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Reflections on a Decade of Research and Excavations at Tell el-Borg and Its Environs (1998–2008)

THE AS-SALAM irrigation project in northwestern Sinai threatened many key archaeological sites associated with Egypt's eastern frontier and those associated with the military highway from Egypt to Canaan in ancient times. One of the projects that responded to the call made by the Supreme Council of Antiquities for salvage of antiquities and investigation of endangered sites was directed by the author of this contribution at Tell el-Borg and its environs. Surveying and excavations occurred between 1998 and 2008. The next decade was devoted to studying and publishing our work. *Tell el-Borg I* appeared in 2015 and *Tell el-Borg II* in 2019.¹ This congress offers a unique opportunity to provide an overview and some reflections on the past twenty years of research and analysis of this body of work.

THE PALEO-ENVIRONMENT OF NORTHWESTERN SINAI

As the area of northwestern Sinai was ancient Egypt's military frontier zone, the intention of this project, from the initial visit to the region in 1994, was to explain the interrelationship between the ancient landscape or paleo-environment and the forts already uncovered (Tell el-Herr, Tell Qedua and Hebua I at that time) as well as the forts that would be discovered in the following years (e.g. Hebua II, Tell el-Borg and Tell Abyad). An initial coring was made in the low, flat plane between Hebua I and Hebua II in 1995,² which demonstrated that a body of water separated the two sites. Hebua II subsequently turned out to be home to the fort of Tjaru, *ḥtm n Trw*.³ Geologist Stephen Moshier worked along with geologists from the Geological Survey of Egypt, namely Dr. Ali el-Kalani and Dr. Bahaa Gayed. The results of this collaboration have altered the map of this area forever.⁴

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1. J.K. HOFFMEIER, *Tell el-Borg I*, Winona Lake, 2015 [hereafter: *Tell el-Borg I*]; J.K. HOFFMEIER, *Tell el-Borg II*, University Park, 2019 [hereafter: *Tell el-Borg II*].

2. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 6–7.

3. M. ABD EL-MAKSoud, D. VALBELLE, "Tell Héboua II : Rapport Préliminaire sur le décor et l'épigraphie des éléments architectoniques découverts au cours des campagnes 2008-2009 dans la zone centrale du Khétem de Tjarou", *RdE* 62, 2011, pp. 1–39.

4. J.K. HOFFMEIER, S. MOSHIER, "New Paleo-Environmental Evidence from North Sinai to Complement Manfred Bietak's Map of the Eastern Delta and Some Historical Implications," in E. Czerny et al. (eds.), *Timelines: Studies in Honour of Manfred Bietak*, vol. II, OLA 149, Leuven, 2006, pp. 167–176; S. MOSHIER, A. EL-KALANI,

Thanks to the work of our geologists, we now know that two eastern branches of the Nile flowed across NW Sinai prior to the 1st millennium B.C. The northern distributary passed between Hebua I and II,⁵ while the southern counterpart went by Tell el-Borg (figs. 1 & 2), and was uncovered during our excavations in 2000.⁶ These branches predate the course of the Pelusiac that reached the 1st millennium site of Pelusium. Traces of the Pelusiac were discovered in the early 1970s north of the coastal ridge formed by the Pelusium line.⁷ These two earlier distributaries emptied into the paleo-lagoon 2-3 km east of Tell el-Borg and Hebua respectively (figs. 1 & 2).

The region of northwestern Sinai was indeed a wet area throughout the New Kingdom. There were numerous bodies of water and wetlands, viz. the Balah Lake system,⁸ the paleo-lagoon, and two Nile branches. During the Nile's annual inundation, the low-lying areas were flooded wetlands that were full of grasses, reeds and rushes. Seeds of various grasses and water plants have been documented by our paleo-botanist, Claire Malleson.⁹ As reeds are concerned, they were used to construct the earliest habitat on the site.¹⁰ The Nile distributary and surrounding wetlands were likely to be the source of mud for the bricks used in the various constructions at Tell el-Borg.

Our recent work in the region supports Manfred Bietak's nearly 40 year-old proposal that the two main bodies of water in this region, the paleo-lagoon and the Ballah Lakes, correspond to Š-Ḥr (i.e. Lake of Horus) and Pꜣ tꜣwfy respectively.¹¹ They are mentioned as parallels to each other in Pap. Anastasi III (2.11-12).¹² Thus the nearby royal residence of Pi-Ramesses was blessed with the products of these adjacent wetlands, as the text itself declares: "The papyrus-marshes (Pꜣ tꜣwfy) come with rushes to it (Pi-Ramesses) and the Lake of Horus (Š-Ḥr) with reeds." As we shall see, the fish and fowl that were a rich part of the diet of the residents of Tell el-Borg, likewise came from the neighboring bodies of water. In between these channels, lakes and wetlands were stretches of sand, and it was on these solid surfaces that the military road ran where the forts were built. The route ran from the Delta to Hebua I, across the Nile to Hebua II, and then south past Tell el-Borg towards the southern end

"Late Bronze Age Paleogeography along the Ancient Ways of Horus in Northwest Sinai, Egypt," *Geoarchaeology* 23/4, 2008, pp. 450-473.

5. This branch was identified by satellite imagery by Dominique Valbelle and Bruno Marcolongo, see D. VALBELLE et al., "Reconnaissance archéologique à la pointe orientale du Delta. Rapport préliminaire sur les saisons 1990 et 1991", *CRIPEL* 14, 1992, pp. 11-31. B. MARCOLONGO, "Évolution du paléo-environnement dans la partie orientale du delta du Nil depuis la transgression flandrienne (8000 B.P.) par rapport aux modèles de peuplement anciens", *CRIPEL* 14, 1992, pp. 23-31.

6. J.K. HOFFMEIER, M. ABD EL-MAKSOUH, "A New Military Site on 'the Ways of Horus' - Tell el-Borg 1999-2001: A Preliminary Report", *JEA* 89, 2003, p. 195.

