



**T**he Nabataean Kingdom not only extended south to Mada'in Saleh in Saudi Arabia and Bosra in Syria, but also had many satellite towns around Petra and a handful of important centers in the desert area southwest of Petra today called Negev.

Let's look at the two most important ancient settlements

close to Petra first Siq el-Barid and Sabra.

#### **Siq el-Barid**

Siq el-Barid is also called "Little Petra" by tourist guides and is situated about six kilometers north of Petra reachable on foot via Wadi el-Meesara Wasta, which is a very scenic walk of two hours, if you are up to it. Otherwise a longer trip on a paved road will take you there by car.

As the name already suggests, it is a canyon like small and short valley and ideally for maximum protection closed at the end. This was considered to be the main warehouse area of Petra with many storage caves and thus an important suburb of

Petra, used as a transshipment place for in and out going goods.

Nevertheless many people must have lived here at the time. Imagine you are an Arab trader, would you leave any valuable goods out of your sight? Certainly not and this is the reason why next to the many storage caves at Siq el-Barid, also four banquet halls were



Colored hall with stores



Siq el-Barid closed end canyon





Siq el-Barid & temples

found here including the famous so-called colored hall.

### Painted Banquet Hall

This five meter high hall is the only one in the Petra area, which features on its walls rests of rich paintings still to be seen in its outlines today.

The motifs include vines, grapes and even a flute player, archer and various birds. For a long time archaeologists have suspected, that most of the Petra tombs were painted on the out and inside.

At Siq el-Barid the actual prove has been found. Also here a sculptural relief with a winged Eros is depicted harnessing two winged lions on one of the murals. The open banquet hall facade is supported by four columns similar to Petra's Garden Tomb, which

was actually not a tomb, but a residence as archaeologists could recently establish during excavations.

### Surrounding Area

The area just in front of the siq entrance plus many of the side valleys are covered with many sanctuaries including



an important stone block built temple for fertility goddess Isis was erected on a small hill top. Even some tombs were discovered spread out in the area. In the flat areas farming activities took place and dams and huge storage basins supplied the needed water.

### Sabra

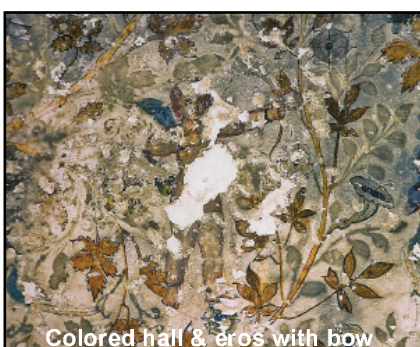
About eight kilometers or a three hours walk south of Petra lies the old mining town of Sabra. Unfortunately this settlement cannot be reached by car and

therefore a camel ride from Petra is suggested. Sabra was an independent town and not a suburb of Petra.

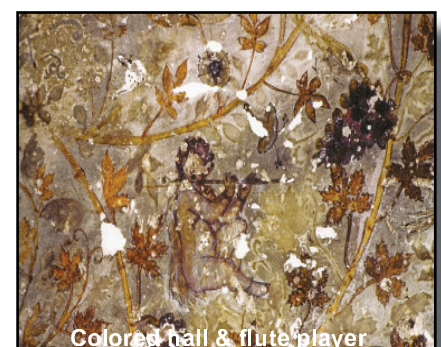
Your way to Sabra is again very scenic and the same to Jebel Haroun. It will first take you via Wadi al-Sugar with many interesting and well preserved tombs and cave homes to be seen, which normal Petra tourist will never set their eyes on. Once arrived you will see the arcosolium cave opposite the Sabra town center.

Here many oil lamps and coins from the Roman period were found, being proof that Sabra was populated after the Roman takeover of Petra in 106 AD. But the old amphitheatre was built earlier around 800 - 500 BC in the typical Hellenistic style.

