NABATAEAN ETHNICITY: *EMIC* PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Ethnicity is a self-definition more than a definition by others. The relationship between *emic* and *etic* perspectives on identity is of crucial importance if ethnicity, as a phenomenon, is to be understood. In social anthropological jargon, '*etic*' perspective of ethnicity refers to externally-perceived identity (They-ness) whereas '*emic*' perspective refers to self-perceived identity (We-ness). The Nabataeans refered to themselves as (*nbṭw*), the Nabataeans. Here we concentrate on the second usage of the term "Nabataeans" i.e. the reference of some individuals to themselves as 'Nabataeans. Five inscriptions in which Nabataean individuals referred to themselves as 'Nabataean' were discussed. These texts written by: Ubaidu, Drb, ʿtq, Mnʿm, and Mesmar. The reason for concentrating on these texts is that ethnicity is a self-definition more than a definition by others.

In light of the analysis and discussion of the five inscriptions' words in which Nabataean individuals asserted firmly that they were 'Nabataean', we conclud that the value of the term (*nbṭw*), as far as the Nabataean ethnic identity is concerned, resides in the following two facts. First, one of the main *indicia* of ethnicity is to have an ethnonym. That is, an ethnic group must have a name. Second, this name must be given by the people in question to themselves and not imposed upon them

1. INTRODUCTION

The Nabataeans called themselves (*nbṭw*) which is translated as the 'Nabataeans.' This term was employed in four different ways. First, the word *nbṭw* was used in the context of the royal title of the Nabataean kings 'X the king of the Nabataeans' or as the Nabataeans put it (*mlk nbṭw*). This indeed shows, on the assumption that the majority of these inscriptions were written by the Nabataeans, that the Nabataeans thought of themselves as a distinct socio-political entity different from other peoples and having a political institution headed by a *malik*. The importance of the latter (the king) is due to the fact that the kingship was one of the clear *indicia* of nationalism[1] in the ancient Near East (Mendels, 1992: 1). Other indications of the fact that the Nabataeans constituted a nation include: their land, their coins, and their army.

The above use of the word 'Nabataean' by the Nabataeans to refer to themselves means that they stated their identity emically. The other emic attestation of the Nabataean identity brings us to the second use of the term nbṭw, namely the reference of some individuals to themselves as 'Nabataeans.' Yet, the third employment of the term nbṭw can be seen in the context of the legal prohibition concerning the sanctity of tombs: (ḥrm kḥlyqt ḥrm nbṭw wšlmw) (inviolable according to the nature of inviolability among the Nabataeans and Salamians). This last use of this name should make it clear that it is an ethnic term rather than a family name. That is, as Starcky (1966:900) already argues, w+bn 'doit être un nom ethnique', since it is mentioned side by side with the Salamians, and we know the latter was an ethnic group. The fourth usage of the term (nbṭw) is seen on royal coins where Nabataean kings described themselves by the phrase (mlk nbṭw) (king of the Nabataeans).

Hence, it goes without saying that in all the above-mentioned cases, by referring to themselves as a collectivity, these people recognised their similarity to one another on one hand, as well as, their difference from the others on the other. Such self-awareness has been regarded by scholars as one of the key factors in forming ethnic identity since it implies the 'perception of the otherness' (Renfrew, 1996: 1996). That is, the Nabataeans emphasised that this king is 'the king of the Nabataeans' and this law is 'the law of the Nabataeans', not the king or the law of 'others' who might, from a Nabataean perspective, have a 'different king' and a 'different law'— the idea of superiority may have been involved, one may speculate. What was the basis of this perceived Nabataean similarity? It seems that it was their culture or perhaps their blood ties. However, the role of the political institution in fostering the feeling of belonging among the Nabataeans ought not be underestimated. For some scholars (e.g. Graf, 2004: 150), Nabataean identity is political and they prefer to understand the term Nabataean as a political concept.

The value of the term w+bn (*nbṭw*) as far as Nabataean ethnic identity is concerned resides in the following two facts. First, one of the main *indicia* of ethnicity is to have an ethnonym. That is, an ethnic group must have a name. Second, this name must be given by the people in question to themselves and not imposed upon them. 'A true ethnic group', Renfrew (1996: 130) tells us, 'will have an ethnonym, and it will be an ethnonym which they have given to themselves.' Indeed, this is the case with the Nabataeans as can be seen from the above-mentioned different uses of this name. Many ethnic names that are taken for granted by scholars are imposed on their bearers whether by ancient or modern writers. A clear example of an ethnic group created by ancient writers, a creation accepted by many modern scholars, are the so-called 'Celts'. The names *Keltoi* and *Galatae* are a product of classical writers rather than the people themselves (Renfrew, 1996: 132; Ross, 1977: 33). *'[...] I shall argue again'*, writes Renfrew (1996: 128), *'as others have done recently (e.g., Merriaman 1987), that 'the Celts' never existed in any meaningful sense [...].'* The so-called 'Safaitic people' is another much-quoted example of an ethnic group invented by modern scholars. In the 19th century, scholars decided to name certain inscriptions discovered in the Syrian and Arabian deserts 'the Safaitic inscriptions'. The reason behind this is that these texts appear near a geographical region south-east of Damascus named the Ṣafā (Macdonald, 1998: 183; 2009: 183). Unfortunately, this geographical name 'the Safaitic' is often extended from the script to the people who wrote it. Doing so, a new community called 'the Safaitic community' was 'born'. We do not possess any evidence of a writer of the so-called 'Safaitic inscriptions' who describes himself as a 'Safaitic'.[2] That is this term was never used by the writers of these texts in any ethnic sense. However, to say that these inscriptions were not produced by a distinct ethnic group is an *argumentum e silentio*. We simply do not know. However, in this study we shall follow the convention and refer to the writers of these texts as 'Safaitic people'. It would appear, then, that the Nabataeans constituted an *ethnos*. An 'ethnic group' is defined as:

