

# A Reassessment of Nabataean Lead Coinage in Light of New Discoveries<sup>1</sup>

OLIVER D. HOOVER

PLATES 27-30

THE coinages of the Nabataeans have long been studied, and numerous collections have examples in silver and bronze.<sup>2</sup> However, until recently Nabataean lead coins have been extremely rare: a single such coin, formerly in the Shraga Qedar collection, Afula, was published by Ya'akov Meshorer in 1975 (C13 in the catalogue, below),<sup>3</sup> and a second (G27), not yet published, was discovered in the excavations at Me'zad Raḥel (Qasr 'Ein Kharuf) in 1981.<sup>4</sup> Numerous new examples that have appeared on the Israeli antiquities market are now greatly expanding our knowledge of this formerly rare series. The coins, which are reported to have come from a Jordanian source, appeared in two lots in the summer of 2001 and a further three lots in early 2002. Three other examples unrelated to the Jordanian pieces have also come to light on the American coin market.

The known lead coins can be divided into twelve typological groups, as follows:

## CATALOGUE

(All coins are illustrated on **Plates 27-30**, unless marked otherwise)

### Group A

*Obv.*: Crude head of Athena wearing crested Attic helmet r.

*Rev.*: Winged Nike standing l., holding wreath (?).

1. 14 mm. ↑ 2.25 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

<sup>1</sup> This paper is dedicated to the memory of Ya'akov Meshorer (1935-2004), the pioneer of modern Nabataean numismatic study. The author wishes to thank Donald T. Ariel, Dan Barag, Tali Erickson-Gini, David Hendin, Arthur Houghton, Ya'akov Meshorer, Duane Pichler, Shraga Qedar, and Abraham Sofaer, all of whom provided important data for this paper or offered their comments. All conclusions are the sole responsibility of the author. The following abbreviations are used: AHNS = Arthur Houghton Collection, New Series, Washington, DC (unpublished). Barag = D. Barag, 'Some examples of lead currency from the Hellenistic period', in A. Houghton *et al.* (eds), *Studies in Honor of Leo Miltenberg* (Wetteren, 1984), pp. 1-5. Bowersock = G.W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge, 1983). CNG MBS = Classical Numismatic Group, Ltd., Mailbid Sale. Gleuck = N. Gleuck, *Deities and Dolphins* (New York, 1965). Houghton, 'Seleucid lead issues' = A. Houghton, 'Two late Seleucid lead issues from the Levant', *INJ* 11 (1990-91), pp. 26-31. IAA = Israel Antiquities Authority. Meshorer = Y. Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins* (Qedem 3; Jerusalem, 1975). Kushnir-Stein and Gitler = A. Kushnir-Stein and H. Gitler, 'Numismatic evidence from Tel Beer-Sheva and the beginning of Nabataean coinage', *INJ* 12 (1992-1993), pp. 13-20. Schmitt-Korte = K. Schmitt-Korte, 'Nabataean coinage - Part II. New coin types and variants', *NC* 150 (1990), pp. 107-31. Spijkerman = A. Spijkerman, *The Coins of the Decapolis and Provincia Arabia* (Jerusalem, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the historiography of Nabataean numismatics and a list of collections with important Nabataean components see Meshorer, pp. 5-9, 84-5.

<sup>3</sup> Meshorer, no. 3.

<sup>4</sup> The information on this find was generously provided by Donald Ariel and Tali Erickson-Gini of the IAA.

**Group B**

*Obv.*: Head of Nabataean ruler (Obodas III?) r., with hair in cascading rows of curls; dotted border.

*Rev.*: Winged Nike standing l., holding palm branch (or cornucopia?) in l. hand and wreath in r.; dotted border.

2. 13 mm. ↑ 2.16 g. Meshorer, Sup. 1 (Jerusalem. Munster N. Collection).<sup>5</sup>
3. 14 mm. ↑ 2.18 g. A. Sofaer Collection (ex AHNS 918A).<sup>6</sup>
4. 12 mm. ↖ 2.06 g. A. Sofaer Collection (ex AHNS 918B).<sup>7</sup>
5. 14 mm. ↙ 2.45 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).
6. 13 mm. → 2.10 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).
7. 13 mm. ↙ 2.18 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).
8. 13 mm. ← 1.61 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).
9. 13 mm. → 2.46 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas). Not illustrated.
10. 13 mm. ↑ 1.94 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas). Not illustrated.
11. 13 mm. ← 1.50 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas). Not illustrated.
12. 13 mm. ↖ 1.92 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

**Group C**

*Obv.*: Diademed bust of Nabataean ruler (Aretas IV?) r., with short hair and wearing Nabataean cloak, linear or dotted border.

*Rev.*: Winged Nike standing l., holding uncertain object in r. hand and wreath in l., linear or dotted border.

13. 14 mm. ↑ ? Meshorer, no. 3.
14. 14 mm. ↑ ? New York market (Amphora).
15. 14 mm. ↑ 1.42 g. Jerusalem. Hebrew University, inv. 6460.

**Group D**

*Obv.*: Youthful head of Heracles (Milkom?) r., wearing lion's skin and with club over his shoulder; linear border.

*Rev.*: Winged Nike standing l., holding uncertain object in r. hand and wreath in l.; no visible border.

16. 14 mm. ↑ 2.21 g. Private North American Collection (ex AHNS 919A).
17. 12 mm. ↓ 1.56 g. A. Sofaer Collection (ex AHNS 919B).

<sup>5</sup> This coin is erroneously described as 'silver (?)' in Meshorer's catalogue, p. 86. For the metallurgical proof that the coin is made from an alloy of lead and tin see Schmitt-Korte, p. 107, no. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ya'akov Meshorer et al., *Coins of the Holy Land: The Abraham D. Sofaer Collection at the American Numismatic Society*. Forthcoming.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

**Group E**

*Obv.*: Uncertain head r., dotted (?) border.

*Rev.*: Winged Nike standing l., holding palm branch (?) in l. hand and wreath in r.

18. 13 mm. ↗ 1.39 g. Jerusalem. Hebrew University, inv. 5284.<sup>8</sup>

**Group F**

*Obv.*: Uncertain laureate and bearded head l. dotted border.

*Rev.*: Winged Nike standing r., holding wreath in r. hand and sceptre in l.

19. 13 mm. ↖ 1.62 g. Jerusalem. Hebrew University, inv. 6459.

20. 13 mm. ↓ 2.03 g. Private North American collection. Haifa market.

21. 14 mm. ↑ 3.11 g. Jerusalem. Hebrew University, inv. 6428.

**Group G**

*Obv.*: Laureate head of Nabataean ruler (Aretas IV?) r.; linear border.

*Rev.*: Bull charging l.; linear border.

