

NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS FOR THE DATING OF THE GERASA ROMAN CITY WALL*

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Introduction

The city or enclosure walls of Gerasa (ancient Jarash جرش) are amongst the best-preserved of any in the Graeco-Roman Empire. The wall extends for about 3.5km enclosing an area of ca. 85ha. There are five known gates and over 101 square towers or tower-like structures projecting at regular intervals of 17-22m.¹

A limited excavation of 10 days at the inner face of the west city wall, north of the South Theatre, grew out of the 1996-2000 architectural/site field studies of the Upper Temple of Zeus complex headed by Jean-Pierre Braun, then director of IFAPO-Amman. The archaeological investigation of the city wall foundation at the South Theatre was undertaken during IFAPO's final September-October 2000 excavation season at the upper temple complex, in order to find stratified material evidence within the foundation for the dating of the first city wall.

Until the early 80s, a late first century AD date for the Roman city wall was quoted from Kraeling's work (Kraeling 1938: 39ff.; Detweiler 1938). Seigne challenged Kraeling's date with his 1983 findings at the South Gate of Gerasa (Seigne 1986)

where he argued a late third or early fourth century date for the building of the first city wall. In his newly posited hypothesis on phases and orientation of urban growth, Seigne's criticism is that Kraeling's (early) dating relied too heavily on epigraphical evidence (Welles 1938: inscr. no. 50 of the N-W Gate AD 75/76; inscr. nos. 56/57 of the North Gate AD 115, etc.) and was not backed by archaeological data (Seigne 1992: 331).²

A resolution to this important issue seemed essential: 1) for understanding the history of town planning and actual progress of implementation (i.e. what was decided and delineated as civic territory before each monument was actually built) and 2) the reason or reasons for building the enclosure wall: the historical setting or in other words the date of construction, most importantly of the foundations, is essential to both answers. The answer could only be found by excavating the foundation of the city wall in various places. This was first done by three soundings, one in 1997 and two in 1998, under Jean-Pierre Braun, along the southern stretch of the city wall, south of the temenos of the Upper Zeus Temple. Each of the three soundings showed that this stretch of wall

* Special permission was granted by the Director-General of the Department of Antiquities, Dr Fawaz al-Khraysheh, to open the 'South Theatre city wall trench' at the end of the final IFAPO excavation season September-October 2000 of the Upper Zeus Temple Complex, Jarash. The IFAPO team consisted of: Jean-Pierre Braun (director of Upper Zeus Temple field studies and IFAPO-Amman), Ina Kehrberg (IFAPO Fellow 1998-2000: excavations coordinator and ceramicist), John Manley (Chief Executive, Sussex Archaeological Society, UK: field archaeologist), Gabriel Humbert (permanent IFAPO staff: conservator), François Bernel (permanent IFAPO staff: photographer), Kate Wolrige (graduate in archaeology/ UWA, Perth: assistant trench supervisor), Michael Manley (student, UK: volunteer helper), Sally White (Museum Curator, UK: volunteer archaeologist). Ben Dolinka (then ACOR Fellow: resident archaeologist) joined the Upper Zeus Temple season for the first week. Nawal Hawari drew the Upper Zeus Temple pottery finds.

1. For an overall view of the updated plan of Gerasa, see J-P. Braun *et al.* 2001, in this volume.
2. Seigne (1992) used the main new and old architectural ev-