> *"[...] A firm aggregate of people, historically established on a given territory, possessing in common relatively stable particularities of language and culture, and also recognising their unity and differences from other similar formations (self-awareness) and expressing this in a self-appointed name (ethnonym)"* (Dragadze, 1980: 162).

The Nabataeans were an aggregate of people who were associated with certain territory (Transjordan). They had their own culture, which included their unique religion, language, and material culture (al-Fassi, 2007: 12). And

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[1] For the use of the term 'nationalism' in antiquity, see Mendels, 1992: 13.

[2] For a full discussion of the term "Safaites", see Macdonald, 2009: 306-310.

above all, both *emic* and *etic* perspectives of their ethnicity are well attested. As for the former, we have some Nabataean inscriptions in which their writers define themselves as Nabataean. This indeed shows, as has already been stated, that the Nabataeans were aware of the fact that they were different from other peoples. However, the etic perspective of Nabataean identity is documented as early as the 4th century B.C. Both classical writers and modern writers see the Nabataeans as a distinct group of people which had its own ethnonym, language, religion, and personal names; basically its sui generis culture. Even if we look at Islamic sources, we will find reference to the Nabataeans despite the fact that these references are not many. In his kitāb al-Aṣnām (1924: 80), Ibn Al-Kalbī mentioned that the cult of the idols was brought to Mecca from the Anbāṭ. These Nabataeans may well have been the Nabataeans of Petra who continued to worship their deities such as Du-Shara in al-Ḥijāz until the rise of Islam (Abdul-Karim, 1990: 423).

In this paper, we will concentrate on the second usage of the term "Nabataeans" i.e. the reference of some individuals to themselves as 'Nabataeans. Five inscriptions in which Nabataean individuals referred to themselves as 'Nabataean' will be discussed. These texts written by: Ubaidu, Drb, ʿtq, Mnʿm, and Mesmar. The reason behind concentrating on these texts is that ethnicity is a self-definition more than a definition by others.

2. ETHNICITY: *EMIC* AND *ETIC* PERSPECTIVES

The relationship between *emic* and *etic* perspectives on identity is of crucial importance if ethnicity, as a phenomenon, is to be understood. Such a relationship has been a subject of scientific inquiry for many years. However, the development of social and anthropological studies, especially since the 1960s, which has led to a new understanding of human societies, brought about a radical change in this relationship. In social anthropological jargon, 'etic' refers to externally-perceived identity (They-ness) whereas 'emic' refers to self-perceived identity (We-ness). In the case of ancient ethnicity in general and Nabataean ethnicity in particular, it can be said that the etic perspective is that of the Greco-Roman writers and that of modern scholars who study the Nabataeans. Greco-Roman writers were interested in others' lives, which led them to write various accounts pertaining to certain aspects of these societies. Up until the 1960s, ethnic and national groups were portrayed as homogeneous human groups that have continuous histories; their members are not distinguishable from each other, and are objectively defined by their cultures, languages, and races. Therefore, such traits are used to distinguish certain past cultures from their neighbouring ones *sc*. to define them. The underlying assumption of this approach is that ethnic specificity is determined by the environment and race; this very supposition was the cornerstone of the Nazi philosophy (Hall, 1997: 1). This short-cut static approach played a decisive role in misrepresenting ancient societies.[3] That is, in assuming that there is a one-to-one relationship between ancient societies and ancient cultures, this approach assumes that these societies were timeless which is, in fact, a wrong assumption, to say the least. If there were no changes in these societies, how could the occurring changes in cultural materials, languages, religions etc. be accounted for? But where did these erroneous assumptions come from? It can be said that they resulted from the dominant political ideologies of the time. As James (1999: 55) clearly puts it, '[these assumptions] were based on arrogant assumptions of the superiority and progress of 'Anglo-Saxon' industrial imperialism'. These same political ideologies also explained the visible alterations in the aforementioned aspects of societies as an inevitable outcome of 'culture contact' whether the contact was cordial (migration) or hostile (invasion). In this respect, James (1999) says: *"If societies did not innovate, then changes – such as new ranges of artifacts, styles of art, types of monument or burial rite – had to be explained by incursion of people from elsewhere, usually interpreted as migration or invasion, bringing upheaval and the probable destruction of the indigenous groups. This presumed fate reflected all too well what was happening to many people under the wheels of European colonialism at that time (ibid.)."*

