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The seven Greek epitaphs which follow are published here for the first time. All come from the same area of the Moab plateau in southern Jordan (Fig. 1). The first five (nos. 1–5) were discovered in June 2013 in ‘Azrā near Karak (ancient Charachmoba). The last two inscriptions (nos. 6–7) have no certain provenance since they are today owned by private citizens residing in Mu’tah (ancient Motho). Without any doubt they have been found in this town or in its immediate vicinity. Due to the generosity of their owners, who supplied photos of the stones, they were included in the present publication.¹

Like the immense majority of the inscriptions from Moab,² our texts consist in short Late Antique Greek epitaphs engraved on rectangular tombstones made out of local limestone and adorned with Christian symbols. These features, as well as the shape of their letters, their abbreviations and ligatures, are generally characteristic of the period ranging from the mid-fourth up to the mid-seventh century AD in the area. Three inscriptions (nos. 5–7) are more precisely dated from the sixth century AD. Their dates have to be calculated by using the provincial era of Arabia (beginning on the 22nd of March, AD 106), which was common in the land of Moab as everywhere else in Palaestina Tertia (formerly the southern part of Arabia) in Byzantine times.³ Two other texts (nos. 2 and 5) fit into the small series of the Greek epigrams that have been recorded in Moab until now.⁴

I. ‘Azrā

‘Azrā (lat. 31° 9’ 20” N; long. 35° 41’ 39” E), also called ‘Izra or Eseriyeh, is located about 2.5 km south of the medieval fortress of Karak, along the road leading to Mu’tah and Ṭafilah. The village is overlooking the left bank of Wādī al-Ṭuway, at about 1120 m above sea level. It has been assumed that its name derives from an ancient Canaanite or Aramaic word (*‘zr*) related to the notion of “help”.⁵ Other interpretations trace it back either to a Canaanite/Aramaic personal name or to Late Hebrew *‘zrh*, i.e. “courtyard”.⁶ Apart from this etymological discussion, archaeological information about the site is rather vague and scanty. The Karak plateau survey conducted by J. M. Miller and J. M. Pinkerton in 1978–1982 recorded in the village surface pottery material ranging from Iron Age up to the Mamluk period, but did not mention any ancient dwellings; closer to the Karak/Mu’tah road, a group of ruins (*khirbeh*) already visited by early European travelers yielded ceramics dated from Early Bronze Age up to modern times.⁷ In Byzantine times, ‘Azrā obviously was of some importance since R. Canova found here seventeen funerary inscriptions, including three epigrams and five dated texts of 460/461, 524/525, 541/542, 557/558 and 577 AD.⁸ In all probability it was a village dependent on the nearby city of Charachmoba (Karak).

Four of our inscriptions (nos. 1–4) have been unearthed during construction work for a private house in the northern quarters of the modern village in 2012. After being informed by Mr. Adel Mahaden, Younis

¹ We are indebted to Denis Feissel for his comments on a draft of our paper, and especially for discussion of the two epigrams from ‘Azrā (nos. 2 and 4).

² Canova 1954; Mouterde 1957; Corbo 1963–1964; Zayadine 1971a and 1971b; Piccirillo 1989, 117–118, nos. 18–19; Gnoli 2002; Piccirillo 2003, 443–444; Meimaris–Mahasneh–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2007, 530–560, nos. 2–23; Calzini Gysens 2008, 63; Karvounis 2010 (= Shiyab 2011).

³ Meimaris 1992, 147.

⁴ Canova 1954, nos. 3, 47, 59, 76, 108, 144, 169, 173, 181, 183, 210, 223, 275–277, 285, 302, and Mouterde 1957, 268 (*SEG* 19, 895; cf. *Bull. ép.* 1959, 480), all short and funerary, to which may be added the epigram in honor of the general Dorotheos republished by Feissel 1984, 545–558, especially 545–546, 556–557. See also Merkelbach–Stauber 2002, 436–444, 454.

⁵ Al-Ma‘ānī 1994, 18; cf. Hoftijzer–Jongeling 1995, 836–837, s.v. ‘zr₁.

