

The Mason's Workshop of Hegra, its Relations to Petra, and the Tomb of Syllaios

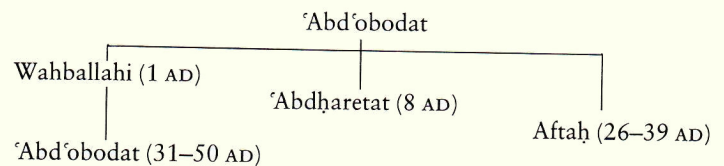
The 16 Nabataean tomb facades at the necropolis of Hegra in Saudi Arabia which are signed with the authentic names of the artists (architect-sculptors) who built the tombs are a unique historical and archaeological complex of this kind in classical antiquity.¹ Thirteen of these inscriptions can be attributed to members of the same family or clan—that of 'Abd'obodat. By comparing the epigraphic evidence with archaeological observations it is possible to clear up the relationship between the masons of that family, and to attribute several anonymous facades of the site to artists named in the inscriptions. This we tried to explain more in detail in a recent study.² Here again is the family tree suggested by us with the attested dates of signed facades of the craftsmen in brackets. The particular facades signed by the individual masons are listed below.

An examination of the chronological distribution of these inscriptions reveals the interesting fact that only two of them date from the first quarter of the first century AD, while nine date from the second quarter of the century. We also may wonder why Wahballahi and 'Abdḥaretat are each named only once while their younger brother Aftaḥ is named seven times. It seems improbable that the two elder brothers would have each worked on only one facade—more likely, they worked outside Hegra as well, for example at Petra where we cannot expect their names to be found at the facades, as there—for whatsoever reasons—obviously it was forbidden or at least not usual to put the names of owners or artists on any of the facades.³

¹ As the basic publications, cf. J. Euting, *Nabatäische Inschriften aus Arabien* (1885) 21ff.; J. S. Jaussen, R. Savignac, *Mission archéologique en Arabie I* (1909) 141ff. 11 (1914) 78ff.; cf. also J. Ch. Balty in: *Architecture et société, Actes du colloque de Rome 1980*. Coll. de l'École Française de Rome 66 (1983) esp. 308ff.; in future also J. McKenzie, *Levant*, suppl. 1987 and Z. T. Fiema, *JNES* 1987. I would like to give my thanks to both of these colleagues who kindly sent me the manuscript versions of their articles.

² A. Schmidt-Colinet, *Berytus* 31, 1983, 95ff. (with further references). Even after the differing family trees suggested by Balty *op. cit.*, 309, and McKenzie *op. cit.*, diagram 2, I do not see the reasons why Wahballahi, 'Abdḥaretat and Aftaḥ should not have been brothers.

³ Cf. M. Gawlikowski, *Berytus* 24, 1975/76, 35ff. The objections raised against Gawlikowski by F. Zayadine, *AAJ* 26, 1982, 367, are not convincing. It remains a fact that inside Petra there is only one facade (out of about 800!) showing a Nabataean inscription,



No.	Date	Name of sculptor(s)
B 19	1 AD	Wahballahi
Q.S.	8 AD	'Abdḥaretat
B 22	26 AD	Aftaḥ (together with Halafallahi)
B 5	27 AD	Aftaḥ (with Wahbu and Huru)
B 7	35 AD	Aftaḥ
C 6	36 AD	Aftaḥ
E 4	39 AD	Aftaḥ
D'	n.d.	Aftaḥ
E 3	n.d.	Aftaḥ
E 18	31 AD	'Abd'obodat (together with Ruma)
A 5	31 AD	'Abd'obodat (together with Ruma)
A 8	42 AD	'Abd'obodat
B 23	50 AD	'Abd'obodat (with Afṣa and Hani'u)

For Wahballahi, the eldest of the three brothers, it can strongly be supported by epigraphic evidence that he did work also outside Hegra. In Petra on the way up to the Sacred High Place, a graffito names 'Wahballahi, the craftsman'.⁴ In the Wadi Ram near the sanctuary of Allat, one graffito names 'Wahballahi, the mason',⁵ another graffito 'Wahballahi and his daughter Shaoudat'.⁶ If all the three graffiti refer to the artist of this name whom we know from inscriptions in Hegra⁷

and this inscription gives neither the name of the owner nor of the artist of the tomb. Cf. also M. Gawlikowski in: *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan I* (1982) 303.

