

Hellenistic Gadara¹

City Wall

When Alexander the Great conquered Syria and Palestine in 333/332 BC, life in this region—after an extended period of Egyptian and Oriental suzerainty—became strongly influenced by the Greek culture. In addition to the existing Semitic towns with the settlement of Greek veterans, there emerged new towns with mixed populations of Greeks, Semites and Arabs that probably have had a special Hellenistic profile which in detail, however, has scarcely been studied. Since only a few years ago it was *opinio communis* that these towns have been united by Pompey into the league of cities known as the *Decapolis*, but recent research proved that this took place only in early Roman Imperial times (Wenning 1994: 1-2, 11-12). The Decapolis towns gained a certain political autonomy which they—with limitations—managed to retain during the following centuries. As late as the fifth century AD, for example, these cities had the right to issue their own coins. As centres of Greek-Roman culture they functioned as an urban counterpoise to the local, nomadic traditions of the original Semitic-Arabian population.

Despite their importance in the country's development, there is very little known about the early Hellenistic period of these cities. There is some information on Pella or Philadelphia/ 'Ammān with its impressive city wall, while at Gerasa/Jarash the stepwise development of the important sanctuary of Zeus from its early nucleus on has been investigated very thoroughly. But one would like to learn more about the related settlement in Hellenistic times.

Written reports from classical historians are concerned for the most part with military aspects (cf. for example Gadara: Polybios *Hist.* V: 69-70, Flavius Josephus *Ant. Jud.* XII: 356). Detailed information on the organisation of the towns and of their daily life is missing in text sources.

For the last ten years the German Archaeological In-

stitute has been excavating in Gadara, one of the major cities of the Decapolis. One main area of research during the last years have been the early periods of the city, and some of the results presented here (Hoffmann 1993: 364-368).

Not far from abrupt descent from 'Ajlūn into the northern Jordan Valley, a rocky hill rises like a fortress about 20 meters above the surrounding terrain of the highland (365m above sea level). Adjoining it to the west there is an extremely fertile triangular plateau. It will have been the strategic rather than the agricultural advantages of the location that led to settlement on the hill. In addition to its obvious defense capacity, it was also an eminently suitable location for communication with the surrounding country and particularly across the Jordan Valley to Palestine in the west. For military purposes the situation was ideal. Polybios refers to Gadara as one of the centres of conflict between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid dynasties that succeeded Alexander, in which the Seleucids finally won the upper hand (Polybios *Hist.* V: 69-70).

The city wall of Gadara has been known since Gottlieb Schumacher published his report on the village of Umm Qays and its ruins in 1898 (Schumacher 1890). Unfortunately, there was no information in detail, either on the construction, nor on the different building periods. Starting in 1992, in continuation with the first surveys and research of Ute Wagner-Lux (Wagner-Lux *et al.* 1978: 136), Thomas Weber (Weber 1989: 32) and Susanne Kerner (Kerner 1993: 368; 1997: 289-290) a series of soundings were made at the southern slope of the hill, where Schumacher reported extended remains of the wall which in great part had been covered by later constructions. Only at the southeastern corner was part of the wall visible all the time. It served as a foundation for the late Ottoman Bayt Malkāwī. By selective excavation at different points along the south side of Ottoman Umm Qays, extensive evidence has been gained regarding the course

¹ Translation: Stella Vitzthum.

and the construction of the wall in detail and regarding its history as well (FIG. 1). To manage urgent demands of tourism in 1997, a parking area was built by the Jordanian authorities on this southern slope next to the wall, which had been completely unearthed in 1996 for the first time (FIG. 2). About 230m of the southern city wall have been exposed, part of which stands up to a height of about 7m. Two big rectangular corner towers and two intermediate pentagonal towers combined with gateways were investigated (FIG. 3).