⁶ Knauf 1991, 286.

⁷ Miller (ed.) 1991, 89–90, sites nos. 205 (‘Izra) and 206 (Kh. ‘Izra).

⁸ Canova 1954, 264–274, nos. 276–291 (‘Azrā). The dated inscriptions are published again by Meimaris 1992, chap. 9, nos. 200, 257, 280, 318, 358.

Shdaifat inspected the spot and discovered several disturbed graves with scattered human skeletal remains in the foundation trenches dug for the new house. One of the tombs contained a broken limestone sarcophagus with a fragment of its lid. Once these remains were recorded, a student from the Department of Archaeology and Tourism at Mu'tah University received a fifth inscribed tombstone (no. 5) from a private owner who had found it several years ago while digging foundations for his own house about 70 m from the first find spot. The five tombstones were all transferred to the store rooms of the Department at Mu'tah University, where they are preserved now.⁹

1. Epitaph of Georgios and Anastasios

Rectangular tombstone rounded at the top, made out of light white-yellowish limestone with brown-yellowish patina, and intact apart from some modern breaks and scratches. The back side is convex. The front surface has been smoothed except in its lower part, corresponding to the part of the stone that was stuck in the ground. H. 80 W. 37 D. 60 cm. H. of the inscribed area: 55 cm. Mixed square and round script. Some letters of the seventh and eighth lines preserve red colour. Horizontal stroke above KEI; ligature EI in the first line; long vertical line under the text. H. of the letters: 3–4.2 cm. Fig. 2.

Ἐνθάδε κεῖ-
νται Γεώργιος
καὶ Ἀναστάσι-
4 ος υἱοὶ Ἀβρα-
αμίου ζήσαν-
τες ἔτη ὁ
εἰς πέντε
8 καὶ ὁ ἄλλο-
ς δύο.

“Here lie Georgios and Anastasios, sons of Abraamios, who lived, the one five years and the other two.”

The two young brothers probably died at the same time and they were subsequently buried together. The formula which indicates their respective ages is unusual, though not unparalleled.¹⁰ The first brother bears the Greek name Γεώργιος, the popularity of which was increased among the Christians by the renown of the soldier-martyr Saint George. The second also has a Greek name, Ἀναστάσιος, which refers to the Resurrection (ἀνάστασις), and which was already recorded in ‘Azrā (see also below, our no. 4), as the feminine Ἀναστασία. The patronymic Ἀβραάμιος is one of the Greek transliterations of patriarch Abraham’s name. All these names are extremely common.¹¹

2. Christian funerary epigram of Zenobia

Rectangular tombstone rounded at the top, made out of light white-yellowish limestone with cinnamon-coloured patina, and intact apart from few ancient and modern breaks and scratches. All sides are carefully cut and smoothed. On the front surface, the area of the inscription is slightly hollowed out. The small recess in the lower left side indicates the height of the part of the stone that was stuck in the ground. The inscription is carefully engraved in a square script under an incised stylized arch supported by two columns with their bases and capitals, like in our no. 5. H. 65 W. 38 D. 22 cm. H. of the inscribed area: 37 cm. The letters still bear traces of red paint. A cross with forked serifs is incised in the middle of the first line. H. of the letters: 3.2–4.5 cm. Fig. 3.

⁹ Twenty-three Greek inscriptions were already kept in Mu'tah University. See Meimaris–Mahasneh–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2007 (*SEG* 57, 1902, 1910–1930).

¹⁰ See for instance at Kios in Bithynia, Corsten 1985, no. 73: ζήσαντες [ἔ]τη δ' καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μῖνας τ' (*sic*).

¹¹ Meimaris–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2005, 320 (Ἀναστάσιος and Ἀναστασία), 340 (Ἀβραάμιος and its different spellings), 392 (Γεώργιος), quoting many inscriptions from Moab and elsewhere.

