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An Offprint of

Dakhleh Oasis Project: Monograph 15

THE OASIS PAPERS 6

Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference
of the Dakhleh Oasis Project

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Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference
of the Dakhleh Oasis Project

Edited by

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Editors' Preface

This volume contains the proceedings of the Sixth International Conference of the Dakhleh Oasis Project held in Lecce in 2009 plus one paper that was to have appeared in the proceedings of the previous conference held in Cairo, which is still being prepared for publication. The organization was principally undertaken by Paola Davoli with some assistance from Roger Bagnall and Colin Hope; in this respect we would like to acknowledge the assistance of Professor Mario Capasso, Director of the Centro di Studi Papirologici of the University of Salento. The conference was hosted by the University of Salento at Lecce, which was pleased to undertake this task coinciding as it did almost with the 30th anniversary of the first major field season of the Dakhleh Oasis Project in 1978. The normal geographical range of papers accepted for presentation at the conference, the entire Western Desert of Egypt, was extended on this occasion to include also the Fayyum in light of the University of Salento's activity there since 1993, first at Bakchias and then Soknopaiou Nesos.

We would like to extend our thanks to the Provost of the University of Salento, Professor Domenico Laforgia, who was an enthusiastic supporter of this event from the outset and whose good offices persuaded Monte dei Paschi di Siena generously to sponsor the conference. Monte dei Paschi di Siena is one of the most important Italian banks, founded in 1472; it is considered the oldest bank in the world. Through their respective institutions, the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World of New York University, and the Centre for Archaeology and Ancient History of Monash University, Melbourne, also contributed significantly to the financial effort. Of the latter institution, our gratitude is extended to the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Ed Byrne, and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Professor Rae Frances, for their support.

The excellent work of the undergraduate and graduate students of the University of Salento, who volunteered to undertake a variety of tasks throughout the conference, is gratefully acknowledged. For assistance in the preliminary stages of formatting the volume we would like to thank Nate Nagy, while the final result is due to the careful and professional work of Bruce Parr.

On a technical note, the volume includes a programme of the papers presented at Lecce, not all of which are published in this volume; those presented here have been grouped into broad chronological periods. As a wide variety of spellings has been used by the contributing authors for place names in the Western Desert, not only resulting from local linguistic differences, but also conventions employed in the languages of the contributing scholars, and the use of writings that have become accepted both over time and through regularity of use within one language, it was thought necessary to introduce some degree of standardisation. This has been done with the advice of Professor Fred Leemhuis, Emeritus Professor of Islamic Studies, University of Groningen, and Director of the Qasr Dakhleh Project. Thus, where authors prefer to use a particular conventional spelling that varies notably from what Arabists might use as a formal transcription of Standard Arabic, then the latter is provided in parentheses when the popular spelling is first used. In some cases the formal transcription has been adopted throughout when variations in spelling have resulted from an incorrect rendering of the Arabic, or when authors have agreed to the formal transcription.

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Conference Programme

THE SIXTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE DAKHLEH OASIS PROJECT

New Perspectives on the Western Desert of Egypt

20–24 September 2009
Università del Salento, Lecce

Sunday, 20 September 2009

Opening Ceremony

Dr Paolo Perrone, Mayor of Lecce
Professor Domenico Laforgia, Provost, Università del Salento
Professor Anthony J. Mills, Dakhleh Oasis Project
Associate Professor Colin A. Hope, Monash University
Professor Paola Davoli, Università del Salento
Professor Mario Capasso, Università del Salento

Monday, 21 September 2009

Surveys and Environmental Topics Chairperson: Anthony J. Mills

Sayed Yamani: *Cultural Heritage Management of the Archaeological Resources of the Eastern Sahara.*
Michel Wuttmann: *La prospection de l'oasis de Kharga.*
Salima Ikram: *Exploration of the Darb 'Ain Amur.*
Barbara E. Barich, Mattia Crespi, Ulisse Fabiani and Giulio Lucarini: *Geomatics Resources for Archaeological Survey in Desert Areas – Some Prospects from Farafra Oasis.*
Rudolph Kuper and Heiko Riemer: *The Gilf Kebir National Park: Challenge and Chance for Archaeology.*
Gaëlle Tallet: *The Survey Project at el-Deir, Kharga Oasis: First Results, New Hypotheses.*
Ursula Thanheiser: *Times of Change: Subsistence Strategies in the Early and Middle Holocene in Dakhleh Oasis.*

