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Athenodorus of Tarsus and Nabataea: The Date and Circumstances of His Visit to Petra

Athenodorus of Tarsus was certainly not the first Greek to cross the Jordan to visit Petra, but he certainly provided the most treasured and cited eyewitness account of Nabataean society and culture that is extant. Nabataea has always suffered from its lack of firsthand local literary sources, so Strabo's account from the Augustan age is especially to be valued even if it is a product of a somewhat remote outsider. It is true that we lack any detailed information about certain aspects of Nabataean culture, such as their educational system, literature, mythology, and history (Millar 1987: 153), but we have Athenodorus to thank for helping to correct somewhat this situation. His description of Nabataean society is preserved in Strabo's account of the Nabataeans in his *Geography*.

“Petra is always ruled by some king from the royal family; and the king has an administrator (*epitrophos*) one of his companions, who is called “brother” (*adelphos*). It is exceedingly well-governed; at any rate, Athenodorus, a philosopher and companion of mine (*anēr philosophos kai hēmīn hetairōs*), who had been in the city of the Petraeans, used to describe their government with admiration, for he said that he found both many Romans and many other foreigners sojourning there, and that he saw that the foreigners often engaged in lawsuits, both with one another and with the natives, but that none of the natives prosecuted one another, and that they in every way kept peace with one another” (Strabo, *Geography* XVI.4.21 [779]; cf. 4.26 [783]).

Athenodorus' description of Nabataean society as egalitarian, harmonious, sophisticated, and cosmopolitan (cf. 16.4.26 [783]) contrasts sharply with that of the earliest eyewitness account of the Nabataeans centuries earlier by Hieronymus of Cardia in 312/11 BC, who depicts them as completely no-

madic, living in tents, and raising camels and sheep (preserved in Diodorus XIX.94; cf. II.48). But as I have argued earlier, there is no reason to interpret this early account literally as an accurate portrayal of Nabataean society, since it appears to represent a highly stylized literary description of them that reflects the stock motifs of traditional Greek ethnography for cultures on the margins of the civilized world (Graf 1990: 52-53). More recently, this interpretation has been supported by Bosworth (2002: 188-191), who notes that Diodorus' details “should provoke disquiet rather than confidence...its literal truth is highly debatable”. In spite of these observations, Hieronymus' description of Nabataea as a basically nomadic society in the early Hellenistic period is still regarded as fundamentally correct (cf. Parr 2003: 28), making dramatic the comparison with Athenodorus' report several centuries later that the Nabataeans now inhabit stone houses, enjoy banquets, and conduct themselves peacefully. What remains unclear is the date and circumstances of his visit to Petra in Nabataea. Who was this philosopher and companion of Strabo and when and why did he visit Petra?

The first question can easily be answered. Elsewhere, Strabo provides the essential details. Athenodorus was the son of Sandon from the village of Kana near Tarsus (cf. Welles 1962: 54-56), and the greatly honored teacher of Augustus, Strabo carefully distinguishing him from another Athenodorus of Tarsus, called Cordylion, an earlier contemporary, the librarian at Pergamum, who lived and died in the home of Marcus Cato (Strabo XVI.5.14 [674]), consequently before 46 BC, and therefore a predecessor of Strabo's friend Athenodorus (Cichorius 1922: 279). This Athenodorus of Kana is apparently the same Athenodorus who produced a work *Against Aristotle's Categories* that drew the

attention a century later of L. Annaeus Cornutus, another Stoic philosopher (*fl.* 60 AD; see Hijmans 1975). Athenodorus was the first Stoic to write on Aristotle's *Categories*. How this relates to the reputed rediscovery of the Aristotelian manuscripts in the early first century BC (Strabo 13.1.54 [608-609]; Plutarch, *Sulla* 25) remains controversial (Primavesi 2007; cf. 1997 Habicht 313: "parts of the tradition are fable"). In any case, Athenodorus offered an original and innovative critique of Aristotle's treatise and produced other philosophical writings sometime between 60 and 30 BC (Gottschalk 1987: 1104 n. 131 with 1111-1112). His philosophical reputation obviously gained for him the special status as a counselor of the emperor Augustus and is well documented by Strabo.

