ABSTRACT

This paper studies the role the women played in ancient Nabataean society in particular in legal, political and social life, in reference to some epigraphic and archaeological evidences. Most of the information concerning Nabataean society come from Graeco-Roman written resources and were not always unbiased. Therefore, the epigraphic and archaeological resources provide us with new information that leads us to a better understanding of the Nabataean woman in politics, ritual activities, social life, costumes and jewelry and her property rights.

KEYWORDS: Nabataean, Nabataean woman, epigraphy, archaeological, ritual, divinity
1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the increasing number of studies and excavations concerning the Nabataeans and their important culture, many questions about their homeland, their detailed chronology, their rise and decline, and their exact date of entering Southern Jordan are still unanswered. Unfortunately, the Nabataeans did not produce any historiography of their own. Among the thousands of inscriptions left by them, there is no individual text demonstrating information about their victory over nations or their expansion of power. More than four thousand Nabataean Aramaic inscriptions do offer valuable direct testimony from the native population, but the majority are laconic graffiti including mere formulae at best, the few lengthier text are mostly funerary. As a result, we are still to a great extent dependent on the images of Nabataeans as drawn by other nations like Roman and Greeks (Schmitt-Korte, 1977: 6). However, these resources cannot be always regarded as very reliable (Helay, 1993). According to these different resources, it seems that the Nabataeans might have migrated to Southern Jordan around the Middle of the first Millennium B.C. in the Neo-Babylonian period. The Edomites who were settling in the Southern part of Jordan had problems with the Neo-Babylonian people during the reign of Nabonidus in 552 B.C. The Edomites were raided by the Neo-Babylonians. The people of Edom were deported to the area west of Wadi Arabah between Hebron and Beer Saba’ah (Schmitt-Korte, 1977: 10). It was at this time that the Nabataeans into Edom without any resistance (Zayadine, 2000: 52). These resources confirm the nomadic nature of Nabataean at this time. The first certain reference to them as an ethnic group was in the records of Diodorus in 312 B.C. in the battle between Antigonus the Seleucid leader and The Nabataeans. All the records of Diodorus attested the nomadic way of life at that time. Our knowledge of the Nabataeans started to be clearer since their transition into sedentary lifestyle. The earliest definite evidences for a settled life came only in the end of the second or the beginning of the first century B.C. That period witnessed a decline of the Seleucid presence in the area which led to the rise of some local powers and to an increase in the long-distance trade of the Ptolemaic World because of the discovery of the direct trade route between India and South Arabia. This might have been a motivation for the Nabataeans to settle in Petra to fill the gap left by Seleucids and to compete with the Ptolemies in long-distance trade (Schmid 2001, 367-370).

Nabataean inscriptions, chiefly the funerary ones and the Nabataean Dead Sea scrolls from Nahal Hever and Ein Gadi, deepen our knowledge about various aspects of the Nabataean Society. The main aim of the present study is shed more light on the role of the women in Nabataean Society in legal, religious and social fields as attested by inscriptions, coins, and sculptures. These archaeological remains reveal directly or indirectly the role the woman played in politics, religion and family. It reveals also some of the women’s interests like fashion and beauty.

2. WOMAN AND POLITICS

Based on Nabataean inscriptions, coins and some historical resources, the Nabataean women seemed to have had a strong presence in political life. Although, these resources do not provide us with detailed information about the exact role the women played in political life or the kind of power she practiced, women seemed to have gained a good status in political realm.

Queen names, for example, have been recorded very often in Nabataean inscriptions. Some of these mentioned the following names; Khaldw, the espouse of
Aretas IV (since the year 9 BC.), Shaqylat the second espouse of Aretas IV (since the year 18/19 B.C.); Shaqylat II the espouse of Malecus II (40-70 A.D.), Phasal, Shaqylat the mother of Rabel II, Gamlat the spouse of Rabel II, Hagrwth second espouse of Rabel II were the most attested women in the Nabataean coins and inscriptions (see: Glueck 1965; Milik and Starcky 1975:112-115; Meshorer 1975:78,79, 94-111).