The Oases in Pharaonic and Ptolemaic Periods Chairperson: Olaf E. Kaper

Anthony J. Mills: *Recent Fieldwork at 'Ain el-Gazzareen.*
Amy J. Pettman: *The Date of 'Ain el-Gazzareen as determined by an Examination of the Ceramic Material.*
Ellen Morris: *Activities at Amheida from Prehistory until the First Intermediate Period.*
Maher Bashendi: *The Necropoleis of the Dakhleh Oasis.*
Laure Pantalacci: *Animals and Meat Consumption in Ancient Balat at the end of the Old Kingdom.*
Colin A. Hope: *Recent Excavations at Mut al-Kharab, Dakhleh Oasis.*
James C. R. Gill: *A Study of Ptolemaic Period Ceramics from Mut al-Kharab, Dakhleh Oasis.*

Tuesday, 22 September 2009

Prehistory Chairperson: Colin A. Hope

Mary M. A. McDonald: *Dakhleh and Kharga Oases in Late Prehistory.*

Barbara E. Barich: *The Culture of the Oases: Late Neolithic Herders in Farafra – a Matter of Identity.*

Giulio Lucarini: *Early Craftsmen of the Desert. Clues of Predynastic Lithic Technology in the Late Neolithic of Farafra.*

Giuseppina Mutri: *Stratigraphic Evidence for MSA Finds at Sheikh el Obeiyid, Northern Farafra Depression.*

Maria C. Gatto: *Beyond the Shale: Pottery and Cultures in the Prehistory of the Egyptian Western Desert.*

Marcia F. Wiseman: *The Khargan Industry Revisited.*

Maxine R. Kleindienst: *Results of Survey for Pleistocene Cultural Evidence from Dakhleh Oasis, 1978–1979 to 2008–2009 Field Seasons: Summary of Evidence and New Geoarchaeological Interpretations.*

Rock Art Chairperson: Mary M. A. McDonald

Andras Zboray: *Rock Art at Jebel Uweinat.*

Daniel James: *Stepping from Winkler's Shadow: an Analysis of Rock-Art Classification at Dakhleh Oasis.*

Daniela Zampetti: *Iconography and Techniques in the Rock Art of the Tadrart Acacus and Messak Settafet (Libyan Sahara).*

Recent Research in the Kharga Oasis Chairperson: Salima Ikram

Bahgat Ahmed Ibrahim: *Archaeological Sites in the Kharga Oasis.*

Françoise Dunand, Jean-Louis Heim and Roger Lichtenberg: *Les Nécropoles d'el-Deir (Oasis de Kharga).*

Deborah Darnell: *Pottery of Ghueita (MK-2IP-NK).*

John C. Darnell: *Cedar of the West, Products of Bahriyya, and Divine Offerings for Thebes: The Trade Relations of Gebel Ghueita in Kharga Oasis.*

Papyrology and Archaeology in el-Fayyum Chairperson: Paola Davoli

Mario Capasso: *La cultura letteraria greca nel Fayyum di età ellenistica e romana.*

Natascia Pellé: *Tra scuola e filologia: la ricezione delle Historiae tucididee nel Fayyum.*

Włodzimierz Godlewski: *The Earliest Hermitages in the Fayyum.*

Fabian Reiter: *New Ostraca from Tebtynis.*

Giuseppina Azzarello: *New Texts from the Archive of Epagathos.*

Ashraf Senussi: *Making Pottery in Fayyum: an Ethnoarchaeological Study.*

Wednesday, 23 September 2009

Egyptian Temples and Religion Chairperson: John C. Darnell

Olaf E. Kaper: *The Reconstruction of the Temple of Thoth at Amheida.*

David Klotz: *Yale University Nadura Temple Project, 2009 Season.*

Adam Zielinski: *Archaeological Exploration and Conservation Measures at 'Ain Birbiyeh Site, Dakhleh Oasis.*

Textual Finds Chairperson: Fred Leemhuis

Roger S. Bagnall and Raffaella Cribiore: *Christianity on Thoth's Hill at Amheida.*

Iain Gardner: *The Coptic Ostraca from Qasr al-Dakhleh (2007–2009).*

Günter Vittmann: *New Texts in Demotic and Abnormal Hieratic from Mut al-Kharab, Dakhleh Oasis.*

