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# HUMAN OR CENTIPEDE? EGYPTIAN INFLUENCE ON THE NABATAEAN CULTURE

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## ABSTRACT

One of the interesting and rare figures that appeared on the Nabataean painted pottery is the part human part centipede; such figure was described in literature as being of a stylized worshipping human. In this study, a new interpretation is proposed based on investigating different aspects of Egyptian influence on the Nabataean culture, where such figure could be a representation of "Osiris the Egyptian Lord of Eternity" in one of its forms, "Sepa" the Egyptian centipede god. It is assumed that the centipede symbol was used for the purposes of protecting the dead body, as well as to ward off evil spirits on the way to eternal life.

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**KEYWORDS:** Painted Pottery, Funeral Practices, Sepa, Centipede, Osiris, Isis.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the distinguished motifs that decorated few Nabataean pottery bowls (1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. to 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.) is the stylized human figure; to the best of author's knowledge, examples come from Petra (Khairy, 1987; Bikai & Perry, 2001) and Masada (Patrich, 1990); these human figures were incorporated into lavish floral motifs, which were obligatory in the painted decorations on Nabataean fine ware. In the example by Khairy (1987, Fig. 5, p. 173), the shallow bowl was decorated with a design that was divided into two equal halves by a central wreath of almonds; two human figures were arranged in a head to tail "tête-bêche" position. The head of each human figure is almost circular and surrounded with dots, divided by a vertical line into equal halves, and it has two eyes with central pupils. The figure was depicted in an Orans gesture of worshipping, where open hand palms were raised up. Khairy (1987) described the body as being of a millipede. In the example by Patrich (1990, Fig. III.43, p. 128, originally cited from Yadin, 1966); a shallow bowl is decorated with three human figures and two almond branches that divided the inside area into three parts, these were arranged

in a head to foot "tête-bêche" position. The head of the human figure was divided into four quarters by two intersecting lines, four pupils are filling each, the Orans figure of prayer or worshipping is seen here as well (Fig. 2). Another example is found on a pottery sherd from Petra (Khairy, 1987, Fig. 7.8, p. 175); the interior part of the sherd is decorated with a head of the same stylized figure mentioned in the two previous examples, the head comes circular with large two eyes with upward-gazing pupils, short strokes radiating from the head give the impression of hair, only the upraised right shoulder with open hand palm appears on this sherd (Fig. 3). A similar example comes from Petra and was published by Bikai & Perry (2001, Fig. 4.8, p. 68), where a half of a deep bowl was found containing this shape (only one) with being surrounded by dots and ears of barley (Fig. 4). The questionable part in this motif is the body which comes with numerous legs placed on each side of it, and a double tail. The author of this paper would interpret this body shape to be of a centipede, more specifically to be of "Sepa" the Egyptian centipede god and as a representation of Osiris. Besides the similarity in shape, a resembling function of protection for the dead could be assumed.



Figure 1. A shallow Nabataean bowl from Petra decorated with three almond branches and two centipedes with human heads (Khairy, 1987, Fig. 5, p.173)



Figure 2. A deep Nabataean bowl from Masada decorated with four almond branches and three centipedes with human heads (Patrich, 1990, Fig. III.43, p. 128)



Figure 3. A pottery sherd from a Nabataean bowl from Petra where the human head and centipede upper part appear (Khairy, 1987, Fig. 7.8, p. 175)

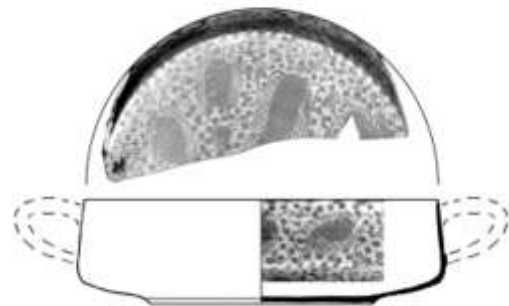


Figure 4. Part of a Nabataean deep bowl from Petra decorated with a centipede of a human head and ears of barley (Bikai & Perry, 2001, Fig. 4.8, p.68)