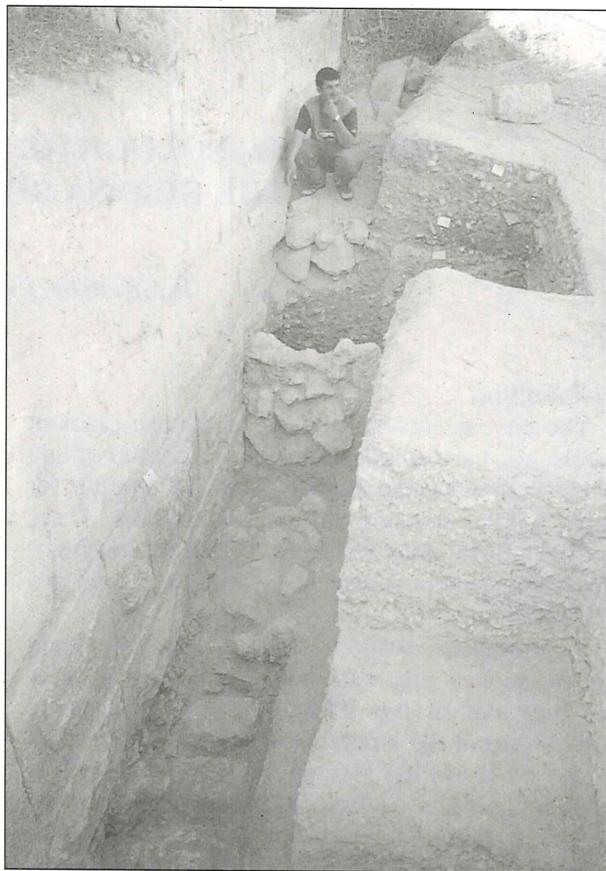
idence and topographical theories to correct Kraeling and to develop his own theories about the city wall and urban growth. These were in part questioned in 1995 at the Torino (*SHAJ 6*) conference by Kehrberg and Ostrasz (1997: 167f), followed by Kennedy (1997: 56-59), who also began to question Seigne's late third-fourth century AD dating of the wall (1986) and considered Kehrberg's suggestion that a second century AD date to be perhaps a more likely one for the construction of the city wall, which she based on her ceramic studies of the 1997-98 archaeological investigations of the wall enclosing the upper Zeus temple complex (Kennedy 1997: 58, n. 71, pers. com.; cf. Kehrberg 1997 and 1998, IFAPO research reports, n.p.). In various aspects, latest archaeological investigation of 1999 and 2000 have not confirmed some of Seigne's opinions about urban growth of Gerasa and in cases have come full circle in support of earlier arguments put forward by and in Kraeling (1938), like the argument over the construction date for the city wall. The conclusive findings in our 2000 excavation of the city wall fully vindicate Kraeling's and others Early Roman, probably Trajanic dating (Kraeling 1938: 39ff) – at least in that section (Kehrberg forthcoming b).

was founded directly on bedrock but the ceramic deposits accumulated in good quantity against the standing wall provided homogeneous results to encourage further archaeological investigations. The pottery from these deposits dated persistently to the transitional second-third or earlier part of third century AD, corresponding with parallel findings at the upper temple complex (temenos and cella).³

Hence a trench was dug in 2000 against the inner face of the west wall, north of the South Theatre and just south of the modern access route from the heliport outside the city wall (Fig. 1). This likely spot to locate built foundations for the city wall was suggested by the late François Carré then working with IFAPO on the topography of Jarash for the revised town plan (see in Braun *et al.* 2001). Here the wall crosses a deep wadi bed which necessitated a solid underground built structure to bridge the slopes of the wadi and to support the heavy city wall. The fact that the Department of Antiquities had already cleared that area of blocks from the city wall tumble, helped us reach archaeological levels almost from the onset of the excavations.

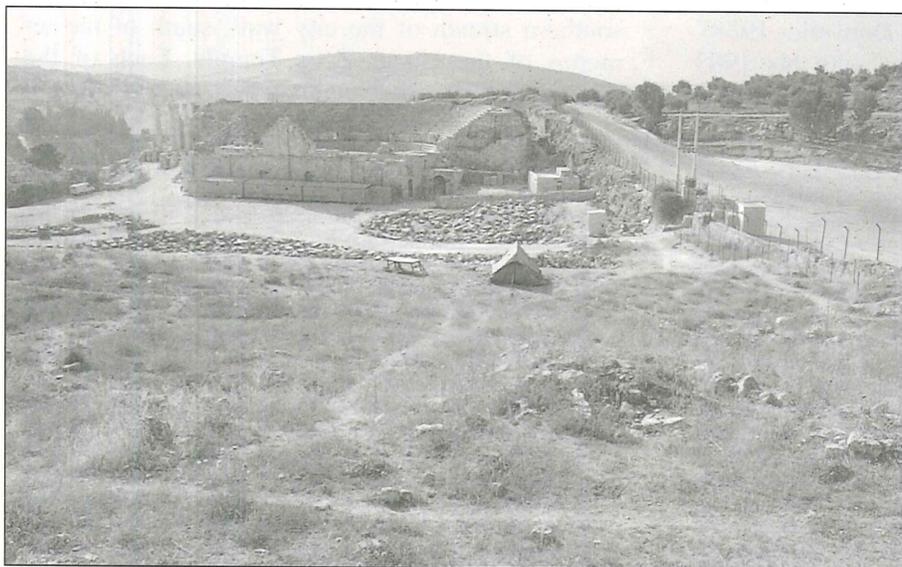
The Excavation of the West Wall Trench (J. Manley)

