

UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE MADRID

Proceedings of the 5th International Congress  
on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East



**Universidad Autónoma de Madrid**

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Edited by  
Joaquín M<sup>a</sup> Córdoba, Miquel Molist, M<sup>a</sup> Carmen Pérez,  
Isabel Rubio, Sergio Martínez  
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### **Programme - Programa**

# New insights into Nabataean funerary practices

Stephan G. Schmid - Aurélien Amour - André Barmasse - Sylvie Duchesne -  
Caroline Huguenot - Lucy Wadeson, Montpellier

## Abstract

Although the huge rock cut façades of the Nabataean capital, Petra in southern Jordan, are mostly related to funerary monuments and a lot of research has been carried out on them, the funerary practices of the Nabataeans remain rather enigmatic. Recent research in the frame of the International Wadi Farasa Project ([www.auac.ch/iwfp](http://www.auac.ch/iwfp)) helped to gain a better understanding of the funerary monuments to which the rock cut façades are related. Further, on two occasions small *necropoleis* were excavated. The first one being situated in a rock cut tomb contained 14 rock cut graves dating to the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. The second one is an assemblage of 15 rock cut «outdoor» pit graves, most of them showing multiple occupations and dating to the late 1<sup>st</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD. Interestingly, the burial customs showed a great variation. While the burials from the first *necropolis* were rather homogeneous regarding treatment of the bodies (inhumation) and construction of the tombs, the second *necropolis* shows a more heterogeneous picture, i.e. different types of constructions, inhumations and incinerations within one single monument etc. Therefore, careful analyses of the archaeological and anthropological data allow obtaining a more differentiated picture about Nabataean funerary customs than what was assumed previously.

**Keywords:** Jordan, Petra, Nabataeans, 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, burial customs, offerings, funerary complexes.

## Introduction

Since 1999 (exploration season) and 2000 (first excavation season) respectively, the International Wadi Farasa Project (IWFPP) has been exploring the installations of Wadi Farasa East in Petra, the ancient capital of the Nabataeans in southern Jordan.<sup>1</sup>

The main goal of the project is the exploration of the so-called Soldier's Tomb Complex, situated on the lower terrace of Wadi Farasa East. Although it is one of Petra's most spectacular funerary installations, featuring a huge rock cut tomb façade, a rock cut banqueting hall and free built structures that form a two storey luxury architecture built during the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, there was little hope to find burials within the complex. The tomb had already been cleared in the 1930s and at that time was found to be completely devoid of burial evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> On the International Wadi Farasa Project (IWFPP) see [www.auac.ch/iwfp](http://www.auac.ch/iwfp). Preliminary reports of the project's field seasons are published in the *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* by S. G. Schmid *et al.* since volume 44, 2000. For a wider context on the project see S. G. Schmid, The International Wadi Farasa Project (IWFPP). Progress on the Work in the Wadi Farasa East, Petra, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 136, 2004, 163-186; idem, The International Wadi Farasa Project (IWFPP). Between Microcosm and Macroplanning - A First Synthesis, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 133, 2001, 159-197.

However, on two separate occasions, the possibility arose to excavate a series of rock cut burials in the immediate neighbourhood of the complex. It is these burials that form the focus of the present contribution.

The first occasion arose in 2003, when a World Bank-supported project took place in Petra over several months. The aim was to provide work and income for the local population, which had suffered from shortfalls of tourism due to the political situation in neighbouring areas. Up to 60 members of the B'dool tribe were employed in order to clean in a systematic way the cavities of the ancient city, that is tombs, caves for domestic purposes, banqueting halls and the like. The project was carried out under the direction and supervision of the Department of Antiquities. The 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-B'dool.

By coincidence, the cleaning of the «Renaissance Tomb» (fig. 1) at the entrance to Wadi Farasa, took place at the beginning of the 2003 season of the International Wadi Farasa Project (IWFP).<sup>2</sup> During the cleaning of the tomb, it soon became apparent that the rock cut interior space contained a large number of rock-cut graves with at least parts of the original coverings *in situ* (fig. 2). In order to prevent illicit excavation of these tombs, it was agreed with Sulejman Farajat, responsible for the above-mentioned cleaning project, to join forces and to excavate and document the graves. We are most grateful to Sulejman Farajat for this exemplary cooperation. Mahmoud Mohammed al-B'dool (MA), Dr. Caroline Huguenot (Lausanne/Montpellier), André Barmasse (MA, Basel) and Stephan G. Schmid (Montpellier) were responsible for the work carried out, assisted by up to four workmen from the International Wadi Farasa Project.

The second occasion came in 2005, when a small rock cut necropolis was discovered at the western corner of the Soldier's Tomb Complex (cf. fig. 5). Initially, this area was simply cleaned in order to be used as a deposit area for architectural fragments. During the cleaning, a series of 11 rock-cut tombs became exposed and despite shortness of time, we decided to excavate them during the 2005 season, in order to prevent potential looting. Excavation and documentation of these tombs was carried out by Aurélien Amour (MA, Montpellier), André Barmasse (MA, Basel), Lucy Wadeson (MPhil., Oxford) and Stephan G. Schmid (Montpellier).

The human remains of the burials discovered in 2003 within the Renaissance tomb were analysed in 2004 by the anthropologist Sylvie Duchesne (MA, Toulouse), the human remains from the other tombs shall be analysed in 2007. Dr. Jérôme Rizzo (Montpellier) was responsible for part of the photographic documentation. The metal finds from both *necropoleis* were restored by the restoration section of the «Haute école d'arts appliqués» at Neuchâtel (Switzerland).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. C. Huguenot – M. Mohammed al-B'dool – S. G. Schmid, Cleaning and Excavation of the Renaissance Tomb at Petra, *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 48, 2004, 203-210.



### *Cleaning and excavation of the «Renaissance Tomb»*

The opportunity for clearing and excavating the interior of the «Renaissance Tomb»<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> The funerary customs of the Nabataeans still remain rather enigmatic, not the least because of the strange testimony by Strabo 16, 4, 26 stating that «[The Nabataeans] esteemed the dead like dung».<sup>5</sup> 14 graves were counted inside the Renaissance Tomb (cf. fig. 2), out of which no. 1 for certain and no. 12 perhaps, did contain two or more burials. 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 most probably during the Medieval period, as is indicated by the significant amounts of Medieval pottery found on the surface and inside many of the graves, such as the jug illustrated in fig. 3. Most of the tombs were constructed as vertical pits with protruding ledges about halfway down the grave, on which the covering slabs rested, as can be seen for instance in the case of tomb 1 (figs. 4, 5). On top of the slabs, smaller stones within a layer of hard lime mortar were added in order to completely cover the grave. The cavity forming the grave is sometimes slightly rounded at both ends. In some cases, the pottery and other finds collected from *beneath* the level of the slabs were sufficiently homogeneous to allow some further thoughts as to their chronology. As an exemplary case we shall briefly discuss tomb no. 8 (fig. 6; cf. fig. 2). Upon the level of the covering slabs, Nabataean pottery was mixed with Medieval sherds, while beneath the level of the slabs the finds were exclusively Nabataean (fig. 7, 8). The Nabataean pottery upon the slabs, as well as all the pottery from beneath the slabs, belongs exclusively to phase 3b (last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD) as does a complete lamp of the Negev 1a type.<sup>6</sup> The same

<sup>3</sup> On the tomb see J. S. McKenzie, *The Architecture of Petra* (Oxford 1990) 166-167; R. E. Brünnow – A. v. Domszewski, *Die Provincia Arabia auf Grund zweier in den Jahren 1897 und 1898 unternommenen Reisen und der Berichte früherer Reisender, 1. Die Römerstrasse von Mâdeba über Petra und Odrub bis el-Akaba* (Strassburg 1904) 158 no. 229.