Athenodorus as the Tutor of Augustus

What clearly ingratiated Athenodorus to the First Triumvirate was his celebration of their victory at Philippi in 43 BC and ability to speak on any subject at a moment's notice (Plutarch, *Apophthleg. Reg.* 207 C). Afterwards, he became the celebrated and honored tutor of Octavian and appears to have remained in Rome in this capacity till after Augustus' return from Actium, during which time he perhaps served as a procurator in Sicily (*Apophthleg.* 207B as emended by Cichorius 1922: 280; cf. Bowersock 1965: 39 n. 2). His loyalty to Augustus is symbolized in the story of how he snuck into the palace of the Emperor dressed as an old woman with a sword hidden under his cloak to demonstrate to the emperor his lax security and consequent vulnerability (Dio. 56.343.2). In addition to his philosophical scholarly contributions, he produced a treatise *On the Ocean* that reflected the ideas of Posidonius (Strabo 1.1.9 [6]), a history of Tarsus called *On the Fatherland* (Stephanus of Byzantium, s.v. *Agchialē*), and a work addressed to Octavia, Augustus' sister (Plutarch, *Publicola* 17), enhancing no doubt his position in the imperial court. In essence, in spite of the fragmentary remains of his career and activities, Athenodorus of Tarsus was hardly a minor figure, even if the precise details of his life can be pieced together only with some uncertainty (Von Arnim 1896; Hense 1907; Cichorius 1922: 279-282; Philippson 1931; Grimal 1945-46; Goulet 1994; Steinmetz 1994; Dueck 2000: 10-11). But our focus is only the date and circumstances of his visit to Petra, and certain possibilities can be eliminated and the time of the event more narrowly

defined.

According to Strabo, in the early days of the Principate, Athenodorus, now an old man, begged Augustus to allow him to return to his home city of Tarsus, and the emperor granted his request. As he started to leave, he cautioned Augustus that when he became angry he should say or do nothing before repeating the alphabet. This seemingly trivial advice purportedly led Augustus to seize his hand and detain him for a whole year longer rather than do without his services (Plutarch, *Apophleg* 207C). Eventually, when he returned to Tarsus, with Augustus' authority to set his home city in order, he confronted Mark Antony's previously appointed governor Boethus, and when Athenodorus' efforts to reform the city failed, he exiled Boethus and his supporters. There was an immediate negative reaction. The rabble in the city ridiculed him, leaving graffiti on the walls that called him a stinky old man. They even smeared their excrement on his walls and door. Athenodorus countered their derogatory actions and words with a graffito of his own: "Thunder for the old". Eventually, the city was set in order and later Nestor, the teacher of Octavia's son Marcellus, replaced Athenodorus as governor of Tarsus (Strabo 14.5.14 [674-675]). Since Marcellus died in 23 BC, Athenodorus' rule at Tarsus must be squeezed into the time around 28-23 BC, precisely when Aelius Gallus' Arabian campaign took place and the context in which his description of Nabataean Petra appears in Strabo. According to tradition in a treatise on old men, he died in his native city of Tarsus at the ripe old age of 82 (Pseudo-Lucian, *Macrobioi* 21, 23). If we postulate a birth of Athenodorus in the first decade of the first century BC (Grimal 1945: 269) or even a decade later (Philippson 1931: 52), he was clearly too old and preoccupied to have visited Petra in the reign of Augustus. When then did Athenodorus and Strabo meet and become companions?