Archaeological research in Gadara, based on stratigraphical analysis, has shown that it was re-fortified fol-

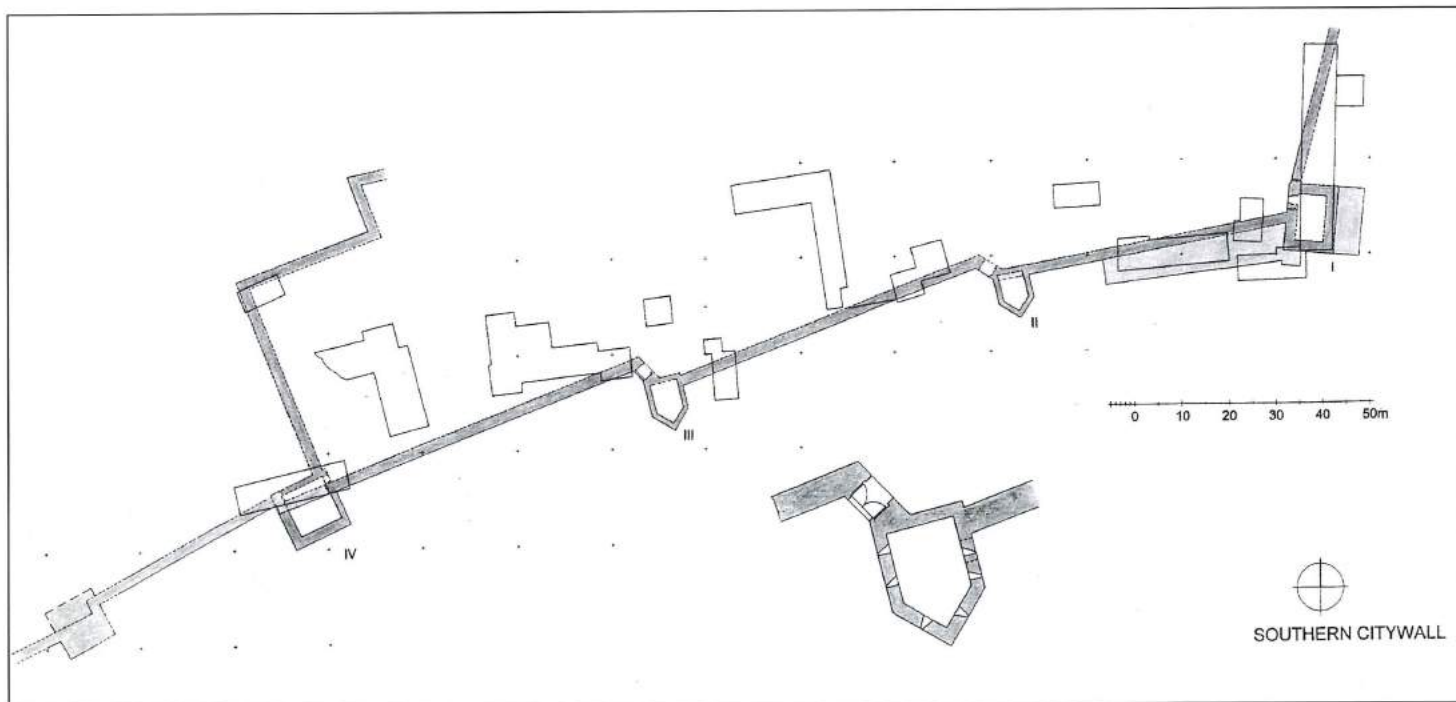
lowing the Seleucid conquest reported by Polybios shortly after 200 BC. This was, however, more than a simple reinforcement exercise and appears to have been planned near the border to the Ptolemaic kingdom as a royal prestige project. Compared to other Hellenistic fortresses east of the Jordan River,² the new walls of Gadara show highly sophisticated military planning and contemporary fortification technology (cf. Philo of Byzantion, *Poliorketika*).³ The systematic tower and gate arrangement is consistent with the most advanced military technical design of the time. Comparable examples of this regulated tower-gate system can be found at very few important cit-



