

THE INTERNATIONAL WĀDĪ FARASA PROJECT (IWFP) PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE 2005 SEASON

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Introduction and Acknowledgments

The field season 2005 of the International Wādī Farasa Project (IWFP) lasted from August 14th to September 1st. The IWFP 2005 was carried out by the Association for the Understanding of Ancient Cultures (AUAC: www.auac.ch), based in Basel (Switzerland) and the University of Montpellier III (France) and was generously sponsored by Wirth and Wirth Architects (Basel, Switzerland). We would like to thank the director general of the Department of Antiquities, Dr. Fawwaz Al-Khraysheh, for his support and for granting the working permit as well as Dr. Fawzi Zayadine ('Amman), Prof. David Graf (Miami) and Dr. Bernhard Kolb (Basel), for their continuous interest in the project.

The following people participated in the 2005 season of the IWFP: the archaeologists Stephan G. Schmid (director), André Barmasse, MA (Basel), Aurélien Amour, BA (Montpellier) and Lucy Wadeson, MPhil (Oxford), the restorer Urs Lang, BA (La Chaux-de-Fonds), the architect Pascal Wirth (Basel) and the software engineer Dominik Wirth (Basel). The representative of the Department of Antiquities was Tahani Al-Salhi, whose help and advice were much appreciated. Eleven workmen and one teawoman from the Bdool tribe were employed. We would also like to thank IFPO, 'Amman and especially its director Jean-François Salles for lodging the team during its stay at 'Amman.

Following the results of the previous campaigns of the project (cf. Schmid 2004 for the results of the previous season as well as for further bibliographical references), the following trenches and soundings were opened (cf. **Fig. 1**): The rock plateau at the NE end of the huge entrance building, that was partially exposed last year, was completely excavated (no. 1 on **Fig.**

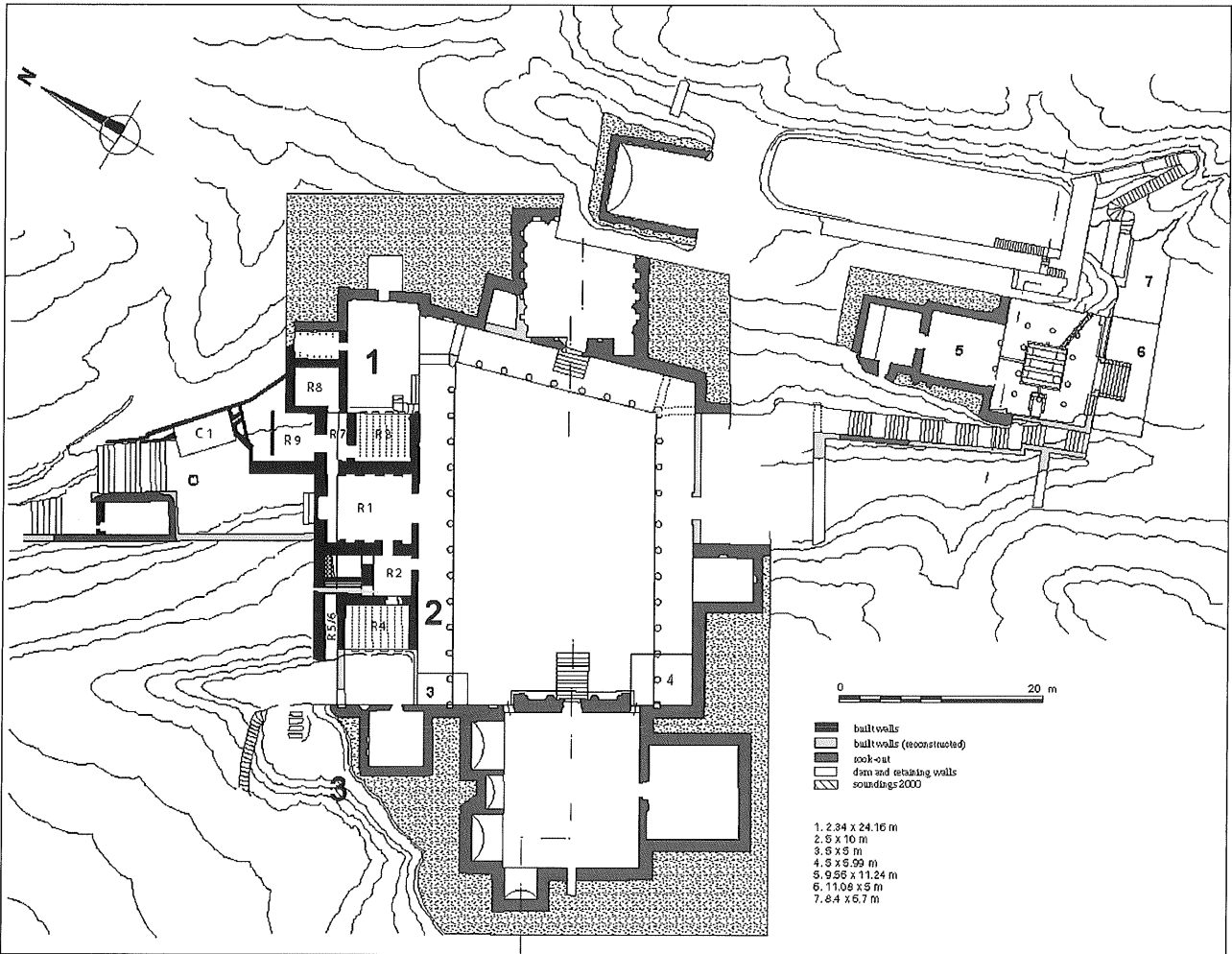
1). Within the northern portico of the complex a trench measuring 5m x 5m was opened behind room 2, in order to expose the next couple of columns and to allow the temporary construction of a wall in order to canalize the water and sand brought into the complex by winter rainfalls (no. 2 on **Fig. 1**). The rock plateau around the western corner of the complex was cleaned and the structures that were discovered were excavated (no. 3, **Fig. 1**)

