

## Two Greek Funerary Inscriptions From Zoara/Ghor As-Safi In Jordan (Early Byzantine Zoora)\*

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### Abstract

Inscriptions from the Byzantine period in southern Jordan include a corpus of mainly funerary Greek and Aramaic texts discovered in recent years in the Ghor as-Safi area of southern Jordan. Containing more than 456 epitaphs from the An-Naq' cemetery of Zoara (Early Byzantine Zoora), this extraordinary collection dating from the fourth to the seventh century AD continues to expand. Many more texts are being currently studied and forthcoming in separate publications. As part of that effort, two additional Greek inscriptions recognized as having originated from Zoara are presented here. The first – significant in filling gaps in the early Byzantine social mosaic – commemorates Faustina, a name appearing for the first time, joining eight other Latin female names, and dating last to 16 February AD 503. This date falling within Year 397 of the Era of the Province of Arabia is known only from one inscription in the corpus, but the Indiction of Year 11 mentioned is unique. Equally unique is the name of Theodotos as an ecclesiastical authority, a deacon, a presbyter, or even the city-bishop. The decoration of a large sun disk with a cross in the middle could represent the Constantinian sun god Sol Invictus converted to Christianity. The second inscription is also rare in commemorating one Bargonnas, a name probably deriving from the epithet given to Simon/Peter in Matthew's Gospel (16:17): βαριωνᾶς.

**Keywords:** Greek Christian inscriptions, *Palaestina Tertia*; Ghor as-Safi, Zoara, Early Byzantine Near East.

### Introduction:

The Ghor as-Safi is located at the south-eastern end of the Dead Sea in the alluvial fan of the Wadi al-Hasa in modern Jordan (Figs. 1-2). It is depicted as *Zoora* (Fig. 3) next to the Sanctuary of Agios Lot (Deir 'Ain 'Abata) on the late sixth-century AD mosaic floor map in Madaba (Politis 1999; Politis 2021, 4, 24).

Ancient remains in the Ghor as-Safi were first recorded in the early 19th century and subsequently were sporadically and hastily explored during the 20th century. But it was not until the 1980s that the significant archaeological wealth of the area came to light.

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Sadly, this was largely due to unrestricted agricultural development, which uprooted ancient structures leading to extensive illicit excavations; consequently, most of the finds ended up in the antiquities market (Politis 2001). After a public awareness campaign regarding the endangered cultural heritage of the Ghor as-Safi in 1994, a rescue mission was initiated in 1996 with the approval of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (Politis 1998). Eventually, in 1999, a research project was launched beginning with a series of intensive surveys, followed by systematic archaeological excavations that continued for 20 years (Politis 2021). One of the main results has been the identification of a multi-period cemetery at An-Naq' (Fig. 4) with Early Bronze Age, Early Byzantine and Medieval burials (Politis 1998, 630-32, figs. 5, 6; *IPT Ia*, 3-7, figs. 2, 3).

It is estimated that well over 500 funerary inscriptions (in Greek and Aramaic) from these graves must have originally existed, associated with Early Byzantine Zoara. Out of these, 456 have been recorded and have now been presented in three volumes (*IPT Ia*, *Ib* and *Ic*) – 321 Greek in *IPT Ia*, 64 Greek in *IPT Ib*, and 71 Aramaic in *IPT Ic*. The number includes eight Greek illegible texts, and two Aramaic ones published preliminarily by Yiannis Meimaris and to be published fully by Steven Fine, and excludes 16 Greek texts found in Khirbet Sheikh 'Isa (one, non-funerary), Umm Tawabeen/Tawabin (one), Khirbet Qazone (one) and Feinan (13). Also excluded are five (one illegible) Aramaic ones to be published by Omar al-Ghul, as well as 19 Greek and 9 Semitic non-funerary texts from Deir 'Ain 'Abata that were published separately (Politis 2012, 393-419). An additional 29 Greek and six Aramaic Zoara inscriptions are about to appear (Politis in press – for the Greek in collaboration with Kalliopi Kritikakou), whereas three Greek ones have recently been published by other scholars (Bader & Habash 2012; Bader & Habash 2013; Zellmann-Rohrer 2019). Several more epitaphs originating from the *Ghor as-Safi* area are known to exist, but they are yet to be recorded and studied. Two of these are presented in this paper.

The first inscription is currently in the Jordan Archaeological Museum on the Amman Citadel, where it is on public display without any label except the registration number "J.16309". Its appearance and content, matching the inscribed sandstone slabs found in the Ghor as-Safi, led us to submit a request to the Department of Antiquities for information and permission to publish. The museum authorities provided the following documentation from its inventory book: "The gravestone with a Greek inscription was acquired from Mr. Abdulhamid Mubaidin, and delivered by Mr. Hefzi Hadad on 26-11-1987" (translated from the Arabic). Mr Mubaidin was a resident of Kerak and was known to have amassed a substantial collection of antiquities precisely from the Ghor as-Safi. His entire collection was ultimately given to the Department of Antiquities. The provenance therefore of the inscribed stone "J.16309" is all but certain. It has consequently been assigned a successive Zoara funerary inscription number: **Z-451**. A note about it (seen by Nikos Kokkinos who alerted Konstantinos D. Politis) had appeared in print by Michele Piccirillo (1989, 118). After studying a poor-quality Polaroid photo in 1985, Piccirillo was unable to read the full text, or to recognise its place of origin, prior to the publication of the *IPT*.

The second engraved inscription on a sandstone block from the Ghor as-Safi is presently with Mr Sami Twal in Amman, who kindly offered a photograph for study and publication. It has been assigned the Zoara number **Z-456**.

The importance of the Ghor as-Safi inscriptions, individually and as an assemblage, cannot be overestimated, since they provide us with a rare understanding into the fourth to *century-seventh* society in Early Byzantine-period Jordan, as much as the 'Holy Land' in general (see further the conclusion). There is no parallel for a large group of funerary

inscriptions from a single city/cemetery in southern Jordan (cf. over 500 epitaphs from Umm al-Jimal in *northern* Jordan – Littmann *et al.* 1913; Littmann 1914; Littmann 1943; Graf & Said 2006; Graf 2009, 752), and only the Kerak region ('Land of Moab') as a whole has come close by producing 428 inscriptions, published almost 70 years ago (Canova 1954; to be included in *IGLS XXI: IJ III*). The trove of papyri discovered at Nessana in the 1930s is valuable for the cultural context of the period in the broader area (*NP*; Stroumsa 2015). The remarkable cache of the Petra Papyri is the best comparable literary evidence in Greek recently found (*PP I-V*; Koenen *et al.* 2003), which also gives a good insight into Early Byzantine society in southern Jordan (*Palaestina Tertia*).

### Two Greek Inscriptions

**Inscription Z-451** (see Figs. 5, 5a & 5b). Dated 16 February AD 503. Tombstone/epitaph of yellowish sandstone rectangular in shape. Dimensions: 0.37 m. height, 0.28 m. width, 0.09 m. depth. The text and decoration is enclosed within an incised red frame (0.29 m. long on the right side, and 0.17 m. wide at the bottom), the text itself set between ten horizontal guide-lines, deeply and irregularly engraved. The letters, varying in size, are carelessly cut and aligned. This inscription had been noted before by Piccirillo (1989, 118, no. 19; *SEG* 39 1670), after he had been shown "a polaroid photograph" in 1985, apparently taken by its owner in al-Karak (el-Kerak). The quality must have been poor, for Piccirillo was unable to read much of the text or its date. He also could not realise (lacking comparative material) that the inscription would have come from Zoara. The photograph we obtained, though not perfect, must be better than the one used by Piccirillo. The tombstone is decorated with a cross at the top centre, and possibly two other crosses, damaged or erased, one on each side. It further has a large incised double circle in the shape of a rosette at the bottom within the frame, with a large cross in the middle – whether it represents a funerary wreath, the sun disk, or a shield. It apparently has the letters alpha and omega on either side of the cross, as also pointed out by Piccirillo.

