

THE 2012 SEASON OF EXCAVATIONS IN THE ANCIENT KHIRBAT AS-SAMRĀ CEMETERY

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As the systematic excavations in the ancient cemetery in Khirbat as-Samrā are nearing their closing stages, the twelfth season, conducted between the 27th August and the 17th October 2012¹, aimed to conclude the remaining sections of the two adjacent sites A and A1. It was also intended to localise the 1993 test excavation area within Site A, i.e. to put it within the site's and project's grid. This report summarises the proceedings of this excavation and its results as well as suggesting some points related to the inscribed and an-epigraphic tombstones found during previous excavations.

A- The Excavation

Excavations in both sites were conducted according to pre-set grids and carried out in the same standards applied earlier (s. Nabulsi *et al.* 2007: 275, 2012). In site A, the 2011 grid of 5x5m was eastwards extended to the rows 2, 1 and Ø (12 squares). The positioning of five tombs dug in this area enabled the localization of the 1993 excavation within 6 squares (ØA to C3), whereby the first trench on the East extended into the balk of square F3 of site A1 (**Fig. 1**). In the remaining 6 squares (column D and row 2), only 12 disturbed tombs were found, nine of which were child burials. This low tomb frequency is mainly to be attributed to un-thorough excavation dictated by the limited time and workforce available. The yield from the twelve excavated tombs was poor in all aspects. Human remains were largely fragmentary and scanty. This is also true for the few objects (tomb furniture) found. These included some glass beads, incomplete fragment of iron and copper bracelets, anklets,

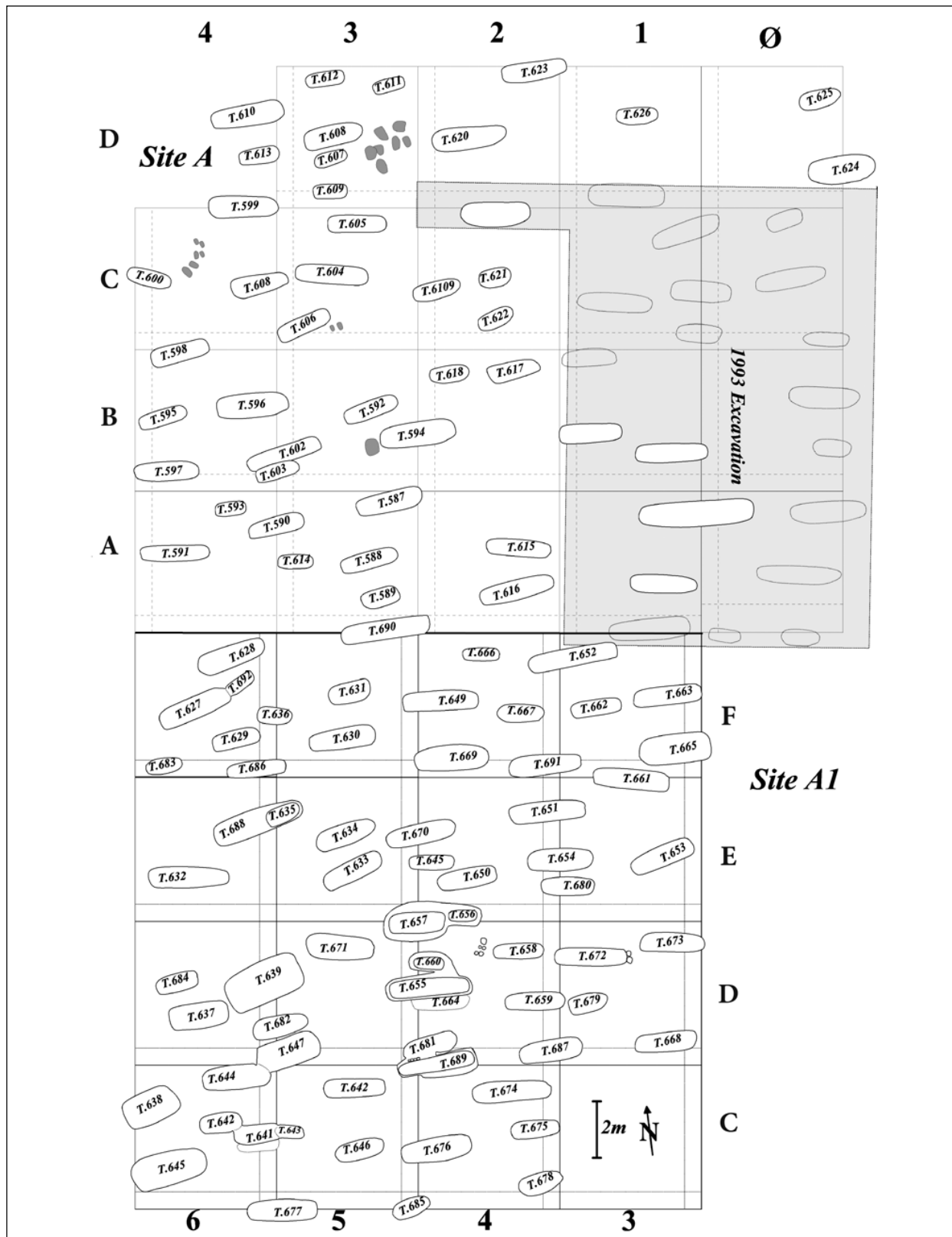
rings, pendants and one fragment of a bronze cross amulet (registered as KS-2107) that dates Tomb-622, and possibly the neighbouring ones, to the that in 1993 suggested 6th-7th AD century period (Nabulsi 1998: 271-274).

