

The Aşlah Triclinium Complex At Petra: 100 Years Of Research

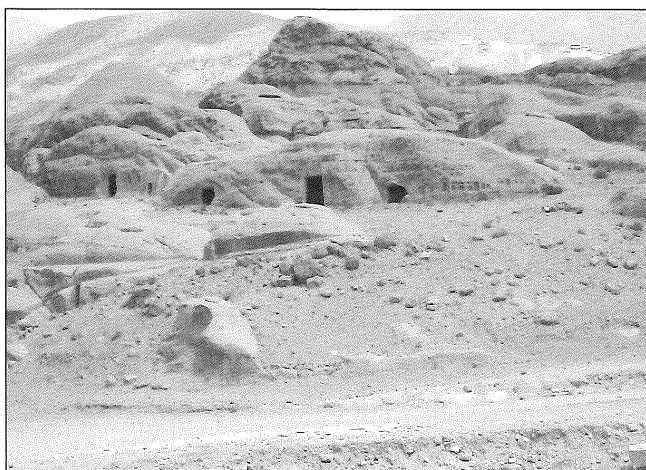
Bāb as-Sīq is a large Nabataean necropolis located on both sides of Wādī Mūsā, just outside Petra and the city gate. Starcky related the necropolis to Gaia, modern Wādī Mūsā (Starcky 1966: 952), but the installations and monuments are oriented towards Petra. The necropolis can be divided into several different complexes. The most western complex on the north bank of Wādī Mūsā is the Aşlah Triclinium complex. This complex is situated on a rocky plateau of the Bāb as-Sīq area, directly opposite the entrance into the Sīq. It is slightly hidden from visitors owing to its elevated position above the path along Wādī Mūsā which leads into the Sīq (FIG. 1). The site is flanked by a couple of hillocks to the south and west, high above the path along Wādī Mūsā. To the south, the two water channels fed by 'Ayn Mūsā are still well-preserved, while the long rock of the Aşlah Triclinium forms its eastern border. However, the eastern face of this rock does not belong to the Aşlah Triclinium complex and is without installations. To the north, the site is con-

finied by more elevated rock-cut structures with a small entrance opening towards ar-Ramla plateau.

When compared with old pictures (Brünnnow 1904: figs 230, 232; Dalman 1908: fig. 2, 1912: fig. 33; Kennedy 1925: fig. 189) (FIG. 2), the only change to the area is the recently paved tourist road. The site was inhabited by the Bedul up to 1985 and some of the chambers are still used by them today as a shady place for cooking and sleeping, or to shelter a horse.

Very few visitors ascend the slope opposite the Obelisk Tomb and until now the site has not received much scholarly attention. In general terms, there have been two main phases of research. First, in 1904 Brünnnow, followed by Dalman in 1908 and 1912, made the first general — and partially still valid — documentation of the rock-cut monuments at Petra. More recently, in 1990-1991 Zayadine and Farajat thoroughly surveyed the site, followed in 1995 by Merklein and the author. Martinaud *et al.* carried out some as yet unpublished geophysical research in 2003 (information from I. Sachet, June 2010).

The Aşlah Triclinium complex is named after an inscription carved into a triclinium, dated to around 96 - 95 BC. This is the oldest dated Nabataean in-



1. Aşlah Triclinium complex with triclinium and lateral rooms in the centre (Southern Terrace) and chamber tomb in the background (Northern Terrace) (R. Wenning).



2. Aşlah Triclinium complex (Kennedy 1925: fig. 189).

scription at Petra. Therefore, this site was included within the Early Petra Project, a French-German collaboration organized by Michele Mouton and Stephan G. Schmid, sponsored by the German Research Association (DFG) and TOPOI, the excellence cluster at Humboldt University Berlin. The first excavation season of the International Aşlah Project (IAP) was conducted in March-April 2010, directed by the author on behalf of the University of Muenster. The former Director General of the Department of Antiquities, the late Dr Fawwaz al-Khraysheh, kindly granted the permit and expressed his interest in the project. Mohammad Abdel Aziz al-Marahleh represented the Department of Antiquities during the excavations and Laurent Gorgerat from Basel Antikenmuseum was field-director. The author wishes to express his gratitude to all for their support.

Nomenclature

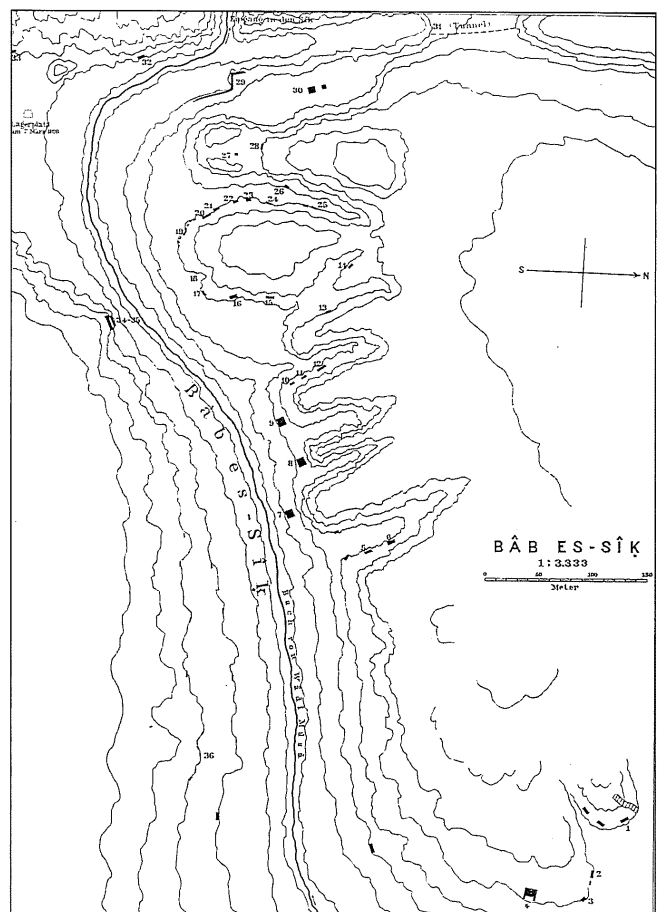
Usually the site is referred to as part of the Bāb as-Sīq area (Dalman 1908: 5). Only Musil considered the pit graves of the site to be part of the al-Mudhlim area (Musil 1907: 50). This may explain why Taylor (2001: 88) located the site in a *wadi* off Bāb as-Sīq. In 1930 Canaan (1930: 46) designated the western part of the northern Bab as-Sīq area et-Tnub; Zayadine and Farajat (1991: 275) note that the triclinium is also known as Magharat et-Tnub. Dalman (Dalman 1908: 107) referred to the Aşlah Triclinium complex as the “Bāb as-Sīq sanctuary”. However, the triclinium below the Obelisk Tomb is already known as the “Bab as-Siq Triclinium” (Br. 34) (McKenzie 1990: 154-156). We therefore refer to the site as the “Aşlah Triclinium complex”, in order to avoid confusion with that triclinium and the few other triclinia of the Bāb as-Sīq necropolis. The IAP has sub-divided the area into the Southern Terrace, with the triclinium, and the Northern Terrace, with the chamber tomb.

