



## **ABOUT THE NABATAEAN MINISTER SYLLAEUS FROM NEW SILVER COINS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research aims to review what we know about the Nabataean official Syllaeus and the date of his death. Only two early sources that speak of his existence and activities, Strabo and Flavius Josephus, of whom only Strabo was contemporary with him. This article sets out those primary sources and their context, which allows some deductions and much speculation in the scholarly literature that is not supported by the evidence. This study includes the publication of two previously unpublished coins in the Jordan National Bank, from the collection of Naif Al-Qsus, of Syllaeus. This paper concludes that the Romans and king Aretas IV were both interested in his execution in Rome.

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**KEYWORDS:** Nabataean, coins, Syllaeus, Jordan, Romans

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Syllaeus was the all-powerful minister of the Nabataean king Odobas III (30- 9 BC), one of the most significant figures in the history of the Nabatean kingdom. To gain a clear picture of Syllaeus we must clarify the following points: the relationship between Syllaeus and King Obodas III, what happened during his expedition with the Roman army to Arabia, the relationship between Syllaeus and King Herod and Herod's sister Salome, and what Syllaeus did in Rome and how he defended himself against the accusations of Aretas IV and King Herod. We must also consider the role Syllaeus played in the Revolution in 12 BC in southern Syria, the relationship between Syllaeus and Aretas IV, and the controversy surrounding the date of Syllaeus death (9 BC or 6 BC). We must also discuss whether there is any evidence to suggest that he ruled as king after Obodas's death (as there are conflicting accounts surrounding his death, these need to be addressed and weighed up as best as possible). Finally, we will also address the nature of the relationship between Syllaeus and the geographer Strabo, the issue of the different kinds of coin minted by Syllaeus (silver, bronze etc.).

There are only two early sources that mention Syllaeus and his activities, Strabo and Flavius Josephus, of whom only Strabo was a contemporary. Despite the good relationship between Strabo and the leader of the Roman campaign against the Arabian Peninsula, Strabo blamed the failure of the campaign which was supposed to move to the south of Arabia on Syllaeus (Strabo, *Geography*, 17.1.53). He was ignorant to address the Romans with the offshore wind and tide in the Red Sea and it led to the wreck of many of Roman ships. Also, they had no experience of this sort of navigation in the Red Sea. However, in the first century AD Josephus wrote of some of the personal events concerning Syllaeus.

However, the Nabataean coins going back to the time of Syllaeus mostly date to 9 BC, the year Syllaeus supposedly returned from Rome to Petra. The coins do

not portray known historical events and they only have the first letter of Syllaeus' name (S). However, if Syllaeus did mint these coins, why did he use the portrait of king Odobas III on them? On the other hand, there were other coins with portraits of king Aretas IV. Perhaps king Aretas IV and Syllaeus ruled jointly over the kingdom in the first year, or Syllaeus did not have time to mint similar coins with the portrait of king Obodas III due to king Obodas III's sudden death.

The mention of Syllaeus comes in Strabo's description of Rome's expedition to Arabia Felix (modern Yemen) (Strabo, *Geography*, 16.4.24.), which took place in 26 or 25 BC, led by Gaius Aelius Gallus, the first prefect of Egypt and Strabo's patron. The expedition consisted of 10,000 Romans and allies in total, including 1,000 Nabataeans under Syllaeus, and 500 Jews (Sidebotham 1986: 120). The plan was to transport the army from Egypt to Arabia by boat, and then march south. The Arabians were not seen as good warriors, and so it was thought that the expedition would be quite easy (Anderson 2010: 392; Bowersock 1983: 46-9).

Strabo writes that the emperor Augustus sent the expedition to Arabia in order to explore a region about which Rome knew very little. Egypt had only recently, in 30 BC become a Roman province (Fuhrmann 2012: 17). However, Augustus also wanted Gallus either to form an alliance with the inhabitants or to conquer them. The chief target in mind were the Sabaeans, who had grown rich from the incense trade passing through their land towards Nabataea (Bowersock 1983: 46). The expedition would mean that the Romans could obtain incense from Arabia directly, which would be advantageous as the Nabataeans taxed all goods passing through their land at a rate of 25 per cent (Anonymous 1989: 19).

