

**GADARA OF THE DECAPOLIS**  
**A SUMMARY OF THE 1986 AND 1987**  
**SEASONS AT UMM QEIS\***

by  
Thomas Weber

After an interruption of six years the German Protestant Institute for Archaeology at Amman resumed archaeological fieldwork at the ancient site of Gadara of the Decapolis, modern Umm Qeis, Irbid district. The survey of 1986 and the excavations of 1987 were financed by the Protestant Churches of Germany and generously sponsored by the Cultural Salvage Fund of the Foreign Ministry of the Federal Republic of Germany. All activities, which included a restoration project in the Ottoman village (*Beit Melkawi*), were conducted with approval of the relevant military and civil authorities and in close cooperation with the Department of Antiquities of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. A joint excavation status was contracted with the German Archaeological Institute, central branch at Berlin.

The works of 1986 focused on establishing a geometrical grid valid for future excavation areas at the ancient site. A result of this will be a reviewed topographical map<sup>1</sup>, showing in addition to the ancient ruins the lay-out of the Islamic village and the locations of the wide-spread antique cemeteries.

In cooperation with the German Archaeological Institute Berlin, two excavation projects were scheduled and partly executed until 1987:

1) The underground mausoleum and the neighbouring circular building, which are located approximately 500 m west of the slopes of the acropolis hill close to the paved Roman *Decumanus Maximus* (see Fig. 1, Pl. XCIV, 1-2). underwent surface clearance in October and November 1986. A sondage uncovered a part of a coloured mosaic in the entrance hall of the underground mausoleum. This was entirely uncovered in August 1987 by the German Protestant Institute for Archaeology Amman (Pl. XCV) and subsequently removed and restored by the Italian excavation team of Mount Nebo under the direction of Father M. Piccirillo. Below the mosaic, which shows an inscription naming a certain *Valentinianos*, *Eustathia* and *Protogenia*, a stone lined grave (tomb 6, see Fig. 1, No. 9) dating to the Byzantine Period<sup>2</sup> was found containing various metal objects, apparently the remains of wooden coffins. Beside this well stratified tomb, other burials within the entrance hall were examined, the context of most of them already destroyed in medieval or modern times.

Further, it was the aim of a second excavation area in 1987 to reveal the function and date of the circular building close to the staircase of the subterranean mausoleum (see Fig. 1, No. 2). Water

---

\* I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Department of Antiquities and extend my thanks to its Director General Dr. A. Hadidi. I owe further thanks to H.E., the German Ambassador to Jordan, Dr. H. Bartels, as benefactor and promoter of the project. The Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology at Yarmouk University Irbid supported the team by lending important field equipment.

The project was accompanied by O. Reshaidat, Department of Antiquities, Umm Qeis. Staff members 1986: R.H. Barnes, P. Grunwald, V. Peise, K.D. Politis, F. Reidel, S. Wegener; 1987: J. Benton, W. Boeser, K. Da Costa, N. Hagen, J.

Halfhide, P. Herz, C. Bol, Th. Kampfmann, L.A. Maxwell, K.D. Politis, K. Rielly, M. Sarley, O. Stoll, H.H. Otto, F. Reidel.

1. Cf. G. Schumacher, *Northern Ajlun* (London 1890) XXXX; E. Krüger - U. Wagner-Lux - K.H.J. Vriezen Van der Flier, *ZDPV* 94 (1978), p. 136 = *ADAJ* 23 (1979), p. 32.
2. Two coins were found in the plaster bed of the mosaic and cleaned by the Roman-German Museum at Cologne. According to the restorations these coins date to the end of the 3rd - beginning of the 4th centuries A.D. The stylistic evidence of the mosaic points to the 6th century A.D.

