

The Nawà-Der'ā Road¹

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The Roman roads from Damascus to Arabia were part of the imperial network of roads in the Roman Orient, used for military as well as commercial and other civilian purposes. The two main southbound routes led (i) to Bostra through Burāq and Suweidā (the eastern southbound route) stretching along the eastern edge of the Lejja; and (ii) to Gerasa and southward through al-Kisweh, Nawà and Der'ā (the western southbound route). However, these routes were interconnected by a couple of roads in a typical "web". One well-attested interconnecting road split east from the western route shortly after al-Kisweh, and joined the eastern route at Suweidā.² A second interconnecting road joined Bostra to Der'ā and continued to the Sea of Galilee. Azraq, Philadelphia and Gerasa, too, could be reached from Bostra, which was a relatively important road-junction, as well as through the western route (which led from Damascus southwards through Nawà, Der'ā, Gerasa and Philadelphia).

The western southbound route from Damascus to Arabian cities such as Gerasa and Philadelphia was not only shorter but also somewhat safer than the eastern one (via Bostra, the provincial capital), since it avoided the Lejja.³ Thus, although longer and indirect (through Nawà and Der'ā), it would even seem the preferable way from Damascus to Bostra. The important road from Damascus to Nawà⁴ is archaeologically attested as far south as Deir al-'Adas; further south, three of its cross-roads are known — the last of these (which will be mentioned later) leading from the Sea of Galilee to the city of Nawà (which is on the route). The road from Der'ā to Philadelphia through Gerasa is known

¹ I wish to thank Professor I. Roll for his kind advice.

² This road, stretching right through the Lejja, has yielded many mile-stones and other signs of military activities (see Th. Bauzou, "Les voies de communication dans le Hauran à l'époque romaine", *Hauran*, ed. J.-M. Dentzer, vol. 1, 1985 [=Bauzou, voies], 139, section 1.2; also: Th. Bauzou, "Les routes romaines de Syrie", *Archéologie et histoire de la Syrie*, edd. J.-M. Dentzer et W. Orthmann, vol. II, 1989, esp. 217-218). One would assume that it was used mainly by the military, and that traders and other civilians would normally avoid it. See also the next note.

³ Bauzou, voies, 139, section 1.1 (partly quoted below, n. 6).

⁴ "On sait que cette route (scil.: la route de Nawà à Damas), une des plus importantes de la région aujourd'hui, correspond à la route du *Hajj* depuis le XVIII^e siècle. Il est vraisemblable qu'elle ait déjà été importante auparavant" (Bauzou, voies, 139, section 1.1).

as well,⁵ but the intermediate segment, connecting Nawà with Der'ā, which must have been an integral part of the western route leading from Damascus southwards (through Nawà and Der'ā to Gerasa, Philadelphia and on southward) is not archaeologically attested; unfortunately, no tangible evidence has survived. However, the existence of this segment of the Damascus-Philadelphia road seems to be required by the known parts of the network surrounding it.⁶ Indeed, maps of the Roman network of roads in the Orient include it, although it is described as a conjectured or presumed road.⁷

Since ancient remains of the Nawà-Der'ā road have not yet been found (in curious contrast to the general abundance of archaeological finds in the region), a chance piece of evidence, even if literary, for the existence of this particular road-segment may be of interest. I should like to suggest that it is mentioned in a halachic discussion in the Palestinian Talmud.

The relevant text is part of a complex discussion of the halachic status of different places on the border of *Eretz Israel*, "The Land of Israel". This halachic term has in Talmudic texts a religious meaning bearing on several ritual and other matters, since *Eretz Israel* is holy in Jewish thought (and law), in juxtaposition to "The Land of the Gentiles", which is ritually impure.⁸ One of the implications of this conception is that residents of the Holy Land are expected not to leave *Eretz Israel* and enter into the "Land of the Gentiles", in order to avoid defiling themselves.⁹ In the case of men of priestly descent, the rules were stricter, since priests needed to maintain the purity of their person. After the Temple had been destroyed in 70, the main ritual reason for this no longer existed. However, in Jewish thought the permanent purity of priests, both in person and in lineage, did not lose its importance. It was a way of expressing the deeply-rooted belief that the present situation was temporary, and that one should always be prepared for the restoration of the Temple and for God's mercy

⁵ The Der'ā-Bostra road (mentioned further below) is also well-attested.

⁶ In the words of Bauzou (voies, 139, section 1.1): "Imaginer une voie romaine reliant Nawà à Der'ā n'est pour l'instant qu'une conjecture qui s'appuie sur l'importance de Der'ā (alors *Adraa*) dans l'Antiquité, et sur l'intérêt d'un tel itinéraire qui, partant de Damas, permettait d'atteindre 'Ammān (*Philadelphia*) en évitant les abords du Lejā".

⁷ The most up-to-date maps are: Bauzou, voies, fig. 1, 138; "Routes romaines de Syrie", *Archéologie et histoire de la Syrie*, (n. 2), 586-7 (carte no. 6 par Th. Bauzou); I. Roll, "A Latin Imperial Inscription from the Time of Diocletian Found at Yotvata", *IEJ* 39, 1989, fig. 2, 254 (not specifically marking unattested roads); B. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire*, 1990, map IV, end of book.

