

# STUCCO DECORATION FROM THE SOUTH CORRIDOR OF THE PETRA GREAT TEMPLE: DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

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## Introduction

Beginning as early as the 1993 inaugural season, excavation efforts at the Petra Great Temple revealed the presence of architectural and decorative elements rendered in stucco. Discovered throughout the temple complex, molded architectural fragments were found in significant quantities both *in situ* and mixed in among fallen structural debris. During the first three seasons, from 1993 to 1995, stucco finds consisted largely of isolated fragments of painted column plaster and molded capital repairs concentrated in areas of conspicuous column collapse. Recovered pieces, while often brightly painted, were extremely fragmentary and offered little insight into the temple's artistic decoration. However, in later seasons, from 1996 through 2001, with the excavation of the perimeter corridors, these relatively meager stucco finds grew substantially in number and expanded artistically to include a more varied and complex canon of painted and molded styles. This heightened artistic complexity is exemplified best by the finds from the South Corridor during the 2001 season. Excavation of the South Corridor, measuring 2.73m north-south-by-17.27m east-west, revealed a number of intriguing plaster elements, four of which will be

discussed here. Particularly notable for the various cultural influences apparent in its design, I will examine the *in situ* plaster flanking the central doorway as well as the three main decorative forms found in collapse: the egg and tongue<sup>1</sup> molded cornice pieces, the painted marbled fragments, and the molded lion body parts.

## *In Situ* Wall Plaster Decoration Flanking the Central Doorway

As it stands, the wall decoration found on either side of the central doorway in the South Corridor of the Petra Great Temple represents some of the best-preserved stucco decoration in the temple complex. As such, the motifs and styles depicted here give great insight into the overall decoration of the corridor.

Mirror images of each other stylistically, the stucco to either side of the central doorway on the northern face of the south wall exhibits multiple artistic patterns arranged as a series of vertical panels separated by vertical *cyma reversa* molded cornices (Fig. 1). From east to west, the visible decorative scheme to the west of the central doorway (Locus 16) (Fig. 2) can be described as follows:

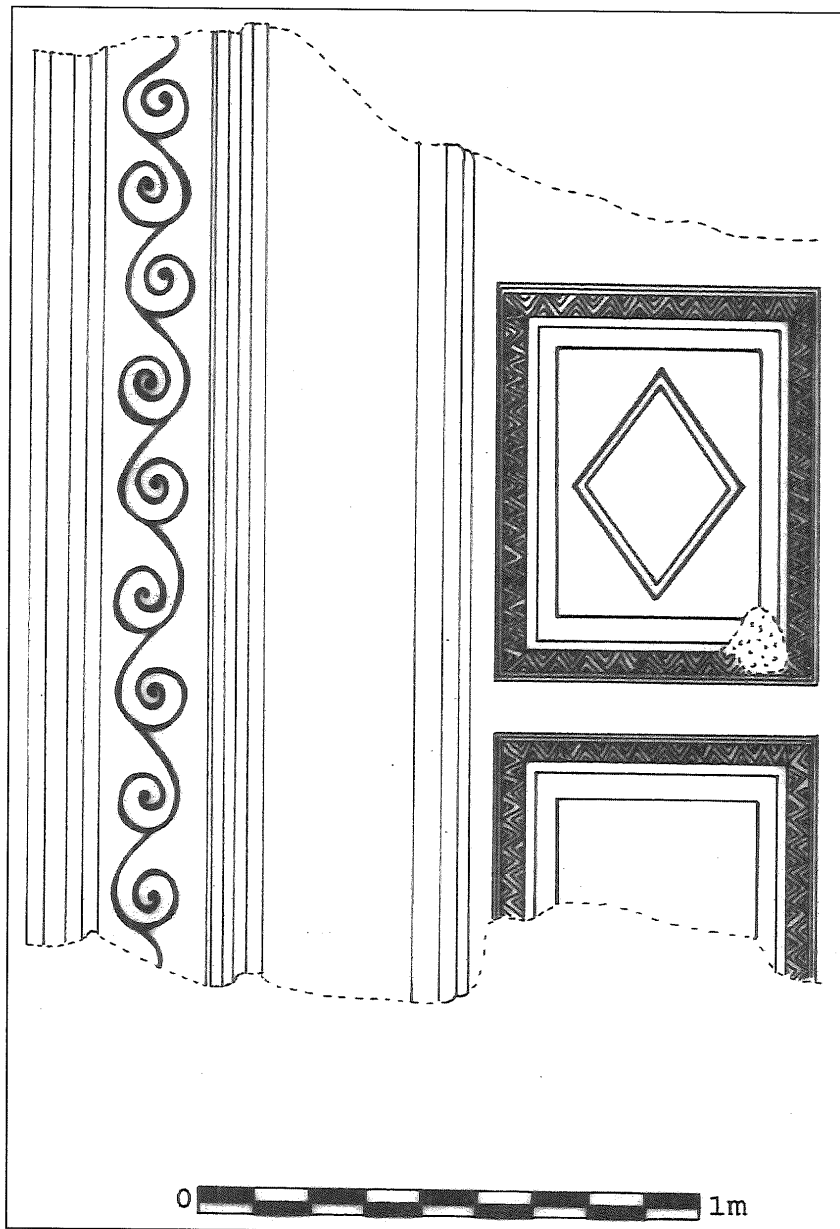
To the immediate west of the central doorway



1. View of *in situ* plaster in the South Corridor from the north. Photo by A.A.W. Joukowsky.

1. Cornice pieces with the egg and dart motif were chosen for exclusive study due to their recognized potential for stylis-

tic comparison with pieces from other sites.



2. Line drawing of in situ plaster to the west of the central doorway in the South Corridor. Drawn and drafted by Emily Catherine Egan

are three painted vertical bands: red (0.03m wide), dark blue (0.04m wide), red (0.03m wide), followed by a vertical light blue (0.04m wide) *cyma reversa* molding abutting a flat panel (0.22m wide) that features a black spiraled vine pattern on a white background. Further west is a vertical thin molded white band (0.01m wide) followed by a vertical black stripe (0.03m wide) next to a vertical green (0.04m wide) *cyma reversa* molding which connects to a second flat panel (0.29m wide) painted a solid dark blue. To the west of this panel are the remains of two raised cassettes, one directly above the other. The top cassette measures 0.60m in width and is light blue with a border of repeating sets of three interlocking black chevrons painted on a white background. In the center of the cassette is a painted red diamond framed by a black and a

white band. This cassette is positioned on a red background. Directly beneath this first cassette is a second, more deteriorated, cassette measuring 0.60m in width set on a light blue background. The cassette itself is red in color with an interlocking black chevron border similar to that on the upper cassette. No central decoration is visible on the lower panel due to the extreme deterioration of the cassette's surface. Bounding the vertical panel into which the cassettes are set are large white vertical *cyma reversa* moldings sloping inward toward the cassettes. The eastern band is mostly complete, while the western band has suffered much damage. To the east of the central doorway the plastering (Locus 39) appears to be the mirror image of its counterpart in the west structurally, though with reversed coloration.

