

NABATAEAN TOMB COMPLEXES AT PETRA: New Insights in the Light of Recent Fieldwork

Lucy Wadeson (University of Oxford)

Introduction

The decorative façades of the tombs at Petra are a visual testament to the wealth, prosperity and cultural contacts of the Nabataeans, who carved them from around the 1st century BC to the second century AD (Fig. 1). The role of the façades in monumentalising the tombs in the landscape has endured to this day, and they are considered one of the most treasured remains of Nabataean culture. Although invaluable to the study of Nabataean architectural history and carving techniques,¹ the façades provide us with little information on Nabataean funerary practices, knowledge of which is limited due to the looting of the tombs in antiquity and their re-use throughout the centuries. Some burial data has been recovered from less monumental tombs at Petra (such as pit graves and shaft tombs²) and several façade tombs that were only partly looted and/or remained sealed for a number of centuries.³ However, a novel approach was taken by the current author, whereby the burial chambers and rock-cut installations inside approximately 500 façade tombs were documented and examined in detail between 2005 and 2010, not only shedding light on their function in the funerary tradition, but also the debated chronology of the tombs.⁴ Many of the tomb interiors had previously remained unpublished as a result of their use as houses by the local Bdool tribe, up until the mid-1980s.

Having studied the interiors of the tombs and related them to the form and size of the façades, the next stage of research has been to record and examine the exterior structures (mostly rock-cut), which are considered part of the tombs' surrounding property.⁵ The aims of this study are to understand the overall architectural plan of the tombs and its origins, the function of individual installations and how the various components worked together, and ultimately to reconstruct the sorts of activities taking place at the tombs, in the area in front of the façades. Most tombs have at least a platform in front of their façades, which was a natural by-product of the façade carving process, as well as other features carved into this area or the enclosing rock-walls, such as niches, basins, receptacles and benches. Tombs with a large surrounding property have a much more complicated plan, consisting of porticoes, additional chambers, triclinia and hydraulic installations. These tombs are often referred to as 'funerary complexes' or 'tomb complexes,' given their multi-functional aspect.⁶ Well-known examples at Petra include 'el-Khan'/Tomb 4,⁷ the 'Soldier

¹ For example, see McKenzie (1990); Netzer (2003); Rababeh (2005).

² Bikai and Perry (2001) 59-78; Perry (2002) 165-70; Schmid and Barmasse (2006) 220-27; Schmid *et al.* (2008) 135-60.

³ For example, most recently the Renaissance Tomb (Huguenot *et al.* [2004] 203-10), the tombs beneath the Khasneh (Farajat and Nawafleh [2005] 373-93), and the el-Khubtha tombs (<http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/petra.html> – accessed 1 May 2011).

⁴ Wadeson (2010a; 2010b).

⁵ This forms part of the 'Funerary Topography of Petra Project' (FTPP) directed by L. Wadeson. It is supported by the Council for British Research in the Levant, the G.A. Wainwright Fund and the Society for Arabian Studies.

⁶ Stephan Schmid's work on the 'Soldier Tomb Complex' (n. 8) has initiated new research into tomb complexes at Petra.

Tomb'/Tomb 239,⁸ the 'Tomb with the Armour'/Tomb 649,⁹ Tomb 676,¹⁰ the 'Urn Tomb'/Tomb 772,¹¹ and the 'Tomb of Unaishu'/Tomb 813¹² (Fig. 2). Numerous other examples were noted during the author's fieldwork, with variations on the arrangement of the complexes and the features found within them. New data is also available from the author's recent excavation of Tombs 779 and 781 at the base of the el-Khubtha mountain (Figs. 1-2).¹³

This paper focuses on these less well-known tomb complexes, the analysis of which sheds light on the nature of the funerary space and the function of certain features within it. Based on epigraphic and archaeological evidence, it will be suggested here that the property belonging to a tomb was considered sacred. In addition, some ideas on the sorts of activities taking place at the tomb complexes will be presented, as well as thoughts on the interaction between the space of the living and the space of the dead. It will be concluded that the majority of the funerary ritual was taking place outside the tombs at Petra.

Façade Tombs at Petra

At Petra, a variety of tombs are carved into the rocky landscape, including the simple shaft tombs and pit graves, carved vertically into the rock, and the monumental façade tombs carved horizontally into the sandstone rock-faces surrounding the city (Fig. 3). A total of 628 façade tombs has been recorded,¹⁴ and these are spread out in different groups or cemeteries around the city (Fig. 2).

The design of the façades is unique among the funerary architecture of the ancient world, blending local, Greek, Egyptian and Mesopotamian architectural traditions. Besides Petra, such façade tombs are found at Madā'in Šālīḥ (ancient Egra), the southernmost outpost of Nabataean territory, which is situated in modern Saudi Arabia (Fig. 4).¹⁵ However, unlike at Petra, almost a third of the Egran tombs are accompanied by formal inscriptions on their façades, providing important information on the tomb owners, the family members allowed to be buried within and when the tomb was founded.¹⁶ At Petra, the Turkmaniyah Tomb is the only tomb with a formal Nabataean inscription on its façade, yet it neither mentions the name of the owner nor the date.¹⁷ Healey suggests that this tomb may have belonged to a temple, rather than a family.¹⁸

⁷ Brünnow and von Domaszewski (1904) 195-97, Fig. 222. Schmid (2009b) 153, Fig. 8. The numbering system of Brünnow and von Domaszewski (1904) is used in this study for the tombs at Petra (BD #) and all tombs mentioned can be found in this volume.

⁸ Excavated by the 'International Wadi Farasa Project' (IWFP), led by S. Schmid. For the latest report see: Schmid (2009a) 95-105, Fig. 1, and Schmid (2009b) 144-152.

⁹ McKenzie (1990) 168; Schmid (2009b) 156, Fig. 11.

¹⁰ Excavated by D. Johnson (BYU): Johnson (2010) 538-40. See also Schmid (2009b) 154-155, Fig. 9.

¹¹ McKenzie (1990) 144-147, Pl. 93.

¹² Zayadine (1974) 142-45; McKenzie (1990) 169-70, Pl. 164.

