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## **Newly Discovered Tombs in the Hinterland of Petra**

### **Introduction**

During the first season of the ‘Petra Hinterland Tombs Project’ (PHTP) in 2012, eleven<sup>1</sup> new tombs were recorded in the Jibāl ash-Sharāh mountain range, that is in the areas to the north-east, east and south-east of Petra. These tombs present a variety of types, both rock-cut and built, and according to the architectural style and scattered pottery sherds, belong to a primary date range of the 1st through 3rd centuries AD. Several of the tombs had already been noted by F. Abudanah during his previous surveys in the area (Abudanah 2004: 51–69; 2006), but they had never been properly documented. Their visibility in the landscape was in fact largely a result of them having been looted and vandalised, which in some cases had taken place quite recently according to local residents and dated images from Google Earth. Faced with the threat of further illegal excavation and pillage, the first fieldwork season of the PHTP involved documentation and study of these tombs over an 11-day period in November 2012. This was seen as a matter of urgency before more data and information was lost.

Among the tombs recorded during our survey,

a particular type emerged that was remarkable for its monumentality, construction techniques and setting. This type of tomb is essentially a subterranean chamber (or hypogeum) with loculi, constructed of irregular ashlars, and in some cases topped with a monumental surface structure. Two similar tombs had already been discovered and excavated by the Department of Antiquities in this area – one in Wādī Mūsa and the other in as-Sadaqa – but received little attention in scholarship as they had only been presented in preliminary report form and were somewhat overshadowed by the monumental façade tombs inside Petra<sup>2</sup>. The former tombs were dated to the 1st century AD (late Nabataean period) based on pottery and other finds. The five new tombs of this type discovered by the PHTP therefore might reasonably belong to this period given the similarities in design and the relatively homogeneous corpus of collected ceramics. However, this remains to be verified through clearance and excavation of the chambers and loculi.

The important new discovery of these tombs by the PHTP reveals that we are dealing here with a specific type of tomb apparently common to Petra’s hinterland but remarkably different from

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1. A further three structures (PHTP 6, 9 and 14) were recorded as ‘possible’ tombs.  
2. In addition, a tomb (JSS 159) visited by Laurent Tholbecq and Hani Falahat during Tholbecq’s Jibāl ash-Sharāh survey (Thol-

becq 2001: 404, fig. 7) is described as being like the tomb at as-Sadaqa. According to the published photo, this seems to correspond to our PHTP Tomb 1, but the location of JSS 159 on Tholbecq’s map (2013: 309) is incorrect.

the tombs inside Petra, many of which may have been contemporary (Wadeson 2010: 48–69). The study of these newly discovered tombs has significant ramifications for our understanding of life and society in the hinterland of Petra. It also contributes to the currently known repertoire of Nabataean funerary architecture and enhances knowledge of burial practices in rural areas of the Nabataean kingdom and later Provincia Arabia.

While the preliminary results from the first season of the PHTP will be published in the forthcoming issue of the *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*<sup>3</sup>, which includes a detailed description of all tombs recorded, this paper focuses specifically on the five monumental hypogea with loculi in order to explore this apparently new type of tomb and to assess its place in Nabataean funerary architecture. After revisiting the previously known examples of the Wādī Mūsa and as-Sadaqa tombs, the characteristics and setting of the newly discovered hypogea will be discussed and considered in relation to the former tombs. We will then seek out comparative examples of such tombs in other parts of the Nabataean kingdom and in the wider region in order to shed light on their chronology and architectural influences.

### Previously Known Monumental Hypogea in the Hinterland of Petra

*Wadi Musa (WM) 25 ('an-Naqla' Cemetery), Wādī Mūsa*

During building works in Wādī Mūsa in 1997, Tomb WM 25 was uncovered and excavated by the Department of Antiquities before being built over. It is located on the eastern edge of Wādī Mūsa, above the site of Khirbet Nawafleh, and apparently belongs to an ancient cemetery ('Amr and al-Momani 2001: 268). The excavation report has not been published, but the tomb was mentioned in reports on the 'Wādī Mūsa Water Supply and Wastewater Project' ('Amr *et al.* 1998: 526; 'Amr and al-Momani 2001: 268). Furthermore, Megan Perry studied the skeletal remains and kindly provided a photo of the tomb before it was built over, as well as an unpublished report<sup>4</sup>.

