

Investigating the Socio-Political Make-Up of Rural Petra – The Petra Hinterland Social Landscapes Project

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Abstract

Recent research within the urban limits of Nabataean Petra has identified different social groups that were organized within spatially defined social ‘districts.’ Together with other archaeological evidence from within the city, this suggests a clear stratification of the cityscape into distinct social spaces. The evidence from Petra clearly highlights a Nabataean social structure that was deeply rooted in family, clan or tribal traditions, which can be traced back to the nomadic origins of the Nabataeans. While this correlates well with the evidence in urban Petra, the socio-political organization of Petra’s hinterland remains largely unknown. This paper therefore aims at offering additional insights into rural Petra’s socio-political make-up by presenting selected archaeological sites that were identified as possible markers of distinct social landscapes in Petra’s surroundings. Specifically, this contribution focuses on presumed rural Nabataean mansions. This paper examines how these structures might reflect new perspectives on the social stratification outside Petra’s city center in Nabataean-Roman times and argues that such sites contribute to our understanding of the complex social structure of Petra’s hinterland, which can be characterized as an intricate patchwork of various social groups as is assumed for urban Petra.

Keywords: Petraean hinterland, rural mansions, Nabataean social structure, *heterotopiai*, landscape.

Introduction

In a recently submitted paper entitled ‘The Nabataeans as Travellers between the Desert and the Sown’ (Kennedy in press) the author presents relevant archaeological evidence derived from previous regional surveys conducted in the rural environs of Petra (cf. below) that point to a more mobile and pastoral way of life around the former Nabataean capital. The author argues that a beneficial relationship existed between a predominantly mobile pastoralist and a more sedentary rural population in the Petra region in Nabataean-Roman times (c. 1st century BC – 2nd century AD), and that a defining aspect of Petraean culture and

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the city's rural hinterland can be characterized by a constant interplay between nomadic or tribal traditions and sedentary lifestyles.² Although the ephemeral nature of the archaeological evidence discussed in that paper only allows rather preliminary conclusions, the results nevertheless highlighted a persisting mobile and pastoral way of life in rural Petra from the 1st century BC onward, underlining the constant interplay between mobile and sedentary traditions.

This is particularly well highlighted when considering the numerous Nabataean tomb complexes distributed throughout the urban limits of Petra (Schmid 2009; Wadeson 2011; Schmid 2012; Petrovsky 2013a; 2013b). These tomb *complexes* not only feature the monumental tomb façades, they also encompass ritual banqueting installations (e.g. *tri-* and *biclinia* as well *stibadia*), which were accessed by a central courtyard. As has already been well established, (e.g. Schmid 2009; 2012) Nabataean tomb complexes in Petra can be conceptually compared to contemporary examples of Graeco-Roman secular luxury architecture. Considered as the 'houses of the dead' and frequently visited by close family, clan or perhaps even tribe members, Schmid argues that these complexes were '*closed spaces, where only restricted and well-defined people or groups of people are granted access*' (Schmid 2013, 251) leading him to refer to Nabataean tomb complexes by the Foucauldian term *heterotopias* (Schmid 2013). Introduced by Michel Foucault in the 1960s for describing (primarily) architecturally defined spaces that could only be accessed and used by a select group of people, the term was adopted in archaeology by S. Cormack in her study of Roman imperial funerary architecture in Asia Minor, which also served Schmid as a basis for his assertion of possible heterotopical structures in Petra (Cormack 2004, 46–47, 106–7, 122; Schmid 2013, 251–252).³

Other examples of Nabataean *heterotopias* possibly include the tribal sanctuary known as the 'Obodas Chapel' located immediately south of Petra's urban center. Dating as early as the 2nd century BC, this family or clan-run sanctuary features both rock-cut and freestanding *triclinia* (Tholbecq and Durand 2005; Tholbecq, Durand, and Bouchaud 2008; Tholbecq and Durand 2013), and thus further underlines the *social* significance of ritual banqueting within Nabataean culture (cf. also e.g. Durand 2017).

Additionally, L. Nehmé's comprehensive study of the epigraphic evidence from Petra has led her to identify different social groups that collectively commemorated a specific deity and which were organized within spatially distinct

² Note the rough dating of this culturally defined time span. The term 'Nabataean-Roman' is to be understood as 'Nabataean to Roman' encompassing the entire 1st century BC and 2nd century AD. For a detailed analysis of the chronological uncertainties inherent to the regional surveys conducted in the Petraean hinterland (the archaeological core dataset of this study) and the problematic use of cultural periods without precise definition of exact time spans, see Kennedy and Hahn 2017. Also note that the surveys only very rarely specify ceramic and other surface finds serving as the basis for their datings of sites rendering any further chronological specifications impossible here.

