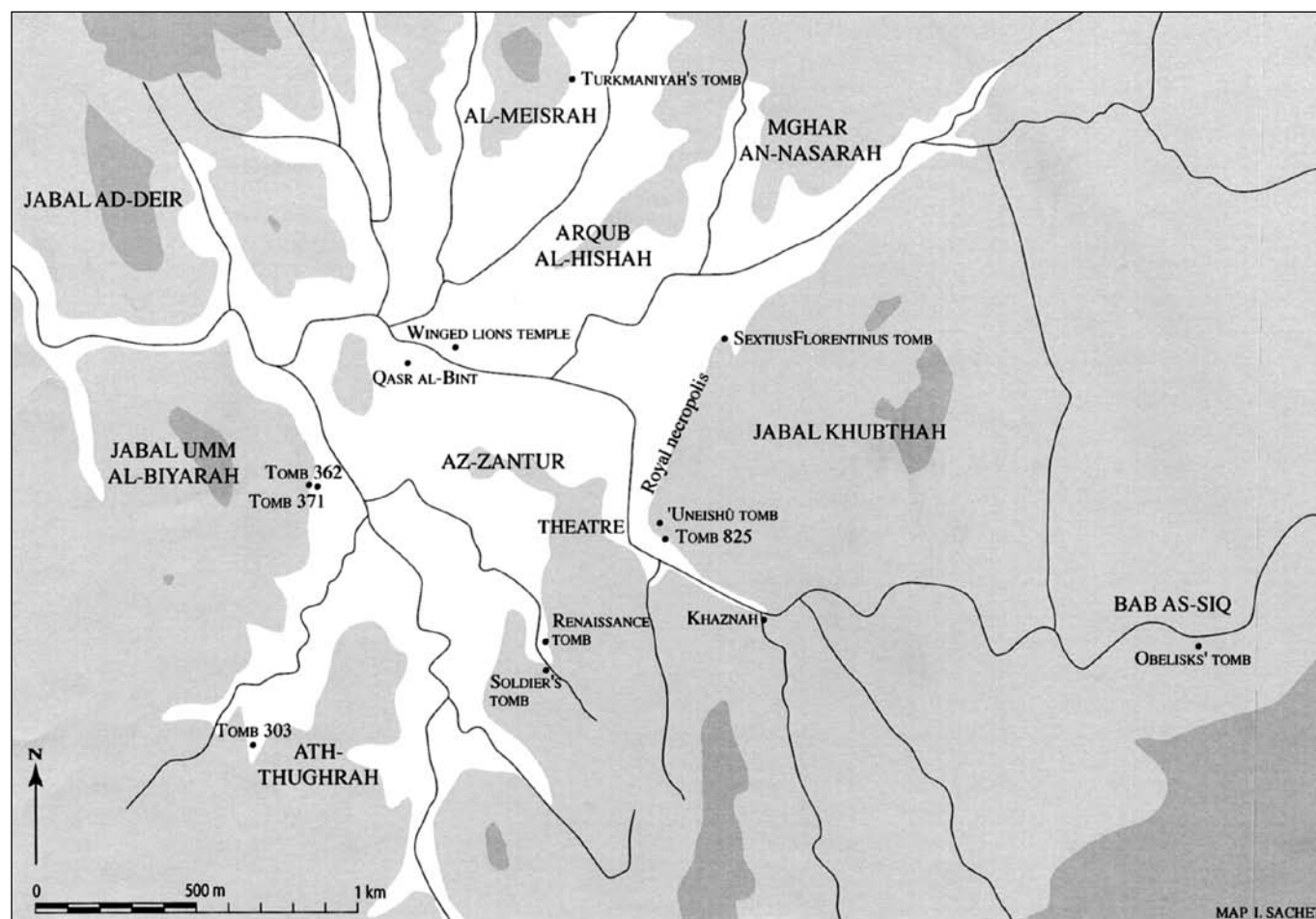


## Refreshing and Perfuming the Dead: Nabataean Funerary Libations

The city of Petra, capital of the Nabataeans, is surrounded by mountains (FIG. 1)<sup>1</sup>. Vast necropolises have been dug into these mountains: at least 1179 rock-cut tombs, including 628 tombs with a decorated façade<sup>2</sup>. The tombs with a decorated façade were used by the wealthiest Nabataeans for bu-

rying their dead in family chamber tombs<sup>3</sup>. Poor people used common tombs: pit-tombs or shaft-tombs. The sepulchre was of great importance to the Nabataeans and they conceived it as a “house of eternity” (*bt 'lm* in Nabataean) which is the name given to the tomb in a Nabataean inscription<sup>4</sup>. No



1. The site of Petra.

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Robert Hawley who kindly read and corrected my English; mistakes are my own.

<sup>2</sup> For these statistics, cf. Nehmé 2003: 157.

<sup>3</sup> Sachet 2005.

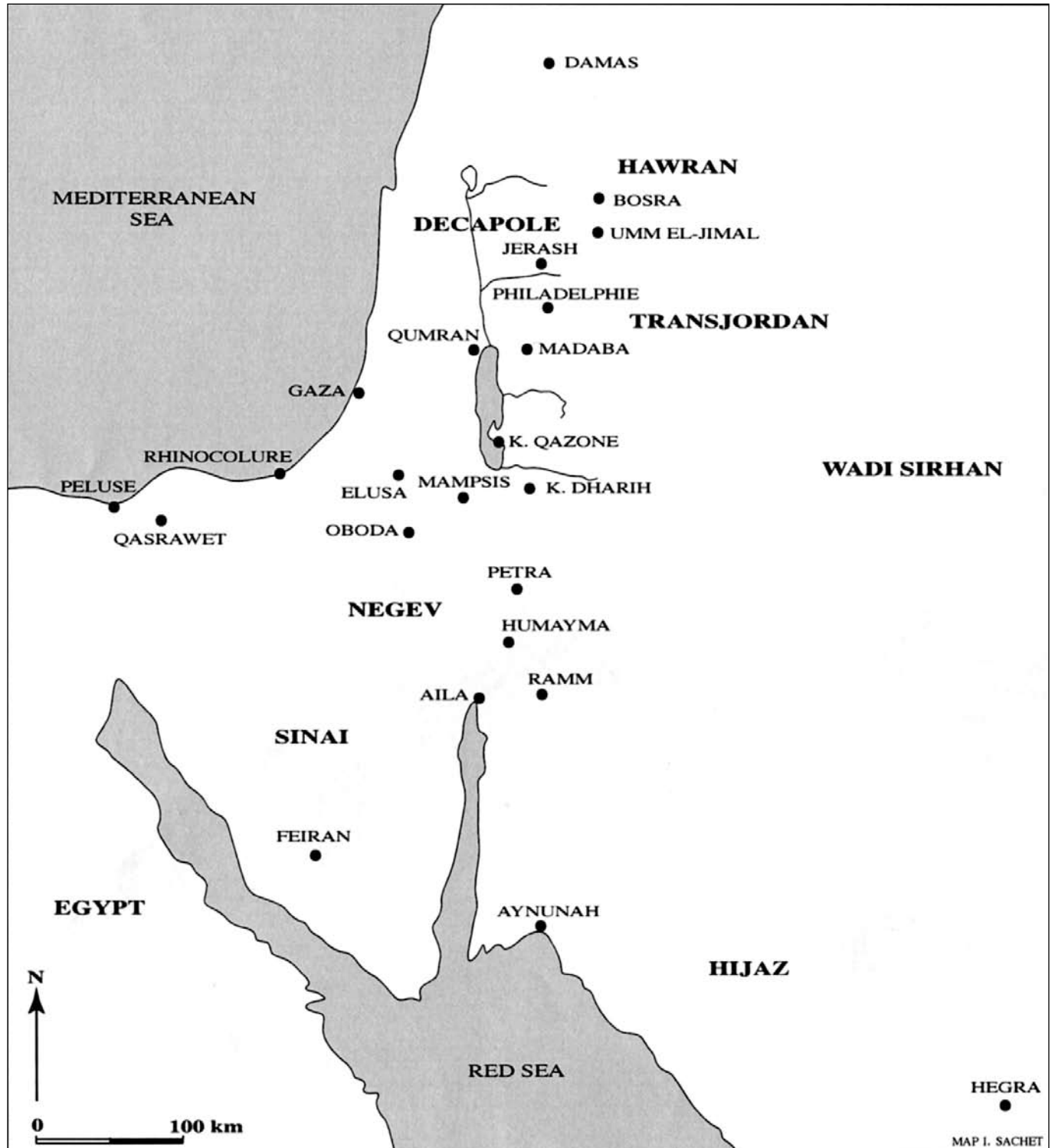
<sup>4</sup> Negev 1971b.

