

NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR ANCIENT BEDOUIN (SHASU) ON EGYPT'S EASTERN FRONTIER AT TELL EL-BORG

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Abstract: Excavations at the military site of Tell el-Borg, just outside of the eastern Delta has produced two New Kingdom forts that were a part of the East Frontier defense system and the military highway, the Ways of Horus. Among the discoveries at Tell el-Borg were the burnt out remains of a cluster of reed huts. This study will investigate who the occupants of these huts may have been. The pottery and C¹⁴ dates suggest that these structures were used in the 2nd Intermediate Period to early New Kingdom. It will be argued provisionally that the occupants of this little community were desert dwellers, possibly Shasu.

Keywords: Tell el-Borg; Sinai; Shasu; Bedouin; ḥryw-šꜥ; šꜥsw; ʕmw; sttyw

First hand knowledge of the ancient desert dwellers who moved between the Levant, Sinai and Egypt, is negligible, and even less is known about their habitat, encampments and social structures. Margaret Drower aptly described the situation with these pastoral nomads relative to Egypt by saying: “on the borders of the Delta, from time immemorial small groups of ... bedawin came to pasture their flocks, tempted by the proximity of better grazing-grounds and possible loot.”¹ Egyptian written and iconographic sources have served largely as the basis of our understanding of these ancient Bedouin, whose material culture continue to elude the archaeologist.

Egyptians had early contact with the peoples to their east in Sinai and southern Canaan before the end of the 4th millennium B.C., as evidence by the presence of significant amounts of Egyptian pottery at several sites.² An Egyptian presence is now attested in south Sinai as early as Dynasty 0 (ca. 3200 B.C.) in the mining district of south Sinai. At Wadi Ameyre, northwest of Serabit el-Khadim, Pierre Tallet has recorded graffiti with the name Iry-Hor, and Narmer and Djer from Dynasty 1.³ King Den of Dynasty 1 is depicted bashing the head of long-haired desert dweller in sandy, hilly terrain on an ivory label.⁴ It documents a military encounter with foes identified as “easterner(s)” (*ibbtj*). This struggle could well reflect Egyptian early efforts to maintain the Sinai routes to southern Canaan and/or to south Sinai. It seems doubtful that this confrontation reflects defensive measures to limit foreign access to the Delta.

Weni, the 6th Dynasty Egyptian official and military commander, reports of military actions against ʕmw ḥryw-šꜥ⁵ (“Asiatic” ḥryw-šꜥ) and ḥryw-šꜥ.⁶ This expression literally means “those who are on the sand,” that is Bedouin.⁷ The identity of the ḥryw-šꜥ is a matter of ongoing debate between scholars who consider them to be nomadic or semi-nomadic desert dwellers of Sinai and the southern Levant,⁸ and a sedentary people of southern Canaan.

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¹ Margaret DROWER, *Egyptians in Sinai and Palestine, Cambridge Ancient History II*, pt. 2, Cambridge 1973, 351.

² Ram GOPHNA, *Southern Canaan During the EB I: The Egyptian Connection*, in *The Archaeology of the Society in the Holy Land* (ed. T.E. LEVY), London 1995, 277.

³ Pierre TALLET, *La Zone Minière Pharaonique Du Sud-Sinai – II: Les inscriptions pré- et protodynastiques du ouadi 'Ameyra (CCIS no 273–335)*, MIFAO 132, Cairo 2015.

⁴ A.J. SPENCER, *Early Egypt: The Rise of Civilisation in the Nile Valley*, Norman 1993, 87.

⁵ Kurt SETHE, *Urkunden des Alten Reich*, Leipzig 1933, 101.9.

⁶ SETHE, *Urkunden des Alten Reich*, 103.7–16.

⁷ Adolf ERMAN and Hermann GRAPOW, *Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache III*, Leipzig 1929, 135, heretofore *Wb*; R.O. FAULKNER, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, Oxford 1962, 175.

⁸ A representative of this position is Bernard COUROYER, “Ceux-qui-sont-sur-le-sable: les Hériou-Shâ,” *Revue Biblique* 78 (1971), 558–575.

Recently Pierre de Miroschedji has offered a thorough well-documented review of the various positions on the identity of the *ḥryw-šꜥ* in Weni's autobiography.⁹ Here is not the place to treat the debate in any detail. De Miroschedji may be right to conclude that Weni's *ḥryw-šꜥ* are a sedentary people, living in or near the sandy coastal dunes in fortified settlements in southern Canaan, in the area later known as the Philistine coastal plain.¹⁰ It seems unlikely, however, that *ḥryw-šꜥ* is limited to only this sedentary people from the end of the 3rd millennium B.C.

The term *ḥryw-šꜥ* continues in use in the Middle and New Kingdoms, and some of these clearly cannot refer to a sedentary people in the southwestern coast of Canaan.¹¹ It seems possible that *ḥryw-šꜥ* can refer to a desert dwelling people whether they are sedentary (periodically?) or more transitory. During our years of life and work at Tell el-Borg in north Sinai, we had first hand contact with Bedouin from the village of Gilbana, east of Qantara and south of Baluzza.¹² They were called "Bedouin" or "Arabs" even though they live in villages in houses made of stone, while others in the area live in tents.

From the 1st Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom numerous literary texts refer to the *šꜥmw*, traditionally rendered "Asiatics," is the term for the Semitic-speaking people who moved across Sinai and infiltrated Egypt's Delta.¹³ In the

Instructions for Merikare, the *šꜥmw* are also called *pḏtyw*,¹⁴ foreigners or tribesman,¹⁵ who move around in search for food (l. 93). The *Prophecy of Neferti* likewise discusses the problems posed by the presence of Asiatic pastoralists in the Delta. He foretells the coming of a savior (Ameny, i.e. Amenemhet I) who will control these infiltrating pests:

One (Ameny) will build the "Walls of the Ruler," life prosperity and health,

To prevent the Asiatics (*šꜥmw*) from going down to Egypt.

They (will) beg for water in the customary manner in order to let their flocks drink.¹⁶

The latter part of this statement seems to allude to the Egyptian policy towards pastoralists entering Egypt, viz. pastoralists were granted short-term access to eastern frontier water sources, of which there was plenty in the northeastern Delta and the Wadi Tumilat.¹⁷ What the Egyptians opposed was giving the pastoralists unbridled access to Egypt who would stay on indefinitely. This apparently was the prevailing scenario during the 1st and 2nd Intermediate Periods when military control of the borders was lacking.

Pap. Anastasi VI contains a message from the scribe Inena, stationed at a fort in the Wadi Tumilat, to his superior. He reports how he handled a situation with a Shasu band,¹⁸ *šꜥsw* being one of

⁹ Pierre de MIROSCHEDJI, *Egypt and Southern Canaan in the Third Millennium BCE: Uni's Asiatic Campaigns Revisited*, in *All the Wisdom of the East: Studies in Near Eastern Archaeology and History in Honor of Eliezer D. Oren*, OBO 255 (eds. M. GRUBER, Sh. AHITUV, G. LEHMANN & Z. TALSHIR; Fribourg 2012), 262–292.

¹⁰ De MIROSCHEDJI, *Egypt and Southern Canaan in the Third Millennium BCE*, 260–270.

¹¹ See references in COUROYER, *Ceux-qui-sont-sur-le-sable: les Hériou-Shá*, and some specific New Kingdom occurrences in Kurt SETHE, *Urkunden Der 18. Dynastie*, Berlin 1961, 83.5, 372.11.

¹² For a decade (1990–2008) I employed men from Gilbana to serve as guards and diggers for our fieldwork. Despite their sedentary status, they considered themselves to be Bedouin.

¹³ For a recent discussion of these texts, see James K. HOFFMEIER, *Israel in Egypt*, New York/Oxford 1999, 54–62.

¹⁴ Wolfgang HELCK, *Die Lehre für König Merikare*, Wiesbaden 1977, l. 91 & 95; *Wb* 1, 570 renders *pḏtyw* as "Barbarenstamm".

¹⁵ Rendered "barbarian" by R.O. FAULKNER in *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, New Haven 1973, 187, with the explanation these were "nomads of Palestine."

¹⁶ Translation in HOFFMEIER, *Israel in Egypt*, 59, based on the critical edition of Wolfgang HELCK, *Die Prophezeiung des Nfr.tj*, Wiesbaden 1970, 56–57.

¹⁷ On the NE Delta, see James K. HOFFMEIER & Stephen O. MOSHIER, *New Paleo-Environmental Evidence from North Sinai to Complement Manfred Bietak's Map of the Eastern Delta and Some Historical Implications*, in *Timelines: Studies in Honour of Manfred Bietak II* (eds. E. CZERNY, et. al.), Leuven 2006, 167–176. S.O. MOSHIER, and A. el-KALANI, *Paleogeography along the ancient Ways of Horus (Late Bronze Age) in northwest Sinai, Egypt*, *Geoarchaeology* 23 (2008): 450–473. For the Delta and Wadi Tumilat, see Manfred BIETAK, *Tell el-Dab'a II*, Vienna 1975, 117–139 and Carol REDMOUNT, *On An Egyptian/Asiatic Frontier: An Archaeological History of the Wadi Tumilat*, Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1989, 18–61.

¹⁸ Here the Shasu are associated with the Trans-Jordanian region of Edom. The Nubian temple at Amrah from the time of Amenhotep III mentions the Shasu of Seir (H.W. FAIRMAN, *Preliminary Report On the Excavations at 'Amrah West, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1938–9*, *JEA* 25 (1939), plates XIII–XVI, 139–44. In the Biblical tradition there is a close connection between Seir and Edom (cf. Genesis 32:3 & Exod. 36:8–9).

the main New Kingdom words for the desert dwelling Bedouin, regardless of their ethnicity or their homeland.¹⁹ The scribe Inena declares:

We have finished letting the Shoshu tribes of Edom pass the fortress of Meneptah-hotphima'e, which is <in> Tjeku, to the pools of Pi-Tum [of] Meneptah-hotphima'e, which are <in> the Tjeku-nome, in order to sustain them and sustain their flocks through the good pleasure of Pharaoh (l.p.h) ...²⁰

This text reflects the approach towards the pastoralists mentioned in Neferti from earlier times. Noteworthy is the name "pools of Pi-Tum," *brkt p(r)-itm*, *brkt* being a Semitic loanword that first appears in Ramesside times.²¹ These pools were likely situated east of Tell el-Retabeh²² where the *Htm*-fortress referred to in this text was located. Renewed excavations at Tell el-Retaba by the Polish-Slovak Mission has included the uncovering of 2nd Intermediate period tombs.²³ Hopefully the new data from these excavations will enable a clearer picture of the foreign element in this region to emerge.

Ellen Morris has shown that the *Htm*-fortresses were located at strategic entry points to Egypt, i.e. on the Ways of Horus in the north and the Wadi Tumilat to the south, with their purpose being for "sealing it (the border) against the unauthorized passage of people and goods."²⁴ This policy is certainly reflected in Pap. Anastasi VI.

As a consequence of this policy of controlling access by pastoralists to Egypt's frontier water sources, one does not expect to find signs of a per-

manent presence, although that might be different in the intermediate periods when people like the Shasu could stay for longer seasons.

In the Ramesside era illustrations of Shasu appear with some regularity in battle scenes, beginning with the incredibly detailed Seti I war reliefs on the outer north side of the Hypostyle Hall at Karnak Temple.²⁵ The entire tableau is made up of four separate scenes, three of which portray Shasu warriors. Two of them depict battles, while a third shows Seti I bringing back POWs from his campaign southern Canaan and Sinai. Other battle scenes, such as those of Merneptah at Karnak also include the taking of Shasu as prisoners. While these dramatic scenes are the most detailed portrayal of Shasu available, including dress, coiffeur, various headgear and weapons deployed, their habitat is not shown.

Little is known about these and others POWs once they came to Egypt, but some may have been pressed into labor for the state. Uvo Hölscher and the University of Chicago expedition to Medinet Habu uncovered the outlines of huts within the Medinet Habu Temple complex.²⁶ Grooves and postholes in the bedrock revealed the plan of one hut and part of a second one. HÖLSCHER suggested a date of or after Ramesses III (1184–1153 B.C.) for the huts.²⁷ Manfred BIETAK has proposed recently that these huts are the four-room house type known from Iron Age Levant, and point to the occupants as having been Levantine prisoners, Shasu (?), who worked on a building or demolition project.²⁸ He generally agrees with the 20th Dynasty date, which is consistent with the period when

¹⁹ Raphael GIVEON, *Les Bédouins Shosou des documents égyptiens*, Leiden 1971.