1. Hellenistic city wall with pentagonal tower (photo: R. Wiczorek).



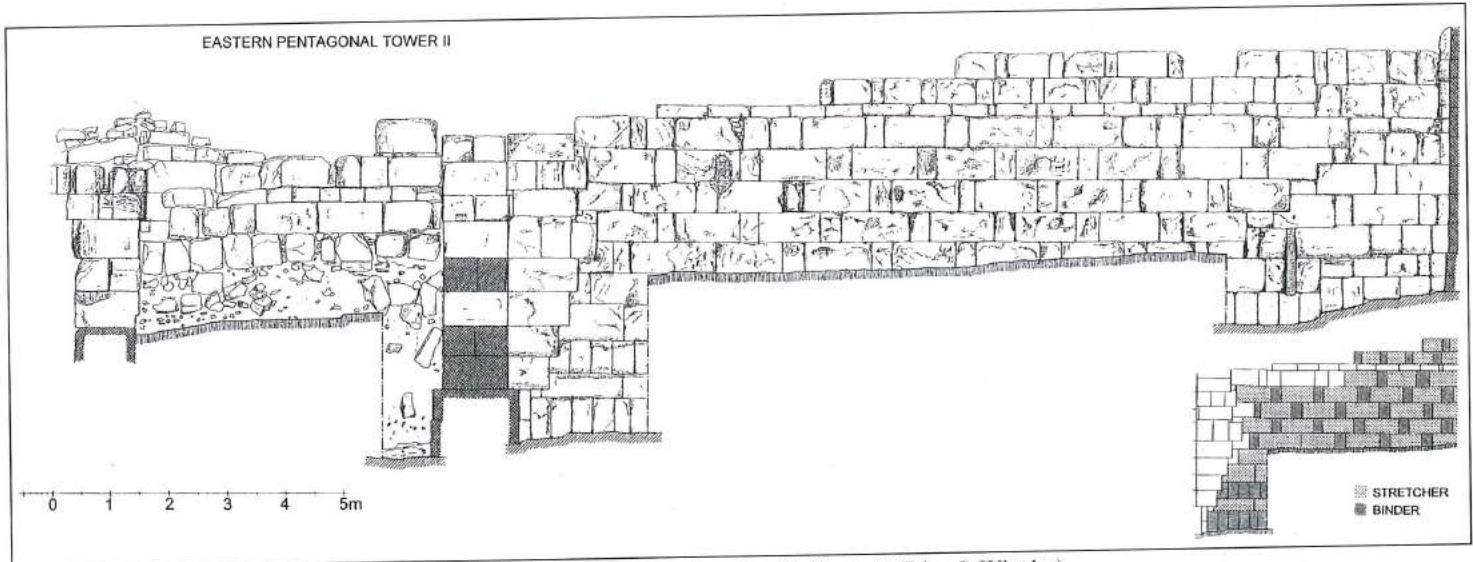
2. Parking area in front of the Hellenistic city wall (photo: R. Wiczorek).



3. Southern section of the Hellenistic city wall (drawing: C. Bührig, J. Meister).

² Cf. for example Jabal Sarṭaba (Zayadine 1986: 142-151); or Amathous, Essa and Ragaba (Mittmann 1987).

³ Translation cf. Lawrence 1979: 75-107; for the problem in general cf. for example McNicholl 1997.



4. Part of the Hellenistic city wall in header and stretcher technique (drawing: T. Bunk, P. Eder, I. Wispler).

ies of the Greek world, such as Apollonia in Cyrenaica from the middle of the third century BC (cf. for example Hallier 1986) and Miletus (on the west coast of Asia Minor), around 100 BC (cf. for example McNicholl 1997: 167-169). The unusual and very distinctive pentagonal towers have few parallels, two examples being Samos, from around 300, and Oenoanda (Asia Minor), around 200 BC (McNicholl 1997: 125-126). Two rows of loop-holes on top of each other and emergency gateways are further details of a refined planning of these towers (cf. for example Adam 1982: 105-110).

The consistently high building standard is manifest in the remarkable precision of the masonry (FIG. 4) as well as in the elaborate detail on the gates, for example. In one of these were found the bronze pivot holes from the second century BC. They owe their preservation to an attack on the city by the Hasmonean King Alexander Jannaeus around 100 BC, in response to which the gates were closed and walled up, but to no avail—the city was sacked and the wall razed nearly to the ground (Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* XIII 356; id. *Bell. Jud.* 1,2,2). The doors were never reopened and so the bronze fittings were preserved.