Athenodorus and Strabo

If we know little about Athenodorus' early career, we also know very little about Strabo's background, whose autobiography is submerged within his account. It is generally assumed that he was born several decades after Athenodorus, sometime around 64 BC (Dueck 2000: 2). Strabo was educated by a string of Greeks — Aristodemus of Nysa, Xenarchus of Seleucia, and Tyrannion of Amisus — all Peripatetic philosophers from Asia Minor

(Roseman 2005: 28). The first was an old man at the time, and the instructor of Pompey's children in Rome (14.1.48 [650]), the second was a friend of Augustus (14.5.4 [670]), and the third a captive from Rome's war against Mithridates who lived in Rome after 67 BC (12.3.16 [548] with Dueck 2000: 9-10). It is then clear that Strabo must have studied in Rome sometime in the late 40s and early 30s, when he was in his twenties. Strabo first appears at Rome shortly before Caesar's assassination (12.6.2 [568]; but cf. Clarke 1997:101), then again in 35 BC (6.2.6 [273]), in 29/28 BC (10.5.3 [485]), and afterwards from 20 to at least 7 BC or even longer, representing perhaps three or four visits to Rome (Dueck 2000: 85-106). It is then probably sometime between 45 and 28 BC at Rome when Strabo encountered and became friends with Athenodorus. It is only much later that Strabo joined his friend Aelius Gallus, the Egyptian prefect, with whom he traveled throughout Egypt and Ethiopia.

Although it is precisely in the context of Aelius Gallus' campaign in 26/25 BC that Strabo mentions his relationship with Athenodorus, Katherine Clarke has observed that Strabo has a tendency to telescope events and relationships into a narrow time-frame (1997). The typical Strabo phrases of "shortly before us" and "recently" stretch from Pompey's campaign against the pirates to events as late as 6 BC in the reign in Augustus (Pothecary 1997). This enormous time-span raises questions about the precise dates of Strabo in the construction of his work. As Clarke notes, such expressions often refer to the contemporary intellectual life of Asia Minor into which Strabo wants to place himself (1997: 102-107). As a result, precise dates, past and present, are difficult to determine in Strabo. What is being reflected is rather Strabo's intellectual milieu in this terminology. So when Strabo says that Athenodorus was his friend and companion, we are not compelled to think of the Augustan era. Strabo lived well into the reign of Tiberius, long after Athenodorus was dead, buried, and honored as a "hero" at his home city at Tarsus (Clarke 1997). In sum, although Athenodorus' observations about Nabataean society are embedded within Strabo's account of Aelius Gallus' expedition into South Arabia and connected with the Nabataean administrator Syllaios, the visit of Athenodorus to Petra must have been decades earlier. As the known facts suggest, it rather appears that if Athenodorus shared his knowledge of the Nabataeans with Strabo, it

was when their paths first crossed in Rome in the late 40s BC (Dueck 2000: 10-11 with 189 n. 33 for discussion). The time and circumstances of his visit to Nabataea remains unknown. As Glen Bowersock so incisively put it, "One is left to wonder when or why Athenodorus was in Petra" (1965: 39 n. 2).

The Early Career of Athenodorus

Where was Athenodorus in the period before he met Strabo in the 40s BC? The first clue lies in the letters of Cicero, that fierce defender of the traditional Roman Republic. In a passage where he declares Pompey the "best man who ever existed", he follows it with praise for Athenodorus of Tarsus for his sayings about the nobility of birth and the nobility of worth" (*Ad. fam.* III. 7.5). It was written by Cicero from Laodicea in February of 50 BC as he was returning from Cilicia, where he served as proconsul in 51-50 BC. He had supported Pompey's great eastern expedition of 67 BC to reduce the stronghold of the Cilician pirates and was now receiving his reward. In another letter, six years later from his home in Arpinum, he wrote Athenodorus at Rome and asked him to send him Posidonius' work on "duty and expediency" and when it did not arrive he wrote Appius Claudius Pulcher at Rome and asked him to remind Athenodorus of his request, but later in the same month of November told him not to stir the philosopher as Athenodorus had already sent an excellent memorandum about Posidonius' thought on the subject (*Ad Atticus* 16.11.4). Appius Claudius Pulcher had been governor of Cilicia in 53-51, just before Cicero, and was devoted to Pompey as well, marrying off his daughter to Pompey's son Gnaeus in 54 BC (Anderson 1963 9; Seager 135 n. 66). The circle of Pompey's powerful Roman friends then included not only Cicero, but Appius Claudius Pulcher, and probably Athenodorus.