³ However, note that more recent archaeological studies deal with heterotopical spaces in a much more comprehensive and differentiated manner. Cf. e.g. Smith 2013, 15–38. For a more detailed theoretical discussion of Foucault's heterotopia, see also Schäfer-Biermann et al. 2016, 49–87.

districts within Petra's urban limits (Nehmé 2013). As these groups are also mostly associated with *triclinia* and Nabataean fraternal cultic associations known as the *marzeah* (Healey 2001, 166–67; Kühn 2005, 75; Wenning 2007, 257; Kropp 2013, 303–6; Nehmé 2013; Charloux et al. 2016, 14), the social significance of Nabataean ritual banqueting is once more emphasized. Arguably, such *heterotopiai* suggest a deeply tribal-based social structure that may be considered as a reflection of the nomadic past that continued to characterize Nabataean society and culture in Petra well after their 'sedentarization' in and around the city from the 1st century BC onward.

While the continuing tribal social structure of Nabataean culture⁴ has been widely acknowledged, as the presented Nabataean *heterotopiai* or recently expressed assumptions made for certain Nabataean cultic structures suggest (cf. e.g. Healey 2001, 48–52; Alpass 2013, 77–86; Tholbecq 2017a; 2017b; Wenning 2017), archaeological research has so far concentrated predominantly on the more monumental Nabataean remains in urban Petra. While recent research has contributed important insights into more non-sedentary aspects of Petraean culture⁵, the lack of convincing archaeological evidence within wider Nabataea has impeded further studies in this regard.

However, as part of a more comprehensive landscape archaeological study on the Petraean hinterland based on a re-evaluation of fourteen earlier survey projects in the region⁶ (Kennedy forthcoming), the author was able to identify a significant number of sites that can be considered not only as first, direct archaeological evidence for the practice of pastoral subsistence strategies in the Petraean hinterland, but also for a persisting non-sedentary lifestyle in Petra's environs and therefore a rural population that continued to adhere to its family, clan or tribal roots as its socio-political and cultural core.⁷ It became clear that a pastorally

⁴ The use of the term 'Nabataean culture' should not suggest the existence of a solid set of universally valid cultural norms that defined the Nabataean realm and its inhabitants. Instead, Nabataea's diversity should be emphasized. Compare e.g. also Alpass 2013, 1–4.

⁵ See e.g. Graf 2013 or Renel and Mouton 2013 as well as other contributions in Mouton and Schmid 2013 dealing with 'Early Petra.'

⁶ In total, nearly 1800 sites recorded by 14 survey projects were re-assessed including agricultural installations, water structures and rural settlements, the regional communication network, industrial sites, funerary and religious structures as well military sites ranging from the Iron Age to the Late Byzantine Periods. The re-evaluated archaeological survey data derives from the Edom Survey (Hart 1987), the Beidha Ethnoarchaeological Survey (Banning and Köhler-Rollefson 1983), the Southeast Araba Archaeological Survey (A. M. Smith 2010), the Jabal Shara Survey (Tholbecq 2001b; 2013), the Archaeological Survey of the Wadi Musa Water Supply and Wastewater Project ('Amr et al. 1998; 'Amr and al-Momani 2001), the Bir Madkhur Project (A. M. Smith 2010), Abudanh's survey of the Udruh region (Abudanh 2006), the Finnish Jabal Harun Project (Kouki and Lavento 2013), the Ayl to Ras an-Naqab Archaeological Survey (MacDonald et al. 2012), the Showbak-Dana L2HE Survey (N. G. Smith 2009), the Shammakh to Ayl Archaeological Survey (MacDonald et al. 2016), the Petra Area and Wadi Slaysil Survey as well as the Petra Routes Project (Berenfeld, Dufton, and Rojas 2016; Knodell et al. 2017), the Petra Hinterland Tombs Project (Wadson and Abudanh 2016) as well as the Petra Hinterland Survey Project conducted for the author's doctoral research (Kennedy et al. forthcoming).

⁷ P. Kouki's definition of the Petraean hinterland was adopted, which is understood as a 20 km radius around the city (Kouki 2012, 17). This is based on similar assertions concerning the extent of a 'Greater

organized rural population constituted a significant part of the Petraean hinterland in the Nabataean Period and beyond, and that a certain degree of mobility very much characterized life in Petra's rural environment *in addition* to a 'sedentary,' agriculture-based lifestyle.⁸

Arguably, the discussed archaeological evidence for a pastoral and more mobile lifestyle in the Petraean hinterland supports the assumption that Nabataean *heterotopiai* may indeed be considered as archaeological indicators for the broadly observed perpetuating family, clan and/ or tribal traditions of the region. For example, this seems particularly confirmed when considering the various burial cairns dating to the Nabataean-Roman Periods: Distributed throughout Petra's rural surroundings in a prominent landscape setting and following a more non-sedentary funerary culture, it can be argued that the identified burial cairns may have demarcated specific *social* landscapes within the wider Petraean hinterland (Kennedy in press). Other structures discovered in Petra's rural environs may have served as similar markers of particular social groups as well. Most notably, these include other funerary monuments, rural sanctuaries and cultic installations as well as possible rural mansions. Moreover, larger and more significant settlements in the Petraean hinterland such as Sabra, Abu Khusheiba, Wadi Musa, Beidha or Udruh may have served as local centers for specific rural social groups as well.

