

# THE INTERNATIONAL AŞLAḤ PROJECT (IAP) 2011-2012: REPORT ON THE SECOND AND THIRD SEASONS

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with a note by Laila Nehmé*

## **Introduction and Acknowledgments**

The second and third field seasons of the International Aşlah Project (IAP) were carried out between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> of April 2011 and the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2012. The IAP was initiated and organized by Professor Dr Stephan G. Schmid, Co-director of the French - German research project 'Early Petra' (sponsored by the German Research Association [DFG], the Excellence Cluster TOPOI at the Humboldt University Berlin, the Freiwillige Akademische Gesellschaft Basel [FAG], the Association for the Understanding of Ancient Cultures [AUAC] and the *Stiftung für das Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig*). The seasons were co-directed by Professor Dr Robert Wenning on behalf of Münster University and Laurent Gorgerat of the Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig. We would like to thank the Department of Antiquities of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for its support and permission to undertake the work. We would also like to thank IFPO 'Ammān, especially its director Dr Jacques Seigne, and GPI 'Ammān, especially its director Dr Jutta Haeser, for accommodating the team during its stay in 'Ammān. In Petra we were kindly supported by Dr Emad Hijazeen, Commissioner of the Petra Archaeological Park and Cultural Heritage, and Tahani Salhi, Director of Cultural Resources.

The team comprised the following archaeologists and students: Professor Dr Robert Wenning (Münster), Laurent Gorgerat (Basel), Aurélie Gorgerat (Basel), Dr Rolf Egli (Basel), Sebastian Hoffmann (Berlin), Thomas Kabs (Berlin) and Wiltrud Wenning (Münster).

The Department of Antiquities representatives were Haroun Amarat (2011) and Samiah Falahat (2012), whose help and advice was most welcomed. During the team's sojourn at Naz-

zal's Camp, Ali Chalaf al-Bdool was our camp manager and Suleiman Mohammad al-Bdool and his wife Aziza were our cooks.

Based on the results of the 2010 season (Gorgerat and Wenning 2010: 255-269), the following objectives for 2011 and 2012 were set: (1) completion of the mapping the site (**Fig. 1**), (2) excavation of the Northern Terrace,, (3) cleaning and investigating Tomb BD 24, (4) extending the excavation towards BD 26 in the north and, finally, 4)(5) analyzing the relationship between the Southern Terrace with Triclinium D17 and the Northern Terrace with Tomb BD 24.

## **The Northern Terrace**

### *General Situation*

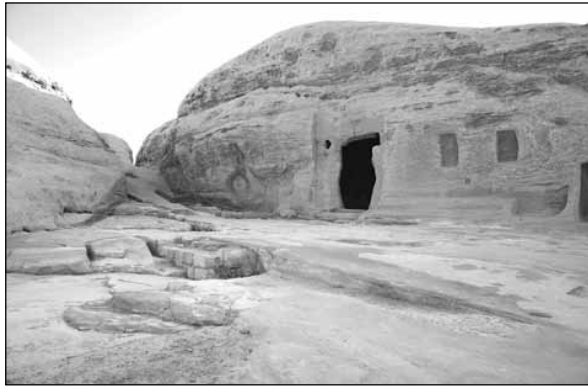
The Northern Terrace was partially excavated in 2010 (Gorgerat and Wenning 2010: 264-268) and forms the northern end of the complex (**Fig. 1**). It consists of a rocky plateau, delimited to the east by an elongated rock running north to south (**Figs. 1 and 2**), while the western area comprises a low inclined slope surmounting the entrance to the Sīq., and by a steep rocky formation in the north. The main structure of this plateau is undoubtedly tomb BD 24, which was cut into the eastern elongated rock, similar to the triclinium D17 on the Southern Terrace. More than 50 pit graves in several low hillocks form a boundary to the south and west, parallel to the path along Wādī Mūsā.

### *Tomb BD 24*

Although the tomb was briefly mentioned in earlier studies (Brünnow & von Domaszewski 1904: 199; Zayadine and Farajat 1991: 278), it was never measured or excavated. The recessed high façade measures *ca* 4.7 m in width (**Fig. 2**). Although a fragment of an attic moulding