During the colonial period, sociologists tended to 'impose' their perspective on peoples whom they studied without, in fact, any regard for the latter's understanding or opinion of their own societies and ethnicities. Since the studied elements were regarded by sociologists as social *facts*, sociologists claimed objectivity in describing them, the objectivity that according to them was granted by the application of the 'scientific method'. However, if there was contradiction between the meaning of elements of these 'facts' given by sociologists and that proposed by the studied people, the latter perception was neglected. The Marxists may believe that they are more just as, according to them, they do not neglect indigenous views in their history, but they regarded them as 'false consciousness' (Cohen, 1985: 71). The negligence of natives' views of their history may have resulted from a misinterpretation of the structure-behaviour relationship. It is argued that it is the former that creates the latter.

If this is the case, it follows that those who live in a similar social structure would behave similarly. This behaviour includes meaning as well as perception (Cohen, 1985: 71-72). Hence, the concentration on structures by scholars would suffice to understand studied social entities.

Since the 1960s, however, the objective approach to ethnicity as well as the terminological framework of the analysis of cultural differences[4] started to be challenged.

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[3] This approach is known in America as the 'cookie-cutter' notion of identities and in Britain as the 'pastry-cutter' conception of identities (James, 1999: 63).

[4] For example, the term 'tribe' and 'race' lost their popularity in favour of the term 'ethnic group'.

This new turn in intellectual thought was a direct result of the political changes that synchronised with the end of World War Two.[5] The end of the Second World War meant the end of European colonialism.[6] It also coincided with mass immigration of different ethnic groups from the former colonies to the former colonial countries as a result of post-war labour shortages in those countries. A consequence of this was direct contact between many different ethnic groups and cultures.

In America, and during this period of rapid immigration, ethnicity was looked at as a relic of the pre-modern world, which could not withstand the assumed assimilative American environment 'melting pot'[7] where different ethnic groups would fuse, adopting American values. Nonetheless, such an assumption was proved to be nonsense. Instead, it was clear that different ethnic groups reacted to American culture differently. While the 'wheel' of 'Americanisation' indeed turned incredibly rapidly for some of these ethnic groups, it is equally true that among others this wheel *did not move at all*[8] (cf. James, 1999: 63-64; Parsons, 1975: 63-64). Not only this, but some ethnic groups' contumaciousness of their ethnicity increased as a result of the xenophobia of established Americans. A good case in point here is the Irish who migrated after the potato famine of 1845-1849 (Curran, 1966: 15).

As a result of all these political and social vicissitudes, it has become apparent that ethnic groups are not necessarily homogeneous, and that ancient societies were not timeless but rather dynamic. Consequently, ethnic groups have come to be thought of as what Jones and Graves-Brown (1996: 6) call 'self-defining systems'. Scholars now place more importance on the categories set by the groups themselves as 'conditions' for inclusion (We-ness), employing what is often termed the 'subjective' approach to ethnicity. The subjectivists, in contrast to the objectivists, give precedence to self-ascription by the actors themselves and hence privilege the *emic* perception of ethnicity. The self-perception of the members (We-ness), according to this approach,

becomes the criterion that binds these members and guarantees the persistence of their group. Such self-perception is what Fredrik Barth expressed in the term 'ethnic boundaries'.[9] In his widely influential introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, the leading functionalist Norwegian anthropologist Barth challenged the objectivists' assumption that lack of geographical and social contact leads to cultural differentiation. He asserts that a group can maintain its culture in spite of social mobility.

Despite the fact that the boundary approach has not escaped criticism, it has become the most dominant approach within the study of ethnicity for the last couple of decades. It is this approach that introduced a theoretical framework within which ethnicity as a *self*-defining system can be analysed through the mechanism of boundary maintenance. In addition, this approach provides an explanation for the persistence of ethnic groups through time. However, this subjective approach can be criticised for its absolute negligence of the *etic* perception of ethnicity. In the case of ancient history where the majority of our material about ethnicity is written from an *etic* perspective (in the case of the Nabataeans, these are Greco-Roman sources) and the *emic* viewpoint is, in most cases, conveyed through inscriptions or material culture, the *etic* perspective cannot be ignored. Another shortcoming in this approach is that it does not address the relation between ethnicity and culture, and therefore fails to explain how people recognize their commonality in the first place. Yet another weakness is that by regarding ethnicity as pure 'discourse' without any 'essence', this approach widens the scope of the term 'ethnic group' to include many other social entities such as, for example minority groups, since it regards all social phenomena as being based on culturally oriented self-definition and the boundary maintenance of ethnicity (see Jones, 1997: 61).

However, since we take ethnicity to be a self-definition before it is a definition by others, we shall start our discussion of Nabataean ethnicity from the perspective of the Nabataeans themselves, before we go on to talk about the *etic* perception of their ethnicity. Our discussion of the latter will be through treating different points in various parts of the thesis.