NE-Corner of Complex

In 2004 the cleaning of the rocky outcrop of the Soldier Tomb's complex was begun. In 2005 this area was completely exposed (**Figs. 2, 3**; cf. **Fig. 1** for location), revealing a small room measuring 6.0m x 4.6m, built haphazardly with reused stones and containing an important amount of the so-called Ayyubid-Mamluk pottery, dating to the 11th to 13th centuries AD. During the Nabataean period, the entire rock plateau probably formed one single room, with some of the rock carvings from the positioning of the lateral walls still being visible. From this room an opening in the sandstone, probably related to a natural crack but enlarged by human activities, leads downwards into another room, completely cut into the rock. Excavation of this room was begun from the SE side, i.e. from the northern portico. From this area, two openings give access to the rock cut room, although it is not yet clear whether they are both of antique origin. So far, only about half of the sandy fill has been cleared, not revealing any information as to the function and use of this room, measuring 3.6m by 3.5m.

Northern Portico

A trench measuring 5m x 5m was opened in



1. Wādī Farasa East, general plan of the Soldier Tomb's complex (A. Barmasse after Bachmann and Watzinger and Wiegand 1921).

the northern portico, adjacent to room 2 (Fig. 4; cf. Fig. 1). As could be expected, the next two columns of the portico were found, confirming the basic dimensions of this architectural feature, as found in previous years, that is a standard *intercolumnium* of 187cm, a bay of 247cm and the width of the portico as 3.65m. As previously observed, most of the original floor slabs had been taken away, most probably in antiquity. Since most of the fallen column drums and other architectural members were standing or lying on several centimeters of earth, accumulated directly on top of the foundations of the slabs, they must have been removed before the columns collapsed. Several bronze coins from that general area belong to the late Roman period, more specifically to the period from 337AD to 361AD, thereby confirming that the complex collapsed during the 363AD earthquake.

Following the results of our 2004 and 2005

campaigns, some additional reflections as to the roofing construction of the portico can be added. In 2004, the upper part of a column including a capital and the following stone were found aligned, following the earthquake that destroyed the entire complex of the Soldier Tomb's. The stone above the capital turned out to be the starting point for a double arch, of unequal width (or height) on both sides. The situation of the find, strongly suggests that these parts once belonged to one of the central columns, flanking the main entrance into the porticoes from room 1 (cf. Fig. 1 for location). As we discussed in last year's preliminary report (Schmid 2004), it was not immediately clear whether the arches indicate a kind of an arcade, i.e. one single row of columns supporting arches, or whether we have to suppose the existence of a second colonnade. Further reflections are now likely to clarify this point.