⁴ R. Savignac, *R. Bibl.* 42, 1933, 414, Rép. Epigr. Sém. no. 1088. The profession named there means 'decorator of a wall', cf. Savignac *ibid.*

⁵ Savignac *ibid.*, 415f. no. 5.

⁶ Savignac *ibid.*, 419f. no. 11. For the name Shaoudat see below, note 30.

⁷ In Hegra the name Wahballahi is recorded not only at the facade B 19, but also on two graffiti: cf. Jaussen-Savignac *op. cit.*, I, nos 58, 119. The profession given in both of the graffiti can be translated as 'goldsmith' as well as 'craftsman' or 'mason'. So, both graffiti might record the Wahballahi of the facade B 19. For three further graffiti of a Wahballahi within the Hejaz area cf. W. Jobling, *AAJ* 28, 1984, 198f.

this could be a hint that the workshop of this craftsman extended to Hegra as well as to Petra and the Wadi Ram. At Petra during that period, Aretas IV needed many artists for his great building projects within the town.⁸ For the Wadi Ram we know that several artists from different regions of the Nabataean kingdom were concentrated there for work at the sanctuary of Allat.⁹ This also was most probably during the reign of Aretas IV.¹⁰

'Abdharetat, the younger brother of Wahballahi, must also have had close connections with Petra. The owner of the tomb built by 'Abdharetat is named 'Malkion Petura'.¹¹ But not only the surname of the owner, 'Petura', but also peculiar archaeological features of the facade lead directly to Petra. Usually at Hegra the rich arrangement of the door frame with its sculptural decoration and a high pediment occupies the major part of the facade. The extremely flat pediment and very simple decoration of the doorway at the tomb of Malkion Petura (FIG. 1) have almost no parallels in Hegra, whereas in Petra these forms are the most frequent ones at facades of this type (FIG. 2).¹² In the same way, the capitals of the facade, consisting of the horned capitals themselves and a series of mouldings below them, show the form most commonly used in Petra. At the dated facades of Hegra however, this form exists only before 27 AD. The youngest of the three brothers, Aftah, used this form of 'Petraean' capital only for his two early facades B 22 and B 5 in 26 AD and in 27 AD.¹³ As time went on he used a different type, with leaf-like motifs at the edges and with only one ridge at the bottom (FIGS 3 and 4). Later, Aftah's nephew 'Abd'obodat used a third variant of capitals which was a mixture of the two older types (FIG. 5).

It is difficult to decide whether the different forms of Nabataean capitals can be retraced to different types, or whether

⁸ For the theater see P. C. Hammond, *The Excavations of the Main Theater at Petra* (1965). For the temple of Qasr al-Bint Firaun see H. Kohl, *Kasr Firaun in Petra* (1910); now F. Zayadine, *AAJ* 26, 1982, 374ff.; G. R. H. Wright, *Dam. Mitt.* 2, 1985, 321ff. (both with further references). For the Atargatis temple (also called 'Temple of the Winged Lion') see now P. C. Hammond, *AAJ* 22, 1977/78, 84ff. (with further references).

⁹ Cf. Savignac *op. cit.*, 413ff. nos 4ff.; *id.*, *R. Bibl.* 43, 1934, 577f. no. 22; D. Kirkbride, *R. Bibl.* 67, 1960, 75; J. Starcky in: *Dictionnaire de la Bible Suppl.* VII (1966), 978ff. In connection with artists from the Hawran cf. the signatures of Nabataean craftsmen in that area itself: M. Dunand, *Le musée de Soueida, Bibl. Archéol. et Hist.* XX (1934), 31, no. 35; 63f., no. 121; 73, no. 157; 95, no. 196.