Ἐνθ + ἀδε
 Ζηνοβίη Σωζο-
 μενοῦ τάφον ἔλ-
 4 λαχεν εὐπατέρια
 ἐνναία τῶν ἐτέων
 δεκάδας βιότοιο
 λαβοῦσα.

L. 4. εὐπατέρια for εὐπατέρεια. L. 5. ἐνναία for ἐννέα.

The whole text has to be considered as a poem:

Ἐνθάδε | Ζηνοβίη Σωζο|μενοῦ τάφον ἔλ|λαχεν εὐπατέρια |
 ἐνναία τῶν ἐτέων | δεκάδας βιότοιο | λαβοῦσα.

“Here, Zenobia of a noble father, the daughter of Sozomenos, received a grave, she who got nine decades of years of life.”

This short funerary epigram is composed of two verses. As Denis Feissel pointed out to us, the first verse should have been an hexameter, but it was distorted by the inclusion of the patronymic Σωζομενοῦ. The second verse is a classical hexameter. The turn of the phrase ἐννέα τῶν ἐτέων δεκάδας, “nine decades of years”, i.e. “ninety years”, is common in funerary epigrams from Moab and elsewhere.¹² On the contrary, the word τάφος, here used to describe the grave, is rather rare in the region.¹³

The name of the deceased woman, well represented in Moab, was already recorded in ‘Azrā.¹⁴ Her father’s name too.¹⁵ Both are Greek classical names. The first (Ζηνοβία) is a theophoric pagan name built on the name of the god Zeus and still very popular in Late Antiquity. The second (Σωζομενός) was more specifically appreciated by the Christians, who may have been seduced by its religious connotation.

3. Christian epitaph of Zenobios

Rectangular tombstone of white-yellowish limestone with red-brown patina, apparently carved again to the right and at the top for a re-use. The front face is carefully smoothed, while the other sides are left embossed. The area of the inscription is slightly hollowed out. It has a few modern breaks and scratches. H. 64 W. 31 D. 25 cm. H. of the inscribed area: 39.5 cm. The five lines of the text are deeply and carelessly engraved in a square script under an incised arch which is still visible in the upper part of the stone. Two linear crosses with short straight serifs appear in the middle of the first line and below the inscription. Ligature NO (l. 3); vacuum between ZH and CA (l. 4); horizontal stroke above the numeral (l. 5). H. of letters: 4–5 cm. Fig. 4.

Ἐν + θά-
 δε κεῖτα[ι]
 Ζηνόβι[ς]
 4 ζήσα[ς]
 ἔτη δ’.
 +

L. 3. It is preferable to restore Ζηνόβι[ς] instead of Ζηνόβι[ος] because the lacuna on the right does not seem to exceed the size of one letter.

“Here lies Zenobios, who lived four years.”

¹² Canova 1954, nos. 47, 59, 173, 210; cf. e.g. *AP* 7, 157, 295 and 557.

¹³ Only two mentions in Canova 1954, nos. 143 and 152.

¹⁴ Ζηνοβία: Canova 1954, nos. 86–87, 230, 231(?), 282; cf. below, our no. 3, about the masculine Ζηνόβιος.

¹⁵ Σωζομενός: Canova 1954, nos. 71, 128, 149, 160, 284, 359, 368.

The deceased child bears the common theophoric Greek name Ζηνόβιος, which was very popular in the Roman Near East. As its feminine counterpart Ζηνοβία (cf. above, our no. 2), it is well represented in Moab and in the immediate surroundings.¹⁶

4. Christian epitaph of Maria

Rectangular tombstone of white-yellowish limestone rounded at the top, broken in the upper and lower right angles. Dimensions are unknown. Square script. Linear cross at the beginning of the first line; vacuum between KEIT and A (l. 2); ligature OY (l. 4); horizontal strokes above numerals and the abbreviation marks after T and ET (l. 5). Fig. 5.

+ Ἐν[θά]δε
κεῖτα[ι] Μα-
ρία Ἀναστασί-
4 ου, ζήσασ(α) ἔτι
ξ', τ(ϕ) ἔτ(ει) υξδ'.

