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Some Aspects of the Monumental Gate *extra muros* of Gadara from the Late Roman Period seen in its Context of Urban Development

The Monumental Gate extra muros of Gadara has been excavated between 1987 and 1992 by a team directed by Adolf Hoffmann, and from 1992 onwards in cooperation with Claudia Bührig, on behalf of the German Archaeological Institute in Berlin.[1] It is a free-standing gate without any connecting city wall (Bol *et al.* 1990: 216-238).

The central part of the Monumental Gate corresponds to the common system of tripartite gates in the Roman Empire, with two narrow side-gateways, 2.03m wide each, as well as one large central gateway, 5.40m wide. The central structure is flanked by two annexes. Towards the city, (towards the east), these annexes form one continuous facade, while on the other side, facing the open landscape, they project out in semicircular plan. Thus, on this side they give the impression of towers which flank the central part of the building like a bulwark (see FIG. 5 below).

The upper border—the *Attika*—of the central structure is a specific Eastern element of the architecture of monumental gates. It is constructed as a structure with several storeys, in the form of a horizontally levelled attic, but without a base profile. The actual purpose of an attic as a base for statues and room for an inscription, is obsolete at Gadara where no such things could be found.

The research on the Monumental Gate *extra muros* will discuss all architectural problems, but furthermore it is particularly focusing on the context of urban development. Some aspects of the Monumental Gate, in particular its context of urban development, will be discussed here.

The Topographical Situation

The site of Gadara lies on the edge of a plateau, in the northwest of modern Jordan, reaching westwards into the Jordan Valley in the shape of a spur. The Hellenistic upper town, dating from the second century BC (Hoff-

mann 1995/96: 24-25), was built on a limestone hilltop, rising 15m above the plateau. This hill, due to its dominant and strategically important location, was a very convenient settlement site, especially since an easily accessible traffic route runs east-west along the site and across the plateau (FIG. 1).

During the Roman period, Gadara expanded along this route from the central hill site to the west, towards the fertile plain of the plateau. The Monumental Gate *extra muros* (FIG. 2 no. 1) marked the westernmost point of the settlement's extension.

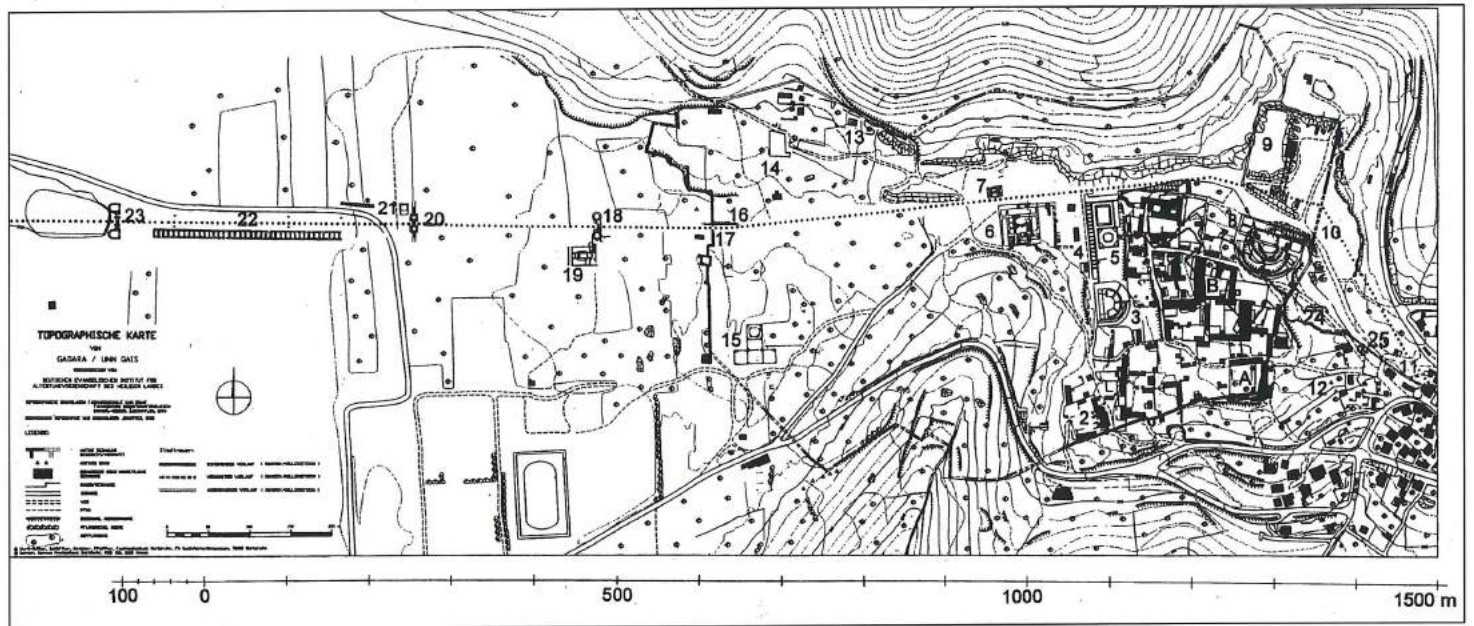## The Ancient City and its Situation Within the System of Regional Traffic Routes

