Overview

Context

Chamber tombs, defined as spaces made of stone or carved in rock to bury several people, are one of the most recognisable elements of the material culture of Semitic populations living in Syro-Palestine in the first millennium BCE and CE (Figure 1). These closed spaces could be a natural cave; a space carved into the rock; a pit chamber...
dug in the ground with a vertical entrance shaft; an underground hypogeum constructed from stone or brick; or a mausoleum, tower, or tumulus built from the same materials on the earth’s surface.

Usually, this type of tomb was used for family burials. This tradition was widespread among various peoples living in the Near East, including Jews, Samaritans, Ammonites, Nabateans, Phoenicians, and Palmyrenes. Moreover, some of the chamber tombs belonged to people arriving from Greece and other parts of the Mediterranean world [1, 2, 3]. This type of tomb started to appear in this region on a large scale only at the end of the first millennium BCE (Figure 2 Bar graph for the entire Syro-Palestine region). Prior to this date, they were erected mostly in Palestine (Figure 2 Bar graph for the Palestine region), and this form of burial was uncommon in Syria (Figure 2 Bar graph for the Syrian region). These suggest a significant difference in the burial practices of the Semitic populations inhabiting those regions. There was a substantial drop in the number of such constructions in particular parts of the Syro-Palestine throughout the Roman period (63 BCE - 324 CE). Furthermore, this tradition seems to disappear entirely after the eighth century CE.

Figure 2: Bar graphs with the weighted-average distribution of the number of chamber tombs in particular centuries within the whole of Syro-Palestine and selected regions between tenth century BCE and tenth century CE, as well as pie charts presenting the variety of tomb forms in particular periods (M. Gwiazda).
Simple rock-cut chambers were the most popular type (Figure 2 Pie charts), both in the first millennium BCE and CE. But for instance, in the first half of first millennium, pit chambers with a vertical entry were unusually common. In the Roman period, mausolea and towers tombs were more popular than in other epochs.

Researchers analysing burial traditions have at their disposal hundreds of excavation reports, as well as a small number of publications on various types of tombs in particular micro-regions [4, 5]. There may be several thousand chamber tombs, and their number increases yearly with new discoveries. For these reasons, this large and varied collection of grave monuments was not subject to systematic scientific research from the perspective of the entire Syro-Palestine. The dataset presented makes it possible to analyse the inter-regional and chronological diversity of this burial tradition. It is based on information from 3,430 tombs, taking into account their varied form, finish, equipment, burial rite and the goods they contain.

**Spatial coverage**
Description: The geographical boundaries of the query included the territory of today's Turkish province of Hatay, Syria, Lebanon, Israel (including the area of Palestinian Autonomy), and Jordan.

- Northern boundary: 37°25'16.7"N
- Southern boundary: 29°33’16.3”N
- Eastern boundary: 40°59’34.2”E
- Western boundary: 34°12’32.2”E (all WGS84)

**Temporal coverage**
1000 BCE–1000 CE

(2) Methods

**Steps**
This dataset is based on published excavation reports, monographs [e.g. 6, 7, 8, 9] and online databases such as The Archaeological Survey of Israel [10]. At this stage, tombs with known dating were included. Dates were based on archaeological findings such as oil lamps, coins, ceramic and glass vessels, etc. with a defined time of their use. In the case of publications from the first half of the twentieth century, corrections based on new typo-chronologies of such artefacts were necessary.

Particularly in the case of Northern Syro-Palestine, Greek and Aramaic inscriptions containing annual foundation dates or modifications of individual graves were helpful. Also included were tombs that lacked such findings but have a characteristic form typical of particular sites or micro-regions in a specific period of time (e.g. tower tombs and mausolea in Roman Palmyra) [11].

The published descriptions and the accompanying drawing and photographic documentation were the basis for filling in the form prepared in FileMaker Pro Advanced 10. This made it possible to standardize the information in the unary numeral system, where “0” indicated the absence of the feature and “1” indicated its presence in the described tomb. In the case of location data, this was limited to indicating the position of the archaeological site and not the exact position of the tombs within its area. This is due to the fact that in most cases the publications did not contain such detailed data. The spatial coordinates of sites are recorded in the World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS84) in decimal degrees.

**Sampling strategy**
During the inventory of the chamber tombs, all the publications known to the author that fall within the chronological scope of interest were taken into account. Their total number in the dataset is 3,430 objects related to 680 locations. These include discoveries made during archaeological surveys and regular and salvage excavations.

