



The inscription of the arch of Hadrian in Gerasa

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

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Building inscription

Original Location/Place: Arch of Hadrian in Gerasa

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Formerly at the Palestine Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem (reported by Welles), now in Jerash (Jordan)

Date: 130 CE

Physical Characteristics: Panel in the form of a *tabula ansata*, now broken in 19 blocks.

Material: Marble

Measurements: 1.03 metres in height and 7.14 metres in width. Letters are between 12 and 13 centimetres tall

Language: Greek

Category: Roman, Greek

Publications: Welles, Charles B., *The Inscriptions: Gerasa City of the Decapolis*, New Haven, American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938, p. 401-402, no. 58.

Commentary: The monumentality of this inscription cannot be envisaged without the structure to which it was attached: a magnificent arch of three gateways and several architectural ornaments presiding the south of Gerasa. Normally known as Hadrian's arch, the date, motivations, and purpose of this monument can be unravelled through the Greek text.

Both the opening and the first lines are largely formulaic. Imprecations to the good fortune (????/tyché) are common at the beginning of public inscriptions in the Graeco-Roman world. Likewise, vows for the salvation (???????/sôtêria) of the emperor as well as the fortune and preservation (???????/diamonê) of the imperial family (???????/oikos) are well attested in the eastern provinces (see Moralee, Jason, *'For salvation's sake'*). In this case, Hadrian is referred to with his long titulature, recording first the names and dynastic affiliations (see Hekster, *Emperors and ancestors*, p. 180-181), followed by his epithets and positions. Among these, the record of the 14th tribunician powers makes it possible to date the inscription to 130 CE.

In the second part of the inscription, the dedicating city (?????/polis) also decides to display its full nomenclature: "Antiocheans on the Chrysorhoas, first Gerasans". This name combined the Hellenistic heritage of a former Macedonian settlement – allegedly founded by Alexander the Great – with the native Semitic environment that surrounded them (see Cohen, *Hellenistic Settlements*, p. 248-253). Even though the entire community was claiming to be responsible for both the erection of the arch (????/pylē) and the concomitant triumphal celebration (???????/thriambos), they also acknowledged conspicuously the testamentary (???????/diathêkê) donation which financed everything. The benefactor Flavius Agrippa is not attested elsewhere in the epigraphic evidence of Gerasa. Yet, the sequence of his names can provide us with relevant insights into his origins and social standing. The imperial *nomen* Flavius indicates that one of his ancestors was granted Roman citizenship by the Flavian emperors, who had direct contact with eastern provincials and rewarded their alliance in the Jewish war (see Gatier, "Onomastique," p. 257). Some of these veterans returned to Gerasa and became prominent and generous promoters of civic life. For example, one Flavian decurion supported the construction of the southern theatre (Welles, *The Inscriptions*, no. 52). In this very theatre, T. Flavius Gerrenus sponsored the first agonistic festival of the city that was dedicated to the salvation of Trajan. Our Flavius Agrippa must have belonged to one of these wealthy families who contributed to the improvement of their local communities and the spread of Roman imperial ideals.

The inscription finished with another dating formula following the local era. Gerasa started counting time since the creation of the Roman province of Syria by Pompey in 63/2 BCE. So, the reader can confirm that the chronology provided by the imperial titulature is not mistaken: 192-63/2=129/130 CE. This year is crucial because it coincides with the moment in which Hadrian crossed the Levant on his route towards Egypt (see Birley, *Hadrian*, p. 226-234). This imperial visit (or *adventus Augusti*) was greatly celebrated by many communities, and Gerasa had good



motives for behaving in this manner too. One of such commemorative texts (Welles, *Inscriptions*, no. 144) records that Hadrian held there audience and sat in judgment (????????? ?????? ???[??? ??????]/ *kathisanta enthade ago[ran dikôn]*). Moreover, an altar prepared by his personal mounted guard (*equites singulares Augusti*) informs that the emperor's troops wintered (*hibernati*) in a city that they considered "autonomous" (Welles, *Inscriptions*, no. 30). The preparation of the monumental arch needs to be connected with the efforts of the Gerasans to display, on the one hand, their grateful alliance towards Rome and, on the other hand, the magnitude of their urban layout. A similar attitude must be supposed in other settlements of the province of Arabia where Petra, for example, began to call itself ????????/Hadrianê (*P. Yadin* 1.25, l. 11). All such cases are important for drawing analogies with the subsequent reception of Hadrian in Judea, where coins also celebrated the journey of this *restitutor Iudaeae* (Halfmann, *Itinera*, p. 207). A recently discovered inscription also records the Legion X Fretensis setting up a dedication for Hadrian in Jerusalem and, during this imperial visit, Aelia Capitolina is supposed to have been founded (see Isaac, "Roman Colonies"; and Baker, "Epiphanius"). According to the epitomizer of Cassius Dio, the establishment of this Roman colony caused the Jewish rebellion led by Bar Kokhba that unexpectedly disrupted the last years of Hadrian's reign (*Roman History* LXIV.12).

Gerasa and the province of Arabia was affected by this Jewish revolt, as the involvement of the Roman legions and officials such as C. Iulius Severus in the regions surrounding Judea is confirmed. The governor of Arabia in this period was T. Haterius Nepos, who is first attested in the Babatha's archive on 17th November 130 (*P. Yadin* 1 23). It has been argued that his name was also inscribed and later erased in the documents – including the arch inscription – commemorating Hadrian's visit to Gerasa (Sartre, *Trois études*, p. 54, 82 and followed by Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, p. 108). However, this theory is not longer tenable because the governor is now attested after 134 CE with no signs of *damnatio memoriae* but rather honoured as a benefactor (see Eck, *Judäa-Syria Palästina*, p. 83-91). Furthermore, it is impossible to know whether Haterius Nepos was actually appointed before Hadrian arrived in the city because the emperor had already reached Egypt by the summer of 130 CE (Birley, *Hadrian*, p. 235-258).

At any rate, the monumental text and arch prepared by Gerasa in 130 CE shows the prosperity, loyalty, and commitment of the city before the beginning of yet another neighbours' uprising. Prior to 132, the available evidence from Judea shows signs of an analogous narrative (see Eck, "Hadrian", p. 155-157), which complicates our interpretation and assessment of the Bar Kokhba's war even further (see, most recently, Mor, *The Second Jewish Revolt*, p. 13-146).

Literary reference:

Hadrian, imperial visit, Gerasa, monuments, loyalty, donations, salvation, preservation, fortune.

Keywords in the original language:

- ?????
- ????????
- ???????????
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- ????????
- ?????
- ??????????

Thematic keywords:

- Hadrian
- imperial visit
- Gerasa
- monument
- arch
- loyalty
- salvation



- preservation
- Fortune

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Arch of Hadrian - Jerash– General View



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Inscription

[Gerasa and the Games under Trajan](#) [4]

Establishment of the first agonistic festival in Gerasa for the salvation of Trajan

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[Bronze statue of Hadrian from Tel Shalem \(135-137 CE\)](#) [5]

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Inscription

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A local benefactor prepares a statue and vows for the hegemony of Hadrian, and the perpetual preservation and victory of the Roman people and senate.

- [Read more about Amastris and the everlasting hegemony of the Romans under Hadrian](#) [6]

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[Hadrian listens to Hymns in the Theatre of Ephesus](#) [7]

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Relief / Sculpture

[Adventus of Hadrian \(second quarter of the second century CE\)](#) [8]

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