

**A NEW BYZANTINE FUNERARY INSCRIPTION FROM ZOARA
(GHOR ES-SAFI; SOUTHERN JORDAN) ***

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Abstract – The funerary epigraph which is the subject of this paper is currently in the Jordan Ahli Bank Numismatic Museum in Amman. Although there is no specific evidence of its origin, its epigraphic formulas allow us to consider that the piece can come from the site of Zoara (or Zoora; Ghor es-Safi, south-east of the Dead Sea).

Keywords – Jordan, Byzantine Empire, Greek inscription, epitaph

Une nouvelle épitaphe byzantine de Zoara (Ghor es-Safi, Jordanie du Sud)

Résumé – L'inscription funéraire présentée dans cet article se trouve aujourd'hui au musée numismatique Ahli Bank d'Amman. Malgré l'absence d'information précise concernant sa provenance, ses formules épigraphiques nous permettent de considérer qu'elle pourrait provenir du site de Zoara (Zoora ; Ghor es-Safi, au sud-est de la mer Morte).

Mots-clés – Jordanie, empire byzantin, inscription grecque, épitaphe

اكتشاف نقش ضريح تذكاري بيزنطي في زغر (غور الصافي، جنوب الأردن)
خلاصة – إن المدونة الجنائزية المعروضة في هذا المقال موجودة حالياً في متحف النميات/ البنك الأهلي الأردني في عمان.
على الرغم من عدم وجود معلومات متعلقة بمصدرها؛ إلا أن طريقة صياغتها تسمح لنا باعتبارها من موقع زغر (غور الصافي،
الجنوب الشرقي من البحر الميت).

كلمات محورية – الأردن، الإمبراطورية البيزنطية، مدونات إغريقية، نقش ضريح تذكاري

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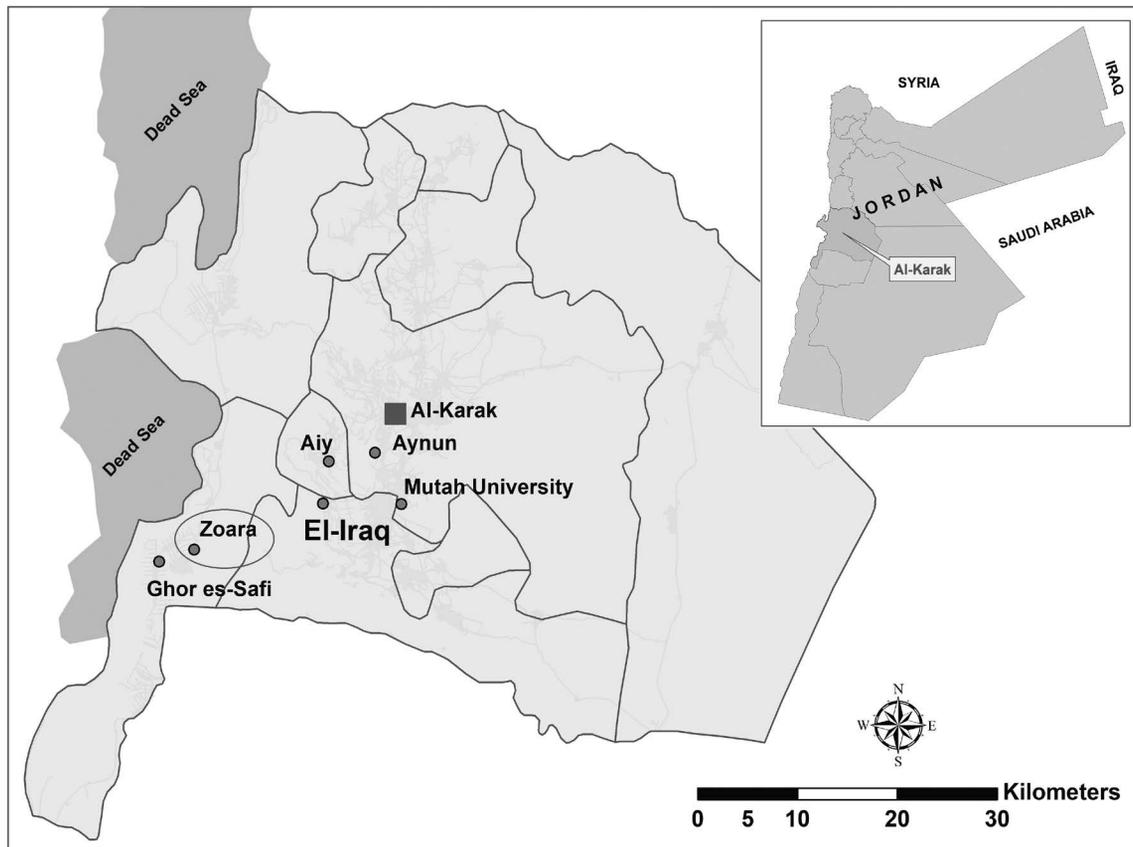


Figure 1. Map of the site of Zoara (M. R. Al-Rawahneh).

