



From utility to imperial propaganda: (Re)discovering a milestone of Constantine I from the vicinity of *Bona Mansio* and *emporion Pistiros* and its significance for the study of the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ in the territory of *Philippopolis*

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ABSTRACT

This article republishes a fragmentary milestone dedicated to Constantine I and his sons discovered by chance in 1964 in the locality “Kaldarmata” situated ca. 4 km south of the village of Vinogradets, Pazardzhik district. It also attempts to place it within its micro-regional context, as part of the larger network of Roman settlements serving the interregional traffic along the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ in the Western Upper Thrace valley. For road stations operated not in isolation, but as a constituent part of larger organisms utilizing a wide range of resources on a micro-regional level. A new look at the milestone’s findspot, date, historical context and relation to other milestones found in the region is necessary because its place of discovery puts the actual route of the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ in close proximity to the fortified settlement at Gradishteto near Asardere, situated ca. 2 km west of “Kaldarmata” and ca. 5 km east of the town of Vetren, commonly identified with *Bona Mansio*, which was the last road station in the territory of *Philippopolis* during Late Antiquity. The diachronic analysis of other milestones found in the region allows us to capture the milestone’s evolving function as a medium of communication between the imperial administration and its subjects within the 3rd and the 4th centuries AD; from a road accessory providing practical information to travellers into an administrative tool displaying imperial propaganda. Evidently, all the examples discussed in this article illustrate the existence of a milestone cluster associated with *mansio Lissae/Bona Mansio*, thereby showcasing the significance of the Western Upper Thrace Valley as an important hub along the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’.

KEYWORDS

imperial roads, *Via Diagonalis*, road stations, milestones, province of *Thracia*, *Philippopolis*

Introduction

The Roman public roads (*viae publicae*) differ significantly from regional (*viae vicinales*) and private roads (*viae privatae*) in that they were both groundwork and a symbol of power for the imperial administration (Torbatov 2004, 77–78; Kolb 2019, 8–13). In addition to the itineraries which provided travellers with written lists of routes corresponding to the existing roads through the terrain, milestones or the so-called *milliaria*, served both practical and ideological needs. On the one hand, they measured the distance in relation to a *caput viae* in *m(ilia) p(assuum)* or one thousand paces (1 MP = 1,480 m), but they also provided a testimony to the power of Roman emperors, magistrates and communities. Milestones evolved over time in terms of the occasion or the type of activity they were set up for. In the Republican period and the early Empire, they can be treated as building inscriptions, recording construction projects or simply repairs along the already existing network of *viae publicae* throughout the

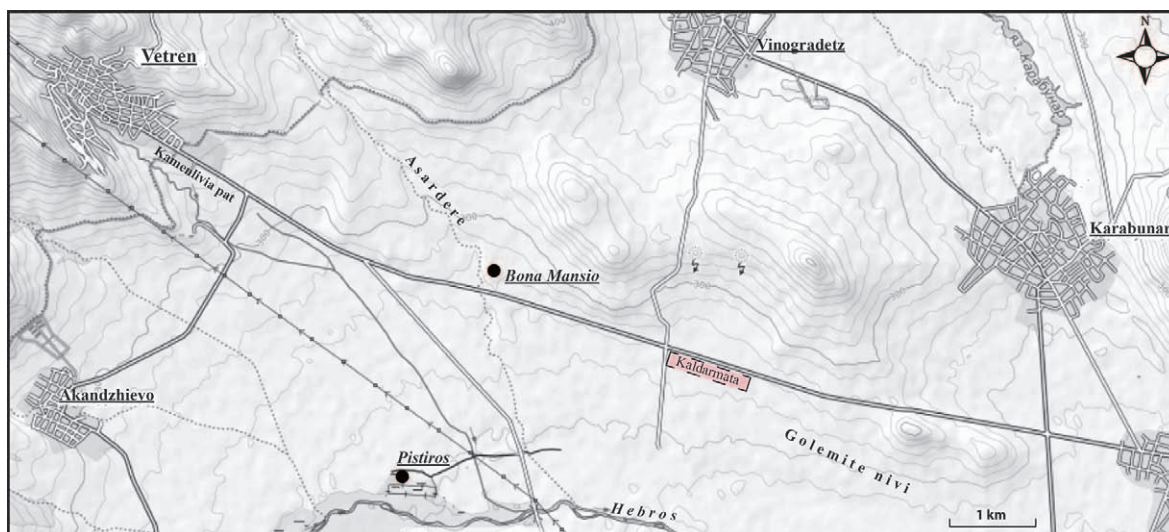


Fig. 1. Ancient sites, toponyms and modern place names discussed in the text (map design E. Nankov)

Обр. 1. Антични обекти, топоними и съвременни населени места, споменати в текста
(карта Е. Нанков)

Empire. By the 4th century AD, however, they had acquired an honorific character, serving as a way for Roman magistrates and communities to showcase their imperial loyalty and political allegiance (Filov 1908, 625–629; Laurence 2004; Conti 2004, 36; Sauer 2014, 257–267; Marcos 2019, 515–518).

Out of 8,000 milestones known from the territories of the Roman Empire, 570 come from the Balkan provinces, which include the two *Pannoniae*, *Dacia*, the two *Moesiae* and *Thracia* (Kolb 2019, 15–16, n. 48, fig. 5). From the territory of Bulgaria over 180 milestones have been recorded, and more than 2/3 of those found in the province of *Thracia* are associated with the Trans-Balkan road, connecting the Middle Danube area to Byzantium/Constantinople, known as ‘*Via Militaris*’ or ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ (but written sources mention it as βασιλικὴ ὁδός) (Jireček 1877, 9–68; Miller 1916, 528–540; Dimitrov 1936, 129–131; Todorov 1937, 20–31; Hollenstein 1975, 25; Soustal 1991, 132–135; Torbatov 2004, 86–87; Madzharov 2009, 70–131). The upkeep of road infrastructure (*mansiones*, *mutationes*), military fortifications (*castella*), as well as milestones (*milliaria*) account for its considerable importance for the Roman Empire, especially during Late Antiquity (Wendel 2005, 108–141; Băjenaru 2010, 26–27). At present, the milestones dedicated to Gordian III (AD 238–244) and Constantine I (AD 307–337) seem to constitute the largest share (cf. Hollenstein 1975, 34–35, 38–40; Bartels 2014, 224, n. 6; Grünwald 1990, 179–264), even though the emergence of new columns (Sharankov, Hristov 2019) and a conceptualization of older finds, as in the case of the milestones of Julian (AD 361–363), are likely to expand in the future (Conti 2004; cf. Sharankov 2019 and Marcos 2019).

