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The Development of the Institute of the Royal Power in the Nabataean Kingdom

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The article is devoted to consideration of the question which kind of royal power was in Nabataea. On the basis of written sources, epigraphy and numismatics it was determined that royal power in Nabataea arose from power of a military leader. The development and establishment of the state system in Nabataea occurred with assimilation of Hellenistic and saving tribal traditions.

Key words: Nabataeans, royal power, Hellenism, tribal traditions

Походнякова Альона. Розвиток інституту царської влади в Набатейській державі. Стаття присвячена розгляду питання про характер царської влади в Набатей. На підставі даних нараптивних джерел, епіграфіки та нумізматики було з'ясовано, що царська влада в Набатей виникла з влади ватажка військової дружини. Становлення та розвиток державності відбувалися при засвоєнні елліністичних та збереженні родоплемінних традицій.

Ключові слова: набатей, царська влада, еллінізм, родоплемінні традиції

Походнякова Алёна. Развитие института царской власти в Набатейском государстве. Статья посвящена рассмотрению вопроса о характере царской власти в Набатее. На основе данных нараптивных источников, эпиграфики и нумизматики было определено, что царская власть в Набатее возникла из власти предводителя военной дружины. Становление и развитие государственности происходило при усвоении эллинистических и сохранении родоплеменных традиций.

Ключевые слова: набатей, царская власть, эллинизм, родоплеменные традиции

The history of birth and development of the Nabataean kingdom, which used to be located on the territory of modern Jordan, has not been fully studied. This is associated with the condition of the sources, the lack of which does not allow to reconstruct the process of development of Nabataean society. An active work has been done by archaeologists and as a result – we have got new material for research.

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The article is devoted to the consideration of the question which kind of royal power was in Nabataea. This research is a necessary stage in reconstruction of the administrative and political system of Nabataea in general, and in the future there is a way to obtain the complete representation of its historical development.

The research is based on the works of Strabo [14], Diodorus [5], Flavius Josephus [6], Stephen of Byzantium [13], epigraphic inscriptions collected in “Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum” (CIS) [3; 4] and “Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique” (RES) [10; 11; 12], numismatic data, which presented in works of R. Barkay [2], M. Huth [8], Y. Meshorer [9], B. Head [7], as well as a Soviet historian, Orientalist and Classics scholar I. Shifman [1].

A king was at the head of the Nabataeans. The royal power existed among the Arabs long before the Hellenistic period. Stephen Byzantine's work includes the confirmation: “Μοθῶ, κόμη Αραβίας, ἐν ἣ ἔθανεν Ἀντιγονοῦς ὁ Μακεδὼν ὑπὸ Ῥαββίλου τοῦ βασιλέως τῶν Ἀραβίων, ὡς Οὐράνιος ἐν πέμπτῳ. ὃ ἐστὶ τῆ Ἀράβιον φωνῆ τόπος θανάτου. οἱ κομῆται Μοθῆροι κατὰ τὸν ἐγχόριον τύπον” (Steph. Byz. s.v. Μοθῶ, p. 466).

However, it should be noted that Diodorus, despite of his good awareness, in the narrative about the Nabataeans did not mention a king. He wrote that the Nabataeans had been a kind of freedom-loving people (Diod., 19.94.1–4). Perhaps it can be explained with the fact that in the 4 BC the king was like a military tribal chief, an equal among equals. If this assumption is correct, the appearance of hereditary royal power in the 3rd century BC can be seen as a result of a political coup and seizure of power. In favor of this statement can be led the evidence contained in the Second Book of Maccabees, where the Nabataean ruler Areta called as a tyrant, not a king: “Ἀρέταν τὸν τῶν Ἀράβιον τύραννον” (В Мак. 5: 8). In the west-semitic inscriptions the Nabataean king usually denoted by the word “mlk” (similar to the Arab “malik”).

There is an interesting information about Nabataean kings in Strabo's work: “ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς ἐν ὄγκῳ μεγάλην πολλὰ συνέχει συμπόσια· πίνει δ' οὐδεὶς πλέον τῶν ἑνδεκα ποτηρίων ἄλλῳ καὶ ἄλλῳ χρυσῷ ἐκτόματι. οὗτῳ δ' ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐστὶ δημοτικός, ὥστε πρὸς τῷ αὐτοδιακόνῳ καὶ ποτε ἀντιδιακόνον τοῖς ἄλλοις καὶ αὐτὸν γίνεσθαι” (Strabo, 16.4.26).

There are three most important facts in this narrative: a king systematically arranged feasts; a king participated in the work for himself and others; a king was accountable to the people not only in his political activities, but also in his lifestyle.

In this way, it is a reason to say that the royal power evolved from a military leader's power. So the welfare of society depended on the ruler's lifestyle. Strabo described the details which were remnants of the past when the king

was the equal among equals, he was an organizer and chairman of the feasts, and his companions took part in deciding most important issues of the society.

In 1st century BC – 1st century AD there were certain changes, which led to the formation of statehood in Nabataea. This process consisted in the fact that the royal power had become dynastic. Another important thing was the fact that the Nabataean rulers began to take titles from the Hellenistic sample and some kings were deified. Strabo noted that Petra was ruled by some king from the royal family: “βασιλευεται μὲν οὖν ὑπὸ τινος αἰ τοῦ ἐκ τοῦ βασιλικοῦ γένους” (Strabo, 16.4.21). A lot of inscriptions also show that the royal power was usually transmitted within the kind of inherited, and usually the king – either the son or the brother of his predecessor (CIS, II, 182; 349; 442).