¹³ The 'International el-Khubtha Tombs Project' (IKTP): <http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/petra.html> (accessed 1 May 2011).

¹⁴ Nehmé (2003) 158.

¹⁵ The city is located c. 460 km south-east of Petra and c. 170 km inland from the coastal city of el-Wedj on the Red Sea. For publications on the tombs see: Jaussen and Savignac (1909) 112-131, 307-404; (1914) 78-108; Nehmé et al. (2006a) 41-124; (2006b) 59-90.

¹⁶ Healey (1993).

¹⁷ Brünnow and von Domaszewski No. 633; McKenzie (1990) 167-8; *CIS* II 350; see Healey (1993) 238-42 for bibliography and translation.

¹⁸ Healey (1993) 39.

It is possible to distinguish eight different types of façade at Petra: Single Pylon, Double Pylon, Step, Proto-Hegr, Hegr, Arch, Simple Classical and Complex Classical (Fig. 3).¹⁹ The first five are characterised by variations on the crowstep motif, combined with elements from classical architecture, while the last three have only classical motifs, which have been given a local interpretation.²⁰ The size of the façades varies according to their type, the general rule being that the more complicated the façade design, the larger the façade.²¹ Thus, for example, the Single Pylon tombs have some of the smallest façades, whereas the Hegr and Complex Classical tombs have some of the largest. It was observed that there are large, complicated façade types, e.g. Hegr, Double Pylon, and smaller, simpler versions of them, e.g. Step, Proto-Hegr and Single Pylon.

Doorways in the centre of the façades provide access to the chambers carved behind. The majority of tombs have a single square-shaped chamber, the average floor area of which is 36.29 m², based on a sample of 262 tombs.²² Although many chambers have blocked floors, the measurements from 75 with cleared floors revealed an average ceiling height of 2.88 m. A variety of burial installations are carved into the walls and floors of these spacious chambers, the most common being tall, deep niches known as loculi, and floor graves.²³

An analysis of the tomb interiors in relation to their façades, revealed that the chamber size and arrangement of the burial features was related to façade type.²⁴ The tombs with large façades and a more complex design, such as the Hegr and Double Pylon types, tend to have large chambers with a neat, symmetrical arrangement of the burial installations, which often culminate in a more prominent burial space in the middle of the back wall, aligned with the entrance, such as in Tomb 781 (Fig. 5). The inscriptions on the façade tombs at Madā'in Šālīḥ reveal that these tombs belonged to the elite of Nabataean society and were intended for the tomb founder and his family.²⁵ The smaller, simpler tombs, such as the Single Pylon and Step types, typically have small chambers with a less orderly plan. At Madā'in Šālīḥ, these tomb types tend to belong to individuals of a lower socio-economic status who had to share the ownership between families.²⁶ Thus, social status and hierarchy are evident in the layout and size of Nabataean façade tombs.

The differentiation between the façade tombs was also discovered to be related to chronological development. Through a study of the relationship between tombs carved side by side at Petra and the evidence of the dated Madā'in Šālīḥ tombs, a pattern became evident whereby the larger, more complicated façade types (e.g. Hegr) tended to occur earlier than their smaller, simpler versions (e.g. Step, Proto-Hegr).²⁷ This can be explained by social and economic developments in the Nabataean kingdom during the 1st century AD.²⁸ This newly proposed chronology for the façade tombs contrasts with more traditional typologically-based chronologies, which see a

¹⁹ Wadeson (2010a) 51-2, Table 1, Fig. 2. These are based on Brünnow and von Domszewski (1904) 137-91.

²⁰ For a study of the classical tomb façades, see: McKenzie (1990).

²¹ Wadeson (2010a) 52-3, Fig. 5.

²² For complete statistics see: Wadeson (2010b) Chapter 3.

²³ Wadeson (2010a) 60-5.

²⁴ Wadeson (2010a) 57-65.

²⁵ Wadeson (2011) in press. See also Negev (1976) 219.

²⁶ Wadeson (2011) in press.

²⁷ Wadeson (2010a) 48-69.

²⁸ Wadeson (2011) in press.

linear development from simple to complex in façade design.²⁹ However, it is more in line with patterns of simplification recently noted in Nabataean sculpture, ceramics and classical-style architecture.³⁰

In terms of absolute dating, the earliest dated façade tombs at Petra are Hegr Tombs 62D and 62E discovered beneath the Khasneh.³¹ Since these tombs are related to the early gravel road of the Siq, they have a *terminus ante quem* of 50 BC, when that road is replaced by a paved one.³² The Complex Classical Tomb of Sextius Florentinus, carved at the base of el-Khubtha, is the latest dated tomb, carved after the Roman annexation in AD 106. According to the Latin inscription on its façade, the Roman official, to whom the tomb was dedicated, was governor of Arabia in AD 127 and was succeeded by AD 130, as indicated by Greek papyri from the Cave of Letters.³³ Therefore, the tomb should be dated to that period, unless it was reused, as has been suggested by several scholars.³⁴ The façade tombs dated by their inscriptions at Madā'in Šālīḥ fall between AD 1 and 76,³⁵ with the Hegr and Double Pylon tombs occurring earlier in the century than their smaller, simpler versions.³⁶ However, as new façade types were introduced, the earlier ones still continued to be made.³⁷

Based on the few burials that have been excavated from façade tombs, it is evident that much care was invested in burying the dead and protecting them from being disturbed.³⁸ For example, the burials excavated in the arcosolia graves of Tombs 779 and 781 were sealed with four types of mortar at different levels, most likely to prevent water seeping into the burial and to inhibit grave robbers.³⁹ The Madā'in Šālīḥ funerary inscriptions show a particular concern with protecting the burials, calling down curses from the gods and fines upon anyone who disturbs the dead.⁴⁰ Given that the tombs would have been re-opened for burials over a number of generations and that decomposition was slow in Petra's dry climate, it must have also been important to seal burials in a way that was hygienic and hid the smell of decomposition. This may also explain the use of quicklime noted on burials at Petra, which effectively prevents bacterial growth through dehydration.⁴¹

Non-burial features carved in the walls and floors of chambers, such as niches and receptacles,⁴² demonstrate that the interior space was used for a fair amount of ritual activity in burying the dead and commemorating them subsequently. However, many more installations are found outside the tombs, in the so-called 'tomb complexes,' suggesting that the area in front of the façades was the focus for funerary ritual. It is the character and functioning of these tomb complexes to which we now turn.