²⁰ Ricardo CAMINOS, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, London 1954, 293.

²¹ *Wb* 1, 466; L.H. LESKO, *A Dictionary of Late Egyptian I*, Berkeley 1982, 159. *Brkh* is the word for pool in Hebrew and is attested in Ugaritic (L. KOEHLER & W. BAUMGARTNER, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Leiden 2001, 161; James E. HOCH, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period*, Princeton 1994, §131).

²² This identification was made by Manfred BIETAK in *Tell el-Dab'a II*. Vienna 1975, 88–90.

²³ For a recent discussion of the identity of Per-Atum/Pithom, see J. K. HOFFMEIER, *Ancient Israel in Sinai*, New York 2005, 58–65. Excavations of the Polish-Slovak mission at Tell el-Retabeh have resumed, see Slawomir RZEPKA *et al.*, Tell el-Retaba 2007–2008, *Ä&L* 19 (2009), 241–280; *idem.*, The New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period at Tell

el-Retaba, *Ä&L* 21, (2011), 139–184; *idem.*, Egyptian Mission Rescue Excavations in Tell el-Retaba. Part 1: New Kingdom Remains, *Ä&L* 22/23 (2012/2013), 253–288; *idem.*, Tell el-Retaba from the Second Intermediate Period till the Late Period. Results of the Polish-Slovak Archaeological Mission, Seasons 2011–2012, *Ä&L* 24 (2014), 39–120; *idem.*, From Hyksos Settlers to Ottoman Pipe Smokers: Tell el-Retaba 2014, *Ä&L* 25 (2015), 97–200.

²⁴ Ellen MORRIS, *The Architecture of Imperialism: Military Bases and the Evolution of Foreign Policy in Egypt's New Kingdom*, Leiden 2005, 804–809.

²⁵ Epigraphic Survey, *The Battle Reliefs of King Sety I Vol. 4, Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak*, Chicago 1986, plates 1–6.

²⁶ U. HÖLSCHER, *The Excavations of Medinet Habu II*, Chicago 1939, 71–72 & fig. 59.

²⁷ HÖLSCHER, *The Excavations of Medinet Habu II*, 71–72.

²⁸ Manfred BIETAK, An Iron Age Four-Room House in Ramesside Egypt, *Eretz Israel* 23 (1992), 10*–11*.

this style of house begins to appear in the southern Levant. Bietak points to the raids of Ramesses III against the Shasu reported in Pap. Harris as the possible explanation for how these Asiatics came to Egypt.²⁹

Additionally, Pap. Harris contains the king's claim, *fh.i n3y.sm ih3rw*,³⁰ "I destroyed their tents." The significance is that it was not the Egyptian word for tent that was used, viz., *im3w*, rather the Semitic word תהא,³¹ which demonstrates that

tents were also a type of habitat used by Shasu. One would not expect tents and huts, especially those that may only have been used seasonally, to leave a permanent imprint of their presence.

Beyond the four room style huts from western Thebes, there are only a few signs in the archaeological record for pastoral nomads in Egypt. At Tell el-Maskhutta John S. HOLLADAY discovered mud-brick tombs, the contents of which showed that contained MB IIA Canaanite cooking pot

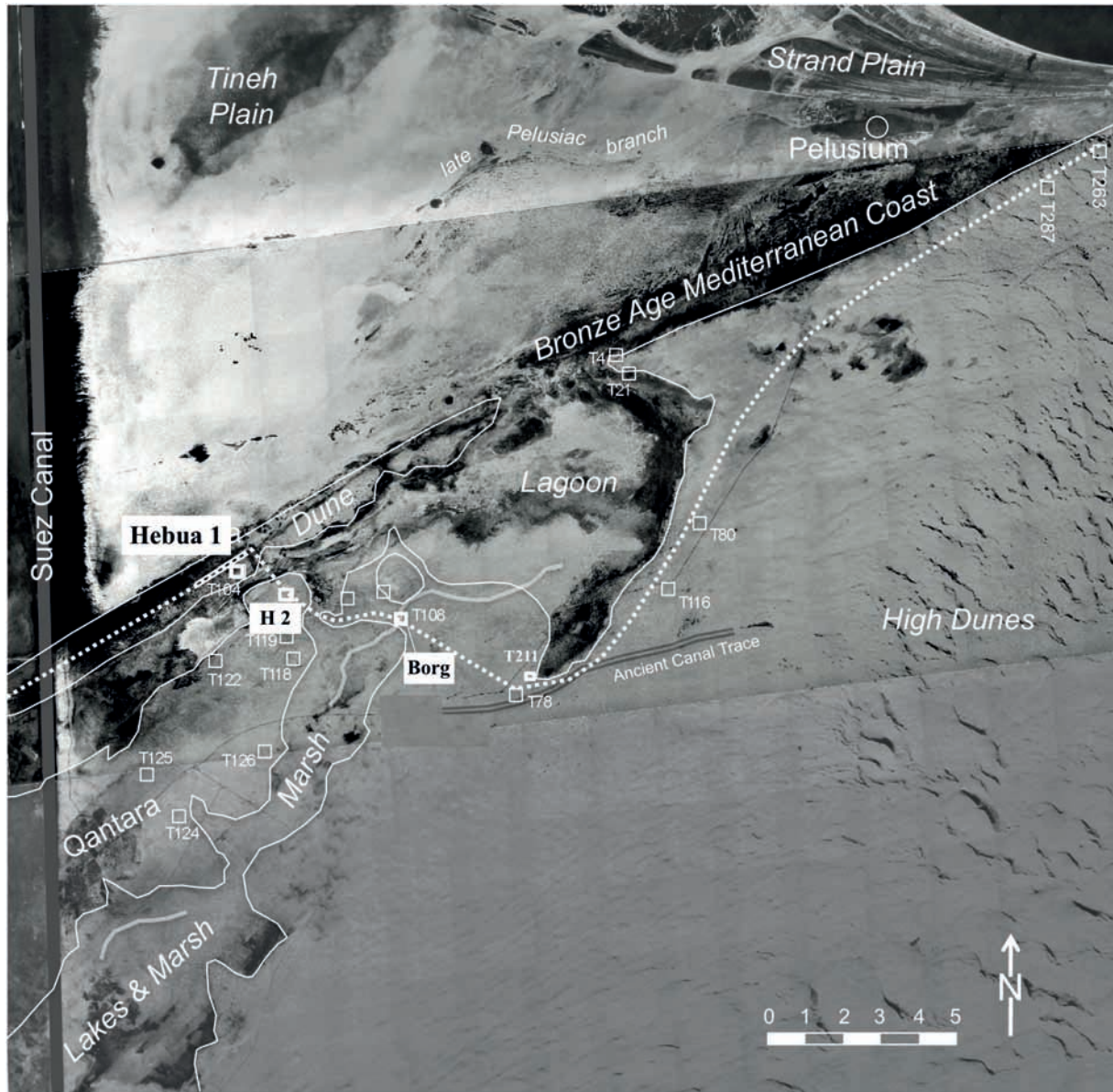


Fig. 1 Corona Image of NW Sinai. Archaeological and Geological data integrated into image by Stephen O. Moshier.

²⁹ BIETAK, An Iron Age Four-Room House in Ramesside Egypt, *Eretz Israel* 23 (1992), 12*.

³⁰ W. ERICHSEN, *Papyrus Harris I*, Brussels 1933, §76.10.

³¹ *Wb* I, 119. For a discussion of the Egyptian terms for tent, see James K. HOFFMEIER, Tents in Egypt and the Ancient Near East, *SSEA Newsletter* VII, No. 3 (1977), 13–28.

rims, donkey burials, a scarab of Sobekhotep IV and other objects that pointed to the tomb owners being Asiatic.³² Holladay believes that there was a short-lived 2–3 ha. settlement there during the 2nd Intermediate/Hyksos Period, although no domestic architecture was found,³³ suggesting that temporary dwellings of some sort housed this non-Egyptian population.

In the light of this evidence, it may be that the presence of huts and other temporary dwellings in and around this area as reflected in the Arabic name, Maskhutta. It preserves the Semitic word סכּה, *sukkot* (cognate with Egyptian Tjeku/*tkw*)³⁴ meaning huts or pens (for animals), and Tjeku/*tkw* is the name of the area known today was the Wadi Tumilat³⁵ where pastoralists entered Egypt from ancient times until direct access was cut off in the 19th century when the Suez Canal was opened.

Just recently excavations at Tell el-Dab^a/Ezbet Helmy have revealed more than 30 sheep/goat burial pits that were cut into the abandoned early 18th Dynasty palace.³⁶ No burial goods were found, nor as any domestic architecture of any sort found associated with these interments, which BIETAK dates to the period ca. 1400–1360 B.C.³⁷ The identity of the people responsible for the burials is uncertain, but he proposes two possibilities: local/Egyptian shepherds or pastorals who came in from Sinai or from points further to the east. He entertains the suggestions that “they may have been the Shosu,” which is an interesting possibility.³⁸

Shasu at Tell el-Borg?

Tell el-Borg is a military site that was a part of the New Kingdom eastern frontier defense network. It is located about 10 km east of the Suez Canal at Qantara Sharq, and 2.5 km north of the El-Arish Road (N30° 55.516' E 32° 24.621') (Fig. 1). It is situated 5 km ESE of Hebua II and 7–6 km from Hebua I.³⁹ An elevated area of the roughly oval shaped tell was about 400 m long E-W, while the maximum width of the mound was about 250 m N-S. The elongated site from the western end is oriented towards the northeast. At the highest area at the center of the site stands about 3–4 m above the surrounding low-lying areas, although most of the elevation is only 1–2 m. As our subsequent archaeological and geological work revealed, most of this elevation was not from human depositions, but from geological formation.⁴⁰ In other words, what appears to be a tell was in fact naturally formed elevated area and the ancient humans who lived in that area over two centuries did not add significantly to the stratigraphy of the site. Deflation across the site is substantial, making it impossible to know how much humanly laid deposits were lost.

Furthermore, just to the south of this high ground a Nilotic distributary was discovered by our staff geologists; it measured around 125 m. wide.⁴¹ The waters from this channel separated the higher ground of Tell el-Borg, where tombs and public space were situated, from the area to the

³² John S. HOLLADAY, *Cities of the Delta, III: Tell el-Maskhuta*, Malibu 1982, 44–47, plates XL–XLV.

³³ HOLLADAY, *Tell el-Maskhuta*, 44–47 and John S. HOLLADAY, “Tell el-Maskhuta” in *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt* (ed. K. Bard), London/New York 1999, 786–789.

³⁴ Yoshiyuki MUCHIKI, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords in North-West Semitic*, Atlanta 1999, 232–233.

³⁵ James K. HOFFMEIER, *Ancient Israel in Sinai*, New York 2005, 65–68.

³⁶ Manfred BIETAK, Nomads or *mnmn.t*-Shepherds in the Eastern Nile Delta in the New Kingdom in “*I Will Speak the Riddles of Ancient Times: Archaeological and Historical Studies in Honor of Amihai Mazar on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*,” Vol. 1 (eds. A. Maeir & P. de Miroschedji), Winona Lake 2006, 123–136.

³⁷ BIETAK, Nomads or *mnmn.t*-Shepherds, 123–124.

³⁸ BIETAK, Nomads or *mnmn.t*-Shepherds, 132–133.

³⁹ For preliminary reports, see J. K. HOFFMEIER, & M. ABD EL-MAKSOU, A New Military Site on the ‘Ways of Horus’ – Tell el-Borg 1999–2001: A Preliminary Report, *JEA* 89 (2003), 1–27. J. K. HOFFMEIER, Tell el-Borg on Egypt’s Eastern Frontier: A Preliminary Report on the 2002 and 2004 Seasons, *JARCE* 41 (2004), 85–111. J.K. HOFFMEIER, Recent Excavations on the ‘Ways of Horus’: The 2005 and 2006 Seasons at Tell el-Borg, *ASAE* 80 (2006), 257–279. J. K. HOFFMEIER, The Walls of the Ruler in Egyptian Literature and the Archaeology Record: Investigating Egypt’s Eastern Frontier in the Bronze Age, *BASOR* 343 (2006), 1–20. Final report in press, James K. HOFFMEIER, *Tell el-Borg*, Vol. 1, Winona Lake.