The academic origins of Athenodorus are now clear. He was the main source and depository of Posidonius, the former head of the academic school at Rhodes, with whom Cicero had studied philosophy in 79-77 BC. Posidonius of Apamea in Syria was one of the grand figures of the Hellenistic world — a polymath, more than a philosopher, a scientist, ethnographer, mathematician, and theologian, but an explorer as well. Born in 135 BC, he traveled in the 90s broadly in the West, visiting Gaul, Spain, North Africa, Sicily and Greece (Kidd 1999: 35-38, 53-56). In 87 BC, he was in Rome,

as leader of a diplomatic visit from Rhodes, where he probably encountered the young Pompey for the first time (Plutarch, *Marius* 45.7 = T 28 Kidd 1999). If Athenodorus was born in ca. 95 BC, he may have studied with Posidonius about the same time as Cicero and it is possible that this is when they formed a friendly relationship.

Pompey and Posidonius

Strabo describes the relations between Pompey and Posidonius as extremely close, and the comparison between Alexander and Aristotle immediately leaps to mind. According to Strabo, “it is said that Pompey, upon arriving at Rhodes on his expedition against the pirates (immediately thereafter he was to set out against both Mithridates and the tribes which extended as far as the Caspian Sea), happened to attend one of the lectures of Posidonius, and that when he went out he asked Posidonius whether he had orders to give, and that Posidonius replied: ‘Be brave and preeminent over others.’ Add to this that among other works he wrote also the history of Pompey”. (11.1.6 [492] = cf. T35-39 Kidd 1999). Pompey returned to Rhodes to visit Posidonius again after his victory over Mithridates (Pliny, *NH* 7.112), and once again after the eastern expedition, to hear Posidonius lecture, but this time he found him seriously ill. When a visit with the philosopher finally was arranged, Pompey expressed his disappointment that he would not hear him lecture, to which Posidonius replied, pain could not prohibit him from lecturing to such a great man as Pompey, and he then produced an oration about moral good from his bed (T38 Kidd = Plutarch, *Pompey* 42). It seems likely that Pompey encountered Athenodorus on at least one of these visits. At any rate, Athenodorus turns up at Rome in the late 50s, and his work on the “Nobility” (*Peri eugeneias*) is already being cited by Cicero by 50 BC (*ad familiares* III.7.5), who later employs him in 44 BC as a collaborator for the third book of his *De officiis*. Afterwards, as we discussed above, he served as one of the tutors of the young Octavian and later as an advisor to him in the newly formed Principate. In essence, he was in Rome as far as we can determine from 50 to about 25 BC, prohibiting or at least making unlikely his visit to Nabataea during this time. In the previous period, Athenodorus was at Rhodes as a student of Posidonius and probably also serving as his successor as a member of the Rhodian academy. When Posidonius died in

51 BC (Kidd 1999: 5), Rhodes was reaffirming its allegiance to Rome, and this must be when Athenodorus left Rhodes for Rome as Posidonius successor (Moretti 1976). It appears then that the only appropriate time for his visit to Petra is sometime between 63 and 50 BC.

In my opinion, it is Pompey’s Eastern Campaign between 67 and 62 BC, where we should focus for a context of Athenodorus’ observations about Nabataea. Pompey’s annexation of Syria in 63 BC, and intervention into Judaeian and Nabataean affairs is well known. Although the last event recorded in Posidonius history is dated to 86 BC, in a visit he made to Rome during his tour of the western Mediterranean, there is no reason to believe that his History stopped at this point (cf. Ruschenbusch 1993). There is nothing chronological about his work, as the few references to any sequential order in the more than 300 fragments of his lost work attest (Malitz 1983). Moreover, the allusion in Strabo to a work of Posidonius on Pompey suggests, there must be a continuation of his historical work into the 60s BC, whether as part of his general history or as a separate treatise. Although he may have met the young Pompey when he visited Rome in 86 BC, it is more than likely that his enthusiasm for Pompey began with the eastern expedition. As far as I am aware, only two proposals have been made for any extant fragments of his work continuing after 86 BC. The first was by Arthur Darby Nock in 1959 and the second by Strasburger in 1965. They can be briefly summarized, but perhaps best in regard to the chronology of Pompey’s campaign.