Examining the designs as they move outward from the doorway, the narrow vertical red and blue solid-colored bands show no clear stylistic ingenuity and are of little stylistic significance. In contrast, the curling vine motif, elevated slightly and framed by two small inward sloping blue and green *cyma reversa* moldings, demonstrates an established artistic style. A culturally important symbol, the vine was used prominently by the Nabataeans in their art and architecture. Associated with the Dionysian god Dushares and the Syrian vegetation goddess Atargatis, two primary gods of the Nabataean pantheon, the vine was commonly depicted in both sacred and secular art. In stucco, painted vines are visible in the decoration on the vault of the so-called "Painted House" (dated to the first or second century AD) at Sīq al-Bārid (سبيق البارد). Here, the vines, laden with grapes and flowers, crawl across the room's ceiling creating a "tapestry like" effect that is asymmetrical and free-flowing. In contrast to the fluidity of the Painted House stucco design, the vine pattern in the South Corridor demonstrates a stylized symmetry evident in its regular alternating spirals that extend the full length of the preserved vertical panel. Recognized by Phillip C. Hammond (1996: 83), symmetry and stylization were dominant factors in the representation of the vine, as were stylized rosettes that commonly appeared amongst the vines' curling leaves. The unadorned, formalized appearance of this painted vine, unlike the more naturalistic appearance of the painted vines from Sīq al-Bārid and carved examples on Corinthian capitals and exterior friezes, demonstrates the non-realistic, non-representational style characteristic of much Nabataean art.

Turning next to the molded cassettes, the *in situ* fragments found in the South Corridor closely resemble those uncovered in the West Corridor during the earlier 1999 season. Both sets of cassettes stand one on top of the other and are contained within vertical alternating solid blocks of blue and red. Plaster specialist Ueli Bellwald reconstructed the full decorative program for the West Corridor at the end of the 1999 season (Joukowsky 1999: 333). As indicated in Bellwald's design, the cassettes were likely part of a vertical panel to the west of the doorway, forming part of the central shaft of a segmented pilaster. The construction of plaster pilasters to mark doorways was common in the Nabataean world. As noted by McKenzie (1990: 88), pilasters originated in Greece in the fifth century BC and became more widely used by the fourth and third centuries BC. Baroque in style, and a central element of façade decoration, pilasters likely reached Nabataea through the spread of Hellenism to the Near East in the late fourth centu-

ry. The most striking example of stucco pilasters in Petra is seen in the molded decoration on the exterior of the north and east walls of Qaṣr al-Bint (قصر البنت). On the north face of Qaṣr al-Bint, on the far west side of the northwest anta, are the remains of segmented molded pilasters which have been reconstructed as a series of square molded cassettes decorated with alternating circular and octagonal molded patterns (Zayadine 1987: pl.13). The South Corridor pilasters are similarly segmented, though broken into rectangular cassettes instead of square ones. The geometric style of the decoration in the centers of the Qaṣr al-Bint cassettes is also reflected in the painted diamonds seen in the centers of the cassettes from the South Corridor.

On the east face of the Qaṣr al-Bint, the stucco pilasters are broken into a series of long thin rectangular panels, outlined by *cyma reversa* moldings, and stacked vertically on top of each other. Here, the panels have no cassettes, are more elongated than the South Corridor examples, and do not flank a doorway. However, along with the pilasters from the north face of Qaṣr al-Bint, they comprise some of the only other examples of segmented plaster pilasters known in Petra's temple architecture.

In stone, numerous examples of Nabataean pilasters exist, many with carved cassettes. The best examples are those seen flanking a decorative niche inside Room 468 at Petra (McKenzie 1990: pl.112). The example from Room 468, essentially a niche contained within two carved façades, shows four pilasters — two marking the extent of the outer façade, and two flanking the interior niche. The outer pilasters are segmented, each carved into a series of six raised cassettes contained within a *cyma reversa* molding very much like that depicted in the South Corridor and in Bellwald's reconstruction.

The inner pilasters show a striking resemblance to the South Corridor decoration as well. In Room 468, the inner pilasters are smaller, deeper set than the outer two, and display no molded decoration. This design mirrors closely the structure of the vine panel from the South Corridor discussed above. As such, it seems very possible that the South Corridor doorway was flanked by double pilasters: a segmented outer one with interior raised cassettes and defined at either edge by two deep *cyma reversa* moldings, and a smooth inner one with a painted vine design defined by two shallow *cyma reversa* moldings. Further, the solid dark blue sunken panel between the pilasters could be interpreted as an attempted depiction of negative space — accentuating the two pilasters by simulating a deep space between them similar to that cut

between the pilasters in the Room 468 niche. In *The Architecture of Petra*, McKenzie (1990: 98-99) comments on the use of blue paint in Alexandrian tomb painting and Second Style Pompeiian wall painting and its role as a device to enhance perspective. Traditionally, in Egypt and Italy blue paint was used in wall decoration to give painted scenes a greater sense of depth. Emulating the distant horizon, blue paint was a commonly used as a background color and sustained the illusion of extended space behind painted architectural features. The blue painted panel in the South Corridor creates a similar heightened sense of depth — enhancing the three dimensional projection of the pilasters by visually depressing the area between them.

Other examples of carved pilasters appear on a niche adjacent to Façade 66 in Petra (McKenzie 1990: pl. 168). Like Room 468, Façade 66 has two sets of pilasters to either side of the niche, one large outer pair and one smaller inner pair. The decoration on these pilasters, however, is reversed from the Room 468 example. The outer set has a smooth, non-segmented appearance, while the inner pair is broken into a series of stacked cassettes; three of a probable six remain. Below the Façade 66 niche is carved an alternating band of *bas*-relief circles and diamonds that are vivid reflections of the geometric motifs seen painted onto the South Corridor stucco decoration.

In addition to stucco and stone-carved examples in Nabataea and surrounding regions, segmented pilasters similar in style and decoration to those from the South Corridor are most readily visible flanking entries in Second Style Italian wall paintings. Included within the first century BC illusionist architecture on the walls of the Torre de Annunziata at the Villa of Poppaea Sabina at Oplontis is a doorway flanked by segmented columns. The individual panels on these columns, like the cassettes on the pilasters from the South Corridor, are decorated with a central diamond design. Comparable diamond designs are also present on the painted columns in the House of the Labyrinth and in the wall decoration in the atrium of the Villa of the Mysteries, both at Pompeii. On the wall of Oecus 43 in the House of the Labyrinth is a painted depiction of a tholos flanked by a broken pediment. Supporting the pediment at either side are a series of columns, each divided into seven vertical sections. Of these, every other section is decorated with a central diamond design outlined by an illusionist raised molding. In the atrium of the Villa of the Mysteries large painted blue diamonds flank the entry to the peristyle. These diamonds, though not part of pilaster or column decoration, closely re-

semble the diamonds on the cassettes from the South Corridor in their accentuated double-outline design. The prominent single dark outlines of the diamonds from both Oplontis and Torre de Annunziata and the raised moldings around those from the House of the Labyrinth, while stylistically different from the borders of the South Corridor diamonds, also serve to give the decorations a noticeable accentuated quality.

One last point of stylistic comparison with the painted diamond designs from the South Corridor are the painted diamonds found decorating the lower parts of the walls at Herod's Northern Palace at Mas'ada/Masada. Dated by Yigael Yadin (1988: 202) to the mid-to-late first century BC, the walls of the lower terrace of Herod's palace are decorated with large colorful orthostata panels, marbled panels, and others that now show fragmented diamond designs very similar in style and coloration to those from the South Corridor. Visible in surviving portions of the plaster decoration is a red diamond, outlined by a black and white line, contained within a blue panel edged in red (Yadin 1988: 49). This design very closely parallels that seen on the cassettes in the South Corridor in both color and in orientation. Due to this high degree of similarity, it is possible to infer that the program of the South Corridor decoration (as a unit of which the diamond decoration is a part) is more essentially Roman, and not Nabataean, in design — a conclusion that cannot be drawn based on the wall paintings from Oplontis and Pompeii. These represent more general decorative parallels and therefore only imply *potential* Roman artistic influence in the South Corridor designs.

