

WILSON, P., and D. GRIGOROPOULOS — The West Delta Regional Survey, Beheira and Kafr el-Sheikh Provinces. (Excavation Memoir 86). Egypt Exploration Society, London, 2009. (30 cm, XIV, 490, cd-rom). ISBN 978-0-85698-194-4. £ 55.00.

Few areas of the ancient world are as rich in ancient sites about which we know so little as the Egyptian delta. This book sets out to introduce us to sites of the western and parts of the northern delta. It can be safely suggested that hardly an Egyptologist, let alone an ancient historian or a classical archaeologist, will be familiar with most sites presented in this book.

The *Egypt Exploration Society*, under whose auspices this work was undertaken, has played a long and highly significant role in studies of the delta. The spectrum of their investigations ranges from the 'Delta Survey', which provides basic information on sites from the entire delta¹), to archaeological excavations at individual sites, such as currently at

Sais, Quesna, Tell Basta and Kom ed-Daba. The scope of this Regional Survey, conducted in six seasons between 2001 and 2006, falls in between. P. Wilson had been directing work at Sais since the late 1990s, when this survey emerged as the project 'Sais and its Hinterland: Dynamics and Power in the Western Nile Delta' (p. 1). Neither Sais nor its immediate hinterland, however, forms part of this study. As the author wrote intriguingly in 2007, 'a 15 km zone around Sais is devoid of other notable archaeological sites'²). The site closest to Sais investigated here is Tell Abu Humar (no. 52), nearly 30 km to the west of Sais.

The book is divided into two major parts of almost equal length: the 'Site Gazetteer' (pp. 43-260), authored by P. Wilson, and the 'Pottery and Glass Catalogue' (pp. 261-477), authored by D. Grigoropoulos. The site gazetteer is preceded by a brief five page introduction, a very useful glossary explaining technical and Arabic terms, 13 colour maps and a table providing a listing with site details. A flap in the back contains a CD with photographs of the sites and pottery. The separation of book and CD is, in this case, well done. Useful documentation and illustrations are amply provided on the CD, but the book can also be read independently. Map 1 shows all 70 investigated sites and it becomes immediately apparent that the area covered by the Regional Survey is quite large. The distance between the westernmost site, Kom el-Hagg (no. 1), and the easternmost, Kom el-Khanziri (no. 66), is about 90 km. The maximum extent from north (Tarbiya el-Abd, no. 42) to south (Abu Guduur, no. 14) is about 60 km. The 'Site Gazetteer' is divided into the governorate of Beheira, with 52 sites, and the governorate of Kafr el-Sheikh, with 18 sites. Within these governorates, regionally different levels of intensity of study are apparent: In the governorate of Beheira a particular concentration of sites is shown around Abu Hummus. In the governorate of Kafr el-Sheikh the sites studied are concentrated in the northern part. Outliers are two sites on the Mediterranean coast, Tarbiya el Abd and Tarbiya el-Alayem, nos. 42 and 43, Abu Mandour (Kom el-Farah), no. 44, just south of Rashid (Rosette), and Kom el-Akhdar, no. 63, on an island in Lake Burullus. The following 12 maps are more detailed and show smaller areas with groupings of sites or as in two cases, maps 8 and 13, just a single site. Some of these maps create smaller regional units which might have been best discussed as such. This is reinforced by the very useful addition of reconstructed features of the ancient landscape linking these sites, such as the ancient extent of Lake Mareotis on map 2. A reconstruction of the Canopic branch based on satellite imagery is shown on map 3. On maps 5 and 6 the Canopic branch is mentioned, but no reconstruction is suggested. It would have been very helpful in order to understand the placement of sites. In the organization of the following site gazetteer, however, these links between individual sites and their natural environment is severed.