## 2. SEPA ON A NABATAEAN BOWL?

When the early examples of this human figure were published for the first time by Khairy (1987), he interpreted them to be of worshippers receiving the god's blessing, or possibly of symbols preventing the bad spirits effect on people using these painted vessels, since they were used in funerary meals and divine services. He then related such figures to human schematic representations of uprising arms that

appeared on Semitic graffiti. The author of this paper could find some examples of such figures: Safaitic inscriptions (1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries A.D.) (Harding 1954, Fig. 3, 358), Thamudic drawings of gods at Wadi Masil (1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.) (70 km south of Dwadmi in Saudi Arabia) (Masry, 1975, p. 26), and even in Midianite Pottery found in mine 25 in Timnah, which is dated to a much earlier period (13<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.) (Rothenberg, 1972), (see Figure 5).



*Figure 5. Thamudic graffiti (1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.) from Wadi Masil (70 km south of Dwadmi, Saudi Arabia), three human figures raising up their arms in an Orans gesture of worshipping or dancing (Masry, 1975: p. 26)*

But then one might ask, why to depict the body of a centipede instead of human, especially that the later was very commonly found in Semitic epigraphy with being involved in different acts as worshipping (Orans gesture), dancing, hunting, and herding cattle (Masry, 1975). The figure of centipede was not very common in such epigraphy; the author of this paper could find only one example in the formal website of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem/ Inscriptions Project (2010); where a centipede appeared on North Arabic Inscription in Nahal Karkom (Mt. Karkom) (Inscription No. 5549) (no date for this inscription was given in the reference), a scorpion was also engraved

on another stone in the same cliff (Inscription No. 5548), no writings were transliterated from the rijm (heap of stones) from which come these examples (Figure 6). Though, centipede is found in Egyptian hieroglyphic writings and wall paintings (see Section 4), in the Egyptian methodology, the centipede god from Heliopolis (known as Sepa or Sep) was believed to have power to prevent snake bites, besides the shape of centipede, it appeared on Egyptian art works with the head of a donkey or as mummified deity with two short horns (Hart, 2005). Since insects as beetles and small animals (the main source of visible decay and rotting of the dead flesh) are the prey to centipedes, it became clear that Sepa was a protector of the dead, and of strong association with Osiris the Lord of Underworld, this would explain also one of the forms of Sepa as a mummified figure with two horns, therefore reflecting both the role of Osiris and the prominent antennae of centipedes (Elena, 2016). The name "Lord of Sepa" was associated with Anubis in the embalming ritual since the Old Kingdom Period (2700-2100 B.C.) (Bernal, 2006); it would be then acceptable to assume that Nabataeans could have used this symbol (even with the very small number of examples of pottery vessels that contained such figure) as a depiction of both Osiris and Sepa as protectors of the dead in the afterlife (which we don't know much about for the Nabataeans). Therefore, the following sections will explain different aspects that would support such assumption; these include symbolism of centipede, and Sepa as a god in Egypt, the ties between Nabataeans and Egyptians, and how they influenced their death rituals, pantheon and arts.



*Figure 6. Graffiti in Nahal Karkom, a centipede can be seen in the right side of the photo (no date was given in the reference for this inscription) (Hebrew University of Jerusalem/ Inscriptions Project, 2010)*

### 3. CENTIPEDE IN MYTHOLOGY AND ANCIENT ARTS

In cases that a figure or table should occupy the entire width of the page then proceed as follows:

Compared to other faunal symbols, centipede is one of the least to appear on the works of art, also in mythology. It was one of the gifts given to "Lamashtu" (Lamastu), most feared demonic goddesses in Mesopotamia, she was known as a remorseless baby-killer and a source of haunting nightmares and fatal diseases. Mothers were seeking for protection of their babies by wearing the amulet of Pazuzu (a wind demon), or by sending her gifts of centipedes, combs, broaches, and her clay images in a model boat which was drifted away in a river after rituals in hope that these gifts would reach her in the underworld (Bane, 2010). The centipede was also known in the Japanese folklore, this gigantic man-eating creature was said to have lived in the mountains near Lake Biwa, it was killed by a hero named Hidesato who shot an arrowhead into her brain (Bane 2016). In the Chinese traditions, the centipede was considered as the enemy of snake. The Dragon Boat Festival was a time to brush away centipede from the home (Chinasage, 2016). The Mayans believed that sun rays could be transformed into centipedes, which symbolized death, darkness and rebirth to them (Werness, 2004). In Antioch (Syria), the centipede appeared as one of the symbols that protected from evil eye, these were depicted on a mosaic in the house of evil (2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D) in the vestibule, where a raven, trident, sword, scorpion, serpent, dog, panther and a centipede were all

