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Article

History of tourism in Petra from the Nabataean Kingdom until the early 20th century

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Abstract: This article provides an account of the tourism in Petra encompassing its development from the time of the Nabataean Kingdom until the early 20th century. It delves into the factors that sparked tourism travel routes taken, security measures implemented, and influential individuals who have shaped Petra's tourism history. Located at a juncture in the Middle East, Petra has consistently fascinated people with its sense of adventure. The city's historical importance as a trade hub and a melting pot for cultural exchanges during the Nabataean era laid a strong foundation for its enduring charm. The skillful navigation of trade routes and effective marketing strategies employed by the Nabataean Kingdom played a role in establishing Petra as an irresistible destination for travelers. Supported by findings and ancient records it becomes evident that extensive trade networks flourished during this period highlighting the city's role in the region. Its allure transcended generations captivating observers from Greece to its rediscovery by Burckhardt (1818–1897).

Keywords: Petra; history of tourism; Nabataean; ancient visitors; tourism

1. Introduction

Throughout history humans have embarked on journeys driven by needs, such as survival with the search for food resources and suitable living environments. Over time humans settled down as economies developed and agriculture and animal husbandry became more established. The discovery of metals and the rise of states ushered in an era of long-distance trade. This flourishing trade along with the emergence of individuals and powerful rulers led to objectives for travel. People began to travel for leisure and to explore territories. In this shifting paradigm the Middle East region played a great a role. The territory now called Jordan, blessed with resources like copper and products from the Dead Sea, became a hub for mining and trade activities. There is evidence for these connections being developed with ancient Egypt dating back to the 5th millennium B.C.

The close proximity between civilizations in present-day Egypt and Jordan facilitated communication and travel between these two regions. The rise of the Nabataean Kingdom to power, coupled with knowledge of travel routes and an influential position in trade, greatly attracted foreigners to Petra, the Nabataean capital city. Consequently, information about this city spread far and wide through marketing efforts. The historical evidence we have gathered from inscriptions and Greek sources undeniably proves that the Nabataeans were actively involved in trade, with the Mediterranean region stretching from the eastern shores to present-day Switzerland.

This trade continued even after Petra was annexed by the Romans in 106 A.D. (Al-Salameen and Raslan, 2020), lasting until the 4th century A.D.

One of the reasons people traveled to Petra was because of its established infrastructure both within the city itself and throughout the broader Nabataean Kingdom. This infrastructure played a role in facilitating trade by supporting caravans and accommodating merchants. Additionally, the friendly locals greatly contributed to creating an amicable atmosphere. These individuals were involved in trade, and gained extensive experience and proficiency in multiple languages along their journeys.

Evidence from ancient Egypt before the rise of the Nabataean Kingdom strongly suggests that leisure travel and tourism already existed, especially for individuals coming from Europe. During this period, Egypt's remarkable civilization garnered recognition. Many people embarked on these tourism journeys specifically to witness the Pyramids and experience the wonders of sailing on the Nile River. The increasing fascination with Egypt led to a rise in sea cruises connecting it with Europe (Ahmed, 2017). Additionally, ongoing wars and European presence in this region served as factors that enticed people to explore the many attractions in this remarkable area.

2. Ancient visitors (up to 1812)

Had Petra ever been a place of attraction in ancient times?

Some accounts from historical sources and hints from archaeological records indicate that Petra was a place of attraction when it was at its zenith in the first century B.C and A.D. According to the Greek historian Strabo, who lived in the first century B.C., Petra was "exceedingly well governed; at any rate, Athenodorus, a philosopher and companion of mine, who had been in the city of the Petraeans, used to describe their government with admiration, for he said he found both many Romans and many other foreigners sojourning there" (Strabo, 1917). Theodor of Sicily, another Greek historian, refers to Petra several times in his books, and he based his account on information from visitors to Petra (Diodorus, 1967).