22. 13 mm. ↓ 2.15 g. A. Sofaer Collection (ex AHNS 918C).

23. 13 mm. ↑ 2.10 g. A. Sofaer Collection (ex AHNS 919C).

24. 13 mm. ↑ 1.62 g. A. Sofaer Collection (ex AHNS 918D).

25. 13 mm. ↓ 1.62 g. A. Sofaer Collection (ex AHNS 918E).

26. 13 mm. → 1.50 g. A. Sofaer Collection (ex AHNS 919D).

27. 13 mm. ↓ 1.56 g. IAA, inv. 95605. Mezad Raḥel excavations (No. 183, Locus 15).

28. 13 mm. ↑ 1.50 g. New York market (Amphora).

29. 13 mm. ↑ 1.45 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

30. 12 mm. ← 1.63 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

31. 13 mm. ↑ 1.77 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

32. 12 mm. ↑ 1.64 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

33. 12 mm. ↑ 1.56 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

34. 12 mm. ↑ 1.62 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

35. 12 mm. ↑ 1.89 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas). Not illustrated.

36. 12 mm. ↑ 1.28 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas). Not illustrated.

37. 13 mm. ↓ 1.71 g. Jerusalem. Hebrew University, inv. 6461.

38. 12 mm. → 2.14 g. Jerusalem. Hebrew University, inv. 6564.

39. 12 mm. ↑ 1.89 g. Jerusalem. Hebrew University, inv. 6565.

<sup>8</sup> Barag, p. 3.

**Group H**

*Obv.*: Laureate head of Nabataean ruler (Aretas IV?) r., with long curls and moustache; linear border.

*Rev.*: Bull charging l.; linear border.

40. 13 mm. ↑ 1.66 g. Jerusalem. Hebrew University, inv. 6429.

**Group I**

*Obv.*: Laureate head of Nabataean ruler (Aretas IV?) r.; linear border.

*Rev.*: Bull charging l.; above, Nabataean inscription.

41. 13 mm. ↙ 1.81 g. *Rev.* inscription: √ (A). CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

**Group J**

*Obv.*: Laureate head of Nabataean ruler (Aretas IV?) r.; linear border.

*Rev.*: Bull charging r.; linear border.

42. 13 mm. ↑ 1.79 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

**Group K**

*Obv.*: Laureate head of Zeus (Hadad?) r.; linear border.

*Rev.*: Bull charging l.; linear border.

43. 13 mm. ↑ 1.55 g. A. Sofaer Collection (ex AHNS 919E).

44. 13 mm. ↑ 1.58 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

45. 13 mm. ↓ 1.75 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

46. 14 mm. ↓ 1.95 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

47. 13 mm. ↑ 1.59 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

48. 13 mm. ↓ 1.82 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

49. 13 mm. ↑ 1.57 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

50. 13 mm. ↓ 1.88 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).

51. 13 mm. → 1.89 g. CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas). Not illustrated.

**Group L**

*Obv.*: Laureate head of Zeus (Hadad?) r.; linear border.

*Rev.*: Bull charging l., above, Nabataean inscription; linear border,

52. 13 mm. ↑ 1.27 g. Rev. inscription: נבט (NBT). A. Sofaer Collection.<sup>9</sup> Not illustrated.
53. 14 mm. ↑ 1.70 g. Rev. inscription: נבט (NBT). A. Sofaer Collection (ex AHNS 918F). Not illustrated.
54. 12 mm. ↑ 1.82 g. Rev. inscription: נבט (NBT). CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).
55. 13 mm. ↓ 1.31 g. Rev. inscription: אדר (ADR). Private North American Collection (ex AHNS 918G).
56. 13 mm. ← 1.79 g. Rev. inscription: אדר (ADR). New York market (Amphora).
57. 13 mm. ↑ 1.82 g. Rev. inscription: אדר (ADR). New York market (Amphora). Said to have come from Israel or the West Bank.
58. 12 mm. ↑ 1.83 g. Rev. inscription: אדר (ADR). CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).
59. 12 mm. ↓ 1.69 g. Rev. inscription: אדר (ADR). CNG MBS 65, 24/9/2003, 476 (ex D. Pichler Collection, Newark, Texas).
60. 12 mm. → 1.47 g. Rev. inscription: אדר (ADR). A. Sofaer Collection (ex AHNS 918H).
61. 12 mm. ↖ 1.64 g. Rev. inscription: אדר (ADR). Newark, Texas. D. Pichler Collection (now CNG Mailbid Sale 65, Sept. 24, 2003, lot 476).

### *Chronology*

When only Meshorer's two specimens of the Nabataean lead series were known, they were generally dated to the first century BC, and specifically to the period of the kings Aretas II, Obodas I, Rabbel I and Aretas III (c. 90-62 BC). This dating was supported primarily on the grounds that the Nike reverse type, which does not otherwise feature regularly on Nabataean royal coinage, seemed to connect the lead pieces to the earliest known Nabataean issues, an anepigraphic bronze series (Pl. 30, fig. 1) imitating the gold staters of Alexander the Great depicting the head of Athena wearing a crested Corinthian helmet on the obverse and Nike holding a laurel wreath and a *stylis* on the reverse (Pl. 30, fig. 2).<sup>10</sup> The bronze imitations are normally attributed to Aretas II, 'although we have no direct proof',<sup>11</sup> in part because of the Greek letter A or Λ that is often located in the reverse left field, apparently representing the initial of the king's name.

Alla Kushnir-Stein and Haim Gitler have corroborated Meshorer's attribution of the imitation series through the use of finds at Tel Beer-Sheva and have posited the period 135/4-104 BC as the beginning of its production.<sup>12</sup> There is no compelling reason to doubt the early emission of these coins since heavily circulated examples appear in hoards alongside much better preserved issues of Aretas IV and later kings.<sup>13</sup> Several examples are known to have been overstruck on Ptolemaic bronzes, also suggesting an early date, although it is not impossible that the overstriking could have been a late episode.<sup>14</sup> However, just because these imitative bronze coins with Nike types were issued at an early period in the history of Nabataean minting, this does not at all prove that the lead Nike types are also early (*pace* Meshorer).

<sup>9</sup> Meshorer *et al.*, *Sofaer Collection* (n. 5 above).

<sup>10</sup> Meshorer, nos 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Meshorer, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Kushnir-Stein and Gitler, pp. 16-18.

<sup>13</sup> The Kadman Museum hoard of 1967 contained worn Athena/Nike types as well as much better preserved coins of Aretas IV, Malichus II and Rabbel II: Meshorer, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Schmitt-Korte, p. 107, nos 5-6. The undertype of no. 6 is believed to be an issue of Ptolemy II (284-247 BC).