The building material used for the walls was the local limestone, which was easy to work but also eroded easily—a distinct disadvantage. The Seleucid wall was a massive stone construction in header and stretcher technique and was further stabilized by the unusual use of very hard gypsum mortar, but the visible exterior surface nevertheless suffered considerable damage in the short span of its one hundred years of existence. In the course of excavations it was observed that damaged sections of the wall had been faced with thin panels of limestone, a practice that can be seen as an early example of heritage res-

toration work. Although the strength of the wall was in no way affected by the erosion, this work restored the appearance of being unimpaired, with the aim of presenting a perfect and impregnable facade to a possible attacker.

Amongst the rubble of the city walls an extremely rare epigraphic specimen for the Hellenistic period of Gadara was found, a fragment of an inscription that can be precisely dated at 86/85 BC (FIG. 5).⁴ Especially significant is the use of the word *seleukeon*, which confirms important historical events that were recorded in a report written only in the fifth century AD (Stephanos of Byzantium, *Ethnika* s.v. Γαδάρρα). In it Stephanos writes that after the Seleucid conquest Gadara was named *Antiochia Seleukia* to underline its subjugation to a new rule. The city by Stephanos is also referred to as *polis*, a most important privilege granting autonomy and special status which now is probably proved by the newly found inscription. Certain urban facilities were associated with



5. Inscription from the Hellenistic city wall (photo: P. Grunwald).

⁴ The inscription is to be studied by Michael Wörrle, Munich.

this status of *polis*, such as the *Bouleuterion*—the place where the *demoi* gathered. However, no trace of this or any of the other *polis* elements has been found to date. The small western theater of Gadara which was part of a grand-scale remodeling of the public center of the town in the time of the Severan emperors and which could have been used as an assembly place, might be a continuation of long-lasting traditions going back to the Hellenistic past.

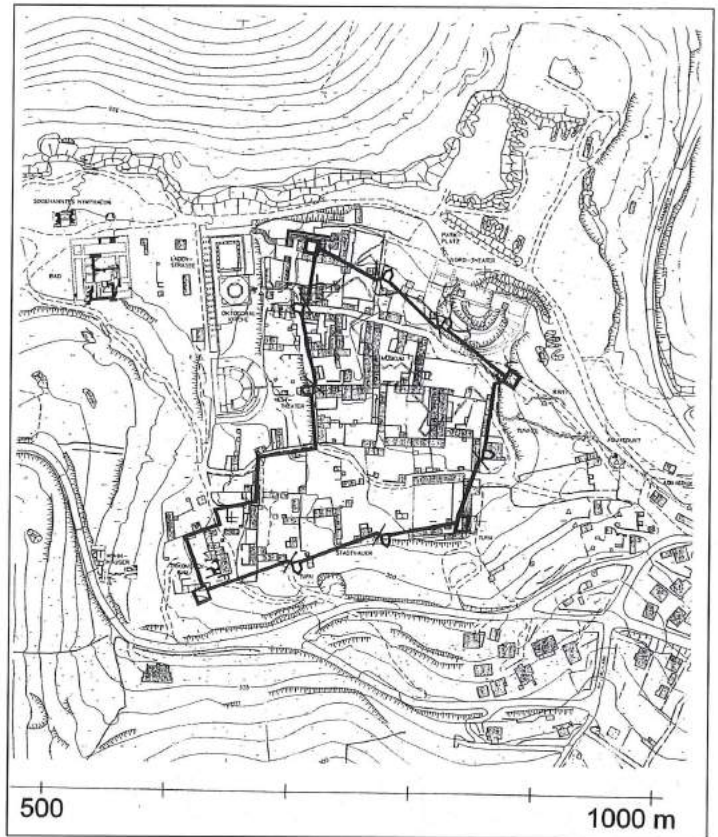
Large amounts of well stratified archaeological material from the different excavations alongside the wall gave much data for a tentative reconstruction of the history of the wall and of the Hellenistic and early Imperial city. The oldest layers at the bottom of the wall go back to the early second century BC. Immediately after the town had been conquered by Antiochos III, a new and strong wall was erected to protect the southern frontier of the Seleucid kingdom against the Ptolemies. A much more dangerous assailant, however, was the Alexander Jannaeus who besieged and finally conquered the town in the early first century BC but soon after, forced by the Nabataeans, had to withdraw to western Palestine (Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* XIII 375; Mittmann 1987: 50). Though the wall had been completely demolished, the people of Gadara started to recover as is testified by the above mentioned inscription, a process that must have been stopped definitely when Alexander returned to the east bank in the late eighties. The wall remained destroyed until Gadara was threatened by the Jewish riots soon after the middle of the first century AD. On top of the old destruction layers a new wall was erected and at the same time new urban quarters were incorporated. These had grown west of the Hellenistic nucleus (Kerner 1992: 409; 1993: 368-369; 1997: 287-289) which had been walled. The building technique with rubble inside the wall differs clearly from the Hellenistic construction.⁵ Finally, nearly two millennia later, the sustaining wall of the late Ottoman village again used the exact course of its Hellenistic predecessor.