In the Roman period, particularly after the annexation of the Nabataean Kingdom in A.D. 106, we find historical references to Petra as a destination. The Petra papyri of the 6th century A.D., for instance, mentions some honorific titles given to Petra throughout its history (Traianos and Frösén, 1998). Among these titles we find "Hadriana", which is particularly significant as it may be the only evidence of emperor Hadrian's visit to Petra in the 2nd century A.D. (Fiema, 2002). Emperor Hadrian reigned Rome from A.D. 117 to 138, toured the eastern Roman provinces, and was in Jerash in the winter of A.D. 129/130. If the assumed visit of Hadrian to Petra had ever been made, it would have happened during his stay at Jerash, and obviously the monuments and status of Petra inspired his visit. At Petra itself, an ancient inscription referring to a certain person called Arianos had long been reported from one of the rock-cut facades. Unfortunately, the façade collapsed a little before the mid of the 19th century A.D., but luckily the inscription was copied by an earlier traveler (Laborde, 1836). The Greek inscription reads as follows:

"My name is Arrianos and Sacred Petra gave me birth
Which was the metropolis of the land of Arabia

The citizens gave me the prized honor of Asonian Laws (Italian law)
I was a first of beloved family
While I was living through my seventh and twentieth year
A disease that subdues all took me away to Hades.
One thing alone stings my heart, and that is that
I have left to my aged mother everlasting grief"

Some commentators on this inscription believe that Arrianos had visited Petra as he had a wish to visit it (MacKenzie, 1990).

Petra continued to flourish in the Roman and Byzantine periods, however, not to the level of development and importance in the Nabataean period. Petra gained a religious status in the Byzantine period, particularly due to the construction of a monastery at the top of Mount Aaron (Fiema, 2002). The monastery, and the place itself, attracted Christian visitors in the middle of the 8th century A.D. according to information reported in a historical source (Lahelma and Fiema, 2008).

During the crusader period, early in the 12th century A.D., Balwin I visited Petra in company with the monk and historian Fulcher of Chartres, and the later recorded the visit in his book (Fiema and Frösén, 2012). A century later, about A.D. 1217, the Christian pilgrim Themtar was reported to have visited Petra, but Fiema and Frösén (2012) have doubts about his visit. In the 13th century A.D., the Mamluk Sultan al-Dhaher Baybars visited Petra when he was on his way from Cairo to Kerak in A.D. 1276. The Sultan was accompanied by an historian called Al-Nuwayri and the latter made a report about this journey. From this period until the historic visit of Burckhardt in A.D. 1812, there is no reference, neither historical nor archaeological, to any visit by people from outside the region.

3. The rediscovery of Petra in A.D. 1812

1812 is undoubtedly a milestone in the history of tourism to Petra. Burckhardt's visit to Petra in 1812 sparked the desire for dozens of people, Europeans in particular and figures in their communities, to visit Petra. Before 1812, Petra was not known by the majority of people in western European countries. Burckhardt himself was not sure if the place he explored was Petra, the capital of the Nabataean Kingdom, or not, and he decided to leave this to the Greco-Roman historians to approve or reject this matter (Burckhardt, 1822). In fact, Petra was not on Burkhardt's initial itinerary from Aleppo to Cairo, and only at Kerak he started to hear about its significance as a ruined and hidden site. The desire to explore and visit Petra enormously increased at Shoubak as he received more information and details about the ancient city.

To achieve this emerging goal, he pretended to be a Muslim, by the name of Sheikh Ibrahim, and told his guide that he had a vow to kill a goat at the shrine of prophet Haroun [Aaron] (Burckhardt, 1822). The latter rite was common among Muslims at that time, and the people of Wadi Musa (a village near Petra) used to pay two visits to the shrine each year (Al-Salameen and Falahat, 2009). Despite the refusal or unwillingness of his guide, Burckhardt successfully visited Petra on the 23rd of August 1812, and managed to take important notes about its monuments. His notes and diaries were sent to London from Cairo, and from there the news about Petra spread all over Europe.

