans

¹ The most important references for the political history of the Nabataeans are Josephus' two main books, *The Jewish War* and *The Jewish Antiquities*. In covering the history of the Jews and the Romans, he comes across the Nabataean relations with the Jews during times of peace and war.



Map (1) The geographical locations of Nabataea and Lycia

WHO WERE THE LYCIANS?

The "Lycians" is a name given to the people who inhabited Lycia which is located on the southwestern coast of Asia Minor in Anatolia. It is mentioned in many historical sources. Herodotus states that the Lycians came from Crete under Serapedon, probably through Miletus (*Histories* 1). They were named after Lycus, the son of Pandion II, king of Athens who was exiled by his brother Aegeus and settled among the Termilae (*The Geography of Strabo* 14:3.10). Homer states that the Lycian contingent fighting at Troy was said to have been led by two esteemed warriors: Sarpedon and Glaucus (*Iliad* II). I Macc. 15:23 mentions that Lycia was among the recipients of a letter from the Roman consul Lucius Piso in the

second century B.C. regarding the Roman alliance with the Jews.

Lycia was under the control of the Persian Empire in 546 B.C. when one of the generals of Cyrus II conquered Asia Minor and they ruled Lycia until 468 BC. Later, it was conquered by Alexander the Great in 333 BC. In 309 BC Ptolemy took over Lycia and during this period Greek culture, art and language were adopted by the Lycians. In 197 B.C. Antiochus III conquered Lycia and the Lycians were granted freedom in 169 BC. Lycia became a Roman province in 46 A.D. Under the Roman rule, Lycia enjoyed relative independence until the time of Augustus (for more details see, Childe 1981: 55-80).

The remaining ruins include many rock-cut tombs and dating from the 5th Century B.C. The Lycians cut their

tombs in the rock and these tombs bear inscriptions (see for example Schweyer 2002). Almost all the tomb inscriptions are written in two different languages: Greek, which can be dated to the first three centuries of the Roman Empire and Lycian, which are older than the Greek and can be dated to the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. (Pembroke 1965:218).

WHO WERE THE NABATAEANS?

They were a group of Arabian tribes who settled in Northern Arabia and the southern parts of the Levant during the fifth-fourth centuries B.C. During the period between the second century B.C. and the first century A.D. they established a kingdom that covered modern Jordan, northern Arabia, southern Syria and southern Palestine. Their kingdom came to an end in A.D. 106 when it was annexed to the Roman Empire by Trajan (Bowersock 1970: 37-47)

Petra, the Nabataeans' capital, was an active commercial metropolis receiving goods from various producers such as Arabia, India, East Africa and China. These commodities were then to be distributed to other nations. Archaeological fieldworks in Nabataea provide ample evidence for international and regional interaction. Pottery, coins and inscriptions have been found outside Nabataea including Southern Arabia, the Arabia Gulf, the Mediterranean basin and Italy (For more details see al-Salameen 2004: 45ff).

Eastwards the Nabataeans probably reached India, China and

Charax. Westwards they reached Greece and Rome and northwards they seem to have reached Phoenicia and Anatolia, as we shall discuss below. Nabataeans are known as merchants who worked as middlemen who controlled and monopolized the trade of aromatics, which were highly prized by the ancients. These commodities were highly esteemed by the Romans, Greeks, Chinese, Charecenes and possibly the Lycians. The location of Nabataean and Lycia both help to flourish this trade. Nabataea's strategic location made it a bridge between the "producers" and the "consumers" of these merchandises. Additionally, the main incense trade passed via these territories. Lycia, on the other hand, was located on the main trade routes between Cyprus and the Levant in the east; Greece and the Anatolian coast in the west; and Egypt to the south (Keen 1998: 31-33). It is located also close to the Greek islands which witnessed Nabataean activities (see map 1). A bilingual inscription was found in Miletus which is not far away from Lycia and dedicated by Syllaeus the Nabataean Minister during his visit to Rome during the last decade of the first century B.C.(Figure 1) (Cantineau 1978:46)

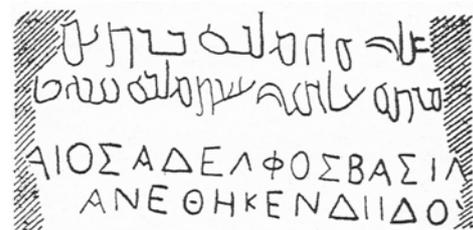


Figure 1 Miletus bilingual Nabataean-Greek inscription (Cantineau 1978.46)

