



**HAL**  
open science

## New Byzantine inscriptions from the Land of Moab

Musallam R Al-rawahneh, Alexandra de Varax

► **To cite this version:**

Musallam R Al-rawahneh, Alexandra de Varax. New Byzantine inscriptions from the Land of Moab. *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, 2023, 34, pp.194 - 201. 10.1111/aae.12238 . halshs-04765967

**HAL Id: halshs-04765967**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-04765967v1>**

Submitted on 4 Nov 2024

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## New Byzantine inscriptions from the Land of Moab

Musallam R. Al-Rawahneh<sup>1</sup>  | Alexandra de Varax<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup>Department of Archaeology and Tourism,  
College of Social Science, Mutah University,  
Karak, Jordan<sup>2</sup>University Lumière Lyon 2, Hisoma, Lyon,  
France

## Correspondence

Musallam R. Al-Rawahneh, Department of  
Archaeology and Tourism, Mutah University,  
Karak, Jordan.  
Email: [rwahneh@mutah.edu.jo](mailto:rwahneh@mutah.edu.jo)

## Abstract

This study describes seven new Byzantine inscriptions discovered in Moab (Governorate of al-Karak, southern Jordan), which was part of *Provincia Arabia* and *Palaestina Tertia* during the Roman Empire. The Byzantine tombstone inscriptions in Moab date from the fifth to the mid-seventh century AD. The inscriptions follow the typical formula of Byzantine Christian epitaphs, including the name of the deceased, the father's name and age. Some of them are dated. These newly discovered names not only contribute to the corpus of common names used in the region but also introduce some new ones.

## KEYWORDS

Byzantine inscriptions, Jordan, Karak, Land of Moab, tombstones

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In the Byzantine period, the Land of Moab, which roughly corresponds to the present-day governorate of al-Karak (Figure 1), was part of the *Provincia Arabia* and later *Palaestina Tertia*. Historical sources on the region during this period are scarce. However, numerous Byzantine tombstones have been sporadically discovered, allowing us to trace the development of Christianity in the area. Around 600 inscriptions have been documented, dating from the fifth to the middle of the seventh century AD, with the majority of them being erected in the second half of the sixth century. The first collection of these inscriptions was published by R. Canova in 1954 and completed with new discoveries over the century (see Aliquot et al., 2014; Meimaris et al., 2007, with a bibliographical update; most recently Gatier, 2017, p. 347 no. 9; Aliquot & Al-Shdaifat, 2020; Aliquot, 2018; Al-Rawahneh & Elboj, 2022a, 2022b, 2023). The article includes seven previously unpublished inscriptions that show the typical characteristics of Christian epitaphs found in the region. These inscriptions typically include the deceased person's name, often accompanied by a patronymic, the age at the time of death and sometimes the date according to the era of the *Provincia Arabia*, which began in 106 AD. More or less sophisticated Christian crosses are often engraved on monuments. Among the inscriptions discussed in this article, three

are dated between 592/593 and 658 AD, which aligns with approximately 44% of the dated inscriptions found in the land of Moab.

## 2 | AL-KARAK

The city of al-Karak (الكرك) in Arabic) was known in the Roman and Byzantine periods as Charachmoba. The town is represented on the topographical mosaic of St. Stephen's Church in Umm al-Raṣāṣ with the other cities of the area. The great majority of the Byzantine funerary inscriptions from the Land of Moab were discovered in this city—approximately 240 inscriptions are recorded (Aliquot & Al-Shdaifat, 2020, nos. 1–10; Canova, 1954, nos. 1–199 bis; Corbo, 1964, nos. 1–4).