1. General plan of the site (J. Falkenberg, L. Gorgerat, D. Koller).



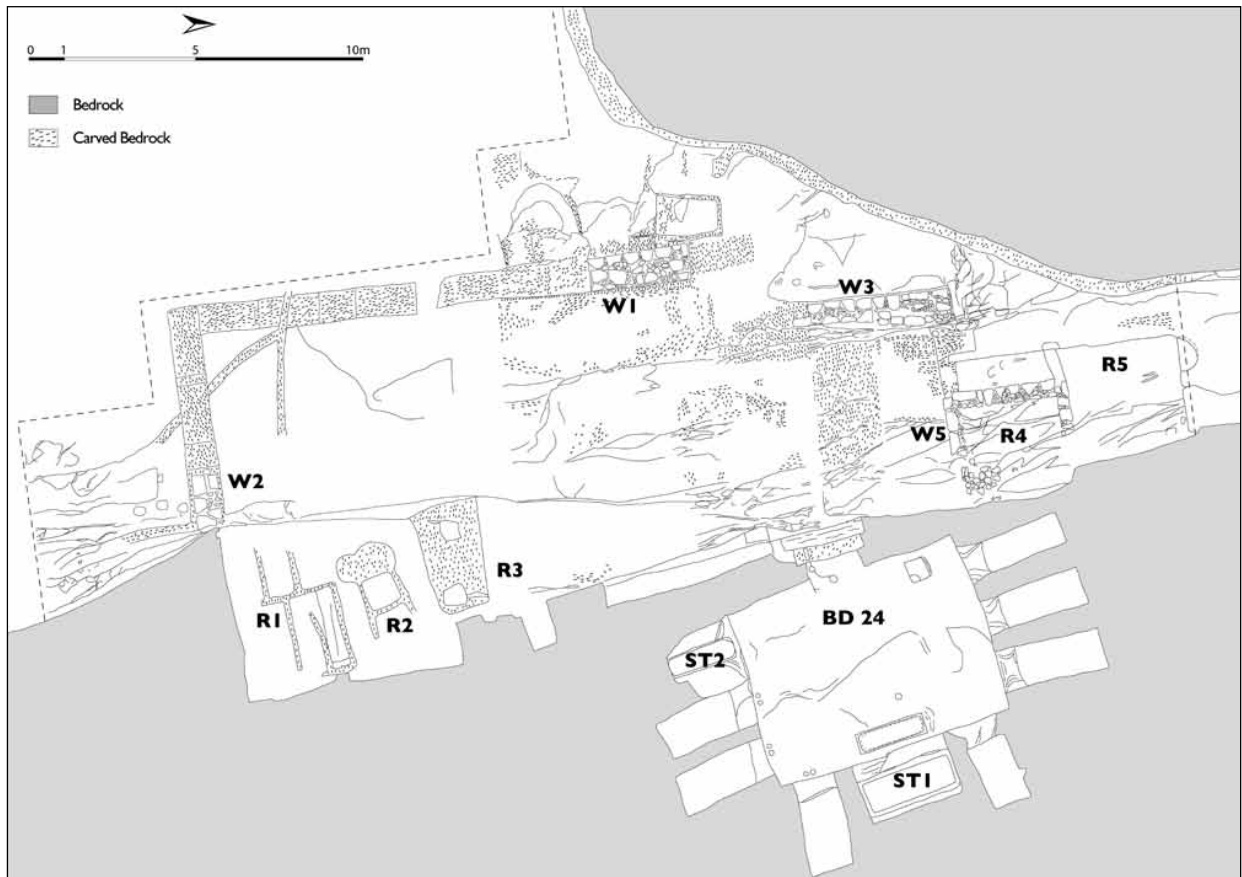
2. Northern Terrace with the entrance to BD 24 (L. Gorgerat).



4. BD 24. Eastern Wall with arcosolium (L. Gorgerat).

was found in front of the entrance (Gorgerat and Wenning 2010: 266 Fig. 23) it could not be proven that the façade and the entrance were decorated. The entrance measures 1.82 m wide and leads into a large, *ca* 40 m<sup>2</sup>, broad room with three *loculi* on each of the three sides (Figs. 3 and 4). The *loculi* measure 1.7 m in height. The cutting of the *loculi* started at 60 cm above

the floor. The central niche in the eastern wall is framed by an *arcosolium* and is oriented parallel to the room (Fig. 4); this is in contrast to all other *loculi* which are cut at right angles into the walls. It is well-known that the *loculus* opposite the entrance seems to be the most important, but there are only a few examples with such an *arcosolium* (Bessac 2007: 37, 74, 77).



3. Plan of the Northern Terrace (A. Gorgerat, L. Gorgerat).

The entrance to the tomb is by two steps (**Fig. 5**). Part of the upper step has a large rectangular depression cut into it, which is wider than the entrance. A groove of 12 cm in width and 7 cm in depth has been cut at right angles into the depression near the southern edge of the entrance. We suppose that this feature was associated with closing and protecting the entrance. Libation cups are cut in and around the threshold and are connected by a small channel – a common feature among the tombs (Sachet 2009: 97-112). A further installation, consisting of a shallow depression, 56 x 70 x 10 cm, cut into the floor to the left of the entrance, may have been used for funerary ceremonial purposes.

The tomb shows different tooling than that used in the triclinium D17 on the Southern Terrace (Gorgerat and Wenning 2010: 261, 2013: 227- 228.). The back wall of the central niche of BD 24, in the right upper corner of the *arcosolium*, is tooled in opposing bands of fine diagonal lines tilted at forty-five degrees (McKenzie 1990: 43. 152 Fig. 51a). This might be an indication for the date of the construction of the tomb. Other walls are more roughly and irregularly quarried.

