

The Architectural Significance of the Sanctuary of Artemis at Gerasa

The Italian expedition in Jerash was undertaken with the intention of clarifying the architectural significance of the Sanctuary of Artemis, perceived as fundamental to the knowledge of the architecture of Roman times.

Our work carried on over the last three years, together with a thorough going record of the visible structures, brought up a number of questions concerning the city layout as a whole and about the fabric of the Sanctuary itself.

This account is therefore a brief outline of some of the tasks that lie ahead.

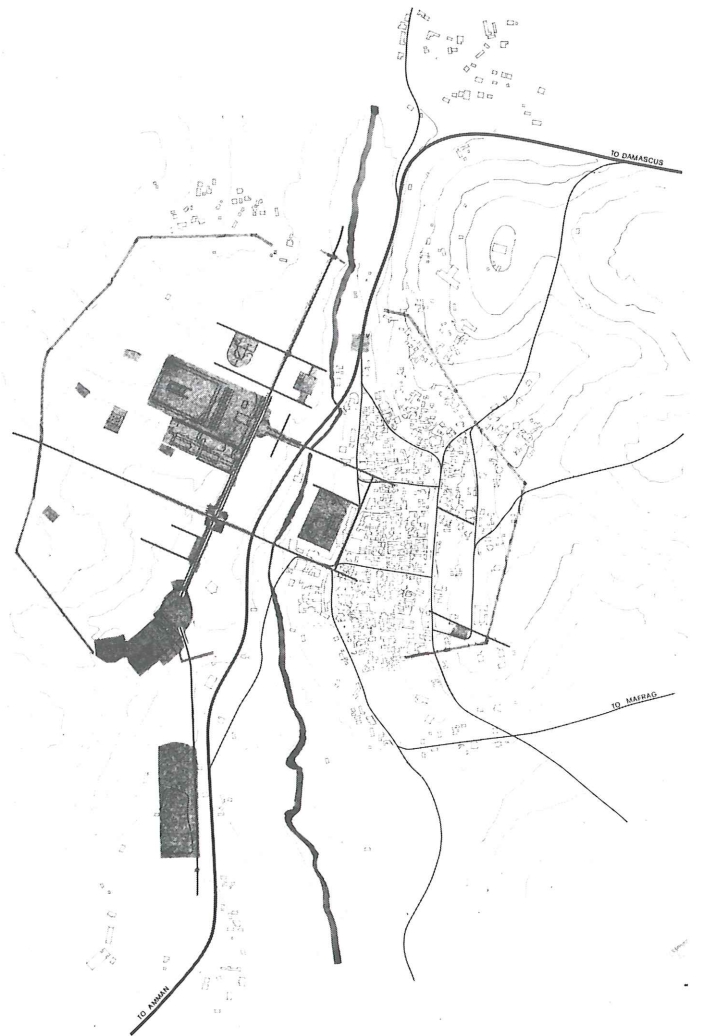
At first sight the location of the Sanctuary seems out of keeping with the street network known up to this time. From the layout of the few identified streets, however, one can deduce a precise town planning which is even possible to trace back to the Hellenistic period when the city is believed to have been founded (see FIGS 1 & 2).

Taking into consideration the very possible changes in the evolution of the urban fabric, two side street entrances west of the *Cardo*, south of the south *Tetrapylon*, show regular spaces of 51.60 metres about (175 pedes) from street to street. (The two streets above mentioned were elucidated by Dr Baarghouthi who conducted the excavation in that area on behalf of the University of Jordan.) A third street on the same side of the *Cardo* reveals a space of 103.30 metres to the north of the *Tetrapylon*. Yet further north, at again about 51.60 metres distance, another streets marks the south side of the ground covered by the Sanctuary of Artemis.

If such a street network were to be found elsewhere, we might assume an original land subdivision spaced, on the *Cardo*, at 175 pedes.