attacking a big eye, from which a dwarf walked away and the word "KAICY" was inscribed above his head (Thompson, 2016), (see Figure 7). The word, which means "you too" worked with the image for purposes of warding off evil; the visitor who would enter the house with bad intentions would conversely have had a strong response, while those who would come with good intentions would have protection as well to themselves (Elliott, 2016).

All the previously mentioned symbolic meanings of centipede in ancient civilizations show that it was particularly associated with death and protection against evil. This applies well to Egyptian mythology; the god was venerated in the Predynastic Period (6000-3100 B.C.) (Mark, 2016). Since the Early Dynastic Period (3100-2686 B.C.), the Egyptian priests practiced zoolatry (animal worship) of both vertebrates and invertebrates, and centipede was one of them; known as Sepa, it was supposed to protect ancient Egyptians from the bites of poisonous animals (Levinson & Levinson 2004). This was a common attribute among deities of venomous creatures as scorpions (Serqet) and snakes (Wadjet) (Ekmy, 2013). Centipedes are carnivorous, they prey on reptiles (as sand vipers and lizards), also on insects and arachnids because they constantly need moisture in the arid environments where they live (Zimic & Jelic, 2014). This would indicate then that such symbol was considered as the strongest in protection since centipede is the strongest predator, thus would make an invulnerable amulet. The following section sheds more light on this Egyptian helping god and its association with Osiris.



Figure 7. A mosaic from the House of Evil with symbols of protection against evil eye (2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.; Antioch, Syria) (Thompson, 2016)

#### 4. SEPA THE EGYPTIAN GOD

Sepa had an important cult in Kheraha which gives its name to the modern Egyptian city of Cairo, near this city was a sanctuary known as the "House of Sepa" which was one of the sites of the interment of Osiris, the cults of Osiris and Sepa were closely related and possibly took place in the region between Kheraha and Heliopolis (the specific location is unknown), which was thought to be the Egyptian Iunu or On (Corteggiani, 1979). The "Road of Sepa" was mentioned in the Victory Stela of the Nubian King Piye (744-714 B.C.), on which he narrates his conquest of all Egypt; after attacking Memphis he made an offering to Atum in Kheraha where he proceeded to "On" through the road of Sepa (Lichtheim, 1980). There was a ritual of "The New Water of Sepa", which involved breaching an earthwork dam to release the flood water into irrigation canals in the area. There was also a festival to accompany Sepa from Heliopolis to Kheraha on his day. At Edfu, Horus was identified as "he who brought Sepa from Heliopolis to Kheraha in his reliquary, this procession was connected to the coming of the flood (Corteggiani, 1979).

The hieroglyphic name of this god was written in any of the following forms:



Sepa (Hart, 2005)



Sepa (Levinson & Levinson, 2004)



Sepa (Budge, 1960a)



Asar-Sepa (Budge, 1920)



Osiris-Sepa (Budge, 1920)

The name of Sepa was mentioned in several texts, one of these is the Papyrus of Ani (1250 B.C.), in the chapter of praises and glorifying of coming forth by day (XVII), the name Lord of Sepa (referring to Anpu or Anubis) in verse 87 comes as a part of a prayer to the lords and to Osiris to destroy all the fault within Ani as done for the seven spirits who are among the followers of their Lord Sepa (Budge, 1960). In Pyramid Texts (5th and 6th Dynasties of the Old Kingdom 2613-2181 B.C.) (Spell 91), the deceased affirms "I have gone forth from a myriad, I have appeared as Sepa", Corteggiani (1978) explains that this might be alluding to the many legs of the centipede, in Spell 280 in the same text, Haroeris is told: "your legs are Sepa" after being identified with "Becoming the Elder Horus". In the tomb of Sennefer (known also as the tomb of vineyards), Sepa was one the four gods mentioned in hieroglyphic text on the northern wall of the burial chamber; where on one of the scenes Sennefer and Meryt his wife appeared standing and being purified by a priest holding a nemset vessel in his hands, from which flows a stream of water. The text above and behind the priest mentioned Horus as the god of the south, Seth as the god of the north, Thoth as the god of the west and Sepa as the god of the east (Osirisnet, 2017).