Christianity and Christian Sites in the Oases Chairperson: Roger S. Bagnall

Nicola Aravecchia: *The Church Complex of 'Ain el-Gedida, Dakhleh Oasis.*

Delphine Dixneuf: *'Ain el-Gedida (Oasis de Dakhleh). La céramique du IV^e siècle.*

Gillian E. Bowen: *The Church of Dayr Abu Matta and its Associated Structures: a Preliminary Report.*

Magali Coudert and Fleur Letellier-Willemin: *The Christian Necropolis of el-Deir in the North of Kharga Oasis.*

Thursday, 24 September 2009

Roman Presence and Late Antique Sites Chairperson: Françoise Dunand

Paola Davoli: *Amheida 2007–2009. New Results from the Excavations.*

Paul Kucera: *al-Qasr: the Roman castrum of Dakhleh Oasis.*

Rosanne Livingstone: *The Textiles from Kellis.*

Tosha L. Dupras and Sandra M. Wheeler: *Children and Childhood in Kellis: a Bioarchaeological Approach.*

Helen Whitehouse: *Vine and Acanthus: Decorative Themes in the Dakhleh Oasis and Beyond.*

Evelyne Ferron: *Roman Adaptation to the Environmental Particularities of the Integrated Regions to its Empire: the Example of the Oases of Kharga and Dakhleh.*

Corinna Rossi: *The Distribution of Late-Roman 'Forts' in Northern Kharga Oasis.*

Islamic Period Chairperson: Włodzimierz Godlewski

Ahmed Salem: *S. C. A. Excavations at al-Qasr.*

Fred Leemhuis: *Letters from al-Qasr. Glimpses into the Life of the Qurashi Family in the 19th and the Early 20th Century.*

Anetta Lyzwa-Piber: *Progress in the Study of the Pottery from al-Qasr.*

Conservation and Technologies Chairperson: Michel Wuttmann

Constance S. Silver: *Mural Painting and Plaster Conservation in the Dakhleh Oasis: a Summary of Conservation Problems and the Status of Conservation Treatments.*

Nicholas Warner: *Amheida: Architectural Conservation and Presentation Works 2006–2009.*

Bruno Bazzani: *A New Database for Recording Excavation Data.*

Posters

Mauro Cremaschi, Simone Occhi and Chiara Pizzi: *The Graeco-Roman Palaeo-Oasis of Dime: Origin, Apogee and Decline.*

Rudolph Kuper, F. Förster and Heiko Riemer: *From Dakhleh down to Yam? New Light on Abu Ballas Trail.*

Conni Lord: *A Histological Investigation of Two Individuals from the Kellis Cemetery.*

Roger Montgomerie: *A Histological Examination of Preserved Lung Tissues from Dakhleh Oasis Mummies.*

Fabrizio Pavia and Silvia Maggioni: *Topographical and Tri-Dimensional Modeling of Amheida, Dakhleh Oasis.*

Maria E. Peroschi: *Wadi Abd el-Malik: Highlights from our Explorations.*

Anna-Katharina Rieger, Thomas Vetter and H. Möller: *Man and Landscape in Ancient Marmarica (Northern Libyan Desert).*

Malgorzata Winiarska-Kabacinska: *Function of Chipped Stone Tools from Old Kingdom Site at 'Ain el-Gazzareen, Dakhleh Oasis.*

Controlling the Borders of the Empire: the distribution of Late-Roman ‘forts’ in the Kharga Oasis

Corinna Rossi

Introduction

The aim of the North Kharga Oasis Survey (NKOS) of the American University in Cairo, co-directed by Salima Ikram and the author, is to explore and map the northern portion of the Kharga Oasis, locating and identifying the archaeological sites that dot the area. The first phase of work mainly focused on the central part of the depression, in particular on a chain of late-Roman settlements (Rossi 2000; Ikram and Rossi 2004b; Rossi and Ikram 2006; Ikram and Rossi 2007; Rossi and Ikram in press, a); over the years, increasing attention has been dedicated to mapping the ancient roads and recording the related archaeological sites, a project that has now fully taken off under the direction of Salima Ikram (Ikram and Rossi 2002; Ikram and Rossi 2004a; Ikram 2005; Ikram 2006; Ikram 2007; Ikram 2008a and b; Ikram 2009a and b; Ikram, this volume).