⁴⁰ Stephen O. MOSHIER, Geologic Setting of Tell el-Borg with Implications for Ancient Geography of the Northwest Sinai, in *Tell el-Borg*, Vol. 1 (ed. J.K. HOFFMEIER; Winona Lake, in press), Chapter 3.

⁴¹ HOFFMEIER & MOSHIER, New Paleo-Environmental Evidence from North Sinai, 167–176; MOSHIER, and A. EL-KALANI, Paleogeography along the Ancient Ways of Horus, 450–473.

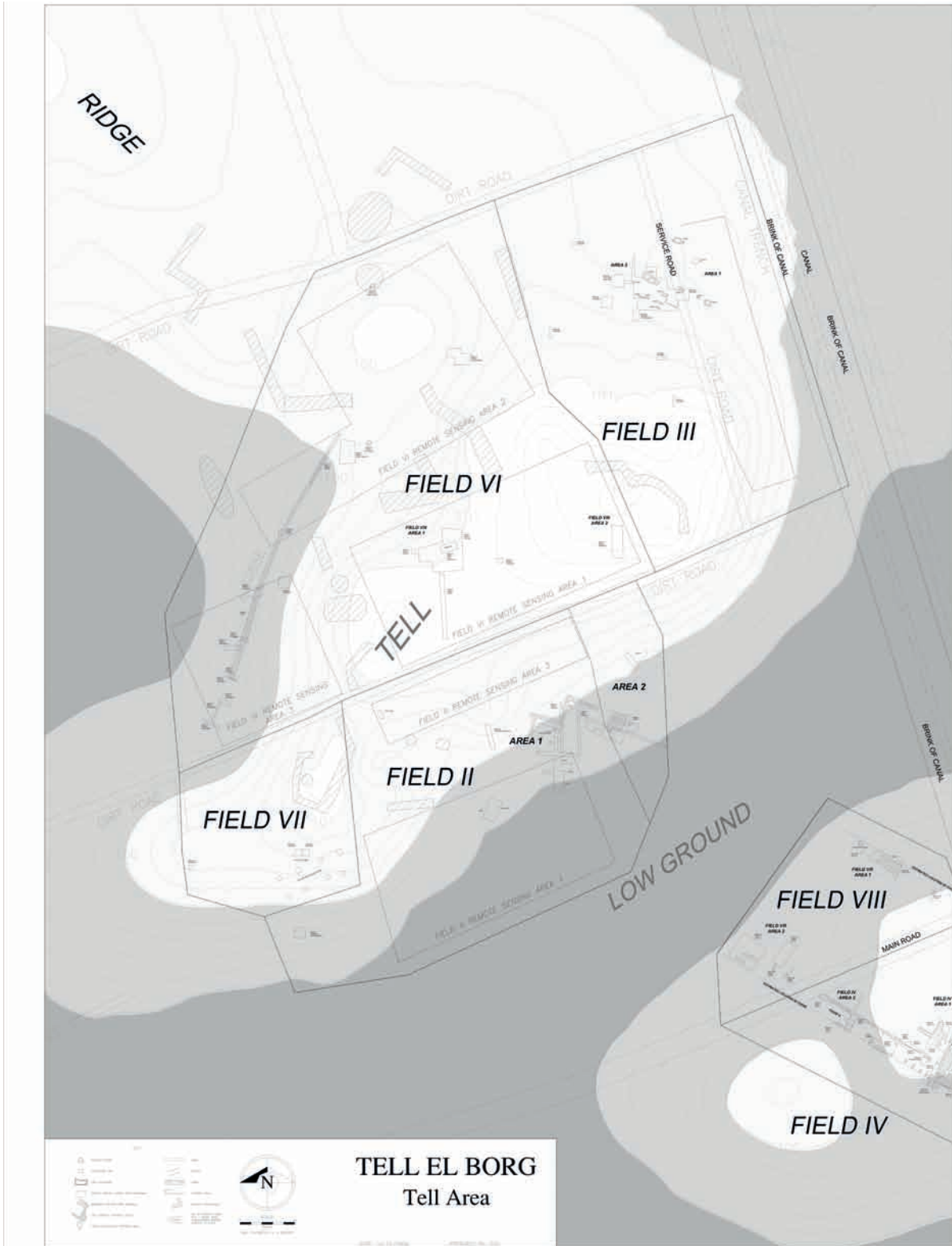


Fig. 2 Site plan from survey of David Olney.

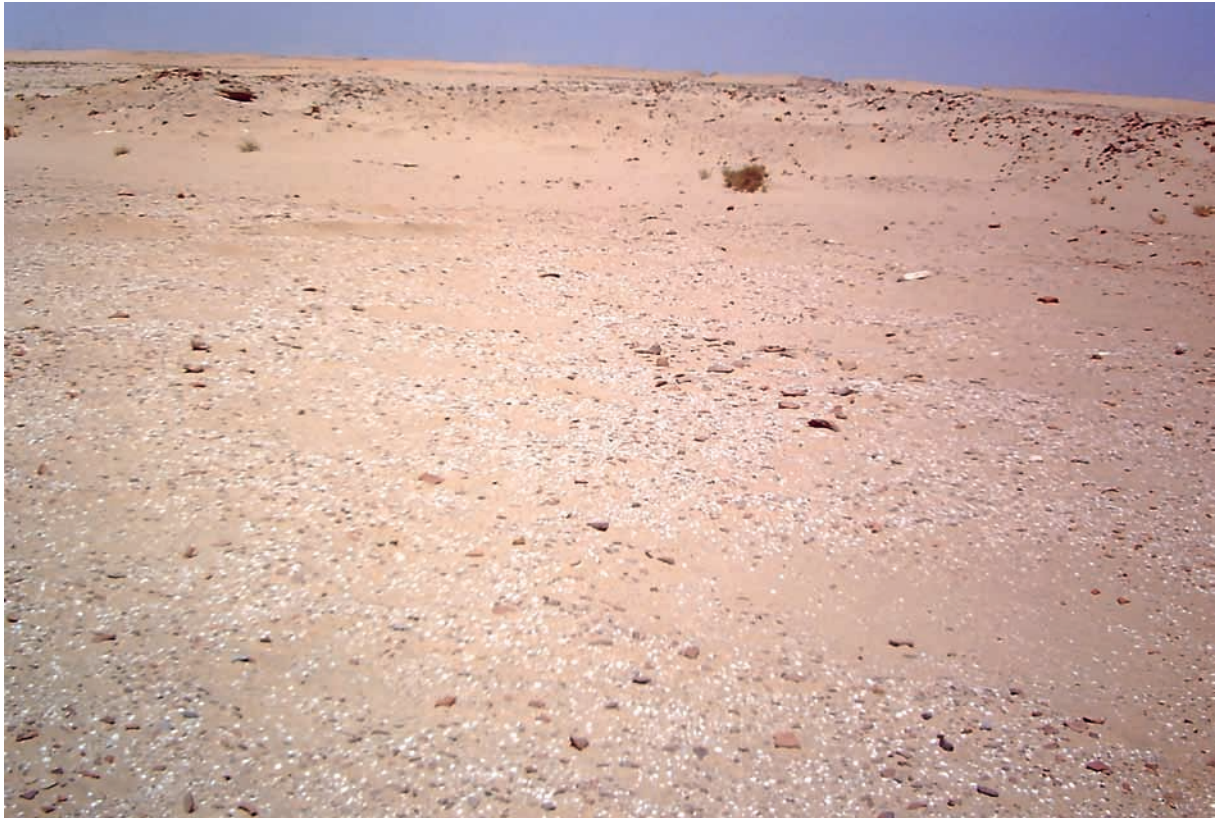


Fig. 3 Field VI, AA before excavations with piles of bulldozed debris in the background from recent military activity.

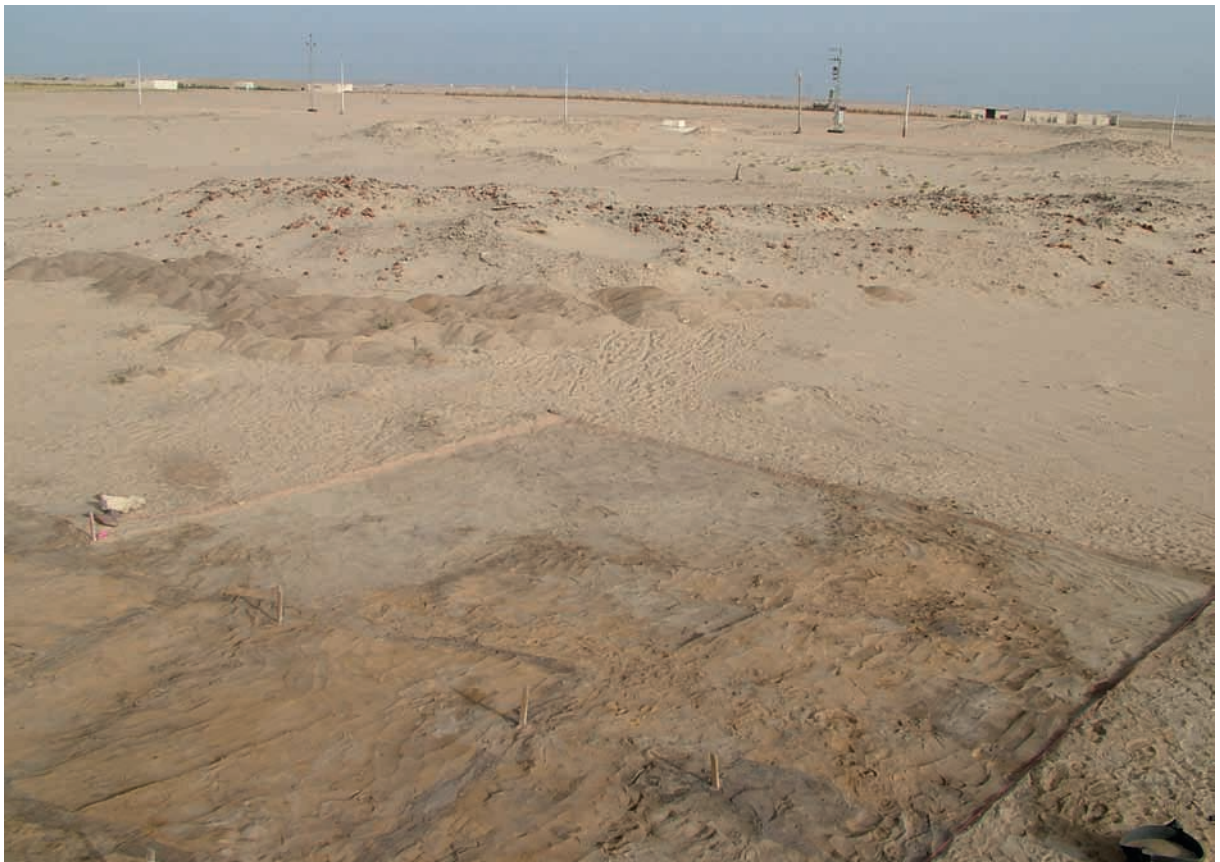


Fig. 4 General view of Field VI, AA, looking northwest (Photo North Sinai Archaeological Project = NSAP).

south of the waterway where the 18th Dynasty fort, followed by its Ramesside period successor, were located (Fig. 2).

Although the high ground of the mound (Field VI) was occupied in recent times by Israeli and Egyptian army units, and both did serious and widespread damage to it, it is towards the central area atop of the mound where traces of habitation were uncovered. To this data we now turn (Fig. 3).

Excavation Results from Field VI, Area 1

In 2002 excavations began in Field VI that occupies the highest location on the tell. Under the direction of Thomas W. Davis, a 5 × 15 m long trench was scraped carefully in the eastern sector of Area 1. Sterile basal sand lay just below the surface, approximately 5 cm deep (Fig. 4). A straight dark (Munsell 10YR 4/2) charcoal flecked stain was identified within the central block. The stain extended down at least 10 cms into the surrounding sands. The dark material appeared to be burnt sand and carbonized reeds. The initial working hypothesis was that this represented a Bedouin encampment of the recent past. Consequently it was thought that the sherds found in the feature resulted from surface sherds being pushed into the sand by the placement of the reeds.