²⁹ Brünnow and von Domaszewski (1904) 137-91; Kennedy (1925) 38, 45; Browning (1973) 79; Netzer (2003) 13-36, 39-45, 46-7.

³⁰ McKenzie (1990) 24-5; 33-59; (2003) 165-91; Schmid (2001) 367-426.

³¹ Farajat and Nawafleh (2005) 373-93.

³² McKenzie (2004) 559; Ruben (2003) 35-40.

³³ *CIL* III 14148¹⁰; Yadin (1962) 259; Negev (1977) 597; McKenzie (1990) 33.

³⁴ Negev (1977) 598; Freyberger (1991) 1-8; Sachet (2009) 111.

³⁵ Healey (1993) 6.

³⁶ McKenzie (1990) 13, 19, diagram 1; Wadeson (2010a) 66-7.

³⁷ For a complete list of dated tombs at Petra see: Wadeson (2010a) 54, Table 3.

³⁸ See Wadeson (2010b) Chapter 8 on treatment of the dead at Petra.

³⁹ For the preliminary report, see the following (accessed 1 May 2011):

<http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/files/Research%20Projects/Petra/JKTP%202010%20preliminary%20report.pdf>

⁴⁰ Healey (1993) 43-8.

⁴¹ Laudermilk (1932) 62-3; Horsfield and Horsfield (1939) 109-10; Zayadine (1974) 144-5; Schmid and Barmasse (2006) 224-5.

⁴² See Wadeson (2010b) Chapter 8, Table 8.2 for a list of funerary installations found inside the tombs.

Tomb Complexes: the Epigraphic and Archaeological Evidence

The most important piece of evidence for tomb complexes at Petra and the structures that form them is the Nabataean inscription on the façade of the Turkmaniyah Tomb/Tomb 633.⁴³ It can be translated as follows:

This tomb and the large burial-chamber within it and the small burial-chamber beyond it, in which are burial-places, niche-arrangements, and the enclosure in front of them and the porticos and rooms within it [i.e. the enclosure] and the gardens(?) and triclinium-garden(?) and the wells of water and the cisterns(?) and walls(?) and all the rest of the property which is in these places are sacred and dedicated to Dushara, the god of our lord, and his sacred throne and all the gods, (as) in the documents of consecration according to their contents. And it is the order of Dushara and his throne and all the gods that it should be done as in these documents of consecration and nothing of all that is in them shall be changed or removed and none shall be buried in this tomb except whoever has written for him an authorization for burial in these documents of consecration for ever.⁴⁴

This inscription reveals that the property of a tomb was conceived of as much more than just the façade, chamber and burial places. Although some of the terminology is still under debate,⁴⁵ it seems the Turkmaniyah Tomb Complex included something along the lines of an enclosure, porticoes, additional rooms, gardens, triclinia, walls and sources of water. Unfortunately, most of the features listed no longer survive in front of the Turkmaniyah Tomb, since it is carved at the level of the valley floor and has been ravaged by flooding over the centuries. All that remains is the large area in front of the façade, partially enclosed at the sides by rock walls, and a heart-shaped column in its eastern corner indicating a colonnade along three sides of the court (Fig. 6).

Fortunately, structures such as walls, porticoes, triclinia, chambers and cisterns do survive with numerous other tombs at Petra allowing us to identify them as tomb complexes similar to that of the Turkmaniyah Tomb. The Tomb of Unaishu is a notable example with remains of a colonnaded courtyard, triclinium to the north of the tomb façade, and a cistern, neatly arranged into a coherent unit (Fig. 7).⁴⁶ The Soldier Tomb Complex is another well-known example, with an elaborate triclinium opposite the tomb façade, multiple cisterns, a colonnaded courtyard and a monumental masonry-built entrance building, the remains of which have been excavated over the last decade.⁴⁷ The excavator of the Soldier Tomb Complex, Stephan Schmid, has likened its plan and architecture to the luxury architecture of the late Hellenistic and early Roman world, such as Alexandrian palaces and Pompeian houses.⁴⁸ The abundant remains also demonstrate how rock-cut and built architecture were combined to create these multi-faceted complexes.

Large tomb complexes typically belong to the Double Pylon, Hegr and Complex Classical type tombs. As mentioned above, these tombs were owned by the wealthiest sector of society, and the extent of the property and installations accompanying those that form funerary complexes reflects this. Many of these funerary complexes are located in prominent positions around the city, where they dominate their surroundings and command views from afar. For example, Tomb 559 commands the high plateau between Wadi Muaisra East and West and is visible from the city centre,

⁴³ CIS II 350; McKenzie (1990) 58 n. 30, 167-168; Healey (1993) 238-242.

⁴⁴ Translation in Healey (1993) 238-239; note that Healey (2009, 66) later translates *pqdown* as 'order.'

⁴⁵ For terminological notes, see Healey (1993) 239-242.

⁴⁶ Zayadine (1974) 142.

⁴⁷ For the latest report see: Schmid (2009a) 95-105, Fig. 1.

⁴⁸ Schmid (2007) 205-219; (2009b) 161.

while the complex of Tomb 276 dominates the area of Wadi Farasa (Figs. 2, 8a). Likewise, the Soldier Tomb complex acts as a gateway between Wadi Farasa East and the path up to the High Place. As such, the possibility can be raised that they acted as territorial markers for certain families or other groups.

The territory of a tomb was clearly an issue given that all the components of the Turkmaniyah Tomb complex are listed as part of its property, which is notably referred to in legal terms through mention of the ‘documents of consecration.’ The idea of the tomb as the legal property of the owner is prominent throughout the Madā’in Šālīḥ funerary inscriptions,⁴⁹ which threaten those who violate the property with curses from the gods and fines payable to the authorities. One inscription, on Tomb A3/IGN 9 specifically mentions the ‘... *tomb and platform and enclosure* ...’,⁵⁰ demonstrating that the area surrounding the tomb also fell under its legal property.

