

**PARETI DIPINTE  
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## New Evidence of Domestic Nabataean Wall Painting from Petra's North Ridge



1. *Opus sectile* style wall painting with blue, green, yellow, pink, and white pigment with black outlines, c. first century BCE-first century CE, Petra North Ridge.



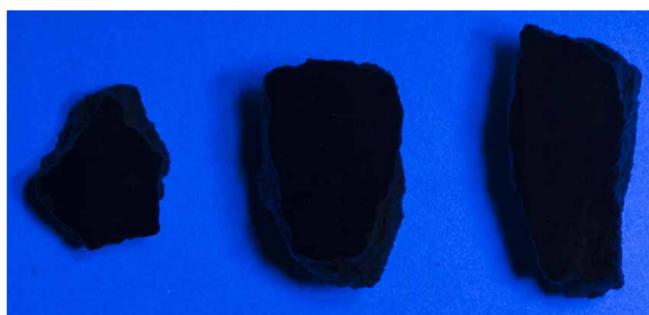
2. Architectural style wall painting with red, green, and yellow pigments with black architectural details, c. late first century BCE-early first century CE, Petra North Ridge.



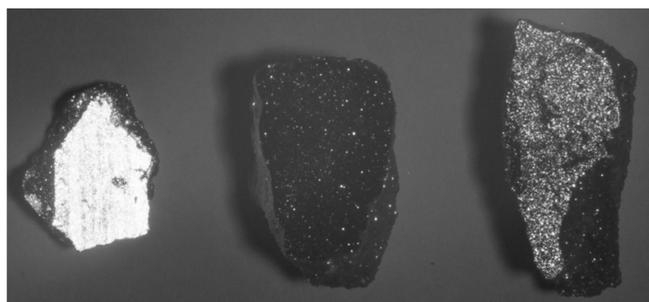
3. *Opus sectile* wall painting fragments in visible light.



4. *Opus sectile* wall painting fragments in raking light.



5. *Opus sectile* wall painting fragments in ultraviolet light.



6. *Opus sectile* wall painting fragments in visible induced luminescence.

The emerging diversity of wall painting styles within domestic and temple structures in ancient Nabataea indicate a selective adoption and adaptation of Hellenistic mural painting from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE through the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. Excavations and conservation efforts in Petra have revealed masonry, illusionistic, and figural wall painting styles and stucco decorations which are comparable to Hellenistic examples in Greece, Ptolemaic Egypt, Palestine, and Rome (Vibert Guigue 2016). Recent excavations by the *Petra North Ridge Project* (2016) have revealed a new corpus of domestic wall painting dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE-1<sup>st</sup> century CE from private residences near the monumental core of Petra. The finds include *opus sectile* style ("Masonry"/"1<sup>st</sup> Style") wall painting, delicate illusionistic architectural painting (similar to early "3<sup>rd</sup> Style"), and raised cornice plaster moldings. Though more fragmentary, the new, important material from Petra's North Ridge sheds light on domestic Nabataean wall paintings and their techniques. The diversity of painting from Nabataea raises new questions about the use of local and imported craft materials and the origins and training of the artisans involved in this little-studied tradition of wall painting in Petra.

### Representative Samples:

*Opus sectile* style wall painting with blue, green, yellow, pink, and white pigment with black outlines, c. 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE-1<sup>st</sup> century CE, Petra North Ridge (fig. 1).

Architectural style wall painting with red, green, and yellow pigments with black architectural details, c. late 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE-early 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, Petra North Ridge (fig. 2).

### Methods:

The 75 wall painting fragments were photographed using multispectral imaging techniques including visible, raking, and ultraviolet light as well as visible induced luminescence. Each fragment was approximately 1-3 cm in width. The images were color corrected in photoshop using a color chart balance card. The fragments were grouped according to the excavations by the *Petra North Ridge Project* (2016), the finds of which have yet to be published.

### Results:

Case Study 1: *Opus sectile* wall painting fragments, 2.9 x 2.1 cm, 4.0 x 2.5 cm, 4.8 x 2.2 cm, PNRP16 06/09/16 E. 2.45 PB 69, Petra North Ridge, Jordan.

*Opus sectile* painting in visible light, revealing layers of plaster painted with pigment and polished with a clear sealant (fig. 3. ***Opus sectile* painting in visible light, revealing layers of plaster painted with pigment and polished with a clear sealant**).

*Opus sectile* painting in raking light revealing vertical brush strokes and the thick application of paint (fig. 4. ***Opus sectile* painting in raking light revealing vertical brush strokes and the thick application of paint**).

*Opus sectile* painting in UV revealing no use of organic pigments, such as lake madder for purple or carbon for underdrawings (fig. 5. ***Opus sectile* painting in UV revealing no use of organic pigments, such as lake madder for purple or carbon for underdrawings**).

*Opus sectile* painting in VIL revealing the fluorescence of cuprorivaite (Egyptian blue) for the creation of blue and green (fig. 6. ***Opus sectile* painting in VIL revealing the fluorescence of cuprorivaite (Egyptian blue) for the creation of blue and green**).

### Conclusions

The new finds from Petra's North Ridge are closely comparable to the colorful, *secco* geometric-style wall painting from the so-called mansion at ez-Zantur on Petra's southern ridge published by B. Kolb (Kolb 2003). Room 1 of EZ IV on the ez-Zantur Ridge preserves extraordinary painted stucco in the architectural style divided into three zones covering the small 5 x 4 meter room. Far from completely dissolving the walls of the space, the tripartite architectural façade illusionistically expands into the viewer's space while simultaneously incorporating a unique *opus sectile* paneling between the baroque architectural frames. The visual effect of the small room transposed the monumental, painted architectural designs prevalent throughout Petra in Hellenistic architecture onto the wall. Despite the incorporation of monumentalizing architectural forms in the room, the scale of the painting at EZ IV is under life-size, which could suggest that the painting was intended to be viewed while reclining on cushions, perhaps directly on the *opus sectile* floor. It is probable that the wall painting evidence from Petra's North Ridge closely compares to this visual and historical context evident on the ez-Zantur Ridge.

Although the exceptional figural painting from the "Painted House" *biclinium* at Siq al-Barid may remain the best-known and conserved painting from Nabataea (Akrawi *et al.* 2010), there remains no comprehensive study of wall painting at Petra or greater Nabataea during the Hellenistic or Roman periods. Multispectral imaging, including visible, ultraviolet, infrared, and visible induced luminescence, has elucidated some of the inorganic and organic pigments and the wide-ranging palettes (white, red, yellow, green, blue, and pink) of this new wall painting as well as its supports, preparatory grounds, underpaintings, and final surface finishes. Some of the data, including the fluorescence of cuprorivaite in VIL, suggests that luxurious painting materials were traded in Nabataea. The technical analysis of a mixing bowl which contained cuprorivaite from the so-called Painter's Workshop within the Temple of the Winged Lions (Shaer 2005) indicates that the North Ridge wall painting was likely painted by locals, perhaps Greco-Roman craftsmen working in Nabataea in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE-1<sup>st</sup> century CE. Despite its common understanding as at the "periphery" of the Greco-Roman world, Petra importantly preserves the most comprehensive vision of Hellenistic architectural motifs in its monumental tomb façades, and, as elucidated by this corpus, examples of the selective adoption and adaptation of Hellenistic wall painting styles and techniques.

Fragments provided by the "Petra North Ridge Project" (2016), led by Drs. T. Parker and M. Perry. Supported by the "Rydquist Research Travel Grant", Lamar Dodd School of Art. All photographs taken by the author.

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