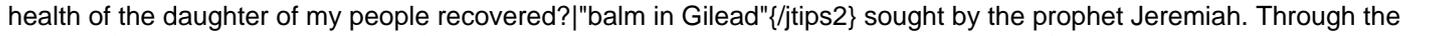
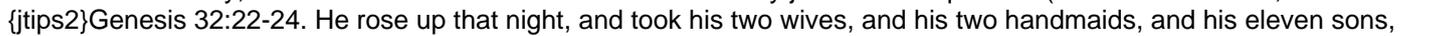


Jerash (Gerasa)

Contributed by Stephen Langfur

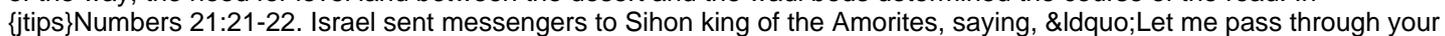
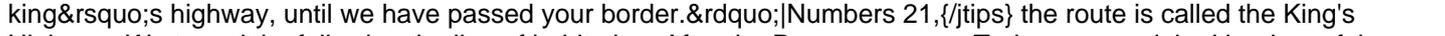
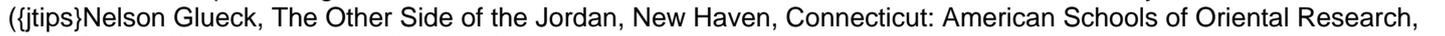
History, Geography and Sacred Geometry

Gerasa offers the best surviving example of a classical city on either side of the Jordan. Although dating from Hellenistic times, it had its first spurt of major growth in the late 1st century AD. Why at that time, and why was it where it was?

 Forest west of Gerasa  The place is gifted with good soil and much water. Oak, terebinth and pine cover the hills with green foliage even through the dry summer months. Here also grows the Pistachia Lentiscus, from whose resin was derived the  Jeremiah 8:20-22. The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt: I mourn; dismay has taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? why then isn't the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" "balm in Gilead"  sought by the prophet Jeremiah. Through the middle of the valley, a small brook flows south where it eventually joins the Zarqa River (the biblical Jabbok, where  Genesis 32:22-24. He rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two handmaids, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford of the Jabbok. He took them, and sent them over the stream, and sent over that which he had. Jacob was left alone, and wrestled with a man there until the breaking of the day. | Jacob wrestled with an angel  In Hellenistic times, the brook was named the Chrysorhoas (golden).

Today we can still see Gerasa's natural bounty. The virgin forests of antiquity, which to Greek and Roman minds belonged to virginal Artemis, have mostly given way to farms.

Many places are gifted by nature, yet few are chosen to host grand cities. The reasons why Gerasa sprang up where and when it did are two: geographical position and the Pax Romana.

Position. The land of the Bible was a narrow strip between sea and desert, a "land bridge" joining Asia and Africa. (More.) Two main north-south highways composed that bridge. One went through Galilee and followed the coast (we may call it the Great Trunk Road). The other, in today's Jordan, stayed on a fertile plateau just west of the desert: wherever it could, this route skirted the deep wadi beds that slice down to the Jordan Valley (see map below). For most of the way, the need for level land between the desert and the wadi beds determined the course of the road. In  Numbers 21:21-22. Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, "Let me pass through your land: we will not turn aside into field, or into vineyard; we will not drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king's highway, until we have passed your border." | Numbers 21,  the route is called the King's Highway. We trace it by following the line of habitation. After the Roman emperor Trajan annexed the kingdom of the Nabataeans in 106 AD, he had this same route paved, from the Red Sea to Philadelphia (Amman), and then he extended it to the city of Bostra (capital of his newly organized Provincia Arabia). The Via Nova Troiana "was divided into two lanes, with a protruding line of stones in the middle, and the sides of the road also marked by raised stones."  Nelson Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan*, New Haven, Connecticut: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1940  Glueck, p.12) It is still visible for miles.

