

## Early Nabataean Royal Portraiture

### Introduction

As is well known, the Nabataean kingdom was founded by one or more initially nomadic Arab tribes<sup>1</sup>. The Nabataeans therefore belonged to the Semitic cultural sphere. This information is important since it could lead to the assumption that the Nabataeans, as Semites, had no figural representation at all<sup>2</sup>, including images of their kings. However, as quickly becomes clear from an overview of Nabataean art and culture, they definitely had figural representation<sup>3</sup>. In the case of their kings and queens, the best evidence comes from coins where the heads of kings and queens were part of the standard repertoire from the early 1st century BC onwards<sup>4</sup>. It is from coins that we have the most precise information about the iconography of Nabataean kings. Apparently they wear their hair long, with curls falling about their neck<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, long hair as male fashion has a long tradition in the Arab world, as already observed by Herodotus, writing in the 5th century BC<sup>6</sup>. Early figural representations of Arabs also show them with long hair<sup>7</sup>. Despite the specific Arab iconography, in style the Nabataean coin portraits are very similar to the coinage of their Seleucid and Ptolemaic neighbours. In particular, the coins of Aretas III struck in the Damascus mint are almost identical to their Seleucid predecessors, including the characteristic ea-

gle nose borrowed from Antiochos VIII Epiphanes Grypos. On the Nabataean coins, the royal status of the kings is indicated by a diadem, i.e. typical Hellenistic ruler iconography, in the earlier series from the early 1st century BC to 14 / 3 BC. In the later series, from 5 BC to the end of the Nabataean kingdom in AD 106, the king usually wears a wreath, i.e. typical Roman ruler iconography<sup>8</sup>. The aim of this article is to question the available evidence for the existence of (early) Nabataean royal statuary and what it looked like. While the first question can be answered quite easily, the second is a little trickier.

### Lost Statues of Nabataean Kings

Epigraphic and textual evidence indicates that statues of Nabataean kings definitely existed<sup>9</sup>. Two possible categories of statuary representations of Nabataean kings would have existed, *viz.* honorary statues and (cult) statues of deified kings. Both categories are attested by ancient texts and inscriptions.

Within the so-called Obodas chapel near Jabal Numayr in Petra a Nabataean inscription mentions a "statue of Obodat, the god..."<sup>10</sup>; during recent archaeological work at the site a fragment that may have belonged to a statue of Obodas was found<sup>11</sup>. A statue of the same deified ruler is attested by an in-

<sup>1</sup> On the Nabataeans in general see Schmid 2008; Hackl *et al.* 2003; Wenning 1987, all with further bibliographies.

<sup>2</sup> This is the tendency of Patrich 1990.

<sup>3</sup> See abundant examples in the contributions quoted in note 1 and many more, e.g. Schmid 2009. However, it may be necessary to differentiate that picture, cf. Schmid 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Meshorer 1975: 12-16; for earlier Nabataean coinage - without royal portraits - see also Kushnir-Stein and Gitler 1992-93.

<sup>5</sup> For some new observations on the hair-style of Aretas IV see Schwentzel 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Hdt. 3, 8, 1; for comments on this passage see Hackl *et al.* 2003: 460-464. As a matter of fact, Herodotus does not explicitly state

that the Arabs wear long hair, but that they pretend to have the same hair-style as Dionysos.

<sup>7</sup> For instance on the famous reliefs of the Assyrian kings showing their Arab enemies of the 8th and 7th centuries BC; Weippert 1973-74.

<sup>8</sup> From 14 / 3 to 5 BC both types occur. Major historical events probably lay behind the surprising change from diadem to wreath; Schmid 2009: 335-337.

<sup>9</sup> On this question see Schwentzel 2006; Hübner and Weber 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Nehmé 2002: 243 with the older references; Schwentzel 2006: 128-130; Hübner and Weber 1997: 113.

<sup>11</sup> Nehmé 2002: 247-250; Schwentzel 2006: 129-131.

scription found in the Negev<sup>12</sup>. The fact that a Nabataean king named Obodas was deified after his death is further confirmed by Stephanos Byzantios, although he does not explicitly mention statues<sup>13</sup>.

