Arch of Hadrian at Gerasa (129-130 CE)

Arch of Hadrian - Jerash– General View

[1]

[Arch of Hadrian - Jerash – General View](#) **[2]**

[3]

[Arch of Hadrian - Jerash– General View](#) **[4]**

[5]

Patron/Sponsor: Unknown
Original Location/Place:
Gerasa

Actual Location (Collection/Museum):
In loco

Original Inscription/Graffito: See [The inscription of the arch of Hadrian in Gerasa](#) [6].
Date: 129 CE to 130 CE
Material:
Marble

Measurements:
37.45 meters long; 9.25 meters wide; 21 m height

Building Typology:
Monumental Arch

Description:

The arch of Hadrian was located 460 m southward of the main Southern Gate of the city of Gerasa, today Jerash (Jordan). The arch itself consists in a rectangular structure, 21 m high, with three arched gateways. The arch is characterized by a dual façade, looking north towards the city, and southward towards the road. The two facades were similar, albeit not identical in their architectural details. The central archway is larger and higher than the two flanking ones. Four huge Corinthian columns frame the façade. Each column stands on a pedestal and a base, which is topped by a decoration of acanthus leaves. The architrave of the main arch, as well as those of the two flanking arches, stand on two flanking pilasters topped by two capitals. The two flanking archways are topped by two identical niches. Each niche is located on a small entablature, which stands on two pilasters crowned with capitals. The niche itself is flanked by two protruding Corinthian columns, which support a broken triangular pediment. According to Kraeling, who excavated the arch, the arch was probably wider in origin, with two superimposed niches on each side of the flanking archways. The lower flanking niche was framed by two pilasters, and topped by a round gable, while the upper flanking niche, also framed by two pilasters, was topped by a triangular gable. The whole arch was crowned by an attic, possibly supporting a dedicatory inscription. The lower part of the attic was decorated with a floral frieze of acanthus leaves. The central part of the frieze was crowned by a triangular cornice (Nassar, "Hadrian's Arches from Roman period Jordan," p. 247-249).

In 2005-2007, the arch underwent a restoration.

Commentary:
The arch of Hadrian at Gerasa was erected in 129-130 CE, on the occasion of the emperor's visit to the city of the Decapolis. The main purpose of the arch was to mark the imperial visit. Yet, its southern location also argues for the possibility that the arch was erected to emphasize a plan to extend the city's boundaries southwards, a plan, which, however, was never implemented. While, on the one hand, the arch is based on Roman models, it uses on the other hand acanthus bases which decorate the base of the engaged columns framing the façade; probably a feature of local Nabatean architecture. Gerasa, as most of the cities of the Decapolis, was part of the province of Arabia Petraea, created in 106 CE after the end of the Nabatean kingdom (Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 76-89). Although the city was autonomous and in fact part of the province of Syria, Nabatean architectural influence is evident in various monuments scattered all around the city.

Till quite recently, it was not clear when exactly Hadrian visited the area. However, an inscription recently analyzed by Hannah Cotton (but not published yet), clearly demonstrates that the emperor visited Judea during the consulate of Quintus Fabius Catullinus and M. Flavius Aper in 130 CE. When visiting Judea, Hadrian refounded Jerusalem as a Roman colony, with the name of Aelia Capitolina. There, at least two arches were found, both quite similar to the one which was erected at Gerasa. The first arch was the northern gate of Aelia Capitolina. This arch was erected on the earlier Herodian main gate of Jerusalem's northern Second Wall. This gate too presented a triple archway, with the central wider and higher passageway flanked by two smaller archways. Four engaged Corinthian columns framed the three archways. The two central columns supported a triangular gable. The attic was probably decorated with an inscription. The other arch in Jerusalem, known as Ecce Homo Arch, which led to the northern forum, and was located on the area once occupied by the Antonia Fortress (razed to the ground in 70 CE), was similar too, although simpler. The central archway was flanked by two smaller archways, topped by two niches (Bahat, *The Illustrated Atlas of Jerusalem*, p. 62-63). The connection between these two arches and Hadrian's visit is probable, but not clearly established.

Mohammed Nassar also emphasizes the similarity between the arch erected at Gerasa and the one erected at Attaleia (modern day Antalya), the so-called Hadrian's Gate, to commemorate Hadrian's visit to the city in 130 CE (Nassar, "Hadrian's Arch's from Roman period Jordan," p. 247-259). Once more the arch is characterized by three archways. Yet, contrary to the arches erected at Aelia Capitolina and Gerasa, the arch at Antalya presents three identical archways, framed by four protruding Ionic columns. On the other hand, the two other arches erected to commemorate Hadrian's visit which have survived, namely the one located in Athens, erected in 131-132 CE, and the one excavated at Ephesus, erected in 130 CE, are quite different and are clearly influenced by Hellenistic architecture. Hadrian's Gate in Athens consists in a rectangular arch, with a central wide single passageway, framed by two flanking engaged Corinthian fluted columns, standing on a base, and two pillars, located at the corners. The crowning flat architrave, decorated with an inscription, supports an upper level.

In the case of Gerasa, the role played by Roman models in the elaboration of the arch is unclear, as native elements are part of the art's architecture. Later on, possibly during the reign of Caracalla, according to inscriptions found in the city, the city became a Roman colony with the name of Colonia Aurelia Antoniniana. At the same time, the city was proud of its "imaginary" association with Alexander the Great, and presented itself as the vanguard of Hellenization in the East (see Cohen, *Hellenistic Settlements*, p. 248-253). Yet, the city council decided to celebrate the visit of Hadrian to the city not only with this spectacular arch but also with a commemorative inscription (see The inscription of the arch of Hadrian in Gerasa [6]). Even if Gerasa tried to foster a self-image of a Greek city, it did not possess an architectural tradition that went back to the Hellenistic period, or

even earlier, like Athens or Ephesus. Thus the arch stood as a witness, to the future generations, of the visit of the emperor to the city, the occasion to celebrate the loyal bond between the far away "Greek" city located on the Eastern border, the *limes arabicus*, nearby the Spice Road, and the center of the empire, Rome, where the emperor resided.

Thematic keywords:

- Hadrian [7]
- triumphal arch [8]
- Gerasa [9]
- Athens [10]
- Aelia Capitolina [11]
- emperor [12]
- Rome (city) [13]
- Syria-Palestina [14]
- Arabia Petraea [15]
- imperial visit [16]
- Attaleia (Antalya) [17]

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The inscription of the arch of Hadrian in Gerasa [27]

The city of Gerasa prepares a monumental arch coinciding with the visit of Hadrian in 130 CE

- Read more about The inscription of the arch of Hadrian in Gerasa [27]

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