But why did the great city of Gerasa develop precisely on the point of the highway where it did? A study of the map above shows the main reason: here was the junction with the road from Pella. Here one could cross the Jordan to Scythopolis (Beth Shean) and head up the gentle Jezreel Valley to a junction that gave access in three directions: to Ptolemais (Acco), Caesarea Maritima or Egypt. Of the few roads linking the two international highways, the Pella-Scythopolis route was the best.

If Gerasa's position was so good, we may ask why there wasn't a city here in the Old Testament period?

First, through most of the third millennium BC, there was indeed a settlement on a hill above a spring just 200 yards to the northeast. Like many towns on both sides of the Jordan, it was destroyed by the Egyptians at the end of that period. The cities in the Jordan valley and west of it were rebuilt in the 18th century BC (it was then that they got their ramparts, which today define the shapes of their tells). The highlands east of the Jordan, however, knew no such urban recovery: the area was probably too close to the desert tribes that sought grazing land in the summer. Urban dwellers would have needed a central power with a standing army to protect them. There was no such power for a thousand years - till the 10th century BC, when the kingdoms of Edom, Moab, Ammon and Israel were established. Only then could cities again arise in the highlands east of the Jordan. A small walled town developed less than three miles north of the later Gerasa. We don't have a biblical identification.

Here then is a second principle governing the establishment of a city at this prime spot: there has to be a power enforcing regional peace.

About 332 BC, Alexander the Great provided that power, and people felt secure enough to settle here. A Roman inscription mentions a statue of Perdikkas at the site. This general became regent of the empire after Alexander's death in 323 and was assassinated three years later. If Gerasa was founded in his time, it must have been in that short span. When Antiochus III, a {tips}After the death of Alexander the Great (323 BC), his successors Ptolemy and Seleucus became rivals for the huge area he had conquered. The former took Egypt, the latter much of Iran, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and Syria. At first the Egypt-based Ptolemies ruled the biblical land, but around 200 BC, the Seleucid Antiochus III inflicted a major defeat on them at Baniyas, enabling him to take over the country. Seleucid king, defeated the Ptolemies at Baniyas in 198 BC, the city was renamed Antioch on the Chrysorhoas. Remains from the Hellenistic period are scant, however. We're not even sure of the town's location.

Yet it must have been substantial. The ruler of Philadelphia, wary of the {tips2}The Hasmoneans: family of Judah Maccabee ("the hammer") and his brothers, who revolted successfully against the Greek Empire in 167 BC. They purified and re-dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem, establishing the festival of Hanukah ("dedication"). They ruled till 63 BC, and their domain extended almost as far as King David's. Hasmoneans, {tips2} deposited part of his treasure in Gerasa, but to no avail: lured by the money, Alexander Janneus conquered it (Josephus, The Jewish War I 103).

Rome's Pompey took Gerasa back. Henceforth it counted its years according to the Pompeian era, starting in 62 BC. The Romans needed four more decades, however, to establish peace. In 23 BC Augustus put {tips2}Herod ruled the land under Roman auspices from 37 - 4 BC. After his death, the Romans called him "the Great" because of his building activities. Christians chiefly remember him, however, as the killer of the innocent children (Mt. 2: 16). Herod {tips2} in charge of the volcanic area to the north (see map above); only then could Gerasa benefit from the Pax Romana.

The city prospered and spread. The Hellenistic shrine was replaced by a Temple of Zeus, built-we know from donors' inscriptions - between 22 and 70 AD. {tips2}Jesus in Gerasa? According to Mark and Luke, Jesus cast demons into swine after entering the region of the Gerasenes, "which is across the lake from Galilee" (Luke 8:26). The presence of the lake is central to the story (the demonized swine leap into it), but it isn't near Gerasa or its region. Other manuscripts of Mark and Luke, however, have Gaderenes or Gergasites instead of Gerasenes, and Matthew has Gergasites. Either Gadera or Gergasa (Kursi) would have suited this miracle well, for both were near the lake on its eastern (pork-eating) side. In Mark 5:20, the healed man reports the miracle throughout the Decapolis, to which Gadera and Gerasa belonged. If Jesus visited Gerasa, {tips2} he would have seen this temple under construction. It was laid out on a north-south axis, like the street grid on the residential side across the river.

