

**GADARA OF THE DECAPOLIS
A SUMMARY OF THE 1988 SEASON AT
UMM QEIS***

by
Thomas Weber

Following the work of 1986 and 1987¹ three German institutions continued archaeological field research during 1988, under the auspices of the Department of Antiquities and in close cooperation with the German Protestant Institute for Archaeology at the site of Gadara of the Decapolis, modern Umm Qeis, Irbid district.

The Galleries of Ancient Sculpture of the City of Frankfurt/M (Liebieghaus), headed by P.C. Bol, uncovered part of a building which might have been a *nymphaeum* at the *decumanus maximus* of the Greco-Roman town, opposite the Byzantine bath complex excavated by a Danish team in the early '80s². Under the directorship of the author, the German Protestant Institute for Archaeology, Amman, followed the schedule of excavation at the site of the underground Roman mausoleum and the circular structure in June and July. In September and October, A. Hoffmann of the German Archaeological Institute at Berlin conducted a second campaign of architectural research at the monumental arch, located outside the city's western enclosure at a distance of about 300m from the western gate. The restoration program in the Ottoman village of Umm Qeis was resumed by A. Kham-

mash in April, carried on throughout the year and financed by funds of the Cultural Foundation of the Foreign Ministry of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The '*nymphaeum*' lies adjacent to the northern sidewalk of the Roman paved road, at the modern Y-junction in the centre of the antiquities area. The western part of the building uncovered thus far, which is preliminarily being interpreted as a monumental fountain pool, exhibits a rectangular plan oriented from east to west. From the road level which gently slopes from the acropolis hill, there is a square recess with a fill which ascends to the interior. At the rear wall of this, a small apse is flanked by two narrow flights of stairs. The exterior walls of the framing compartments have rounded apses or semi-circular *exedrae* of different sizes facing towards the street, towards the west, and the east. The northern half of this structure is occupied by a barrel-vaulted cistern, which had been in use until recent times and still is accessible from the western part of the building. In front of a wide *exedra* with a narrow rounded niche at the eastern façade, fragments of several fine Roman marble statues were found. Among these was a well preserved, less than life-size sculpture representing a standing maiden

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The work was supervised by the Inspector of Antiquities at Umm Qeis, Mr. Omar Reshaidat, M.A., and temporarily by the Inspector of Islamic Antiquities at the Ministry of Awqaf, Mr. Abdallah Nsour, M.A.

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1. Cf. Th. Weber in: *Ricerca storico-archeologica in Giordania VII* (1987) ed. M. Piccirillo, *LA* 37, 1987, 395ff.; *idem*, *ADAJ* 31, 1987, 531ff.
2. Cf. S. Holm-Nielsen, I. Nielsen and F.G. Andersen, *ADAJ* 30, 1986, 219ff.

draped in a long garment. The statues were originally displayed in the niches of the building. Their material, shiny white marble (probably painted in antiquity!), did not contrast with the dark blue basalt masonry, which was originally covered by marble slabs. The style of these sculptures indicates a date of origin in the Roman Imperial period.

In the entrance hall (which according to numismatic evidence was built during the 4th century A.D.), in front of the Roman underground mausoleum (Fig. 1), fourteen stone-lined tombs (Pl. LII,1) belonging to the transitional phase between the late Roman and early Byzantine periods produced a number of glass vessels, some in excellent condition (Pl. LII,2) and several metal tools. Tombs nos. 12 and 17 (Fig. 1:14 and 20) are of special interest for yielding various glass bottles, a chain with bronze bells and a set of surgical instruments. The shafts of tombs nos. 15 and 19 (Fig. 1:17 and 19) had been used for double burials. Three persons were buried in tomb no. 6 (Fig. 1:12) which was found covered by a large fragment of a coloured floor mosaic. The mosaic had been previously excavated and lifted in 1987³. The three-line inscription, framed by crosses and a cable pattern, refers to a certain Valentinianos, Eustathia and Protogenia. An inscription on a lead sarcophagus, uncovered by the Department of Antiquities in 1968 and now on display in the new museum of the Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology at Yarmouk University, Irbid, mentions a certain Helladis⁴. Thus the entrance porch of the pagan Roman funeral monument was an addition of the early Byzantine period, designated to serve as a cemetery for Christians. The most important tomb is no. 1 (Fig. 1:8),

which lies in the centre of the apse and in front of the profiled door-frame to the pagan part of the monument. Possibly this tomb was the focus of pilgrimage and veneration for a local saint or martyr. In the early years of the 4th century A.D., for instance, during the *vicennalia* of Diocletian, Saints Zacharias and Alpheios suffered torture and were decapitated at Gadara⁵. Unfortunately, there is neither archaeological nor epigraphical evidence for a definite link between these tombs in the Byzantine entrance hall of the Roman underground mausoleum and the early Christian hagiographic tradition concerning Gadara.