Described as a 'family' tomb, consisting of loculi built inside a subterranean cave ('Amr and al-Momani 2001: 268), Perry adds that it was a large, vaulted tomb with twenty loculi built into the east and north walls (FIG. 1). Furthermore, she notes that there were two rock-cut chambers in the eastern end and one pit grave sunk in the



1. Wādī Mūsa (WM) Tomb 25, 'an-Naqla' cemetery (Photo courtesy of M. Perry).

3. Wadeson, Abudanah and Holman (forthcoming).

4. M. A. Perry: 'A Nabataean Tomb found near Khirbet Nawafleh, Wadi Musa, Jordan' (unpublished).

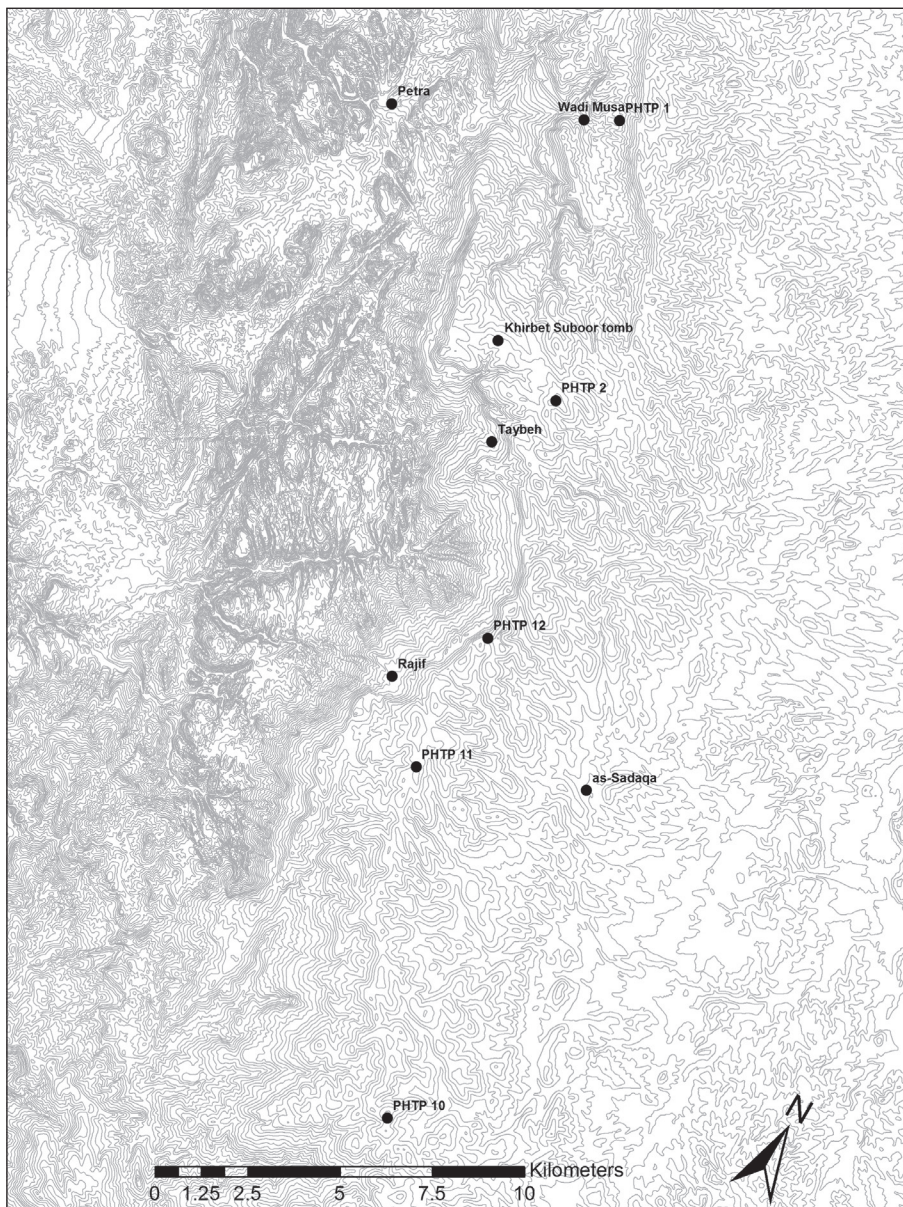
floor of the main chamber, which was accessed by a stairway leading down from the south-west corner. The photo reproduced here appears to show a view down into the main chamber, with the stairway visible in the bottom left. It is also possible to see the springers for the arches that spanned the east and west walls. In her study of the human remains, Perry counted a minimum number of 34 individuals buried in this tomb. The excavators dated it to the 1st century AD, based on ceramic finds, and thus called it a ‘Nabataean’ tomb (‘Amr and al-Momani 2001: 268).