Dated by the historian Josephus Flavius to the first century (37-31) BC during the Roman Empire, Herod's Masada Northern Palace provides a source of relative dating for the construction phases of the Petra Great Temple. If the temple was initially constructed and decorated in the last quarter of the first century BC *following* the construction of the Masada palace, as suggested by M.S. Joukowsky, it is possible that the diamond decoration in the South Corridor was directly influenced by Roman (perhaps specifically Herodian) presence at the site. On the other hand, if the Petra Great Temple was built and decorated prior to the last quarter of the first century, *before* the Masada palace was built, it is possible that the decoration was Nabataean in origin and was absorbed conversely into the Herodian artistic repertoire by local or imported artisans. If the South Corridor plastering was influenced by the designs at Masada and not vice versa, the date of 37-31 BC for the Masada Northern Palace becomes a potential *terminus post quem* for the sug-

gested architectural redesign (and related re-decoration) of the Petra Great Temple by the Romans. In the manner of plaster re-decoration at Petra evidenced by the appliqué floral motifs, red painted diamond decorations, and blue and black line designs added to the columns of the Temple of the Winged Lions during the remodeling stage of the temple (Hammond 1996: 14, 78),<sup>2</sup> it is possible that the plaster decoration in the South Corridor was Nabataean in its early form but was later embellished following increased Roman influence in the area. The revamping of the stucco decoration in the Petra Great Temple South Corridor is plausible particularly in light of the suspected change in the use of the space following the addition of the arguably Roman theatron. Once the theatron was built, the temple South Corridor may have taken on a new character, possibly one of more importance than it had during Nabataean times. As such, perhaps there was a need to “Romanize” the area, now linked to the theatron, by adding characteristically Roman decorative touches, such as the diamonds, to existing artistic elements. This scenario also accounts for the notable absence of the diamond motif on the fragmented molded cassettes uncovered in the West Corridor and reconstructed by Bellwald. The western corridor, of potentially less or unchanged importance in Roman times, may not have been considered a priority for re-decoration and was left in its original Nabataean decorative state.

A final point of stylistic consideration for the *in situ* South Corridor stucco is the interlocking chevron pattern visible along the sides of the molded cassettes. The use of black interlocking chevrons as a decorative pattern does not have any known parallels in Nabataean architectural wall painting or stone carving.<sup>3</sup> As such, the closest contemporary stylistic parallels I could find are the large black interlocking chevrons painted on some of the Fourth Style panels on the walls of Peristyle 29 and Cryptoporticus 41 at the Villa of Popaea Sabina at Oplontis dated to the mid-first century BC. The wall paintings at Oplontis, described as stylized simulations of cut slabs of marble with “extreme transverse veining” in Jacqueline and Maurice Guillaud’s book, *Frescoes in the Time of Pompeii* (1990: 62), may reflect the Nabataeans’ desire to create the effect of marbling along the edges of the South Corridor cassettes. The use of marbling as a

form of wall decoration is also seen in conjunction with the diamond patterns on the east wall of the atrium at the Villa of the Mysteries and at the Masada North Palace — in both instances tying the two geometric motifs together in an entryway context as they exist in the South Corridor.

### Egg and Tongue Cornice Pieces

Judging from the architectural fragment data collected on site, the molded cornice/wall decoration pieces with the egg and tongue motif were found in eleven different varieties differentiated primarily by color scheme and precise decorative image (Table 1). All pieces recovered appear to have been carved *in situ* due to the irregularity of their molded elements and the rough surface of their reverse faces (which would have been chinked directly into the uneven surface of the south wall). Taking into account both color and visible motif, three similar styles can be gleaned from the ten unique forms of egg and tongue. Group numbers 2 and 8 possess the common pattern of a yellow egg and tongue band directly above a painted blue band. Group numbers 4, 5, 6, and 11 all display a row of uncolored dentils directly on top of a row of colorless egg and tongue. Numbers 5 (Fig. 3) and 6 (Fig. 4) have the additional commonality of a blue band above the row of dentils. Lastly, group numbers 2 and 7 both have a molded, uncolored vine pattern surmounting a thin, colorless band that is directly above a row of egg and tongue. The noted similarities of both the motifs and colors displayed on the fragments give some insight into what the full appearance of the cornice band (or bands) may have looked like. However, as the pieces of stucco recovered from the South Corridor have been exposed to over two thousand years of degradation and decay, it is unreasonable to assume that they accurately display their original coloration today. Thus, a second means of comparison, looking only at the molded schemata, must be used.

By this method many more commonalities are readily visible. First, group numbers 1, 6, 8, and 10 all display an egg and tongue pattern above a single thin band. Group numbers 4, 5, 6, and 11 all show three thin bands above a row of dentils above a single thin band above a row of egg and tongue. The above two sets of similarities can be combined; the smaller decorative pattern evident in the

2. Hammond dates this remodeling at the Temple of the Winged Lions to sometime early in the reign of Malichus II from AD 40-70, well past the beginning of informal Roman occupation of the area in 64 BC. Hammond suggests that the motivation behind the plaster re-decoration is to “remove the more strictly Hellenistic ritualistic decoration and

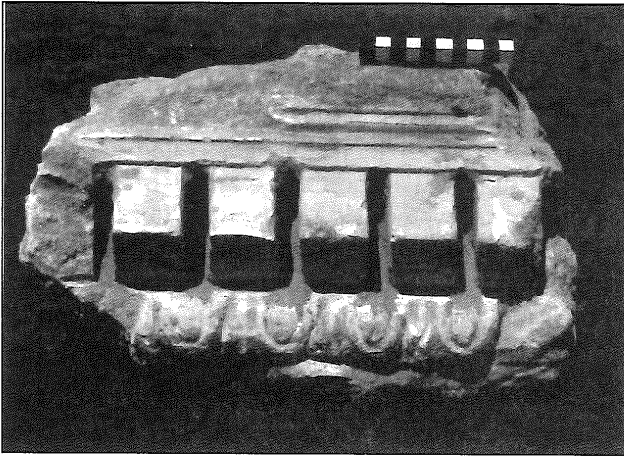
replace it with simple painted panels, indicating cultic or socio-political expressions” which indicates the prominent influence of a new people, perhaps the Romans, in the area.

3. Interestingly, the diagonal slant of the design closely resembles the diagonal Nabataean tooling commonly cut into masonry surfaces as a plaster key.

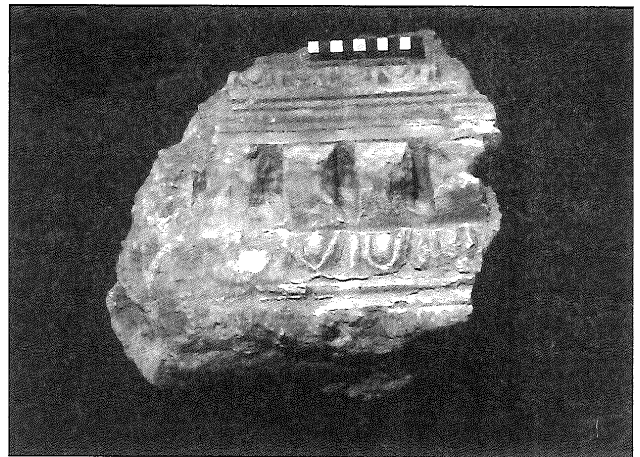
Table 1: Groupings of similarly styled cornice fragments.