The building material for this entrance hall was quarried from a circular monument lying north of the *hypogaeum* staircase and immediately adjacent to the paved *decumanus maximus* (Fig. 1:1-3; Pl. LII,3). The original purpose of this circular structure is still obscure. A trial trench (Sondage II/88) north of the road pavement (Fig. 1:4) revealed a section of a wall running north to south, corresponding to the eastern facade of the protruding part of the circular structure. The design of this wall is definitely different and the associated pottery indicates a date later than Roman. The limestone foundations on the other hand are coherent in dressing and level to that of the circular building. At the northern end of the basalt wall, two foundation stones are oriented to the northeast, at an angle to the overlying course. Further trial trenches planned for the forthcoming season of 1989 will hopefully prove the theory that the circular structure was originally part of a free standing arched gate, flanked on both sides by cylindrical towers. Such a feature would be analogous to the triple arched gate, also flanked by two cylindrical towers, dedi-

3. Th. Weber, *ADAJ* 31, 1987, Pl. XCV.

4. First published by M. Piccirillo, *Chiese e Mosaici della Giordania Settentrionale*, Publications of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, *Collectio Maior* 30 (1981) 31 Pl. 19, 24; cf. Y.E. Meimaris,

Sacred Names, Saints, Martyrs and Church officials in the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri pertaining to the Christian Church in Palestine, *Meletemata* II (1986) 178 No. 891.