Although such hypotheses require further research, the identified structures in Petra's rural environs may indicate that – as in urban Petra – the Petraean hinterland can be characterized as an intricate patchwork of various social groups that were strongly bound by more local, 'tribal' affiliations. If indeed true, the Nabataean kings in Petra certainly must have maintained good relations to these satellite communities as they arguably played a significant role for the survival of the Nabataean capital and the overall stability of the entire Nabataean realm.

However, although such considerations may seem likely, they remain completely hypothetical at this point. The *Petra Hinterland Social Landscapes Project* (PHSLP), recently launched in 2019, therefore aims to achieve a better understanding of the socio-political make-up of Petra's hinterland. The project will enhance our archaeological knowledge of selected Nabataean-Roman sites (c. 1st century BC – 2nd century AD) in Petra's surroundings that seem to have been variably significant depending on one's membership in particular social groups. The long-term goal of the PHSLP is to provide a clearer understanding of the intersection of social groups in Petra's hinterland through a comprehensive archaeological investigation of relevant rural sites including funerary monuments,

Petra' expressed by M. Lindner (Lindner 1992, 266) and on the fact that the 6th century AD Petra Papyrus list Udruh (Augustopolis) and Saddaqa (Zadacathon) – both situated c. 20 km away from Petra – as still being under the jurisdiction of Petra in the Byzantine Period.

⁸ In total over 200 sites were identified within the study area that may suggest a more mobile way of life in Petra's rural environs. Note, however, that dating ephemeral structures such as campsites or corrals is particularly difficult – especially when based on surface finds. While this explains why a large number of these sites cannot be dated, the majority of those that offer some chronological indicators date between the 1st century BC and 2nd century AD with some continuing until the 7th century AD.

rural sanctuaries and cultic installations as well as possible rural mansions and to consider them in their wider cultural landscape setting.

The scope of the PHSLP is considerable and research is ongoing. This paper only presents some tentative results based on preliminary examinations of Nabataean rural mansions. However, this single dataset raises important issues and challenges longstanding perceptions about the social makeup of Petra's hinterland. Based on the available archaeological information from previous investigations, the following will first briefly present the archaeological evidence. Subsequently, the rural mansions are critically assessed in a culture-historical context as possible signifiers of socio-political identities in Petra's hinterland.

Nabataean Rural Mansions in the Petra Hinterland

Before presenting the archaeological evidence, the difficulty of adequately defining the term 'rural mansion' should be noted: For the purpose of this paper, a rural mansion is generally defined as a large, often isolated, non-urban building used mainly for habitation purposes. Such structures may also include representative as well as utilitarian features. For the former, the most important structural characteristic is the comparatively large size, sophisticated construction technique and overall elaborate architectural design. The incongruity of defining these mansions in Roman terms, e.g. *villa urbana* or *villa rustica*, has already been noted by Kouki (Kouki 2012, 128), who rightly questions their applicability to Nabataean architecture. Therefore, the term rural mansion is preferred here.⁹

Importantly, the presented evidence is based on surface observations alone rendering any functional interpretations highly problematic. Excavation results are therefore particularly important for a more in-depth evaluation of the discussed sites.

The sample size is small. In total, there are only seven rural mansions identified thus far in Petra's hinterland. The only possible mansion dating to the Iron Age as early as the 12th century BC (and thus well before the Nabataean Period) is al-Muzayr'a located along the slopes of the Jabal Shara, which seems to be the first and only rural mansion documented in the Petra area until the 1st century BC ('Amr and al-Momani 2001, 269; 'Amr et al. 1998, 519; Tholbecq 2001a, 401; MacDonald et al. 2012).

Based on the dating of surface finds, three new mansions were built in the course of the 1st century BC: located near Beidha, these include the structures of al-Brayka and Umm Qussah (the so called 'Dionysian Hall') as well as, possibly, Seir al-Begh'er (the so called 'Pond Temple') near the Nabataean settlement of Ras Slaysil (Bikai, Kanellopoulos, and Saunders 2008; Lindner and Gunsam 1995a).

⁹ Compare a similar definition of the 'maison rurale' offered by Ginouvès et al. (Ginouvès et al. 1998, 155). The definition of a 'rural mansion' is better comparable to Kouki's 'small sites' (Kouki 2012, 79).

