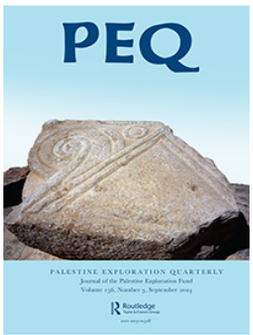

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The Fifth Milestation from Tiberias: A Newly Discovered Milestone in the Gennesaret Valley Illumines the Roman Arterial Network

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ABSTRACT

Through the prism of a fairly recent discovery of a milestone, the present article sheds light on the Roman road in the Gennesaret Valley, particularly the span connecting Tiberias to Julias. Building on Zvi Ilan's initiative in the 1980s, the author will emphasise two milestones: IMC 694 and IMC 847. Dating to 120 CE, the latter stone's inscription not only divulges the role of Emperor Hadrian in the artery's construction, but establishes Tiberias as its *caput viae*. By delving into historical sources, contemporary research, and the broader context of Hadrian's infrastructure initiatives throughout the province of Judaea, the paper explicates the road network's purpose and strategic importance during the Roman era.

KEYWORDS

Roman roads; Tiberias; Julias; Hadrian; Latin inscription; *caput viae;* milestone; milestation

Introduction

As part of a survey of ancient roads headed up by Zvi Ilan in the 1980s, a milestone (catalogued as IMC 694)[1] was discovered in the courtyard of a farmer in the modern Israeli village of Migdal. The farmer reported having found the milestone in his field, north of the 'Ein Nun spring on the outskirts of the village. Within the framework of regular surveys conducted by the author, we returned to his home to take new measurements and photographs of the artefact. Much to our surprise, another milestone now graced the courtyard. According to the farmer's son, he came across the object in the 1990s, near the original location of IMC 694 (Figure 1).

Though partially truncated, the new milestone's inscription opens a window onto a chapter in the history of Galilee. As we shall see, it attests to a Roman imperial road in the Gennesaret Valley connecting Tiberias and Julias. Furthermore, the milestone indicates that Tiberias was a *caput viae*.

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Figure 1. The Roman road between Tiberias and Julias, including the location of IMC 847 (drawn by S. Krapiwko).

Historical Sources and Modern Research

Accounts of the Roman road in the Gennesaret Valley are quite scarce. The first to broach this topic was Flavius Josephus (*War*. 3.532–539; *Life*. 276), who wrote about a northbound road from Tiberias during the early Roman period, which pertains to events surrounding the Jewish revolt of 66/67 CE.

> After the battle Vespasian took his seat on his tribunal at Tarichaea, and separating the native population from the crowd of immigrants … Vespasian accordingly granted these

> aliens an amnesty in equivocal terms, but permitted them to quit the city by only one route, that leading to Tiberias … The Romans, meanwhile, lined the whole road to Tiberias, to prevent any deviation from it, and on their arrival shut them into that town.
>
> (*War*. 532–539)

> So I departed for Tarichaea, having suspected nothing, but all the same having left behind in the city those who would pass along anything that they might say about us. And along the entire road from Tarichaea to Tiberias I set up many others, so that they could signal me via relay about whatever those left behind in the city might discover (*Life*. 276).

In Leibner's estimation (2009, 17), Josephus was likely alluding to an unpaved road, for the archaeological evidence suggests that the province's earliest Roman road – the Caesarea-Scythopolis artery – dates to 69 CE (Isaac 1998).[2]

While the Tabula Peutingeriana features Tiberias, the only road depicted leaving the city heads south (towards Scythopolis and Gadara). Further testimony surfaces in *De situ terrae sanctae*, which is attributed in a few of its manuscripts to the archdeacon Theodosius.