### Diplomatic Transcription

+  
MNHMION ΦΑΥCTI  
NAC ZEBHNOY AΠO  
ΘANOYCHC META ΠIC  
TEΩC KΑΛHC ETΩN  
I EN MHNI ΔYCTPOY  
B INΔK s IA ETOYC  
TḠZ EΠI ΘEOΔO TOY  
TO ΠOIHCAE EYMYPI  
OYΔIC AΘANATOC  
+A ω  
(έν μέσῳ διπλοῦ κύκλου)

**Text**

+  
 Μνημῖον Φαυστί-  
 νας Ζεβήνου ἀπο-  
 θανούσης μετὰ πισ-  
 4 τεως καλῆς ἐτῶν  
 Ι' ἐν μηνὶ Δύστρου  
 Β' Ἰνδκ s ΙΑ' ἔτους  
 ΤηΖ' ἐπὶ Θεοδό του-  
 8 το ποιήσας ἐν μύρι  
 οὐδὶς ἀθάνατος.  
 +Α ω  
 (ἐν μέσῳ διπλοῦ κύκλου)

**Critical Apparatus**

- l. 1: Μνημ(ε)ῖον; this introductory sepulchral formula appears in the majority of the Zoara inscriptions (see *IPIT Ia*, p. 24).  
 ll. 3-4: μετὰ πίστεως καλῆς – better μετὰ καλῆς πίστεως.  
 l. 5: Δύστρου for Δύστρω: genitive for dative.  
 l. 6: Ἰνδ(ι)κ(τίωνος); the “s-sign” following the word indicates its abbreviation (see *IPIT Ia*, p. 71).  
 ll. 7-8: ἐπὶ Θεοδό(του) τουτο (το μνημεῖον) ποιήσας.  
 l. 8: ἐν μύρι for ἐν μοίρει  
 l. 9: οὐδ(ε)ῖς

**Translation**

+  
 Monument of Faustina  
 (daughter) of Zebēnos, who  
 died, having good faith, aged  
 ten, on the month Dystros,  
 second (day), the eleventh (year) of Indiction, Year  
 397, under Theodotos  
 I made this, have a good fortune,  
 No one (is) immortal.  
 + A(lpha) O(mega)  
 (within a double circle)

**Commentary**

ll. 1-2: Φαυστίνας (nominative Φαυστίνα). In spite of a slight difficulty in reading the first two letters (see Fig. 5c, detail), the young girl whom this tombstone commemorates almost certainly is named Faustina. An exact parallel of the letter Φ, as a large circular omicron with a vertical line across it, is not to be found in the palaeographical table of the Zoara corpus (*ITP Ia*, pp. 75-85), but it is close to an example from Gerasa in an inscription dated to AD 526 (Welles 1938, 366, no. 304). The letter Α, working from the photograph,

could be confused with a Δ, having the middle line set so low, but a close example of such an A is known from Zoara dated to AD 455 (*ITP Ia*, no. 201). The name of Faustina would ultimately derive from the Latin praenomen Fausta (the feminine of Faustus), in its diminutive form (Kajava 1994). It was the name of Faustina the Elder, wife of the Emperor Antonius Pius, and of Faustina the Younger, wife of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, some three and a half centuries earlier (see Levick 2014). This is the first time this name appears in Zoara, but it joins seven other female names of Latin origin (Antonina, Lucia, Marcella, Matrona, Valentina, Sabina, Severina – *ITP Ia*, nos. 105, 125, 193, 228, 247, 308; *ITP Ib*, nos. 2, 19, 35, 40, 62), all dated to the fifth century, apart from Antonina dated near the middle of the fourth. Further, Faustina joins 55 cases of Greek/Latin names with Semitic patronymics (see *ITP Ia*, p. 31).

I. 2: Ζεβήνου (nominative Ζεβήνος). The patronymic Zebēnos is a Semitic name from the root זבן, “to buy” (Wuthnow 1930, 138), and it is found in Zoara four times as Zebinas (*ITP Ia*, nos. 45, 46, 93, 145) and once as Zabinas (*ITP Ia*, no. 68), all dating to the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century. An Idumaeian called Zabidos is mentioned in the Hellenistic story about a head of an ass in the Temple of Jerusalem written by Mnaseas (Jos., *Ap.* 2.112-120; see Kokkinos 1998, 66, n. 66). Bar-Kochva (2010, 216) who recently re-examined this story wrote that: “...Zabidos, bears a typical Aramaic-Arabic-Nabataean name (Zabid) well known throughout the East in the first millenium B.C.E.”

II. 2-4: ἀποθανούσης μετὰ πίστεως καλῆς. Better syntax would usually require the epithet in the middle – μετὰ καλῆς πίστεως. The phrase μετὰ καλοῦ ὀνόματος, or expanded as μετὰ καλοῦ ὀνόματος καὶ καλῆς πίστεως, is encountered in numerous inscriptions from Zoara, running from the middle of the fourth to the sixth century. However, the second part of this phrase, μετὰ καλῆς πίστεως, is found on its own only twice, in AD 446 (*ITP Ia*, no. 181) and in AD 472 (*ITP Ib*, no. 41), while in the order followed here (even if in the dative, ἐν πίστι καλῇ) only once in AD 591 (*ITP Ia*, no. 264). Nevertheless, a different epithet is also known once in this order (πίστεως ἀγαθῆς) in AD 489 (*ITP Ia*, no. 246). The word καλή itself (in the sense of good, fair, beautiful, or noble) appears in a non-dated inscription from Qazone (*ITP Ib*, no. 67). The discussion by the editors (*ITP Ia*, pp. 25-26; 185-86) suggests that the full phrase would be a reference to the Christian identity and/or faith of the deceased, as expressed in the notion of the baptized individual since these qualities (good by name and faith) were considered to be acquired at baptism. This sounds most probable, for otherwise, the praise would not be easily explainable when the individuals concerned are underage, as in our case of young Faustina. The youngest individuals in this area known to have been praised thus, were two four-year-olds (*ITP Ia*, nos. 154 and 250), and even one two-year-old (*ITP Ib*, no. 41)!

II. 4-5: ἐτῶν Ι´. The age of death at ten for Faustina falls within the range of “8 to 14”, which is represented by 15 other young females in the Greek inscriptions of Zoara, standing at 11.4% of the females who died (132) of all ages (*ITP Ib*, p. 40). One of them, Sōsanna daughter of Obedas, who died in AD 360/1, is also recorded to have been ten years old (*ITP Ia*, no. 20).

II. 5-6: ἐν μηνὶ Δύστρ(ω) Β´. The day of the month is almost certainly the second (B),

even if the reading is badly preserved (see Fig. 5d, detail). The month Dystros in Arabia began on the 15th of February in the Julian Calendar, according to the Early Medieval Hemerologia (such as the Florence Hemerologion, Med. XXVIII 26), which, however as scholars agree, represents ancient compilations (see Samuel 1972, 172, 177). On that basis, 2 Dystros translates into 16 February. Up to twenty of the thirty days of Dystros (1-5, 7?, 8-10, 12-13, 15, 18, 20, 21?, 22-25, 30) have been recorded in the inscriptions from Zoara, including the second of the month on a tombstone dating to 16 February AD 408 (*IPT Ib*, no. 95). Mortality in the month Dystros (15 February-16 March) was around 10% of all months found in the corpus, which is a higher rate than at least the six months between May and November (cf. *IPT Ia*, p. 45, table, with some adjustment from the input of *IPT Ib*). In other words there was less mortality in the summer and the autumn than the winter and early spring.