Honorary statues of Nabataean kings are attested by inscriptions found in the city centre of Petra. Clearly attested are two examples, both from the area around Qaşr al-Bint, one probably of Aretas IV, the other probably of Rabbel I<sup>14</sup>. A third inscription, from the temenos of Qaşr al-Bint, might also refer to statues, in this case of Malichus II and Shaquilat<sup>15</sup>. However, other proposals regarding the translation of the inscription would indicate different use (Hackl *et al.* 2003: 242-244). Either way, the first two inscriptions mentioned above attest to the existence of royal statues around Qaşr al-Bint, although their value for dating built structures associated with that monument must be considered with care and not over-interpreted<sup>16</sup>. Less clear is the case of an inscription from Jarash that might also relate to a statue of a Nabataean king; doubt has been cast on this interpretation<sup>17</sup>. Finally, inscriptions found in the Mediterranean area which mention Nabataean kings might also refer to possible statues<sup>18</sup>. However, according to the epigraphic evidence this cannot be confirmed with confidence, as in the case of the above-mentioned inscriptions from Petra.

The picture that arises from this very short overview is at first sight rather disappointing. Very few statues of Nabataean kings are attested (which does not mean that there were no others; we simply have no evidence). At second glance, regarding the geographical distribution of confirmed statues the picture is clear. With the exception of the specific case of the deified Obodas, confirmed statues of Nabataean kings occur exclusively at Petra and, more specifically, in the city centre. This information fits well with the general picture of Nabataean art and culture. It was long ago observed that there are different trends in Nabataean artistic behavior: a stronger Graeco - Roman one including manifold figural representations, and a more 'oriental'

one with some preference for aniconic artistic expressions. While earlier research has long ago discussed whether this twofold picture may be related to chronological and / or social differences, it has recently been shown that there is also a clear geographical factor: Petra, and more specifically the city centre of Petra, has by far the highest density of Graeco - Roman figural representations within Nabataean culture<sup>19</sup>. Most of them must once have belonged to as yet unspecified public buildings. Therefore, Petra was deliberately used by the Nabataean kings as an international window using the pictorial *lingua franca* of the period, i.e. Graeco - Roman styles in sculpture and relief decoration, in order to communicate political messages<sup>20</sup>. On the other hand, we have only a few, and not too convincing, indications that the Nabataean kings tried to communicate these messages abroad, especially outside their kingdom. This is very different to, for example, Herod the Great who had to practice a completely different method. In his own kingdom he could not make use of figural representations and was therefore very limited in pictorial communication with the international audience. Therefore, he had to concentrate his efforts abroad, where several statues, buildings, donations etc. of Herodes are indeed attested<sup>21</sup>.

### Possible Identifications

It should be clear from the above that statues of Nabataean kings must have existed at Petra (and perhaps elsewhere) and that they were most likely made in the style of the contemporary Mediterranean world. On the other hand, they would probably also show some distinctive Nabataean - or at least Arab - iconographic features, as do the Nabataean kings on coins (cf. above). It is these strongly Hellenizing portrait heads with distinctive Arab details that form the basis of the following discussion. There are two additional categories of heads that have previously been proposed as possible representations of Nabataean kings: small (clearly less than life-size) heads in stone and terracotta<sup>22</sup>,

<sup>12</sup> Hübner and Weber 1997: 113; however, this interpretation has also been contested: Wenning 1997: 181-183; Hackl *et al.* 2003: 407.

<sup>13</sup> Stephanos Byzantios, *Ethnika* 482, 15-16; Hackl *et al.* 2003: 597-598; Schwentzel 2006: 130-131.

<sup>14</sup> See Hackl *et al.* 2003: 240-242, 244-247; Schwentzel 2006: 126-128.

<sup>15</sup> Zayadine *et al.* 2003: 90-91; Schwentzel 2006: 128 with a slightly different reading but the same interpretation.

<sup>16</sup> See some remarks in Graf *et al.* 2007: 230-237; Graf 2006.

<sup>17</sup> See comments in Hackl *et al.* 2003: 202-203.

<sup>18</sup> As proposed by Schmid 1999.

<sup>19</sup> See Schmid 2010 with further references.