ISABELLE SACHET

doubt, elite tombs with a façade were built with eternity in mind.

The lack of Nabataean texts of a religious nature prevents us from reconstructing the beliefs of their society in detail, especially those concerning

death, but archaeological remains do provide us with some clues. In Nabataea (FIG. 2), numerous temples and sanctuaries attest to the religiosity of the population. In these buildings, they worshipped a pantheon of gods inspired by North Arabia, Syria



2. Major cities of the Roman Near East with main sites of Arabia Petraea.

and Egypt<sup>5</sup>. The funerary inscriptions of Madā'in Šālīḥ show how deeply the gods, and especially Dushara, were concerned with protecting the tomb. The gods were called upon to ensure the safety of the dead: "And may Dushara and Manutu and her Qaysha curse anyone who sells this tomb"<sup>6</sup>.

In funerary contexts, religion is everywhere and the plan of the tomb is organized according to specific funerary rituals. Libations were part of these rituals. This paper is concerned with those archaeological remains from Nabataean sites which help to determine some of the actions performed inside and around the chamber tombs, both when the body was being buried and after interment, when people visited the tomb.

### Historical Context

In the ancient Near East, libations were practiced in a variety of ways according to the periods and communities concerned. The longevity of libation rites in the Near East is well demonstrated by the difficulties encountered by the Judaeen Yahwist priests of the first century BC when they tried to put an end to the feeding and refreshing of the dead in funerary customs in Judaea. They fought fiercely against these well-established local funerary practices<sup>7</sup>, but despite their prohibition such practices were still active during the first century BC and first century AD. The feeding of the dead by means of food offerings placed in the tomb is well-known from archaeological discoveries in Judaeen tombs. Archaeological material, including drinking vessels and *unguentaria*, is abundant in the tombs of that period<sup>8</sup> and shows the importance of drink and perfume offerings made to the dead.

Libations are better known from classical sources, i.e. Greek and Roman texts and epigraphy, and also classical iconography, sculpture and painting on vases<sup>9</sup>. For the ancient Greeks, a libation was a sacrifice consisting of a liquid offered to the gods (*σπουδή*) or to the deceased (*χοή*). In both Greece and Rome<sup>10</sup>, festivities honouring the dead were planned according to a cultic calendar and were associated with banquets and sacrifices. Greek fu-

nerary libations included water, milk, honey and sometimes wine<sup>11</sup>. In the Roman world, perfumed oils were additionally poured on the tombs: ceramic and glass bottles of perfume have been found on many tombs in Pompeii<sup>12</sup>.

Although no written source describes libations in a Nabataean funerary context, they are described in a domestic context. According to Strabo, Nabataeans poured libations on the roofs of their houses:

*ἡλιον τιμῶσιν ἐπὶ τοῦ δώματος ἰδρυσάμενοι βωμόν, σπένδοντες ἐν αὐτῷ καθ' ἡμέραν καὶ λιβανωτίζοντες*

*A particular cult to the sun was made by the Nabataeans, they erected altars to it on the roofs of their houses, and, there, they honoured it everyday by pouring libations and burning incense*<sup>13</sup>

Archaeological remains are therefore the only source of information concerning libations in Nabataean tombs, but these require careful analysis. Pottery vessels of various sorts were used as containers for different liquids and have been found in the tombs: jugs, cups, *unguentaria*, etc. Equipment for pouring and distributing liquids are found in the tombs, especially holes and canalisations. Banquet rooms built in funerary complexes also provide indirect evidence for libations, since they were places of eating and drinking. These vessels and installations all suggest that liquids were used in Nabataean funerary contexts. We propose here to examine critically the evidence for drinking and sprinkling of liquids in funerary contexts.

### The Pottery: Containers for Liquids in the Tombs

Containers designed for water and other liquids have been found in Nabataean tombs, sometimes in large quantities<sup>14</sup>. We can assume that these containers were filled with water or other liquids. Even if they were empty, vases could have been used symbolically as a substitute for an offering. These deposits were made by the living for the dead during a ceremony at the time of a burial or, possibly, after it. Vases were also used by people who vis-

<sup>5</sup> Healey 2001: 181.

<sup>6</sup> Healey 1993: 115, inscription H2 on tomb IGN 22.

<sup>7</sup> Bloch-Smith 1992: 126-132.

<sup>8</sup> Hachlili 2005: 484-485.

<sup>9</sup> For example, a libation scene on a vase from the painter of Argos in the Louvre Museum, no G 236 (c. 480-470BC).

<sup>10</sup> Scheid 2005: 193-200.

<sup>11</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XI, 20-50; Aeschylus, *The Persians*, 608-623. Aeschylus describes Atossa's libation at Darius' tomb, probably made according to the Greek rituals.

<sup>12</sup> Ovide, *Fastes*, III.561; Van Andringa, Lepetz 2008: 1158.

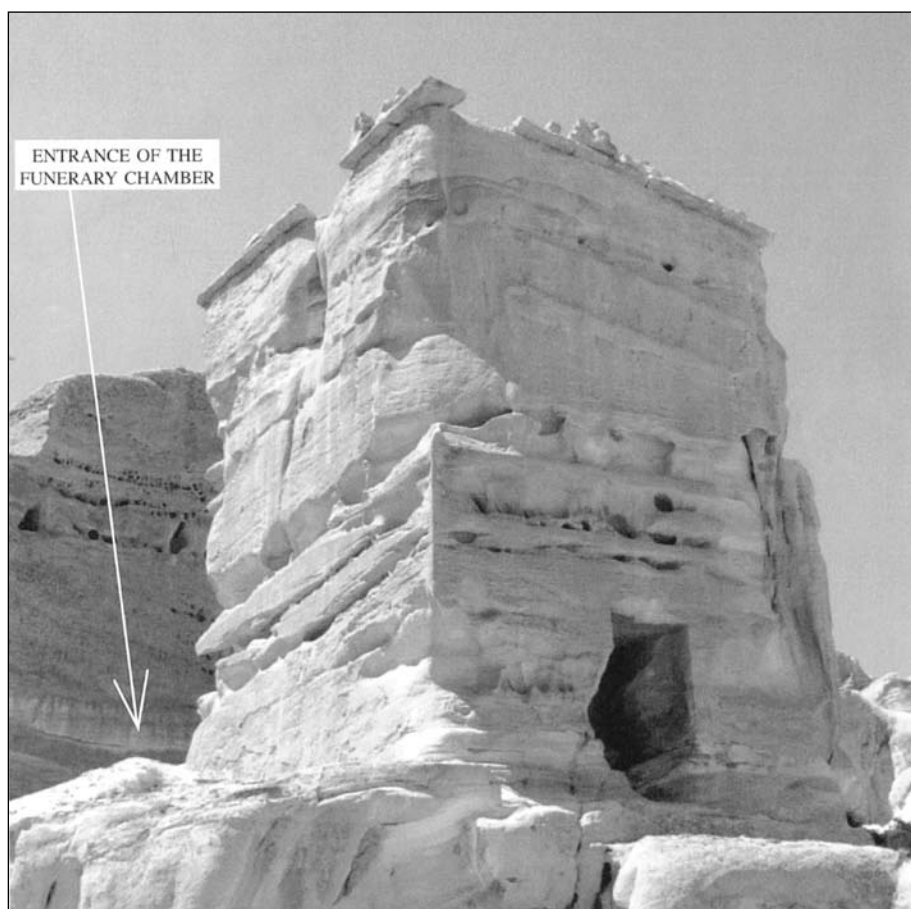
<sup>13</sup> Strabo, *Geographica*, 16.4: 26.