However, as the Romans did not know the territory, they needed guides. The only people who knew the area well enough for this job were in fact the Nabataeans, the same people who stood to lose the most if the expedition was successful. This put the

Nabataeans in a dilemma; they would either anger Rome or lose the monopoly (Accettola 2012: 18). Wenning argues that the only way to avoid both of these situations was for Syllaeus to guide the Romans but to ensure that they did not succeed, and claims that Syllaeus' plan was to allow the Romans to make some progress against the Sabaeans, but not enough to defeat them completely (Wenning 2007: 33-36).

Strabo accuses Syllaeus of forcing the Romans to make a difficult landing at Leuce-Come, when there was an overland trade route from Petra which could have been used, as it could sustain significant traffic from trade caravans. However, according to Mayerson, this oversight was not Syllaeus' fault, and Gallus instead was to blame for not gathering adequate military intelligence about his route. Mayerson says that this, along with the poor choice of Cleopatra as a starting point for the expedition, reveals that Gallus lacked military experience in the region, and that the failure of the expedition is as likely to be as much a result of his mistakes as of Syllaeus' treachery (Mayerson 1995: 17-24).

By the time the army reached Leuce-Come, many soldiers had fallen ill from contaminated water and food. This meant that Gallus had to halt there for the summer and the winter of 26 BC to allow the sick to recover. Strabo then claims that Syllaeus led the expedition through places where there was no water, which meant that the army had to carry water with them. Despite these difficulties, Strabo states that the Romans were still able to take cities with few casualties from fighting. Gallus continued as far as the city of Marib (Strabo, *Geography*, 16.4.24; Bowersock 1983: 48), and besieged it for six days. However, the siege was abandoned due to a lack of water, and Gallus turned back when he was two days march away from the incense-producing region. The army returned home in sixty days, whereas the outward journey had taken six months. Strabo sees this as the ultimate sign of Syllaeus' treachery.

Importantly, despite later accusations, Rome took no action against Nabataea or Syllaeus immediately after the expedition (Strabo, *Geography*, 16.4.24). When Syllaeus was accused of various crimes later on, even Strabo has to admit that it was on different charges. Rome had other preoccupations immediately following the failed expedition. Roman armies were at this time involved in Galatia, Spain and Germany (Grant 1978: 518), so the lack of response is understandable. It is also possible that the Romans blamed the adverse conditions rather than their guide for the losses.

Historians are divided over the extent to which Syllaeus really was responsible for what happened. It certainly was in the Nabataeans' interest for the expedition to fail, so that Romans would remain dependent on them for frankincense. However, the Nabataeans also benefitted from the success of the expedition. Their allies, the Himyarites, were able to conquer the Sabaeans the next year while they were still recovering from the Roman attack (Anderson 2010: 393). Strabo says that both the success and the failure were part of the Nabataean plan, but it is hardly fair to blame Syllaeus for engineering the success and the failure of the expedition at the same time. After all, the Romans could have made absolutely no progress without Syllaeus, and their stay in Leuce-Come was apparently as guests of a Nabataean leader named Aretas (Bowersock 1983: 48, Everatt 1972: 44). Furthermore, as Bowersock argues (1983: 49) Syllaeus himself had a great deal to lose from the failure of the expedition, as success would have meant personal advancement in Rome.

Moving from motive to opportunity, it is possible that Syllaeus knew of easier routes (Gibson 2004: 42), but used a more difficult one (Accettola 2012: 19). However, the route he used was apparently an established trade route that had fallen into disuse (Gibson 2004: 42), and there is evidence that the re-opening of this route benefitted Nabataea in the years after the expedition (Accettola 2012: 19). As for the land route, Bowersock dismisses it as equally prob-

lematic if not more so (1983: 47). Strabo also saw the arid conditions as a problem the guides should have helped to avoid (Anderson 2010: 393), as a guide could have helped the Romans make the necessary adjustments (Accettola 2012: 20). However, this was not the first time that the Romans had suffered in desert campaigns. A much worse disaster had happened at the battle of Carrhae in 53 BC, just over thirty years before the Arabian campaign. Later historians also blamed Roman military incompetence in the Parthian campaign on treachery (Plutarch Crassus 21-2, quoted in Bowersock 1983: 48). Strabo's case against Syllaeus is by no means irrefutable.