> From Tiberias it is two miles to Magdala, where my Lady Mary was born. From Magdala it is two miles to Seven Springs, where my Lord Christ baptised the apostles, and where he satisfied the people with five loaves and two fishes. From Seven Springs it is two miles to Capernaum. From Capernaum it is six miles to Bethsaida, where the apostles Peter, Andrew, Philip, and the sons of Zebedee were born (Wilkinson 1977, 63)

Dated to the early 6th century, this text references the Tiberias–Julias highway. Interestingly enough, it divides this road into a number of sections that together span 12 Roman miles. However, our measurements indicate that the artery is no less than 13 Roman miles long (c. 19.26 km).

The first modern comprehensive study of the Roman arterial network in the area was part of the cartographic enterprise of the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) in the 1870s. The PEF's Survey of Western Palestine (SWP) meticulously documented built sections, ancient side walls and milestones. Moreover, the Fund's survey identified Roman roads on its survey maps (Ben David 2019). That said, the survey did not uncover the remains of any Roman road – milestones included – anywhere in the Gennesaret Valley.

In 1917, Peter Thomsen published a seminal article, 'Die Römischen Meilensteine der Provinzen Syria, Arabia, und Palästina' (1917), on the milestones as well as the roads along which they were arrayed. He was the first to suggest that there was a Roman highway in the area. However, Thomsen believed that it continued north to Damascus, traversing the Jordan river at Jisr Bint Yaqub, rather than closer to the estuary and going directly to Julias. In any case, he refrained from corroborating this theory with any physical remains in the Gennesaret Valley. As far as can be seen, he was tracking the main road of the early 1900s.

Avi-Yonah was the first to date the Roman road in the Gennesaret Valley to the time of Hadrian, particularly after 134 CE. He suggested that the emperor had constructed a 'security road' from Ptolemais to Tiberias via Sepphoris, thereby improving transportation in the heart of the Galilee (Avi-Yonah 1950–1).

While conducting excavations and surveys in the Capernaum area during the 1970s, Corbo and Loffreda unearthed a column fragment bearing an inscription. Identified by

the authors as a milestone, it was located roughly 100 meters northeast of the site. Sparking reactions, they tentatively dated this artefact to the Hadrianic era. However, they were unable to pinpoint the exact year of the milestone's placement due to the absence of imperial titles (Corbo and Loffreda 1976).

As opposed to the column near Capernaum, milestones typically possess a square base, similar to IMC 847. Given the question marks surrounding other confirmed milestones in the immediate vicinity, the pillar's classification remains a subject of debate.[3] That said, the recent discovery of an inscribed milestone in Migdal from this same period appears to bolster Corbo and Loffreda's hypothesis.

In the paper outlining his findings at Migdal during the 1980s, Ilan merely touched on, and furnished a photograph of, the milestone (Ilan 1989, 12). However, further testimony supporting the existence of an imperial highway between Tiberias and Julias has since come to light. Corbo (1976), followed by de Luca and Lena (2014), revealed a paved street six meters wide in the centre of Migdal from the Roman period, indicating the likely path of the road through this town. While it is uncommon for an imperial road to cross through a settlement that is not a *polis*, this route was apparently chosen owing to Migdal's strategic location.

Stepansky (1991, 27–9) surveyed a retaining wall of an ancient road on the slopes of Tel Kinnarot – another vital node on the highway spanning the Gennesaret and Tabgha Valleys. Excavations at the Tabgha-based Church of the Multiplication revealed that the prayer-house's early structure abutted a paved road. Despite extensive archaeological surveys in and around the Gennesaret Valley (Dark 2013, Leibner 2009, Tepper *et al.* 2000, Stepansky 1991), no remains of Roman arterial infrastructure have been found.

While most Roman roads generally skirted alluvial valleys to minimise the need for repairs, there were instances where the imperium's engineers opted for a more direct route (Stein 2024, forthcoming). Local examples of this exception were the roads along the Mediterranean coast, between Diocaesarea and Tiberias in the Tur'an Valley, in the Bethsaida Valley (Pažout *et al.* 2020), the Jezreel Valley (Hecker 1961) and the Bet She'an Valley.