3. NABATAEAN ETHNICITY: *EMIC* PERSPECTIVE

Men can be unified in self-defining in-groups as long as they have what De Vos (1975: 5) calls 'common cause'. This means a sense of common beliefs, values, origin, and shared future. The recognition of commonalities is an instrumental factor in generating a sense of ethnic identity. 'An ethnic group', we are told by Patterson, 'only exists where members consider

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[5] In general, the post-war period witnessed a development in many branches of history internationally, not least social history. In Britain, what is called 'History from below' emerged, shifting the focus of historiography from the 'crown' to the common people.

[6] The formal decolonisation of the Western colonial empires started in 1947 (Webster, 1996: 5).

[7] The concept 'melting-pot' as well as 'acculturation' were diffused by Robert Park and his colleagues who were to be known as the 'Chicago School' (Eriksen, 1993: 18-19).

[8] Though it could be argued that on the cultural level the various ethnic groups in America have been affected by the process of Americanisation (Parsons, 1975: 53-83), it is still true that, beside the dissimilarity of the level of this impact, ethnic attachments have not been affected. Quite the contrary, they may even increase. For a general analysis of this phenomenon see, Barth, 1969: 33;Sollors, 1996: xviii.

[9] For scholars' attempts to form a subjective approach to ethnicity based on the actors' perception of their ethnicity before Barth (1969), see Jones, 1997: 60, note 5: 148.

themselves to belong to such a group; a conscious sense of belonging is critical' (1975: 310). Ethnicity may have some biological element. However, as far as the Nabataeans, in fact all ancient peoples, are concerned it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw firm conclusion regarding this side of their identity. Not only do we believe that the Nabataeans intermarried with other different ethnic groups, [10] we also possess little information regarding their genetic make-up. Even in the case of some modern ethnic groups, the difficulty of defining them biologically is apparent. In the United Kingdom, as an example, it is not easy to distinguish the Picts, Britons, Celts, Angles, Saxons, Danes, and Normans according to their biological features (Kellas, 1998: 19).

However, one of the most serious methodological obstacles to the study of ancient ethnicity is the difficulty we have in accessing peoples' self-perceived commonalities. The main reason is plain, namely the lack of written sources by native peoples. As a result, we have to utilize sources written from an *etic* perspective, in particular the works of Greco-Roman writers. This, in itself, is another layer of complexity to the question. Hence, these classical sources need to be treated carefully and located within their political context.

We have around five instances in which Nabataean individuals stated that they were 'Nabataean'.[11] In these cases, we can safely assert a Nabataean ethnicity. The reason is that ethnicity is a *self*-definition more than a definition by others. That is, ethnic groups 'are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves […]' (Barth, 1969: 10). What this means is that ethnicity needs to be looked at from within and examined through the categories used by the actors themselves to define themselves *vis-à-vis* others in social interaction. Indeed, this *emic* or psychological aspect of ethnic identity is the more informative of the two categories. 'How one learns about oneself by contrasting oneself to other individuals and groups is important, for only in this way does one develop a strong sense of self ', argue De Vos and Romanucci-Ross (1975: 368).

However, before we discuss these texts, a comment needs to be made upon their representation of Nabataean society. We do not expect these epigraphic materials to give a complete picture of Nabataean society. First, many other similar Nabataean inscriptions that touch upon the question of ethnicity must have disappeared given the unfavourable climatic conditions of the area. Second, it is not likely that the different strata of the Nabataean society had an equal opportunity in accessing writing. The elite and upper classes are expected to be able to present

themselves in writing unlike others. Therefore, while these texts give an indication of the Nabataeans' sense of their ethnicity, they do not tell the whole story.

3.1 Ubaidu the Nabataean

The first inscription comes from Palmyra and is dated to the year 132 A.D. (twenty four years after the annexation of Nabataea). In this inscription, *ʿbydw br ʿnmw*, who was a cavalryman in the Roman army, defined himself as a Nabataean, *nbṭyʾ*, of the Rawāḥ tribe. The inscription, written in Palmyrene, runs:

(1) [t]rtyn ʿlwtʾ ʾlh ʿbd ʿbydw br ʿnmw (2) [b]r šʿdlt nbtyʾ rwḥyʾ dy hwʾ prš (3) [b]ḥyrtʾ wbmšrytʾ dy ʿnʾ (4) lšyʿʾlqwm ʾlhʾ ṭbʾ wškrʾ dy lʾ (5) štʾ ḥmr ʿl ḥywhy wḥyy mʿyty (6) wʿbydw ʾiwhy wšʿdlt brh byrḥ (7) ʾlwl šnt 442 wdkyr zbyd (8) šmʿwn br blʿqb gyrh wrḥmh qdm (9) šyʿʾlqwm ʾlhʾ ṭbʾ wdkyr kl (10) mʿyd ʿlwtʾ ʾln wʾmr dkyryn (11) …ʾln klhwn bṭb

Translation (*cf.* Littmann, 1904: 70, no. 76)

