

## The Rock-Cut Tombs in Wâdy Er-Rababi, Jerusalem

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# THE ROCK-CUT TOMBS IN WÂDY ER-RABABI, JERUSALEM.

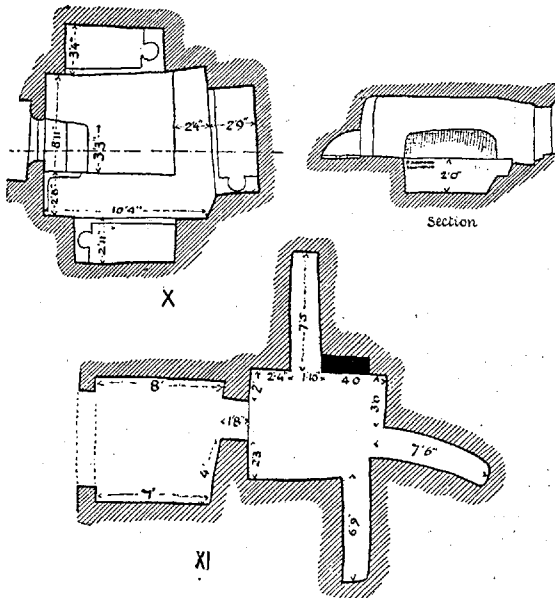
By R. A. STEWART MACALISTER, M.A.

(Continued from the "Quarterly Statement," July, 1900, p. 248.)

27. The angle of a tomb-chamber of which the rest has been quarried away. Portions of two sides, respectively 8 feet and 6 feet 4 inches, remain together with fragments of the roof. The bottoms of the walls have been quarried out, and with them two loculi in the longer side. In this side are red marks resembling a painted inscription: two strokes, much like the uprights of an H, are especially conspicuous. These are, however, mere red veinings in the stone.

The five following tombs are on or near the top of the hill, above the level of the preceding series, but to the east of it:—

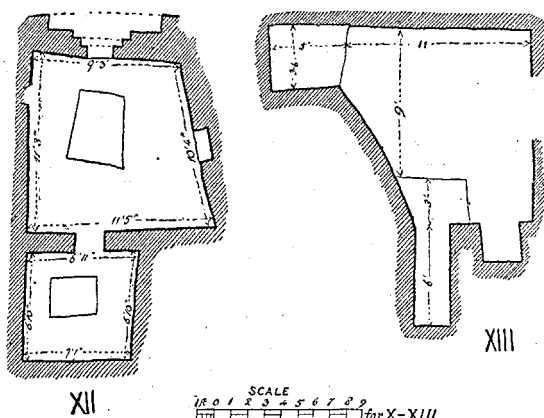
28. (Plan X).—A single chamber tomb: two steps lead down from the door to the floor of the chamber. Round two sides of the chamber is a raised bench, 2 feet high, and on a level with the



upper surface of this bench is an arcosolium in each of the sides not occupied by the door. These arcosolia have depressions for the head, like the benches in No. 23 already described. On the face of the bench, at its southern end, is inscription No. 9.

29. (Plan XI).—A very roughly executed tomb. It consists of a four-sided vestibule open to the north, in the centre of whose floor is a block of stone 2 feet  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches by 3 feet 6 inches by 2 feet, most probably the stone that blocked the door of the tomb-chamber. The floor of the latter is at a level of 2 feet 8 inches below that of the vestibule. There are three large deep irregular kokim. Part of the east side has been repaired by building, the rock being rotten; this part is blackened in in the plan.

30. (Plan XII).—An irregularly cut group of two chambers. The door is coarsely moulded. Both chambers, as may be seen from the plan, are crooked, and in their floors are four-sided depressions, 1 foot 2 inches deep in the outer, 2 feet in the inner chamber. The roof of the outer chamber is 6 feet above its floor, that of the inner 5 feet 2 inches. The rock in the west side of the outer chamber is fractured; on the south side is a niche, 2 feet 6 inches high. There are no graves of any kind in the excavation.