In 1994, the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities published the *Tabula Imperii Romani* (TIR). This project features a thoroughly researched map illustrating all the extant data on Roman roads and milestones. This comprehensive work was skilfully drafted by Israel Roll (Roll 1994), who incorporated two milestations along the Tiberias–Julias highway: one near Capernaum (IMC 528); and the second north of Magdala (IMC 694). The road itself was depicted in the middle of the Gennesaret Valley.[4]

The Tiberias–Julias highway formed a crucial span of the Roman east–west artery, which began in the coastal cities of Ptolemais and Caesarea Maritima. These roads traversed Legio and Diocaesarea before reaching Tiberias. Beyond Julias, the route continued along the Sea of Galilee's eastern shoreline. The road bifurcated a few miles north of Hippos. Ascending the Golan Heights, it followed a meticulously engineered and well-paved route along the relatively gradual slope of Lawiye. On the Golan, the road split into two. The northern branch proceeded due east to Neve, while the southern route wended its way to the legionary camp at Bostra (Roll 2009).

This artery's Hadrianic provenance is firmly corroborated by a milestone from Capernaum. The primary evidence, though, derives from a series of milestones erected in 120 CE, the third year of Hadrian's reign. These milestones – IMC 525 from the Caesarea–

Legio road (Roll 2011, Tepper 2011), IMC 682 from the Ptolemais–Diocaesarea road (Isaac 2018, Tepper 2018), as well as IMC 171 and IMC 438 from the Legio–Diocaesarea road (Hecker 1961, Isaac and Roll 1979, Isaac and Roll 1998,) – graced the western branches of the arterial system.[5] On this basis, Roll has already proposed dating this part of the network to 120 CE. Moreover, the archaeologist has identified a milestone adorned with a lower moulding – a characteristic that he associates with Hadrian's reign (Roll 2002, 217). If confirmed, this hypothesis would significantly augment the list of Hadrianic milestones.[6]

IMC 847 Paves the Way

The discovery of IMC 847 in the 1990s at a recognised milestation of the Gennesaret Valley has enhanced our understanding of the Tiberias–Julias road. To begin with, this finding suggests that the highway underwent official renovations after its initial construction. Another milestone, IMC 694, which had surfaced a decade earlier, features a square base with a broken column. The dimensions (in centimetres) of this item's base are 24 h × 55 w × 65 l; and the column measures 47 h × 49 d. Crafted from hard limestone, the milestone harbours no signs of inscriptions, painting, or carving. The more recently discovered milestone, which is the focus of our research, has much in common with IMC 694. In the first place, this milestone also possesses a square base with a broken column. The base measures (in centimetres) 20 h × 54 w × 46 l; and the column's dimensions are 59 h × 49 w (see Figure 2).

Crafted from soft limestone, it bears three lines of Latin inscription and traces of red paint. The two lower lines are intact, whereas the top line is partially truncated. In consequence, we only managed to reconstruct some of that line's letters. Below is a transcription of the text (Figure 3):

MAX T[R]IB PO

COS III

V

Of all the published milestone inscriptions found in Israel and Jordan, the only ones ending with the title of 'consul for the third time' (*COS III*) are those of Hadrian. All these particular items date back to 120 CE (Isaac 2018, Isaac and Roll 1998).[7] With this in mind, the proposed transliteration is as follows:

[IMP CAESAR DIVI

TRAINI PARTHICI

FIL DIVI NERVAE NEPOS

HADRIANVS AVG PONTIF]

MAX T[R]IB PO[TESTAS

IIII] COS III

V

Figure 2. A general view of IMC 847 (photo: author)

Reading:

[Imp(erator) Caesar divi / Trai(a)ni Parthici / fil(ius) divi Nervae nepos / Hadrianus Aug (ustus) pontif](ex) / max(imus) t[r]ib(unicia) po[testas / IIII] co(n)s(ul) III /

V

Translation:

Imperator Caesar, son of the divine Traianus Parthicus, grandson of the divine Nerva, Hadrianus Augustus, High Priest, holder of the tribunician power for the fourth time, consul three times.