The state of preservation of the late-Roman sites offers abundant material for a survey; although some crucial information on the function of these sites may only be retrieved by excavation, the careful observation of the standing remains allowed the accumulation of a wealth of information on these sites. A full discussion of the evidence (ranging from textual to archaeological sources, from previous studies in the area to previous and contemporary studies of other areas of Egypt and the Roman empire, plus of course a full description of the sites that are being studied by NKOS) must be postponed to the forthcoming monograph that will contain the results of our work in the area. Nevertheless, it is already possible to anticipate some of the most important conclusions that we have reached. This paper will therefore focus on these sites as a group, and will suggest an interpretation of their function based on their differences and similarities, on their architecture, their position and their mutual relationships.

The Kharga Cross-Road

Since 6000 BP, when the desert dried out, the inhabitants of Egypt's Western Desert gathered around the major

oases of the area (Kuper 2002, 5; Eichhorn, Hendrickx, Riemer and Stern 2005; for Kharga, see Gardner and Caton-Thompson 1933; Caton-Thompson 1952; Rossi and Ikram in press, b). Kharga, thanks to its shape, size and position, became an important cross-road (Figure 1). Its best-known role was to provide water to a long north-south section of the route generally known as the Darb el-Arba'in, that linked Middle Egypt with the Sudan. The exploration carried out by NKOS, however, proved the importance of several other desert tracks that departed from/converged to Kharga. Their importance obviously varied over the centuries, depending on climatic and political variations, but it is now clear that in historical times the east-west route, linking Upper Egypt, Kharga and Dakhleh, was as important as the better-known north-south Darb el-Arba'in.

The late-Roman sites that punctuate the northern part of Kharga appear to have no direct parallels in the other oases. Because of their fortified appearance, a direct link with the Roman military presence is an obvious suggestion; however, a strictly military function, originally taken for granted, has been challenged by recent studies (Wagner 1987 and Reddé 1991, and see below). The starting point of NKOS was just to study the late-Roman sites as a group, that is, to investigate their mutual relationship and to try to understand the underlying strategic design that led to their installation. The study of the desert tracks has been the key to understanding their function. The late-Roman military-looking buildings are: Qasr el-Gib and Qasr el-Sumayra in the north; el-Deir (al-Dayr) to the east, Mohammed Tuleib in the middle and Qasr el-Labakha to the west of the main depression; and Umm el-Dabadib to the west, on the way to Dakhleh via 'Ain Amur (Figure 2). These sites share four important elements: first, the 'forts' are accompanied by substantial settlements, cemeteries of various size, small industrial areas, elaborated water systems, and extensive agricultural land (Ikram and Rossi 2004b; Rossi and Ikram 2006; Ikram and Rossi 2007; Rossi and Ikram in press, a); that is, the 'military' building belonged to a larger complex of installations, an autonomous and self-

