

THE TIBERIAS GATE OF GADARA (UMM QAYS) REFLECTIONS CONCERNING THE DATE AND ITS RECONSTRUCTION

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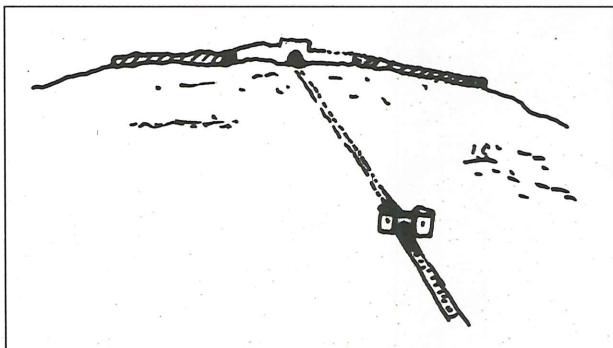
1. Introduction

1.1. Uncommon Characteristics

There are three particular and remarkable characteristics about the Tiberias Gate of Gadara, that distinguishes it from ordinary city gates: First, the gate stood separated and isolated from the city wall and spanned the *decumanus maximus*, which was the ancient road towards Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee (Weber 1998: 444). This is in opposition to ordinary city gates. It belongs to the building type of arch monuments *extra muros* (Fig. 1). The actual city wall dates from the Early Imperial period and was excavated about one hundred metres east of the Tiberias Gate. Second, in ancient times the Tiberias Gate in Gadara surpassed other arch monuments *extra muros* of the period in that its dimensions were relatively monumental: the width measured about 35 metres. Third, today, however, the Tiberias Gate stands out against other arch monuments *extra muros*, because of its deplorable condition. Since 1989 the arch monument was known only by its visible round southern part and was simply referred to as a circular building (*Rundbau*).

1.2. Current Research Status

Consequently, our knowledge regarding the Tiberias Gate of Gadara is limited: Any attempts at its dating, as well as attempts at its reconstruction,



1. General location of an arch monument (after Arnould 1997).

have remained vague (Kader 1996: 164; Arnould 1997: 103). Therefore, the aim of the following report is to present and discuss our latest knowledge about the Tiberias Gate of Gadara. Through new observations of the ground plan, we now have a more reliable source for its dating, all of which is critical to recent reconstruction attempts.

1.3. History of Discovery

During the 1967 hostilities between Jordan and Israel, the remains of a circular structure were discovered. This was located in the western part of the lower town of Umm Qays أم قيس (ancient Gadara), just south of the *decumanus maximus*. In the following two decades this circular building was identified either as a grave tower with an external staircase (Zayadine 1972: 27) or as an ancient water-basin (Wagner-Lux *et al.* 1978: 141; Weber *et al.* 1990: 208). Both interpretations of the original intention were proven incorrect during an exploratory excavation in 1989, which revealed that the base had a parallel counterpart on the north side of the road (Weber *et al.* 1990: 209, fn 42). Therefore, it can be concluded that this structure was indeed a gate.

1.4. Terminology

The name *Tiberias Gate* was coined by the excavator according to the ancient custom of naming gates after their geographic direction (Weber *et al.* 1990: 208). Subsequently, the title of my report is *The Tiberias Gate of Gadara*. This somewhat inaccurate term was chosen in order to differentiate between another structure in Gadara, which probably dates from the third century AD, simply called *arch monument extra muros* (Bühlig 2001). Technically, both are arch monuments *extra muros* (Fig. 1).

2. Description

2.1. Building Material

All structural parts of the Tiberias Gate were made of basalt stone. This stone is found in the im-

mediate vicinity of Gadara. Only the foundation consists of *opus caementicium*, which runs to a depth of 5 metres and is covered by a layer of lime-stones on top, providing an even surface for the base zone. This is still visible today. The southern tower is a circular structure consisting of a circular wall of pseudo-square stones. On the outer side, the square stones were carefully cut and smoothed. The inner side, in contrast, were chiseled to a point. The mortar used in the wall is not visible and can only be seen from the top, where the wall has broken apart. Plugs and hinges, and traces thereof, were not to be found and therefore they were probably not used in the construction. The quarry stones of the risalit (Koepf 1974: 318) are arranged in layers with headers to fortify the structure.