Fifth Mile

Figure 3. A close-up of IMC 847's inscription (photo: author)

Several emperors were granted the title of 'third consul' during their reigns, including Vespasian in 71, Marcus Aurelius in 161, Lucius Verus in 167, Septimius Severus in 202, Caracalla in 208, Elagabalus in 220 and Severus Alexander in 229. Hadrian received this honorific in the year 119 (Henderson 1923, Appendix D). Until the title *Pater Patriae (PP*) was bestowed on the Caesar in 128, milestone inscriptions from his rule consistently ended with the honorific *COS III*.

In all other instances where this title is noted on a milestone, it is situated in the upper lines (table 1). That said, Hadrianic versions place the honorific on the penultimate line, just before the mileage. To the best of our knowledge, the line with *COS III* sufficed with this title. However, the latter series of Hadrian milestones (129–130 or 135) also featured the title *PP*.

The Fifth Milestation

The bottom line of the inscription denotes the fifth mile from the *caput viae* – the city from which the distance along this road is measured. The *polis* in question is either Tiberias or Julias. Since Julias is eight miles away from this milestone, the only viable option is the former. Although the city's name is not explicitly mentioned, this milestone marks the first instance of Tiberias serving as a *caput viae*. It also bears noting that this city is the third *caput viae* in the region (anteceded by Legio and Ptolemais) the name of which is not expressly stated on a milestone, but can be inferred from the cited mileage (Ben David and Stein 2022).

In some cases, the distance from the main city is indicated in Latin; and beneath the Latin writing, one finds a supplementary inscription providing the city's name and the mileage therefrom in Greek. Examples include milestones from Diocaesarea and

Table 1. Roads and milestones dating to Hadrian's reign in Provincia Judaea-Palaestina.

Road (North-South)	IMC Number	Year	Bibliography	Notes
Ptolemais-Diocaesarea	167	135	Iliffe 1933, 120-121 Pl. XLIV a-b	
	682	120	Isaac 2018, 61-62	
	684	130	Isaac 2018, 62	
Tiberias-Julias	528	120?	Corbo and Loffreda 1976, 274	The new dating adheres to Stein's reading
	847	120		
Legio-Diocaesarea	170	120	Hecker 1961, 178; Isaac and Roll 1998, 184-186	
	171	120	Hecker 1961, 178; Isaac and Roll 1998, 184-186	
	172	129 or 135	Avi-Yonah 1946, 97; Isaac and Roll 1998, 184-186	
	174	120	Avi-Yonah 1946, 96; Isaac and Roll 1998, 184-186	
	179	120 or 130?	Hecker 1961, 181-182; Isaac and Roll 1998, 184-186	
	438	120	Isaac and Roll 1979, 150	
Legio-Caesarea	525	120	Roll 2011, 247	
Legio-Neapolis	24	117-138	Thomsen 1917, no. 242	
Scythopolis-Tiberias	495	117-138	Zori 1962, 182 no. 120	
Scythopolis-Legio	431	129	Isaac and Roll 1982, 67	
Scythopolis-Hierico	310	117-138	Roll 1983, 154	
	699	117-138	IMC Archive	
Neapolis-Diospolis	672	129-130 or 135	Roll and Ayalon 1986, 119-120	The new dating adheres to Stein's reading
Aelia Capitolina-Eleutheropolis	97	130	Thomsen 1917, no. 282	
Aelia Capitolina-Hebron	130	130	Thomsen 1917, no. 296	

Scythopolis (IMC 168 and IMC 201, respectively). At any rate, the earliest milestone in the province (IMC 395), which dates to 69 CE, specifies the distance from Caesarea without spelling out the *polis*' name.

In all the Hadrianic milestones in Israel, the *caput viae*'s name is not etched in Latin. Conversely, the available evidence demonstrates that later milestones contained a city's name. In the provinces of Judaea and Arabia, there are approximately thirty references to milestones with the Latin name of a *polis* or legionary camp. On the other hand, Greek analogues surface 74 times, a number of them alongside the Latin inscriptions (Ben David and Stein 2022).