Along with the information mentioned above there is another interesting fact. Strabo noted that the king had one of his companions as Administrator, who was called “brother”: “ἔχει δ' ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐπίτροπον τῶν ἐταίρων τινά, καλούμενον ἀδελφόν· σφόδρα δ' εὐνομεῖται” (Strabo, 16.4.21). Despite the direct meaning of the word, the “brother” could be not a real relative of the king, though it means that some earlier idea from the time when only a blood brother could be an Administrator remained during certain period. If the Administrator was elected among the king's companions, we can suggest that the kings' court was arranged to the Hellenistic sample and there were companions and relatives of the king of various ranks. So, for example, some of the inscriptions show that there were Strategists and Hipparchus among the Nabataeans and they performed administrative functions (CIS, II, 195–196; RES, 1104). In the inscriptions the commander's functions are indicated by the verb “sit”, which implies that they were connected with the responsibilities of the king. Those Strategists and Hipparchus could hardly be sheikhs who took Hellenistic titles. We rather deal with the attempts of the Nabataean kings to create their administrative and territorial control system.

The sources contain the detailed description of the activity of one of those “brothers” of the king – Syllaueus, whose evidence is in the inscriptions of Miletus (RES, 672; 1100). According to the Strabo, Syllaueus participated in the expedition of Aelius Gallus to the South Arabia (Strabo, 16.4.22–24). Flavius Josephus accused Syllaueus in deliberately killing the reigning king Obodas and many noble Nabataeans in Petra (Fl Jos, Antt., 16, 296; 17, 54).

The Nabataean rulers tried to achieve absolute power changing their position in the society according to the Hellenistic model. This statement can be attested by the titles of some kings. For example, Nabataean king Aretas III had taken the title “φιλῆλληνος” [7, p. 686; 2, p. 99], which means “the one who loved Greeks”. The inscriptions and the coins contain the title of Aretas IV: “the one who loved his people” (hmm ‘mh) (CIS, II, 199; 201;

354) [8, p. 204; 7, p. 686], which corresponds to the Greek “φιλῶδημος”. The adoption of such title meant that the king added himself in series of Hellenistic rulers and tried to turn his people into his clients and citizenship. The evidence of this statement might be the title of Rabbel II, the king of Nabataea: “the one who revived and saved his people” (dy ‘hyw syzb’ mh) (RES, 1423; CIS, II, 354) [8, p. 204; 9, p. 21; 7, p. 686], which is close to the Hellenistic “Σωτήρ” – “Soter” (the title of Hellenistic kings).

Another important thing is the deification of some Nabataean kings. The analysis of sources allows to state that Nabataean king Obodas II was deified (Steph. Byz. s.v. Ὀβοδῶρ, p. 482; RES, 1423; CIS, II, 354).

The question of the foreign policy status of the Nabataean kings under Roman control in the Near Eastern Mediterranean is of especially interesting. Probably the Nabataeans were allies of the Romans. The union (especially in the notion of Rome) was a form of subordination of weak one to strong one. So, the allies had to accept the domination of Rome, adjusting their foreign (sometimes internal too) policy and to provide it with troops. However, the formal sovereignty of the allied state was remained which could continue its independent policy, being outside the jurisdiction of the Roman local rulers and this is what Nabataea had been doing.

The government of Rome strove for receiving of royal power by Nabataean kings, thereby recognizing its supreme power, as Flavius Josephus noted (Fl. Jos., Antt., 16, 294–297). Aretas IV became a king without previously informing Augustus and waited for the Emperor's will. Augustus was angered by that act and he refused to take the gifts, believing that Aretas IV tried to demonstrate the independence of the Nabataeans. Flavius Josephus narrated that Augustus was ill-disposed to Aretas IV, who had taken the power not from him, but himself. The Emperor even thought about giving Nabataea under the control of the Jewish king Herod I (however, this statement of Flavius Josephus is doubtful) (Fl. Jos., Antt., 16, 354). In any case, that was hardly possible to realize, therefore Augustus adopted the power for Aretas IV and that act was a formal confirming of the rights of the new Nabataean king. In fact, a compromise was reached: the supreme power of Rome had been recognized, but at the same time it was formal.

I. Shifman [1, c. 80] stated that Aretas IV tried to demonstrate the independence of Nabataea. However, there could be other reason. Aretas IV was forced to fight for power against the “brother” of the king Syllaueus. The Nabataeans did not have a real ruler at that time. Obviously, Aretas IV understood the situation when his power and the internal political condition of Nabataea were so unstable and would not try to prove something to Rome. Probably the Nabataean king did not want to delay the process of establishing

of his own royal power to avoid disorder and to take the control in Nabataea as soon as possible. Then Aretas sent gifts to Augustus.

The independence of Nabataean kings can be explained by the fact that the Nabataeans were located far from the center of the Roman possessions in Syria and the comparative inaccessibility of Petra, which was an important political center. Moreover, the existence of the Nabataeans helped the Romans not to contact with the nomads of Sinai and the Arabian Peninsula. The Province of Arabia was established when the Roman interests were threatened by the independence of the Nabataeans.

In that way, the royal power in Nabataea evolved from a military leader's power. The members of the royal family not only took part in the govern of the state, but they also had the right to rule, so there was a dynastic principle of passing the power. In 1st century BC – 1st century AD there was the process of forming of the state system. At the same time some tribal traditions had been saved for a long time, for example, the post of the king's adviser (or Administrator) – so-called "brother".

The Nabataean kings took the titles from the Hellenistic model and some of the kings were deified. These facts demonstrate the influence of the Hellenistic traditions on the formation of the institute of the royal power, the kings tried to take absolute power by changing their position in the society. The development and establishment of the state system in Nabataea occurred with assimilation of Hellenistic and saving tribal traditions.

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