Another similar tomb was apparently discovered just to the east of WM 25, while a further hypogeum with loculi – WM 33 – was

recorded as being almost directly above ‘Ayn Mūsa (‘Amr and al-Momani 2001: 270). Only the upper level of this tomb was apparently exposed during the laying of pipeline trenches for the ‘Wādī Mūsa Water Supply and Wastewater Project’.

#### *The ‘Nabataean’ tomb at as-Sadaqa*

A monumental, subterranean tomb was also excavated by the Department of Antiquities at the site of as-Sadaqa, 26 kilometres south-east of Petra (Kurdi 1972: 85–87) (FIG. 2). The tomb is located in an isolated and commanding position on top of the *tell*, to the east of the ancient settlement. It consists of a square



2. Tombs in the hinterland of Petra mentioned in the text (Map by F. Abudanah).

structure at surface level built of massive ashlars and measuring *ca.* 6 × 6 metres (FIG. 3). The south-west wall is the best preserved. In the centre of this structure, a vertical shaft (once sealed with covering slabs) provided access to two facing walls of subterranean loculi built on either side of the shaft (FIG. 4). The shaft measured 4.5 m in length, 1 m in width and 2.1 m in height (Kurdi 1972: 85). Each wall had four rows of loculi, and each row contained six loculi, thus providing a total of 48 places for burial. The average size of each loculus was 1.75 – 1.90 m in length, 0.45 – 0.47 m in width and 0.40 – 0.45 m in height (Kurdi 1972: 85). Although the tomb had been robbed before it was excavated, skeletal remains were found *in situ* in the loculi, as well as twenty lamps and abundant ceramics (Kurdi 1972: 86). According to the excavators, the pottery suggested a 1st century AD date (Kurdi 1972: 87).

Unlike the tomb excavated in Wādī Mūsa (WM 25), described above, the Sadaqa tomb contains a central access shaft, rather than a central chamber. Since the shaft was narrow in width, it could be easily sealed with covering slabs, and there was no need for vaulting. Nevertheless, the construction technique and appearance of the loculi are almost identical to

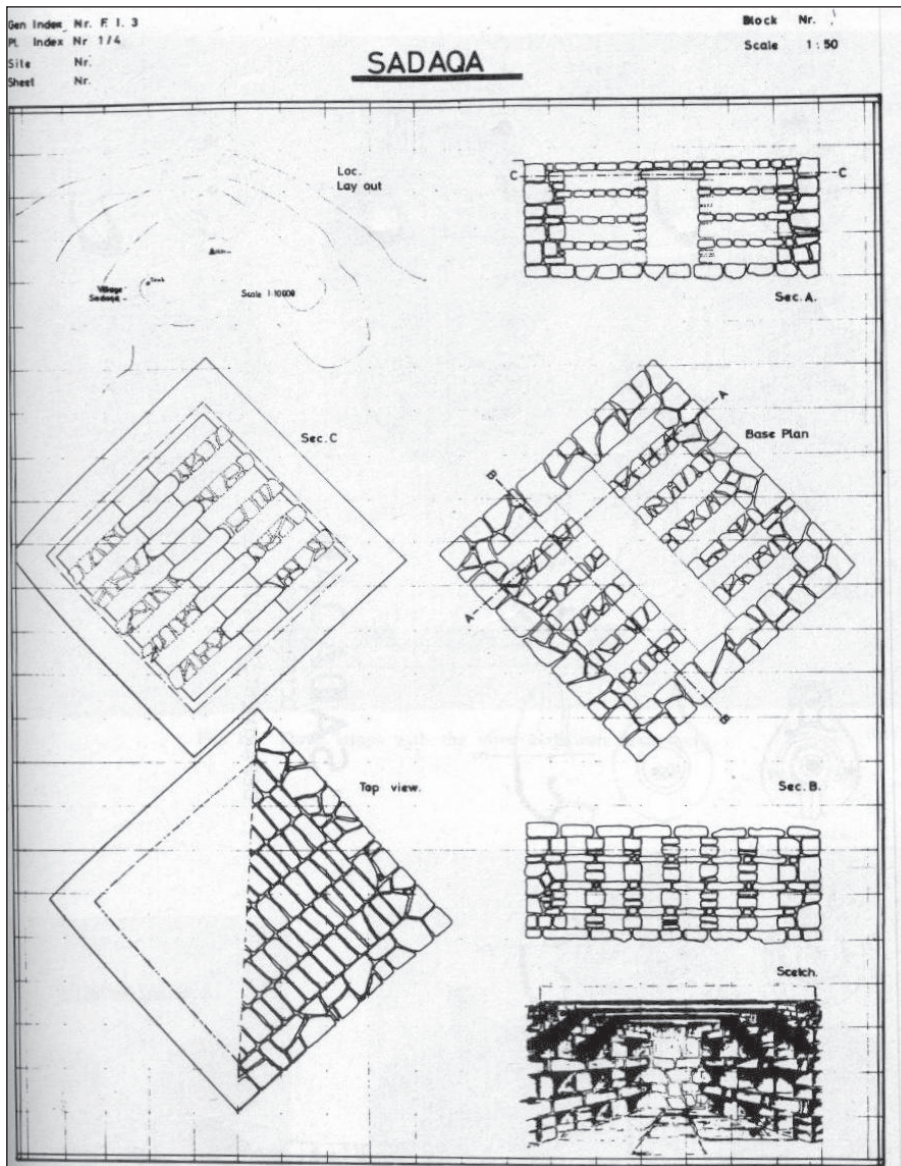
Tomb WM 25, and both tombs have been dated to the 1st century AD. Furthermore, they were both intended for the burials of a large number of individuals, possibly several generations of the same family. This tomb, and the Wādī Mūsa tomb, could be interpreted as two variants of the same general type, both of which have parallels in the new tombs discovered by the PHTP.