Most rock-cut features in Petra were (and still are) used as shelters for animals and as such we first had to clear the tomb of dung. During this work, double cup-holes, possibly used for libations, were discovered in the floor directly at the foot of three of the *loculi*. The cleaning also revealed the presence of a pit grave located in front of *loculus* ST1 (**Figs. 4 and 6**). During its excavation, it became apparent that the pit grave had been looted. As with most tombs, the robbers proceeded in the most efficient way,



5. BD 24. Threshold (L. Gorgerat).



6. Tomb BD 24. Pit grave in front of *loculus* ST1 before excavation (L. Gorgerat).

looking for the cranial remains where most of the grave goods would have been located. In this case, the cranium should have been positioned in the northern part of the grave, according to the libation cup on the floor of BD 24 (**Fig. 3**). It could clearly be observed, that the northern section of the grave was broken up, while the southern part remained more or less intact (**Figs. 7 and 10**). The pit grave is typical of Nabataean rock-cut graves (**Fig. 9**). At a depth of approximately 1.9 m, a protruding ledge of 5 - 10 cm in width was cut into the rock to support the heavy covering slabs, which were still *in situ* in the southern part of the pit (**Fig. 8**). The covering slabs were sealed with a layer of smaller stones and hard lime mortar. Comparison with similar excavated graves suggested that the pit grave in BD 24 had a slightly different type of fill. Usually in single burials, above the slabs there would have been either a thick layer of sand completely filling the pit (see Schmid 2008: 137 **Fig. 6**) or, if the grave was used for multiple burials, vertical standing slabs would have delimited the interspaces (Schmid 2008: 141 **Fig. 15**). In this case, a second layer of covering slabs were laid directly on the mortar of the first layer and therefore left no space for a second burial. This procedure was obviously repeated three times to fill up the pit (**Fig. 10**), but no human remains were found in these upper layers. Although the pit grave was looted, the presence of Nabataean sherds, which originally were mixed within the hard lime mortar and belong to Schmid's Phase 3b (Schmid 2000: 29), allow us to date its last burial to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD or beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.



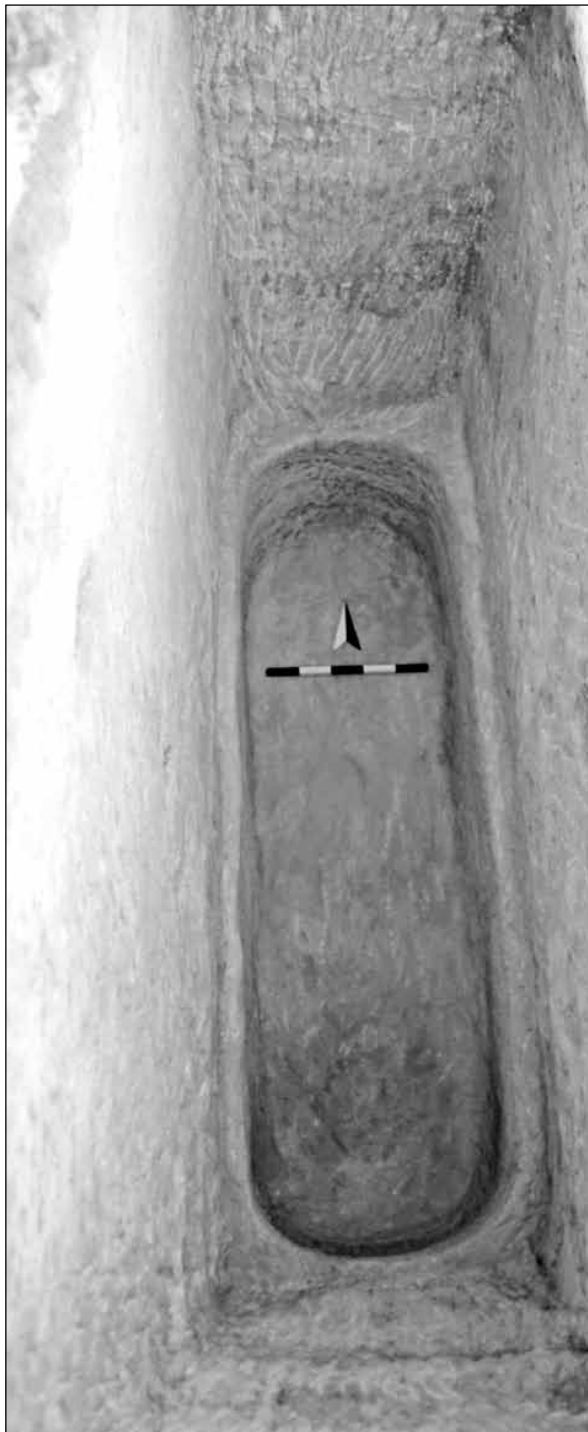
7. *BD 24. Pit grave. Stone and mortar filling in the southern section, -70cm (L. Gorgerat).*

The second grave excavated in BD 24 is ST1, and is situated in the *loculus* below the *arcosolium* (Figs. 3 and 11). Due to the prominent location within the *arcosolium* one must assume that this was the main burial of BD 24. It was quite obvious that ST1 was looted in a similar way to the pit grave situated in front of it. Again the focus was on the northern end of the grave where most of the finds were expected. At the southern end of the grave we found two covering slabs, which originally sealed the burial, still *in situ* (Figs. 12 and 13). Although they were broken, they lay on the protruding ledge in the lower part of the pit (Fig. 14). The fill of the pit comprised mixed fragments of covering slabs, small stones, bone and mortar fragments, attesting to



8. *BD 24. Pit grave. Covering slabs in the southern section, -160cm (L. Gorgerat).*

the looting of the feature (Fig. 15). Nevertheless, various elements in the grave allow some conclusions concerning its dating. First, the mortar used to seal the covering slabs consists of lime,