7. A. SNEH, T. WEISSBROD, I. PERATH, "Evidence for an Ancient Egyptian Frontier Canal", *American Scientist* 63, 1975, pp. 542-48. Previously they had discovered the Pelusiac Nile from the Greco-Roman Periods; see A. SNEH, T. WEISSBROD, "Nile Delta: The Defunct Pelusiac Branch Identified", *Science* 180, 1973, pp. 59-61.

8. For a complete study of the geological history of the Ballah lakes, see *Tell el-Borg II*, pp. 5-20.

9. *Tell el-Borg II*, pp. 380-389.

10. In addition to the treatment of the reed huts in this volume see J.K. HOFFMEIER, T.W. DAVIS, R. HUMMEL, "New Archaeological Evidence for Ancient Bedouin (Shasu) on Egypt's Eastern Frontier at Tell el-Borg", *ÄgLev* 26, 2016, pp. 285-311.

11. M. BIETAK, *Tell el-Dab'a*, vol. 2, Vienna, 1975, figs. 10, 23.

12. A. GARDINER, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, Brussels, 1937, p. 22.

of the lagoon where we believe “the Migdol of Menma’atre” (i.e. T-211) was located.¹³ The route turned north along the eastern side of the paleo-lagoon before turning east and running parallel to the coast towards Raphia and Gaza. The two forts uncovered at Tell el-Borg, from the 18th Dynasties and the Ramesside era respectively,¹⁴ were strategically located to protect the intersection of the land road and river course that guarded access to Egypt.¹⁵

Due to a number of factors, including lower Nile levels and possible tectonic tilting of NW Sinai along the Pelusium Line (i.e. a transcontinental linear structure along the Central Plate, which is moving northwards and the NW African Plate),¹⁶ the water levels of the paleo-lagoon were lowered.¹⁷ By the 3rd Intermediate Period, the opening in the lagoon along the old coastal ridge that once marked the Mediterranean coast, had silted up. This change in landscape made it possible to traverse the area where the lagoon waters previously emptied into the sea. Archaeological proof of this development is the location of the site Tell el-Ghaba at the center of the mouth of the old lagoon,¹⁸ and the placement military site to the east, Tell Queda with its Saite Period fort, and its contemporaries at Hebua I and II to the west, guard the new road of the Delta.¹⁹ Thus a new land route was established from Pelusium (and points east) to Tanis in the Delta (fig. 3).²⁰ As a consequence, the New Kingdom and earlier route around the southern end of the lagoon, which passed by Tell el-Borg, fell out of use.

As this area of NW Sinai (Egypt’s NE frontier zone) was very wet due to the presence of Nile distributaries, lakes and wetlands, it served as a natural defense which, together with the forts and naval operations at Hebua and Tell el-Borg, made Egypt virtually impenetrable from the east.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE SITE

From the initial seasons of work at Tell el-Borg we thought it might be identified with the New Kingdom military site, “The Dwelling (*t*’ *t*) of the Lion/Ramesses/Sessy”, first attested on

13. J.K. HOFFMEIER, “A Possible Location in Northwest Sinai for the Sea and Land Battles between the Sea Peoples and Ramesses III,” *BASOR* 380, 2018, pp. 1–25; *Idem*, “The Curious Phenomenon of Moving Military Sites on Egypt’s Eastern Frontier,” *JSSEA* 36, 2019, pp. 105–134.

14. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 119–206 and 207–345.

15. J.K. HOFFMEIER, “Reconstructing Egypt’s Eastern Frontier Defense Network in the New Kingdom (Late Bronze Age)”, in F. Jesse, C. Vogel (eds.), *The Power of Walls – Fortifications in Ancient Northeastern Africa*, Köln, pp. 163–194.

16. D. NEEV, “The Pelusium Line – A Major Transcontinental Shear”, *Tectonophysics* 38, 1977, pp. T1–T8; D. NEEV, N. BAKLER, K.O. EMERY, *Mediterranean Coasts of Israel and Sinai: Holocene Tectonism from Geology, Geophysics, and Archaeology*, New York, 1987.

17. For a discussion of the desiccation of this region and the more northerly course taken by the Pelusiac late in the 2nd and into the 1st millennium, see J.K. HOFFMEIER, *JSSEA* 36, 2019, pp. 105–134.

18. Concerning work at Tell Ghaba, see T. HERBICH, “Geophysical Survey at Tell el-Ghaba, 2010”, *PAM* 22, 2013, pp. 121–130; P. FUSCALDO, S. LUPO, *Tell el-Ghaba II*, Buenos Aires, 2006.

19. For a recent summary of Saite Period forts, see K. SMOLÁRIKOVÁ, *Saite Forst in Egypt: Political-Military History of the Saite Dynasty*, Prague, 2008. On the most recent work at Tell Queda, see H. HUSSEIN, E. ABDEL ALIM, “The Way(s) of Horus in the Saite Period: Tell el-Kedua and its Key Location Guarding Egypt’s Northeastern Frontier”, *JAIE* 7, 2015, pp. 1–13. Concerning the Hebua Saite forts, see E. ABD EL-ALIM, “Tell Habua: New Discoveries from the Saite Period”, *EA* 56, 2020, pp. 10–15.

20. J.K. HOFFMEIER, *JSSEA* 36, 2019, pp. 121–126.

the famed Karnak war reliefs of Seti I.²¹ Even though the site had a dynamic military presence in the 18th Dynasty (see next section), the name of the site prior to the Ramesside period is presently unknown. Given the tendency for military toponyms to continue with only the royal name changing to reflect the current monarch, one might think that the name had been the Dwelling (*t3 't*) of the Lion, i.e. the lion representing any pharaoh, or *t3 't* + royal name.