## 2.1 | The Greek Christian epitaph of Oualerios son of Poseidonios, Early Byzantine period

## 2.1.1 | Description

Rectangular limestone tombstone, roughly carved. Measurements ( $H \times W \times D$ ): 68 × 28 × 20 cm. A small simple cross is engraved at the beginning of the first line. Height of the letters: 4–6 cm. Horizontal stroke

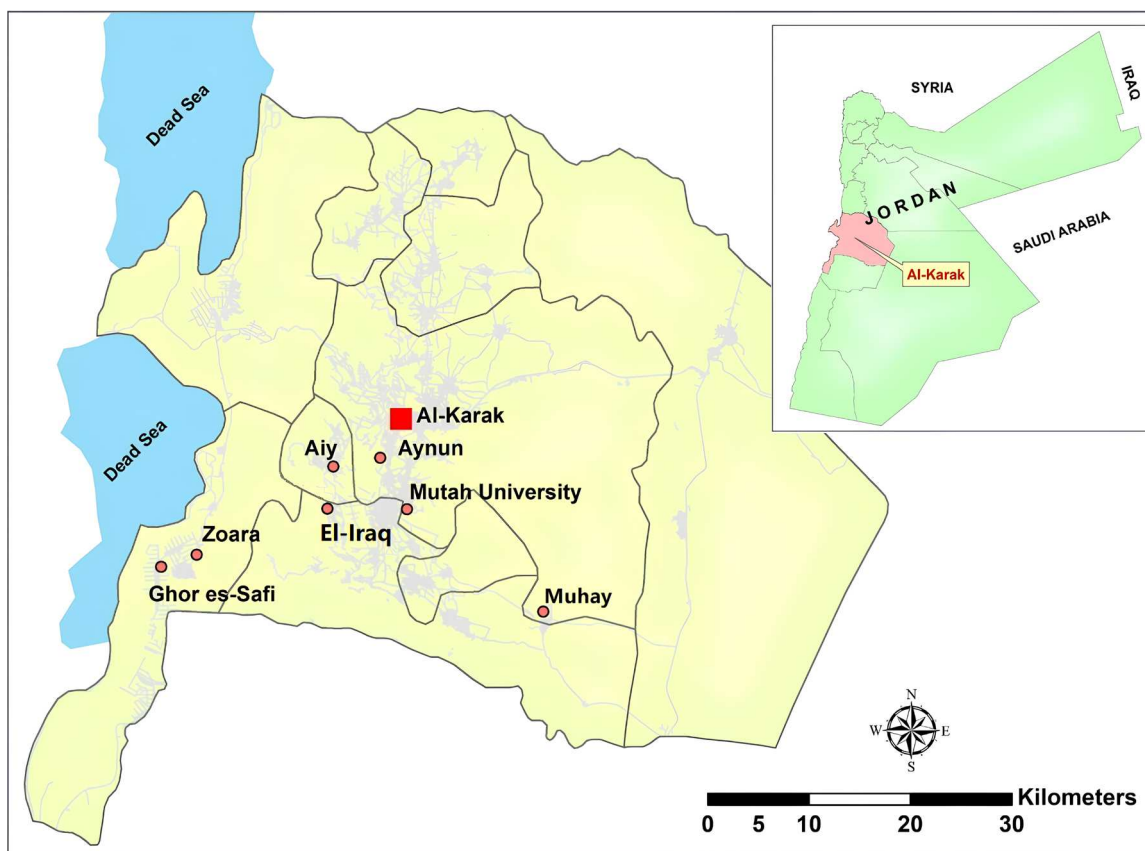


FIGURE 1 A map showing the location of al-Karak, Mu'tah, al-'Irāq and Muḥāy (©M. Al-Rawahneh). [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

above numerals (line 7). Found in 'Ayn Sāra necropolis (see Figure 2).

### 2.1.2 | Editing

† Ἐνθ-  
 ἄδε κῖ(τε)  
 Οὐαλ-  
 4 ἔρης  
 Πασιδο-  
 νίου, ἐτ(ῶν)  
 ---

Lines 3–4: Οὐαλ|έρης iotacism for Οὐαλέριος.

Lines 5–6: Πασιδο|νίου for Ποσειδωνίου.

### 2.1.3 | Translation

'Here lies Oualeri(o)s son of Poseidonios, ... years old...'