GROUP NO.	SEQ.#	QTY.	FEATURE OR FUNCTION	PAINT COLOR	DECORATIVE MOTIF	LENGTH RANGE: (IN METERS)	WIDTH RANGE: (IN METERS)	THICKNESS RANGE: (IN METERS)	COMMENTS
1	85130 85146	2	WD	BLUE	EGG AND TONGUE	0.12-0.17	0.10-0.13	0.07-0.08	EGG AND TONGUE ABOVE A THIN BLUE BAND
2	85155	1	CORNICE	BLACK, BLUE, YELLOW	RIBBED, EGG AND TONGUE, VEGETAL ELEMENTS	0.37	0.20	0.12	MOLDED VEGETAL ELEMENTS ABOVE A THIN BLUE BAND OVER A BAND OF YELLOW EGG AND TONGUE ATOP A BLUE DOUBLE RAISED BAND ATOP A BLACK PANEL
3	85188	1	CORNICE	BLUE, WHITE, RAINBOW	RIBBED, EGG AND TONGUE, VINE	0.18	0.20	0.08	MOLDED VINE (?) ELEMENTS ABOVE A RAISED BLUE BAND OVER EGG AND TONGUE ABOVE A RAINBOW PANEL
4	85194	1	CORNICE	NONE	RIBBED, DENTILS, EGG AND TONGUE	0.28	0.23	0.12	RAISED BANDS ATOP DENTILS ATOP EGG AND TONGUE
5	85204	1	CORNICE	RED, BLUE	RIBBED, DENTILS, EGG AND TONGUE	0.32	0.21	0.17	WHITE, RED AND BLUE RAISED BANDS ABOVE DENTILS AND EGG AND TONGUE MOTIFS
6	85208 85228 85256 (85297 & 85306)	4	CORNICE	BLUE, WHITE, YELLOW	RIBBED, DENTILS, EGG AND TONGUE	0.33-.55	0.29-0.41	0.18-0.21	SMALL EGG AND TONGUE BAND ABOVE TWO RAISED BANDS ABOVE A RAISED BLUE BAND ABOVE DENTILS ABOVE A YELLOW BAND ABOVE A THICKER EGG AND TONGUE BAND
7	85224	1	CORNICE	NONE	EGG AND TONGUE, VEGETAL ELEMENTS	0.24	0.17	0.13	MOLDED VEGETATIVE ELEMENT OVER TOP RAISED BAND OVER TOP EGG AND TONGUE BAND OVER SHORT CARINATED PANEL
8	85232	1	WD	BLACK, BLUE, YELLOW, WHITE	EGG AND TONGUE	0.11	0.10	0.08	YELLOW EGG AND TONGUE OVER A PINK AND BLUE BAND OVER A WHITE PANEL WITH A BLUE PAINTED ARCH
9	85259	1	CURVED CORNICE	RED, YELLOW	EGG AND TONGUE	0.58	0.16	0.09	MOLDED ARCH IN TWO PIECES WITH EGG AND TONGUE RUNNING ALONG TOP
10	85323	1	CORNICE	RED, PURPLE, BLUE	EGG AND TONGUE, DENTILS	0.26	0.33	0.14	PURPLE/BLACK PANEL ABOVE EGG AND TONGUE ABOVE RED AND BLUE BANDS OVER DENTILS OVER A THIN BLUE BAND
11	85324	1	CORNICE	RED, YELLOW, PURPLE	EGG AND TONGUE, DENTILS	0.30	0.30	0.15	THREE MOLDED BANDS OVER DENTILS ABOVE AN EGG AND TONGUE





3. Stucco cornice fragment Seq. No. 85204. Photo by A.A.W. Joukowsky.



4. Stucco cornice fragment Seq. No. 85208. Photo by A.A.W. Joukowsky.

first set of examples bring present within the larger program of the second set. Therefore, group numbers 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, and 11 can be identified collectively as parts of one cornice with the following decorative scheme from top to bottom: one thin band of painted yellow egg and tongue above three alternating white, red and blue thin bands in the *cyma reversa* style atop large, square dentils atop a medium-sized band of egg and tongue over a double undecorated *cyma reversa*.

The matter of group numbers 2 and 7 is more difficult. Judging by their appearances, neither of these fragments fit comfortably with the decorative program noted earlier. Displaying a unique vegetal design (above which there is no evidence for a second motif), a thin egg and tongue design, and a tapering at the base into a flat panel below the egg and tongue, these two fragments appear to comprise an entirely separate stylistic arrangement from that illustrated above. Group number 3, also displaying the vegetal design and the egg and tongue motif, appears to fit with this group, with the lower panel extending out to a carinated edge or drip cornice. Due to noted similarities, it seems likely that group numbers 2 and 7 also had this carinated edge/drip cornice in antiquity, but it has since broken off leaving only the flat upper portion.

The curved group number 9 fragment presents a similar difficulty of placement as it also does not visibly connect stylistically with any of the other cornice fragments. The unusual curvature of this piece can be interpreted in a variety of ways. The piece may be part of a semi-circular arched "Syrian Style" architrave or entablature similar to that drawn by Clarence S. Fisher in his plan of the Period III<sup>4</sup> eastern exterior façade of the Nabataean Temple at Khirbat at-Tannūr (خربة التنور) (Glueck

1965: 143 plan B). In his plan, Fisher places overtop the temple entrance an arched stone cornice attached at either end to a band cornice that extends along the front of the building. While Fisher's drawing is of an exterior façade and not of an internal room, the position of the South Corridor as a direct point of access into the Great Temple's Southern Passageway shrine gives it the character of a formal entryway that might require such a façade to mark the passage between two distinct sacred areas of the temple. Parallels for semi-circular arched entablatures are visible in southern Italy in the freestanding archways depicted in the Second Style wall paintings in cubiculum 16 at the Villa of the Mysteries, and in triclinium 14 at the Villa of Poppaea at Oplontis. Others include the banded arch over the façade of Tomb 154 and the carved arch seen on Tomb E17 at Madā'in Šāliḥ decorated with a large egg and tongue pattern mirroring the decorative motif seen on the fragment from the Petra Great Temple (McKenzie 1990: pl. 9, 156).

A second theory for the placement of the curved cornice is founded in the notion that the piece is not part of an arched, but rather of a segmental, pediment. "Segmental" pediments are defined by McKenzie (1990: 88) as those pediments that "involve a curve which is a segment of a circle or a section of an ellipse, rather than a semi circle". As noted by McKenzie (1990: 88-89), contemporary examples of segmental pediments exist both in standing architecture and in paintings dating to the Ptolemaic period. Examples from this period include carved segmental pediments from the western cemeteries in Alexandria including Hypogea 2 and 5 at Anfoushy. Located along trade routes stretching from southern Arabia to Syria, Petra

4. Glueck defines Period III at Khirbat at-Tannūr to the first quarter of the second century AD, just prior to the Roman

annexation of Petra in AD 106.

would have had ample access to Ptolemaic artistic styles and traditions. Therefore, the use of segmental pediments in Nabataean architecture is not at all unusual.

In Petra, rock-cut examples of segmental pediments with plain banded decoration are visible over the second doorway from the north of the Corinthian Tomb, atop the flanking niches on the lower orders at both the Bāb as-Sīq Triclinium and the Palace Tomb, crowning the Renaissance Tomb, and over top Façade 849 at Baydā (بيضا). Examples of segmental entablatures and pediments with carved dentils include those seen on the second order of the rock-cut façade of the Tomb of Sextius Florentinus (AD 129) and the plaster façade rendered on the exterior face of the south wall of the Qaṣr al-Bint, the closest in proximity of all the aforementioned monuments to the Petra Great Temple itself.

Segmental pediments are also seen outside of Petra proper in the rock-cut tombs of Madā'in Šālīh. Tombs B19 (dated to AD 1), C14 (dated to AD 60), and A6 all possess arched stone pediments supported at either end by carved pilasters flanking the tomb's entry. In examples B19, C14, and A6, the segmental pediments are carved as plain bands with no ornamentation. The presence of such curved decorations above entryways during the Nabataean period corroborates the possibility that the curved cornice fragment from the Petra Great Temple was placed in a similar orientation, either as part of a semi-circular cornice or segmental pediment, over the central doorway of the South Corridor.