The Introduction (pp. 1-5), preceding the above discussed maps, outlines in five sections the selection and definition of the investigated sites, the methodology and its limitations, a history of previous survey work in the delta and the organization of the report. The sites were chosen based on place names containing elements such as 'kom' and 'tell' (p. 1). Sites which had 'ceased to exist in any meaningful way'

¹) <http://www.deltasurvey.ees.ac.uk/ds-home.html>

²) <http://www.dur.ac.uk/penelope.wilson/Delta/Intro.html>

were, however, subsequently excluded, while the survey was 'extended to include those sites which were extant rather than those which might be extant' (p. 1). 'Meaningful' and 'exist' are relative terms and it is not quite clear what is meant by them here. This survey in the following precisely illustrates the importance of studying sites which in the past have been ignored, as they had generally not been considered worth investigating. While the amount and quality of information varies from site to site, depending to a large degree on the preservation and accessibility of the site, it is crucial to keep in mind that dropping sites which no longer are deemed extant is a reduction of information. One could argue it is precisely the task of a survey to find out if these sites are entirely lost or not and what information might still be gathered from them. Actually, this is what the survey under discussion in some cases did: Following visits, some sites, such as Tarbiya el-Abd (no. 43), were deemed modern, while in other cases it was declared as uncertain whether there was an ancient settlement at the site or not. The 'Methodology' section outlines three levels of investigation of sites: (1) basic visits, (2) basic surveys and (3) substantial surveys (p. 2). Most sites, 43 %, were investigated by a basic survey, which includes collecting pottery on the surface and taking GPS measurements of archaeological features. More substantial surveys were conducted at 28.5 % of the sites and can include a program of auger core drillings and a topographic map. 28.5 % of sites only received a 'basic visit'. The 'limitations of the methodology' briefly address some issues such as the restrictions of dating based on surface finds and the importance of establishing a methodology for surveying. The preliminary nature of the understanding of these sites is stressed. A short history of survey work in the delta follows. Finally, the statement 'This...is not intended as a shopping list for future work, but rather an initial assessment of the historical nature of each site and its current condition as of 2005-7' (p. 5) anticipates the widespread assumption in Egyptology that surveying only serves the purpose of finding a good place to excavate.

Each site is discussed on average on 2-3 pages, while a number of sites are treated in greater detail and a few in less. The condition of the sites today ranges from clear, free standing tells (e.g. Kom Dahab iii, no. 10, pp. 71-77, Tell Mutubis, no. 53, pp. 195-201) to levelled areas where it is difficult to verify if a site ever existed or not (e.g. Kom Mazen, no. 11, pp. 78-81). The majority of sites surveyed are overbuilt by villages and cemeteries, usually a combination of both (e.g. Kom Ishu, no.2, pp. 47-48, Kom el-Gel, no. 3, pp. 49-50), less frequently by a village (e.g. Kom Aziza, no. 28, pp. 121-126) or a cemetery alone (e.g. Sidi Yusef, no. 19, p. 99). Some sites are overbuilt by industrial installations such as water processing plants (e.g. Kom Saieda, no. 34, pp. 146-147). The spatial distribution of sites based on their current state of preservation is remarkable: Almost all sites surveyed in the governorate of Beheira are overbuilt or levelled as opposed to those in the governorate of Kafr el-Sheikh, where all sites remain clear of modern constructions. Various factors come into play explaining this phenomenon: Firstly, the selection process of the surveyor. Secondly, the sites in the governorate of Kafr el-Sheikh all lie in the north, while the area covered in the governorate of Beheira extends further south and therefore into a zone of very dense modern settlement. In contrast, while the northern part of the governorate of Kafr