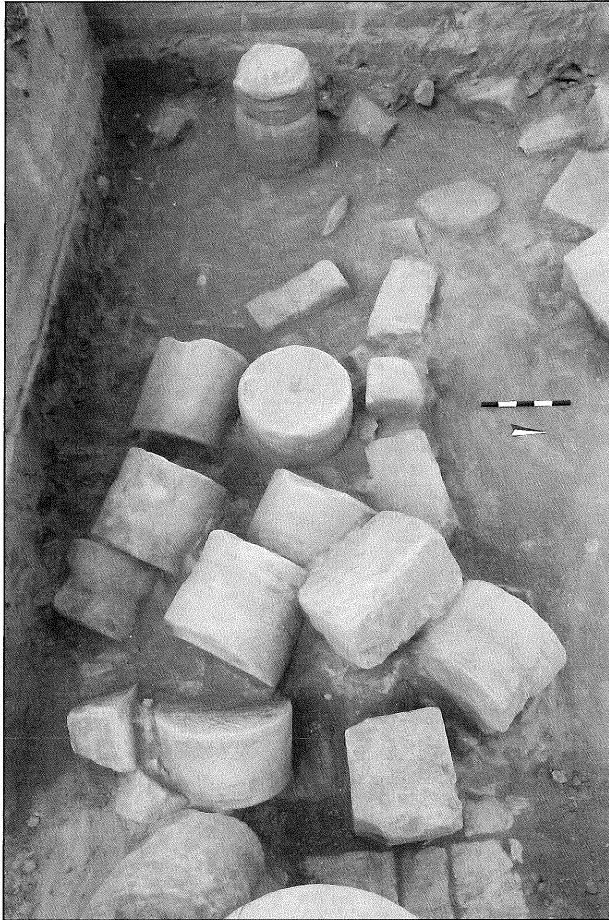
2. *Wādī Farasa East, Medieval room on rocky outcrop in NE corner of the complex (Schmid).*



3. *Medieval room on rocky outcrop in NE corner of the complex (Schmid).*

First of all, a double portico covered by arches would create a significant technical problem, the point where the pressure of the second arch met the second colonnade would be at risk of collapsing, since it would have no counterpart.

The positive evidence of a reconstruction, with one portico in the shape of an arcade, is offered by the rock cuttings of the first half column of the northern portico. Therefore it can be seen to be the same structure that we discussed in the



4. Wādi Farasa East, northern portico adjacent to room 2 during excavation, with fallen column drums (Schmid).

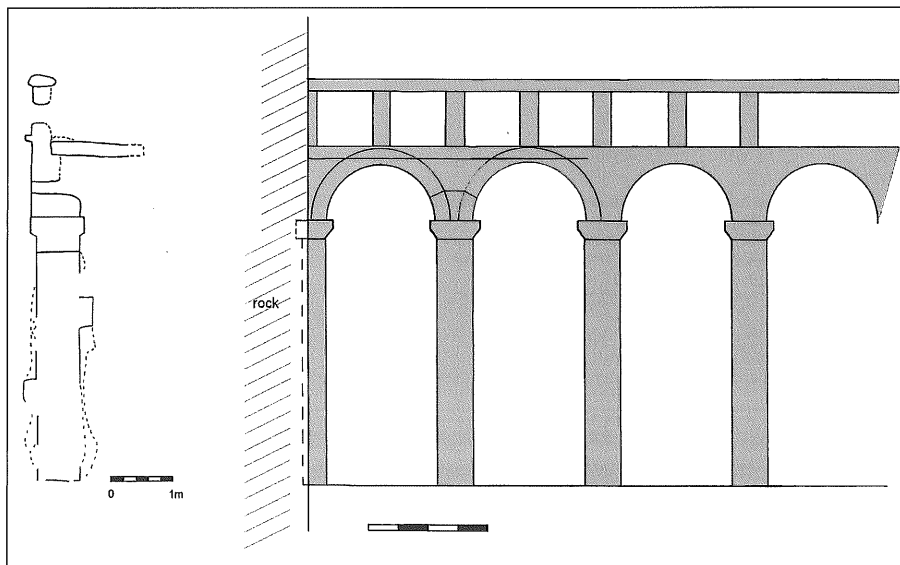
reports of our survey season and of our first field season (cf. Schmid 1999, 2000) and also the same structure that led the “Deutsch-Türkische Denkmalschutzkommando”, in 1916, to the

first reconstruction of the complex (Bachmann, Watzinger and Wiegand 1921; cf. here left on Fig. 5).

