Agriculture in sixth-century Petra and its hinterland, the evidence from the Petra papyri

Since their discovery in 1993 the Petra papyri have drawn the attention of both historians and archaeologists because of the amount of information they contain. They deal with the property of Theodoros, son of Obodianus, and his family in Petra and its vicinity in the period between AD 537 and 593.

This paper focuses on agriculture and its importance in Petra and the surrounding area in the sixth century AD, according to the information derived from the scrolls. It appears that agriculture played a major role in the economy of Petra and its hinterland at the time these documents were written. The papyri repeatedly mention agricultural lands throughout the region and in many cases specify their locations and toponyms. Some of the latter are significantly still in use. There is also information about springs, some of which are still active and contribute to local agriculture. Some papyri even contain information about the type of plants grown in the area. Finally, the authors present the current state of agriculture at selected places and compare it with the state of agriculture in the sixth century AD in the study area.

Keywords: Byzantine period, Petra, church, papyri, agriculture

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Introduction
Jordan has an extremely rich and long archaeological history. Both the Roman and Byzantine periods are mostly well represented through the results of regional fieldwork (Sauer 1982: 73). One of the most important resources for the history of Jordan in general and southern Jordan in particular during the Byzantine period is the Petra papyri. It can be said that these papyri are the only direct written information about Petra and its hinterland during the Byzantine period, although the work of ecclesiastical historians such as Eusebius (1904: 36: 13–14) provides much secondary information.

From the Petra papyri we know that the settled communities in the Petra area were not isolated from other parts of the empire (Caldwell 2001: 30). The papyri also attest that the city of Petra was not destroyed after the earthquake of AD 551, but continued to be occupied (Russell 1990: 37–60). Petra was still inhabited in the sixth century, and while it was perhaps not as prosperous as it had been, it was still capable of serving as a centre for the Byzantine administration in the province of Palaestina Tertia. The Petra papyri (or Petra archive) also contain valuable information about the social and economic situation of Petra during the sixth century AD, yielding important data on the population of Petra.

The papyri were found in a storage room in a Byzantine church complex at Petra during the excavations of the site by the American Center of Oriental research (ACOR) in...
December 1993 (Fiema, Schick & Amr 1995: 289–303; Frösén 2002: 18–24) (Fig. 1). The entire church had been destroyed by a fire, which most likely caused the burning of the scrolls (Koenen 1996: 177). Fortunately, the papyri were only carbonised and the dull black ink was still legible on a charred shiny black background (Bikai & Kooring 1995: 531; Peterman 1994: 242–243). The carbonised remains of 152 papyri scrolls containing documents written in Greek — the administrative language of the Byzantine Empire — were subjected to a conservation process by a team of Finnish conservators (Frösén et al. 1998: 484). The papyri cover a large portion of the sixth century. The earliest securely dated piece, Papyrus Petra 68, is from AD 537 and the latest papyrus, Papyrus Petra 44, is dated AD 593/4.

The contents of the papyri

The texts found in the scrolls constitute the largest group of written material from antiquity found in Jordan (Peterman 1994: 243). Most of the papyri still await analysis, but important information concerning Byzantine Petra and its hinterland has been revealed from the analysed scrolls. It should be noted that not all of the papyri could be saved and deciphered; some cannot be

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4 The papyri were quickly brought to the premises of ACOR in Amman. At this point they were completely black, fragile and embedded in burnt debris.

5 The material was divided into two groups to be worked on by two teams of papyrologists, one from the University of Michigan, headed by Ludwig Koenen, and the other from the University of Helsinki, headed by Jaakko Frösén.

6 The combination of the subjects of these papyri makes it a unique collection among papyri found in the Middle East and Egypt. For more details about these papyri see Bikai 1996: 487–489.

7 Until the reign of Maurice Tiberius (582–602).
opened at all, others yielded small fragments with little intelligible content (Frösén, Arjava & Lehtinen 2002: 4). Thus we cannot read all of the papyri and in some cases only words or isolated letters may be deciphered. All or most of the documents seem to be interrelated. Therefore, it is quite possible that the archive was owned by a single person, Theodoros, son of Obodianus, grandson of Obodius (Koenen 1996: 178).

In general, these documents deal with important property matters. Most of the Petra papyri are sworn and unsworn contracts concerning the acquisition of immovables by purchase, sale, testamentary, bequest, dowry and division of property (Koenen 1996: 180). The papyri are also legal documents regarding transactions, registration of property and settlement of disputes involving several Petra families over at least two generations (Koenen 1996: 180; Frösén, Arjava & Lehtinen 2002: 27).