Site A1 was divided by a 5x5m grid of six (E-W) rows and 6 (S-N) columns. After the 1997, 2006 and 2008 excavations (Nabulsi *et al.* 2007: Fig 4), the remaining 15 squares were excavated during this season (**Fig. 1**). The site was probably one of the intensely used burial areas within this cemetery and indicated by 66 excavated tombs (4.4burials/25m²). Four other large tombs at the site's western margin were not excavated as they critically extended below the main South-North modern road. The excavated tombs included eight intact, at least 3 with multiple consecutive burials (two individuals), and 3 totally disintegrated infant burials. The total number of excavated tombs in the 900m² area of Site A1 increased to 157 tombs, 16 of which were intact. Overall, 692 tombs were excavated during 12 campaigns at Khirbat as-Samrā cemetery, 78 during the 2012 season.

Despite fragility, fragmentation, and surface erosion, a large sample of human material was retrieved; some partly or completely articulated. Other objects, tomb furniture, were scanty. These included four, low quality, golden earrings of simple ring-form found in previously disturbed tombs. A number of iron bracelets and anklets were found *in situ*, while other unrecognizable object was strongly rusty and fragmentary. Bronze and copper objects were generally deteriorated. These included 3 small bronze coins, fragmentary bracelets, earrings,

1. The excavating team included the students Charleen Gaunitz, Mareike Neumann, Nicola Silber, and Chris-

tina Wurst (all from JG University in Mainz, Germany) beside the authors listed above.



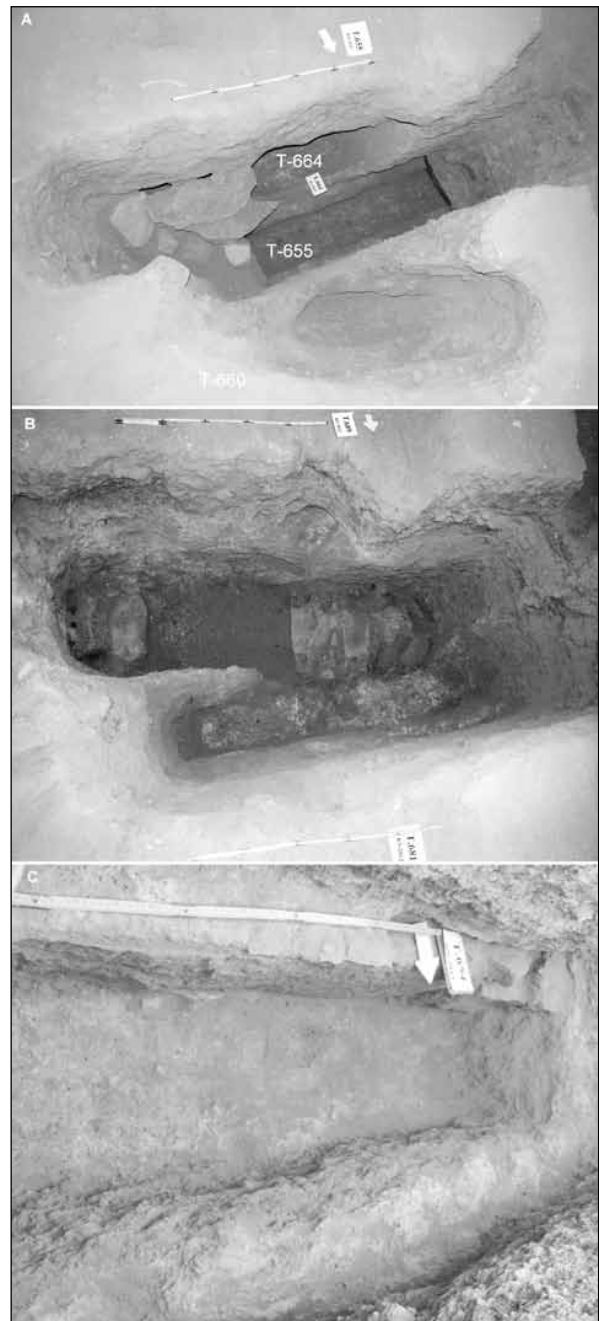
1. The excavated parts of Site A and A1 during the 2011 and 2012 seasons. The shaded area within Site A marks the 1993 excavation (comp. Nabulsi 1998).

