

**A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE EXCAVATIONS
AT GADARA (UMM QES)
IN JORDAN FROM 1976 TO 1979**

by
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In preparation for a series of excavations at the ancient city of Gadara in Jordan, present-day Umm Qes, a surface survey of this site was carried out in 1974 by the members of the German Institute of Archaeology (Deutsches Evangelisches Institut für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes)¹. From May 8 to June 21, 1976, and from May 4 to July 1, 1977, two major seasons of excavation were conducted in an area between the upper and lower cities. Two shorter excavating seasons followed in 1978, from August 2 to August 9, and in 1979, from July 9 to July 24.² In 1977 a Danish group from the University of Copenhagen led by Professor Svend Holm-Nielsen undertook an independent excavation in the lower city, some 90 metres further to the west. In 1978 they continued their work there.

The German team began excavating in 1976 near the middle of the long NS terrace separating the upper city from the lower city. To the north the terrace is bounded by the main EW street and to the south by the west theatre. The upper portion of the 1.70m wide basalt western terrace retaining wall was uncovered. It was capped by a row of c. 0.90m wide, 0.55 m high, right-angled basalt blocks supporting five column bases (B 11—B 15; see plan). Other than the 3.8 m between B 14 and B 15, the distance between the column bases' centres was 3.15 m. Column bases B 11 through B 18 had the same profiles and (except for B 16's rounded plinth) the same square plinths, and belonged as a unit to the same column row. However, to the south of column base B 15 several changes were noted: 1) The row of basalt foundation blocks from B 11 to B 15 did not continue beyond column base B 15. 2) Column bases B 16, B 17, and B 18 were set on 0.36 to 0.38 m high pedestals. 3) Between column bases B 15 and B 16, and B 16 and B 17 a 0.76 m wide wall had been constructed out of reused basalt and limestone.

At an average distance of 4.24 m to the east of the column base row and parallel to it is the west wall of a square building which by various criteria can be interpreted as a church. Between the row of column bases and the church's west wall, two superimposed floors were detected. Directly above the upper floor, composed of reused building stone and architectural fragments, a considerable number of hewn stones that had fallen from the west church wall were found. This was especially the case to the east of B 14-B 16, where a complete 7.70 m section of collapsed wall lay toppled over in its original order, one course next to the other. The lower floor was composed of large limestone slabs with a minimum measurement of 0.68 by 0.80 m. An identical floor came to light outside the north and south church walls, where it had been broken through during the church's construction. The same type of flooring was also found to the north beneath the present floor of the colonnaded courtyard and to the south of the church. Thus it can be provisionally stated that, prior to the construction of the church and prior to the latest phase of the colonnaded courtyard, the entire terrace area was paved with these large limestone slabs. Both the west wall of the church and the still more westerly row of column bases (B 11—B 18) had a length of 23.23 m. In the middle of the west church wall there was a large entrance with a total width of 3.73 m including the door jambs. A smaller entrance, which lay tumbled to the west, had been built into the larger entrance. To the south of this entrance one could still see six courses of wall stones lying on the ground in header-stretcher fashion. Of these, the two lowest courses were composed of basalt, the upper four of limestone. The same construction method was used for the east wall of the church as well as elsewhere in ancient Gadara.