Returning now to the earlier discussion of the running egg and tongue cornice fragments, I will here propose three scenarios for the position of this cornice in the South Corridor. One possibility is that one large cornice extended, uninterrupted, along the uppermost portion of the northern face of the south wall of the South Corridor. While uniting the two distinct styles noted above is difficult, it is not impossible because decoration, if any, above the thin egg and tongue band noted on the examples from group numbers 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, and 11 is not detectable due to the broken edges of the fragments. As such, it is possible to link this group with group numbers 2, 3, and 7 by positioning the drip cornice from the lower part of the second group above the egg and dart of the upper part of the first group as is characteristic of Ionic entablature. The combined result would be an immense triple egg and tongue cornice punctuated by other decorative motifs including the vines on the uppermost band of the cornice and the modillion decoration on the drip cornice.

Found in incomplete form on multiple fragments, small five-petaled yellow flower modillions

hung from the drip cornice. Few examples of flower modillions in Petra have been documented. Generally, modillions are uncommon but are seen alternating with rosettes on an unprovenanced cornice fragment (McKenzie 1990: pl. 39) and are speculated to have existed on the Qaṣr al-Bint. Serving as comparative models, McKenzie (1990: 93, pl. 215c, d) discusses the presence of molded flowers between the modillions on two unpublished cornice fragments from the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria. Glueck (1965: pl. 172) observes two examples of inter-modillion floral decoration on cornice fragments from the Khirbat at-Tannūr Temple.

Complete with inter-modillion flowers, a massive cornice style such as described above would have worked structurally in the South Corridor of the Petra Great Temple. As noted in **Table 1**, many of the stucco cornice fragments recovered were in excess of 0.15m in thickness. This immense thickness would have been necessary in the South Corridor both to securely anchor the large cornice pieces into the rough surface of the wall and to ensure visibility of the pieces from the floor by the viewer. Clarity was notably an issue of concern for the craftsman carving the Petra Great Temple cornice. In the fragments found, the different decorative elements are boldly rendered and brightly painted enabling the cornice to be viewed from a considerable distance.

Despite its architectural feasibility, I could find no parallels for a triple egg and tongue cornice in Nabataean architecture. The use of large, elaborate double egg and tongue cornices, however, is common. Influenced by Hellenistic and Roman models, the double egg and tongue cornice style is visible along the top of the central doorway of the vestibule of al-Khaznah (الخبزينة). On al-Khaznah, the egg and tongue bands are separated by a painted band of dentils, drawn in the long, narrow style that is traditionally Hellenistic. In contrast, the dentils in the South Corridor fragments are carved and more square, suggesting either a local adaptation of the Hellenistic motif, or the influence of Roman design.

A second example, also demonstrating the thin Hellenistic style, is the pillar capital from the north arch of the Temenos Gate. This example, with fully carved dentils, comes closer to the style of the South Corridor pieces. The most notable difference between the al-Khaznah and Temenos Gate examples and the South Corridor fragments is the apparent compressed nature of the lower egg and tongue bands and the dentils in the South Corridor examples. In these, the three bands appear in close proximity to one another, while on the al-Khaznah and



Temenos Gate examples they are placed further apart. It seems likely that this arrangement occurs due to the considerably more confined space within which the artists of the South Corridor were working — particularly in comparison to the al-Khaznah or Temenos Gate structures, which were two of Petra's larger monuments.

Ignoring the apparent lack of precedent for a triple egg and tongue cornice, a second potential arrangement for the South Corridor cornice decoration is one large cornice band split into two sections along the south wall, one between the east wall and the center door and one between the center door and the west wall. Extending overtop the pilaster decorations the two bands would have approached the center doorway from either side of the corridor and terminated in a semi-circular arch over the central doorway similar to that seen in the proposed Period III exterior façade of the Khirbat at-Tannūr Temple. Stylistically, there is little comparison for this specific cornice arrangement used in the *interior* decoration of a building. However, it is my assertion that the interior stucco decoration, specifically the cornice pieces, in the South Corridor of the Petra Great Temple was intentionally modeled to mimic the appearance of an exterior façade. The combination of the projected immense height of the doors in the rear wall of the temple with the unusually large and complex decorative program strongly reinforces the idea of the South Corridor as an internal threshold. As mentioned earlier, situated in the rear of the Petra Great Temple, the South Corridor provides the most direct means of access between the temple proper and the rear shrine in the Southern Passageway. In this position, the south wall of the South Corridor serves as an exterior façade for the shrine area, perhaps justifying its closer stylistic resemblance to monumental exterior Nabataean tomb and palace architecture than to more-subtle interior décor.

As additional support for the theory of the South Corridor as a religious threshold, it is important to note that the closest overall stylistic parallel to the decoration in the South Corridor is the niche in Room 468 described earlier. Presenting such a striking parallel, it is possible to argue that the purpose of the decorative "façade" in the South Corridor is parallel to that of the façade of the niche — to designate the passage into sacred space.

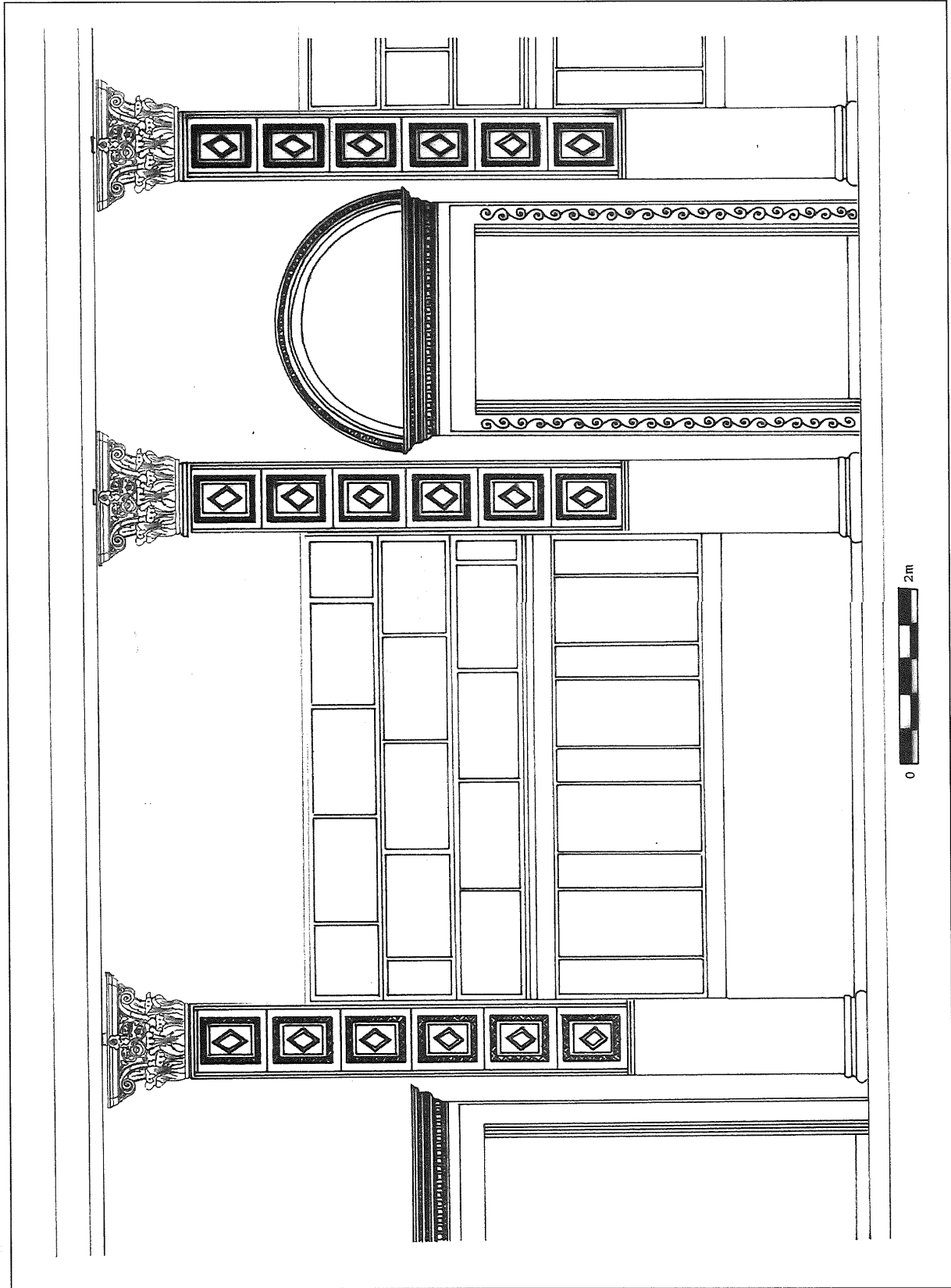
Drawing its inspiration again from the al-Khaznah and Temenos Gate examples cited above,

