

CLEANING AND EXCAVATION OF THE RENAISSANCE TOMB AT PETRA

Caroline Huguenot, Mahmoud Mohammed al-Bdool and Stephan G. Schmid

Introduction

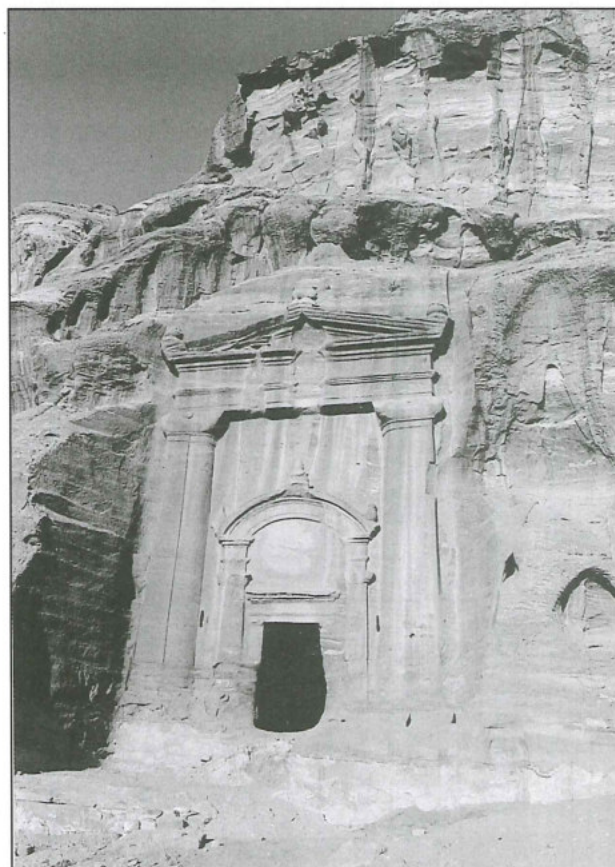
During several months within 2003, a World Bank supported project took place in Petra. Up to 60 members of the Bdool tribe were employed in order to clean in a systematic way the cavities of the ancient city, that is tombs, living caves, banqueting halls and the like. The project was carried out under the direction and supervision of the Department of Antiquities. Overall director of the project was Suleiman Farajat from the Petra office of the DoA, while the local supervision was assured by Mahmoud Mohammed al-Bdool.

By coincidence, the cleaning of the “Renaissance Tomb” (Fig. 1; BD 229) at the entrance to the Wādi Farasa took place at the beginning of the 2003 season of the International Wadi Farasa Project (IWFP)¹. During the cleaning of the tomb it became soon apparent that the interior of the rock cut space contains a large number of shaft graves with at least parts of the original covering *in situ* (Fig. 2). In order to prevent illicit excavation of these tombs it was agreed with Suleiman Farajat, responsible for the above mentioned cleaning project, to join forces and to excavate and document the tombs. We are very grateful to Suleiman Farajat for this exemplary cooperation. Mahmoud Mohammed al-Bdool (MA), Caroline Huguenot (MA, Lausanne), André Barmasse (MA, Basel) and Stephan G. Schmid (Montpellier) were responsible for the works carried out, assisted by up to four workmen from the International Wadi Farasa Project.

Cleaning and Excavation of the “Renaissance Tomb”

The opportunity for cleaning and excavating the interior of the “Renaissance Tomb”) on the tomb see McKenzie 1990: 166f.; Brünnow and Domaszewski 1904: 158 no. 229) has to be hailed all the more since so far only a few Nabataean tombs

from Petra have been excavated more or less in context and according to modern archaeological standards (Bikai and Perry 2001; Zayadine 1986: 224-237, 248-258; 1982: 365-373; 1979: 185-192; 1974: 139-150; Murray and Ellis 1940: 7. 12f.). The funerary customs of the Nabataeans still remain rather enigmatic, not the least related to the strange testimony by Strabo 16, 4, 26 stating that “[The Nabataeans] esteemed the dead like dung” on this see the controversial discussion by Hackl *et al.* 2003: 96-98, 615-617; Zayadine 1986: 221;



1. Wādi Farasa East, Renaissance Tomb (Schmid).

¹ On the International Wadi Farasa Project (IWFP) see <http://home.tiscalinet.ch/iwfp> and the preliminary report on the

2003 season by S. G. Schmid and A. Barmasse in this volume.