<sup>14</sup> For example, in the North Ridge tombs 1 and 2: Bikai, Perry 2001.

ited the tomb after a funeral. For example, during a banquet, people may have poured some of their drinks to the dead. They may have used their glass or cup to drink to and commemorate the dead and then left the container there. We can distinguish two kinds of deposit attesting to two different kinds of gesture. First, pots found in a sealed tomb could have been deposited at the time of the initial burial or when the tomb was reopened for a subsequent burial. Second, pots found above a tomb were more likely to have been left there by people who came to commemorate the deceased.

Tower-tomb 303 from ath-Thughrah in Petra (FIGS. 3-4) was excavated in December 2006<sup>15</sup>. A rock-cut chamber of ca. 40 square meters was excavated at the base of a monolithic tower; access to the chamber was probably through a shaft. The bones of about 50 individuals were piled in the north-west corner of the chamber<sup>16</sup>. According to the pottery found in the same context, these bones

are probably of individuals dating to the main phase of occupation. The main occupation was a family one and took place between the end of the second century BC and the second / fourth century AD. After its abandonment, most likely during the fourth century AD, the chamber progressively filled with sand. Generally, ancient robbers were primarily interested in jewellery, not pottery. The pottery was left inside the tomb, sometimes broken during the cleaning or looting of the tomb. Such was the case in Tomb 303: human bones were piled up in a corner of the room by people who came there to clean or rob the tomb. Few sherds were found in the chamber, i.e. only three complete pots and a few sherds, mostly *unguentaria*. A unique piece of gold jewellery, a drop-shaped pendant, escaped these visits. Two plates and a cooking-pot from the last phase of occupation were found intact on the rock surface (FIGS. 5-6). The pottery from inside the tomb sheds light on the funerary deposits associated with

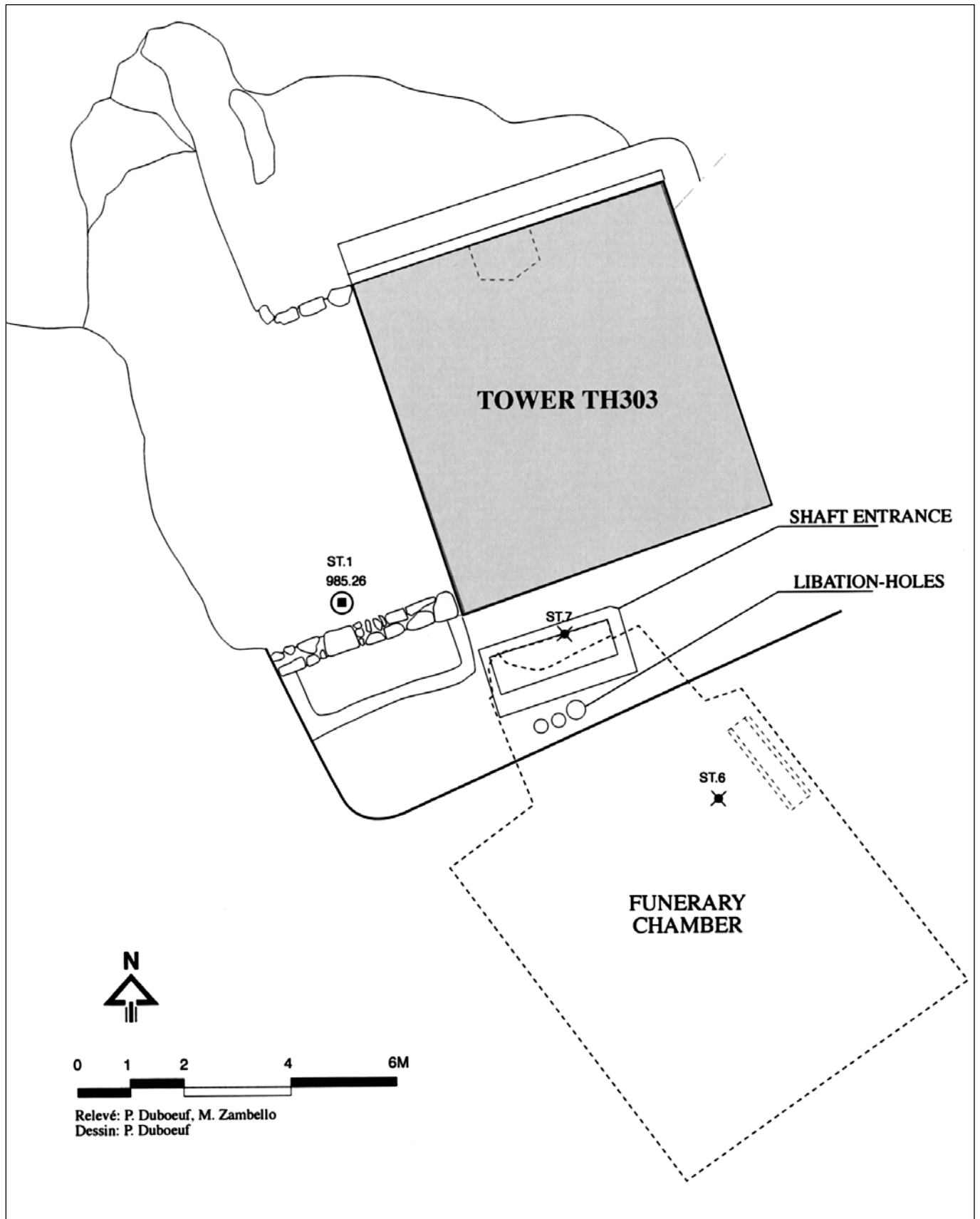


3. Tower-tomb 303 in ath-Thughrah necropolis.

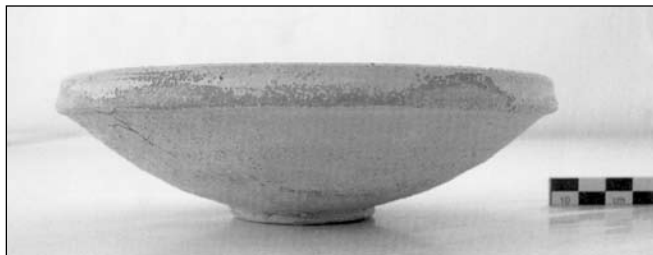
<sup>15</sup> Excavation conducted by the author, under the direction of Christian Augé, director of the French mission in Petra. The numbering of the tombs is after Brünnow, Domaszewski 1904.

<sup>16</sup> An anthropological study of the bones is being prepared by Nath-

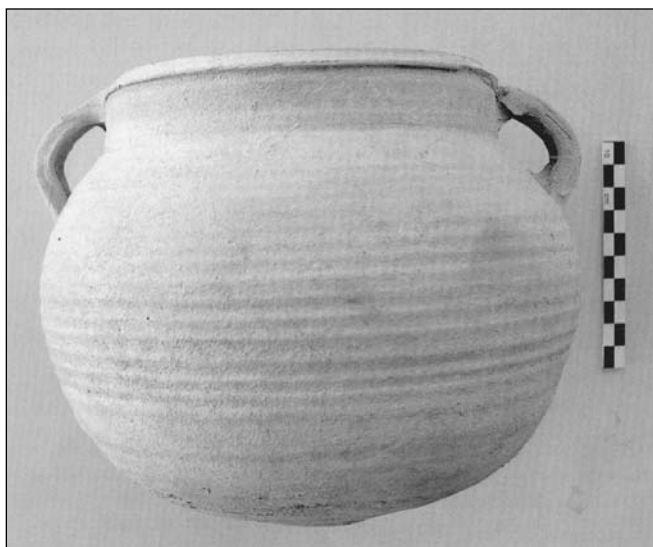
alie Delhopital (Ph.D. dissertation, in the Université de Bordeaux 1). The final publishing of the excavation by Isabelle Sachet is in preparation.