After careful removal of the topsoil, almost immediately undisturbed archaeological layers were located across the sounding. The clear outline of a deeply cut foundation trench was located first at the northern end of the trench (Fig. 2). The southern end of the archaeological sounding showed that the



2. North side of the inner west city wall trench, showing foundations.

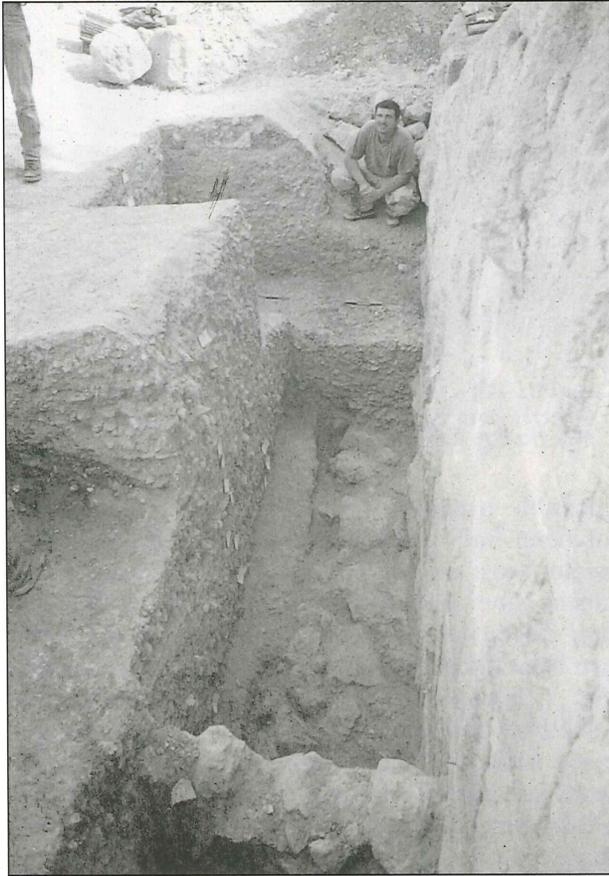
foundation trench was cut into ground that gradually sloped towards the south (Fig. 3). The distinctive colour of the ground into which the foundation



1. General view of the west Gerasa city wall, trench north of the South Theatre.

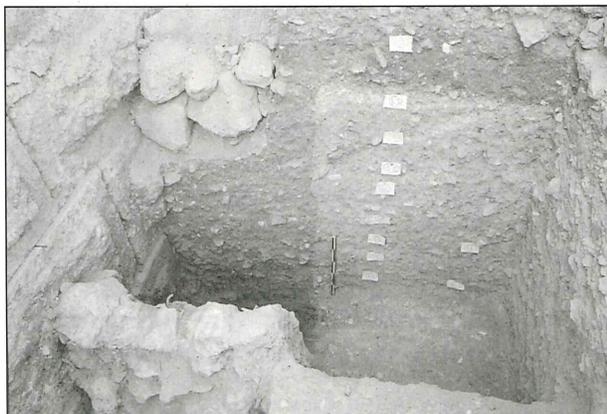
3. See Kehrberg 2001a: esp. 604; above n. 2 and Kehrberg's research reports 1999-2000, IFAPO n.p., on the ceramic findings of the city wall investigations. The preliminary

findings will be part of a summary report of 1998-2000 IFAPO field studies and ceramics in their contexts by J-P. Braun and I. Kehrberg, to be submitted for ADAJ 46.



3. South side of the inner west city wall trench, showing foundations.

trench had been cut (see Fig. 4) represents a mix of earth, ashes and residual dirt or dust. The entire excavated original ground surface into which the foundation trench had been cut contained much pottery (see below, I. Kehrberg), some animal bones and in one of the uppermost layers (level 55, see Fig. 4 and Table 1: coins) a Nabataean coin, probably Aretas



4. North section of the city wall foundation trench, foundation-fill and -support wall.

IV,⁴ next to a complete bowl placed upside down (Fig. 5; see below Fig. 6). The colour and make up of the layers within the pre-wall deposits suggested that they represented one homogeneous context; this was later confirmed by the pottery and context study (I. Kehrberg, below).