<sup>4</sup> P. M. Bikai – M. A. Perry, *Petra North Ridge Tombs 1 and 2. Preliminary Report, BASOR 324*: 59-78; F. Zayadine, *Tempel, Gräber, Töpferöfen. Ausgrabungen des Department of Antiquities in Petra*, in: M. Lindner (ed.), *Petra. Neue Ausgrabungen und Entdeckungen* (Munich – Bad Windsheim 1986) 224-237. 248-258; *idem*, Recent Excavations at Petra (1979-91), *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 26, 1982, 365-373; *idem*, Excavations at Petra (1976-78), *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 23, 1979, 185-192; *idem*, Excavations at Petra (1973-1974), *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 19, 1974, 139-150; M. A. Murray – J. C. Ellis, *A Street in Petra* (London 1940) 7. 12-13.

<sup>5</sup> On this see the controversial discussion by U. Hackl – H. Jenny – Ch. Schneider, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Nabatäer. Textsammlung mit Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Freiburg/Göttingen 2003) 96-98. 615-617; Zayadine 1986 (*supra* n. 4) 221; G. R. H. Wright, *Strabo on Funerary Customs at Petra, Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 101, 1969, 113-116.

<sup>6</sup> On Nabataean pottery see S. G. Schmid, *Die Feinkeramik der Nabatäer. Typologie, Chronologie und kulturhistorische Hintergründe. Petra - Ez Zantur II 1. Ergebnisse der Schweizerisch-Liechtensteinischen Ausgrabungen, Terra archaeologica IV* (Mayence 2000) *passim*; for phase 3b and its chronology *ibid.* 28-29. 38; on Negev 1a lamps see now M. Grawehr, *Die Lampen der Grabung auf ez Zantur in Petra, Petra – Ez Zantur III 2. Ergebnisse der Schweizerisch-Liechtensteinischen Ausgrabungen, Terra archaeologica V* (Mayence 2006) 296-304 with older references; the results of M. Grawehr show that Negev 1a lamps continue well into the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD: *ibid.* 297-298.

picture is provided by other graves containing sufficient material. Among all the finds collected in the «Renaissance Tomb» there were only very few Nabataean sherds belonging, for instance, to phase 3a (c. AD 20-75). The vast majority of pottery belongs to the last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD (with the obvious exception of the Medieval pottery). Although disturbed and in a very fragmentary state, the pottery from inside the graves in the Renaissance Tomb do confirm observations from other tombs, such as the so-called North ridge tombs 1 and 2, that contain a rich selection of Nabataean ceramics.<sup>7</sup> In general terms, the same types are 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 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, with some painted and plain vessels from earlier periods, mainly 2b, that is the third quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.<sup>8</sup> Tomb 2 from the North ridge contained pottery from phases 3a to 3c, that is from most parts of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD including some bowls and plates from the very early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>9</sup> What is interesting in the case of the two North ridge tombs is the evidence of provision for services to the deceased. In fact, both 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.<sup>10</sup>

At first sight, the fact that all the graves from the Renaissance Tomb were looted and their remaining contents at least partially mixed up may leave us with reasonable doubts as for their exact chronology. Even in case of graves with relatively homogeneous lower sections such as grave 8 (cf. above), mixing up of pottery can be proven: For instance, the painted Nabataean bowl illustrated on figs 7 (bottom) and fig. 8 is composed from fitting fragments coming from grave 8 and grave 13. However, there is other evidence that allows us to be rather precise about the chronology of these graves. The most promising approach in order to obtain more precise indications seemed to be the analysis of the covering or sealing layers of the individual graves. As a matter of fact, most of the pits inside the Renaissance Tomb were covered by stone slabs and then sealed in with a hard layer consisting of gravel stones mixed with lime mortar and containing small fragments of pottery. This is best illustrated by tombs 4 and 8 (cf. fig. 3 for location). Since the tomb robbers opened only the minimum space necessary to reach the burials, most of the covering material remained untouched. These sealing layers were systematically excavated in 2003 and 2006. In the case of tomb 8 (left on fig. 23; fig. 24), the covering layer above the stone slabs measures around 80 cm in height, while in the case of tomb 4 (right on fig. 23; fig. 25) it still reaches about 25 cm. In both cases, substantial and – more importantly – homogeneous amounts of Nabataean pottery were found. The painted pottery from the sealing of tomb 8 (fig. 26) consisted mostly of sherds

<sup>7</sup> Bikai – Perry (*supra* n. 4).

<sup>8</sup> Bikai – Perry (*supra* n. 4) 68 fig. 4; 70-71 figs 5. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Bikai – Perry (*supra* n. 4) 73 fig. 7; 75-76 figs. 8. 9.

<sup>10</sup> On services within Nabataean pottery see Schmid (*supra* n. 6) 91f. fig. 422.

belonging to phase 3a (c. AD 20 to AD 75) and a few belonging to phase 3b (c. AD 75 to AD 100). No later material was recorded.<sup>11</sup> This picture is confirmed by the finds of plain fine and coarse ware from the same sealing (fig. 27). Therefore, the burial within tomb 8 can securely be dated to the beginning of the last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. The situation is similar when analyzing the finds from the sealing of tomb 4 (fig. 28). Most of the sherds belong to phase 3a, some are even earlier, and only one can possibly be assigned to phase 3b. One would conclude, then, that tomb 4 is, at the latest, contemporary to tomb 8, or maybe even slightly earlier.

The same tombs 8 and 4 did contain tombstones with carved inscriptions in Nabataean, rather unusual finds as, so far, 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 Hauran and other specific locations.<sup>12</sup> In Petra, several rock-cut funerary or memorial *nefesh* have been found;<sup>13</sup> 10 of them were inscribed in Nabataean, one could not be deciphered and one was inscribed in Greek. Both our inscribed stones still preserve a cluster of mortar at the base of their backs, that suggests they were fixed on top of or near the gravestone to which they belonged. This gives them an overall form similar to some of the Nabataean tombstones from Khirbet edh-Dharih.<sup>14</sup>

Within tomb 7, a few small fragments of textile were found, maybe related to the deceased's clothes or a wrapping of the body in textiles. Although generally in a bad state of preservation, the skeletal remains from the different tombs allowed some further observations as to the number of deceased, their age, sex etc., as the synoptic presentation of Table 1 demonstrates.