Setting the agenda

As much as this article increases the number of *milliaria* from the province of *Thracia* by providing a new edition of a fragmentary milestone discovered by chance in the locality “Kaldarmata” situated ca. 4 km south of the village of Vinogradets, Pazardzhik district (Appendix I), to a greater extent it also attempts to place it within its micro-regional context, as part of the larger network of Roman settlements serving the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ in the Western Upper Thrace valley (figs. 1, 5). In addition, a new look at the milestone from Vinogradets is necessary because its findspot at the locality “Kaldarmata” places the actual route of the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ in close proximity to the fortified settlement at Gradišteteto near Asardere, situated ca. 2 km west of “Kaldarmata” and ca. 5 km east of the town of Ve-



Fig. 2. The locality “Kaldarmata” along the modern road Vetren–Pazardzhik; a view from east, with Gradishteto at Asardere (Bona Mansio) and the town of Vetren in the background (photo E. Nankov)

Обр. 2. Местността „Калдърмата“ в близост до асфалтовия път Ветрен–Пазарджик; поглед от изток, обект „Градичето“ при Асардере (Бона Манзио) и гр. Ветрен на заден план (снимка Е. Нанков)

tren, commonly identified with *Bona Mansio*/κάστρον Βονομάσιον (fig. 2), which was the last road station in the territory of *Philippopolis* during Late Antiquity (Dimitrov 1936, 137; most recently Manev 2018). The milestone from Vinogradets, which I managed to examine personally in 2020 (fig. 3), was dedicated to Constantine I and his sons within AD 333–337, and interpreted by its editor as a testimony to road repairs along the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ carried out during Constantine’s reign (Zhlegov 1978, 75).

Although the fortuitous discovery of this column is significant for topographical and historical reasons, which I discuss below, the milestone from Vinogradets has somehow escaped scholarly scrutiny. Aside from the *editio princeps* published by Zhlegov in 1978 and some editorial corrections of the text by Boyadzhiev (Boyadzhiev 1990, no. 90), there has been little discussion about its findspot, historical context and relationship to other milestones found in the same region (figs. 4a, c; 5) (bibliographical notices in Božilova 1980, #255 and Gerassimova–Tomova, Hollenstein 1989, 45–46, 1; brief remarks in Gizdova 2012, 427 and Iliev 2019, 82, n. 18; 88, n. 39; absent from the catalogue of the Latin inscriptions of Constantine I assembled in Grünewald 1990, 179–264). The circumstances surrounding the discovery are of paramount importance, providing sufficient grounds to consider the milestone an *in situ* find – a critical nugget of archaeological information the majority of these epigraphic monuments are often deprived of (Lefebvre 2021, 133–135; Stanev 2020, 256–257).

Description of the milestone’ findspot and the topography of the locality “Kaldarmata” near the village of Vinogradets, Pazardzhik district

In 1964 tractors stumbled upon a column fragment, while deep-ploughing fields to be cultivated for vineyards in the vicinity of the village of Vinogradets, Pazardzhik district¹. Zhlegov (1978,

1 Preparing terrains for vineyards involves mechanical ploughing up to 60–70 cm in depth.



Fig. 3. The milestone of Constantine I from the village of Vinogradets, Pazardzhik district; general views and details (photos and transcription E. Nankov)

Обр. 3. Пътната колона на Константин I от с. Виноградец, обл. Пазарджик; общи изгледи и детайли (снимка и рисунка на надписа Е. Нанков)

75) reported that he had seen another, larger in diameter and uninscribed column and its base among “the other thrown out stones” upon visiting the locality. It seems reasonable, nonetheless, to suggest that these fragments, or at least the base, belonged to the inscribed upper part. For Roman milestones, being essentially columns carved out of a monolithic block (2–4 m in height), were slenderer at the top and thicker towards the lower body which typically terminated in a square base (Torbatov 2004, 79; for a recent *in situ* column found intact, see Sharankov, Hristov 2019).

Of further significance for our discussion is the attempt to pinpoint the precise topographical position of “Kaldarmata”, where the milestone was found. Zhlegov, who learned of its name from a resident of Vinogradets, estimated that the locality was situated ca. 2.5 km southwest of the village without providing further details. The toponym, apparently, exists in local vernacular only and has gained no official currency in the topographic maps of the area. Recently, I was taken to the locality in question by another resident of Vinogradets, who described to me its position in more detail². In fact, as the toponym suggests (“kaldaram” – a paved road), it lies immediately south of the modern asphalt road Vetren–Pazardzhik, now being a strip of corn fields measuring ca. 900 m (E–W) x 170 m (N–S), and is thus situated ca. 4 km due south of Vinogradets (figs. 1–2). Although Zhlegov reported seeing stones on the surface, which were dug up by the bulldozers, it remains unclear whether they actually belonged to the pavement of the road (Gizdova 2012, 427).

Although the locality “Kaldarmata” fell outside the scope of a recent archaeological survey within the boundaries of Vinogradets’ land, two tumuli and a prehistoric site closer to the left bank of *Hebros* were documented in its vicinity to the south (Gotsev, Manev 2019, nos. 10005977, 10005978, 10005979, fig. 2). Immediately to the east, but already lying within the land of the neighbouring village of Karabunar at the locality “Golemite nivi” (fig. 1), traces of a large settlement from the Roman period were discovered (Gotsev, Manev 2019, 645, o6p. 1–2; Manev 2018, 62). With this new information in hand, I would like to examine more closely the topographic proximity of the milestone’s findspot to other Roman sites in the area.

In search of the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ and the genesis of road infrastructure in the Western Upper Thrace valley

Perhaps most significant is the immediate association with the fortified settlement Gradishteto sprawling along the left bank of Asardere, a left tributary of *Hebros*, ca. 2 km to the west of “Kaldarmata”. The site, in fact, is quite substantial, consisting of a fortified compound (*castellum*) and a lower settlement reaching to the springs “Tekera”, situated ca. 1 km to the southwest (Batakliiev 1969, 649; Manev 2018, 60–61). Recently, the remains of a large architectural complex were identified on the surface immediately south of the modern road Vetren–Pazardzhik, ca. 300 m southeast of the *castellum* (Manev 2018, 58, 62). A link between these sites should be made on historical grounds as well, since *Bona Mansio*, commonly identified with the Gradishteto at Asardere (Soustal 1991, 214), appears for the first time in the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* in AD 333 shortly before the milestone from Vinogradets was set up. The recorded distance from *Bona Mansio* to *Philippopolis* in that period is 42 MP (*Itin. Burdig.* 567. 11). Moreover, I suggest that the milestone has been found in its original position along the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’. Since the actual distance between the milestone’s findspot and Plovdiv (*Philippopolis*) is approximately 56 km or 38 MP, this signifies that a traveller en route from *Philippopolis* to *Serdica* would have passed by the milestone just 2 MP before reaching

2 I am indebted to Athanas Krumov Blagov for the willingness to share his knowledge. It is also significant that he himself used to work as a tractor driver for the “Labour–Cooperative Agricultural Holding” in the village of Vinogradets. Mr. Blagov also informed me that as a tractor driver he had ploughed the fields in the locality “Kaldarmata” in 1989.

the grounds of Gradishteto at Asardere (cf. figs. 1–2, 5). This also means that at least the identification of the latter with *κάστρον Βονομάσιον* should be more confidently considered as secure, since its distance to *Philippopolis* is 40 MP or 59 km, as reported in another 4th century written account (*Passio Alexandri Rom.* 17, cf. Dimitrov 1934, 124, 152, fig. 99; Manev 2018, 61).

