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The blocked-out capital is usually regarded as one of the characteristic elements of proper Nabataean architecture. But the question of how and why this style came into being is rarely addressed. This article argues that its use was dictated by the properties of the soft local stone, and that its use was by no means restricted to the Nabataean realm. Instead it occurred at many sites within a similar geological setting. Using capitals in their roughed-out state soon developed into a regional fashion and typologically the capitals appeared more and more removed from the finished Corinthian shape. Where different qualities of stone were locally available, blocked-out capitals have often been used in one and the same building in combination with elaborate Corinthian capitals. Several reasons may have dictated the choice. One of them was the demand for more durable shapes on facades than a fragile ornamentation could provide.

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