Why a north-south axis? North was determined by Polaris, the North Star. While the constellations drift from east to west

in the night sky, Polaris appears to be fixed. The Romans wanted a connection to the fixed order of things, and they planned their cities accordingly. Whenever they could, they placed the *Cardo* or "main street" on this axis mundi, each city a microcosm.

As the photo makes clear, however, it would have been inconvenient to put the *Gerasa Cardo* on the axis mundi: as the street stretched northward, it would have become increasingly distant from the residential section. What is more, a *Cardo* requires level ground, but the landscape rises to the north. We shall soon see how the planners solved this problem.

Gerasa in the reign of Vespasian (69-79 AD)

Of all Roman emperors until his time, Vespasian knew the Near East best, for he had been here to put down the Jewish revolt. Among his trusted officers was one Trajan, whom we'll call Traianus to distinguish him from his son, the later emperor. When the revolt was over, Vespasian - now emperor - put Traianus in charge of the province of Syria. The two undertook to foster trade with Mesopotamia. An inscription on a milestone discovered in Syria indicates that Traianus paved a road from Palmyra all the way to the Euphrates. The decade saw simultaneous development in three cities that were key to this trade: Palmyra, Bostra and Gerasa. (See map above.) In all three the Nabataeans were strongly present. Bostra, for example, could not have developed without them: they alone had the knowhow to harness the meager water supplies. The Nabataeans and the Romans appear to have cooperated in this period for the sake of their commercial interests. (More in [G. W. Bowersock, "Syria under Vespasian," The Journal of Roman Studies, Vol. 63 \(1973\), pp. 133-140](#))

Amid the general prosperity, Gerasa had a surge of growth. The city's *Tyche* ("Good Fortune") was Artemis (why her?), and it was she, in cooperation with certain geographical "givens," who determined the layout of the streets and the placement of the buildings. We shall now attempt to see how.

Sacred Geometry

The geographical givens were these:

1. The *Cardo* could not follow the north-south axis, as said above; the planners wanted to keep it close to the river and to the (already existing) residential section.

2. On the west bank of the *Chrysorhoas*, opposite the residential section, the land gradually rose to 600+ meters above sea level. It made a slight ridge on the south side, with a valley beyond, although there was no such natural protection on the west, north or east. The *Gerasenes* built a wall on the ridge and extended it around their city, finishing it by 80 AD, according to an inscription in the northwest gate. Inside the wall, one hill remained prominent as it sloped down toward the river. We shall call it "Artemis hill." A point on this slope was chosen for the *cella* of her temple, that is, the chamber containing her statue. Perhaps the augurs determined this point, but in any case a very suitable spot was chosen: not too close to the city wall but far enough from the residential section to preserve a sense of distance and holiness, allowing a stately procession. The procession would require a *Via Sacra* from the residential section to the *cella*. This is shown here:

These "givens" sufficed to generate the master plan of Gerasa.

Here we make use of an article by {jtips}Donald J. and Carol Martin Watts,"The Role of Monuments in the Geometrical Ordering of the Roman Master Plan of Gerasa," The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. 51, No. 3 (September 1992), pp. 306-314|Watts and Watts{/jtips} (although they might not agree with the order of the process imagined here). First, draw a north-south line through the place appointed for the cella of Artemis. (She had a special connection to the North Star: her personal constellation circles it.) We now have two lines: this and the line of the Via Sacra. You would not want a main east-west road to coincide with the Via Sacra, obviously. It would have to be beyond it, and preferably on level ground. But where exactly? At what point would it intersect the north-south line? The answer to this question determined everything.