1. Strasburger observed that Plutarch’s description on the origins and spread of piracy and its final suppression by Pompey may be derived from Posidonius’ *History*. Of particular interest was Pompey’s humane treatment of the 20,000 prisoners captured during his victory over the pirates. Rather than execution, they were settled on land in Cilicia and Greece — “breaking with a long tradition of Roman behavior towards enemies considered as criminals” (1965: 51). According to Plutarch, “Pompey never entertained the idea of putting them to death. Instead he reflected that by nature man neither is nor becomes a wild or unsocial creature; it is rather the case that the habit of vice makes him something by nature he is not, and on the other hand, he can be made civilized again by precept and example, and by the change of place and occupa-

tion. In fact, even wild beasts given a measure of gentle treatment, lose their savage and intractable qualities” (*Pom.* 28). Where did such lofty philosophical ideas come from? As Strasburger notes, it is “tempting to assume that an exchange of ideas with the Stoic philosopher of Rhodes had its share in Pompey’s decision on the lot of the pirates, which was humane and at the same time politically far-sighted, and was followed by his large-scale and lasting organization of the eastern world in the same spirit” (1965: 51). Strasburger’s suspicion that Pompey’s humane solution after his victory should be credited to the influence of Posidonios may be correct, but even he was forced to admit “the sources say nothing about this”. Nevertheless, Arnaldo Momigliano agreed with Strasburger’s suggestion that Posidonius admired Roman politicians like Pompey who had shown moderation and turned away from the displays of brutal power seen in Rome’s treatment of Carthage and Greece in the previous century (Momigliano 1975: 22-49).

2. It has been suspected that the sketch of Jewish history with which Tacitus opened the fifth book of his *Histories* may well have had a forerunner in Posidonius History. Nock suspected Strabo preserved Posidonios account in his section on Judaea, where he says the most prevalent and creditable reports indicate that the ancestors of the priests of Jerusalem were Egyptians, and that Moses was a rebel Egyptian priest who migrated to Jerusalem because of his aversion to representing the Divine God in images. Strabo adds that his descendants were a superstitious and tyrannical people, who in his day were bands of robbers, who disturbed even neighboring Syria and Phoenicia. He indicates that tyrants ruled Jerusalem “now”, evidently alluding to the Hasmonean dynasts Hyrcanus and Aristobulus of the time of Pompey (16.2.32-40 [760-763]; cf. Bellemore 1999). Nock therefore suggested the Jewish segment was derived from Posidonius’ discussion of Pompey’s expedition. Jacoby also proposed that Posidonius remarks were from his History, but assigned them to the occasion of a clash between the Hasmoneans and the waning power of the Seleucids (*FgrH* 264 F6, Kom, 47) and this has been recently been designated as the siege on Jerusalem by Antiochus VII Sidetes in 135/4 BC (Berthelot 2003: 161; cf. Posidonius F 278 Kidd and Shahar 2005: 245). But Strabo

does place the Jewish account in the context of Pompey’s visit to Jerusalem and Nock’s view cannot be totally dismissed.

Both of these proposals, whether correct or not, emphasize the cultural and philosophical dimensions of Pompey’s mission. Unfortunately, Pompey’s eastern campaign has been viewed traditionally only as a military and political campaign — to rid the sea of pirates, to depose the troublesome Mithridates king of Pontus, and annex the unstable territories in the region. But very early in Pompey’s career, Plutarch says Pompey’s peers were struck with his similarity in looks to Alexander and gave him the name “Alexander” (*Pompey* 2). If this seems like a *post eventum* characterization, a fragment from Sallust’s *Histories* renders support for Pompey’s early admiration and attempt to emulate Alexander the Great: “from his early manhood, being influenced by the flattery of his admirers, [Pompey] believed he would be the equal of king Alexander, what is more he sought to rival his deeds and his plans” (3.84 = McGushin 1992: 39). There is then no reason to not perceive Pompey’s relationship to Posidonius as comparable to that of Alexander the Great and Aristotle, and that his eastern expedition also had cultural and intellectual dimensions (see Leach 1978: s.v. ‘Alexander’). After all, Pompey’s title of *Magnus* and tendency to imitate Alexander the Great dates back to the time of his first triumph in 81 BC (Plutarch, *Pompey* 14; Seager 1979: 11-12), almost two decades earlier. Nor should Pompey’s interest in Posidonius be merely regarded as curiosity and incidental.