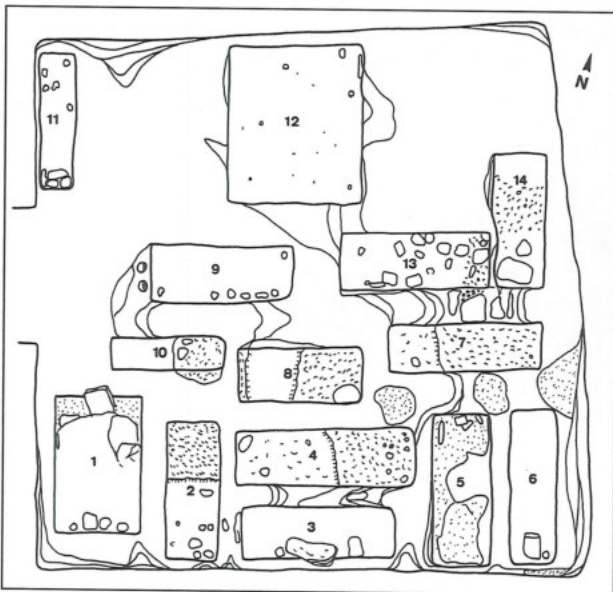


2. Renaissance Tomb, interior after cleaning of the surface (Schmid).

Wright 1969). 14 graves were counted inside the Renaissance Tomb (Figs. 3, 4), out of which no. 1 (Fig. 5) for sure and no. 12 perhaps did contain two or more burials (cf. Fig. 3). The complete study, including a detailed paleoanthropological analysis of the bones collected will take some time, for the moment we present only a brief summary.

All the graves were looted and this most probably already occurred during the Medieval period as is indicated by the important amounts of Medieval pottery found on the surface and inside most of the tombs, such as the jug illustrated on Fig. 6. Most of the tombs were constructed as shafts with

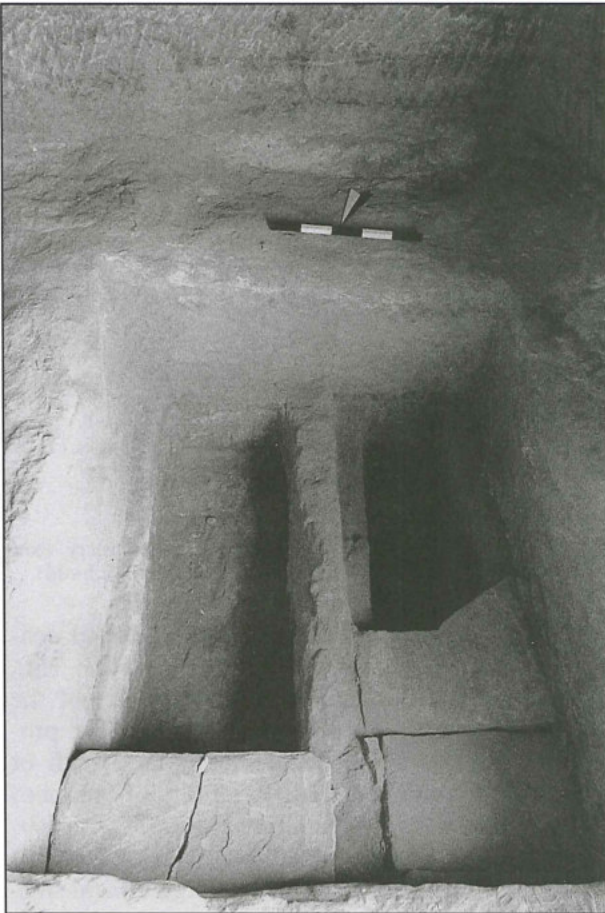
a kind of shoulders in about half the height of the grave onto which the covering slabs were applied, as can be seen for instance in the case of tomb 1 (Fig. 5). On the top of the slabs smaller stones and sand were added in order to completely cover the tomb. The cavity forming the *loculus* is in some cases slightly rounded at both ends. In some cases the pottery and other finds collected from *beneath* the level of the slabs were sufficiently homogeneous in order to allow some further thoughts as to their chronology. As an exemplary case we shall briefly discuss tomb no. 8 (cf. Fig. 3). Upon the level of the covering slabs, Nabataean pottery was mixed with Medieval sherds (Fig. 7), while beneath the level of the slabs the finds were exclusively Nabataean (Fig. 8). The Nabataean pottery from upon the slabs as well as all the pottery from beneath the slabs belongs exclusively to phase 3b (last quarter of the first century AD) as does a complete lamp of the Negev 1a type (Fig. 9; on Nabataean pottery see Schmid 2000 *passim*; for phase 3b and its chronology *ibid.* 28f. 38; on Negev 1a lamps see I. Zanoni in Bignasca *et al.* 1996: 314-316; new research by M. Grawehr shows that Negev 1a lamps continue well into the second half of the first century AD, personal communication). The same picture is provided by other tombs containing sufficient material. Within all the material collected in the "Renaissance Tomb" there were very few Nabataean sherds belonging for instance to phase 3a (ca. AD 20-75), the vast majority of pottery belongs to the last quarter of the first century AD (with the exception of the Medieval pottery, of course). Although disturbed and in very