They also mention local towns, churches and dwellings, sales, tax receipts, changes in tax responsibility, loans as well as the agricultural hinterland of Petra (Frösén et al. 1998: 484). Many professions and pursuits were attested in the archive such as farmers, a tailor, church officials, soldiers and their officers, a medical doctor and slaves — not only as property, but also as farmers (Bikai 1997: 343–344; 1994: 509–511). In addition, religious ranks and positions such as monks, priests, deacons and archdeacons (Frösén, Arjava & Lehtinen 2002: 23; Lehtinen 2002: 277–278) are also attested.

Many of the documents refer to Petra as Augustocolonia Antoniana Hadriana Metropolis of the Province Palaestina Tertia Salutaris. This title clearly reflects the importance of Petra as a centre of administration during the sixth century. The presence of Petra’s titles in the papyri illustrates the significance of the status of Petra for its inhabitants as they still recall its honourable titles not only in the Byzantine period but also in the Roman period (Caldwell 2001: 152).

Finally, it can be said that the Petra papyri offer very good evidence indicating that southern Jordan was densely populated in the Byzantine period, and showing that Petra did not lose all its importance. The archive points to the fact that land ownership was the backbone of Byzantine Petra’s society. It also offers information regarding the question of what happened to the Nabataean culture in Petra during the early Byzantine period (2001: 243).

**Nabataean agriculture**

When the Greek historian, Strabo (1930: 14.4.21) described Petra in the late first century BCE, he wrote that it was ‘abundant of water both for domestic purpose and for watering gardens’. Indeed, natural springs (Fig. 2) are known in the vicinity of Petra and the importance of a reliable water source to the inhabitants of this harsh and dry environment cannot be underestimated (Bedal 2002: 225). At an early stage of their history, religion and possibly common traditions had prohibited the Nabataeans, under pain of capital punishment, to grow wheat, trees and wine and to live in stone houses. But this changed rapidly (Diodorus Siculus 161, 93; 87, parags 6–94). As early as the Hellenistic period they turned to agriculture and became experts in water management and hydraulic techniques (Lawlor 1974: 76). They built the necessary aqueducts, cisterns, channels, dams and water reservoirs (Shqirat 2005: 160; Oleson 1995: 707). Furthermore, Strabo states that the Nabataeans had mastered the art of irrigation and enjoyed rich harvests of cereal and fruits from across the kingdom (1930: 16.4.21). A good indication of the farming practices of the Nabataeans during the second century AD is found in the Nabataean papyri (Yadin et al. 2002: 120) uncovered near ‘Ain Gedi west of the Dead Sea, which confirm that the Nabataeans had a lot of experience in agriculture.

Because of limited rainfall, which in the region of Petra occurs only in winter, the emphasis of the Nabataean water supply system was rain catchments and storage for use throughout the long dry summer months (Lawlor 1974: 77). When rain does come, it is usually in the form of sudden bursts making the hard soil and impermeable rock unable to absorb the water quickly enough (1974: 76). Instead, it flows rapidly across the surface and into the dry wadis where flash floods often develop, carrying topsoil along with rocks and debris, which are deposited in the wadis and catchment basins. In an effort to conserve precious natural resources, the Nabataeans built walls and terraces along entire wadi systems in order to trap silt and water on the slopes and spread it out for wider use (1974: 78).

In the Negev desert, for example, the main wadis were converted into U-shaped terraces to divert the water and silt into the side plots. Upstream conduits and collector walls led water to downstream plots that might otherwise have

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8 Most of the geographical names in the papyri have not been identified.
9 See Papyrus Petra 67. Petra titular is also found in Papyrus Petra 68. Names of other settlements, such as Augustopolis (Udhruh), Eleutheropolis (Beit Jibrin) and Zadakathon are mentioned (Bikai 1996: 487).
been missed when the floodwaters rushed by (Evenari & Koller 1956: 42–44). Dams were constructed across wadis to slow the flow of water and reduce its force and to store it for subsequent use (Hammond 1967: 39). This system allowed for the irrigation and cultivation of large field crops (mainly grain), as well as orchards and vegetable gardens to fulfil the demands of a growing population (Evenari & Koller 1956: 42–44; Hammond 1959: 201).

