

NOTES ON ROMAN MILESTONES FROM KHIRBAT BADRĀN¹ PRELIMINARY REPORT

by

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In 1899, during the exploration of the *Gerasa/Philadelphia* Roman road by Germer-Durand, two members of his group found, at nine miles from 'Ammān "...a road going north and which is probably the joint of the Roman road to Gerasa. Going on that road for a distance of one mile [so at ten miles from 'Ammān and apparently in the surroundings of Khirbat Badrān], two of us found a group of milestones. Four columns are still standing but buried deep. Only one bears a visible inscription. Due to lack of time and tools to excavate it, we could only copy the first lines:

IMPCAES
DIVIMFILDIVIPII
NEPOTIDIVIHADRI
ANIPRONEPMAVR
////////////////////ANTO
[...]

IMP(eratori) CAES(ari) DIVI M(arci)
FIL(io) DIVI PII NEPOTI DIVI HAD-
RIANI PRONEP(oti) M(arco) AUR(elio)
[Commodo] ANT(onino).....

The name of Commodus has been erased, as on almost all inscriptions of that Prince, but the list of the ancestors is enough to identify the personage".²

As the emperor's first name mentioned is M(arcus) and not L(ucius), that inscription was most probably carved between 180 and 191 AD.

Inscriptions of Commodus are known on the *Via Nova*³ and in the Jordan Valley⁴ but the one found in Khirbat Badrān by Germer-Durand is actually the only one known from that emperor in the area between Gerasa and Philadelphia.

That inscription, and the three other milestones, which Germer-Durand considered as coming from the *Gerasa/Philadelphia* Roman road,⁵ were never seen later – they were considered lost.

The new survey of the *Gerasa/Philadelphia* Roman road done after the accidental discovery in January 1995 of a group of unknown inscribed columns on top of the Jabal al-'Ālūk,⁶ led us to re-examine all past information on that road and to check them on the ground, from Jarash to 'Ammān. From this survey, it appeared that

1. We would like to express our gratitude to Dr Ghazi Bisheh, Director-General of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, for his assistance and support, and to the Jordanian Army for kindly giving us special authorization for entering a military area.
2. J. Germer-Durand, *Nouvelle exploration épigraphique de Gerasa*, *RB* 8, 1899; 37 et 38. That inscription is registered in CIL under number 14173/1.
3. At miles 11, 12?, 14, 15?, 19?, 20?, 21?, 22, 24, 25?, 26?, 36?, 38?, 41, 44?, 47, ... Inscriptions numbered 12, 19, 21, 26, 45, 49, 60, 66, 71, 77, 87, 100, 107, 113, 116, 119 in Th. Bauzou, *A Finibus Syriae, Recherches sur les routes des*

frontières orientales de l'Empire Romain, Paris 1989 (unpublished). Most of the inscriptions, erased under Pertinax, are reattributed by Th. Bauzou to Commodus on paleographical grounds. Inscriptions 133 and 138, were found near al-Fedein.

4. See Th. Bauzou, *op. cit.*, inscriptions nos 298, 300 and 303.
5. J. Germer-Durand considered that the *Gerasa/Philadelphia* Roman road was passing by Khirbat Badran. J. Germer-Durand, *op. cit.*: 37.
6. A.-M. Rasson-Seigne et J. Seigne, *Notes préliminaires à l'étude de la voie romaine Gerasa/Philadelphia*, *ADAJ* 30, 1995: 193 - 210.

the group of milestones seen by Germer-Durand's friends was not on the *Gerasa/Philadelphia* road but, apparently, on a possible branch of that road, going to the west, maybe to Palestine.⁷ From Germer-Durand's information, the location of the stones found one century ago was estimated to be Khirbat Badrān, now a military camp. Fortunately, an authorization to visit that area was given by the Jordanian Army, and with the help of General Hamad Mahmoud Knian and officer Abdallah Salem,⁸ four pieces of three different columns were found inside the camp, on the east slope of the Khirbat Badrān hill. Apparently, some years ago, all these blocks were standing together, in the same place. Unfortunately the road, used by the army's trucks, was bulldozed and renewed. During that operation the milestones were moved some metres to the north-east from their original position. The four fragments lie today on the east side of the track, some of them partially buried. It seems quite sure that they are from the group of the "four columns which were still standing but deeply buried" seen by Germer-Durand's friends in 1899. Unfortunately, the Commodus milestone was not found during our survey⁹ but one of the biggest fragments found in 1995 bears an almost complete inscription.

Milestone 2¹⁰ (Fig. 1)

Upper part of a milestone of white hard limestone.