The present catalogue contains an apparently unique lead version (A1) of one of these early imitative issues, which, if it were not for the evidence of the royal portraits, might suggest that the Nabataean lead series began at an earlier date than the reign of Obodas III. However, although the graceful figure of Nike with large wings on the reverse of this lead piece is very close to the Nike types of the Athena/Nike bronze coins, the obverse head of Athena lacks many of the stylistic features of the goddess portrayed on the imitative issues. On the latter, Athena is notable for her prominent corkscrew curls (taken directly from the Alexandrine prototype) and her Corinthian helmet, to which a crest is attached by means of a bulb at the top of the helmet (possibly a misinterpretation of the side crest on the helmet of the Alexandrine original).<sup>15</sup> The image of Athena on the lead piece is far more crudely executed than on the bronze issues. Not only does she lack her characteristic curls of hair and the bulb attachment for her helmet crest, but she also seems to wear a different type of helmet. Because of these stylistic differences it is likely that the lead coin was not produced at the same time as the bronze series. Instead, it should probably be seen as a later imitation. Since the hoard evidence indicates that the imitative Athena/Nike bronzes continued to circulate into the first century AD there is no way to be certain when it was made. Nor is there any reason why it should not be connected with the general outpouring of Nabataean lead issues that seems to have taken place under Obodas III and Aretas IV (see below).

What most scholars involved in the chronological debate have overlooked is the fact that the Nike depicted on the imitative bronze series is very different from her counterpart on the lead pieces other than A1, i.e. on Groups B-F. On the bronze coins, Nike is generally a slim and well-proportioned female figure with a large wing sprouting from each shoulder and a laurel wreath held in her right hand. Despite the somewhat schematic treatment of the wings and the absence of the *stylis*, her appearance openly betrays the artistry of the Alexandrine model.<sup>16</sup> However, on the lead pieces of Groups B-F, Nike is shorter and stockier, often with only one visible wing. Even when she has two wings they are much smaller than those of Nike on the bronze imitative series. She also carries what appears to be a palm branch (Groups C and D) or a sceptre (Groups E and F) in addition to the standard laurel wreath. The great difference in style makes it quite unlikely that the two series were contemporary. Indeed, the Nike of Groups B-F has a greater stylistic affinity to Nikai found on eastern Roman provincial issues of the first century BC/AD than to those of Hellenistic coinages.<sup>17</sup>

The erroneous association of the Nike of the bronze imitations with the Nike of lead Groups B-F has also coloured the dating of G27, a royal portrait/charging bull type, and the only Nabataean lead piece with a well-documented archaeological context. This coin was discovered in the course of excavations of the Nabataean fortress at Meẓad Raḥel. We are very grateful to Tali Erickson-Gini and Donald T. Ariel of the Israel Antiquities Authority for providing the following details of the find prior to the publication of the final report on the small finds:<sup>18</sup>

‘The lead coin under discussion derives from Room 15 of Meẓad Raḥel, a fort next to the spring of ‘En Raḥel excavated in 1981 by the Israel Department of Antiquities under the direction of Y. Israel and D. Nahlieli.

The fort is located in the Central Arava Valley approximately 35 km north-west

<sup>15</sup> Both of these features are clearly visible on Meshorer nos 1-1A and Kushmir-Stein and Gitler, nos 2, 19, 21-22.

<sup>16</sup> See Price, *Alexander*, pls. I-XVII, for numerous possible prototypes for the Nabataean imitations.

<sup>17</sup> For provincial types of the first century see *RPC* I, 4333-4346 (Apamea), 4403A (Laodicea), 4457, 4462, 4464, 4465B/4 (Balanea), 4751 (Ptolemais), 4768, 4772 (Chalcis), 4782 (Damascus), 4825-4826 (Nysa) 5067, 5372-5373 (Egypt).

<sup>18</sup> This report is currently being prepared by T. Erickson-Gini of the IAA.

of Petra. It measures 16 m x 16 m and contains a central courtyard surrounded by small casemate rooms. The evidence provided by 52 identified coins and other finds indicate that the fort was constructed some time in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE by the Nabataeans and was abandoned around the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, possibly as a result of the conquest of Gaza by the Hasmonaean king Alexander Jannaeus in the early years of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, before 95/94.<sup>19</sup> Following a hiatus of nearly 100 years the fort was again reoccupied by the Nabataeans until it was destroyed around the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE by an earthquake.

The finds from Room 15 date to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. They include early forms of Nabataean painted ware bowls, an alabaster bee hive shaped jar produced in Yemen and used for transporting raw incense resins, fragments of a Rhodian amphora and early Nabataean plain ware jars, an elaborately decorated leather object and 20 identified coins. Unlike the other finds which may only generally be dated, the coins are of a very restricted date. Seventeen are of the Athena/Nike type (now dated by Stein and Gitler to between 129/128 and 104 BCE).<sup>20</sup> In addition a bronze of Aradus dating between 135 and 112 BCE (identified by Y. Meshorer) was found.<sup>21</sup> No finds dated to the later 1<sup>st</sup> century CE phase of the fort were found in Room 15, save one intrusive Nabataean coin of the jugate busts/double cornucopiae type. It is also worth noting that a second lead coin was found in the room, but it was unfortunately unidentifiable.<sup>22</sup>

Although two occupation phases were found throughout the fort, no evidence of the second and latest phase of occupation was found in Room 15 other than the one first century AD coin mentioned above. Pottery and small finds discovered in this room date exclusively to the third and second centuries BC.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the predominance of Hellenistic material in Room 15 does not clearly prove that G27 should also be dated to the Hellenistic period. If we agree with the assertion that the room was only occupied in the early period the coin could still be a late intrusion associated with the jugate busts/cornucopia coin, which cannot be Hellenistic and must date to the reign of Aretas IV (after AD 17) at the earliest.<sup>24</sup> It is impossible to know whether G27 was deposited in connection with the earlier Hellenistic coins or with the Nabataean jugate busts/cornucopia type, although its portrait tends to suggest the latter (see below). The Nabataean Athena/Nike coins are not especially helpful for dating purposes in this context since they are known to have continued to circulate well into the first century AD.

One might argue that support for an early first century BC date for the Nabataean lead pieces can be found in the remarkable outburst of lead issues produced by kings and cities of the Near East in the late Hellenistic period. The Hasmonaean priest-king, Alexander Jannaeus produced a lead series some time after 79 BC.<sup>25</sup> Lead issues were struck at Damascus by Jannaeus' contemporary, the Seleucid king Demetrius III (97-87 BC), as well as by the city

<sup>19</sup> A. Kushnir-Stein, 'Late Hellenistic coins of Gaza and the date of the Hasmonaean conquest of the city', *SM* 198 (2000), pp. 22-4.