31. (Plan XIII).—A ruined tomb, fallen in, and in winter full of water. The chamber is 11 feet long, 9 feet broad. There is a raised bench, 3 feet broad, on the south side of the chamber. There are three kokim, two pointing south, one pointing west;

the latter is very wide, and, no doubt, was intended for the reception of more than one body.

32. Just over the monastery, a large natural cave, 30 feet deep and 25 feet across. It has been artificially enlarged: there are traces of working at the inner end. In the roof is a cylindrical shaft, now blocked up.

The following series of tombs are at the level of the row ending with No. 27, and immediately below Nos. 29-32:—

33. A small opening in the rock, the top of which alone is visible. It is certainly artificial, but may be a mere quarry.

34. (Plan XIV<sup>1</sup>).—A large cave, with two openings, but so much destroyed by quarrying that an exact plan would be useless. The chief feature remaining is a shaft 3 feet 7 inches diameter, cut vertically through the pier separating the two doors.

35. A small hole, perhaps merely a quarry.

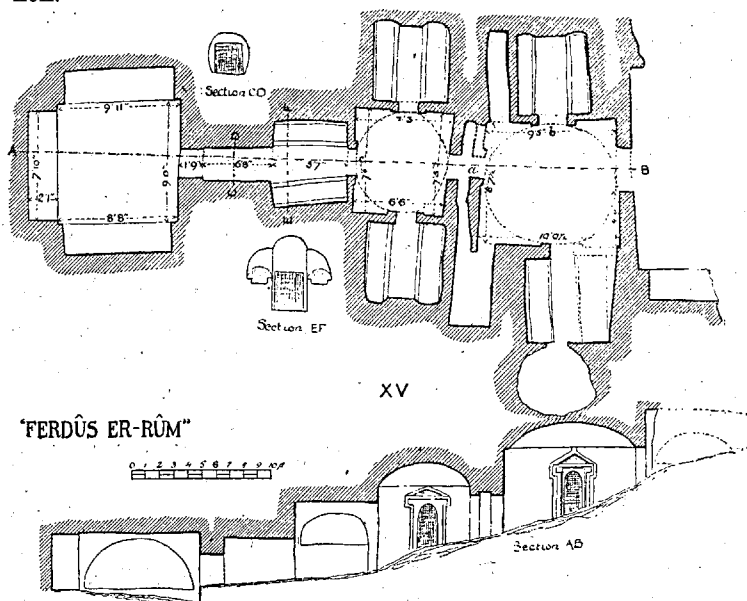
36. A larger hole of similar character. The tooling visible here and there seems better than would be expected in a mere quarry.

37. An irregular hole, 9 feet across, 7 feet deep. At both the east and the west sides are openings reduced by the accumulation of *débris* to mere slits, through which chambers are visible.

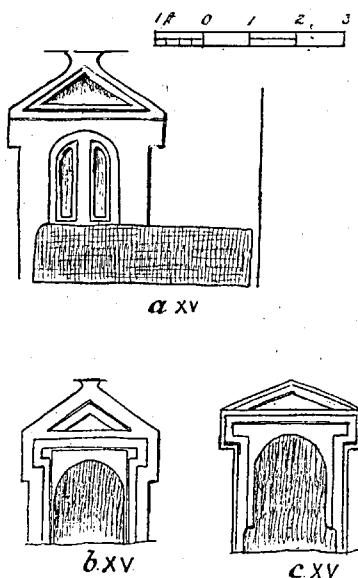
38. (Plan XV; Tobler, 13; Baedeker, 13A).—The elaborate cave known as *Ferdûs er-Rûm*. The vestibule is quarried away: in the east side is the spring of an arch like the vault of an arcosolium, but this could scarcely have been sepulchral, as the bench under the arch must always have been in the open air. The door is small, but as it is remarkably irregular for a system of tomb-chambers otherwise carefully finished, it must originally have been even smaller and subsequently roughly enlarged. To the east of the doorway the wall of the vestibule is covered with a diaper of little crosses, the work of pilgrims to the "Aceldama."