These two altars have been made by ʿUbaidu, son of ʿAnimu, [s]on of Saʿd-allath, the Nabataean, of the Rûḥu tribe, who was a horseman in the fort and camp of ʿAna, to Sheʿa-alqûm, the good and bountiful god, who does not drink (?) wine, for his life and the life of Muʿîthi and ʿAddu his brothers, and Saʿd-allath his son; in the month Elûl, the year 442. And remembered be Zebîda, son of Shimʿon, son of Bel-ʿaqab, his patron and friend, before Sheʿa-alqûm the good god; and remembered be every one…visits (?) these altars, and says, 'Remembered be all these …for good!'[12]

In this inscription, ʿUbaidu stated that he was a Nabataean. This *emic* perspective of ethnicity is the surest indication of ethnic identity. However, even if ʿUbaidu had not mentioned explicitly that he was a Nabataean, *nbṭyʾ*, there are other markers in the inscription that may indicate his Nabataeanness. First, there is the dedicant's name. ʿUbaidu, son of ʿanimu, is a typical Nabataean name. Second, the other personal names mentioned are also Nabataean (e.g. Saʿd-allath). Third, Shayʿ-al-Qawm is a known Nabataean deity whose worship was widespread despite the fact that his mention in Nabataean inscriptions was limited (Healey, 2001: 144).[13] This deity was known throughout the Nabataean realm whether in the north or the south. All of these make the inscription, as Cooke (1903: 304) has already noted, 'Nabataean in character.'

ʿUbaidu may have needed to define himself as a Nabataean because he felt that he was a foreigner among the Palmyrenes and others. This feeling may be seen in the word *gyrh*, 'his partner' (line 8). As a stranger, ʿUbaidu needed to establish himself with a native

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[10] We know, for example, that the mother of King Herod the Great was a Nabataean (Gross, 1962 : 29; Marshak, 2015: 83).

[11] This can be six if we take the word *nbṭw* which occurs in al-Theeb, 1993: 115, n. 133 as a continuation of the previous inscription (n. 32) which consists only of a single name. In this case, the reading could be *šnypw nbṭw* (*šnypw* the Nabataean). However, it should be noted that *nbṭw* does appear in Nabataean texts as a personal name (al-Theeb, 1993: 137, n. 164).

[12] For a quite different reading, see Healey, 2001: 145.

[13] However, this deity is also invoked in the so-called Ṣafaitic inscriptions (Knauf, 1990: 176).

inhabitant of Palmyra in order to give himself a sense of protection (Littmann, 1904: 72). Therefore, he identifies himself with Zebîda, son of Shimʿon, son of Bel-ʿaqab to be his *jar* (πρόξενος). However, his need for a *gyr* was not only driven by a necessity of protection as Littmann argued. In the customs of pre-Islamic Arabs, a stranger needed to associate himself with a native person (usually an influential person) so that he could be accepted by the new society; this custom was called *jiwār*. Fortunately, this custom can also be seen in the Nabataean society. In a Nabataean inscription, though inscribed by a Taymanite woman, from Ḥegrā, we find among those mentioned in the text 'all those who were under her protection and the protection of her daughters' *wgrhm klh* (Healey, 1993: 137). A similar custom can be seen outside the ancient Near East. In Greece and Italy, in order for a foreigner to be protected by the law, enjoy his property, conduct his own business, engage in trade activities, or even write a contract, he needed to be a client of a native. Basically, without a citizen patron he was not eligible for basic 'human rights' (Denis, 1980: 189). The only channel that connected him with the natives was his πρόξενος. All of this shows the evident importance of Zebîda to ʿUbaidu.

However, ʿUbaidu was not content merely to mention his general identity, namely his Nabataeanness, but he went on to mention his tribal affiliation. Here, the word-order is important. He followed the customary practice in inscriptions where more than one identity is claimed *i.e.* placing the larger social organization first (Macdonald, 1993: 352). Hence, ʿUbaidu 'the Nabataean' precedes ʿUbaidu of the Rûḥu tribe. This double identity *nbtʾ rwḥyʾ* can be attributed to more than one factor. First, he might have anticipated prior knowledge, by those surrounding him, of the Nabataeans. In this case, identifying himself with the Nabataeans would not really be enough since we might expect them to have asked a question such as 'from which particular Nabataean clan?' This is of course a common reaction when you are familiar with a person's general socio-cultural background. If you meet an English person and you already have knowledge about England, and he says he is from England, the second natural question will be to ask from which part of England, which will lead him to give a double identity: an Englishmen from Manchester, for instance. However, if you are not familiar with England and English culture, you will see his Englishness as his ultimate identity and no further elaboration will be asked for. This seems to fit very well with ʿUbaidu's case: he wrote his inscription in Palmyra where the Palmyrenes must have been at home with the Nabataeans and Nabataean culture. This very last fact may have been behind Ubaidu's preference for service in the Palmyrene army rather than that of the Romans (Knauf, 1990: 176).

