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EAST OF THE *VIA NOVA* IN ROMAN ARABIA: TWO TETRARCHIC MILESTONES FROM NORTHERN JORDAN

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Résumé – Cet article présente deux milliaires inédits découverts entre Mafraq et Zarqa, dans le nord de la Jordanie. Les deux monuments jalonnaient la même route, à l'est de la *via nova* et au nord de la province romaine d'Arabie. Inscrits en latin à la même époque, ils témoignent de l'entretien du réseau routier de la steppe sous la Tétrarchie.

Mots-clés – Jordanie, Arabie romaine, Tétrarchie, routes, milliaire

Abstract – This article presents two new milestones discovered between Mafraq and Zarqa in Northern Jordan. Both monuments marked the same road, east of the *via nova* and north of the Roman province of Arabia. Inscribed in Latin at the same time, they testify to the maintenance of the road network in the steppe in the Tetrarchic period.

Keywords – Jordan, Roman Arabia, Tetrarchy, roads, milestone

ملخص – تقدّم هذه المقالة إثنتين من المعالم الجديدة التي عثر عليها بين "المفرق" و"الزرقاء" شمال الأردن. يحد كلا النصبين الطريق نفسها. شرقي ال *via nova* وشمال المقاطعة الرومانية العربية. وحمل كلاهما نقوش باللاتينية تعود الى نفس الفترة والتي تشهد على صيانة طرق السهوب تحت الولاية الربعية.

كلمات محورية – الأردن. المقاطعة الرومانية العربية. الولاية الربعية. طرق. معلم

The two milestones published here have been more or less recently found between Mafraq and Zarqa in Northern Jordan. The main road that crossed this area in Roman times was built under Trajan shortly after the province of Arabia was created (106 AD) in order to connect Syria to the Red Sea ¹. Modern historians call it the *via nova* by taking the phrase that appears on its oldest milestones: *viam novam a finibus Syriae usque ad mare Rubrum*. As can be inferred from the places where they were discovered, our monuments did not belong to this road. They rather marked out a side route following a north-south direction to the east of the *via nova* and running about 30 km long from Umm al-Jimal via al-Qihati to Qasr al-Hallabat, in a stark landscape of limestone, chert, and lava ². Both are small coarse columns of black basalt including a base, lacking mileage, and bearing a Latin dedication in honour of the two *seniores Augusti* Diocletian and Maximian, the two Augusts of the second Tetrarchy Constantius I (Chlorus) and Galerius, and the two Caesars Severus and Maximianus II (Daia). They were thus engraved after the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian, between the 1st of May 305 AD and the 25th of July 306 AD. Several monuments of the same series have already been found along the *via nova* and eastwards ³. Like the numerous inscribed milestones dated from 285 to 307 AD and spotted in the northern section of the road (more than 20% of the inscribed milestones between Bostra and Philadelphia), they were certainly related to the reorganization of the Roman eastern frontier by Diocletian and his colleagues. Such operations involved the building of forts on the edge of the desert and the raising of new units as well as the construction or rehabilitation of the most strategic roads and tracks in the steppe.

1. The first milestone was found in 1998 in an ancient grave at al-Hussayniyya, about 5 km to the north of Khalidiyya and al-Qihati fortlet, along the way to al-‘Ajib. It is now at Mafraq in the courtyard of the Department of Antiquities (inv. 197). The surface of the block is much scratched. A large cross added in the middle of the monument over lines 5-9 points to a secondary use of the stone in Late Antiquity as a Christian tombstone. Dim.: 115 x 25-33 x 18-26 cm. Height of the letters: 2-3 cm (**fig. 1-3**).

Felici C(aio) Aur(elio) Val(erio)
 Diocletiano p-
 at[ri i]mmpp(eratorum duorum) et
 4 M(arco) Aur(elio) Val(erio) Maxim-
 iano patri imm-
 pp(eratorum duorum) et Fl(avio) Aur(elio) Val(erio)
 Consta[nti]o P(io) F(elici)
 8 Invicto A[ug(usto)] e[t]
 G(alerio) Aur(elio) Val(erio) Maximi-
 ano P(io) F(elici) [Invic]to A-
 ugg(usto) et Fl(avio) Val(erio) Sev-
 12 ero nob(ilissimo) Caes(ari) et
 G(alerio) Val(erio) [Maximi]no
 nob(ilissimo) Caes(ari).

“To the most fortunate Caius Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus, father of the two emperors, and Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maximianus, father of the two emperors, and to Flavius Aurelius Valerius Constantius, Pius, Felix, Invictus Augustus, and Galerius Aurelius Valerius Maximianus, Pius, Felix, Invictus Augustus, and Flavius Valerius Severus, nobilissimus Caesar, and Galerius Valerius Maximinus, nobilissimus Caesar.”