The name "Lord of Sepa" was associated with Anubis in the embalming ritual since the Old Kingdom Period (Bernal, 2006), this title was to be found as well on wooden coffins from different periods in Egypt (which usually take the form of lid-topped boxes of an architectural decoration to be indicated as the house of the dead; one of these is the coffin of Ameny which dates back to the Twelfth Dynasty (1813-1802 B.C.), the lid of the coffin holds an inscription that begs Anubis "Lord of Sepa" to allow the deceased to cross the sky and ascend to the Great God, Lord of Heaven (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017). The coffin of Steward Chnum-hotep from the same period is another good example, where the text on the top invoked Anubis "the Lord of Sepa" and Nut the sky god to rise-up the dead to the Lord of Heaven (Hayes 1990). The name of Sepa was also mentioned within an inscription on the eastern wall in the sanctuary of Lower Anubis shrine in the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut (1478-1458 B.C.) at Deir al-Bahri, on this wall Hatshepsut was depicted between Hathor and the jackal-head god Imuit, also the western wall in the Upper Shrine (Szafranski, 2010) (see Figure 8).

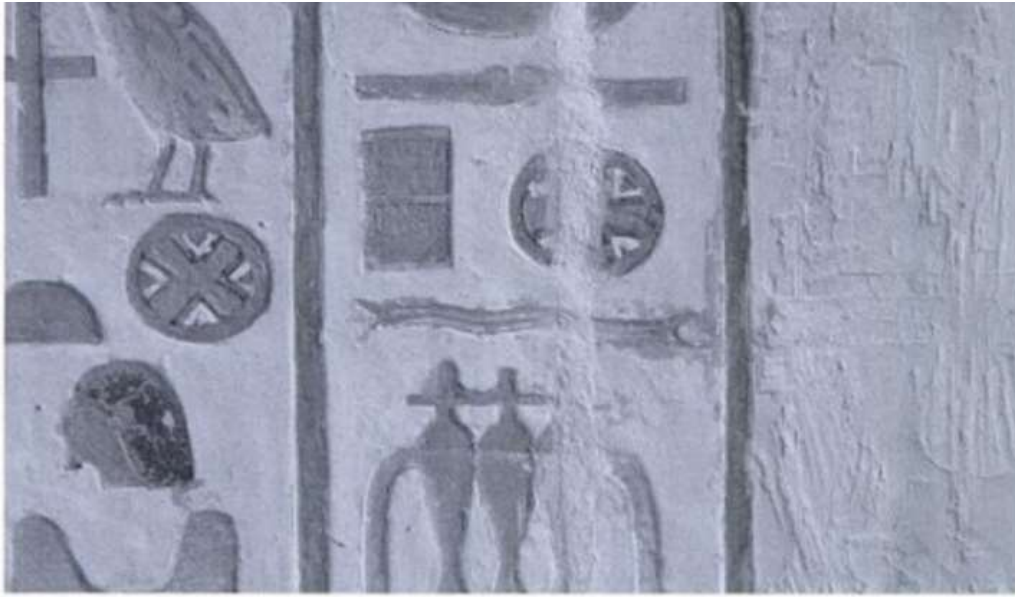


Figure 8. The paleography of Sepa as part of Imiut title in the west wall at Upper Shrine of Queen Hatshepsut (1478-1458 B.C.) at Deir al-Bahri (Szafranski, 2010, Fig. 7)