The carving of the roof of the portico (Fig. 5 left on top), is located more than one meter above the top level of the capital. On the one hand, this situation is difficult to explain in the case of a flat covered roof. On the other hand, immediately above the capital, the beginning of a curved carving is clearly visible. In other words, this must have been the beginning of the first arch, that was directly set into the rock cuttings for the half column and, therefore, the pressure did not create a problem. Therefore, we are able to propose a reconstruction of the colonnade as shown in figure 5 (right), combining the information obtained by the rock-cuttings, with the architectural elements found during excavation.

Western Corner of the Complex

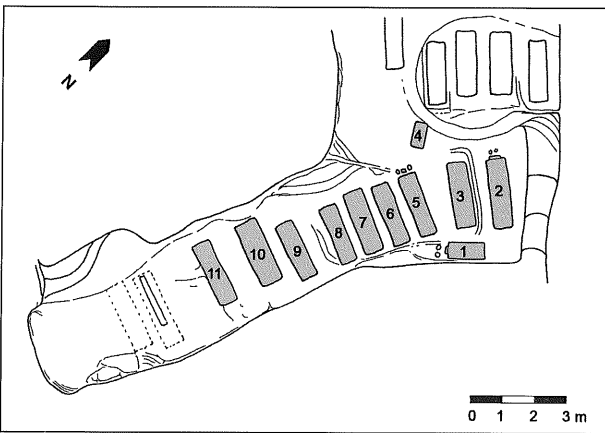
Initially, it was planned to expose only the area related to the construction of the entrance building to the Soldier Tomb’s complex. Cleaning of the adjacent area revealed a small necropolis containing 11 shaft graves (Figs. 6, 7). Four more shaft graves, cut into a rounded rock cut structure were visible, that had not been noted in the first plan of the area was established (Bachmann and Watzinger and Wiegand 1921) and were reported being to have been looted during the interim. The additional eleven graves had not been previously investigated, but it soon became clear that they must also have been looted,



5. Wādi Farasa East, rock carvings for half column, beginning of arch and roof of northern portico, drawing with tentative reconstruction (Schmid).



6. Wādī Farasa East, rocky outcrop in W corner of the Soldier Tomb's complex with small graveyard (Schmid).



7. Wādī Farasa East, plan of small graveyard adjacent to the Soldier Tomb's complex (Schmid).

at least partially. Nevertheless, the information obtained from these burials is interesting and deserves further study.

Most of the graves showed a part of their original upper fill still *in situ*, but usually over only about one half of the grave's surface. The same was true for the covering slabs of most of the single burials (Figs. 8-10). This reveals the tactics of the looters, who in most cases seem to have been quite experienced: they presumed that offerings (pottery, coins etc.) and jewellery (earrings, necklaces), were usually displayed around or at the head of the deceased. Since some of the graves show circular and rectangular rock cuttings at the top of the structure, the looters appear to have supposed that these were the respective areas of the heads and concen-



8. Tomb 2 after cleaning of looters excavation (Schmid).

trated their efforts on those parts. This can be seen clearly on figures 8 to 10 and 14. On figure 8, the two lowest burials of tomb 2 were looted, simply by lifting the uppermost covering slabs, i.e. precisely the head area. As a consequence,

in such cases the respective skeletons were rather well preserved, but with their heads missing (**Fig. 9**). The same is true for the uppermost burial in tomb 10, where an excellent preserved but headless skeleton was found (**Fig. 10**). As we shall see, different elements led to the idea that most of the tombs had already been looted during antiquity or at least during the Medieval period. There is, however, one exception provided by tomb 11 (**Fig. 11**). It had been almost completely emptied with only some covering slabs remaining inside the shaft. Furthermore, about 1.2m below the surface and at the presumed head end of the tomb, a metal headpiece of a *mudjarfa* was discovered (top center on **Fig. 11**), clearly indicating modern looting. Another