4. The 19th century trips to Petra

4.1. The motivations

The long quotation below clearly shows two different views regarding the motivations to visit the ruins of Petra. For Western European travelers, it was merely the marvelousness of the ancient monuments of Petra which drew their attention and attracted them. Meanwhile, the majority of travelers before the 19th century were true believers of the biblical narrative regarding the history and archaeology of the region. Therefore, their diaries and published books are overwhelmingly enriched with biblical narratives and texts. In fact, this obviously and strongly had an impact on their understanding and interpretation of the region's history and archaeology. In brief, investigating and exploring the Holy Land, and verifying the biblical narratives, was clearly the aim of many travelers. And, the titles of their books do reflect their motivations, as demonstrated in the following quote:

"That evening Paul and the sheikh had a long and curious conversation. After supper, and over their pipes and coffee, the sheikh asked him, as a brother, why we had come to that old city, Wady Mousa (Petra), so long a journey through the desert, spending so much money; and when Paul told him it was to see the ruins, he took the pipe from his mouth, and said, "That will do very well before the world; but, between ourselves, there something else;" and when Paul persisted in it, the sheikh said to him, "Swear by your God that you do not come here to search for treasure;" and when Paul had sworn by his God, the sheikh rose, and, pointing to his brother as the very acme of honesty and truth, said, after a moment's hesitation, "Osman, I would not believe it if that brother had sworn it. No," he continued, "the Europeans are too cunning to spend their money in looking at old stone. I know there is treasure in Wady Mousa (Petra); I have dug for it, and I mean to dig for it again;" and then again he asked Paul whether he had discovered any, and where; telling him that he would aid in removing it, without letting any of the rest of the tribe know anything of the matter." (Stephens, 1836).

Hoyle, in an article entitled *Thomas Cook: Tourism and the rise of Britain's empire in the Middle East*, thoroughly discussed the different aspects of tourism in the Middle East almost from the middle of the 19th century (Al-Salameen and Hani, 2009). He noted that "The expansion of mass tourism to the Middle East was soon reflected in popular Western culture, with the "Orient" becoming an exotic backdrop in British literature, especially the work of Agatha Christie in novels such as *Death on the Nile* (1937) and *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936). European painters also created exotic depictions of harems, Pashas and rural landscapes in what became known as "Orientalist art".

4.2. On the footsteps of Burckhardt

The published information, which were based on Burckhardt's notes and journals about Petra, obviously inspired people who were fond of travel and exploration in Europe. Consequently, Petra became one of the most desirable destinations in the world at that time. Trips to Petra, throughout the nineteenth century, were initiated and conducted by individuals, friends, or family members. The travelers (tourists) were

therefore responsible for planning and organizing the trips, including their security, means of transportation, translators, scouts, and accommodations.

The first consequential visit to Petra, after the historic visit of Burckhardt in 1812, was made in 1818 by a group of Europeans (British). This trip was led by Banks, Leigh, Irby and Mangles, where dramatic events unfolded before they saw the ancient city of Petra (MacMichael, 1819). Irby and Mangles attempted to make the visit from the Belka region in central Jordan, but their attempt was not successful. They made a deal with a local tribe and paid them a requested amount of money to scout Petra out, but the alleged tour leaders, for some unknown reasons, did not fulfill their mission. The two British navy officers had to return to Jerusalem, and there they met Leigh and Banks and joined their group to Petra via Kerak (MacMichael, 1819). This groups managed to quickly tour Petra on March 1818, under the protection of a local Sheikh, after experiencing a difficult time and complicated situation. The latter arose due to their denial of entry by the local people of Wadi Musa and Petra, who were against the visit as they suspected the authenticity of the Feraman (an official permit to visit the location), issued and given to the group by the Ottoman authority at Aka. The group was also given a recommendation letter by the sheikh of Hebron to the sheikh of Kerak. The former sheikh sent some of his men with the group to protect and guide them to Kerak.

Ten years later, in 1828, de Laborde and his friend Linant were in Petra for a few days. De Laborde made great plates (painting) of the major monuments at Petra, and published his narrative about the journey in a book (Laborde, 1836). In the following decades, from 1830 to 1883, several groups arrived at Petra. Subsequently, the frequency of visitors began to increase starting from 1835, and there was a group of travelers at Petra almost each year after (Brünnow and Domaszewski, 1904). Charlotte Rowley is believed to be the first Western woman to visit Petra in 1836. She was on a honeymoon trip to the Middle East along with her husband, her brother, and a friend of the family. At Petra, they met other visitors, and her name is still written on the rear wall of the main internal chamber of the treasury. The same year, 1836, witnessed the first visit to Petra by an American called John Stephens (1838). David Roberts, the famous Scottish painter, was in Petra along with his friend John Kinnear in 1839 (Kinnear, 1841).