Although in a preliminary state, the analysis of the human remains allows several conclusions regarding the small group of people buried in the Renaissance Tomb. For instance, the relatively small percentage of children (23%) is surprising, since child mortality in antiquity was known to reach up to 40%-50%.<sup>15</sup> Among the children from the Renaissance Tomb, we may further point out the total absence of small children (under age 6 years). Could this be an indication that they received different funerary treatment?

The nature of the activities that took place in the Renaissance Tomb during the Medieval period are difficult to determine. However, the jug in fig. 3, as well as a the mortar with a grinding stone, indicate that there was most likely a permanent

<sup>11</sup> Phasing of Nabataean fine ware pottery according to Schmid (*supra* n. 6).

<sup>12</sup> cf. for instance the tombstones from Khirbet edh-Dharih: L. Nehmé, in: P. Lenoble – Z. al-Muheisen – F. Villeneuve, *Fouilles de Khirbet edh-Dharih (Jordanie)*, I: Le cimetière au Sud du Wadi Sharheh, *Syria* 78, 2001, 128-132; finds like ours would indicate a possible solution for the otherwise observed absence of inscribed grave markers; cf. L. Nehmé, Les inscriptions des chambres funéraires nabatéennes et la question de l'anonymat des tombes, *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 14.2, 2003, 203-258.

<sup>13</sup> J. Starcky, Nouvelles stèles funéraires à Pétra, *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 10, 1965, 43-49.

<sup>14</sup> Lenoble – al-Muheisen – Villeneuve (*supra* n. 12) 93 fig. 2, 1. 3. 5.

<sup>15</sup> See in a wider frame: A. Bideau – B. Desjardins – P. Brignoli (eds.), *Infant and Child Mortality in the Past* (Oxford 1997).

use of the rock cut structure in later times, despite the obvious presence of the Nabataean graves.

The Renaissance Tomb presents some particularities, especially concerning its façade.<sup>16</sup> Some minor errors can be observed in details of the façade; further, the entire façade is somewhat warped as can clearly be seen when standing very close to it and looking upwards. It is, however, not clear whether this is an error by the stonecutters or whether it happened in order to avoid weaker parties of the sandstone. Another peculiarity is the unfinished frontal area of the tomb (cf. fig. 1). As can be seen in fig. 1, the area south of the entrance is about one and a half metres higher than the area to the north and traces of stone extracting activities are still clearly visible. Although all these elements may indicate an abandonment of the tomb before it was completely finished, the pit-graves excavated in 2003 clearly show that the Renaissance tomb fulfilled its function as a burial space. Another peculiarity of the Renaissance Tomb is the partially inset raking cornice of the left part of the pediment.<sup>17</sup> Whilst one fragment of the inset part remained in the pediment, another one fell down and was found inside the tomb together with other architectural fragments.

Besides providing further insights into Nabataean funeral practices, the results from the excavation of the Renaissance Tomb are also likely to change the chronology of the monument. Since most of the graves apparently belong to the last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD., the Renaissance Tomb must have been constructed towards the third quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 to the second quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, according to the inscription on the latter.<sup>18</sup> However, it has been suggested that the inscription of the Sextius Florentinus tomb belongs to a secondary reuse of that monument and that the tomb may date to the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC or very early 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.<sup>19</sup> By comparing its architectural features, K. Freyberger would like to date the Renaissance Tomb to the early 1<sup>st</sup> century AD at the latest.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, the results of the excavation presented above do not allow a dating in the early 1<sup>st</sup> century and they suggest prudence for such an early date. Indeed, it would seem strange to have the façade of the tomb more or less completed by the Augustan period and the burials beginning only half a century later. According to the evidence presented above, it seems most likely to suppose that the Renaissance tomb must have been accomplished shortly after the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD at the latest.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> On this see McKenzie (*supra* n. 3) 166-167.

<sup>17</sup> cf. McKenzie (*supra* n. 3) 166.

<sup>18</sup> McKenzie (*supra* n. 3) 46-47, 165-167.

<sup>19</sup> K. S. Freyberger, Zur Datierung des Grabmals des Sextius Florentinus in Petra, *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 5, 1-8, 1991; Negev 1977: 598.

<sup>20</sup> Freyberger (*supra* n. 20): 5.

<sup>21</sup> This remains true even if the tomb was never properly accomplished, as can be seen on the façade and also in the chamber. As a matter of fact, many rock cut tombs in Petra were never completely finished but still used for burial.

### *The pit graves in the W-corner of the complex*

Initially, it was planned to expose only the area related to the construction of the entrance building of the Soldier Tomb's complex. Cleaning of the adjacent area around the corner revealed a small necropolis counting 11 pit graves (figs. 12, 13). Four more pit graves, carved into a rounded rock cut structure had been visible since the first plan of the area was made and were reported as having been looted since then.<sup>22</sup> The eleven additional graves were not previously known, but it became evident that they also must have been looted, at least partially. However, the information obtained from these burials is particularly interesting and deserves further study.

Most of the graves preserved a part of their original upper fill still in situ, but usually only in about one half of the grave's surface. The same was true for the covering slabs of most of the single burials. This clearly reveals the tactic of the looters, who in most cases seem to be quite experienced: they presumed that offerings were usually deposited around (pottery, coins etc.) or on (earrings, necklaces) the head of the deceased. Since some of the graves have circular and rectangular rock cuttings at one end, the looters supposed that these were the respective areas of the heads and concentrated their efforts on those areas. This can be seen clearly in most cases. For example, the two lowest burials of tomb 2 were looted simply by lifting the end covering slab, i.e. precisely the area of the head, as illustrated on figs. 14 and 15. As a consequence, in such cases the skeletons could be rather well preserved but with their heads missing. For instance, this is true for the uppermost burial in tomb 10, which shows a well preserved, but headless, skeleton. As we shall see, different elements led to the presumption that most of the tombs had been looted during antiquity or at least the Medieval period. There is, however, one exception provided by tomb 11. Almost completely emptied, only some covering slabs remained inside the grave. Furthermore, about 1.2 m below the surface and at the presumed head end of the tomb, a metal headpiece of a *mudjarfa* was discovered, clearly indicating a modern looting. Another indication as to the date of looting is provided by tomb 7. No element of the initial covering slabs or the burials themselves was discovered. The entire tomb was densely filled in with Medieval pottery (fig. 16) 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 observations regarding Nabataean burial practices and construction techniques of such tombs were obtained. First of all, with the exception of two smaller graves, probably used for children (nos. 1 and 4 in fig. 13), all the tombs excavated so far were used for several burials; as many as three, as far as the evidence preserved. This indicates that the graves show considerable depth, which is slightly more than 2 m in most cases, by a width that usually is about 60 cm. While the lower burials –in some graves even all of them– were covered by slabs resting on rock cut shoulders, some of the burials located higher up in the shaft were constructed using vertical slabs for