I. 6: Ἰνδ(ι)κ(τίωνος) s IA'. The abbreviation for indiction is signalled by the “s-sign” immediately following the word (*IPT Ia*, p. 71). The number of the indiction at first glance is difficult to perceive, but upon close examination, it must be a double figure – two letters accidentally connected (see Fig. 5d, detail). It cannot be a single letter, for none between A and I (1 to 10) fits the shape, and the apparent resemblance to the letter K (20) or M (30) is beyond the counting of indictions. The cycle was 15 years, each extending from 1 September to 31 August in the Julian Calendar, with Arabia following the Constantinopolitan system (see Meimaris *et al.* 1992, 33-34). Thus only IA, IB, IF, IΔ and IE can be considered, and it is clear that only IA is possible for the figure under discussion. So the indiction is that of the Year 11. This provides us with a pivotal measure of control for the year of the Era of the Province of Arabia to be examined in the next line. Indictions as a dating element in inscriptions of Syro-Palestine appear from the late fourth century, in AD 389/90 (Waddington 1870, 470, no. 1965), while the earliest in Zoara dates to AD 384 (*IPT Ib*, no. 8), and the latest to AD 607 (*IPT Ib*, no. 49). During the entire fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, to cover the whole period under consideration, there were only twenty-seven indictions of Year 11 (AD 307/8, 322/3, 337/8, 352/3, 367/8, 382/3, 397/8, 412/3, 427/8, 442/3, 457/8, 472/3, 487/8, 502/3, 517/8, 532/3, 547/8, 562/3, 577/8, 592/3, 607/8, 622/3, 637/8, 652/3, 667/8, 682/3, 697/8 – see Tab. 1; cf. Meimaris *et al.* 1992, 392, Tab. II.). None is represented in the 25 inscriptions with noted indictions published in the corpus of Zoara (*IPT Ia*, nos. 156, 162, 196, 221, 246-248, 254, 257-264, 302; *IPT Ib*, nos. 8, 36-37, 43, 45-46, 48-49).

II. 6-7: ἔτους ΤϞΖ'. The first three letters of the seventh line determining the year of the Era of the Province of Arabia (E.P.A.) are difficult to read (see Fig. 5d, detail) but they can ultimately be understood, especially in view of already knowing the indiction year. The first letter is most probably a half-preserved T (300), the second, looking a little strange and somewhat resembling the Arabic letter Kaf (5), would only be a Greek koppa (90), while the third is almost certainly a Z (7). This gives us the E.P.A. year 397, translating into AD 502/3. Checking individually with all the koppas (some 25) found in the Zoara corpus (unfortunately the palaeographical table in *ITP Ia*, pp. 75-85, does not include the numeric letters digamma, koppa and sampi), there are two examples looking fairly close to our koppa: one dating to AD 396 (*ITP Ib*, no. 12) and another to AD 398 (*ITP Ia*, no. 79), both considerably earlier in time. Only one inscription also dates to E.P.A. year 397 (*IPT Ia*, no. 253).

E.P.A. years run from spring to spring, while the year of the indiction from autumn to autumn. This means that each indiction overlapped with two E.P.A. years – half of one E.P.A. year running from autumn to spring (second half of the year), and another E.P.A. year running from spring to autumn (first half of the year). Knowing that twenty-seven indictions of Year 11 existed in the fourth to seven centuries (see comment line 6), the number of possible E.P.A. years are doubled to fifty-four. However, knowing that in our case the month involved is Dystros (see comment line 5), only the second halves of E.P.A. years can qualify, and so this brings us back to twenty-seven. Now by the method of elimination, from the twenty-seven E.P.A. years possible (202, 217, 232, 247, 262, 277, 292, 307, 322, 337, 352, 367, 382, 397, 412, 427, 442, 457, 472, 487, 502, 517, 532, 547, 562, 577, 592) fourteen are excluded by ending with the number 2 (B), whereas our date ends with 7 (Z). We are left with thirteen E.P.A. years (217, 247, 277, 307, 337, 367, 397, 427, 457, 487, 517, 547, 577), of which those in the four hundreds (Y) and the five hundreds (Φ) are excluded by what is seen as the first letter in the photograph. Also the two hundreds (C) should most probably be excluded, leaving only the three hundreds (T) as possible. Of those (307, 337, 367, 397), the first is a double figure number and has to be excluded, while the second requires a Λ (as thirty) in the middle, which is impossible. The choice comes down to 367 or 397, yet the first requires a Ξ (as sixty) in the middle and obviously this is not the case looking at the photograph. Therefore, the date must be E.P.A. 397 (ΤϞΖ), running from spring AD 502 to spring AD 503, in which the 16th of February 503 fell within Indiction 11, running from autumn AD 502 to autumn AD 503. A later rather than earlier date for this inscription may also be implied by the letter Θ (best seen on line 3, first letter), which is written with a cross in the middle. Such a Θ does not appear in Zoara (see *ITP Ia*, pp. 75-85, palaeographical table), but a cross through the letter Φ is known, for example, in an inscription from Cyprus thought to date to the 6th century (Mitford 1961, 120-21, no. 20 & pl. 45:20).

l. 7: ἐπὶ Θεοδό(του). It is possible that the stone-cutter abbreviated the name of Theodotos, because the genitive ending (του) was to be repeated in the first syllable of the subsequent word (τούτο). This well-known Greek name (“given by God”, equivalent to Hebrew Yehonatan), also of the famous synagogue inscription in Jerusalem (*CIIP* 1.1, no. 9), is found only once in Zoara, as the patronymic of one Valentinus (*ITP Ib*, no. 1) dated to AD 332/3. If the ἐπὶ has been read correctly here (and it is unknown so far in the inscriptions of Zoara), then “under the power of” signifies a local (ecclesiastical) authority, and Theodotos may have been a deacon (see example with ἐπί in Meimaris 1986, 169, no. 848), or a presbyter (see example with ἐπί in Meimaris 1986, 189, no. 934), or even, though unlikely, the city-bishop (see example with ἐπί in Meimaris 1986, 205, no. 1024). We know the names of a few bishops of Zoara, one revealed in the corpus (*ITP Ia*, no. 27), named Apses, who died in AD 369. The closest bishop to the date of the present inscription was one Isidoros, “who signed a synodical epistle in Jerusalem in AD 518 against Severus of Antioch” (*ITP Ia*, p. 124). If, by any chance, Theodotos was the bishop in AD 503, then Isidoros may have been his successor.

l. 8: τούτο ποιήσας. This (monument) I made. The reference would be to the stone-cutter or his customer (a relative of Faustina), without giving a name. The verb ποιέω is found as ἐπ(οίησεν) only in one inscription in Zoara (*ITP Ia*, no. 62). It is unlikely that the reading

of the difficult lines 7-8 (aggravated by the restrictive quality of the photograph), could have meant to refer to Theodotos as the maker of the tombstone (in the sense of having paid for it). In such a case one would have expected (despite frequent orthographical, grammatical and syntactical weaknesses in the corpus) to read ἐπὶ Θεοδότου ὅς τοῦτο ποιήσας, or in different constructs ἐπὶ Θεοδότου τοῦ ποιήσαντος, or ἐπὶ Θεοδότου τοῦ ποιησαμένου (in the genitive depending on the tense), or ἐπὶ Θεοδότου τῷ ποιήσαντι, or ἐπὶ Θεοδότου τῷ ποιησαμένῳ (in the dative depending on the tense), or even ἐπὶ Θεοδότου τὸν ποιήσαντα, or ἐπὶ Θεοδότου τὸν ποιησάμενον (in the accusative depending on the tense). One other verb which might have been read instead of ποιήσας, would have been θρηνήσας. The verb θρηνέω/ᾶ (to lament, to sing a dirge, to wail), may have been appropriate in connection to Theodotos (if the local ecclesiastical authority), and given the young age of the deceased (worthy of a θρῆνος), but such a reading cannot easily be made out (see Fig. 5d, detail), and the word is unknown in the Zoara inscriptions.