9. BD 24. Pit grave after excavation, -220cm (L. Gorgerrat).

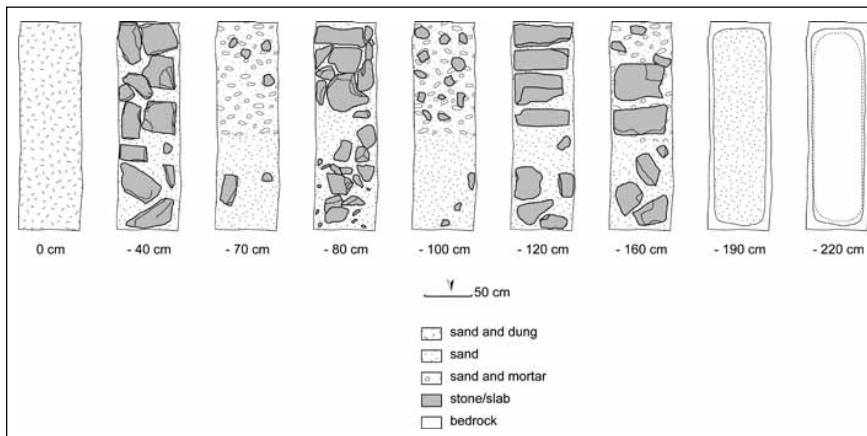
pebbles, charcoal and small fragments of pottery used as temper (Fig. 16), characteristic of other burials in Petra (Schmid 2010). The sherds used for this purpose are of Nabataean painted fine ware and provide an indication of the date of the

last burial (Fig. 17). The greatest proportion of the pottery temper belongs to Schmid's Phase 3b, indicating that the earliest possible date of the last use of the grave was toward the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD or the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. This *terminus post quem* was corroborated by several other finds, for example, an oil lamp of the later Negev 1a-type (Fig. 18) and 19 *unguentaria* (Fig. 19) which escaped the attention of the robbers and which also belong to Schmid's Phase 3b (Schmid 2000: 77).

Although not all the *loculi* were uncovered within BD 24, the dating for the use of the tomb is quite clear. The pottery found between the entrance of BD 24 and Room 4 (Figs. 1, 3 and 20) is of special interest. There, an area of debris yielded many fragments of pottery, mainly plain ware, including cooking pots. The earliest group belongs to Schmid's Phase 2b or the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (Schmid 2000: 28, 38, 148–150). This may well be the date of the carving of the tomb. These observations suggest that the northern part of the Aşlah triclinium complex, for of which BD 24 is the main structure, was probably built around the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC or the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and was used until the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD at the latest. A similar abandonment took place at other rock-cut 'sanctuaries' in Petra, such as the veneration place of Isis in the Wādī as-Siyyagh (Merklein and Wenning 2001: 427) and the Obodas Chapel (Tholbecq and Durand 2005: 310).

#### *Further Structures on the Northern Terrace*

Excavation of some parts of the Northern Terrace in 2010 (Gorgerat and Wenning 2010) revealed the existence of built architecture in front of BD 24, and in 2011 and 2012 the plateau of the Northern Terrace was completely excavated (Figs. 3 and 21). This could be done easily as the bedrock was covered by only a thin layer of sand and rubble washed in from the higher north passage. The packing of earth and stones, only a few centimetres thick in the south, was around 75 cm in the north. We noticed that the plateau has suffered from water damage, which had caused cracks and fissures. Natural features and depressions in the rock had been filled in antiquity with stones and earth to create a level surface. Even in Rooms 1 - 2 (Figs. 3 and 22),



10. BD 24. Layers of the pit grave in front of loculus ST1 (A. Gorgerat, L. Gorgerat).



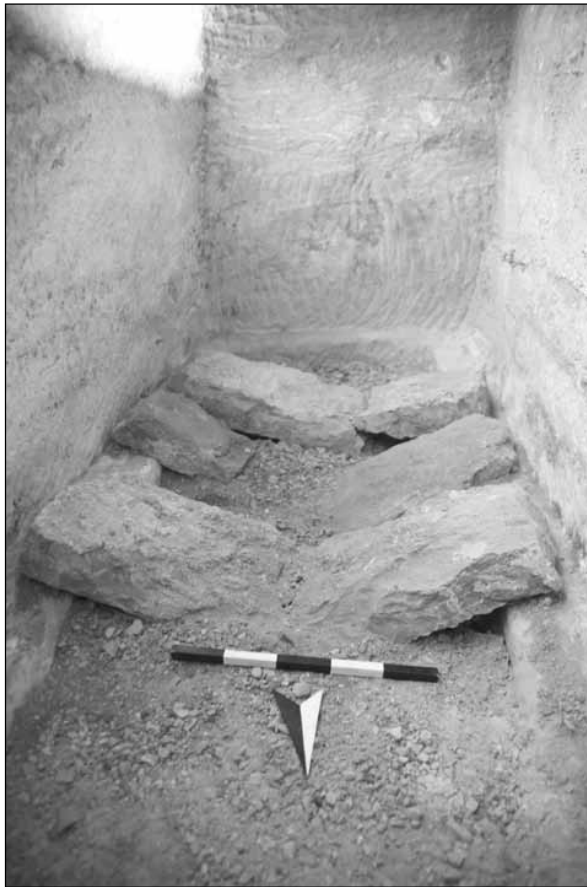
11. BD 24. Loculus ST1 before excavation (L. Gorgerat).