No less important is the eyewitness account of Jireček's visit at Asardere in the late 19th century, when he reported seeing "kaldarum road furnished with bridges and wells..", also locally known as "Trojan", situated in the fields south of the road Vetren–Pazardzhik (Jireček 1886, 91). A section of perhaps the same road ca. 2 km long, designated as "каменливия път" or "the stony road" can be seen on 1:5000 map, which begins at the eastern edge of Vetren and runs parallel to the modern asphalt road Vetren–Pazardzhik ca. 200–250 m south of it, at least up to the fork for the village of Akandzhievo (fig. 1). At this point, it seems likely to conclude that the Vetren's "stony road" continuing to the east and passing at the foot of Gradishteto at Asardere in fact coincides perfectly with the position of the locality "Kaldarmata" in Vinogradets's land, where the milestone of Constantine I was found (figs. 1–2). Future excavations may determine whether or not this road was also used during the Roman period (Dernschwam 1979, 240–241, 263; cf. Dinchev 2020 64–66), as suggested by a coin of Caracalla (AD 211–217) found together with the milestone.³ At present, the toponym alone would indicate that it was certainly used in the Ottoman period (for the history of Vinogradets, see Batakliiev 1969, 612–614; Gyurova 2011). Finally, the same road bypasses the large, sprawling Roman settlement detected during the recent archaeological survey at the locality "Golemite nivi", situated just 1–1.5 km east of "Kaldarmata" (Gotsev, Manev 2019, 645, figs. 1–2), which to the south of it is designated on the 1:5000 map as "малкия друм" or the "little road".

Emporion Pistiros and its territory in the Roman period: military revival of an old trading post?

At this point, I would like to discuss the scarce, and largely overlooked archaeological evidence for Roman habitation from *emporion Pistiros*, which is situated ca. 2 km south of *Bona Mansio* and ca. 3 km southwest of "Kaldarmata" and the settlement at the "Golemite nivi" (fig. 1). To begin with, the French–Bulgarian field surveys in the territory of *Pistiros* have collected surface data for a substantial number of Roman sites indicating extensive occupation of the immediate countryside (Chankovski, Gotsev 2002, fig. 16.1; cf. Weisssova 2013, 68–73, pl. 16–17). At *Pistiros* itself, excavations near the Eastern Gate turned up Roman bricks, tiles, pottery, a belt finial, fibulae and coins, dated to the 2nd–3rd centuries AD, which according to Bouzek would indicate that "a small Roman building (watchtower?) existed near the ruins of the Eastern Gate" (Bouzek, Musil 2010, 28–29; Bouzek 2013, 68; cf. Musil et al. 2013, 8–10; Bouzek, Musil 2013, 136, fig. 2). A "garbage pit" was excavated at the edge of the river terrace within the fortified compound that was filled only with Roman bricks, tiles, daub and pottery (Katinčarova 2007, 42, fig. 30). Domaradzki reported the presence of numerous Roman and Late Antique pits along the fortification wall (Domaradzki 1996, 17). Although future excavations will refine the evidence, currently it seems that we need to clearly distinguish and draw a line between the Roman occupation at the site and the sporadic looting and recycling of ashlar blocks from the fortification walls during Late Antiquity, including the famous 'Pistiros Inscription' found by chance in the vicinity of *κάστρον Βονομάσιον* (Domaradzki 1993, 41; cf. Bouzek et al. 2001, 16–18, Pl. V, 1–4).

This short survey of the available data for Roman habitation at *Pistiros* and its surroundings

3 I owe this information to Adriana Bozhkova from the Regional Museum of History – Pazardzhik (Inv. no. 1076) to whom I express my gratitude.

shows that its scale was much more extensive than scholars are prepared to admit. The material and density of sites clearly demonstrate a busy life in the countryside, one of which has already been identified on an inscribed plaque found at Rome as *vicus Lisenon Philippopoli* in AD 227. The monument lists soldiers from the Praetorian Guard, originating from 17 villages (*vici*) in the territory of *Philippopolis*, who made a dedication to Asclepius Zimidrenus (*CIL* VI 32543). One of them, Marcus Aurelius Flavius Mucianus from *vicus Lisenon*, was already a priest (*sacerdos*) of Asclepius Sindrinus by AD 241 (*CIL* VI 30685). The Thracian name Zimidrenus/Sindrinus, most probably a toponymic epithet, would suggest a local divinity or regional hero known to have been worshipped at the sanctuary near the village of Patalenitsa (Batkun), Pazardzhik district, situated ca. 20 km southeast of Vetren (see description with lit. in Valchev 2015, 261–268). Two more inscriptions from the vicinity of Vetren may confirm the Roman military presence associated with *vicus Lisenon*: (1) a fragmentary dedication from the area of the “Tekera” springs, situated ca. 1 km southwest of Gradishteto at Asardere, has been put forward as evidence for a settlement of veterans from the Flavian period involved with policing the Sredna Gora mountain crossing via the *Succi* Pass (*Succorum claustra*: *Amm. Marc.* 21. 13, 6; cf. Gerov 1961, 112, n. 2 with Kalinka 1906, no. 215 = *IGBulg* III.1 1070; Gerov 1980, 51, n. 120); and (2) a badly preserved Latin inscription in *tabula ansata* dated to the 1st–3rd century AD originating from an unspecified location around Vetren (Škorpil, Škorpil 1892, 96, no. 19 = *CIL* III 12332; cf. Mihăescu 1978, 141, n. 19).

The military backdrop described above coupled with the close proximity to the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ would eventually have led to the establishment of infrastructure suitable for providing services to travellers on a regular basis, including the *cursus publicus*, in conjunction with the construction of a road station along with its constituent elements – *praetoria*, *tabernae*, *stabula*, etc. (Torbatov 2004, 80–83, figs. 6–7; Panaite 2015, 598), came to be known in the *Itinerarium Antonini* (136. 2) as *Lissae* (cf. Miller 1916, 534; Velkov 1962, 36; Soustal 1991, 336). Military road posts (*stationes*) played an integral part in policing the main roads and were normally stationed nearby (Nikolov 1994, 126–127; Torbatov 2004, 82; Panaite 2015, 598). Typically, at stations along *viae publicae* local residents were required and later reimbursed by the state to provide wagons, animals and food (Tacheva 2004, 31–32; cf. Kolb 2018, 5). During the 3rd century AD *emporia* were established in the province of *Thracia*, e.g. *Pizos*, *Thouida* among others, in order to provide means of transportation (Soustal 1991, 405–406; Nedyalkova 2012, 382; Boyanov 2014, 121–141; cf. Kolb 2018, 5). Along these lines, it is symptomatic that *Parembole*, situated near the village of Belozem, Plovdiv district, is attested both as a *mutatio* and an *emporion* on the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ in the 4th century AD (*Itin. Burdig.* 568. 6; *Passio Alexandri Rom.* 21; Soustal 1991, 388; for a military diploma of AD 235, mentioning *Parembole*, see Dana 2020, 335, n. 71). Perhaps, this may explain why the extinguished life at *Pistiros* was rekindled again, calling upon its former significance as a trading post in the heart of the Odrysian kingdom during the Classical period.