Nabataean inscriptions mentioned women hold the title mlkt: the feminine form of mlk “king” (Hoftijzer and Jongeling, 1995 II: 634), other inscriptions exposed the title ‘日正式 mlkw “the king sister” which could be protocol titles.

During the time of Aretas IV, the queens of his reign were his sister Huldu and his sister Shuqailat. Historians have argued whether the term ‘sister’ meant that these two were his actual sisters, or whether the term ‘sister,’ simply referred to them as female. Some have also wondered if they were married to Aretas IV (Abbas, 1987). There is no record, however, that tells us if these women were indeed the sisters or wives of the king, if they were his sisters, or whether they were actually married or not. Some have even speculated that perhaps they appeared on the coins simply because of a wish of someone in the royal house (Abbas, 1987). However, the two titles mlkt “Queen” and essional mlkw “Queen’s sister” express the high political title given to the Nabataean women.

Some Queens’ names have also been recorded in Nabataean coins, others also demonstrate queen figure side by side with her protocol title mlkt. Three different figures types be noted: the queen bust next to the king; the queen bust a lone on one side of the coin; the queen standing alone one of the faces of the coin. (al-Rawhneh, 2002: 9,34).

These queen figures were accompanied with certain botanical and faunal symbols such as eagle, corn of laurel plenty of fruits, wheat spikes, pomegranates, palm leaf stalk and palm of the hand (al-Rawhneh, 2002: 90-91). These artistic symbols were associated with the prosperity and the peace given by kings and queens to the people. They also indicated the significance of women in giving peace and prosperity to their people. (al-Rawhneh, 2002:101).

Some historical and archaeological resources refer to a period where Nabataean queen dominated the political life and occupied the throne of the kingdom. Shaqylat, spouse of Malecus II (40-70 AD.) was the regent of the Nabataean throne when her son Rabbel II, the last Nabataean kings, was still young (Abbas, 1987: 67).

The Nabataeans also married their daughters to other leaders from other nations to strengthen relations or to bring peace with others. One of the most famous marriages was the marriage of the daughter of the King Aretas IV with Herod Antipas (Abbas, 1987: 64). The marriage of Antipater of a Nabataean Princess have had an influence in the some political issues with the Maccabeus (Starcky, 1969: 6) All the above mentioned archaeological evidences lead us to conclude the significance of women in political life either as a queen or as a regent. al-Fasi H. (2007: 21-40) indicated that Nabataean woman has a considerable position in the social and political life from the end of the first century AD.

3. WOMAN AND RELIGION

The Nabataean art and inscriptions showed that women were present at most ritual ceremonies and festivals in ancient Nabataean society. They participated frequently in religious activities in the Nabataean temples. Moreover, some of their important pantheon were women.

Woman and ritual activities

Glueck mentions that Nabataean women had right to visit temple as well as men, and this occurred in the temple of the main cities as well as in other areas like for instance, the
temple ate Khirbet al Tannur. He also said that she participated in the fertility ceremonies, and she offered sacrifices for the temple (Glueck, 1965).

The historian Strabo mentions on his book the geography that the Nabataeans used to make religious banquets for about thirty persons, and there were two woman singing in each banquet (Starbo, the Geography XVI. 4.26). Archaeological excavations uncovered the places of some banquets, these were normally annexed to the temples (Glueck, 1965:190).

A terracotta figurine from Petra confirm the participation of woman singer in the ritual activities on the Temples, These terracotta figurine contains three singers (two women and a man), the first woman played on a five chords guitar while the second woman played on an other musical instrument containing chords (Fig. 1) (see: Almasri, 1997). This may indicate that Nabataean woman worked at the temple side by side with male priests.

Woman and divinity

The female divinity occupied a very central role in the Nabataean Pantheon world. The goddess Allat , the mother goddess, for instance represented earth in Nabataean religion. Al Uzza was the main goddess for Nabataeans and was frequently associated with the planet Venus. Atargatis, the renewable goddess, was considered as the symbol of love, fertility. She was the deity of the Zodiac, too (al-Fasi, 1993: 221).