3. Renaissance Tomb, distribution of shaft-graves before excavation (Barmasse and Schmid).

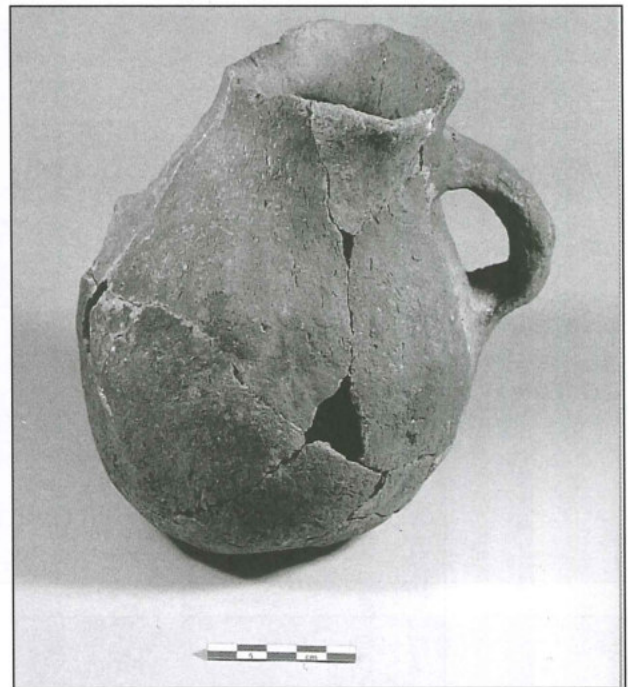


4. Renaissance Tomb, interior after excavation of the tombs (Schmid).



5. Renaissance Tomb, tomb 1 after excavation (Schmid).

fragmentary state, the pottery from the *loculi* in the Renaissance Tomb do confirm observation from other tombs, such as the so-called North ridge tombs 1 and 2 (Bikai and Perry 2001), that contain



6. Renaissance Tomb, Medieval jug from tomb 3 (Schmid).

a rich selection of Nabataean pottery. In general terms the same types can be found within the Renaissance Tomb. Tomb 1 from the North ridge contained mainly pottery of phase 3a, i.e. from the second and third quarter of the first century AD, with some painted and plain vessels from earlier periods, mainly 2b, that is the third quarter of the first century BC (Bikai and Perry 2001: 68, fig. 4; 70f., figs 5. 6). Tomb 2 from the North ridge did contain pottery from phases 3a to 3c, that is from most parts of the first century AD including some