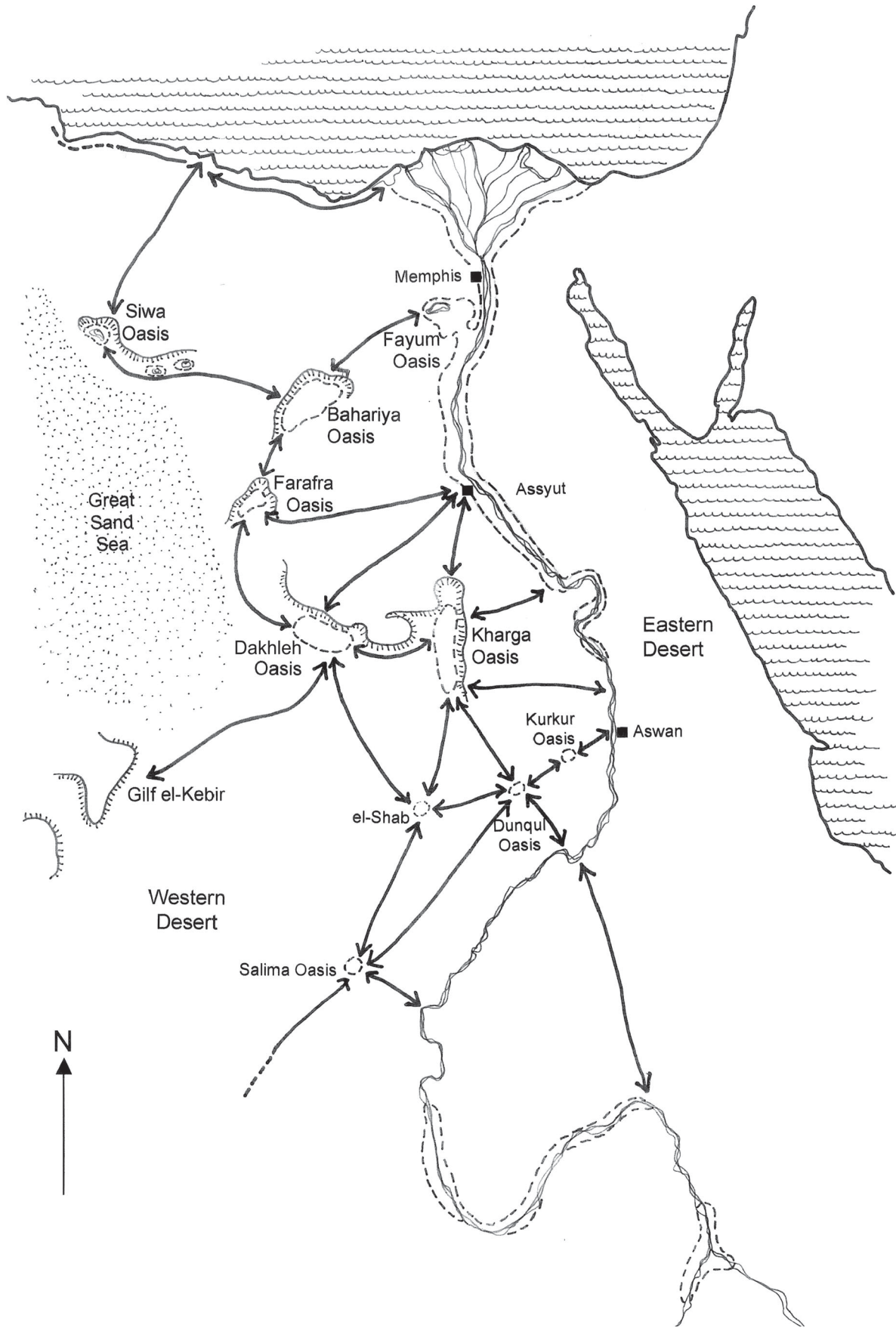


Figure 1 Schematic map of the main desert routes across Egypt's Western Desert; drawing by C. Rossi, © C. Rossi/NKOS.

