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TWO ROMAN MILESTONES FROM THE SOUTHERN GOLAN HEIGHTS

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Introduction

In this article, readings of two previously unpublished milestone inscriptions coming from southern Golan Heights, Israel, are presented. The two milestones in question (IMC 212 and 250)¹ were found in the 1970s on the north-western terrace of Lawiye spur, east of Moshav Ramot, during agricultural work (Fig. 1).²

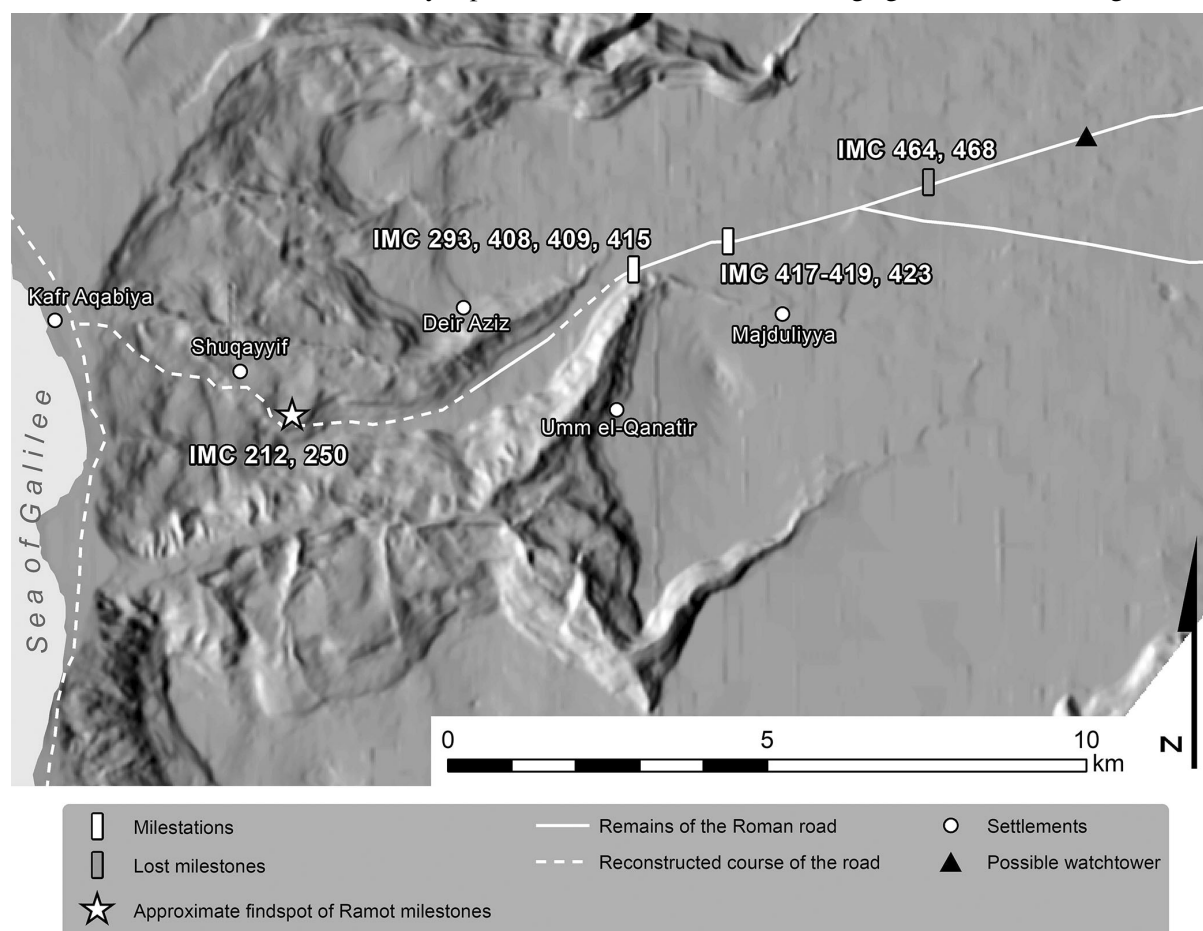


Fig. 1. Findspots of the milestones mentioned in the text

The milestones were briefly described in the publication of the Golan Survey (Hartal/Ben Efraim 2012a: site no. 86). They were erected on a Roman Imperial Highway connecting the road circling the Sea of Galilee with Nawa in southern Syria in the east, with a southern branch crossing the Roman bridge over Ruqqad River (Jisr e-Ruqqad; Schumacher 1888: 165–167) and continuing south-east towards the city of Dion (Tell el-‘Ashari) and Adraha (Der‘a; Fig. 2; Habas-Rubin 1995; Roll 2009).