The name of Sepa was also mentioned in an inscription on a white limestone carved sarcophagi lid dated to the Ptolemaic Period, this text is known as the inscription of Wennofer from Saqqara (380-332 B.C.); it included the speech of the prophet of Osiris, the royal scribe Wennofer was addressing his lord Osiris-Khetitamenti and the other gods: "...And Horus in Roau, Anubis Lord of Sepa, hail to you, gods of the two truths, excellent nobles, lords of the court... Osiris-Sepa, most august of On's souls... Apis-Osiris-Khentamenti, god of this holy place...and Horus in Roau, Anubis Lord of Sepa" (Lichtheim, 1980). There were several names for this god as: "the centipede of Horus" (Mark, 2016), "the body of the divine Osiris" (Corteggiani, 1979), Wsir-spa was a combination of the names Osiris and Sepa, which was a chthonian deity worshipped in the neighborhood of Heliopolis, it is comparable to gods unifications that were common in ancient Egypt as Amon-Re, Re-Harachte, and Osir-Harachte (Mussies, 1979), and in some cases it was considered as an independent god "Lord of insects" (Bernal, 2006). The centipede appeared as well on artworks (not necessarily as Sepa), such as pottery and seals (Figures 9 & 10). In order to understand how Nabataeans would have adopted this religious and funeral symbol from Egyptians, it would be useful to understand the cultural ties between these two nations.



Figure 9. A blue faience scarab (664-332 B.C.), on the base the hieroglyph Amen-Re' with a centipede border (Vandervort, 2017)



Figure 10. A sherd of Coptic pottery painted with two birds, a worm and a centipede (5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) (University College London, 2003) (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/digitalegypt/pottery/copticdec.html>)

## 5. NABATAEANS AND EGYPTIANS

### 5.1. Background

The contact of Nabataeans with their sedentary neighbors had its influence in many aspects, especially in different forms of arts, religious customs where new concepts and pantheon were introduced, also burial practices (Hammond, 1973). Egypt was one of the most important trading partners of the Nabataeans; myrrh and spices from Arabia Felix, as well as the bitumen from the Dead Sea were exported to Egypt by Nabataean caravans. The Nabataeans existence was also witnessed in the Egyptian lands; there was a Nabataean settlement in Wadi Tumilat to the east of the Delta, Nabataean inscriptions were found in the desert valleys between the Red Sea and the Nile Valley (Southland, n.d.). Citing from Littman & Meredith (1953), Mohamed (n.d.) mentioned that there were at least six probable Nabataean tracks to the Nile, where they used Egyptian ports on the Red Sea in addition to their ports on the eastern side (as Aila, Akra, and Luke Come). The Egyptian influence was seen in many forms, one of these are the Egyptian large cavetto cornices in Proto-Heger and Heger types tombs, as well as the obelisks (e.g. Obelisk Tomb) which are cut from the rock behind (Rababe'h, 2010).

### 5.2. Isis in Petra

Another strong influence is seen in worshipping the Isis the Egyptian goddess (identified also with al-'Uzza, which means the very strong); in Oxyrhynchus papyri found in Upper Egypt, Petra was described as one of the centers of the cult of Isis. Besides being the wife and sister of Osiris (the god of death), she was also considered as the guardian of the dead; her worship by Nabataeans was the consequence of commercial ties with Egypt (Nehme, 2000). Isis was one of the children of Geb (earth) and Nut (sky), married to her brother Osiris (the benevolent ruler of Egypt), who was killed and put in a chest by his brother Seth (the god of chaos and darkness), the grieving Isis located the coffin which was thrown in the Nile and reanimated Osiris to conceive a son by him (Horus), then Osiris descended to the underworld to become the Lord of Eternity, his son took revenge on his uncle Seth, and became his father's heir in Egypt. This story would explain the role of both Isis and her

counterpart al-'Uzza in Petra, besides being the protecting god of the city, she was recognized as mother goddess (a counterpart of the Syrian Atargatis), also as a mourning wife who oversaw the rites of death, as a consort of Osiris she presided over the underworld, and as a goddess of magic (Taylor, 2012). She (as a goddess of stars), Dushrat (the sun god) and Shaj el-Qaum (the male god of might) were considered as the most important members of the Nabataean pantheon (Levy, 1999).