The aim of this work is to bring to light and to edit a new funerary inscription from Jordan. It is currently preserved in the Jordan Ahli Bank Numismatic Museum, whose manager, Dr. Hassan al-Zuod, has kindly allowed us to study and publish it. Although there is no documentary evidence for its provenance, the parallels of its iconography and the coincidence of its epigraphic formulas with those from funerary inscriptions found in Ghor es-Safi (ancient Zoara; **fig. 1**) suggest that the piece comes from this Jordanian site, whose epigraphy has been studied in details by Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou.¹

THE INSCRIPTION

Description

The piece displays an inscription incised on a stone block that originally had a rectangular shape with rounded upper corners. Its measures are 47 cm in width, 84 cm in height, and 23 cm in thickness. As can be appreciated in **fig. 2** and **3**, the stone is severely deteriorated in its four corners (especially in the lower left corner). However, since the main body of the text has been preserved, its reading has not been excessively hampered. The epigraphic space (33 × 36 cm) is delimited by an edge consisting of an irregular rectangle. The script corresponds to the “type 1” of R. Canova.² The A, Δ and Λ have

1. MEIMARIS and KRITIKAKOU-NIKOLAROPOULOU 2005 and 2008. Ghor es-Safi (the biblical Zoar [cf. Gen 19, 20-23]) is an archaeological site in the Jordan valley placed between the governorates of Karak and Tafilah, near the southern Dead Sea. It is depicted on the 6th-century Madaba map as Zoara. For a historical description of this city during the Byzantine period, see AL-NASARAT 2013, p. 2-13, and POLITIS 2020, p. 43-71.
2. CANOVA 1954, tavola II.

left-facing upper serifs at the top. The E and Ω have a rounded shape with a double loop. There are no guidelines or visible interpuncts. Some of the letters show traces of a reddish pigment.³

Edition

εἰς Θεός. ὁ μόνος.
 μνημῖον Σωσάν-
 νας Καλανδίωνος,
 4 τοῦ βίου παυσομέ-
 νης μετὰ καλοῦ >>
 ὀνόματος, ἐτῶν
 [...] ἐν ἔτι τεκε', μη(νὸς)
 8 [Α]πελλ(έου) ια', ἡμέρ(α)
 [Κ(υρίου)] ε[']. θάρσι, οὐδὶς
 [ἀ]θάνατος.



Figure 2. Photograph of the gravestone (M. R. Al-Rawahneh).



Figure 3. Hand-drawn copy (M. R. Al-Rawahneh).

Line 3. The upper part of the letter o of Καλανδίωνος is not visible.

Line 7. There are faint traces of a “numeral bar” under the v of ὀνόματος (line 6). However, there are no remains of the letter-numeral marking the age of the deceased. The sequence τεκε is overlined by a “numeral bar”. The abbreviation μς = μη(νὸς).

Line 8. Damage in the lower left corner has destroyed the letter A of [Α]πελλ(έου). Only the right half of the letter π has survived. [Α]πελλς = [Α]πελλ(έου). The sequence ια is overlined by a “numeral bar”. The ε of ἡμέρ has lost its lower part. On the right of ἡμέρ there is a raised abbreviation that cannot be identified with certainty.

Line 9. Damage in the left-hand corner has destroyed the abbreviation Κ(υρίου)υ —or Κ(υρίου)—which should precede the numeral ε. To the left of this numeral, there are faint traces of a stroke—or perhaps an accidental scratch on the stone—that cannot be identified. There are no traces of any identification to characterise the ε as a numeral.

Line 10. Damage in the left corner has destroyed the initial ἀ of [ἀ]θάνατος. The left half of θ has been deleted, but it is still clearly recognisable.

Translation

God (is) One (and) the Only (One). Monument of Sosanna, (daughter) of Calandion, who ceased to live having a good name at the age of .. years. In the year 325 [= AD 430], on the 11th (?) (day) of (the) month Apellaios, the 5th day [of the Lord] (Thursday). Be of good cheer, no one (is) immortal.