¹ All milestones mentioned in the article are referenced to by their number in the Israel Milestone Committee (IMC) database, available at <http://milestones.kinneret.ac.il/en>.

² Discovered by Naftali Reuveni in whose custody both milestones are currently located. We would like to thank him for kindly allowing their study and providing the context of their finding.

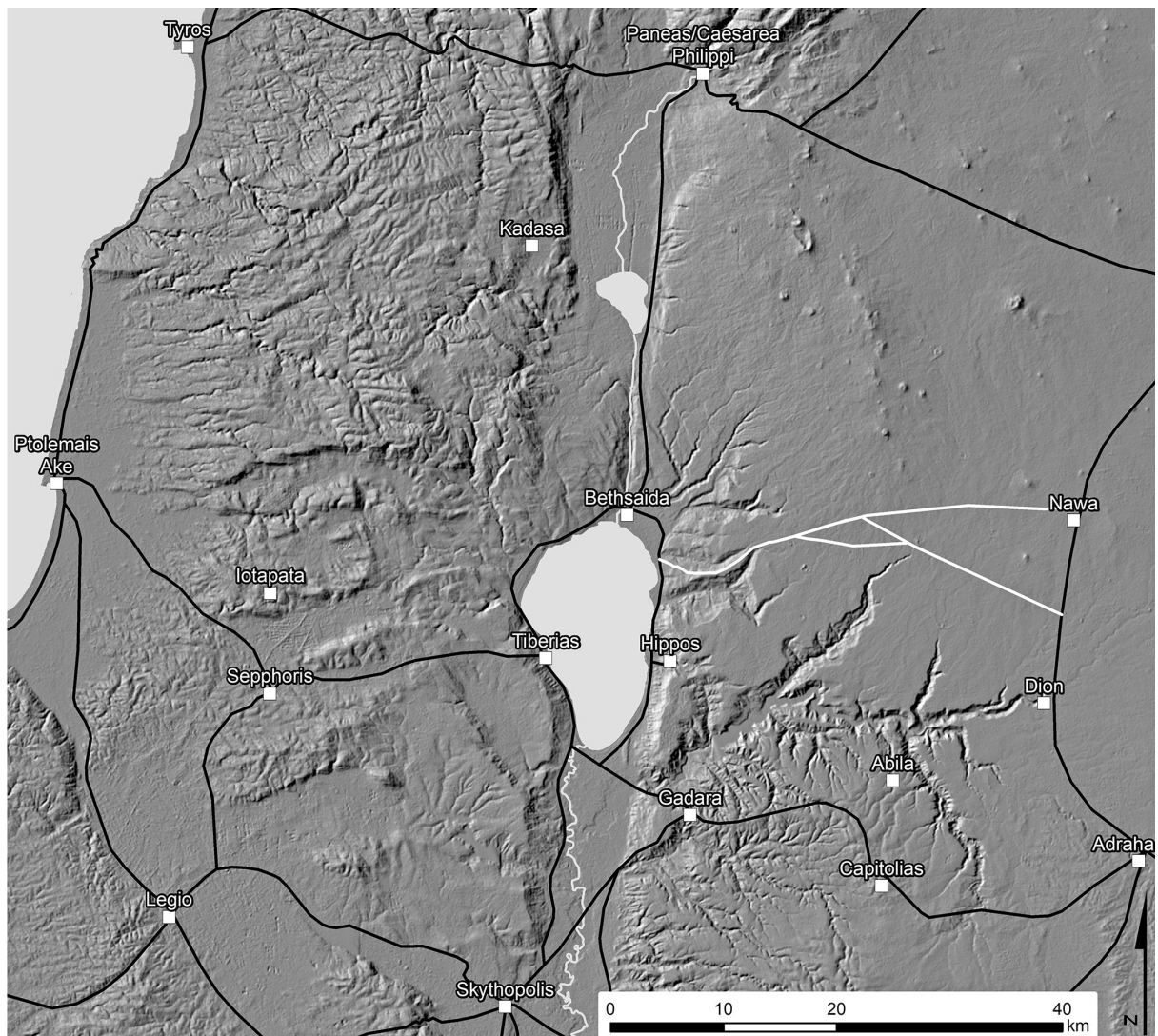


Fig. 2. The course of the road crossing the southern Golan Heights (in white) in relation to other Roman roads in the region

The course of the road is well preserved on the Golan plateau from the Lawiye spur to the east. However, no road remains were found on the western part of the Lawiye spur or on the slopes below it. Given the position of the two milestones treated in this paper, the road probably descended on the north-western slopes of Lawiye spur and bypassing the ancient settlement at Shuqayyif³ descended westbound towards the Sea of Galilee, roughly in the area of Kafr Aqabiya (a-Duka) where it joined the Roman road circling around the lake. This course is supported by recent surveys and GIS analyses (Pažout 2017).