Even though the Aşlah Triclinium complex could be considered a “sanctuary” according to the definition of Dalman (1907: 67-69), we currently prefer to leave its precise definition open.

Area Maps and Site Maps

In 1904, Brünnow was the first to mention and list the monuments of the Aşlah Triclinium complex (Brünnow and Domaszewski 1904: 199-203, figs 229-232 pl. III). He made no reference to any earlier descriptions. On plate III, he published the

first map of the Bab as-Siq area (FIG. 3). However, Brünnow’s drawing exaggerates the size of the long, stretched rock of the Aşlah Triclinium. Dalman, Musil, Canaan and Lindner — amongst others — paid no greater attention to the site during their mapping. A more recent map of Petra, including the Bāb as-Sīq area, was published by the Royal Jordanian Geographic Centre as *The Tourist Map of Petra* in 1988 (cf. Nehmé 2003: 151-152 for the various new maps and associated problems). The French published a valuable area map of Bab as-Siq in 1999 (Nehmé 2003: 152, fig. 142). Both maps are based on aerial photography undertaken in 1974 and 1981, but they lack detail in the area of the Aşlah Triclinium complex. A sketch of the Aşlah Triclinium complex made in 1997 by Merklein as part of the Petra Niches Project (PNP) was published by Kühn (2005: fig. 8), but has now been superseded by a more recent map produced by the IAP (Gorgerat and Wenning 2010: fig. 1). The UTM co-ordinates of the triclinium are 736772 357186.



3. Aşlah Triclinium complex; detail of map by Brünnow and von Domaszewski (1904: plate III).

Numbering of the Monuments by Brünnow.

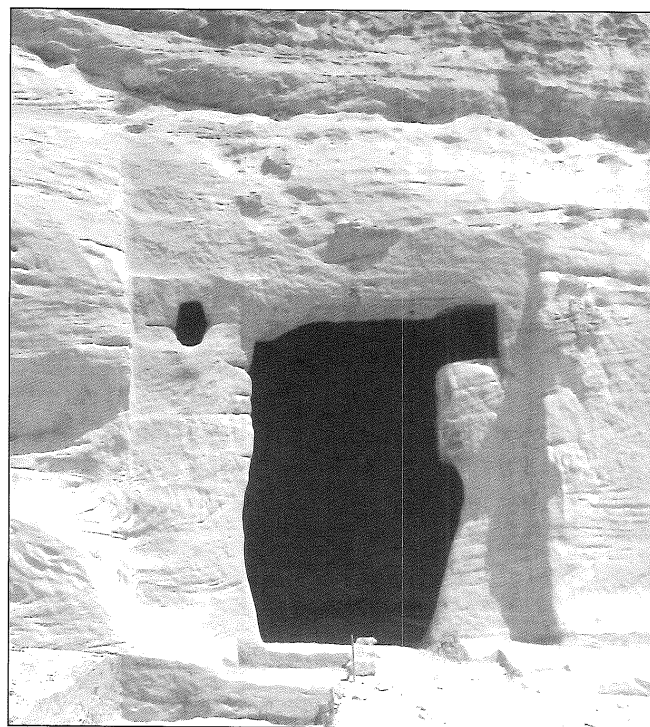
On his map of Bāb as-Sīq, Brünnow indicated the position of the monuments of the Aşlah Triclinium complex by numbering them 19 - 28 (Brünnow 1904: pl. III). He started with an “*Opferische*”, or votive niche (Br. 19), but refers to the row of votive niches on the rock face (Brünnow 1904: fig. 230). The triclinium is listed as Br. 21. Nothing is said about the triclinium apart from a rough indication of its size: “six paces squared”. Brünnow mentions Nabataean inscriptions, but as he did not read and copy them he failed to recognize their significance. If the plural form does not refer to the four lines of the Aşlah inscription(s), it is possible that Brünnow also noticed the second Nabataean inscription in the chamber. All later research refers only to the famous Aşlah inscription(s). In 2010 the author ‘discovered’ another Nabataean inscription on the south wall (Gorgerat and Wenning 2010: fig. 5), which has not been mentioned elsewhere but which had apparently already been recognized by Milik (information from L. Nehmé, 2010). The inscription is badly preserved and difficult to read, but seems to hold promising information. It will be published by Nehmé in the context of the IAP as a supplement to CIS II.

Brünnow interpreted the triclinium as “*Heiligtum*”, or sanctuary, as he did most of the rock-cut chambers with inscriptions or niches. He therefore refers the small right chamber with two wall niches (Br. 20) as a small sanctuary, but the small left chamber without niches as just a chamber (Br. 22). The two niches of Br. 20 do not fit the characteristics of votive niches and may thus be interpreted as a kind of cupboard. The possibility that they relate to Crusader occupation of this location needs further investigation. Either way, the room is clearly not a sanctuary. The function of the two lateral small rooms in relation to the triclinium still remains unclear. Many scholars have followed Brünnow (and Dalman 1908: 107) in their identification of the triclinium as a ‘sanctuary’.