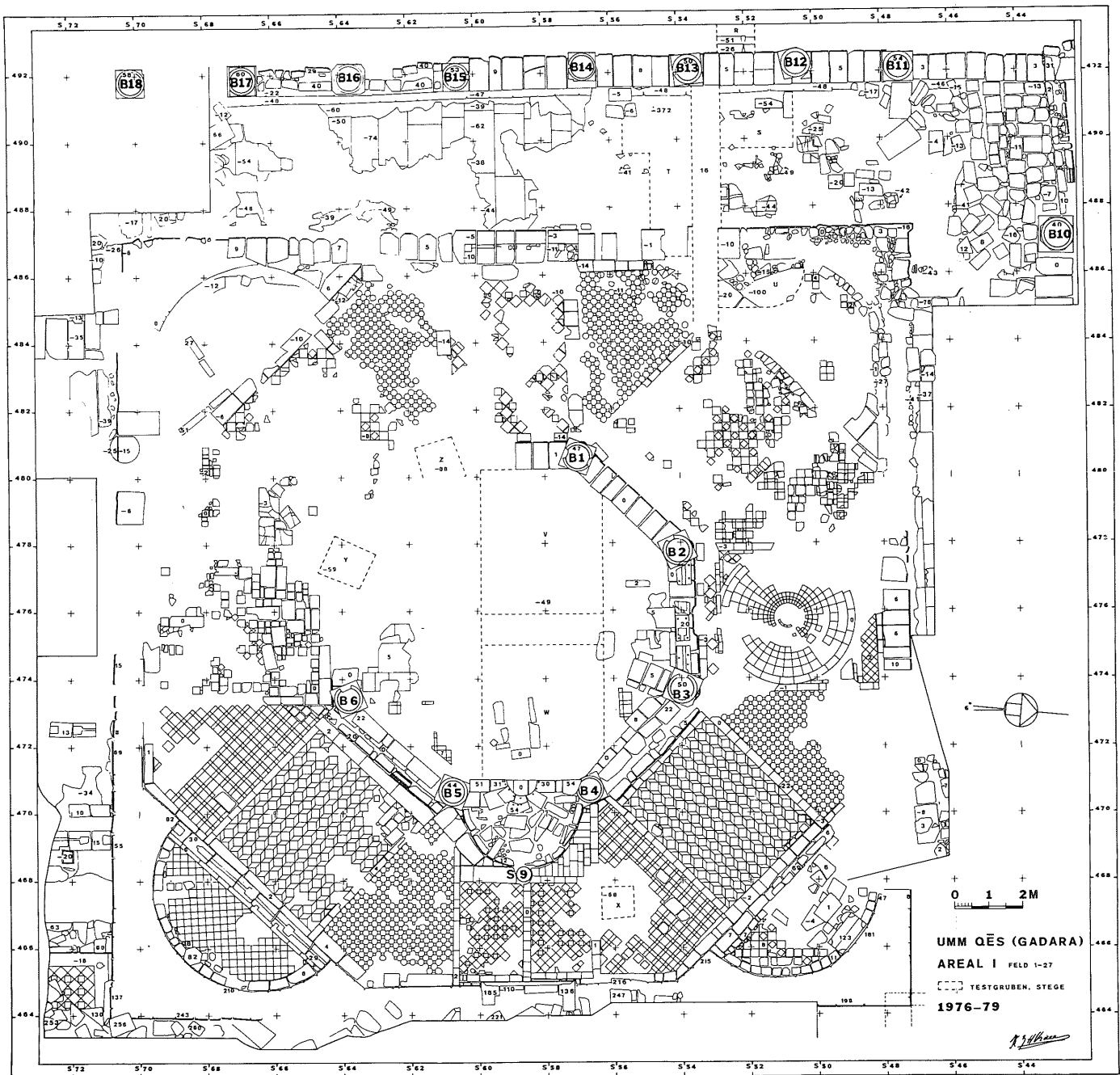
Of the western part of the north church wall (length: 23.15 m) only the foundations and a row of basalt stones protruding slightly above the floor level were preserved. Toward its eastern end, on the other hand, c. 2 m high remains of the north wall could be detected.

A similar picture applies to the south wall (length: 23.12 m), which revealed only a few remains of reused material at its western end but at its eastern end was preserved to a height of c. 2.40 m. The better state of preservation of the eastern parts of both walls and floors (see plan)

is attributable to the slope of the terrace, which rises sharply to the east. The eastern sector was consequently better protected by layers of fill and fallen building remains than the western sector, where fill had covered the ruins to a lesser extent.

This also explains the preservation of the east church wall (length: 23.70 m) to a height of 1.98-2.43 m. The installation of four apses in the four corners had determined the arrangement of the church interior. The ground plan of the southeast apse, partitioned off from the rest of the building by chancel screens, was perfectly preserved (width: 6.02 m; depth: 3.00 m). The floor was covered with white and brown tiles. On the interior wall face remnants of plaster could be seen. Centered at the back of the apse stood a 0.74 m high hexagonal basalt column decorated on all sides with geometrical patterns in relief (a reliquary stand?)³. The northeast apse was likewise separated from the main room of the church by a step. A row of building stones placed in the middle of the step apparently formed part of a partition wall. The apse's yellow, red, and black floor tiles were arranged in a geometrical pattern. A basalt sarcophagus (1.12 x 0.59 x 0.59 m) had been set against the back wall. On its facade part of a cross applied with plaster was preserved. Inserted into the floor of the apse in front of the sarcophagus were two graves (0.52 x 1.72 m and 0.60 x 1.74 m) with soft limestone cover slabs.⁴ Found in the grave debris were countless tiny glass mosaic tesserae of the same type as those unearthed in other areas of the church ruins; these tesserae may have been used to decorate the church walls. The outlines of both western apses could only be partially determined.