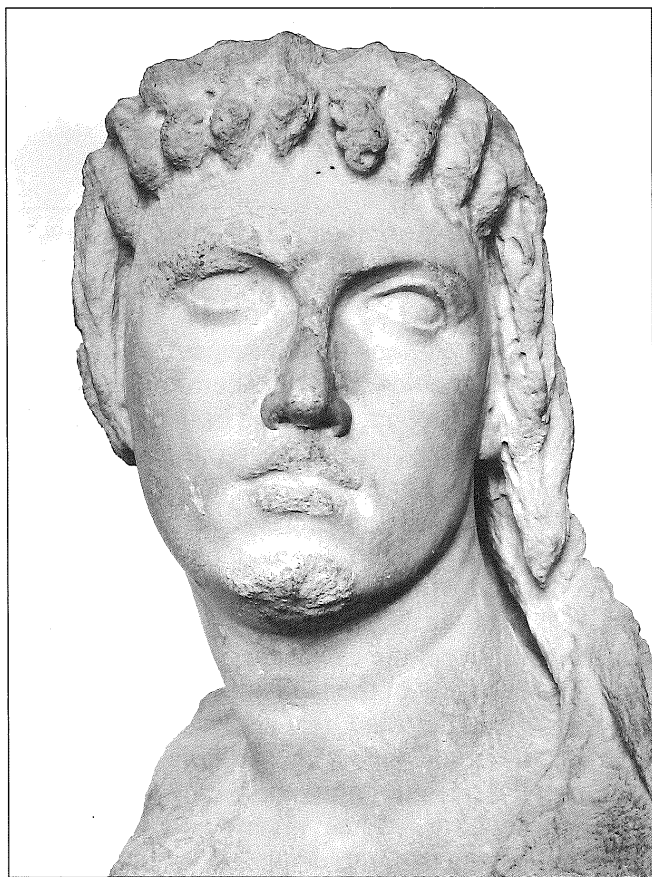
<sup>20</sup> For more details see Schmid 2009; Schmid 2010.

<sup>21</sup> On differences between the figural propaganda of Herod and the Nabataeans see Schmid 2009: 346-348 with further references; cf. also Schwentzel 2007.

<sup>22</sup> On these see for example Hübner and Weber 1997: 111-112; Schwentzel 2006: 131-134.

and more or less life-size or bigger heads in stone but showing fewer Mediterranean and more Near Eastern stylistic features, in part owing to the fact that a lot of them are manufactured of hard (basalt) stone<sup>23</sup>. Although they will be mentioned in order to make a better case for the following interpretations, they will not be discussed in detail.

Some years ago the present writer proposed to identify a marble bust now in the Louvre at Paris (FIGS. 1 - 2) as being the portrait of a Nabataean king of the late 2nd or 1st century BC (Schmid 2001). The arguments proposed then seem valid still and need not be repeated here. The characteristics of the bust are exactly those we would expect of Nabataean royal portraits in the round, e.g. typical Graeco - Roman stylistic features (*viz.* strong



1. Marble head of a Hellenistic ruler wearing a diadem. Paris, Louvre Ma 3546 (photograph Museum).



2. Marble head of a Hellenistic ruler wearing a diadem. Paris, Louvre Ma 3546 (photograph Museum).

turning of the head, nudeness of at least the torso, pathos formulae of the face) combined with specifically Arab-Nabataean iconography (*viz.* long curly hair).

Exactly the same observations must, therefore, lead to a new consideration of a very similar head, though in a completely different category of ancient craftsmanship. The small (1.83cm high) convex amethyst stone with an engraved portrait of a diademed ruler now in the Antikensammlung at Berlin was bought on the art market and first published in 1969 (FIGS. 3 - 6)<sup>24</sup>. According to Erika Zwierlein-Diehl who first studied and published the object, the person represented is Ptolemy III Euergetes who reigned Egypt from 246 to 221 BC<sup>25</sup>. She made this

<sup>23</sup> Discussed in Weber 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Berlin, Antikensammlung Inv. 1967.8; according to the inventory number the stone was bought in 1967. On 11 June 1968 E. Zwierlein-Diehl presented the object during a public lecture at the Archaeological Society at Berlin; an abstract of that paper can be considered the first publication of the object: *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 1969: 530-531. In the same year, the amethyst was again

mentioned and illustrated in another publication by the same author: Zwierlein-Diehl 1969: 97-98 cat. no. 225 pl. 48. A. Scholl and A. Schwarzmaier of the Berlin Antiquity Collection kindly granted access to the object.

<sup>25</sup> See references in note 26; cf. later publications by the same author: Zwierlein-Diehl 2007: 375 fig. 248 pl. 62.