Brünnow also listed niches (Br. 23) on the northern terrace. In addition, he mentioned a large rock-cut chamber tomb with an entrance door (Br. 24), but did not give any more details - presumably because the façade seemed to be without decoration and Brünnow and von Domaszewski were more interested in the typology of decorated tomb façades. However, the upper part of the entrance shows cuttings which seem to point to some sort of

former decoration (FIG. 4). In fact, during the first IAP season fragments of mouldings were found in front of the entrance (Gorgerat and Wenning 2010: fig. 23), which could have been part of the original framing of the entrance as suggested by Gorgerat.

Brünnow listed another large chamber tomb (Br. 26) with an entrance door of the same size as triclinium Br. 21. This ‘tomb’ was more correctly identified as a large rock-cut water reservoir by Zayadine and Farajat (1991: 275). Brünnow mentioned red-coloured Nabataean inscriptions in the ‘tomb’. Their traces do not allow the signs to be classified as Nabataean; they might equally be mediaeval in date or even younger. The red-coloured inscriptions were noticed on the remaining plaster of the reservoir as well as on the walls where the plaster is lost, and are therefore clearly secondary. The reservoir is situated north of the site, just off a small pathway leading through the rocks to ar-Ramla plateau. Here, Brünnow also noticed a few niches (Br. 25). There are four votive niches and one niche basin on both sides of the pathway. Returning to the Northern Terrace, Brünnow listed a cistern (Br. 27) and a “small niche with an altar” (Br. 28) cut into the rock close to the cistern. Today the cistern is completely filled with sand, stones and rubbish. The large stone cistern cover is broken



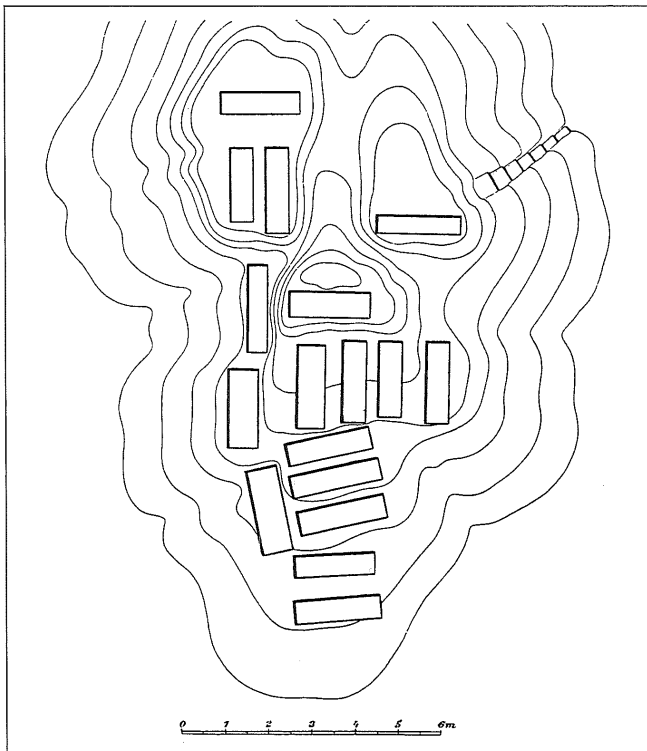
4. Entrance of Tomb Br. 24 with traces of framing (R. Wenning).

and buried in the rubbish (FIG. 5).

Brünnow did not mention the many rock-cut pit graves at the site. Musil gave a brief description of the graves but did not mention any other feature of the Aşlah Triclinium complex (Musil 1907: 50, figs 13-14). Musil only discussed and mapped the most northern of the hillocks, which had 17 pit graves (FIG. 6). These were all that featured in the litera-



5. Cover stone of cistern D. 19, now broken (M. Lindner).



6. Old map of the pit graves on one of the hillocks at the edge of the area (Musil 1907: fig. 14).

ture until the beginning of the PNP. In fact, there are a total of 53 visible pit and shaft graves on the six hillocks and in the flat bedrock area, as Merklein indicated in his 1997 sketch (Kühn 2005: 71-72, 247, fig. 8). All pit graves appear to be looted and are now partially buried by sand and rubble. Nevertheless, they do shed light on Nabataean funerary practices and should be documented.

It is debatable whether or not these pit graves belong to the Aşlah Triclinium complex and whether or not they were intentionally positioned opposite the entrance to the Σπq. The group described by Musil is indeed the most interesting. This rock can be reached by a staircase from the area below the plateau of the Aşlah Triclinium complex. Contrary to Musil's description, the staircase consists not of ten, but of more than twenty steps, as well as a votive niche (D. 25). This 'approach' may be one reason not to associate the pit graves too closely with the Aşlah Triclinium complex and not to consider the hillocks as a burial ground for members of the Aşlah clan as has been previously suggested. Having said that, the pit graves of the easternmost hillock do seem to be oriented towards the triclinium, on the basis of the steps leading up to the graves (cf. Kühn 2005: 72-73, 247).

Numbering of the Monuments by Dalman

Dalman added more information on the Aşlah Triclinium complex in his documentation of the "*Felsheiligtümer*" at Petra, numbering the monuments 15 - 21 (Dalman 1908: 107). Dalman was especially interested in the votive niches on the rock face of the Aşlah Triclinium (D. 15a-t; Dalman 1912: fig. 33) and the one near the cistern (D. 20; Dalman 1908: fig. 27), but did not mention the group of Br. 25. He made a careful description of the niches, but a few corrections are nevertheless necessary. Under the auspices of the Petra Niches Project (PNP), the author is currently documenting and analysing all votive niches in Petra. At a rough estimate, there are more than 1300 rock-cut votive niches. The PNP is proceeding area by area and has so covered the eastern half of Petra, counting *ca.* 850 examples (Merklein and Wenning 2001; Wenning 2010).