{maps}images/stories/jordan/jordan_north/jerash/sacred-cut5.jpg|The sacred square|right{/maps}The solution went as follows. Find a point on the north-south line such that, if it is the corner of a square (we shall call it the "master square"), the Via Sacra will be the side of a sacred-cut square within it. (What is a sacred square? Enlarge the diagram on the right.) The architect found this point (it is shown in the next photo), constructing the master square and its inner, sacred-cut square. That gave the whole plan, as you can see below. The Cardo bisects both squares. The vertical sides of the master square coincide on the right with the North {jtips}A main east-west street in Roman city planning|Decumanus{/jtips} and on the left with a line through the southern tip of the Cardo where it meets the Oval Plaza. Its upper (west) side coincides with an ancient street. Its bottom side coincides today with a major street in the residential section (note the many automobiles), whose axis varies from the older residential grid. The vertical sides of the inner sacred-cut square coincide with the South Decumanus and the Via Sacra.

The plan was not without problems. Until it was rebuilt to face the populace in 161-166, the Zeus Temple remained on a north-south axis. The difference between its axis and that of the Cardo might have created a sense of imbalance. The solution? An oval plaza. For the viewer at ground level, this elongated circle blurred the discrepancy.

Just as a person entering through the North Gate had the Temple of Zeus in view, so a person entering through the South Gate saw the Temple of Artemis.

The surge of the 2nd century AD

The younger Trajan, who reigned as emperor from 98 till 117, had worked in the East with his father and knew it well.

Looking toward the Mesopotamian trade, he annexed the Nabatean kingdom in 106, converted it (with additions including Gerasa) into the Provincia Arabia, and paved the aforementioned Via Nova Traiana. This new road and its branches led to a surge in the city's prosperity, reflected in the complete implementation of the above building plan throughout the second century.

When Trajan's successor, Hadrian, wintered at Gerasa in 129-130 AD, he had a commemorative arch erected, as was his wont. The hippodrome beside it may also date from this time. Because the master plan was already established, there was no place for another significant structure inside it. The solution was to double the master square to the south:

Looking straight through Hadrian's Arch, one sees the Temple of Artemis a kilometer away. All the main monuments of Gerasa are part of a single vision.

When we contemplate this interaction of religion and geometry at Gerasa, the question arises whether similar principles, not yet detected, may have been at work in the other major cities of the time. But we leave the question for now.

Moments from the later history

From 350 AD, Gerasa held a large Christian community. Its delegates took part in church councils of the time. Between 400 and 600 AD, fifteen churches were constructed here, often using stones and columns from earlier buildings, including the Temple of Artemis. The churches were paved with mosaics, of which several have survived.

The Persian invasion of 614 caused a rapid decline in Gerasa's wealth and population. In the early Muslim period under the Umayyads, however, mosques were built, testifying to renewal. It did not last long. The great earthquake of 749, which destroyed Scythopolis and Tiberias, brought much of Gerasa down too. It remained a field of ruins. During the Crusades, the Muslim ruler of Damascus briefly converted the Temple of Artemis into a fortress; Baldwin II, king of Jerusalem, captured and burned it. Not long after that, an Arab geographer named Yaqut passed through; he saw just "a field of ruins." To this day, when the Arabs of Jordan seek an image for destruction, they often say "like the ruins of Jerash."

In 1806 Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, a German traveler, described the remains. His report led to a visit by Johann Ludvig Burckhardt, a Swiss explorer. Burckhardt's description attracted more visitors.

The modern settlement of the city began when Russia expelled a million Circassians from the Caucasus in the late 19th century. About 800,000 survived to reach the Ottoman Empire. Some entered the area today known as Jordan, restarting the cities of Amman and Jerash. Those in Jerash settled on the east bank of the old Chrysorhoas, where the Roman residential section had been.