Another dated Nabataean inscription was found in Cos island and dedicated the construction of a temple to the goddess al-'Uzza (Roche 1996:79). Traces of a bilingual Nabataean-Greek inscription have also been discovered in Delos (Schmid 2004: 415-426). The letters of this inscription are somewhat unclear and only a few words can be read and refer to the Nabataean minister Syllaues of Obodas and probably mention the Nabataean god Dushara (Figure 2) (Roche 1996:83-84).

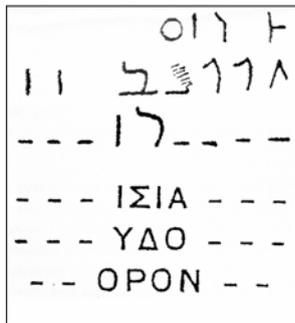


Figure 2 Traces of a bilingual Nabataean-Greek inscription found in Delos (Roche 1996:Figure 2)

Additionally, a sculptured head has been found in Delos and that maybe was a part of the dedications presented by Syllaues during his trip to Rome and represents a statue of Obodas III (Schmid 1999:279).

A Greek inscription found in Priene in Asia Minor written in honour of a certain Moschion indicates the strong connection between the Ptolemaic rulers and the Nabataeans. It mentions Moschion who was a member of a delegation "to Alexandria, to king Ptolemaious and to Petra of Arabia" (Retsö 2003:337).

In the light of the aforementioned evidence it is not surprising to postulate that the Nabataeans reached Lycia which is located within the Mediterranean basin, an area which had close links with the Nabataeans.

The legacy of the Nabataeans is mostly represented in religious heritage. Nabataean tombs and temples are scattered in many areas of their cities which indicate that religion and afterlife played an integral role in their belief. In this article I am not going to go into these aspects but will try to shed some light on the Nabataean tomb inscriptions and their similarities to the Lycian sepulchral inscriptions. Additionally, this paper will try to measure the range of Nabataean-Lycian architectural influence especially in terms of tomb architecture.

NABATAEAN AND LYCIAN TOMB INSCRIPTIONS

The longest and most important Nabataean inscriptions have been found in Hegra and these are tomb inscriptions and they provide us with evidence of Nabataean juridical and legal aspects (Healey 1993; Abdelaziz 2005:189-199). The Nabataean-Lycian link became evident after comparisons between the Nabataean and Lycian inscriptions inscribed on the rock cut tombs. After a thorough investigation and study, we are able to point out the following similarities between the Lycian and Nabataean tomb inscriptions in term of their contents:-

1. both identify the tomb owner and record that a person built the

tomb for his wife and relatives, brothers, sisters as well as for his own descendents (Pembroke 1965: 224). One of the Lycian sepulchral inscriptions, for example, reads "*this tomb Khertuhi has built (it), (son) of Tu.... For himself and (his) wife and his children and the descendents of his grandmother*" (Bryce 1978:223). Similar Nabataean parallels are abundant. One of the Nabataean inscriptions in Hegra, for example, reads "*this is the tomb and platform and enclosure which Hawshabu son of Nafiyu son of Alkuf, the Taymanite, made for himself and his children and Habbu, his mother, and Rufu and Aftiyu, his sisters and their children*" (Healey 1993:1).

2. both are formulaic, the formulas vary, but within different limits (Pembroke 1965:218; Healey 1993:1, 2, 3).

3. both contain regulations concerning the tomb ownership. A Lycian inscription reads "*others, (however) let it not be permitted (?) To their descendents to place them within*" (Bryce 1978:221). A similar Nabataean inscription reads "*and no-one has the right to write for this tomb any deed of entitlement or to bury in it any non-relative other than by hereditary title*" (Healey 1993:3).