As D. 15r is not a niche at all and D. 15n is a niche basin, as already indicated by Dalman, the number of (votive) niches on the triclinium rock face is reduced from 20 to 18. Not only D. 15l, but also D. 15i and D. 15m, contain sunken *baetyls* (to

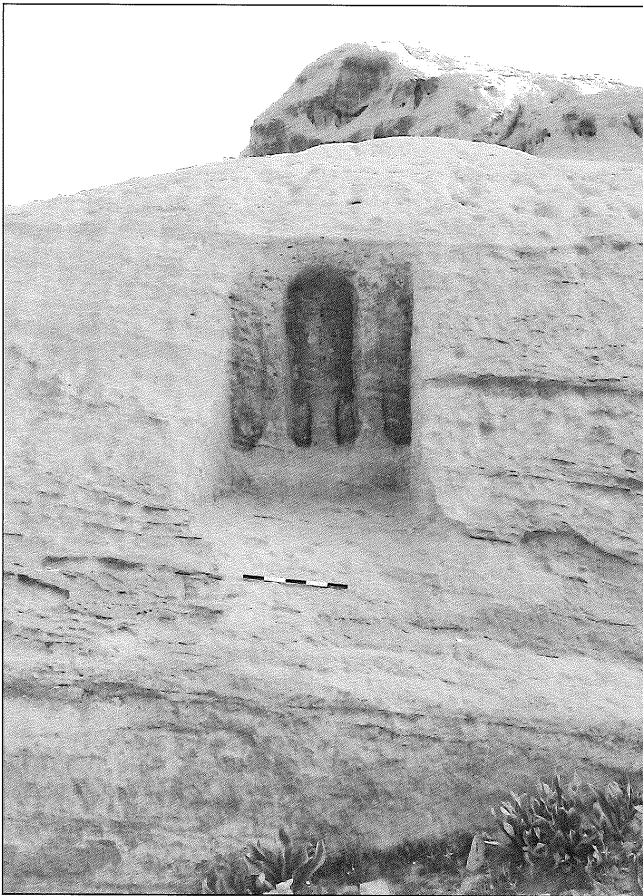
discourage mispronunciation the author exchanges the previously used *betyl* with *baetyl*, but rejects the demand to replace *baetyl* with *idol*). The main niche of the register is D. 15c, with an arch carried by pilasters and a pedestal below the niche (Gorgerat and Wenning 2010: fig. 9), which is the Nabataean *mtwb* or seat of the deity (Wenning 2007: 258). The other niches are empty, providing space for portable *baetyls* to be brought to the site for special reasons.

D. 20 is an elaborate niche, arched with pilasters framing a small rectangular *baetyl* and resting on a rock-cut bench (FIG. 7). In front of it is another, larger rock-cut feature where donations could have been placed, but it is not an altar as termed by Brünnow. So far as its position is concerned, it can be assumed that the niche is related to the cistern (D. 17) and the water running down through channels from the higher rocky outcrops. At Petra, votive niches are often found in association with running water (Wenning 2004: 39). It is no wonder that in this arid area, the deity was thanked for

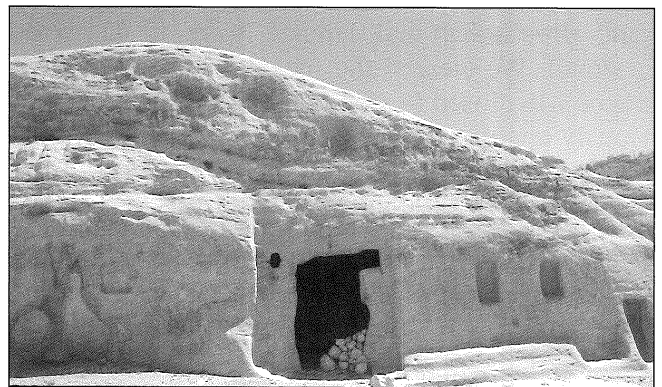
‘living water’. According to Dalman, the Aşlah Triclinium complex ends with this niche and the pit graves (D. 21) do not belong to this complex; they were however cited when he interpreted the site as a funeral structure (Dalman 1908: 67, 107).

Dalman mentioned six empty niches (D. 18) on the façade of the rock into which tomb Br. 24 is cut, but there are in fact four pairs of niches. They are no votive niches, as some scholars have assumed, but rather abutments for arches of various architectural structures that once stood in front of the rock (FIG. 8). The different heights of the abutments are suggestive of relatively complex built architecture. The rock face also has a cemented water basin (D. 18a), a high cupboard-like niche and the remains of a wall protruding to the west. Additionally, there are various features cut into the bedrock that once functioned as wall foundations (Gorgerat and Wenning 2010: fig. 15). It is therefore surprising that the buildings were not mentioned before Merklein and the author started the PNP in 1997 (cf. Kühn 2005: 70; Wenning 2007: 258). The walls and foundations were partly excavated in the first season of the IAP and will be completely cleared during the second season in 2011.

Dalman did not enter the triclinium (FIG. 9) during his first visits to Petra, being afraid of fleas (Dalman 1912: 3; cf. Musil 1907: 48). In 1909 however, he mastered his fear and gave measurements (5.38 x 5.63 m) and detailed descriptions of the niche basin (D. 17a), incisions (D. 17b-c) (Dalman 1912: 40, figs 34-35), drawings of camels (D. 17d) and the famous Aşlah inscription (Dalman 1912: 99-101 no. 90, fig. 68 and facsimile p. 172). Dalman (1912: 40, fig. 34) was the first to present a plan of the triclinium. Other plans have been published by McKenzie (1990: pl. 167d) and Zayadine