“Here lies Maria, daughter of Anastasios, who lived sixty years, in the year 464.”

The deceased woman bears the common biblical name of the Virgin.¹⁷ For Ἀναστάσιος, see above, no. 1. Date: 569/570 AD (year 464 of the provincial era of Arabia).

5. Christian funerary epigram (of Megethios?)

Rectangular tombstone rounded at the top, made out of light white-yellowish limestone with brown-yellowish patina. The stone is carefully carved and all the surfaces are smoothly finished, but the right side of the monument is lost and the inscribed surface is badly worn. The lower part of the stone is obliquely broken, which also deprives us of the end of the text. This damage occurred a long time ago because the patina covers the break. The left bottom at the back side preserves a rectangular hole cut into the stone and filled with a hard concrete-like material. This device might be an ancient repair. The inscription is carelessly engraved in a mixed round and square script under an incised stylized arch supported by two columns, as in our no. 2. The field of the arch is filled with hatchings. H. 57 W. 39 D. 15 cm. Maltese cross above the inscription. H. of letters: 3.3–6 cm. Fig. 6.

+
Με[. .]ίου
κλέος οἶδαν
ὄλοι κατὰ ἴχ[ν]ο[ς]
4 τοῖο, ὀδῖται, ἦσ[υ]-
χον ἀσκήσαντ[ος]
ἀεὶ βίον ἄχρι
τελευτῆς,
8 ζήσα[ντος]
[ἔτη - -]

L. 1. The name of the deceased man is expected here. Even if the first syllable should be long, Με[γεθ]ίου would fit both the size of the lacuna and the traces of letters in the middle of the line. Two hastae are visible after the first epsilon. The last letter before -ίου could be a theta as well as a beta or a rho. L. 2. οἶδαν: the second desinence is applied to the third person plural of the verb εἶδω in the perfect indicative active, as in Romanus Melodus, *Hymn.* 32, 4, 4, 8 and 9; the second syllable is normally a breve, contrary to that of the classical form οἶδᾶσι(ν). L. 4–5. After ὄλοι, one would expect to find a participle or an adjective of four syllables which would go with ὀδῖται. However, the still visible traces of letters do not encourage us to restore the text in this way. On the other hand, the reading κατὰ

¹⁶ Ζηνόβιος: Canova 1954, nos. 17, 211, 231(?) (Moab); Meimaris–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2005, 106, with further references.

¹⁷ Μαρία: Canova 1954, nos. 121–124, 275, 296, 360, 391 (Moab); Meimaris–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2008, nos. 44, 45(?) (Zoorā).

ἴχ[ν]ο[ς] τοῖο is not entirely sure. The article τοῖο would be used here instead of the demonstrative pronoun τούτου or instead of the possessive pronoun αὐτοῦ, cf. Hesychius, s.v. τοῖο· τούτο(υ) ἢ αὐτοῦ.

Lines 1–7 contain two verses:

Με[. . .]ίου | κλέος οἶδαν | ὅλοι κατὰ ἴχ[ν]ο[ς] |⁴ τοῖο, ὀδίται,
ἤσ[υ]λχον ἀσκήσαντ[ος] | ἀεὶ βίον ἄχρι | τελευτῆς.

“Passers-by, all those who have followed his footsteps know the glory of Me . . . , who always practised a gentle life until the end (and) who lived . . . years.”

As in our no. 2, the first hexameter is too long and the second one is correct. The deceased may have borne the name Μεγέθιος. This Greek name is common in Arabia. It is attested twice in Zoora. The feminine Μεγεθία has been found four times in Moab.¹⁸

II. Mu'tah or its surroundings

Mu'tah (lat. 31° 5' 31" N; long. 35° 41' 47" E) is located about 8 km south of Karak, at 1160 m above sea level. It is universally renowned as the place of the first clash between the Byzantine army and the Muslim conquerors in 629 AD.¹⁹ The modern town which has grown here since the beginning of the twentieth century is settled on the site of the ancient village of Motho.²⁰ Almost nothing remains of the old settlement,²¹ with the remarkable exception of twenty-two or twenty-three Greek epitaphs, seventeen of which are dated from 384 up to 652/653 AD.²² The two following inscriptions, today kept by private owners of Mu'tah, might well be added to this series.