### Newly Discovered Monumental Hypogea in the Hinterland of Petra: The PHTP Tombs

The Jibal ash-Sharāh mountain range extends in a north - south line to the east of the mountains of Petra. It is characterised by rocky hills that are often intersected by small valley systems and occasionally by great ravines. The five hypogea we recorded in the 2012 season of the PHTP are situated in isolated positions, roughly in a line along the top of the Sharā ridge (FIG. 2). Their precise locations are detailed in TABLE 1. Being located on the highest points of the mountain range afforded them a commanding view over the surrounding landscape, sometimes with direct views towards Petra, as is the case for PHTP Tombs 1 and 12. It also meant that the tombs themselves were visible from a distance, depending of course on the height of their superstructure.



3. Nabataean tomb at Sadaqa  
(Photo by L. Wadeson).



4. Plan and section of the Nabataean tomb at Sadaqa (*Kurdi 1972: pl. on p. 163*).

**Table 1.** PHTP Season 1: Location of the hypogea with loculi.

<b>Tomb No.</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>UTM Coordinates</b>	<b>Elevation</b>
PHTP 1	East of 'Ayn Mūsa	0741121; 3357327	1447 m
PHTP 2	East of Taybeh	0739395; 3349737	1711 m
PHTP 10	Northwest of Rās an-Naqb	0734832; 3330296	1691 m
PHTP 11	Southeast of Rajif	0735613; 3339813	1703 m
PHTP 12	Northeast of Rajif	0737555; 3343300	1677 m

Four of the tombs we recorded (PHTP Tombs 1, 2, 10 and 11) are of the same type as WM Tomb 25 (see above), essentially comprising a subterranean, vaulted chamber with rows of square-shaped loculi in the walls, constructed of irregular ashlar blocks (FIGS. 5 and 6). Remains of a possible stairway leading down

to the chamber are visible on the north side of PHTP Tomb 11 (FIG. 7), while it is unclear at present how the other tomb chambers were originally accessed. The chambers are almost square, the smallest measuring 3.75 m<sup>2</sup> and the largest measuring 13.2 m<sup>2</sup>, and the location of the surviving arch springers for the vaulting



5. PHTP Tomb 10 (*Photo by L. Wadeson*).



6. Surviving arch and loculi inside PHTP Tomb 2 (*Photo by L. Wadeson*).



7. PHTP Tomb 11: view towards entrance and ancient road in the background (*Photo by L. Wadeson*).

was noted in different locations for each tomb (TABLE 2).

The number and position of the loculi varies, but their size is fairly consistent across the tombs, as detailed in TABLE 2. Furthermore, they are typically arranged in rows, maximising the wall space. The loculi are usually constructed of horizontally and vertically placed limestone slabs, with small stones filling the gaps. In the case of PHTP Tomb 10, while some loculi were constructed according to this typical method, others were built with small stones only. In PHTP Tomb 11, the loculi are built at

the front and rock-cut at the back (FIG. 8), and at the back of the loculus in the east wall is a carved opening leading to a concealed rock-cut chamber for further burials.