Apart from the milestone under review stating its distance from Tiberias, historical sources also reference such information. Josephus mentions a distance of roughly 30 stadia between Tiberias and Magdala/Tarichaea (*Life*. 157). Considering that one stadia equals roughly 200 meters, we estimate that the two cities were around four Roman miles (30 stadia ≈ 6000 meters; Roman mile ≈ 1482 meters, four Roman miles ≈ 5930 meters) from each other (Chevallier 1976, 39–40).

Identifying Migdal Nunya as Magdala, Leibner approaches the distance between the two aforementioned cities through the lens of Rabbinic texts. While the Babylonian Talmud situates Migdal Nunya a mile away from Tiberias, the locally produced Jerusalem Talmud suggests a journey of four miles (Leibner 2006, 36–8). Our recent measurements found 'Ein Nun and Magdala to be approximately 1.5 km or one Roman mile apart. Consequently, the total distance from Tiberias to 'Ein Nun is five miles.

In the case at hand, scholars would be hard pressed to locate the starting point for gauging distances along this road. Since there is but one tenable option for the contours of the Tiberias–Migdal highway, the measuring process is quite straightforward (Stein 2024, forthcoming). Moreover, the starting points for Judaea's *poleis* vary between, say, a monumental structure by the city centre in Caesarea and city gates in Scythopolis (Ben David and Stein 2022).

Upon gauging distances and mulling potential routes, the author cautiously posits that the measurement in Tiberias began at an as-yet undiscovered monumental gate along the northern wall, which Harif excavated in 1980 (Harif 1984). Projecting from Foerster's work adjacent to the southern gate in 1973–4, this section of city might have also sported a monumental gate (Stacey 2004). Vestiges of similar gates have turned up in other *poleis* throughout Judaea, including second-century Scythopolis (Atrash and Overman 2022, 20–2).

Tiberias as *Caput Viae*

Like other cities in Judaea, Tiberias' status as a *polis* has long been established. In contrast, its role as a *caput viae* has hitherto eluded substantiation. However, the inscription on IMC 847 offers evidence that Tiberias did indeed serve in this capacity from as far back as the early second century. What is more, the city was a crossroad along the province's arterial system, with three roads departing from the *polis*. To the north was the above-mentioned highway to Julias. As illustrated in the Tabula Peutingeriana (Figure 4), the southerly road forked off in proximity to where the Jordan river discharges from the Sea of Galilee, *en route* to Scythopolis and Gadara. Lastly, the westerly span led travellers to Diocaesarea as well as further afield to the Mediterranean ports of Ptolemais and Caesarea.

Figure 4. Tiberias and the roads to Scythopolis and Gadara in Tabula Peutingeriana.

IMC 847 on Judaea/Palaestina's Arterial System

There is information concerning three series of milestones that were laid down throughout the province over Hadrian's rule (117–138) dating to the years 120, 129–130, and 135, respectively. All told, twenty of these milestones have surfaced in Israel along 11 different roads (table 1).[8] Over this period, the Roman arterial network in the region was essentially planned and its construction launched (Isaac 1992, 111).

The deciphering of IMC 847 strengthens the possible dating of IMC 528 to the same year – 120 CE. A fresh look at the inscription on IMC 528 reveals that Hadrian's names