9. Tomb 2 with remains of second burial (Schmid).



10. Tomb 10 with remains of last burial (Schmid).

indication of the date of the looting, is provided by tomb 7 (**Fig. 12**). No element of the initial covering slabs or of the burials themselves were discovered. The entire tomb was densely filled with Medieval pottery (**Figs. 12, 13**) and animal bones, clearly indicating its function as a rubbish pit during that period and, therefore, necessarily a contemporary or earlier looting of the graves.

Nevertheless, several interesting pieces of information and new elements, concerning Nabataean burial practices and the construction techniques used in such tombs, were obtained. First of all, with the exception of two smaller graves, probably used for children (nos. 1 and 4 on **Fig. 7**), all the shaft tombs excavated to



11. Tomb 11 with modern looting evidence (Schmid).

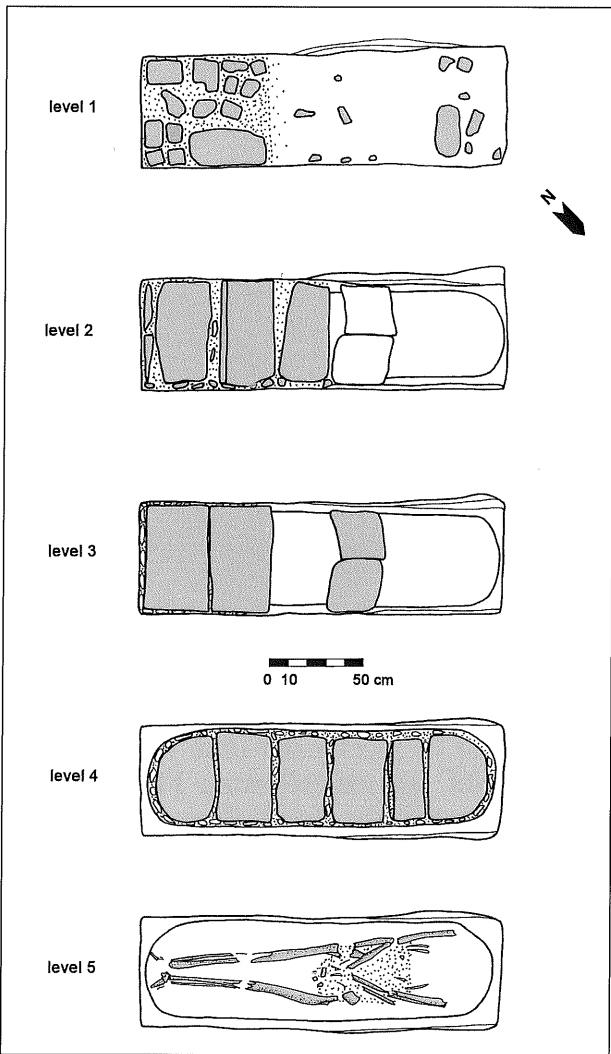


13. Tomb 7, Medieval pot (Schmid).

date were used for several burials; up to three as far as could be ascertained from the preserved evidence (cf. for the following **Figs. 14, 15**). This means that the shafts show considerable depth, in most cases slightly more than 2m, usually with a width of about 60cm. While at least the lower burials – in some shafts even all of them – were covered by slabs placed on rock cut shoulders (visible on **Figs. 8, 10, 11, 16-18**), some of the burials located higher up in the shaft were constructed using vertical slabs for the sides and horizontal slabs for the covering (**Fig. 9**). In shaft grave 5, after having cleaned the dis-



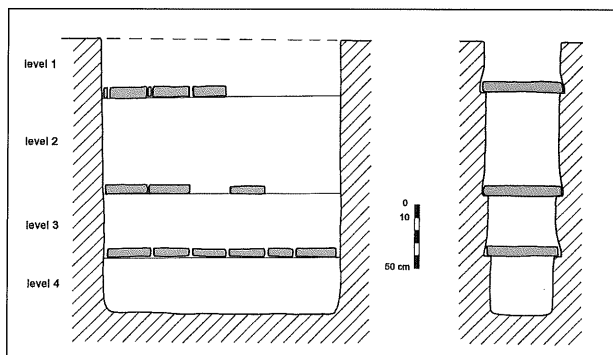
12. Tomb 7 with Medieval fill (Schmid).