A possible fire pit was identified on the surface 2 m to the east of the straight stain. The fire pit was sectioned and a carbon sample removed for dating. The carbon dating yielded surprising results,⁴² indicating a late Middle Kingdom date for the features:

1. Sample TEB02/1 from the fire pit yielded a conventional date of 3630 +/- 140 BP;
2 Sigma Cal. 2200–1770 B.C. (95%); 1 Sigma Cal. 2450–1630 B.C. (68%)
2. Sample TEB02/2 from the burnt stain yielded a conventional date of 3570 +/- 130 BP;
2 Sigma Cal. 2290–1600 B.C. (95%); 1 Sigma Cal. 2120–1740 B.C. (68%)

However, the date range for the calibration curve was very broad and such an ancient date for the features was widely questioned by the excavation team, although a date from the early New Kingdom and back to the 2nd Intermediate Period seems plausible.



Fig. 5 First signs of Hut 1 in Field VI, Area 1, Unit B = AA (Photo NSAP).

The investigations in the 2004 season were designed to expose the features to better understand their nature, and to gather sufficient carbon for a suite of radiocarbon dates to settle the question of the antiquity of the features. When the season began in 2004, the straight-line feature and the fire pit could be clearly identified from the surface. A much wider area was scraped carefully surrounding the initial unit. Eventually, an area measuring more than 20 × 20 m. was opened; this square (Unit AA) was re-examined in 2005. Work in Field VI during 2005 focused on delineating features in the southern half Unit AA to determine if the cluster of cultural features extended into other portions of the field.

Numerous cultural and natural soil loci were identified just below the surface fill in the main test block (Fig. 5). The surface sand was very disturbed and as a guiding principle, all features and deposits were treated as potentially disturbed unless they were clearly intact beneath the upper stratum. A bulldozer and heavy vehicle traffic had disturbed the sand during the recent military occupation. In some places, the disturbance extended nearly 20 cms below the surface (cmbs). The surface was pockmarked with numerous robber pits, military and/or squatter refuse pits. Bulldozer cuts had obliterated any cultural features at the north edge of the block. Numerous fire pits were present, some of which were modern. In the field, the key to identifying the age of the fire pits was assumed to be the presence or absence of fish bones. Fire pits that had fishbone were likely to be ancient since the Nile distributary that ran through Tell el-

⁴² Collection Carbon 14 samples were of non-archaeological materials collected in cooperation with members of the Geological Survey of Egypt and testing was done at Beta Analytics.



Fig. 6 Fire pit, L 2, Unit B=AA (Photo NSAP).

Borg had desiccated more than two millenniums ago (Fig. 6).⁴³ Bones from four types of fish were identified, viz., *Lates niloticus* (Nile perch), *Clarias* spp. (Nile catfish), *Tilapia* sp., and *Synodontus* sp. (another type of catfish).⁴⁴

A further support for this argument was the observation that some of the pits that lacked fish bones contained modern glass in the matrix. On at least one occasion, a modern fire pit had intruded into an ancient one. All of the fire pits were simple holes in the ground with no permanent aspects such as stones being used as a base or a hearth ring. Robber holes were clearly identified by white sand fill. They were removed as they were identified.

The dark brown (Munsell 10YR 4/2) stains, lacking any stone or mud-brick architecture, had to be carefully delineated through a combination of shallow (1–2 cm) shovel scrapping and meticulous troweling. The best method was to cut away surrounding sterile sand, and leave the feature lines emergent from the background. The dry conditions at Tell el-Borg and the strong Sinai sun quickly leached out the stains, making them more vulnerable to being swept away by the daily afternoon breeze. On more than one occasion, newly exposed elements were nearly invisible after 15 minutes.

A small 150 × 150 cm probe was excavated within the square feature in Hut 2A (see below). This probe was excavated to a depth of 150 cm into sterile sands. No cultural material was recov-

ered from the probe. This confirms the absence of any deeply buried cultural deposits in Field VI.

Field Results: Area 1

A total of 35 loci were identified within Area 1, Field VI. Some of the loci appeared to form individual structures and are discussed together below. This analysis assumes that all of the stains identified as “Hut” elements are contemporary, which cannot be definitively demonstrated when the stains are not physically linked together. However, the clear indications of fainter stains, overridden by darker ones, provides for a convenient method for discerning phasing. This allows for the grouping of alignments with a fair degree of probability.

The disturbed sands yielded miscellaneous small finds which included fragments of narrow copper alloy tools (awls?) (TBO 450, 469, 474, & 497),⁴⁵ a rim fragment of a pale green faience vessel (TBO 443), a light blue faience vessel fragment (TBO 471), flint blades (TBO 442, 458, 464, 466, & 463), and a variety of bead types including faience (TBO 446, 447, 466 & 482), stone, and ceramic (TBO 460, 465 & 481). Ground stone tools included quern fragments (TBO 444 & 540), grinding stones and a possible sling stone (TBO 459 & 462). The ceramic remains from this Area 1 point to an early occupational history from the Second Intermediate Period through early to mid-18th Dynasty (see Excurses 1), and the flint blades point to Sinaitic and Levantine origins (see Excurses 2).

Hut 1

The first loci identified in the north of the test block were eventually designated Feature 1 or Hut 1 (Fig. 7a & 7b). Hut 1 appears to be the remains of a rectangular reed hut and associated pits and structures. The main structure measured 7.5 m east west along its south edge and 3.75 m along the east edge. The outline stain, L.003, was approximately 30 cm in width. The stain consisted of fragments of burnt reed, darkened sand and occasional small (<1 cm) clumps of burnt daub. Reed impressions were preserved on at least one piece of daub (TBO 771; Fig. 8a & 8b).

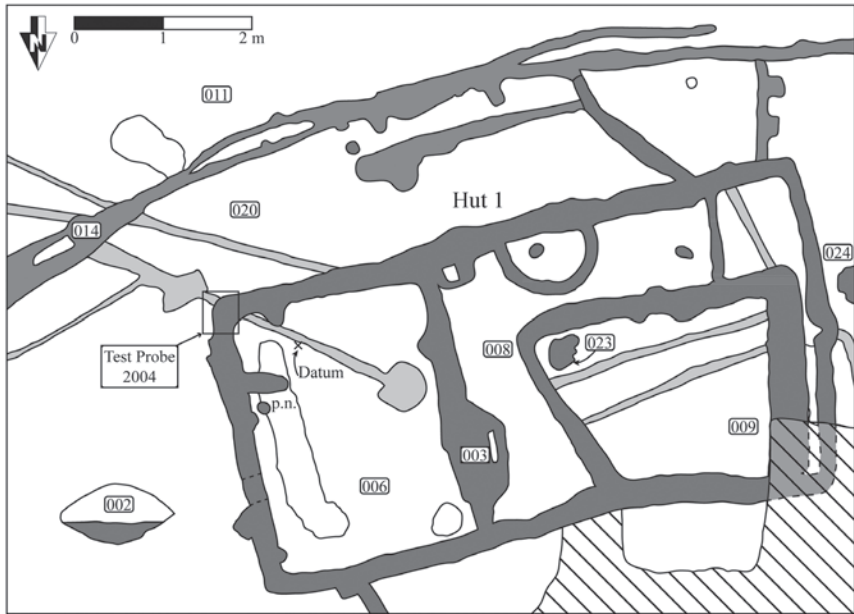
⁴³ See note 33.

⁴⁴ Michelle LOYET, Tell el-Borg Faunal Report on the First Three Seasons of Excavations in *Tell el-Borg II* (ed. J.K. HOFFMEIER), Winona Lake, forthcoming.

⁴⁵ TBO = Tell el-Borg Objects: this is our registration prefix used for small find registration.



a)



b)



c)

Fig. 7 a) Hut 1 (Photo NSAP); b) Hut 1 plan (Field drawing by Thomas Davis, digitally enhanced by Joshua Olsen); c) Hut 1 and Hut 3 plan (Field drawing by Thomas Davis, digitally enhanced by Joshua Olsen).



Fig. 8 a) Piece of mud daub (Photo NSAP); b) Piece of mud daub, verso (Photo NSAP).

The outline of the structure was nearly complete, except for approximately 1 meter in the northwest corner, where a bulldozer had destroyed the stain. No visible doorway or entry space was identified. Periodically, semi-circular stains extended beyond the wall from the inside and outside edges. These stains represent the remains of reed bundles, placed to strengthen the reed walls of the structure. This type of construction is still used in Egypt today. The huts shown in Figure 9

were spotted by HOFFMEIER in 2004 while driving several kilometers north of Tell el-Borg (Fig. 9). Two of the circular, beehive-shaped huts are connected by a fence, all of which is made of reeds and smeared with mud. Henein NESSIM has recently documented the techniques used for making of reed huts in the Lake Manzala region in our own day.⁴⁶

Feature 1 was subdivided into three spaces, designated Loci 006, 008 and 009 (from east to west). L.006 was the largest space with an internal measurement of 260 × 340 cms or 8.84 m². Once the interior edges of the locus were identified, all of the burnt staining within the area was treated as *in situ* material and screened. It is likely that the thin, non-concentrated carbonized material represented either collapsed roofing material, remains of the side walls, or possibly floor matting.

L.008 is the central space of the hut, forming an “L” shape, with the base along the south side. The north/south leg is from 90 cm to 1.70 m wide and 3.25 m long; the east/west space measures 1 m × 4.5 m long. The internal walls are slightly lighter in color. A large patch of ash bulged into the space along the eastern separation. This may be the product of a bundle leaning against the divider that



Fig. 9 Huts located north of Tell el-Borg and east of Hebua II, 2004 (Photo James K. Hoffmeier).

⁴⁶ Henein NESSIM, *Pêche et chasse au lac Manzala*, Cairo 2010, 385–401.



Fig. 10 L. 008 circular feature within Hut 1 (Photo NSAP).

burnt in place, or a reinforced section of the structure. The relatively centralized location of the expanded segment of the divider may indicate a structural role, perhaps a double bundle of reeds or another type of thickened support. A lot of ash was scattered across the surface of the locus suggesting roof collapse. The walls of L.008 had numerous reed bundles in their construction, particularly along the north separator wall that divides L.008 from L.009 (at least three). The average bundle stain extends 10 cm out from the wall and 20–25 cm along the wall in a rounded shape.

A semi-circle of ash from burnt reeds extends north from the south wall of L.008. In the center of the semi-circle is a small posthole (Fig. 10). This strange feature may indicate a platform or shelf. Directly above this area was a modern fire pit.

L.009 is the easternmost section of the hut, 225 cm N/S and 310 cm E/W at its largest internal measurement. All of the walls of the space show internal buttressing. When the area was re-cleaned at the beginning of the 2006 season, L.009

appeared to be a separate square room, not directly connected to the easternmost wall of Hut 1 suggesting a separate construction or occupation phase.

L.008 may represent a connector space, or shared familial space that links the two private spaces, L.006 and L.009. The strange ash feature and the thick accumulation of ash along one wall suggest that this space was more crowded, not employed for personal use such as sleeping, but for communal storage. Since the entire outline was only cleared, but not excavated, it is possible that some of the apparent outline is not the product of reeds that were driven into the ground, but may reflect burnt matting that followed the wall line and collapsed across possible openings. Thus, a doorway or reed curtain, if burnt in place, would produce the same surface signature as a wall that was anchored in the soil, although the cross section would be different.

A double line of stains (L.014) delineated the exterior space to the south of the hut (Fig. 11). This feature is the remains of a reed fence line that



Fig. 11 Fence lines that enclose area within which is Hut 1 & Hut 3 (Photo NSAP).

extended from the eastern baulk for at least 15 meters in a curving semicircle separating Hut 1 from another hut to the south (i.e. Hut 2). The fence appears to have two alignments with irregularly spaced reed bundle buttresses (Fig. 12). The fence is shallow (<15 cm) and lighter in color than the hut outlines; it contains less charcoal and ash. Short alignments appear to link the fence and Hut 1 near the southwest corner making the fence contemporary with the main occupation of Hut 1. The ceramics (20 sherds) from the space (L.020) between the fence line and the huts were 30% Levantine in origin and included a Cypriot milk bowl fragment, and two black-rimmed bowl sherds. This early 18th Dynasty material is consistent with the material recovered from inside the hut and from the hut stain. (For an analysis of some of the Second Intermediate to early 18th Dynasty ceramic remains, see Excurses 1 below).

A large fire pit (L.002) lay within L. 020, two m east of Locus 003 (Fig. 6). The stain formed an irregular oval, approximately 160 cm N/S by 200 cm E/W. L.002 consisted of at least 2 distinct firing episodes separated by 3–4 cm of burnt sand. The radiocarbon date from 2002 came from material from the bottom layer of the fire pit (Sample 1



Fig. 12 Reed bundle fence posts (Photo NSAP).