Manat, the goddess of destiny or fate, was frequently mentioned in Nabataean inscriptions. The above mentioned female deities were distinguished from their Nabataean male equals by being associated with concepts of fertility, motherhood and the ability to renew life or to give birth

The Nabataean people used to shape their female deity in the form of a woman. This is attested by the abundant number of distinguished terracotta figurines, statues and sculptures that were unearthed in different Nabataean sites. These relics were used by Nabataeans in the world of worship and constituted an important part in their ritual ceremonies.

Many of the figurines or statues were depicted as naked women and had some gestures or movements indicating preaching for fertility and grace (el-Khoury, 202: pls:1-30). In fact, the tradition of manufacturing fertility and mother-goddesses figurines goes back to the Paleolithic Ages. The humans were occupied with the ideas of immortality and fertility since the dawn of history (Janson, 1977: Figs. 16, 24, 27).

As we mentioned before the figurines were mainly shaped as naked women with great emphasis on either the sexual organs or the lower part of the body like the abdomen, hips, breasts, thighs and vulva. This type of figurines was frequently manufactured in the Ancient Near East. Some of the continual representations were a pregnant woman, women giving birth, or women lactating their kids. A woman holding her breasts with her hands was also a frequent scene in the field of ancient art (el-Khoury, 2002, 9). The emphasis on shaping naked women in Ancient ages was associated with two main concepts: **Beauty** and **Fertility**. The continuity of this tradition from Paleolithic Ages into Nabataean Era is a strong indication of the human belief in the role of woman in the world of fertility, grace and prosperity.
The representation of the Greek goddess Aphrodite in Petra or other Nabataean sites with the upper part of the body naked emphasizes the fact that the Nabataeans believed strongly in beauty and fertility. These values were exclusively associated with female deities. This shows the central role the women played in Nabataean society. In addition to this, a number of statues represented the Egyptian goddess Isis while she was feeling sad for the loss of her husband. Isis was shaped either as round or as a relief statue carved on the facades of Petra (el-Khoury, 2002: pls: 33-43).

This type of representation reflects the strong belief of Nabataean in marital relations and fertility. Besides this, Nabataeans manufactured large stone statues uncovered in certain temples. Most of these sculptures were accompanied with things associated with fertility. In Khirbet Attannur temple, the upper part of the goddess Atargatis, was manufactured. A part of her body was covered with grape leaves which were known as symbol of fertility. Her breasts were uncovered which emphasizes the symbol of fertility. The breasts are organs that distinguish femininity and a simple symbol of fertility. In other examples of statues representing Atargatis, she was associated with other symbols of fertility like pomegranates, figs, wheat grains and sometimes with fish (Glueck, 1965: pls. 1, 25, 31). The main sculpture in the second floor of the façade of the Treasury in Petra represented al Uzza in the form of a woman holding with her left hand the horn of fertility and prosperity. The same goddess in Greece representing fertility was Tyche. It was represented in Nabataean Sculpture. Isis the Egyptian goddess was frequently represented in Nabataean art. Another Statue holding the horn of fertility and prosperity was found in Petra. This statue aimed at giving the city Petra grace and prosperity (Glueck, 1965, pl.185).

4. WOMAN AND SOCIAL LIFE

As attested by the different archaeological evidences including sculptures, and inscriptions, women seemed to have gained a good status in Nabataean society. The sculptures exhibit woman traditional costumes and jewelry reflecting a prestigious status of women. Nabataean inscriptions, especially funerary inscriptions from Higra and the Dead Sea Nabataean scrolls, provide us with a good deal of information concerning woman possession rights, woman legal rights and woman commercial rights.

Costumes and jewelry

The archaeological excavations in the Nabataean sites yielded artistic works including costumes, jewellery and accessories that shed important light on the life of women. Various jewellery pieces of different shapes, some Nabataean terracotta figurines representing women, coins and Nabataean mural painting recovered during archaeological excavations from different Nabataean sites demonstrated the significant status of women in ancient Nabataean society.

Crowns, earrings, nose rings, necklaces, torques, fibula, girdle, rings, hand bracelets, armlets and anklets represented the most frequent accessories used by Nabataean women from different social ranks.

Nabataean women clothes and accessories designate the social and the political situation of the woman; crowns were used only by women from the royal family, diamonds were used by women of high level social status, while rings and hand bracelets used by all women.