The first chamber is a quadrangular room with domed roof. Doorways, the design of which is shown in the cut, lead into subordinate chambers, each with two sunk bench graves. (The letters in the cut refer to corresponding letters on the plan and indicate the position of each door.) The doorway on the east side has been half quarried away, and the chamber into which it leads breaks into an irregular natural cavity in the rock. There is also a deep kok-grave to the south of the western subsidiary chamber,

and opposite it the door of what may be described as a "false kok."



This "false kok" forms a portion of the elaborate system of defence by which it was hoped the inner chamber would be protected from spoliation. It is evident that a rolling stone ran in front of the entrance to the inner chamber, and that it was held in position by a block which could be manipulated in the little secret chamber to which the false kok gives access. The rolling stone itself was concealed by a long slab of stone, now disappeared, which no doubt was ornamented with a completion of the panelling of the blank doorway shown on the plate. When this slab was in position



the sepulchre would present the appearance of a single main chamber, with two side tomb-chambers and two kokim; and having a mock door in the back wall, imitating the "practicable" side doors, and completing a uniform scheme of ornamentation. Whether thieves were ever put "off the scent" by these elaborate devices we cannot say; rolling stone and cover slab have disappeared, and the door now stands open to give admission to the second chamber. This is similar to the first, but on a slightly smaller scale; there are two side tomb-chambers, as in the first room, and the doors are of the same character as those already met with. There is, however, no attempt at concealing the entrance to the inner members of the sepulchre. The ceiling of the second chamber is domed like that of the first.

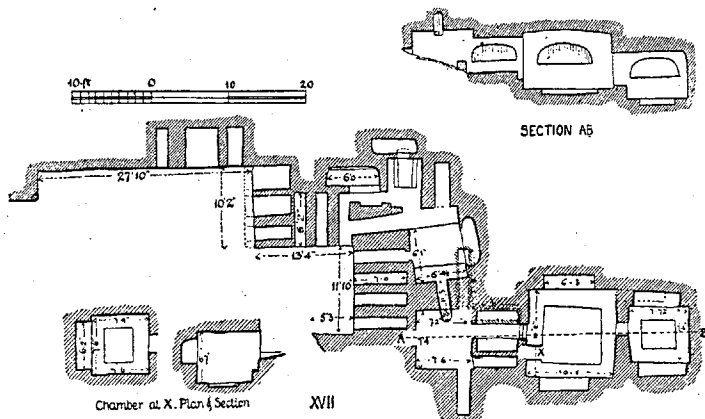
A long passage leads downwards to the third and last chamber. The first half of this passage is higher and wider than the second, and contains a sunk bench tomb on each side. The innermost chamber is quite plain, and contains three arcosolia. The floor is covered with rubbish. Except the dimensions, which are figured on the plate, there is nothing to be said about this room.

39. (Plan XVI,<sup>1</sup> mentioned in Tobler under 13).—Fragment of a tomb, destroyed by quarrying. One arcosolium is left, 2 feet 10 inches high. The ceiling of the chamber is 1 foot 10 inches above the top of the arcosolium.

40. (Plan XVII; Tobler, 13b, c?).—A complicated system arranged in three storeys. The outer chamber, or pair of chambers, have been laid open by quarrying. The large, open outer chamber to the east has six shallow kokim (the central kok on the south side remarkably wide), probably very much shortened by cutting back the walls. In the north-east corner is a hole, as though for tying horses, drilled through the projecting angle of rock. The western open chamber has seven kokim, one of which is converted into a passage to the inner chambers. This is another method of deceiving would-be thieves. The chamber at the end of the passage is four-sided, having on the north one kok, on the west an arcosolium, and on the south a kok and an entrance to another chamber. The entrance to the chamber itself is on its eastern wall. The southern door leads to a room having on its floor a sunk grave rebated for cover-slabs,

<sup>1</sup> Not published.