With the certain identification of the huge forts of Hebua I and II with Tjaru/Sile, thanks to Mohamed Abd el-Maksoud's pioneering work,²² establishing the possible sequence of fortified sites can now be made. Figure 1 presents the new paelo-environmental data and archaeological sites on a 1967 CORONA image and Figure 2 presents the same data Google earth image that offers an eastern perspective.²³ Here is the proposed sequence:

Egyptian Name	Archaeological Site
Tjaru/The Ways of Horus ²⁴	Hebua I
<i>T3 dnit</i>	Hebua distributary (early Pelusiac)
<i>h3tm n T3rw</i>	Hebua II
The Dwelling of the Lion/Ramesses II	Tell el-Borg
Migdol of Menmaatre/Ramesses III	T-211
Wadjet District of (Ramesses II)	Tell Abyad

HISTORY OF OCCUPATION OF TELL EL-BORG

The earliest inhabitants are associated with the reed huts found in the highest area of the tell, viz., Field VI Area 1. Based on C¹⁴ and early ceramic markers, a date from the Second Intermediate Period through early 18th Dynasty is most likely for these residents.²⁵ Ceramic remains for the earlier period were documented.²⁶ We are inclined to think that these reed huts had been occupied by Shasu.²⁷

The earliest royal name discovered is that of Thutmose III on a reused block that was churned up when the drainage canal was dug through the site.²⁸ This is the lone witness to his name, however for his son and successor, Amenhotep II, there are numerous attestations. His name occurs on

21. J.K. HOFFMEIER, M. ABD EL-MAKSOU, *JEA* 89, 2003, pp. 195–197. See also *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 34–61.

22. M. ABD EL-MAKSOU, D. VALBELLE, "Tell Héboua-Tjarou, l'apport de l'épigraphie", *RdE* 56, 2005, pp. 7–8 and pp. 18–21. Regarding Hebua II, see M. ABD EL-MAKSOU, D. VALBELLE, *RdE* 62, 2011, pp. 1–39.

23. J.K. HOFFMEIER, *JSSEA* 36, 2019, pp. 121–126.

24. Since every fort had a name, it stands to reason that the fort at Hebua I was named, even though presently we do not know what it was; *h3tm n T3rw* (as suggested by the placement of the label on the Seti I scene) was likely the recently discovered fort at Hebua II. Since we do not know the name of the fort at Hebua I, I have simply called it "Tjaru/Ways of Horus" as in Pap. Anastasi I.

25. T. DAVIS, J.K. HOFFMEIER, R. HUMMEL, "New Archaeological Evidence for Ancient Bedouin (Shasu) on Egypt's Eastern Frontier at Tell el-Borg", *ÄgLev* 26, 2016, pp. 285–311.

26. R. HUMMEL, in *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 376–378.

27. T. DAVIS, J.K. HOFFMEIER, R. HUMMEL, *op. cit.*, pp. 285–311.

28. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 91–92.

six doorjambs that experience the expunging of Amun's name during the Amarna period.²⁹ These jambs no doubt graced the doorways of structures with the 18th Dynasty fort, though none of those structures survived. Amenhotep II's cartouche also was found on several impressions on ceramic vessels.³⁰

It may well be that the first fort at Tell el-Borg was commissioned and its construction started during the reign of Thutmose III, but certainly by the reign of Amenhotep II (to judge from the architectural pieces) the fort was completed and fully functional and continued in use until late in the Amarna Period.³¹ No other earlier royal 18th Dynasty figure is documented at Tell el-Borg until the name of Queen Tiye, wife of Amenhotep III, which is found on a faience ring in the Field III cemetery.³² From this point on, the royals of the Amarna Period are well attested:³³

- Akhenaten (TBO 0309 = *Tell el-Borg I*, p. 139);
- Neferneferuaten who is beneficial to her husband (TBO 0565 = *Tell el-Borg II*, p. 325);
- Ankhkheperura, 2 (TBO 0077 = *Tell el-Borg I*, p. 139 & TBO II 37 = *Tell el-Borg I*, p. 131);
- Tutankhamun, 2 (TBO II 36 = *Tell el-Borg II*, p. 30 & TBO II 61 = *Tell el-Borg II*, p. 31);
- Kheperkheperura, Aye (TBO 0778 = *Tell el-Borg II*, p. 325);
- Horemheb, 3 (TBO 0567, TBO 0683 & TBO 0668 = *Tell el-Borg II*, p. 325-326).

The royal names, Akhenaten to Aye, are on amphora vessels, whereas two of Horemheb are on mud bullae that sealed official documents, and the third is on the bezel of a faience ring.³⁴ Clearly during the Amarna period, official and military activity at the fort was robust as the wine jars demonstrate: they had been furnished for the officers (and troops?) from the royal largess, possibly from the vineyards of Tjaru, whose famous vintage is mentioned in the tomb of Tutankhamun and the newly discovered tomb KV 63.³⁵ The military activity at this fort throughout the Amarna Period also demonstrates that there was no weakening of Egypt's border defenses in response to Akhenaten's religious revolution, as often thought. Indeed, the above-mentioned iconoclasm of Amun's name on the Amenhotep II blocks assures us of ongoing military presence, as J. van Dijk has argued, such a widespread program of defacing images and the writings of Amun (and other deities) "can only have been carried out with the support of the army."³⁶

The presence of the stamped handles of Akhenaten and Ankhkheperura in the fill of the 18th Dynasty moat, the latter being at the top of that fill, suggests that the fort with the fired brick moat of the Thutmose III–Amenhotep II era continued in use till late in the Amarna Period, 1450–1330 B.C.³⁷ The complete loss of the back or west end, and signs of flood damage to the

29. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 245–247.

30. *Tell el-Borg II*, p. 196 and p. 223.

31. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 128–197.

32. *Tell el-Borg II*, p. 215.

33. For a complete study of these seal impressions from this period and their significance, see J.K. HOFFMEIER, J. VAN DIJK, "New Light on the Amarna Period from North Sinai", *JEA* 96, 2010, pp. 191–205.

34. T. DAVIS, in *Tell el-Borg II*, pp. 325–326.

35. For a discussion of these references, see J.K. HOFFMEIER, J. VAN DIJK, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

36. J. VAN DIJK, "The Amarna Period and Later New Kingdom," in I. Shaw (ed.) *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, New York, 2000, p. 270.

37. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 137–143.

areas of the moat called Fosse E and Fosse G led the archaeologists and our geologist to agree that a high-flooding Nile must have demolished this end of the fort, thus requiring the building of a second fort.³⁸ The evidence seems to suggest that the second or “Ramesside” fort was constructed during the reign of Horemheb or in the early 19th Dynasty.³⁹ Surprisingly, Seti’s name was not found at Tell el-Borg, even though he was militarily active in North Sinai as the Karnak war reliefs attest, and then before he became Pharaoh, he had been the commandant of the nearby Fortress Tjaru, the central command for the region.⁴⁰ Ramesses II’s name, however, is widely attested (more than 20 occurrences) at Tell el-Borg, on blocks and fragments from the destroyed limestone covered gateway.⁴¹ There are also the pair of Ramesses II stelae that stood in front of the same gate that bore his name.⁴² No doubt Ramesses II originally decorated this gate,⁴³ and subsequently Merneptah’s name was added to the gate.⁴⁴

The last certain royal name found at Tell el-Borg, likewise among the limestone fragments in the shattered gate area, is that of Ramesses III.⁴⁵ We have proposed that the gate of the fort had experienced a military attack, and was at least partially damaged and burned, along with the stelae from the entrance.⁴⁶ How much longer the site continued in use after this possible Sea Peoples assault on the gate remains uncertain. No pottery was found for the Third Intermediate Period. The 12th century B.C. seems to align with the last known reference to the Dwelling of the Sesu in a broken stela from Serabit el-Khadim (no. 300), which contains the epithet: “Amun Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands of ‘the Dwelling (at) of Sesu’.”⁴⁷ Just recently Meindert Dijkstra matched stela no. 300 with no. 297, which provided an important clue to dating the stela, likely to the reign of Ramesses IV (1153–1147 B.C.).⁴⁸ This datum indicates that “the Dwelling of Sesu” continued to play a military role past the middle of the 12th century B.C., but before the end of the 20th Dynasty, it appears to have been abandoned.

After the New Kingdom, evidence of human presence is limited. Two Scythian arrowheads in the trilobe style were found on the surface and can be dated to the Saite to Hellenistic period.⁴⁹ It has been noticed that fired bricks had been mined for reuse in Field VIII Unit A-5, and some

38. *Tell el-Borg II*, pp. 147–183, 197–198.

39. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 207–345.

40. See the 400 years Tanis Stela which reports that Seti had been *imy-htm n t3rw* (KRI II, 288.7 & 9).

41. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 97–99, 103, 105, 108–109, 114, 117, 284, 298, 300, 303, 304, 307, 309, 313.

42. *Tell el-Borg I*, p. 329–345.

43. There is evidence of an earlier mud brick gate that could go back to Horemheb or Seti I, viz., the Z-4 mud brick structure, adjacent to the south side of the stone gate (*Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 291–294).

44. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 305, 308–309.

45. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 298–299.

46. First proposed in J.K. HOFFMEIER, “Tell el-Borg on Egypt’s Eastern Frontier: A Preliminary Report on the 2002 and 2004 Seasons”, *JARCE* 41, 2004, pp. 100–103. See also *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 325–329, and J.K. HOFFMEIER, *BASOR* 380, 2018, p. 1–25.

47. A.H. GARDINER, T.E. PEET, *The Inscriptions of Sinai Part I*, London, 1917, pl. LXXVII; A.H. GARDINER, T.E. PEET, *The Inscriptions of Sinai Part II*, London, 1955, pp. 193–194.

48. M. DIJKSTRA, “A Chief of the Bowmen, Overseer of Foreign Lands at Serabit el-Khadim (Sinai 300+297) and the ‘Dwelling of Sesu’ (Tell el-Borg)”, *ÄgLev* 19, 2009, pp. 121–126.

49. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 514–515.

Greco-Roman period sherds were discovered in that locus.⁵⁰ This led the excavator to believe that brick removal dated to this late period. In total, about 30 sherds from this late period were collected. No other remains from this period were discovered, which suggests that occupation if permanent was limited, and most likely was from transients.

THE MILITARY NATURE OF DWELLING OF THE LION/RAMESESSES

The strategic nature of this ancient military site has already been noted in detail, primarily through its architecture. The 18th Dynasty fort is largely represented by the impressive and unique fired brick moat that measured around 117 × 80 m, yielding a 9 600 m² footprint (fig. 4). Few other elements of this fort have survived, with the exception of the large D-19 structure located just inside the entrance of the fort in Field IV, as well as a small stretch of the defensive wall which was incorporated into the enclosure wall of the second fort.⁵¹ Otherwise, the enclosure wall, along with the entire gate system, has been lost.

The aforementioned Amenhotep II door jambs stood in the doorways of important buildings. The 18th Dynasty stela of Betu, the overseer of horses (*imy-r ssmt*), demonstrates that a unit of chariotry was stationed at “the Dwelling.”⁵² Betu appears to be a Hurrian name, and Hurrians were experts in horsemanship. It is not surprising, therefore, that he was the stablemaster. Whether Betu was in Egypt voluntarily or had been conscripted from POWs● (or the son of one), we may never know, but clearly the appropriate Syro-Canaanite deities associated with horses and chariots, Astarte and Resheph, are depicted on this stela. Fittingly, Astarte is perched on a chair and seated on the back of a horse, while Resheph is identified by the epithet “Lord of the horse stable” (*ršp nb pr iḥw*). Other signs of chariotry at Tell el-Borg include a pair of cheek bridle bits and a limestone saddle finial.⁵³ Then too, there are the equine remains found in association with the second fort, as well as one from the Field VI moat.⁵⁴

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One last point related to chariotry, was the discovery of a stretch of mud/mud brick road between Hebua II (the Khetem of Tjaru) and Tell el-Borg by Hesham Hussein, the General Director for the Sinai Inspectorate who worked many years with us on site.⁵⁵ The fact that there was a road across the sand dunes between Tjaru, the area’s central command, and “The Dwelling” was to facilitate movement of carts with supplies and chariots moving back and forth between the sites.

50. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 177–178.

51. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 184–190.

52. J.K. HOFFMEIER, K.A. KITCHEN, “Resheph and Astarte in North Sinai: A Recently Discovered Stela from Tell el-Borg,” *ÄgLev* 17, 2007, pp. 127–136. See also *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 251–253.

53. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 277–278.