Owing to the looting of the tombs, their chamber floors are blocked with rubble and large blocks which in some cases conceal lower rows of loculi. As with Tomb WM 25, there may even be graves sunk in the floor, which will only become apparent upon clearance of the tombs. Despite the pillage and disturbance of the tombs, human remains were still visible in the loculi and there were abundant ceramic

**Table 2.** PHTP Season 1: Details and measurements of chambers and loculi.

<b>Tomb No.</b>	<b>Chamber Measurements (metres)</b>	<b>Number of Visible Loculi (i.e. minimum number)</b>	<b>Location of Loculi</b>	<b>Average Loculus Measurements (metres)</b>	<b>Location of Arch Springers for Vaulting</b>
PHTP 1	2.57 x 2.42	13	East and west walls	0.50 x 0.50; depth: 2.20	North and south walls
PHTP 2	2.50 x 1.50	14	West and south walls	0.55 x 0.85; depth: 2.30	North and south walls
PHTP 10	2.60 x 2.55	16	North, south, east and west walls	0.55 x 0.60; depth: 2.50	West wall
PHTP 11	4.00 x 3.30	6	East, west and south walls	0.70–1.20 x 0.70–0.85; depth: 1.00–2.70	East and west walls



8. View inside loculus in PHTP Tomb 11 showing built and rock-cut construction (*Photo by L. Wadeson*).

sherds. Furthermore, traces of plaster survive on the walls of PHTP Tomb 10, which would have once concealed the irregularity of the ashlar (FIG. 9).

While the situation is unknown for Tomb WM 25, the tombs we documented appear to have been monumentalised above-ground with

a built structure supported by the vaulting. This is suggested by the mounds of large, scattered ashlar on the surface – displaced from the looting of the tombs and, in the case of PHTP Tomb 2, four walls above the chamber forming a square structure of 5 × 5 metres (FIG. 10). Three courses of the one-metre thick walls



9. Surviving plaster on the south-east wall of PHTP Tomb 10 (*Photo by L. Wadeson*).





10. Surface structure of PHTP Tomb 2 (*Photo by L. Wadeson*).

survive above PHTP Tomb 2 and, on the west side, where they are best preserved, they have an external height of 0.75 m.

The fifth hypogeum we recorded, PHTP Tomb 12, also has a square structure on the surface, built with massive ashlar (FIG. 11). The structure measures  $6.45 \times 6.45$  metres and is best preserved in the south-west and south-east corners. Tomb 12 is approximately four kilometres to the north-east of PHTP Tomb 11

(FIG. 2), to which it is connected by an ancient road. Located to the south-east of Petra, it has a direct view towards Jabal Harūn and the mountains of Petra (FIG. 11), as mentioned above. The tomb itself is heavily blocked with large ashlar and rubble almost up to ground level, however built loculi are visible on the west side, close to the surface (FIG. 12). The position of these loculi in relation to the interior space, and close to the surface, suggests that this



11. PHTP Tomb 12 with Jabal Harūn behind (*Photo by L. Wadeson*).



12. Loculi visible in PHTP Tomb 12 (Photo by L. Wadeson).

tomb is arranged like the tomb at as-Sadaqa, with a central shaft rather than a chamber.

Thus, it appears that we are dealing with two variants of the same general type – a monumental, built hypogeum with loculi, either with a vaulted central chamber or a narrow central shaft covered with massive ashlar. Nevertheless, all these tombs present common characteristics when it comes to their setting. Besides being located in high, prominent points in the landscape, they are usually associated with ancient roads, as is the case for Tombs 2, 10, 11 (FIG. 7) and 12, and also small settlements (a farmstead or hamlet), for example Tombs 2, 10 and 11. Furthermore, Tombs 1, 2 and 10 are situated by ancient walls or within enclosures. These factors may indicate that the tombs also served as territorial markers of family-owned property. Their monumentality and visibility would have no doubt displayed the status of the families that owned them, and their size would have allowed the collective burials of several generations. Whether indeed the individuals buried inside these tombs are from the same families can only be verified through analysis of the skeletal remains.

