

summer he has never been near us save for a friendly visit, which we would like repeated.

Our relations with the Imperial Museum at Constantinople are cordial, through its Director, H. E. Hamdi Bey, and our genial Commissioner, Ibrahim Effendi, who both are deeply interested in the progress of the work.

In closing I would beg indulgence for the hurried style of this report, which has been written under great pressure. The pen was often dropped during the midst of a sentence, when I was summoned from the tent to make a descent underground.

JERUSALEM, *December 8th*, 1895.

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## REPORT ON TOMBS DISCOVERED NEAR SÛR BÂHIR.

By ARCHIBALD C. DICKIE, A.R.I.B.A.

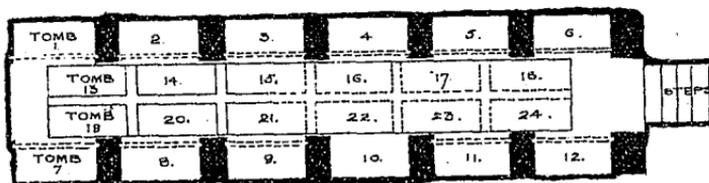
ON my return to Jerusalem after a two weeks' holiday up the country, I was instructed by Dr. Bliss to report on some tombs which he had discovered on a hill about a mile due east from the village of Sûr Bâhir, from which it is separated by a ravine. The initial discovery was made by some natives, who were digging on the crest of the hill for broken pottery. They reported it at once to Dr. Bliss, who immediately visited the place and found it to be a cell enclosing a very interesting series of tombs.

Accompanied by Ibrahim Effendi, I started on the morning of 12th October, equipped with the necessary implements for the accurate plotting of the building, and the no less necessary lunch basket or lunch "hurj," as it may more appropriately be called in this country. Three workmen preceded us, whom we overtook at the base of the hill after an hour's ride over the now barren and unfruitful hills lying to the south of the city.

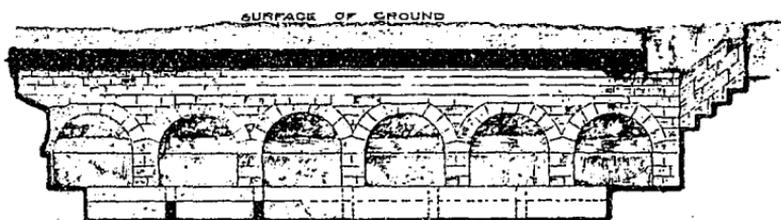
A general survey of the hill top gave me but little light on the position of the tombs, as the entrance had been filled up since Dr. Bliss's visit. Everywhere were signs of a disturbed surface, but in no place could I find any clue to lead me to the object of my visit. At last, after careful examination and a little hand excavating, in what seemed to me to be the most recently disturbed soil, a welcome *voussoir* peeped out of the crumbling earth followed by another of the same. Here I set the men to work, and after an hour's digging I was able to squeeze myself into the building at the apex of the vault, just where the steps lead down to the cell. The *débris* had all fallen from this aperture, and consequently more than half of the interior was practically empty, hence the inside excavation only consisted of minor pickings here and there, to find real bottoms, true corners, thicknesses, &c.

TOMBS DISCOVERED  
NEAR  
SÛR BÂHIR

OCT 9 1935.