2.2. Architectural Structure

The Tiberias Gate consists of two main architectural elements: a gateway in the middle flanked by two cylindrical towers. Between the towers are the two square-shaped risalits, which once supported the today non-existing barrel vault. On the other side of the gate, facing the city, is a small doorway in the risalit, where the two (the tower and the risalit) meet. These doorways lead into the interior of the tower. The arch has a width of about 35 metres (see above) and complements the foundation of the north tower and the base zone of the south tower.

2.3. Pavement

In the gateway the basalt stone pavement of the road shows a horizontal direction, in opposition to the western and eastern extension of the road,

which is laid in a diagonal pattern (Fig. 2), an unusual phenomenon. Until now, no plausible explanation has been offered for this unusual but common method of paving roads (Vann 1982: 165) in conjunction with gates in Near East. A plausible interpretation is the improvement of the road safety which is obtained through such diagonal paving. For instance, a road with a diagonal pavement would prevent wheels from getting stuck in between the gaps of the stones, which present a greater risk in horizontally laid stones. An exception to that rule are entrances, like those of the so-called *nymphaeum* in Gadara where the space is wider. Here they are often horizontally paved. One could ask, therefore, whether this exceptional case is a matter of taste and perspective character. For instance, the visual pattern of blocks, set with their long dimensions parallel to the direction of a street, would have provided a significantly different impression from blocks set with the long sides in a transverse direction. The former pattern would emphasize the perspective character of the street thereby creating a visually long, narrow space whereas the latter would create lines across the width of the thoroughfare, emphasizing that dimension (Vann 1982: 173).

3. Chronology

There are no inscriptions that give information about the dating of the gate, and literary sources do not offer any historical evidence.

3.1. Construction of the Arch Monument

3.1.1. The Dating: First, a vague external in-



2. Horizontal and diagonal pattern of the pavement (photo. T. Weber).

dication for the dating of the construction could be established by the pottery found in the wall of the southern tower base, which could be dated to the late first century BC-early first century AD (O. Stoll, pers. comm.). This dating is supported by typological analysis. A similar arch monument *extra muros* on the southern border of the city of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee, confirmed to be from the "Herodian period" (Kader 1996: 164; Arnould 1997: 283), shows a comparable structure with two cylindrical towers flanking the gateway, built with basalt stones. The road there is also paved diagonally and horizontally, as in the Tiberias Gate of Gadara. Finally, the historical background also supports a "Herodian" dating of the arch monument in Gadara (Kader 1996: 183). Thus, the dating can only be done by stylistic analysis of the decoration (Meynersen forth.).

3.1.2. The Reconstruction: How did the gate in Gadara look like at that time? In view of the ground plan (Fig. 3), there is reason to believe that the east façade was a simple, flat-surfaced structure. There is no elaboration of architectural elements in the base zone. In comparison with the east façade, the western façade was more varied and contoured: Between the southern tower and its adjacent risalit the contour of a right-angled projection with a width of about 0.95 metres is still visible (Fig. 4). Whether this niche extended to the top or not cannot be determined, nor can we determine its purpose. Kader (1996: 164 note 1077) compares these findings with the two niches that belong to the better preserved arch monument in Tiberias, where they are similarly situated. Here in each niche remains of a postament are found, which could support a column. Contrary to these proposals, the right-angled niches of the monument at Gadara differ from the niches of the arch monument at Tiberias, because they are semi circular and therefore more likely to have held columns.

One may safely assume that the ground level of the niche was once covered, because of its roughly done surface: either by a basalt stone layer that belonged to a niche which filled the gap between the tower and the gateway, or this area was filled by a pedestal for supporting a column. However, there was probably at least one slightly projecting column framing the gateway on either side.