4. both mention names of eligible tomb occupants

5. The Lycians were buried in groups and the majority of these groups were centered on the family (Pembroke 1965:226) and the inscriptions of these families contain details about arrangements inside the tomb. One of the Lycian inscriptions reads "*and he has allocated the upper chamber to his wife and the descendents of*

Mnneteida, and he has allocated the lower chamber to his own household" (Bryce 1978:223). Similar Nabataean inscription reads as follows "*and to 'Aminu belongs a third of this tomb and burial chamber and to Arsaksah two thirds of the tomb and burial chamber. And her share of the burial-niches is the east side and burial niches and so for 'Aminu, his share of the burial-niches is the south-east (?) side of the burial-niches which are in it*" (Healey 1993:24)

6. as indicated by inscriptions, the majority of the Lycian and Nabataean rock-cut tombs were built by males during their lifetime and in some cases it was the woman who did this (Pembroke 1965:225; Healey 1993:1, 14).

7. both refer to fines imposed on those who violate the tomb regulations. A number of Lycian tomb inscriptions refer to disciplinary agents responsible for punishing person who misuse the tombs and Bryce classified those authorities into two main categories: those which are deities or have religious nature and those which are secular in function and character (Bryce 1981:81) One of the Lycian inscriptions reads as follows "*if (anyone) places anyone (else) upon them, the Huwedri gods and the Lycian Itlehi will punish him*" (Bryce 1981:81). In another example we find that "*Tarhunt and all (?) the gods will punish him*" (Bryce 1981:81). Another example says that "*whoever arranges anyone (else) within on top, or whoever places anyone (else) within upon (them) will pay Aitata cattle by-way of penalty Qebeliyat to the Pntrenni mother of this*" (Bryce 1981:90). The Nabataean tomb

inscriptions from Hegra imposed two main types of fines and penalties upon those who violate, misuse or change what has been inscribed and this include the curse and payments that should be made either to the god or to the king or the governor (Healey 1993:1.3.5 .8.16). Curses occur frequently in Hegra tomb inscriptions (Healey 1993:1, 2, 8, 11, 16, 19). One of the Nabataean inscriptions reads "*and may Dushara, the god of our lord curses whoever removes this Wushuh from this burial-niche forever*" (Healey 1993:11). Fines and Penalties imposed upon those who violate the tomb are attested also in the Hegra inscriptions (Healey 1993:1, 5, 9, 11, 12, 16, 19, 28, 30, 31, 34, 36, 38). One of them reads as follows "*and whoever alters or does not do according to what is written above shall be liable to our lord in the sum of two thousand Haritite Sela's*" (Healey 1993:9).

8. Nabataean burials and their inscriptions refer to the relationship between the tomb type and socio-economic position of the owner (McKenzie 1990:115) and the Lycian inscriptions reflect socio-economic aspects. The vast majority of the Lycian tomb owners and occupants ranked amongst the political, military and social elite (Bryce 1978: 298 ff). Many of the Nabataean rock-cut tombs in Hegra were owned also by high-ranking military and civilian officials (Healey 1993: 6, 19, 24, 31, 32, 34, 38).

9. The Lycian Greek inscriptions and the Nabataean tomb inscriptions from Hegra indicate a large range of tomb inhabitants and comprehensive

coverage of relatives and family relations (Bryce 1979:296).

10. Concerning the burial rights that the owner grants in the Lycian inscriptions and this include the spouse, children and other descendents, parents, collaterals (brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, uncles, aunts and cousins), in-laws and slaves (Bryce 1978:298 ff). We should mention that these elements are varied from one inscription to another and we might find some of them and not all of them in the same inscription. The Nabataean tomb inscriptions of Hegra refer also to similar burial rights that the tomb owner normally grant and this includes the owner of the tomb, his wife, parents and their descendents as well as his sisters, brothers and aunts.

11. Burial right is granted sometimes to authorized persons. A Lycian inscription reads "*...and of those whom he authorizes/ approves*" (Bryce 1978:221). A Nabataean inscription reads "*..and whoever produces in his hand a deed of entitlement from the hand of Hani'u to the effect that he may be buried in this tomb*" (Healey 1993:5).

CONSTRUCTIONAL TECHNIQUES

It is a commonly held opinion among scholars that the Nabataeans followed the Greco-Roman, Hellenistic and Ptolemaic architectural patterns (McKenzie 1990, 99). Interestingly, there are similarities in the design of the Lycian and Nabataean rock-cut tombs (Figures 3 and 4). Most tombs are for families and their internal size

is comparatively small and is entered through steps. The Lycian burial chambers have flat ceiling and most were designed with three burials couches (triclinia) with enough space between couches to allow the movement (Cevic 2003:105). Some of the Nabataean tombs have the same design (Figure 3).