Other milestones associated with *mansio Lissae* and *Bona Mansio*: the curious cases of two ‘*pierre errante*’

Essential to the discussion here is the fact that there are two other milestones associated with *Bona Mansio* and its predecessor *Lissae* on the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’, which traverses the westernmost fringes of the territory of *Philippopolis*. Unfortunately, neither of them has been found *in situ* (fig. 5), but they both contain *Philippopolis* as *caput viae*, half preserved mileage figures, and, significantly, one features successive inscriptions applied on four separate occasions in the course of 120 years.

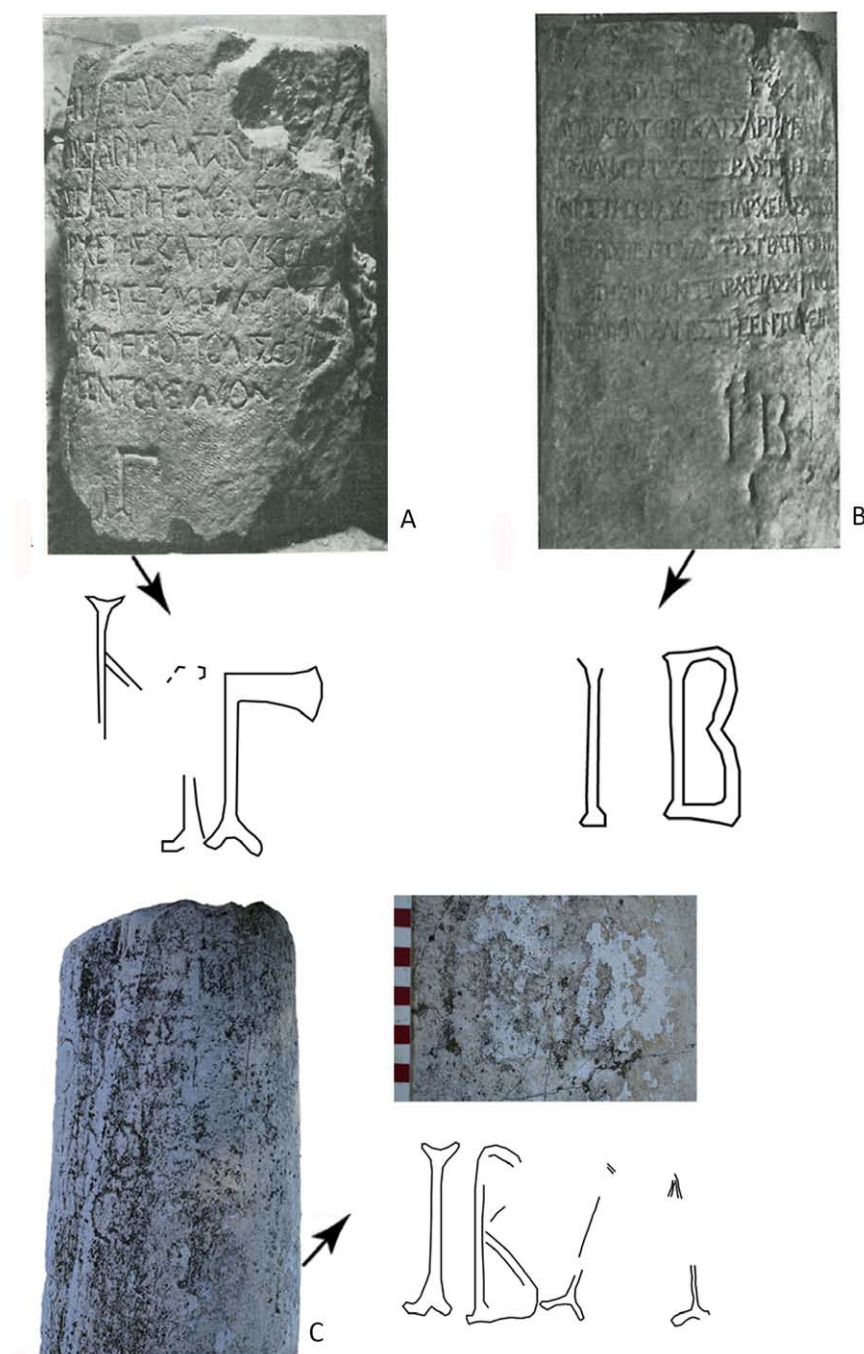


Fig. 4. A. The milestone of Gordian III from the town of Vetren, Pazardzhik district (photo IGBulg III. 1. 1069; line drawing of mileage figure E. Nankov); B. The milestone of Gordian III from the village of Ioakim Gruevo, Plovdiv district (photo IGBulg III. 1. 1375; line drawing of mileage figure E. Nankov); C. The milestone of Gordian III, Constantine I and Julian at the Monastery "St. Nicholas" near the village of Kalugerovo, Pazardzhik district, a detail of the inscription of Gordian III (photo and line drawing of mileage figure E. Nankov)

Обр. 4А. Пътната колона на Гордиан III от гр. Ветрен, обл. Пазарджик (снимка по IGBulg III. 1. 1069; рисунка на числото, обозначаващо милите Е. Нанков); Б. Пътната колона на Гордиан III от с. Йоаким Груево, обл. Пловдив (сн. по IGBulg III. 1. 1375; рис. на числото, обозначаващо милите Е. Нанков); В. Пътната колона на Гордиан III, Константин I и Юлиан от манастира „Св. Никола“ до с. Калугерово, обл. Пазарджик, детайл от надписа, посветен на Гордиан III (сн. и рис. на числото, обозначаващо милите Е. Нанков)

The milestone of Gordian III

The first milestone (figs. 4a; 5) dated to the reign of Gordian III (AD 238–241) was published by Albert Dumont in 1868 (Dumont 1868, 441), who saw it in Pazardzhik at the house of the French engineer M. de Verny, according to whom the milestone came from Hisardzhik (Vetren). In spite of the lack of specific details and thanks to an early suggestion by Jireček, it has long been considered to have come from Gradishteto at Asardere, situated ca. 5 km east of the town of Vetren (Jireček 1877, 35; cf. Jireček 1886, 91, repeated by Shkorpil, Shkorpil 1885, 16, Mutafchiev 1915, 359, Miller 1916, 536 and Deliradev 1953, 192; but not mentioned by Kalinka 1906, no. 59 and Todorov 1937, 26). For the milestone is historically related with *Lissae*, the Roman predecessor of *Bona Mansio* (cf. *IGBulg* III.1 1069). However, recent archaeological excavations (2002, 2016–2018) at Gradishteto have confirmed the lack of physical remains and habitation strata dated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD (Chankovski et al. 2004, 1253; cf. Manev 2018, 60). While attractive, the idea that the milestone might have been used at Asardere as a *spolium*, in a building dating from the 5th–6th centuries AD, has increasingly become a moot point. Jireček's suggestion, therefore, should be treated with caution and not taken for granted. The least one can conclude is that originally the milestone of Gordian III must have been set up elsewhere. Perhaps it was found at Hisardzhik (Vetren) itself after all, as initially reported (Dumont 1868, 441). A possible clue is provided by the letters for the miles (ΜΓ) whose numerical reading as 43 MP (fig. 4.A) seems warranted (Iliev 2019, 83), corresponding to 63 km, which is the actual distance between Vetren and Plovdiv (fig. 5). *Itinerarium Antonini* (136. 2) records the distance from *Philippopolis* to *Lissae* as 44 MP, so it may be argued that the milestone was set up a mile before the road station, just as the milestone from Vinogradets would be erected two miles before *κάστρον Βονομάσιον* a century later. Thus, *mansio Lissae* may be sought either someplace else in the plain, or along the foothills occupied by the town of Vetren (figs. 1–2).