3. Amethyst stone. Berlin, Antikensammlung 1967.8 (courtesy of Antikensammlung, Berlin; photograph Isolde Luckert).



4. Amethyst stone (cast). Berlin, Antikensammlung 1967.8 (photograph Schmid).

case on the basis of similar profile lines and similar corpulent features to representations of Ptolemy III on coins<sup>26</sup>. However, this kind of argument and, therefore, its result must be reconsidered. First, despite significant efforts, no typology of portraits of Ptolemy III has so far been established<sup>27</sup>. Second, it has been convincingly demonstrated that similar profile lines of ancient heads do not necessarily refer to the same person (Jaeggi 2008: 78-83), all the more so when comparing different media such as coins, gems, sculpture in the round etc. Otherwise, the amethyst from Berlin only very rarely pops up in scientific contributions. For Wolfram Martini it could depict Ptolemy IV Philopator, although he notes differences with all known portraits of that dynasty<sup>28</sup>, while Ines Jucker favors Alexander II Zebina or Zabinas who ruled Syria from 128 to 123 BC<sup>29</sup>. Finally, Dimitrios Plantzos prefers to remain somewhat unspecific, but tentatively agrees

to identify the head as one of the Ptolemies<sup>30</sup>. All of these interpretations do not respect the simplest methodological rules and can therefore easily be disputed, since they argue on the basis of very subjective 'similarities' between persons variously depicted in different categories of ancient craftsmanship. The obvious Hellenistic stylistic and technical features of the intaglio contrast remarkably with the iconography of the depicted person. Especially noteworthy is the fact that the long, flowing hair completely covers the ear of the represented ruler. No member of any of the Hellenistic dynasties succeeding Alexander the Great shows that particular feature. Ptolemies, Seleucids, Attalids and Antigonids are all depicted with considerably shorter and more strictly arranged hair, always with clearly visible ears<sup>31</sup>. Even geographically more distant rulers claiming to be in more or less direct succession from Alexander, as far away as modern Afghanistan, fol-

<sup>26</sup> For an in-depth study of the portraits of Ptolemy III see Kyrieleis 1975: 25-42 and more recently Känel 2009; Queyrel 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Känel 2009 convincingly exposes the reasons for this failure.

<sup>28</sup> Martini 1972: especially 609.

<sup>29</sup> Jucker 1975: especially 18 with note 9.

<sup>30</sup> Plantzos 1999: 47: "Finally, no. 23 is a very interesting intaglio, with a head in three-quarter view, engraved in a highly convex

amethyst ringstone. The shape of the face and its particular features bring it close to the Ptolemaic model, even though it does not look like any of the intaglios discussed above. At any rate, it seems reasonable to keep it as a tentative Ptolemaic portrait".

<sup>31</sup> See various examples in Smith 1988 (all dynasties); Kyrieleis 1975 (Ptolemies); Fleischer 1991 (Seleucids); Gans 2006 (Attalids); Queyrel 2003 (Attalids).





5. Amethyst stone (cast). Berlin, Antikensammlung 1967.8 (photograph Schmid).

low these characteristics<sup>32</sup>. Even in the most ‘unconventional’ portraits of a Hellenistic ruler, those of Mithridates VI Eupator of Pontus and Bithynia, the hair does not completely cover the ears (Højte 2009; Smith 1988: 99-100). Although the long hair flows around the head in a somewhat exaggerated *imitatio Alexandri*<sup>33</sup>, at least the lower part of the ear always remains visible. One of the best parallels for the exaggerated *tryphé* and pathos of our intaglio portrait can be found on a head from Ostia, now in the Villa Aldobrandini at Frascati, often associated with Mithridates VI<sup>34</sup>. However, although the hair forms an impressive mass of lengthy curls all over the head, the lower part of the right and three-quarters of the left ear are visible. Such iconographic details were important. We can therefore conclude that the ear of the ruler on the Berlin amethyst was not depicted for a specific reason. The same must be true for the fleshy face and fork-like division of the central curls above the forehead. If we are looking for parallels, the best evidence comes from areas beyond the Hellenistic world proper, but in contact with it. There, the conven-



6. Amethyst stone (cast). Berlin, Antikensammlung 1967.8 (photograph Schmid).

tions of ruler iconography may have been different to those in the wider Mediterranean (Ptolemaic, Seleucid etc.) sphere, but ruling dynasties may still have been keen to employ well-trained stone cutters from the Hellenistic royal courts, as is obviously the case with our amethyst stone. This can be demonstrated, for example, with the Himyarites in South Arabia, at least to judge by their coins (FIG. 7)<sup>35</sup>. Indeed, the long curls completely cover the ear of the ruler, who wears a wreath. The reverse of these coins imitates the new-style Athenian tetradrachms with the owl and wine amphora, indicating long-term contact with the Mediterranean world. However, this argument faces a chronological problem, as the Himyarite dynasty is considerably later than the portrait on the amethyst, which

<sup>32</sup> See for example Kritt 2001; Kalita 1997; Bopearachchi 1991.