GROUND PLAN



LONGITUDINAL SECTION



CROSS SECTION



*F. J. Bliss*  
Walter Dimes by *AC DeG...*

The building can best be described as a rectangular, semicircular, barrel-vaulted cell, measuring 6 feet 1 inch wide by 49 feet 3 inches long; the height from the bottom of floor tombs to apex of vault being 11 feet 11 inches. Six semicircular-arched recesses, 3 feet 3 inches deep, 6 feet 2 inches wide, and 5 feet 3 inches high, on each side form the side tombs, and the floor is divided into 12 compartments, 6 feet 0½ inch long, 2 feet 9½ inches wide, and 2 feet 7 inches high, by dwarf walls, 10 inches thick, thus forming the floor tombs. The entrance at the east end has five steps, which end abruptly at the face of the wall. The masonry of the stair walls is diagonally bedded, parallel to the rake of the steps, the upper course being the springing course of a sloping vault, which must have intersected the main vault at the broken part. At the west end is a small opening (now built up), measuring 3 feet by 12 inches, abutting up to the apex of the vault. The cell is partly cut out of the solid rock and partly built. In the lower part the rock has been faced up and made good in cement and stones, but in the upper part of the recesses the natural rock projects slightly forward. The masonry is fine pick dressed, with chiselled margins well set and close jointed with fine trowel-keyed pointing, courses averaging 15 inches high. The floor tombs must have been covered with stone slabs, although no signs of them now remain. Broken parts show that the fronts of the tombs had been formed by a thin division or slab of very strong concrete, made of lime, pottery, and small stones 4 inches thick and 2 feet 6 inches high, bonded into the side piers at the small checks shown on plan. Stone slabs would seem to one to be the most natural and simple method of construction, but in every tomb where any remains of the fronts existed I observed the same peculiarity, the check heads being in many cases broken off, evidently when the tombs were destroyed. No remains of the covers exist, but it is probable that they were of slabs resting on the concrete wall, and the 4-inch projection at the back of the recess. The bottoms are made up of the same character of concrete as I have already described.

Not a vestige of the contents of these tombs remains, although it is certain that they were almost all used, from the way in which the edges and checks of the piers have been destroyed and the fronts broken off, as well as from the cement beds and joints which can be seen on the bearings for the covers. Recess No. 10 appears for some reason or other to have been unused, as there are no checks in the piers and no evidence to show that its original form has been disturbed. The ruthless hand of the robber seems to have confined itself to the tombs and their contents as all the other parts of the building are in perfect preservation, and the whole structure looks as fresh and new as the day it was built. Indeed, although it is probable that it has existed since Byzantine times, were it not for the blackened stones above the lamp-rings hanging from the apex of the vault, it would be difficult to believe that one was not measuring up a recently-completed building to satisfy the demands of a nineteenth century builder. It is curious that such a building could have

remained so complete, when only 3 feet of *débris* protected it from the ravages of the Arab.

A study of the surrounding ground above shows that the tombs may have been under a larger building of some sort, situated within a quadrangle, measuring, roughly speaking, about 70 yards square. At the north-east, just on the verge of the descending rock, can be seen two courses of masonry, which might have been the corner of the enclosure. The east wall is also distinctly traceable for some distance, running exactly at right angles to the tombs. The south and west lines of walls are inferred from the ridges of *débris* and fallen stones, there being a distinct rise of ground everywhere inside these lines. No hewn stones are seen above the tombs, or to the north of the enclosure. There is a large rock-cut and plaster cistern within the enclosure to the north-east of the tombs, with a Latin cross modelled on the plaster.

The site is entirely surrounded by deep valleys, except at the south-west, where it is connected by a narrow neck to the adjoining hill. A bright autumn day gave us a splendid view of the surrounding country. The Frank mountain loomed and Bethlehem glittered on the south, while the sparkling Mount of Olives and the interesting but dismal village of Bethany attracted the eye to the north. The hill village of Súr Bâhir, ragged and picturesque on the west, linked the circle of view, which on the east was completed by the barren sandy "knowes" leading to the Dead Sea, with the intense blue belt of water beyond, terminating in the clear, soft tones of the indescribable, unpaintable blue mountains of Moab.

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## A JOURNEY EAST OF THE JORDAN AND THE DEAD SEA, 1895.

By GRAY HILL, Esq.

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WE desired to reach Petra from the north. No European has, so far as I know, visited this most interesting place either from the north or the south for a good many years, and it has hitherto been very difficult of approach from the north. We made an attempt which failed in 1890. It is fully described in my book, "With the Beduins." We tried again in 1891 and in 1893 under the charge of Sheikh Hâzâh of the Beni Sakhr tribe, keeping on those occasions to the east of the Derb el Haj, but had not got far when we were driven back—in 1891 by the Beni Sakhr fighting with the Kerâki, and in 1893 by the Aenezeh attacking the Beni Sakhr. Since 1893, however, the Turkish Government has established military posts at Dhibân, Kerâk, and Ma'an, in addition to one at Madeba established in that year, and they were now said to be in process of establishing one at Shobek, so that the road to Petra from the north appeared to be no longer attended with great difficulty or danger.