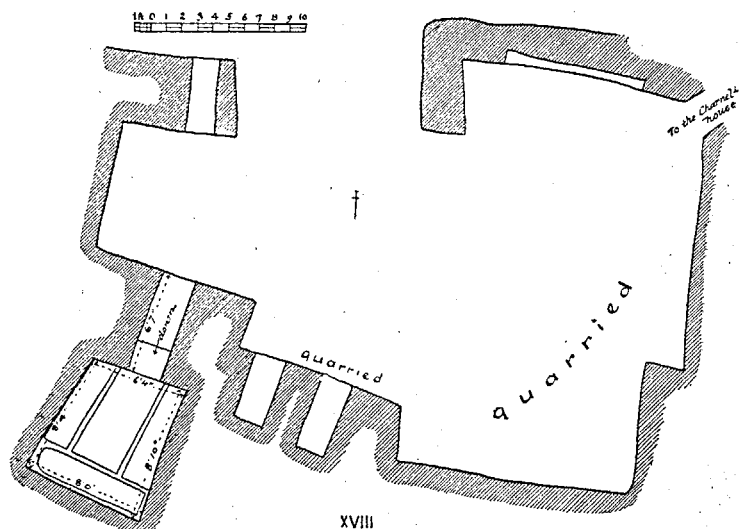
and additional graves in the south and east. The northern kok breaks into the roof of a chamber with an independent entrance, now blocked; it was probably made for convenience in clearing away the loose *débris* resulting from the work of cutting out the chambers. (But was it found open by Tobler? His descriptions seem to imply this, but they are rather confused.) This separate entrance is directed eastward; there is a kok to the north and another to the south, and westward a passage and two kokim.



The passage has a bench-grave on each side; it leads into a fine chamber with a step surrounding it. There are two arcosolia, and in the west one kok. A door to the west connects this chamber with another, similar to it and with arcosolia similarly disposed, but without kokim. Another door near the north end of the eastern side of the first of these two chambers communicates by two steps downward with a small chamber having one arcosolium.

41. (Plan XVIII).—This is a large cave which has been much injured by quarrying. One kok alone remains uninjured. At its end is a square hole which communicates downward with a small chamber having three sunk bench-graves. Its floor is 4 feet 10 inches below the level of the kok serving as an approach, and the height of its roof above the floor is 5 feet 7 inches. Here, again, we see an example of a secret room hidden in an unlikely place; Professor Clermont-Ganneau reports similar examples from Wady Yasûl. There are remains of two other kokim: a curious window-opening beside the door, 2 feet 3 inches above

the present level of the floor of the chamber, and a communication with the well-known charnel-house called "Aceldama," next



to be described. The floor of the latter is 9 feet 4 inches below the level of the tomb under discussion.