and pendants. Also found were a number of diverse glass, stone, shell, and animal bone beads, though usual abundance. No glassware or plaster objects were found. Despite being adjacent to the 2011 excavated part of Site A (Nabulsi *et al.* 2012), no cloth or wood pieces were observed in any of the this season's Site A1 tombs.

The observed diversity within the Khirbat as-Samrā cemetery was not reported from any of the similar dated cemeteries in Jordan, e.g. Wādī Faynān (Findlater *et al.* 1998). It is interesting to observe that the ancient grave diggers never ran out of ideas to build simple or complex tomb structures, in adaptation to space, geology and very probable to the individual wishes of their local community. Site A1 revealed a wider diversity in tomb structure and arrangement than that documented in Site C (Nabulsi *et al.* 2009: 167-169).

Tomb-655, sized *ca.* 310x70x200cm, had a fine dug burial cist closed by almost similar sized (*ca.* 55x20x15cm), rectangular, fine cut, basalt slabs with smooth even surfaces. At about the slabs level, an oval opening, *ca.* 150x60cm was dug in the northern wall's virgin soil layer forming a side chamber, Tomb-664, with a 175x45cm burial bed. The tomb included a nearly intact single human burial, only the skull was displaced and damaged. The side chamber was closed by six flat and rough-cut basalt and limestone slabs, piled in two rows. The structure rested upon the covering stones of Tomb-655 and was fixed and sealed using variably small pebbles. When excavated, only the eastern row was intact and two of the displaced slabs had crude engraved cross on one side (see below). The complex was completed by the intact Tomb-660, a child burial, partly dug at the NE end, in the filling of Tomb-655 (**Fig. 2a**). Between Tomb-681 and Tomb-689 a short wall, 60x40cm, was built separating the western ends of both burials. The structure was constructed at the side Tomb-681 burial bed, and the covering slabs level of Tomb-689 (**Fig. 2b**). In the case of Tomb-654, its southern shoulder built using three rectangular basalt stones. The smaller one on the west was followed by two large, Greek inscribed basalt tomb stones, with their bases towards the middle. The shoulder was levelled by adjusting cuttings of the tombstones and the placement of small and flat stone (**Fig. 2c, 3**).

This observation reflects the attention and accuracy with which burial chambers were constructed in this cemetery. The burial cist contained the partially articulated lower limb parts of two individuals. Furthermore, there are structural indications that Tomb-654 and Tomb-664 were reused, i.e. earlier burials than those found in 2012.