<sup>22</sup> W. Bachmann –C. Watzinger– Th. Wiegand, *Petra. Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen des Deutsch-Türkischen Denkmalschutz-Kommandos*, Heft 3 (Berlin/Lepizig 1921) 76-77.

the sides and horizontal slabs for the covering. In shaft grave 5, after clearing the disturbed upper levels, intact and perfectly sealed covering slabs appeared (fig. 17), a clear indication that the lower burials of that tomb were not disturbed. As a matter of fact, there were two intact burials, since beneath the first preserved one, appeared further intact covering slabs (fig. 18). The results obtained by the excavation of these two burials were somewhat surprising. In the upper one, at first sight no visible burial was apparent, not even skeletal remains, and yet the covering was perfectly preserved. The careful excavation and sifting of the entire content revealed that there were different layers within that grave. The highest layer consisted of a very fine sandy earth that was completely sterile. Then followed a sandy layer containing ashes and other small remains, such as 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 by small clusters of what at first looked like the hydraulic mortar used in later Nabataean and Roman times, that is a mixture between lime, sand and charcoal or ashes. Surprisingly, in our case there was a significant number of bone fragments added to the mixture. The bones collected are surely human, since there are clearly identifiable skull fragments mixed with the plaster. This strange observation is reminiscent of the description of loculus 3 in tomb 813<sup>23</sup> and of a similar burial in the «Triple Dushara» tomb.<sup>24</sup> However, more investigation and scientific analysis of the collected organic material is necessary to be sure about the exact procedure that was performed during the burial. From the small amounts of pottery found by sifting, a date within the last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> or the very beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD can be proposed for this burial (fig. 19).

The lowest burial in tomb 5 provided a slightly different picture. Contrary to the above-described case, here we are dealing with an inhumation, though the skeleton was badly preserved. Only the more substantial bones, such as the skull and parts of the legs, were recognisable. The rest had completely disintegrated. More surprisingly, there were no offerings 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 1<sup>st</sup> century AD for the burial. Finally, from the lowest and undisturbed burial in grave 3 came a pair of small golden earrings (fig. 20), weighing only 3g each and found on both sides of the skull. Apart from the earrings, no other offerings were found in that grave and the small potsherds found indicate a date of around AD 100 for this burial.

As the collected evidence so far suggests, the necropolis was probably initiated during the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and remained in use until the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, that is slightly later as the burials within the Renaissance Tomb dealt with above. Three coins were found from different burials indicating that Nabataean funerary practices of that time contained the offering of

<sup>23</sup> Zayadine 1974 (*supra* n. 4) 144-145.

<sup>24</sup> G. and A. Horsfield, Sela-Petra, the Rock of Edome and Nabatene, III. The Excavations, *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine* 8, 1939, 108-111.

Charon's *oboloi*. That at least in some cases such coins were of more or less substantial value is suggested by the fact that two out of the three were silver coins, like the coin of Rabbel II illustrated on fig. 21.<sup>25</sup> Although this coin was found in the middle section of pit grave 9, that was disturbed by secondary looting activities, it further confirms the overall chronology of the graves as proposed so far.

Like in the Renaissance Tomb, within the pit caves, too, funerary *stelae* were found. One of them, found within pit grave 10, shows an incised triangle, a very popular symbol within the Nabataean realm. The other one, coming from pit grave 3, bears an inscription, naming the deceased and his/her father's name. However, in both cases these stones were secondarily used as covering slabs for later burials.

Detailed archaeological, anthropological, archaeozoological and botanical studies of the material collected during the various seasons will provide important knowledge on such matters as 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 Wadi Farasa Project.

Already from first sight it becomes clear that the Nabataeans practised various types of burial customs. Besides «standard» inhumations as represented by the graves from the Renaissance Tomb belonging to the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, there were apparently practices whereby the deceased was either put in a layer of quick lime and/or were subject to secondary burial as was already pointed out by A. Negev.<sup>26</sup> In our case, the indications for such practices come from some of the pit graves at the western corner of the Soldier Tomb complex, dating to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Could this be an indication that the Nabataeans practised a form of bone collection and secondary burial? Several years ago, it was suggested that this custom might explain the strange passage in Strabo's *Geography* (16, 4, 26 [C 784]), according to which the Nabataeans did not respect their dead and buried even their kings beside dung heaps.<sup>27</sup> It is true that exposing the dead –if really practiced by the Nabataeans– and subsequently collecting their bones must have seemed a rather unusual practice to the Greeks and Romans. It does, on the other hand, correspond rather well to similar practices within Zoroastrism.<sup>28</sup> However, further studies must be undertaken in order to verify whether the Nabataeans were influenced by such customs, possibly through contact with the Parthians.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Y. Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, Qedem 3 (Jerusalem 1975) 76-77. 109-110 nos. 147-161 pl. 8. Our coin belongs to a group of silver coins illustrating on the obverse the laureate head of Rabbel II (left on fig. 21) and on the reverse the veiled head of Gamilath, his sister and first wife (right on fig. 21); these coins were struck between AD 75/76 and AD 101/102.

<sup>26</sup> A. Negev, *Nabataean Archaeology Today* (New York/London 1986) 71-84; cf. Hackl –Jenni– Schneider (*supra* n. 5) 96-98.