7. Votive niche D. 20 with *baetyl* near cistern D. 19 (L. Gorgerat).



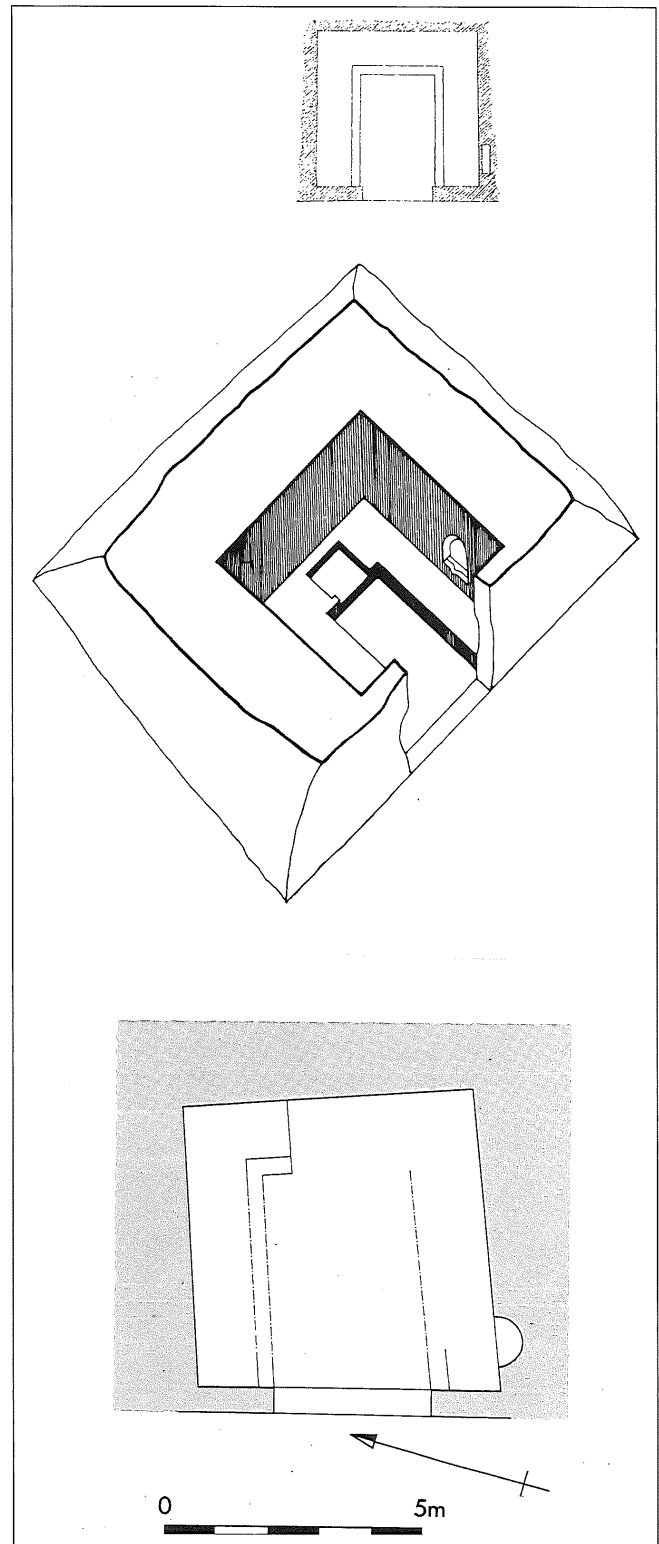
8. Detail of rock face of Tomb Br. 24 with architectural features (L. Gorgerat).



9. A look into the Aşlah Triclinium (D. 17) (L. Gorgerat).

and Farajat (1991: 277, fig. 2.) (FIG. 10). However, none of these drawings were entirely satisfactory, so the IAP produced a new plan after cleaning the triclinium (Gorgerat and Wenning 2010: fig. 3), which was no great effort since Zayadine and Farajat had already done this in 1990 - 1991. The chamber was carefully studied and the original features, as well as the secondary installations (including 19 sand-glass holes) and damage, were all described in detail. We cleared the means by which the entrance was closed (a wooden door), as well the previously unnoticed steps leading up to the triclinium benches (Gorgerat and Wenning 2010: figs 6-8).

Dalman discussed the two incisions in the back wall (FIG. 11). The carving in the centre shows an aedicule measuring 44 x 51.5 cm. A rectangular *baetyl* measuring 14.5 x 21 cm is cut to the right of the aedicule. A hollow is cut into the lower part of the aedicule which Dalman and others assumed to be a *baetyl* of its own (FIG. 12). Merklein (1995) followed this identification and based his inter-

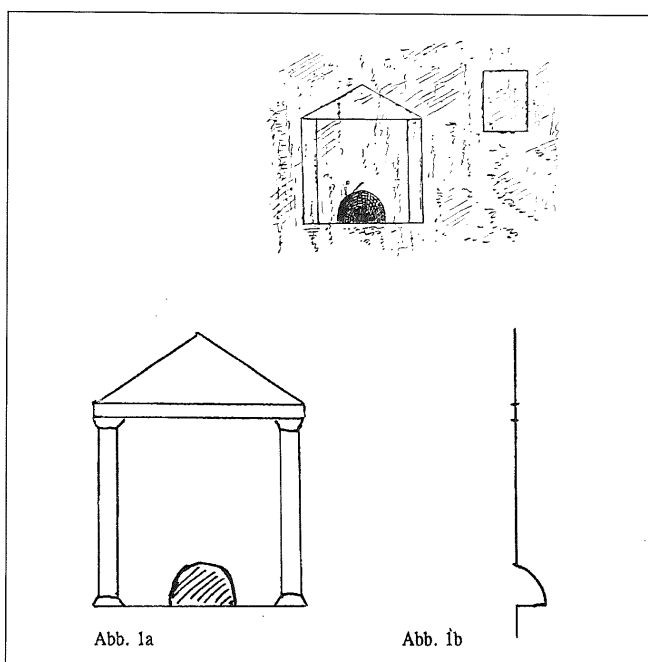


10. Plans of the Aşlah Triclinium (Dalman 1912: fig. 34; Zayadine and Farajat 1991: fig. 2; McKenzie 1990: pl. 167d).

pretation of the Dushara *baetyls* and further characterization of this deity on this example. Later, Merklein and the author studied this niche-type in-



11. Aşlah Triclinium; incisions in the back wall, aedicule and *baetyl* (D. 17b-c) (R. Wenning).



12. Older reconstructions of the incised aedicule with *baetyl* (Dalman 1912: fig. 35; Merklein in Wenning 2003: fig. 1a-b).