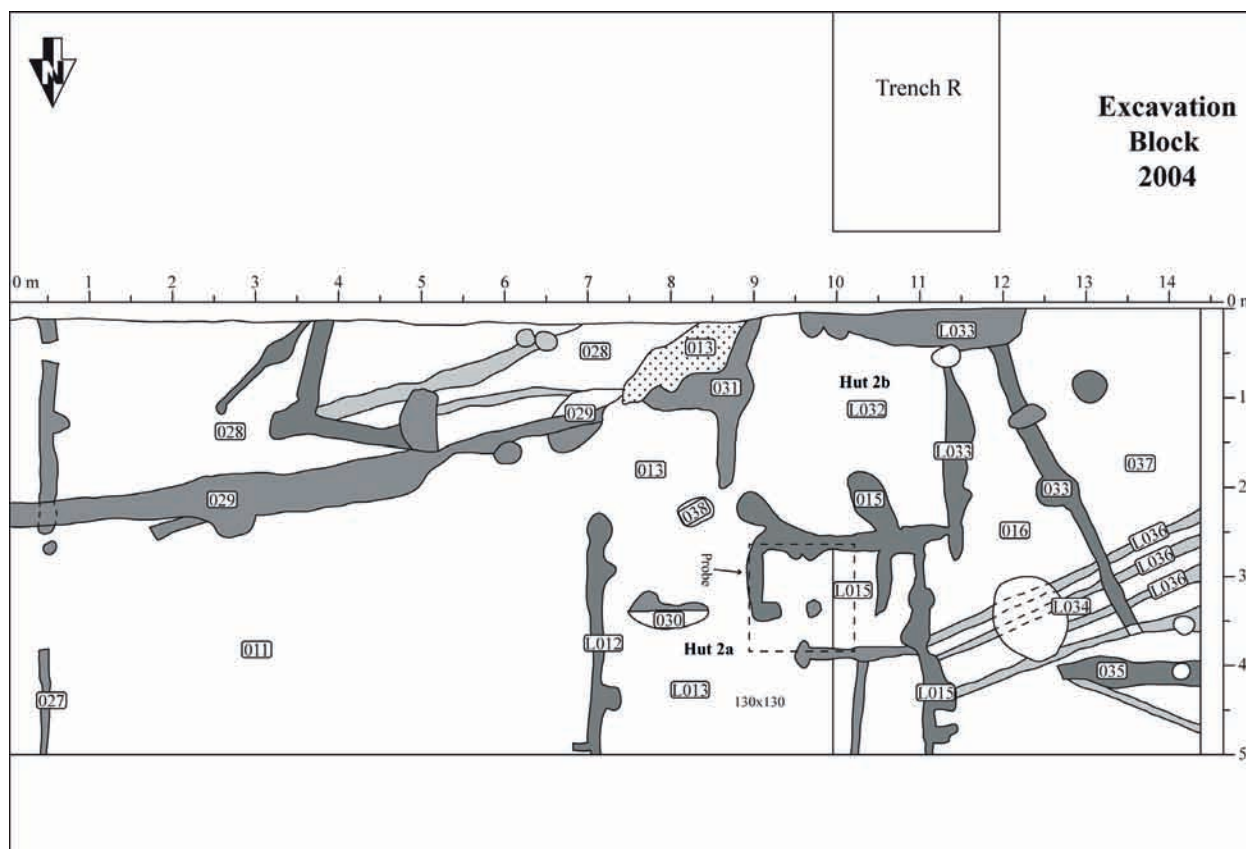


Fig. 13 Plan of Hut 2a & b and Hut 4 (Field drawing by Thomas Davis, digitally enhanced by Joshua Olsen).

above). The feature contained small, vitrified pottery sherds, probably present on the site when the fire pit was first used. One Levantine amphora fragment was identified amongst non-diagnostic New Kingdom marl sherds. Fish bones were also present.

This may have been the main cooking fire for the structure. The layer of sand dividing ash layers probably was blown over the first fire after it was extinguished. A second fire was then built in the same spot, suggesting L.002 likely represents two closely contemporary use episodes, maybe even a daily succession of fires. The fire appears to have burned very hot as the sand is discolored and slightly vitrified. The top covering of sand appears uniform, and was not burnt, suggesting that the sand was blown over the fire pit after final abandonment. The fuel appears to have been dung, reeds, and small branches/roots of the local vegetation.

Some of the diagnostic sherds from the Hut 1 have been studied and included in *Tell el-Borg I*. According to Rexine HUMMEL, two early markers

were found in this hut, viz. a Tell el-Yehudiah juglet sherd⁴⁷ and painted rim of a black-rimmed bowl (see further Excursus I).

Hut 2

The floor plan, wall construction and most likely the function of Hut 2 is rather different from Hut 1 (Fig. 13). The main structures in the Hut 2 stain cluster consisted of two squared areas adjacent to one another. The walls were uniformly thin and light in color, containing less visible charcoal and burnt reed fragments. The stains evidenced the same texture as the burnt lines from Feature 1. The walls do not form a continuous line, but included gaps and isolated postholes associated with the gaps. Most of the lines appeared to include reed bundles.

It is possible that the original ground surface was slightly higher in the southern portion of the Field VI, Area 1 excavation block. If so, the level at which the lines were isolated during excavation

⁴⁷ See Rexine HUMMEL in *Tell el-Borg I*, 375. The Yehudiyah fragment was very small and worn, and therefore, was not entered into our pottery registry as a TBP (=Tell el-Borg pottery) as a small find and hence, was unfortunately, not photographed.



Fig. 14 Section of hut wall showing the base (Photo NSAP).

would be correspondingly deeper in relation to the original reed structure. As a result, less of the original burnt lines would have been remaining when the excavation team first identified the stains. Since the reed walls narrow near the base (Fig. 14) and if the excavation surface was deeper, the remaining stains would be thinner and lighter in color producing the feature signature that has been recorded here.

The northernmost squared structure, Hut 2A, had an interior space measuring 3.75 m E/W by 2.75 m N/S (Fig. 13). The stain had a depth of only 7 cm. This is unlikely to be a major structure, perhaps simply a screen or flimsy animal pen. L.015 was a complex sequence of reed stains, which delineated the north, south and west sides of Hut 2A. The northern side of Hut 2A was partially closed with a short reed alignment and two separate reed posts forming the side. The placement of reed posts suggest a designed entryway, although there is less than a meter separating the fence line from the edge of Hut 2A. It is impossible to determine if the fence line was present at the same time as Hut 2A.

The southwest corner of Hut 2A contains a rectangular inner room, 175 cm × 125 cm. a separate post appears to screen the small 20–25 cm opening. The northern closing reed alignment appears to be only abutted to the main outline of L.015 and may indicate either a movable screen or a later addition, changing the function of the smaller space (Fig. 13). The small screened space leaves a 150 cm opening along the south side of Hut 2A. A line of 3 larger posts or supports, approximately 40 cm south of the opening in Hut 2A makes a partial screen along the length of the south side of L.015. The easternmost post is isolated (L.038) but in line with the southern terminal post of L.012, suggesting a more open screened area perhaps with the posts supporting a roof, creating a primitive portico. A relatively large fire pit isolated inside of Hut 2A (L.030) support the idea of a more open space. The fire pit 55 cm × 110 cm, yielded some fish bones but no ceramics. The interior (L.013) yielded only a small number of pottery sherds, including black-rimmed bowls and Levantine sherds; 1 red-slipped bowl base had been used as a tool of unknown function. It was perforated

and had soot marks on it (on the ceramic materials, see Excurses 1).

Hut 2B, south of Hut 2A, was a more enclosed space delineated by substantive linear staining. The delineated interior space, L.032, measures 240 cm × 230 cm and yielded ash patches, ceramics and bone fragments.

Hut 2A and 2B appear to be contemporary structures as the western stain of L.033 joins the Hut 2A alignment at the northwest corner of Hut 2B. Unfortunately, a modern robber pit has destroyed the corner linkage along the south edge of Hut 2B. L.033 extended at least 10 cm into the surrounding matrix with even burning. Reed bundles are visible to a depth of 15 cms and suggest a real structural role. One bundle measured nearly 40 cm across.

The southern wall of Hut 2B may be something much more substantive as it is nearly 50 cm wide and extends into the southern baulk separating the main trench from Trench R. The eastern end of this stain is marked by two reed bundle posts immediately adjacent to each other. It is possible that the central space in Hut 2B was accessed from the south although the apparent association with Hut 2A suggests a focus to the north and east.

There appears to be a well delineated courtyard, marked by a thin fence line (L.027) running along the eastern baulk of Area 1, the main fence line (L.014) and a long linear feature, probably another fence-type structure, along the south edge of Area 1 (L.029). The ceramic sub-assembly from the courtyard (L.011), although limited in number, was comprised of an unusually high percentage of Levantine wares (> 30%). Most of the sherds were tiny and abraded heavily, suggesting exposure to animal/foot traffic and wind abrasion. The sub-assembly included an incised carinated bowl fragment of the Second Intermediate Period, four black-rimmed bowl fragments and other early to mid 18th Dynasty marls. The identifiable forms were small bowls and small store jars. Small finds included 2 faience beads (TBO 510), 1 ceramic bead, a ceramic “game” piece (TBO 504), and two ground stone fragments (TBO 512 & 539).

L.029 is a major stain forming a concave line running from east baulk towards the south where it terminates at the eastern extension of L.031. It is possible that L.031 should actually be considered an element of the barrier line and not a hut member. Originally, the main stain was very broad and mottled indicating a mixture of sources. Upon further excavation, it narrowed to appear to be a

robust curved fence, with a visible indentation sloping towards the center of the line. It separates the open area east of Hut 2. The fence overrides a small fire pit, L. 029, near Hut 2B. This indicates a change in function here, perhaps seasonally.

Hut 3

The Hut 3 stain cluster was identified approximately 150 cm west of the west wall of Hut 1, north of fence L.014 (Fig. 7c). The lines were cleared, but not excavated. The lines appear to be the outline of a large double hut, extending into the disturbed zone to the north. A rectangular closed shape, 125 × 300 cm extends almost to the fence line. This is attached to a much larger curving line with two extensions running to the north. This may be a larger hut similar to Hut 1. Extensive disturbance west and north of these features and within them made their excavation a lower priority. A large 100 cm × 200 cm fire pit (L026), which appears ancient, lies along the western baulk. A small storage or trash pit, 50 cm wide by 15 cm deep (L024), is located near the west wall of Hut 1 within the open area between the features. The pit yielded a bronze knife that exceeds 10 cm in length (TBO 494), charcoal, and a minimal sub-assembly of small sherds. Its ancient nature cannot be definitively proved due to the absence of fish bones. It does not appear to have a structural function.

L.010 is a fire pit measuring 85 cm × 160 cm, located southeast of Hut 3 and southwest of Hut 1, within the curve of the fence line. Ovoid in shape, the pit evidenced relatively intense burning with numerous fragments of burnt reed. A fair amount of fish bones are present so this appears to be an ancient fire pit. Carbon samples and four liters of flotation were taken (analysis of this material forthcoming in Tell el-Borg II). No other cultural material was recovered.

Earlier Occupation

At least two phases of activity are visible in Field VI, Area 1. When the interior was cleared, a faint stain running SE/NW was uncovered. The stain terminated in a round posthole/reed bundle hole near the west wall of the hut (light gray features in Fig. 7b–c). The stain was cut by the main structure wall and clearly predated Hut 1. The earlier phase line continued beyond the southeast corner of the structure, was crossed by the main fence line (L.014), and continued to the east baulk of the exca-

vation block (Fig. 7b). This likely represents an earlier fence line as it was much thinner at the base than the main structure outline. Previous phase lines were also visible within L.008 and L.009, although no coherent structure could be determined (Fig. 7a–c). A fire pit (L.023) within L.009 may be associated with the earlier activity in Field VI.

This earlier occupation may have been separated from the main phase by a very short interval. No visible charcoal was seen in the early lines and they seem to be the product of surface sands filling in when structures were removed. No pottery could be definitively associated with the earlier lines. It is unlikely but not impossible that L.025 represents a structural remnant of the earlier occupation, although if so, all connections have since disappeared.

A series of thin parallel lines (L.036) cross the open area L.016, west of Hut 2A (Fig. 13). The lines underlay the fire pit L.034. They appear to be a series of small fences, that terminate at the west wall of Hut 2A. Earlier phase lines are also visible south of the open area to the east of Hut 2A and under Hut 3. The lines do not form discernable structures. Except for the earlier phase lines under Hut 1, the earlier material only survives in the open courtyard (?) areas of the excavation zone.