el-Sheikh was evidently a densely populated area in Roman and late Roman times, today it is somewhat off the beaten track. This has had very positive effects for the preservation of archaeological sites. Every site is provided with a sketch, usually based on google Earth satellite images and 1:50.000 *Survey of Egypt* maps. The sketches are very basic black and white line drawings. A weakness of these drawings, in particular in comparison to satellite images, is that one is not immediately able to visually grasp what is the ancient settlement mound (*komp/tell*) and what is not. Some graphic additions, such as shading, would have been helpful. In addition, more detailed topographic maps were made for numerous sites, in particular for sites in the governorate of Kafr el-Sheikh. The auger core drillings are depicted in a rather abstract form, but the crucial information is provided. The placement of the auger cores is usually displayed on the site sketches, but not always (e.g. not at Kom el-Debaa North and South, fig. 31, and Abureh, fig. 40). The sites are described, their pottery is highlighted and a brief final discussion summarizes the results and assesses the value for future investigations. The dating of sites relies primarily on surface pottery. Of the 49 sites where pottery was collected, Ptolemaic material was the earliest at most sites (16), followed by Roman and Late Roman. Late Roman foundations concentrate in the northeast (Kafr el-Sheikh) and the northern part of the Beheira governorate. As surface collections are strongly biased towards the later periods of occupation, the results of auger core drilling are of particular importance for finding out about the entire settlement history. For example Kom el-Debaa North and South (nos. 24 and 25), far in the north at the edge of Lake Idku, are described as Ptolemaic foundations erected on an older settlement (p. 115). The date of this older settlement, however, remains unclear. Interesting is the case of Kom Aziza (no. 28) which has very thick settlement layers reaching 4.5 m below the surface. Sherds most likely to be dated to the Old Kingdom were found (p. 124). The depth of this Old Kingdom material is not given. Due to the importance of this material it would have been worth being represented by drawings. At Kom en-Nawwam (no. 49) the material from layers 3.2 m below the surface is considered possibly Late Period (p. 185), but the pottery sherds from the auger core are not discussed in detail.

The site gazetteer functions primarily as a compilation of basic information, with only a preliminary interpretation of the data. Functional issues of sites can only be addressed in exceptional cases, such as at Kom Defshu (no. 8, p. 63), where the southwestern part of the *tell* was used as a cemetery in antiquity. An interesting line of research is the dynamic between neighbouring sites. Kom el-Waset (no. 47), a Late Dynastic foundation, was in use until the Ptolemaic period and then seemingly mostly abandoned (p. 177). Kom el-Ahmar (no. 48), about 1 km to the southwest, continued into the Roman period and some of the people of Kom el-Waset may have moved there. The interesting question is why. The relationship of site location and the course of the Canopic branch of the Nile is relevant for numerous sites, such as Kom en-Nawwam and Damanhur (p. 186). Three sites in the governorate of Kafr el-Sheikh, Tell Qabrit, Tell Amya and Tell el-Matiur, seem to be lying in a line. Finding what links these sites would be very intriguing, but the suggestion that they lay along the east-west Antonine itinerary (p. 211), a Roman trans-delta road, is most likely

incorrect, as the stations along that route lie further to the south.³⁾

Since the study was made, Corona satellite imagery of Egypt from 1968 has become readily available (<http://corona.cast.ark.edu/>). Based on this, some interesting additions can be made to the sites discussed: Kom Hashiem (no. 27), the placement of which was considered uncertain (p. 119), can be clearly identified on the Corona image. It evidently was still in existence in 1968. It is a round site, with a diameter of 100 m, just adjacent to the north of the 'open sandy area' shown on fig. 35. Today this area is fields, with one house. The site is not located in the 'open sandy area' as suggested (p. 119). The site of Tell Foqaa (no. 62) today consists of a large and a small tell. The Corona image confirms the suggestion (p. 234) that it used to be part of a much larger contiguous area. It is unclear, however, where the ancient site ends and the geological formation began. In the case of Kom el-Debaa North and South (nos. 24 and 25) the Corona images provide proof that the two adjacent sites originally formed one crescent shaped tell, as suggested on p. 111. The northern site was, however, not square, but had a curved shape, as reflected by the curved field boundaries to the east.