The octagonal room formed by the installation of the four apses also had an octagonal centre. The total floor width between the outer and inner octagons (c. 5.50 m) was covered with stone tiles. The tiles were arranged in various geometrical patterns set within rectangular and rhomboidal (kite-shaped) fields and surrounded by a border. With the exception of a few slate-colored tiles, the floor tiles were yellow, red, and white. The inner octagon was separated from the rest of the building by a row of 0.80 m wide, 0.04 m high basalt stones. From column base B 6 nearly to B 1 the basalt stones were missing (see plan). Column bases were found *in situ* in six corners of the central octagon. Their square plinths indicated, however, that they were not originally intended for use in an octagonal structure. Vertical grooves could be seen on two sides of column bases B 1 and B 2, but only on the west sides of B 3 and B 6. Between B 2 and B 3 a 0.24 m wide limestone threshold was preserved in which horizontal slots for chancel posts and screens had been cut exactly in line with the vertical east groove of B 2 and the west groove of B 3. Apparently there was once a chancel screen between B 2 and B 3 and presumably also between B 1 and B 2, B 1 and B 8, and B 6 and B 7 and B 8. On the north side of the octagon between B 2 and B 3 there was a narrow (c. 0.51 m wide) entrance (see plan). The eastern portion of the octagon was set apart from the outer isle behind it by: 1) two walls, 0.94 m wide and preserved to a height of 0.20 m above the floor, erected on top of the basalt stone rows running between B 3 and B 4, and B 5 and B 6; and 2) a semicircular, step-like structure, 3.50 m wide, 2.62 m deep, and 0.54 m high, oriented to the east (Pl. XCIX,1). A reused limestone column shaft, c. 0.45 m in diameter and standing 2.03 m above the floor, leaned against the east side of the semicircular structure. A cross had been chiseled into it at eye level. Two types of tiles were evidently used as flooring for the central octagon: in the western part only remnants of a simple stone paving were found, but on the east side fragments of square and rectangular tiles laid in a repeated cruciform pattern with a border along their eastern edge were preserved; similar tiles were encountered elsewhere in the building. In the eastern portion of the inner octagon, c. 0.62 m west of the semicircular structure and in line with the church's EW axis, two parallel rows of elongated rectangular stones were uncovered a few centimeters below the level of the floor tiles. We assumed that these stones were the tops of the walls of a sunken grave. In order to further examine this grave and to investigate the general nature of the inner octagon, fields V and W (see plan) were laid out in 1979. After the removal of the earthen fill under the floor in field V, a 0.35 m thick layer of stone fill came to light. It consisted of architectural fragments plus stone rubble and had apparently served as a foundation for the church floor. This stone layer was piled directly on the large-slabbed limestone floor beneath (minimum slab size: 1.54 x 0.63 m). It was this second floor that had previously been uncovered in various places outside the church in connection with the foundation trenches of the church walls. We observed that the basalt stone rows (upon which stood column bases B 1 through B 6, plus the hypothetical bases B 7 and B 8) also rested directly on this limestone slab floor. Under the floor, functioning as its foundation, was a stone rubble fill, which extended to bedrock at 0.49 m below floor level. The same picture applies beneath the church floor in field W: a thin earthen



layer, a stone fill made up of architectural fragments and stone rubble, a limestone slab floor (the so-called second floor), a stone rubble fill as foundation, and bedrock. Also uncovered in field W were the two parallel rows of elongated rectangular stones — reused architectural fragments of varying sizes set up on end. Except toward the west where they were missing, the tops of these vertically erected stones formed the outline of the sunken grave (Pl. XCIX, 2). They were at the same level as the stone fill beneath the church floor ($\pm 0.00\text{m}$). Within this outline and under a very hard, chalk-plastered stone layer, a stone chest was found, which would have contained a secondary burial. The chest itself stood directly on bedrock, and the space between it and the walls of the grave was filled with small stones. In contrast to the finely hewn chest were its two roughly worked stone cover slabs ($0.75 \times 0.30 \text{ m}$). An irregular stone slab and a well-worked, semicircular limestone disc lay directly on top of the two cover slabs. The chest (exterior measurements: $1.62 \times 0.52 \times 0.40 \text{ m}$) was filled with a loose, fine soil and produced no special finds. The interior bottom of the chest was not flat but curved, sloping up on either side (in cross section a hemispherical depression). Across the interior at its midpoint ran a groove into which the semicircular disc would have fitted, dividing the interior of the chest into two sections.

Outside the south wall of the church parts of various rooms were uncovered, one of which was subdivided by chancel screens. Further details concerning these rooms can only be given

after continued excavation. In the area between the south wall of the church and the theater, several fields were excavated down to the level of the extensive limestone slab surface. These slabs were similar and at the same level as those mentioned in connection with the excavation of the church.

The results of our excavations to date make it clear that this church belongs to the central-building type. It was built of robbed-out architectural elements on a previously existing terrace that extended beyond the church precinct. Approximately comparable Byzantine churches of the central-building type are found principally at Zor'a (the Church of St. George: 515 A.D.)⁵ and Bosra (the Cathedral: 512 A.D.)⁶ in Syria, as well as at Gerasa (the Church of St. John: 529-533 A.D.)⁷ in Jordan. However, these examples all have a main apse on their east side, which is not the case at Gadara, where there is simply an east entrance.