At least two watchtowers are known to be built along the course of the road east of the findspot of the milestones: el-Qusayyibe East (Hartal/Ben Efraim 2012b: site no. 79)⁴ and a tower excavated by Z. U. Ma'oz in 1981 (Ma'oz 1982), both dated from the late 2nd c. to the late 3rd c. AD. The two towers are placed at a distance of ca. 1 Roman mile (ca. 1,500 m on the ground) and each is associated with additional milestones. A putative third watchtower was recently surveyed ca. 4 Roman miles east of Ma'oz's tower on the northern branch of the road (without milestone finds). Apart from the two milestones from Ramot, 10 milestones are known from this road in the Golan Heights (Fig. 1).

³ Also known as el-Mesherfawi.

⁴ In October 2019 excavated on behalf of the Hippos Regional Project by M. Eisenberg, M. Osband and A. Pažout (IAA excavation license G-4/2019).

Four milestones (IMC 293, 408, 409 and 415) are found at el-Qusayyibe East, another four (IMC 417, 418, 419 and 423) are located by the tower excavated by Ma'oz (Hartal/Ben Efraim 2012b: site no. 111). Two milestones (IMC 464, 468) were recorded in the past to the east of the excavated towers, ca. 800 m east of the modern asphalt road (Hartal/Ben Efraim 2012b: site no. 103), but they have been lost for several years.⁵ Milestone finds from the continuation of the road west of Nawa in Syria were recently published by M. Sartre and A. Sartre-Fauriat (IGLS XIV 2 p. 411–415 Nawa M1-6). To date, no Roman milestones from the southern Golan Heights were read and published, which underlines the importance of the two milestone inscriptions published here. Both are hewn from local basalt, which forms upper layer of the Golan plateau and is ubiquitous as a building material.

The following readings are based on personal examination of the stones, photographs and squeezes, taken in July 2018 and now stored at Cologne. The photographs published by the Israel Antiquities Authority on which putative letter traces are marked with chalk can also serve as points of reference (Fig. 5).

No. 1 Milestone of the first tetrarchy, 293–305 AD (IMC 212; Fig. 3)

Total height: 1.37 m – Shaft height: 1.00 m – Upper diameter: 0.35 m – Lower diameter: 0.41 m – Base (w. l. h.): 0.40 × 0.42 × 0.37 m

The shaft is almost square right above the base and then rounded to the top. The stone itself is well preserved, lightly worn on the top of the shaft. Approximately 11 lines with letters of 8–10 cm in height are recognisable.

- 1 [---]
 2 [---]
 3 [---]
 4 AVÇ I[---]
 5 FĪ VΛ[---]
 6 TIO Ī O[. . .] .
 7 Š Ī Ī Ī CAES[---]
 8 AVRGAΛ[.]X[---]
 9 ANO[---]
 10 [.]C . A [---]
 11 [.] Ī . L Ī [---]
- 1–3 [--- DIOCLETIANO ET--- MAXIMIANO ---]
 4 AVÇ(VSTIS) E[T]
 5 FL(AVIO) VΛ[L(ERIO) CONSTAN]
 6 TIO NO[BILI]S
 7 ŠĪM(O) CAES[A(RI) ET C(AIO)]
 8 AVR(RELIO) GAΛ(ERIO)[MA]X[IMI]
 9 ANO [NOBILISSI]
 10 [M]O (?) [C]A[ESARI (?)]
 11 MĪL(IA) P(ASSVVM) [---] (?)



Fig. 3. IMC 212

On this milestone TIO in line 6 in connection with the rest of line 5 leads to the restoration of the 12 letters FL VΛ[L CONSTAN]]TIO, naming *Flavius Valerius Constantius* (*Chlorus*), who has been *Caesar* (since 1 March 293 AD) with *Gaius Galerius Valerius Maximianus* (perhaps since 21 May 293 AD) in the first

⁵ Haim Ben David, personal communication.

tetrarchy (March 1, 293 – May 1, 305 AD), while *Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus* and *Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maximianus* were *Augusti*. Thus, the names of the both *Augusti* are to be supplemented in the lost lines at the beginning.