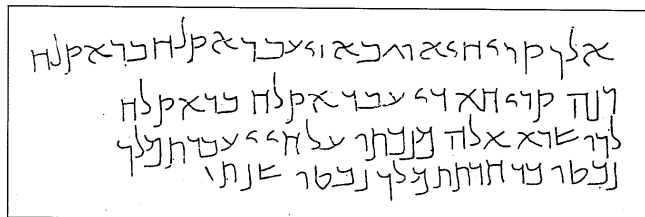
tensively, which can be found in various chambers of Bāb as-Sīq. In the end, we became convinced that this hollow and the so-called sand-glass holes associated with it are much more recent additions of the Bedul, who lived in the triclinium for a long period of time. Owing to its secondary use, the triclinium has suffered a fair amount of damage.

The most important feature of the triclinium and the complex as a whole is of course the Aşlah inscription carved high on the back wall of the triclinium on a smoothed field (Gorgerat and Wenning 2010: fig. 4). Much of the scholarly literature on the Aşlah Triclinium complex relates to this inscription. Indeed, the history of this discussion

deserves a chapter of its own. However, for the purposes of this contribution, only a few remarks need be made. Cantineau, Cross, Starcky, Naveh, Jones, Gruendler, Dijkstra and Macdonald have all contributed to the palaeographical analyses. Savignac (1913: 441) noted that its reading is less of a problem than its translation. Various aspects and suggestions have been discussed: Who are the kings mentioned? How does the inscription fit into early Nabataean epigraphy? What is the dating of the inscription and how can we explain the differences between line one and the other lines? What is the meaning of particular words like *şryh*? Who are Aşlah and Manbatu and the groups represented by them, and what is their relation to the dynasty? What is the correct reading, Manbatu or Mankatu / Malikatu, which would make Dushara king of the dynasty at a very early period, as suggested by Milik (Savignac and Starcky 1957: 208)?

Line one reads “These are the chambers and the cistern which Aşlah son of Aşlah has made.” Lines two to four read “This is the chamber which Aşlah son of Aşlah has made for Dushara, the God of Manbatu, for the life of Obodas, king of the Nabataeans, son of Aretas, king of the Nabataeans. Year one.” The differences between line one and lines two to four suggest that we’re dealing with at least two inscriptions.

Up to 2004, the only available image of the inscription was a poor rubbing, which Dalman (1912: fig. 68) published together with a facsimile. The author published a first photograph in 2004 (Wenning 2004: 43). In 1913, just a year after Dalman, Savignac (1913: 441-442, fig. 6) published another facsimile correcting a few minor mistakes made by Dalman (FIG. 13). Cantineau (1932: 2-3, no. I.II) then attempted a third facsimile. So far as the Aşlah inscription is concerned, all palaeographic script tables comparing the characters of various early Nabataean inscriptions are based on these facsimiles (Starcky 1956: 522, fig. 2; Starcky 1966: 927-928, fig. 696 I; Naveh 1979: 115, fig. 1; Marchetti 1992: 167, fig. 2; Gruendler 1993; Macdonald



13. Facsimile of the Aşlah inscription by Savignac (1913: fig. 6).

2003: 52-53, fig. 38). It has been demonstrated that the Aşlah inscription dates to the early first century BC. The named kings are therefore Aretas II and his son Obodas I, rather than Aretas III and Obodas II as suggested by Dalman (1912: 100-101; cf. also Cantineau 1930: 7-8; Meshorer 1975: 16). Obodas I became king after the Battle of Gaza between 100 and 96 BC, and certainly before 95 / 93 BC; the first year of his reign is therefore normally dated to around 96 / 95 BC.

After a closer study of the original inscription during the 2010 IAP season, the question of the correct transcription of the facsimiles arose. It seems that a few characters have been wrongly drawn, where damage to the field of the inscription was not identified. Our photographs show that, amongst

others, the third letter of the personal name Manbatu / Mankatu, i.e. a beth or a kaf, does not fit with the facsimiles. For the time being, we cannot dismiss one or the other reading but are leaning more towards Manbatu, since the beth is very close to the beth of bar in the fourth line. Unfortunately there is no other kaf in the inscription, so it needs to be compared with other early Nabataean inscriptions as well. If the reading Mankatu is the correct one, we would prefer to read Mankatu as a personal name rather than the king's name. We therefore decided to study the whole inscription once again more thoroughly.

For the sake of convenience, a concordance of the numbering by Brünnow, Dalman and Roche (1985) is provided below:

1.	<i>B</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>IAP</i>	<i>Monument</i>
<i>Southern Terrace</i>					
19	15a-t	II.3-22	D. 15a-t	Votive niches (except D. 15r), rock face	
	15n	II.16	D. 15n	Niche basin, rock face	
20	16		D. 16	Southern small chamber	
		II.23(-24?)	D. 16.1-2	Two niches inside the chamber	
21	17		D. 17	Aşlaḥ Triclinium	
-	17a		D. 17a	Niche basin inside the triclinium	
-	17b	II.25	D. 17b	Incision, aedicule, back wall	
-	17c	II.26	D. 17c	Incision, <i>baetyl</i> , back wall	
-	II 90		D. II 90	Aşlaḥ inscription	
-	-		CIS II no.?	Second Nabataean inscription	
22	17 ¹		D. 17 ¹	Northern small chamber	
<i>Northern Terrace</i>					
23	18	II.27-32	D. 18.01-08	Four pairs of abutment niches, rock face	
-	-	IV.63	D. 18.09	High niche, rock face / back wall	
-	-		D. 18.010	Niche, rock face / back wall	
-	18a		D. 18a	Cemented basin, rock face / back wall	
24	18 ¹	IV.60	Br. 24	Large chamber tomb	
<i>Beyond the terraces</i>					
25	-	II.33	D. 18.2	Votive niche north of Br. 24, rock face	
25	-	II.33	D. 18.3	Votive niche north of Br. 26, rock face	
25	-	II.34	D. 18.4	Votive niche north of Br. 26, rock face	
25	-	II.34	D. 18.5	Votive niche north of Br. 26, rock face	
25	-		D. 18.6	Niche basin north of Br. 24, rock face	
26	Br. 26		Br. 26	Reservoir ‘chamber’	
27	19		D. 19	Cistern	
28	20	III.1	D. 20	Elaborated votive niche, rock face	
	21		D. 21.1-53	Pit and shaft graves	

Other aspects of research on the Aşlah Triclinium complex are best described by referring to its individual features. Excluded are the Nabataean inscriptions, which will be studied separately for the final publication, and a detailed discussion of the niches, which is being undertaken by the author as part of the PNP (Wenning in prep.).