Corresponding to the general increase of settlements¹⁰, by the 1st century AD the number of known rural mansions rises as well (Kennedy forthcoming). Seven additional possible mansions were constructed: One possible mansion was identified by the Jabal Shara Survey (Site no. 055)¹¹ and two other examples, WMWS Site No. Bayda 20 ('Amr and al-Momani 2001, 258; 'Amr et al. 1998, 511–12) and the site of Shammaasa (Lindner and Gunsam 2002), are situated in the wider Beidha area. The remaining four are all situated within the limits of Wadi Musa and are considered to have been within an urban context ('Amr et al. 1998, 522, 524–25; 'Amr, al-Nawafleh, and Qrarhi 1997; 'Amr and al-Momani 2001, 267). Therefore, these are not further discussed here. Generally, these mansions seem to concentrate within a radius of less than 10km around Petra. While the overall number of rural mansions peaks in the 1st century AD, many seem to have been abandoned already by the 2nd century AD. Mirroring the general decline of rural settlements of the 3rd century AD, the abandonment of rural mansions continues during the 3rd and 4th centuries AD when the only two remaining mansions can be found in Beidha (WMWS Site No. Bayda 20) and Wadi Musa (WMWS Site No. Wadi Musa 18D). To date, the latter is the only possible mansion that seems to have been occupied in the 6th and 7th centuries AD.

Unfortunately, the archaeological information on the identified 'mansions' is limited. For instance, at the possible 1st century BC mansion at al-Brayka near Beidha, only a few wall lines, a ceramic water pipe as well as an apparently large quantity of Nabataean pottery dating to the 1st centuries BC and AD are attested ('Amr et al. 1998, 522–24). While it does not seem too farfetched to assume that the observed remains were part of a once substantially built structure, it is impossible to offer any further interpretations concerning its function at this point. Also, the possible mansion recorded by the Jabal Shara Survey is so far only known as a large debris of building remains with a possible cistern and smaller structures around it. As the structure is situated in a heavily cultivated area, it may be assumed that it once served as a rural mansion with associated agricultural lands, but this can currently only remain speculative. There are, however, other examples in the Petraean hinterland that are archaeologically better explored and which are presented here in further detail. These structures are: Umm Qussah (the so called 'Dionysian Hall'), Seir al-Begh'er (the so called 'Pond Temple'), WMWS Site No. Bayda 20 and the site of Shammaasa.

Umm Qussah (The 'Dionysian Hall')

Uncovered in 2005, the substantial building remains on a rocky promontory known locally as *Umm Qussah* just outside Siq al-Amti (Beidha) are well known (fig. 1) (Bikai, Kanellopoulos, and Saunders 2007; 2008).

A highly luxurious complex consisting of a monumental gateway, possible

¹⁰ In addition to rural mansions, other subcategories of settlements include: Towns, villages, farms and 'clusters of buildings (hamlets).' These are further defined in Kennedy forthcoming.

¹¹ Unpublished report kindly provided to the author by L. Tholbecq, which is greatly appreciated.

baths, a huge rock-cut cistern as well as an elevated courtyard and peristyle were revealed. Moreover, immediately adjacent to the main structure, rock-cut wine presses were documented suggesting that *Umm Qussah* was once situated within an extensive wine-growing area. This and the discovery of numerous architectural and decorative elements with Dionysian themes has led the excavators to term the structure as the ‘Dionysian Hall.’ Furthermore, the evidenced peristyle was interpreted as an *oecus* that may have served as a *triclinium* for the Nabataean kings, which may seem fitting to the overall ‘Dionysian’ setting of the structure. Chronologically, Umm Qussah was constructed during the reign of Malichos I (59/58-30 BC) as is evidenced by stratified pottery material dating shortly after 50 BC. However, as there is no material dating subsequent to the last quarter of the 1st century BC, the structure seems to have been occupied only briefly.



Figure 1: The so called ‘Dionysian Hall’ at Umm Qussah: A and B: Overview of the rocky promontory. C and D: Rock-cut and freely built monumental architecture of Umm Qussah. Photos: W. M. Kennedy.

Although plausible, whether Umm Qussah can truly be associated with the king himself, or not, can certainly be discussed. The identification of Umm Qussah as a royal structure is based chiefly upon its luxurious nature and the pottery dating. There is, however, no specific evidence linking the site to a king. Nevertheless, Umm Qussah was undoubtedly used by a member of an extremely wealthy, elite serving as a focal point in Beidha’s immediate surroundings. The Dionysian context and the presumed *triclinium* within the structure’s *oecus* clearly suggests that it served elite *convivium* purposes. As social gatherings associated with the consumption of wine are arguably a fundamental feature of Nabataean socio-religious culture, it may be postulated that Umm Qussah functioned as a possible monumental gathering place for an elite – possibly even royal – Nabataean social group.