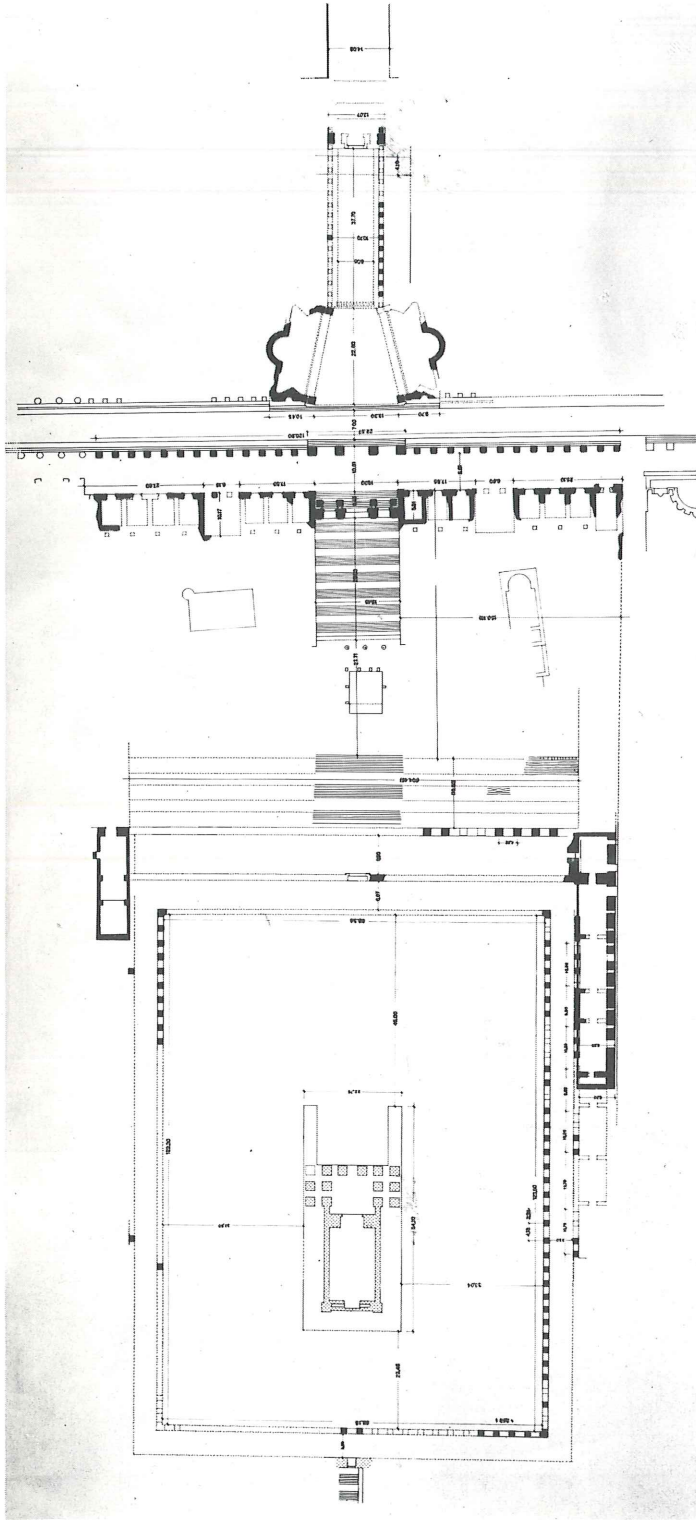
The main frontage of the Sanctuary onto the west side of the *Cardo* does not, however, fit the same land vision as the streets described above, being about 122 metres wide. The entire complex, in fact, may have been superimposed on a previous street layout. The northernmost bridge, still recognizable, connected the east side of the city to a Sacred Way which led up to the temple. What remains of it is only the west abutment but there is enough to relate it to the same planning phase as the Sanctuary complex. Its positioning slightly off the main axis may be explained by the need to connect a pre-existing street on the east side of the wadi.

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Clearly this fact makes us question the second century AD land division to which the construction of the Sanctuary decidedly contributed and to which a large part of the visible monuments belong. Further we must question the land divi-

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sion of an earlier age as we know practically nothing about the Hellenistic or first century B.C. city from excavation.

The fabric of the Sanctuary seems, therefore, to belong to a comprehensive programme which at the same time must

imply the reorganization of an area of a much larger scale than the one directly related to the Sanctuary itself.

Apart from the knowledge of an older temple of Artemis which in all probability can be localized not far from the present one, we lack further data about other possible prior structures in the area. Yet it is possible, assuming a certainly much more modest earlier Sanctuary, that the urban alteration was directed towards an entire reorganization of that area.