The Pottery and Glass Catalogue (pp. 261-477) represents a very substantial pottery publication in its own right. It is the first large scale overview of pottery from this region of Egypt. In comparison, previous surveys within this area have only presented small amounts of material⁴⁾. The catalogue is opened with an outline of the methodology and a very useful discussion of the pottery of the five main periods, Late Dynastic, Ptolemaic, Early Roman, Late Roman and Early Arab and Medieval Arab (pp. 263-286). Obviously, this is a chronologically broad field and in an era of specialization anyone willing to tackle such a wide range of periods is to be commended. The pottery is organized by site. The next level is according to functional categories: tableware, utility and storage vessels, cooking pots and kitchen ware, transport amphorae and vessels of other functions. Within these groups the material is separated into Egyptian and imported pottery. The Egyptian pottery fabrics are classified according to the Vienna System. This is unusual for these periods, but at least serves as a clear point of reference, as no other unanimously agreed upon system has yet been devised for these phases of Egyptian pottery. The pottery is shown in good quality line drawings, however they are not provided with separate numbering on the figures. This makes it a bit more difficult to put drawing and information together when paging back and forth in order to read the discussion, fabric description and bibliographical references. For a range of sites, in particular from the Kafr el-Sheikh governorate, no pottery is shown. According to information in table 1.4 and the individual site descriptions, pottery was collected there, so it will most likely be published separately.

Integrating the information from the two main parts of the book did not always succeed. In particular regarding the dating some discrepancies are noticeable. The relevant pages of the pottery section and the site discussions in the gazetteer need to be synchronized. One wonders whether by joining

the pottery pages directly with the site discussions in the gazetteer these inconsistencies might have become obvious in the editing process and prompted a correction. The summary of dates for the sites given on tables 1.1.-1.4 does not always correlate with those provided in the gazetteer, the tables 2.1 and 2.2 and the pottery section. Of great interest is the Old Kingdom date discussed in relationship to both surface material and results from auger core drillings at Kom Aziza (no. 28, pp. 123-124). The date is dropped from the tables 1.2 (p. 40), 2.1 (p. 287) and the pottery section (pp. 351-352). Here the earliest pottery from Kom Aziza is dated to the Late Period. In the introduction to the pottery chapter another Old Kingdom date is mentioned (p. 269) in connection with a piece of pottery (KS.P4) from the site of Kom Saieda (no. 34). In the pottery section the final date is given as 'Late Dynastic (or earlier?)', p. 368. Table 1.2 shows Ptolemaic as the earliest date for this place (p.40). The site of Kom Barsiq/Awad (no. 33) has Late Dynastic material according to the description in the gazetteer (p. 140), table 2.1 (p. 287) and the pottery section (pp. 362-366). Table 1.2 cites the earliest material being from the first two centuries BC, i.e. Ptolemaic or Early Roman. A Late Dynastic date is also mentioned for a range of sites in tables 2.1-2.2 (pp. 287-288), but this date is not given in tables 1.1.-1.4. The sites are Kom Dahab iii (no. 10), Kom Khaleesh (no. 21), Kom Nakhlah (no. 31), Abu Mandour (Tell Kom el-Farah, no. 44), Tell Dibi (no. 51) and Kom el-Arab (no. 67). Somewhat confusing is the dating of pottery from the site of Abu Mandour (Tell Kom el-Farah, no. 44), at the southern edge of the town of Rosette. Pharaonic pottery is alluded to in the text (p. 169). The earliest material in the pottery summary is mentioned as Late Period (p. 170). In table 1.2 an intriguing New Kingdom date is provided (p. 40), whereas the pottery distribution by period in table 2.1 again mentions only the Late Period (p. 287). A piece of pottery dated to the Late Period is shown on fig. 138 and this dating is given on p. 382, but the Late Period is not listed among the periods represented by pottery on the top of p. 382. For Kom el-Ahmar (no. 48) Saite pottery is mentioned on table 1.2 (p. 40). In the text, however, the earliest pottery is described as Ptolemaic and in the following the lack of Pharaonic pottery is explicitly stated (p. 181). No Late Period pottery is shown or mentioned in the pottery section (pp. 396-402). At Tell Mutubis (no. 53) some potential Pharaonic pottery is hinted at in deep layers of auger core no. 1 (p. 198), but no drawing or details are given. Table 1.4 (p. 41) lists the site as a Ptolemaic foundation.