l. 8: εὐμύρι for εὐμοίρει. This exhortation (see Fig. 5e, detail), with the same deficient spelling εὐμύρι, is known in Zoara dated to AD 356 (*IPT Ia*, no. 16), as well as with the spelling εὐμοίρι dated to AD 512 (*IPT Ib*, no. 45). Interestingly the latter, close in date to our inscription, combines this exhortation with the ending phrase οὐδ(ε)ὶς ἀθάνατος. This combination is otherwise known once in Beth She‘arim (Schwabe & Lifshitz 1974, no. 187). Further, Zoara has also produced the form of εὐμοιρίτω (for εὐμοιρείτω) in a bilingual Greek/Aramaic inscription dated to AD 358/9 (*IPT Ia*, no. 18). The exhortation in our inscription was appropriate and at the same time ironic. Whether accidentally or purposefully put by the stone-cutter, the name of young Faustina meant “fortunate”, which she was hardly in life dying at ten years old. So εὐμοίρει, “have a good fortune”, deservedly prepared her for the afterlife.

l. 9: οὐδ(ε)ὶς ἀθάνατος. An extremely common formula in the cemetery of Zoara, appearing in the vast majority of the inscriptions (in some 249 of 382 dated and non-dated, counting only *IPT Ia* and *Ib*). The formula has pagan origins, but Zoara shows that it survived in a Christian context to the late sixth century AD (see *IPT Ia*, p. 94). Nowhere else has this formula been found in such frequency. It can almost become an indicator for provenance.

**Inscription Z-456** (see Fig. 6 & 6a). Non-Dated. Dimensions: 0.24 m. height, 0.21 m. width, 0.06 depth. The tombstone/epitaph is decorated with an Alpha and Omega on the fifth line, with a cross formed in the middle of the omega. It also has two crosses, on either side of the sixth line, with a palm branch off center on the right.

### Diplomatic Transcription

MNHMION  
BAPFONNA  
NEECTAB  
OY ETΩN ΛΖ  
ΑΩ+  
+ (Κλάδος φοίνικος)+



## Text

Μνημῖον  
Βαργοννᾶ  
Νεεστάβ-  
4 ου ἐτῶν ΛΖ'  
Αω+  
+ (Κλάδος φοίνικος)+

## Critical Apparatus

l.1: Μνημ(ε)ῖον

## Translation

Monument  
of Bargonnas  
(son of) Neestab-  
os, aged 37  
A(lpha) O(mega)+  
+ palm branch +

## Commentary

l. 2: Βαργοννᾶ (nominative Βαργοννᾶς). The name Bargonnas is rare. It is found only in one other inscription in Zoora (*IPT Ia*, no. 42, colour plate III) as Bargounnas (Βαργουννᾶς), dated to 12 October AD 382. Though the *IPT* commentary missed the opportunity to make the connection, one cannot escape (and it is worth a discussion here) from seeing this name as ultimately deriving from the epithet of the Apostle Simon/Peter found in the Gospel of Matthew (16:17), Σίμων Βαριωνᾶ. This follows the Aramaic word *barjona* (בַּרְיֹנָא), which has variously been interpreted as “rebel”, or “outcast”, or “enforcer”.

However, in the English Bible, after the plain transliteration “Barjona” of the King James Version, it evolved to “Bar-Jona” in the Revised Standard Version, and then progressively to “son of Jonah” in the New International Version. This presented a patronymic – as if the Greek text read υἱὲ Ἰωνᾶ. Such a reading had already been found to be convenient in Tatian’s *Diatessaron* 5.11 (Arabic version – ابن يونس). However, it makes no sense. According to the Gospel of John (which cannot be shown to be reductive of Matthew) the name of Simon’s father was John/Johanan: Σίμων ὁ υἱὸς Ἰωάννου (1:42) and Σίμων Ἰωάννου (21:15-17). Jonah (Ἰωνᾶς) and Johanan (Ἰωάννης) were two different names, and there is no evidence that the first was ever used as a diminutive of the second.

Thus Jerome in his commentary on Matthew says that some unspecified Christians (*alii* – “others”) take *barjona* to be a defective reading of “son of John” (*filius Joannis*), with a syllable dropped in the copying (*Comm. in Evang. Mat.* 16:17). This is merely wishful thinking in an effort to achieve correspondence with the Gospel of John. Might this group

have been people such as the followers of the *Judaikon*, the so-called “Zion Gospel Edition”, which included the variant reading υἱὲ Ἰωάννου, preserved in the margins of Codex miniscule 566 (ninth century) and Codex miniscule 1424 (ninth/tenth century): σίμων βὰρ ἰωνᾶ – τὸ ἰουδαϊκὸν υἱὲ ἰωάννου? This variant has been assigned by P. Vielhauer (in Hennecke 1963, 148, frg. 14) to the apocryphal *Gospel of the Nazarenes*. But uncertainty remains (cf. Luomanen 2012, 116). The reading “son of John” (*fili Joanne*) has also been claimed on behalf of the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, for the Latin translation of Origen’s commentary on Matthew (*In Matt.* 15.14, on Matt. 19:16-30) by C. H. Dodd (1963, 307). But the Benz-Klostermann edition (1935), and commentators (P. Vielhauer in Hennecke 1963, 148-49, frg. 16; Klijn & Reinink 1973, 128-29; Klijn 1992, 56, 59; Elliott 1999, 10-11, frg 1; Luomanen 2012, 175-76), seem to read “son of Jonas” (*fili Ionaē*), and given the date of the Latin text (fifth to ninth century) it is assumed to be interpolated. In any case it would be later than the tradition of Tatian’s *Diatessaron* mentioned above. So whatever the hypothesis, there is nothing original here. The reading Βαρῖωνᾶ (*barjona*) in the Gospel of Matthew, evidently predates all its subsequent interpretations and assimilations with the Gospel of John.

Besides, the word *barjona* finds its match in the *barjone/biryone* (plural; in Hebrew *baryonim*) of the Babylonian Talmud in its account of the siege of Jerusalem – despite the lateness of this text and the reservations by Hengel (1989, 55-56). In *b.Gittin* 56a we read:

The *barjone* were then in the city. The Rabbis said to them: “Let us go out and make peace with them [the Romans].” They would not let them, but on the contrary said: “Let us go out and fight them.” The Rabbis said: “You will not succeed.” They then rose up and burnt the stores of wheat and barley so that a famine ensued... Abba Sikra [literally, Father of the Sicarii], the chief of the *barjone* in Jerusalem, was the son of the sister of Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai. [The latter] sent to him saying: “Come to visit me privately.” When he came he said to him: “How long are you going to carry on in this way and kill all the people by starvation?” He replied: “What can I do. If I say a word to them, they will kill me”... (Soncino translation)

A previous sympathy of Simon/Peter to the Fourth Philosophy (from which Zealots and Sicarii sprung) should not alienate (Eisler 1931, 252-55; Hirschberg 1942; Cullmann, 1962, 23-24; Brandon 1967, 204-05; Nevada 1973; Kokkinos 1980, 114-18; Kokkinos 2018, 133, n. 16; cf. Marcus 1942; Wall 1987; Davies & Allison, 1991, 622), if only because of the existence of the other Simon, “the Zealot”, among the disciples of Jesus (Lk 6:15; Acts 1:13), and possibly Judas son of Simon “Iscariot” (Jn 6:71; 13:2, 26).