Second, ʿUbaidu may have wanted to distinguish himself from other people who could also be included under the name 'Nabataean'. This is because although ethnicity is a differentiation between 'Us' and 'Them', there are, actually, different type of 'Us' and 'Them.' This is due to notions of social distance, which lead to differing degrees of inclusion and exclusion (Eriksen, 1993: 25). Hence, if ʿUbaidu wanted to keep himself distant from other people who could also be included under the name 'Nabataean', he may have looked negatively at them and thus desired to dissociate himself from the negative characteristics associated with them (whether deservedly or otherwise). Hence, he seems to have felt the need to assign himself a double identity. He may have wanted to say ' yes I am a Nabataean but not a Nabataean of X tribe; I am a Nabataean of the Rûḥu tribe.' To him, there may have been differences between these two kinds of Nabataeanness, one of which may be seen in the phrase *dy lʾ štʾ ḥmr* as a descriptor of his deity. That is to say, by indicating that his god does not drink wine (the perfect *štʾ* indicates a general statement) (Knauf, 1990: 176), he may have wanted to say 'I am a Nabataean of the Rûḥu tribe whose deity does not drink wine, unlike other Nabataeans, whose god Du-Shara (presumably) does drink wine.'

Hence, some scholars understand the phrase *dy lʾ štʾ ḥmr* as a reflection of internal conflict within the Nabataean society. In other words, they think that this phrase is mentioned as 'a protest against the Dionysiac cult of Dûshara' (Cooke, 1903: 305). The opposition between Shayʿ-al-Qawm who does not drink wine and Du-Shara who is equated with Dionysus as a deity of royal drinking among the Nabataeans has already been mentioned by some scholars. However, Knauf argues that these two 'gods' were two elements of one and the same deity since both Shayʿ-al-Qawm and Du-Shara are titles rather than actual names (1990: 179). In any event, the question that presents itself here is why does Shayʿ-al-Qawm not drink wine? Knauf (1990: 177) offers two reasons. Since Shayʿ-al-Qawm was the god of war, the drinking of alcohol would prevent him from fulfilling his duty appropriately. Hence, he, as well as his followers, did not drink wine in times of war. The other reason is that he never drank wine, like his devotees. Hence, the Rûḥu tribe did not drink wine, as it was forbidden by its god. This would reflect clearly how the Nabataean people differ in their reaction to the different cultural influences in which they found themselves either by virtue of their geographical location or by virtue of their commercial activities – both were well connected. As in many other ancient Arabian tribes, some *strata* of the Nabataean social body abstained from drinking wine. We are told by Diodorus Siculus (94. 3) that:

νόμος δ' ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς μήτε σῖτον σπείρειν μήτε φυτεύειν μηδὲν φυτὸν καρποφόρο μήτε οἴνῳ χρῆσθαι μήτε οἰκίαν κατασκευάζειν·

It is their custom to refrain from planting grain, setting out any fruit-bearing tree, using wine, and constructing any house.

Though we believe that Diodorus' account of the Nabataeans was exaggerated to give a nomadic picture of them which contradicts the usual Greek way of life as a means of emphasising the latter identity (see the Nabataeans in the Classical Sources), it is perfectly possible that some sections of the Nabataeans did not

drink alcohol. This may be supported, apart from ʿUbaidu's inscription, by the fact that it was an old Arab custom not to drink wine, which existed before the Nabataeans and is mentioned long before Diodorus Siculus. So old a custom was to form a belief of the yet-to-be-born religion of Islam (see Healey, 2001: 192). In the Bible, when Jeremiah invited the house of the Rechabites to the house of Yahweh, as the latter ordered him, and offered them wine, they replied to him: 'We [the Rechabites] will not drink wine, for Jonadab, the son of Rechab our father, commanded us, saying, you shall not drink wine, you nor your sons forever' (Jeremiah, 35, 5-6). From the 3rd century A.D., we have a Roman reference to such an Arab custom. According to the Historia Augusta, after a defeat of a Roman army by the Saracens, Niger talked to the Roman soldiers. The latter related their defeat to the fact that they did not have wine: 'We get no wine, we cannot fight.' 'Shame on you', says Niger, 'for your victors drink water' (Isaac, 1992: 73).

At any rate, the Rûḥu tribe members wanted to express their identity by emphasising their abstention from drinking wine. This symbolic expression of identity clearly reflects how the *past* functions in the assertion of the *present* identity. That is, ʿUbaidu, in order to express his identity, looked at the past of his group. However, in these cases, the past is always approached selectively in a way that fits the present circumstances. Hence, in order to understand such present action, one must view it in its past context.[14]

3.2 *Drb, ʿtq, Mnʿm, and Mesmar, the Nabataeans*

Apart from ʿUbaidu's inscription above, we have some Safaitic inscriptions and a Greek one in which writers designated themselves as 'Nabataeans'. In a Safaitic text, drb bn qn refers to himself as a Nabataean hnbṯ[y] (Graf, 1989: 370). Recently, three Safaitic inscriptions have been uncovered near Rijim Mushbic. Two of these texts were written by individuals who designated themselves as 'Nabataeans'. The first one runs:

> *l ʿtq bn sd h-nbṭy* (By Atiq son of Asad, the Nabataean)

Though the name *ʿtq* is new in Nabataean (Arabic ʿAtiq), the name Asad is found six times among Nabataean personal names (Negev, 1991: 15).