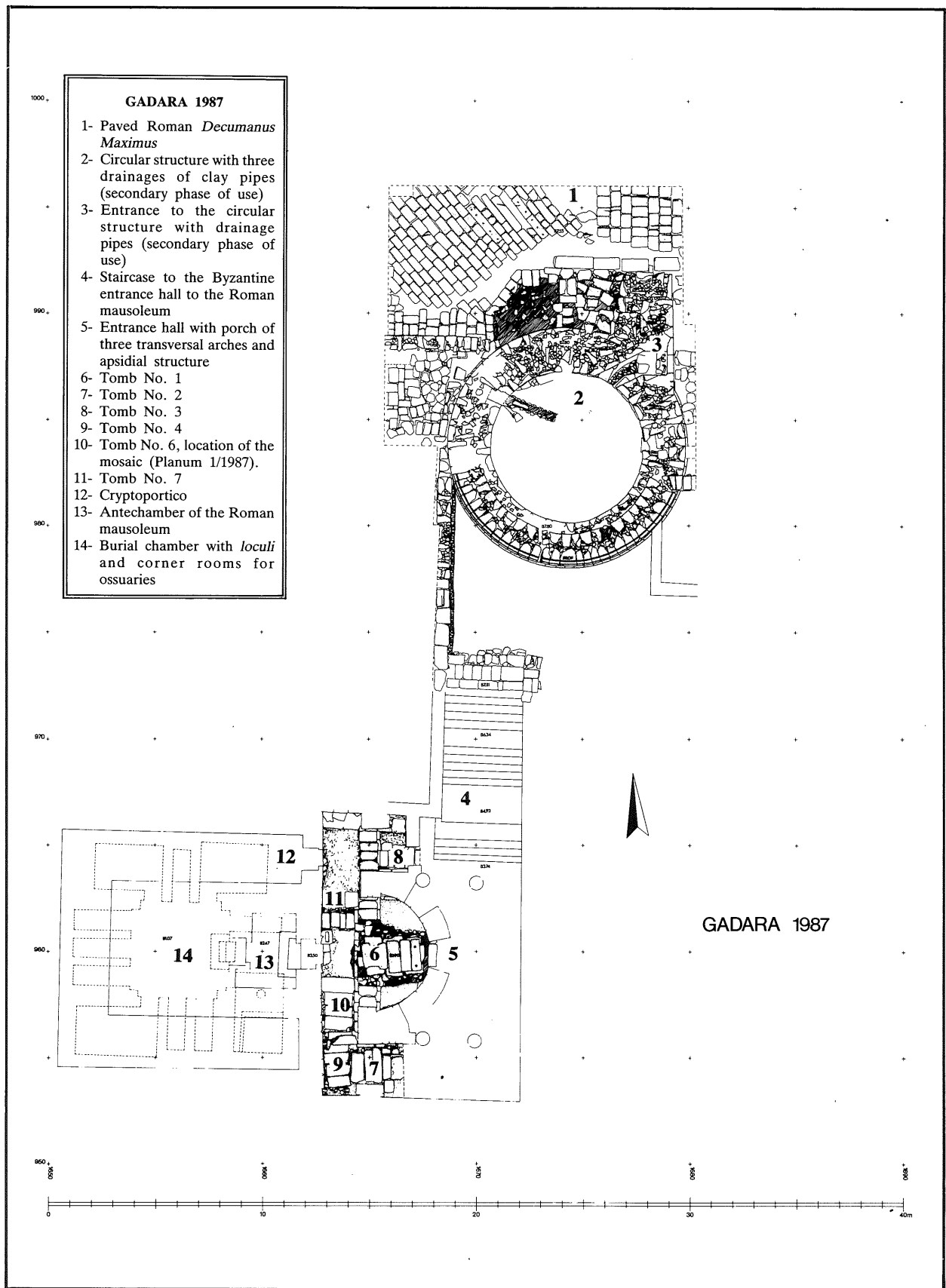


Fig. 1: The circular building and the underground Mausoleum (Planum 2/1987). Drawing by F. Reidel.

pipes, which pierce through the soft limestone foundation of the basalt building, provide evidence for a secondary use of the structure as a cistern or a dwelling. This was obviously the case when the high quality masonry was brought down to its present level when the Byzantines reused the ashlar blocks for the enlargement of the entrance to the adjacent Roman underground mausoleum. The excavations, up to this date, could not verify whether the circular foundation was originally part of a Roman monumental tomb of cylindrical type<sup>3</sup>. The prolongation of the eastern elevation in a wall running tangentially north towards the paved road and giving access to the interior of the building via a small entrance (see Fig. 1, No. 3) may be explained as the base of a barrel vaulted arch. If this is true, and if there is a symmetrical counterpart to the circular structure still covered by a Mamluk cemetery beyond the Decumanus, the building itself was possibly a free standing monumental gate with round flanking towers. It has to be emphasized that this interpretation remains rather hypothetical until further evidence for this building's purpose is gained in forthcoming excavations.

2) A monumental arch *extra muros* is the subject of architectural research by A. Hoffmann, director of the expedition of the German Archaeological Institute Berlin. The surface clearance and excavation of the eastern central part show the ground plan of a monument with three arched gates and horse-shoe-shaped flanking towers.

In addition to this, the following work was conducted during the campaign of 1987: 1) geometrical documentation of the mausoleum and the circular structure by N. Hagen (Berlin) and Th. Kampfmann (Mainz); 2) photogrammetrical docu-

mentation of exterior and interior elevations of both monuments by W. Boeser and G. Otto (Karlsruhe); 3) an archaeological survey concerning the building phases of the burial chamber and the entrance of the underground mausoleum by F. Aalund (Copenhagen); 4) epigraphical survey of Greek and Roman inscriptions from Gadara by P. Herz (Mainz); 5) classification, registration and documentation of pottery by L. Maxwell (St. Paul, Minnesota, U.S.A.); 6) research and registration of animal bones by K. Rielly (London); 7) development of a Data Base and registration on computer of the files of saved minor finds, pottery, and bones by K. Da Costa (Sydney); 8) survey of the shrine of Abu Gaboo east of Umm Qeis by K.D. Politis (Athens).

On September 11th, 1987, the completion of restoration work at Beit Melkawi in the Ottoman settlement of Umm Qeis was celebrated under the patronage of the German Ambassador to Jordan, Dr. H. Bartels, with a public reception. The restoration programme was scientifically surveyed by the Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology of the Yarmouk University at Irbid (H. Gaube, S. Shami, B. Mershen), subsequently proposed, planned and finally supervised between January and August 1987 by A. Khammash (architect), O. Reshaidat (representative of the Department of Antiquities at Umm Qeis), and the author. In future the late Ottoman complex of Beit Melkawi will be available as a base for scientific research at the site of ancient Gadara of the Decapolis.

Thomas Weber  
German Protestant Institute  
for Archaeology  
Amman

3. This was first suggested by F. Zayadine, *Jordan Magazine*, V4 (1972), p. 27; cf. H.C. Butler, *Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expedition to Syria in the years 1904, 1905-1909* II A 4: Busra (1914) 278 Fig.

245; for the type see M. Eisner, *Zur Typologie der Grabbauten im Suburbium Roms, Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung*, Ergänzungsheft XXVI (1986), p. 164ff.