Why it has been difficult to recapture this cultural aspect of Pompey’s enterprise is that such elements only emerge sporadically in the later literary tradition. Some appear in Pliny’s *Natural History*, but it takes some effort to weld them into a unity and suggest that Pompey’s program emulated Alexander the Great’s same scientific objective, with Pompey assembling scholars and scientists to record his penetration of the eastern world, like Alexander before him and Napoleon’s entrance to Egypt more than a millennium and a half later.

For Alexander’s Calisthenes, we have instead Pompey’s Theophanes of Mytilene, who had vigorously opposed the pro-Mithridates faction of his city, and seized Pompey’s arrival in the East in 67 BC to advance his own future, by becoming his counselor and historian (Anderson 1963: 34-41). After his campaign, Pompey returned to Mytilene, where

he arranged a festival in honor of Theophanes . In the process, Theophanes earned his citizenship by being the historian and propagandist of Pompey's eastern exploits. At least four honorific inscriptions of Theophanes are known from Mytilene (Robert 1969), the most recent discovered in 1992, signaling his importance as a politician before Pompey's arrival (Anastasiadis and Souris 1992). Afterwards, he followed Pompey to Rome, where his activities are recorded until 48 BC, when he returned to Mytilene with Pompey. Of his great work on Pompey, virtually nothing survives. Jacoby records only seven fragments, five from Strabo, and all dealing with geography, ethnography or fauna in the lands visited by Pompey (*FGrH* 2B no. 188). The only inkling we receive of his reputation as a historian is preserved by Plutarch, who observes that, according to Theophanes, Mithridates' correspondence found by Pompey contained letters incriminating the Pontic king of poisonings and lascivious letters to the wives of Roman legates. According to Plutarch, most authorities dismiss these purported letters as malicious inventions to discredit Pompey's enemies (Plutarch, *Pompey* 37).

Pompey's commander Marcus Terentius Varro, who served with him during his campaign against Sertorius in Spain, was chosen to lead again in the war against the Pirates and Mithridates. A noted legalist, there are also suggestions that his scholarly pursuits included interests in exploration and trade. Pliny notes that Alexander the Great had found that the waters of the Caspian were sweet to drink, and that Varro reported not only was it true, but conveyed some of the water to Pompey who was in Armenia at the time to confirm the fact (Pliny, *NH* VI.19.51). Varro furthermore advised Pompey that it was only a seven days journey from India into Bactria, and that Indian merchandise could be conveyed to Pontus in 5 days (*NH* VI 19.52).

In addition, included in Pompey's retinue during the campaign were also a number of Greek freedmen, whose counsel and expertise were important to the expedition. Among these was Demetrius from Gadara in the Syrian Decapolis, a rather pretentious and enterprising figure, who amassed a fortune from Pompey's eastern campaign, and even purchased prize territories in the suburbs of Rome before he returned. Why Pompey favored him and what role he played during the campaign are never described (Seager 1979: 54). Another freedman, Cn. Pompeius Lenaeus, a slave from Athens, was