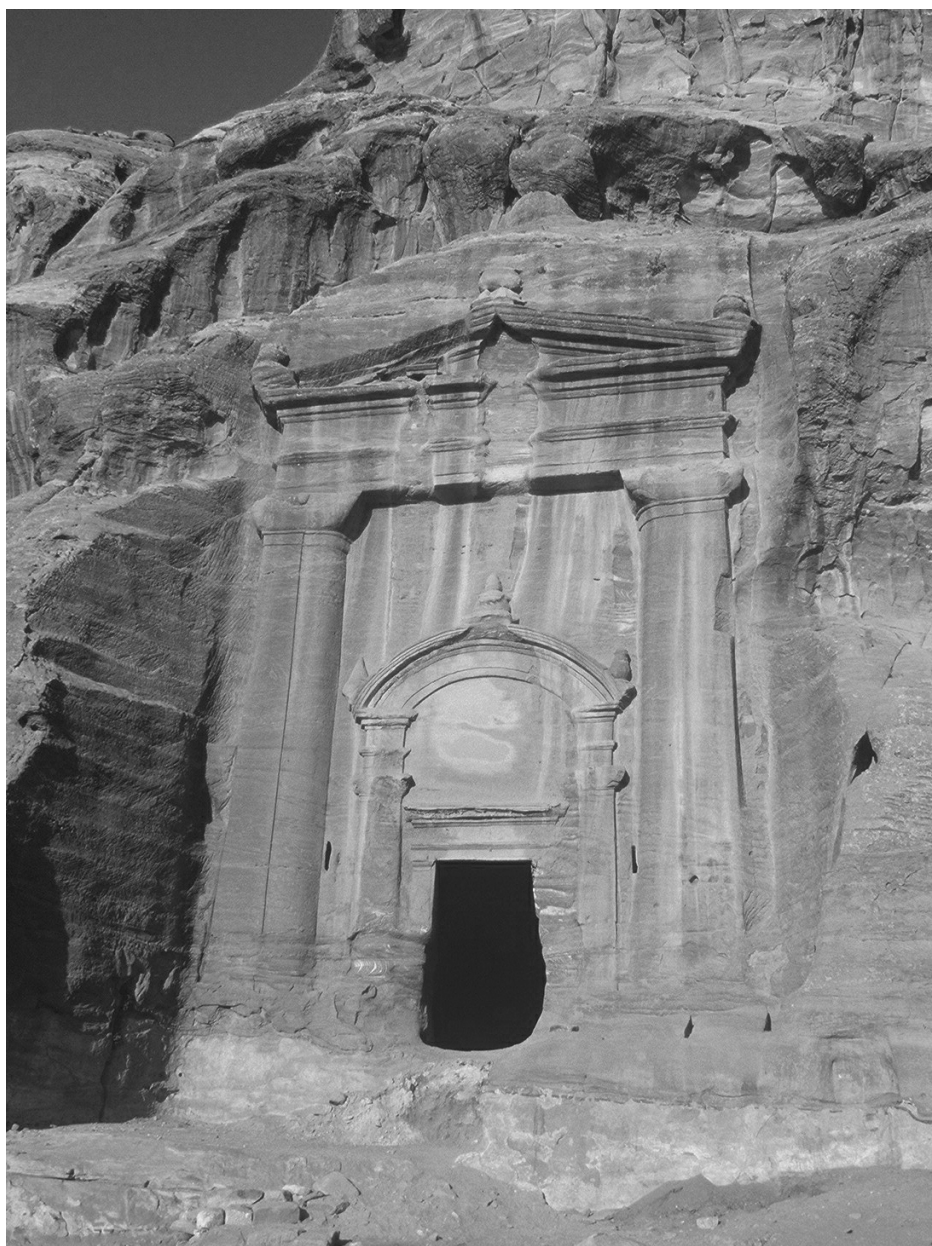
<sup>27</sup> cf. Wright (*supra* n. 5); Hackl – Jenni – Schneider (*supra* n. 5) 616-617.

<sup>28</sup> F. Grenet, *Les pratiques funéraires dans l'Asie centrale sédentaire de la conquête grecque à l'islamisation* (Paris 1984).

<sup>29</sup> As was suggested by Wright (*supra* n. 5).

Also the analysis of the burials within the two small groups presented shows that there was a lot of differentiation and variation. For instance, in neither case a prevalent orientation of the graves seems obvious. Within the Renaissance Tomb the individual graves were located in order to make a optimal use of the space available. And the pit graves with multiple burials obviously simply followed the topographical conditions.





**Fig. 1:** Petra, Renaissance Tomb (Schmid).

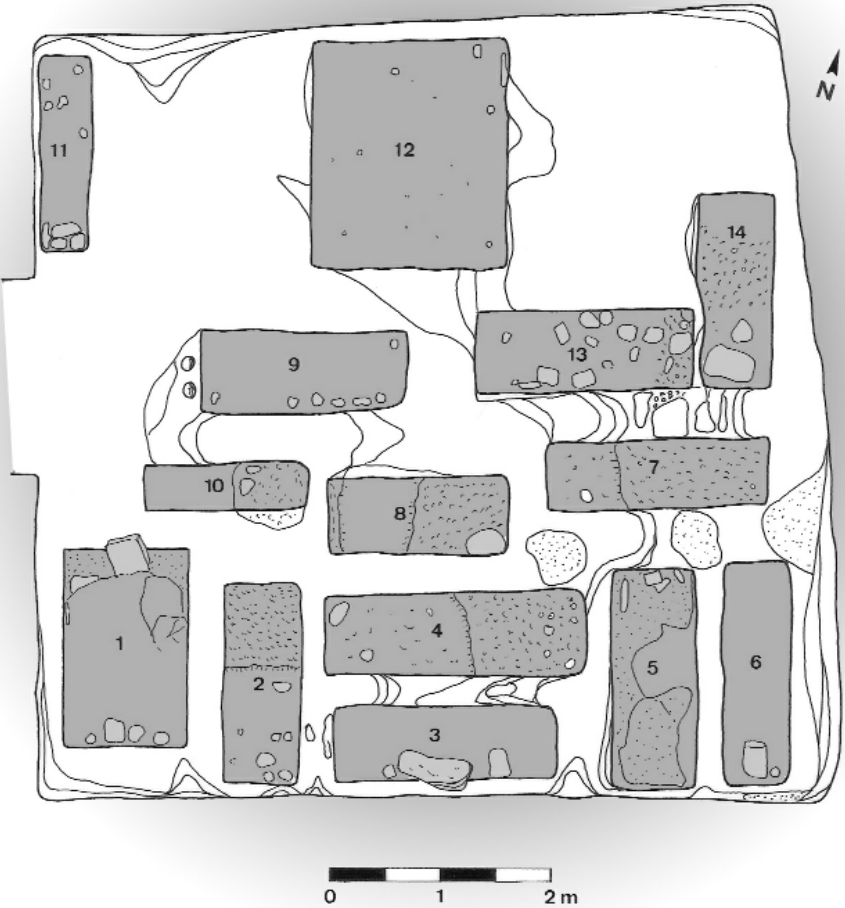


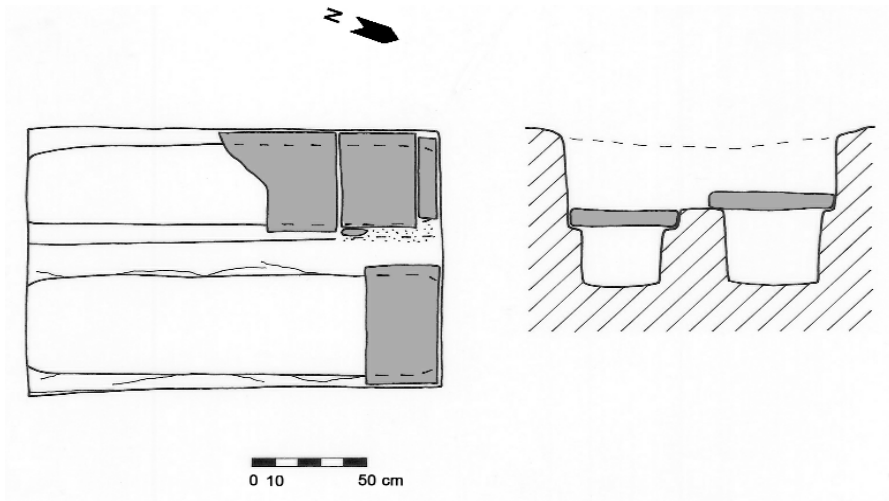
Fig. 2: Renaissance Tomb, plan of interior with graves (Barmasse, Schmid).