<sup>20</sup> Kushnir-Stein and Gitler, pp. 13-20.

<sup>21</sup> *BMC Phoenicia*, p. 36, nos 300-310.

<sup>22</sup> Private communication, 10 January 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Private communication, 13 January 2002.

<sup>24</sup> For the first appearance of these types under Aretas IV see Meshorer, p. 57. Coins of these types were also issued by Malichus II (Meshorer, nos 140-140A) and Rabbel II (Meshorer, nos 146-146MR, 162-164).

<sup>25</sup> Barag, pp. 1-3; Y. Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, vol. 1 (New York, 1982), pp. 82-3; Y. Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins* (New York, 2001), pp. 47-8. Both Barag and Meshorer connect the Nabataean lead emissions to those of Alexander Jannaeus.

of Gaza in 79/8 BC, and an uncertain political entity in the Beqa'a Valley.<sup>26</sup> To this list we might also add a lead issue with the types of a Ptolemaic bronze series struck under Cleopatra IV and Ptolemy XI Alexander (107/6-101 BC) or Cleopatra VII (52-29 BC).<sup>27</sup>

However, while there can be no question that the first century BC saw the production of a variety of lead pieces in the Near East, this is hardly conclusive dating evidence, since lead issues were also struck and used in the region before and after this time. In the second century BC, lead pieces were produced under the Seleucid king Antiochus III, apparently during his Parthian campaign, while lead issues are also attributed to the Ptolemaic king Ptolemy VI Philometor (181/0-145 BC).<sup>28</sup> Likewise, from the first to third centuries AD a wide variety of lead pieces were produced in Roman Egypt, two examples of which were said to have been found with the Nabataean lead issues of the Pichler collection.<sup>29</sup>

In short, all of the evidence that has been offered to support a date for the Nabataean lead series in the first half of the first century BC is circumstantial at best, and is ultimately trumped by Karl Schmitt-Korte's convincing reading of the obverse portrait of B2 as that of Obodas III (30-9 BC).<sup>30</sup>

### *Royal portraits*

Although Meshorer assigned nos. B2 and C13 to the early period of Nabataean minting under Aretas II, Obodas I, Rabbel I and Aretas III (c.90-62 BC), a close examination of the portrait style on these coins and on the new portrait issues of Groups B, C, G, H, I and J makes it difficult to maintain this view. All of these portraits can be linked to images of the later Nabataean kings, Obodas III and Aretas IV.

As Schmitt-Korte has already shown, the portraits found on the coins of Group B are remarkably similar to those that appear on the 'mature portrait' series of Obodas III, struck from 14 to 9 BC.<sup>31</sup> Both depict a diademed, mature Nabataean ruler with ringlets of hair descending in 'oblique, wavy lines'.<sup>32</sup> The manner in which the hair flows down the king's neck, as if escaping the diadem which holds the hair tight on the top of the head, is virtually identical on both the royal bronze coins and on the new lead pieces. However, this exact form of the Nabataean ringlet hairstyle is not worn by any of the earlier kings from Aretas III to Malichus I. In addition to the close physiognomic similarities between the man depicted on the lead coins of Group B and the regular silver and bronze coins of Obodas III, the fact that the Nabataean character π (H) can be read behind the head of B2 and B7 makes it almost certain that the same individual is represented. A common feature of the coins of Obodas III is the frequent presence of the letter π behind the portrait head, which Meshorer took to be

<sup>26</sup> Demetrius III: Houghton, 'Seleucid lead issues', pp. 30-1; the lead series attributed to Antiochus VIII by Houghton (ibid., pp. 26-30) is no longer believed to be Seleucid, but rather an issue of an uncertain entity in the Beqa'a Valley - see O. Hoover, *Coins of the Seleucid Empire in the Collection of Arthur Houghton, Part II*, nos. 831-834. Gaza: O. Hoover, 'A late Hellenistic lead coinage from Gaza', *Israel Numismatic Research* 1 (forthcoming).

<sup>27</sup> A late Hellenistic lead piece attributed to Ascalon by Barag, p. 4, is really a lead issue with the types of Svoronos, *Ptolemies*, no. 1733. The inscription on better preserved examples is B-A, not A-[Σ], as reported by Barag. The Nabataean lead issues in the Pichler collection were said to have been found with three examples of this same Ptolemaic lead type.

<sup>28</sup> Antiochus III: SC, p. 466 and no. 1282. Ptolemy VI: Svoronos, *Ptolemies*, nos 1429-1430.

<sup>29</sup> K. Emmett, *Alexandrian Coins* (Lodi, WI, 2003), nos 4275-4675. The Pichler specimens were of the Nilus reclining/Euthenia reclining type (Emmett, no. 4325).

<sup>30</sup> Schmitt-Korte, p. 107 and no. 7. However, because we believe there to be no direct connection between the anepigraphic imitative bronze coins and the lead issues with Nike types (see above), we do not endorse Schmitt-Korte's view that the portrait of Obodas III on B2 must therefore date the bronzes to his reign.

<sup>31</sup> Schmitt-Korte already recognized that the portrait on Meshorer's Sup. 1 (our B2) was that of Obodas III.

<sup>32</sup> For the discussion of the portrait of Obodas III see Meshorer, p. 33.

the signature of the mint master.<sup>33</sup> It is especially notable that the epigraphy and placement of  $\eta$  on B2 and B7 is similar to that of a silver denarius (Meshorer no. 38) produced in year 20 (=10/11 BC) of Obodas' reign (Pl. 30, fig. 3).

The poor striking of C13, one of the first known Nabataean lead issues, made the identification of the portrait extremely difficult. Meshorer originally ascribed it to Aretas II or III. However, the relative shortness of the hair makes it unlikely that this portrait depicts one of the early Nabataean kings, who habitually wore their hair in long rows of curls. This long hairstyle was so well recognized that it was reproduced by Roman die engravers in order to identify the Nabataean king depicted on denarii (Pl. 30, fig. 4) struck in 58 BC to commemorate M. Aemilius Scaurus' victory over Aretas III, four years earlier.<sup>34</sup> The shorter hairstyle worn by the individual on C13 is very close to that worn by Aretas IV on the 'archaic style' silver issues (Pl. 30, fig. 5) from the beginning of his first regnal year (9 BC).<sup>35</sup> On the commemorative half shekels, denarii and half denarii issued in 9 BC, and on the lead piece C13, the figure wears a diadem and the traditional Nabataean cloak. The letter  $\Lambda$  placed behind the head on the lead issue may represent a corrupt or overly cursive form of the letter  $\eta$ , which often appears behind the head of Aretas IV in order to identify his portrait.<sup>36</sup> This Nabataean character occasionally comes quite close to looking like Greek  $\Lambda$  on the early silver issues of Aretas IV, as in the case of Meshorer no. 46.<sup>37</sup>