The boundary structures that form the enclosures of the tomb complexes at Petra clearly functioned in defining the sepulchral property. These are either rock-cut, built, or formed by natural features in the landscape. For example, low rock-cut walls define the external property of Tombs 276 (Fig. 8a-b), 779 and 781 (Figs. 5, 9), while the remains of masonry walls are visible in front on Tomb 676.⁵¹ The space could also be defined by a combination of carved walls and colonnades (both carved and freestanding) as in front of the recently excavated Tomb 779 (Fig. 5), the Urn Tomb and the Tomb of Unaishu (Fig. 7). The colonnades functioned in regulating the uneven space of the natural rock surroundings, and, as we will see below, may have been used as areas for feasting. Several tomb complexes are set off from their surroundings by natural topographical features. For example, Tomb 6 in the Outer Siq is located at the end of a narrow gorge, whereby it is enclosed by high rock-faces, and Tomb 472 in Wadi Muaisra is located at the top of a high plateau that drops away steeply on three sides of the courtyard.

Monumental entranceways/gateways also provided access to the property of several tomb complexes at Petra. The complexes of Tombs 269/270 and 276 are approached on a linear axis by monumental stairs and a carved gateway (Figs. 8a, 10a), while that of Tomb 572 is preceded by a large rock-cut portal that appears to have been once accessed by stairs that have now eroded away (Fig. 11).⁵² The built entrance-hall that led into the Soldier Tomb Complex is at right angles to the tomb,⁵³ but this results from the formation of the narrow rock gorge, the two faces of which were exploited for the carving of the tomb façade and triclinium opposite. The recent excavation of the complex of Tomb 781 revealed carved holes for the posts and locking system of an external doorway at the western edge of the courtyard (Figs. 5, 9). This is the first of its kind noted in a tomb complex at Petra, and indicates the importance of controlling access into the funerary area.

The delineated area of tomb complexes, their monumental entrances and architectural layout are reminiscent of the *temenoi* of sanctuaries, such as that of the Qasr el-Bint or the so-called ‘Great Temple’ in the city centre.⁵⁴ Certain other archaeological evidence and the Turkmaniyah Tomb inscription also suggest that the tomb’s property was considered as sacred space.

⁴⁹ Healey (1993) 42.

⁵⁰ CIS II 199; Inscription H1: Healey (1993), 68.

⁵¹ Schmid (2007) 213-15, Fig. 14.

⁵² For plans, see Schmid (2009b) 156, Fig. 12, 160, Figs. 15-16.

⁵³ Schmid (2009b) 142, Fig. 3, 147, Fig. 6.

⁵⁴ Qasr el-Bint: Larché and Zayadine (2003) 199-213; ‘Great Temple’: Joukowsky (2003) 214-222.

The Sanctity of the Tomb's Property

According to the Turkmaniyah Tomb inscription (see above), the property of the tomb complex was considered sacred (*ḥrm*) and dedicated to the gods. This concept is also expressed in the Madā'in Šālīḥ funerary inscriptions, but in relation to the tomb itself as inviolable.⁵⁵ For example, Tomb B22/IGN 44 is, '... inviolable according to the nature of inviolability of what is inviolably consecrated to Dushara.'⁵⁶ Gawlikowski discusses the term *ḥrm* in pre-Islamic traditions in its reference to sacred ground attached to temples and tombs that was the property of the gods.⁵⁷ The presence of certain features at the entranceways to several complexes, such as animals, betyls, niches and basins, also suggest a transition to sacred space and thus accord with the epigraphic evidence.

Early descriptions of the complex of Tomb 4 in the Outer Siq record a low wall along the front of the courtyard and two large sculpted lions or sphinxes flanking the entrance.⁵⁸ These no longer survive since the tomb was largely modified when it was built into the Petra Rest House (since dismantled). The presence of such animals signifies the sacred space of the complex and its need for protection. A comparable example is found in the two lions carved on either side of the entrance to the so-called 'Lion Triclinium (BD 452).⁵⁹ Apotropaic imagery, such as eagles, snakes, sphinxes and mythological faces are also common on the façades at Madā'in Šālīḥ and several tombs at Petra.⁶⁰

Betyls are non-figural representations of gods in block-like form, often carved in votive niches in religious and funerary contexts around Petra, and typical of Nabataean and Arabian religions.⁶¹ They also took the form of portable blocks of stone that could be inserted into fixtures specially designed to hold them within niches. Their shape is predominantly rectangular, but sometimes rounded and with added details.⁶² Betyls are often found carved on or beside tombs, perhaps signalling the sacred quality of the space, and the involvement of the gods in funerary practices and beliefs. In the case of two large tomb complexes, they are observed at the entranceways as part of elaborate installations involving water. The outline of a betyl in a niche is carved in the monumental entranceway of the complex of Tombs 269/270 (Fig. 10b). Water was directed over this betyl via a drain leading out of a basin in the rock platform above. Similarly, at the entrance to the complex of Tomb 192, an empty niche (supposedly once holding a betyl) and basin are carved atop a platform which is accessed by a small stairway (Fig. 12). Behind this is a large vat for water, and two drains in the wall above once directed water down into the niche-platform. This type of installation underlines the important relationship between water and cult and could be a way of thanking the god(s) for water, a precious commodity in the region.⁶³ A similar arrangement was noted in the complex of the 'Painted House' at Beidha, interpreted by Twaissi et al. as a sanctuary to Isis.⁶⁴ However, they suggest that the water had to pass through the betyl-niche so as to purify it for sacral purposes.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of the term *ḥrm* in relation to Tomb A3/IGN 9, see Healey (1993) 72.

⁵⁶ CIS II 206; Inscription H19: Healey (1993) 166.

⁵⁷ Gawlikowski (1982) 301-3.

⁵⁸ Brünnow and von Domszewski (1904) 195-96.

⁵⁹ McKenzie (1990) 158-9.