### 2.1.4 | Commentary

The name Οὐαλέριος (Latin Valerius) has been recorded once in the Land of Moab but with a hesitation between [Γαλ]ήριος and [Οὐα]λήριος (Canova, 1954, no. 282). On the ending -ης (= -ις phonetically) instead of -ιος, see Canova (1954, p. cix, with nos. 66 [Γεώργης] and 202 [Σέρρης]) and Aliquot and Al-Shdaifat (2020, pp. 22–23 no. 14 [Δουσαρης]).

Ποσειδώνιος: The name is common in the region (Canova, 1954, nos. 342, 352, 419; below, no. 3.2); in Byzantine times, the name was disconnected from pagan references.

## 3 | AL-'IRĀQ

The village of al-'Irāq (العراق in Arabic) is situated approximately 15 km southwest of al-Karak and 6 km west of Mu'tah. A dozen inscriptions from Byzantine times have been found there in the last century (Al-Rawahneh & Elboj, 2023, nos. 1–9, with a precise presentation of the village; Meimaris et al., 2007, nos. 3–5).





FIGURE 2 Al-Karak: Tombstone of Oualeri(o)s son of Poseidonios (©Julien Aliquot CNRS 2022).

### 3.1 | Greek epitaph of Armenios son of Annianos, Early Byzantine period

#### 3.1.1 | Description

Rectangular limestone tombstone. Measurements ( $H \times W \times D$ ):  $66 \times 31 \times 9$  cm. The inscription is placed in the middle of the stone. Height of the letters: 3–5 cm. The script corresponds to ‘type 4’ in Canova’s classification (1954, tavola II), with O and C in rounded type (see Figure 3).

#### 3.1.2 | Editing

Ἀρμένιος  
Ἀννιανοῦ,  
ζήσας ἔ-  
4 τη ζα’.

#### 3.1.3 | Translation

‘Armenios son of Annianos, who lived 61 years’.



FIGURE 3 Al-'Irāq, Tombstone of Armenios son of Annianos (©Julien Aliquot CNRS 2022).

#### 3.1.4 | Commentary

Ἀρμένιος; unknown so far in the Land of Moab and rather rare (one example from the sixth to seventh century AD: Cotton, 2018, no. 2874, at Choziba).

Ἀννιανός; Latin Annianus, is common in Arabia and Palaestina (cf. Meimarīs & Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, 2005, no. 144, at Zoora). The formula of this inscription is different from the usual one in Moab: there is neither a date nor a Christian symbols. Nevertheless, we can compare it with some other inscriptions from Moab that bear a short formula without Christian symbols (Canova, 1954, nos. 14, 15, 88, 136; but nos. 336–343, for the short formula with a Christian symbol).



## 3.2 | Greek epitaph of Poseidonios son of Philemon, Early Byzantine period

### 3.2.1 | Description

Rectangular limestone tombstone. Measurements ( $H \times W \times D$ ):  $64 \times 34 \times 20$  cm. Inscribed field:  $40 \times 26$  cm. An incised line marks out the text in a square. Dots in place of omicron (lines 1, 5, 7). Height of the letters: 3.5–5 cm (see Figure 4).

### 3.2.2 | Editing

Ἐνθά-  
δε κῆτε  
Πασιδό-  
4 νις Φιλ-  
ήμονο-  
ς, ζήσ(ας) ἔ-  
τη ος'.

Line 2: κῆτε for κείται.

Lines 3–4: Πασιδό|νις for Ποσειδώνιος.

### 3.2.3 | Translation

'Here lies Poseidonios son of Philemon, who lived 76 years'.

### 3.2.4 | Commentary

Ποσειδώνιος, see above, no. 2.1.

Φιλήμων is unknown so far in the Land of Moab and only one occurrence is attested in Palestine and Arabia (Meimaris & Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, 2005, no. 220, at Zoora). It is more frequent in Egypt (Foraboschi, 1971, p. 331, s.vv. Φιλήμων, Φιλήμων).