Of course by the time of our inscription, the evolution of Simon/Peter’s epithet Βαρῖωνᾶς (Aramaic *barjona*) into the Hellenised Nabataean-Arab Christian name Βαργουνᾶς, would have had no possible conception of its original meaning. The iota turning into gamma in later colloquial Greek is well known, as in Ἰωάννης becoming Γιάννης, and the double nu may indeed indicate the transfer of orthography from the name of Ἰωάννης, following the assumed identification based on the Gospel of John.

II. 3-4: Νεεστάβου (nominative Νεέσταβος). The patronymic Neestabos is a known Semitic name, which has been found in inscriptions, literature and papyri in many locations

of Syro- Palestine, from Palmyra to Emesa to Tyre to Gaza to Nessana, extending mostly from the third to the seventh century AD (see references and bibliography in Di Segni 2012, no. 3; Decourt 2016, no. 13, fig. 17). It derives from כּוּשָׁכּוּ, meaning “of good fortune” (paralleling the Greek name Εὐτύχιος/Εὐτύχης) or “of good auspices” (paralleling the Greek name Καλόμοιρος/Καλομοίρης). Various spellings have been encountered, including Νέσταβος of Ascalon (Meimaris 1986, 52, no. 296 from Choziba), Νεέσταβος, an ἀναγνώστης (Di Segni 2012, no. 3, from Ozem) and possibly a διάκονος (*SEG* 64.1644 B, from Hanita), Ναήσταβος, a φροντιστής, and one Ναάσταβος (Decourt 2009, no. 41; Decourt 2016, no. 13, fig. 17, from of Liftāyā).

I. 4: ἐτῶν ΑΖ'. The stone-cutter run out of space for the figure of Bargonnas' age, especially since the stone had a large deficiency at this point, and the hammering of the last letter (Ν) of the word ἐτῶν could not hold, chipping further onto the damage. So both letters of the figure were apparently added as superscript, written above the line (see Fig. 6b). The first, probably Α, seems to be positioned above and between ω and Ν, and the second, probably Ζ, above and on the right side of Ν. This would make Bargonnas 37 years old at the time of death.

II. 5-6: The rest of the stone, with the deficiency on the right side, was decorated by the stone-cutter in the best way possible. First with an alpha and an omega, referring to Christ as the beginning and the end of all the universe (Re 1:8; 21:6; 22:13), and then by a palm branch (cf. Jn 12:13; Re 7:9) with crosses on either side, symbolising the triumph of Christ in his death. The vertical line in the middle of omega also seems to create a cross. A palm branch combined with an alpha and an omega on either side is found once in the Zoara corpus (*ITP Ia*, no. 341, pl. LXXI). But there are 41 examples of palm branches (see *ITP Ib*, p. 26), ranging from AD 357 to 535, the earliest one of which depicts the branch almost in the same position as in our inscription (*ITP Ib*, pl. III, no. 5).

### Conclusion

In reviewing the two *ITP* volumes, *Ia* (2005) and *Ib* (2008), of Greek inscriptions from Ghor es-Safi, and being aware more or less of the then forthcoming volume, *Ic* (2016), of Aramaic inscriptions, a corpus amounting to over 456 texts, Graf (2009, 753) wrote:

If an indication is needed for the value of this new corpus, it can be seen in the fact that in 1993 the entire known epigraphic corpus of this region of “Pétra de la Nabatène méridionale” was just 176 Greek and Latin texts.

Indeed a striking indication. Graf's reference was to the 1993 corpus compiled by Maurice Sartre (*IGLS XXI: IJ IV*), which included all known texts of the wider region. It is interesting to read what Issac (1994, 167) wrote in his review of Sartre and in connection to Zoara:

For those interested in the Babatha documents the section on the Ghawr al-Safi could have been rewarding, for this is the area of Zoara, which is subject of many of the papyri. There are, however, only two inscriptions from this region... (pp. 133-7, nos. 105f).

This is the real local scale of discovery – from two inscriptions to over 456! It is difficult to think of any other region of the Near East which has experienced something similar. Also, inscriptions from Zoara continue to be published (e.g. Bader & Habash 2012; Bader & Habash 2013; Zellmann-Rohrer 2019) and many more are forthcoming.

The addition here of two texts continues this effort. Looking at the first inscription, the following points illustrate its significance in broadening our understanding of the corpus. This is the first time that the name Faustina appears in Zoara, and it is the only one (among eight Latin female names) dating to the beginning of the sixth century and thus is the latest. With the phrase μετὰ πίστεως καλῆς, without μετὰ καλοῦ ὀνόματος, it joins only two other texts, while by having the epithet in the end of the phrase, it joins only one other. Faustina dying at ten years old, joins only one other young female known to have died at that age. The second day of Dystos is known only once. It is the first time that we find an indiction of Year 11 in the Zoara corpus, which includes 25 inscriptions with noted indictions. This indiction of Year 11 was one of 27 that occurred from the fourth to the seventh centuries. Only one inscription also dates to E.P.A. year 397. If the ἐπὶ has been read correctly (and it is unknown so far in the inscriptions of Zoara), Theodotos is found only once and only as a patronymic, not as ecclesiastical authority. Theodotos may have been a deacon, a presbyter, or even the city-bishop, and only a handful such local officials are known – none in action, but all as dead individuals. Ἐπ(οίησεν) is found only in one text. The exhortation εὐμύρι, is known only twice, and only once combined with the ending phrase οὐδ(ε)ὶς ἀθάνατος.

The decoration has a large double circle in the shape of a rosette at the bottom, with a big cross in the middle, and apparently with the letters alpha and omega on either side. Whether it means to represent a funerary wreath, the sun disk, or a victory shield, is not clear. Such circles, mostly painted, single or double, crossed or un-crossed, plain or with small linear or triangular rays, appear frequently in the Zoara corpus. The editors classified them as a symbol of the sun (*IPT Ia*, p. 14), though in one occasion a “wreath” is suggested (*IPT Ib*, no. 36). This is compared with another example (*IPT Ia*, no. 183), in which, however, it is not called a wreath, and wreaths are not mentioned in the lists of signs and symbols (*IPT Ia*, p. 15, fig. 44; *IPT Ib*, p. 28). It is possible that minor changes in the design could reflect different understandings, and yet the sun disk interpretation has its merits. The editors suggest “the brightness of eternal life which will be enjoyed by the souls of the righteous in heaven”, as in Mt 13:43 (*IPT Ia*, p. 14). But the disk, especially with the cross in the middle, could also represent the Constantinian sun god Sol Invictus converted to Christianity. In this context it would refer to the story of Constantine’s vision of the cross at the Battle of Milvian Bridge, where he had the Christian symbol marked on his soldiers’ shields (see Nicholson 2000). We may be seeing the transformation of Jesus into the new Sol Invictus, and the sun disk as a shield engraved with the victorious cross. The double circle with the cross in our inscription, its large size (cf. *IPT Ib*, no. 60), and the fact that it is incised rather than painted (cf. *IPT Ia*, no. 281), is almost unique in the Zoara corpus of dated and undated inscriptions. It is also the latest in date by more than half a century. Its size can only be compared to some plain tombstones bearing only symbols (e.g. *IPT Ia*, no. 329).