⁶⁰ McKenzie *et al.* (1998) 35-50.

⁶¹ Patrich (1990) 57; Healey (2001) 155-58; Wenning (2001) 79-95.

⁶² For a typology see: Patrich (1990) 75-91.

⁶³ Wenning (2001) 91 notes, 'Wherever water is present, the gods are praised.'

⁶⁴ Twaissi et al. (2010) 35, Fig. 7; Wenning (2001) 88 notes other examples of betyl-niches with drains.

This explanation is plausible for such installations accompanying tomb complexes, especially since basins are also a common feature found at the entrances to these complexes, suggesting the rite of ritual purification upon entering the sacred space of the tomb's property. For example, arched basins for containing water are carved by the eroded stairway leading to the entrance of Tomb 572's complex (Fig. 11), and in the rock wall to the right of Tomb 693 (Fig. 13). They are also commonly found by the entrance of the actual tomb, as in Tombs 372 and 522, and accompanying triclinia, as in Triclinia 256 and 812. The remains of hydraulic mortar in many of these basins testifies to their use as water containers.

Sources of water, such as cisterns and reservoirs, are frequently found in tomb complexes, indicating the important role of water in the funerary rites and activities associated with the tomb. Many of the features characteristic of funerary complexes are also found in religious contexts at Petra, such as platforms, cisterns, triclinia, basins and betyls.⁶⁵ This highlights the possibly cultic aspect of the activities taking place at the tombs and the affinities between religious and funerary practices.⁶⁶ Some of the activities, such as funerary feasting, are well-known in scholarship.⁶⁷ However, detailed study of a wide variety of tomb complexes at Petra allows some new insights into the nature of the activities taking place in them and their significance for our understanding of Nabataean funerary habits.

Activities at the Tomb Site

Examination of the structures that form tomb complexes allows a reconstruction of how they were used and therefore the principal activities they accommodated. These included gathering, offerings to the dead and funerary feasting, all of which were in the service of commemorating and honouring the deceased. Such practices are customary in the ancient Mediterranean and Near East region during this period.

The large, level platforms that form the courtyards of the complexes were appropriate places for people to gather, with the façade of the tomb as a back-drop, such as the complexes of Tomb 276 (Fig. 8a-b) and 779 (Fig. 1).⁶⁸ Certain installations carved in this area, such as circular receptacles or cup-holes, were likely used to contain offerings to the dead in the form of libations.⁶⁹ Circular receptacles are commonly found in sets of two or three in front of graves (e.g. Chamber 2 of Turkmaniyah Tomb), in the thresholds of tombs (e.g. Tomb 450) and before the façades (e.g. Tomb 596) (Fig. 14). One large receptacle is prominently placed on a raised platform in front of Tomb 693 (Fig. 13), while the one in the threshold of the Khasneh has a small drainage hole connected to a channel that would have drained liquids into a rectangular receptacle in the step below.⁷⁰ Recent excavations in the courtyard of the Khasneh also revealed large amounts of burnt incense and the remains of small altars.⁷¹ In addition, a large hearth full of ash, burnt animal bones, potsherds, iron fragments and incense, was discovered outside the entrance to Tomb

⁶⁵ For example, the 'High Place' on the peak of Zibb Attuf: McKenzie (1990) 172, Pls. 169-170. For sacred places at Petra, see Healey (2001) 38-50.

⁶⁶ Due to limited literary sources, little is known of Nabataean religious practices: Healey (2001) 1-2.

⁶⁷ Healey (1993) 38; Sachet (2010) 249-262.

⁶⁸ An ashlar-built platform was recently excavated in front of Tomb 676: Johnson (2010) 539.

⁶⁹ Libations in the tombs at Petra are discussed in Sachet (2009) 97-112, including some ideas on what liquids were poured (108-9).

⁷⁰ Stewart (2003) Fig. 205.

⁷¹ Farajat and Nawafleh (2005) 381, Fig. 16.

62A beneath the Khasneh.⁷² These findings may reflect a variety of offerings to the dead, if not the remains of funerary meals.

The emphasis placed on commemorating the dead in the courtyard area is also highlighted by the typical alignment (if the topography allowed) of the principal burials in the back wall of the tomb with the tomb entrance, façade, courtyard and entrance to the complex. Clear examples of this are observed in the arrangement of the complexes of Tombs 276 and 781 (Figs. 5, 8a-b), which recall the plans of Ptolemaic-period monumental tombs at Alexandria, particularly the Mafrousa Tomb, dated to the 2nd century BC.⁷³ In Alexandrian funerary practice however, offerings to the dead were focused on large altars placed in the middle of the courtyards, in line with the tomb chambers and burials.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, ritual activity in the courtyards was directed towards the burials in both Nabataean and Alexandrian monumental tombs.

One activity that is well attested at the tombs is commemorative feasting in honour of the deceased. Besides the numerous triclinia (three-benched dining rooms) accompanying the tombs, the large amounts of ceramics (fineware and coarseware) and the water reservoirs in the complexes point to this activity. For example, the clearance of the small cistern at the entrance to the Soldier Tomb Complex revealed a great amount of coarseware and fineware dated to the end of the 1st century AD that apparently had been thrown in complete.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the additional rooms forming part of many complexes and lacking evidence of burial may have been used for storage of cultic implements or for the preparation of meals. These are usually small and inconspicuous chambers, which sometimes have niches with grooves for wooden shelving, such as those in the Wadi Farasa West Complex (Fig. 15).

Group-feasting (ritual meals – *marzēḥā*⁷⁶) in Nabataean society was a regular practice: Strabo (*Geog.* 16.4.26) reports that the Nabataeans commonly held symposia in groups of thirteen, while an inscription at Beidha refers to a symposiarch, and another near ed-Deir mentions a symposium in honour of the deified King Obodas.⁷⁷ Triclinia, biclinia and stibadia are found throughout Petra, in domestic, religious and funerary contexts.⁷⁸ The triclinia found in tomb complexes are either contained in tall rock-cut chambers with a plain façade or open front (for e.g. Triclinia 256 and 812), or are open to the sky, with benches carved in the bedrock, perhaps functioning as a sort of summer dining arrangement. The latter are usually located in dramatic positions, such as the edge of a rock plateau, to provide diners with a scenic and sweeping vista, as in the complexes of Tomb 270 and Tomb 559 (Fig. 16).