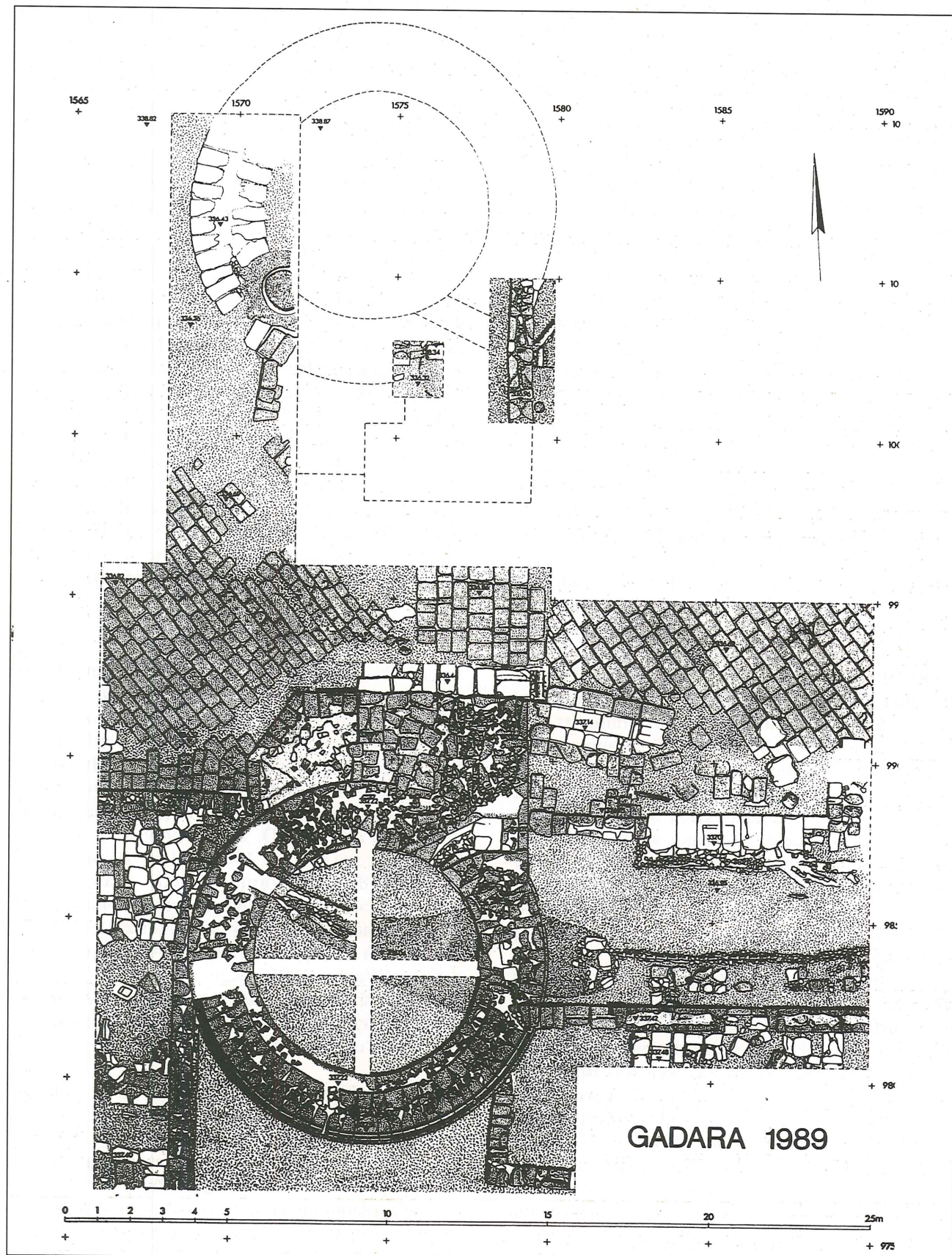
A great number of decorated basalt stone elements were found in the area around the circular building. Some of them apparently date from the period of the gate and are of the right size to fit the proportions of the building. They can therefore be used in the reconstruction. For example, curved

and double S-shaped profile elements, segments of semi circular framed niches, maybe a frieze, which show palm leaf and double axe motives. The location of the double S-shaped profile elements (Fig. 5) can be assumed to be nearly similar to that of the western arch monument which dates from the early third century AD (Bühlig 2001). Fragments of the cylindrical towers were found as well as one piece that fits in nicely at the edge of the niche. Since architecture is based on a canon of proportions and forms, a reconstruction of the main structure of the Tiberias Gate could be as follows: The frieze with the palm leaf and axe at the top of the middle part of the gate; a comparable location can be seen at the tetrapylon in Lattakia, for instance (Kader 1996: 32 fig. 12). An architrave with triglyphs and metopes mentioned by Kader without critical discussion (1996: 164 with fn. 1077) may belong to a grave, probably to that of the Germani in Gadara, which shows similar types of decorative elements at the top (Hoffmann 1996: pl. 40,2). This short description clearly shows the difficulties of reconstructing the Gate of Tiberias. It also shows the marked differences between the relatively impressive countryside and the more functional city.