Let us now take a walk in Gerasa.

{mospagebreak title=Walk in Gerasa}

A Walk in Gerasa

We begin our walk with Hadrian's arch, which was positioned, we have seen, in accordance with the sacred geometry that ruled all the monuments in Gerasa. Hadrian succeeded Trajan, whom he'd helped in putting down a revolt by Diaspora Jews (115-117). No sooner was it quelled than preparations for another rebellion began in Judaea itself. Like the first revolt of 66-70 AD, these later uprisings were sparked by a belief that the time of the birthpangs had reached its climax and redemption was about to occur. We have no Josephus Flavius (36 – 100 AD), Jewish general, one of two directing the revolt against Rome in Galilee. After Vespasian captured him, he prophesied the latter would be emperor. When this proved true, the Romans honored him. He then turned historian, writing *The Jewish War*, *The Antiquities of the Jews* and many other books. Because of a paragraph about John the Baptist (and maybe a sentence about Jesus), the Church preserved his works. Josephus, however, to describe the revolts against Trajan and Hadrian; the sources are scanty and contradictory.

It seems likely that the Jews of Judaea were encouraged by the following fact: thinking to consolidate the empire and make it more defensible, Hadrian had pulled the Roman army out of all the lands conquered by Trajan east of the Euphrates. (The same policy led to the building of his famous wall in England.) The spectacle of a unilateral Roman withdrawal may have fired the Jews into thinking that they could make their land into a "hot potato" and win the same liberation.

By 129, the revolt was in full swing, led by a man nicknamed "Bar Kokhba," "son of a star," whom the rebels identified as the Messiah. (For this unconventional date, see Hugo Mantel, "The Causes of the Bar Kokba Revolt," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 58 No. 3 (Jan. 1968), pp. 237-242) Mantel, pp. 237-242.) The uprising spread beyond Judaea: the legion stationed at Bostra in Provincia Arabia was obliged to get involved. These circumstances explain why Hadrian wintered in Gerasa in 129-30 C. H. Kraeling, *Gerasa*, New Haven, Conn. 1938, p. 49). The arch commemorates his stay.

(A similar arch of Hadrian's, though much built over, is the so-called "Ecce Homo" on the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem; it dates from after the revolt, when he banished the Jews from Jerusalem and rebuilt the city in Roman style. Pieces of a third Hadrianic arch have been found twelve miles south of Scythopolis, on the border between Galilee and Samaria.)

A few steps away is the hippodrome. It lines up, like the arch, toward the Temple of Artemis and the North Star. Exactly one Roman stadium long (244.05 meters) and 52 wide, it is the smallest known circus in the Roman East, estimated to have seated 15,000. It is also among the best reconstructed. The Gerasa hippodrome currently hosts R.A.C.E. (the Roman Army and Chariot Experience), a company that specializes in reenactments of marching formations, gladiator combat and actual chariot racing - all performed by Jordanian army regulars.

Continuing on the axis mundi, we reach the South Gate, similar in design to Hadrian's arch. Here we enter the oval plaza and begin to understand why there's so much fuss about Jerash:

An oval plaza is unusual. (Many consider it the forum of Gerasa.) The Ionic columns were typical for the first century AD, so it was probably built in the initial surge of construction during the reign of Vespasian. A temple to Zeus had recently been finished after decades of work, and it stood on the same north-south axis as the nearby theater and the streets of the residential section (still visible today) between the decumani.

The photo below is shot from the platform of the Zeus temple.

If we look at a detail in this picture, we can make out parts of the earlier shrines:

Standing with the five people in the picture above, then looking a little to the left of the camera, we see the ruins of the Temple of Zeus, as rebuilt in 166 AD:

Behind the temple is one of Jerash's best-renovated buildings: the South Theatre. It was erected during the reign of the hated Domitian (c. 92 AD), whose name was inscribed - and later eradicated - on several donors' inscriptions. The climb to the top row is worth the effort: it is the highest point in Gerasa. From here one can get an idea of the scope of the city, much of which remains to be excavated. This and the North Theater are central to the Jerash Arts Festival, an annual event. Combined, their almost 5000 seats fill up for performances by the world's greatest Arab singers.