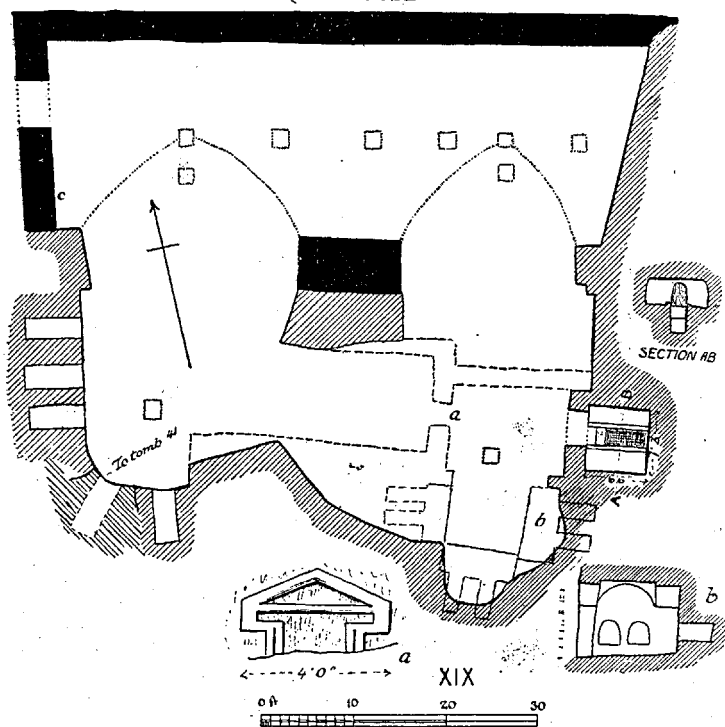
42. (Plan XIX).—This is the group of tombs which in the Crusaders' period was united under one roof to form a cemetery or charnel-house for the bones of pilgrims who died at Jerusalem. It consists of a passage, scarped through the rock, running east and west, and having tomb-chambers excavated on the south side. A good description, with plan, was communicated by Dr. Schick to the *Quarterly Statement* some years ago, and it is necessary for me only to refer to this article, and to indicate a few supplementary details. The plan deduced from my measurements is less regular than that prepared by Dr. Schick, and we restore the tomb-chambers (which have suffered severely from quarrying) rather differently. This will easily be understood by anyone familiar with the site, as the indications that remain are meagre, and not very distinctive. There is, however, no doubt that there was a door at *a*, as its top still remains (see the separate sketch). This seems to me to require the restoration of the passage behind it, as indicated on the plan by a broken line. The elevation, *b*, shows the grounds for restoring the small chamber with arcosolia



and kokim. At *c* are five well-cut crosses of different sizes, with expanding ends to the arms, but the Armenian inscription reported by Tobler is no longer to be seen. In the south-west corner is the entrance to tomb No. 41.

In the plan masonry is *blackened in*, rock is *hatched*, features of the vault (holes, &c.) are *dotted*, restorations are indicated by a *broken line*. The reverse direction of the hatching at the corner

### THE CHARNEL-HOUSE



doorway indicates that the kok there shown, as well as the kokim associated with it, are at a lower level than the doorway itself.

43. A little north of the charnel-house; a rectangular chamber, of which the back wall alone remains perfect. It is 10 feet 8 inches long. This is nearly full of rubbish.

44. East of the above; a chamber, much choked with *débris*, 7 feet 8 inches by 7 feet 6 inches, having two kokim running east and west, close to the back wall. These are respectively 6 feet

and 7 feet 3 inches long. The longer of these kokim is 2 feet 9 inches broad and 2 feet 8 inches high, and is covered with a vaulted roof.

Tobler describes an elaborate system about 20 paces north of Aceldama. Strange to say, I searched in vain for this.

45. (Plan XX<sup>1</sup>).—This tomb is at the side of the new road leading up to the monastery of the Aceldama. It consists of one chamber, irregular in shape, 5 feet 6 inches high, with a bench of maximum height 1 foot 6 inches round two sides. An irregular fracture interrupts the bench on the east side, and behind it is a crooked cavity 6 feet deep and 5 feet maximum width. This may be a natural hole. In the middle of the west side is a sunk grave 2 feet deep, 6 feet 6 inches long, and 2 feet across; and at the north end of the same side is a small chamber 5 feet long, 3 feet broad, and 2 feet 7 inches high. The entrance door is raised about 2 feet above the floor. Over it, on the exterior face of the rock, is inscription No. 10.

46. A chamber 10 feet long, 6 feet broad, recessed behind a vestibule nearly full of stones. It is much destroyed by quarrying.

47. This tomb has been turned into a cess-pit, and the entrance is blocked with stones. Above the door is inscription No. 11.

The nine tomb systems following (48–56) are contained within the precincts of the modern Greek monastery of Aceldama, and are adapted for various purposes in connection with it:—

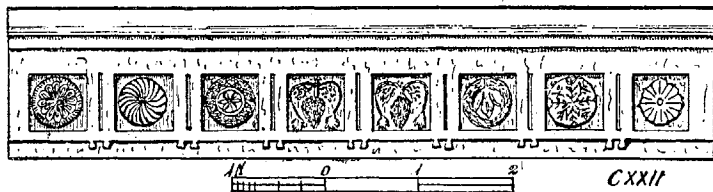
48. A small chamber, nearly full of rubbish; all that is left of a system that, in addition, possessed at least one kok. It has nearly all been removed, in order to make room for a pathway.