The original ground surface of construction (levels 52 north and 26, 33 south; Figs. 2, 3) marked the edge of the cut of the foundation trench. It was covered by excavated layers referred to as post-construction or post-city wall deposits. In fact, the sections, especially the north section (see Fig. 4) show a slight spill of the foundation fill covering the top of the original ground surface.

The fill of the foundation trench was a matrix of slightly darker soil throughout (Figs. 2, 3), in part having limestone chips (from the wall masonry) and mixed with the soil or ground deposits identical to the pre-wall layers. The fill contained slightly less material matter, pottery and other artefacts; the type of fill did not alter throughout. Excavating the fill of the foundation trench revealed that the city wall rests on a platform of large, irregular boulders that had been placed in layers at the bottom of the foundation trench (Figs. 2, 3; see also Braun *et al.* 2001: 448, fig. 20). Some of the uppermost boulders were removed (level 31, see Table 3) to see what lay underneath and to collect archaeological material trapped within the platform construction (level 21, see Table 3). Another course of boulders (level 32) emerged. It was not safe to go deeper in order to see how many built courses of boulders there were. The irregular gaps between the boulders were packed tight with a clay substance to solidify the platform structure. The wall itself is set back on the platform (see Figs. 2, 3) and is built from the bottom course up of dressed embossed blocks, no different from those higher up: the first course of the clear-standing wall is slightly recessed, parallel to the top of the foundation trench. This and the 'rustic' embossed blocks are a common feature for massive supportive wall constructions in Roman Gerasa, best seen in their original state at the two theatres and the hippodrome, dating from the late first to about mid-second century AD and each carrying the same type of masonry. A 'retaining wall' was put across the foundation trench to act as barrier for the earth fill of the trench (see Fig. 2), its construction indicating that the wall-building at that spot was advanced from north to south (the only 'face' is south of this simple wall holding the foundation fill in place). As remarked earlier, the foundation

4. D. Keller, who will present a final study of the glass finds, did the preliminary reading of the coin.

trench falls slightly toward south, which became evident in the differing heights of the section at either end of the excavated sections.

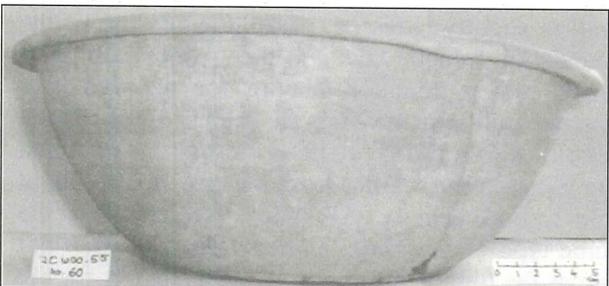
The Pottery Finds: Their Contexts and Interpretation (I. Kehrberg)

The Pre-Construction Context (Table 1; Figs. 5-7)

The clearly discernible foundation trench (Figs. 3 and 4 especially) was cut into a large waste dump containing charcoal, ash, some animal bones and glass fragments but mostly masses of pottery fragments, partly wasters and partly residual. The excavated trench baulk revealed homogeneous first century BC and BC/AD ceramics with a few types dating up to the end of the first century AD and possibly going into the early second century (see e.g. level 55 Figs. 5-7 and Table 1). The local pottery assemblage alone would suffice to date the context (Kehrberg forthcoming a); the Nabataean coin (see above J. Manley and Table 1) and glass finds (see n. 4) confirm the first centuries date with