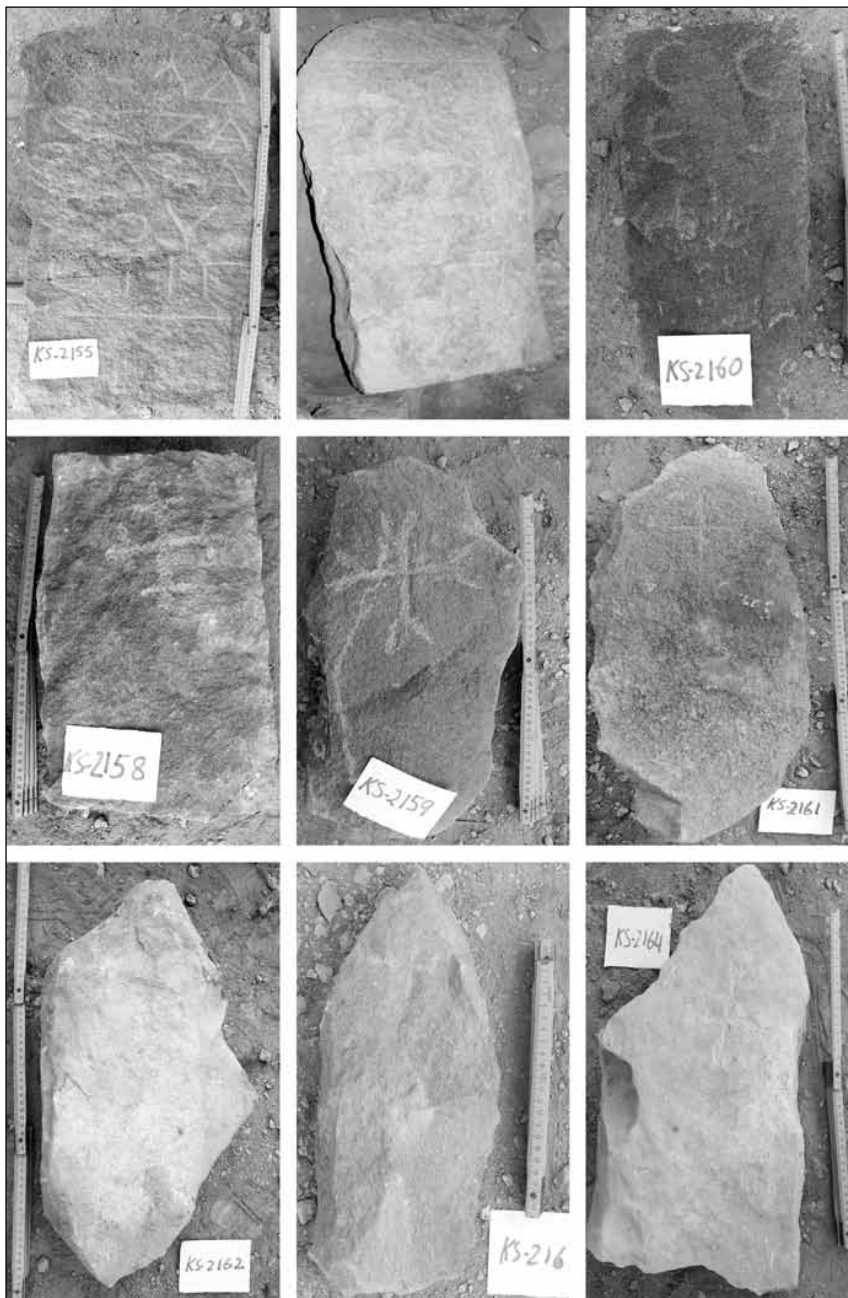


2. Tombs excavated in Site A1, 2012. A: complex of Tomb-655/644/660, B: the joint Tomb-681/689, C: Tomb-654 with levelled stone-built shoulder.

Earlier, it was suggested that a road or pathway (no tombs found within it) ran through the cemetery along the northern margin of Site C (Nabulsi *et al.* 2009: 167). During the 2009 season in Site E, a similar pathway that ran along through the southern squares was thought to be continuous with that in Site C. After the last two seasons, 2011 and 2012 in Site A and A1, it became evident that both must have been pathways leading to different burial areas within the cemetery, i.e. dead-end roads.

B- Inscribed and Anepigraphic Tombstones

Three Greek inscribed and eight cross-en-graved tombstones were found during the 2012 excavation from tombs in Site A1. The basalt tombstone, registered as KS-2160, was reused as a covering slab in the burial chamber of Tomb-682. The rectangular stone, 43x20x14cm, had roughly cut smooth surfaces. The inscribed face carried an unintelligible Greek text of 5-6 letters (**Fig. 3C**). The other two Greek inscribed tombstones reused in Tomb-654 (s. above and



3. Inscribed and an-epigraphic tombstones from the 2012 excavation season.

Fig. 3A, B) revealed similar features. Both were large oblong basalt stones with arched, dorsally wrapped top and thicker flat base, a flat inscribed face, rough back and partially dressed lateral sides. Originally, the stones had a broader upper part than their base but these were reduced, as evident by cut marks, to vertically level the tomb shoulder (**Fig. 2c**). The first tombstone found eastwards, KS-2155 (78x41x18cm), had a 5-line engraved Greek text followed by a vertical line. The text mentioned a man's name, his father's, and age at death. The Greek inscription on the second tombstone, KS-2156 (80x38x21cm), was engraved in 5 lines with similar information, whereby the part referring to personal names was separated between two vertical lines, and the age engraved below the lower line. Secure readings of the three inscriptions, including graphical details, are forthcoming.

Tombstones from Khirbat as-Samrā were differentiated in two distinct types. The First, Type 1, includes the “pagan” Greek inscribed stones dated to the 2nd-4th AD century. Type 2 represents the “Christian” tombstones dated to the 6th-7th AD century and includes Greek and “Melkite Aramaic” inscriptions (Savignac 1925: 118-119; Gatier 1998: 364-366).