¹⁰ Due to an inscription mentioning works at the temple of Allat during the reign of Rabel II, the excavators dated the first building of the sanctuary in the Wadi Ram to this period. But by comparing the specific architecture of the temple, it seems clear that the first building phase of that temple must go back to the reign of Aretas IV; cf. A. Negev, *R. Bibl.* 80, 1973, 377f.; *id.* in: *ANRW II* 8 (1978), 587; *id.* in: *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. by M. Avi-Yonah, IV (1978), 997; also P. C. Hammond, *The Nabataeans: Their History, Culture and Archaeology, SIMA XXXVII* (1973), 63. In addition to the material treated by Negev, today we know two other temples of the reign of Aretas IV which show very close parallels to the temple in the Wadi Ram: the temple of Atargatis in Petra (see above, note 8) and the temple at Khirbet adh-Dharih, cf. F. Villeneuve, *R. Bibl.* 92, 1985, 420f.

¹¹ Euting *op. cit.*, 36f., no. 5; Jaussen-Savignac *op. cit.* I, 189f. 363ff. FIG. 177ff.; for the following considerations cf. Schmidt-Colinet *op. cit.*, 98ff. The pediment and other parts of the decoration around the door of this tomb show a rare and interesting tactical detail: The rectangular holes prove an antique repairing.

¹² For new methods of measuring the mouldings of the facades in Petra cf. J. McKenzie, A. Phippen, *AAJ* 27, 1983, 209ff.; *id.*, *Levant* 17, 1985, 157ff.

¹³ Also Aftah might have worked in Petra as well, cf. Schmidt-Colinet *op. cit.*, 98, notes 25, 28.

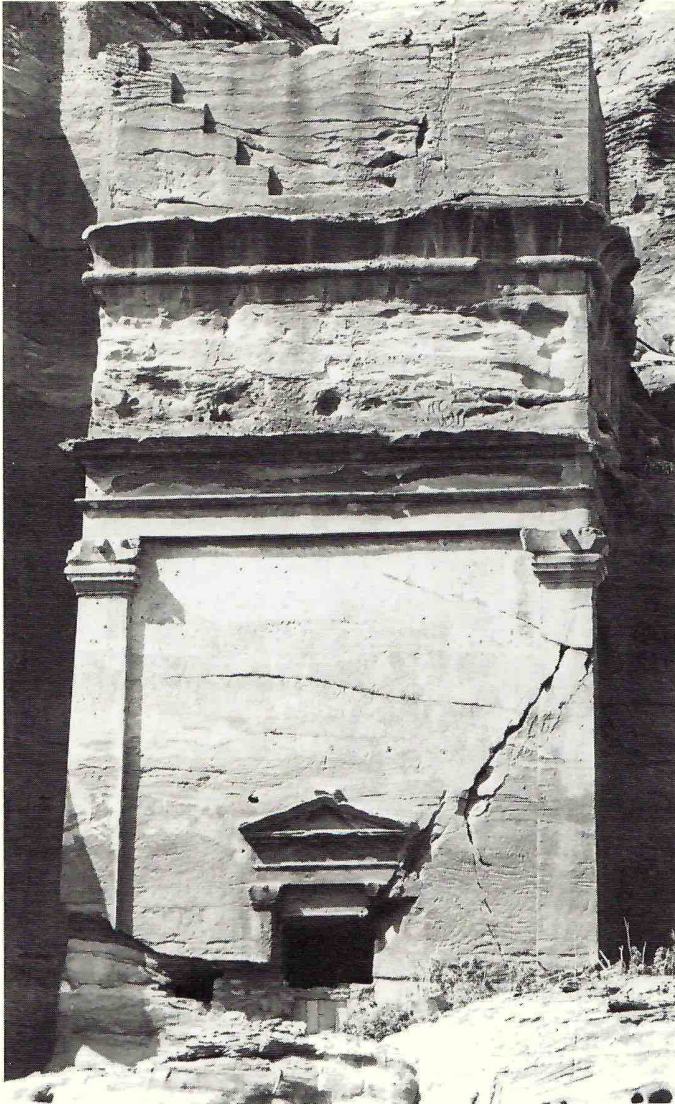
1a. Hegra, facade 'Qasr as-Sane' of 'Abdharetat.



1b. Detail of FIG. 1a.