Area 1 Discussion

Chronology: The original 2002 conventional carbon dating from Field VI Area 1 indicated a late Middle Kingdom/early New Kingdom date for the features. The dates from 2005 Season, run as AMS dates, provide a more accurate picture. The dates suggest at least 2 phases of occupation on the site, a late Second Intermediate/early New Kingdom date and the main occupation in the early 18th Dynasty. A fire pit (L.023) overlain by Hut 1 yielded an AMS radiocarbon date of 3310±40 BP with a 2 sigma calibrated range of 1690–1510 B.C. The other three dates indicate a relatively tight range of occupation for the main phase of the occupation. The 2 sigma calibrated date ranges are: 1530–1410 B.C. from the fence line (L.014); 1500–1380 B.C. from a fire pit (L.010); and 1530–1400 B.C. from Hut 1 (L.003).

All three dates show the features are contemporaneous and date to the pre-Amarna 18th Dynasty. The entire final complex appears to have been destroyed at the same time, as the later phase stains share the same characteristics in terms of color, texture and evidence of burning. The total

ceramic assemblage from Field VI supports the radiocarbon dates. The predominant black-rimmed bowls, an early to mid 18th Dynasty type, falls into this range. The Cypriot imports have a use life that overlaps with the bowls, as does the Mycenaean material. The diagnostic Levantine material also falls into the earlier half of the Late Bronze Age sequence. Taken together, this material indicates that the Field VI settlement was occupied during the early 18th Dynasty, probably contemporary with the early fosse fort. This area of the site may not have been occupied domestically during the Ramesside period.

Spatial Organization and Activities

The floor plan of the reed features uncovered in Field VI Area 1 suggests conscious spatial organization. The major fence lines appear to separate the visible features into four major clusters: Hut 1; Hut 3 and their accompanying courtyards; Hut 2A, 2B; and the area to the south of fence line (L.029). Both major fence lines were replaced at least once in their uselife. This spatial separation suggests the delineation of nuclear family space within a larger kinship grouping.

The organization of the Hut 1/ Hut 3 cluster suggests organized activity areas. Most communal tasks probably took place in the open courtyard within the fence and outside of the hut outline. The external fire pits (loci 002, 010, and possibly 026) indicate that cooking and food preparation occurred external to the huts. The obvious danger of fire makes this a rational choice. This is supported by the recovery of ground stone tool fragments from either disturbed contexts above the open courtyards, or from the cleanup of the courtyards. The phasing of fires in L.002 indicate repetitive activity, although the fires could have been lit within a very short time and do not need necessarily imply abandonment and re-occupation of the hut. Cooking was probably by direct heat using ceramic cooking vessels as no identifiable boiling stones were found.

The floor plan of Hut 2A and 2B is not as clear as Hut 1. Hut 2B is more closed with Hut 2A being very open in plan. Hut 2B may have been the sleeping space with Hut 2A being a more communal space. Hut 2A is marked by the distinctive use of isolated reed bundles, which may have held up a roof, creating a portico-like effect. A small fire pit, probably contemporary with the use of Hut 2A provides a focal point immediately in front of a

small squared off space. The small size of the fire and its location within the apparent boundaries of the space suggest that it may have fulfilled a social function rather than a purely utilitarian one.

It is tempting to associate this structure with a more overtly communal role, such as a gathering place for the family or a larger kinship unit. Hut 2A has an oblique opening onto a wide courtyard area (L.011) measuring more than 36 m². L.011 has no fire pit or other structural indications of domestic activity. This could have been a family/clan gathering place. Perhaps the small squared off space within Hut 2A was set aside for the use of a single high status individual or to store/display a significant artifact. The minimal size of the directly associated material assemblage precludes any definitive statements.

Another possibility is that Hut 2A and 2B are short-term animal pens reused and rebuilt during the occupation of the main huts. The flotation from Field VI identified sheep dung indicating that domestic animals were quartered amongst the human occupants.⁴⁸

The ceramic sub-assemblage from the excavation in Field VI Area 1 is almost entirely domestic in character, with small black-rimmed bowls and small store jars predominant. The amount of pottery recovered in situ is small, although it is consistent with the overlying disturbed material. This sub-assemblage probably represents household utilitarian wares. A relatively large amount of Levantine material was recovered, in some case nearly 40% of a locus assemblage. A few luxury items were also recovered from here although very few luxury imports were from good contexts. The Cypriot sub-assemblage included sherds of White Slip 1 and II milk bowls, Base Ring I and II juglets, and Red Burnished wares. Mycenaean stirrup jar fragments and stone vessel fragments were also found. These luxury items recovered from disturbed contexts may be associated with activities subsequent to burning of the huts and were intermixed by subsequent deflation and modern activity.

The variety of non-ceramic material recovered from the area indicates generalized domestic life. The evident deflation of the area combined with mechanical stripping during the modern military occupation, created a palimpsest of material preventing the affiliation of most of the recovered

finds with a distinctive occupational/chronological episode. The copper alloy knife recovered from the small storage/refuse pit was broken in antiquity; this was not a weapon, rather it was a tool. Other copper alloy finds included needle fragments. The artifacts recovered were probably used in compound tools, perhaps to cut the reeds or to harvest local grains. One arrowhead fragment was recovered. Outside the excavated area, a suite of ground stone tools were recovered in general surface collection of Field VI. It is likely that this type of site furniture would have remained here on a semi-permanent basis. The ground stone tools were probably used for food processing.

Personal items include a variety of beads and a small fertility amulet of Taweret (Fig. 15). A number of deliberately rounded small circular sherds were recovered from the surface of Field VI Area 1. Although these may have a variety of uses, they could have been used as gaming pieces, indicating leisure activity by the hut occupants.

The main occupation phase of Field VI Area 1 provided some evidence of animal husbandry from the flotation material recovered from L.003, the main walls of Hut 1. This was not surprising as it was initially assumed that the features were the product of semi-nomadic peoples with associated



Fig. 15 Faience (?) Taweret amulet (Photo NSAP).

⁴⁸ Claire MALLESON, "Report on the Charred Plant Remains at Tell el-Borg," *Tell el-Borg II*.

domestic flocks. It is certainly possible that animals were penned nearby. The fires all yielded fish bones, but no animal remains. Animal products were almost certainly used on site, but have left no evidence, other than the use of dung as fuel. It is probable that the earliest use of this area was to pen animals. The faint early phase stain alignments could represent a series of light, animal pens that were periodically replaced. In this scenario, the occupational space would have been elsewhere, perhaps under the modern military defenses.

Observations and Speculations

The ancient cultural features uncovered in Field VI Area 1 are the remains of a domestic quarter dating to the earliest occupation of the site. The first phase of occupation (a fire pit and non-structural fence lines) predates the first fosse fort, possibly as early as the 17th century B.C. These features suggest animal enclosures, not domestic dwellings. These were probably sporadically used by the local transient population, or by travelers passing through on the coastal route to Egypt, before the Egyptian garrison occupied the site. The main domestic occupation dates to the 15th century B.C. and may also predate the construction and use of the first fosse fort. The huts and associated features appear domestic in nature, organized on a familial level, with animals quartered amongst the huts. It is possible that Hut 2A may have a wider communal role.

Bound reeds are a traditional building material in Egypt from pre-dynastic times up to the present day. It has been long recognized that some of the earliest buildings were made of reeds and stand as the models for earliest brick and stone temples and palaces in early dynastic times.⁴⁹ Vernacular architecture also made use of reed bundles and still does in the Delta and the Sinai (Fig. 16). The late G. R. H. WRIGHT, the dean of Near Eastern architectural archaeologists, commented favorably on the building properties of reeds: "This is a very effective and versatile building material for light shelters. Some of these plants have very robust stems that serve as rigid frame members in themselves; others can be bundled together to form rigid members; still others can be latticed and inter-

woven. Above all such elements can be woven into substantial and durable matting which, hung between frames, forms efficient wall paneling."⁵⁰ All of these elements were probably present in the hut features at Tell el Borg. Bundled reeds are clearly used as buttressing along the walls of the huts and along the fence lines (Fig. 12). Wright goes on to mention that reed architecture often employed mud plaster, creating a form of wattle and daub construction;⁵¹ small fragments of daub were recovered from L.003 (Fig. 8a–8b), the outline stain of Hut 1.

The archaeological record creates a mixed portrait of the occupancy of Field VI Area 1. The presence of ceramic materials, albeit in sherd form and not restorable pots, suggests more permanent use of the site. Nomadic, transient populations would have probably used goatskins for liquid containers, leaving a minimal archaeological signature. Post-depositional movement of the sherd material could account for some of the finds, such as the few clay coffin fragments found in Area 1; however, the ceramic sub-assemblage is too large and varied to be explained solely in this way. The large fire pit east of Hut 1 (L.002) evidences repeated use. The ground stone artifacts are portable, but could also have been deliberately left on site in a cycle of repeated occupation.

The likeliest candidates for the identity of the occupants that produced the main phase in Field VI Area 1 are the original inhabitants of Tell el-Borg, the Shasu, although the precise time span and the nature of their presence remain uncertain. The remains from Field VI probably represent the remains of a Shasu encampment on their "home ground." Several scenarios present themselves:

1. The field wide destruction may have been deliberate, evidence of the arrival of the Egyptian garrison who destroyed the huts of the local "Asiatics" to eliminate a possible threat. Of course, the destruction may have been an accidental fire, although the lack of evidence of a rebuild argues against this idea. It is possible that the entire site may have been abandoned for a number of years when the garrison arrived and the fire was part of the site preparation.
2. Another possibility is that the huts represent a seasonal occupation of this portion of the site

⁴⁹ I. E. S. EDWARDS, *The Pyramids of Egypt*, Baltimore 1961, 60–76; Richard WILKINSON, *The Complete Temples of Egypt*, London 2000, 16–18 & 126–128.

⁵⁰ G. R. H. WRIGHT, *Ancient Building Technology* Vol. I, Historical Background, Leiden 2000, 50.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 51.



Fig. 16 Bundles of reeds for sale in Suk in Sharqia province (Photo Thomas Davis).

by (temporarily) non-hostile Shasu, from as early as the Second Intermediate Period (as the sherds and C¹⁴ suggest) and down to the early decades of the first fort, which we date to the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II.⁵² They would have come for a short periods of time to trade with the garrison or with the merchants who stopped off at this site, along the banks of the easternmost branch of the Nile. It is difficult to say whether or not the small campsites noticed by Eliezer Oren in his surveys in north Sinai represent habitat of such people or not.⁵³ The small amounts of Cypriote and Mycenaean wares could have come onto the site as the result of individualized, low-intensity trade from passing merchant vessels. Once the trade goods were exhausted or the local market saturated, the semi-nomadic occupants of the huts may have moved on, and the

garrison may have burned the huts as a way of removing the refuse left behind.

Trade with the garrison may not have been the only motivation of the hut occupants. They may have housed a small family group that was passing through the frontier posts. Traffic could have been seasonal with various groups settling down for a short time near the garrison during the summer to be close to a water source, or to gain the protection of the garrison in unsettled times.

3. A symbiotic relationship between Shasu/pastoralists and a military garrison beyond trade is also worth considering. Bedouin throughout the millennia have served as scouts and/or guides for travelers and armies across north Sinai. In the story of Sinuhe,⁵⁴ it reports that when he returned from his exile in the northern Levant he stopped at the frontier town and mil-

⁵² HOFFMEIER, *Tell el-Borg I*, 196–97.

⁵³ Oren only mentions “campsites” in various articles, but never elaborates. See for example “The Establishment of Egyptian Imperial Administration on the ‘Ways of Horus’: An Archaeological Perspective from North Sinai,” in *Timelines: Studies in Honour of Manfred Bietak II* (eds. E. CZERNY *et. al.*; Leuven 2006, 279–202.

⁵⁴ The discussion about Sinuhe is based on the critical edition of A.M. BLACKMAN, *The Story of Sinuhe*, Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca II, Brussels 1932.

itary stronghold known as “the Ways of Horus,” i.e. the site of Tjaru/Sile, presented-day Tell Hebua.⁵⁵ There Sinuhe was met by a *ts im nty m-s3 phrt*⁵⁶ which has been variously translated, e.g. “commander in charge of the patrol” by William Kelly SIMPSON,⁵⁷ while Miriam LICHTHEIM offered “commander in charge of the garrison,”⁵⁸ and Ellen Morris rendered it as “commander in charge of the frontier patrol.”⁵⁹ There Sinuhe waited until King Senusert I sent a ship to ferry him to the royal residence (Itjtawy), and with the ship gifts were sent “for the Asiatics (*sttyw*) who came with me to conduct me to the Ways of Horus” (B 245–46).