Urban Planning System

The southern section of the wall system has been unearthed completely and it has been possible to identify main parts of the eastern section as well—most important the northeastern corner tower. Going by geophysical conditions and certain other local factors, the walls—with a reasonable degree of certainty—can be assumed to have formed a closed circle (FIG. 6) like at Samaria-Sebaste, Marisa/Tall Şandaḥanna and other towns in the region. However, in no other Decapolis city is the research on

Hellenistic walls anywhere near as detailed and complete as in Gadara. What is more, the city walls provide important clues to the planning concept of the Hellenistic city.

Through a process of combination of the position of the gates in the walls with the building grid of the 19th century settlement—which clearly used the ancient constructions as foundations (Weber 1989: 16)—one can conclude that the street plan was more or less orthogonal, as was common in Hellenistic cities. Within the Decapolis there are hitherto no parallels. Even less regular is the example known from the Sidonian colony of Marisa/Tall Şandaḥanna south of Jerusalem, from the second century BC.⁶ Though it differs in several important details in comparison to the big royal cities like Eumenes II/Pergamon, of the second century BC (Wulf 1994: 145) there is a lot of similarity to the presumed town planning concept of Gadara and thus demonstrates how ambitious this possibly royal project was. To prove the theories the rest of the inner-city buildings have to be found. Further excavation is necessary.



6. Course of the city wall in Hellenistic times, hypothetical reconstruction (plan: Fachhochschule Karlsruhe, C. Hartl-Reiter, D. Schäffler; drawing: J. Meister).

⁵ This technical detail is proved by the findings from different soundings; stratified pottery points to the second half of the first century AD.

⁶ For general information cf. *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* 3 (1993) 948-951, with plan p. 949 s. v. *Mareshah* (M. Avi-Yonah).

Temple

An indispensable part of urban communal life and the centre of the citizens' religious life was the temple. Until only a few years ago, however, no traces of a temple in Gadara had been found. The strategic importance of Umm Qays—by virtue of its elevated position—is as relevant today as ever and the village had been involved repeatedly in military conflicts during the past decades. Long time restricted areas, however, have been lifted and access for archaeological research for example was granted in 1995 for the plateau on the north side below the hilltop settlement. Although it has been ravaged by bulldozer operations, the hitherto unexplored area (Wagner-Lux *et al.* 1978: 141) is level and proved on closer inspection to be the large courtyard of an urban temple precinct. The remains of a temple located in the centre have been excavated together with a gateway in front of it and remains of other elements of the courtyard ensemble (FIG. 7). Of the main building only the foundations exist *in situ*, comprising three barrel-vaulted rooms, whose vaults stand above ground level and so formed a podium for the upper level, the actual temple, of which numerous elements have luckily also been found. Steps in the rear descend to the basement (FIG. 8), which was possibly used for storing valuable goods. It probably served as an *aerarium*.