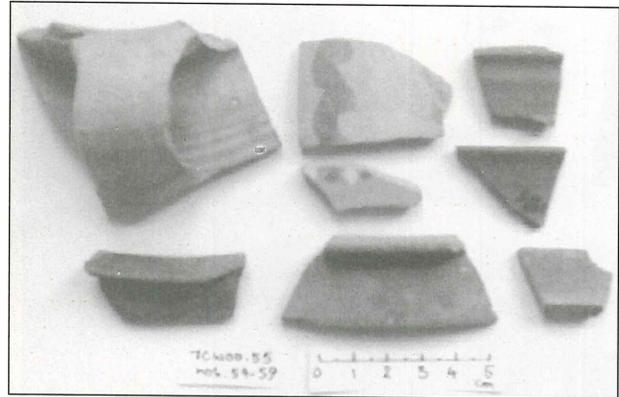


5. Context JCW00.55 with basin no. 60 still in situ.



6. Context: pre-construction of city wall (baulk of foundation trench), basin no.60 from level JCW00.55.

5. The inspirational origin, function and date of this type of Gerasa ware has been discussed in a paper by Kehrberg (forthcoming a). The first fragments of this ware had been identified from tomb deposits under and in the foundations deposits of the hippodrome, the great altar of the Temple of Artemis and then at the lower sanctuary of Zeus excava-



7. Context: post-fill of city wall foundation trench, sherds from level JCW00.55.

a possible extension into the second century AD. Collateral finds are imported sigillata (ESA), some 'cream ware' and a good number of Late Hellenistic 'fine' grey ware and first century BC/AD lamp fragments. One of the most important finds have been the early painted ware or 'Gerasa Ware' (Fig. 7: top centre), a common bichrome painted (sometimes trichrome and incised) ware of mostly closed form, probably inspired by the earlier imported late second and first century BC Cypriote lagynos types.⁵ The association of this pottery waste dump with funerary practices is not only suggested by the 'lagynos association' with Dionysiac funerary rituals in Late Hellenistic times; other predominant vessel types, lamps and glass are also frequently found in Late Hellenistic and Early Roman tombs; in addition, this part of the city wall belonged previously to the south-west necropolis closed for urbanisation by the time the wall was actually built. The opening date of the South Theatre (begun in about AD 80, Welles 1938: inscr. nos. 51, 52) in the beginning of the second century AD (Welles 1938: inscr. no.53) may have coincided with the end of the building of the upper part in that stretch of the city wall.

The Construction Context (Tables 2, 3; Figs. 8-10)

The pottery shown in Figs. 8-10 is little different from the pre-construction phases. This can be understood in two ways: one is that much of the foundation trench fill in that spot derived from the excavated debris of the foundation trench (see e.g. Fig 10: early painted 'Gerasa Ware' rim top left); some vessel fragments are suspected to have made

tions. Their chronological place in Jarash, securely dated by the stratified hippodrome finds (since confirmed by the upper Zeus temple and city wall excavations of 1999 and 2000, see above nn. 2 and 3, and lack of parallels elsewhere, were first recognised in the late 80's by I. Kehrberg and A.M. Rasson-Seigne (pers. comm.).

Table 1: Pre-City Wall deposits/assemblages (earliest context at top).

(north section)		(south section)		N-S section				
north levels	Ceramics	kiln evidence	other finds	south levels	Ceramics	kiln evidence	other finds	N-S section joins/same
62-63 (JCW87-94)	1stBC, 1st->AD	1stBC, AD	LH grey ware lamp	30* (JCW28-43)	1stBC, AD few possibly into 2nd	1stBC, AD	1st->AD glass, poss into 2nd; BC/AD incised ware (JCW28)	30/29 x
60-61 (JCW77-86)	1stBC, 1st->AD	1stBC, AD	LH grey ware lamp, BC/AD r-w ptd ware	29* *level with 1st found course of boulders (platform) above 27.2, same pot in 29	1stBC, AD	1stBC, AD	BC/AD lamp, Nab ptd b-s ESA, BC/AD ptd ware*	29/28/30 x
59 (JCW71-76)	1stBC, 1st->AD			28* *level with fill 27 against wall, join in 29 (JCW1-16)	1st BC/AD, 1st->AD		1st-early 2nd AD lamp, ESA, BC/AD ptd ware (JCW5,7,14)	28/29 x
58 (JCW63-70)	1stBC, 1st->AD		Nab plain b-s, BC/AD lamps, BC/AD incised b-s					
56 (JCW49-53)	1stBC, 1st->AD few poss begin 2nd	1stBC, AD						
55* (JCW54-62)	1stBC, 1st->AD few possibly into 2nd BC/AD ptd pot? complete, mended large bowl (JCW60)	1stBC, AD	Nab coin Aretas IV (JCW61), BC/AD ptd ware, glass (JCW62)					55/25 x?
54 (JCW54-62)	1stBC, 1st->AD few possibly into 2nd	1stBC, AD	Lamp (JVW47)					
53 individual finds not registered by number but as assembly, by context	1stBC, 1st->AD few possibly into 2nd	1stBC, AD						
Abbreviations: BC/AD/1st century BC and AD; b-s/body, sherd, ESA/ Eastern Terra Sigillata A. fgl/fragment; LFL/ Late Hellenistic; Nab/Nabataean, ptd/painted, tc/bra colts (for Tables 1-4)								