which had been carved out like a quarry, the remaining grooves had been packed with a hard material. At the bottom of one of the grooves we found a well-preserved lamp, a local imitation of the 'Broneer XXI' type (Fig. 23) and which is dated *ca* AD 100 (Grawehr 2006: 291-294). On the basis of the presence of fragments of some paving slabs among the debris in the

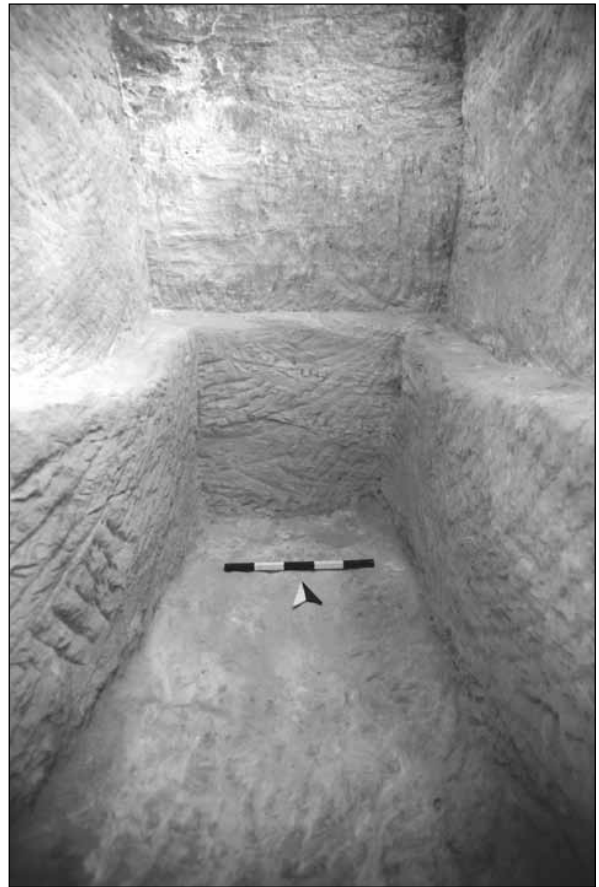


12. BD 24. Broken covering slabs and mortar in loculus ST1 (L. Gorgerat).

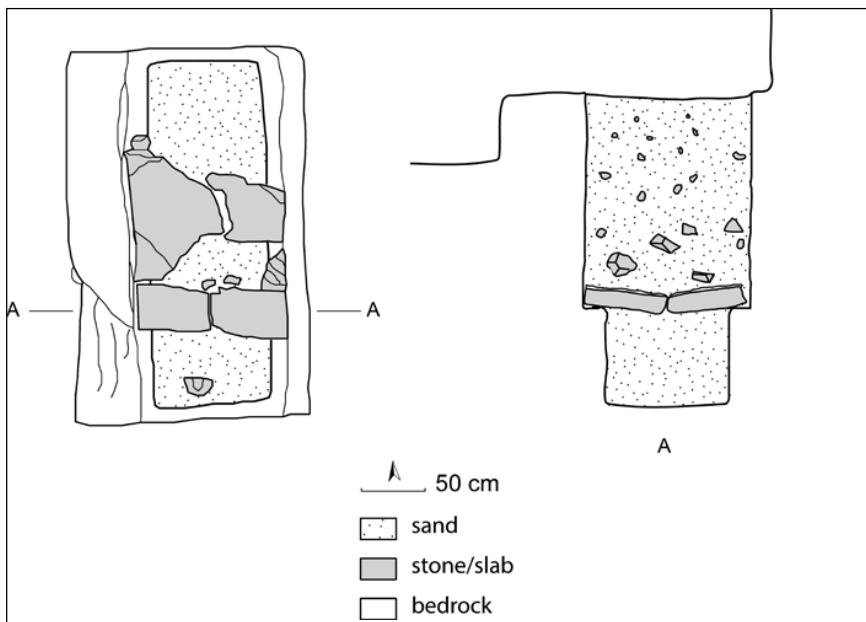




13. BD 24. Broken covering slabs and mortar in loculus ST1 (L. Gorgerat).



14. BD 24. Loculus ST1 after excavation (L. Gorgerat).

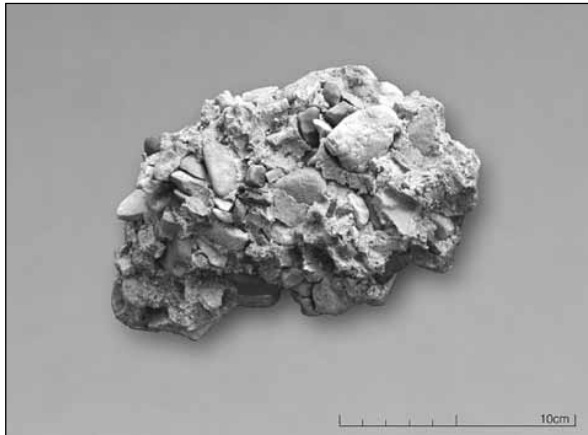


15. BD 24. Plan and section of loculus ST1 (A. Gorgerat, L. Gorgerat).

north it is assumed that a fine covering of slabs overlaid the packing. The entrance to Room 3 is postulated to have been located where the

foundation trench of Wall 1 is interrupted and rises up to the floor-level. This interpretation is supported by a hole for the door pivot. Together