As part of the raised architecture there are one Doric



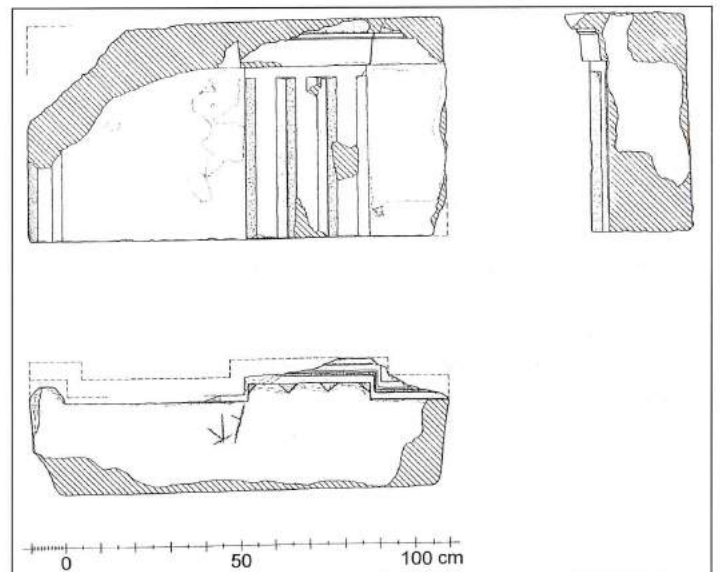
7. Temple area seen from the south (photo: C. Bührig).

column drum, several elements of a Doric frieze (FIG. 9) and cornice, and the pediment whose details resemble in its correct and somehow academic design very much the Doric architecture of the upper storey of the Hellenistic palace in 'Irāq al-'Amir, erected in the very same period (Will *et al.* 1991: 56, 185-189). Although these elements represent only a fraction of the whole, there is a good chance of being able to reconstruct the main parts of this Doric temple with reasonable certainty. It was a prostyle, that is, a building with a closed cella. In front there was a porch with four columns or with two columns *in antis*, similar for example to the somewhat later temple of Augustus at Philae in Egypt (Hänlein-Schäfer 1985: 219-222).

From the fill close to the temple, there is clear archaeological evidence that the construction of the building started in the first half of the second century but was finished only at the beginning of the first century BC. Be-



8. Detail from the back wall of the Hellenistic temple (photo: R. Wiczorek).



9. Frieze block with triglyph and metope belonging to the temple (drawing: C. Bührig, J. Meister).

sides the first temple at Ba'albak in Lebanon (Wiegand *et al.* 1921: 56-57, 185-190; Hoffmann 1998: 291-297) it is thus one of the earliest known temples in the region with a podium, a type of temple that became widespread only in Roman imperial times.⁷ A fire, most probably caused by the Jewish riots,⁸ destroyed the Doric temple in Gadara but the podium may have served for a new temple; no elements of that, however, have been found.

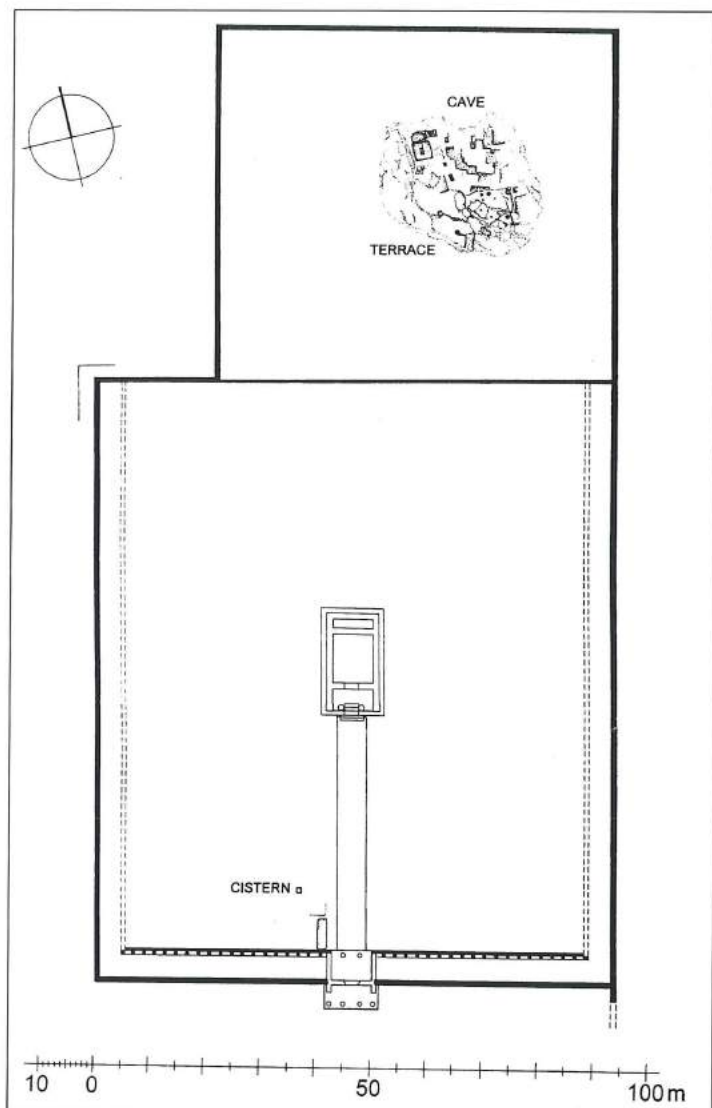
The rough local limestone, that the first temple was built of, was covered with a fine layer of white plaster imitating finely dressed and fitted masonry blocks. Many pieces of the plaster decoration, very similar to the so-called Pompeian First Style, were found in the rubble together with numerous fragments of tiles from the roof.