49. (Plan XXI<sup>1</sup>).—This excavation is now the wine cellar of the monastery. Its members are:—(1) A vestibule, 10 feet 7 inches across; over the doorway leading into the chamber beyond it is a single red spot, probably the sole relic of an inscription. (2) A chamber, 10 feet 2 inches by 9 feet 11 inches, with three arcosolia and one kok. (3) A chamber, 6 feet by 7 feet 6 inches, at a lower level, approached by a short flight of steps. In this chamber are two kokim beside the entrance to the staircase, two arcosolia (one on each of the side walls), and, on the back wall, a niche and a passage that communicates with some

<sup>1</sup> Not published.

place outside the monastery—perhaps tomb No. 47. This passage is therefore securely closed with fixed iron bars.

50. (Plan XXII; Tobler, 10; Baedeker, 9).—An elaborate but much-injured excavation, part of which is now the monastery chapel. The doorway has been restored in modern masonry;



above it is a frieze divided by diglyphs into eight metopes (Fig. c), containing wreaths and rosettes. The vestibule has been covered with modern painting, which destroys nearly all traces of the ancient decoration. The only visible remains of the latter are a red line with black spots in the cornice, and the letters **A—W** in the spandrels of the inner doorway.

The east wall of the first chamber has been cut away, and an extension has been made so as to give space for the chapel. Of the ancient wall paintings that once covered the plastered rock-surface, very little remains; time, the vandalism of former Fellah inhabitants, and modern restoration, have all had their share in obliterating them. The few relics consist of a border round the ceiling in red and green (Fig. b), which enclosed five almost full-size figures (these have been completely repainted), and the tops of square panels that no doubt once also contained figures, which, owing to the

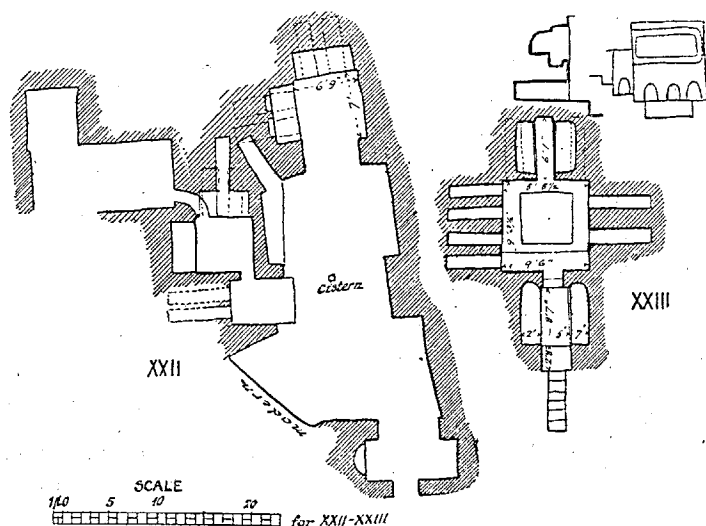


destruction of the plaster, have disappeared. The broken east wall shows the top of an arcosolium.

To the right of the entrance is the name of a saint, which formerly explained a now destroyed figure, and there was a similar inscription on the north wall; but both are now too much battered to be legible. On the east face of the remaining fragment of the east wall are also traces of painting.