The milestone of Gordian III, Constantine I and Julian

The second milestone (figs. 4c; 5) contains four successive inscriptions of the so-called palimpsest type (cf. Kolb 2004, 154–155; Cooley 2012, 165–166) dedicated to at least three emperors. The earliest belongs to Gordian III (dated AD 238–241), the second to Constantine I and his sons (dated AD 333–337), and the last to Julian (dated AD 361–363) (*SIBulg* no. 228; most recently Sharankov 2019, 42, n. 7, 64–65, Appendix 1D, Fig. 21). Unfortunately, the circumstances surrounding its discovery are uncertain and the views about its original findspot remain split (Zahariev 1870, 75; Batakliiev 1969, 562–564).

That the Monastery “St. Nicholas” at the village of Kalugerovo, Pazardzhik district, situated ca. 10 km northeast of Vetren, may be considered as the original place of the milestone has lent support to the proposition that there was a road station near the village of Kalugerovo at the locality “Zmeyovets” associated with an alternate route of the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’, along the course of the Topolnitsa River, running near the villages of Kalugerovo, Slavovitsa, Vinogradets, Lyubnitsa and over the Eledzhik peak near the church of “St. Spas”, thereby avoiding the crossing via the *Succi* Pass (Deliradev 1953, 193, 215, Soustal 1991, 294–295; Gizdova 2012, 165; *contra* Tsonchev 1963, 12, n. 2).

Similarly, a late milestone with successive inscriptions dated to the 4th century AD found broken in five fragments on the premises of the church “St. Spas” (*SIBulg* no. 33) was taken as a proof for the existence of this alternate road (fig. 5), despite Mutafchiev's observation that the road was difficult and unsuitable for armies (Mutafchiev 1915, 354–355, fig. 22, n. 100, Todorov 1937, 25, cf. Velkov 1961, 53; Mitova–Dzhonova 1994, 82–83). The real obstacle, however, lies in answering the following questions: was the column found *in situ* and was the road in operation during the Roman period (see also Miller 1916, Strecke 71, Abb. 168)? Recently, an archaeological survey established

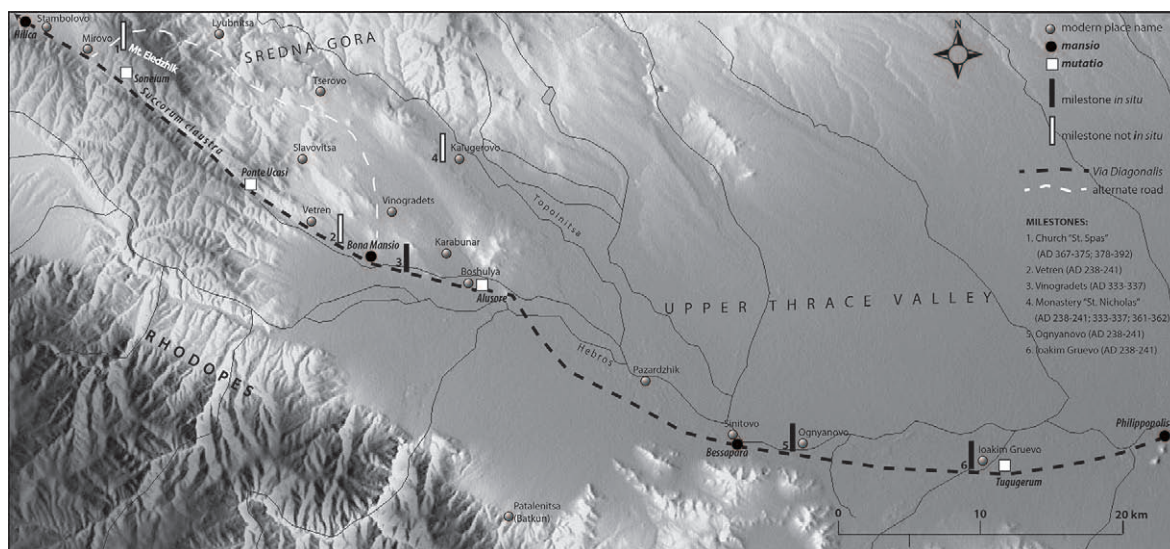


Fig. 5. The route of Via Diagonalis with road stations (*mansiones*) and halting stops (*mutationes*) in the territory of Philippopolis according to the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*. Discovered milestones (*milliaria*) are added for cross reference (map design E. Nankov)

Обр. 5. Трасето на Виа Диагоналис с пътните станции (*mansiones*) и спирките (*mutationes*) в територията на Филиппопол според Бурдигалския пътеводител. Археологическите находки на пътни колони са добавени за информация (карта Е. Нанков)

a network of Roman sites around Kalugeroovo and at the fortress of Zmeyovets (2nd–3rd century AD) in particular (Boyadzhiev et al. 2018, 16–19, figs. 11, 13), whereas Gizdova reported the identification of a road through rescue excavations ca. 2–3 km north of the village (Gizdova 2012, 165; Boyadzhiev et al. 2018, 23). But should they necessarily imply the existence of a *via publica* and a road station near-by, especially since Kalugeroovo stands ca. 5 km away to the east from the supposed route following a NW–SE axis between the villages of Tserovo, Slavovitsa and Vinogradets (fig. 5)? Petar Mutafchiev, who first argued for the presence of an alternate road, was initially ambivalent about its chronology (Mutafchiev 1915, 357), but in his later work he was inclined to date it as early as the 6th century AD (Mutafchiev 1937, 547). With regard to the milestone from the church “St. Spas”, Mutafchiev suggested that it was most likely taken from the old road traversing the lower ground near the village of Mirovo, in the municipality of Ihtiman (Mutafchiev 1937, 547; cf. Mutafchiev 1915, 354–355, fig. 22, n. 100), perhaps to be associated with the road station *Helice/Hilica* (*Itin. Ant.* 136, 1; *Itin. Burdig.* 567, 4) and *Egirca/Egirica* (*Tab. Peut.* VIII, 1; *Geogr. Rav.* IV 7) or the *mutatio Soneium* (Mitova–Dzhonova 1994, 96), the remains of which (*taberna*) were recently excavated ca. 3 km southeast of the village of Stambolovo (former Bodrovo), also in municipality of Ihtiman (Hadzhiangelov, Stoyanchova 2020, 492–502, figs. 1–3, cat. nos. 420–428).

In short, we have two “palimpsest” milestones from both ends of the Sredna Gora mountains crossing at the *Succi Pass* (Mitova–Dzhonova 1994, 77–78), recycled in later periods on the compounds of two churches situated on elevated grounds ca. 10 km away from the nearest road stations along the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ – *Helice/Hilica* in the territory of *Serdica* and *Lissae/Bona Mansio* in the territory of *Philippopolis* (fig. 5).