The road, which only touches the original settlement to the north, runs on—straight and easily accessible—in a westerly direction, before eventually branching off in a northwesterly direction towards Tiberias. A milestone found west of the Monumental Gate could be dated by its inscription to AD 217 or 218 (Mittmann 1970: 138). It
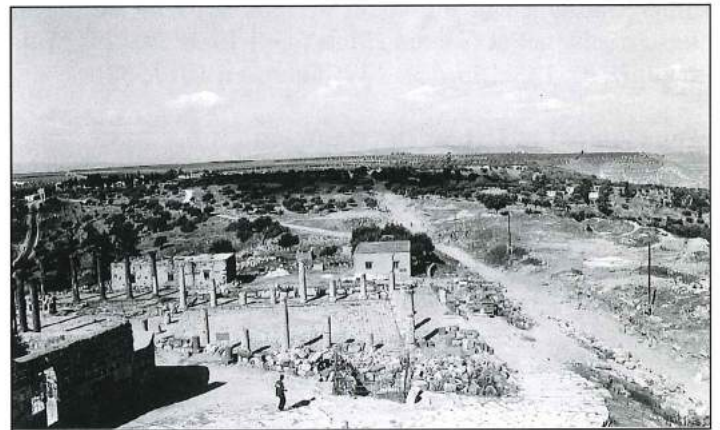
1. View from the upper town to the west, along the east-west axis to the plateau (photo. C. Bührig).

2. Topographical plan of Gadara: 1. city wall (Hellenistic and Early Imperial); 2. Trikonchos - building and church (early Christian); 3. West Theatre; 4. *cardo*, with street front shops (*tabernae*); 5. colonnaded courtyard and octagonal church; 6. Thermae (late antiquity); 7. so-called podium-monument or altar; 8. North Theatre; 9. Main Sanctuary on the northern terrace; 10. so-called Abila Gate; 11. Tomb of the Germani and of Lucius Sentius Modestus; 12. Tomb of Chaires; 13. North Mausoleum; 14. Thermae of Heracleides; 15. Thermae ('al-Qaṣr'); 16. colonnaded street (*decumanus maximus*); 17. Western City Gate (Early Imperial); 18. so-called Tiberias Gate; 19. western underground mausoleum and church (early Christian); 20. Western City Gate; 21. tomb; 22. Hippodrome; 23. Monumental Gate *extra muros*; 24. tunnel and channel, water supply system; 25. aqueduct. A. Bayt Melkawi (archaeological station); B. Bayt Rusan (museum) (plan: Fachhochschule Karlsruhe, C. Hartl-Reiter, D. Schäffler; drawing: C. Bührig).

gives evidence that this route already existed in Severian times.

At a fork of the road within the city, a second traffic route branched off towards Skythopolis in the southwest, on the western bank of the River Jordan (FIG. 3). During antiquity, these were the major trading routes of the region. Coming from Bostra in the south of Ḥawrān (Auranitis)—one of the termini of the caravan roads—and running on to the harbours at the Mediterranean coast of either Caesaraea in the south or Ptolomais in the north, these roads met at Gadara (MacAdam 1986: 20, 23; Mittmann 1970: 133-136, 138-139; Thomsen 1917: 32).

The Context of Urban Development

From the Early Imperial period onwards, the east-west axis, the *decumanus*, constituted the "backbone" of the urban development of Gadara. All public buildings of major importance have been loosely lined up along this axis or they simply emphasize prominent positions. Among others, there are the town's main sanctuary on the northern terrace, the north theatre, the central octagonal church with a colonnaded courtyard on the northwest terrace, as well as the altar or so-called podium-monument (FIG. 2 no. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9). Five gates round off the picture (FIG. 2 no. 10, 17, 18, 21, 23). On the western slope of the settlement hill, a *cardo* branches off the *decumanus*, but only towards the south (FIG. 2 no. 4).