Thanks to C14-15, new examples of this type in better condition, it is clear that an early portrait of Aretas IV in the 'archaic style' was also depicted on C13. Unlike the more common later coins of this king in all metals, where he appears with curls falling down the back of his neck and wearing a laurel wreath, on these lead issues, as well as his commemorative silver of 9 BC, Aretas IV wears a short 'Romanizing' hairstyle and diadem, highly appropriate for an eastern client king recently confirmed in his power by Augustus. The close similarity of the portraits on C13-15 to those of the silver suggest that they were all struck in 9 BC, probably to celebrate Aretas's triumphant return from Rome with full, if reluctant, recognition as the king of the Nabataeans.<sup>38</sup>

The portraits of Groups G, H, I and J differ markedly from those of Groups B and C, in that they represent a man with hair bound tightly to the crown of his head with a laurel wreath and curls of hair falling down to the nape of his neck. The combination of the hairstyle, the wreath, and the facial features make it likely that the man depicted on these lead coins is Aretas IV, who used similar portraits for his early silver and bronze coins (Pl. 30, fig. 6).

The moustached portrait used for Group H associates it with the images of Aretas IV wearing a moustache that appeared on bronze coins issued in his name alone and in conjunction with his wife, Shuqailat (Meshorer nos. 112-115). The presence of Shuqailat allows the bronze coins, and probably the new lead type, to be dated to the period AD 18-25.<sup>39</sup>

### *Uncertain Portraits*

It is unclear who the obverse types of Groups E and F are intended to represent. F19-21 may represent a stylized head of Zeus, identifiable by a beard composed of dots and a

<sup>33</sup> Meshorer, pp. 27 and 35, with nos Sup. 3, 32, 34, 38-39A. The letter  $\eta$  also frequently appears behind the royal portrait on coins of Aretas IV (Meshorer nos 46-47, 50, 58, 60, 73, 82), but does not appear in this location on the portrait coinages of rulers prior to Obodas III or after Aretas IV.

<sup>34</sup> Crawford, *RRC*, no. 422; E. Sydenham, *The Coinage of the Roman Republic* (London, 1952), no. 913.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Meshorer nos 46-47A.

<sup>36</sup> Aretas is the Greek form of the Nabataean personal name  $\eta\tau\eta\tau$ .

<sup>37</sup> Meshorer also suggests that the Greek letters  $\Lambda$  and  $\Lambda$  (cursive  $\Lambda$ ) with a presumed rough breathing were interchangeable with Nabataean  $\eta$ : Meshorer, pp. 11-12.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph. *AJ* 16.355.

<sup>39</sup> Meshorer, p. 58.

laurel wreath, or possibly another (non-Nabataean?) ruler. The dissimilarity of this type to the Zeus (Hadad?) obverses of Groups K and L may support the latter interpretation, but the poor engraving and preservation conspire to prevent a more secure attribution. The extremely poor preservation of E18 makes it impossible to suggest the identity of the man or god depicted on the obverse.

### *Nike*

The Nike on issues of Obodas III and Aretas IV may have served a commemorative purpose, as she often did on Hellenistic and Roman coinage. On the other hand, it is just as possible that she appears here as a generic symbol of victory. In the years after the victory of the future Augustus at Actium in 31 BC images of Nike/Victoria became especially popular on the coinages of the Mediterranean world in general. She also appears frequently as a decorative feature of architecture at Nabataean centres like Petra and Khirbet et-Tannur.<sup>40</sup>

Obodas III is not known to have been an especially warlike king, but on his issues Nike may refer to the brief military victory that he claimed over Herod the Great. According to Josephus, in 12 BC the bandits of the Trachonitis revolted against their ruler, Herod of Judaea, a longstanding enemy of the Nabataean kings. Although this uprising was soon crushed, the leaders of the rebellion fled to Nabataea where they were warmly welcomed and received royal support. For the next three years the bandits and their Nabataean allies inflicted severe losses on the Herodian domains. Their string of victorious attacks only came to an end in 9 BC when Herod invaded the Arab kingdom, supposedly killing some 25,000 Nabataeans. Obodas III died shortly thereafter, perhaps by the treachery of his chief minister, Syllaeus.<sup>41</sup>

It is also possible that the lead and bronze Nike types of Obodas III were intended to commemorate the Roman expedition against the Sabaeans of Arabia Felix in 26/5 BC. This invasion of the Arabian Peninsula aimed at claiming the vast wealth of the perfume and spice trade for the Roman Empire and relied heavily on Nabataean support. Obodas III provided about 1,000 auxiliary troops and Syllaeus as a guide for the prefect of Egypt and his legions.<sup>42</sup> Ultimately poor planning and the hostile desert environment forced the Romans to return to Egypt, having accomplished little. Nevertheless, it is notable that contemporary Roman literature largely ignored the debacle of the Arabian episode, preferring to add the 'conquest' of the Sabaeans to the long list of Augustus' triumphs. The Emperor himself describes it as one of his great accomplishments in the *Res Gestae* and Strabo insists that the Sabaeans became Roman vassals, despite the ultimate failure of the expedition.<sup>43</sup> Describing the power of Augustus, Virgil says, 'At that terror...all Arabs, all Sabaeans flee'.<sup>44</sup> Propertius places the Sabaeans in a more explicitly triumphal context in his description of Augustus' restoration of the Parthian standards. According to him, 'even India offers her neck to your triumph, Augustus, and the house of virgin Arabia trembles before you'.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps Obodas III also took the diplomatic route by using the Nike type to cast the imperfect Sabaean invasion (and the part his people played in it) in the light of victory.

The lead Nike issues with the portrait of Aretas IV (Group C) may simply be a continuation of the Nike series of Obodas III. On the other hand, the early portrait with which Nike is

<sup>40</sup> Glueck, pp. 430-50 and pls. 179-185, 188-189.

<sup>41</sup> Jos. *AJ* 16.296.

<sup>42</sup> For the main account of the invasion see Strab. 16.4.22-24; S. Jameson, 'Chronology of the campaigns of Aelius Gallus and C. Petronius', *JRS* 58 (1968), 71-84; A. Dihle, 'Der Zug des Aelius Gallus', in *Umstrittene Daten* (Cologne, 1965), pp. 80-4.

<sup>43</sup> *RG* 26.5; Strab. 16.4.21.

<sup>44</sup> ...omnis eo terore Aegyptus et Indi, omnis Arabs, omnes vertebant terga Sabaei. *Aeneid* 8.705-704.