## 4 | MUḤĀY

The village of Muḥāy or Muḥā (محي in Arabic) is located at the very southeast of the Land of Moab, close to the Wadi al-Ḥasā. It was settled on a road leading to the Via Traiana. In the 1930s, during her exploration, R. Canova identified two cemeteries, collected 68 inscriptions (Canova, 1954, nos. 350–418), and a large number of anepigraphic stelae adorned with crosses and palms. The inscriptions of the tombstones of Muḥāy have several specific



FIGURE 4 Al-'Irāq, Tombstone of Poseidonios son of Philemon (©Julien Aliquot CNRS 2022).

features regarding style and wording: the rectangular stone is partially hollowed, and the dating is more precise than in other villages.

## 4.1 | Greek Christian epitaph of Andronikos son of Theodoros, 658 AD

### 4.1.1 | Description

Limestone tombstone, rounded at the top and inscribed inside a frame. Measurements ( $H \times W \times D$ ):  $50 \times 28 \times 22$  cm. Inscribed frame:  $35 \times 22$  cm. Height of the letters: 3 cm. Crosses at the beginning of the text and below. Ligatures (lines 5, 7–8), S-shaped abbreviation signs (lines 3 and 9), horizontal strokes above the numerals (lines 4 and 9) and above the abbreviation  $\text{IN}\Delta$  for  $\text{ινδικτιῶνος}$  (line 8). Now at Mutah University Museum. From Muḥāy (see Figure 5).

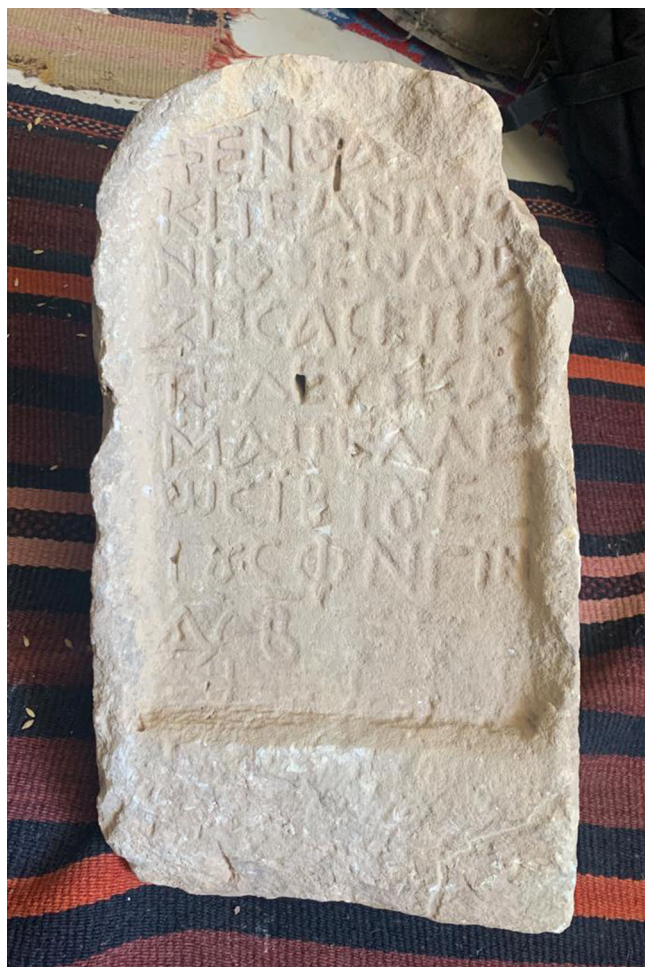


FIGURE 5 Mutah University Museum: Tombstone of Andronikos son of Theodoros (©Julien Aliquot CNRS 2022).

#### 4.1.2 | Editing

† Ἐνθάδε  
κῆτε Ἀνδρό-  
νικ(ος) Θεωδόρ(ου),  
4 ζήσας ἔτι κ',  
τελευτήσας  
μη(νὶ) Ἀπελλᾶ-  
ως ἰβ', τοῦ ἔ-  
8 τους φνγ', ἰν-  
δ(ικτιῶνος) β'.  
††

Line 2: κῆτε for κεῖται.

Line 4: ἔτι for ἔτη.

Lines 6–7: Ἀπελλᾶ|ως for Ἀπελλαίου.

