

The Ancient Egyptians' Travels to the Phoenician Coastal City of Byblos

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Abstract: There were many travels and journeys that the ancient Egyptians did to the coastal cities in the eastern Mediterranean. One of the most important cities of that region to which the Egyptians travelled was Byblos "Jbail". This paper aims mainly to try to identify the true reason behind the Egyptians' travels to Byblos. In addition to that, the paper, through the archaeological, textual, and pictorial evidences, sheds some light on the Egyptians' transportations means to Byblos, the route or the sea lane through which they used to go there, as well as the influences of such Egyptians' travels on the Byblite community.

Introduction

The ancient Egyptians were really true lovers of their homeland. They didn't bear to stay away from it. Their literature reflected that feeling in many texts. Sinuhe was always longing for returning back to Egypt despite the very high position he gained in his refuge. He begged to god to show mercy and bring him home, to grant him to see the place where his heart dwells. He wondered what matter is greater than that his corpse should be buried in the land wherein he was born (Lichtheim, 1973, 228). A text from the Ramesside period describes the felling of a scribe while he was far from Memphis, his home city, he wrote how much he suffered from home-sickness; his heart left his body, it traveled up-stream to his home. "I sit still," he wrote, "while my heart hastens away, in order to find out how things are in Memphis. I can do no work. My heart throbs. Come to me Ptah, and lead me to Memphis, let me but see it from afar" (Erman, 1971, 117). Another text records the fear of the Egyptian of not coming back to Egypt again, the ship's crews received their loads in order to depart from Egypt for Syria, and each man's god is with him. But not one of them says "we shall see Egypt again!" (Lichtheim, 1976, 170).

In spite of the above mentioned texts, it is not right to imagine that the ancient Egyptians were

entirely cut off from intercourse with other races, dwelling in other states (Wiedemann, 1902, 22). Contrary to popular belief, they were great travelers (Montet, 1958, 169).

There were various motivations to travel; the trade was the main and most important one, in order to obtain commodities that were scarce or unavailable in Egypt, the Egyptians entered into commercial and trading activities with other lands. Merchants travelled to buy and sell in unknown regions. Policy was another factor, diplomatists left their homes to administer Egypt's foreign possessions, or to carry letters and gifts to the rulers of other empires both far and near. Religion was an important motivator pushed them to travel in order to visit the sacred cult centers of different gods and goddesses.

The Egyptians apparently had no great desire to explore or travel abroad in the spirit of adventure. All their hopes and aspirations were firmly fixed within Egypt. Most traveling abroad was carried out for business rather than for recreational reasons (David, 2003; 300).

For all those reasons, the ancient Egyptians traveled to the lands of Punt, Nubia, and Syro-Palestine region since very early of their civilization (Hoffman, 1979, 339; Schulman, 1978-1979).

Among the earliest and most remarkable destinations to which the ancient Egyptians traveled

was Byblos (Chéhab, 1968, 1). The city which situated on a headland about 37 km north of Beirut, bounded by two small water-courses to the north and the south. The preserved area of the city is of approximately five hectares and is bordered on the east by an outcrop of calcareous rock sloping gradually towards the sea (Ciasca, 1988, 170). Byblos was very famous for its timber which grew on its mountains. The Egyptians needed the timber for tomb construction and funerary rituals. They used wood products such as cedar oil in mummification (Lucas, 1962, 369). This provided a strong religious motivation for maintaining trade with Byblos (Jidejian, 1968, 17). The city was known in the ancient Egyptian language as *kbn* or *kpn*y (Erman and Grapow, 1971, 118, 2), the change from *b* to *p* took place during the Twelfth Dynasty (Horn 1963, 52) when it was also written as *kbni* (Erman and Grapow, 1971, 118, 2). It was referred to as Gebal in the Old Testament (1 Kings 5.18; Ezekiel 27.9); this Biblical name has been preserved in the present day city of Jebeil. At the end of the second millennium B.C., it started to be known as Byblos (βύβλος) by the Greeks. The name was derived from the Greek word for papyrus as the city was the center of an extensive papyrus trade with Egypt and the Greek world (Jidejian, 1968, 2). In the adventure of Wenamun, it is stated that five hundred rolls of papyrus and five hundred coils of rope were sent from Egypt to the king of Byblos (Breasted, 1906, 284, §582) in payment for shipments of cedar wood. In the context of the name of Byblos it should be mentioned that the words Byblos and Bible as well are derived from the same Greek word for papyrus (Jidejian, 1968, xv) which in turn is probably derived from the ancient Egyptian words which mean the pharaoh's plant (Parkinson and Quirke 1995, 11; Černý 1971, 218). Nibbi thought that the name cannot be connected to the papyrus plant and it might be derived from the early name of a city in Egypt called Bilbeis (Nibbi 2001, 40); as well as she opposed against the general acceptance that the many occurrences of *gbl* in the Ancient Near Eastern texts, and *kbn/kpn(y)* in the Egyptian ones, were all referring exclusively to the Lebanese city of Gebeil/Byblos (Nibbi 1994, 139).