Altar and 'High Place'

Every temple of this type should have had an altar, but it has not yet been found, and as such, it probably never existed. Instead, the actual place of worship could have been the rocky spur that lies behind the temple, fitted out with the appropriate ritual objects: there are several canals and all kinds of bowl-like holes cut into the rock that has been artificially terraced at different levels.⁹ Prominent landmarks such as this one at Gadara have a long tradition in Palestine as nucleus for local cult centres, so-called high places, and there is good reason to believe that at Gadara, as so often at other places, the cult traditions of yore were continued in Hellenistic times but with the addition of a temple in Greek style (FIG. 10). Indigenous and imported cultures tended to blend into each other, forming a close union that was a characteristic of this region. A small marble statue discovered in the area of the sanctuary several years ago suggests that the Hellenistic Doric temple was dedicated to Zeus Nicephorus.¹⁰ The very same type of Zeus set into a tetrastyle temple front is found on many of the coins from Gadara minted in the later Roman imperial times (for example cf. Spijkerman 1978: No. 31. 35. 36. 46 etc.).

The significance of a cult site for the early process of urbanization is also illustrated by the Zeus temple in the nearby town of Jarash (Seigne 1992: 332-334). Here the monumentalization of a simple 'high place' into a courtyard ensemble built in Hellenistic style took place in a series of small steps and continued into Imperial times with the building of a huge new temple on an upper terrace.

In Gadara—with the monumentalization of the cult area



10. Reconstruction of the temple area in Hellenistic times (drawing: A. Riedel, J. Meister).

in Hellenistic style—the settlement initially built in accordance with military considerations as a garrison and a fortress acquired a developed urban form.¹¹ The fortress appearance was preserved nevertheless by a strong wall surrounding the temple grounds. With this information, by no means complete, on the development of Gadara in the second and first centuries BC, essential elements and individual stages of growth of a Hellenistic Decapolis town have been documented for the first time with tangible examples.

⁷ This detail may point to interventions made by Antiochos IV, who had been in Rome for years and who, being back to the region, favoured the Hellenization of various cult sites. A Doric temple of the third century BC with a kind of podium, however, is already known at Mamurt Kale next to the royal town of Pergamon (cf. Schazmann 1911: 15).

⁸ The destruction level is characterized by a dense layer of ashes, obviously caused by the burned wooden roof.

⁹ No appertaining pottery but a limestone altar of probably Augustan

times has been found here.

¹⁰ The statuette, now at the local Archaeological Museum was found in 1974 amongst bulldozer rubbish by Mr. Omar Reshaidat, then Inspector of Antiquities of Umm Qays.

¹¹ Street, sanctuary and market place (which in Gadara most probably is to be found in the plain area south of the temenos) are most important elements of an Oriental town in Hellenistic times; cf. for example Kader 1996: 176-179.

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