#### 4.1.3 | Translation

‘Here lies Andronikos son of Theodoros, who lived 20 years (and) died in the month of Apellaios, the 12th, in the year 553, indiction 2’.

#### 4.1.4 | Commentary

The Greek name Ἀνδρόνικος does not seem to have been recorded in the Land of Moab to date, but it is rather common in the Near East. Θεόδωρος (here Θεόδωρος) is common.

This inscription is specific of Muḥāy. It is part of the latest texts. Just 5% of the dated inscriptions from Moab are from the second half of the seventh century AD.

Date: November 28, 658 AD.

### 4.2 | Greek Christian epitaph, 620 AD

#### 4.2.1 | Description

Rectangular limestone tombstone, broken at the top. Measurements ( $H \times W \times D$ ): 60 × 30 × 21 cm. Inscribed frame: 27 × 22 cm. Height of the letters: 2.5–5 cm. S-shaped abbreviation signs (lines 3–5), horizontal strokes above numerals (lines 2, 4–6). Mutah University Museum. From Muḥāy (see Figure 6).

#### 4.2.2 | Editing

---  
[---] ἔτη η', τε-  
[λε]υτήσ(ας) μη(νὶ)  
4 Δαισ(ίου) ζ', τ(οῦ)  
φῖε', ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος)  
η'. †

Lines 3–4: τε|[λε]υτήσ(ας) or τε|[λε]υτήσ(ασα).

#### 4.2.3 | Translation

‘... who lived 8 years and died in the month of Daisios the 6th, in the year 515, indiction 8’.

#### 4.2.4 | Commentary

In the whole corpus, nine inscriptions are dated from the year 515 of the Province of Arabia or 620 AD. Among them, four are from Muḥāy, one from the village of ‘Aynūn and the last one from Umm



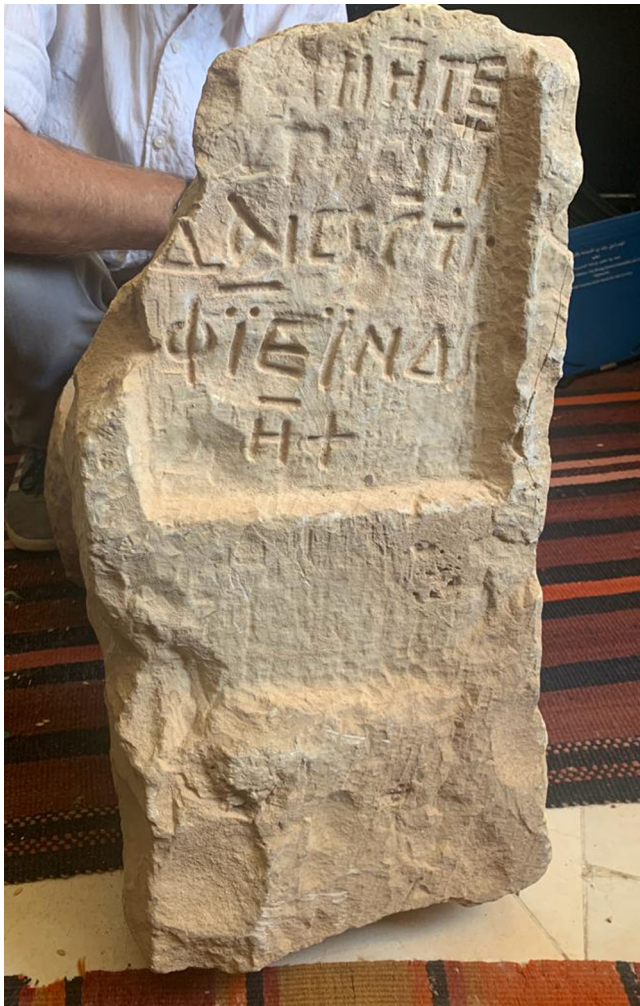


FIGURE 6 Mutah University Museum: Tombstone (©Julien Aliquot CNRS 2022).