Sttyw is the term used in the Middle Kingdom for Levantine and Sinaitic bedouin.⁶⁰ Proof of this suggestion is also found in the story of Sinuhe when he was escaping Egypt and entering Sinai; he nearly died of thirst. Fortunately he was rescued by a *Sttyw* who gave him drink⁶¹ and their chief (*mtn*) who had been in Egypt recognized Sinuhe. It is noteworthy that Simpson translates *mtn* as “bedouin chief.”⁶² Moreover, Faulkner notes that the word *mtn*/*mtn* literally means “path finder,”⁶³ an apt meaning for a bedu. The Wörterbuch offers the same interpretation (Wb 2, 176).

Further evidence that Shasu-like people worked with the military is that when Ramesses II marched to Kadesh, he got intelligence from two Shasu, whose reports turned to be false; they had been planted by the Hittites.⁶⁴ This account illustrates that the Egyptian military was accustomed to using Shasu for military intelligence and the Hittites knew it as well!

Later still, the Assyrians recognized the need to have friendly Arabs in north Sinai in anticipation of their conquest of Egypt. In his study of the Assyrian invasions of Egypt, A. Kirk GRAYSON,

observed that as early as 732 B.C. Tiglath-Pileser III took the first steps towards the eventual conquest of Egypt when he seized “control over Sinai, the road to Egypt. He appointed an Arab sheik called Idi-bi’il as his representative in the area and installed him in a newly formed office with the appropriate title, ‘Gate-keeper on the Border of Egypt.’”⁶⁵

Conclusions

Located on the frontier of Egypt, technically just beyond Tjaru/Sile, Egypt's traditional border town, we have uncovered evidence of habitat that can very likely be assigned to Shasu or Bedouin within the Bronze Age horizon. Such discoveries are rare and hence will likely contribute to our understanding of these furtive people whose footprint in the archaeological record is negligible. Future investigations of military establishments on Egypt's frontiers may further expand our knowledge of such desert dwellers who frequently interacted with sedentary populations throughout the ancient Near East.

EXCURSUS I

Early Sherds from Field VI, Area 1

Jars (Plate I)

1. Rim of slender jar. Prov: VI.1 AA.1 basket 4 (surface fill). Diam: 7 cm.

Preserved height: 3 cm. Ware: Marl B. Surface: uncoated.

Parallel: SEILER 1997, PL. III, fig. 5: ZN 94/69 (Hebua I, early 18th Dynasty).

2. Rim of slender jar. Prov: VI.1 AA.1 basket 4 (surface fill). Diam: 9 cm.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of this identification and references, see James K. HOFFMEIER & Stephen O. MOSHIER, ‘A Highway out of Egypt’: The main road from Egypt to Canaan, in *Desert Road Archaeology in Ancient Egypt and Beyond*. (eds. F. FÖRESTER & H. REIMER), Africa Praehistorica 26, Köln 2013, 485–510. On the identification of “Ways of Horus” and Tjaru/Sile, see HOFFMEIER, *Ancient Israel in Sinai*, 90–94.

⁵⁶ B 242, BLACKMAN, *Sinuhe*, 35.

⁵⁷ William Kelly SIMPSON, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, New Haven 1973, 70.

⁵⁸ Miriam LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Berkeley 1973, 81.

⁵⁹ Ellen MORRIS, *The Architecture of Imperialism: Military Bases and the Evolution of Foreign Policy in Egypt's New Kingdom*, Leiden 2005, 48.

⁶⁰ *Sttyw* is clearly the word used in Sinuhe for the bedouin, and a precursor to the New Kingdom term Shasu.

⁶¹ Sinuhe R 49–50; BLACKMAN, *Sinuhe*, 14.

⁶² SIMPSON, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 71.

⁶³ R.O. FAULKNER, *Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, Oxford 1962, 122.

⁶⁴ KRI II, 108ff.

⁶⁵ A. Kirk GRAYSON, Assyria's Foreign Policy in Relation to Egypt in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C., *JSSEA* XI no. 2 (1981), 86.

Preserved height: 3.8 cm. Ware: Nile B2. Surface: wet-smoothed.

Parallel: ASTON 1997, PL II:11 (Hebua IV/S, mid-18th Dynasty)

3. Rim of slender jar. Prov: VI.1 AA.20 basket 2. (between fence and hut). Diam: 10 cm. Preserved height: 3.5 cm. Ware: Nile B2. Surface: red slip with two horizontal black bands below the rim.

Parallel: BOURRIAU et. al. 2005, 110 “black-banded decoration on red slip is popular in the Early New Kingdom.”

4. Rim of slender jar. Prov: VI.1 AA.18 basket 2 (inside feature 3). Diam: 11 cm.

Preserved height: 7.5 cm. Ware: Nile B2, Surface: horizontal, incised line on neck.

Parallels: SEILER 1997, PL.II, fig. 4 ZN94/9 (Hebua I, early 18th Dynasty), ASTON 1996, tafel 4:13 (Hebua IV, dated to the reigns of Thutmose IV – Amenhotep III), BOURRIAU 2010, 137, fig. 35:n (Memphis, early to mid 18th Dynasty)

5. Rim of jar. Prov: VI.1 AA.11 (occupation debris). Diam: 15 cm. Preserved height: 8 cm. Ware: Nile B2. Surface: wet-smoothed.

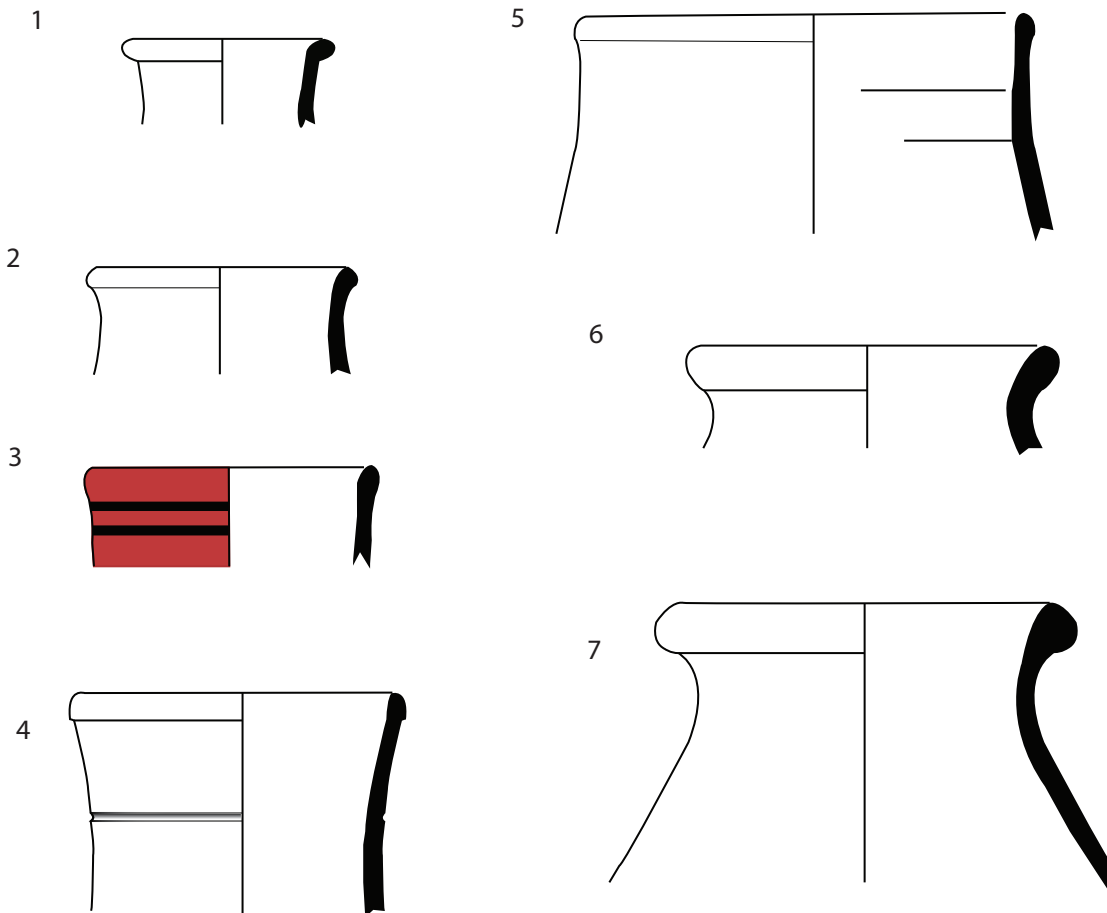
Parallel: BOURRIAU 2010, 128, fig. 26:10.4.3 (Memphis, early to mid-18th Dynasty)

6. Rim of jar. Prov: VI.1 AA.11 basket 2 (same level as occupation). Diam: 12.5 cm.

Preserved height: 3.5 cm. Ware: Nile B2. Surface: uncoated and abraded.

Parallel: BOURRIAU 2010, 129, fig. 27:10.16.2 (Memphis, early to mid-18th Dynasty)

JARS FROM FIELD VI.I



Scale 1:2

7. Rim of jar. Prov: VI.I AA. 23 (pit in room 9 of Hut 1). Diam: 13 cm. Preserved height: 10.5 cm. Ware: Nile B2. Surface: uncoated, soot inside and out.

Parallels: ASTON 1996, 189:11 (Hebua IV, dated to the reigns of Thutmose IV – Amenhotep III), BOURRIAU 1997, 177, fig. 6:16 14 and 16 (late 2IP through early 18th Dynasty)

Small/Medium Bowls (Plate II)

1. Rim of bowl. Prov: VI.1 AA.11 basket 2 (same level as occupation). Diam: 20 cm.

Preserved height: 3 cm. Ware: Fine Nile B2. Surface: red slip in and out, wide black rim out and narrow black rim inside.

Parallel: SEILER 1997, PL.I, fig. 1 ZN94/125 (Hebua I, early 18th Dynasty)

2. Rim of bowl. Prov: VI.1AA.11 basket 2 (same level as occupation). Diam: 21 cm.

Preserved height: 3 cm. Ware: Nile B2. Surface: red slip in and out, wide black rim out and narrow black rim inside.

Parallel: SEILER 1997, Pl. I, fig.1 ZN94/125 (Hebua I, early 18th Dynasty).

3. Intact simple bowl. VI.1 AA.1, TBP 657 (surface fill). Diam: 19 cm. Preserved height: 5 cm. Ware: Nile B2. Surface: Traces of red slip on exterior and rim area of interior, tiny traces of red slip on interior. The entire bowl may have been originally coated with red slip that has mostly worn off.