The great value of this book lies in bringing this region of Egypt to our attention and highlighting the potential of these delta sites. The authors have gone to places no scientist has gone before and accomplished ground breaking work. This is an important book: Crucial gaps are being closed and maps are becoming fuller. The work is at times necessarily defined as experimental and preliminary. Future surveys will profit. This is primarily a volume with data and one eagerly awaits its interpretation. This separation of data and interpretation is, however, problematic. It is not clear if and when such an interpretation will follow. What connects these sites, what forms a region? Intriguing historical issues ask to be addressed, such as potential Old Kingdom settlements in the northern delta, the notable absence of any 2nd millennium sites (Middle Kingdom, Second Intermediate Period, New Kingdom), and the massive Roman expansion into the northern delta, possibly

³⁾ B. LÖHBERG, *Das "Itinerarium provinciarum Antonini Augusti"*. Ein kaiserzeitliches Straßenverzeichnis des Römischen Reiches. Überlieferung, Strecken, Kommentare, Karten, Berlin 2006, 153-154, maps 74.1 and 74.2.

⁴⁾ P. BALLETT and T. VON DER WAY, *Exploration archéologique de Bouto et de sa région. Epoques romaine et byzantines*, in: *MDAIK* 49, 1993, 1-22.

reaching its apex in the late Roman period. We are dealing here with a very substantial swath of territory which was added as cultivatable land. This is a fascinating new area of research, which reaches beyond Egyptology and should be taken into account by ancient historians and classical archaeologists of the Mediterranean. Ultimately, the lack of interpretation will probably reduce the impact of this study. And this is regrettable, as one would wish this study a wide audience.

Corrections and omissions:

The title of the book and the second author's first name are written slightly differently on the cover and on the inside and on p. 263. The 'Nile' from the title and the 'o' from the first name should be dropped from the version inside and on p. 263. Table 1.3 (pp. xiv, 39-41) does not exist. In the table of contents the correct pages for site no. 5, Kom el-Mahar, are pp. 53-55. In the heading of Kom el-Waset on p. 176 an incorrect site number is given. It is listed as 'Map number 4', correct is 'Map number 47'. The numbering for this site in the pottery section on p. 390 is incorrectly listed as no. 46. It should also be 47. On p. 338 in the heading for Kom Khaleesh the site no., 21, should be added. In the pottery section the sites Kom Abu Ismail (p. 415), Kom el-Misk (p. 423) and Tell Aluwe (p. 427) are mistakenly listed as nos. 56, 57 and 58 respectively. This should be corrected by adding a number to all three, that is, corrected to nos. 57, 58 and 59 respectively. In the text of the pottery section, the numbering of the tables needs to be changed: Table 1 (p. 268) refers to table 2.1 and table 2 (p. 270) refers to table 3 and should be changed accordingly. On Fig. 132 the same piece of pottery is shown twice, once numbered as KS.P4 and once as KS.P5. The bibliographical reference for Elaigne 2002, cited on p. 270 und 374, is missing in the bibliography. It is S. Élaigne, L'introduction des céramiques fines hellénistiques du bassin oriental de la Méditerranée à Alexandrie: importations et imitations locales, in: *Céramiques hellénistiques et romaines: productions et diffusions en Méditerranée orientale (Chypre, Égypte et côte syro-palestinienne), Actes du colloque tenu à Lyon du 2 au 4 mars 2000. Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient* 35, 2002, pp. 159-173.

German Archaeological Institute Cairo, Robert SCHIESTL
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