Other outdoor areas of the complexes may have been used for feasting, such as the benches lining the platform of Tomb 276 (Fig. 8a-b) or the space within the porticoes of the Urn Tomb and Tomb 4 (Fig. 17). It is also possible that the platforms outside the tombs were used as a dining area, such as those to the side of Tomb 273. Healey notes that the Nabataean term for ‘enclosure’ (*krk*) mentioned in the inscription on Tomb A3/IGN 9 at Madā’in Šālīḥ also appears in Palmyrene tomb inscriptions, where

⁷² Farajat and Nawafleh (2005) 375-6, Fig. 4.

⁷³ McKenzie (1990) 65-66, Pl. 186. For more examples, see Venit (2002).

⁷⁴ Venit (2002) 15.

⁷⁵ Schmid (2005) 20-21.

⁷⁶ Healey (2001) 165-169.

⁷⁷ Cantineau (1932) 7; Zayadine (1976) 139-42.

⁷⁸ For a summary of non-funerary triclinia, see McKenzie (1990) 108, and Netzer (2003) 58-64. Dalman (1908, 1912) recorded several triclinia that were not noted by Brünnow and Domaszewski. See also Tarrier (1980) 38-40; (1986) 254-56; (1995) 165-82.

it may refer to the place where ritual meals took place.⁷⁹ The ‘enclosure’ likely refers to the platform area which is enclosed by the rock wings projecting either side of the tomb façade.

A notable feature of Nabataean funerary triclinia is that many have burials in their back walls, above the benches. In Triclinium 256 and the Bab es-Siq Triclinium,⁸⁰ these burials are placed in the small, square-shaped loculi high up in the wall where they cannot be reached. Whereas in Triclinium 812 and the Triclinium of Tomb 276, the burials are at ground level, in tall loculi and chambers respectively (Fig. 18). It is possible that the deceased were literally thought to be partaking in the funerary banquet with their family members, since they occupy the most prominent position of the triclinium and replace the focal niche that is usually present in religious triclinia, such as in BD 272. To dine in the same room as burials was seemingly unproblematic to the Nabataeans. Such a practice was forbidden in the neighbouring Jewish tombs of Jerusalem during the same period, where laws concerning the separation of the space of the living and the space of the dead were much stricter.⁸¹

Although the property of the tomb complexes appears to have been conceived of as sacred, it may have been that the boundaries between the space of the living and the space of the dead were fluid. This idea accords with Schmid’s observation that large-scale tomb complexes, like that of the Soldier Tomb, possibly held utilitarian functions, since large amounts of drinkable water were available via the multiple cisterns.⁸² Tomb complexes seem to not only have served a high number of visitors,⁸³ but also to have been very much a part of daily life at Petra, given their multi-structures, size and prominence in the urban landscape.

Conclusions

The variety and extent of rock-cut installations and structures found in the area surrounding many of the façade tombs at Petra indicate that most of the funerary ritual took place outside the burial chambers. This ritual activity mostly converged on the platform or courtyard immediately in front of the façade or in adjoining triclinia. The sorts of activities that took place, either at the event of a funeral or on other occasions, appear to have included gathering, libations, offerings and feasting. Water seems to have been central to many of these activities, judging by the presence of cisterns, reservoirs and basins in the complexes. The ritual focused on the burials within the chamber, as suggested by the alignment between the interior and exterior parts of the tomb.

The property of tomb complexes is usually defined by natural features in the rock, walls or colonnades. That this circumscribed area was a sacred space is suggested not only by the Turkmaniyah Tomb inscription, but also by the carvings of betyls and apotropaic imagery on the boundary structures. It seems to have been acceptable to place burials in triclinia, even though these areas were frequented and used by the living. The extent of some of the large funerary complexes, including additional chambers and intricate water management systems, in fact might suggest they also served practical, non-funerary functions. Tomb complexes may also have functioned as territorial markers for leading families in Petra. The showy display of ritual on the

⁷⁹ Healey (1993) 70 (see further: Ingholt *et al.* (1955) 2, nos. 8 and 146).

⁸⁰ McKenzie (1990) 153-56, Pl. 128.

⁸¹ Kloner and Zissu (2007) 20-22, 29, 123-35.

⁸² Schmid and Studer (2003) 481. Roman funerary gardens served similar purposes: Toynbee (1971) 94-100. Schmid ((2009b) 162) questions the extent to which the living were using the tomb complexes.

⁸³ Schmid (2009b) 163.

prominent platforms seems to have been as much for the benefit of the living as it was for the dead.

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Figure 1. Façade Tombs 779, 780 and 781 at the base of el-Khubtha, Petra
(Photo: L. Wadeson).