An isolated, monumental tomb with an

enclosure linked to an ancient road was discovered at Khirbet Suboor (near Taybeh) (FIG. 2) and subsequently excavated by F. Abudanah in collaboration with the Department of Antiquities in 2007 (Abudanah, Tweissi and Falahat 2011: 1–10). Unlike the tombs described above, this tomb consisted of just one subterranean vaulted burial place, built with well-carved ashlar (Abudanah, Tweissi and Falahat 2011: 4, figs 5–6). The individual buried here must have been of considerable importance, given the high quality of construction, monumentality and location of the tomb. Although the date of the tomb is uncertain, the excavators believe it most likely belongs to the Nabataean period owing to the potsherds, architecture and location (2011: 7–9). They suggest that the enclosure demarcated the sanctity of the funerary space which may have been used for activities related to ancestor worship (2011: 7–8) and would be in keeping with Nabataean funerary customs. The concept of a monumental approach to a tomb – as evidenced by the built corridor leading from the ancient road – is also one well-known in the Nabataean funerary tradition (Wadeson 2011: 5–8).

In terms of assigning a date to the newly discovered hypogea, as mentioned above the ceramics collected during the survey were dominated by Nabataean coarse and fine wares, with a primary date range of the 1st through 3rd centuries AD (FIG. 13)<sup>5</sup>. Among the Nabataean painted fineware, Schmid's Phase 3b (Schmid 2000) was the most frequent type recovered. Naturally caution must be employed in using these unstratified sherds to date the tombs; only excavation will provide a clearer picture of their chronology. However, the sherds collected do demonstrate activity at the sites during the period in which Nabataean pottery was produced, and the hypogea present a homogenous corpus of 1st century AD material. Furthermore, a 1st century AD date was assigned to the WM 25 Tomb and the tomb at as-Sadaqa ('Amr *et al.* 1998: 526; 'Amr and al-Momani 2001: 268; Kurdi 1972: 87), which are of the same architectural type. A 1st century AD date has also been proposed for other similar built tombs in the Nabataean kingdom and neighbouring regions (FIG. 18). These comparative examples will now be considered in order to understand this tomb type in a wider architectural and cultural context.

### Comparative Examples in the Nabataean Kingdom and Beyond

The PHTP aims to seek out comparative examples of these built hypogea with loculi recently discovered in Petra's hinterland in order to understand the origin and date of this type of tomb and whether it was originally 'Nabataean' in conception or whether the architectural influences came from neighbouring regions. This aspect of the project is in its early stages and the list of examples presented here is preliminary and far from being exhaustive. We also discuss particular elements of other constructed Nabataean tombs to determine whether the same concepts of funerary space underlie their design.

Since presenting these tombs at ICHAJ 12 in Berlin, it was brought to our attention that a similar vaulted 'Nabataean' hypogaeum was discovered in 1997, 6.5 km north-east of Humaymah, near a caravanserai (Oleson 2010: 29, 62 n. 1; Graf 1995: 252–257)<sup>6</sup>. The tomb had been opened by grave robbers and was then subsequently re-filled by the Department of Antiquities to deter further looting. Although we cannot verify the interior arrangement of the tomb, there are particular aspects that link it



13. Diagnostic sherds from PHTP Tomb 11 (Photo by L. Wadeson).

5. The results of the preliminary ceramics study can be found in Wadeson, Abudanah and Holman (forthcoming).

6. We would like to thank Barbara Reeves for informing us about this tomb, and also for facilitating our visit to the site.

to the PHTP tombs. For example, it is isolated, rather than belonging to a cemetery (the main cemeteries of Ḥumaymah are to the south and west of the settlement), and close to the Via Nova Traiana. In addition, upon visiting the site of the tomb we noted built walls on the surface that once formed some sort of monumental marker (FIG. 14). Oleson believes that the funerary inscription of Marcus Ulpius Su'aidu, published by Hayajneh (2001: 171–185) originates from this tomb (Oleson 2010: 62 n. 1).

Further south, in Wadi Ramm, Megan Perry excavated a large Nabataean - Roman tomb with built loculi to the south of the temple area, within the framework of the Wadi Ramm Cemetery Project (Perry 2007: 6). According to the brief description and image, this tomb bears some similarities to the PHTP hypogea in terms of size and construction. However, rather than being isolated, it appears to belong to a cemetery.

The Nabataean and Roman period monumental tombs at Umm aj-Jimāl in the north perhaps offer the clearest parallels for the PHTP tombs. The most important and well-known of these is the so-called 'Nabataean' tomb, which was first described by Butler

(1913: 206–207, figs 185–186). This is a built hypogeum, located to the south-east of the city. It is accessed by a door on the south, and consists of a central vaulted chamber with rows of loculi built into the walls. Butler suggests it may have been topped with a monument based on the surviving steps at surface level (Butler 1913: 206). Notably, funerary stelae inscribed with Nabataean inscriptions were discovered in the entranceway of the tomb (Butler 1913: 207). Other monumental tombs, the Tomb of Sareidos and the Stelae Tomb, are also vaulted with loculi. These tombs notably have additional chambers in the corner of their main chambers, as observed in PHTP Tomb 11 (Butler 1913: 207–210, figs 188, 190).