Excavations unearthed several

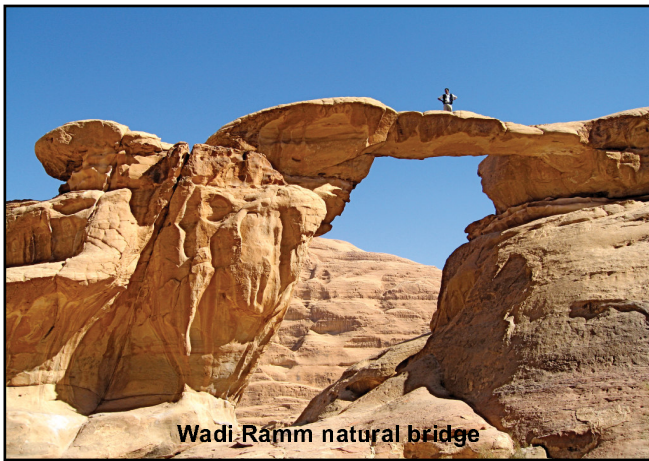


Colored hall & eros with bow

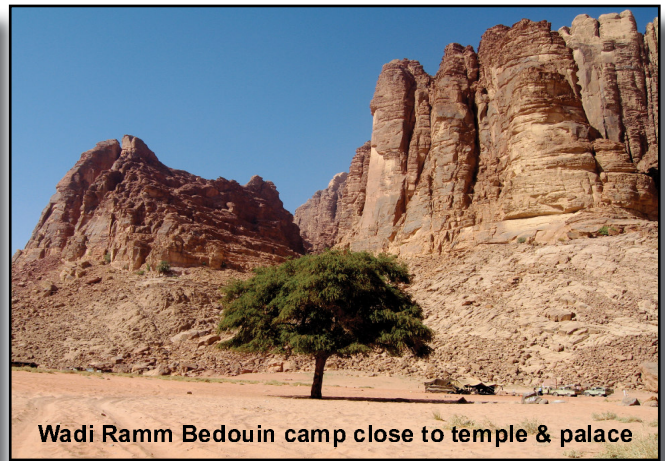


Colored hall & flute player





Wadi Ramm natural bridge



Wadi Ramm Bedouin camp close to temple & palace

temples on the northwest wadi side close to the acropolis with its monumental tenemos type building with big surrounding columns.

The archaeologists also discovered a highly developed water canalization system with water retention walls for flash flood protection, so common to the Petra mountain area.

Sabra is assumed to have been the center of Petra's mining and smelting activities, as huge heaps of copper ore slags were found on top of the river embankments. In addition the experts established further cupriferous sandstone deposits and found iron ore and copper remains along the wadi valley.

### Wadi Ramm

This was an area south of Petra inhabited by Hismaic

speaking Bedouins and a main route for incense caravans on their way to Petra. Therefore it is no surprise that these camel breeding nomads were trading and living peacefully side by side with Nabataeans. They even used Nabataean names and worshipped Nabataean gods.

The Allat temple in Wadi Ramm was the only one with a formal Nabataean inscription referring to King Rabbel II. and seven of his family members.

The reason for this is that adjacent to the temple the Nabataean king built 28 room palace including a thermal bath. This was certainly one of his winter residences to escape the occasional floodings.

### Hawara or Humeima

There is not much left today

of this ancient Nabataean settlement halfway on the road from Petra to Aila or Aqaba. The small town was built by King Aretas III.

Following an interesting oracle instruction he received to build a new town.

The settlement was supported by various aqueducts with a total length of 27 kilometers carrying water from Ain al-Qanah to the small town, where underground cisterns with arches for roof slabs were erected for storage, similar to those found in Umm al-Jimal in northern Jordan. A Roman fort and thermal bath were added later, again proof of the strong Roman presence.

### The Negev Area

The Nabataeans inhabited and controlled the Negev desert area from as early as 400 BC. There

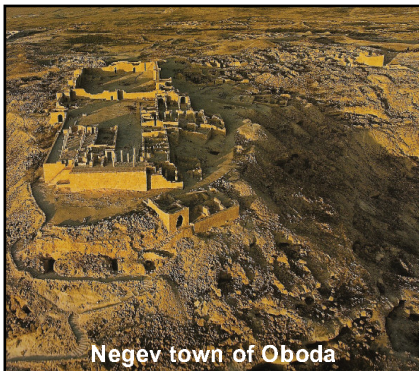


Wadi Ramm temple & palace building



Little remains left of Hawara ruins





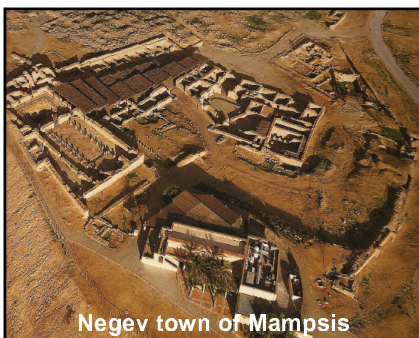
Negev town of Oboda

were various settlements in the triangle between the important Nabataean towns of Elusa in the north, Nessana in the south on the Sinai border and Oboda in the east.