14. Tomb 9, different levels of coverings and burials (Barmasse and Schmid).



16. Tomb 9 with different burials (Schmid).



15. Tomb 9, section (Barmasse and Schmid).

turbed upper levels, intact and perfectly sealed covering slabs appeared (Fig. 17), a clear indication that the lower burials of that tomb had not been disturbed. As a matter of fact, there were two intact burials, beneath the first preserved one, other intact covering slabs appeared (Fig.

18). The results obtained from the excavation of these two burials were somewhat surprising. In the upper one initially nothing was found (Fig. 19), not even skeletal remains and yet the covering was perfectly preserved. The careful sifting of the entire contents revealed that there were different layers within that grave. The upper layer consisted of very fine sandy earth that was completely sterile. Then followed a sandy layer containing ashes and other small remains, like fish and bird bones, burnt plant remains as well as some potsherds. The lowest layer offered a surprising picture: the entire surface of the grave was covered with small clusters, of what at first sight seemed to be hydraulic mortar as used in later Nabataean and Roman times, that is a mixture of lime, sand and charcoal or ashes. Unusually, in this case there were a significant number of bone fragments added to the mixture.



17. Tomb 5 with covering slabs of second burial (Schmid).

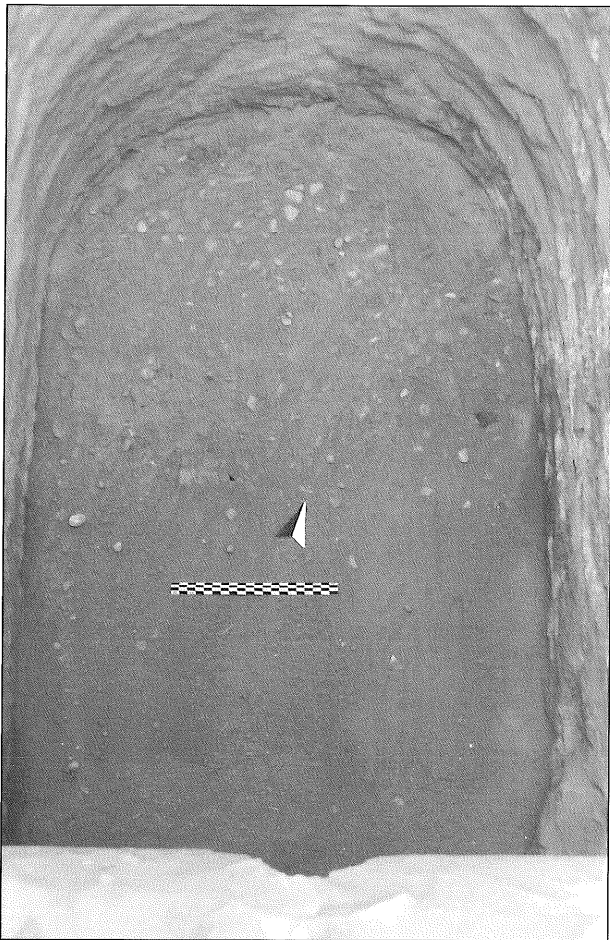
The bones collected must have been human remains, since there are clearly identifiable skull fragments mixed with the plaster. This strange observation recalls the description of loculus 3, in tomb 813 (Zayadine 1974: 144f.), and of a similar burial in the “Triple Dushara” tomb (Horsfield 1939: 108ff.). However, more investigation and scientific analysis of the collected organic material will be necessary in order to establish the exact procedure performed used in that burial. From the small amounts of pottery