If this could be archaeologically verified the political implication is extremely interesting: it shows the clear intention of a programme aimed at the maximum utilization of the ground but at the same time allowing the expression of grandeur and propaganda. Land and properties are turned into structures and facilities intended for public utility, trade and worship.

The spatial interpretation of the entire complex of buildings is even more interesting: it shows a total organic mind where each element of the whole affirms its own spatial autonomy but at the same time each of the elements is linked together by a logical sequence of intentions.

The monumental complex develops along a main axis at right angles to and astride the *Cardo* with successive vistas from the changing levels, each framed along the ascending approach (see FIGS. 5a,b,c,d).

The temple is built on a rock platform on the brow of a hill which rises up from the *Chrysorhoas* and is reached by a range of terraces (see FIGS 3, 4).

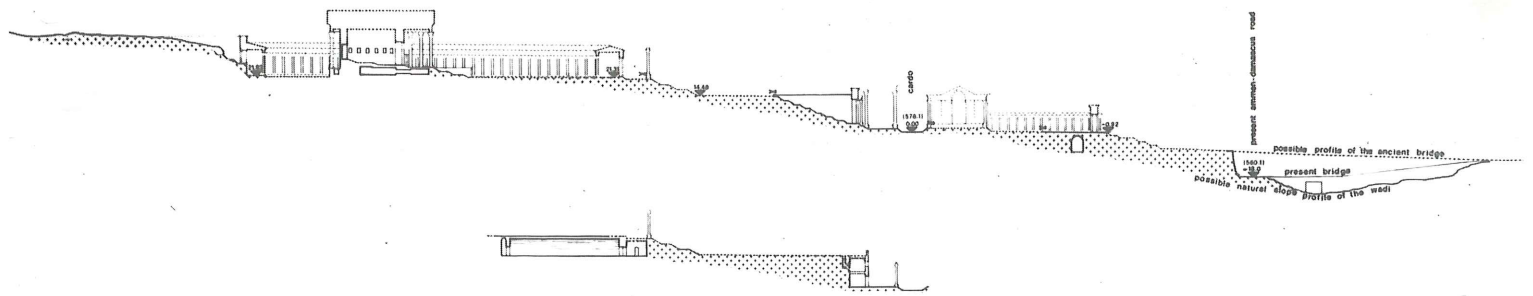
The Sacred Way started at its east end with a propylaea giving access to a large street, or rather a long square, gently inclined, flanked by colonnades (the street is 8.10 metres wide while the *Cardo* is 7.00 metres) (see FIG 6). This bridges a street parallel to the *Cardo* and at the same time the unusual bridge-like solution emphasizes the intention of making a specialized route.

The colonnades end against the sides of two structures for fountains which form a second square beyond. This is raised up, reached by a short flight of steps and forms a trapezium shape plan. The fountain structures open, in fact, westwards to the *Cardo* creating a dynamic expanding space able to visually overcome the gap created by the *Cardo* which separates the square from the propylaea opposite. Conveniently the pavements of both the square and the propylaea are at the same level (see FIGS 7, 8).