Travel from Egypt to Byblos was affirmed by variety of archaeological, pictorial, and textual evidences. According to archaeological evidences, travel to Byblos started as early as the Proto dynastic period where some small Egyptian objects were

found there such as a gold bead, a bird figurine, two playing pieces and a small ape statuette give ample evidence (Ward, 1963, 18). The archaeological evidences of the Old Kingdom are numerous (Sowada, 2009, 128). The first inscription of Egyptian origin found in Byblos is a fragment of diorite with the cartouche of Khasekhemui, the last pharaoh of the Second Dynasty (Dunand, 1939, 26) that indicates his interest in the so-called the Egyptian temple in Byblos (Wimmer, 1990, 1065; Albright, 1927, 62). Khufu of the Fourth Dynasty might have sent an expedition as the name of his royal boat was found at the headwater of the Adonis River - modern Nahr Ibrahim- (Rowe, 1936, 288). Fragments of alabaster with the cartouches of Menkaure and Unas were found in the temple of Baalat-Gebal (Montet, 1928, 70-74). There are a total of thirty-six inscriptions from Byblos bearing the names of Pepi I and Pepi II of the Sixth Dynasty found there (Harold 1934, 19). Fragments of stone vases bearing the names of pharaohs of the Old Kingdom in hieroglyphic characters are evidence of their respect to this particular temple (Espinell, 2002, 103; Jidejian, 1968, 19).

Travels from Egypt to Byblos reduced during the first intermediate period but never completely ceased as there was an obelisk inscribed in hieroglyph with the name of the local Byblite prince (Ward, 1963, 25).

Travel activities increased during the Middle Kingdom. Most of the pharaohs of this era left objects and inscriptions with their names there. The names found were of Senusert I, Amenemhat II, and Amenemhat III who sent a pectoral and a vase as gifts to the prince of Byblos (Smith, 1965, 15; Montet, 1941, 37), as well as a box sent by Amenemhat IV (Montet, 1941, 36). Khnumhotep, the monarch of the Orynx nome during the Twelfth Dynasty, mentioned a maritime journey to Byblos composed of 20 ships (Breasted 1906, 463, §224). The princes of Byblos at the end of the Middle Kingdom used Egyptian hieroglyphic inscription and adopted the Egyptian title *hstj-ꜥ* (Flammini, 1998, 41) which, in Egypt, was a title conferred by a pharaoh (Breasted 1906, 173, §385; Grimal, 1992, 398). The sarcophagus of Ahiram, king of Byblos, shows a strong Egyptian influence (Montet, 1928, 215; Porada, 1973, 354). This Egyptian influence in Byblos and other Syro-Palestine areas during the Middle Kingdom doesn't mean that these lands were completely subjugated to the Egyptian rule (Smith 1969, 277). Sinuhe stayed for more than a year free from the authorities of the

pharaoh and wasn't forced to return to Egypt. So it was a kind of cultural influence as well as some commercial interests and economic benefits.