Up to the present, it has not been possible to locate a
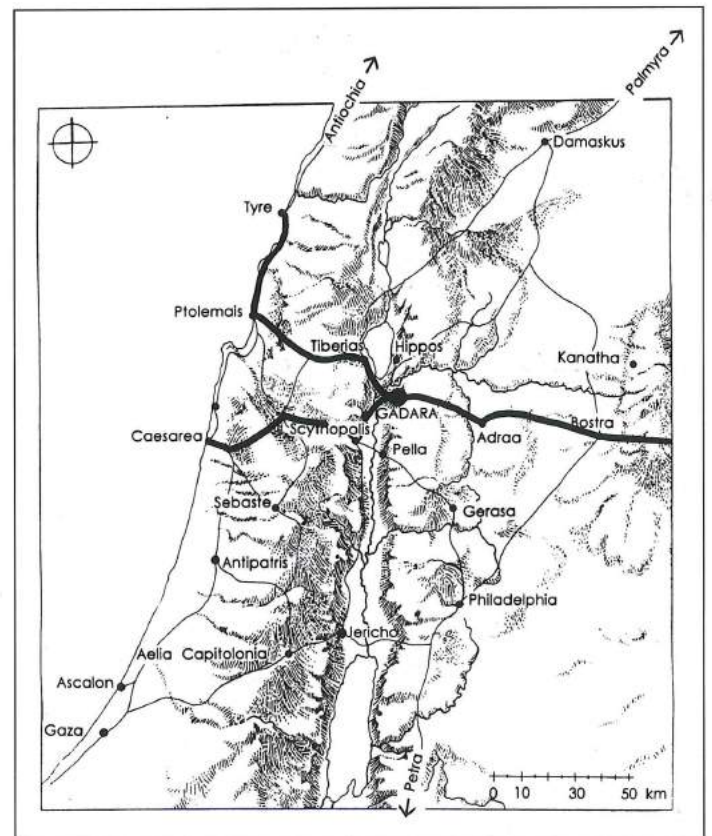
3. Topographical map of Roman Palestine with the major trading routes of the region during the antiquity (based on a plan by L. Lüders, drawing: C. Bührig).

forum at Gadara; instead, it appears as if the street would have functioned as a forum. In the course of the second and early third centuries, the street was converted gradually into a representative colonnaded street (Wagner-Lux *et al.* 1978: 136-137; Wagner-Lux and Vriezen 1982: 158-162 fig. 2; Hoffmann 1995/96: 37-38). The result of the excavation of U. Wagner-Lux at the *decumanus* was, that the street was bordered on the outer sides by a stylobat, which may have been used as a substructure for a portico running along the road (FIG. 4 and FIG. 2 no. 16). The traffic area was supplied with a podium-type structure elevated by the height of one step above road level on both sides. This so-called estrade served as a platform for a row of honorary monuments. All work was carried out very representatively in polychrome materials. Thus, the street-space gained a considerable increase in architectural value.

Outside the town, the street is lined by several cemeteries and this emphasize its importance.

Townscape - Gates along the Decumanus

The various phases of the urban development of Gadara go parallel with two distinct phases of the city's fortification walls (Hoffmann 1995/96: 24-27, 32; 1997: 513), and they are underlined by the sequence of five gates along the *decumanus*, on a length of 1450 metres. Towards the east end of the city, there is the so-called Abila Gate (Schumacher 1890: map between p. 46 and p. 47), which has not been excavated so far (FIG. 2 no. 10). This gate can presumably be connected with the city walls of the Hellenistic and Early Imperial period. Around 720m to the west, there follows a second gate, which gave access to the town where the fortification wall of the Early Imperial period crossed the road (FIG. 2 no. 17); it was dated to the second half of the first century AD (Hoffmann