2. Petra, facade no. 524.



they just show different variants of one basic model.¹⁴ Generally, the horned capital is explained as a geometrically reduced form or an abstraction of the greco-roman corinthian capital.¹⁵ Moreover, the kind of transformation of the 'classical' form seems to be influenced by old Arabian traditional forms.¹⁶ Several limestone reliefs from Saudi Arabia and the Yemen,

¹⁴ We hope to come back to this problem in a forthcoming study. For the methodic way of questioning, within a group of Roman corinthian capitals, cf. now K. S. Freyberger, *Stadtrömische Kapitelle aus der Zeit von Domitian bis Alexander Severus* (manuscript Ph. Diss. Munich 1984) 6f.

¹⁵ Cf. A. Schmidt-Colinet, *BJb* 180, 1980, 201 (with further references); also M. Lindner, *AAJ* 28, 1984, 164, note 11.

¹⁶ Another architectural detail, the 'hooked architrave', at some facades in Hegra can only be explained by a direct Egyptian tradition; see Schmidt-Colinet, *Berytus* 31, 1983, 96 with note 12. For the far reaching contacts and complex relations of North Arabia and the important geographic position of the Hejaz, see for example F. V. Winneett, W. L. Reed, *Ancient Records from North Arabia* (1970), 71ff., 88ff. 113ff. 130ff.; P. J. Parr in: *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan I*, ed. by A. Hadidi (1982),

dated commonly between the 4th and the 1st century BC, are decorated with architectural facades of palaces or houses (FIG. 6)¹⁷ carried by small elements which must be capitals. In general, these representations remind us of abstract figurations of the tops of palm trees well known from that area during the same period (FIG. 7).¹⁸ The famous Aramaic relief from Taima (near Hegra) dated to the 5th century BC (FIG. 8)¹⁹ nicely confirms that the palm tree in fact could take over the function of a column.²⁰

Typologic 'missing links' between representations like those and the Nabataean horned capitals might be seen for example in the 'Nabataean' capitals found in the Fayum (FIG. 9).²¹ The motif in the middle of these capitals could well be interpreted as a reduced representation of the fruits of a palm tree. In any case, a direct Egyptian influence can be proved for other architectural details of the facades in Hegra, for example the 'hooked architrave' (FIGS 3 and 4) of some facades of Aftah.²²

But, back to our masons from Hegra. As we have seen, epigraphic evidence as well as archaeological considerations lead to the conclusion that members of the family or workshop of 'Abd'obodat worked in Hegra as well as in Petra, and in the Wadi Ram at the end of the 1st century BC or at the beginning of the 1st century AD. Is it possible to date these connections more precisely within the reign of Aretas IV?

There is one huge facade in Hegra which never has been finished (FIG. 10),²³ although at that part of the mountain the rock does not show any breaks or fractures which could have caused the breaking off or interruption of work at this facade. The facade is situated in the middle of the plain of Hegra. On the other hand, it also dominates the approach to the Sacred Diwan of the site. This dominating position can well be compared with the position of the Khazne in Petra,

127ff. For the hellenistic-roman period see also A. Negev, *Qedem* 6, 1977, 62ff.; D. Graf. *AAJ* 23, 1979, 127, note 10; M. Sartre in: *Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg 1978* (1982), 79f., 82ff.; D. Graf. *AAJ* 27, 1983, 506ff.; J. Eadie, *AAJ* 28, 1984, 211ff. For the complex origins of the historical phenomenon of the Nabataeans cf. J. T. Milik in: *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan I* (1982), 261ff.

¹⁷ H. Th. Bossert, *Altsyrien* (1951), 371f., nos 1275–1278 (the nos 1275 and 1277 are reproduced there upside down!); A. Grohmann, Arabien, *Kulturgeschichte des Alten Orients III*, 4 (1963) 241f. FIG. 110; W. Radt, *Kat. der staatlichen Antikensammlung von Sanā und anderen Antiken im Jemen* (1973) nos 116f. pl. 40; cf. also G. van Beek, *AJA* 63, 1959, 269ff., pl. 69f. – cf. also the different interpretation of J. Pirenne, *Syria*, 42, 1965, 311ff. pl. 22, 23.

¹⁸ Bossert *op. cit.*, 378, no. 1296.

¹⁹ Euting *op. cit.* (above note 1), 12, FIG. 7; Grohmann *op. cit.*, 43.

²⁰ For the palm tree in general see H. Danthine, *Le palmier-dattier et les arbres sacrés dans l'éconographie de l'Asie occidentale ancienne*, *Bibl. Archéol. et Hist.* XXV (1937) with the review of A. Parrot, *Syria* 20, 1939, 75ff.

