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# Assembling columns: construction process through the masons' marks from the *Macellum* of Gerasa (Jerash, Jordan)

**Alexandra Uscatescu**

The study of the so-called masons' marks found on some architectural elements of the *macellum* of Gerasa (Jerash, Jordan) is presented; these unpublished archaeological data, recovered from excavations conducted in the 1983–90s at the site, shed light on the day-to-day construction process of the *macellum* Roman building, dated before mid–2nd century AD.

**Keywords** assembly marks, Gerasa, *macellum*, masons' marks, Roman architecture

Testimonies of labelling of architectural elements in stone in the Syrian-Palestinian region can be traced back to the 9th–8th centuries BC (Franklin 2001). The origin of marks for architectural assembling, however, is more controversial, due to the discontinuity of evidence. The practice has been related to the fitting guides noticed on ivory pieces dated to the Iron Age, as is the case with, for example, Nimrud (Iraq) and Jezreel (Israel) (Driver 1948: 115; Hammond 2000: 123; Millard 1986: 43). The closest antecedents in stone are found only in classical Greek architecture, which Rome adopts and expands, via imperial quarries, coming hand-in-hand with the 'Marble Style' (Ward-Perkins 1971: 146, pl. XIII–XIV). Certainly, the first two proposals face a problem of temporal connection, due to the gap between the dating of the Eastern ivories or the Athenian constructions and the great Herodian building projects, in which this type of architectural mark is once again documented in the region: it could, therefore, be explained as a convergence phenomenon. The imperial Roman option seems the most feasible one, although it should be noted that, for continental cities such as Gerasa, the appearance of assembly marks would respond to a collateral effect: the diffusion of the system throughout the coast, transferred to the local inland quarries.

Regional studies on the subject range from simple testimonies regarding the existence of 'quarry marks', to analyses focused on explaining the functioning of these marks, with results that largely depend on the nature of the evidence, since few study cases can be interwoven in the construction process. For this reason, the case of the Gerasa *macellum* is, due to the accompanying archaeological documentation, interesting (Fig. 1): a collapse of columns connected architecturally produced by two successive earthquakes — the collapse of the earthquake of AD 659/60 is preserved under a retaining wall dated to the Umayyad period (Fig. 2) and that corresponding to the final earthquake of AD 749, *c.* 0.3 m over the Roman slabs (Fig. 3–4). The verification of the specific location of each type of mark, due to being found *in situ*, as well as the use of techniques allowing differentiation between functional categories, the moment at which the marks could have been engraved, and even references to particular entrepreneurs and workshops that participated in the construction and decoration of the Roman market, make the Gerasa *macellum* particularly noteworthy. It should be noted that the marks on the pedestals and shafts of the 'Cardo' colonnade, previously interpreted as donations from those who paid for their

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