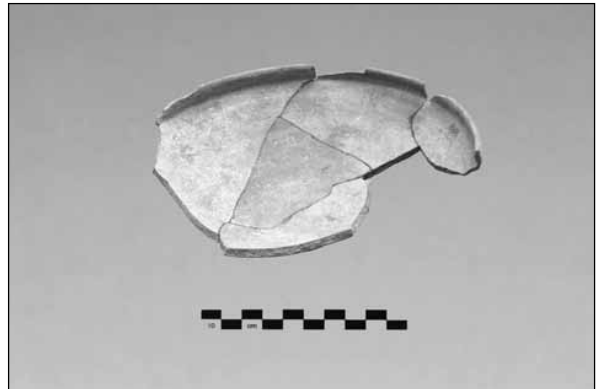
16. BD 24. Mortar from the covering layer in locus ST1 (L. Gorgerat).



19. BD 24. Unguentaria from locus ST1 (L. Gorgerat).



17. BD 24. Nabataean fine ware from the mortar in locus ST1 (L. Gorgerat).



20. Nabataean plate found in front of BD 24 (L. Gorgerat).



18. BD 24. Lamp from locus ST1 (L. Gorgerat).



21. Panoramic view of the Northern Terrace (L. Gorgerat).

with Walls 1 - 2, a new water channel was cut into the bottom of the foundation trench of Wall 1 and continued for some distance almost parallel to Wall 2 towards the old fissure at the foot of the higher Rooms 1 - 2. From here water could naturally follow the fissure under Wall 2 and be collected in a large rough depression just to the south of Wall 2. To the north of the entrance of

BD 24 (**Figs. 24 and 25**), further built structures and rock-cut features were excavated during the 2011 and 2012 seasons. The rectangular Room 4 (**Fig. 25**) is attached on its eastern extent to



22. Northern Terrace. Rock-cut rooms R1, R2 and R3 (L. Gorgerat).



23. Northern Terrace. Lamp from the groove of R2 (L. Gorgerat).

the tomb, while the western extent comprises a built wall. It might be that an entrance existed in the south-eastern corner, which had been later closed. A narrow rock-cut corridor leads to Room 5, which marks the northern extent of the area. The corridor could have been closed by a wall or a door in the north. At the northern limit of Room 5 there was a well-preserved basin which had been cut into the rock (**Fig. 26**).



24. Northern Terrace. Rock-cut rooms R4 and R5 from the south (L. Gorgerat).



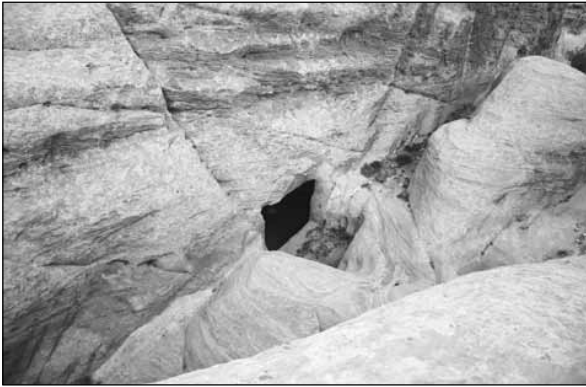
25. Northern Terrace. Rock-cut rooms R4 and R5 from the east (L. Gorgerat).



26. Northern Terrace. Rock-cut basin in room R5 (L. Gorgerat).

To the right of the basin, the higher passage to the north would probably have been dammed by a wall, of which only the lower layers appear in the section. Four abutment niches in the rock face point to arched rooms roofed with slabs resting on the arches, and which can be compared to Rooms 1 and 2 (Gorgerat and Wenning 2013: 233-234).