4. Funerary complex of Tower-tomb 303 in ath-Thughrah necropolis (Drawing P. Duboeuf).



5. Nabataean plate found intact on the rock surface within Tower-tomb 303.



6. Cooking-pot found intact on the rock surface within Tower-tomb 303.

successive inhumations. As the chamber was sealed with large stone slabs, it was rarely reopened, probably only for new inhumations. Certainly, funerary deposits only seem to have been made on these oc-



8. Libation holes in front of a shaft-tomb in Nasarah necropolis.

casions, when a new body was buried.

In contrast to the very limited amount of pottery found inside the chamber, a large quantity of broken pots were found above the tomb and around its access shaft. The surface ceramic finds were most likely brought to the tomb by people who came to visit it, probably to commemorate their dead. The wide range of different drinking (jugs, juglets, cups, goblets) and eating (cooking-pots, boiling-pots) vessels found above Tomb 303 could even indicate that banquets were held there.

Judging from the ceramic material found in Tomb 303, there is limited evidence for the observation of rituals inside the tomb, perhaps because of the difficulty of accessing the funerary chamber. Food and drink were deposited on two plates and in a cooking-pot, and oils contained in *unguentaria* were poured out, but it was uncommon for such



7. Libation holes in front of a shaft-tomb in Umm al-Biyārah necropolis.

REFRESHING AND PERFUMING THE DEAD: NABATAEAN FUNERARY LIBATIONS

rites to be observed there. More intense ritual activity took place above the tomb, where people most likely commemorated their dead.

**Pouring Liquids into Libation Holes**

In Petra, circular holes dug into the rock are often associated with tombs. These holes are known as “libation holes” and are interpreted as receptacles for libations and other liquid offerings made to the deceased. We will examine a few examples of these libation holes. In the Nabataean Kingdom, libation holes are found only at Petra and, furthermore, only in funerary contexts. Typically, three of them are grouped together inside or outside a sepulchral

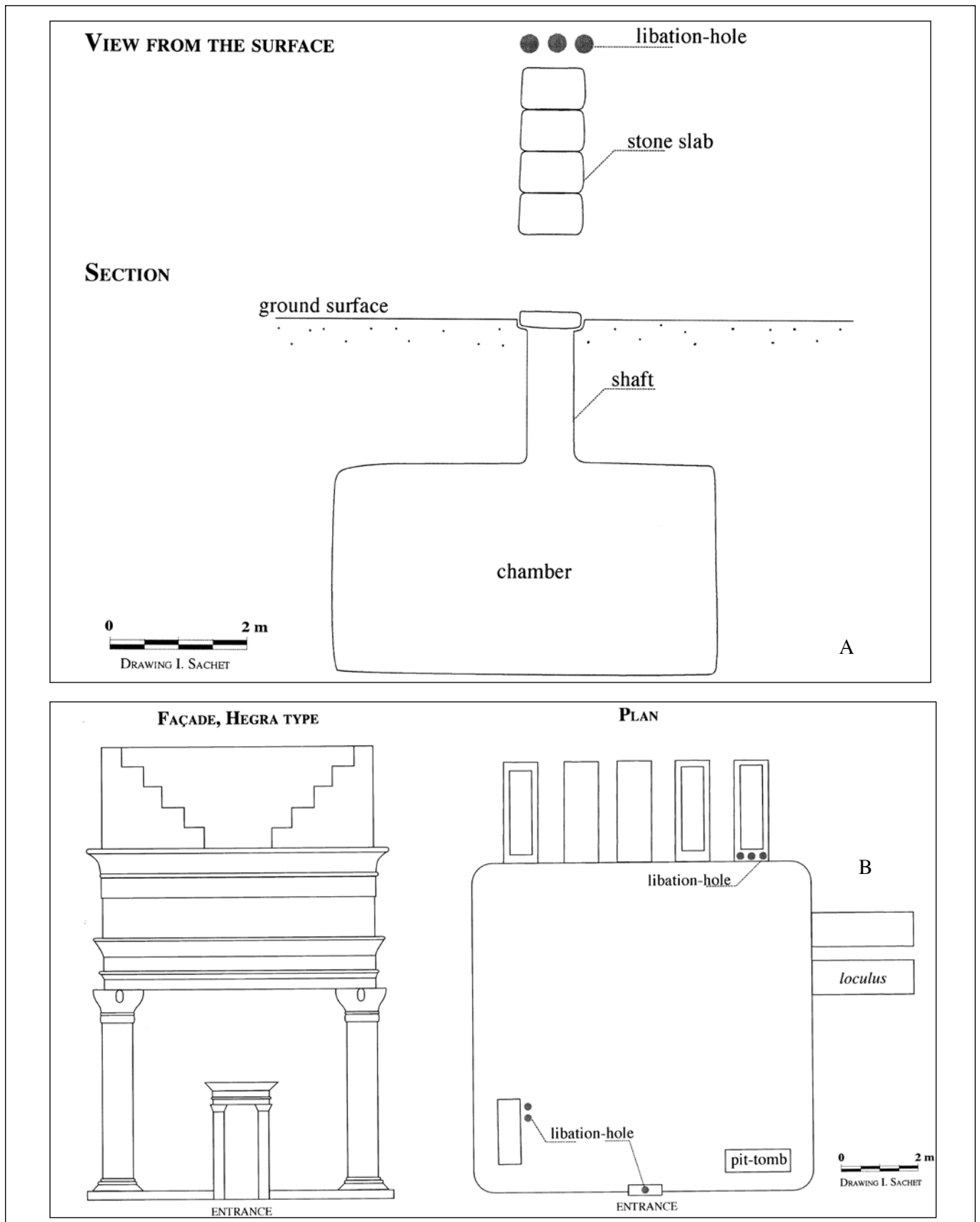
chamber, on one side of a rectangular pit-tomb or on one side of the entrance to a shaft-tomb (FIG. 4). In a façade tomb, typically one libation hole, but sometimes as many as two or three, were cut inside the funerary chamber, on one side of a pit-tomb or a *loculus*, or outside the funerary chamber on the threshold (TABLE 1; FIGS. 9a-b).

The semi-circular shape of the libation holes is consistent with receiving liquid offerings and one of them, in the al-Khaznah tomb, is associated with a canalisation to collect water. It is nevertheless possible that, sometimes, liquids were not poured directly into the holes themselves but into bowls or plates which were then put in the holes. Nabataean

TABLE 1. List of libation holes in the monumental tombs of Petra <sup>17</sup>

Area	Tomb	Location of the libation - holes	Location with respect to the funerary chamber	Number of libation-holes
Entrance of the Siq	Khaznah, nr 62	Threshold of the main chamber	Outside	1
Entrance of the Siq	Khaznah, nr 62	Threshold of the right chamber	Outside	1
Bāb as-Siq	Triclinium-tomb nr 34	Left of the door	Outside	2
Al-Khubthah	Urn-tomb, nr 772	<i>Loculus</i> , left	Inside	1
Al-Khubthah	Urn tomb, nr 772	<i>Loculus</i> , right	Inside	1
Al-Khubthah	Corinthian-tomb, nr 766	<i>Loculus</i> , bottom	Inside	3
Al-Khubthah	Sextius Florentinus tomb, nr 763	Threshold	Outside	2
Wādī Farasa	Broken pediment tomb, nr 228	Chamber ground	Inside	1
Umm al-Biyārah	Nr 362	Pit-tomb with <i>nefesh</i>	Inside	3
Umm al-Biyārah	Nr 371	Pit-tomb	Inside	2
Umm al-Biyārah	Nr 375	Pit-tomb	Inside	2
Meisrah	Nr 476	<i>Loculus</i> , left	Inside	1
Meisrah	Nr 620	Chamber ground	Inside	1
Meisrah	Turkmaniyyah tomb, nr 633	Pit-tomb, bottom	Inside	3
Meisrah	Turkmaniyyah tomb, nr 633	Pit-tomb, left	Inside	2

<sup>17</sup> Data derived from field investigations made by the author (Ph.D. research: Sachet 2006).



9. Possible locations for libation holes in Nabataean tombs. A: Chamber-tomb with shaft access. B: Façade-tomb with door access.