The complex biography of the milestone from Kalugeroovo is by no means an unusual one. Almost identical cases involving original and reused milestones of Gordian III are known from the route of the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ in the territory of *Serdica* (Dinchev 2020, 73–76). Within a short segment of the road (ca. 2–3 km) between the town of Kostinbrod (the site “Primichur”) and at the village of Mramor, Sofia district, were found, respectively, a milestone of Gordian III dated to AD

238–241 (*IGBulg* IV 2016) and a “palimpsest” milestone dedicated to Gordian III (AD 238–241), Diocletian (AD 293–305) and Constantine I and Licinius (AD 317–324) (*IGBulg* V 5694). As recently demonstrated by Dinchev, they were most likely erected along the road not far away from each other, southeast of Kostinbrod, even though the milestone from Mramor with the successive inscriptions was found (not *in situ*) ca. 2 km east of the supposed route of the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ (Dinchev 2020, 76, figs. 43, 49c, f).

Recently, Sharankov reiterated Tsonchev’s hypothesis that the milestone from Kalugerovo must have originally stood on the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ and was transferred to the Monastery “St. Nicholas” during the Middle Ages (Sharankov 2019, 64; cf. Tsonchev 1963, 12, n. 2; Conti 2004, 94, n. 51). Since, in my view, this offers more convincing epigraphic and historical arguments about the milestone’s original position, I would like to elaborate on it by presenting new observations on the mileage figure. As convincingly restored by Sharankov (2019, 64, Appendix 1A), the Greek text on the column is identical to that on the milestone found at Hisardzhik (Vetren), which, as I discussed above, must have been erected 43 MP away from *Philippopolis*, a mile before the road station *Lissae* (*Itinerarium Antonini* 136. 2; *IGBulg* III.1 1069). Thus, they were set up within a short period of time during the reign of Gordian III, in AD 238–241, and both measured the distance in relation to *Philippopolis* as *caput viae*. Although the mileage figure immediately below the text is badly damaged, Sharankov identified the first letter, which he interpreted as I (= 10 MP), and added that the next letter was illegible due to the fact that the milestone was covered with lime (Sharankov 2019, 64; cf. Gerassimova–Tomova, Hollenstien 1989, 54). Through autopsy I identify the second letter as B or E, the area of which is almost entirely whitewashed, so the full figure should read 12 or 15 MP. I would prefer the former option, which is more in agreement with the traces on the stone (fig. 4.C). This, however, complicates the matter since another milestone (figs. 4.B; 5) with exactly the same text, mileage figure IB (12 MP = 17.7 km) and date (AD 238–241) was found near the village of Ioakim Gruevo, Plovdiv district, identified with *mutatio Tugugerum*, situated 12 MP west of *Philippopolis* (*Itin. Burdig.* 568. 3; Dobruski 1901, no. 84, 775–776; *IGBulg* III.1 1375; Tsonchev 1950, 71–72; Soustal 1991, 486). And this is even more striking in view of the assumption that typically the mileage figure was added on after the milestone had been set up (Bekker–Nielsen 2004, 40, n. 24). In any case, at the time of the dedication made to Gordian III the milestone from Kalugerovo would have been originally placed along the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ much closer to *Philippopolis*, i.e. between *mansio Bessapara* and *mutatio Tugugerum*, since the reading for the mileage would suggest a range of 11–19 MP or 16–28 km (fig. 5).

Regardless of how one solves the problem of the milestone’s original position within that stretch of road during the 3rd century AD, several considerations seem to tip the scale in favour of the idea that the milestone was eventually transported to the area of *Bona Mansio*, as I would argue, most likely prior to Julian’s passing through the territory of *Philippopolis* in AD 361. For clearly his dedication was inscribed last on the stone, overlapping with the earlier dedications made to Gordian III and Constantine I (Sharankov 2019, 65, n. 112, Appendix 1E). Arguably, there are enough traces of a third numerical letter (M = 40 MP) immediately after the original mileage (IB = 12 MP), which, I think, was attempted and clumsily executed, again in Greek, in order to reflect the distance between its new location and *Philippopolis* (fig. 4.C). The milestone must have been taken westwards from the nearest available milestone cluster associated with the road infrastructure of the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ in the territory of *Philippopolis* (Dimitrov 1936, 137), namely the segment of road between *mansio Bessapara* and *mutatio Tugugerum* (fig. 5). The palaeographic features of the numeral M (= 40 MP), particularly the outward splaying vertical hastas, replacing that of Gordian III’s dedication (IB = 12 MP), are also more indicative of a date in the 4th rather than in the 3rd century AD, thereby serving as an anchor for its secondary position near *Bona Mansio* (κάστρον Βονομάσιον–*Philippopolis* = 40

MP: *Passio Alexandri Rom.* 17). This conclusion seems plausible, since there are several instances of dedications made to Julian from other Roman provinces involving transportation of older milestones and re-inscribed mileage figures associated with the earlier inscriptions (Conti 2004, 36, nos. 99, 109, 129).

Julian travelled between *Naissus* and *Constantinople* in November AD 361, but just a few months earlier, he successfully captured the *Succi* Pass and used it as a military base, with his *magister militum* Flavius Nevitta left in command of the Pass (Amm. Marc. 20. 4. 8, 21. 10. 2; Sharankov 2019, 54–55, n. 46; Mitova–Dzhonova 1994, 78). So eventually, it made strategic sense for him to lead his troops *en route* to Constantinople going next directly through the territory of *Philippopolis* and quickly emerging at *Bona Mansio* in the plain, rather than bypass the *Succi* Pass via the more difficult and arduous road over the Mt. Eledzhik and the longer loop it made between the villages of Lyubnitsa, Tserovo, Slavovitsa and Vinogradets (cf. *supra* and fig. 5). In expectation of his passing, the city magistrates at *Philippopolis* quickly took the chance to commemorate Julian's travel by re-inscribing an older milestone and transporting it closer to the territory of *Serdica*, perhaps emulating the more generous gesture of its officials who dedicated 11 milestones made anew between *Turres* (mod. Pirot) and *Serdica* (Sharankov 2019, 60, n. 96, fig. 1; Marcos 2019, map on p. 519; Appendix A).

Concluding remarks

If the milestones from Vetren and Kalugerovo are to be associated with the '*Via Diagonalis*', which is the most likely scenario based on the newly presented evidence from the mileage figures, then in reality *mansio Lissae/Bona Mansio* and *κάστρον Βογομάσιον* had either identical locations or were situated close to each other. Indeed, both propositions remain possible, and this is no doubt the sense one gets from the slightly diverging mileage figures recorded in the itineraries (44, 42 and 40 MP). Significantly, the grouping of the milestones from Vetren, Kalugerovo and Vinogradets along the road station's immediate vicinity seems to follow the same pattern (43, 40 and 38 MP) (fig. 5). While the findspot of the milestone from Vinogradets pinpoints the route in close proximity to *Bona Mansio/κάστρον Βογομάσιον*, the milestone from Kalugerovo encapsulates in a single monument the long history of this area as an important hub along the '*Via Diagonalis*'. In short, the consideration of mileage calculations on milestones in relation to those on other such stones from the same region and the recorded distances in literary *Itineraria* can be used to (1) confirm the accepted locations of *mansiones* and *mutationes*, and (2) help triangulate, discover the unknown locations of other such sites, in Bulgaria and elsewhere.