Roberts produced fascinating drawings of the city's monuments, of the local people, and scenes of some spots along their route from Aqaba. The increase in the number of visitors to Petra raised some concerns regarding their security and their interference with the local people. James Finn, the British consul for Jerusalem and Palestine, paid a visit to Petra on April 1851 to make the visit to Petra more accessible and safer (Finn, 2007). In this respect, he states that "During the last twenty years there have been many English and other visitors to Petra; but they have usually taken it in the way from Egypt towards Jerusalem, which is probably convenient with respect to the season of the year…". "I went accordingly, and treated with the Fellahheen of Wadi Moosa in the place itself; and numerous travelers have since availed themselves of this advantage, though none have published an account of their expedition."

The flow of visitors to Petra had a drawback in the period between 1883 and 1895 due to a local tribal conflict. No visit to Petra, by an individual or a group, was reported during that period (Hill, 1897). Attempts were made by some visitors (i.e., Gray Hill

in 1890, 1891, 1893 and 1895), but none were successful before 1895. The year 1895 is a milestone for the situation in the region in general and for tourism in Petra in particular. In that year, the Ottoman authority established military outposts, for the first time, along the route between Kerak and Petra (Hill, 1897). Forder, an English clergyman, eye witnessed the deployment of an Ottoman force to Kerak in 1893 for the first time (Forder, 1920).

Forder (1905) was the first Western visitor to arrive at Petra in 1895 after the considerably long pause, as was Charles Alexander Hornstein (1898) as attested by Brünnow and Domaszewski (1904). That same year, the son of the Ottoman governor of Syria is reported to have visited Petra, accompanied by a squad of military forces (Forder, 1905). By the end of the 19th century and the turn of the following century, the number of visitors to Petra increased, particularly due to the improvement of security. Nevertheless, getting a permit from the Ottoman authorities in Damascus was a condition to visit Petra. In this respect, Al-Batnouni (1910) mentioned that caravans of Western tourists, particularly Americans, headed to Petra in the spring each year. He also stated that a special permit should be issued by the governor of Syria for the visit, and this was a difficulty for ordinary tourists.

The political situation, before the First World War, appears to have left its impact on travelling to Petra, particularly the tourists or travelers from countries like Britain and America. Gertrude Bell, for instance, was allowed to visit Petra in 1900 with limitations on her free movement in the region (Abudanh, 2010). This fact can be seen through the earliest scientific explorations of Petra. They were conducted by scholars and travelers from the countries which were allies to the Ottomans, such as Germany (Brünnow and Domaszewski, 1904; Musil, 1907). The region witnessed a drastic political change after the First World War and the Great Arab Revolution in 1916. Soon after, a new state was established in eastern Jordan, and it became under the British mandate as a result of the Syskes-Beiko agreement.

Theoretically, the new transition should have had a positive impact on tourism to Petra, considering the foundation of a new state and the security measures following deployment of military forces throughout the country under the supervision of the British Mandate (i.e., the Arab Legion). Nevertheless, there is not enough information about tourism in Petra during this period. The American journalist, Lowell Thomas, visited Petra in 1918 during the military skirmish between the Arabs and their allies on one side and the Ottomans on the other. Thomas, in his diaries and writings, made no mention of tourists at Petra during his visit, obviously due to the war and the unrest.

4.3. Thomas Cook and the mass tourism in the Middle East

After the success he achieved in Europe, Thomas Cook started a new business based on mass tourism in the Middle East in 1869. Soon after the opening of the Suez Canal, Thomas Cook inaugurated tourist offices in Egypt and Palestine in 1872 and 1874 successively. According to Hoyle, “Ancient ruins and biblical sites on such tours included the Holy Sepulchre Church in Jerusalem, the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Palmyra in eastern Syria, and Petra in Jordan” (2019). First-hand information about Cook’s Company role in organizing and conducting mass tourism trips to Petra are not available. Their role in the last quarter of the 19th century in particular is not clear.