The second inscription reads:

> *lmnʿm bn ʾrsmnwt bn ʾbgr bn ˟tl h-nbṭy* (By Mnʿm son of ʾrsmnwt son of Abgar son of ˟tl, the Nabataean)

The names *Mnʿm*, *ʾbgr*, and *˟tl* are common in Nabataean, whereas *ʾrsmnwt* is not. It appears once in Safaitic. It is significant here that the name *mnwt(w)* is

written in accordance with the Nabataean spelling rather than the Safaitic. In the latter, this name is usually written *mnt* (Macdonald, *et al.*, 1996: 446).

The fourth inscription in which an individual referred to himself as a 'Nabataean' comes from al-Namārah and is written in Greek. It runs:

> Μεσάμερος ἱππεὺς Κυρ(ηναικῆς), γένος Νάβας.

Here, Mesmar refers to himself as a Nabataean (γένος Νάβας).[15] This sense of identity may have been generated by the fact that native soldiers were mixed up with 'foreigners'. We know that, later, some other units came to the province, such as *cohors III Alpinorum*, *cohors VIII Voluntariorum*, and the *Gothi gentiles* (Speidel, 1977:720). This may have been the reason behind the 'formation' of the *exercitus Arabicus* not only in an administrative sense, but also in an ethnic sense.

The fact that these inscriptions were written in other languages than Nabataean Aramaic, though their writers claim that they were 'Nabataeans', underlines the fact that there is no complete congruence between ethnicity and culture. From the latter, an ethnic group chooses certain elements and gives them an ethnic value. Though language, along with religion, is one of the most frequent cultural aspects used as an ethnic symbol (see Rodinson, 1991: 17-18), the above-mentioned inscriptions show that an individual can express himself in other linguistic mediums (Macdonald, *et al.*, 1996: 449). Therefore, while ʿUbaidu expressed himself in Palmyrene, *drb*, *ʿtq*, and *Mnʿm* chose Safaitic. Yet, Mesmar used Greek to articulate his ethnic affiliation. However, they all deliver the same message: they were all Nabataeans. ʿUbaidu, *drb*, *ʿtq*, *Mnʿm*, and Mesmar's choice of languages does not seem to be arbitrary. One may say that they chose the languages that would be comprehensible for the surrounding peoples.

4. NABATAEAN ETHNIC BOUNDARIES

In defining their ethnic status in the above-mentioned inscriptions, the Nabataeans were addressing the question of ethnic boundaries. These boundaries were social rather than geographical. All but one of these Nabataean inscriptions were found in foreign lands in which the Nabataeans were in the minority and therefore not part of the dominant group. Such consciousness of being among 'foreigners' regardless of any cultural similarity was undoubtedly an important reason for these Nabataeans to express their identities. Similar examples can be cited

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[14] These contemporary actions that derive their appropriateness from the past are called by Malinowski 'charters' and by Cohen 'myth-like, meta-history-like'. For more information, see Cohen, 1985: 99.

[15] Macdonald doubted that the term Νάβας here means 'Nabataean' since it is unlikely that a native would omit ṭ (Macdonald, 1998: 189). However, given the fact that the inscription is written in Greek such an omission should come as no surprise. If Mesmar is the one who wrote the text, his knowledge of Greek spelling is not expected to be perfect. However, if it was written for him by a Greek scribe, the latter may have found Mesmar's pronunciation difficult to grasp. However, be that as it may, Macdonald's suggested alternative reading: *Nʿb* or *Nb* is less likely.

from the ancient Near East. The Jews who were driven out by the Babylonians after the destruction of Judah found themselves in a Diaspora living among a 'foreign' nation in a foreign land. In fact, they understood this was an important factor that led to the preservation of their Jewishness (Smith, 1989: 57). However, a distinction should be maintained between the experience of the Nabataean individuals and the exiled Jews. Whereas the former, we think, moved voluntarily to their new social environments, the latter, or at least some of them, were taken by force to Babylon. What this means is that the forcibly exiled Jews would try to resist assimilation. This may be among the reasons that ethnic sentiments were so strong among them.

Ethnic boundaries do not depend on the absence of social contact as had been held for a long time (see Barth, 1969: 9-10; Kellas, 1998: 49). On the contrary, we believe that social contact is a paramount factor, but not the sole one, in creating ethnic awareness. Standing in the middle of their culture, people may not understand its limits. When they come to its peripheries (contact with others), they come to realise the existence of these limits, and this ignites their need for identity.

Ethnic boundaries are attitudinal factors that exist in people's minds. Consequently, being in foreign lands, these Nabataeans clung to their Nabataeanness. However, the question arises as to what it actually meant to be a *Nabataean* in, for instance, the Palmyrene land. Put differently, what did *ʿbdw br ʿnmw* mean when he referred to himself as *nbṭyʾ* ? Stating overtly that he was a Nabataean, *ʿbdw* affiliated himself with the Nabataean culture – presumably contrasting it with the Palmyrene culture. This has significant implications. He may have wanted to be treated as a *Nabataean* and to have his behavior and demeanor judged accordingly. Though we do not know for sure what kind of treatment this was, it can be said that he saw it as being to his benefit.