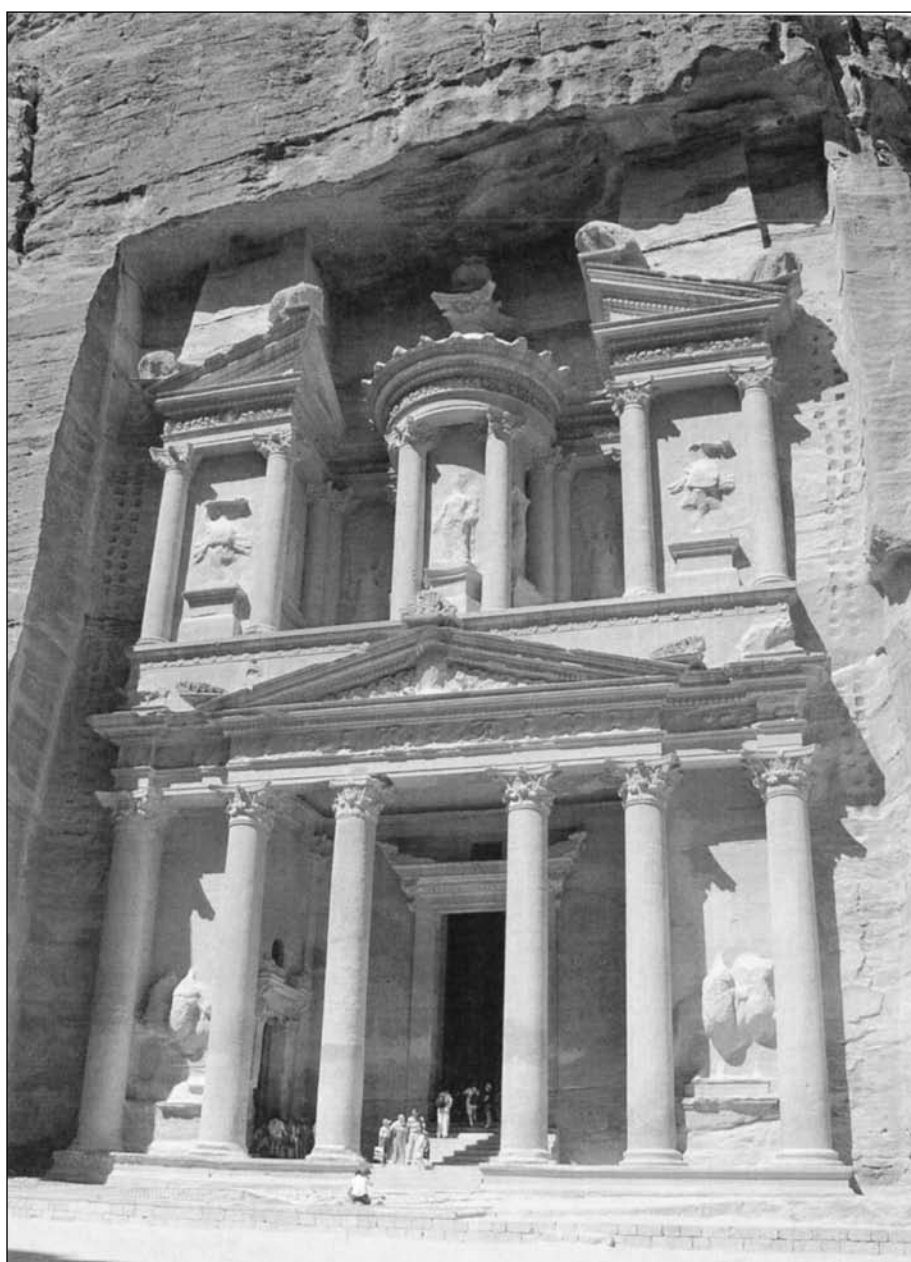


## REFRESHING AND PERFUMING THE DEAD: NABATAEAN FUNERARY LIBATIONS

plates and bowls with no ring base needed support if they were not to topple over, and libation holes may have been used in this way. A large libation hole, linked with canalisation to a basin, was cut on the threshold of the al-Khaznah tomb (FIGS. 10-11). In this case, liquids may have been poured directly into the libation hole and were thus conveyed to the basin immediately after having been poured.

What were the places chosen for the cutting of libation holes in tombs? On the basis of several surveys of the necropolises of Petra<sup>18</sup>, many libation

holes have been noticed above shaft-tomb entrances. For example, at Tomb 303 from ath-Thughrah, three libation-holes were cut above the tomb chamber and alongside its access shaft (FIG. 4). At this location, libation holes were cut outside, not inside, the tomb chamber. Here, access to the chamber was especially difficult, being a 3m. shaft closed by large, heavy stone slabs. We can suppose that people did not open the shaft each time they wanted to make an offering to their dead. Thus, libation holes may have been cut above the chamber tomb if the access to the tomb itself was difficult, such as when



10. Façade of the al-Khaznah tomb.

<sup>18</sup> We would like here to thank Christian Augé, director of the French

archaeological mission in Petra, for his support.



11. Libation hole cut into the al-Khaznah threshold and associated canalisation.

access was gained through a shaft.

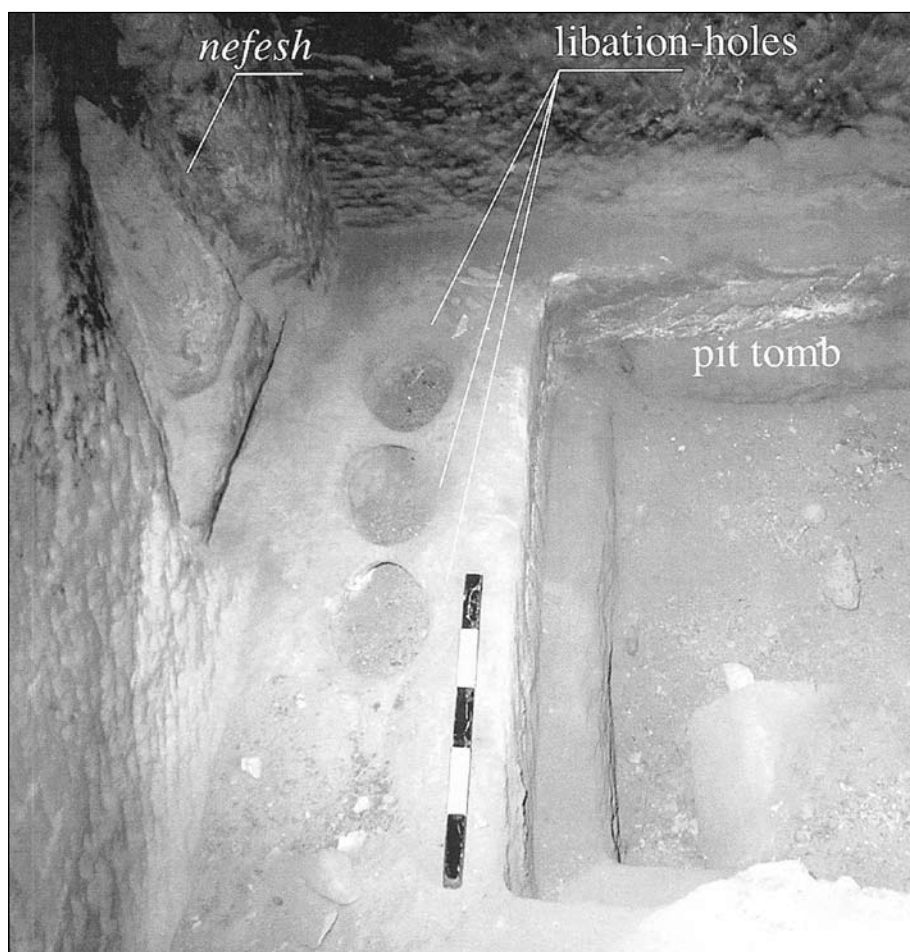
So far, no excavated shaft-tomb has yielded a libation hole cut inside the funerary chamber. Naturally, it has not been possible to survey all shaft-tombs in Petra because they are filled with sand and access is difficult. Therefore, new excavations should reveal more information. Indeed, libation holes cut inside the chamber are always found in funerary chambers to which access was through a door rather than a shaft. At Umm al-Biyārah, access to chamber-tomb nr 362 was through a door. Three libation holes were cut on the small side of a pit-tomb inside the chamber (FIG. 12). A *nefesh*, or triangular motive used to symbolise the deceased among the Nabataeans, was carved above the libation-holes. People who poured libations in the tomb were thus commemorating not only the body of the deceased in the pit-tomb, but also the memory of the deceased as illustrated by the *nefesh*. In fact, we note that libation holes are always cut in places that the living can reach easily. They are cut inside the chamber if the entrance was through a door and outside the tomb if access was too difficult.