5. J.T. Milik, *LA* 10, 1959/60, 180f.

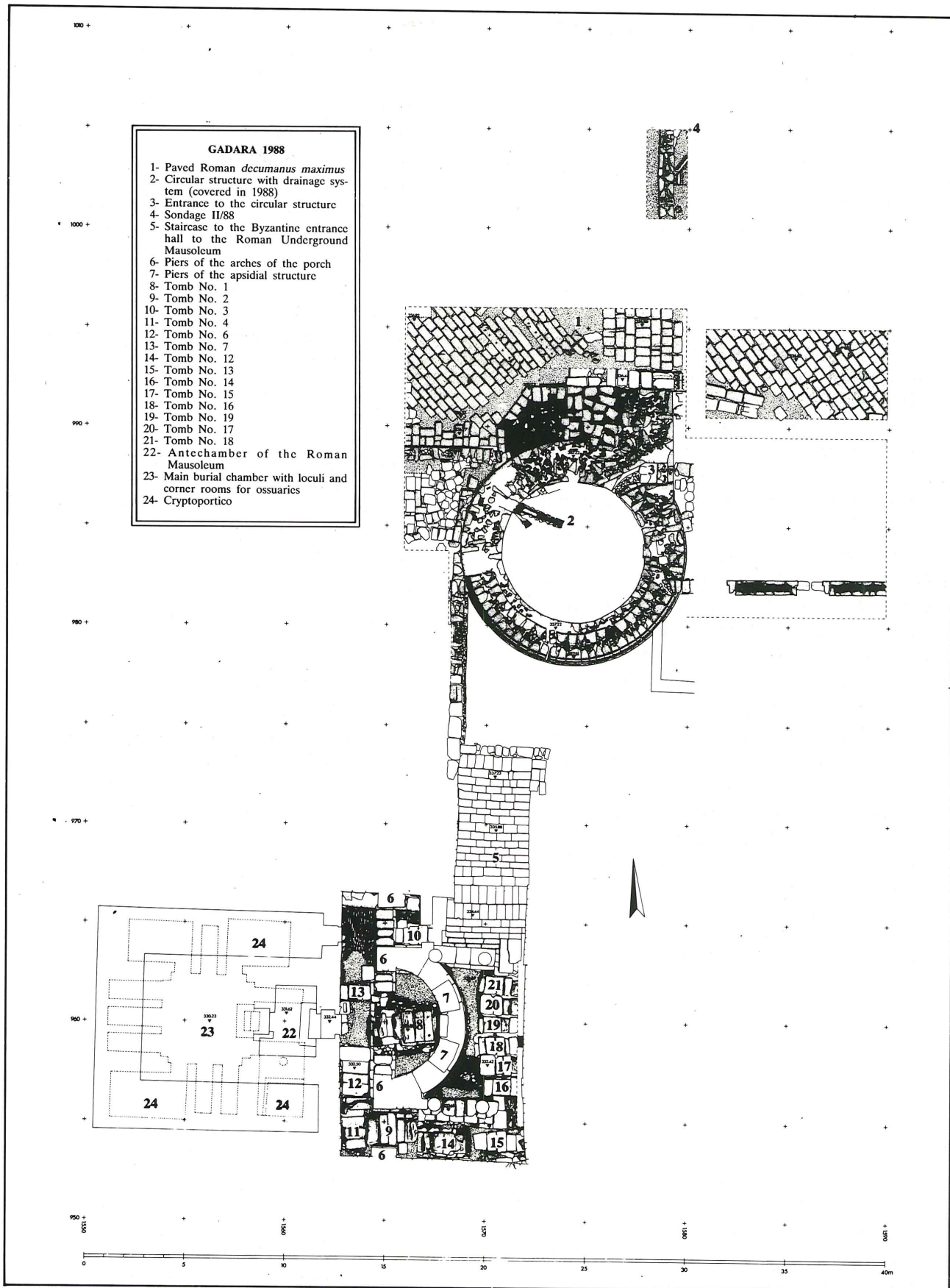


Fig. 1. Gadara 1988: The Roman Underground Mausoleum and the Circular Structure (drawing by F.J. Reidel)

cated to Emperor Domitian at Hierapolis in Asia Minor.⁶

After its destruction, the Gadarene circular building was transformed into a water reservoir. A clay pipe drainage system pierces through the soft limestone foundations which have an external diameter of 11.40m. According to the pottery sherds found in the interior, this building was in use as a cistern until the Mamluk period.

The monumental western gate was very similar in its plan and elevations to the Hadrianic arch of Gerasa. It consisted of three barrel-vaulted passages, the middle wider than the lateral ones. To the north and south it was flanked by single semi-circular towers which resemble those of city-gates. The passages were framed by columns with Corinthian capitals on both the eastern and western facades. The columns had profiled bases, stood on high pedestals and supported the delicately ornamented architrave. The features of these architectural decorations point to a date later than that of the Hadrianic arch at Gerasa. By the end of the campaign most questions concerning the reconstruction of the Gadarene gate had been answered. The northern and central passages have been cleared of fallen ashlar from the vaults and have been excavated down to the ancient floor.

The restoration programme in the Ottoman village of Umm Qeis focused this

year (after the completion of the Melkawi courtyard compound) on the two-storeyed complex called Beit al-Rusan. This estate was once the property of the wealthy family headed by Faleh al-Rusan and temporary residence of a local governor (Qa'm Maqam). The history and architecture of this beautiful complex had been carefully surveyed by the Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology at Yarmouk University, Irbid. A documentation of the extant situation prior to the restoration work was conducted by H. Gaube, B. Mershen and S. Shami⁷. After abandonment by its former owners, the compound, especially the upper floor, was seriously endangered due to vandalism and climatic influences. The restoration work is scheduled to be finished in 1990 and the future use will be devoted to a small local archaeological museum and visitors centre. The mosaic found in 1987 in the entrance hall of the Roman underground mausoleum⁸ is already transferred to Beit al-Rusan for display.

This project of Jordanian-German cultural cooperation was honoured by the visit of Her Majesty Queen Noor Al-Hussein on November 22nd, 1988 in the frame of the opening ceremonies of the Museum of Jordanian Heritage at Yarmouk University, Irbid.

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6. C. Humann, C. Cichorius, W. Judeich *et alii*, *Altortümer von Hierapolis*, 4. Ergänzungsheft des Jahrbuchs des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts (1898) 8ff.; cf. H. Kähler in: *Pauly-Wissowas Real-Encyclopädie der Altertumswissenschaft* VII A 1 (1939) 455 Nr. VII 11 s.v., *Triumphalbogen*; cf. E. Akurgal, *Ancient Civilisations and Ruins of Turkey from Prehistoric*

Times Until the End of the Roman Empire (5th. ed. 1983) 176f. No. 12.

7. Cf. S. Shami in: *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* III (1988) 211ff.; further publications on this topic will follow, published by the participants of the Yarmouk University ethnological survey.

8. See note 3.