54. S. IKRAM, in *Tell el-Borg II*, pp. 414–423.

55. H.M. HUSSEIN, in *Tell el-Borg II*, pp. 348–354.

Weapons of various sorts were also discovered. A sword (TBO 0395) and an Aegean type lance blade (TBO 0177), unparalleled in Egypt, are among the prize finds.⁵⁶ The lance was apparently used in chariot warfare to attack the enemy's horses. Copper/copper alloy spear/javelin and arrowheads were also found.⁵⁷ These weapons are further testimony to the military nature of the site.

The second or Ramesside era fort was originally designed to employ a moat around the mudbrick enclosure wall that varied in width from 3.6 to 4.1 m thick. For reasons that are unclear, the moat sections found in Field IV A (Fosse A) and Field V Area 2 (Fosse N) were only partially constructed.⁵⁸ Of the former, only 18.5 meters survived. It was likely longer, but a section was lost when the modern canal was dug.⁵⁹ The mudbrick walls of the fosse were laid on a foundation made of various stone fragments and pieces of fired brick. Many of the limestone blocks were *talatat* from an Akhenaten era temple, which prove to be an important dating criterion for this feature. Fosse N, on the other hand, had a wider array for stone blocks in the foundations, including the Amenhotep I door jambs and the Betu Stela, and in the matrix of the fill, the equine remains had been tossed.⁶⁰ 18 m of the constructed moat remained, while a further 23 meters of trench continued to the west of the finished end of the constructed moat. The brick walls were, however, not laid into the trench. This demonstrates that the construction of the fosse was abruptly stopped, thus abandoning a key military defensive feature.

The gate of the Ramesside fort was pylon-like, covered in limestone and extensively decorated.⁶¹ The royal names found on the gate were discussed in the previous section. It is likely that the blocks found in Field I were originally on this gateway and that Ramesses II is the king depicted pursuing Shasu enemies, firing arrows from his chariot.⁶² The other side of the gate may have contained a triumph scene in which the deity (Amun-Re?) extended his arm and offered a sword to the king with the order to extend the borders of Egypt.⁶³ A pair of walls extended from the stone gate to form an open court. At the end of the walls stood a pair of stelae of Ramesses II that may have signaled that this fort marked a section of Egypt's border (fig. 3).⁶⁴

The familiar war scenes of the Seti I relief at Karnak contain stylized icons of the forts across north Sinai and their names are typically recorded. Pap. Anastasi I records a version of the names of this sequence of forts and wells or watering holes. Wells and cisterns associated with forts are also represented at Karnak and their names are often mentioned. In the case of the Seti I panorama, "the Dwelling of the Lion" has a rectangular pool in front of it and a pair of trees by the front corners, but no name is recorded.⁶⁵ At Tell el-Borg, two stone-lined water installations were uncovered that were

56. M. NESKA, in *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 510–514.

57. D. FALK, in *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 514–520.

58. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 217–221, 228–230.

59. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 119–120.

60. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 229–254.

61. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 318–325.

62. J.K. HOFFMEIER, L. PINCH BROCK, "A New Royal Chariot Scene from Tell el-Borg," *JSSEA* 32, 2005, pp. 81–92; J.K. HOFFMEIER, "The Gate of the Ramesside Period Fort at Tell el-Borg, North Sinai," in M. Collier, S. Snape (eds.), *Ramesside Studies in Honour of K.A. Kitchen*, Bolton, 2011, pp. 207–219.

63. TBO I 1 shows the male deity extending his arm (*Tell el-Borg I*, Figs. 88–90), while TBO I 6 portrays another male figure (deity?) with an arm extended, under which the text reads "I give (or have given) to you [///]... your boundaries, there (?) [///]..." (*Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 94–95).

64. See *Tell el-Borg I*, p. 325 and especially notes 134–138.

65. A.H. GARDINER, "The Ancient Military Road Between Egypt and Palestine", *JEA* 6, 1920, pl. XI.

fed by the high water table in the area due to the proximity of the Nile. The first one was in Field II and was located near (north) the Nile distributary. This water installation was somewhat oval in shape, with stairs of reused *talatat* that descended to water level. The other well or cistern (“the Fosse D well”) was located within the walls of the Ramesside fort on the south side of the Nile. This well was at least 7 m long on the western side and at least 2 m deep, with stone steps at the NW and SW corners (the NE and SE corners were not reached).⁶⁶ Since the eastern side was not excavated, it is uncertain whether the structure was originally square or rectangular. By locating the well inside the fort, the troops would have had access to water in the event of a siege, an important military consideration. Should this square or rectangular well be the one depicted in the Seti I relief; its placement outside of the fort (rather than inside) may have been made so that its presence could be illustrated in the relief.

There is some evidence for the military organization of this fort. A small inscribed limestone block, thought to be a name plate (TBOX 27),⁶⁷ contains the name of an officer, “the Weapons bearer (*tꜣi-hꜣw*)” named Shesep who was attached to the “Great Company (*šꜣ ꜣꜣ*) (of) Amun, “Amun appears gloriously and victoriously for Usi-mare Setepenre” (= Ramesses II).” A *šꜣ*, company or regiment, is typically made up of 250 soldiers and 20 regiments made up an army division of 5 000 soldiers. Further, a regiment had three senior officers, the highest ranking of which is the “standard-bearer (*tꜣy sꜣꜣ*).⁶⁸ The weapon’s bearer Shesep was possibly an aide to one of the officers. If our fort was home to this regiment, then it had at least 200 and possibly 250 soldiers stationed there. One curious datum that might elucidate the military organization of the Borg fort and its relation to the nearby central command of Tjaru, is on the Serabit Stela 297/300 previously mentioned. There, an unnamed military officer, with the titles [*Hꜣ*]ry [*p*]dt *imy-r hꜣswt nb tꜣ.wy*, “the commander of the host, overseer of foreign lands,” who stands before an image of “Amun-Re Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands of the Dwelling of Sesu.”⁶⁹ Unfortunately, the name of the officer is not given, but M. Dijkstra, following Eileen Hirsch, identifies him as Usikau, who has the same titles on other Serabit stela from the reign of Ramesses IV.⁷⁰ Whatever the identity of this military commander, it seems doubtful that his command center was based at “the Dwelling.” Nevertheless, the depiction on Stela 297/300 may be commemorating a visit of this officer to this fort, and might suggest that the commanding officers at “the Dwelling” reported this *hꜣry pꜣdt* who was stationed at Tjaru. Since the regiment stationed at Tell el-Borg, “Amun appears gloriously and victoriously,” is from the Division of Amun, it makes sense that this *hꜣry pꜣdt* stands in presence of Amun-Re, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands. This epithet of Amun-Re was also written on a pair of the Amenhotep II door jambs previously discussed.⁷¹ Perhaps this form Amun-Re was the patron deity of the Dwelling of the Lion/Ramesses.