Triclinium

Savignac (1913: 442) gave a measurement of 5.55 x 4.88 m for the triclinium and a width of 4.30 m for the entrance. Tarrier (1988: 168-169, pls 71-73, plan II) included triclinium D. 17 in his catalogue of Petra triclinia. He followed the data given by Dalman (5.38 x 5.63 m), but added a few measurements for the benches and the height of the entrance of (3 m). McKenzie (1990: 171) re-measured the chamber (5.74 ± 0.12 x 5.65 ± 0.23 m; 4 m height) and entrance (3.04 m width), but missed the lateral frames of the latter; the plan of the triclinium remains incomplete owing to modern sheep and goat dung covering the floor and benches, and the niche basin in pl. 167d is erroneously drawn as semi-circular. In 1990-1991, the triclinium was cleaned by Zayadine and Farajat. For the first time, the irregular bench arrangement could be seen (Zayadine and Farajat 1991: 275-278, figs 1-3, pl. I 1; in this article, as already noted by several scholars, an inscription concerning Rabb'el I, CIS II 349 is erroneously presented instead of the Aşlah inscription). The isometric plan of the triclinium gives a preliminary impression of the monument. An investigation of Petra triclinia by Brockes (1994: 39, 196) did not give any further details or discussion of the peculiarities of the triclinium, which might be explained by its early date. The rubbish present in the chamber until 1990, the damage to the benches and the many Bedul drawings on the walls may be one reason why not a single picture of the triclinium itself was published prior to 2010. The *bedouin* drawings have never received any attention, but have a heritage of their own, showing dromedaries, horses, donkeys with and without a rider, and even two aeroplanes (FIG. 14).

Chambers D. 16 and D. 17¹

The two small rooms north and south of the triclinium have previously been ignored except during the course of discussion of the way they are mentioned in the Aşlah inscription. Dalman erroneously listed the northern chamber as no. 17, which is the triclin-



14. Detail of *bedouin* drawings on walls of Aşlah Triclinium (R. Wenning).

ium, but some pages corrected it as no. 17¹ (Dalman 1912: 40, 100). D. 16 received a cement floor in recent times and is still used by *bedouin* today.

Water Basins

To date, niche basin D. 17a in the triclinium, niche basin D. 15n in the row of niches on the outer face of the triclinium rock, northern niche basin D. 18.6 and cemented water basin D. 18a on the outer rock face of tomb Br. 24 have not been described, studied or illustrated in detail.

Tomb Br. 24

Whether this tomb belongs to the rooms mentioned in the Aşlah inscription is debated. The nature of its relationship with the triclinium still needs to be examined, although there is no doubt that all features of the Aşlah Triclinium complex formed one ensemble. Zayadine and Farajat (1991: 278) mentioned eight *loculi* and a vaulted *arcosolium* opposite the entrance (FIG. 15). There are three *loculi* on the lateral sides and two *loculi* frame the larger, central *loculus* with the *arcosolium* on the back wall. We thus counted nine *loculi*, of which the southernmost is very small. Contrary to common opinion, the author refers to it as a tomb with façade (Wenning 2007: 258), an interpretation supported by the results of the 2010 IAP season (see above). Before the investigations of Martinaud *et al.* (2003) and the IAP, the tomb had never been researched, described or illustrated.

Reservoir Br. 26

Originally misinterpreted as a chamber tomb by

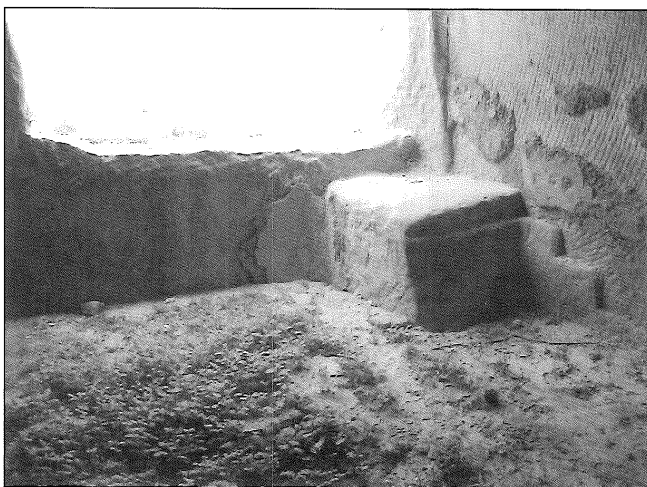


15. Central *loculus* of Tomb Br. 24 with arch (R. Wenning).

Brünnow, Zayadine and Farajat cleared the rock-cut room and correctly identified it as a cubic water reservoir (1991: 278, pl. I 2). A large proportion of its thick plaster can still be seen on the walls. The steps leading down to the bottom have been cut away (FIG. 16). In front of the cave is an open rock-cut settling tank. Zayadine and Farajat (1991: 278) suggested that the reservoir collected rain-water and that the overflow runs to cistern D. 19. No plan of the reservoir has been published and no further research was undertaken here until the IAP studied the area.

Cistern D. 19

This cistern seems to be the one mentioned in the Aşlah inscription. Dalman (1908: 107) called it pear-shaped. So far, two photographs of the cistern with its cover stone have been published (Lindner



16. Detail of reservoir Br. 26 with plaster on walls and cut-away steps (R. Wenning).

1986: 166, fig. 15; Zayadine and Farajat 1991: 278, pl. II 1). The cistern will be cleared by the IAP.

Pit and Shaft Graves D. 21

The north-western hill and its 17 graves were discussed by Musil in 1907 and have also been mentioned by others. Most of the graves were identified by the PNP (Wenning 2004: 47). Kühn (2005: 71-72) has given an interpretation of the graves, noting the offering cups connected with them.