Seir al-Begh'er (The 'Pond Temple')

Situated along the far western cliff before the steep descent towards the Wadi Arabah north of Petra's city center and overlooking the Nabataean settlement of Ras Slaysil, the structure of *ad-Dahhune Slaysil* with its conspicuous pavement and visible building remains (fig. 2) was already noted by early travelers to the region (Kirkbride 1961; Lindner and Gunsam 1995a, 268–69; Lindner 2003, 168–69; Alcock and Knodell 2012, 12; Kennedy 2016, 146).



Figure 2: Small hilltop sanctuary at *ad-Dahhune Slaysil* overlooking the descent towards Seir al-Begh'er and the Wadi Arabah. Photo: W. M. Kennedy.

M. Lindner later reinvestigated the site and documented a rectangular structure constructed of well-built ashlar placed on the flattened bedrock surface of the hilltop, which was once accessible via a well-built flight of stairs. The structure is flanked by a large 2m-high freestanding quartz stone (Lindner and Gunsam 1995b, 269). Lindner also recorded well-worked architectural elements and even marble fragments immediately around the structure, thus interpreting the structure as a sanctuary (Lindner and Gunsam 1995b, 269–73; Lindner 2003, 169; Kennedy 2016, 146). The more recent research activities of the *Brown University Petra Archaeological Project* (BUPAP) confirms the identification as a sanctuary and, based on their surface pottery analyses, dates the structure as early as the 3rd -2nd century BC (Knodell and Alcock 2011, 502–3; Alcock and Knodell 2012, 12–13; Knodell et al. 2017). Due to the immediate proximity to the settlement of Ras Slaysil, the sanctuary's prominent position with good visibility to and from its environs as well as it being situated along the ancient pathway of Naqb Slaysil, it may well be assumed that the site was not limited to private use, but served as a more public religious structure for the inhabitants of Ras Slaysil and its immediate surroundings.

Immediately to the west of ad-Dahhune Slaysil, after a 450m drop down Naqb Slaysil and Naqb Seir al-Begh'er, lies the monumental Nabataean structure commonly referred to as the 'Pond Temple,' but locally known as *Seir al-Begh'er* (Lindner and Gunsam 1995a; Lindner 2003, 170–74; Alcock and Knodell 2012, 12; Ben-David 2012, 21; Ben David 2013, 276; Kennedy forthcoming). The building is undoubtedly of monumental character (fig. 3) and the documented architectural elements (including metope and triglyph fragments as well as a florally decorated pediment piece) may indeed suggest a religious nature of the site. However, the interpretation as a Nabataean temple is founded solely on the masonry technique, the architectural fragments, ceramic finds and on the fact that the structure is supposedly situated “[...] at the crossroads of caravan routes” (Lindner and Gunsam 1995a, 207).

This last point is particularly untenable, as its surrounding topography is impossible for camels to pass and the structure itself can only be accessed with great difficulty (Kennedy 2016; Kennedy forthcoming). In fact, Naqb Slaysil and Naqb Seir al-Begh'er, which lead to the site, are undoubtedly one of the most strenuous routes yet discovered in Petra's hinterland (Kennedy forthcoming).



Figure 3: A: Overview of the structural remains of Seir al-Begh'er. B: Debris with monumental Graeco-Roman architectural fragments. C: *Suspensurae* fragments of a heating system. Photos: W. M. Kennedy.

If a structure of such architectural monumentality as Seir al-Begh'er is to be interpreted as a temple, it would surely be more easily accessible, as is the case of other larger cultic structures known in Petra's surroundings (e.g. Ras Hamra, Jabal Harun or Sabra) (Zeitler 1992; Hübner 2002; Lahelma, Sipilä, and Fiema 2016; Schmid 2016; Tholbecq et al. 2016). Ben David's interpretation of Naqb Slaysil leading to the presumed 'Pond Temple' as a *via sacra* is therefore difficult to

uphold (Ben-David 2012, 21) – at least according to strictly cultic terms.

The structure's incorporation of the eponymous pond merits further consideration. Its clear association with Seir al-Begh'er may suggest that the discovered *pilae* and *tubuli* fragments (see fig. 3.c) indicate a possible heated bath system at the site. However, to date, no further hydraulic installations have been documented. Were one to accept that the documented *pilae* and *tubuli* are indeed associated with a heated bathing system, parallels to other major Nabatean temples and sanctuaries such as at Khirbet edh-Darih, Sia in the Hawran, the Nabataean temple in Wadi Ramm, the bathing complex just south of the *temenos* area at Sabra as well as at the 'high place' sanctuary on the Jabal al-Khubta can certainly be found (Villeneuve and al-Muheisen 2008, 1499; Tholbecq, Delcros, and Paridaens 2014; Tholbecq et al. 2016). Other parallels from Petra, however, can also be drawn to secular luxury architecture such as at the luxurious mansion of ez-Zantur, the bathing complex next to the *paradeisos* of the 'Great Temple' or the 'palatial' structures on Umm al-Biyara (e.g. Bedal 2003; Kolb 2012; Schmid et al. 2012). Also, while the recently investigated baths at Sabra (Fournet and Tholbecq 2015; Tholbecq et al. 2016, 287) may be associated with the sanctuary on the settlement's 'acropolis,' there is no clear indication that the baths at Sabra were necessarily used for ritual purposes.