As to the second inscription, Bargonnas is found only in one other text in Zoara as Bargounnas. This name provides us with a probable but rare parallel to the epithet given to

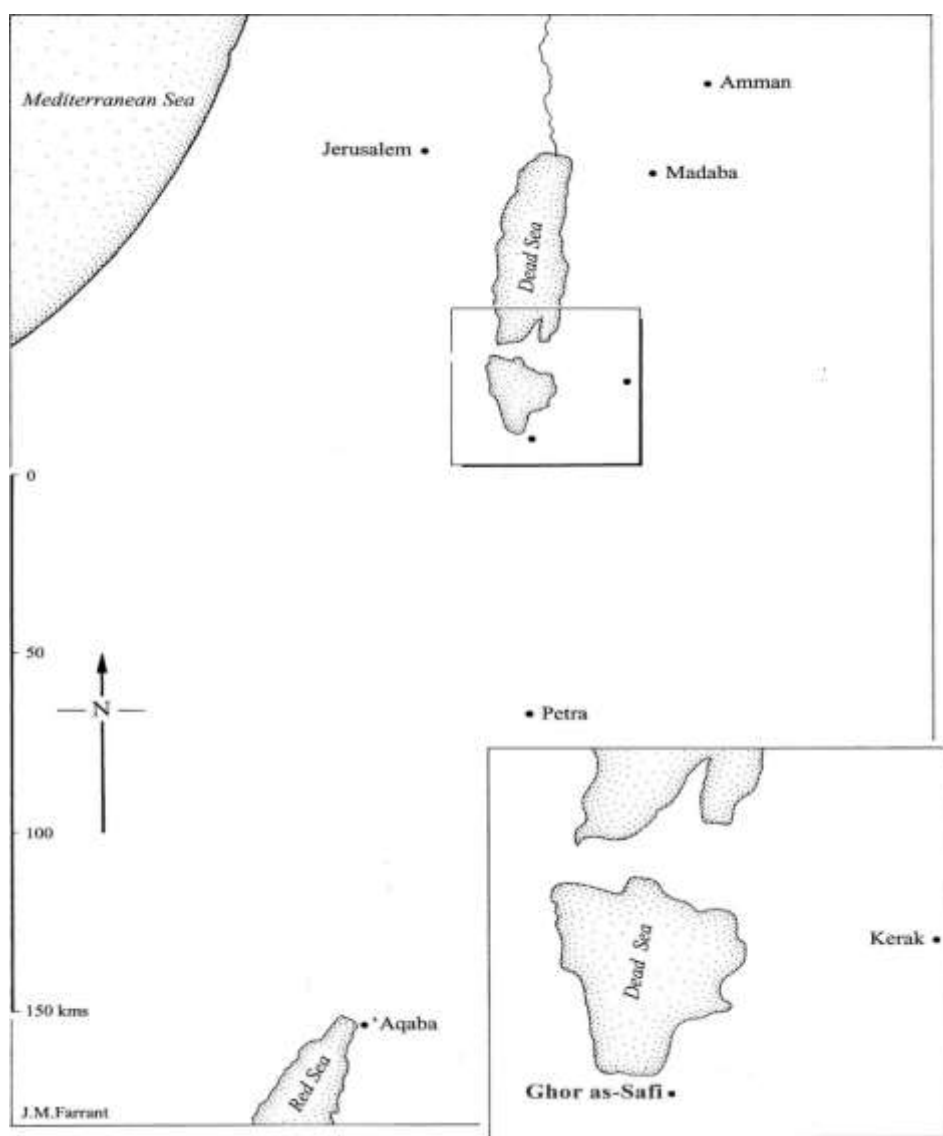
Simon/Peter in the Gospel of Matthew (16:17), Σίμων Βαριωνᾶ. The patronymic Neestabos adds to the long list of occurrences of this Semitic name. In the decoration a palm branch combined with an alpha and omega on either side is found only once in the Zoara corpus.

For all these reasons, the inscriptions published here offer additional information, illuminating further this extraordinary corpus.