For many decades, archaeologists working in Petra believed that the extensive system of water channels, aqueducts, dams, cisterns and reservoirs — the remains of which are found throughout the ancient city — were engineered for the sole purpose of serving the domestic and civic needs of the city (Bedal 2002: 225). It seems that the people of Petra dedicated themselves to serve their city and cultivate it and they achieved this very successfully. Strange as it may seem, the people of Petra were successful agriculturists, as we shall see (Negev 1961: 134–135).  

In the Nabataean period we also found the same thing concerning the division of water (see below). Documents in the Nabataean language from the Wadi Habra west of the Dead Sea, give us an idea of the way the distribution of water between worker farmers in the Nabataean period was arranged. A document known by P. Yadin mentions that, ‘One that day (He) purchased (namely) Archelaus, Son of ‘Abad-’Amanu ……, The commander, from me, I,

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10 It is important to note that this success is not a chance one, as some scholars have stated by attributing their success to merely a piece of good fortune in this phase of their culture.
Abi-Adan daughter of ‘Aftah, son of Manigares, a plantation of date palms which is in Mahoz ‘Eglatain, including irrigation ditches and assigned watering periods’ (Yadin et al. 2002: 2, verso, line 3).

Agriculture in the Petra papyri
Concrete evidence about the Byzantine farming practices in the sixth century AD at Petra and its hinterland, has come to light with the unearthing of the carbonised papyri from the storeroom of the Petra church (Koenen 1996: 183). The new archive provides rich information about agriculture, and according to this archive it appears that agriculture was the backbone of Petra’s economy in the sixth century, particularly in its hinterland. The people mentioned in the scrolls possessed orchards, vineyards, threshing floors, grain land and other properties of an agricultural nature such as farmsteads and farmhouses (Fiema 2002: 215–216; Abudanah 2006: 24). Recent fieldwork in and around Petra revealed that many Byzantine remains (villages, hamlets, farmsteads, terraces and installations) (Fig. 3) appear more frequently to the east and south of Petra, where the higher elevation and more abundant rainfall permitted even non-irrigated agriculture (Fiema 2002: 207). The evidence of agriculture intensification in the Petra region in the Byzantine period corresponds to what we know about the eastern provinces in general during that period (Kouki 2009: 50).

Mention is made in these papyri of sown lands for wheat, vineyards and houses with adjoining orchards, which would have been irrigated by hand. This practice is still common in Jordan today. A further roll fragment mentions a ‘regular orchard’ which has been interpreted as referring to an irrigated orchard, as seems to be the case with similar papyri from Nessana in the Negev11 (Koenen 1996: 184). It is also interesting to note that the land divided up in Inv. 10 was scattered in plots across a relatively large geographical area, and that the individual fields were small in size, from around 2.6 acres (c. 1 ha) up to an occasional maximum of around 16 acres (c. 6.5 ha). As Koenen suggests, this reflects well-known methods of risk management where the availability of water could fluctuate wildly from year to year at different locations within a very localised area (1996: 184).

As previously mentioned, by the sixth century it is certain that Petra was still occupied and there is further evidence to show that the agricultural areas in Wadi Musa and Beyda to the north were also inhabited (Amr et al. 1998: 503–515).12 The Petra region was most likely part of a network of agricultural sites and provided a significant market for local agricultural products (Caldwell 2001: 24). It is important to note that most of the agricultural sites mentioned in the Petra papyri are still in use by the local people in Petra and Wadi Musa.13 These sites, such as al-Bassa and al-Hawawer (meaning ‘moist place’) (Gagos & Frösén 1998: 474), are still cultivated by the indigenous inhabitants and are still known by the same names. Some places are mentioned in Inv. 10; these places are located about 5 km north of Wadi Musa, including Umm al-Lawza (‘mother of almond trees’), and contiguous to it is part of the hillside called al-Rafeed (1998: 474).

It is also worth mentioning that the new Greek archive provided us with the names of three springs in Wadi Musa never referred to before: ‘Ain al-Bassa (Papyrus Petra 88; Gagos & Frösén 1998: 473) (Fig. 4), ‘Ain al-Eis (Papyrus Petra 88; Arjava, Buchholz & Gagos 2007: 195; Kaimio & Koenen 1997: 495) (Fig. 5) and ‘Ain Borakon (Papyrus Petra 88)14 (Fig. 6). These springs might have provided the city of Wadi Musa with water during the Byzantine and

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12 The evidence from the papyri also attests that part of Petra was still occupied as will be seen when discussing Inv. 10.
13 This area is possibly to be identified with Gaia, which is mentioned in Nabataean inscriptions (Healy 2001: 89–90; Al-Salameen 2004: 153).
14 ‘Ain Braq, located in the eastern hills a few kilometres south of Wadi Musa, was of secondary importance, mainly serving the agricultural lands and residences south of the city centre.
probably the Nabataean periods (Al-Salameen 2004: 153). At present, there are many springs (thirty) in Wadi Musa used to irrigate the agricultural fields which are cultivated with olive, vine, pomegranate and other trees (2004: 153). Clearly, the family of the archive owned much property in prime farmland around Wadi Musa.