1. BAUZOU 1998 offers a comprehensive study on the northern section of the *via nova* and its milestones.
2. On the network of Roman roads in North-East Jordan, see KENNEDY 1997, with useful maps and air photographs. The route in question here is discussed at length on p. 81-88.
3. BAUZOU 1998, p. 214-218, nos. 121-128 (*via nova*), p. 251-252 and no. 132 (Sabha); BADER 2009, p. 100, no. 122 (Umm al-Jimal).



Figure 1. Milestone no. 1,
DoA Mafraq (inv. 197): front
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Figure 2. Milestone no. 1, DoA
Mafraq (inv. 197): left side
© J. Aliquot.



Figure 3. Milestone no. 1, DoA Mafraq
(inv. 197): right side
© J. Aliquot.

At some distance south of al-Hussayniyya, the environs of the hill where the small Roman fort of al-Qihati stands have yielded no less than a dozen of milestones. All those which were readable are Tetrarchic in date ⁴. Like ours, two of them date from 305-306 AD and have similar wording ⁵. Other formulae also appear on contemporary milestones in Northern Jordan ⁶.

2. Our second milestone was lying among the blocks scattered north of the Qasr al-Hallabat, a Late Roman *quadriburgium* changed into an aristocratic residence under the Umayyads. Thanks are due to Thomas Weber, who found it in 2013 and who drew our attention to it. It is broken at the top and on the left, but is almost completely preserved on the right. Dim.: 93 x 23 cm. Height of the letters: 2-3 cm (fig. 4).

4. KENNEDY & AL-HUSAN 1996, p. 259-262, nos. 6-18.

5. KENNEDY & AL-HUSAN 1996, p. 261-262, nos. 11-12 (AE 1996, 1621-1622).

6. BAUZOU 1998, p. 251.

- [- - -]
 [- - -] et Flav(io)
 [Val(erio) Cons]tanti[o]
 4 [Pio Felici In]vict[o]
 [Aug(usto) et Gal(erio) Val(erio)] Maxi-
 [miano Pio Felici In]victo
 [Aug(usto) et Flav(io)] Val(erio) Sev[e]-
 8 [ro nob(ilissimo) C]aes(ari) et
 [Gal(erio) Val(erio) Maxim]ino nob(ilissimo)
 [C]aes(ari).

The names of Diocletian and Maximian have to be restored in the beginning of the text. Only one milestone was known in Qasr al-Hallabat up to now. It is a small black basalt column on a base with a Latin inscription in honour of the emperors of the first Tetrarchy (293-305 AD). David Kennedy found its two fragments in 1978, the upper part “some 200 m. beyond the fort wall on the E. slope of the hill near the perimeter fence,” the lower “inside the fort in the rubble of Room 12”⁷. We may not set aside the possibility that this monument and the new one come from elsewhere, and especially from the site of Umm al-Jimal, which has long been supposed to have been used as a quarry to complete the late mansion in Hallabat⁸. Nevertheless, the presence of a Late Roman *quadriburgium* in Hallabat, the discovery of at least one fragment of milestone out of the Umayyad residence, and the identification of the route running from Umm al-Jimal to Hallabat are also worthy of consideration. All this supports the idea that the two milestones found in Hallabat actually stood *in situ* or in the immediate surroundings at a time when the route was surely open and maintained, i.e. in the Tetrarchic period.

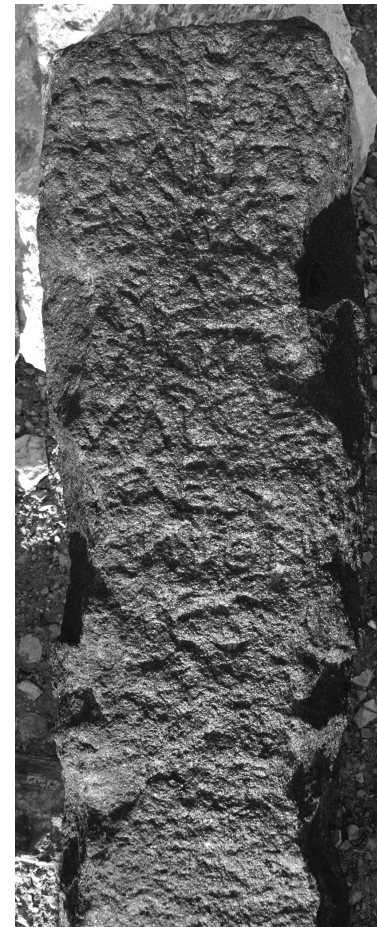


Figure 4. Milestone no. 2, Qasr al-Hallabat © J. Aliquot.

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7. KENNEDY 1982, p. 162, no. 28. The inscription was published with improved readings by MARCILLET-JAUBERT 1980, p. 122-123.

8. BISHEH 1993, p. 49-50; KENNEDY 1997, p. 86; ARCE, FEISSEL & WEBER 2014, p. 19-26.