Parallel: ASTON 1998, 100–101, fig. 83 (Qantir, late 2IP)

BOWLS FROM FIELD VI.I

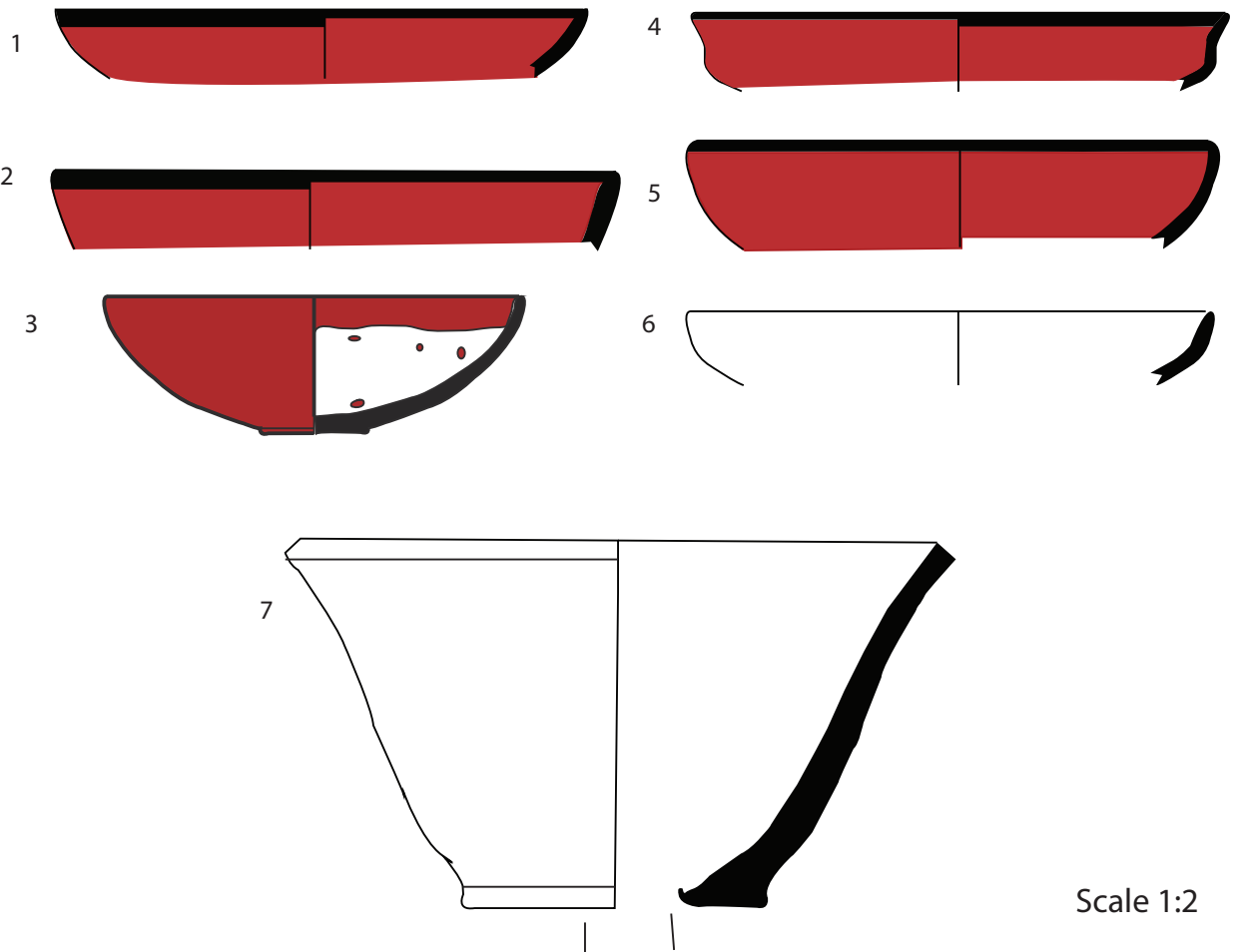
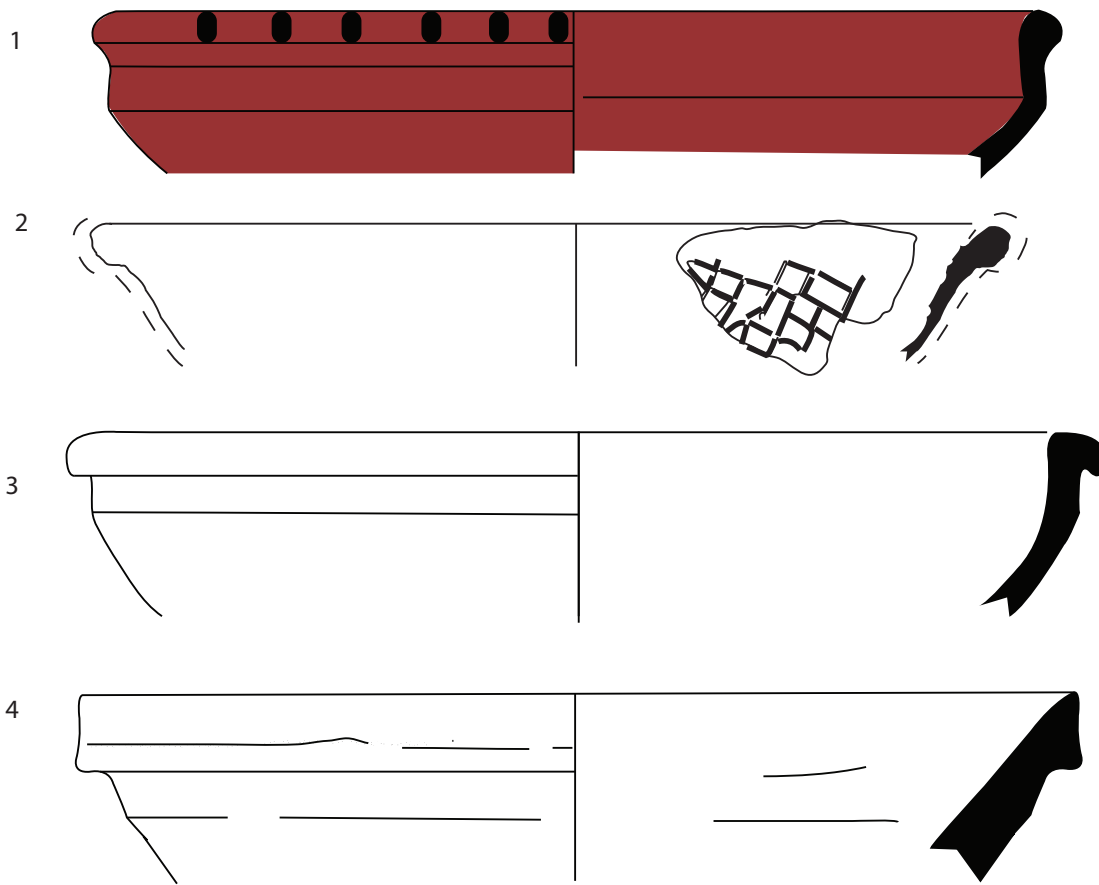


Plate II Bowls from Field VI (Drawings by Lyla Pinch-Brock & Rexine Hummel)

LARGE BOWLS FROM FIELD VI.1



Scale 1:2

Plate III Large Bowls from Field VI (Drawings by Lyla Pinch-Brock & Rexine Hummel)

4. Rim of carinated bowl. Prov: VI.1 AA.12 basket 2. Diam: 20 cm. Preserved height: 2.5 cm. Ware: Nile B2, Surface: red slip inside and out with black rim.

Parallels: SEILER, 1997, Pl. I, fig. 1 ZN94/127 (Hebua I, early 18th Dynasty); ASTON, 1998, 87:1 (Qantir, late 21P)

5. Rim of bowl. Prov: VI.1 AA.11 basket 1 (occupation debris). Diam: 19 cm. Preserved height: 4 cm. Ware: Nile B2. Surface: red slip in and out with black rim.

Parallel: SEILER, 1997, Pl. I, fig. 1 ZN94/125 (Hebua I, early 18th Dynasty).

6. Rim of carinated bowl. Prov: VI.1 AA.11 basket 2 (same level as occupation). Diam: 19 cm. Preserved height: 3 cm. Ware: Marl B. Surface: smoothed.

Parallels: WODZIŃSKA 2010, 132:128 (early 18th Dynasty); BOURRIAU 2010, 133, fig. 31:4.7.5 (Mem-

phis, early to mid 18th Dynasty; BOURRIAU 1997, 176, fig. 6.15, 24 (late 21P through early 18th Dynasty)

7. Intact bowl, “flower pot”. Prov: VI.1 AA.1, TBP 658. Diam: 25 cm. Preserved height: 7 cm. Ware: Nile E. Surface: untreated. Hole pierced in base before firing.

Parallels: BOURRIAU 2010, 126, fig.24:4.10.7 (Memphis, early to mid 18th Dynasty); BOURRIAU 1997, 176, fig. 6.15, 22 and 26 (late 21P through early 18th Dynasty).

Large Bowls (Plate III)

1. Rim of large carinated bowl, Prov: VI.1 AA 1 (surface fill). Diam: 36 cm. Preserved height: 6 cm. Ware: Nile B2. Surface: red slip in and out, black tics on rim.

Parallel: BOURRIAU 2010, 134, fig. 32: 4.18.6 (Memphis, early to mid 18th Dynasty)

2. Rim of bread tray, Prov: VI.1 AA.1 TBP 659 (surface fill), Diam: 34 cm. Preserved height: 5.8 cm. Ware: Marl E. Surface: Gritty and deeply incised with a geometric design, surface has spalled off.

Parallel: BOURRIAU 2010, 137, fig. 35:h (Memphis, early to mid 18th Dynasty)

3. Rim of large bowl, Prov: VI.1 AA.1. (surface fill), Diam: 39 cm. Preserved height: 6.5 cm. Ware: Nile E. Surface: burned inside and out.

Parallel: BOURRIAU 2010, 127, fig. 25:4.18.3 (Memphis, early to mid 18th Dynasty)

4. Rim of large bowl, Prov: VI.1 AA 11 basket 2 (same level as occupation). Diam: 37 cm. Preserved height: 7 cm. Ware: Nile B2/C Surface: uncoated and abraded.

Parallels: FUSCALDO 1998, 63, Fig.1:e ('Ezbet Helmi, late Hyksos period); BOURRIAU 2010, 130, fig. 28: 3.10.9 (Memphis, early to mid 18th Dynasty). This form continues into the late 18th Dynasty.

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EXCURSUS II

271 flints or chipped stone implements and flakes found at Tell el-Borg. This assemblage was studied by Carole McCartney, and her work will appear in *Tell el-Borg II*.⁶⁶ Those found in connection with the “reed huts”, McCartney opines, are “the most interesting”. Of the 271, 95 were found in Field VI, i.e. 35% of the total documented. The total from Field VI represents the largest number. The next largest number of flint materials came from Field V, 88 in all, and this was one of the most thor-

oughly excavated fields. Thus the actual number of implements from Field VI is quite high when compared to other fields, while is relatively small compared with size of Field V. More significant is that number of non-Egyptian flint materials found in Field VI. The following table shows the sources of the material of the flints⁶⁷ from Fields V and VI, which account for 67% of the total from Fields II–VIII.

Nearly 75% of the flint materials from Field VI originate in Sinai, Canaan and the Negev, the very

⁶⁶ Carole MCCARTNEY, Chipped Stone Artifacts at Tell el-Borg, in: *Tell el-Borg II* (Winona Lake, forthcoming).

⁶⁷ The identification of the sources of the flint materials was made by James Phillips, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at University of Illinois, Chicago and the Field Museum of Natural History, during his visit to Tell el-Borg dur-

ing the 2003 season to consult with us on our lithic remains. See also, James PHILLIPS, Sinai during the Palaeolithic: Early Periods, in *Prehistory of Arid North Africa: Essays in Honor of Fred Wendorf* (ed. A. CLOSE; Dallas 1987, 105–121).

Table 1

Field	Sinai	Canaan	Negev	Egypt	Other	Total
V	32=36.36%	19=21.59%	0	21=23.86%	16=18.18%	88
VI	49=51.58%	20=21.05%	2=2.11%	14=14.74%	10=10.53%	95



Fig. 17 TBO 442 (Photo NSAP).

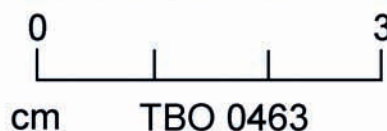


Fig. 19 TBO 0463 (Photo NSAP).

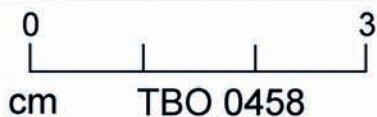


Fig. 18 TBO 0458 (Photo NSAP).



Fig. 20 TBO 0483 (Photo NSAP).

area where the *Sttyw* and Shasu moved about, whereas only about 15% come from the Nile Valley. In Field V 58% come from the same regions, whereas a higher percent are from Egypt, nearly 24%. The high number of materials from Sinai and Canaan may suggest that those in Field V (the area covered by the Ramesside period fort)⁶⁸ may have come to the fort via commercial ties with Shasu in the late period of the site's history.

The following are some examples of the registered lithic tools:

TBO 0442 (VI.1 AA, L 1) = Canaanite glossed blade (Fig. 17)

TBO 0558 (VI.1 AA L 1) = Re-used medial Canaanite blade (Fig. 18)

⁶⁸ It is not inconceivable that some of the flints from Field V date prior to the Ramesside period when this same area was the open space in front of the early 18th Dynasty fort where Shasu may well have engaged in trade and other activities with the Egyptian military, see *Tell el-Borg I*, fig. 273.

- TBO 0463 (VI.1 AA L 1) = Re-used medial
Canaanite blade
(Fig. 19)
- TBO 0483 (VI, surface) = Canaanite glossed
blade (Fig. 20)

While the presence of a significant number of Sinaitic and Levantine type flints and that the chert come from those areas, does not prove that the occupants of the huts in the middle third of the Second Millennium B.C. were Shasu, it certainly supports the interpretation offered here, especially when the other data are considered.