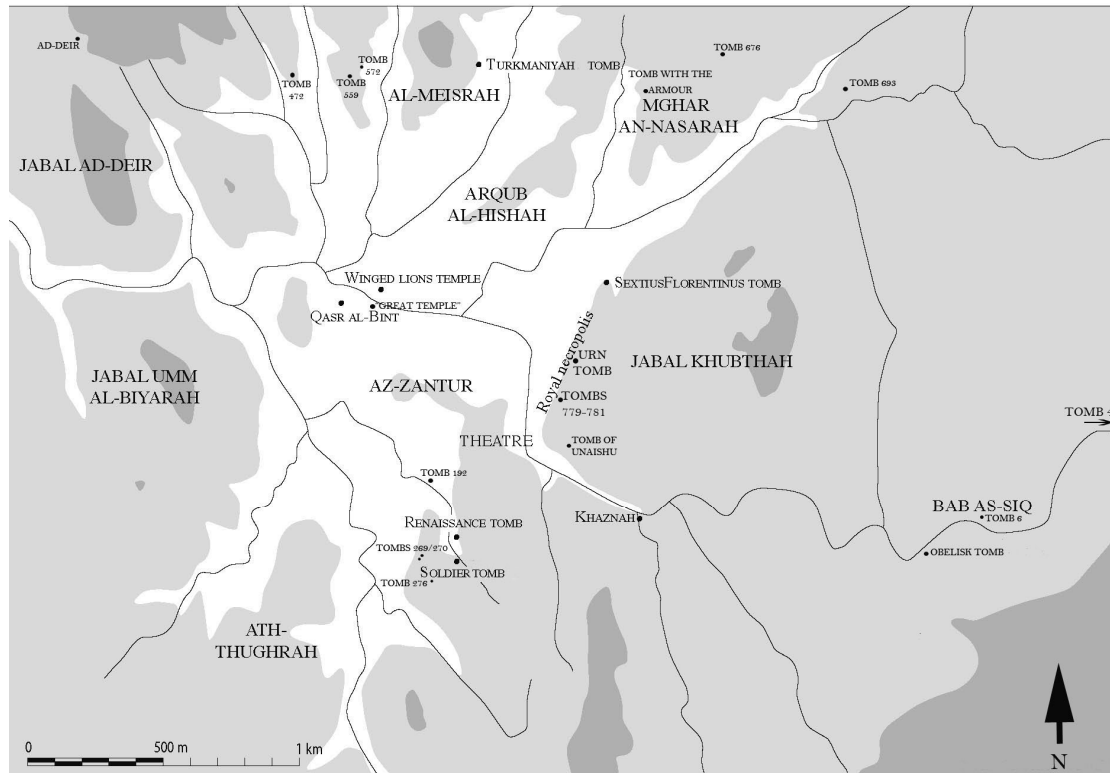


Figure 2. Map of Petra showing tombs and monuments mentioned in this study
(Map after I. Sachet).



Figure 3. Façade tombs of different types at the base of Umm el-Biyara, Petra
(Photo: L. Wadeson).

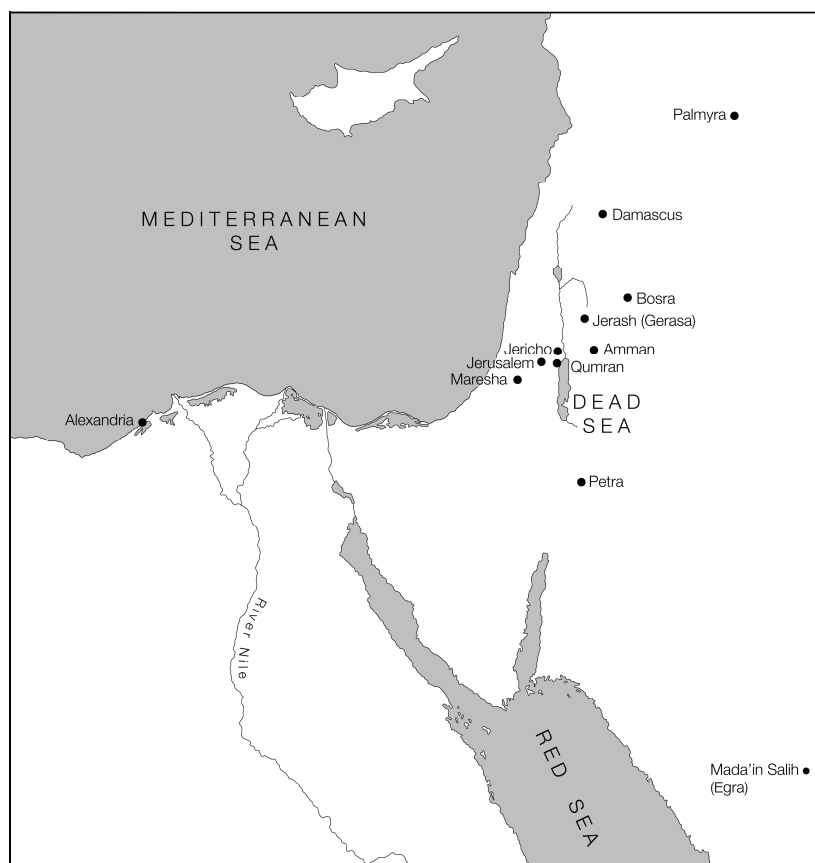


Figure 4. The Near East and Egypt (*Map: A. Wilkins*).

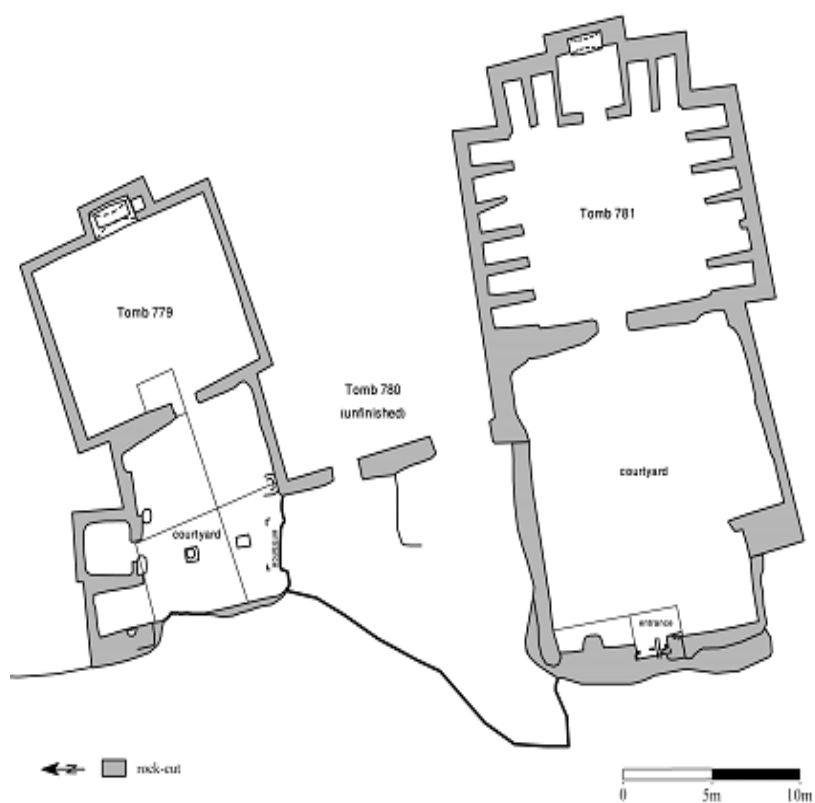


Figure 5. Plan of Tombs 779 and 781, el-Khubtha, Petra (*Plan: M. Dehner and L. Wadeson*).