Moreover, an examination of the other sources gives us reason to doubt Strabo's assessment that Syllaeus was to blame. Cassius emphasizes the difficulty posed by the climate and disease rather than any treachery, and Josephus also fails to mention Syllaeus' role, while mentioning the expedition itself in the *Antiquities*. Strabo's focus on Syllaeus can be explained in part by the fact that Gallus was his patron (Dio Cassius, LIII, 29, 3ff.; Richardson 1999: 230). However, as Anderson argues, Syllaeus is used to support the main thesis of Strabo's work, that other lands may appear to flourish independently of Rome, but lands such as Arabia and Nabataea have major flaws, and need Roman rule for these flaws to be resolved. Anderson sees Strabo as writing a justification for Roman imperial rule over places such as Nabataea. In this case, the Nabataeans are at fault for allowing someone as deceptive as Syllaeus to gain so much power. If we adopt Anderson's explanation, we can indeed see that Syllaeus fulfils a literary role in the narrative, which may bear little relation to the actual historical events (Anderson 2010: 393).

## 2. SYLLAEUS UNDER KING OBODAS III

Regardless of the question of blame over the expedition to Arabia, what we do know is that Syllaeus was promoted to chief minister under Obodas III soon after it. His title, according to Dussaud, was *epitropos* (Hill 1922: XVI), which means chief minis-

ter. After this point, he appears as an ambassador to foreign courts, such as Herod's in Judaea, and Augustus' in Rome. A bilingual Nabataean and Greek inscription describes Syllaeus with his official title of 'brother to the king' Obodas III. Obodas' patronage was very important to Syllaeus in his intrigues against Aretas IV, as we shall see (Fig. 1).



Figure 1 the bilingual Nabataean and Greek inscription (Kawerau und Rehm 1914, 387).

There is a debate concerning whether or not Obodas III was a weak king for allowing Syllaeus the power that the sources say that he had. Strabo and Josephus say that Syllaeus was allowed to be king in all but name because of Obodas' weakness and because of his lack of interest in public affairs. This assessment is supported by Bowersock (1983: 46). This lack of interest in public affairs is a weakness which Strabo attributes to all Arabian kings. Obodas III's old age and frailty is sometimes given as another reason why Syllaeus took more and more power, as Syllaeus is depicted as a young man in Josephus' account of his visits to Judaea. Josephus also reports that Syllaeus himself mentioned Obodas' frailty when he spoke to Augustus about Herod's incursion into Nabataea (see below).

However, there are good reasons to question our sources here. Strabo and Josephus probably took their information concerning Nabataean constitution from Athenodorus. Athenodorus made several mistakes concerning Nabataean politics because he did not understand the tribal system on which it was based. For example, he did not see that public duties such as foreign policy were traditionally left to

the chief minister (i.e. Syllaeus). This was not weakness or laziness on the part of Obodas; he was simply fulfilling his constitutional role. Amongst other things, the grand building programme dated to Obodas' time suggests that he was rather an active king, as these projects could not have been completed by Syllaeus alone (Wenning 2007: 34-35).

When Obodas died in the winter of 9 BC (Bowersock 1983: 51), by Aretas IV accused Syllaeus of poisoning him (Strabo, *Geography*, 16.4.25-26). On the other hand, this makes little sense, as according to Josephus, Syllaeus was in Rome at the time of Obodas' death. Furthermore, given the amount of power Syllaeus enjoyed under Obodas, an assassination attempt would be a foolish risk to take. What would Syllaeus gain from assassinating a king under whom he already had so much power? What we must remember, however, is that this accusation only emerged in the context of a power struggle between Syllaeus and Aretas IV, and that according to Josephus Augustus initially rejected the accusation because of his hostility to Aretas. For more about this, we must turn to Syllaeus' dealings with Herod the Great king of Judaea (Knoblet 2005: 142).

### 3. SYLLAEUS AND HEROD THE GREAT

The Nabataeans were historically on bad terms with Herod in particular, as they had previously denied him asylum when he was fleeing for his life. Despite this, and contrary to everyone's expectations, Herod became ruler with Augustus' support (Gibson 2004: 42). Upon his promotion to chief minister under Obodas III, Syllaeus was sent as an ambassador to Herod's court, as Judaea was Nabataea's most significant neighbour after Rome. This is the context in which Josephus first mentions him in *Jewish Antiquities*.

Josephus writes that while Syllaeus was in Judaea, he fell in love with Herod's sister Salome, who was a widow at the time. Josephus goes on to say that Salome was herself attracted to Syllaeus, and that this was reported to Herod. Syllaeus left quite quickly

after this became known, but returned a few months later and asked to marry Salome. He argued that this would create a strong alliance between Judaea and Nabataea, as he was powerful in Nabataea because of the position that Obodas had given him. However, Syllaeus was told by Herod that he would need to become a Jew, which would mean that he would be stoned to death in Nabataea. Salome was then accused of immorality for associating with Syllaeus in the first place. The negotiations then ended with bitterness on both sides.