6. Christian epitaph of Kyrikos

Rectangular tombstone of white limestone, broken on the top and in the upper angles. The front face is smoothed until the part of the monument that was stuck in the ground. Dimensions are unknown. The text is carelessly engraved in a mixed round and square script, inside an incised frame. Large linear cross with forked serifs in the middle of the first line; horizontal strokes above numerals (l. 5–6). Fig. 7.

Ἐν + θά-
δε κῆτε Κ-
ύρικος Σ-
4 αωρου ζ-
ήσας ἔτη ν',
ἔτους υιε',
μηνὸς Αὐδο-
8 νέου θ'.

L. 7–8. Αὐδολνέου for Αὐδυναίου.

“Here lies Kyrikos, son of Saoros, who lived fifty years, in the year 415, on the ninth of the month of Audynaios.”

¹⁸ Μεγέθιος: Meimaris–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2005, no. 28; Meimaris–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2008, no. 16 (Zoora). Μεγεθία: Canova 1954, nos. 125, 315, 381 (or Μεγεθίας, according to Mouterde 1957, 267), 409 (Moab).

¹⁹ Theophanes Confessor, *Chron.*, a. 6123, i.e. 630/1 AD (ἐν χωρίῳ ἐπιλεγμένῳ Μόθου). For the discussion of Arabic tradition, see Buhl 1990 and Kaegi 1992, 71–74.

²⁰ Stephanus of Byzantium, s.v. Μωθώ (quoting Uranius' *Arabica*), discussed in Bowersock 1997, 181, and Sartre 2005, 19, 381 nn. 70–71. The village of Motho is probably also mentioned in a pagan Greek dedication from Petra, *I. Jordanie* 4, no. 14, recently restored by Gatier 2007, 180–182 (*SEG* 57, 1931).

²¹ Miller (ed.) 1991, 119–120, site no. 304 (Mauta/Mōta).

²² Canova 1954, LXIII, 285–303, nos. 301–321 (el-Mōte); Meimaris–Mahasneh–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2007, 537–539, nos. 6–7. The dated inscriptions from Canova's corpus are republished by Meimaris 1992, chap. 9, nos. 189, 208, 213, 230, 234, 293, 325, 336, 345, 360, 386, 406–407, 454, 514. See also Gatier 2011, 8 n. 7.

The deceased man bears the name of Saint Kerykos (Κήρυκος, Κύρικος), a child who suffered martyrdom in Tarsus with his mother Saint Julitta (Ἰουλίττα) and whose cult was spread through Asia Minor, Palestine and Arabia.²³ This name was rather popular in the Near East. It may appear three or four times in the Christian inscriptions of the land of Moab.²⁴ On the contrary, the name of Kyrikos' father, Σαωρος, does not seem to have been recorded as it is up to now. It is probably the Greek transliteration of a Semitic name also spelled Σαωρεος in Zoorā.²⁵

Date: December 25, 520 AD (year 415 of the provincial era of Arabia).

7. Christian epitaph of Roumos

Rectangular tombstone of beige limestone, carefully smoothed on the front surface. Dimensions are unknown. The eight lines of the text are deeply and carefully engraved in a mixed round and square script. There was probably a cross at the beginning of the first line. Large linear cross with forked serifs at the end of the text; S-shaped abbreviation marks (l. 2, 8 and 9); ligatures OY (l. 2 and 4); horizontal strokes above numerals (l. 8 and 10). Fig. 8.