The libation hole of the al-Khaznah tomb is a unique case. As we have seen, it is associated with a canalisation and a basin, as well as being far larger than other libation holes. Furthermore, its location is not consistent with our theory about the location of libation holes, as it has been cut outside the funerary chamber even though access to the chamber was straightforward and through a door.

According to our theory, the libation hole should ought to have been cut inside the chamber itself. Let us consider possible reasons for this exception. First, the al-Khaznah tomb was a royal one made for a Nabataean king, probably Aretas IV (9BC - 40AD)<sup>19</sup>. The funerary chamber was closed by a large double-door which was probably shut for most of the time, and the number of persons authorised to enter the chamber was probably restricted. We have no evidence for the ritual behaviour that occurred inside the royal chamber, which would certainly have been restricted to the high priests and royal family. On the other hand, we do know that libations were poured outside the chamber, in front of the tomb door. Thus, access to the libation hole was possible for a greater number of people, indicating that the rituals practiced here were performed by a larger community than the rituals practiced inside the tomb. The al-Khaznah tomb is located at the main entrance to the city of Petra. All visitors would have been able to admire this tomb and, perhaps, make their libations to the dead Nabataean monarch before they came into the city. A key point is that the libation hole of the al-Khaznah tomb could be an important clue in reconstructing a public ritual dedicated to a Nabataean monarch. A libation hole was also cut into the threshold of the Sextius Florentinus tomb. It is not impossible that a public cult was established also established in Petra for the Roman legate.

At Petra, libations were poured into holes cut

<sup>19</sup> Stewart 2003: 194.



12. Libation holes and *nefesh* from Tomb 362 in Umm al-Biyārah.

above individual burials and at the entrances to collective burial chambers. Thus, a single libation could have been offered to one or to several persons. Was it dedicated to the deceased, to the gods, or both? Unfortunately, no inscription allows us to address this question. Archaeological installations in Pompeii give some information about the recipient of the libations. In many tombs at the Porte Nocera necropolis, a canalisation was built between the ground surface and the cinerary urn. Thus, dedicants could come and honour the deceased with their libations whose remains came into actual contact with the oils<sup>20</sup>. At Pompeii, there is no doubt that libations were for the deceased. Regarding Nabataean individual tombs, we have no evidence to indicate that liquids were conveyed into the grave. Individual tombs are not well-studied, nor are they well-preserved in Nabataea, but none of the stone slabs which were used to seal tombs have any holes

which would indicate an intention to sprinkle the body with libations. Instead, Nabataean libations were poured on the ground in front of the tomb, perhaps for both the gods and the dead.

#### **Drinking and the Funerary Banquets**

Banquets were part of the funerary cult in Petra. Banqueting rooms associated with tombs are numerous at the site and the abundance of pottery that is found around the tombs is a testimony to the activities that occurred in the necropolises. In M'aisrah necropolis, a banqueting room, *smk'*, is mentioned by the inscription of the Turkmaniyah tomb one of the installations inside the funerary complex<sup>21</sup>. The funerary complex, including the banquet room, was sacred and placed under the protection of the god Dūsharâ:

*This tomb and the large burial-chamber within (...) and triclinium-garden (?) (...) and all the rest*

<sup>20</sup> Van Andringa, Lepetz 2008: 1144, fig. 8.

<sup>21</sup> See the study of the term *smk'* by Healey 1993: 240.

of the property which is in these places are sacred and dedicated to Dushara (...) <sup>22</sup>.

Unfortunately, the banqueting room of the Turkmaniyah complex is not preserved, but other funerary complexes are preserved in Petra and include both a tomb and a *triclinium*. According to D. Tarrier (1988), about 25% of the banqueting rooms in Petra were reserved for funerary meals<sup>23</sup>, e.g. the Soldier Tomb (nr 239), whose main parts are dated to the middle of the first century AD<sup>24</sup>. In Wādī Farasa, the Soldier Tomb and banqueting room nr 235 are part of the same building. Access from the *triclinium* to the tomb was possible through a peristyle courtyard<sup>25</sup>. It is possible that the banquet room was not only used for funerary meals, but it is part of an architectural complex dedicated to the dead which was initially planned for that purpose.

Funerary meals were an occasion for people to eat and drink together. People attending a banquet in the *triclinium* would have had a view of the façade of the Soldier tomb through the window. The rituals that took place in the banqueting rooms are unknown. No text explicitly describes a Nabataean funerary banquet. Royal Nabataean banquets, however, are mentioned by Strabo and Tacitus:

*The king holds many drinking-bouts in magnificent style, but no one drinks more than eleven cups, each time using a different golden cup*<sup>26</sup>.

A special ritual may have existed to commemorate the dead during a banquet. Did people pour the contents of a cup on the floor or did they drink from it? As they were celebrating in a building complex dedicated to the dead, people may have made some gesture of that kind to commemorate the dead.

### What Liquids were Poured?

Is it possible to determine what liquids were poured into the vases placed with the dead or into the libation holes, or what people drank during funerary meals?

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus made libations to the dead and poured wine into a square hole that he

dug in the ground<sup>27</sup>. The import of wine to Petra is attested to by Rhodian amphorae stamps from as early as the second half of the third century BC<sup>28</sup>. Excavations have also demonstrated the presence of wine presses in the Petra area<sup>29</sup>. Furthermore, Nabataean plates found in domestic as well as funerary contexts are often considered to be drinking cups<sup>30</sup>. Piles of Nabataean plates were found above Nabataean tombs in the cemetery of Mampsis in the Negev where the archaeologist interpreted them as the remains of funerary meals<sup>31</sup>. Although we lack conclusive evidence, it is not improbable that grape wine was used in funerary rituals and drunk during commemorative ceremonies for the dead.

One can also consider whether blood sacrifices were made before banquets and whether animal blood was used for libations? According to the *Suda*, a Greek encyclopedic lexicon compiled by the end of the 10th century AD, the god Ares was represented in Petra by a quadrangular black stone placed upon a golden base. Victims were sacrificed to the god and their blood was poured on the stone<sup>32</sup>. Thus, bloody sacrifices are known in Petra from later written sources, but archaeological evidence from funerary contexts is limited. A small rectangular monument built in front of the main tomb of the site of Khirbat adh-Dhariḥ has been interpreted as a sacrificial table<sup>33</sup>, but as no bones were found around it the function of this monument remains unclear. Meat was probably eaten during funerary banquets but it must be admitted that we do not know how the animals were slaughtered or if their blood was used as an offering.

Water is certainly the most common and easiest liquid to obtain. Refreshment of the dead and the quenching of their thirst are familiar themes in the Classical periods. In Calabria, a text was engraved on a golden leaf in the Hipponion necropolis. It recounts the path followed by souls on their way to the city of Hades and how they stopped to drink the water of a fountain that made them forget their lives on earth<sup>34</sup>. Arabic sources also refer to water

<sup>22</sup> Healey 1993: 238-239. In the Turkmaniyah tomb, the banquet room should be associated with a garden. J. Healey proposed translating the terms *gnt smk'* by triclinium-garden.

<sup>23</sup> Tarrier 1988: 99.

<sup>24</sup> Schmid, Barnasse 2004: 340. The Soldier tomb was formerly called "the Roman Soldier tomb" but Schmid showed that the soldier was Nabataean: Schmid 2001b: 176.

<sup>25</sup> See the reconstruction of the Wadi Farasah Complex in Schmid 2007: figs. 9-11.

<sup>26</sup> Strabo, *Geographica*, 16.4.26. See also Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.57, 4

for a banquet given by the king of the Nabataeans to Caesar and Agrippina.

<sup>27</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XI, 20-50.