66. *Tell el-Borg I*, p. 362–366.

67. J.K. HOFFMEIER, K.A. KITCHEN, *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 108–111.

68. For the organization structure of a *šꜣ* see A.R. SCHULMAN, *Military Rank, Title, and Organization in the Egyptian New Kingdom*, Berlin, 1964, pp. 26–30.

69. A.H. GARDINER, T.E. PEET, *Sinai Part I*, pl. LXXVII; A.H. GARDINER, T.E. PEET, *Sinai Part II*, pp. 193–194.

70. M. DIJKSTRA, *ÄgLev* 19, 2009, p. 122; E. HIRSCH, “Ramesses III. und Sein Verhältnis zur Levante,” in R. GUNDLACH, U. RÖSSLER-KÖHLER (eds), *Das Königtum der Ramessidenzeit. Voraussetzungen – Verwirklichung – Vermächtnis. Akten des 3. Symposiums zur Ägyptischen Königsideologie, Bonn 7.–9.6.2001*, ÄAT 36, Wiesbaden, 2003, p. 150. ●

71. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 245–246.

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Some marine units were surely attached to “the Dwelling.” Given the presence of the Nile, this is not unexpected. New evidence supports our suspicion. Recently, Orly Goldwasser has shown that some of the royal cartouches found on vessels in North Sinai include a hieroglyph of boat, indicating that these are the names of marine units that functioned in the area. She pointed to one of the Tutankhamun amphora impressions from Tell el-Borg, TBO II 0061, as having a boat sign.⁷² This writing demonstrates that in the late 18th Dynasty, there was a marine unit at Tell el-Borg. This new interpretation of TBO II 0061 makes perfect sense, given the location on the distributary and the proximity of the paleo-lagoon that had direct access to the Mediterranean. It is now evident that the military makeup of this fort was rather complex, with the infantry, chariotry, and navy all being present at “the Dwelling.”

LIFE ON THE EAST FRONTIER

The living conditions of soldiers at Tell el-Borg, i.e. at a stationary location near the frontier, were obviously different from those traveling and bivouacking further east in Sinai or in the Levant. As the interior of both forts has been completely lost, we do not know whether the soldiers and officers lived inside the fortifications or in what were considered residential areas, possibly in Field VI. The only obvious habitats discovered on the site were the reed huts from Field VI. Tents were certainly used during campaigns abroad,⁷³ but it seems unlikely that they served as permanent dwellings, as the fort was located only 4 km south of the Mediterranean coast, making this area prone to cold, wind and rain during the winter months. Our own experience over a decade of work, typically in March-April, confirmed just how cold and wet this season can be. In January 2000, we began surveying and even living in a nearby building, I experienced the coldest overnight of my life! More promising is information about diet. The location of “the Dwelling” by the Nile distributary, along with surrounding wetlands and adjacent lagoon meant that there was an abundance of fish and water fowl available for consumption (not to mention reeds for basketry, mats and arrows). Indeed fish (perch, tilapia and catfish bones) was the most common faunal remains at the site. Consequently, fish was probably the most frequently consumed meat by the residents.⁷⁴ Faunal remains of twenty-two genus of birds were identified, the most common being the freshwater duck. Sheep/goat and pig bones were also found. The latter serves no other purpose than its meat, so clearly pork was eaten at this site. Most unexpectedly was the significant number of bovine remains. Louise Bertini concluded that the residents of Tell el-Borg “relied significantly on cattle for both meat and their secondary products.”⁷⁵ The dietary faunal assemblage analyzed suggests that the diet of the troops stationed in this fort was quite robust, perhaps reflecting the importance and strategic nature of “the Dwelling of the Lion.” They were well fed!

The paleo-botany further indicates that a typical Egyptian diet was enjoyed on site. Bread and beer are the staple of any Egyptian diet. The discovery of emmer wheat and free-threshing wheat,⁷⁶

72. *Tell el-Borg II*, p. 165.

73. J.K. HOFFMEIER, “Tents in Egypt and the Ancient Near East,” *SSEAN* 7/3, 1977, pp. 13–28.

74. M. LOYET, in *Tell el-Borg II*, pp. 390–403; L. BERTINI, in *Tell el-Borg II*, pp. 404–413.

75. L. BERTINI, *op. cit.*, p. 408.

76. C. MALLESON, in *Tell el-Borg II*, p. 381.

along with the presence of bread molds and beer jars, numerous grindstones and mortars, are testimony to dietary essentials. The presence of sickle blades may indicate that some planting and harvesting of grains occurred at or near the site.⁷⁷

Other botanical remains include lentils, figs and grape seeds. The grapes of the Tjaru region were highly valued for the wine produced.⁷⁸ The significant number of wine amphorae, both Egyptian⁷⁹ and Levantine,⁸⁰ were documented. Twenty-six amphorae were discovered in the cemetery area, in a pit thought to be from funerary ritual meals.⁸¹ The appearance of royal names from the 18th Dynasty on jar handles and other vessels show that the Crown was responsible for keeping the wine flowing for the troops! The soldiers at Tell el-Borg seem to have enjoyed a rich and healthy diet, and wine for special occasions.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Evidence for religious practices and cult at Tell el-Borg are scant. Architecturally, in what we have called the “public” space in Field II, the mud brick floor of a structure thought to be a temple was uncovered. Measuring 7.60 m wide and at least 6.75 long, the floor is just one brick thick. In the eastern end of the structure are three constructed rectangles counter sunk through the floor and into the basal.⁸² These might have had plinths set in them, on which statues were placed. According to this scenario, the preserved eastern section was the holy of holies, and the western section of the edifice did not survive. If this poorly preserved building had been a small temple or shrine, it is the only religious structure uncovered, but there is no indication of who its patron deity was.