a third possible (and in my opinion most likely) placement for the cornice band in the South Corridor is over the doorways. Judging from the frequent placement of cornices over entryways in Petra such as the elaborately carved examples on al-Khaznah and the Temenos Gate, as well as those cut beneath the arched and segmented entablatures at Madā'in Šāliḥ Tomb E17, and the Renaissance Tomb, the presence of cornices over the doorways in the Petra Great Temple South Corridor would not be unprecedented.<sup>5</sup>

The placement of the cornices over the doorways also works particularly well in combination with the arched entablature discussed under the second reconstruction. While imagining a curved entablature connecting either end of a running cornice is not difficult with the Khirbat at-Tannūr reconstruction in mind, it is difficult to orient this program around the existing pilasters that flank the central (and likely the eastern and western) doorway. If the curved-entablature/split-cornice model existed it would have to have been placed above the capitals of the pilasters to prevent disruption of the pilaster design. In his reconstruction of the stucco decoration in the Petra Great Temple West Corridor, Bellwald precludes the possibility for such a design as he shows the pilasters rising to nearly the full height of the corridor wall, leaving little room for a surmounting cornice and fully-arching entablature. However, based on the preponderance of examples of Nabataean tombs exhibiting carved pilasters in conjunction with cornice-topped doorways surmounted by curved entablatures such as those seen at Madā'in Šāliḥ Tomb E17, the interior niches on ad-Dayr (الدير), the outer niche of Façade 66, and particularly on the Tomb of Sextius Florentinus and the Renaissance Tomb, I would argue for a similar arrangement in the South Corridor: taking form in one of three ways. *Scenario one*: The south wall of the temple is much higher than projected in Bellwald's construction, possibly to support the rear of the theatron structure. This additional height would easily allow for a surmounting arch resting on the tops of the segmented pilasters, possibly attached to a running cornice band as described above. *Scenario two*: The projected height of the south wall is unchanged, but the six raised cassettes carved into the outer pilasters begin at the base of the pilasters rather than one third of the way up the shaft as they do on Bellwald's model. By starting the cassettes

5. The possibility for a plaster cornice overtop the doorways in the South Corridor is also supported by the archaeological data. The estimated combined length of the plaster cornice fragments recorded as architectural fragments is 3.23m, a

number very close to the combined width of the east and central doorways (the west doorway is beyond the boundary of Trench 85) which is 3.76m.

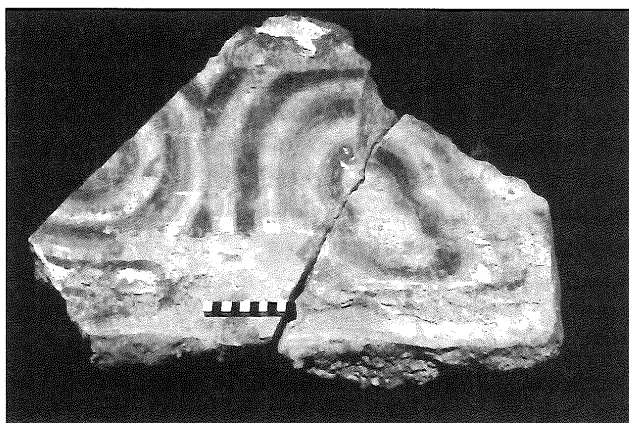


5. Possible reconstruction for the South Corridor decorative program including "First Pompeiian Style" wall decoration. Drawn and drafted by Emily Catherine Egan.

lower down, the height of the pilasters would diminish by one third, again allowing room above for an arching entablature. *Scenario three*: As there is no precedent for pilasters to begin their carved decoration at floor level, and it is unlikely that the rear wall of the temple is considerably higher than projected, it is likely that instead of extending over the tops of the segmented pilasters, the arched entablature may have rested on top of a cornice overtop the doorway, which would overlie the inner, vine-decorated pilasters (Fig. 5).

### Painted Marble Fragments

Comprising a significant portion of the larger plaster fragments recovered from the South Corridor at the Petra Great Temple, pieces of wall decoration painted to resemble panels of marble are unusual in Nabataean art. Marbling, a typical motif for First Style Pompeiian wall decoration, is commonly depicted in domestic Italian, palatial Palestinian, and Ptolemaic tomb wall painting. From the corpus recovered, the most recognizable fragments of marbled plaster are Sequence Nos. 85120 and 85121 (Fig. 6). Part of the same piece, these fragments display a cloud-like veining pattern consisting of concentric purple curls, edged in blue, on a white background which is most likely an emulation of the circular bands in alabaster. Noted by Roger Ling (1991: 12) in his book, *Roman Painting*, wall plaster painted to imitate stonework was commonly used as a decorative device in both Hellenistic and Roman times. Referred to generally as “masonry style” and known more specifically in Italy as “First Pompeiian Style”, simulated ashlar masonry originated in Greece in the fourth century BC and had spread considerably around the Mediterranean by the second century BC. Well-preserved examples of the masonry style are visible in the west at Pompeii and Herculaneum and further east at Pergamum, Sardis, Delos, Thera and



6. Marbled stucco fragment Seq. Nos. 85120 and 85121. Photo by A.A.W. Joukowski.

Alexandria. As noted by Ling (*ibid.*) “the essential characteristic of this [masonry] style is that it employs stucco as a medium for imitating ashlar blockwork; these are modeled in relief, the margins of the blocks having been recessed in the manner of undressed, or ‘drafted’ masonry; and colors are applied to suggest the use of different types of stone”.

In the Mediterranean, the creation of false masonry falls into two stylistic categories: that used in the west (i.e., at Italian sites including Pompeii and Herculaneum) and that used in the east (i.e., Greek sites including the islands and sites in Asia Minor). The eastern style is dated earlier than the western style and follows a rigid visual scheme. Bearing close resemblance to exterior masonry, from base to top the eastern style, as appears at the House of the Comedians, Room Q on Delos, is as follows: a narrow plinth below large square or vertical rectangular orthostata under a thin stringcourse and/or frieze, below a series of isodomic courses. In addition to its structural realism, the eastern model also adheres closely to natural coloration patterns — tinting each course a single color in emulation of a known stone. Examples of such homogeneous marbling occur on the lower order orthostata along the walls of the Tomb at Sidi Gaber and Anfoushy Hypogeum 2 in Alexandria and on the walls of the lower terrace building of Herod’s North Palace at Masada. Marbling as a decorative motif occurs frequently within the model, but is confined to the stringcourse and less commonly to the orthostata.