**Agriculture in Petra’s hinterland**

The papyri discovered in the Petra church also revealed important information concerning the agricultural relationship between Petra and Udhruh (Fig. 7) in the sixth century (Koenen 1996: 187). The papyri clearly show that there was a tax collection office based in Petra responsible for tax collection not only for the lands of Petra but also for registered lands in nearby regions such as Augustopolis (Udhruh) (Fiema 2002: 215–216). This is quite significant since the Petra papyri confirm that the local administration, including tax collecting, remained active throughout the sixth century AD (2002: 215). Byzantine tax collectors and other officials seem to have used a road linking Petra and Udhruh and travelled between both cities as indicated by the fact that in AD 540 the collection of taxes for land registered in Augustopolis (Udhruh) was administered by a collegium of tax collectors in Petra (Koenen 1996: 188).
The collection of taxes for Petra and Augustopolis was shared and this may suggest that the two cities were close together. This in fact favours the identification of Udhruh with Augustopolis (1996: 188). If the identification of Augustopolis with Udhruh is correct, Udhruh is never referred to by this name but always by Augustopolis. Many scholars, particularly the analysts of the scrolls identify Augustopolis with modern Udhruh (Fiema 2002: 209). The list by Hierocles known as the Synekdemos which was written in c. AD 720 but records conditions in the fourth century, shows that each region of Palaestina Tertia had its own administrative cities that included Aila, Petra, Augustopolis (Udhruh), Arindela and Zoora (Hierocles 1939: 721.1–11).

Udhruh seems to have been a very important centre in southern Jordan in the Byzantine period. Mayerson states that Udhruh would have been prosperous since it was listed on the Beersheba Edict as paying the second highest amount of tax among the towns of southern Jordan (Mayerson 1986: 143–143; Watson 2001: 469). The region saw a rapid expansion of settlement and increased population during this period, which demonstrates that this region may have had a rural settlement pattern and widespread cultivation (Caldwell 2001: 20). Another factor for the prosperity of Udhruh during this period may be attributed to the trade route networks that were passing through this region (Fiema 1991: 220–221).

It has been noted that the available archaeological evidence from the region of Udhruh confirms a picture of an agricultural society during the Byzantine period. This survey portrays an area dominated by farmsteads and agriculturally based settlements during the Islamic periods also, taking into account that water resources and fertile soil were available (Abudanah 2006: 228).

In Scroll 60 dated to AD 540 a man registered a vineyard called Malouda (Gagos & Frösén 1998: 473–481) in the tax office at Petra; the property was previously registered in the local cadastre of Augustopolis (Udhruh) by his grandfather. It records the transfer of tax-paying responsibility on that property to the local authorities (1998: 473–481) to Theodoros, son of Obodianus. Papyrus Petra 72 is dated to AD 582–589. The document deals with various topics, a house and taxes in Augustopolis and a spring, Ain Tollat (Papyrus Petra 72; 1998: 479).

It is clear from Petra’s papyri that the agricultural products were exported to regional markets. Petra, Augustopolis (Udhruh) and towns like Sadaqa were not isolated places. The papyri also have much to say about agriculture in the Petra region. The scrolls confirm that wine, wheat and fruits from orchards were the characteristic products of ancient dry agriculture.

In Scroll 83 the text explains the settlement of a dispute over properties located in Zadakotha (Sadaqa) (1998: 479). The information derived from the Petra Papyri shows that Sadaqa (20 km south-east of Petra) was one of the major agricultural areas in the hinterlands of Petra (Abudanah 2006: 24; Fiema 2002: 16). The economic importance of Sadaqa is also attested in the Beersheba Edict, which lists the tax-paying towns in Palaestina Tertia (Mayerson 1986: 469). Papyrus Petra 83 contains a very long settlement of a dispute, made with the help of two arbitrators, between Theodoros, son of Obodianus, and Stephanos, son of Leontios. The dispute concerns rights of drawing water from a spring and leading it through neighbouring houses, the building of water channels and drains, and a similar disagreement that has arisen between the owners of two neighbouring houses in Zadakatha (Papyrus Petra 83; Bikai 1996: 488).