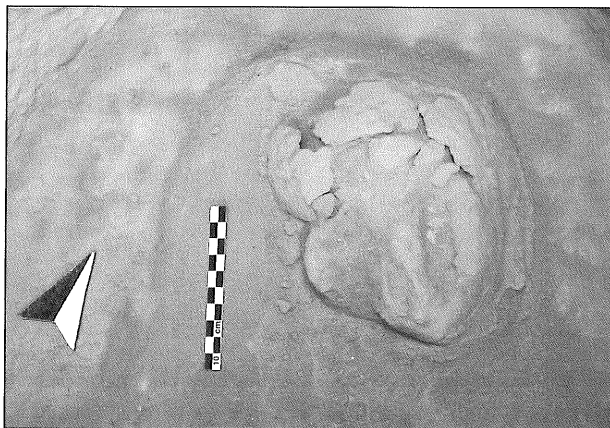
18. Tomb 5 with covering slabs of first burial (Schmid).

found by sifting, a date within the last quarter of the 1st or the very beginning of the 2nd century AD can be proposed for this burial.

The lowest burial in tomb 5 provided a slightly different picture. In contrast to the case just described, tomb 5 contained an inhumation, though the skeleton was badly preserved. Only the more substantial bones, such as the skull (Fig. 20) and parts of the legs were recognisable, the rest had completely disintegrated. More surprisingly, there were no offerings



19. Tomb 5, remains of second burial (Schmid).



20. Tomb 5, skull of first burial (Schmid).

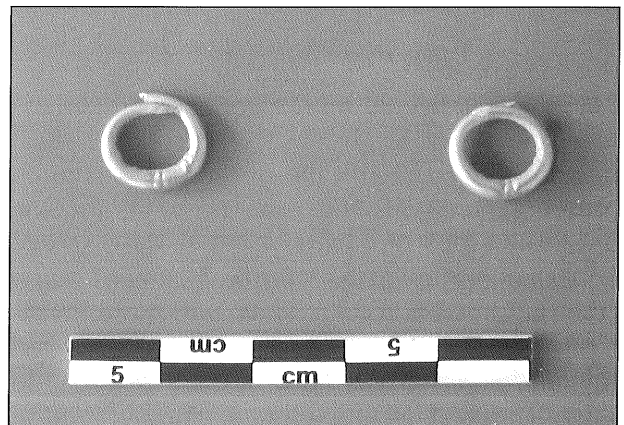
identifiable; such as complete pottery etc. Careful sifting of the complete content of that burial revealed organic material and small potsherds, indicating a chronological frame of the second and third quarters of the 1st century AD for the burial. Finally, from the lowest and undisturbed burial in grave 3 came a pair of small golden

earrings (Fig. 21), only 3g each, found on both sides of the skull. Despite the earrings, no other offerings were found in the grave and the small potsherds found within indicate a date of around AD 100 for this burial.

From collected evidence that has already been studied, the graveyard was probably first in use during the second half of the 1st century AD and remained in use until the early 2nd century AD. Three coins were found from different burials and will hopefully provide further chronological evidence.

After detailed archaeological, anthropological, archaeozoological and botanical study, the information concerning the burial practices at Petra, collected during this season and during the 2003 excavation of the shaft graves within the Renaissance Tomb (Mohammed al-Bdool and Huguenot and Schmid 2004), will provide an important insight in to the way the Nabataeans treated their dead. A detailed study dealing with these issues will be part of the first monograph devoted to the results of the International Wādi Farasa Project.

Already it becomes clear that the Nabataeans used several forms of burial custom. Beside “normal” inhumations, there appears to have been burial practices where the deceased were either put in a layer of quick lime and/or were subject to secondary burial; as has been highlighted by A. Negev (Negev 1986: 71-84; cf. Hackl and Jenni and Schneider 2003: 96-98). The Nabataeans obviously practice a form of bone collection and secondary burial. Several years ago, it was suggested that this could be a way to explain the strange passage in Strabo’s *Geography* (16, 4, 26 [C 784]; cf. Wright 1969; Hackl and



21. Tomb 3, golden earrings from lowest burial (Schmid).

Jenni and Schneider 2003: 616-617), according to which the Nabataeans did not respect their dead and buried even their kings next to dung heaps. It is true that exposing the dead – if really practiced by the Nabataeans – and subsequently collecting their bones must have seem a rather unusual practice to the Greeks and Romans. It does, on the other hand, correspond to similar practices within Zoroastrianism (Grenet 1984). Further studies need to be carried out in order to verify whether there is any possibility that the Nabataeans were influenced by such customs; perhaps through contact with the Parthians (as was suggested by Wright 1969).

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