Table 2: Original ground surface (52/26) and cut for foundation trench (33/33) of city wall deposits/assemblages.

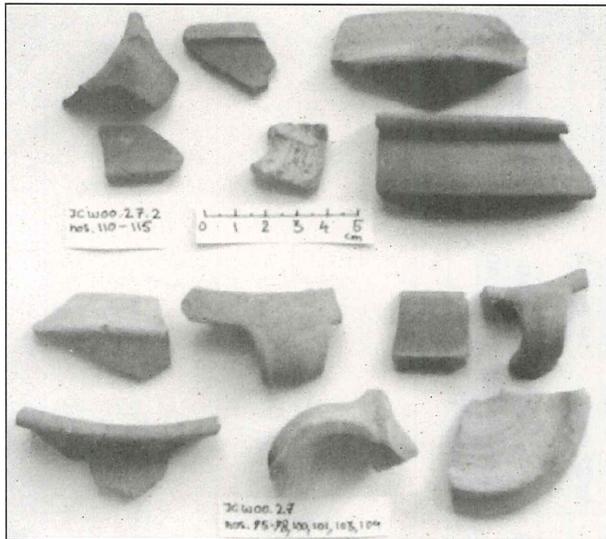
(north section)		(south section)		N-S section				
north levels	Ceramics	kin evidence	other finds	south levels	Ceramics	kin evidence	other finds	joins/same
52* possibly top of foundation fill or overlap (JCW154-160)	1stBC, 1st->AD few into 2nd AD	1stBC, AD	Nab base, (type dates into 2nd AD), LH grey ware	26 finds not registered by number, context only	1stBC, AD few into 2nd AD	1stBC, AD	Gerasa lamp fig 1's early 2nd	X
33 no pottery				33 no pottery				X

Table 3: Lower fill (32/31/21) (platform of boulders) and upper fill (14/11/107; 27.2/27) (earth fill) of foundation trench deposits/assemblages.

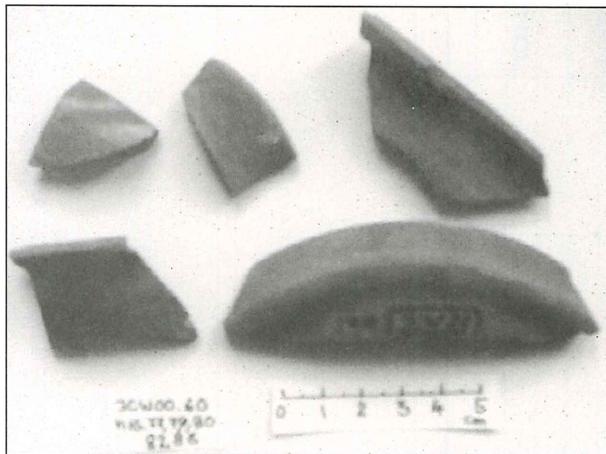
(north section)		(south section)		N-S section				
north levels	Ceramics	kin evidence	other finds	south levels	Ceramics	kin evidence	other finds	joins/same
lower fill 32	no pottery			lower fill 32	no pottery			X
31* *poss. sherd of same pot in 21, prob. Aqaba ware	1stBC, 1st->AD		(JCW105-109)	31* possibly into early 2nd	1stBC, 1st->AD		Aqaba ware	31/21 X
21* *cf. Aqaba ware pot in 31	1stBC, 1st->AD	1st AD	(JCW117-122)	21* possibly into early 2nd	1stBC, 1st->AD	1st AD	early Gerasa lamp (nozzle type)	21/31 X
City Wall 6	no pottery			City Wall 6	no pottery			
upper fill 14* (JCW135-138)	1stBC, 1st->AD poss into early 2nd	1st AD	lamp figt (JCW138)	upper fill 27.2 (JCW110-116)	1stBC, 1st->AD few begin of 2nd	1st AD		X
*same wares as in level 17 north section (1st BC, AD & possibly into early 2nd AD), not listed here								
11 (JCW131-134)	1stBC, 1st->AD few begin of 2nd			27 (JCW95-104)	1stBC, 1st->AD few begin of 2nd			X
10 (JCW128-130)	1stBC, 1st->AD few begin of 2nd	1stBC, AD						
7* *joins in 3 (contaminated layer just above foundation fill mixed with foundation fill), not listed here (JCW123-127)	1stBC, 1st->AD few begin of 2nd	1st AD						
retain'g wall 8	no pottery (but of same context as the earth fill of foundation trench or upper fill/north, base of wall on top of boulders platform course)							