However, photos and reports from the 3rd decade of the following century (the 20th) evidently reflect the involvement of Cook's company in tourism to Petra.

4.4. The routes

The routes which the travelers and tourists took to reach Petra in the 19th century and during the first half of the 20th century had changed over time. The use of animals, camels mainly, was the main mean of transportation to Petra during the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century. In the 19th century, the majority of travelers and explorers started their journeys from Cairo, then went to Aqaba, and from there to Petra. Most of them came to Petra via Wadi Araba, and a few made it via the eastern route. The latter almost runs parallel to the modern desert highway before it branches off over the mountainous ridge through the path of the King's Highway. Wilson (1891) made his journey from Aqaba to Petra in 1836 via this route.

Those who came via Wadi Araba used to enter the ancient city of Petra from the west from a point near Mount Aaron, locally called Naqeb Jabal Haroun. The second major route started either from Jerusalem or Hebron, and the latter was the real starting place of the journey. From Hebron the journey went to Kerak in southern Jordan, and then south to Petra through Tafilah and Shoubak. This route was taken by William Banks and his companions in 1818 (MacMichael, 1819). In fact, these routes were not the best in terms of time, distance and topography but were the best in terms of security. Irby and Mangles (1823), for instance, did attempt to reach Petra from the north in central Jordan while they were touring the Jordan River. Their attempt failed and the lack of security along that route was the reason for the unsuccessful attempt, and they went back to Jerusalem before they joined Banks and his group (MacMichael, 1819).

Finn, the British Consul at Jerusalem, had a plan to introduce a new route, directly from Jerusalem to Petra as stated in the following words "But, on hearing that several travellers had been unable to reach Petra even after "Akabah, on account of hostilities arising between the Alaween and the Tiyâhah Arabs, or on account of the exorbitant demands of money made by the former of these, I thought the time had arrived for me to show the practicability of getting at the wonders of Petra from Jerusalem, under escort of the Jehâleen Arabs near Hebron" (Finn, 2007). Although there are no reports about any direct journey to Petra by any travelers from Jerusalem, there is enough evidence about direct journeys from Jerusalem and Hebron to Petra. Those journeys were made by the travelers who came to Petra from Cairo via Aqaba (Abudanh and Twaissi, 2021). The reason of this situation was the lack of security along the direct route from Jerusalem. However, the journey to Petra from Hebron and Jerusalem took place under the guard and protection of the same tribes who escorted the travelers from Aqaba to Petra (Abudanh and Twaissi, 2021).

By 1895, the Ottoman authorities established security outposts along the route from Kerak to Petra (Hill, 1897), and this encouraged the use of this route more frequently than the Cairo–Aqaba–Petra route (Abudanah, 2010). In 1908, the Hijaz Railway (HR) project was finished, and the train arrived at Madinah in Saudi Arabia. Ma'an, 40 kilometers east of Petra, was a major station on the HR line, but no information is available about the use of trains by tourists coming to Petra before the 1920s. This was probably due to the fact that the HR line was mainly to transport pilgrims to Mecca and Madinah, and due to the restrictions the Ottomans imposed on

the movement of Western visitors (Forder, 1905). After the creation of a new state in eastern Jordan in 1921, the visit to Petra became easier and more secure as a result of using trains and establishing police stations along the major routes. Tourists used to leave the trains at the Ma'an station, and then went on horseback to Petra. Rarely, special airplanes carrying tourists to Petra landed at Ma'an as well. Transportation from Ma'an to Petra by car was not possible before 1932.

4.5. Security and tour guiding

Until 1895, there were no military or police outposts along the travelling routes to Petra, neither along the northern routes (from Kerak) nor along the southern routes (from Aqaba). However, the security of travelers was in the hands of local tribal chieftains or sheikhs according to certain agreements and arrangements. The latter were usually organized with the leaders of the powerful tribes along the routes, and at Petra itself. The friendship between the tribal and town chieftains was also employed to facilitate and secure the arrival of travelers to Petra. The sheikh of Hebron, for instance, in 1818 sent guides and a recommendation letter to the sheikh of Kerak with William Banks and his group (MacMichael, 1819). The guides refused a generous offer from the travelers to take them directly to Petra due to the lack of security along that route. Having safely arrived at Kerak, the latter's sheikh joined the group and employed other sheikhs who were his acquaintances, along the route to Petra to secure the journey.