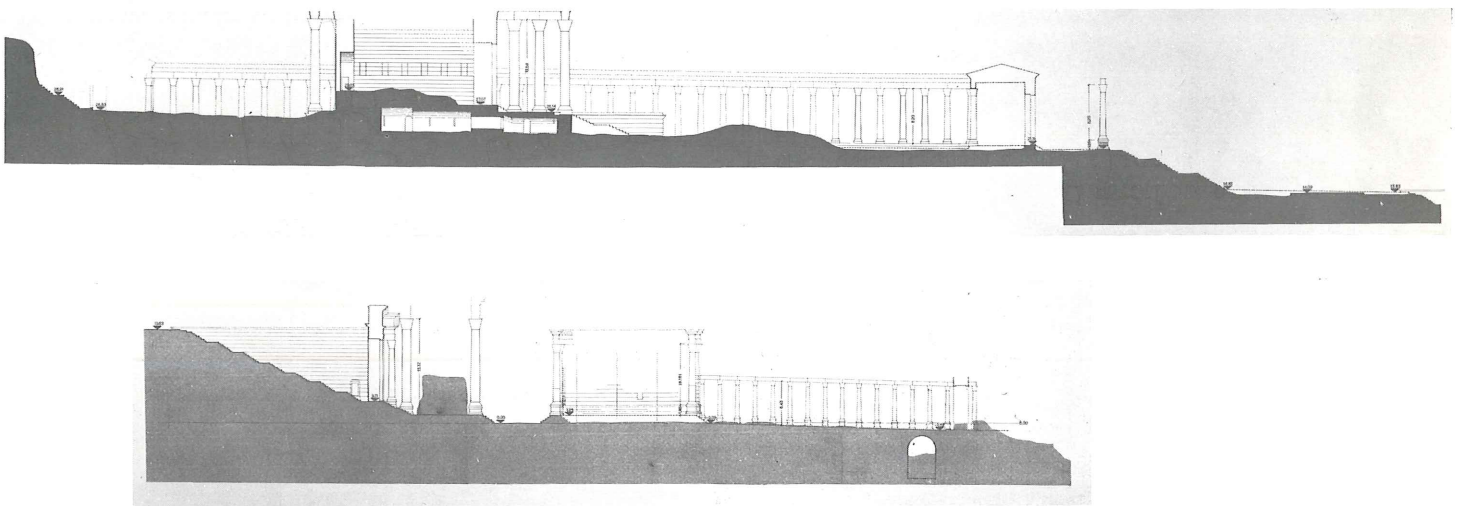
The longer base of the trapezium matches exactly this second propylaea which stands behind four gigantic columns of the colonnade along the *Cardo*.

This is set in a recess of a double storey parade of shops which forms the bearing structures of the retaining wall of a terrace about 14 metres above the *Cardo* (see FIGS 9, 10). The terrace which is reached by a long staircase (seven flights of seven steps) rising through the backfill, was probably framed by porticoes and formed a square as wide as the entire ground of the Sanctuary. This was articulated in two major spaces at the sides of the cavity of the staircase. The west side

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of the terrace was finished by a second flight of stairs (three flights of nine steps) which reached the temenos level about 7 metres higher up. At the top stood a row of columns. Like the colonnade along the *Cardo*, the significance of which has to be interpreted as an allusive piece of urban design rather than providing the structure of an improbable portico, the row of columns at the top of the staircase, mentioned above, had the purpose of suggesting the image of an upper colonnaded street parallel to the *Cardo*. This had to foresee, as for the colonnades along the *Cardo*, an interruption of vertical and horizontal rhythms qualified in accordance with the buildings behind.

It is very probable, in fact, that the axis of the ascending approach to the uppermost temple was marked by a pediment on a portal of higher columns.

This fact is definitely unusual since it shows how flexible the use of columns had become: from a solid volume generat-

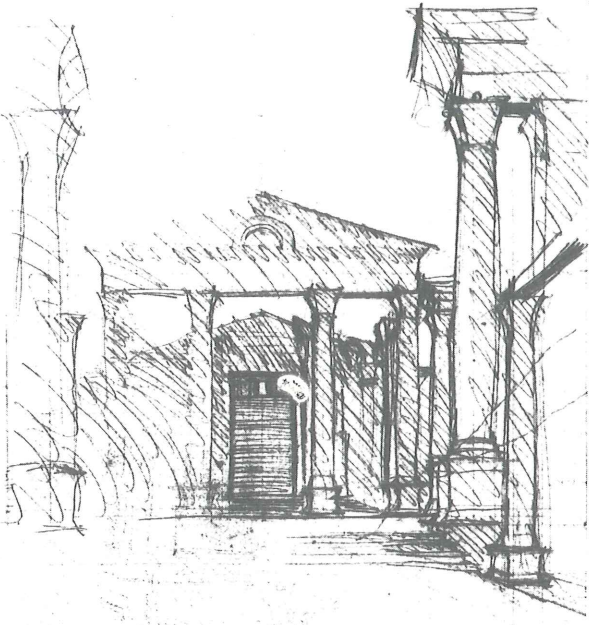
ing architectural space to that of defining urban space through the adoption of formal codes.

Beyond the colonnade at the top of the staircase stood the temenos of the temple. This, roughly rectangular, was framed by porticoes on all four sides. The wall of the south portico was deepened by alternating exedras and rooms supported at the eastern end by vaulted structures accessible from the street which bound that side of the Sanctuary. Most probably the north side of the enclosure, not visible at present, was similar. The west enclosing wall was a retaining structure for the hill behind; a staircase in the backfill on the main axis started from a level 4.65 metres above the portico pavement.