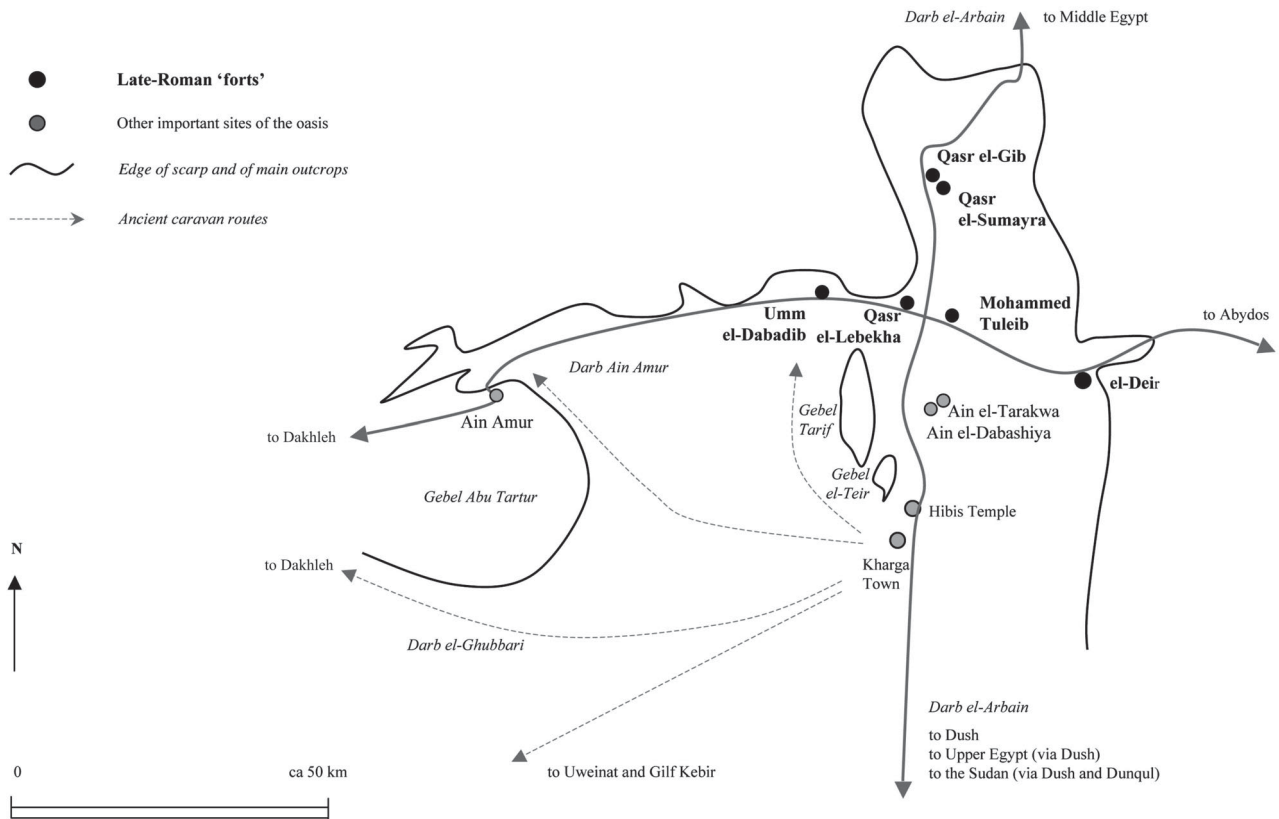


Figure 2 Schematic map of northern Kharga with position of Late Roman 'forts'; drawing by C. Rossi, © C. Rossi/NKOS.

sufficient community evidently made up of a variegated population (Reddé 1999, 383).

Second, apart from el-Deir (see below), these buildings were built to convey (but not necessarily to sustain) an idea of strength and resistance. Qasr el-Gib, for instance, which physically consists of a small cubic construction completed by round buttresses at the four corners, thanks to its total lack of windows (which would provide a clue about its size), the presence of the buttresses (which looked like towers) and its elevated position (it was built on a rock outcrop), when seen from the distance gives the impression of being a large, impregnable fort. Qasr el-Labakha is larger, but its towers are fake (the outer layer of the external walls protrudes at the four corners), and the packed settlement that surrounds it does not appear to have been defended by any major wall (Rossi and Ikram, in press, a). The enclosure wall that closes the southern side of the 'Fortified' Settlement at Umm el-Dabadib is endowed with buttresses, but is actually made of a one-mud-brick thin layer, which would not be able to withstand any real, major attack (Rossi and Ikram 2006).

Third, all these military-looking buildings and relating settlements were installed at key-points along the ancient network of desert routes: Qasr el-Gib can be seen from miles away, and clearly acted as a beacon for incoming travellers; Mohammed Tuleib and Qasr el-Labakha lie on either side of a major desert cross-road marked by a

huge cairn, where the Darb el-Arba'in met the Darb 'Ain Amur (Rossi and Ikram, in press, b); Umm el-Dabadib lies along the Darb 'Ain Amur, whilst el-Deir lies at the beginning of a convenient, relatively short east-west track that leads to Upper Egypt (see Figure 2).

Fourth, although significantly different in shape, size and appearance, these 'forts' (apart from el-Deir) share the adoption of some architectural elements, as we shall see in the next section.

Architectural Differences and Similarities

The 'forts' of Qasr el-Gib, Qasr el-Sumayra, Mohammed Tuleib, Qasr el-Labakha and Umm el-Dabadib are all linked by the adoption of some architectural features.

In terms of general shape and appearance, Qasr el-Gib and Qasr el-Sumayra are very similar, the latter being a miniature version of the former; Qasr el-Labakha appears to be a larger and more elaborated version of the same model, consisting of rectangular plan completed by round buttresses at the four corners. Mohammed Tuleib and Umm el-Dabadib, instead, follow a different, more linear design that does not include round elements (Ikram and Rossi 2004b; Rossi and Ikram 2006 and in press, a).