<sup>45</sup> India quin, Auguste, tuo dat colla triumpho, et domus intactae te tremuit Arabiae. Propert. 2.10.15-16.

paired may indicate that the type was produced to celebrate Aretas IV's success in defeating the political machinations of Syllaeus at the court of Augustus and his official recognition by Rome in 9 BC. Alternatively, there is a remote possibility that the Nike type may have been resurrected by Aretas IV to celebrate his successful campaign against Herod Antipas in AD 34, which added the Gaulanitis and adjacent regions to the Nabataean kingdom.<sup>46</sup> However, the very early style of the obverse portrait bust and the close similarity of the Nike reverse to those issued by Obodas III seem to tell against this war as the occasion for the production of this type.

Another possibility is that Nike represents some non-military triumph. The palm branch, a victorial emblem often carried by Nike, appears on the coins of Aretas IV, apparently to herald the birth of his fourth son, Phasaël, in 5 BC and to celebrate the coronation of his second wife, Shuqailat, in AD 18.<sup>47</sup>

It is unclear whether the use of Nike in conjunction with the Heracles (Milkom?) obverse type might have had any special political meaning.

### *Heracles (Milkom?)*

Although Heracles was an extremely popular god among the Greeks, in a Nabataean context it seems probable that he is a Hellenized version of a native Semitic god. Already at the end of the fifth century BC Herodotus had popularized the notion that the Tyrian god Melqart was a Phoenician version of Heracles.<sup>48</sup> This view became so prevalent that by the end of the first century BC Melqart had lost almost all of his traditional iconography and replaced it with the accoutrements of his Greek counterpart. Tyrian silver and bronze coins from the late second century BC to the second century AD depict him as a youthful god wearing Heracles' lion skin and a laurel wreath, while his club is used as the city's mintmark (Pl. 30, fig. 7).<sup>49</sup>

If a native god does lurk behind the image of Heracles on the lead issues of Group D, the most likely suspect is the old Ammonite deity Milkom, who continued to be worshipped in the Hellenistic and Roman periods at cult centres in Nabataea proper, as well as in the Decapolis. Heracles-Milkom is most notable at Adraa, Abila and Philadelphia, where he was depicted on Roman provincial coins as a youthful Heracles (Pl. 30, fig. 8).<sup>50</sup> Statuary depicting Heracles has been found at the Nabataean capital of Petra.<sup>51</sup>

### *Zeus (Hadad?) and the charging bull*

While the obverse type of groups K and L depicts a fairly standard image of Zeus wearing a laurel wreath, in the Nabataean context it is tempting to think that he represents the syncretistic Graeco-Syrian deity, Zeus-Hadad. By the first century BC/AD this god, essentially a Hellenized version of the ancient Ba'al Hadad ('Lord of Thunder') worshipped for centuries in Syria and Palestine, had taken on many of the characteristics of Olympian Zeus. In the art of the Hellenistic and Roman periods he has the long flowing hair and beard as well as the laurel wreath familiar from depictions of the Greek supreme deity.

<sup>46</sup> Jos. *AJ* 18.112-118. This attack on former territories of the deceased Philip the Tetrarch was intended as a reprisal for Antipas' divorce of Aretas IV's daughter. For discussion of the problems of the campaign as presented by Josephus and modern emendations, see Bowersock, pp. 65-7 with nn. 24 and 25.

<sup>47</sup> Meshorer pp. 48-49, 57-58 and nos 61-63A and 97.

<sup>48</sup> Hdt. 2.44.

<sup>49</sup> *RPC* I, nos 4675-4719; *SNG Cop.* nos 312-328, 331-332, 338-343.

<sup>50</sup> Adraa: *SNG ANS* 6, 1129; Spijkerman no. 13; Abila: Spijkerman nos 3, 9, 13, 17; Philadelphia: Spijkerman, nos 9-11, 17, 20, 26-27, 44-45.

<sup>51</sup> P. Hammond, 'Petra, une ville de légende au coeur du désert de Jordanie', *Archeologia* 2 (Jan/Feb 1965), pl. XLI.

It would be unsurprising for Zeus-Hadad to appear on Nabataean coins since his sculptural representation has been found at several important Nabataean sites, including Qasr el-Bint in Petra and Jebel et-Tannur.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, it has been plausibly suggested that in a Nabataean context this iconography may not have been employed to represent Zeus-Hadad *qua* Zeus-Hadad, but rather to provide an anthropomorphic form for Dushara ('Lord of the Sharā'),<sup>53</sup> the principal male god of the Nabataean pantheon. In his natural Nabataean form Dushara, much like Jewish Yahweh, had no true iconic representation. Instead, he was traditionally worshipped in the form of a *baetyl*, a cult stone, not unlike the famous Black Stone of Emesa brought to Rome by the emperor Elagabalus. Depictions of Dushara as a *baetyl* survive on the Roman provincial coinage produced by Bostra and Adraa (Pl. 30, fig. 9) under various second century emperors.<sup>54</sup> Because Dushara lacked his own anthropomorphic identity, it was fitting that when an iconic depiction was deemed necessary he was cast in the guise of Zeus-Hadad, the popular supreme deity of the surrounding region.

Although Dushara (Dousares in Greek) is depicted on Roman provincial coins of the second century AD as a wreathed beardless youth (Pl. 30, fig. 10),<sup>55</sup> perhaps assimilating him to Dionysus because of his powers as a vegetation deity,<sup>56</sup> it is almost certain that in the first century BC/AD the Nabataeans identified him with Zeus. While on his way to Rome in 9 BC, Syllaeus made dedications to Zeus Dushara (ΔΙΙ ΔΟΥ[ΣΑΡΕΙ]) for the health of Obodas III in both Greek and Nabataean at Miletus and Priene.<sup>57</sup> The identification of Dushara with Zeus appears to have been so strong that it survived into eastern Christian folklore in the person of St Zeus Dousares.<sup>58</sup>

Dushara in the guise of Zeus-Hadad would make good sense of the iconography of the lead pieces. As early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century BC, Ba'al Hadad, the original Semitic deity who underlies the Hellenized Zeus-Hadad, was closely associated with bulls and taurine iconography. In early Syro-Phoenician depictions he often wears a crown decorated with bull's horns and rides on the back of a bull, emblematic of his power as a weather god. His taurine associations continued into the Hellenistic and Roman periods, when he was normally depicted enthroned with bulls flanking him on either side (Pl. 30, fig. 11).<sup>59</sup>

### *The Inscriptions*

At the present time the full meaning of the Nabataean inscriptions found on the issues of Groups I and L still remains uncertain. Meshorer interpreted both נבט (NBT) of L52-54 and 778 (ADR) of L57-59 as the abbreviated ethnic of the Nabataeans and the name of Adraa, one of their important cities in northern Nabataea. While these are certainly attractive

<sup>52</sup> Glueck, p. 86; P. Hammond, 'The Goddess of the "Temple of the Winged Lions" at Petra (Jordan)', in F. Zayadine (ed.), *Petra and the Caravan Cities* (Doujtain Hills, Arizona, 2000); Glueck, pp. 86, 204-5, 195.