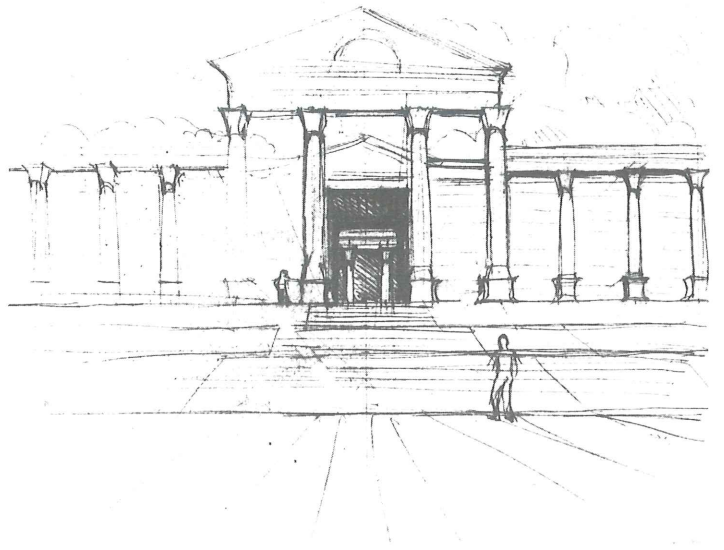
The temple, in the middle of the courtyard but slightly nearer to the west side, was raised on a high podium supported by vaulted rooms reached from the temple cella.

Most exciting is the hypothesis that such a remarkably organic urban achievement, documented in Gerasa as early as