The milestones under consideration also capture the shift in the function of milestones as a medium of communication between the imperial administration and its subjects within the 3rd and the 4th centuries AD; from a road accessory providing practical information to travellers (Gordian III) into an administrative tool displaying imperial propaganda (Constantine I and Julian). As I discussed above, road amenities were conceived of as part of larger organisms utilizing a wide range of resources on micro-regional level. More than one place within this compound in close proximity to *mansiones* may be considered suitable for erecting a milestone. Thus, evidently, the three milestones belonged to the so-called milestone clusters formed along *viae publicae* throughout the Roman Empire, particularly in the vicinity of road stations (Sauer 2014, 269–274, n. 62, Figs. 1, 8). The area of *Lissae* and *Bona Mansio* situated on the territory of *Philippopolis* was therefore no exception; for just before or after negotiating the difficult passage in the Sredna Gora mountains through the *Succi* Pass seemed like a perfect opportunity for a traveller to spend the night (cf. Mutafchiev 1915, 358–359; Mutafchiev 1937, 535–536), it was equally beneficial for the city magistrates at *Philippopolis* to

seize the chance to showcase their loyalty to Rome by erecting milestones along the ‘*Via Diagonalis*’ in expectation of imperial benevolence.

Appendix I

Milestone from the village of Vinogradets, Pazardzhik district (fig. 3)

Editions: Zhlegov 1978, 74–75, fig. 1 (blurry photo); Boyadzhiev 1990, no. 90 (no photo)

Provenance: Found by chance in the locality “Kaldarmata”, situated ca. 4 km south of the village of Vinogradets, Pazardzhik district in 1964 by bulldozers which were deep-ploughing fields to be cultivated for vineyards. The stone was taken to the house of Nicola Dobriyanov, a resident of Vinogradets, and eventually handed down to Dimitar Zhlegov, a student of history at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, and from 1965 until 1993 an employee of the Regional Museum of History–Pazardzhik.

Location: Currently stored at the lapidarium of the Regional Museum of History – Pazardzhik, Inv. no. A – 713.

Description: Column of white marble, with multiple shallow, linear scratches presumably left from the bulldozers upon discovery. Only the upper part is preserved; the top is almost flat, the lower end is cut at an angle. The longer side is 57 cm and the shorter side is 26 cm h., diam. 32 cm (top). Latin inscription; four lines preserved, starting at 7 cm from the top and taking up a half of the column’s circumference. Letters: 6–10 cm h., 2,5–3,5 cm w. In the first line the letters are smaller: 6–7 cm. There are no traces of earlier lettering.

Transliteration:

DN F[] CONSTANTINO PIO
MAXIMO VICTORIS AC TRI
[]PER AVG ET
[]TANTIO
////////////////////////////////////

Reading:

D(omino) n(ostro) F[l(avio)] Constantino Pio
<Felici> Maximo Victori{s} ac Tri–
[umphatori, sem]per Aug(usto) et
4 [Constantino et Cons]tantio
[et Constanti nob(ilissimis) Caes(aribus)]

1. D(ominum) n(ostrium) Constantino <no> (Zhlegov); D(omino) n(ostro) Constantino <no> (Boyadzhiev). I noticed F on the stone, to be restored as *F[l(avio)]*. I read PIO instead of <no>. 2–3. [maximo] victori ac tri[umphatori sem]per Aug(usto) et (Zhlegov); [maximo] victori ac tri[umphatori sem]per Aug(usto) et (Boyadzhiev). Felici is omitted but should be supplied in order to complete the epithet Pio in the preceding line. I read VICTORIS, perhaps the stonecutter’s mistake. 4. [Cons]tantino (Zhlegov); [Cons]tantino | [et Constanti et Constantio | [nobilissimis Caes(aribus)] (Boyadzhiev). 5. [et Constanti et Constantio] (Zhlegov). 6. [nob(ilissimis) Caes(aribus)] (Zhlegov).

Translation: “To our Lord, Flavius Constantinus, Pious, Fortunate, Maximus, Victor and Triumphator, forever Augustus and Constantinus and Constantius and Constans, most noble Caesars.”

Date: late June AD 334–early AD 335.

Discussion: The arrangement and the wording of the text are almost identical to several mile-

stones from the provinces of *Thracia*, *Haemimontus*, *Moesia Secunda* and *Scythia Minor* dated to AD 333–337; three originate from the road *Anchialus–Philippopolis* (Kirilovo, Korten, region of Sliven) and three from the road *Marcianopolis–Anchialus* (*Mesambria*, Koparan [mod. Poroy], Goren Chiflik, Varna district) (*SIBulg* nos. 150, 152, 170, 189, 199, 200; cf. Grünewald 1990, nos. 420–423, 431–435, 466 for milestones from *Galatia*, *Pontus Polemoniacus* and *Caria*; cf. also Isaac 2018, 63, no. 3, who lists several milestones of Constantine I dated AD 333–337 from Judaea, Syria and Arabia). The dedicatory language is formulaic, with minor variations regarding Constantine I's titulature and the order of his sons' names (for the imperial titles *Pius Felix Maximus Victor semper Augustus* and *Victor ac Triumphator*, see Grünewald 1990, 137–138, 147–150, nos. 303, 381, 384, 428–430, 436). Most likely, there was no *caput viae* and numerical indication for the distance in *m(ilia) p(assuum)* below the text, even though this should not be taken for granted (e.g. *SIBulg* nos. 1, 45, 202; Grünewald 1990, no. 420, 422, 423).