<sup>53</sup> P. Hammond, *The Nabataeans – Their History, Culture and Archaeology*, Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology 37 (Gothenburg, 1973), pp. 95-6; 'Sharā' was the Nabataean geographical term for the mountainous elevation into which Petra is built.

<sup>54</sup> Adraa: *SNG ANS* 6, 1130-1131 (Marcus Aurelius). Bostra: *SNG ANS* 6, 1215-1216 (Elagabalus).

<sup>55</sup> A. Kindler, *The Coinage of Bostra* (Warminster, UK, 1983), p. 114 no. 29.

<sup>56</sup> For his syncretism with Dionysus see Arrian 7.20; Hesych. s.v. Διόνυσος; A. Kammerer, *Petra et la Nabatène* (Paris, 1929), p. 403; D. Sourdél, *Les cultes du Hawran à l'époque romaine* (Paris, 1952), pp. 63-4; Glueck, pp. 313, 416.

<sup>57</sup> J. Cantineau, *Le nabatéen II* (Paris, 1932), p. 46.

<sup>58</sup> Bowersock, p. 8, n. 16.

<sup>59</sup> Lucian, *Dea Syr.* 31; his Hellenistic cult statue with its attendant bulls is depicted on the Damascene tetradrachms of Antiochus XII: A. Houghton, *Coins of the Seleucid Empire in the Collection of Arthur Houghton* (New York, 1983), no. 864. He appears enthroned with bulls beside him on a Nabataean relief from Khirbet et-Tannur and on a famous relief from Dura Europus: Glueck, pp. 205-6 and pls. 41-42; A. Perkins, *The Art of Dura Europus* (1973), pp. 100-101, pl. 141. He is also depicted in this manner on the tetradrachms of Hierapolis under Caracalla: M. Prieur and K. Prieur, *A Type Corpus of Syrian Tetradrachms from 57 BC to AD 253* (London, 2000), no. 925.

interpretations, it is hard to understand why the die engravers found it necessary to abbreviate these two words. The coins show that there was definitely enough room to fit the extra letters required to spell out the full names נבטו (NBṬW) and אדרה (ADRH). It is also less than perfectly clear why the city of Adraa and the Nabataeans as a group should both use the same Zeus (Hadad)/bull types.

The single letter ט (A) on I41 is especially perplexing. It may represent a mintmark, the initial letter of a name, or perhaps even a date (ט=70). Because dates are normally introduced on royal Nabataean coins by the word 'year' (שנה, sometimes abbreviated as ש), and none of the Nabataean kings ruled for seventy years, the use of ט as a date seems unlikely. There is a slim possibility that the letter could represent a date reckoned by a civic era. The Pompeian Era, counting from 64/3 BC and employed by the Decapolitan and Arabian cities of Dium, Abila, Canatha, Gadara, Gerasa and Pella, would make year 70 equal to AD 6/7. Such a date would be in keeping with the view that the obverse portrait is that of Aretas IV. Nevertheless, it is difficult to be sure that a date is intended, on the basis of a single letter. It is also unlikely that the Pompeian Era would have had any importance as a dating system in the major Nabataean centres of Adraa, Bostra, Petra, and Rabbathmoba, which only issued dated civic coinages after they were reconstituted as part of the Roman *provincia Arabia*. In these cities an era counting from the formation of the province in AD 105/6 was used. Year 70 calculated on this provincial era would equal AD 175/6, which seems much too late in light of the portrait type.

### **Lead Coins or Lead Tokens?**

One of the more vexing problems concerning the Nabataean lead issues, as with most lead series of the ancient world, is the determination of their function within the economy. When only one or two examples were known it was possible to dismiss them as Nabataean test pieces for bronze coins that were never produced,<sup>60</sup> but the existence of 61 specimens of 12 different types now makes this view untenable. Because lead was rarely a standard metal for proper coinage in the ancient Mediterranean world, there are really only two possible explanations for the Nabataean pieces. They should either be seen as emergency coins struck in lead at a time when precious metal was unavailable for minting, or they should be considered as tokens or *tesserae* redeemable for various goods or services.

Lead coins, thought to have been produced as stopgap replacements for regular silver and copper coinage, are known from a variety of Near Eastern cities and kingdoms, particularly in the late Hellenistic period. The lead series of Alexander Jannaeus is thought to have been struck because of a copper shortage, although it has recently been argued that these were really tokens rather than a substitute coinage.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, as mentioned above, under the Seleucids the types of the regular silver and bronze coinages of Antiochus III and Demetrius III were struck in lead, apparently at times when, or in places where, the appropriate metals were hard to come by.<sup>62</sup> Lead replacement issues have also been identified for the Ptolemaic and Parthian kingdoms.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Schmitt-Korte, p. 107, no. 7.

<sup>61</sup> Barag, pp. 1-3; Y. Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, vol. 1 (New York, 1982), pp. 82-3; Y. Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins* (New York, 2001), p. 47-8. For the possibility that this was really a token issue see D. Hendin, 'Four new Jewish lead coins or tokens', *INJ* 13 (1994-99), pp. 63-5 and D. Hendin, *A Guide to Biblical Coins*, 4th ed. (New York, 2001), pp. 139-40.

<sup>62</sup> Antiochus III: *SC*, p. 466 and no. 1282; Demetrius III: Houghton, 'Seleucid lead issues', pp. 30-1. The lead pieces attributed to Antiochus VIII by Houghton in the same article (pp. 26-30; and see n. 26 above) and those attributed to Antiochus VII by Barag, p. 4, are not included here because they do not directly copy known coinages and therefore may not have been intended for use as currency.

<sup>63</sup> Ptolemies: Svoronos, *Ptolemies*, nos 1429-1430. Parthians: *SC*, p. 466.

It might be tempting to interpret the Nabataean lead pieces as emergency coins because the end of Obodas III's reign and the early years of Aretas IV saw financial difficulties for the Nabataean kingdom exacerbated by the border conflicts with Herod the Great and the magnificent gifts given to Augustus. However, it is unlikely that the lead issues were produced as replacements for silver since Aretas IV issued a special series of copper coins which explicitly indicate that they were used for this purpose. Certain bronze coins of his tenth (AD 1/2) and eleventh (AD 2/3) years are marked in Nabataean with the names of the silver denominations that they replace. Both silver *ma'ah* (מעה כסף) and silver half (חצי כסף) substitute denominations are known.<sup>64</sup> These coins apparently began to fall out of use after year sixteen (AD 7/8) when the silver shortage ended and Aretas IV resumed production of a proper silver coinage.