a companion of Pompey on all his campaigns (Anderson 1963: 62-63). As a grammarian and scholar, he must have handled Pompey's correspondence and helped write his speeches. At Pontus, when the archives of Mithridates were found, Pompey charged Lenaeus with the task of preparing a Latin edition of the medical books of the king (Pliny *NH* XV.5-7). Lenaeus also mentioned a Pontic plant known locally as *scordotis* which was described in the books in the king's own handwriting, and since among the plants mentioned it had many purposes it served as an antidote for various poisons, so he called it *Mithridatium* (*NH* XXV.26.62). All of this was probably derived from the books of Crateuas, the personal physician of Mithridates VI of Pontus, who was a botanist. Fragments of his treatises on herbs and root-cutting were known to Pliny (*NH* XXV.4.8), and he was responsible also for ascribing another plant to Mithridates, calling it *mithridatia* (Pliny, *NH* XXV.26.62). In his books, he adopted the method of painting a likeness of the various plants he found alongside his descriptions (XXV.8.4), and copies of his drawings are known as late as the sixth century AD. This botanical interest helps explain Pliny's observation that it was Pompey who introduced trees to accompany captives in the triumphal processions at Rome (XII.54.111-112).

As with Alexander the Great, Pompey's great eastern expedition did not lack a company of cultural scholars, historians, explorers, and scientists. What is missing is an ethnographer and geographer, someone with a scientific perspective, like Eratosthenes or Agatharchides. Pompey's admiration of Posidonius would make him an ideal candidate, and as we have seen, Pompey, visited the great Stoic philosopher periodically before, during and after his eastern campaign. Pompey surely knew and appreciated Posidonius' reputation for exploration and ethnography (Müller 1993; Alfonso-Núñez 1994), and we can imagine he made inquiry and consulted with him about the new world emerging for Rome in the East. But Posidonius was now in his 70s and sickly, hardly able to join Pompey's scholarly entourage. However, this would not prevent the Rhodian academician from sending some of his finest students with the commander for his enterprise. If this were the case, Athenodorus would have been a prime candidate. Of course, Pompey was prevented from visiting Nabataea, forced to return back to Rome from Jerusalem (Bellemore 2000: 123), but

his commanders and administrators in the East did make several attempts to bring Nabataea under the Roman aegis (Sartre 1979; Hackl, Jenni and Schneider 2003: 40-42 and 111-114). If their expeditions also embraced Pompey's cultural program, it is possible that Athenodorus' continued Posidonius' program for exploration and ethnographic inquiry, managing a visit to Petra in Nabataea with other Romans. Of course, actual proof is lacking, but the scenario depicted here at least seems reasonable and appropriate to what is known about the period. Whatever the case may be, Athenodorus' account of the advanced state of Nabataea must be placed between 63 and 50 BC, a generation before the Augustan era. The period after 50 BC for his visit to Petra seems precluded by his tenure and activities at Rome.

As a consequence, the advanced state of Nabataea he describes must be dated a generation earlier than it was previously thought. This means the widespread assumption that Petra's development rose only sharply under Roman auspices in the Augustan era, when Nabataea was transformed into a civic state after supposedly centuries of nomadism, must be revised. Recent discoveries already are pointing in that direction. The new Milan papyrus (*P. Mil. Vogl.* VIII.109) of the early third century BC preserving a reference in the epigrams of Posidippus to a Nabataean king and his powerful Arab cavalry force in the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (284-286 BC) suggests already a well organized state in the early Hellenistic era centuries earlier (Graf 2006). Moreover, we know an envoy from Priene in Western Asia Minor was sent to Alexandria in Egypt and "Petra in Arabia" in 129 BC (Hiller von Gaertringen 1906: 82-91: No. 108, Kol. 5167-168 = Hackl *et al.* 2003: 126-127), and that a Han Chinese envoy probably became aware of Petra at approximately the same time (Graf 1996). These sources suggest that the Nabataeans had a well-established urban state at Petra before the hypothesized dramatic transition in the first century BC. Although the archaeological record offers now only minimal support for these literary and epigraphic finds of the Hellenistic era (cf. Graf, Bedal and Schmid 2005), Athenodorus' description of Nabataean culture in the period between 63 to 50BC must now be moved into closer proximity with this testimony. As the impressive accumulating literary sources suggest, archaeological evidence, even when unequivocal, never tells the full story.

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