7. Renaissance Tomb, pottery from upper level of tomb 8 (Schmid).



8. Renaissance Tomb, pottery from lower level of tomb 8 (Schmid).



9. Renaissance Tomb, lamp from tomb 8 (Schmid).

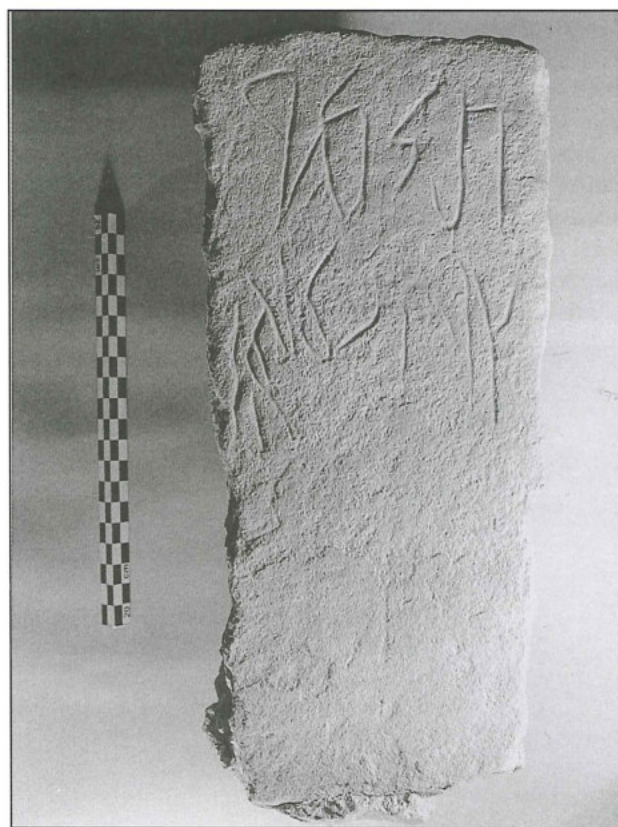
bowls and plates from the very early second century AD (Bikai and Perry 2001: 73, fig. 7; 75f., figs. 8-9). What is interesting in the case of the two North ridge tombs is the evidence for providing services to the deceased. In fact, both of these tombs contained a good quantity of (painted) drinking bowls, some plain fine plates/dishes probably used for eating as well as plain and coarse ware pottery for serving (jugs and juglets) and storage/preparation of food (cooking pots). Although in a more fragmented state, the same tendency can be observed within the Renaissance Tomb (on the services of the Nabataean pottery see Schmid 2000: 91f., fig. 422).

Two of the tombs contained tombstones with

carved inscriptions in Nabataean, rather unusual finds as no freestanding inscribed Nabataean tombstones have been reported for Petra and are rare elsewhere in the Nabataean sphere of influence with the exception of the Ḥawrān and other specific locations (cf. for instance the tombstones from Khirbat adh-Dhariḥ :L. Nehmé in Lenoble and al-Muheisen and Villeneuve 2001: 128-132). In Petra several rock-cut funerary or memorial *nefesh* have been found (Starcky 1965); 10 of them were inscribed in Nabataean, one could not be deciphered and one was inscribed in Greek. The inscribed tombstone on **Fig. 10** was found in tomb 4; the reading of the inscription provides some problems, the most probable reading could be²:

ḤGYT	ḤAGYT	Ḥagyt,
BR THN'	BAR TAHN'	daughter of Tahn'

It can, however, not be excluded that the name in the first line should read HGYRW, that is Hagir and would be a man's name, and in the second line one could also read BR RBHW, son of Rābih. Hagir and Rābih are otherwise known names in Nabataean (Negev 1991: nos. 415 and 1050), and



10. Renaissance Tomb, inscribed tombstone from tomb 4 (Schmid).

Rābih has already been attested elsewhere in Petra (Starcky 1965: 46f. nos. 3. 5), whilst Hagyt or Hagyt would be a new name. TAHN' is attested in Thamoudic but not in Nabataean so far (TIJ 281; Harding 1971: 140).

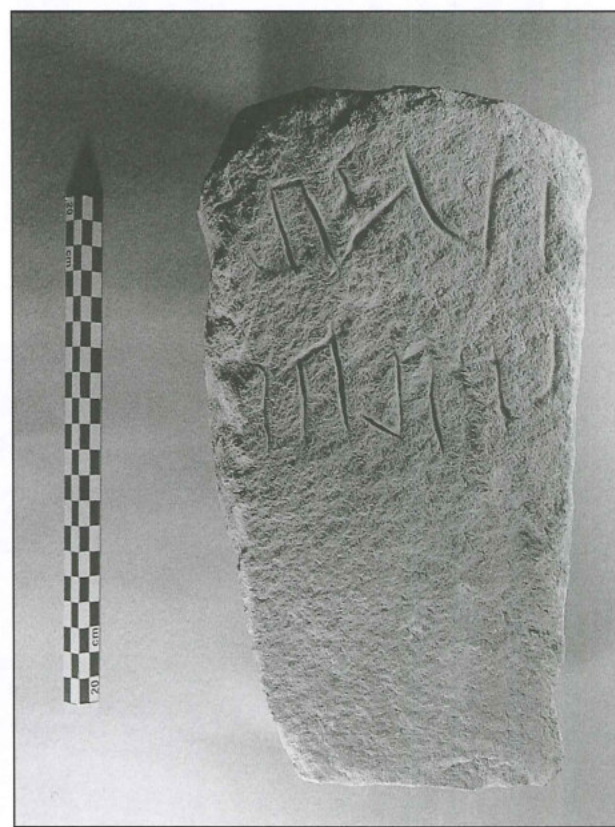
The stela on **Fig. 11** was found in tomb 8 and reads:

TYMW	TAYMU	Taymu,
BRWHB'LHY'	BARWAHBI'LLAHY'	son of Wahbi'llahy'

The reading of this stone is somewhat easier; both names are already attested within the corpus of Nabataean names (Negev 1991: nos. 1218 and 337 respectively) but the *aleph* at the end of the second name has not been reported so far.