Presenting a noticeably more artistic approach, the western, Italian masonry tradition, known as “First Pompeiian Style”, followed a distinctly different visual program from the original Greek plan. Judging by the example from Insula VI Oecus N at Pompeii, from base to top the “First Pompeiian Style” appears as follows: a large, tall socle below a thin string course below a series of narrow vertical orthostata and finally a thin frieze below a series of isodomic courses beneath the upper frieze. In many examples, a molded cornice appears above both the lower and upper friezes. This style, while adhering loosely to an architectural model, incorporates many unique elements that make this design, more so than the ‘masonry style’, suitable for interior decoration. First, the color scheme of “First Pompeiian Style” is erratic. Unlike the monochromatic courses characteristic of the ‘masonry style’, the individual panels of the all the courses in the “First Pompeiian Style” are painted different colors. Reds, yellows and blacks are mingled together with marbled panels to create a more irregular, less regimented artistic pattern.

Unfortunately, due to the paucity of sizable flat

painted stucco fragments recovered from the South Corridor of the Petra Great Temple, it is difficult to tell whether the marbled/alabaster panel fragments listed above belong to a 'masonry' or "First Pompeiian" style wall decoration, or if they existed in an entirely unique decorative context. Considering the sheer degree of western versus eastern influence in other decorative elements recovered from the South Corridor, there is no notable preponderance of either style as the Nabataeans tended to glean artistic styles from many different cultural sources. As noted above, the segmented pilaster design is common both in painted Alexandrian tomb architecture as well as in Italian "Second Pompeiian Style" wall paintings. Additionally, the numerous cornice fragments pulled from the fill in the South Corridor would seem to argue for the Pompeiian model in which cornices were commonly used. However, the cornice fragments recovered are much larger in size than the thin Ionic style typical of the Pompeiian style and probably had a more prominent architectural role.

Due to the recognized lack of a definable east or west style in other elements, the only clear evidence for the position of the marbled fragment is the archaeological context in which it was found. Located about four meters up from the floor in fill, the marbled fragment, assumed to have fallen from a place higher on the wall would have, if it adhered to an established decorative scheme, been located approximately at the level of the isodomic courses in either the 'masonry' or "First Pompeiian" style. Relying on Ling's model, the rigidity of the 'masonry style' precludes the presence of a marbled panel in the upper isodomic courses. Therefore, by process of elimination, it appears plausible that the fragment fell from the irregularly painted upper courses of a "First Pompeiian Style" wall design. However, it is impossible to conclusively argue for the existence of a known decorative style in the South Corridor due to the extreme lack of archaeological evidence. As such, it is equally possible that the masonry style decoration in the South Corridor is unique — deriving its style both from Greek and Roman models, but existing as a distinct cultural amalgam not falling securely within either style.

### Molded Lion Body Parts

Perhaps the most unique and intriguing elements recovered from the excavations in the Petra Great Temple South Corridor are the molded plaster lion body parts. Specifically, seven parts from what appear to be two sculpted lion protomes include two heads, one facing east and one facing west, each with a detached mandible, two fragments of mane or fur, and a small detailed paw

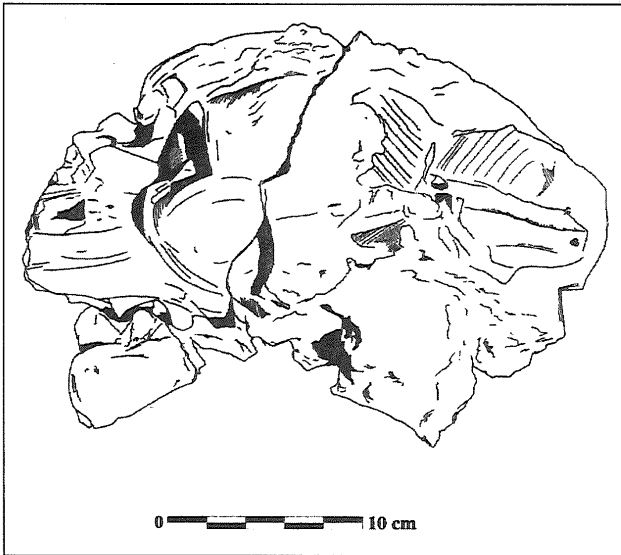
carved almost fully in the round.

Judging from the smooth surface and cut dowel holes on the reverse surfaces of the lion heads it is likely that the lion protomes were affixed separately onto a thick layer of foundation plaster on the northern face of the south wall rather than being carved *in situ*. Evidence for preparatory carving is unique to the lion parts and is not apparent in any of the stucco elements from the South Corridor discussed above. The lack of mold lines on their surface also suggests that the lion parts were not made from molds but were carved by hand.

Looking first at the artistic rendering of the lions, it is interesting to note the overall character of their appearances. While portrayed with open mouths and bared teeth and tongues, the demeanor of the two lions appears to be complacent. Lacking the ferocity of snarling, narrow-eyed Assyrian lions, the lions of the South Corridor appear closer in style to Parthian examples. With rounded jaws and fleshy noses, particularly evident on westward facing lion, the South Corridor lions closely resemble the lions affixed to the exterior cornices from Qaṣr ar-Rabbah (قصر الرابية).

While presenting a similar overall countenance, it is important to note that each of the two lions has a distinctive personality. The west (eastward facing) lion (Fig. 7), Sequence No. 85154, appears to be the more pacific of the two and likely, as suggested by Dakillalah Qublan, represents the female of the pair. Carved in profile and broken into two pieces, the west lion retains remnants of blue paint on its eye, flecks of red on its bared tongue, and has two deep cuts at the back and base of its head where additional pieces of plaster, perhaps parts of a neck or mane, may have been attached. Reed impressions also remain in the upper cut, suggesting the use of vegetation to reinforce the plaster application to the surface of the head. The eye of this lion is low set beneath a thin, arching brow and above a prominent, rounded cheek.

The east (westward facing) lion (Fig. 8), Sequence No. 85283, has a noticeably larger face and appears to be the male of the pair. The forehead of this lion arches upward and the eye is deep set beneath a thick, rounded brow. While the westward lion is rendered in direct profile, this lion is carved in a near three quarters view — its head turned slightly outward toward the viewer. The jaw on this lion, again like the west example, is detached from the head and no paint is visible on the tongue. The nose, like the forehead, arches upward as does the flesh of the mouth, curling around the nose in a half snarl. No evidence of reed depressions are visible on this lion head, though the plaster away from



7. Line drawing of west stucco lion head. Drawn and drafted by Emily Catherine Egan.



8. Line drawing of east stucco lion head. Drawn by Christian F. Cloke and drafted by Emily Catherine Egan.

the face is worn down suggesting perhaps the overlay of a mane or some other decorative element in antiquity.

The lion heads were likely positioned on either side of the center doorway in the South Corridor,<sup>6</sup> as speculated by foreman Dakillalah Qublan (Fig. 9). This was reinforced archaeologically due to the find spots of these pieces. This central placement, flanking a major entry and exit of the temple complex, likely indicates that the lion protomes served a purpose beyond pure decoration.

As suggested by Persian and Hittite examples of lions guarding major gateways, the dual lions in the South Corridor may be apotropaic in function. Flanking the doorway, the lion heads, with open mouths and bared teeth, maybe serve as a visual defense for the temple, warding off evil and promoting a sense of power and majesty complementing that created by the elephant heads carved onto the capitals of the triple colonnade in the temple's Lower Temenos. Nearby examples of lions poised as guardians are seen predominantly in tomb architecture and include the carved striding lions flanking the doorway to the Lion Triclinium in Petra and those sitting atop the entablature at Tomb B17 at Madā'in Šāliḥ. Carved lion heads are also seen in the forms of gargoyles and fountain fixtures rendered in high relief at Khirbat at-Tannūr and Qaṣr ar-Rabbah — each serving an explicit apotropaic function (Glueck 1965: 286).