8. Context: post-fill of city wall foundation trench, sherds from level JCW00.52.



9. Context: fill of city wall foundation trench, sherds from levels JCW00.27+27/2.



10. Context: post-fill of city wall foundation trench, sherds from level JCW00.60.

up part of the same pots (not shown here). The other is that there is a small time gap between the end of

6. The assemblages were composed of many thousands of pieces of a great variety of forms; the good number of 'cooking pots' in all assemblages had the first-early second century short neck and flat handle (see Figs. 7, 9, 11, 13),

use of the waste dump and the start of construction. The difference between the two contexts of pre- and construction is made obvious, however, by a very small proportion of forms originating in the second century which belong only to the construction contexts (and post construction contexts, see below). Among them is the classic 'Gerasa lamp' dated by Iliffe to the first quarter of the second century AD ("Trajanic") and by Kehrberg until the mid-second century (Iliffe 1945; Kehrberg 1989); both references come from securely dated contexts in Jarash. An early second century context date for the 'Gerasa lamps' from this foundation fill corresponds well with the overall composition and quantitative ratio of pottery types and wares: the majority belongs to the first century BC/AD and first AD; few types go into the second century AD, like the imported Nabataean ware in level 52 (Table 3).

This puts the construction for the foundation of the city wall here firmly into the first half of the second century, and most probably in the first quarter due to the greater, even predominant mass of first century AD pots and lamps, only very few of earlier second and lack of mid- to late second century forms. The material assemblage has yet to be studied in detail but the use of the debris from the excavated trench as fill cannot be responsible for a distortion of chronological pottery type representation. The residual dirt layer of the original ground surface (levels 52 and 26, on top of the pottery waste dump; cf. Table 3) bears this out: there the numerical ratio of predominantly first to much less second century AD forms is the roughly same as in the fill itself. A possible 'terminus a quo' in early second century Gerasa may be posited here for the two pinched handle fragments (one e.g. is in Fig. 9: bottom centre) found in the entire pottery assemblages: the pinched handle of two separate jars.⁶ The ware is Early Roman, the handle traditionally dated from the later second century in Jarash, but earlier (from early second) elsewhere in Jordan and southern Syria (Bostra). Its paucity in Gerasa until it becomes common late in the second century AD may also speak for an introductory phase of our fragments at the beginning of the second century AD.

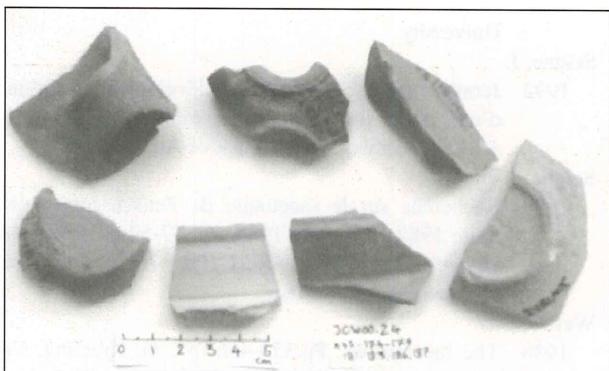
The post-fill context (Table 4; Figs 11-13)

The same picture is also true for the 'post-fill' levels (Table 4), albeit with a slightly larger ratio of second century forms. The quantity of the ce-