Throughout the New Kingdom travels to Byblos were very active. Thutmose III undertook sixteen campaigns against Syria and Palestine (Redford 2003) some of them were just a parade of strength and simply were considered tours to Syria and Canaan to collect tribute (Grimal, 1992, 214). Six scarabs with the inscription of his name were found in Byblos (Jidejian, 1968, 46). One scarab of his successor Amenhotep II was unearthed, as well as five of Amenhotep III (Jidejian, 1968, 46). The Amarna letters from the reign of Amenhotep IV, Akhenaten, documented very well the relationship between Egypt and Byblos. There are fifty-four letters from Rib-Addi king of Byblos to the pharaohs Amenhotep III and Akhenaten, in addition to ten letters that he sent to agents of the pharaoh (Knudtzon, 1907, L.1-54; Swiggers, 1985, 45). It is probable that Rameses II went to Byblos as parts of a large doorway bearing his cartouche have been found (Dunand, 1939, 92). His cartouches were also inscribed on several objects found in different levels at Byblos (Montet, 1928, 225; Dunand, 1939, 53).

The most remarkable pictorial evidence is the relief of Sahure. It is one of the earliest examples of reliefs representing a sea voyage, found on the east wall of the transverse corridor west of the pillared hall of the mortuary temple of Sahure at Abusir (Borchardt, 1913, pl.xiii). In one scene, there are great ships with Egyptians and Asiatics on board. They are returning, as believed, from the port of Byblos. This expedition was received by the pharaoh himself accompanied by a translator to interpret the dialogue between the king and the Phoenicians. The peaceful circumstances of the expedition lead Montet to believe that – especially in the absence of cedar wood or any other products on board- it aimed to bring back to Egypt a Phoenician princess in order to be a wife of Sahure (Montet, 1941, 23). However, in the presence of some Syrian pottery and bears in the reliefs, it was believed that the expedition represents a governmental trade expedition to Phoenicia (Smith 1965, 7; Kantor, 1965, 9).

The textual evidences clearly document the Egyptians travel to Byblos. The Palermo stone recorded that king Snefru of the Fourth Dynasty brought forty ships filled with cedar wood, one of them was called “praise of the two lands”, which was 100 cubits long (Wilkinson, 2000, 141; Vinson, 2002,

89). The text of Khnumhotep, an official of the Sixth Dynasty, on the walls of the tomb of Khui at Aswan mentioned his travels to Punt and Byblos eleven times (Breasted, 1906, 164, § 361; Newberry, 1938, 182). The admonitions of Ipuwer confirm the multiplicity of the Egyptians' travels to Byblos. He mentioned that “None shall indeed sail northward to Byblos today; what shall we do for pine trees for our mummies,” (Lichtheim, 1976, 152). Sinuhe mentioned Byblos among the places that he arrived to (Erman, 1977, 17). The true geographical arrangement of the Phoenician coastal cities including Byblos, mentioned in the so-called “The Satirical Letter of Papyrus Anastasi I”, reflects a real experience of travel to those places (Gardiner, 1911). The famous adventure of Wenamun records more details concerning travel to Byblos (Wente, 1973, 142).

Travel from Egypt to Byblos was either by sea or by land. Travel by sea was more preferable as it was safer since the desert was a greater barrier than the sea. The Sinai Peninsula and southern Palestine were infested with nomads who harassed overland caravans. Nevertheless, a few ships could carry the equivalent of many donkey caravans. The Ancient Sea-trade through maritime travel between Egypt and Syria started since prehistoric Egypt (Ward, 1964, 23; Sowada, 2009, 245). Bringing Snefru's ships to Egypt is good evidence that travel during that time was by sea and not by land (Ward, 1964, 22). It seems that there was no direct navigation during the entire EB I period when an Egyptian colony in Canaan existed extending from Rafiah in the south to the Yarkon River in the north, and spread over the coastal plain and the lowlands to the east. This colony functioned to lengthen the protected coastline for the Egyptian shipping on the way towards Byblos. It apparently lost its usefulness when the Egyptians could sail directly from the Delta to Byblos (Brandl, 1992, 441). There was a direct maritime shipping line between Egypt and Byblos which started at Tanis –according to Wenamun' story- and went through one of the ancient branches of the Nile to the Mediterranean along the Syrian coast -which was named the great Syrian sea in Wenamun' story- till arriving Byblos (Montet, 1928, 270). Such journey took about six days of coastal hugging from the Nile Delta to Byblos under good conditions, but the return trip would take twice as long fighting countervailing winds and unfavorable currents (Smith, 2009, 47). This way was used also as a mediator way between Egypt and Crete in order to avoid the winds that hamper the direct