<sup>33</sup> On the imitation of Alexander see Bohm 1989.

<sup>34</sup> Højte 2009: 152-153 with fig. 12; Smith 1988: 171 cat. no. 84.

<sup>35</sup> On Himyarite coins see Munro-Hay 2003: especially 135 for the type discussed here.



7. Himyarite coin, mid 2nd century AD (after [www.coinarchives.com](http://www.coinarchives.com)).

definitely belongs to the Hellenistic period, or Augustan era at latest. However, the characteristics of the Nabataean kingdom may shed some light on the matter. The close contacts of the Nabataeans with the Mediterranean world is beyond doubt. Since they most likely hired craftsmen from the Hellenistic capitals to construct some of their monuments and decoration, at least in Petra<sup>36</sup>, they may also have employed stone-cutters from Alexandria, Antiocheia and the like<sup>37</sup>. Depictions of Nabataean kings, from the beginning of portrait coinage under Aretas III until the last Nabataean king Rabbel II, show them with long curly hair covering the entire ear<sup>38</sup>. This was of course reminiscent of the typical Arab iconography already known to Herodotus (cf. above). The heavy and fleshy lower face is in perfect accordance with the *tryphé* so prominently favoured by oriental rulers of the Hellenistic period, including some of the Ptolemies and Seleucids<sup>39</sup>. It seems logical that these characteristic features would correspond perfectly with the iconographic needs of a Nabataean king depicted by a Greek gem-cutter. This combination might also explain the specific rendering of the hair, being less 'corkscrew-like' as on Nabataean coins, which was most probably a Greek view of an Arab hair-style. Finally, the above-mentioned fork-like division of the central curls above the forehead would also find

a good match within the Nabataean world. On most coins the side curls covering the lateral part of the king's head start from the centre of the forehead, thereby creating a noticeable central division. On coins of Aretas IV, the king (and queen) are often shown wearing an additional decoration above the forehead (FIG. 8)<sup>40</sup>. Similar decoration above the



8. Nabataean coin of Aretas IV wearing floral element above the forehead (after [www.coinarchives.com](http://www.coinarchives.com)).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *supra* notes 20, 21.

<sup>37</sup> All the more, since stone-cutters were probably amongst the most mobile and itinerant craftsmen; see some thoughts in Zwieler-Diehl 2007: 144-146; Plantzos 1997: 197-207. In the case of a bronze foundry discovered at Petra, a clear Alexandrian connection could be established: Grawehr 2010: 159-163, 207, 215-217, 219-230.

<sup>38</sup> There are exceptions from Aretas IV onwards, not earlier than the year 9 BC (Meshorer 1975: cat. no. 46), where the ear is visible.

For the time being it is difficult to decide whether this is another sign of stronger Roman influence; cf. *supra* note 8.

<sup>39</sup> A characteristic expression of wealth, culminating in royal epithets such as *Tryphon* ("the luxurious", e.g. for Ptolemaios III Euergetes Tryphon or Diodotos Tryphon) or *Physkon* ("fat-bag", e.g. for Ptolemaios VIII Euergetes II Physkon); on the - positive - meaning of *tryphé* expressions see Heinen 1983; Kyrieleis 1975: 163-164; Tondrau 1948.

<sup>40</sup> Meshorer 1975: 43, 94-95, cat. nos. 49, 53 and others.

forehead also occurs in a relief in Wādī Farasa East at Petra that most probably depicts Dushara, or potentially a Nabataean king as Dushara<sup>41</sup>, and also on a series of stone heads from Syria, all showing royal persons, some of whom may be Nabataean kings<sup>42</sup>. A similar decoration was once placed on the head now in the Louvre, as is clearly indicated by the carefully prepared placement and round hole in the middle of the forehead (FIG. 1). It therefore seems reasonable to identify the Berlin amethyst as a Nabataean king of the 2nd or 1st century BC.