The architectural element that most of these forts share is the gate: all of them were entered through one single gate, which was absolutely identical, in terms of both

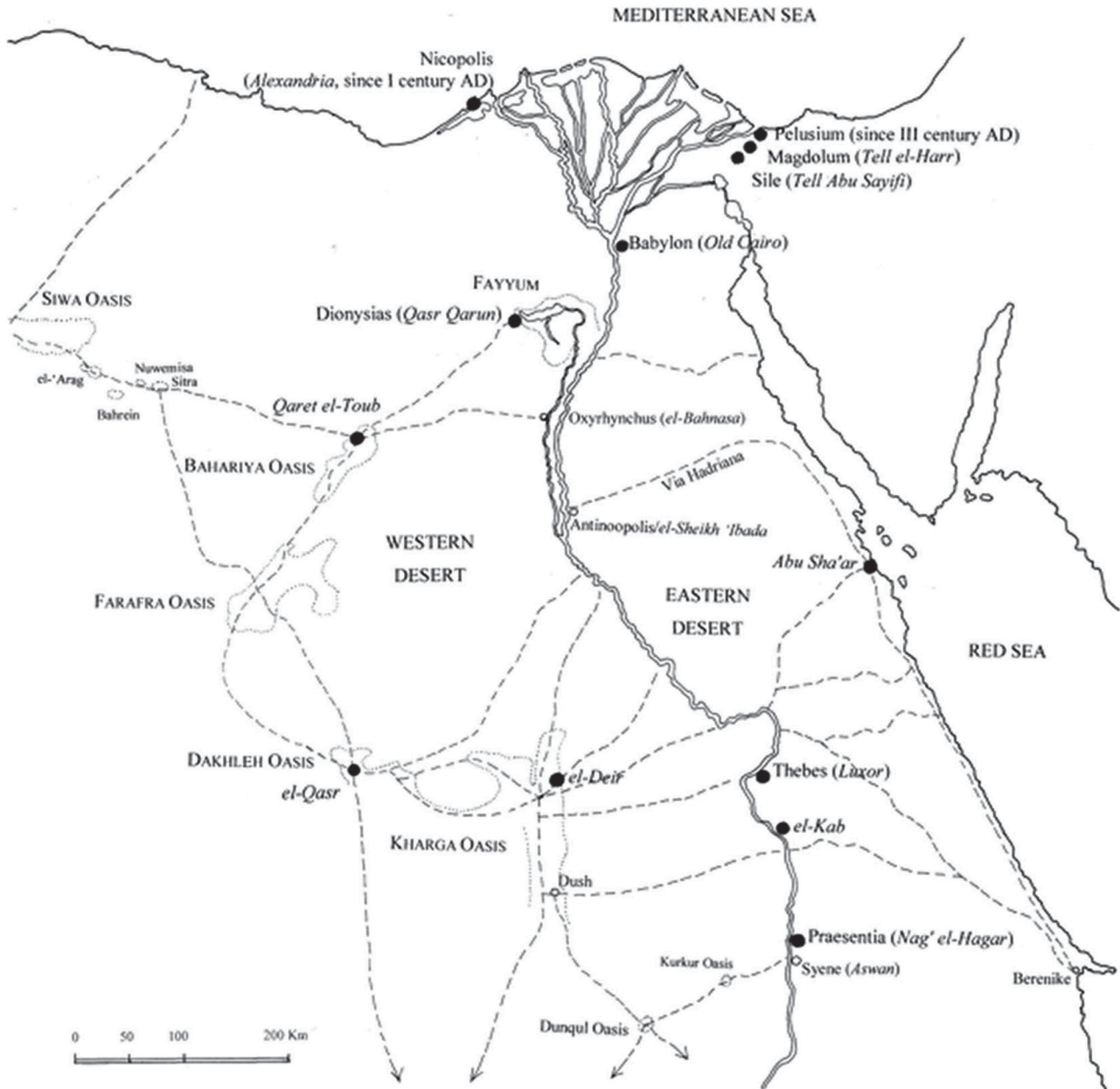


Figure 3 Position of Late Roman fortresses dating to the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth century that have been located so far; drawing by C. Rossi, © C. Rossi/NKOS.

position and design, in all cases apart from Mohammed Tuleib. A detail that is shared by Qasr el-Sumayra, Qasr el-Labakha and Mohammed Tuleib is the adoption of walls made of two parallel layers, with or without hidden passages running in the cavity. Qasr el-Labakha, Umm el-Dabadib and Mohammed Tuleib, instead, share the adoption of a specific building technique: the external walls were built in separate sections, that is, were divided by a vertical cut running from the bottom to the top of the wall. This method was probably employed to avoid breaks due to the natural shrinkage of the mud-brick masonry.