1995/96: 34). Only a short time after the erection of the city gate, one more gate was built, the so-called Tiberias Gate, approximately 140 metres to the west (FIG. 2 no. 18). It is an isolated monumental gate in an advanced position. This gate, consisting of a central structure with a gateway, flanked by circular towers, has been dated to the time of Vespasian by T. Weber (Bol *et al.* 1990: 204-205; Weber and Hoffmann 1990: 324-325 fig. 2; Weber 1992: 536), the second half of the first century AD.[2]
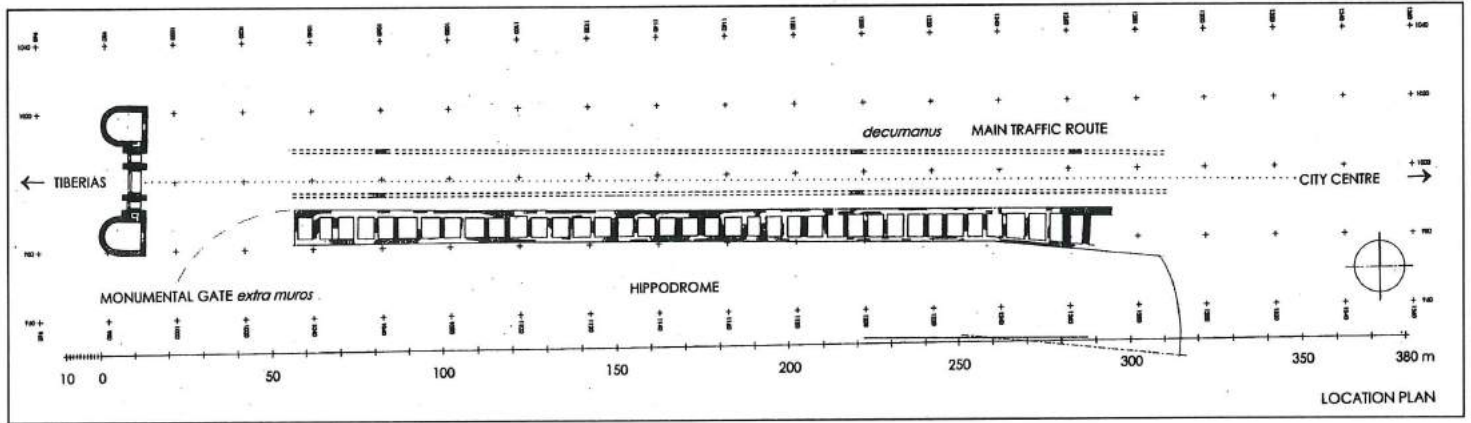
The Monumental Gate *extra muros* constitutes the most advanced point of the extension of the city (FIG. 5). Immediately to the east of the Monumental Gate, which was erected in the first quarter of the third century AD[3] (Bol *et al.* 1990: 236-237), the trade road is flanked to the south by the remains of a contemporary hippodrome (FIG. 2 no. 22, 23). It is most likely that the neighbouring city of Gerasa, with an almost identical situation dating from the first half of the second century AD (Detweiler 1938: 73-83. fig. 6; Müller 1938: 85-100), gave the model for Gadara (FIG. 6). In contrast to the hippodrome at Gerasa, the planned starting boxes at Gadara have been situated towards the city (Kerner and Hoffmann 1993: 360). It must be mentioned that the plan was never entirely carried out. It is conspicuous, however, that the entire area between the Monumental Gate and the western city gate, that was built later, appears to have been levelled off with great effort, which can be seen as an indication for the monumental character of this measure.

Right here, at the westernmost edge of the city, the Monumental Gate *extra muros* was erected to give a symbol of the prospering town (FIG. 5). In combination with the hippodrome, there may have been a plaza-like enlargement in front of the gate, which probably had trade functions. Like a funnel, it may have predominated the direction of the street. Furthermore, for those visitors

4. Colonnaded street of Gadara - *decumanus* (photo: P. Grunwald).
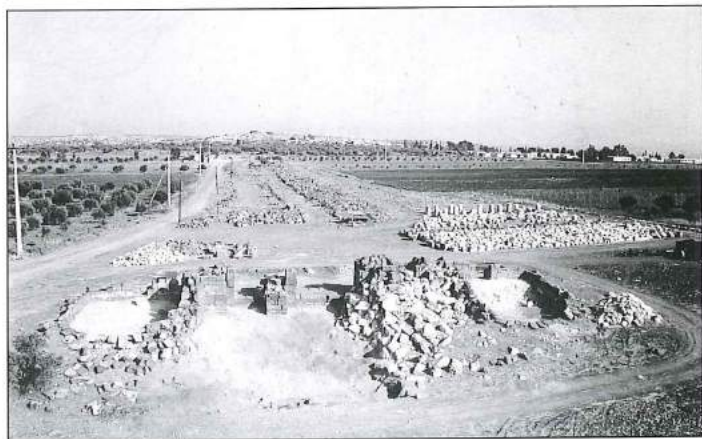
5. Monumental Gate *extra muros* - aerial view from the northeast (situation of the ruin in 1995) (photo: A. Hoffmann).