²¹ O. Rubensohn, *Jdl* 20, 1905, 10 FIG. 19; Ev. Breccia, *Monuments de l'Égypte gréco-romaine I* (1926), 129 pl. 68b.

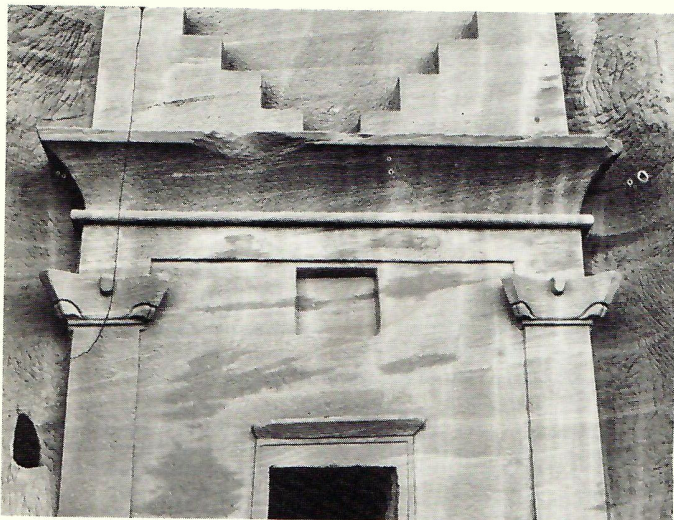
²² See above, note 16. A special kind of 'horned capitals' can be found in Saudi Arabia and the Yemen: Bossert *op. cit.*, 368, no. 1264; Grohmann *op. cit.*, 211, FIG. 90f., 94; Radt. *op. cit.*, no. 127, pl. 41f. Here the 'horns' have an aesthetic function as well as a technical one.

²³ No. 0 on the map of Jaussen-Savignac *op. cit.*, 1 (above, note 1), pl. 37. The facade is situated at the northern part of the west slope of the mountain called 'Qasr al-Bint'. For the 'Diwan' of Hegra see Jaussen-Savignac *ibid.*, 405ff.

3. Hegra, facade B 7 of Aftah.



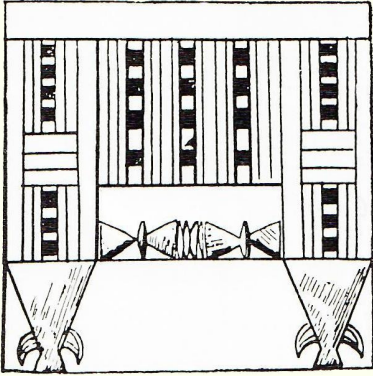
4. Hegra, facade C 6 of Aftah.



5. Hegra, facade A 8 of 'Abd'obodat.



6. Relief from Marib with architectural representation.



7. Relief from Hadaqān with the representation of palm trees.



in spite of all topographic differences between the two sites. The height of the huge facade in Hegra can be reconstructed to about 38 m. This means that if the facade had ever been finished it would have been the same height as the Khazne in Petra which is about 39 m high.²⁴

Here we should remember some historical facts of the last quarter of the 1st century BC.²⁵ In Petra, since 30 BC Obodas II was king of the Nabataeans. The antique sources (especially Stabon and Flavius Iosephus) describe him as a weak king, not very interested in political questions. It was his dynamic and ambitious chancellor Syllaios who directed the active politics. Syllaios probably was related to the royal family.²⁶ He originated from the Taima region and was said to own landed property in the Hegra area. In 26 BC it was he who guided the famous Roman expedition to Arabia and who ensured that this expedition ended with a disaster for the Romans. At that time the Romans had not yet succeeded in taking over the direct control of the important connections between Naba-

taea and Arabia Felix.²⁷ The picture of Syllaios drawn by the Roman authors certainly is not correct, as Th. Mommsen has seen already.²⁸ But, it remains a fact that Syllaios led Nabataean politics in keeping up central national interests. He also tried to become king himself. This he prepared with clever negotiations in Jerusalem and in Rome. When in 9 BC Obodas died, a man named Aeneas took possession of the throne, taking the royal name Aretas (IV) king of the Nabataeans. In spite of all personal interventions of Syllaios in Rome and against all his ambitious plans, it was Aretas who finally was confirmed officially as king by the Roman emperor. In the end, an accusation was brought against Syllaios. Accused of having assassinated Obodas II, and to be a person guilty of high treason, in 6 BC Syllaios was executed in Rome.