Further monumental loculi tombs (BB.1 and BB.2) were excavated in 1996 to the south of the Umm aj-Jimāl settlement that the excavators dated to the early Roman period (1st – 2nd centuries AD) with reuse in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods (Cheyney *et al.* 2009: 340–346). The same team did a spatial study of the distribution of the monumental tombs and discovered that they occur in isolation rather than in groups (Cheyney *et al.* 2009: 355). For this reason, they suggested they were used by separate kinship groups



14. Site of Nabataean tomb north-east of Ḥumaymah (Photo by L. Wadeson).

over several generations that may have owned the surrounding agricultural land (Cheyney *et al.* 2009: 355–356). Also noted is the potential location of the tombs on major thoroughfares in and of the city and their orientation according to the cardinal directions (Cheyney *et al.* 2009: 356–358). These aspects, together with their architectural design, are reminiscent of the PHTP loculi tombs. However, those in Umm aj-Jimāl present a higher quality of construction with well-carved ashlar and sometimes more varied plans.

Parallels to the monumental tombs at Umm aj-Jimāl are found throughout the Hauran (Sartre-Fauriat 2001: Vol. 2, 52–57). Similar examples, although on a much more monumental scale, are also found at Jarash. For example, a monumental built tomb was discovered in the north-west necropolis that consists of a large central corridor flanked by rows of built loculi (FIG. 15) (Smadeh *et al.* 1992: 271–272; 278–279, pl. IV). However, this tomb was built above-ground, contained rich architectural decoration, and the loculi were large and contained sarcophagi (Smadeh *et al.* 1992: 278–279, pl. IV; Seigne 2006: 142–143, fig. 2). Jacques Seigne dated this tomb to the second half of the 2nd century AD based on

its architectural decoration (Seigne 2006: 143).

As mentioned above, the PHTP loculi tombs seem to have been monumentalised by a built structure above the chamber, according to the traces of walls and large ashlar on the surface. The concept of a monumental tomb marker, as distinct from the burial chamber, is well-known in the Nabataean funerary tradition (Wadson 2012: 107). The idea is expressed in funerary inscriptions (*e.g.* a Nabataean inscription from Madaba, *CIS* II 196; Healey 1993: 247–248), where we understand that the monumental part of the tomb, or *nep̄sh* (*np̄š*), memorialised and commemorated the souls of the deceased (Wenning 2001: 87–88; Kühn 2005: 136–228), while the actual burial chamber held the physical remains. This is seen in the monumental rock-cut tombs in Petra and Mada’in Salih, where the decorative façade functioned as the monumental marker.

However, more relevant to our built hypogea are the monuments above the Nabataean tombs at Khirbat adh-Dharīḥ (Lenoble *et al.* 2001: 100–108), Mampsis (Negev 1971: 114–117, pls 21B, 23D) and Dhat Rās (Zayadine 1970: 121–123, fig. 3) which present similar dimensions and are most likely dated to the 1st / 2nd centuries AD. At Mampsis, the tombs in



15. Monumental tomb in the north-west necropolis of Jarash (Photo by L. Wadson).

the Nabataean cemetery were monumentalised by stepped pyramids (Negev 1971: 114–115, pl. 21B) (FIG. 16), while the excavators of the monumental tomb at Khirbat adh-Dharīḥ have proposed that it was topped with a tower-like structure on a stepped base (Lenoble *et al.* 2001: 108, fig. 12) (FIG. 17). Nevertheless, the burial chambers of these tombs differ from the PHTP tombs: those at Dhat Rās consist of a rock-cut chamber with tall loculi and floor graves,

similar to the tombs at Petra, and the tombs at Mampsis and Khirbat adh-Dharīḥ have graves sunk vertically into the ground.