Behind the present chapel is a long irregular chamber, that has apparently been considerably interfered with; it is difficult to believe that the present is the original plan, though the latter

cannot be restored with certainty. On the western side an arcosolium has been broken away to form a recess for a row of stalls; further south is a recess with a now blocked shaft running upwards from its ceiling. In the centre of the floor is the entrance to a cistern, now used as one of the water stores of the monastery. On the east side is a quadrangular space partly recessed in the wall, and sunk about 1 foot below the level of the floor; on its eastern side are two kokim, blocked up, and on the south side a door communicating with a small chamber containing two arcosolia and three kokim—two which are rather shallow

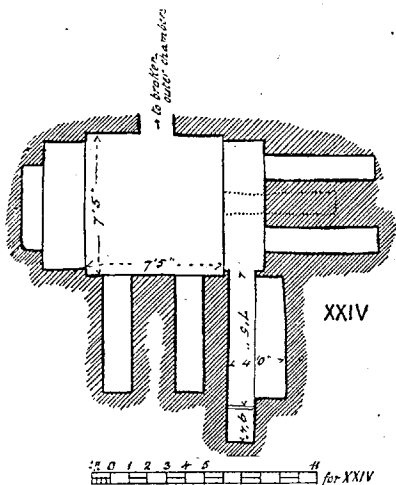


recesses, under, one behind the arcosolium in the southern wall. From this chamber a curved passage gives access to another, now much broken, and used as a store and lumber room. There are traces of painting on the walls of the quadrangular space (figures in outline, indefinite fragments only left), and in the small tomb-chamber (a few red and black lines, apparently part of a figure in outline, on the eastern arcosolium; some plain red crosses on the southern).

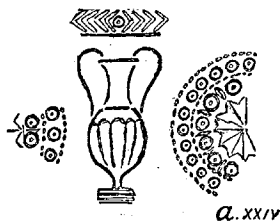
Returning to the first chamber, and proceeding southward, we enter by an arched doorway into a chamber 7 feet by 6 feet 9 inches, containing two arcosolia—one on the east, one on the south—with two kokim under each. In the wall behind the arcosolium on the eastern side are two niches.

51. (Plan XXIII).—A flight of steps downward gives access to a chamber 3 feet across, 8 feet 7 inches long. On each side is a sunk tomb in an arcosolium. Behind is a square chamber, having a raised bench all round, doubled on the north side. This has four kokim on the west wall with a double arcosolium above them; the latter detail is new to me. On the east side are two kokim; on the south two kokim and a passage with an arcosolium on each side.

52. (Plan XXIV).—Two rooms at least, broken together to form a bedroom: in one side is a niche with a plain moulding. Behind is a chamber, intact, 7 feet 5 inches square. It contains on the west side an arcosolium with a niche behind it; on the south, two kokim; on the east an arcosolium, having a kok below it, two at right angles to the wall behind it, and one running parallel to the wall southward from it; on the east of the latter is a grave-recess, and at the south end a niche. There are fragments of one or two handsome ossuaries (the principal design on which is shown on Fig. *a*) lying in this chamber.



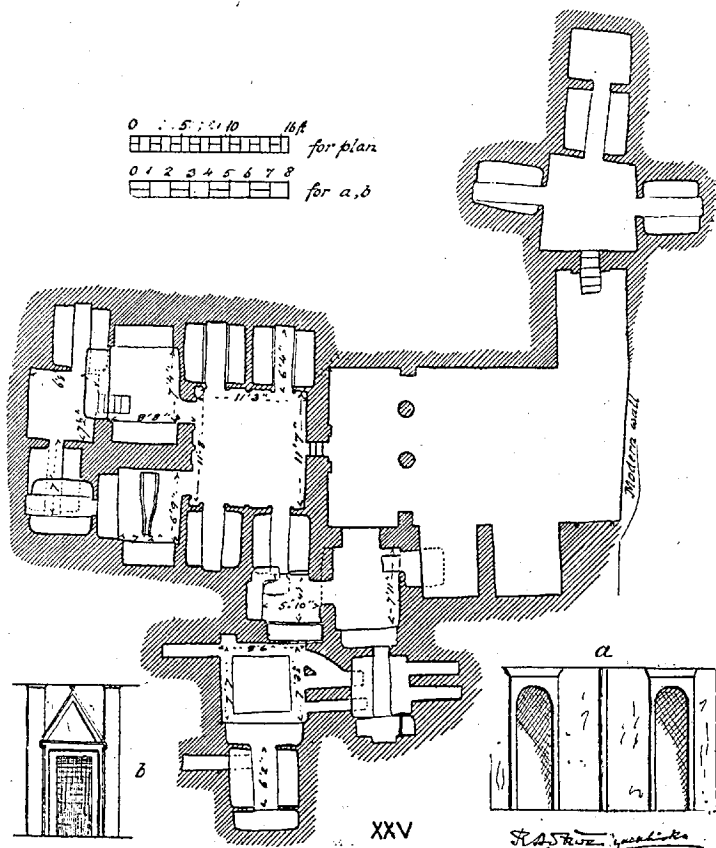
53. A large square room, much injured by quarrying. It is 18 feet by 15 feet 8 inches. At the end is an arcosolium. A bench runs round the wall, and underneath is a cistern. Over the entrance is inscription No. 12.