**Fig. 3: Medieval jug (Schmid).**



Fig. 4: Renaissance Tomb, grave 1 (Schmid).



**Fig. 5: Renaissance Tomb, grave 1 (Huguenot, Schmid).**

tomb no.	MNI <sup>30</sup>	biological data
1A	2	1 <sup>st</sup> individual: male, age 45-50; 2 <sup>nd</sup> individual: adult, age 30-40
1B	1	adult: age over 25
2	1	child: age 5-9 or 10-14, represented only by one tibiafragment
3		no human remains
4	1	adult: age over 25 but rather young
5	2	1 <sup>st</sup> individual: adult, age 40-45; 2 <sup>nd</sup> individual: adult, age over 25, rather old
6		no human remains
7	1	adult: age over 25
8	1	child: age 6-7
9	1	adult: male, age 35-40
10	1	adult: male, age over 30, rather old
11		no human remains
12	9	1 <sup>st</sup> individual: adult, age over 25, rather young; 2 <sup>nd</sup> individual: adult, age over 25; 3 <sup>rd</sup> individual: adult, age over 25; plus 3 more adults, 2 children (age 6 and 8-9) as well as an adolescent, age 16-19
13	2	1 <sup>st</sup> individual: young adult, age 18-25; 2 <sup>nd</sup> individual: adult, age over 25
14	1	adult, only one metatarsus

**Table 1**

<sup>30</sup> MNI: Minimal Number of Individuals.

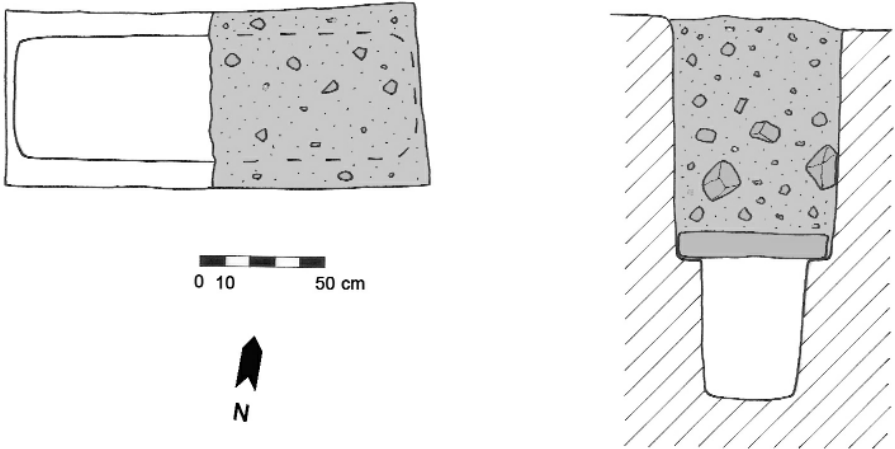


Fig. 6: Renaissance Tomb, grave 8 (Huguenot, Schmid).

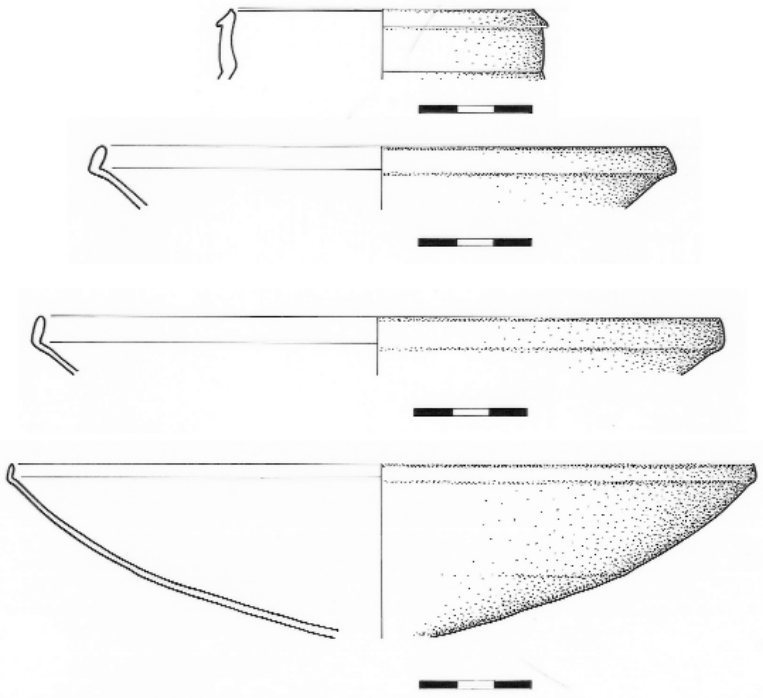


Fig. 7: Renaissance Tomb, Nabataean pottery from grave 8, coarse ware (top), plain fine ware (centre), painted fine ware (bottom) (Schmid).



Fig. 8: Renaissance Tomb, Nabataean painted bowl from graves 8 and 13 (Schmid).