### **Acknowledgment:**

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### **Figures & Table**

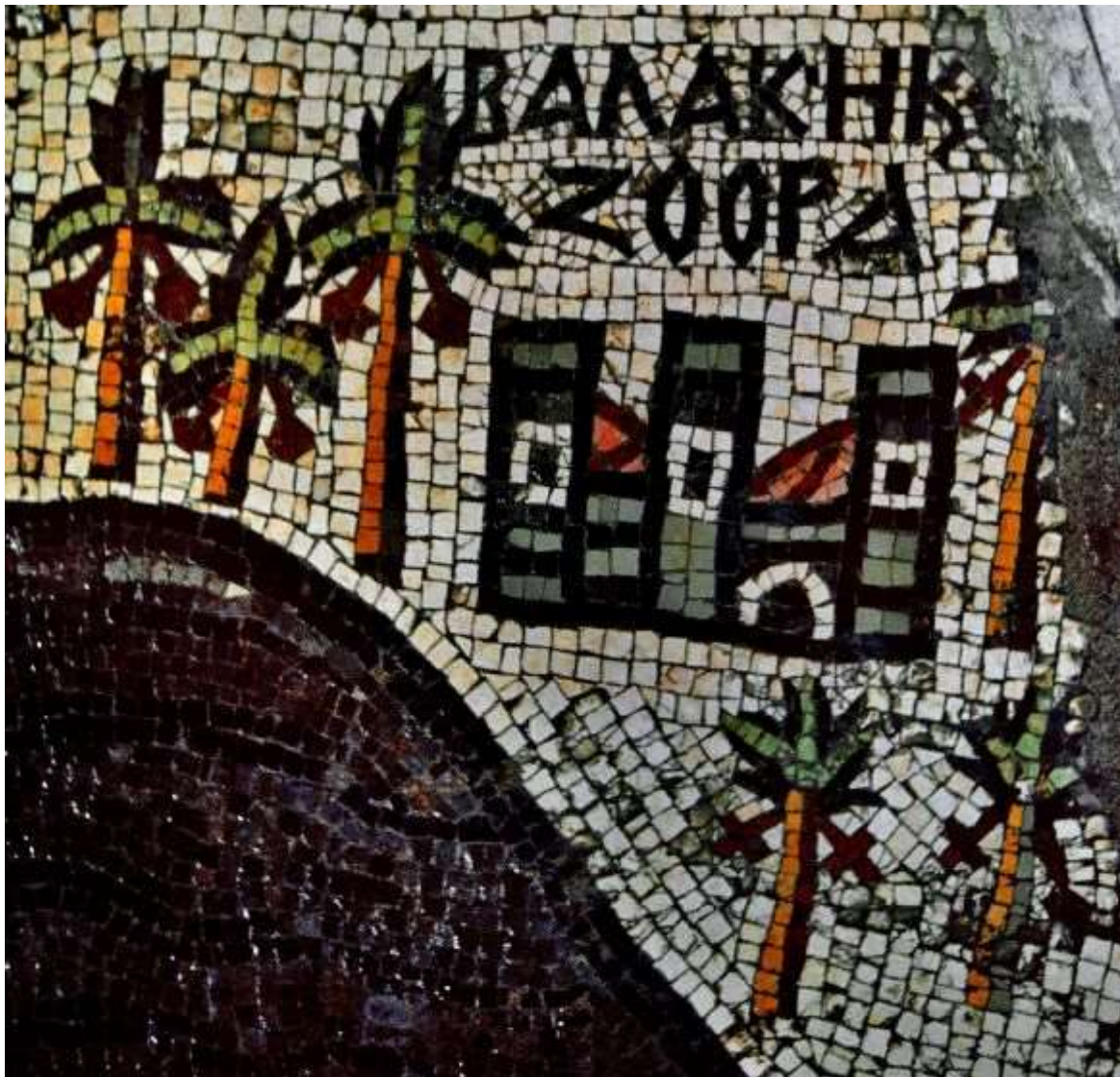


**1 = Map location Ghor as-Safi (J. M. Farrant)**

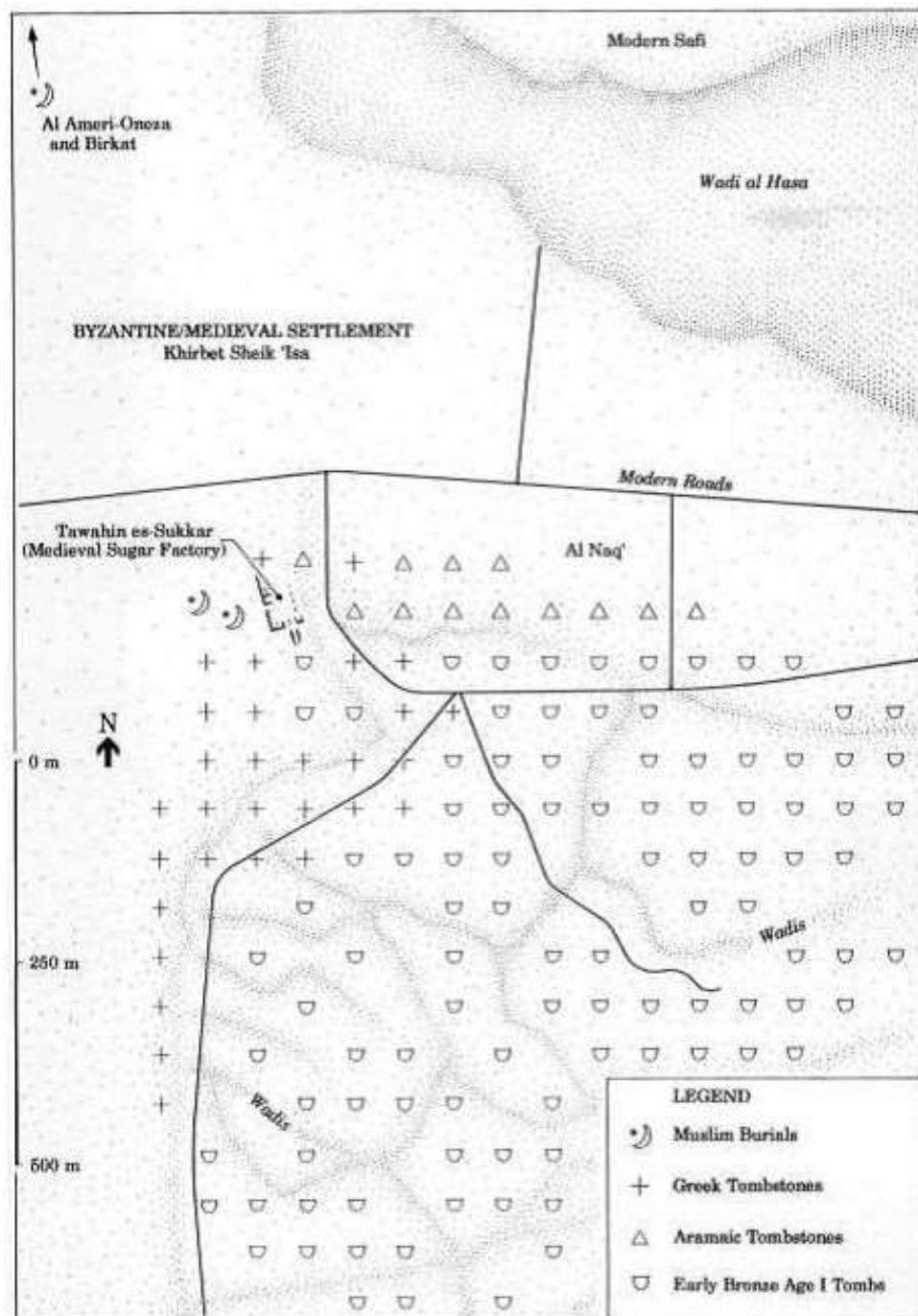


**2 = Aerial (eastern) view of An-Naq' in the foreground on south bank of the Wadi al-Hasa, Ghor as-Safi (K. D. Politis 30-3-2009).**





3 = Detail of mosaic map in Madaba, Jordan, depicting *Zoora* (K. D. Politis)



4 = Map based on 1992 aerial photographs and 1996 investigations showing cemetery with multi-period graves, An Naq' in Ghor as-Safi (J. M. Farrant after K. D. Politis).

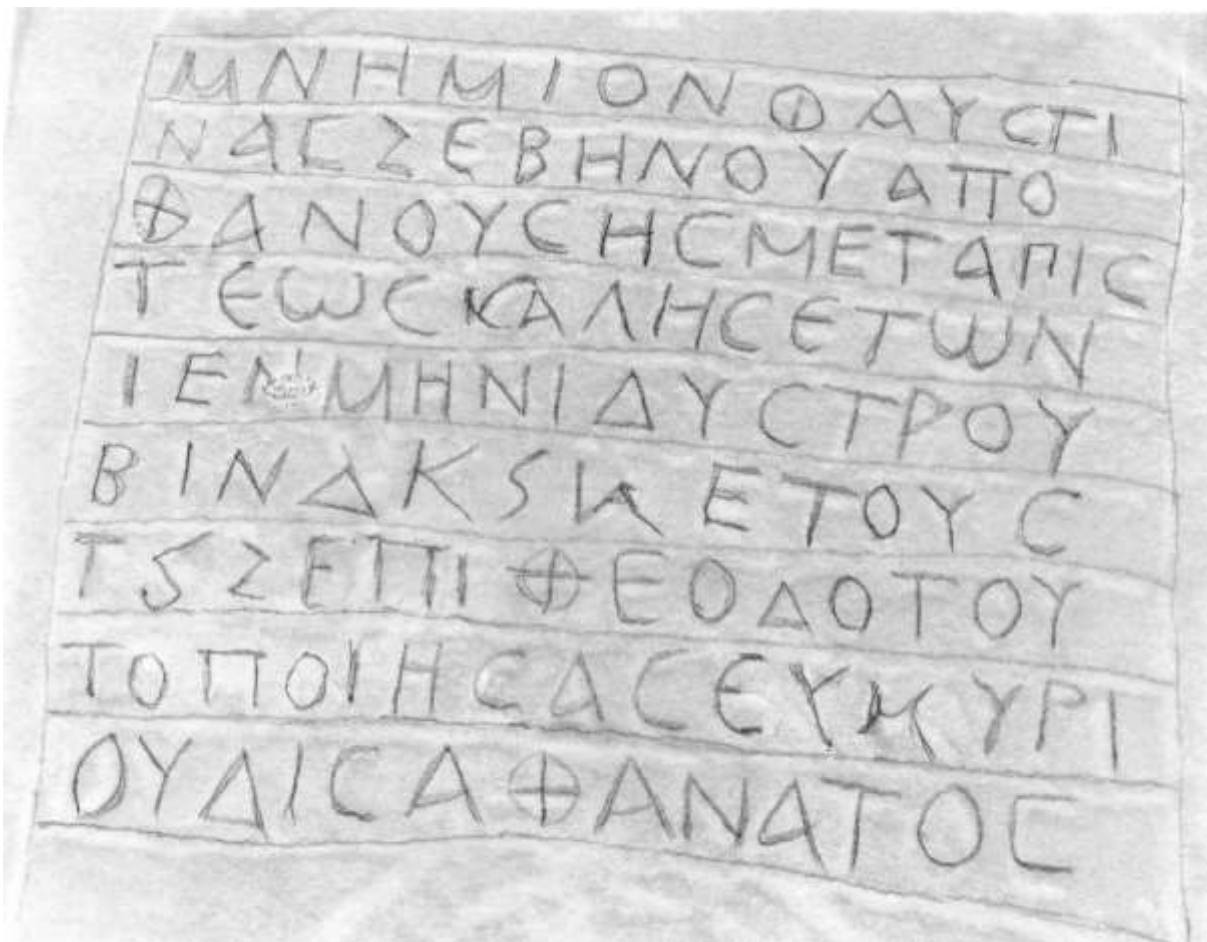




**5 = Inscription Z-451 (K. D. Politis)**



**5a = Inscription Z-451, close up (K. D. Politis)**



5b = Rough drawing, tracing inscription Z-451 (N. Kokkinos)