Therefore, even if the existence of a bathing system at Seir al-Begh'er can be confirmed, this alone is not in itself indicative of a cultic installation. It does, however, clearly highlight the monumentality and luxurious nature of the site. A spatially closer parallel, also featuring baths, is the luxury structure of Umm Qussah described above. Such comparisons to secular Nabataean luxury architecture may therefore allow to interpret Seir al-Begh'er not (exclusively) as a cultic structure, but as a possible luxurious rural mansion instead. In any case, although the inaccessibility of the site indicates a more private use, the structure of Seir al-Begh'er has rightly been associated with the settlement of Ras Slaysil (Lindner and Gunsam 1995b; Alcock and Knodell 2012, 12). While the association with the settlement above cannot be disputed, following the structure's identification as a temple would mean that Ras Slaysil had two cultic structures: One above at ad-Dahunne Slaysil and one below at Seir al-Begh'er. This is generally not impossible, particularly when drawing comparisons to the situation at Sabra, but it is rather unlikely. While there is indeed a structural link between the baths and the sanctuary at Sabra, there is nothing that would clearly suggest that the two were linked *functionally*.¹²

Alternatively, it could thus also be tentatively hypothesized that Seir al-Begh'er was reserved for an elite social group, possibly even a member of the Ras Slaysil community as a private luxurious rural mansion immediately below the settlement and not as a cultic structure. However, further in-depth archaeological work is necessary on-site to test such hypotheses – as is the aim of the *Petra Hinterland*

¹² A cultic setting may be assumed for the bathing complex at Sabra, but this cannot be stated for certain at this point – an argument that could also be drawn for the structure at Seir-al Begh'er.

Social Landscapes Project.

WMWS Site No. Bayda 20

WMWS 1996 Site No. Bayda 20 is situated in the eastern al-Begh'a plain between Petra and Beidha and is characterized by one larger rock-cut 'hall' as well as another, smaller rock-cut room (fig. 4) ('Amr et al. 1998, 511–12; 'Amr and al-Momani 2001, 258).



Figure 4: A: Rock-cut doorway into WMWS 1996 Site Nr. Bayda 20. B: Horizontal carvings along the upper part of the rock-cut rooms. C: Central rock-cut room with niches in southern wall (D). Photos: W. M. Kennedy.

The hall can be accessed through a rock-cut doorway and features equally measured rock-cut niches carved in the southern wall. These niches most likely served as foundations for the flooring of the second story as there are indications for another rock-cut door above the doorway of the presumed first floor. Also, in addition to the observed rock-cut water channels and cisterns nearby, 'Amr et al. report several architectural blocks near the structure, including fragments of half columns that are still visible today ('Amr et al. 1998, 512) (fig. 5). Thus, WMWS 1996 Site No. Bayda 20 may indeed be referred to as a small, but presumably wealthy Nabataean rural mansion that may have been associated with the production of agricultural goods in the al-Begh'ah area.



Figure 5: A and B: Fragment of a column drum immediately west of WMWS 1996 Site No. Bayda 20. Photos: W. M. Kennedy.

Shammasa

A further important site is situated in the western al-Begh'ah area at *Shammasa* (fig. 6) (Lindner and Gunsam, E. 2002; Knodell and Alcock 2011, 492; Alcock and Knodell 2012, 11). Lindner and Gunsam refer to it as a 'fortified suburb' of Petra because the main site is located on a rocky promontory characterized by several built structures on top, as well as an associated rock-cut wine press. Furthermore, the promontory is located within an extensive agricultural area with an additional winepress and rock-cut cistern nearby. A small rock-cut cultic installation, probably for the veneration of Dushara, is also associated with Shammasa (Knodell et al. 2017). This further highlights the site's local significance, serving the cultic needs of those who lived and/or worked there.



Figure 6: Overview of the rocky promontory of Shammasa. Photo: W. M. Kennedy.

Discussion

As this brief overview of presumed rural Nabataean mansions in Petra's hinterland illustrates, the sites are poorly known and any attempt to resolve their specific nature or function is entirely speculative. Apart from the 'Dionysian Hall' at Umm Qussah, all available evidence is based solely on surface observations, which calls for caution concerning any interpretative propositions.