Descending, we head back to the Oval Plaza and proceed through the Cardo. The colonnades of the Plaza are Ionic, but those of the Cardo are Corinthian, a style typical of the buildings erected in Gerasa during the city's boom period in the 2nd century AD. The Gerasenes widened the street and replaced the Ionic columns from Vespasian's time.

Less than a hundred meters up the street, on our left, is the macellum (Latin) or agora (Greek), a market. Eighty meters more and we reach the south Tetrakionion ("four columns," of which only the square foundations remain), where the group is standing in the photo below. Roman urban planners liked to place four columns at the intersection of the Cardo with the Decumanus, the main east-west street. In Gerasa there were two Decumani, as well as a Sacred Way, each joined by a bridge to the residential section.

About 100 meters north of the junction and west of the Cardo is the entrance to the so-called Cathedral. Built on four rising terraces around 400 AD, it is the oldest church yet found at Gerasa. The steps leading up to it are two centuries older. They belonged to a temple, the basis of which has been found beneath the church.

A little farther with the Cardo and we reach the city's fountain or Nymphaeum, so named for the statues of nymphs that once graced such structures. Roman cities vied with one another for splendor, and the Nymphaeum of each was its central jewel. In Gerasa, as elsewhere, little remains, but that little remains quite something. Note the holes for pipes and the central basin:

A few steps further and we come to four huge columns, flanked by thirteen smaller on either side. We are on the sacred way that led westward and up to the Temple of Artemis. We shall not ascend yet. (We'll come back to this temple on a separate page). Rather, we continue north toward what looks like a gate. It is the entrance to the North Tetrapylon "four arches." Before reaching it we visit another, smaller theater on our left, entering from the back.

This is the North Theatre, built in the 2nd century as an odeon (a small covered hall for poetry and music) with fourteen rows of seats. (Some of the seats have holes to hold the posts of the canopy.) The upper eight rows were added later, expanding the theater's capacity to 1600.

Unlike its companion to the south, the theater is on the axis of the master plan. In its earlier phase, it may have functioned as the city council. Some of the seats have names inscribed in them, and some of the names are preceded by *phyl* in Greek, an allusion to the tribes (*phyloi*) that sent representatives. Each of the ten or twelve tribes would have sent fifty. That would have filled most of the odeon.

The pillars at the top of the photo on the left above belong to the North Decumanus. We follow this eastward to the Tetracylon ("four arches"), which has been rebuilt as a covered structure. From here to the north we find ourselves on the *Cardo* in its original, first-century form. The pillars and capitals are again Ionic, and the road is narrower. You can see in the satellite photo below that the north gate is subtly angled in order to meet the traffic from Pella.

We head back through the Tetracylon in order to visit the Temple of Artemis.

{mospagebreak title=Artemis Temple}

The Temple of Artemis

Gerasa had a large forest to its west. As late as 1939, {tips}Nelson Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan*, New Haven, Connecticut: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1940|Nelson Glueck{/tips} (p. 121) described Jerash as "close to an extensive forest region where one can still ride for hours in leafy shade." This was likely the same {tips2}2 Samuel 17:26. Israel and Absalom encamped in the land of Gilead. 2 Samuel 18:6-9. So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the forest of Ephraim. The people of Israel were struck there before the servants of David, and there was a great slaughter there that day of twenty thousand men. For the battle was there spread over the surface of all the country; and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword devoured. Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great terebinth, and his head caught hold of the terebinth, and he was taken up between the sky and earth; and the mule that was under him went on.|"forest of Ephraim"{/tips2} in Gilead that devoured more men than the sword on the day of battle between David and Absalom; here Absalom got his hair caught in a great terebinth.

