

## PRESENCE OF *BYZANTINIA* (RODENTIA, CRICETODONTINAE) IN THE LATE MIOCENE OF LEBANON

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*Byzantinia* is a Cricetodontinae of which nine species are known to date. *Byzantinia* originated in Anatolia in late Middle Miocene time and became extinct at the end of the Miocene. Until now, it was known only from Anatolia and Greece. However, various isolated molars of *Byzantinia* have been collected at a new locality, situated immediately northwest of the town of Zahleh (Bekaa Valley, central Lebanon). These fossils are indeed the first remains of *Byzantinia* from the whole Arabian area. They provide thereby the first physical evidence of the dispersal of these rodents into Afro-Arabia. The molars of the Lebanese taxon are slightly hypsodont. The second upper molars are characterized by showing a “funnel” structure on the occlusal surface, which allows to differentiate the taxon to which they belong from all the known species of the genus but *B. eskihisarensis*, *B. sofcaensis*, *B. nikosi* and *B. ozansoyi*. The Zahliote *Byzantinia* is noticeably smaller than all the known species of the genus except for *B. nikosi* and *B. ozansoyi*. The marked reduction of the posterior part of the third upper molar shows that it probably belongs to neither of these two small species of *Byzantinia*. Therefore, we are inclined to regard the specimens from Zahleh as a new, relatively small species of *Byzantinia*, which represents an evolutionary stage very close to *Byzantinia ozansoyi*, from the Late Miocene site of Bayraktepe I (MN7+8). Accordingly, we infer that the lacustrine sediments from which these new specimens have been recovered are early Tortonian in age.