It is tempting to correlate the breaking off of the works at the huge facade in Hegra with the execution of Syllaios. If we accept the Khazne in Petra with its pure Hellenistic elements to be the tomb of Aretas II 'Philhellenos',²⁹ then the huge facade in Hegra showing more indigenous traditional forms could well be the tomb of Syllaios which was never

²⁴ See the photogrammetric elevation of F. Zayadine, Ph. Hottier, *AAF* 21, 1976, 197, pl. 41; cf. also below note 29.

²⁵ For the historical background during the reign of Obodas II and Aretas IV see A. Kammerer, *Petra et le Nabatène* (1929), 190ff.; Starcky *op. cit.* (above, note 9), 911ff.; G. B. Bowersock, *JRS* 61, 1971, 223, 227; P. C. Hammond *op. cit.* (above, note 9), 22ff.; J. J. Lawlor, *The Nabataeans in Historical Perspective* (1974), 91ff., 103ff.; A. Negev in: *ANRW* II 8 (1978), 559ff.; M. Lindner, *Petra und das Königreich der Nabatäer* 3 (1980), 65ff.; G. B. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (1983), 45ff.

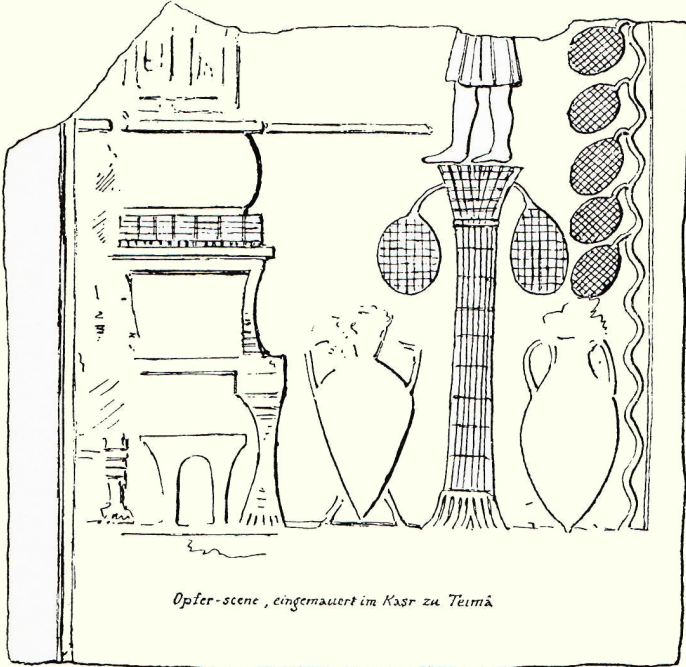
²⁶ Lawlor *op. cit.*, 92; generally no direct relationship between Syllaios and the royal family is assumed, cf. also M. Sartre, *Liber Annuus* 29, 1979, 256f., note 22.

²⁷ For the Roman expedition to Arabia Felix see also H. von Wissmann in: *ANRW* II 9/1 (1976), 311ff., 466, 480; for the date see Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (1983), 46 (with further references).

²⁸ Th. Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte* V (1904), 609, note 66.

²⁹ For the Khazne and its interpretation see A. Schmidt-Colinet, *BjB* 180, 1980, 216ff. (with references); also J. McKenzie, *Levant* 19, 1987 (forthcoming). Cf. above, note 12.