Around 400 BC there were no permanent housing structures in those settlements as Nabataeans were living in tents. This was a very effective defense strategy against inherent attacks, being able to pack up quickly and leave nothing behind.

At the time it was prohibited and punished with the death penalty to farm and build houses. Interestingly the consumption of alcohol was punished as well to stay alert at all times.

This only changed with growing Nabataean wealth and regional poweress about 300 years later, when first houses were erected and further towns founded such as Rehovot between Elusa and Nessana, or Sobata between Nessana and Oboda, and Mampsis northeast



Negev town of Mampsis

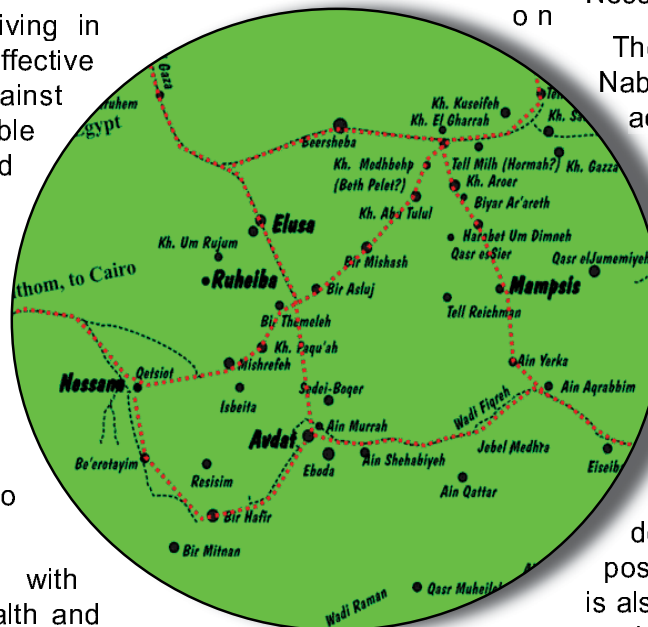
of Oboda.

### Nessana

Nessana was is called Auja el-Hafir or Awj al-Hafir or el-Audja in Arabic, and today Nitzana in Hebrew. It is one of the earlier Nabataean Negev centers and already existed around 300 BC. The lower city was much destroyed in recent war activities and the acropolis was partly excavated, unearthing a fort and temple with some important papyri documents discovered here.

### Sobata

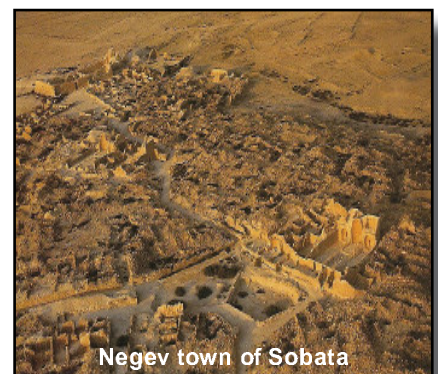
Called Isbeita in Arabic and Shivta in Hebrew for those, who want to look it up on



the map or in Google Earth. It lies on route to Rhinocolura a port on Mediterranean coast. This huge city was founded by Nabataeans around 50 BC and a Byzantine basilica with three naves is proof of the later Roman occupation.

### Elusa

In Arabic Elusa is called el-Khalasa and today Haluza or Chalutza in Hebrew. It was founded by Nabataeans at a late stage after the Roman takeover and inhabited from 200 - 600 AD until the rise of Islam. Elusa was



Negev town of Sobata

the largest city between Petra and the important port of Gaza.

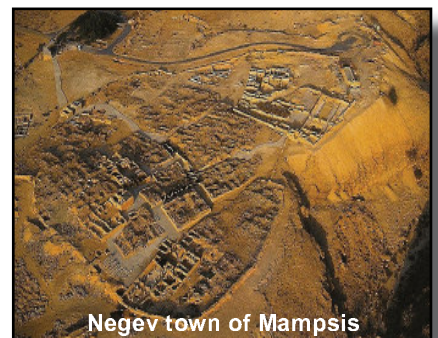
Again the Romans erected the largest Byzantine church in the Negev area here. This basilica can be seen still today on the famous Madaba mosaic and was also mentioned in the Nessana papyrus documents.

The city featured some Nabataean houses and various aqueducts, plus a small theatre. The city was totally destroyed and it is assumed that the ancient settlement lies under sand dunes today.