⁸ For a general halachic survey of the terms *Eretz Israel* and Land of the Gentiles see: *Talmudic Encyclopedia*, vol. II, 1986⁶ (Hebrew), 196-199 (ארץ העמים) and 199-235 (ארץ ישראל), esp. 224 (concerning the prohibition on leaving *Eretz Israel* and going to the Land of the Gentiles) and n. 48 *ibid.* (concerning the special case of priests).

⁹ This general rule has, of course, some exceptions, even for priests (see previous note). There is no need to discuss these halachic problems in full in this context. For some details see the next note.

accustomed to get as far as Darai,¹⁴ and [go on] to this road to (literally: thread of, stretch of) Bostra ([the district of] the Bostrans), as far as Pardeisa¹⁵.”

Rabbi Yoḥanan was asked about the halachic status of the road leading to Nawà (Naveh in the PT). Both the context in the *sugya* and the fact that the inquiry was made by priests imply that the road in question began in territory defined as *Eretz Israel*, and the problem was, how far along the road did this status still hold, namely, how far from the part of the road which was commonly known to be *Eretz Israel* could it still be used by priests. The road in question would therefore be a west-east route, leading to Nawà from the Sea of Galilee.¹⁶ Rabbi Yoḥanan's reply, on the authority of a local sage,¹⁷ Rabbi Ḥunya of Barat Ḥawran, consisted of the following statements: 1. Priests (that is, local priests, who are familiar with this particular road) use this road [not only up to Nawà, but further on¹⁸] up to Darai (which must be identified as Der'ā¹⁹). 2. Furthermore, they use the Der'ā-Bostra road up to Pardeisa, in the *territorium* of Bostra.

The form of the answer, which fortunately gives us more information than the anonymous priests had asked for, implies a quotation of a ruling laid down by Rabbi Ḥunya of Barat Ḥawran, and accepted by Rabbi Yoḥanan. The meaning of Rabbi Yoḥanan's answer is that not only the (eastbound) road from *Eretz Israel*²⁰ to Nawà was under the status of “*Eretz Israel*”, but so also was the road further on, leading (south) to Der'ā. Further still the road (eastbound again) connecting Der'ā to Bostra was considered *Eretz Israel* up to Pardeisa.²¹ There is no other evidence for a place of this name, but the word פּרְדִּיסָא (a Persian word)²² might indicate orchards or vineyards on the way to Bostra.²³ Rabbi

¹⁴ שאלון לרבי יוחנן ההן חוטא דנוה אמר לון רבי יוחנן בשם רבי חוויא: דרי, דראי, דרי. Variants: דרי. see Felix (next note), 60.

¹⁵ PT Shvi'it 6 36c: וההן חוטא דנוה אמר לון רבי יוחנן בשם רבי חוויא: דרי, דראי, דרי. A critical edition of this text can be found in Y. Felix's edition of the tractate Shvi'it of the PT, based on the Leiden Manuscript: *PT Tractate Shevi'it*, Vol II., 1986 (Hebrew), (=Felix), 60-61. The text here is cited according to the Venice *editio princeps*.

¹⁶ The various maps show slightly different tracks for this road; however, for our purpose it is not necessary to determine its exact track.

¹⁷ Whose words would reflect the local custom, and therefore (if not contradicted for some reason, which is not the case here) the correct practice.

¹⁸ This ellipsis is implied and is quite in normal form (compare n. 13).

¹⁹ Compare the place-name אֲדִרְעָא/אֲדִרְעִי/אֲדִרְעִי found in adjective form in several places in the PT and the BT in connection with a certain Rabbi Tanḥuma (e.g., PT Ber. 5 9b, etc.).

²⁰ As the context dictates; and this must be the road mentioned above, which connected the Sea of Galilee (and Tiberias) with Nawà.

²¹ A discussion of the halachic problems concerning Bostra and its *territorium* and an analysis of the relevant texts (including the text discussed here) is to be published separately.

²² See Jastrow, 1216, s.v. פּרְדִּיסָא, פּרְדִּיסָא; Lévi², vol. IV, 102, s. v. פּרְדִּיסָא; Sokoloff, 444, s. v. פּרְדִּיסָא, פּרְדִּיסָא (perhaps also 445, s.v. פּרְדִּיסָא). A possible relation to *praesidium/praesidia* (see Jastrow, 1219, s.v. פּרְדִּיסָא/פּרְדִּיסָא, פּרְדִּיסָא).

Yoḥanan assumed that the priests were interested in going to Bostra, and that was the reason for their question about the road to Nawà (presumably from the Sea of Galilee "ring road", which passed through Tiberias, where the Academy and Rabbi Yoḥanan himself were placed). Rabbi Yoḥanan held a very firm view concerning Bostra, and insisted that the city itself was Gentile Land (ארץ העמים). The halachic status of Bostra, and of the road connecting it to Tiberias through Der'ā, need not be discussed here.²⁴ For our purpose it suffices that an important segment of the Damascus-Philadelphia road, the Nawà-Der'ā road, is finally attested. Although this segment is not described explicitly as a Roman road in the evidence presented, it would seem to be one, since it fits in with the surrounding parts of the known Roman road network.²⁵

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Lévi², *ibid.*, 106-107, s.v. (פרוודאוא/פרוסדאוא) is an interesting though problematic alternative, to be explored elsewhere.

²³ Bostran dried figs are mentioned in the PT as a distinct type: D'mai 2 22b; Bikkurim 3 65c; Bava Mzi'a 3 8b.

²⁴ See n. 21.

²⁵ Cf. the maps referred to in n. 7.