Niches

In 1985 Roche catalogued all published niches and established a typology of niches and *baetyls* in Petra. Some minor objections to her description and typology may be made (cf. Wenning 2001: 85-87, fig. 4), but her thesis is nevertheless a good approach to classification of the material. In the meantime, the survey work of the PNP has more than tripled the quantity of data; more critical investigations could enhance some of the descriptions and interpretations published by Dalman and Roche.

D. 15a-t

Roche repeated the data given by Dalman for D. 15a-t (Roche 1985: nos II 3-22, pl. 8-9, followed by Nehmé 1997: 1038-1039), but see above for some corrections. In Roche's catalogue a few numbers were confused. Zayadine and Farajat (1991: 275) noted "more than 14 niches" instead of 18 niches and referred to them as small, religious shrines by citing Strabo (*Geogr.* 16, 4, 26). This is refuted by Kühn (2005: 73, note 192; for another interpretation of the Strabo text see Wenning [1997: 180-181]). The sketch of the register by Zayadine and Farajat (1991: 276, fig. 1) is incomplete and the detail drawings flawed. The author has published a photograph of the Aşlah rock, with the entrances to the three chambers and the row of niches and niche basin (Wenning 2004: 44-45). In 2005, Kühn (2005: 70, note 174; Wenning 2008: 618) reported a number of corrections made by the author.

D. 16.1-2

The two niches in this small room have been interpreted as cupboard-type features, although Roche (1985: 391, no. II 23[-24?]) has made a case for them being votive niches. There are two other hollows, one each in D. 16 and D. 17¹ (much like the hollow below D. 17b). They have not previously been mentioned and are interpreted by the author

as secondary cuttings made by *bedouin*.

D. 17b-c

Roche followed Dalman in describing the two incisions in the triclinium and also identified an ovoid *baetyl* in the carving below the aedicule (Roche 1985: 100-101, 391, nos II 25-26 pl. 9bis; cf. Tarrrier 1988: 168; Merklein 1995: 110, with a new drawing in Wenning 2003: fig. 1a-b). As explained above, this is not a *baetyl* (Wenning 2001: 85, 2003: 151-153, fig. 1c, 2004: 43, 47; Kühn 2005: 71-72; Wenning 2007: 251). Concerning the rectangular *baetyl*, Roche suggested that it could be dedicated to Dushara or another deity, possibly al-‘Uzza. The possible association of the *baetyl* with al-‘Uzza was based on the fact that two *baetyls* are represented; the author does not agree with this suggestion. The hollow below the aedicule is not a *baetyl*, nor the framing for a *baetyl*. However, the possibility cannot be excluded that the aedicule once framed a small incised (rectangular) *baetyl*, which was subsequently destroyed by the secondary hollow. However, it is more likely that we are only dealing with an aedicule and the incised *baetyl* to the right.

D. 18.01-08

The four pairs of abutment niches (see above) were interpreted as votive niches by Roche (1985: 338-339, nos. II 27-32) and Nehmé (1994: 135, pl. 32.1). This assumption has been challenged by the author on the basis of the PNP results (cf. Kühn 2005: 70, note 174). D. 18.09 is a high niche cut into the back wall of a room near the corner; it seems to be some sort of cupboard. The niche is not listed by Dalman (1908, 1912). The same is true of small niche D. 18.010 on the same wall. It can be debated whether or not this was a votive niche, or if it was used in some other context. Roche photographed Br. 24 with niche D. 18.09 in her pl. 27, but erroneously attributed the monuments to al-Madras (Roche 1985: 295, 342, 395, no. IV.60-63, pl. 27). In so doing, she listed tomb Br. 24 as niche IV.60, D. 18.03-04 as IV.61-62 and high niche D. 18.09 as IV.63.

D. 18.2-5

These four votive niches on the pathway to the ar-Ramla plateau are mentioned only by Brünnow (Br. 25) and Roche. Roche confused the German “*ein paar*” (a few) with “*ein Paar*” (a pair), and

therefore related Br. 25 to two niches only. Roche numbered the other two niches as 34, but erroneously noted “not mentioned by Brünnow or Dalman” (Roche 1985: 75, 338, 391, nos. II 33-34). None of these have been mentioned elsewhere, nor photographed, although they were catalogued by the PNP.

D. 20

Roche followed Dalman’s measurements. She suggests including the *baetyl* within her Souda-type because of its 1 : 2 proportions (Roche 1985: 131, 340, 393, no. III.1 pl. 10), although this classification can be debated. Why Roche located this niche, rather than niches D. 15, in the ad-Dara area cannot be explained. The niche has been mentioned several times in the literature (Zayadine and Farajat 1991: 278; Nehmé 1994: 135, pl. 32,3; Wenning 2008: 618). Merklein (1995: 110-111, 114) repeated the measurements of Dalman and attempted an interpretation; his association of the niche with Dushara was subsequently rejected (see above), but the function of the niche is correctly described.

Interpretation of the Complex

Kennedy described the site as a burial ground, placing it in the context of Bab as-Siq and its importance to the caravan trade, as well its association with religious ceremonies (Kennedy 1925: 53, 73). An initial interpretation by Merklein was corrected by the author and Kühn after the PNP realised that the small ‘arched niche’ below D. 17b was secondary (Merklein 1995: 109-115; Wenning 2003: 151-153; Kühn 2005: 70-73; cf. Nehmé 1997: 1031). Kühn suggested that the Aşlah Triclinium was a *mrzḥ*-room, used for family or clan celebrations in honour of Dushara rather than just for memorial feasts. She also agreed that the site could also have been the burial ground of a family or clan. However, she convincingly rejected the assumption that the owner of the site belonged to a ‘*Kultgenossenschaft*’. Recent research by the IAP and PNP suggests that the Aşlah Triclinium complex was a place for celebrations by a particular clan group, where the clan’s burial activities and commemoration of the dead were combined in a single multifunctional space.

Finally, past and current research at the Aşlah Triclinium complex has not only brought the rich history of this area to light, but has also contributed in a meaningful fashion to the scholarly debate. The

difficulty of describing and interpreting the monuments, as well as the many gaps in their previous documentation, called for the International Aşlah Project (IAP) to make a thorough examination and excavation of the site.

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