### Oboda

This city was named by Nabataeans after one of their kings, actually the only king who was deified by its people or even possibly by himself. This king is also the only Nabataean ruler not buried in Petra but here in a family mausoleum with 22 loculi.

Called Abdeh in Arabic and Avdat or Avedat in Hebrew, the town features an acropolis with various sanctuaries and shrines and a main temple built



Negev town of Mampsis

in southern Nabataean style. This has parallels to earlier built Palestine Canaanite temples, a concept also used for Petra's Qasr al Bint temple with pronaos, naos and the holy of holies.

This unique layout divides the holy of holies into two rooms, one reserved for the deified Oboda and the other for Nabataean father deity Dhu Shara and goddess al-Uzza. But different to the Khirbet et-Tannur temple here no human or animal motives are seen. The temple also provided important financial services to Nabataean traders.

King Aretas IV. built the Oboda city wall plus the first major temple with courtyard, vestibule and tower. The Oboda area was an important food production

center with a focus on camel, horse breeding center with various horse training circles discovered. And north of Oboda a fortified military camp with corner and central towers was discovered.

The economic activity also included a vital pottery production center with unique pottery sherds found here, including imported pottery from all over the Roman empire, even from Roman controlled England and Crimea. Archaeologists also established essential copper and turquoise mining activities.

This leads to conclusion that Oboda had the necessary wealth to afford such pottery imports and housed a sophisticated society to demand and enjoy

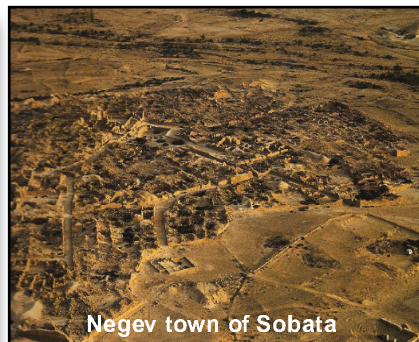
after excavations. Architects used arches to achieve larger rooms and ceiling spans and introduced staircase towers for wider stairs and stability.

Some of these large buildings were surrounded by perimeter walls and guard houses. For example a 1,000 square meter building featured courtyard, cistern, liwan, library, kitchen with baking and cooking ovens, a food cool room including an installation to keep water cool and a sophisticated wash room. An elaborate staircase tower led to the upper floor where the living quarters were situated.

Another example of an even bigger building with 1,600 square meters had a vestibule, entrance with guard room, guest



Negev town of Mampsis



Negev town of Sobata



Khirbet et-Tannur

center with a focus on camel, sheep and goats meat.

This is the reason why lots of saltpeter was found here for curing meat, as well as potassium from the Dead Sea for mixing it with animal or human urine to produce an important conserving agent.

What surprised archaeologist was that an altar was found in midst of a farm, a unique discovery with no parallel in Nabataea. But later it was discovered that the reason was a new Nabataean focus on agriculture, which took place after 100 AD and resulted in an increase in farming and irrigation activities.

these luxury items. Oboda was finally destroyed by the 636 AD major earthquake.

### Mampsis

The Arabic name of Mampsis is al-Kurnub and today it is marked on the maps as Mamshit. It was founded by Nabateans around 100 BC and inhabited until Byzantine times. It was a huge city on the road from Petra to Jerusalem and is also shown on the Madaba mosaic.

This vital Nabataean center had various large double floor buildings measuring between 600 - 1,600 square meters with a surprisingly sophisticated layout and high quality finishing's as archaeologists have established

room with separate wash room, strong room and stables.

The columns carried Nabataean capitels and two staircase towers opened the way to the upper rooms, which walls were covered with frescoes. A surprise discovery for archaeologists was a hoard of 10,500 silver coins dated 100 – 200 AD unearthed under the staircase of one of the Mampsis buildings.

Three dams with a 10,000 m<sup>3</sup> capacity were vital for Mampsis, as otherwise very little water was available. A public reservoir with a thick layer of water resistant plaster and huge cisterns with arched roofs stored





the necessary water for the arid summer season.

It is important to note, that Nabataean were excellent hydrologists and invented water resistant cement already over 2,000 years ago.

A protective wall surrounded the town with large watch towers with rooms for military personnel. But Mampsis was economically the weakest city in Negev and that might have been the possible reason for two architectural schools residing here.