This hypothesis can be strengthened by two further factors. First, from the Nabataean mansion on az-Zanṭūr in Petra comes a garnet ring-stone depicting Athena (Kolb *et al.* 1997: 246-249). The colour, form and chronology of the garnet compare well with the amethyst in Berlin. Second, from the Tomb of the Soldier complex in Wādī Farasa East at Petra comes an interesting imitation of an amethyst gem in red glass, unfortunately without any decoration<sup>43</sup>. Both pieces show that ring-stones, with figural depictions and imitations of amethysts respectively, were not uncommon at Petra. Last but not least, the well-known relief from the city centre of Petra with the representation of Dushara / Dionysos (FIG. 9) indicates that this type of exag-

gerated pathos combined with tryphé features was well known to the Nabataeans, at least in Petra<sup>44</sup>. Dushara / Dionysos is represented with a wreath of grapes and long hair very similar to the portrait heads under discussion. Furthermore, the representation also displays a comparable central division of the hair above the forehead.

The discussion of the above-mentioned stone and gem portraits, including the quoted comparisons with coins, clearly demonstrates that our picture of the variety of possible Nabataean royal portraits is still incomplete. It also shows that previous research has all too frequently focused on classical interpretations, i.e. by restricting itself to strictly Mediterranean areas when looking for possible identifications. This is also true for a slightly over life-size bronze head from the famous 'Villa dei Papiri' at Herculaneum (FIG. 10)<sup>45</sup>. The seemingly strange corkscrew curls have previously been interpreted as an attempt to create a pseudo-portrait of a person of the Greek past in a later period. As the sculptural decoration of the villa does have, amongst other tendencies, a specific lyric touch<sup>46</sup> the head was interpreted as representing Thespis, a flute player at the court of Ptolemy I in the late 4th century BC (Sgorbo 1970). On the other hand, the sculptural decoration of the



9. Architectural fragment with bust of Dionysos / Dushara. From Petra, city centre (after Markoe 2003: 62, fig. 44).

<sup>41</sup> Schmid 2001: 104-105 with further references.

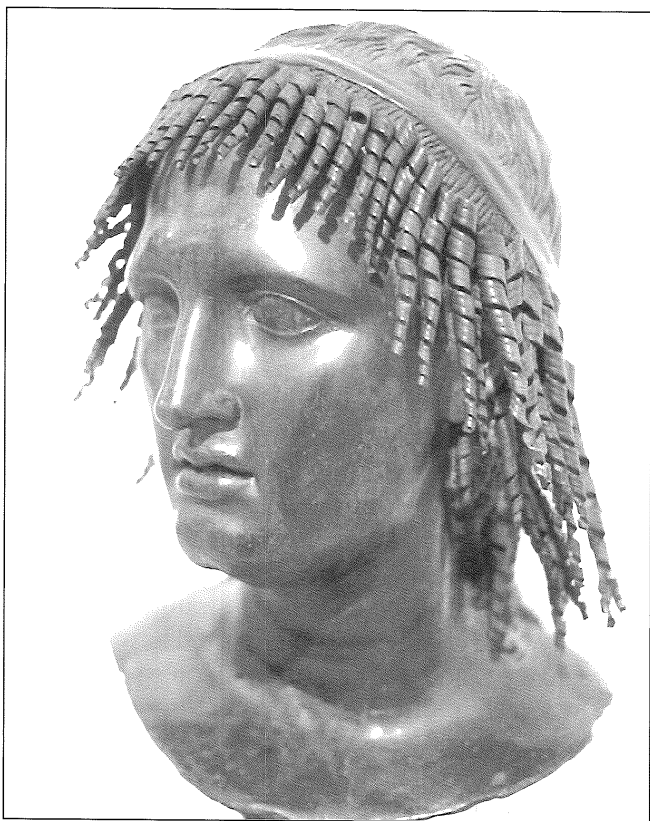
<sup>42</sup> Cf. *supra* note 24.

<sup>43</sup> Found during the 2009 season, but not yet published. G. Platz-Horster (Berlin) kindly confirmed that the colour and form indicate an intended imitation of amethyst and, most likely, a date in the late Hellenistic period. The context of the object does not give any further information, as it was found in layers washed in from above which covered the Nabataean structures.

<sup>44</sup> The relief belongs to a group of figural decorated architectural members reportedly found together in 1967: McKenzie 1990: 134-135 with further references; Lyttelton and Blagg 1990: 98-100.

<sup>45</sup> Naples, National Museum no. 5598; Mattusch 2005: 230-233.

<sup>46</sup> On the sculptural decoration of the villa see Mattusch 2005; Neudecker 1988: 105-114, 147-157; Pandermalis 1971.