We should mention that disputes between farmers and inhabitants in Zadakatha and Petra over the distribution of water for domestic use or for agriculture are attested even in modern times. The accounts of elderly people in the above-mentioned areas point to repeated disputes concerning the share of water and carried water from one piece of land to another through neighbouring houses, which caused problems in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In order to solve this problem the local people created new methods of distributing spring water between the inhabitants alternately, especially the water of ‘Ain Musa (‘Moses’ spring’) (Figs 8 & 9), the main water source for Petra.

The agricultural community at Wadi Musa established a special system to control the issue of distributing water among the farmers to irrigate their farms. This system had judges, old men and experts who knew the apportionment

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15 Unknown site.

16 For more recent studies on Sadaqa see Al-Salameen, Twaissi & Abudanah 2009: 397–416.

17 ‘Ain Musa is a perpetual spring, which was channelled by the Nabataeans all the way to Petra 5 km away. It is the most famous, abundant and rich spring in the region, located in the eastern hills approximately 5 km from the city centre, covers one third of the daily need of the agricultural sector in the region, and pumps at least 500 m³/day. It is situated 1300 m above sea level. The spring was linked by a network of cement channels built on the remnants of a network of channels made of old pottery and stone.
of water and had the ability to solve problems and disputes between the local people. The distribution of water also had rules, and the water was divided according to land rather than persons.\textsuperscript{18}

One of the most important papyri among the archive of Petra is Papyrus Petra 10 (Bikai 1996: 488), which is dated to AD 527/537. From this papyrus we find information about settled communities and agriculture. The papyrus reports a division of property among three brothers, Bassus, Epiphanios and Sabinus (1996: 488). The type of property is listed in the same order: vineyards are listed first, followed by sown land, slaves and housing complexes with orchards. All of the vineyards were located near a village called Serila,\textsuperscript{19} while other sown lands were located in a village called Ogbana.\textsuperscript{20} The nature and location of these properties are not clear from the papyrus. The brothers divided 85 \textit{iugera}\textsuperscript{21} among themselves, the fields that border the fields subject to the division are usually owned by one or two of the brothers or by other relatives (1996: 488). It is noteworthy that in roll Inv. 10, as well as in some other rolls, districts, fields, orchards and even parts of houses have Greek transcriptions of Semitic, mostly Arabic names. For example, one of the papyri refers to a dry orchard called Gannath al-salam (`garden of peace') (1996: 488). It is clear that these people, while using Greek in their documents, named their houses and fields in their own tongue, most likely a dialect of Arabic, and this may indicate that the bulk of Petra's inhabitants were Arab (1996: 488).

Inv. 67 is written by Flavios Dusarios son of Valens who had been prefect of Kastron Ammatha (modern al-Hammam) (Koenen 1996: 185; Genequand 2003: 25), which lies to the south-east of Udhrui near modern Ma'anan. This site, which may have been founded in the fourth century, contains the remains of an extensive settlement including a large reservoir and aqueduct (Fiema 1991: 220; Parker 1986: 100–103) (Fig. 10). This papyrus offers new insight into Flavios Dusarios, son of Valens, who was a citizen from Petra and held a post in Ammatha. He requests the keeper of the public records (Alpheios, son of Valens) to transfer tax responsibility for a piece of land (part of which was a vineyard) to Theodoros, son of Obodianus. The property was located near Kastron Zadakotha (modern Sadaqa) (Papyrus Petra 67; Gagos & Frösén 1998: 473).

Inv. 4 deals with the settlement of a division of inherited property, written in Gaza in AD 538 on the twelfth regnal year of Justinian (Papyrus Petra 4; 1998: 473). Papyrus Petra 9 also talks about a written contract concerning the sale of real property, including the right to pasture (1998: 473). Papyrus Petra 13 and Papyrus Petra 14 deal with the same issue. Papyrus Petra 14 (AD 538) is a registration of an agreement concerning real estate. The documents deal

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} For more details about this aspect of Petra culture see Nawafleh 2004: 25–28.
\item \textsuperscript{19} This village is unknown. It is thought to be located in the suburbs of Petra, as there are many farms and agricultural land still in use today.
\item \textsuperscript{20} The location of this place is uncertain.
\item \textsuperscript{21} One \textit{iugera} is equal to about 0.65 acres (c.0.26 ha).
\end{itemize}
with tax payments by Panolbios, which were received by a tax official, Euthenios, son of Dousarios (1998: 477).