When the Greeks arrived in the late 4th century BC under Perdikkas, regent of the late Alexander's empire, they saw the potential for a city. Their question would have been: What god or goddess rules here? In other words, who must we get permission from? Who has the power to protect us? Zeus, of course, but Zeus was responsible for everything, whereas the city founders would have wanted to know which deity had this spot in particular as the apple of his or her eye. The forest was the clue: Artemis!

{maps}images/stories/jordan/jordan_north/jerash/dibeen-forest_600.jpg|Remnants of forests near Gerasa|right{/maps}Nature is diverse, and diversity engenders diverse gods. Monotheism requires the desacralization of nature: one must cease to hear a god in the brook or see a goddess in the rainbow. Bereft of its divinity, nature lies flat out, available to be experimented on. (Experimental science could most readily develop in a monotheistic civilization.) For those who've grown up in a world where nature is not divine and experiment seems quite natural, it is difficult to fathom how the Greeks or Romans could take their gods as seriously as they did. But if you have ever been alone in a forest and suddenly felt an uncanniness, as if some hostile, intelligent and cunning attention were fixed on you from all around, then you have encountered the kind of phenomenon that the ancients attributed to Artemis.

She was a goddess of the forest, and here was a forest, much bigger than. On seeing it, the founders of Gerasa must have thought, "It is she who has power here."

A forest untouched by human beings (no trees felled, no paths cut) is called "virgin," and so the goddess of forests had to be a virgin:

Artemis (not lightly do poets forget her) we sing, who amuses herself on mountains with archery and and the shooting of rabbits and wide circle dances.

When Artemis was still just a little slip of a goddess, she sat on her father's knee and said: "I want to be a virgin forever, Papa, and I want to have as many names as my brother Phoebus [Apollo], and please, Papa, give me a bow and some arrows-please!..."

"And let me be Light Bringer and wear a tunic with a colored border down to the knee, loose for when I go hunting wild game. And give me sixty dancing girls, daughters of Ocean, all nine years old, all little girl sea nymphs, and twenty wood nymphs ...to take care of my boots and tend my swift hounds when I'm done shooting lynx and stag, and give me all the mountains in the world, Papa, and any old town, I don't care which one: Artemis will hardly ever go down into town. I'll live in the mountains, and visit men's cities only when women, struck with fierce labor pangs, call on my name, for the Moirai [Fates] ordained when I was being born, that Artemis be a helper of women, because mother in bearing and birthing me had no pain at all: I just slipped right out of her dear round belly." And with that she stretched out her hands to her father's beard, but hard as she tried couldn't reach his whiskers; and he nodded, laughing and caressing her, and said: "When goddesses bear me children like, this, I hardly mind Hera's jealous anger."

- From the Greek poet Callimachus (305-240 BC), Hymn III to Artemis

In Latin she is Diana, "Deana" in two Gerasene inscriptions. She appears on vases and in sculpture as a tall, haughty, forbidding, long-striding, independent young woman, wielding the bow of a huntress, fondling a lion or deer - or grasping it by the throat. (Readers of Henry James will remember Isabel Archer; the name is surely no accident.) She was Apollo's twin sister, and like him, she could bring sudden death with her arrows. He killed men, she women. But Apollo also healed, and his sister's special province, as said, was helping women through childbirth.