54. The entrance portion of this tomb has been greatly modified to form the kitchen of the monastery. A chamber remains intact at the back, and contains two arcosolia and four kokim.

55. This tomb, now the wood store of the monastery, is peculiar among those of this group in possessing kokim only. There are three on the south, three on the west side.

56. (Plan XXV; Tobler, 8; Baedeker, 8).—This is by far the most elaborate tomb system in Wâdy er-Rababi. It is at a lower level than the others, and its porch has been ingeniously adapted in the substructures of the monastery. The graves have been filled with skulls and other bones taken from the charnel-house and the other tombs in the neighbourhood.



Before the entrance is a distyle portico, such as exists in a few of the most costly of the tombs near Jerusalem. The other examples known to me are:—(1) The tomb of Queen Helena; (2) the tomb of the Beni Hazer; (3) a little-known tri-cameral tomb of unknown appropriation, south of the "Tombs of the Judges"; (4) a tomb, conspicuous in a valley north-east of the

"Tombs of the Judges," where the pillars have long been removed, though the portico remains. In this tomb the walls of the portico are blocked in imitation of drafted masonry.

A doorway of peculiar design, Fig. *b*, with a lofty triangular pediment and two side pilasters, gives access to a chamber between 10 and 11 feet square, with a domed roof such as we already met with in Ferdûs er-Rûm (No. 38). To the west are two side chambers, each with two arcosolia; these have round-headed doorways, with a half-column between them. Fig. *a* shows the elevation of this side of the chamber. The eastern side is similar, but the northern of the two chambers leads to a complicated system consisting of five rooms with kokim and arcosolia. The south side of the first chamber also shows two doorways. That on the east leads to a room, 6 feet 9 inches by 7 feet 2 inches, with a sunk grave in the centre of the floor—the only grave in the cemetery that in shape follows the general outlines of a human body—an arcosolium eastward, and another northward, with above it the entrance to a smaller chamber having two arcosolia. The western side door leads to a chamber, 7 feet 4 inches by 8 feet 8 inches, the ceiling of which is covered with crosses smoked by pilgrims. This has three arcosolia, one in each of the walls not containing the doorway, and in the floor an opening giving admission by steps downward to another chamber, 7 feet 2 inches square, having subsidiary chambers eastward and westward, with two arcosolia in each.

There are two ossuaries in the entrance chamber. One of these has an inscription scratched upon its cover; it is in square Hebrew letters, but so defaced that I could make nothing of it.

In front of the entrance portico is a rock-hewn court, with two recesses on the eastern side, and in the south-west angle the entrance to another tomb system. This consists of a vestibule with a staircase leading downward into a four-sided chamber having subsidiary chambers with arcosolia, one in each of the sides not containing the doorway. The chamber on the side opposite the doorway leads to a further chamber (unfinished), 4 feet 10 inches by 5 feet 9 inches, presenting no feature of interest.

I cannot recognise Tobler's No. 9.

(*To be continued.*)