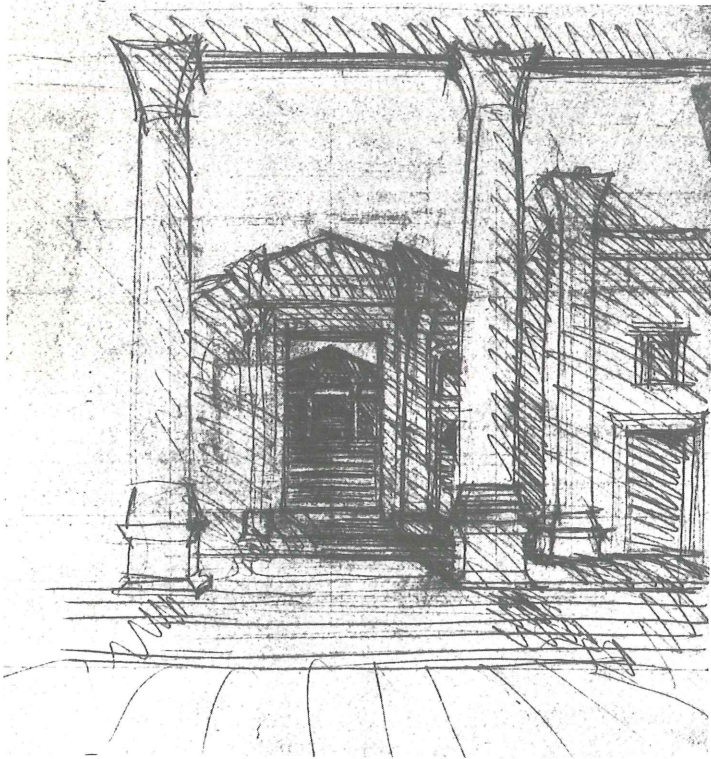
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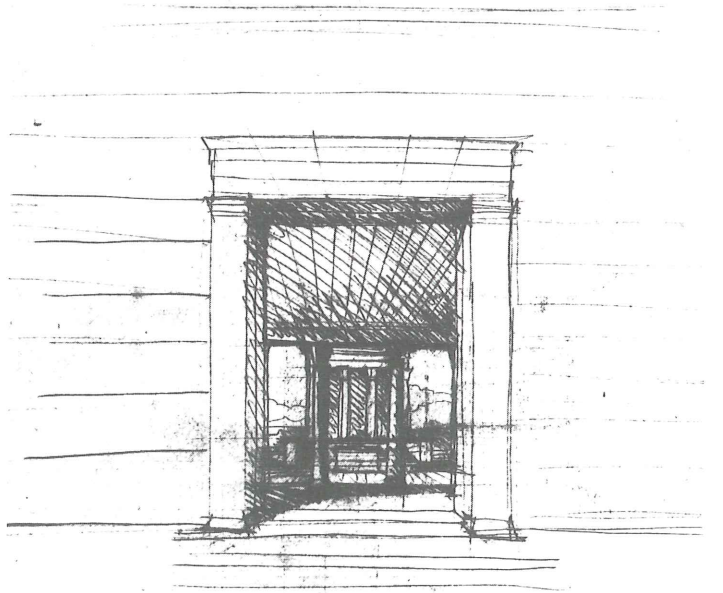
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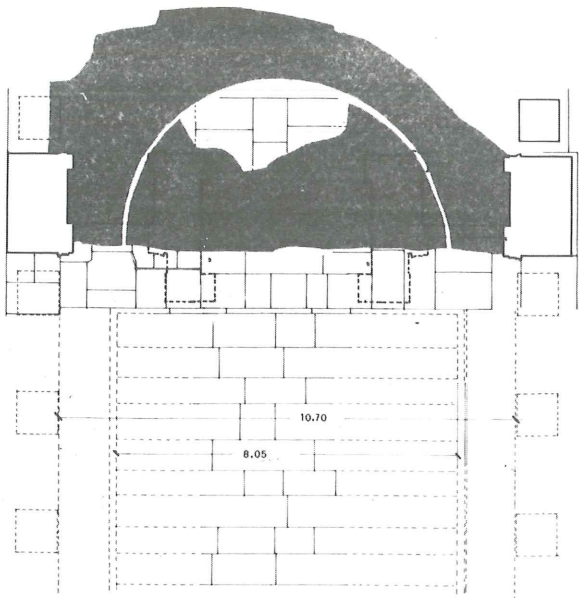
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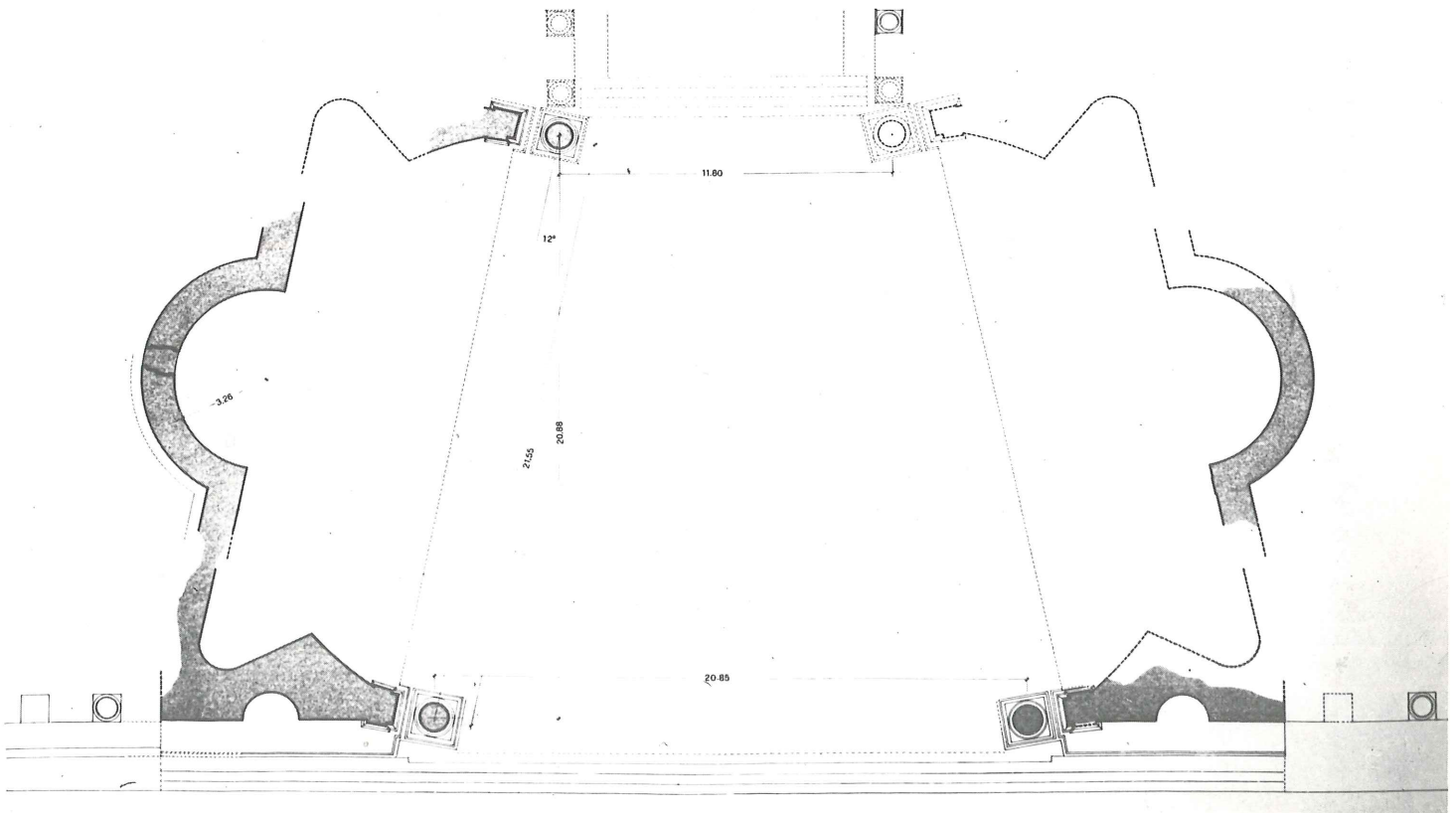