In Gerasa we find her in pure Greek form. It was not the case here that a local god presided and the Greek equivalent was grafted on, as happened almost everywhere else in the region. It happened, for example, in Ephesus, where Artemis was conflated with the indigenous Astarte, the fertility goddess. It was this maternal virgin whose outraged worshippers chanted at Paul, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:28)

In Gerasa the Greek element prevails. Those devotees who left inscriptions, with one exception, had Greek or Latin names. She is called "Laconian," Spartan. In more than 330 Gerasene inscriptions, "the name of only one Semitic deity, Pakeida, has been found... One has but to compare the inscriptions of Palmyra or Bostra with those of Gerasa to sense a world of difference in all of these matters." (C.C. McCown, "The Goddesses of Gerasa," *The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Vol. 13 (1931), pp. 129-166|McCown, p. 151)

Nearly all the city's known coins include "a charmingly designed bust of the youthful huntress with her quiver showing over her right shoulder and her hair in a smooth chignon at the nape of her neck." (Ibid., 132) They bear the legend, "Artemis, tyche of Gerasa," where tyche means good fortune. Each Roman city had its Tyche, but nowhere else in the

East, not even in Ephesus, did a city take Artemis for that role. In her pure Greek version she was, after all, no city slicker. "Artemis will hardly ever go down into town."

So the Greek newcomers looked at the encroaching forest and found her in it. Perhaps they saw that they'd have to clear trees for farmland (Joshua 17:14-18. The children of Joseph spoke to Joshua, saying, "Why have you given me just one lot and one part for an inheritance, since I am a great people, because Yahweh has blessed me so far?" Joshua said to them, "If you are a great people, go up to the forest, and clear land for yourself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the Rephaim; since the hill country of Ephraim is too narrow for you." The children of Joseph said, "The hill country is not enough for us. All the Canaanites who dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron, both those who are in Beth Shean and its towns, and those who are in the valley of Jezreel." Joshua spoke to the house of Joseph, even to Ephraim and to Manasseh, saying, "You are a great people, and have great power. You shall not have one lot only; but the hill country shall be yours. Although it is a forest, you shall cut it down, and its farthest extent shall be yours; for you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, and though they are strong." as Joshua had told the Ephraimites to do.) This would have required Artemis' permission. They could compensate her by making Gerasa her city.

But to build a Temple to Artemis must have seemed presumptuous, considering that her temple in Ephesus had been one of the world's Seven Wonders. It had burned on the day of the night when Alexander was born, July 21, 356 BC. Artemis couldn't rescue it, for she was off in Macedonia helping his mother deliver. But the rebuilt version was still a matter for Acts 19:35. When the town clerk had quieted the multitude, he said, "You men of Ephesus, what man is there who doesn't know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great goddess Artemis, and of the image which fell down from Zeus?" boasting.

In Gerasa, the siting of the Artemis temple determined the plan for the public part of the city. One crucial move was topographical: to choose the place of the cella, the chamber containing her statue, on the most prominent height. Then the planner drew two lines: the north-south line through that place and the line of the Via Sacra leading to it from the residential section. These two lines made up the basis, we have seen, for the entire city plan.

The Via Sacra crossed the Chrysorhoas, so the Gerasenes built a bridge. This must have supported a staircase, for the ascent was too steep for vehicles. At the first terrace on the west bank they erected an arched gate, which the Byzantines later converted into the apse of a church. The gate led into a colonnaded street, which became the church's nave and side aisles. Then the procession arrived at an open space in front of the temple's entrance, called a "propylaeum."

Inside the propylaeum begins a great staircase, almost 20 meters wide, eased by landings every six steps. On either side are high walls, directing the view to the distant pillars of the temple itself.

And now we approach the temple.

"All but one of the twelve great columns of its portico are still in place," wrote the archaeologists in 1930. "Some of them rock with the gusty winds...but their foundations are so solid and they are so delicately poised that the many earthquakes to which Transjordan is subject have not overthrown them" (Clarence S. Fisher and Chester C. McCown, "Jerash-Gerasa 1930: A Preliminary Report of the First Two Campaigns of the Joint Expedition of Yale University and the American Schools of Oriental Research," *The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Vol. 11 (1929), pp. 1-59|Fisher and McCown, p. 4). In their slender grace they would have brought to the devotee's mind the young women with whom Artemis, gazing from the inner chamber, always surrounded herself.