8. Aramaic cultic relief from Taima.



9. Nabataean capitals from the Fayum.

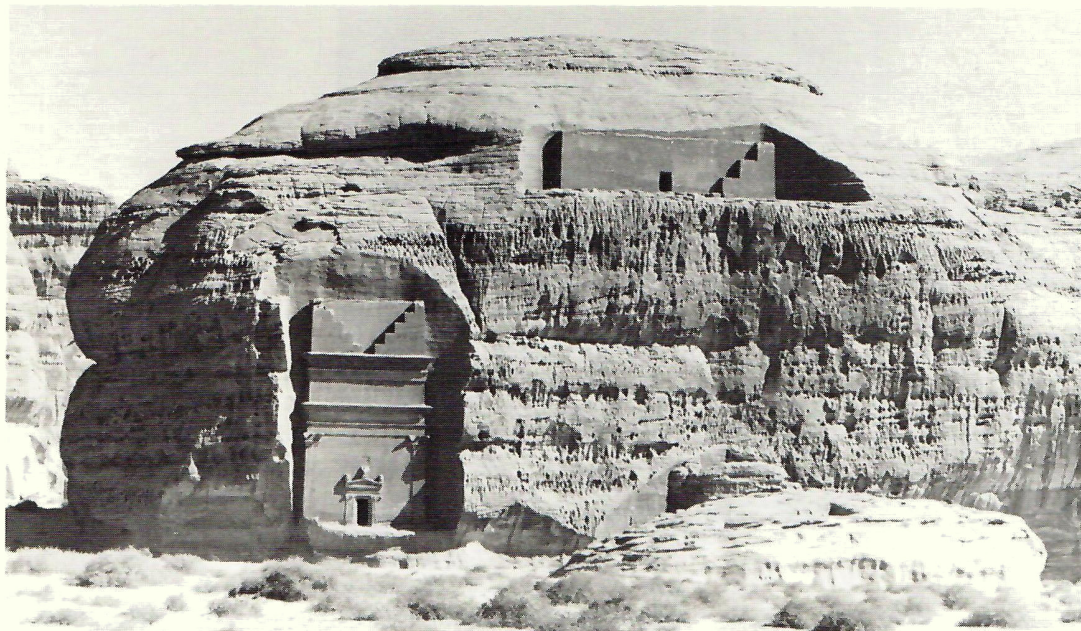


finished due to his execution. We can suppose that members of the family or workshop of 'Abd'obodat worked at the facade of Syllaios. If so, the close connections of this workshop with Petra and the Wadi Ram might give a *terminus ad quem*. After the sudden end of the work at the facade of Syllaios, the men engaged to work on this facade must have been directed to other work. We may imagine that the new king himself gave new orders to this most important workshop. Maybe the court was even the main employer of this workshop. After all, some of the names of our artists contain the names of Nabataean kings: 'Abd'obodat and 'Abd'aretat just mean 'ser-

vant of Obodas' and 'servant of Aretas'.³⁰ The high social status of these artists is proved, in any case, by the fact that they put their names on the facades immediately behind the names of the Nabataean kings. If the workshop of 'Abd'obodat's family was something like an official or even royal work-

³⁰ Among the Nabataeans, the names Obodas and Aretas have been used especially by members of the royal family, cf. J. T. Milik, J. Starcky, *AAJ* 20, 1975, 115f. (also for the rare exceptions). The graffito of Wabballahi in Petra refers to the name Shaoudat for his daughter. This name also was commonly used by Nabataean princesses: cf. Savignac (above, note 6).

10. Hegra, unfinished facade.



shop,³¹ it must have been very much in the mind of Syllaios to engage this workshop for himself after the death of Obodat II in 9 BC. On the other hand, this would certainly have been interpreted as hubris and arrogance.

Finally we may ask what the tomb of Aretas IV, the rival of Syllaios, might have looked like. Aretas came to power on his own, and he remained king of the Nabataeans for almost 50 years. Of all the Nabataean kings, he had the closest relations with Rome, personally to the Roman emperor. Like Augustus in Rome, it was Aretas in Petra who started the main building projects inside the capital (see above note 8). Thus, differently from the tombs of Aretas III or Syllaios, the tomb of Aretas IV should show elements of Roman imperial architecture. Furthermore it should be situated in a dominating topographic position, as the tombs of his forerunners were. There is only one monumental tomb in Petra that fits well to both of these conditions: the so-called Urn-Tomb (FIG. 11).³² It is the first monumental tomb behind the exit of the