Even so, the sites have certain characteristics in common:

- 1) substantially built architecture,
- 2) luxurious building features (possible baths etc.), architectural elements and ornamentation/ decoration, and
- 3) commanding placement in a prominent landscape setting. For example, Umm Qussah was undoubtedly deliberately placed within its particular environment and as a spatial focus point in the area served its owner(s) as a public display of wealth and know-how.

The fact that Seir al-Begh'er is associated with Ras Slaysil, which already has a hilltop sanctuary (ad-Dahune Slaysil) renders any cultic interpretation of the site at least questionable. The architectural finds, the overall monumentality, the visible evidence for heating installations as well as its extremely difficult accessibility may also suggest a luxurious secular structure. Based on the limited evidence, this hypothesis is, at this point, equally valid as other interpretations.

Finally, the more substantial remains of both Shammaasa and WMWS Site No. Bayda 20 in the al-Begh'a area may suggest that both sites managed the agricultural lands in their immediate surroundings.

The presented evidence thus supports the existence of few elite structures in the Petraean hinterland that may have served as residences and indicate that elites appropriated the landscape of Petra's rural environs. Whether these structures were run by elite Petraeans, owned by members of distinct elite rural social groups or whether all sites were managed by one single owner cannot be determined. Questions concerning the ownership of the sites cannot be clarified.

When considering further archaeological evidence from the Petraean hinterland, however, it nevertheless does not seem too unfounded to venture the hypothesis that the presented rural mansions may have been run by distinct social groups:

Other sites¹³ in Petra's hinterland pertaining to a more mobile rural lifestyle in Nabataean-Roman times (discussed above) possibly reflect the continuing tribal-based, nomadic make-up of the Nabataean social structure in Petra's rural environs, which is also mirrored in urban Petra as indicated by the tomb complexes, tribal sanctuaries and other cultic installations for the Nabataean *marzeah* (cf. above as well). The analysis of other rural structures such as rural sanctuaries or isolated funerary monuments that could not be discussed here allows similar considerations (Kennedy forthcoming).

¹³ Including conspicuous pottery concentrations, natural and/ or rock-cut structures such as caves, rock drawings, short commemorative inscriptions, tribal *wusūm*, campsites, corrals or burial cairns.

While the purely speculative nature of the notion that the presented rural mansions and other sites demarcated distinct social landscapes of particular social groups must be emphasized once more, a far more complex socio-political make-up of the Petraean hinterland than previously assumed may nevertheless be hypothesized. This seems even more evident when considering the dating of the discussed sites: With the exception of WMWS Site No. Bayda 20 and Shammasa, all of the presented rural mansions appear to have been abandoned by the 2nd century AD (Kennedy forthcoming). This is reminiscent of similar observations made for Nabataean tomb complexes in urban Petra by Schmid, who claims that Nabataean heterotopical structures were either altered or completely abandoned by the 2nd century AD – thus around the Roman annexation of the Nabataean realm in 106 AD (Schmid 2013, 258–59). Arguably, the end or alteration of Petraean *heterotopiai* immediately after the Roman annexation could be explained with the overall Roman suspicion and fear of potential unrest triggered by such specific (elite) social gatherings held within tomb complexes and other *heterotopiai* with greater *social* significance (Schmid 2013). Incidentally, with the exception of the evidenced *hypogea* (Wadson and Abudanh 2016), there are no larger funerary monuments in the Petraean hinterland that can be dated after the 2nd century AD as well, and the same can also be observed for rural tribal sanctuaries such as the ‘Obodas Chapel’ (e.g. Tholbecq and Durand 2013), Jabal Numayr (Tholbecq 2011) or the Isis sanctuaries in the Wadi as-Siyyagh and Wadi Abu Olleqah (Merklein and Wenning 2001; Roche 2012; Vaelske 2013). Moreover, isolated cultic installations such as the *triclinium* discovered on top of Jabal al-Farasha south of Jabal Harun (Kouki and Silvonen 2013, 312–14) are also abandoned by the time of the Roman annexation. While the Obodas Chapel is the only site where the dating is based on actual excavation results, it nevertheless is conspicuous that all heterotopical structures seem to have been abandoned by the 2nd century AD. It is therefore tempting – although entirely speculative – to correlate these developments with the Roman annexation and the prohibition of specific *heterotopiai* by the Roman authorities to weaken a possible political threat; thus underlining the social significance of the discussed sites. Whether the rapid abandonment of the presented rural mansions by the 2nd century AD can indeed be related to the Roman annexation in 106 AD is impossible to clarify without excavation results. However, as they are of relatively more luxurious and substantial character arguably used by distinct elite social groups, their abandonment may support the supposition that elite Nabataean culture in and around Petra was deliberately undermined by the new Roman authorities and, in turn, verifies the hypothesized social significance of the presented sites.