In this preliminary report no attempt is made to establish a date for the erection of our church. This must await the completion of the study of the finds.

The central octagon is remarkable in that so far only one access to it has been discovered. Located on the north side, the access aligns with the NS axis of a floor panel on which concentric circles are represented. The central octagon is composed of two parts: a western section with chancel screens and simple flooring, and an eastern section where, in place of chancel screens, walls have been incorporated and inlaid patterns appear on the floor. The semicircular structure at the eastern end, with the cross-incised column standing behind it and the grave lying to the west in front of it, may indeed be seen as the major element of the inner octagon. Noteworthy in this connection are also column bases B 14 and B 15, which lie along the church's EW axis. Not only is the interval between them greater than that between the other bases in the B 11 — B 18 row, but also these two bases still bear traces where chancel screens were once inserted. The two eastern apses may have had a special function, too.

The church was evidently destroyed by an earthquake. This is indicated first by the remains of the west wall, which lay on the ground, collapsed to the west but still assembled in their original order, and second by the column shafts, which fell next to their bases.⁸ For example, base B 2 and the column shaft fallen to the west of it both had the same mason's mark, a P. Likewise the two column shafts fallen to the west of B 1 and the capital that lay on the threshold of the west entrance were all marked with a B. Masons' marks were also found on other column shafts, bases, and capitals lying in and around the church. The date for the destruction of the church was ascertained by finds from the Umayyad period associated with a light brownish-gray soil layer deposited on top of the tile floor of the church. The building stones had collapsed onto this soil layer.

With the support of the Jordanian government and under the direction of the architect Ernst W. Krüger, the following architectural features have been restored insofar as possible: 1) the colonnaded courtyard (previously excavated and cleared) to the north of the church, 2) the columns of the inner octagon, 3) the columns of row B 11—B 18, and 4) the west wall of the church (which had collapsed to the outside, i.e., to the west) including the west entrance with its two door frames, one set within the other (Pl. XCIX, 3).

NOTES

1. U. Wagner-Lux, E. W. Krüger, K.J.H. Vriezen and T. Vriezen-van der Flier, Bericht über die Oberflächenforschung in Gadara (Umm Qes) in Jordanien im Jahre 1974, *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 94 (1978) pp. 135-144; and *ADAJ* 23 (1979) pp. 31-39.
2. The director of the excavations was Dr. Ute Wagner-Lux. The staff included Geoffry Adams - London (1976), Gjalb Blaauw - Groningen (1976), Drs. Paul H. de Boer - Utrecht (1977/79), Dr. Auguste Bruckner - Basel (1976), Dr. Christel Kessler - Cairo (1976), Thilo Khres - Irbid (1977), Abu Habib Kort - Jerusalem (1977/79), Ernst W. Krüger - Amman (1976/77/79), Dr. John Landgraf - Jerusalem (1979), Adam Nicolsen - London (1976), Markus Ryser - Basel (1979), Dr. Bruce E. Schein - Jerusalem (1976), Marianne Vogelzang - Groningen (1976/77/78), Tootje Vriezen-van der Flier - Vleuten (1976), and Drs. Karel J.H. Vriezen - Vleuten (1976/77/78/79). Omar Rshedat and Sultan Shraide from Irbid served as the representatives of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities. We would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank each of the participants. We are especially grateful to the director of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities in Amman, Prof. Dr. Adnan Hadidi, who in numerous ways has so generously supported our work. The excavations in 1976 and 1977 were financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. The institute itself was able to finance the shorter seasons of 1978 and 1979.
3. On the cultic use of apses see J. Lassus, *Sanctuaires Chrétiens de Syrie* (Paris 1947) p. 183.
4. For burials within church buildings see J. Lassus, op. cit. pp. 162 - 183 and especially for graves in the NE portion of churches see J. Lassus, op. cit. p. 168 and R.H. Smith, *Pella of the Decapolis I* (Wooster 1973) pp. 143 - 149 and also A. Grabar, *Martyrium I* (Paris 1943 - 1946) pp. 437-441.
5. H.C. Butler, *Early Churches of Syria* (Princeton 1929) pp. 122-125 and E.M. de Vogüé, *La Syrie Central I* (Paris 1865 - 1877) p. 61f., Pl. 21.
6. J.W. Crowfoot, *Churches at Bosra and Samaria* (*Brit. School of Archaeol. in Jerusalem Suppl. Paper 4*, 1937).
7. C.H. Kraeling, *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis* (New Haven 1938) p. 241ff.
8. For earthquake destruction in Transjordan in the 2nd half of the 7th and first half of the 8th centuries A.D. see, e.g., R.H. Smith, op. cit. pp. 164-166, C.H. Kraeling, op. cit. pp. 69 and 247 ff.