Elsewhere I have written in detail about deities found at Tell el-Borg and in the immediate area.⁸³ The dominant role of Horus on the eastern frontier is evident from the geographical names, such as the Way(s) of Horus and Shi-Hor, and the epithet Horus of Mesen that is thought to be somehow related to Tjaru.⁸⁴ A small copper alloy statuette of a headed falcon may be the only representation of Horus at the site, although it cannot be ruled out that Ra-Harakhty or Montu was the intended deity. The name of Amun-Ra appears on the Amenhotep II door jambs already mentioned and on another where he is identified as “Amun-Ra who is within Tjaru.”⁸⁵ Nut’s name is also found on two these blocks,⁸⁶ including the epithet “Great one, foremost of Tjaru.” The link with the nearby town of Tjaru may indicate that there was an important cult center for these two deities just a few kilometers away.

Deities associated with childbirth, rearing and protection—popular religion—are represented by Tawert, Hekat and Bes.⁸⁷ These deities remind us that despite Tell el-Borg being a military site,

77. C. McCARTNEY, in *Tell el-Borg II*, pp. 365–379.

78. J.K. HOFFMEIER, J. VAN DIJK, *JEA* 96, 2010, p. 197.

79. R. HUMMEL, in *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 424–425.

80. C. DUFF, in *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 457–459.

81. R. Hummel, in *Tell el-Borg I*, p. 236–258.

82. G. MUMFORD, in *Tell el-Borg II*, pp. 98–104.

83. J.K. HOFFMEIER, “Deities of the Eastern Frontier,” in Z.A. HAWASS, K.A. DAUD, R.B. HUSSEIN (eds.), *Scribe of Justice: Egyptological Studies in Honour of Shafik Allam*, ASAE-Suppl. Cahier 42, 2011, Cairo, pp. 197–216.

84. *Ibid.*, pp. 197–199 for a review of the various uses of Horus on texts from the region.

85. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 245–248.

86. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 246–247.

87. *Tell el-Borg I*, pp. 202–204.

families were present and life continued from generation to generation with the appropriate protective amulets. Foreign deities were also documented. Astarte and Reshep have been already mentioned and studied in detail elsewhere.⁸⁸ The name of the Canaanite goddess, “Anat lady of heaven” occurs on an inscribed block.⁸⁹ Given how little has survived from this remote site that had suffered so much damage in modern times, it is striking that the names of two sky goddesses survived. It might be that given the frontier location the protection of these sky-deities (and we can add Horus as the male counterpart) was particularly needful, as were the martial deities Reshep, Astarte and Seth.⁹⁰

CONCLUSION

Tell el-Borg is an important site on the Ways of Horus only a few kilometers from the major frontier town of Tjaru/Sile. It stood at the junction between the land route from the Levant and the southern Nile distributary, which explains why the military site flourished for over 250 years during the New Kingdom.

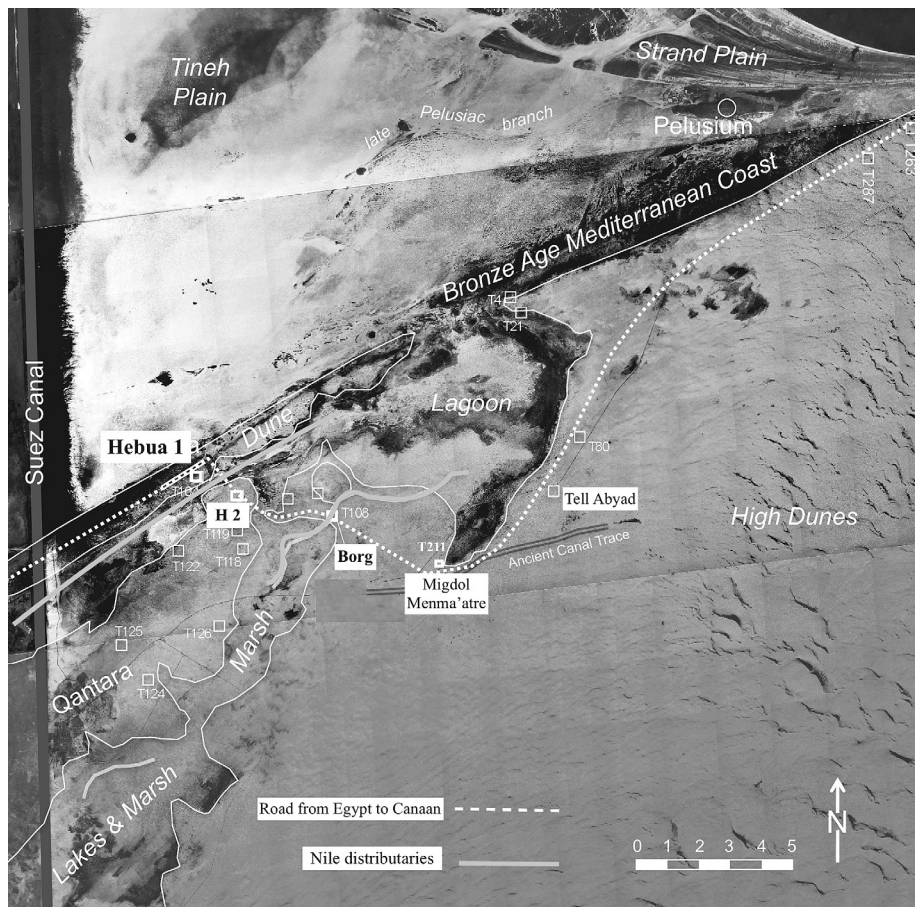


Fig. 1. CORONA image (December 1967) – geological and archaeological data of NW Sinai overlaid by Stephen O. Moshier.

88. J.K. HOFFMEIER, K.A. KITCHEN, *op. cit.*

89. *Tell el-Borg I*, p. 101.

