"The *chōra* of the Gerasenes": first century context
source: David Kennedy, *Gerasa and the Decapolis: A "Virtual Island" in Northwest Jordan* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007)

ORIGINS: "Several new Hellenistic cities had appeared in the second century BC ...Rome seized control in 63 BC and settlement began to change dramatically. A generation of turmoil followed the Roman takeover, then two or more generations when parts of the region were in the hands of Rome's surrogate Herod the Great and his descendants." (84-85)

ROADS: "Collectively the construction and restoration of roads was designed to knit together the urban centres and open up their hinterlands. Perhaps central to the whole network was Gerasa, from which we have several tombstones of the late first century AD attesting a regiment of Thracian cavalry." (89)

"Even more than in Italy, perhaps, the new roads would be 'a symbol of the conquest and organization of newly-won territory' striking off in a way that seemed 'to tame the irregularities of the natural landscape' (Zanker 2000: 29)" (94)

LOCAL ELITE LITERACY: "The elites of the Roman Decapolis cities would be familiar with the great works of Classical Greece and the writings of at least those Romans who wrote in Greek. Many may well have been familiar with not just Polybius and Cassius Dio but Cicero, Caesar and Tacitus. Even those who could not read the Latin of Pliny the Elder could read the Greek of Strabo's Geography and the technical treatises which explained and gave meaning (however inaccurate) to their world." (141)

PEASANT/NOMAD LITERACY: Common genealogical inscriptions suggest pride of identity with places So-called "Safaitic" inscriptions used a unique language of the nomads, perhaps expressing resistance to Rome (145)

ROMAN LEGION PRESENCE: "In the second century there were three legions (c .15,000) and probably 15,000 auxiliaries (Kennedy and Riley 1990: 44, Table II). If the population was three million by that time, the ratio would be 1:100; if it was as high as five million, the ratio would be 1: 65." (115)

TOMBSTONES: "...the few hundred tombstones we have must also be for the richer inhabitants. Conversely, the disposal of the vast majority of the dead in the cities of the region (and in the countryside as well) must have been far more informal; indeed, probably casual. We can only suppose that here, as in the imperial capital itself, the bodies of the dead were dumped in communal pits with minimal ceremony" (124)

IMPERIAL ARRIVAL/DEPARTURE RITUAL: "The departure from or return to Rome of the emperor was formulaic, recorded on coins proclaiming Arrival/ Departure and is a common motif in relief sculpture on imperial monuments. It involved official greetings by the aristocracy and crowds meeting him well beyond the city, sometimes with seating provided to present a pageant for the imperial party. Likewise emperors were publicly greeted and seen off at cities they visited. On a more modest scale a governor was similarly treated." (157)

GETTING THERE: "From Caesarea the route ran to Scythopolis after which one could either travel to Bostra through Gadara or Gerasa." (159)

"It is possible that Gerasa was also the base for the imperial provincial procurator ...Gerasa would then have organized the formal greeting (and, perhaps, departure) of the retiring governor). (160)