The Temple of the winged Lions in Petra was dedicated to this goddess (the temple was built to honor Hadrian when he visited the city in 131 A.D.) (Southland, n.d.). In Wadi Siyyagh (before it opens out into the centre of Petra), four niches with a basin/niche form a 'sanctuary' for small groups of worshippers was devoted to Isis (Alpass, 2010). In one of these niches the figure of the goddess was carved, though, it was decapitated by iconoclasts, she was sitting on a throne with the podium depicted in profile, finely worked were the folds of her cloak and tunic, the knot of Isis can be seen on her breast. Near this niche a carved Nabataean graffiti indicate that this shrine was visited by pilgrims. What makes this feature of significance is being close to the caravan route from Petra to Egypt (Nehme, 2000). Another statue of enthroned Isis was found on the side of the Wadi Abu Olleiq, near the Jebel Harun, it was carved on a terrace above a ravine (Alpass, 2010); an inscription dates this badly eroded shrine to the year 25 B.C. (Fig. 11) (Nehme, 2000).

Moreover, Isis terracotta and stone figurines were found at Petra, they were of the enthroned goddess wearing the basileion, some of them represented her as 'Isis in mourning' as an allusion to her grief for the murdered Osiris with her right hand raised to her cheek, while others show her hands held together on her lap (Alpass, 2010). Isis also had a central place at the Treasury (Khaznet Faro'un); her figure decorated the tholos of this monument. Another depiction was in the form of anthropomorphic betyl, where one of them is crowned by a headband in the center of which the fertility emblem of Isis appears; also a sun disk is surrounded by horns and ears of wheat (Fig. 12) (Nehme, 2000). Another Egyptian influence is observed in some of the funeral practices, which also can be related to the worshipping of Isis, the following section clarifies this aspect.





Figure 11. Statues of Isis ('Uzza) from Wadi Siyyagh (left) & Wadi Abu Olleiqā (right)  
(Alpass 2010, Fig. 2 & 4, p. 96)



Figure 12. Anthropomorphic betyl of Egyptian goddess  
Isis (Ma'bodāt Hayyan Bin Nabat)  
(1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.) (Nehme, 2000, p. 164)

### 5.3. Nabataean Funeral Practices

One of the most obvious features of Nabataean religion was the interest in the welfare of the dead; many signs of respect are reflected in their belief of afterlife and funeral practices, the well dressing of walls, well cutting of loculi, decorative embellishments, funerary inscriptions and curses, and legal means, all show the significance of death to the Nabataeans (Hammond, 1973). They considered tombs as the eternal home of the dead (Negev, 1971), there was

a ritualized treatment and reburial of decomposed corpse remains; generally, there are three forms of Nabataean burial in the archaeological record: burial in large monumental tombs with carved facades (as those in Petra and Madain Saleh), burial in communal shaft tombs (as in el-Habis and Wadi Abu Olleiqā), and single burials in cist tombs or coffins (Perry, 2002). As for the first form, one of its subtypes is the stele monument, an obelisk structure called by Nabataeans as *nephesh*, which has many meaning in Semitic languages as life, soul, person...etc. In these tombs, corpses were buried and ceremonies took place through which individuals who were present could have a mystical vision of the soul of the deceased, while the physical body was less significant for this rite, this would recall Egyptian stylistic forms in the upper parts of the tombs' facades where relief-like battlements and steps symbolise the ascent and descent of the deceased soul (Levy, 1999).

The undisturbed tombs contained articulated and commingled skeletons, which suggest occasional reuse of tombs, in addition to great quantities of pottery artefacts (painted and unpainted wares), wooden coffins and jewellery were found. For the pottery vessels, these were used in funerary feasts honouring the dead (Perry, 2002). There were also triclinia and banquets in which feasts were held with ritual meals to keep the memory of the dead alive (al-Zoubi & al-Qudrah, 2015). Moreover, in some sites outside Petra other funerary practices were revealed; in Mampsis, cedar coffins, alabaster jug, and wooden box