Nabataean coins and figurines exhibit types of Nabataean woman traditional clothes (Fig.2); these archaeological remains demonstrated two form of traditional clothes: the first one is a long twisted ribbon on an earring made of gold (al-Muheisen et al., 2002), the second one is a tubular cloth.
folded inside-out from the top about halfway down, altering what was the top of the tube to the waist and the bottom of the tube to ankle-length (Figs. 3 and 4) (cf. Glueck 1965: Pls. 188a,b; 189 a,b).

As shown by some figurines Nabataean woman seemed to have had a special hairstyle. Women used to wear luxurious necklaces, belts and bracelets (Fig. 5) (al-muheisen at al. 2002).

Several Nabataean sculptures from Petra and from other Nabataean sites reflect the different social classes by showing differences in clothes and costumes. The crown, for instance, was one of the most significant accessories that indicated the high social situation of the Nabataean woman.

**Woman Property Rights**

Nabataean inscriptions reveal interesting facts regarding woman property rights. Nabataean funerary inscriptions demonstrate the equality of property right between man and woman.

Funerary inscriptions carved on the tomb's facades demonstrate women's rights in inheritance and the control over their property. Funerary inscriptions provide us with direct evidences concerning some juridical aspects. They contain a proclamation of tomb ownership, they give special indications for certain depositions of the Nabataean legal traditions such as the patterns of inheritance and women rights. (Abdelaziz, 2005: 190). Tombs inscriptions provided us with some evidences regarding the women’s rights in inheritance; woman had right to possess a tomb as wife (ex. CIS II 219, JS 38); as daughter (ex. CIS II 202, JS 5); as sister (ex. CIS II 210); as aunt (ex. CIS II 226) and as granddaughter (ex. CIS II 212).

Some inscriptions mention that woman shared man in the possession of the tomb (CIS II 213). Other inscriptions confirm the women property of the whole of the tomb, They mention the woman right to use the tomb without limitations (cf. for example: CIS II 223, 211, 205, 203, 198, 200, 223, 224). These inscriptions authenticate that women in Nabataea had independent legal personalities, the inscription CIS II 204 confirm this fact, it contains a proclamation of donation from man to his spouse. Nabataean funerary inscriptions show, generally, that Nabataean woman have had the same right as the man in the as legal heir, but also she has right to make her own tomb.

In one of the Dead Sea scrolls, we note a borrowing contract between a couple; Amaṭiṣī lends her husband Muqīmū 150
piece of silver of, and she recorded this in a borrowing contract guarantee her right (Yardeni, 2002:271-277; Abdelaziz 2005:169). This contract confirms the Nabataean women right on her possession but also that she disposed of an independent legal personality.

Nabataean Dead Sea scrolls demonstrate the effective participation of the woman in the economic activities. Following the Dead of Sale from Nahal Hever, Nabataean woman was the owner of Palm-trees gardens, and she has the absolute right of use on these gardens. Women bought palm-trees garden to men, and they signed themselves the contract (cf. Yardeni, 2002:278-289; Abdelaziz, 2005: 194), these contract illustrate clearly that Nabataean woman participation in the commercial activities, and she have had an independent legal personality.

Regarding the woman manual labor in the Nabataean society, we have no, in fact, any direct indications, but allusions bearing in some female personal names; Hatebat, ‘mat and qaynat were female personal names indicate jobs name. We cannot presume clearly if this signify that women worked on these jobs or these were just personal names. (Maani, 2008:59-60).

5. CONCLUSION
Based upon the archaeological evidences mentioned in this study, women seemed to have gained a good status in Nabataean Society. As attested by some of the inscriptions, Nabataean women were equal to men in many aspects of life. They could own land, manage their own property and represent themselves in court cases. In world of divinity, they had a number of goddesses and their images were most often associated with life and fertility.

The role of the women developed with the transition of Nabataean from nomadic to sedentary life. Some historical resources show the development of their roles during the different reigns of the successive rulers. As it is shown in Nabatean sculpture, she played many roles, such as goddess, queen, priest, and musician Their role was at its zenith during the reign of Aretas IV (9 B.C. - 40 A.D.).

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