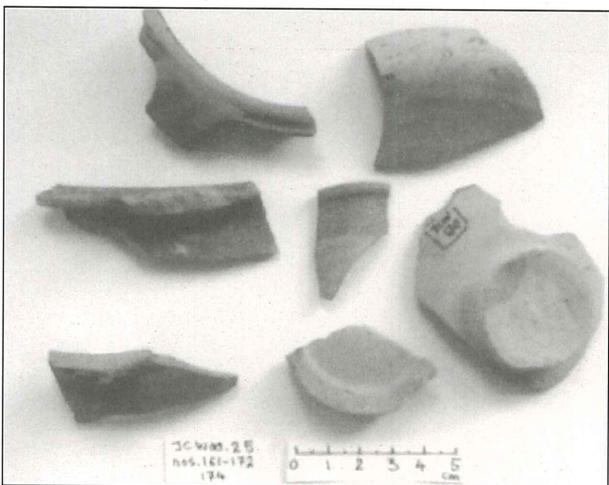
except the two pinched examples. The pinched handle type was known to Gerasa potters from the Late Hellenistic fine grey ware juglets.

Table 4: Post -City Wall deposits/assemblages (earliest context at top).

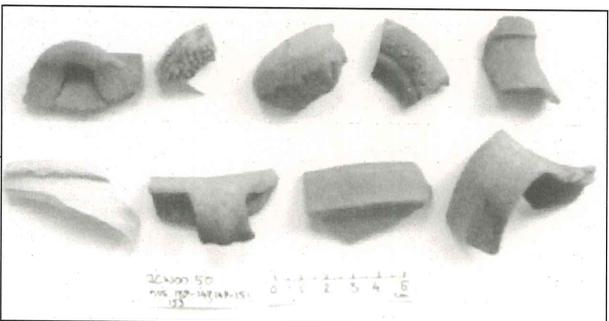
(north section)		kilm waste		(south section)		kilm waste		N-S section	
north levels	Ceramics	evidence	other finds	south levels	Ceramics	evidence	other finds	joins/same	
50*	1stBC/AD, 1st->AD, overf. Frigs	overf. Frigs	4 lamp frigs (JCW 150)	25	1stBC/AD, 1st-2nd AD	overfired frigs	Gerasa lamp, BC/AD ptd ware, cream ware (JCW 161)	50/22	X
22 south same	few begin of 2nd			(JCW 161-174)					
Gerasa lamp (JCW 139-153)			BC/AD ptd ware, cream ware	24	1stBC/AD, 1st-2nd AD	overfired frigs	Gerasa lamp, ESA cream ware, tc figurine frgt (JCW 187, 188)	50/24	X
				(JCW 175-188)					
				23*	1stBC/AD, 1st-2nd AD	1st AD wasters	1st-early 2ndAD lamp, Nab common ware? (JCW 192)	23/22	X
			(JCW 189-198)	*cf 22 south					
				22*	1stBC/AD, 1st-2nd AD	1st AD wasters	Gerasa lamp (JCW 207)	22/50	X
			(JCW 199-207)	*50 north same Gerasa lamp					



11. Context: pre-construction of city wall (balk of foundation trench), sherds from level JCW00.24.



12. Context: original ground surface of foundation trench, sherds from level JCW00.25.



13. Context: bottom of foundation trench (boulders), sherds from level JCW00.50.

amics for the same volume of excavation is slightly more than of the construction context and a little less than of the pre-wall pottery waste dump. What closes the tight sequence from preparation to actual construction of the foundation to the upper courses of the city wall are the fragments of the same pot (or at least type of pot/ware) from the baulk of the foundation trench to the first layer above the fill (see **Tables 1, 4**: levels 55 and 25). The foundation fill and the post-fill layer held much the same material but the latter included 'Gerasa lamp' frag-

ments, Nabataean and local bowl type fragments dating to the early part of the second century AD. At no instance did any of the well stratified large pottery and lamp assemblages, nor any other artefacts (see **Tables 1-4**) contain types and wares typical of the late third to early fourth century AD by then in profusion throughout Jarash as a major north Jordan pottery centre in that period (Kehrberg 2001b).

In conclusion, a date within the first quarter of the second century AD for the construction of that part of the west city wall fits the archaeological, typological and historical contexts. A detailed study of the pottery will hopefully lead to a further narrowing down of the early second century date.

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