A second possibility for the role of the lions is that they represent the consorts<sup>7</sup> of the Syrian god-

dess of vegetation, Atargatis. Atargatis, along with Dushares, was one of the primary gods of the Nabataean pantheon and was commonly accompanied by two lions, resting or seated alongside each of her feet, in cultic iconography. This possibility becomes more probable based on the known prominence of the deity in the Petra area, as well as the striking physical similarities noted between the South Corridor lions and examples of lions carved on an Atargatis stele from Khirbat at-Tannūr. Seated to either side of her throne, the lions, as described by Glueck (1965: 270), each possess a “low sloping forehead, deeply grooved eyes with protruding irises and perforated pupils, rounded cheeks, [and a] flattened nose with flaring nostrils”. This description matches almost identically the style of carving visible in the South Corridor (particularly on the western) lions and lends validity to their potential role as consorts of the deity.

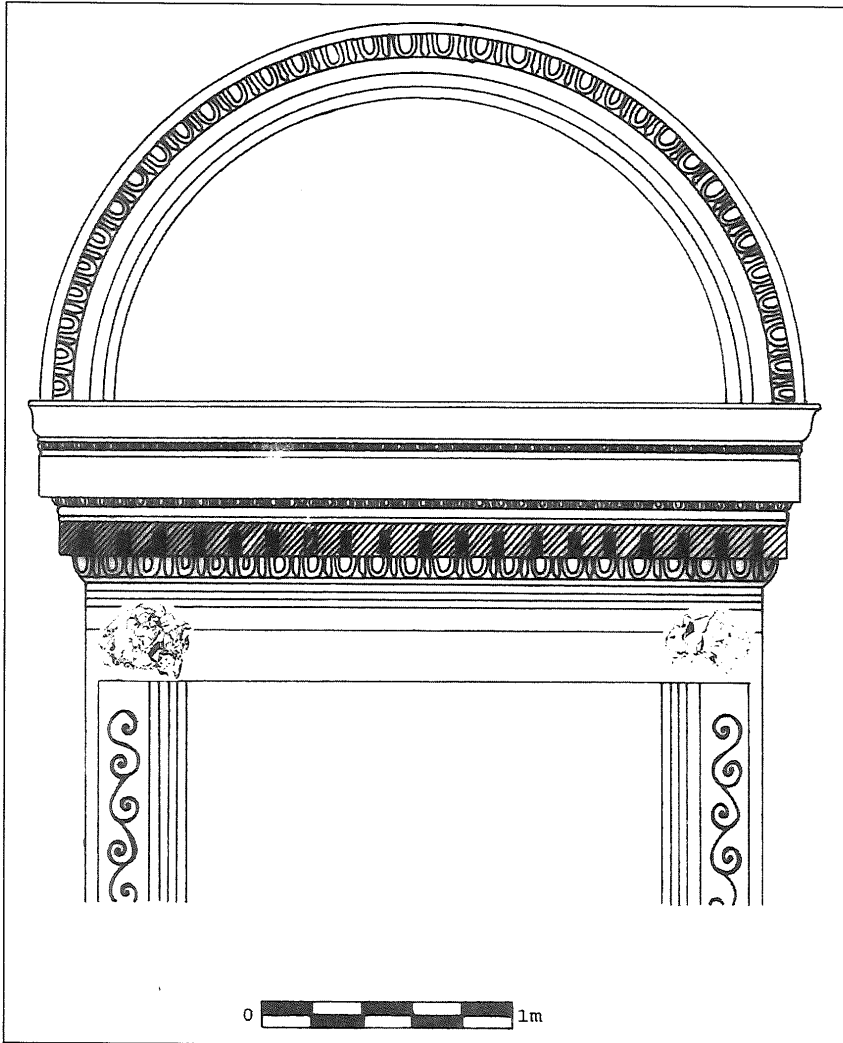
The possibility that the South Corridor lions are directly linked with the goddess Atargatis brings to light again the interesting notion of organization of sacred space within the Petra Great Temple complex. As expressed earlier, the exceptionally ornate decoration of the South Corridor may be related to its role as a threshold space marking the boundary between the inner cult area of the temple sanctuary and the outer cult area defined by the numerous small shrines built into walls and cut into the bedrock in the Southern and Eastern Passageways. The apparent presence of this secondary sacred area to the rear and side of the temple provokes explora-

6. Dakhillalah Qublan also speculates that lions flanked all of the exterior doorways in the temple complex, though no evidence of such decoration was found during excavation.

7. Glueck (1965: 286) also alludes to the possibility that lions

may stand for the goddess Atargatis herself and not just her consorts. Due to the non-representational character of Nabataean art, animals or amorphous shapes often served as stand-ins for the true forms of the gods or goddesses.





9. Possible reconstruction for central doorway showing lion protomes in situ.

tion of at least two possible scenarios for the choice of decoration in the South Corridor. First, if the rear shrines and the temple proper were contemporary areas of cultic activity (perhaps to Atargatis?), it is likely that elaborate decorative elements such as the molded lions are examples of original Nabataean carving emphasizing the point of passage between these two distinct sacred areas.

A second, perhaps more radical, possibility is that rear and side shrine areas were the true “sacred” areas of the complex, and the temple itself served a civic, rather than religious, function. In this case, the elaborately decorated South Corridor door would do more than mark the transition between two sacred areas, it would mark the passage between a *secular* and a *sacred* area — a passage perhaps much more worthy of decorative distinction.

A third, and less likely, possibility is that the shrines to the rear and side of the temple represent the marginalization of the sacred aspects of the temple to the rear and side of the complex following its redesign under the Romans. In this case, the

elaborate doorway decorations of which fragments now remain, are the result of Roman intervention, perhaps with the intent to enhance the entry to the now-sacred rear and side areas via decorative flourishes including the addition of the lions heads and the diamond patterns mentioned earlier.

If not representations of the consorts of Atargatis, a final possibility is that the lions in the South Corridor served as solar symbols — representatives of Nabataean cosmological and astrological beliefs. Present at such Hellenistic sites as Ba‘albak and Timnā‘, the use of the lion as a solar symbol became a hallmark of Hellenistic influence. Closely associated with the Syrian goddess of the spring, Atargatis, the role of lions as markers of the changing of the seasons, namely the vernal equinox, is well represented in Near Eastern art. The depiction of the lion as the harbinger of a new season is perhaps best illustrated on the façade of the eastern staircase of the Apadana at the Persian festival palace at Persepolis. On the Apadana, the lion of spring is shown biting the bull of winter, marking the changing of the seasons through the tri-

umph of the lion over the bull. Interestingly, this same iconography is present in Nabataean mythology in the two main gods of their pantheon, Dushares and Atargatis whose respective consorts are the bull and lion. As such, the prominence of the lion (and the absence of the bull) at the Petra Great Temple may indicate the presence of a solar cult to Atargatis, whose worship would bring the fertility of spring to the land.

### Conclusion

Looking at the various decorative elements found both *in situ* and within the fill during the excavation of the South Corridor of the Petra Great Temple, the most striking characteristic common to all pieces is the vast stylistic cultural repertoire from which they are derived. Drawing inspiration from Rome, Pompeii, Herculaneum, and the Villa of Oplontis to the west, from Hellenistic Alexandria to the south, Roman Arabia to the north, the Persian and Parthian empires to the east, as well as numerous local sites, the decoration in the South Corridor represents a unique blend of foreign and local design characteristic of a people whose empire was fueled by trade. As such, possessing both extensive cultural mobility and craftsmen of remarkable skill, the Nabataeans created an artistic canon impossible to fully define. As such, while the above reconstructions are firmly rooted in the stylistic, structural, and technical character of culturally accessible sites, they are in no way definitive, and more likely than not exist as a stylistic amal-

gam as of yet unfounded in its particular design.

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