The intertwined presence of these architectural elements and techniques suggests that, although not

identical, all these buildings were built on the basis of the same set of architectural models, possibly designed by the same team of architects. Another factor that reinforces this suggestion is the presence in the settlements associated with Qasr el-Sumayra, Qasr el-Labakha and Umm el-Dabadib, of exactly the same domestic unit; this, again, strongly suggests not only that all these sites were built more or less at the same time, but also that the builders drew from a common set of architectural models.

The Function of the Chain of 'Forts'

Even without written documents directly supporting this idea, one characteristic of all these settlements appears

quite clear: they belonged to a single, strategic design meant to colonise and control the area. The size of the installations, the effort poured into quarrying kilometres of underground aqueducts, the stress on self-sufficiency, the position along the ancient routes, all indicate the clear intent of installing a permanent 'Roman' community in what was evidently perceived as a key-area of the region.

The key to understanding the specific function of these forts probably lies in the function of el-Deir which, in turn, can be explained in the wider frame of the late-Roman control of Egypt's Western Desert. In the Diocletianic Period, a number of fortresses were added to those already existing in Egypt: Figure 3 shows the position of the major military centres founded in Egypt between the very end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth, of which some archaeological remains have been identified. They are: Nag' el-Hagar, el-Kab and Luxor in Upper Egypt; el-Deir, al-Qasr, Qaret el-Toub and Qasr Qarun in the Western Oases; Abu Sha'ar on the Red Sea coast; Babylon (Old Cairo), and Tell Abu Sayfi and Tell el-Harr in the eastern Delta (Wareth and Zignani 1992; Badawi 1946; El-Saghir, Golvin, Reddé, Hegazy and Wagner 1986; Naumann 1938; Kucera in this volume; Colin, Laisney and Marchand 2000; Kucera 2005; Sidebotham 1994; Sheehan 2010; Abd el-Maqsud, Kamal, Helmy and Grossmann 1997; Louis and Valbelle 1988).

In the Western Desert, the Romans installed a series of fortresses very similar in shape and size, all placed at important desert crossroads: Qasr Qarun in the Fayyum, Qaret el-Toub in Bahriyya, al-Qasr in Dakhleh and el-Deir in Kharga. Logically, another similar fortress should be located in Farafra, probably at the intersection of the two tracks connecting Dakhleh, Bahriyya and Siwa; perhaps future research in the area will uncover evidence of such an installation.

The function of these fortresses must have been twofold: controlling the local trade and representing a network of reference points for the army. Thus, they probably had both a commercial and a military function: the control of travellers and goods has been already stressed by other authors (e.g. Kucera 2005 and Dunand, personal communication) but perhaps so far their military function has not been fully appreciated. When Wagner first wrote about the late-Roman sites in the Western Desert, he interpreted nearly all the remains as belonging to military installations (Wagner 1987). Concerning Kharga, this assumption was later challenged by Reddé (1989), who correctly concluded that not all the 'fortified' sites of the oasis must have had a strictly military function. By combining these studies with the archaeological evidence that has recently come to light, it is now possible to suggest a tentative interpretation of the distribution and function of these sites.

El-Deir clearly belongs to a large-scale strategy to control/defend Egypt. It worked together with al-Qasr, Qaret el-Toub and Qasr Qarun to keep under control the Western Desert by forming a chain of imposing (both

visually and physically) symbols of the Roman presence in the region. What makes Kharga different from the other oases is the presence of so many other fortified and military-looking sites: in this case, el-Deir might have also played a small-scale strategic role, together with the local chain of fortified installations. In particular, the distribution of the sites in northern Kharga appears to reflect the strategic operational method labelled defence-in-depth, "based on the combination of self-contained strongholds with mobile forces deployed between or behind them" (Luttwak 1976, 139).

El-Deir was conveniently placed at the starting point of one of the shortest tracks linking Kharga with the Valley, from where additional troops might arrive in case of need. It may have worked together with the other sites to control the cross-road: the Gib/Sumayra Complex guarded the northern access, Mohammed Tuleib controlled the middle of the depression, in line with 'Ain Labakha, that guarded the track heading west to Dakhleh. Umm el-Dabadib was installed along that track, nested under the scarp and provided with an aggressive appearance. The control of this major cross-road, therefore, may have been the main reason behind the installation of so many large communities in and around 'forts' of various size. In particular, this control might have concerned both commercial and military interests, by combining the revenues of the lucrative trade from modern Sudan with the necessity of quickly deploying fresh troops to the oases in case of need.

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