Because it is clear that Aretas IV used bronze for his replacement coinage when silver was scarce, and because the non-portrait types of the Nabataean lead issues, with the exception of A1, are so completely unrelated to types used for the regular coinage, it seems most likely that the lead pieces were produced as a kind of token analogous to the *tesserae* used to distribute largesse at Rome and other cities of the Empire. According to the literary sources, *tesserae*, given out by emperors on festive occasions, could be redeemed by their recipients for gifts of foodstuffs or money and sometimes for luxury items like pearls or even an entire apartment block.<sup>65</sup> Lead *tesserae* were also produced by private establishments and clubs as tokens redeemable for various goods and services.<sup>66</sup>

If our interpretation of the Nabataean lead pieces as *tesserae* is correct, they were probably distributed by the king or his officials on important triumphal or religious occasions, much as they were at Rome. The types, which emphasize victory and local deities, would tend to corroborate this view.

### **Conclusion**

When Ya'akov Meshorer pioneered the modern study of Nabataean coinage in 1975, the lead issues could be interpreted only very dimly because of the great rarity of specimens and the poor preservation of those that were known. Thanks to the sudden appearance of Nabataean lead pieces in quantity at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is now possible to better scrutinize the several series and properly attribute them to Obodas III and Aretas IV, rather than to Aretas II and III. Hopefully more specimens will appear in future with full context information, especially from controlled archaeological excavations, so that our understanding of the enigmatic Nabataean lead pieces can be brought further into focus.

### **Key to Plates (27-30)**

Group A (Pls 27, 29)

Group B (Pls 27, 29)

Group C (Pls 27, 29)

Group D (Pls 27, 29)

Group E (Pls 27, 29)

Group F (Pls 27, 29)

Group G (Pls 27-28, 29)

Group H (Pls 28, 29)

Group I (Pls 28, 29)

<sup>64</sup> Meshorer, pp. 50-2.

<sup>65</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 40.2, 41.2; *Ner.* 11.2; *Juv.* 7.174; *Mart.* 8.78.10.

<sup>66</sup> M. Rostowzew, *Römische Bleitesserae* (Wiesbaden, 1905), pp. 59-121.

Group J (Pls 28, 29)

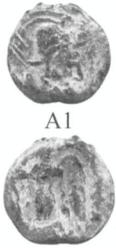
Group K (Pls 28, 29)

Group L (Pls 28, 29)

Figures (Pl. 30)

1. Anepigraphic proto-Nabataean bronze coin, after c. 135/4 BC. Meshorer 1A.
2. Alexandrine gold stater, Kition mint, 325-320 BC. New York, inv. 1964.42.55.
3. Nabataean silver denarius of Obodas III, year 20 (=10/11 BC). Meshorer 38.
4. Roman denarius of M. Aemilius Scaurus and P. Hypsaeus, 58 BC.
5. Nabataean silver half shekel of Aretas IV, year 1 (=9/8 BC). Meshorer 46.
6. Nabataean bronze coin of Aretas IV, year 5 (=4/3 BC). Meshorer 60A.
7. Silver tetradrachm of Tyre, year 25 (=107/6 BC). New York, inv. 1944.100.72773.
8. Roman provincial bronze coin of Abila under Lucius Verus, year 230 (=AD 166/7). New York, inv. 1944.100.69218.
9. Roman provincial bronze of Adraa under Caracalla, year 72 (=AD 177/8). New York, inv. 1944.100.69222.
10. Roman provincial bronze of Bostra under Caracalla, year 104 (=AD 210). New York, inv. 1944.100.69273.
11. Seleucid silver tetradrachm of Antiochus XII, Damascus mint, SE 229 (=84/3 BC). Washington, Arthur Houghton coll., AHNS 712.

Group A



Group B



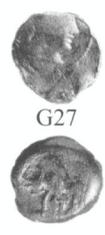
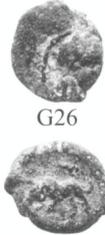
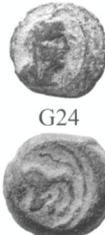
Group C



Group D

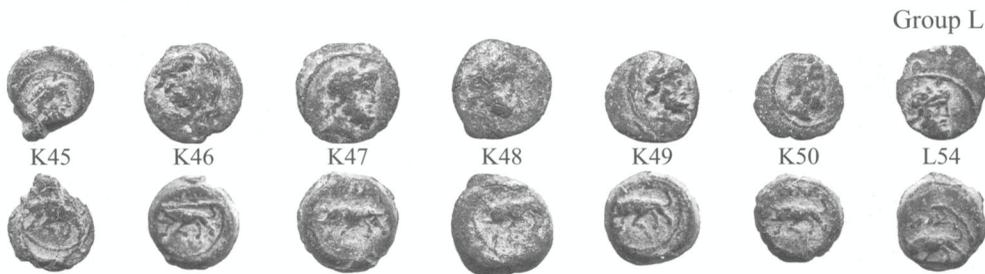
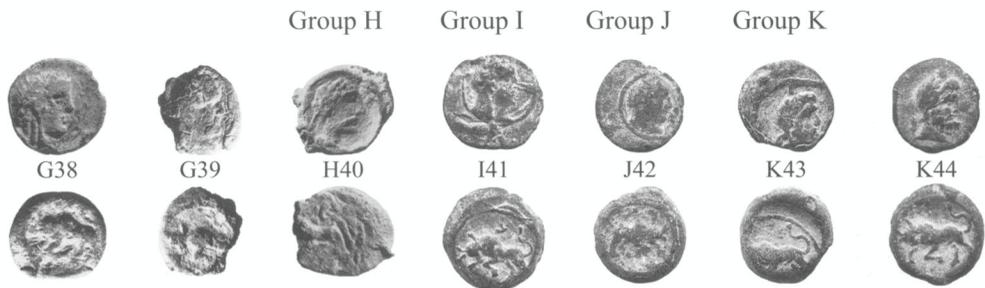


Group G



HOOVER, A REASSESSMENT OF NABATAEAN LEAD COINAGE (1)

PLATE 28



HOOVER, A REASSESSMENT OF NABATAEAN LEAD COINAGE (2)



A1x2



B7x2



C15x2



D16x2



E18x2



F20x2



G34x2



H40x2



I41x2



J42x2



K44x2



L54x2



L55x2



L60x2



HOOVER, A REASSESSMENT OF NABATAEAN LEAD COINAGE (3)

PLATE 30



HOOVER, A REASSESSMENT OF NABATAEAN LEAD COINAGE (4)