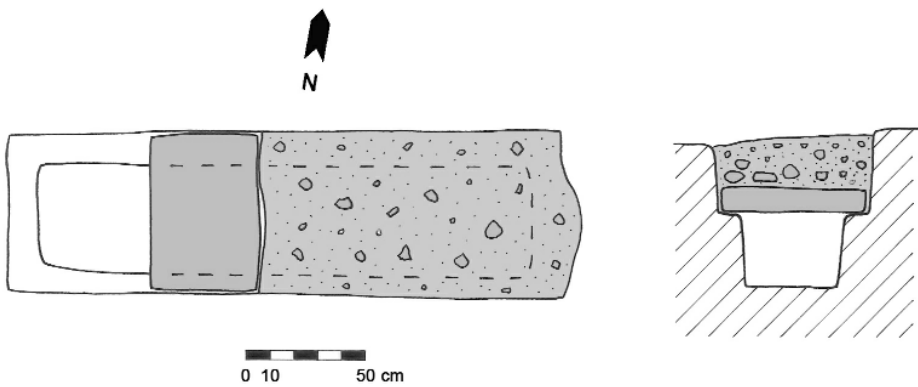
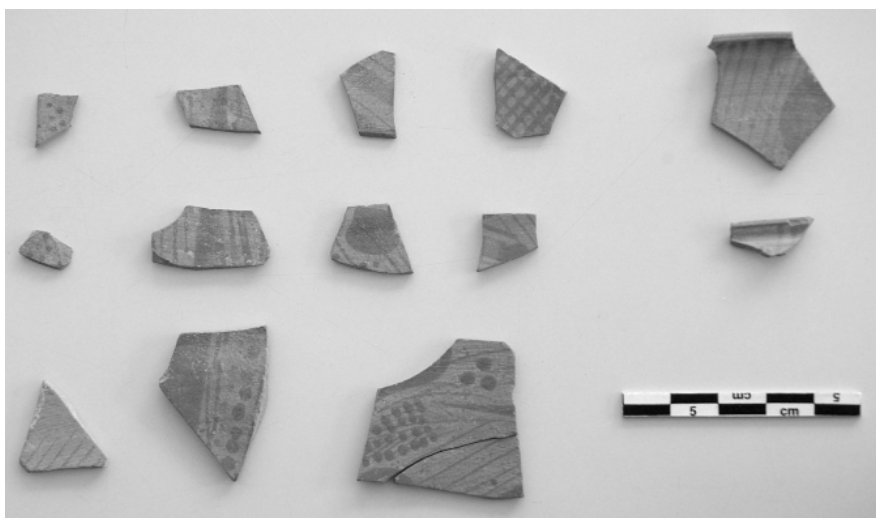
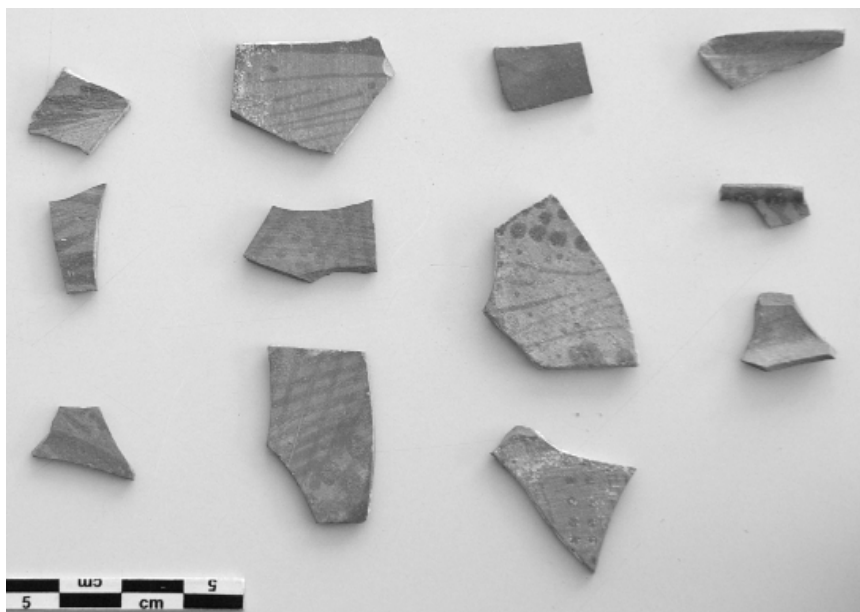


Fig. 9: Renaissance Tomb, grave 4 (Huguenot, Schmid).