Constantinus II was proclaimed *Caesar* on 1 March AD 317; Constantius on 8 November AD 324; Constans on 25 December AD 333. Constantine I died on 22 May AD 337. The imperial title *maximus victor ac triumphator semper Augustus* was introduced after the Gothic wars in AD 328/332 (Grünewald 1990, 147–150, 180). These facts circumscribe the date within AD 333–337 (Zhlegov 1978, 75; Boyadzhiev 1990, no. 90). I narrow down the date to the summer of AD 334 – early AD 335, since Constantine I was at *Constantinople* on 17 June and at *Singidunum* on 5 July AD 334 according to the Theodosian Code (*CTh.* 1. 22. 2; 10. 15. 2). One may expand this dating to include early AD 335, when Constantine returned to Constantinople by 22 March of that year (*CTh.* 10. 10. 3). This dating is worth considering because the missing bottom portion of the column does not allow us to see whether any additional text was inscribed, whether this milestone was purely honorific or if it also advertised some imperial legislative action that Constantine took toward *Philippopolis*, just as is evident on Julian's milestones from *Serdica*. The column could have been inscribed before or after Constantine's passage through the region in late June AD 334 – early AD 335. Presumably he passed by *Bona Mansio* as well in the context of his travels related to the wars against the Limigantes and the Sarmatians (Velkov 1959, 32; Marcos 2014, 763, n. 76; Doležal 2019, 244–246). In a similar vein, one can consider the case of the emperors Valens and Valentinian I, who conducted state affairs, while staying at *Bona Mansio* thirty years later, on 27 May AD 364 (*CTh.* 7. 4. 12; 14. 2. 1; cf. also Velkov 1959, 34, n. 6; Destephen 2016, 161–166). Although imperial visits sometimes did not necessarily prompt local communities to erect milestones in their honour, as has been shown for the Late Roman milestones in Asia Minor (cf. Destephen 2018, 175–176), the epigraphic evidence from *Thracia* and elsewhere seems to paint a different picture (Velkov 1961, 51–52; cf. Cooley 2012, 163, n. 132). In addition, written accounts demonstrate that the emperors often travelled between Central Europe and Asia Minor specifically for military purposes. In the case of Gordian III, his Balkan itinerary was related to his Persian campaign, and more specifically, to his wars against the Carpi in Asia Minor in AD 242 (Gerassimova–Tomova, Hollenstein 1989, 49–50; Bartels 2014, 230–232). His passage was commemorated through 12 milestones, half of which were erected between *Serdica* and *Philippopolis* (see list in Bartels 2014, 224, n. 6). Among other things, the death of Constantius II prompted Julian's travel between *Naissus* and *Constantinople* in AD 361, which was commemorated through the erection of 11 milestones on the territory of *Serdica* and one on the territory of *Philippopolis* (Sharankov 2019; Marcos 2019, 519, Appendix A), most likely to be associated with *Bona Mansio*.

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От полезност към имперска пропаганда: (пре)откриване на една пътна колона на Константин Велики от околностите на Бона Манзио и емпорион Пистирос и нейното значение за изследването на „Via Diagonalis“ на територията на Филипопол

Емил Нанков

(резюме)

Римските обществени пътища се различават значително от регионалните и частните пътища по това, че са били едновременно основа и символ на властта на императорската администрация. В допълнение към итинерариите, които предоставят на пътниците писмени списъци с маршрути, съответстващи на съществуващите пътища през терена, пътните колони или така наречените *milliaria*, обслужват както практически, така и идеологически нужди. Те измерват разстоянието по отношение на *caput viae* в *m(ilia) p(assuum)* или хиляда двойни крачки (1 MP = 1480 m), но също така представляват свидетелство за властта на римските императори, магистрати и градски общности. Функцията на пътните колони еволюират във времето по отношение на повода или вида дейност, за които били създадени. В републиканския период и ранната императорска епоха те могат да се третират като строителни надписи, отбелязващи строителни проекти или просто ремонти на вече съществуващата мрежа от *viae publicae* в цялата империя. През IV век сл.Хр. обаче те придобиват почетен характер, служейки като начин за римските магистрати и градски общности да покажат своята императорска лоялност и политическа вяроност.

От 8000 пътни колони, известни днес от териториите на Римската империя, 570 произлизат от балканските провинции, които включват двете Панонии, Дакия, двете Мизии и

Тракия. От територията на България са известни над 180 броя, като повече от 2/3, открити в провинция Тракия, са свързани с Трансбалканския път, свързващ Средния Дунав с Бизантион/Константинопол, известен като „*Via Militaris*“ или „*Via Diagonalis*“. Поддържането на пътната инфраструктура (*mansiones, mutationes*), военните укрепления (*castella*), както и пътните колони (*milliaria*) показват неговото огромно значение за Римската империя, особено през късната античност. Понастоящем пътните колони, посветени на Гордиан III (238–244 г. сл.Хр.) и Константин Велики (307–337 г. сл.Хр.) заемат най-голям дял, въпреки че появата на нови колони и концептуализацията на по-стари находки, какъвто е случаят с пътните колони посветени на Юлиан (361–363 г. сл.Хр.), вероятно ще увеличава техния брой в бъдеще.

Тази статия преразглежда една фрагментирана пътна колона, посветена на Константин Велики и неговите синове, открита случайно през 1964 г. в местността „Калдърмата“, намираща се на 4 km южно от с. Виноградец, обл. Пазарджик. Паметникът, понастоящем намиращ се в лапидариума на РИМ–Пазарджик (инв. №713), който успях да изследвам и документирам отново през 2020 г., е интерпретиран от неговия пръв издател, Димитър Жлегов, като свидетелство за ремонтни дейности по трасето на „*Via Diagonalis*“, извършени в последните години от Константиновото управление (333–337 г. сл.Хр.). Въпреки че случайното откритие на тази колона е значимо по топографски и исторически причини, тя някакси остава скрита и убягва от погледа на научната общност. Освен *editio princeps* на Д. Жлегов в далечната 1978 г. и някои редакционни бележки върху надписа, публикувани от Димитър Бояджиев през 1990 г., дискусии относно историческия контекст на пътната колона, както и нейната връзка с други екземпляри, открити в региона, на практика липсват. Обстоятелствата около откритието са от първостепенно значение, осигурявайки достатъчно основание да се счита, че пътната колона от с. Виноградец е находка *in situ* – ценна археологическа информация, от каквато повечето от тези епиграфски паметници са често лишени.

В голяма степен статията предлага опит пътната колона от с. Виноградец да бъде поставена в своя микрорегионален контекст, като част от по-голямата мрежа от римски селища, обслужващи междурегионалния трафик по „*Via Diagonalis*“ в западната част на Горнотракийската низина. Специално внимание е обърнато на пътните станции, функциониращи не изолирано, а като съставна част от по-големи организми, използващи широк спектър от ресурси на микрорегионално ниво. Представена е нова информация относно местонамирането, датировката (прецизирана в средата на 334 – началото на 335 сл. Хр.) и историческия контекст на пътната колона, както и нейната връзка с други екземпляри, открити в региона. Местонамирането ѝ в местността „Калдърмата“ поставя действителното трасе на „*Via Diagonalis*“ в близост до укрепеното селище Градището близо до Асардере, намиращ се ок. 2 km западно от „Калдърмата“ и на 5 km източно от град Ветрен, традиционно идентифициран с *Bona Mansio*, която е била последната пътна станция на територията на Филипопол през късната античност. Диахронният сравнителен анализ позволява да обхванем развиващата се функция на пътната колона като средство за комуникация между имперската администрация и нейните поданици през III и IV век сл.Хр. – от крайпътна маркировка, предоставяща практическа информация на пътниците в своеобразен инструмент на имперска пропаганда. Налага се изводът, че всички пътници колони, разгледани в тази статия, доказват съществуването на крайпътен клъстер, свързан с *mansio Lissae/Bona Mansio*, като по този начин е демонстрирано значението на западната част на Горнотракийската низина като важен инфраструктурен хъб по трасето на „*Via Diagonalis*“. Точно както преди или след трудното преминаване на Средна гора през прохода Суки за един пътник е предоставяло идеална възможност да пренощува в района на *Lissae/Bona Mansio*, така е било полезно и за градските магистрати във Филипопол да се възползват от шанса, за да покажат своята лоялност към Рим, поставяйки пътни колони по „*Via Diagonalis*“ в очакване на императорско благоволение.