Natural water channels running along the foot

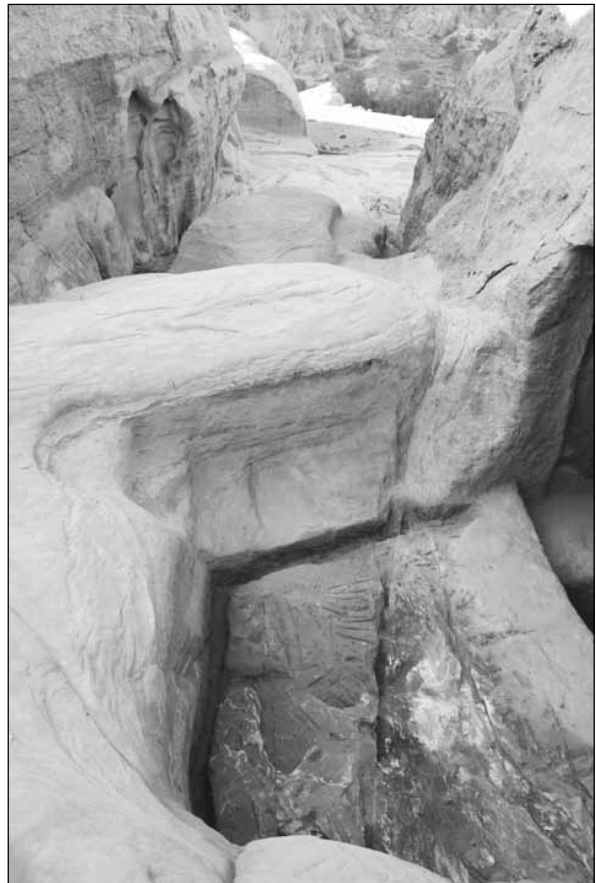


27. Northern Terrace. Rock-cut reservoir BD 26 (L. Gorgerat).

of the high rocks indicate that the heavy winter rains poured down over the plateau of both terraces from the higher area in the north, dammed in depressions and intruded into the rock, which has become very weak only a few inches below the surface. The Nabataeans tried to prevent such damage by keeping out the water. They cut grooves and simple channels all around for water flow. This can be best seen in the part between the Northern Terrace and the ar-Ramla plateau (**Fig. 1**). Here the reservoir BD 26 is cut into the rock (**Fig. 27**) along with four votive niches and a small niche basin. Although we were not able to excavate the reservoir, which is full of earth, stones and rubble today, we made a sounding but had to stop at *ca* 2.5 m. Considering the steps leading down, we suggest that the chamber could be about 5 - 6 m deep. The chamber itself measures 6 x 6.28 - 6.43 m. The walls had been roughly carved using a 'tooth' chisel. A thick layer of grey plaster, with small pebbles and tiny pottery fragments covers the walls to a thickness of *ca* 4.5 cm. The capacity of the reservoir appears too large in relation to the amount of water estimated from the relatively small area around. A few mediaeval characters are painted on the plaster. We suggest that in this period the steps were truncated (**Fig. 28**). The opening of the reservoir measures 2.5 m wide by 1.75 m high. An open settling tank with four steps is cut in front of the opening into the rock, measuring 3 m x 2.3 m (**Fig. 29**). The bottom of the basin is 70 cm below the opening of the reservoir, but the side walls of the basin reach a height of *ca* 1.3 m. When the basin was filled with water it flowed into the reservoir. There are traces of a natural channel along the foot of the



28. BD 26. Remains of the steps leading into the reservoir (R. Wenning).



29. Settling tank in front of reservoir BD 26 (L. Gorgerat).

rock between the basin and the built installations around Room 4. This channel begins to the north of the basin and originally fed the cistern D19, while the basin interrupted its course. The water has deeply eroded the rock in some parts. The danger this water presented to the built architecture was noticed by the Nabataeans, who

cut an artificial channel almost 13 m long to direct the water to cistern D19 (Fig. 1). The new channel begins at the level of Room 4. When the site was abandoned in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and the channels were no longer maintained, the water broke the interface and found its way down to the Northern Terrace along the southern face of Wall 3, eroding the rock here as well.

### Conclusions

The results of the 2010 - 2012 seasons of excavation by the International Aşlah Project allows more precise conclusions regarding the use of the complex. First, it must be noted that the Southern Terrace with the triclinium D17 and the Northern Terrace with the chamber tomb BD 24 and other architectural structures are of two different periods and cannot directly be put in one coherent plan. The triclinium is dated *to ca* 96 BC. If the new suggestions by numismatists are correct, i.e. that we have to delete Obodas II (62 - 60 BC) from the list of Nabataean Kings, then the argument to relate the inscription to Obodas I is even stronger. The Nabataean fine ware from the Northern Terrace is not older than the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and can be attributed to Schmid's phase 2b (30/20 - 5/4 BC) (Schmid 2000: 38). This means there is a chronological gap between the inscription (Wenning and Gorgerat 2012: 132-136; Gorgerat and Wenning 2013: 223-225) and the architecture on the Northern terrace dated by pottery. Therefore, we have to accept two main phases of construction at the site. It is not only the gap between the inscription and the pottery that defines the two periods. The structures of the Southern Terrace and Northern Terrace do not follow a coherent plan. While the chambers of the Southern Terrace are cut into the natural rock, the architecture in front of the chamber tomb on the Northern Terrace was built after the rock had been dismantled. The rock of the Aşlah triclinium is sharply cut towards the west to enlarge the area in front of the tomb. The outer wall of the Northern Terrace isolated the structures in front of the tomb from the open area in front of the triclinium. There is no attempt to correlate the two terraces and there is no alignment which corresponds with the older installations. An old water channel running diagonally across the Northern Terrace is cut by the foundation trenches for the outer wall and thus testifies to the two periods as well (Gorgerat and Wenning 2013: 267-268). Thus, chamber

tomb BD 24 does not belong to the Aşlah triclinium and we are left with a conundrum: that is, a rock-cut triclinium but no tomb belonging to it. Triclinia are not identified *per se* as parts of tomb sites. On the contrary, among the more than 100 triclinia, biclinia and stibadia in Petra, less than a quarter belong to burial places, but the Aşlah triclinium is situated in a necropolis and there is no other monumental tomb nearby which could be related to it. Therefore, we have to consider that the tomb of Aşlah and other members of that clan are amongst the large number of pit graves in the hills, may be. None of the pit graves is of outstanding size or construction, or is orientated towards the triclinium to such an extent as to be designated a possible grave of Aşlah.