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[2] As shown in the paper of F. Meynersen given during the Seventh International Conference on the History and Archaeology of Jordan, the Tiberias Gate has been dated to the "Herodian Period".

[3] The monument can only be dated with the help of stylistic elements in the decoration of the gate, which indicate a date around the first quarter of the third century AD.

6. Gadara, location plan of the Monumental Gate *extra muros* and the hippodrome (drawing C. Bührig).

approaching Gadara from the west, from the Jordan Valley, the Monumental Gate formed one first highlight of urban architecture.

A fifth gate, which was built about eighty years later, revoked this kind of planning. In connection with some new fortification walls on the western side of the city, the so-called Western City Gate (FIG. 2 no. 20) was erected as a plain functional building of defense (Kerner and Hoffmann 1993: 360-363 fig. 2).

Town Planning in the Near East - the Bases

The purpose and erection of monumental gates in relation to urban development in the eastern provinces have to be taken into consideration, because the architectural concepts of the Romans were confronted with the Oriental traditions.

After the First Jewish Rebellion, the construction of the Via Nova Traiana in the years AD 111-114 AD improved the trading routes of this area and led to new prosperity (Kempinski and Avi-Yonah 1978: 154-155; Kuhnen 1990: 120). The Second Jewish Rebellion, in the second half of the second century AD, however, caused an economical decline, and it was only under the rule of the Severans that the province Syria Palestina experienced a kind of economical revival (Hasebroek 1921: 121; Walmsley 1996: 127). Here, in the eastern provinces, Rome pursued a policy of forced urbanisation from the end of the second century AD onwards (Kuhnen 1990: 122). Like Bostra (Freyberger 1989: 58-59) or Gerasa (Browning 1982) for instance, Gadara was one of those cities which profited from this policy and experienced some economical upswing and a new building boom. The public buildings and monuments along the east-west-axis of Gadara clearly demonstrate this (FIG. 7).
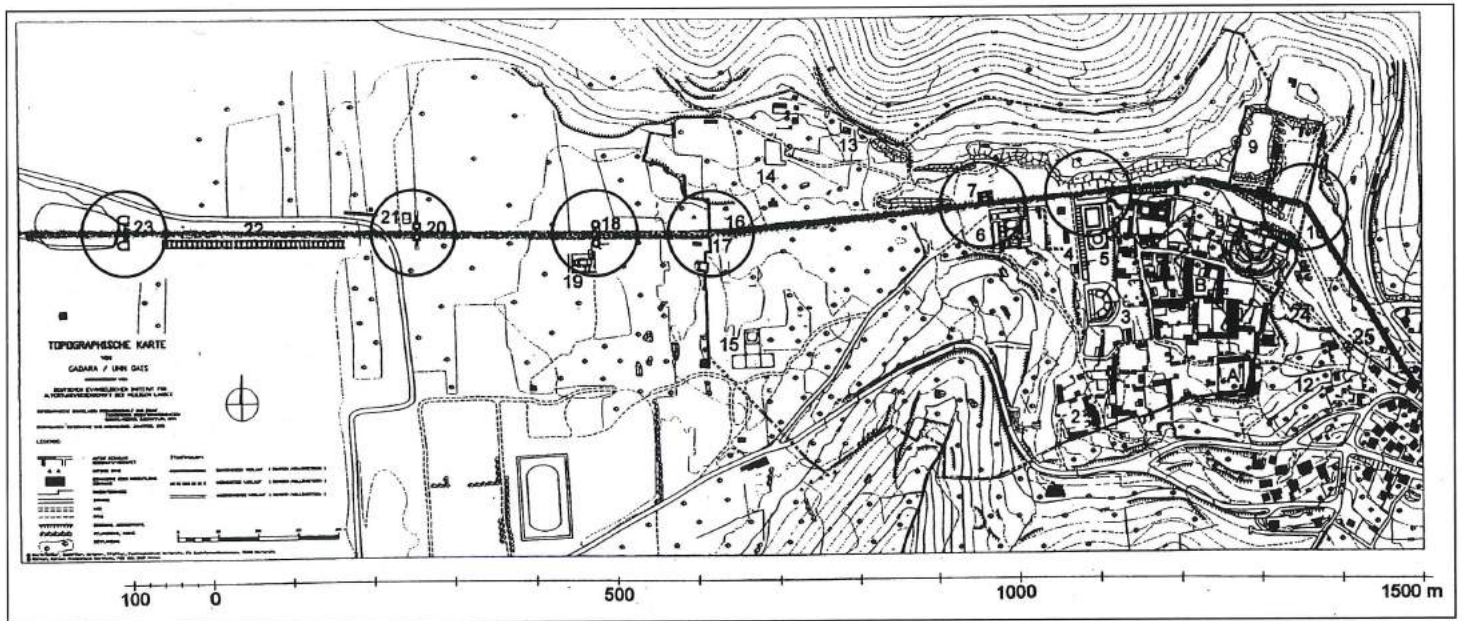
7. Topographical plan of Gadara with the public buildings and gates along the *decumanus* (see FIG. 2, drawing: C. Bührig)