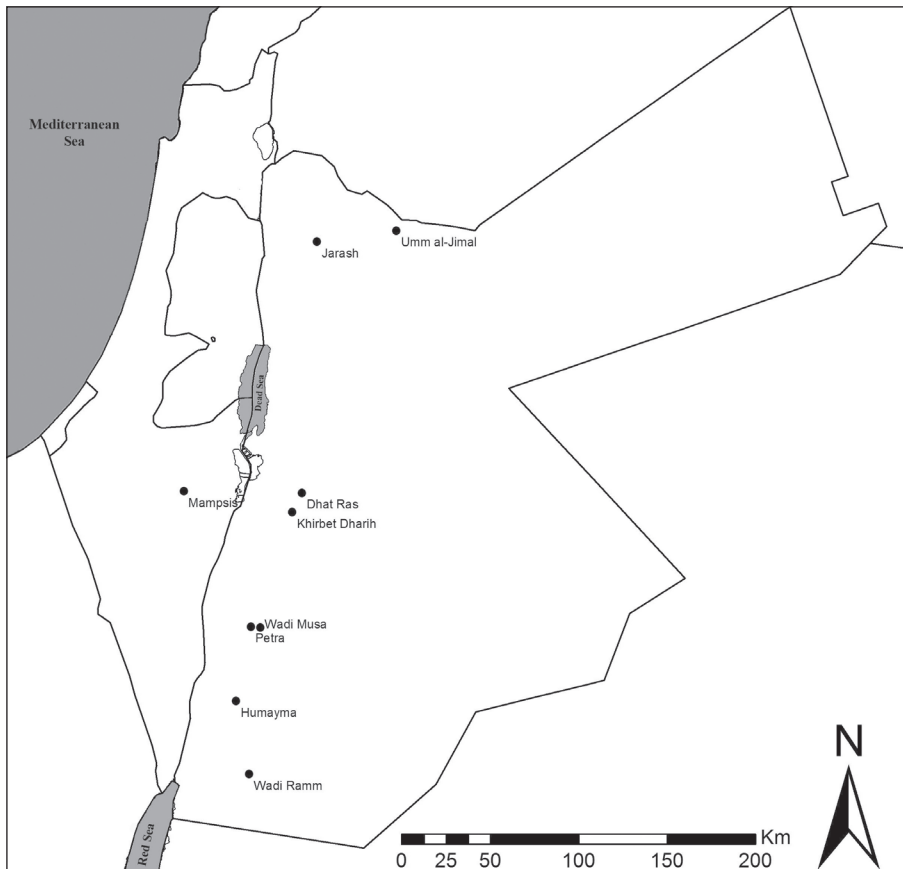
An important aspect of the Nabataean funerary tradition was also the funerary feasting and associated activities which took place at the tomb site, as clearly evidenced at Petra (Wadeson 2011: 8–10; 2013: 18–24; Sachet 2010: 249–262.). Among the tombs discussed in this section, only those at Mampsis and Khirbat



16. Monumental tomb at Mampsis (*Photo by L. Wadeson*).



17. Monumental tomb at Khirbat adh-Dharīḥ (*Photo by L. Wadeson*).



18. Other sites with monumental hypogea mentioned in the text (Map by F. Abudannah).

adh-Dharīh were so far found with what may be an installation for funerary feasting (Negev 1971: 111–114, figs 2–4, pl. 21C; Lenoble *et al.* 2001: 106–107). This consists of a small, rectangular platform (also termed a ‘*massif*’ or ‘table’ by the excavators) in the vicinity of the tombs, which the excavators propose may have either been used for meals (Negev 1971: 114) or other activities, such as offerings, laying out of the corpse or erecting nepheshes (Lenoble *et al.* 2001: 147). At this stage we do not know if the hypogea in the hinterland of Petra were accompanied by such installations owing to thick deposits around the tomb. This can only be elucidated through excavation.

### Concluding Remarks

The newly discovered hypogea with loculi in the hinterland of Petra thus share notable characteristics of design and concept with other monumental built tombs in the Nabataean kingdom and neighbouring regions during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. However, until

excavation of the PHTP tombs is undertaken and a firmer chronology is established, it is not possible to say at this stage where these architectural concepts originated. On the one hand, the tombs belong to an established tradition of funerary architecture in the region according to their general characteristics. But on the other hand, their particular aspects, such as construction techniques, size, plan and location, suggest that they ought to be considered as a specific group or tomb type so far restricted to the Jibāl ash-Sharāh area.

These tombs, which held numerous interments, were prominent in the landscape and associated with ancient roads and small settlements, most likely served as territorial markers for landowners in Petra’s hinterland, as well as being testimonials to the status and wealth of the families. Thus, they are an important source of information for life and society in the Jibāl ash-Sharāh during the late Nabataean and early Roman periods. The planned excavation of these tombs by the PHTP

will shed light not only on their chronology, but also on who was buried in them and their associated funerary rituals. This will also provide useful data for comparative studies with monumental tombs in urban centres, such as Petra, during the Nabataean period.

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