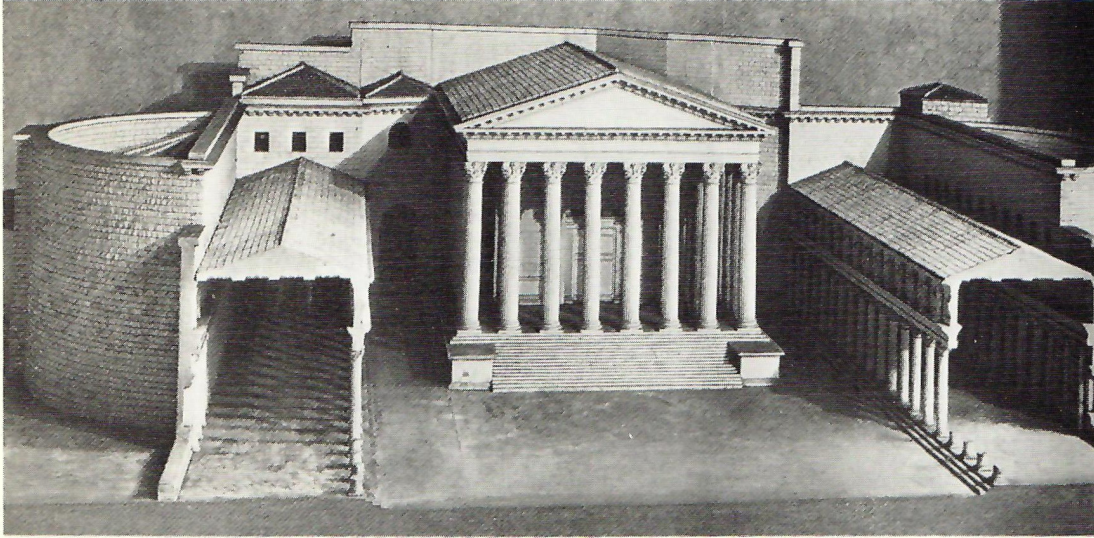
11. Petra, facade no. 772 ('Urn-Tomb').



³¹ For a workshop belonging to the royal court of the Ptolemies cf. H. von Hesberg in: *Das ptolemäische Aegypten*, ed. by H. Maehler, V. M. Strocka (1978), 145, note 15. This crew of craftsmen was even lent out by the Ptolemies to other courts. For the social status of architects and craftsmen and for their organization forms during the hellenistic period, cf. now H. Lauter, *Die Architektur des Hellenismus* (1986), 17ff. For the Roman period cf. also N. Blanc, *MEFRA* 95, 1983, 859ff.

³² R. E. Brünnow, A. von Domaszewski, *Die Provincia Arabia I* (1904), 393ff., no. 772, FIG. 191, 445, pl. XIX. Starcky *op. cit.* (above, note 9) proposed a date of the second half of the 1st century AD; M. Lyttelton, *Baroque Architecture in Classical Antiquity* (1974), 62, suggested a terminus of about 40 AD.

12. Rome, forum of Augustus, model.



Siq inside the town, opposite and overlooking the whole sacred temple area of the city mainly built by Aretas. It is the only monumental facade in Petra which is crowned with a gigantic pediment. Moreover, the complete height of this facade is again the same as that of the Khazne (about 38 m). In general, the tomb looks like the facade of a temple situated in the background of a collonaded courtyard. This conception corresponds exactly to Roman imperial architectural features like, for example, the forum of Augustus in Rome (FIG. 12).³³ In

a forthcoming study we hope to explain more in detail, that the Urn-Tomb indeed can be dated to the reign of Aretas IV by stylistic and typological details, and that again members of that official workshop of 'Abd'obodat's family did work at this facade.

Architecture (1981), 28ff., FIG. 6–8; also V. Kockel, *RM* 90, 1983, 421 ff., and J. Ganzert, *RM* 92, 1985, 201ff. (both with further references).

FIGS 1–5, 10: photographs by the author; FIG. 6: after Grohmann (note 17) FIG. 110; FIG. 7: after Bossert (*ibidem*) no. 1296; FIG. 8: after Euting (note 1) FIG. 7; FIG. 9: after Rubensohn (note 21) FIG. 19; FIG. 12: after Zanker (note 33) FIG. 4.

³³E. Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome I*, 2 (1968), 401ff.; P. Zanker, *Forum Augustum, Monumenta Artis Antiquae* (1968); J. B. Ward-Perkins, *Roman Imperial*