A Type of Urban Planning in the Near East - Summary

Compared to the preceding settlement structures, from the beginning of the first century AD onwards under Roman presence, a change in the urban planning concepts can be noted in the Near East (Barghouti 1982: 209-229). The founding of the cities in the Seleucid and Ptolemaic periods had been adjusted with their city walls to the natural surroundings, including a major long-distance route, which is demonstrated for example by the city plan of Laodicea, Antioch and Apamea in Syria (Barghouti 1982: 213-215; Kuhnen 1990: 32-36; Peters 1983: 269-272 fig. 1-3). On the other hand the indigenous settlements founded by the Nabataeans, gave a special character for the trading stations, which extended along the major long-distance routes from the Early Imperial period onwards. Almost all the buildings erected along these routes were meant to give a representative setting to commerce, the basis of urban wealth. The oval square of Bostra is a good example for a combined location of city gate and market (Peters 1983: 273-277 fig. 5 A, B).

This type of urbanisation was closely linked up with the local requirements and developed some very specific Syrian-Palestinian urban structures out of the prerequisites mentioned above (Barghouti 1982: 209-229). Typical is the major importance of the main axis, which could be bordered by colonnades either along the entire length or at least in certain segments (Walmsley 1996: 130). It is noteworthy that the street did not necessarily run in a straight line, long-distance routes were often incorporated into the settlement, and wide and open forum-type squares in the city centre were lacking.

The road-space was divided into segments, which could be joined up by means of a square, a tetrapylon or some corresponding monument such as a gate or a nymphaeum, as can be seen in Gadara (FIG. 7). Quite clearly, these architectural features, which were referring to one another, did improve the townscape. By erecting these buildings, especially the gates, urban spaces were created, and this certainly has to be seen as a planned townscape, for example in Gerasa, Palmyra and Apamea (s. Peters 1983; Browning 1979; 1982; Barghouti 1982). Secondary transverse axes, which cross the main axis, can be found only occasionally.

The advantages of this type of planning are apparent: Apart from the adaptability to topographical facts, the opportunity is created to trade along the street (about the colonnaded streets, cf. Segal 1997: 3-53). Pillars topped with consoles, pedestals for honorary monuments provided some additional ornament for the central urban spaces. Thus, the colonnaded street forms the vital centre of the city and probably assumes the function of the forum.

The aim of creating an impressive urban visual axis often led to a competition amongst the cities with ever bigger and more magnificent building programs. At the time of the Severans, the monumentalizing of the cityscape reached a climax, see Bostra for example (Peters 1983; Freyberger 1989: 58-60).

Summary

The wish to monumentalize the townscape was a driving force behind the building measures at Gadara, which was competing with the neighbouring cities. This aspect can clearly be demonstrated by the Monumental Gate *extra muros*, which does not directly address the Emperor, since both the inscriptions and the statues are lacking. A standardized system has not been developed for monumental gates, which were erected as a deference of the cities to their own prestige and importance. Thus, they could do without inscription and relief decorations.

In this region, which was specifically shaped by ideological and cultural contrasts, the building of Roman monumental gates was a favourite architectural quotation. By means of this quotation, the cities wanted to approach the Roman system of notation of architectural symbols and demonstrate their affiliation with Rome.

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