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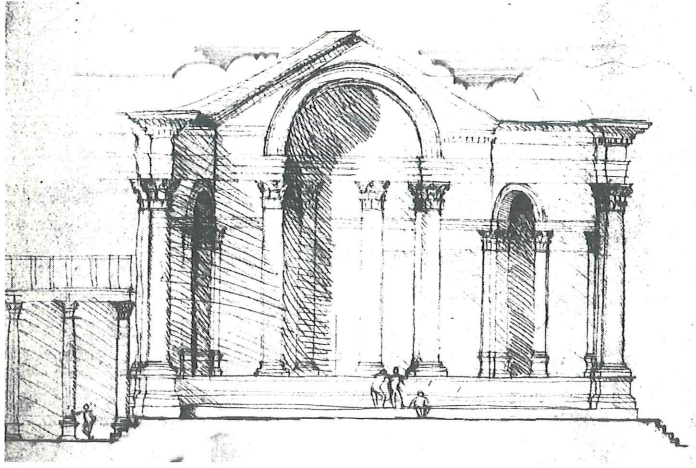


the second century AD, belongs to and is the expression of a new eastern architectural school, to which we are indebted for the last inventions of the ancient world. Apollodorus from Damascus, among other works, planned the Forum and the Markets of Trajan complex in Rome which represented the only urban intervention able to connect the Campus Martius to the Colosseum by a continuous public space. This subject is of such an importance that it demands, of course, the most careful verification. In the absence of any useful architectural evidence from Antioch, leader of the eastern culture, Gerasa can be considered the centre best qualified to improve our knowledge of the achievements of architecture and town planning of Roman times.

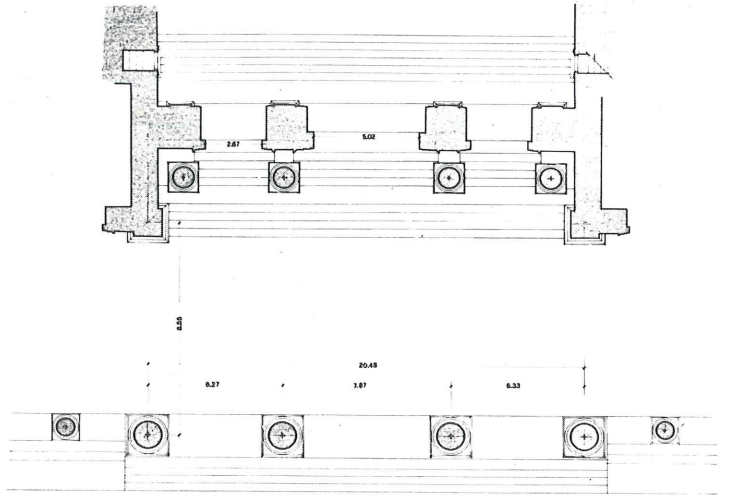
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