The journeys from Cairo to Petra via Aqaba appear, relatively, well organized. The arrangements and agreements with the tribal chieftains were conducted at the house of the British Consul in Cairo, or in Aqaba in the presence of the Ottoman governor of the castle (Laborde, 1836). Sometimes, travelers had to wait several days in Aqaba for the arrival of tribal chieftains to escort them to Petra (Kinnear, 1841; Millard, 1843).

The engagement of chieftains and their tribes in tribal conflicts had a negative impact on the flow of visitors to Petra. A war, about 1857, caused the cancelation of some trips to Petra via Aqaba since the Alaween tribe, who escorted Western travelers to Petra for several decades, was one of the involved tribes in the conflict then (Porter, 1858). No travelers went to Petra between 1882 and 1895 as a result of the tribal war between the people of Kerak and their allies on one side, and the people of Petra and their allies on the other side. Despite this situation, no Western traveler or visitor had ever been reported to have been killed, robbed, or injured.

The local tribal escorting team, under the leadership of a certain sheikh, would secure the route and protect the travelers and supply them with camels for transportation and to carry their belongings. In return, the travelers would pay them a certain amount of money, a tip and some gifts, such as pipes, a piece of cloth, or other desirable items. (Kinnear, 1841; Formby, 1843). Porter (1858) summarized the fares paid by travelers to the Alaween sheikh until 1857 as follow: Kinnear and Roberts (in 1839) paid 4500 piasters for the journey and the camels for a group of three people.

Olin and his group paid 280 piasters for each camel and 260 piasters for each Bedouin guard throughout the journey. Bartlett (in 1849) paid 3000 piasters for the journey from Aqaba to Petra, and back from Petra to Cairo. Martineau (in 1847) and her group paid 1000 piasters for the protection and 250 piasters for each camel they

used during the journey. Dragomen or translators, mostly Egyptians, accompanied many travelers, some of them were doing this job for many years and were well aware of the region and its inhabitants (Kinnear, 1841).

5. Conclusion

This study focused on the development of travel and tourism in the Middle East, specifically highlighting Petra. It examined how humans progressed from migrating for survival to seeking resources and comfort over time. As settled communities emerged and trade flourished, long distance travel became more prevalent. The research underscored the role of the Middle East, especially Jordan as a trade and exploration hub due to its abundant resources. The growth of trade and prosperous individuals ushered in an era of travel and exploration. The connection between Egypt and Jordan facilitated communication and travel while the prominence of the Nabataean Kingdom played a part in attracting foreigners to Petra. Archaeological findings provided evidence of trade networks between the Nabataeans and Mediterranean regions. Thanks to its established infrastructure and welcoming population, Petra became a thriving center for commerce as well as an enticing destination for visitors. Ancient records from Egypt showcased instances of tourism from Europe driven by attractions such as the Pyramids and the Nile River. The study also delved into visitor's experiences in Petra during its peak economic and social period based on historical accounts. The rediscovery of Petra in 1812 marked a turning point that sparked heightened interest among travelers.

During the 19th century numerous explorers made trips to Petra driven by a combination of fascination with monuments and biblical stories. The impact of the Thomas Cooks company's introduction of Petra to a wider audience was examined, highlighting the role of tourism in the Middle East. The research also traced the development of travel routes to Petra from camel-based journeys to the inclusion of trains and automobiles in the early 20th century. Emphasis was placed on security measures and tribal arrangements that ensured the safety of travelers. Local sheikhs often played a role in guiding and protecting travelers on their route to Petra. The study shed light on the logistics involved in these journeys including guides and payment arrangements. Overall, this research offered an overview of the progression of travel and tourism in the Middle East with a specific focus on Petra. It reveals how this remarkable ancient city became an attraction, for both explorers and tourists alike.

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