**Taxes and land tenure**

A city like Petra would use the recorded total tax liability to determine how much tax the committees would collect from each payer based on the assessment received from the central administration. The total request would in turn be divided by the amount of liability that each taxpayer was registered for in the cities accounts (Caldwell 2001: 76). From tax records, it appears that in many cases regional fluid and capacity measures were used to determine the size of fields. They measured a field by the amount of seed needed to sow it. This makes sense when local conditions did not allow farmers to sow the entire area regularly. This easily occurs in dry agriculture when the amount of rain or other water changes from one year to the next or when rocks and migrating stones and sand render part of the area infertile.

In general, land around Petra was measured in Roman iugera (2001: 76) and it is clear from the papyri that taxation was based on a fixed fiscal unit calculated according to the type, amount and quality of the land. Therefore, different types of land would be taxed at different rates, so all land cannot be lumped together under one measurement. The Petra papyri show that tax collectors from Petra and Augustopolis used the system of taxation based on the registration and classification of land prescribed by the Byzantine state. The accounts of tax liability were kept in records for the cities of Petra and Augustopolis (2001: 76). In Inv. 64 and 66 we found that land registered in Augustopolis was subject to the tax office in Petra (Papyrus Petra 64 and 66). It seems that there were tax collectors from both cities, but all updates may have been kept in Petra. There is only one clear example in Papyrus Petra 10 of an official from Augustopolis (apparently not attested), Euthenius, son of Dousarius. The origin of the official who issued receipts in Inv. 69 is unclear. Augustopolis is a possibility; but Petra may be mentioned in those receipts as well. It is quite possible that taxpayers owned property in areas of both cities. These arrangements suggest that Petra retained its importance as a local centre of administration since it was the metropolis.

The land that was used for vineyards differed from the land that was ideal for sown land. For the former, rocky soil on slopes served best (2001: 36), while seed land in the Petra area was near slopes in order to take advantage of run-off. One of the fields of roll 10 was bordered by a ‘torrent’, i.e. a wadi that turns into a torrent after rainfall (Koenen 1996: 185) (Fig. 11). It should be noted that Papyrus Petra 10 reveals some neighbouring lands (Peterman 1994: 243); one plot has neighbouring fields on all four sides (Papyrus Petra 10, 161–163). In the other three entries, one plot is bounded on three sides by roads while the other has ‘dry’ land to the south and north (Papyrus Petra 10). Here it can be said that some of the land in Petra and the surrounding areas is not suitable for

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**Fig. 10.**
Large reservoir/Kastron Ammatha. (Photo by the authors).

**Fig. 11.**
A field bordered by a ‘torrent’ (wadi). (Photo by the authors).

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22 Rocky soil is beneficial for vines, figs and olives because it forces roots to go deep into the soil to reach the moist earth.
cultivation because it is too rocky while other land is not irrigated and depends on rainwater. There are many instances in Papyrus Petra 10 attesting that fields and vineyards were located on slopes. One field, whose name is lost, consists of two *iugera* described as located below another place (Papyrus Petra 10, 143–145) (clear evidence for terraced fields). This kind of agriculture is still common in the region in general.

With regard to land tenure (Cotton 1997: 255–265) in the Petra papyri, it is important to note that Papyrus Petra 10 asserts the rights of individual brothers to the land and their ownership (Papyrus Petra 10, 192–195). It is clear that the land is registered in the individuals’ names. Importantly, there is no difference between the evidence for private land ownership seen in the Petra archive and that found in the Elephantine documents (Caldwell 2001: 63).

**Conclusion**

The Petra archive is a reliable and unique source for understanding the different aspects of life in sixth-century Petra. The archive offers valuable information concerning the social, economic (including agriculture), legal and administrative situation. This paper has mainly considered the status of agriculture and other relative issues in Petra throughout the sixth century. The Petra Papyri provide valuable information to indicate that agriculture was a major economic source for Petra’s inhabitants, and also reflect the importance of agricultural pursuits for the local economy and the concentration of landownership in the sixth century AD. The Petra papyri indicate that arable lands were continuously kept under cultivation, some of which still have the same names. This may be indicative of continuous use during successive periods.

**References**