<sup>28</sup> Bignasca, Dese-Berset, Fellmann Brogli *et al.* 1996: 142.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Salameen 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Schmid 2000: 91-92, 153-156.

<sup>31</sup> Negev 1971a: 127.

<sup>32</sup> Adler 1931: 713; text revised by Healey 2001: 96.

<sup>33</sup> Lenoble, al-Muheisen, Villeneuve *et al.* 2001: 147.

<sup>34</sup> Burkert 2001: 91; the text was translated by A. Bernand.

in connection with tombs. An inscription on a funerary stela from Qudam B. Qâdim in Yemen asks for heavy rain (*wâbil*, *midrâr*) on the tomb so that a luxurious garden might grow on it. The tradition of pouring water on a grave, a gesture the Prophet made over the tomb of his son Ibrâhâm, is still known in Arabic countries<sup>35</sup>. In Petra, hydraulic systems including cisterns (*shwt*) and wells (*b'rw't my'*) are mentioned in the Turkmaniyah inscription. These installations were part of the funerary complex and were placed under the protection of the god, just as the tomb and the sepulchres were<sup>36</sup>. Archaeological remains from Petra confirm that water was commonly found next to tombs. Basins were sometimes built at tomb entrances and cisterns are often associated with funerary complexes. The supply of water to Petra was made possible by aqueducts that crossed the necropolises before reaching the city. The aqueducts thus supplied water to the funerary complexes before reaching the houses of the city centre. For example, at the south-eastern part of the site, a spring supplied first the funerary complex of the Soldier tomb and then the az-Zanṭūr residential area<sup>37</sup>.

It is certain that specific oils were also poured out during funerary libations. According to Strabo, Nabataea was rich and fertile, and produced sesame but not olive oil<sup>38</sup>. Strabo's latter assertion is surprising, since olive trees are obvious in the region today. Olive pits were found in the oil presses of Khirbat adh-Dhariḥ, dated to the second century AD, thereby refuting the testimony of Strabo and confirming that olive oil was produced in ancient Nabataea. Sesame and olive oil were thus produced locally, but rare oils would certainly have been imported. As mentioned above, liquids that were poured into the libation hole in front of the al-Khaznah tomb were collected in a basin via a canalisation. We doubt that such a precaution would have been taken if it was olive or sesame oil that was being poured. Clearly the liquids that were poured in front of the al-Khaznah tomb had a certain price, or at least a symbolic value. Precious oils ought to have been those which were difficult

to extract or those which were imported. In the Nabataean tombs of Madā'in Šāliḥ, calcite — a stone similar to alabaster — vases were found<sup>39</sup>. These vases were produced in Yemen and their diffusion was linked to the incense trade. In Palmyra in 137AD, a tax of 25 denarii was imposed on a camel loaded with aromatic oils in alabaster containers. Certainly, aromatic oils were also imported into the capital city of the Nabataean kingdom<sup>40</sup>.

Is chemical analysis any help in determining what liquids were poured into libation holes? Unfortunately, no residues were visible on the surfaces of the libation holes from the tombs that we surveyed. Nevertheless, as an experiment, in 2005 sandstone samples from the base of two libation holes were taken from tombs nr 362 and nr 371 at Umm al-Biyārah. The two samples were analyzed by gas chromatography and mass spectrometry<sup>41</sup>. Despite the lack of visible residues, the results for both samples showed a significant presence of organic matter. Fatty acid analysis confirmed the presence of vegetal oils, and perhaps dairy products and animal fats. Heavy compounds of the triterpene family might have come from vegetal resins, such as incense or myrrh. In 2006, new analyses were conducted on the libation holes from tombs nr 8 and nr 303<sup>42</sup>. They seemed to confirm the results from tombs nr 362 and nr 371: the same organic materials — vegetal oils and dairy products — were found. We may thus note, first, that even if no residue is visible, sandstone may nevertheless retain traces of organic matter susceptible to further analysis and, second, vegetal oils and dairy products were found in four libation holes from Petra. This represents an important contribution to our knowledge of the liquids poured out by the Nabataeans for their dead, but more analyses are needed.

## Conclusion

The main features of funerary ritual in Nabataea, especially Petra, seem to have been close to the funerary rituals of the classical Mediterranean world. Inside the tomb, offerings of food and water were left close to the deceased in order to provide them

<sup>35</sup> See the commentary on the stela by M. Schneider and her study of water rituals on Islamic tombs in Schneider 2001.

<sup>36</sup> Healey 1993: 238-242.

<sup>37</sup> Schmid 2001a: 346-347.

<sup>38</sup> Strabo, *Geographica* 16.4: 25-26.

<sup>39</sup> Unpublished results from the french archaeological mission in Madā'in Šāliḥ, directed by Laïla Nehmé.

<sup>40</sup> Browning 1979: 15-16; Teixidor 1984: 86.

<sup>41</sup> Analyses conducted by Nicolas Garnier, LNGVic-le-Comte laboratory. We are grateful to Dr Fawwaz al-Khraysheh for having authorized these analyses.

<sup>42</sup> Nicolas Garnier, the results are to be published in the Acts of the Society for Arabian Studies Biennial Conference, "Death, Burial, and the Transition to the Afterlife in Arabia and Adjacent Regions", held in the British Museum, London, November 2008.

with sustenance. Above the tomb, families made offerings and libations to commemorate their dead. In Petra, libation holes were always located in an easily accessible place so that people could use them regularly, perhaps several times per year. Libation holes have only been found at Petra, but this need not indicate that libations were not made elsewhere in the Nabataean kingdom, as plates or other receptacles could have been used to pour liquids. Banquets also took place in the funerary complexes at Petra, which were holy places (*hram*) protected by the Nabataean gods. Details of the ceremonies are unknown, but people might have had eaten and drunk together to celebrate the memory of their dead. Public funerary rituals seem to have been distinct from private ones. For example, libations were made inside or outside the funerary chamber according to the private or public nature of the cult. Families made libations in holes cut inside the tomb, when the funerary chamber was easily accessible, or above the chamber where an entrance shaft made access more difficult. In the al-Khaznah royal tomb, however, the chamber could easily be accessed through a large door, but it seems to have been opened only for a few people, probably priests and relatives. The general public would have offered their libations to the dead monarch outside the tomb, in a hole cut into the threshold of the closed door. Thus, in private cult, families apparently performed their rituals inside the funerary chamber. In public cult, dedicants had no access to the funerary chamber and the sepulchre seems to have been closed to the public most of the time.

Were Nabataean funerary practices influenced by the Roman practices current at that time? The question is not an easy one to answer. Within Nabataea, it is extremely difficult to distinguish Hellenistic influence from Roman influence<sup>43</sup>. There were Roman military expeditions to the Near East prior to 65/64BC; Roman missions were travelling in Syria more than a century earlier, even as early as 164BC<sup>44</sup>. However, from the first century BC exchanges between Rome and Petra increased significantly. Foreigners — Romans amongst them — were already numerous in Petra in the first century BC<sup>45</sup>. Nabataean delegations went to Rome

as well; the Nabataean minister Syllaeus went to Rome at least twice, in 9/8BC and 6BC<sup>46</sup>. When Trajan annexed the Nabataean kingdom in 106AD, the Romans interacted with the Nabataeans for two or three centuries, not only in the eastern but also in the western Mediterranean. Nabataean aristocrats became wealthier thanks to trade and their society was eventually transformed. Nabataean civilisation reached its peak between the second half of the first century BC and the end of the first century AD. The funerary architectural remains that enable us to study Nabataean funerary practice date mainly to this period. We have very little evidence of funerary architectural remains dating to the middle of the first century BC. It is thus difficult to distinguish the results of external influence from the internal transformation of Nabataean society. It is clear that Nabataean society underwent radical change following contact with Rome. But as archaeological remains are extremely scarce for the preceding period, we do not have detailed information about Nabataean society before the middle of the first century BC.