After this dispute, Syllaeus worked against Herod by supporting bandits who raided his territory. Here we are again dependent on Josephus, who follows Nicolaus of Damascus, Herod's representative to Augustus in the resulting dispute (Gibson 2004: 42). Josephus writes that trouble began in 12 BC, while Herod was in Rome. Trachonitis was a region that had been added to Herod's territory by Augustus so that Herod could stop the inhabitants from becoming bandits (Josephus AJ 16.355; Bowersock 1983: 50-51). This was a common problem because the land was unproductive and unsuitable for farming. Herod was successful in this policing role as long as he remained in Judaea, but while he was in Rome the inhabitants of this region spread a rumour that Herod was dead and began a revolt (Richardson 1999: 280).

The revolt was soon dealt with by Herod's military, but forty of its leaders fled to Nabataea. Josephus claims that Syllaeus welcomed them to take revenge on Herod (Everatt 1972: 44) and allowed them to use a strong place in Nabataea. From there they raided Judaea and also the surrounding region of Coele-Syria and the Decapolis. It is possible that Syllaeus was the instigator of the revolt in the first place, though Josephus does not say this. Such actions could be explained both by Syllaeus' bitterness against Herod and also because the transfer of Trachonitis to Herod had been a blow to the Nabataeans' power (Bowersock 1983: 50). This theory could explain why the bandits fled to Nabataea. However, their flight to Nabataea could also be explained

by the fact that it was the closest place that was not under Herod's rule.

Herod returned to Judaea to finish off the revolt in Trachonitis and killed the families of those hiding in Nabataea. Herod also settled a colony of Idumneans in the region (Gibson 2004: 43). However, Herod's severe response only made things worse, as the bandits were then bound by ancestral custom to take revenge on the one who had killed their families. The raids on his lands continued and, according to Josephus, they were as destructive as a war. This was because the number of brigands had grown to about a thousand men, secure as they were in Nabataea (Josephus, AJ 16.276-81; Bowersock 1983: 51).

Herod demanded that the Nabataeans hand over these bandits as well as the money that he had lent to Obodas III, a sum of 60 talents (Josephus AJ 16.346; Anderson 1735: 299). When these things were requested, however, Syllaeus said that the bandits were not in Nabataea and put off paying the money. Herod then appealed to the governors of Syria, Saturninus and Volumnius, to act on his behalf. They ordered that Herod's demands be obeyed by the Nabataeans within thirty days. When these thirty days had gone by, neither the prisoners nor the money had been handed over to Herod. At this point, it appears that Syllaeus went to Rome to appeal to Augustus directly. When Josephus next mentions him, he is in Rome (Bowersock 1983: 39).

After the deadline had passed, Herod led an army into Nabataea, assaulted the bandit stronghold and demolished it, and also defeated a group of Nabataeans who had come to help the bandits. Furthermore, he sent an account of his actions to Roman officials in the region. We should remember that Josephus is basing his account here on the works of Herod's chief defender in Rome (Nicolaus of Damascus). As a result, Herod may have been painted here in a more sympathetic light than was warranted. Messengers were sent to Syllaeus in Rome telling him about Herod's attack, and according to Josephus they exaggerated the number of dead very greatly. Syl-

laeus then convinced Augustus that Herod had launched an unprovoked attack on Nabataea, killing many of its nobles and destroying the countryside. This angered Augustus, and he asked Herod's supporters only whether Herod had led an army into Nabataea, asking nothing concerning Herod's motives. On hearing that Herod had indeed attacked Nabataea, Augustus wrote to Herod to say that he would now be treated as a subject, not as a friend of Rome (Sicker 2001: 96-99).

#### 4. SYLLAEUS AND ARETAS IV

After Herod's fall from favour, on Syllaeus' advice the Nabataeans did not hand over any of the surviving bandits nor any of the money owed. The inhabitants of Trachonitis rose up again, as they knew that Herod would not be able to retaliate effectively because of the loss of Augustus' support. It was also at this point that Obodas III died and that the crown was claimed by Aenaeas, a descendent of Malichus I, a previous king of Nabataea. Aenaeas then changed his name to Aretas IV, a name with a more royal precedent. This was perhaps to compensate for the fact that his claim to the throne through descent was tenuous at best.