navigation to the Aegean islands (Smith, 1965, 133; Helck, 1983, 81). In their sea travel to Byblos, the ancient Egyptians used a type of ships called *kpt* which literary means the Byblite ships. This name led some Egyptologists to think about Byblite origin and manufacture of those ships (Montet, 1941, 26; Newberry 1942, 64), while others believe in Egyptian made despite the Byblite origin of raw materials (Säve-Söderbergh, 1946, 12; Faulkner 1940, 6). These so-called Byblite ships were used on coastal journeys and appear to have plied the sea route from Byblos to Punt. They traveled via the Delta through the arm of the Nile as far as Bubastis and then passed by canal to the Wadi Tumilat and across the Bitter Lakes to reach the Gulf of Suez (Montet, 1928, 270). The fleet of queen Hatshepsut headed for Punt was from that type (Wachsmann, 1998, 19).

The Egyptians used large ships and relatively small anchors (Frost, 1970, 377). Examples of actual Egyptian anchors were found in Byblos (Nibbi, 1975, 38). Presumably, these anchors had been dedicated by Egyptian ship crews who had voyaged with their ships to that city (Wachsmann, 1998, 11). Despite Nibbi's believe that the ancient Egyptians never went to sea in sea-going ships because of the absence of harbors in ancient Egypt, the unsuitability of the coast line of the Delta for travel by large vessels; the absence of a sea-god in their religion (Nibbi, 1979, 201); the textual, pictorial and archaeological evidences prove that they practiced actual sailing.

Travel by land to Byblos was also known. Sinuhe mentioned that a land gave him to land until he arrived Byblos (Lichtheim, 1973, 224). He hosted the envoys of the residence through their coming to north or going to south (Lichtheim, 1973, 227). The doomed prince travelled to Asia across the desert, following his heart and living on the best of all the desert hunt (Lichtheim, 1973, 201).

The most famous journey from Egypt to Byblos was that of Osiris and Isis. According to Plutarch in his story of Isis and Osiris 15-16, Isis went to Byblos because she was informed that the chest with the body of Osiris had been carried by the waves of the sea to the coast of Byblos. The chest came to rest in a heath-tree, and the king of Byblos used a part of the tree as a pillar. Isis befriends the queen and her child; yet she burnt the mortal parts of the child's body and flew around the pillar in the form of a swallow. Later she demanded the pillar and cut away the heath-tree; placing it for veneration in the temple of Isis in Byblos (Griffiths, 1980, 32). Finally she set sail with

the chest for Egypt. Actually there is no trace at all of such story in the early myth. So there are various opinions concerning that. Some Egyptologists believed in an ancient Egyptian origin of Plutarch's story; Sethe thought that cedar in PT 590a is an Old Kingdom origin of the episode (Sethe, 1908, 11), while Herrmann is not disposed to find an ancient tradition in Osiris myth (Herrmann, 1957, 55), and Brunner believed it may have its origin in a passage from the chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead (Brunner, 1975, 37). On the other hand some others believed in a foreign origin not only of this episode of the myth but of the origin of the cult of Osiris itself; Weill maintained that the cult of Osiris originated in Byblos (Weill, 1940, 61), Breasted suggests that Nedyet, where Osiris was laid low may be an ancient name for the region of Byblos (Breasted, 1959, 100). There is no doubt that there is an interaction between the myth and the very early trade relations between Egypt and Byblos. One of them should have affected the other. If Sethe's believe in an old kingdom origin is right, it means that the myth preceded the trade relations and affected it. In the light of this explanation some of the travels of the Egyptians could be seen as travels for visiting religious places connected to the myth of their most famous god, Osiris. In other words, such travels – according to modern concept of travel- were more or less a type of tourism.