Ḥamāt (Canova, 1954, 242, 281–283, 339). This year is the most represented after the year 472 of the Provincia Arabia, with 13 occurrences. In the year 620 AD, the Roman province was newly under the rule of the Sasanian king (see also the recent book of Di Segni, 2022).

Date: May 26, 620 AD.

## 5 | UNKNOWN PROVENANCE

### 5.1 | Greek Christian epitaph of Selaman son of Aphellos, 592/593 AD

#### 5.1.1 | Description

Limestone tombstone, rounded at the top. Broken at the top and at the bottom. Cross between two doves above the inscribed frame. Measurements ( $H \times W \times D$ ):



FIGURE 7 Mutah University Museum: Tombstone of Selaman son of Aphellos (©Julien Aliquot CNRS 2022).

38 × 40 × 16 cm. Inscribed frame: 26 × 33 cm. Height of the letters: 3–3.5 cm. S-shaped abbreviation signs (lines 2–5), ligature OY (line 3), horizontal strokes above numerals (line 5). Mutah University Museum (see Figure 7).

#### 5.1.2 | Editing

† Ἐνθάδε κτ̃-  
τ(αι) Σελαμαγ Α-  
φελλου, ζήσ(ας)  
4 ἔτ(η) ι', τοῦ ἔτ(ους)  
υπζ', ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ια'.

Lines 1–2: κτ̃|τ(αι) for κεῖται.

Line 2: Σελαμαγ: the nu looks like a lambda followed by a iota.

#### 5.1.3 | Translation

‘Here lies Selaman son of Aphellos, who lived 10 years, in the year 487, indiction 11’.

#### 5.1.4 | Commentary

Σελαμανης is common in the area (Canova, 1954, nos. 121, 141, 306). This Semitic name is undeclined and

spelled here without a Hellenising ending *Σελαμων*, as in Madaba (Gatier, 1986, no. 118).

*Αφελλος* is rather rare. It is certainly a transcription of a Semitic name (cf. *hpl* ‘oath’). The only other examples are from the Near East (Canova, 1954, no. 4; SEG 51, 2032).

This inscription is dated from the last quarter of the sixth century AD as 25% of the dated inscriptions known in the Land of Moab.

Date: between September 1, 592 AD and March 21, 593 AD.

## 5.2 | Greek Christian epitaph of Selamanes, Early Byzantine period

### 5.2.1 | Description

Limestone tombstone, rounded at the top, inscribed inside an incised frame between two small columns with capitals, and recut at the bottom to be used as a moulded block. Cross in the upper part with enlarged arms at the ends. Measurements (*H* × *W* × *D*): 51 × 35 × 15 cm. Cross: 13 × 13 cm. Epigraphic field: 33 × 27 cm. Height of the letters: 5–6 cm. Traces of red paint in the letters. S-shaped abbreviation sign (line 2). Today kept in the Jordan Ahli Bank Numismatics Museum in ‘Ammān (see Figure 8).



FIGURE 8 Tombstone of Selamanes (©Julien Aliquot CNRS 2022).

### 5.2.2 | Editing

Ἐ † v-  
θάδε κῆτ(αι)  
Σελαμα-  
4 [v]ης ζασς  
[ἔτη ---]  
- ? -

Line 2: κῆτ(αι) for κεῖται.

Line 4: ζασς: seemingly a misspelling of ζήσας; no personal name is known that could be substituted for this participle.

### 5.2.3 | Translation

‘Here lies Selamanes, who lived... years’.

### 5.2.4 | Commentary

The Hellenised Semitic name of the deceased man is common in the Land of Moab in early Byzantine

times; see above no. 5.1 (e.g., Canova, 1954, nos. 121, 141, 306).