It also seems as though Syllaeus himself was trying to gain power at the same time. He remained in Rome and persuaded Augustus that Aretas was not to be trusted (Everatt 1972: 44). In this he was helped by the fact that Augustus was already angry that Aretas had taken the throne without Augustus' permission. This indicates that Augustus saw Nabataea as a client kingdom at this time (Gibson 2004: 42), and therefore felt that he should have been consulted on the succession. Consequently, when Aretas sent Augustus gifts along with a warning that Syllaeus was treacherous, his messengers were rejected. Although Aretas may have been in control in Nabataea, he did not have the support of Rome which he needed to govern effectively. Following these decisions by Augustus concerning Aretas IV and Herod, neither Judaea nor Nabataea had a king with full

control of his kingdom. The region therefore descended into chaos because of the bandit raids from Nabataea and the revolt in Trachonitis, as well as the struggle for power between Syllaeus and Aretas IV. After some time, Herod sent Nicolaus of Damascus to represent him before Augustus in Rome (Knoblet 2005: 142).

### 5. SYLLAEUS IN ROME

According to Josephus, when Nicolaus arrived in Rome, he found that Augustus would not receive ambassadors from Herod, as he was still angry with Herod. However, Nicolaus also discovered that some of Syllaeus' followers had turned against him. These people came to Nicolaus with evidence that Syllaeus had poisoned some of the friends of King Obodas III. Nicolaus saw this as an opportunity to accuse Syllaeus before Augustus and indirectly raise the matter of Herod's attack. This was a clever way of gaining access to Augustus, which he could not do simply as Herod's ambassador. Attacking Syllaeus was therefore a means to an end (Josephus, AJ 16.294).

As a result, Nicolaus joined forces with Aretas' ambassadors, accusing Syllaeus of poisoning Obodas III and others, of conducting adulterous relationships with Roman and Nabataean women, of giving support to the bandits in the region, and of not repaying the money which Herod had lent to him (Josephus, AJ 16.335-55). Most importantly, Syllaeus was accused of lying to Augustus about Herod. While Syllaeus was not in Nabataea itself, this does not mean that he was not seeking the throne, as he was a powerful figure in Rome and able to influence Augustus. Nabataea was a client kingdom at this time, and kings would need to go to Rome to be approved, as Herod had done (Everatt 1972: 44).

When Augustus asked for more details concerning Syllaeus' treachery, Nicolaus used this as an opportunity to speak about Herod. Nicolaus presented the raid on Nabataean territory as an attempt by Herod to reclaim the money borrowed by Syllaeus. The incursion into Nabataean territory was

presented as a debt collection rather than an invasion. When Nicolaus gave accurate numbers for the Nabataeans killed and indicated that Herod had consulted the Roman governors before attacking, Augustus demanded the truth from Syllaeus (Smith 2013: 124-5). When it was exposed that he had been inaccurate, and that this had led Augustus to punish Herod, Augustus was enraged. It appears at this point that Syllaeus was sent away to pay Herod the money he owed and then was punished. Following their reconciliation, Augustus then wanted to give the kingdom of Nabataea to Herod, but on reading about Herod's successors and knowing that Herod was old and frail, he eventually decided to leave the kingdom to Aretas IV for the sake of stability. Aretas was therefore confirmed as king in Nabataea (Josephus, AJ 16.355).

If we only had Josephus' *Antiquities*, we might assume that Syllaeus was indeed executed in 9 BC. However, Syllaeus appears again in Josephus' *Jewish War*, once again plotting against Herod. Josephus refers to him in *War* 1:574 as having 'disregarded Caesar's orders,' which presumably means that he avoided execution and managed to get out of paying the money he owed. From the coins, as we shall see below, it is quite possible that there was a brief period in which Aretas IV and Syllaeus were both in power, before Syllaeus overreached himself again in 6 BC. Syllaeus was at this point also accused of killing a number of Aretas' friends, according to Josephus. Josephus also writes that Syllaeus refused to pay what he owed to Herod, instead bribing Augustus' treasurer and Corinthus, one of Herod's bodyguards (Josephus AJ. 16.282). These plots were eventually discovered and those involved were tried first in Syria and then in Rome. It is likely that it was in 6 BC that Syllaeus was executed, having previously avoided death in 9 BC after being exposed as a liar to Augustus (Strabo, *Geography*, 16.4.24).