**Quality Control**
All published information was verified. It mainly concerned the dating of illustrated finds of oil lamps, glass vessels and other objects found inside the tombs. Spatial coordinates were checked using ArcGIS software, which made it possible to catch mistakes made during the transcription of geographical coordinates.

**Constraints**
One of the main limitations of the presented datasets is the varied state of archaeological research in different Near Eastern countries. This is responsible for the marked differences in the number of chamber tombs discovered in the northern and southern parts of Syro-Palestine (Figure 1). The lack of precise geographical coordinates for all the tombs makes it impossible to use the datasets to study their dispersion at individual sites. These data can only be used for spatial analysis on a regional scale.

(3) Dataset description

**Object name**
Chamber_tombs_catalogue.csv – A comma-separated values file containing the dataset.
Chamber_tombs_catalogue.xls – Excel file containing the dataset

Below is a list of fields of the dataset file with additional explanations for each attribute.

**Inventory number**: Inventory number assigned arbitrary and automatically by the system. It is determined only by the order of cataloguing tombs.

**Country**: This field contains information about the name of the contemporary country in which the tomb has been discovered.

**Site name**: The contemporary name of the place where the tomb was discovered is given first. In brackets, the ancient names of these settlements are given.

**Tomb name**: This field contains information on name/names under which the tomb is mentioned in publications. These may be common names as well as inventory numbers given by other researchers.

**Context**: This field contains information on the context in which the tomb was discovered. Is the necropolis
associated with the town or the village. Separately treated are crypts built within monasteries or in churches. 

**Coordinates:** WGS84 coordinates in decimal degrees.

**Capacity:** It is a numerical information about the number of loculi, arcosolia etc., which were intended for burials.

When the tomb does not have such places designated for deposition of bodies, the number 1 is recorded as the minimum number of potential burials.

**Interment quantity:** This field contains information on the minimum number of identified corpses in a given tomb.

**Chambers quantity:** This field contains information on the minimum number of chambers in the tomb. The basic assumption is that each tomb has at least one chamber.

**Dated:** The field contains dating of the time of use of the tomb.

**Tomb form:** This field contains a simplified classification of tombs. Here featured: 1. “Caves”, natural hollows in rocks, have not been transformed or transformed in a very limited way in order to be used as a place of burials; 2. The “mausoleum”. Understood as a tomb built on aboveground; 3. “Pit” is a tomb with a chamber carved in the rock or dug in the ground, accessible only through shaft; 4. “Rock cut tomb” is at least one burial chamber carved in a rock. In some cases, such objects have built elements (e.g. entrance); 5. “Built hypogeum” is understood as an underground tomb, the greater part of which was built and not carved in the rock; 6. “Tower” is a form of a mausoleum with burial chambers located on several levels; 7. “Tumulus” is a burial chamber covered with a artificial mound.

**Burial place form:** In this column there is a classification of burial places, which consists of: acrosolia, bench, loculi, pit, repository, trough.

**Type of construction:** This field contains information on whether the tomb was carved in the rock or whether it was built. It is also possible to combine these two forms within one tomb.

**Burial rites:** This field contains information on what kind of burial practices are certified in the tomb. Three basic forms can be distinguished here: cremation; inhumation; repositioning.

**Facade:** This field contains information on whether the tomb has a decorated façade.

**Internal decoration:** In this field, the presence of decorations inside the tomb is noted. They can be paintings, reliefs (including sculptures) and mosaics.

**Inscriptions:** This field contains information on the presence of the inscription, on the façade or inside the tomb. They can be engraved or painted on the walls of the tomb or on its furnishing (e.g. ossuaries). Also, information on specific language is given (e.g. Greek, Latin, Nabatean, Palmyrenian etc.).

**Furnishing:** This field contains information on objects that contained the burial/s. They can be coffins from clay, lead, wood, ossuaries, and stone sarcophaguses.

**Equipment:** This field contains information on archaeologically certified objects found inside the tombs.

**References:** This field contains information on bibliographic references.

**Data type**

Secondary data, and processed data from publications.
Acknowledgements
I would like to express my gratitude to Julia Chyla for the preparation of the map used in the article.

Competing Interests
The author has no competing interests to declare.

References
5. de Jong, L 2017 The Archaeology of Death in Roman Syria. Burial, Commemoration, and Empire. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316443231

Figure 3: Map presenting the distribution of various tomb types in Syro-Palestine in the third century CE (M. Gwiazda, J. Chyla).