Preserved length: 114 cm, upper diameter: 53 cm, lower diameter: 58 cm.

Height of letters: 6,5 cm. Letters very

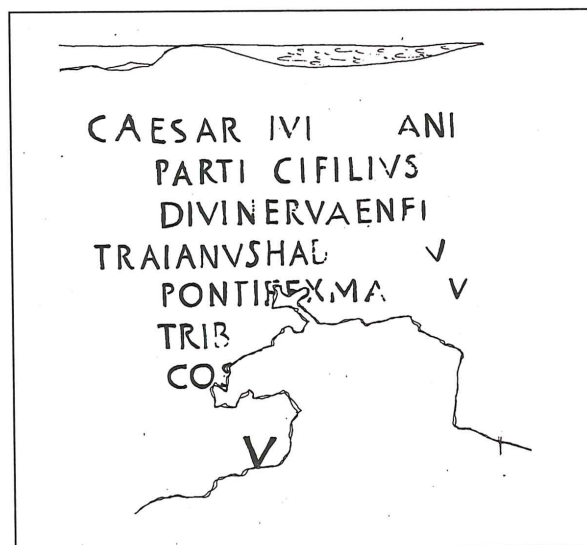
regular and well-cut. Traces of natural weathering on the right side.

Vertical axial composition of the text. The first visible letters are CAESAR. There is sufficient space between the top of the column and CAESAR for only one line of text, but no trace of a single letter is visible. However, it seems quite difficult to imagine that the text did not start with IMP.

1 [IMP] ?
 CAESAR[...]IVI[...]ANI
 PARTH[...]CIFILIVS
 DIVINERVAENFI
 5 TRAIANVSHAD[...]V[...]
 PONTIFEXMA[...]V[...]
 TRIB[...]
 COS[...]

X
 10 [I ?]

That inscription can be reconstructed as

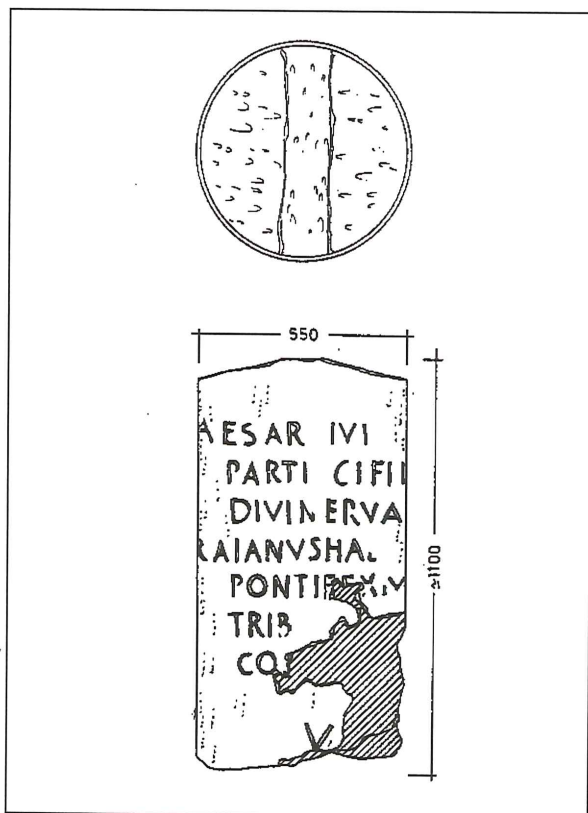


7. A.-M. Rasyon-Seigne et J. Seigne, *op. cit.*: 208. An other possibility could be that these milestones were taken from the *Gerasa/Philadelphia* road and carried to Khirbat Badrān, for building purposes, in the eighteenth century or earlier. The site of Khirbat Badrān is actually covered with ruins of medieval buildings (massive amount of so-called Ayyubid/Mamluk painted pottery) there are even remains of Iron Age constructions.

8. Thanks for their kind support and to all officers and soldiers from Khirbat Badrān camp for their nice welcome and help during that survey.

9. It may have been buried under the path during the renewal of the track.

10. In this article the inscribed milestone seen by Germer-Durand's friends last century is considered as number 1. The new ones are numbered 2, 3, etc.



1. Milestone 2.

[IMP] ?
 CAESAR [D]IVI [TRAI]ANI
 PARTH[I]CI FILIVS
 DIVI NERVAE NE[POS]
 TRAIANVS HA[DRIAN]V[S A]V[G]
 PONTIFEX MA[XIM]V[S]
 TRIB [POTES XIII]
 COS [III REFECIT]

X?
 [I ?]

and completed as follows:

[IMP(erator)]/ CAESAR [d]IVI
 [TRAI]ANI/ PARTH[I]CI FILIVS/ DIVI
 NERVAE NE[POS]/ TRAIANVS HA
 [DRIAN]V[S A]V[G](ustus)/ PONTIFEX

MA[XIM]V[S]/ TRIB(uniciae) [POTES(ta-
 tis) XIII]/ CO(n)S(ul) [III REFECIT]/ X ?
 (millia passuum) /[ten in Greek ?]