Artefacts provide slightly more information than architecture about pre-Roman Nabataea. In the Petra tombs, Hellenistic black-glazed *unguentaria* dating to the third – second century BC are the earliest vases intended to contain liquids, but these were imported from Greece and are not necessarily linked to the Roman presence. Can we observe any changes in ceramic assemblages from tombs following the second half of the first century BC, when the Roman presence became stronger in the Near East, or following the beginning of the second century BC after Trajan annexed Nabataea? Some variation can be observed in the pottery from inside the tombs during the Nabataean period. During the entire Nabataean period, almost all pottery types were placed in tombs: vessels for drinking, eating and cooking were all used in funerary deposits. This pottery was essentially local — very little was imported. Not a single sherd of Italic production has been found in a Nabataean tomb at Petra; even the widely-distributed Eastern Sigillata A, produced in Asia Minor, is rare<sup>47</sup>. However, from the Augustaeon period onwards, Nabataean pottery

<sup>43</sup> Local oriental tradition is not our purpose here (for which cf. Sachet 2005: 33-34, and Sachet 2006).

<sup>44</sup> 2Maccabees, 11.34-37; Sartre 2001: 430.

<sup>45</sup> Strabo, *Geographica*, 16.4: 21.

<sup>46</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 16.271-299, 17.54-57.

<sup>47</sup> See the study of the ceramics found in Nabataean tombs: Sachet 2006: ch. 7.2, 156-164.

was Romanised. Cups and goblets inspired by contemporary glass production appear and demonstrate that tastes had changed among the population.

At first glance, the Roman presence does not appear to have had much influence on Nabataean funerary custom. The Nabataeans may have been subjected to stronger influences when the Near East was Hellenised. Moreover, the Romans living in Nabataea often adopted local habits. For example, Sextius Florentinus, a Roman legate who died in ca. 129AD choose to be inhumated in a rock-cut tomb with a façade identical to the tombs of Nabataean aristocracy. The tomb is located among other rich Nabataean tombs, north of the royal necropolis<sup>48</sup>. Sextius Florentinus' tomb may actually have belonged to a Nabataean family before being used by the Roman legate. The decor of the façade is very similar to the decor of the Renaissance tomb, dated to the third quarter of the first century AD<sup>49</sup>. The construction of the tomb of Sextius Florentinus could therefore have been earlier than the inscription engraved above the door that describes the Roman legate as owner of the tomb. We may also note that, even though the inscription only mentions one burial, the tomb was actually made for many more — at least eight persons — on the pattern of Nabataean family tombs<sup>50</sup>.

Exchange between Rome and Petra invariably led to changes in Nabataea. The thriving incense trade, which developed in order to satisfy growing demand in Rome, led to the rapid enrichment of the Nabataean population. The development of commercial trade routes gave the inhabitants of Petra easier access to rare products. They could afford rare goods from south Arabia or India, and may have offered these rare and precious products, such as imported perfumes and oils, as libations to commemorate the family dead.

### Bibliography

- Adler, A. (ed.). 1931. *Suidae Lexicon, II*, Lexicographi Graeci, Leipzig: B.G. Teubner.
- Bignasca, A., Desse-Berset, N. and Fellmann Brogli, R. et al. 1996. *Ez Zantur I, Ergebnisse der Schweizerisch-Liechtensteinischen Ausgrabungen 1988-1992*, Terra Archaeologica, no 2, Mainz: von Zabern.
- Bikai, P. and Perry, M.A. 2001. Petra North Ridge Tombs 1 and 2: Preliminary Report. *Bulletin of the*

- American Schools of Oriental Research* 324: 59-78.
- Bloch-Smith, E. 1992. *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement series; no 123, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Browning, I. 1979. *Palmyra*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Brünnow, R.E. and von Domaszewski, A. 1904. *Die Provincia Arabia auf grund zweier in den Jahren 1897 and 1898 unternommen Reisen und der berichte früherer Reisender. Band I. Die Römerstrasse von Mâdebâ über Petra und Odruh bis el 'Akaba*. Strassburg: K.J. Trübner.
- Burkert, W. 2001. *La tradition Orientale dans la culture grecque*. Macula: Paris.
- Freyberger, K.S. 1991. Zur Datierung des Grabmals des Sextius Florentinus in Petra. *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 5: 1-8.
- Hachlili, R. 2005. *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period*. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, vol. 94, Brill: Leiden, Boston.
- Healey, J. 1993. *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih*. Journal of Semitic Studies, Supplement, no 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2001. *The Religion of the Nabataeans. A Conspectus*. Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill.
- Lenoble, P., Al-Muheisen, Z., Villeneuve, F. et al. 2001. Fouilles de Khirbet edh-Dharih (Jordanie), I : le cimetière au sud du Wadi Shareh. *Syria* 78: 89-151.
- McKenzie, J. 1990. *The Architecture of Petra*. British Academy Monographs in Archaeology, no 1, Oxford University Press.
- Al-Muheisen, Z. and Tarrier, D. 2001-2002. Water in the Nabataean Period. Amman: Department of Antiquities. *ARAM* 13-14: 515-524.
- Negev, A. 1971a. The Nabataean Necropolis of Mampsis (Kurnub). *Israel Exploration Journal* 21: 110-129, 21-28.
- 1971b. A Nabataean Epitaph from Trans-Jordan, *Israel Exploration Journal* 21: 50-52, pl. 4.
- Nehmé, L. 2003. The Petra Survey Project. Pp. 144-163 in G. Markoe (ed.), *Petra rediscovered. Lost City of the Nabataeans*.
- Sachet, I. 2006. *La mort dans l'Arabie antique. Pratiques funéraires nabatéennes comparées*. thèse de l'école Pratique des Hautes études.
- 2005. étude sur le développement et l'organi-

<sup>48</sup> McKenzie 1990: 46; Freyberger 1991: 8.

<sup>49</sup> Schmid, Huguenot, B'dool 2004.

<sup>50</sup> See the plan of the tomb in McKenzie 1990: pl. 153.

ISABELLE SACHET

- sation des nécropoles de Pétra et Medain Salih. *Deuxièmes rencontres doctorales d'Orient-Express*: 25-41. Paris.
- Al-Salameen, Z. 2005. Nabataean Winepresses from Bayda, Southern Jordan. *Aram* 17: 115-127.
- Sartre, M. 2001. *D'Alexandre à Zénobie. Histoire du Levant antique. 4<sup>e</sup> s. av. J.-C.-3<sup>e</sup> s. ap. J.-C.*, Paris: Fayard.
- Scheid, J. 2005. *Quand faire, c'est croire. Les rites sacrificiels des Romains*. Collection Historique, Paris: Aubier.
- Schmid, S.G. 2000. *Petra. Ez Zantur II, Teil 1. Die Feinkeramik der Nabatäer*. Terra Archaeologica, no 4, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern.
- 2001a. The International Wadi Farasa Project (IWFP) 2000 Season. *ADAJ* 45: 343-357.
- 2001b. The International Wadi Farasa Project (IWFP) between Microcosm and Macroplanning – A First Synthesis. *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 133: 159-197.
- 2007. The International Wadi Farasa Project (IWFP) 2006 Season. *ADAJ* 51: 141-150.
- Schmid, S.G. and Barnasse, A. 2004. The International Wadi Farasa Project (IWFP). Preliminary Report on the 2003 Season. *ADAJ* 48: 333-346.
- Schmid, S.G., Huguenot, C. and Mahmoud al-B'dool, M. 2004. Cleaning and Excavation of the Renaissance Tomb at Petra. *ADAJ* 48: 203-210.
- Schneider, M. 2001. La stèle funéraire en arabe de Qudam B. Qâdim (Yémen). *Le Muséon* 114: 3-4, 407-436.
- Stewart, A. 2003. The Khazneh. Pp. 192-198 in G. Markoe (ed.), *Petra rediscovered. Lost City of the Nabataeans*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Tarrier, D. 1988. *Les triclinia nabatéens dans la perspective des installations de banquet au Proche-Orient*. thèse de l'université de Paris I.
- Teixidor, J. 1984. *Un port romain du désert. Palmyre*. *Semitica* 34, Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient.
- Van Andringa, W. and Lepetz, S. Pour une archéologie de la mort à l'époque romaine: Fouille de la nécropole de Porta Nocera à Pompéi. *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres - Comptes rendus des séances de l'année 2006 (avril-juin)*: 1131-1161.