## 6 | CONCLUSIONS

The seven inscriptions published above fit well in the Moab corpus. The various origins of the names, common in the region, are worth noting: Latin, Greek, and Semitic—Hellenised or not. Three new names are added to the regional onomastic stock: Ἀρμένιος, Φιλήμων, and Ἀνδρόνικος. The most interesting inscriptions are, paradoxically, the shortest (nos. 3.1 and 3.2). They stand out with a different formula and no Christian symbol, but this absence does not imply that the deceased people were not Christian.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was carried out thanks to the collaboration between Mutah University and the French–Jordanian program of the Greek and Latin Inscriptions in Jordan (<https://igls.mom.fr/jordanie>). The documenters would like to express their gratitude to Dr. Fādī Bal‘āwī, General Director of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, for allowing them to study the inscriptions published here, to Dr. Hassan Al-Zyoud, Director of the Jordan Ahli Bank Numismatics Museum in ‘Ammān, for




entrusting them with the study of one of these documents, and to Prof. Julien Aliquot (French National Center for Scientific Research, Lyon) for his precious help in reading some problematic texts, his advice on onomastic study and for providing the pictures. They would also like to thank Prof. Gonzalo Fontana Elboj, a Senior Lecturer in Classical Philology at the University of Zaragoza, Spain, for providing valuable comments.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data are available on request from the authors.

## ORCID

Musallam R. Al-Rawahneh  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6664-6232>

Alexandra de Varax  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0794-1323>

## REFERENCES

- Aliquot, J. (2018). Un professeur de lettres chrétien au pays de Moab. *Topoi*, 22(1), 331–340. <https://doi.org/10.3406/topoi.2018.3252>
- Aliquot, J., & Al-Shdaifat, Y. (2020). Greek Christian epitaphs from Charakmoba and the Land of Moab. *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 152(1), 3–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00310328.2020.1712834>
- Aliquot, J., Shdaifat, Y., & Weber, T. M. (2014). New Byzantine inscribed tombstones from the Land of Moab. *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 189, 149–158.
- Al-Rawahneh, M. R., & Elboj, G. F. (2022a). Two new Byzantine inscriptions from El-'Aynūn (Kerak Governorate; Southern Jordan). *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, 33(2), 196–201. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aae.12211>
- Al-Rawahneh, M. R., & Elboj, G. F. (2022b). A new Byzantine funerary inscription from Zoara (Ghor es-Safi; Southern Jordan). *Syria*, 99, 311–316. <https://doi.org/10.4000/syria.14730>
- Al-Rawahneh, M. R., & Elboj, G. F. (2023). Nine new Byzantine funerary inscriptions from El-'Irāq (Southern Jordan). *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 155(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00310328.2023.2182951>
- Canova, R. (1954). *Iscrizioni e monumenti protocristiani del paese di Moab*. Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana.
- Corbo, V. C. (1964). Ricordi dell'antico cristianesimo nel paese di Moab. *Liber Annuus*, 14, 229–244.
- Cotton, H. M., Eck, W., & Di Segni, L. (2018). *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae IV: Iudaeae/Idumaea Part 1: 2649–3324*. De Gruyter.
- Di Segni, L. (2022). *An introduction to late antique epigraphy in the holy land* (Collectio Minor 46). TS Edizione.
- Foraboschi, D. (1971). *Onomasticon Alterum Papyrologicum. Supplemento al Namenbuch di F. Preisigke*. Istituto editoriale cisalpino.
- Gatier, P.-L. (1986). *Inscriptions de la Jordanie 2: Région centrale (Amman, Hesban, Madaba, Main, Dhiban)*. Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner.
- Gatier, P.-L., Bader, N., Aliquot, J., Sartre, M., & Yon, J.-B. (2017). Greek inscriptions in the Jordan Museum. *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 58, 341–350.
- Meimaris, Y. E., & Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, K. I. (2005). *Inscriptions from Palaestina Tertia, Vol. Ia: The Greek Inscriptions from Ghor Es-Safi (Byzantine Zoora)*. Research Centre for Greek and Roman Antiquity/National Hellenic Research Foundation.
- Meimaris, Y. E., Mahasneh, H. M., & Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, K. I. (2007). The Greek inscriptions in the Mu'tah University Museum Collection. *Liber Annuus*, 57, 527–562. <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.LA.2.305726>

**How to cite this article:** Al-Rawahneh, M. R., & de Varax, A. (2023). New Byzantine inscriptions from the Land of Moab. *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aae.12238>