Translation

The Emperor Caesar, son of the Holy Trajan the Parthian, grandson of the Holy Nerva, Trajan Hadrianus, Augustus, Great Pontiff, entrusted with the Tribunal Power for the thirteenth time, Consul for the fourth time, repaired (the road). Ten miles ?(from Philadelphia).

The Latin letter, engraved under the text and indicating the distance from Philadelphia, is just on the broken line of the stone. It has been restored as the upper part of fragmented letter X because that stone was found approximatively at 10 miles from 'Ammān. But the reading could also be the complete letter V from fragmented number VIII or VIII. In that case we would have to consider that the milestone was not found in its original location and was most probably taken from milestation nine from Ammān for building purposes.¹¹

It is also possible that the indication of the distance was inscribed in Greek, under the sign in Latin, on the missing lower part of the block.

That inscription is apparently the same as the one found in the last century on the *Gerasa/Philadelphia* road, 6 miles from 'Ammān.¹² Like that one, the newly discovered inscription could be dated to 129. These are the only two milestones of the same type discovered in the area. They possibly indicate that the road between Gerasa and Philadelphia had been restored for the visit of the Emperor Hadrian in the region in 129/130.¹³

The other known milestones of that em-

11. See no. 7.

12. CIL 14168. J. Germer-Durand, *Exploration épigraphique de Gerasa*, RB 1895: 396. R.E. Brünnow et A. von Domaszewski, *Die Provincia Arabia II*, Strassburg, 1904: 228. That inscription is numbered 232 by Th. Bauzou in his thesis, *op. cit.*

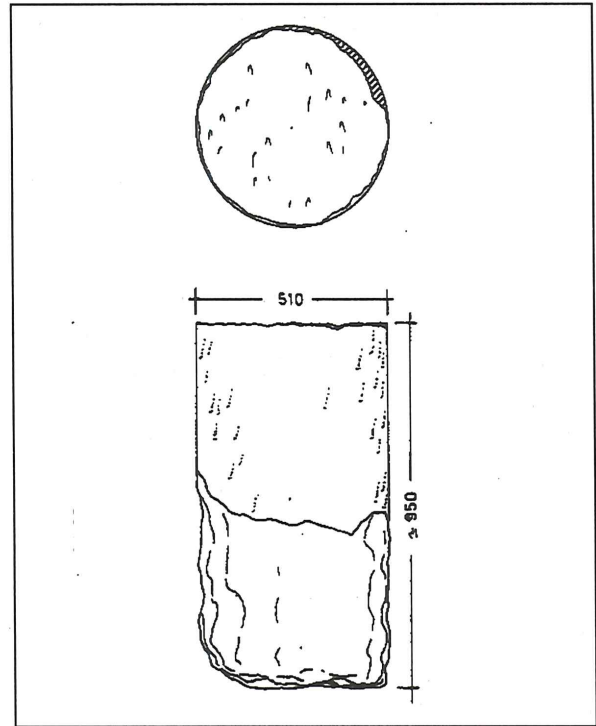
13. P. Thomsen, *Die römischen Meilensteine der Provinzen Syria, Arabia und Palaestina*, ZDPV 40, 1917: 64. The dating to 129 is only a possibility, the two inscriptions being broken in the place where the number of years of the Tribunal Power and of the Consulate were mentioned.

peror came from the *Gerasa/Bosra* road (by Adraa)¹⁴ and from the northern part of the *Via Nova*.¹⁵

Milestone 3 (Fig. 2)

Apparently the two other fragments of column 3 (Fig. 2), visible on the side of the path, are not inscribed.

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2. Milestone 3.

14. Four inscriptions of that emperor are known from the survey done by S. Mittmann on that road: *Die römische Strasse von Gerasa nach Adraa*, *ZDPV* 80, 1964: 113-136 and, *The Roman road from Gerasa to Adraa*, *ADAJ* 11, 1966: 65-87.

Inscriptions numbered 281, 287, 288 and 290 in Th. Bauzou, *op. cit.*
15. 22 miles from Bosra. Inscription no 65 in Th. Bauzou, *op. cit.*, and 51 miles from Bosra. Inscription no 129 in Th. Bauzou, *op. cit.*