While the “Christian” tombstones were considered to be characteristic of Khirbat as-Samrā (Gatier 1998: 366), those of Type 1 were the southernmost representatives of the Hauran material, similar to those from the surrounding sites, e.g. Umm al-Jimāl. This did not prevent the distinction between Riḥāb and Khirbat as-Samrā tombstones, based on differences in décor and style (Gatier 1998: 364-366). Many of these stones have horizontal lines below and sometimes above the text. Among these was one single case, S.2257 (Gatier 1998: 367-380, no. 20) that was smaller in size but with features similar to KS-2155 and KS-2156. Curiously, the only other tombstone of similar size and style to these two was the Nabataean inscribed KS-1685 from Tomb-517 (Nabulsi and Macdonald, in press). Earlier, the Nabataean inscribed tombstones with arched or rounded topsides from in

Umm al-Jimāl were related, or even restricted, to female burials (Littmann 1914). This association was later extended to include Greek inscribed from other sites (e. g. Mac Adam and Graf 1985:187; Hübner and Weiss 2007:179). While KS-1804 could be such an example from Khirbat as-Samrā cemetery (Nabulsi and Macdonald, in press), KS-2155, KS-2156, KS-1685, as well as S.2257 were oblong gravestones with rounded tops, engraved vertical line below the inscription, and erected for deceased male individuals. With these features they can be considered as representatives of a local distinct tombstone style. The inclusion of the Nabataean inscribed stone also suggest dating not later than late 3rd AD century².

During the excavations carried out in Khirbat as-Samrā cemetery 52 an-epigraphic cross engraved and 18 inscribed “tombstones” were discovered. They are listed and classified in **Table 1** according to their type and location. Though only two were found *in situ*, KS-1261 and KS-1537 found in topsoil layer were probably collapsed headstones of Tomb-153 and 477 respectively (Nabulsi *et al.* 2007: 274; Nabulsi 2010: 217). The table show that more than half of the 52 cross engraved stones were reused as covering slabs, preferably on the western end rather than the lower eastern part. It appears that not all such stones were originally tombstones. This is definitely true in three cases, whilst possible in few others. The stones KS-2161 and KS-2162 found in Tomb-664 were thin on one oblong side and thicker on the other. Their *ca.* 8x7cm cross was applied by crudely “scratching” multiple perpendicular lines on the rough surface. The basalt covering stone KS-1383, Tomb-421, is fine-cut rectangular stone taken from a built structure. One side revealed irregularly engraved dotted lines and was partly covered with about 1cm thick plaster layer. The opposite side had a centrally rough engraved cross. It is improbable that these three were erected headstones.

The use of inscribed stones³ of type 1 as covering slabs was restricted to the tomb's eastern side. To four stones listed in **Table 1**, one can in-

2. The inscription was Nabataean and not “Hauran Aramaic” (Macdonald 2003:44–46,54–56) and no dating was suggested in the related publication (s. Nabulsi and Macdonald, in press). It has been suggested that Nabataean remained in use in the Hauran well into the

3rd AD century (e.g. Said and al-Ghul 2007:256).
3. The inscribed Hamaic text on KS-1331 and KS-1332 was a graffiti and not funerary (Nabulsi and Macdonald, in press) and therefore cannot be described as parts of a tombstone.

Table 1: The type and distribution of tombstones during excavations at Khirbat as-Samrā cemetery. Inscribed stones are given in singular registration numbers. See text for those marked (*).

	With Cross		Inscription Only		Total
	Anepigr.	and Greek or Syriac	Greek	Aramaic	
<i>In situ</i>	1	KS-2001			2
Topsoil	17	KS-1261* KS-1326, KS-2027	KS-1863 KS-2000		22
Fill	8		KS-1205*	KS-1685*	10
Slabs					
W	17	KS-2009			18
M	3				3
E	5	KS-2010	KS-1325 KS-1804	KS-1331 KS-1332	10
Western half	19	1			20
Eastern half	6	1	2	2	11
n. d.	2		KS-1810		3
Chamber			KS-2155 KS-2156		2
Total	52	6	9	3	70

clude KS-1205 and KS-1685 which were found in the filling but fitted as one of the last, eastern, covering slabs in Tomb-310 and 517 respectively. Furthermore, it was observed that the inscribed and cross engraved stones were placed with their inscribed side facing the deceased. But in Tomb-34⁴, the covering slabs at both ends included the tombstones KS-2009 and KS-2010. Their inscribed faces carried an engraved cross and a text in Greek and Syriac was placed upwards.

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4. Wrongly referred to as “tombe 14” in Humbert (1998:

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