90. A copper alloy image of Seth, see *Tell el-Borg I*, p. 325.

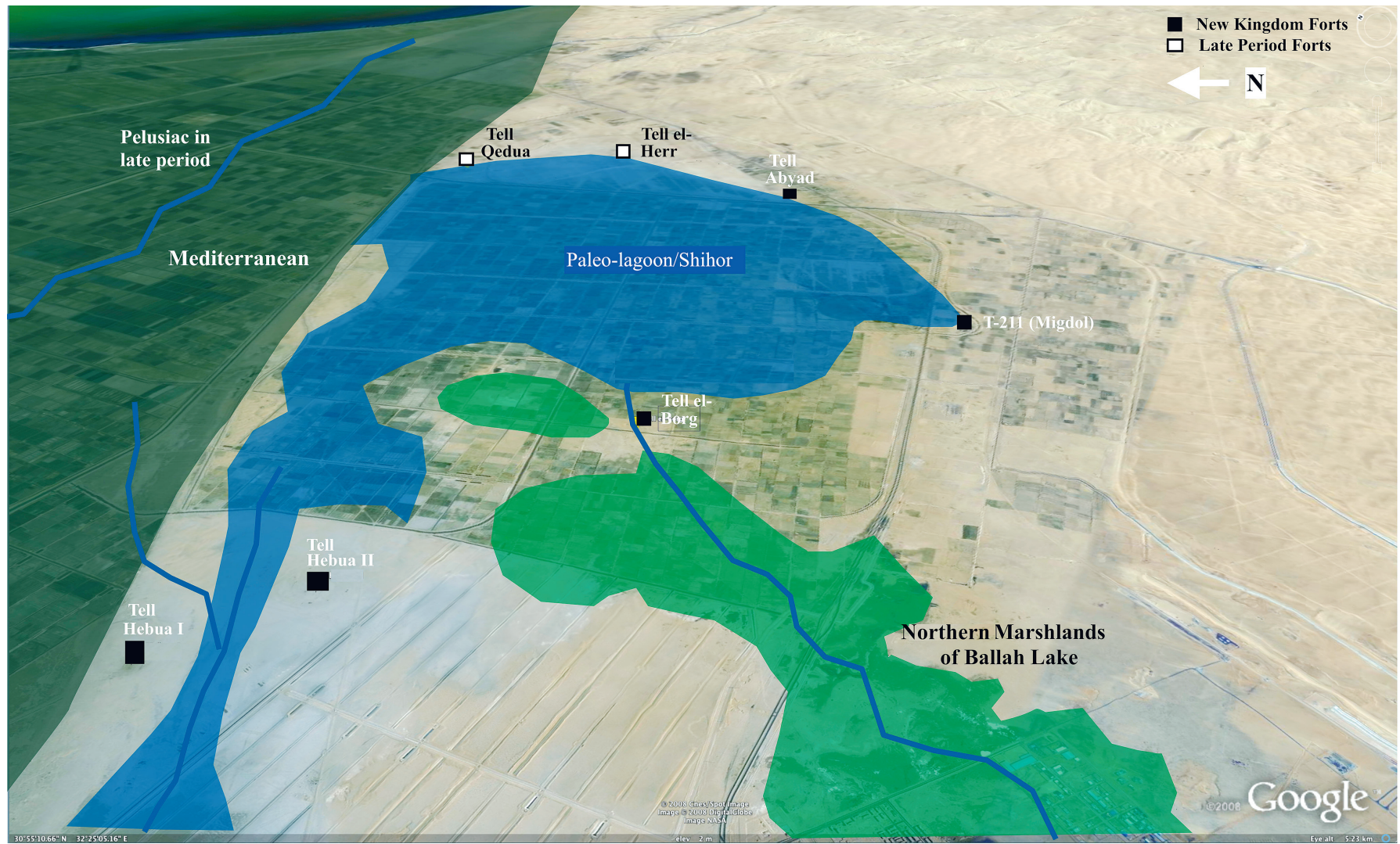


Fig. 2. Google Earth image (2008) – geological and archaeological data of NW Sinai overlaid by Stephen O. Moshier.

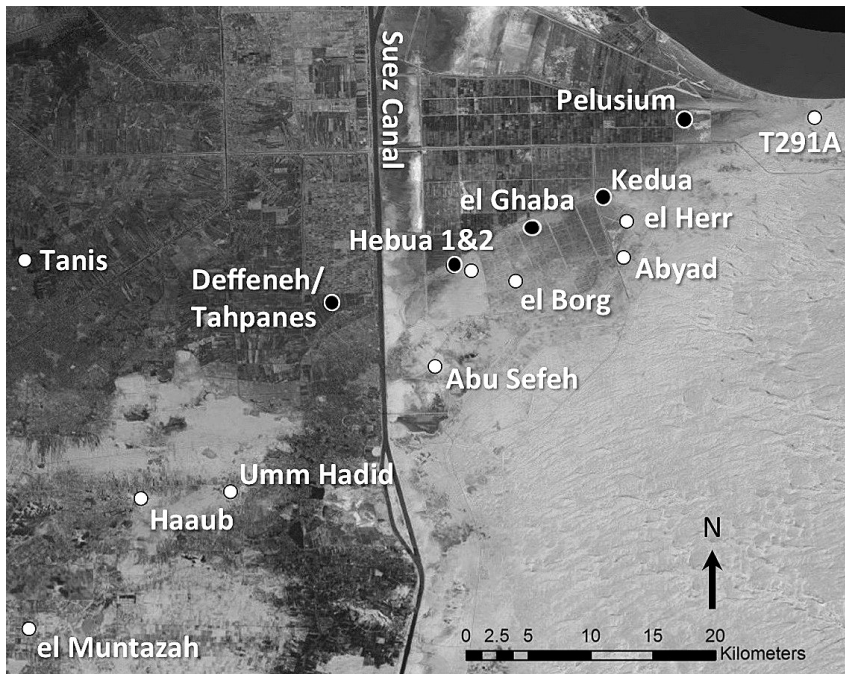


Fig. 3. Google Earth image (2008) – geological and archaeological data of NW Sinai overlaid by Stephen O. Moshier. Toponyms with black dots are Saite period sites.



Fig. 4. Field IV section of the 18th Dynasty moat with fired brick foundations (Photo: North Sinai Archaeological Project).