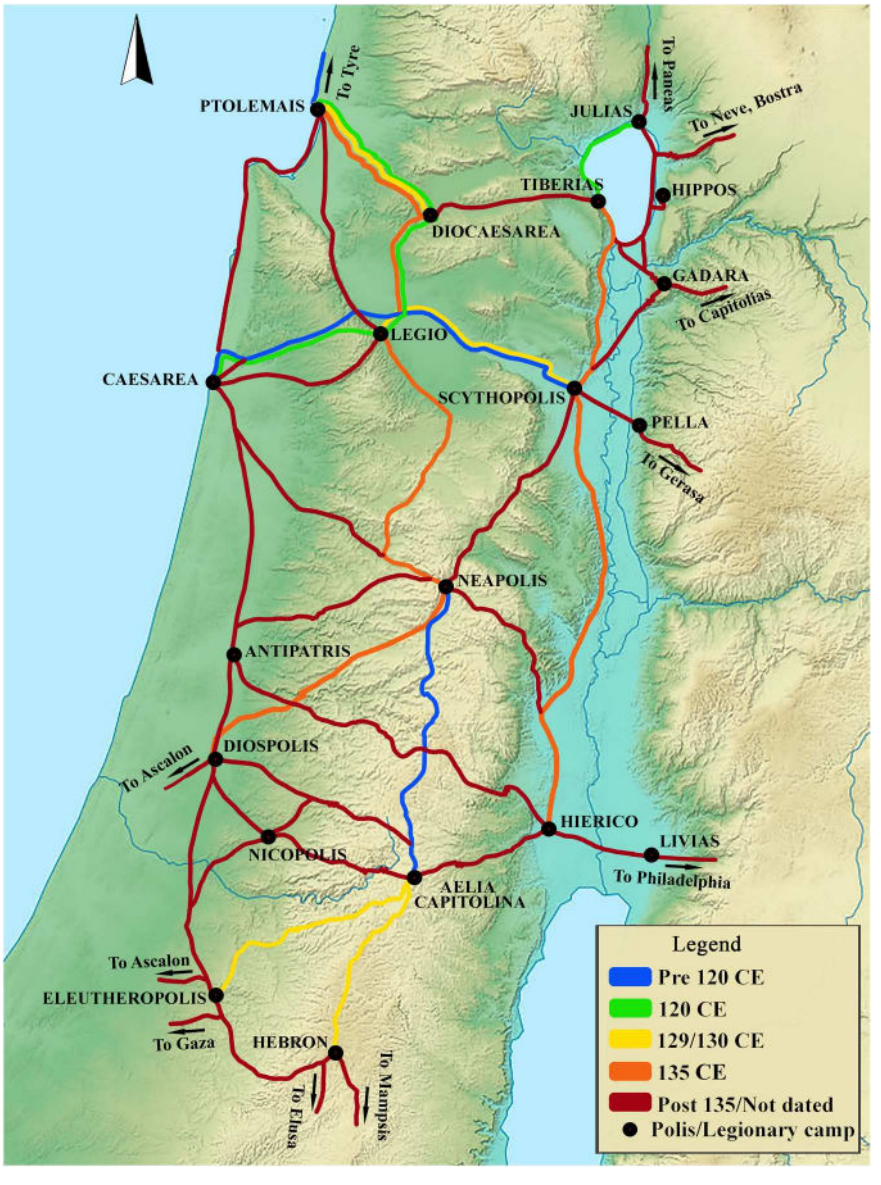

Figure 5. Roman roads in Judaea/Palaestina; the marked roads are from Hadrian's reign (drawn by S. Krapiwko).

and titles are in the nominative case. This was indeed a defining element of milestones from 120. However, this is merely a tentative conclusion, for additional parts of the text are required for an accurate decryption.

Taking into account the historical-geographic perspective adds insight into this artefact. Our dating of the Tiberias–Julias road suggests that during Hadrian's reign, there were other west–east routes besides the main artery traversing the land from Caesarea through Legio, Scythopolis, Gerasa and up to Bostra (Isaac 1992, 121–2). This vantage point also unveils a more northerly route. Commencing at Ptolemais, this highway passes through Diocaesarea, Tiberias and Julias, whence it climbed to Bostra via the Golan Heights. In an effort to improve communication with Bostra, Hadrian apparently opted for multiple routes to this key eastern settlement, which had recently been designated a provincial capital, rather than settling for a lone highway (Figure 5).