Both inscribed stones still conserve a cluster of mortar on the bottom of their backside that suggest it was used in order to fix them on top of or near by the *loculi* to which they belonged. This gives them an overall form similar to some of the Nabataean tombstones from Khirbat adh-Dhariḥ) Lenoble and al-Muheisen and Villeneuve 2001: 93, fig. 2, 1. 3. 5).

The skeletal remains were in all cases disturbed,



11. Renaissance Tomb, inscribed tombstone from tomb 8 (Schmid).

2 We would like to thank D. F. Graf (Miami), F. Zayadine (Am-

man) and H. Jenni (Basel) for commenting on the two *stelae*.

but several bones remained within the single tombs so that a determination of age, sex and eventual diseases should be possible (Fig. 12).

The nature of the activities that took place in the Renaissance Tomb during the Medieval period are



12. Renaissance Tomb, skeletal remains in tomb 10 (Schmid).



13. Renaissance Tomb, Medieval (?) stone mortar and grinding stone found in tomb 3 (Schmid).

difficult to determine. However, the jug on Fig. 6 as well as the mortar with a grinding stone (Fig. 13) indicate that there was probably a kind of permanent use of the rock cut structure in later times, despite the obvious presence of the Nabataean tombs.

General Observations

The Renaissance Tomb offers some peculiarities, especially concerning its façade (see McKenzie 1990: 166f.). Some minor errors can be observed within details of the façade; further, the entire façade is somewhat warped as can clearly be seen on Fig. 14. It is, however, not clear whether this is an error by the stonecutters or whether it happened in order to avoid weaker parts of the sandstone. Another peculiarity is the not complete-



14. Renaissance Tomb, detail of façade (Schmid).

ly finished part of the space in front of the tomb (Figs. 1, 15). As can be seen on Fig. 1, the area south of the entrance is about one and a half meter higher than the area to the north of it and the traces of the stone extracting activities are still clearly visible (Fig. 15). Although all these elements could indicate an abandonment of the tomb before it was completely finished, the shaft-graves excavated in 2003 clearly show that the Renaissance tomb truly fulfilled its purpose. One other peculiarity of the Renaissance Tomb is the partially inset raking cornice of the left part of the pediment (cf. McKenzie 1990: 166). Whilst one fragment of the inset part remained in the pediment (Figs. 1, 16), another one

fell down and was found inside the tomb (Fig. 17) together with other architectural fragments.

Beside further insight on Nabataean funeral practices, the results from the excavation of the Renaissance Tomb are also likely to change the chronology of the monument. With most of the graves apparently belonging to the last quarter of the first century AD, the Renaissance Tomb must have been constructed towards the third quarter of the first century AD at the latest. In her architectural study of the Petra monuments, Judith McKenzie compared the Renaissance Tomb to the Sextius Florentinus Tomb and dated both of them in the second quarter of the second century AD ac-



15. Space in front of the Renaissance Tomb showing traces of stone extracting (Schmid).



16. Renaissance Tomb, detail of pediment (Schmid).



17. Renaissance Tomb, separately worked part of pediment found inside the tomb (Schmid).

According to the inscription on the latter (McKenzie 1990: 46f. 165-167). However, it has been supposed that the inscription of Sextius Florentinus only belongs to a secondary reuse of that monument and that the tomb may date to the late first century BC or very early first century AD (Freyberger 1991; Negev 1977: 598). By comparing its architectural features, K. Freyberger would like to date the Renaissance Tomb to the early first century AD the latest (Freyberger 1991: 5). On the one hand the finds from the 2003 excavation (cf. above) are not substantial for dating in the early first century and they suggest prudence for such an early date. On the other hand it is clear that the Renaissance tomb must have been accomplished shortly after the middle of the first century AD at the latest.

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