3. Besides, above the incised area of the inscription there are clear remains of other decorative elements also painted in red: a Greek cross framed by a circle, which is, in turn, flanked by two birds, a motif of Paleochristian origin well attested in the area. For an extensive catalogue of iconographic motifs present in the tombstones from Zoara, see MEIMARIS and KRITIKAKOY-NIKOLAROPOYLOU 2005, p. 17-20.

Commentary

Leaving aside the fact that we were unable to recognise the raised abbreviation after ἡμέρ (line 8), abbreviations (*S* and ^s) and non-alphabetical signs (>) are the ones commonly found in the epigraphy of the area. It is worth drawing attention to the presence of two “diples” (>>) after καλοῦ to fill the line, whose usage is also documented in some texts on papyrus.

The personal name Καλανδίων is not attested in the onomastics of Zoara. However, it is a name that is widely attested in many other regions of the Empire, since a search in Cornell University’s database⁴ (PHI) produced 39 matches of this name. In contrast to its relative scarcity in the East, the name is well represented—although with slight Latin variants—in the West: Kalandio,⁵ Καλανδίω⁶ and Calendio.⁷ Nevertheless, there are also some variants of the name in the East: Καλάνδιος,⁸ a name also borne by the patriarch of Antioch between 479 and 485. Besides, the feminine variant of this name (Καλανδία) is also attested.⁹

Σωσάννα, by contrast, is a name already recorded in Zoara’s epigraphy.¹⁰ It is a name of Semitic origin¹¹ which sometimes appears with the variant ου instead of ω. In a papyrus from Hermopolis (*flor.* 1, 78), it is possible to find both forms: Σωσάννα (r. l. 9) and Σουσάννα (v. l. 23). The variant form Σουσάνα is recorded in a mosaic inscription from Jerusalem.¹²

The date mentioned in the inscription, the 11th (?) of the month of Apellaios in the year 325 of the era of the Roman province of Arabia (EPA) corresponds to the 27th (?) of November of the year AD 430. The fifth day of the Lord is a Thursday.

The formula that heads the inscription, εἰς Θεός. ὁ μόνος, is well attested in the area.¹³ However, what is most relevant is that the epigraphic phrase τοῦ βίου παυσομένης μετὰ καλοῦ ὀνόματος is characteristic of Zoara’s epigraphy—*I.Zoora* reports on the existence of 116 testimonies—, which is a strong evidence for the provenance of this inscription. Finally, the epigraphic pattern, οὐδὲς ἀθάνατος is common in Greek epigraphy of this area and it is attested in pagan, Jewish and Christian inscriptions.¹⁴

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4. <https://inscriptions.packhum.org>.
5. *CIL* VI 463 (Rome).
6. *JJWE* 2, 293 (Rome).
7. *AE* 1920, 24 (Tabarka); *CIL* VIII 27210 (Thugga); *AE* 1981, 565 (Ampurias).
8. *I.Mus. Beyrouth* 438; and, probably, *CIIP* II 1687 (ΚΑΛΑΝΑΙΩ, read as Καλανδῖος), an inscription in a ring found in Caesarea Palaestinae.
9. *IK* 29, 58 (Kios; Bithynia); 32, 54 (Apameia; Bithynia); *IG* X 2 1, 195 (Thessalonike).
10. *I.Zoora* 20 and 148.
11. MEIMARIS and KRITIKAKOU-NIKOLARPOULOU 2005, p. 115.
12. MEIMARIS 1986, no. 328.
13. The formula is recorded in Zoara (*I.Zoora* 71 [AD 394]; *I.Zoora* 305 [late 4th/early 5th c. AD]; *I.Zoora* 306 [late 4th/early 5th c. AD]); but it is also attested elsewhere in the East: *IGLS* 4, 1532bis (Dahr el-Kebīra; AD 378).
14. This formula is predominantly Eastern, but there are some testimonies documenting its presence outside the region as well: *I.Kition* 2121 (Larnaka); *I.Porto* 90 (Latium); *IGUR* II 1113; 1114; 1115 (Rome). Moreover, most of the Zoara inscriptions bearing this epigraphic phrase are Christian, but there are also some cases of Jewish origin (e. g. *I.Zoora* 7; 11). In fact, the formula is also present in other Jewish burial sites outside the area (*JJWE* 1 206 [perhaps non-Jewish]; 2 31; 99; 172 [Rome: Monteverde]). It is also documented in some pagan inscriptions of the region (*IGLS* 13,1 9230; 9315; 9352; 9409 [Bostra]).

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