[+ Ἐνθ]ά-
 δε κῆτ(αι) Ρου-
 μοσ Σαβ-
 4 ίνου θ(ανών) ἐ[τ(ῶν)]
 μ', ἐ[κ]υμή-
 θεῖ μ(ηνι) Ὑ-
 περβερε-
 8 ταιῶ κ', τ(οῦ)
 υξθ', ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος)
 ζ'. +

L. 2. κῆτ(αι) for κεῖται. L. 4. θ(ανών) ἐ[τ(ῶν)] or, perhaps less probably, β(ιώσας) ἔ[τ(η)]: the first letter of θ(ανών) or β(ιώσας) is square and neither resembles the tau nor the beta of the inscription. L. 5–6. ἐ[κ]υμήθεῖ for ἐκοιμήθη.

“Here lies Roumos, son of Sabinos, dead at the age of forty years, he fell asleep on the twentieth of the month of Hyperberetaios, in the (year) 469, indiction 7.”

The two formulas θανών ἐτῶν, “dead at the age of ... years”, and ἐκοιμήθη, “he fell asleep (in death)”, appear only here in our series. The first phrase was written out in full probably in Karak and surely in Mu'tah.²⁶ The second formula is well attested in Moab as in Zoorā. The verb κοιμάομαι was used metaphorically in Christian epigraphy to designate death as a state of long sleep in anticipation of the resurrection.²⁷

The Hellenized Semitic name of the deceased man, Ρουμος (sometimes accentuated Ῥοῦμος by modern editors), is typical of Moabitic onomastics, and especially of Maḥay, southeast of the plateau.²⁸ It has

²³ Meimaris 1986, 122–123; Feissel 2006, nos. 517, 700, 728, 880, 882.

²⁴ Κύρικος; Canova 1954, nos. 295(?), 311 (in this inscription from Mu'tah, rather than Κυρικῶς, maybe read Κύρικας, with the usual confusion between alpha and omicron); Meimaris–Mahasneh–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2007, no. 21 (where the restoration [Κυρια]κός was preferred). In the epitaph from the environs of Karak published by Corbo 1963–1964, 237–238, no. 2, the name and the patronymic of the deceased woman should be read Φιλσίλα Κυ[ρί]κου instead of Φιλνίλα Κύλικου.

²⁵ Variant spellings of Σαωρος: Meimaris–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2005, nos. 236, 258, 307, with commentary on pages 325–326 (Σαωρεος in Zoorā); cf. e.g. SEG 7, 1032 (nominative Σαωρος at Namāra in southern Syria); 8, 6 (genitive Σαουρου at 'Ayn al-Ṭābgha, northwest of the Sea of Galilee); 40, 1478 (nominative Σαορας in the area of Jericho).

²⁶ Canova 1954, no. 189 (Karak); Meimaris–Mahasneh–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2007, nos. 6 (Mu'tah) and 13 (unknown provenance). The abbreviated version θ(ανών) ἐ(τῶν) α' (together with the verb ἐκοιμήθη) might be restored in Canova's no. 355 from Maḥay, instead of β(ιώσας) ἔτ(η) α'. Cf. also at Zoorā Meimaris–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2005, nos. 76, 90, 260; Meimaris–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2008, no. 24b.

²⁷ See Canova 1954, nos. 339, 355, 410, and maybe 192 (Moab); Meimaris–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2005, nos. 84, 106, with additional bibliography on page 176; Meimaris–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2008, nos. 13, 66 (Zoorā).

²⁸ Ρουμος; Canova 1954, nos. 354–355, 365–366, 376(?), 398, 400, 411; Meimaris–Mahasneh–Kritikakou–Nikolaropoulou 2007, no. 11. All these mentions come from Maḥay.

been considered as the hypocoristic of a theophoric name, the meaning of which could be: “(the god) is exalted.”²⁹ The common patronymic Σαβίνοϛ (Latin Sabinus) has already been found in the region. Its possible assimilation to Semitic names has been noticed for long.³⁰

Date: October 7, 574 AD (year 469 of the provincial era of Arabia) or 573 AD (indiction 7).

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²⁹ See Feissel–Gascou 2000, no. 17, with onomastic commentary and parallels (especially from Dura and the middle Euphrates region) on page 204. Ρουμος is also attested at Antioch (*IGLS* 3/1, no. 970: vocative Ρουμῆ) and in Josephus, *AJ* 1, 149 (nominative Ρουμος, accusative Ρουμον).