Hadrian's road-building enterprise extended beyond the Province of Judaea. In 120, he broke ground on a highway connecting Bostra to Gerasa through Adra'a (Mittman 1964, 113). Furthermore, the emperor regularly invested in the building or renovation of arteries in preparation for his visits to different areas, such as his trip to Judaea in 130 (Isaac 1992, 111). The previous year Hadrian initiated substantial road repairs in Provincia Arabia, focusing on crucial routes between Gerasa and Philadelphia and the latter and Bostra (Thomsen 1917, nos. 110, 211a).

This military-led project encompassing several provinces aimed to bolster imperial control by enhancing intra-provincial communication. To the best of our knowledge, Hadrian's trips to the region, which included major *poleis* like Antioch, Bostra, Gerasa, Caesarea and Jerusalem, from June 129 to August 130, were facilitated by these strategic improvements (Destephen 2019, 65 Fig. 3b).

Conclusion

The emergence of IMC 847 and the deciphering of its inscription have enabled us to date the Roman road between Tiberias and Julias to the year 120 CE. As Isaac has already observed and the milestone further demonstrates, Hadrian was the first Caesar to launch an imperial network of roads. This evidence also sets a precedent by verifying that Tiberias was a *caput viae* from which distances were measured, at least on the road to Julias. In addition, our findings indicate that there are reasonable grounds for assuming that this starting point was a yet-to-be-located northern gate in close proximity to Harif's excavation site.

Expanding the scope beyond Judaea, the main east–west arteries crisscrossing the province and linking the capital city of Arabia and the legionary camp at Bostra to the Mediterranean Sea were also constructed during Hadrian's rule. The northern route at least, from Ptolemais to Bostra via Tiberias, can be dated to the year 120 CE.

Notes

1. Upon processing the data, major parts of the Israel Milestone Committee (IMC) archive were uploaded to http://milestones.kinneret.ac.il/. Dedicated to this topic since 2012, the website currently provides information on approximately 850 milestones.

2. According to Josephus, the road led to Tarichaea. Scholars now believe that Tarichaea is synonymous with the Roman town of Magdala in the southern Gennesaret Valley. Bauckham (2018, 3–10) expounds on the identification of Tarichaea and Magdala in Kh. Majdal.
3. Notwithstanding the dearth of archaeological evidence on Roman roads in the province before 69 CE, Corbo and Loffreda claim that this milestone attests to the renovation of the highway, which was originally paved during the time of Jesus.
4. Stein (2024, forthcoming) elaborates on this topic.
5. For a disquisition on the milestones sprinkled along the roads to Legio, see Isaac 2015, 42.
6. The IMC Archive documents a plethora of milestones adorned with lower moulding, some of which postdate Hadrian's rule.
7. In addition, milestones located outside of the province ending with the title COS III were typically dated to 120 CE. A case in point is CIL VII 1169 (Hübner 1873).
8. The only unpublished milestone cited in table 1 is IMC 699. I am indebted to C. Ben David for granting me access to the IMC archive's milestone file. As a result, I was able to confirm this item's Hadrianic origins. This artefact will merit a closer look in the forthcoming CIIP volume dedicated to milestone inscriptions. IMC 672 was initially published by Roll and Ayalon with a broad chronological range (119–138), due to the preservation challenges involving Hadrian's titles on its signage. A re-examination by the present author suggests that the milestone belongs to Hadrian's later series, either 129–130 or 135. This conclusion rests on the appearance of the title *PP (Pater Patriae)*, which was bestowed upon Hadrian in the year 128. Milestones from the reign of Marcus Aurelius make note of repair. On this basis, Roll and Avi-Yonah asserted that two roads in the area – Aelia Capitolina–Nicopolis–Diospolis and Jericho–Esbus – were paved during Hadrian's rule. See Isaac 1998, 50; Roll 1974, 507–8; Thomsen 1917, nos. 230a and 272.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Statement of Disclosure

There is no potential conflict of interest to report.

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