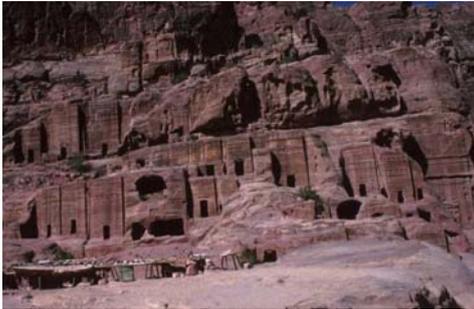


Figure 3 Nabataean rock-cut façade from Petra

The Lycian burial chambers were cut inside three burial couches (triclinia) meanwhile the triclinia were constructed some times near the tombs and not inside it (Figure 4). The Turkmaniyah tomb inscription in Petra hints the triclinium was part of the Nabataean tomb complex (Healey 1993, p. 238) even though some tombs were not furnished with triclinia. Additionally, the distribution of the loculi inside the tombs is different. The Lycian loculi are arranged in three directions of the tombs meanwhile in the Nabataean tombs there is no definite pattern and they were cut in the rock and distributed irregularly.

There are differences in some cases such as the general distribution of the tombs. The Lycian tombs (Figure 4) rise up the rock face like multi-storey

apartments (Cevic 2003:101) while the Nabataean tombs are not arranged in the same manner as the Lycian except the Petra Pylon Tombs which resemble to some extent some of the Lycian tombs in terms of their general distribution.



Figure 4 Lycian rock-cut necropolis

Lycian facades (Figure 5) are plain with no elaboration except the profiles on the doorframe and the carved ornaments at the upper corner of the doorway (Cevic 2003:99). Some of the Nabataean tombs are plain but other are architecturally sophisticated monuments but the evidence is not too much convincing to take it as an indication of an external influence coming from Lycia.

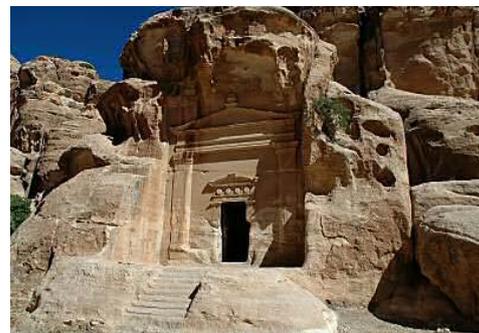


Figure 5 Nabataean Façade from Bayda

Interestingly, the main Nabataean theatre in Petra was carved in the rock and it is the only rock-cut theatre in the southern Levant (Figure 6). The Lycian theatres in some Lycian cities in southern Anatolia such as Selge and Sillyon are carved in the rock also (Cevic 2003:108).

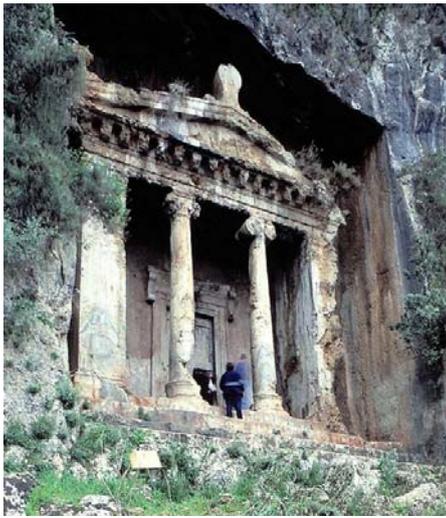


Figure 6 Lycian Façade

CONCLUSIONS

The Nabataeans were open-minded people who absorbed what attracted them from other civilizations and molded these influences within their main cultural framework. They had contacts with the Mediterranean islands and evidence of Nabataean activities have been found in different islands in the Mediterranean basin and could be attributed to their commercial activities in these islands located along the main sea trade route from Arabia to Rome.

The close similarities between the Nabataean and Lycian tomb inscriptions may be attributed to be the Nabataeans' direct contact with these civilizations or at least to their knowledge of the cultures of these civilizations and this affected their artistic and cultural achievements, while they attempted to imitate and emulate some of the foreign cultures.

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