³⁰ Σαβίνοϛ: Canova 1954, no. 397; cf. Meimaris–Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou 2005, 335–336.

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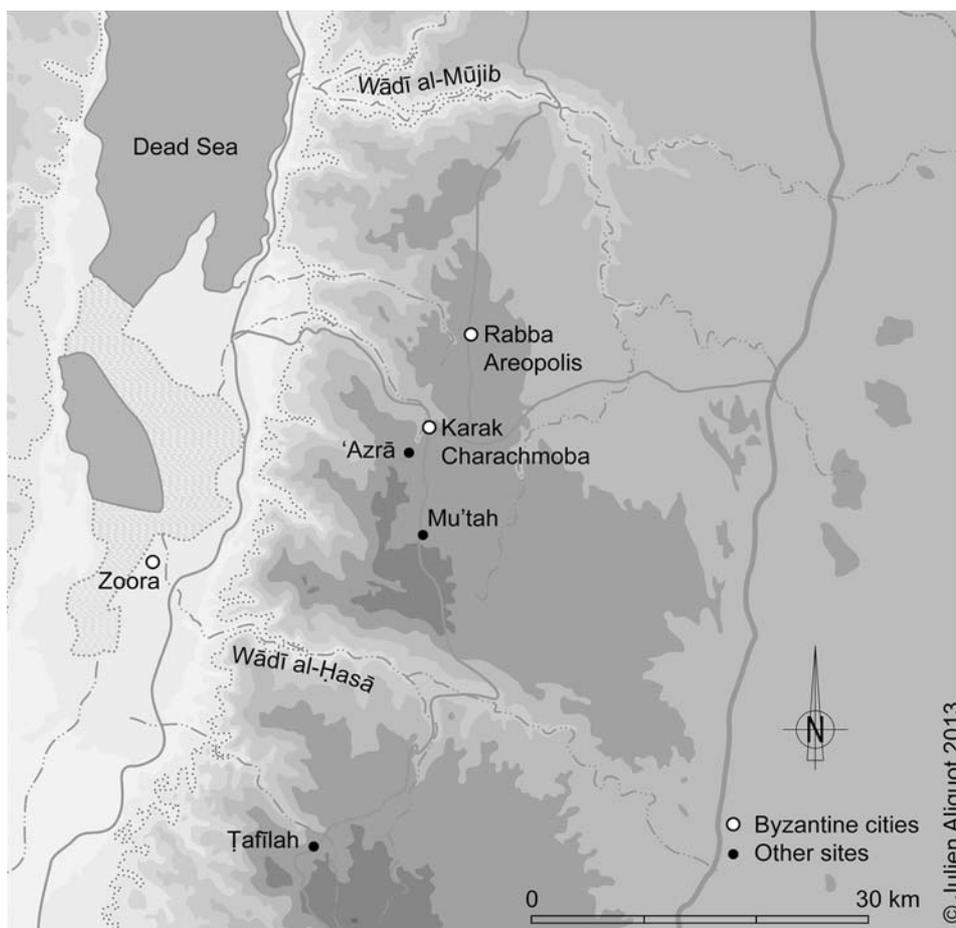


Fig. 1. Map of the Karak plateau



Fig. 2. Epitaph of Georgios and Anastasios,
from 'Azrā (no. 1)



Fig. 3. Christian funerary epigram of Zenobia,
from 'Azrā (no. 2)



Fig. 4. Christian epitaph of Zenobios,
from 'Azrā (no. 3)



Fig. 5. Christian epitaph of Maria,
from 'Azrā (no. 4)



Fig. 6. Christian funerary epigram,
from 'Azrā (no. 5)



Fig. 7. Christian epitaph of Kyrikos,
from Mu'tah or its surroundings (no. 6)



Fig. 8. Christian epitaph of Roumos,
from Mu'tah or its surroundings (no. 7)