The excavations of the Aşlah triclinium complex have produced an example of an early clan assembly place within a necropolis. It is a 'burial complex' without a monumental tomb but with a monumental triclinium. The site is enclosed by rocks and hillocks, not by masonry-built structures. The chambers of the Southern Terrace are without boundary structures, porticos and monumental entranceways, and are more functional than luxury architecture. This seems to be typical for the earliest tomb complexes, as opposed to later tomb complexes. In front of the triclinium, there was a large open space free of installations. Nevertheless, the triclinium, the small rooms beside it, the niches for betyls, the various water installations and the pit graves formed a 'sacred space' which is different from the later tomb complexes. A discussion of function has proposed that this early grouping was already a multifunctional complex (Wenning and Gorgerat 2012: 136-138). For the first time, its early beginnings could be studied. Additionally, the chamber tomb and structures in front of it, which were added at a later stage, are different from contemporary tomb complexes constructed following a more homogeneous plan.

### Note by Laila Nehmé

As promised in our first report L. Nehmé kindly gave us her reading of the second inscription of the Aşlah triclinium in October 2011 for this report. Although the inscription is now published (Nehmé 2012: 163-164 no. MP 4), we can present her full note here and we would like to thank her for this helpful support.

MP 4

This inscription is carved in the middle of the right (south) wall of the triclinium (Fig. 30). It was copied by J. T. Milik in 1955, and photographed and copied again in 2002 by L. Nehmé. It is 1.38 m long, the first □s 13 cm and the average height of the letters is 12 cm. J. T. Milik's reading is as follows:

'nt □b ly g"nt

□n

□n □m

which he translates:

"You compensated me by giving the klinè to me, Ge', you, Šalim, Šalim, may be safe".

He interprets this as the brief summary of a legal act between two persons who may have been slaves because they do not give their patronym. He adds that it may refer to the cession of a seat in the *triclinium* to a person who was not part of the owner's family.

In Milik's reading, 'nt is the second person personal pronoun, □b is a "death bed", attested in the form m□b' in Nabataean (JSNab40, "resting bed"; on this word, see Nehmé 2005-2006: 206) and ly is the preposition l- + the enc-

litic pronoun of first person singular -y. Ge' and Šalim are interpreted as personal names. Finally, Milik suggests that the third line may have been written by different hand to the first two. According to him, this line may be the signature of a partner of the legal act.

However attractive this reading and interpretation are, they conflict with the traces of the letters, which are currently visible on the stone. Indeed, as one can see in the photograph, the reading of the text is very difficult because it is obscured by traces left by stone-cutting tools on the wall. The facsimile we propose is based both on the copy we made *in situ* and on a careful examination of several digital photographs taken in 2002 (Fig. 31).

If Milik's reading were not available, we would only be able to read the following sequence of letters:

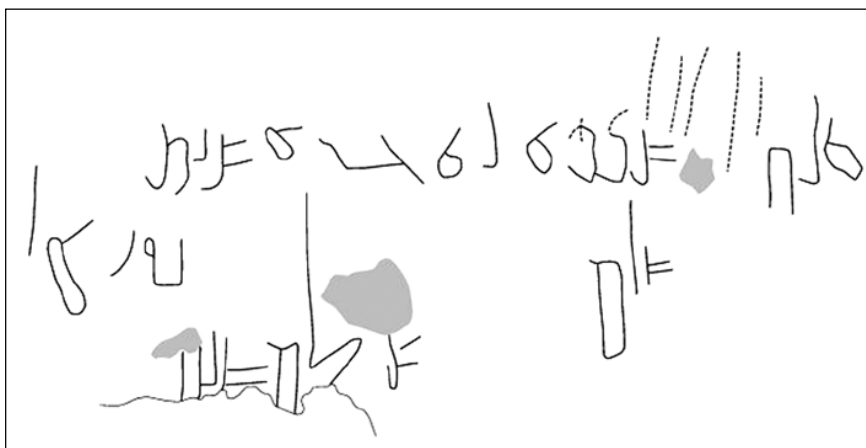
'{l/n}{t}----škb' {l/n}'g{d/r}'š{b/n}t  
 {b/n}wb{.}'l

šlm šlm šlm

We may recognize, with some uncertainty, '{nt}', "you" but '{lt}'. □b' can also safely be read and a m before the □ erased by the chip in the



30. Southern Terrace. Second inscription in Triclinium D17 (L. Nehmé).



31. Southern Terrace. Facsimile of the Second inscription in Triclinium D17 (L. Nehmé).

rock, is not completely impossible. The mention of a “resting bed”, a couch or bench, would not be surprising in a triclinium. Contrary to Milik’s reading, the *d* or *r* after the *g* is certain and the same is true for the □ that follows. Therefore, the rest of Milik’s reading cannot be accepted, especially since he missed the few letters which were traced below the end of the first line, in which we may see,  $\{l\}r\}b'\{l\}$  if the second letter does not have a loop (it is very difficult to say from the photograph).

As for lines 2 and 3, they are in fact more or less aligned and since they clearly form three times the sequence of letters □*m*, there is no particular reason to think that some of them are personal names (*šālim* for instance) while others would be the greeting word “may be safe”.

Thus, all that can safely be said about this text is that it probably mentions one of the benches of the Aṣḥāḥ triclinium, but it is futile to speculate on the meaning of the rest because there are too many uncertainties in the reading.

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