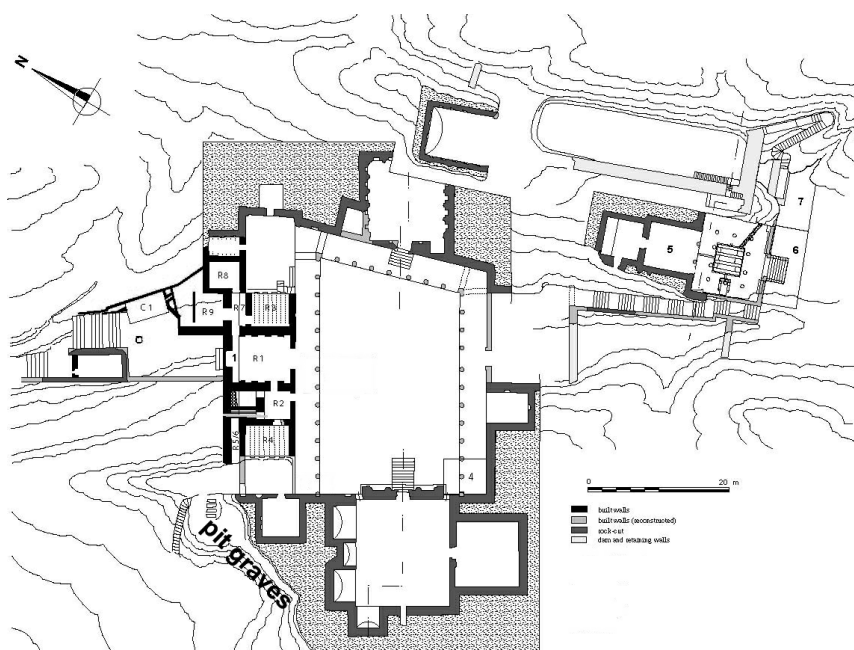


**Fig. 10: Renaissance Tomb, Nabataean painted pottery from sealing of grave 8 (Schmid).**

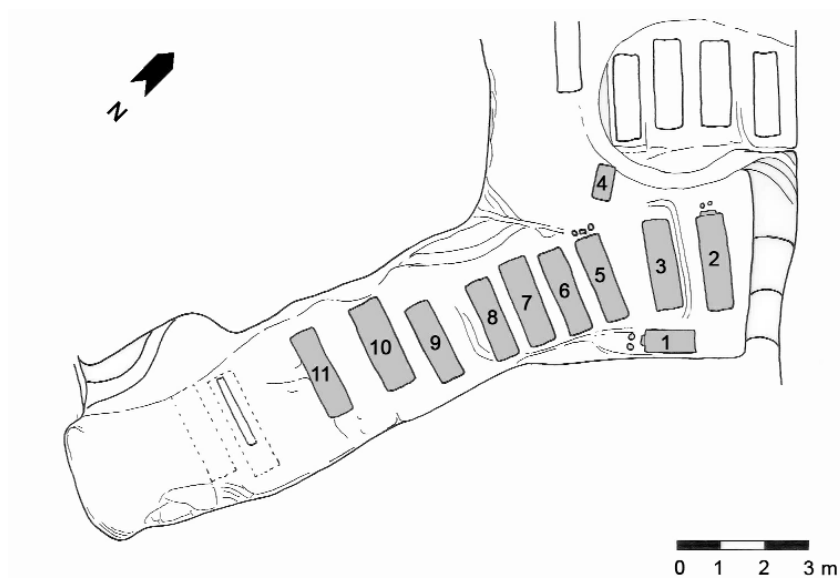


**Fig. 11: Renaissance Tomb, Nabataean painted pottery from sealing of grave 4 (Schmid).**





**Fig. 12: Petra, Wadi Farasa East: Complex of the Soldier Tomb with related structures (Barmasse).**



**Fig. 13: Pit graves at western corner of Soldier Tomb complex (Barmasse, Schmid).**



**Fig 14:** Pit grave 2 after cleaning of looters' fill (Schmid).

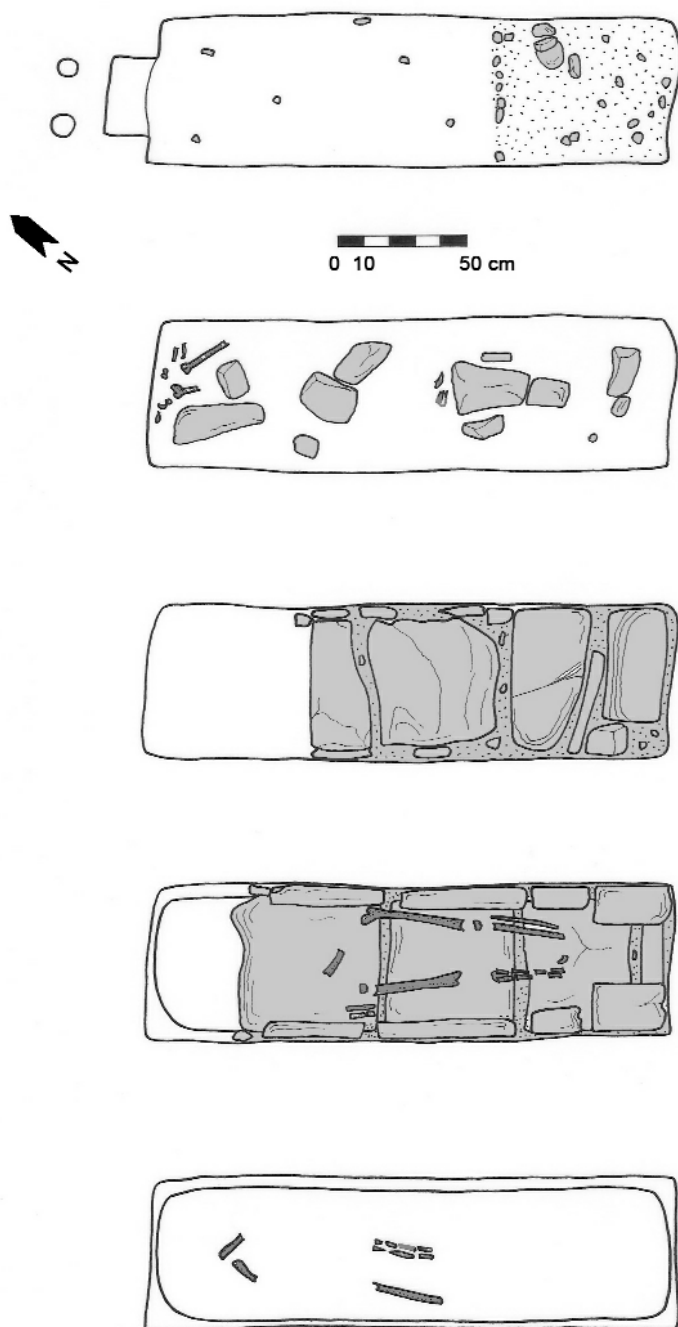


Fig. 15: Pit grave 2, different levels (Amour, Schmid).



**Fig. 16:** Pit grave 7, Medieval pottery from fill (Schmid).



**Fig. 17:** Pit grave 5, intact covering slabs beneath upper fill (Schmid).

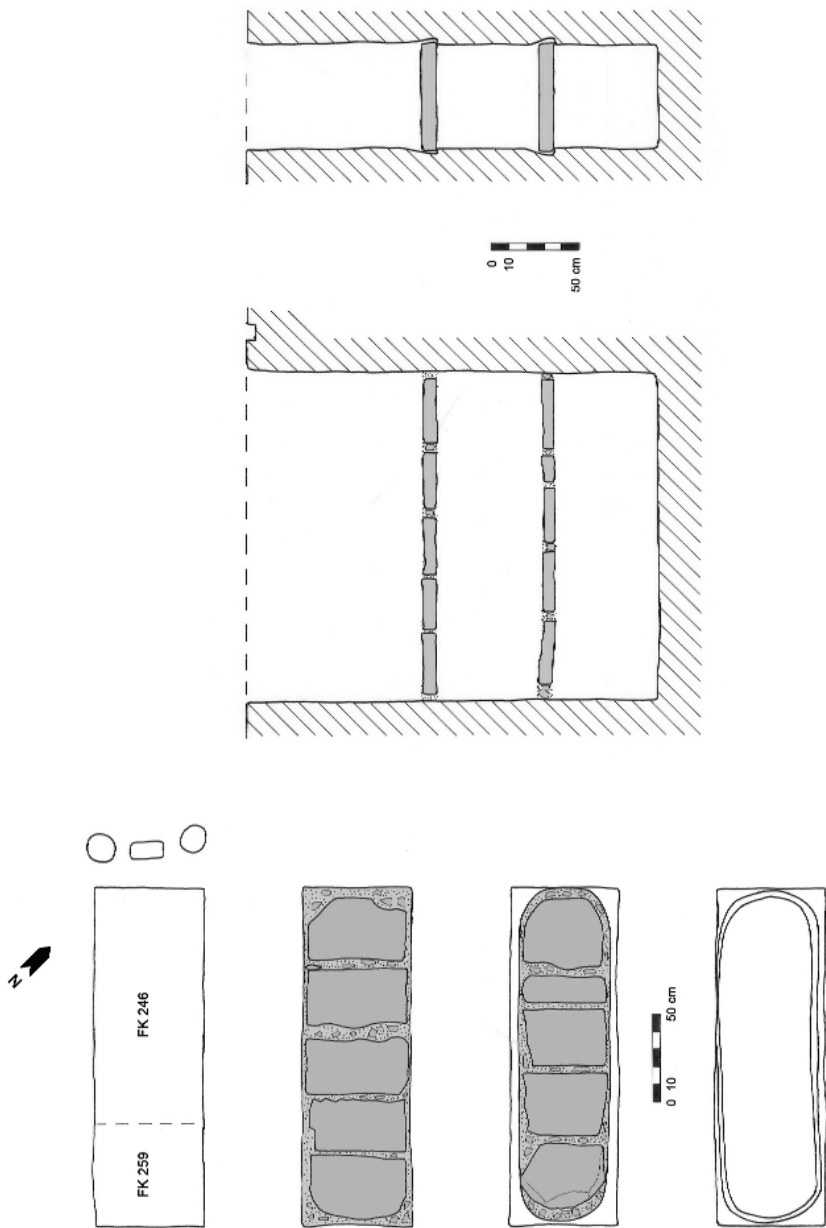


Fig 18: Pit grave 5, plans and sections (Wadeson, Schmid).



**Fig. 19:** Pit grave 5, Nabataean pottery from sealed Burial (Schmid).



**Fig. 20:** Pit grave 3, golden earrings (Schmid).



Fig. 21: Pit grave 9, silver coin of Rabbel II (Schmid).