### 6. THE SYLLAEUS COINS

A number of coins have been discovered dating from the chaotic period following

the death of Obodas. They show the influence of Syllaeus and his supporters in Nabataea at this time. At one point, while Syllaeus was in Rome and Aretas had not yet been confirmed as ruler by Augustus, Syllaeus could have been the one closest to being recognised by Augustus. The coins were probably minted to emphasize this fact and initially as a challenge to Aretas. Later coins, however, reveal a rather more cooperative relationship (Schwentzel 2005: 154-55; Kropp 2013: 477; Meshorer 1975: 36-40). It is quite possible that the Syllaeus coins used the imagery of Obodas III to add credibility to Syllaeus' claim to the throne. An inscription uncovered by Claremont-Ganneau in Miletus was set up by Syllaeus as a tribute to king Obodas, with Syllaeus presented as being of high rank, being described as 'brother to the king.' The inscription gives the date in the form of a year of Obodas III's rule, rather than a date based on Aretas or Syllaeus' rule. The use of Obodas' portrait on coins could be seen as an attempt by Syllaeus to justify his usurpation of power based on his connection to the former king. It appears, however, that he did not have the confidence to present himself on coins as king in his own right.

The silver coins associated with Syllaeus weighing around 2.2g, in contrast to the silver coins of Obodas III and Aretas IV which normally weigh about 4.5g. An even smaller coin than these was found among those belonging to Syllaeus, which weighed a mere 0.86g, due to perforation and wear. This could be explained by the power struggle following Obodas' death, where Syllaeus needed silver to buy the support of the army and in Rome. As a result, silver for the minting of coins was in short supply and had to be divided into smaller pieces for minting coins.

The silver coins do not contain complete inscriptions but only letters that could stand for names. The Aramaic letters H and S are prominent. Neither is likely to be a numeral or a date, as no relevant dates exist. It has been suggested that they refer to Aretas and Shuqilat. However, the name

Shuqilat does not appear on coins before AD 18. Furthermore, the portrait looks like that of Obodas, with its characteristically strong chin, rather than of Aretas IV. Based on the inscription described above, we can see why Syllaeus would mint coins with Obodas' portrait, but it is hard to see why Aretas IV would do such a thing. The bronze coins associated with Syllaeus again have the portrait of Obodas and the monogram of Syllaeus. A common image on the coins is of two cornucopiae, which echo the symbolism used on other coins. The cornucopia, or horn of plenty, is an image that occurs on some of the coins of king Aretas IV as well. It is a Hellenistic symbol of fertility and abundance that had also been adopted in Nabataea.



Figure 2a Obverse and reverse description of the first coin.

Obverse Description	Diademed head of Obodas III right
Reverse Description	Aramaic shin (Syllaeus) and het (Aretas) within wreath
Weight	1g
Metal	Silver
Diameter	11 mm
Die Axis	↑
Comparison	Schmitt-Korte and Price "Nabataean Coinage III", NC 1994, pl. 10



Figure 2b obverse and reverse description of the second coin.

Obverse Description	Head of Nabataean ruler Obodas III, with hair in cascading rows of curls; dotted border.
Reverse Description	Eagle standing left and the Aramaic shin (Syllaeus) and ḥā' (Aretas IV)
Weight	2g
Metal	Silver
Diameter	15 mm
Die Axis	
Comparison	Meshorer 1975, Coin No. 40

If we do have a combination of Aretas and Syllaeus, this would indicate a partnership rather than open hostility. Such an alliance could have taken place following Syllaeus' dismissal from Rome in 9 BC. Aretas was king but Syllaeus had enough support in the country to stir up trouble if provoked. As a result, neither Aretas nor Syllaeus were able to dispose of each other. This explains why the *H* of Aretas and the *S* of Syllaeus appear together on coins, first with Obodas' portrait when the succession

was in doubt, and then with that of Aretas when it had been confirmed by Rome (Schmitt-Korte and Price 1994, 101).

The presence of Obodas' portrait is a sign of the influence of Syllaeus and followers. The small silver coins were still used 10 or 11 years into the reign of Aretas (Schmitt-Korte and Price 1994: 102). Josephus also hints at this partnership in War 1:574, where he states that Aretas was simply Syllaeus' sovereign, suggesting that any previous hostilities had ceased.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The historical and archaeological material presents Syllaeus as an important figure in the history of the Nabataean culture. The relationship between the Nabataeans and the Romans was demonstrably strengthened during the reign of Aretas IV. Arguably, the Romans found in Aretas IV the right economic partner, while he was able to take advantage of their military prowess. Syllaeus' ambition was likewise known to the Romans, which ultimately led to his downfall.

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