Figure 6. 'Turkmaniyah Tomb' (Tomb 633), Wadi Turkmaniyah, Petra
(Photo: L. Wadeson).

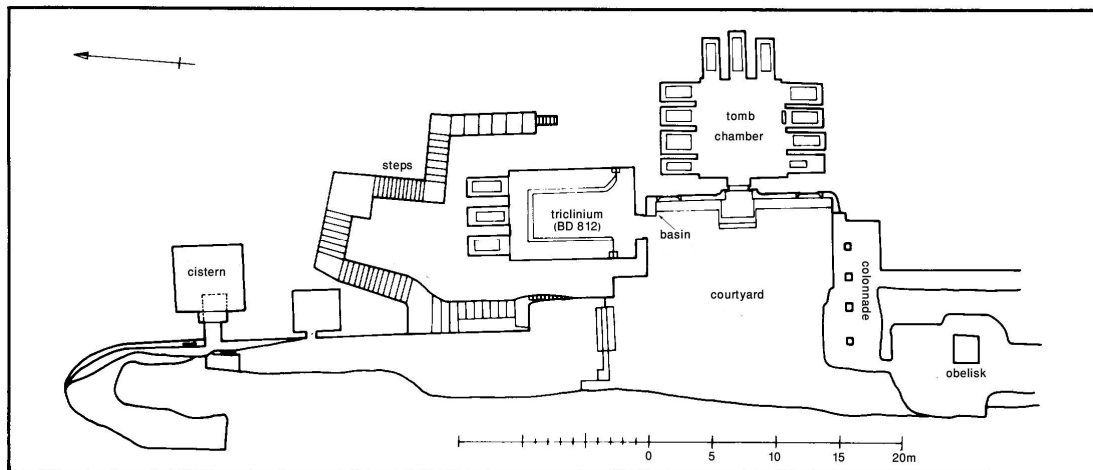


Figure 7. Plan of the 'Tomb of Unaishu' (Tomb 813) showing components of the complex, el-Khubtha, Petra (after Zayadine (1986) 232, Fig. 22).



Figure 8a. Complex of Tomb 276, Wadi Farasa, Petra
(Photo: L. Wadeson).

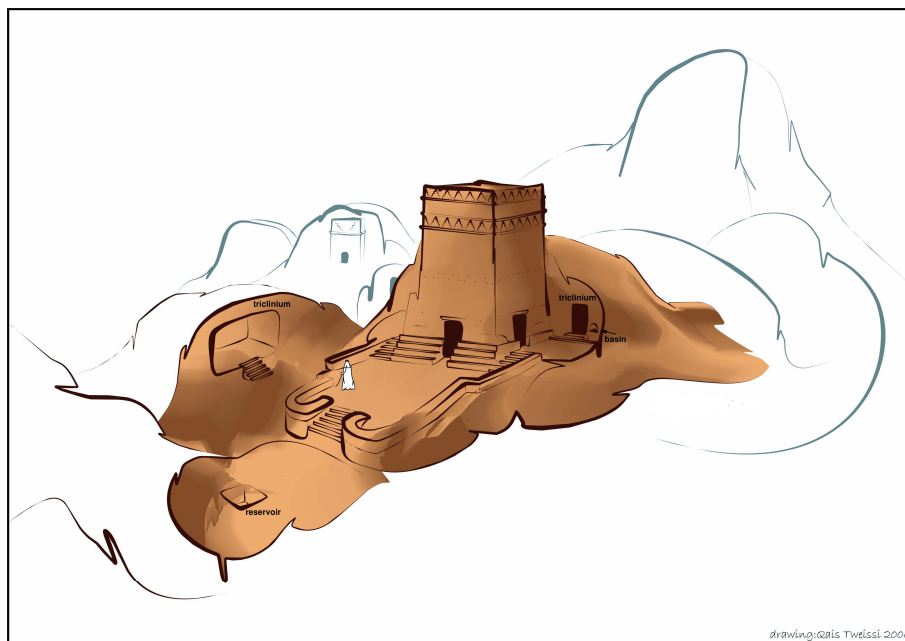


Figure 8b. Reconstruction drawing of Tomb 276, Wadi Farasa, Petra
(Drawing: Qais Tweissi)



Figure 9. Rock-cut walls surrounding the complex of Tomb 781, el-Khubtha, Petra
(Photo: L. Wadeson).



Figure 10a. Entrance to complex of Tombs 269/270, Wadi Farasa, Petra
(*Photo: L. Wadeson*).



Figure 10b. Detail of betyl-niche at entrance to complex of Tombs 269/270
(with basin and channel above), Wadi Farasa, Petra (*Photo: L. Wadeson*).



Figure 11. Complex of Tomb 572 (with arrow indicating rock-cut portal), Wadi Muaisra East, Petra (*Photo: L. Wadeson*).



Figure 12. Complex of Tomb 192 (niche-platform on right), Wadi Farasa, Petra (*Photo: L. Wadeson*)



Figure 13. Complex of Tomb 693, Mughur en-Nasara, Petra
(Photo: L. Wadeson).



Figure 14. Circular receptacles in threshold of Tomb 450, Wadi Kharrouba, Petra
(Photo: L. Wadeson).



Figure 15. Niche in chamber beside Tomb 253, Wadi Farasa West, Petra
(Photo: L. Wadeson).



Figure 16. Triclinium of Tomb 559, Wadi Muaisra East, Petra
(Photo: L. Wadeson).



Figure 17. Colonnaded courtyard of Tomb 4, Outer Siq, Petra
(Photo: L. Wadeson).



Figure 18. Loculi in back wall of Triclinium 812, el-Khubtha, Petra
(Photo: L. Wadeson).