In the rest of the Nabataean inscriptions that we have, the Nabataeans defined ethnic boundaries less rigidly. This is because the majority of these inscriptions come from the Nabataean land at the time when there was a Nabataean kingdom. Therefore, there was no need for the Nabataeans to affirm that they were Nabataeans because it was known that they were. In addition, these inscriptions (of a more legal nature) were written for neighbours who were probably Nabataeans rather than for foreigners. Accordingly, the function of 'the basic group identity', to take Isaac's (1975) term, which we can take here to refer to the Nabataeanness as a source of belonging, is weakened because it was shared by all the Nabataeans at the time when there was no threat to their identity. Hence, Nabataean individuals may have tended to define themselves according to their class, occupation, social status, and so on (see Healey, 1993: 106). This can be seen conspicuously in various Nabataean inscriptions. Furthermore, the nature of the Nabataean sources left behind is not particularly informative as far as ethnicity is concerned. The Nabataeans did not bequeath a written history, but rather left behind inscriptions, many of a legal rather than a social nature. 'The biggest methodological difficulty', writes Healey (2001: 167), 'is that in dealing with ethnicity we are really talking about *self*-definition, but there are very few circumstances, in epigraphic sources at least, where a writer is likely to express his own self-definition' [emphasised in origin].

Therefore, the dearth of examples of the term 'Nabataean' being used *emically* should not be understood as an indicator of the weakness of Nabataean ethnic identity. Moreover, ethnicity in ancient times should perhaps, in general, not be expected to be as salient as it is in the modern era. There are many reasons that may account for this fact. For example, the unparalleled mix between different ethnic groups, not least after the age of 'massive immigration' to the West that followed World War Two, put ethnic groups and their different cultures under the spotlight. What is different in this immigration from the phenomenon of migration that is recorded throughout history is its intensity and speed. This suddenness with which different peoples find themselves face to face is, according to Glazer and Moynihan, one of the reasons that make ethnicity more salient in modern times (1975: 15). Another reason may be that the freedom that these different ethnic groups experience in western countries gives them the chance to demand their human rights. Yet, the advances in writing social and cultural history, which have allowed many oppressed and marginal ethnic groups to participate in this writing, may be another factor (De Vos, 1975: 7).

Given that ethnicity at its deepest psychological level means 'a sense of survival' (De Vos, 1975: 17), it is perhaps unsurprising that this handful of Nabataean inscriptions came from the period which followed the destruction of the psychological Nabataean political state. The individual feels a threat to his survival if there is a threat to the survival of his ethnic group, and the sense of continuity with the past that he needs is never assured in the absence of the group. Therefore, the historical continuity of the group through its symbols gives it a sense of survival that enables its members to define themselves (c.f. De Vos, 1975: ibid). Indeed, what could have been more of a threat to the identity of *drb bn qn*, for example, than the destruction of his country after around five centuries of independence?

We thus find that all of the Nabataean inscriptions that touch upon the subject of ethnicity are late (after 106 A.D..). One may say that after the annexation of Nabataea by the Romans, the Nabataeanness became more important for the invaded people. A clear modern example of the effect of military invasion on ethnic consciousness may be seen in the case of Armenians who have only become fully aware of their ethnicity after the Turks killed thousands of them following the First World War.

5. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, ethnicity is a *self*-definition more than a definition by others, we discussed in this paper five texts in which Nabataean individuals asserted firmly that they were 'Nabataean'. The value of the term (*nbṭw*) as far as the Nabataean ethnic identity is concerned resides in

the following two facts. First, one of the main *indicia* of ethnicity is to have an ethnonym. That is, an ethnic group must have a name. Second, this name must be given by the people in question to themselves and not imposed upon them. ʿUbaidu stated that he was *nbṭyʾ* (a Nabataean). Such *emic* perspective of ethnicity is the surest indication of ethnic identity. The Nabataeanness of ʿUbaidu is reflected in this text by some indicators. First, his name ʿUbaidu, son of ʿanimu, is a typical Nabataean name. Second, the other personal names mentioned are also Nabataean (e.g. Saʿd-allath). Third, Shayʿ-al-Qawm is a Nabataean deity (Healey, 2001: 144). In addition, *Drb*, *ʿtq*, *Mnʿm*, and *Mesmar* all refer to themselves as Nabataeans. The reason why these individuals defined themselves as Nabataeans is that they felt they were strangers among others. Peoples need to define themselves when they come to contact with others. In defining their ethnic status in the above-discussed texts, these individuals were addressing the question of ethnic boundaries. As seen above, such boundaries are social rather than geographical. Such consciousness of being among 'foreigners' regardless of any cultural similarity was undoubtedly an important reason for these Nabataeans to express their identities. As we argue above, the fact that these inscriptions were written in other languages than Nabataean Aramaic, despite the fact that their writers referred to themselves as 'Nabataeans', shows clearly that there is no complete congruence between ethnicity and culture. Ethnic identity is a matter of self-definition.

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