10. Bronze head from the Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum. Naples, National Museum 5598 (photograph Schmid).

villa also has a clearly historical - political agenda, representing many Hellenistic rulers. This has led others to identify the head as being the portrait of a Ptolemaic queen<sup>47</sup>. The textile diadem of the head would support both interpretations, i.e. winner of a theatrical contest or a royal person. Yet further proposals have attributed the head to other historical persons, both Greek and Roman<sup>48</sup>. The initial appearance of the head is now somewhat hard to reconstruct, owing to the fact that the freely hanging corkscrew curls can probably be attributed to modern restoration. However, as there are similar but thicker curls on the neck, the head may indeed have been depicted with broadly similar hair-style (Mattusch 2005: 231-232). In its actual state of conservation, the similarity with Himyarite rulers depicted

on coins (FIG. 7) is striking. With thicker curls the head would also sit quite happily within the gallery of the Nabataean kings. This was first appreciated by Eugenio la Rocca (La Rocca 1984: 53-60), followed by Stefania Adamo Muscettola who proposes to identify it as an Arabian ruler<sup>49</sup>, maybe even a Nabataean king. Indeed, the similarity of its iconographic and typological features with the marble head in the Louvre (FIGS. 1 - 2) and the intaglio portrait in Berlin (FIGS. 3 - 6) lend strong support to this new identification. Also, the fact that many scholars have hesitated to identify the represented person as male or female strengthens the hypothesis of a Near Eastern ruler, exposing his wealth in the specific iconography of *tryphé*, combined with the traditional Arab long hair-style<sup>50</sup>.

The three portraits discussed so far would fit very well within 'early' representations of Nabataean kings, showing a Hellenized Arab ruler of the Hellenistic (330 - 30 BC) or very early Roman Imperial (from 27 BC onwards) period. Last, but not least, we shall turn to yet another specimen. In contrast to the examples discussed above, its context and chronology are relatively clear. What is less clear in this case is the royal status of the person represented and this, as we shall see, has significant consequences. In the attica zone of the so-called Tomb of the Soldier in Wādī Farasa East at Petra three male persons are represented in high relief<sup>51</sup>. The person in the centre is wearing a typical Graeco - Roman cuirass, which has led to the misleading designation of the structure as the Tomb of the 'Roman' Soldier (FIG. 11)<sup>52</sup>. In the meantime, it has become evident that the main building phase of the entire complex of the Tomb of the Soldier belongs to the third quarter of the 1st century AD, clearly within the Nabataean period. The question therefore arises as to who is represented in the centre of one of the most prominent funeral complexes of the Nabataean capital wearing the dress of a high-ranking officer, with a cloak wrapped around his left arm<sup>53</sup>. Since the head of the person is unfortunately missing, a definitive answer is

<sup>47</sup> Mattusch 2005: 233; Smith 1988: 160 cat. no. 24.

<sup>48</sup> Summarised in Moesch 2009: 132.

<sup>49</sup> Adamo Muscettola 2000: 18-19 "Busto di sovrano d'Arabia".

<sup>50</sup> See the arguments discussed above.

<sup>51</sup> Since 1999, the Tomb of the Soldier complex has been the focus of an archaeological project carried out under the direction of the present writer; see various preliminary reports in the *ADAJ* from volume 44 onwards as well as under [www.auac.ch/iwfp](http://www.auac.ch/iwfp).

<sup>52</sup> During the 2002 season of the International Wādī Farasa Project,

several leg-fragments belonging to the three statues were found; in 2003 a fragment of a bended arm and part of a face were discovered: Schmid and Studer 2003: 476-479; Schmid and Bar-masse 2004: 341.

<sup>53</sup> Both arms are broken off and their original position is not entirely clear. It seems possible that the left arm with the cloak leaned on the hip while the right lower arm was held upright; cf. below on the coins of Aretas IV (FIG. 12).