Conclusion

This contribution gave a brief overview of sites in Petra’s hinterland that may be considered as possible rural mansions of the Nabataean elite. Particularly the luxurious structures of the ‘Dionysian Hall’ or the so called ‘Pond Temple’ at Seir al-Begh’er may represent the seats of a wealthy Nabataean elite (of perhaps even

royal status) demarcating distinct social groups. Possibly, these groups were based on family-, clan or even tribal affiliations as a similarly structured social stratification could be demonstrated for urban Petra. Convincing evidence for this was already laid forward with the numerous Nabataean tomb complexes, tribal sanctuaries and other cultic installations that were used exclusively by distinct social groups (Nehmé 2013; Schmid 2013). Such installations can be referred to by the Foucauldian term *heterotopias*, which is defined as any structural place or complex that was used exclusively by one particular social group. In urban Petra, such heterotopical structures indicate the continuing family, clan and/ or tribal base of Petraean society, which is arguably mirrored in the city's rural hinterland as well. This has already been hypothesized when evaluating archaeological evidence derived from various regional surveys that suggests a pastoral and more mobile lifestyle in Petra's environs in addition to a more sedentary, agriculture-based way of life. As in urban Petra, the city's rural hinterland can be characterized by both sedentary and non-sedentary lifestyles still greatly driven by a strong tribal-based, nomadic social structure. This particular duality of Nabataean society in and around Petra may also be evident for the discussed rural mansions: While their more luxurious and monumental character clearly served to show off wealth and know-how, their deliberately chosen landscape setting renders them a regional focal point demarcating possible social landscapes of rural Petra. Similar claims could also be made for other heterotopical structures, such as rural sanctuaries, cultic installations as well as funerary monuments (cf. Kennedy forthcoming). This may also be assumed for larger settlements in the Petra area such as Sabra, Abu Khusheiba, Wadi Musa, Beidha or Udruh. As in urban Petra, a similarly intricate and very much diversified social stratification is observed for Petra's rural environment as well.

However, as our archaeological knowledge of most of the discussed sites is extremely limited and based on preliminary surface observations only, such considerations must remain speculative at this point. Further in-depth archaeological research is thus necessary to better investigate the socio-political make-up of rural Petra – as is planned within the frame of future endeavors of the Petra Hinterland Social Landscapes Project.

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التحقيق في التركيب الاجتماعي والسياسي لريف البترا - مشروع المناظر الطبيعية الاجتماعية في منطقة البترا الداخلية

ويل كنيدى

ملخص

أدى مؤخرًا البحث ضمن الحدود الحضريّة لمدينة البترا النبطيّة إلى تحديد مجموعات اجتماعيّة مختلفة نُظمت ضمن مناطق اجتماعيّة محدّدة جغرافياً. ويشيرُ هذا الأمر، إضافةً إلى الدليل الأثريّ من داخل المدينة، إلى تقسيم طبقيّ واضح لبيئة المدينة الحضريّة إلى فضاءات اجتماعيّة. ويُظهرُ الدليلُ الأثريّ من مدينة البترا بوضوح البناء الاجتماعيّ النبطيّ المُتَجَزَّر بشكل كبير في تقاليد العائلة والعشيرة والقبيلة، ويمكنُ إرجاعُ هذا الأمر إلى أصول الأنباط البدويّة. وبينما ينسجمُ هذا الاستنتاج بشكل قويّ مع الدليل في البترا، إلا أن تنظيمَ ريفِ البترا الاجتماعيّ - السياسيّ يبقى غيرَ معروفٍ بشكل كبير؛ لذا تهدفُ هذه الدراسةُ إلى تقديم أفكارٍ إضافيّةٍ حولَ ذلك التنظيم من خلال تناول مواقعٍ أثريّةٍ مُختارةٍ حُدِّدت بوصفها صانعةً لبيئات اجتماعيّةٍ مستقلّةٍ في محيط البترا، وتركزُ هذه المساهمة تحديداً على افتراض وجود قصور نبطيّة ريفيّة. وعليه، فتستعرضُ الدراسةُ كيف تعكسُ هذه المباني رؤى جديدةً محتملةً حول التقسيم الطبقيّ الاجتماعيّ خارج قلب مدينة البترا في الفترات النبطيّة والرومانيّة، وتناقشُ مساهمةً هذه المواقع في تحسين فهمنا للبناء الاجتماعيّ المركّب لريف البترا، الذي يمكن وصفه بأنه خليطٌ معقّدٌ من المجموعات الاجتماعيّة المختلفة كما هو مفترض في البترا.

الكلمات الدالة: ريف البترا، قصور ريفيّة، البناء الاجتماعيّ النبطيّ، الفضاء الثقافيّ، البيئة.

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