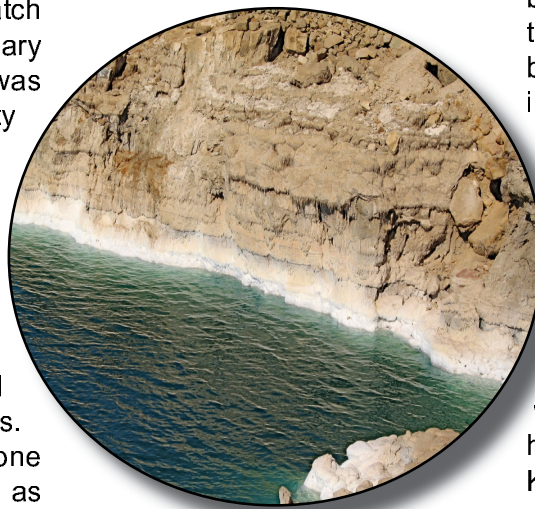
### **Architectural Schools**

This also is the explanation for the large and sophisticated high quality local buildings. Unique is also that not one building has the same layout as the other, so it was a real training ground for young architects.

These sophisticated buildings included features such as ashlar door frames, halls with columns, but also used wooden beams for ceiling made of imported Syrian black pine and Lebanese cedar.

This allowed architects at that early time to design huge halls

measuring 35 meters in length with nine arches to support the ceiling of the double floor buildings. One of these halls had not one but three palace like wide doors giving a maximum view on the courtyard. These beams were also found in Oboda buildings.



Mampsis was also an important horse breeding center with stable building layouts with two naves and second floor.

The various graveyards are proof of the extended occupation of Mampsis. The Nabataean cemetery was used for 400 years starting from 100 BC. Here at various female graves gold jewelry was excavated.

Very interesting is the fact that a few small stepped pyramid tombs were found, which were very similar to those early Egyptian tombs. What is also remarkable against normal

Nabataean ceremonial practice stone tables were used for ritual meals instead of the common triclinia banquet halls.

The Roman cremation cemetery is the only one in the Negev region, which was later extended for Christian Byzantine burials. When Romans converted to Christianity two Byzantine basilica were constructed both in a very elaborate way.

### **The Dead Sea Area**

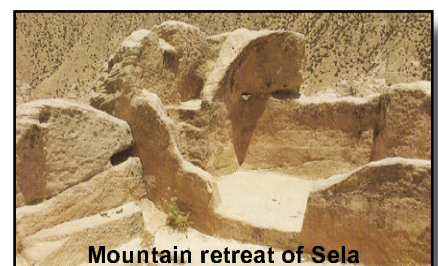
Going now further north we come to another economically important Nabataean area. Please remember that Nabataeans never were the majority population in the area, which is marked on modern history maps as Nabataean Kingdom.

But they were certainly the most dominant economic and military power. The Dead Sea was the most important source in the whole Middle East for bitumen, salt and balsam sulphur production.

Nabatean settlement sites were Umm al-Tawabeen, Khirbet Sheikh, 'Isa, Deir 'Ain 'Abata was



Mountain retreat of Sela



Mountain retreat of Sela



Khiret edh-Dharih temple

mentioned as a cave sanctuary, Numeira and 'Isal were two wadi forts and Beliedah was a farming area in Wadi Kerak. Khirbet Qazone was the cemetery for Mahoza and Zoar with over 3,500 shaft tombs for single burials.

The deceased bodies were simply wrapped in leather or cloth and discovered grave goods included jewelry, glass vessels, small wooden boxes, papyri, iron bracelets, copper, silver and gold earrings and even a laurel wreath, all dated to the first and second century AD.

### Sela

Looking at the area north of Petra there are various Nabataean sites of interest. Sela was a fortification about 50 kilometers north of Petra close to Buseirah between Wadi Hirsh and Wadi Dshamal. The

name is derived from its secure position on a rock formation, as sela means rock.

Research shows that Sela was not of Nabataean origin, but first work here was executed by the Edom Kingdom before the Nabataean arrival in the area. Sela was used by many as a refuge for 4,500 years starting from 3,000 BC.

Steep rock cut stairs called khandag are the only entrance to Sela starting from the Wadi Hirsh based cistern. They climb up to the plateau on the southeast side and end at a narrow ascending passage which ends up in front a lockable door at the plateau entrance.

The Sela plateau had sufficient water supply with over 25 pear shaped cisterns able to hold over 2 million liters and fed via various funnels to catch run off



Khiret edh-Dharih temple

rain water. Inhabitants lived in various rock hewn houses, one of which featured an arched roof. Archaeologists also discovered rests of painted stucco with green, blue and red bands.