11. Central figure from the Tomb of the Soldier. Petra, Wādī Farasa East (photograph Schmid).

difficult to come by. Of particular interest are the two young male individuals flanking the central figure. Both are almost completely naked, a tiny cloak around one forearm is more a decorative element than clothing. With the other hand both hold a long stick, probably a spear or sceptre, and both are standing in a marked contraposto scheme, a typically Graeco - Roman feature. The naked bodies and standing positions correspond perfectly with Mediterranean artistic features. However, as can be seen from their badly mutilated heads, both were shown with long hair falling on to their shoulders. This of course has nothing to do with Greek or Roman iconography, since no male Greek or Roman would be represented with long, flowing hair after the Archaic period (700 - 490 / 80 BC), but must instead be considered a clear indication of their Arab background. This, together with the chronology of the monument, leads to the conclusion that the two young males in the lateral niches were represented in the iconographic scheme as Hellenized / Romanized Nabataeans. It is therefore legitimate to ask what interpretation should be given to the central figure. The best parallels for the standing position and dress of that figure come from coins of Aretas IV showing the king in military dress, in an almost identical position to the central figure of the Tomb of the Soldier (FIG. 12)<sup>54</sup>. He is clearly wearing a cuirass, has his left hand on the hip where it holds a sword, while the right arm is raised in front of him. Also clearly visible is a cloak wrapped around the left arm. Seemingly the exact same figure is



12. Nabataean coin of Aretas IV in military dress (after [www.coinarchives.com](http://www.coinarchives.com)).

represented in a rock-cut relief measuring approximately 50 cm in height along the steps leading up to Jabal Numayr (FIG. 13)<sup>55</sup>. Owing to its state of preservation and the absence of any precise archaeological context, neither the chronology nor the interpretation (and perhaps not even the sex) of the person depicted in FIG. 13 can be accurately defined. On the other hand, the interpretation of the Nabataean king Aretas IV as commanding officer on his coins (FIG. 12) is beyond doubt. Therefore, the question arises of what we should call the person in the centre of the attica zone of the Tomb of the Soldier. Was it possible for a 'normal' officer to be represented in a formerly royal iconography, roughly two generations after the coins struck in AD 18 / 9? Or was this specific iconography still reserved for the king when the Tomb of the Soldier was built during the third quarter of the 1st century AD? In the second case, we would have to assume that the complex of the Tomb of the Soldier in Wādī Farasa East is a lavish structure built for Malichus II (AD 40 - 70)<sup>56</sup>. The fact that he is



13. Relief with representation of cuirassed person. Petra, steps to Jabal Numayr (after Dalman 1908: 208).

<sup>54</sup> Meshorer 1975: 57-58, 103 cat. no. 97; most likely dating to AD 18 / 9.

<sup>55</sup> Tholbecq forthcoming; Dalman 1908: 208, fig. 131.

<sup>56</sup> As has already been proposed by Wenning 1987: 251 (tentatively identified as the Tomb of Rabbel II).

represented as commanding officer may recall one of his military exploits. Whether or not this was his participation in (or at least sending troops to) Titus' campaigns against the Jews in AD 66 / 7 and AD 70<sup>57</sup> is, of course, purely speculative, as is the attribution of the Tomb of the Soldier complex to a Nabataean king<sup>58</sup>.

### Conclusions

During the Hellenistic period, the Nabataeans established their kingdom on the margins between the Mediterranean and Arab cultural spheres. This led to different cultural influences within their artistic expressions, the figural representation of humans and human – like gods being the most noteworthy. Especially at Petra, Graeco - Roman influences were deliberately put on show, not exclusively but in a high concentration in and on the public monuments of the city centre. This is also the area where, according to inscriptions, statues of Nabataean kings were standing. Coin portraits of the Nabataean kings indicate that they were represented with a specific Arab iconography, including long curly hair. Taken together, these elements lead to several new proposals regarding the identification of images of Nabataean kings. In light of this, a marble portrait in the Louvre (FIGS. 1 - 2), a portrait on an amethyst in Berlin (FIGS. 3 - 6) and a bronze head from Herculaneum in Italy (FIG. 10) would all fit perfectly within the gallery of Nabataean kings. The points made about specific Nabataean royal – and stylistic – elements finally led to a discussion of the central figure represented on the attica zone of the Tomb of the Soldier at Petra (FIG. 11), which may have belonged to a complex built for Malichus II.

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<sup>57</sup> Ios., BI 3, 68 (AD 66 / 7); Tac., Hist 5, 1, 2 (AD 70); on these texts see Hackl *et al.* 2003: 558. 620.

<sup>58</sup> One would have to ask why a royal funerary complex is located in a side-valley and not more prominently along the main cliffs surrounding the city centre. However Wādī Farasa East, with the complex of the Soldier Tomb on its lower terrace, a spacious

living space on its upper terrace (the so-called Garden Valley) and access to the High Place on Jabal Madhbah, becomes an extremely interesting complex overall, in which all the important elements needed by one of the tribal or clan groupings that shaped Petra (with the exception of the immediate city centre) are gathered together.

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