In line 6 and the beginning of line 7 there is space for supplementing an official title after [CONSTAN]TIO before a new person with the *nomen gentile* AVR (l. 8) is introduced at the very end of line 7. Considering the parallels, NOBILISSIMO CAESARI (possibly abbreviated) is to be expected in the inter-space. This is well in line with the rounding for O, recognisable at a distance of about two letter spaces after TIO. The ending of the attribute in line 7 seems to be misspelled in the form NO[BILI]S[İ]M[İ] or it was shortened to NO[BILI]S[İ]M.

A problem arises with the certain reading AVR in line 8 preceding ANO in line 9, since Galerius, whose name has to be expected here, normally did not bear the *nomen gentile Aurelius*. So we have to assume that Galerius was misstated here. Although milestones are official documents in form of a dedication to the Emperors who are responsible for the construction measures, mistakes and anomalies are not uncommon on them, even more in remote regions.⁶ The same error as in the Golan inscription occurs in three milestones from Jordan, all of the second tetrarchy 305/6 AD: one from Khirbet al-Samra at the Philadelphia-Bostra road (Bauzou 1998: 217f. no. 126, cf. p. 121f. BA XXXI F), the so called *via nova*, built under Trajan, a second, about 15 km east of that findspot, from Al-Qihati (Kennedy/Al-Husan 1996: 261 no. 12 pl. IV) and, some kilometres north of it, a third one (Aliquot/Al-Husan 2015: 362 no. 1), probably belonging to the same side road of the *via nova* (cf. ibd. 361). As far as the remains suggest, all three stones present Constantius' coregent Galerius mistakenly as an *Aurelius* by calling him like Maximianus AVR VAL instead of GAL VAL.⁷

Lines 10 and 11 are supplemented here in a highly speculative manner.

No. 2 Milestone of Trebonianus Gallus, 251–253 AD (IMC 250; Figs. 4 and 5)

Total height: 1.56 m – Shaft height: 1.14 m – Upper diameter: 0.32 m – Lower diameter: 0.53 m – Base (w. l. h.): 0.42 × 0.52 × 0.42 m

The shaft is strongly elliptic in cross-section above the squared base, sharply narrowing and lightly rounding towards the top. Wears and cracks are apparent all over the shaft. Nine lines are recognisable with letters of 8–11 cm in height.

- 1 İM . .
- 2 [.]EŞA
- 3 RICAİ
- 4 OVIBIO
- 5 T̄REBON
- 6 [.]IANV
- 7 [. .]Aİ İ Q
- 8 [.]IO[.]EL
- 9 İÇ[.] AVÇ

⁶ Salama 2004.

⁷ According to an old copy of a now worn milestone from ancient Archelais in Cappadocia the inscription might have shown the same mistake (French 2012: 265f. no. 160 [2] l. 9–12): CAES FLA | CONSTANTIO | ET CAIO A[VR VAL] | MAX-IM[IANO]), though already in CIL 14186 a misreading of GAL V[AL] is suspected. – Cf. similar confusions in a milestone from Sardinia (AE 1979, 303; 2005, 690) and ILS 653 with note 2: “Aurelii nomen rarissime datur Galerio.”



Fig. 4. IMC 250



Fig. 5. IMC 250 with chalk outlines of putative letters (Hartal/Ben Efraim 2012a: site no. 86; courtesy of Yigal Ben Efraim)

- 1 IMP C
- 2 [A]ESA-
- 3 RI CAI
- 4 O VIBIO
- 5 TREBON-
- 6 IAN'O'
- 7 [G]ALLO
- 8 [P]IO [F]EL-
- 9 IC[I] AVG(VSTO)

l. 6 stone: V

The pivotal point for the reconstruction presented here is the letter sequence VIBIO | TREB in the lines 4/5. It leads to Trebonianus Gallus (June ? 251 – Aug. ? 253 AD) who became emperor after the death of Decius under the full name *Imp. Caes. C. Vibius Trebonianus Gallus*. Milestones testifying his activity in road building are known from almost all provinces of the Roman Empire. Next to our findspot a *miliarium* dedicated to Trebonianus Gallus is documented on the Pella-Philadelphia road via Gador (Huppenbauer 1962: 178f. pl. 16 A/B = SEG 1969/70: no. 629). Like the inscription from the Golan Heights it offers the name components CAESARI CAIO unabbreviated. The reconstruction of lines 7–9, hardly readable on the Golan milestone, is based on the common short form of the titulature.

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