Two large and deep votive niches or cult sites are worth being mentioned here. One features a stone throne with armrests containing twelve small bowls around a bigger central bowl.

These are carved out and have the size of an eating plate and it is assumed by archaeologists that they were used to sacrifice food. A second cult site on the



Khiret edh-Dharih temple

plateau has a monolith block altar about two meters high with twelve stairs leading up to it.

### Khirbet et-Tannur

Khirbet et-Tannur is situated 70 kilometers north of Petra on "Kings Highway", seven kilometers from Khirbet edh-Dharih between the Edom area in the south and the Moab area in the north.

The first structure was erected here around 100 BC, but the site was first mentioned only in 8 BC. It was used only as sanctuary during pilgrimage with no village close by and possibly it was reserved for men only.

The sanctuary lay out is similar to the second sanctuary in the area Khirbet edh-Dharih, but smaller as only limited space was available on its summit plateau. Steep slopes did not allow any terracing and a cistern



Khirbet et-Tannur sanctuary



Khirbet et-Tannur temple



on the slope was its only water source.

It is not certain which gods this sanctuary was home to, but it is assumed the main Nabataean deity Dhu Shara and goddess al-Uzza were worshipped here. Archaeologists established that the sanctuary was built in three phases. At first a simple altar on a platform was erected. Thereafter a wall was built around it on three sides forming a small temple with stairs to its roof for ceremonial purposes.

This temple cella was surrounded then with a small columned courtyard measuring about ten meters square, possibly open without roof, so that open air ceremonies on top of temple cella could be performed. A unique Zodiac frieze was erected during this phase as well, unique because the order and mix of animals and personifications was different. It started with March on the top center to run down on the left side and to return to the top again to run down from September on right side.

Finally the outer columned courtyard or tenemos measuring about 35 meters square was added. The complex also included four roofed triclinia for ceremonial meals. The various divine and zodiac busts and sculptures found here included those of Tyche/Fortune, Zeus/Jupiter, Helios, Kronos/Saturn, Victories/ Nike and Atargatis.

### **Khirbet edh-Dharih**

This sanctuary and settlement is close to Khirbet et-Tannur. The Nabataean village was supplied with water by three springs and had its own necropolis. It was established that the first settlement could be traced back to the Neolithic period. The sanctuary is much bigger than Khirbet et-Tannur and was extended during Roman times. But unfortunately it was destroyed by the 363 AD earthquake and abandoned, but later re-occupied. The temple had three entrance doors and measured fifteen meters square and had a large central platform with two crypts under the platform. At its back three betyles were representing the main deities being worshipped here. Holes in the ground indicate that blood sacrifices took place here as well.

The temple cella was surrounded by a corridor and the overall heights reached a towering 15

meters high with four columns in front. This facade was adorned with many sculptures in relief including animals such as the Roman she-wolf, medusa, zodiac busts of Taurus, Cancer, Gemini, Nike and Libra. Again stairs were leading to the roof terrace where priests performed regular ceremonies, similar to Petra's Qasr al Bint roof platform. The layout was similar to Khirbet et-Tannur, only that here not four but seven triclinia were erected for pilgrims ceremonial meals.

### **Settlement**

The Nabataean settlement in the valley had approximately twenty residential buildings and various oil presses were found giving an idea about the agricultural activities. One large luxurious house close to sanctuary had a paved courtyard, various reception rooms, a bath with hypocaust plus outside courtyard. It is assumed to have been occupied by the high priest, based on the only monumental tomb with six shafts and a total of 30 burial chambers found here.

A second large building had two floors, with a triclinium, columned hall and small store rooms on the ground floor. The rooms on the first floor were all stuccoed and included an altar. This building had no parallel elsewhere in the Nabataean Kingdom. A third large building seemed to have been a caravansary and a Roman bath was also part of the small settlement.



Column with  
horned capital

### **Summary**

From this brief description of secondary Nabataean settlements next to the three most important Petra, Bosra and Mada'in Saleh a better understanding of Nabataean culture and sophistication can be derived. But it is also became clear that each area had specific features, which were dictated by climatic and economic conditions. The Negev area had little agriculture and focused on horse breeding and architectural training.

The sites in the north of Petra were used as important mountain sanctuaries for worship and pilgrimages. The satellite towns close to Petra were fully under the capital's influence and played a vital supportive role. Today the Nabataean archaeological sites spread over five modern states and it is rather difficult to visit only the most important of them.