5c = Inscription Z-451, detail, enhanced negative enlargement of the end of line 1 (N. Kokkinos)





**5d = Inscription Z-451, detail, enhanced negative enlargement of the beginning of lines 6-8 (N. Kokkinos)**



**5e = Inscription Z-451, detail, enhanced negative enlargement of the end of line 8 (N. Kokkinos)**



6 = Inscription Z-456 (Sami Twal)



6a = Rough drawing, tracing inscription Z-456 (N. Kokkinos)





**6b = Inscription Z-456, detail, enhanced negative enlargement of the end of lines 3-4 (N. Kokkinos)**

**Table: Indictions of Year 11 Through Fourth to Seventh Centuries**

	INDICTION 11	ERA OF THE PROVINCE OF ARABIA	E.P.A. Greek Numeral	ZOARA INSCRIPTION Z-451
1	Sep 307 to Aug 308	202 = Sep 307 to Mar 308 203 = Mar 308 to Aug 308	CB CΓ	
2	Sep 322 to Aug 323	217 = Sep 322 to Mar 323 218 = Mar 323 to Aug 323	CIZ CIH	
3	Sep 337 to Aug 338	232 = Sep 337 to Mar 338 233 = Mar 338 to Aug 338	CAB CΑΓ	
4	Sep 352 to Aug 353	247 = Sep 352 to Mar 353 248 = Mar 353 to Aug 353	CMZ CMH	
5	Sep 367 to Aug 368	262 = Sep 367 to Mar 368 263 = Mar 368 to Aug 368	CΞB CΞΓ	
6	Sep 382 to Aug 383	277 = Sep 382 to Mar 383 278 = Mar 383 to Aug 383	COZ COH	
7	Sep 397 to Aug 398	292 = Sep 397 to Mar 398 293 = Mar 398 to Aug 398	CϣB CϣΓ	
8	Sep 412 to Aug 413	307 = Sep 412 to Mar 413 308 = Mar 413 to Aug 413	TZ TH	
9	Sep 427 to Aug 428	322 = Sep 427 to Mar 428 323 = Mar 428 to Aug 428	TKB TKΓ	
10	Sep 442 to Aug 443	337 = Sep 442 to Mar 443 338 = Mar 443 to Aug 443	TAZ TAH	
11	Sep 457 to Aug 458	352 = Sep 457 to Mar 458 353 = Mar 458 to Aug 458	TNB TNΓ	
12	Sep 472 to Aug 473	367 = Sep 472 to Mar 473 368 = Mar 473 to Aug 473	TΞZ TΞH	
13	Sep 487 to Aug 488	382 = Sep 487 to Mar 488 383 = Mar 488 to Aug 488	TΠB TΠΓ	

	INDICTION 11	ERA OF THE PROVINCE OF ARABIA	E.P.A. Greek Numeral	ZOARA INSCRIPTION Z-451
14	Sep 502 to Aug 503	397 = Sep 502 to Mar 503 398 = Mar 503 to Aug 503	ΤϞΖ ΤϞΗ	2 Dystros = 16 Feb 503
15	Sep 517 to Aug 518	412 = Sep 517 to Mar 518 413 = Mar 518 to Aug 518	ΥΙΒ ΥΙΓ	
16	Sep 532 to Aug 533	427 = Sep 532 to Mar 533 428 = Mar 533 to Aug 533	ΥΚΖ ΥΚΗ	
17	Sep 547 to Aug 548	442 = Sep 547 to Mar 548 443 = Mar 548 to Aug 548	ΥΜΒ ΥΜΓ	
18	Sep 562 to Aug 563	457 = Sep 562 to Mar 563 458 = Mar 563 to Aug 563	ΥΝΖ ΥΝΗ	
19	Sep 577 to Aug 578	472 = Sep 577 to Mar 578 473 = Mar 578 to Aug 578	ΥΟΒ ΥΟΓ	
20	Sep 592 to Aug 593	487 = Sep 592 to Mar 593 488 = Mar 593 to Aug 593	ΥΠΖ ΥΠΗ	
21	Sep 607 to Aug 608	502 = Sep 607 to Mar 608 503 = Mar 608 to Aug 608	ΦΒ ΦΓ	
22	Sep 622 to Aug 623	517 = Sep 622 to Mar 623 518 = Mar 623 to Aug 623	ΦΙΖ ΦΙΗ	
23	Sep 637 to Aug 638	532 = Sep 637 to Mar 638 533 = Mar 638 to Aug 638	ΦΛΒ ΦΛΓ	
24	Sep 652 to Aug 653	547 = Sep 652 to Mar 653 548 = Mar 653 to Aug 653	ΦΜΖ ΦΜΗ	
25	Sep 667 to Aug 668	562 = Sep 667 to Mar 668 563 = Mar 668 to Aug 668	ΦΞΒ ΦΞΓ	
26	Sep 682 to Aug 683	577 = Sep 682 to Mar 683 578 = Mar 683 to Aug 683	ΦΟΖ ΦΟΗ	
27	Sep 697 to Aug 698	592 = Sep 697 to Mar 698 593 = Mar 698 to Aug 698	ΦϞΒ ΦϞΓ	

## نقشان يونانيا جنازيان من زُغر/ غور الصافي

نيكوس كوكينوس<sup>1</sup> كونستانتينوس د. بوليتيس<sup>2</sup>

### ملخص

تتضمن النقوش العائدة إلى الفترة البيزنطية، المكتشفة في السنوات الأخيرة في منطقة غور الصافي جنوبي الأردن، عددًا كبيرًا من النقوش الجنازية باللغتين الآرامية واليونانية؛ فهي تحتوي على 456 نقشًا قبوريًا من مقبرة النقع في زُغر، وتغطي هذه المجموعة الاستثنائية، المتزايدة تباعًا، حِقبة تقع ما بين القرنين الرابع والسابع الميلاديين. وتجري حاليًا دراسة العديد من هذه النصوص في منشورات منفصلة، وكجزء من هذا الجهد تعرضُ الدراسة الحالية نقشين يونانيين إضافيين من موقع زُغر، تتبع أهمية أولهما من أنه يسدُّ ثغرة في الفسيفساء الاجتماعية للفترة البيزنطية المبكرة؛ إذ يخلد ذكرى فاونسينا الذي يردُّ لأول مرة، فينضم بذلك إلى ثمانية أسماء لاتينية أنثوية أخرى، ويعود بتاريخه إلى 16 فبراير 503. يُذكر أنَّ هذا التاريخ المناظر لسنة 397 من حِقبة المقاطعة العربية معروف في نقش واحد من مدونة نقوش هذه المنطقة، ولكنَّ الإشارة إلى السنة الحادية عشرة المذكورة تُعدُّ فريدةً من نوعها. وبالقدر نفسه، فإنَّ اسم ثيودوتوس، الذي يمكن أن يمثِّل سلطةً كنسية، أو صفةً شماس، أو كاهن، أو حتى أسقف مدينة، يُعدُّ فريدًا من نوعه أيضًا. أمَّا زخرفة قرص الشمس الكبير الذي يتوسطه صليب، فقد يمثِّل إله الشمس سول إنفيكتوس في القسطنطينية، الذي تحوَّل إلى المسيحية. وأما النقش الثاني فنادر أيضًا؛ إذ يخلد ذكرى بارغوناس، الذي يُحتملُ أن يكون مشفقًا من كُنية شمعون بطرس الواردة في سفر متى. (16:17).

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