3.2. Reorganization of Arch Monument

3.2.1. The Dating: A closer examination of the ground plan suggests possibilities for the rebuilding of the arch monument (Weber *et al.* 1990: 208): In front of the west façade two platforms of trapezoidal shape can be recognized which are not linked with the central block (Fig. 6). They belong to a reorganization of the gate in the late second or early third century AD. This is proven by coins of the late second century AD found in the foundation of the southern platform. In addition, a close typological comparison with the arch monument in Shahbā, ancient Philippopolis, founded by Philip the Arab in the mid-third century AD supports this dating (Weber 1995: Kat. No. BD. 5). Furthermore, the pottery sherds confirm the dating to the third century, as there are no sherds dating to the second century AD.

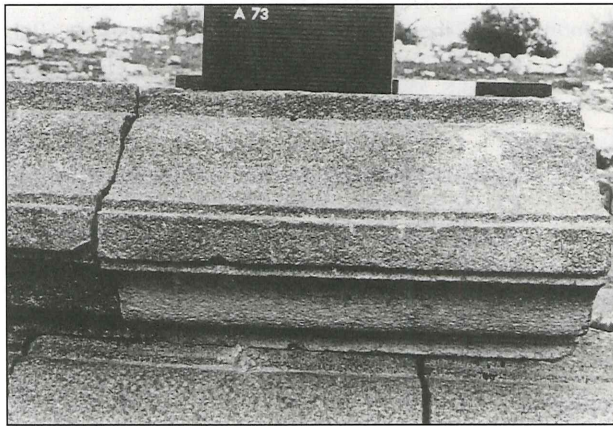
3.2.2. The Reconstruction: It is possible that the polygonal platforms were a stylobat or an attempt to emphasize the fortified character of the arch, as demonstrated by the better preserved example in Philippopolis. The rebuilding of the Tiberias Gate can be explained in connection with the erection of the western arch monument *extra muros* in Gadara, which was built at that period and has a similar fortified structure.



3. Tower base, condition in 1989 (drafted by F. Reidel).



4. Niches (photo T. Weber).



5. Double S-shaped profile element (photo. T. Weber).

3.3. Time of Destruction

A *terminus ante quem* for dating the destruction of the gate is given by a later building on the site of the Tiberias Gate. Thirteen coins of the fourth century AD were found in a pithos in a storage room, set into the northern foundation of the gate tower. These coins thus complement, along with the pottery sherds, a dating to before the fourth century AD. We can conclude that the Tiberias Gate was reduced to its present level in the fourth century AD. At that time the northern tower of the gate was used as a solid foundation for a storage room, while the southern counterpart was used for a water basin (Wagner-Lux *et al.* 1978: 141; Weber *et al.* 1990: 208); at least an interpretation involving



6. Polygonal platform, added to the structure at a later phase (photo. T. Weber).

water can be confirmed (Meynersen, in press).

4. Results

In conclusion, a detailed examination of the ground plan enables one to distinguish between three periods of the arch monument in Gadara: its probable "Early Imperial" construction, its reorganization in the late second or early third century AD and its destruction during the fourth century AD.

5. Outlook

Finally, we do not completely understand the meaning of the Tiberias Gate as an arch monument at a location away from the city walls. Research has considered selective elements in the interpretation of this gate's function, such as representative, sacred, sepulchral or economic reasons (Kader 1996: 182ff.; Weber 2001). Symbolically, the arch monument is understood to represent a *pars pro toto* for the town, or as a quotation of the city wall. Surely, such a monument can incorporate manifold functions (Mazzoni 1997: 307ff.). From this point of departure, it is possible to see the Tiberias Gate as a symbol of peace and prosperity rather than as a symbol of defense, especially since the gate stood alone, outside the city walls. In conclusion, establishing a reconstruction and function of the Tiberias Gate is not only difficult because of its poor physical condition, but also of the lack literary or historical sources.

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