containing papyri were used as funeral objects, while in Khirber Qazone wrapped bodies with decorated and stitched leather shrouds and textiles were uncovered (Perry, 2002). Different symbols were carved on tombs facades for decoration and protection, these included snakes (symbolizing the soul of the dead and a guardian of sacred places), lion (a guardian and a symbol of death), falcon (symbolizing the passage of the soul to the other world and they connect people to deity), sphinx (a guardian), and rosette (symbolizes immortality and eternal life) (Al-Zoubi & Al-Qudrah, 2015). There is also medusa (a guardian and a protector) (Lazarou, 2019). Moreover, jewellery worn by Nabataeans to get protection in daily life against evil, enemies and bad luck was also buried with their dead; these pieces carried some symbols related to death as lion head, rosette, and snake, bunch of grapes (for fertility), sea shell (for birth and innovation), palm branch (victory over death), laurel wreath (for blessings and immortality), and figures of mythological figures (as Pan, Eros and Mercury) (Al-Masri et al., 2012). Terracotta figurines (in addition to human depictions) of faunal shapes as camels, horses, birds and monkeys were also put inside the tombs in niches to protect the body of the dead and in afterlife (Al-Zoubi & Al-Qudrah, 2015). There were also dolphins in sculptures auguring well-being and safety of travel in life and to the afterlife, and as a symbol of immortality (Glueck, 1965).

All the previously listed details about Nabataean burial practices indicate a significant Egyptian (as well as Greek and Semitic) influences on Nabataean culture. Consequently, it would be acceptable to assume that the centipede on the Nabataean bowl is simply a symbol of protection as relates to the Egyptian Sepa and Osiris, the following section discusses such possibility based on different aspects related to art and mythology.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A significant aspect in Nabataean funerary rituals is the use of painted pottery vessels in the feasts of the dead; according to Schmitt-Korte (1971), these usually lacked ring-bases and were broken into fragments in most cases, which explains the great quantities of pottery sherds found near holy places since such vessels were used in religious ceremonies, and were broken on purpose to prevent their reuse after giving offerings. Such painted vessels were in most cases lavishly decorated with floral motifs, animals representations were very rare and included only birds and centipedes' bodies with human heads. This would be simply explained by assuming that both symbols of birds and centipedes had specific funeral functions; as for birds, they can fly high up to reach gods, and they

symbolize the passage of the soul to the place where they become divine (Al-Zoubi & Al-Qudrah, 2015). For the centipede, it played a role of protecting the soul of the dead in the journey to the afterlife, which reminds us of its role in the Egyptian mythology. As mentioned before, the centipede or Sepa was strongly associated with death gods, most particularly during the Ptolemaic Period (contemporary to Nabataean flourishing period), where it was mentioned in different funeral texts with the following names and titles: "Anubis Lord of Sepa", "Osiris-Sepa, most august of On's souls" (Lichtheim, 1980), and "the body of the divine Osiris" (Corteggiani, 1979), that is in addition to the spells in the Book of the Dead and Pyramid Texts where its role in protecting the soul of the deceased was obvious; all of this makes it very possible to interpret the centipede on the Nabataean pottery vessels as being of Osiris with the body of Sepa, which was depicted to protect the soul of the dead. This can be supported by the fact that Petra was one of the centers of the cult of Isis (previously explained) who is also a wife and sister of Osiris, and a guardian of the dead (Nehme, 2000); consequently, the vessels depicting Osiris as a centipede and figurines of Isis could both have been used in funeral rites to gain protection.

One would argue though that Osiris could have appeared in a full human form (as in the case of his wife Isis); Osiris had attributes of many native gods of the dead in Egypt, he passed through several phases before becoming a god-man (e.g. grain-spirit, tree-spirit, water-spirit, animal spirit, star-spirit...etc) (Budge, 1911), there were also Osirian theriomorphic deities as Osiris Banebdjed, Osiris Sepa and Mnevis bulls (Elena, 2016); so possibly Nabataeans intended to have the attributes of both the centipede as a protector against evil creatures, and the humanistic figure of Osiris who appeared mostly in the Egyptian art as a mummified human. Since mummification was not a very common practice by the Nabataeans, the unification of human head with centipede body became more purposeful. This combination of human and animal was not unusual in the Nabataean art, one of the best examples is the "anguiped" (part serpent and part human), which is a Parthian influence, two examples come from Syria; one is on a stele from Soueida, where an anguiped (legs were replaced with two serpents) was shot by a bowman; another example is from Palmyra, where the anguiped was with five serpents as legs (Glueck, 1965). What might be a limitation to this study though is the very small number of pieces that had this figure of centipede with human head as a painted decoration; hopefully, more examples and evidences would be unearthed in the future archaeological works.

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