It should be noticed that travelers 'tourists' during those ancient times had their rights protected by an international law. When Wenamun informed the ruler of Dor that he was robbed in his harbor, the ruler offered to repay him his belongs if the thief belonged to the ruler's land (Lichtheim, 1976, 225). Rulers were generally held responsible for the welfare of persons from abroad in their territories, that responsibility included foreign merchants and travelers, the messenger and his credentials, and the protection of wares against theft (de Spens, 1998, 105). Such matter was confirmed before in the Amarna letters when Burnaburiash complained to Akhenaten that his envoy, Salmu, twice has his caravan been plundered. Once was by a governor of a land that belongs to Akhenaten. He asked the pharaoh to restore Salmu's things that had to be returned to him, and he should be compensated for his losses (Moran, 1992, 14). In another letter Burnaburiash sent to Akhenaten complaining about the robbery of his merchants while they were traveling to Egypt by kings of Canaan who were Akhenaten's servants, as being a land subject to Akhenaten, Burnaburiash

asked him to return the plundered money back otherwise the ambassadors between them will cease (Moran, 1992, 16). In the present day tourism law, the host governments have to ensure that the tourists' lives and properties are protected and governments should take quick and stern action once the crime is taken place (George and Varghese, 2007, 43).

Tourism is defined as the activities of people traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for more than twenty-four hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited (WTO, 1995, 1). The three basic components of tourism are transport, accommodation, and locale. Transport is the mean that enables a traveller to reach his predetermined destination. Accommodation is another basic component which is essential for food and sleep. Locale with its attractions and amenities is the most important as these are very basic to tourism (Raj, 2002, 23).

If this theoretical definition of tourism and its components is applied to the travels of the ancient Egyptians to Byblos, it would show clearly that such travels were simply a type of tourism. The transport component was confirmed through various archaeological, textual, and pictorial evidences. Despite the absence of any explicit or detailed mention of the accommodation component, it could be recognized through some statements and phrases in travel stories. As the locale and attractions component is the most important in present day tourism industry, it was the same to the ancient Egyptians. The location of Byblos, its richness in timber was the essential factor of the Egyptians' travels there, but this timber was mainly brought to Egypt for religious purpose, so it was religion that motivated the ancient Egyptians to travel to Byblos. Moreover, the existence of an Egyptian temple there dedicated to the most famous goddess in the ancient Egyptian religion Isis or Hathor or both as Hator-Isis, goddess of motherhood and symbol of love and loyalty. As well as the existence of a Byblite temple dedicated to a goddess associated with the Egyptian Hator-Isis was another motivation behind the Egyptians travel to Byblos in order to visit a place connected with the myth of their beloved god Osiris.

Conclusion

From what is mentioned above, it could be

concluded that most of the travel of the ancient Egyptians to Byblos was almost a religious tourism. The widespread use of the Egyptian names, titles, writing, and language adopted by the Byblites, as well as the existence of an Egyptian style temple, together with the Byblite monuments influenced by the Egyptian motives and style, such as the temple of Baalat-Gebal that always represented in art in a manner similar to the Egyptian Hathor-Isis even under the height of the Persian influence in the Near East during the fifth century B.C., all are impacts of that tourism on the Byblite destination society.

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أسفار المصريين القدماء إلى مدينة بيبلوس "جبيل" الفينيقية الساحلية

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قدم للنشر في ٩/٧/١٤٣٢هـ، وقبل للنشر في ١٦/١٢/١٤٣٢هـ

الكلمات المفتاحية: مصر القديمة، بيبلوس، فينيقيا، شرق المتوسط، أوزير، التجارة، السفر، السياحة الدينية

ملخص البحث. سافر المصريون القدماء إلى العديد من المدن الساحلية في منطقة شرق المتوسط، وكانت مدينة بيبلوس "جبيل" إحدى أهم المدن التي سافر إليها المصريون القدماء في تلك المنطقة. ويهدف هذا البحث في المقام الأول إلى محاولة تحديد الدوافع الأساسية وراء سفر المصريين إلى بيبلوس، وبالإضافة إلى ذلك فالبحث - من خلال الأدلة الأثرية والنصية والتصويرية - يلقى بعض الضوء على وسائل الانتقال التي استخدمها المصريون في سفرهم إلى بيبلوس، والطريق البحري المستخدم، وكذلك أثر أسفار المصريين الكثيرة على مجتمع بيبلوس.