

In memoriam Joachim Werner (1909-94)

The Tetrarchic fort at Nag al-Hagar in the province of *Thebais*: preliminary report (2005-8)

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For decades, systematic archaeological research on Late Roman fortifications in the Upper Egyptian province of *Thebais*, as well as in the Lower province of *Aegyptus*, seemed to be largely neglected, even though the preservation of signal towers, fortlets, forts and fortresses, mostly of mudbrick, was in places exceptional. As background to the present report on the results of three seasons of fieldwork at the Late Roman fort at Nag al-Hagar near Aswan (Upper Egypt), previously (1984-89) uncovered in part and of special interest because of its residential palace, it seems useful to give a brief overview of current research at other Late Roman military sites in Egypt (fig. 1).

The Diocletianic fort of *Dionysias*/Qasr Qarun¹ at the W fringe of the Fayum was almost completely excavated in 1948-50 by a French-Swiss team.² It provided the ground-plan of the fortification and various interior buildings used by the garrison *ala quinta Praelectorum* (*Not. Dig. Or.* 28.34). Further fieldwork on Late Roman military sites in Egypt mostly depended on the efforts of a few individuals.³ In this context belongs the work of P. Grossmann on Late Roman structures in the courtyard of the Ptolemaic-Roman temple of Chnum on the island of *Elephantine*.⁴ A series of multi-phase, two-storeyed buildings excavated in the early 20th c. he presumed to be the barracks of a small fort,⁵ built early in the second quarter of the 5th c.⁶ for the *cohortis prima felix Theodosiana* (according to *Not. Dig. Or.* 31.64, this unit was garrisoned *apud Elephantinam*).

The situation improved from the 1980s due to research on the Tetrarchic fortress of *legio tertia Diocletiana* built at *Thebas*/Luxor (*Not. Dig. Or.* 31.8)⁷ within the *temenos* of the monumental temple of Amun erected by Amenhotep III and Ramses II. It was published by J.-C. Golvin, M. Reddé and G. Wagner.⁸ In Lower Egypt, architectural documentation of the S and E gates of the high standing curtain wall and gate towers of the fortress of *legio tertio-decima Gemina* at *Babilona*/Old Cairo (*Not. Dig. Or.* 28.15) was conducted by Grossmann between 1990 and 1994.⁹ Based on typological criteria (in particular, the ground-plan of the projecting U-shaped towers of the S gate, together with its posterns and its ward-like inner courtyard), he assumed a construction in the context of the Diocletianic re-organisation of

1 In the text the spelling of the Egyptian or Jordanian site names corresponds to those mostly employed in the relevant archaeological literature, although I am well aware that these simplified transcriptions are not correct from an Arabist's point of view.

2 Schwartz 1969.

3 Cf. the summary on military forts (*castra*) by Grossmann 2002, 351-61 (figs. 125-89; Bonnet and Valbelle 2000, 131-44; Mackensen 2003). Cf. also Reddé 2003, 235-53, for the development of mid-Roman fortlets and some consideration of the Late Roman development in the Eastern Desert; id. 1999.

4 Grossmann 1980, 9-75, especially 21-29 p. 26; id. 2002, 357 f., fig. 186.

5 But see the criticism by Arnold 2003, 20 f. and 44 f. who suggested a purely civil character for the standardised multi-storeyed houses in the courtyard of the Chnum temple (Grossmann 1980, 21-28). Grossmann 2002, 357 n.717 gives a different interpretation. It should be observed that there is neither a recognizable headquarters-building (*principia*) nor a residence (*praetorium*) for the commander (*praefectus*); nor characteristic storerooms (*horrea*) for the unit's food supply.

6 Grossmann 1980, 26-29. For the revised dating of the papyrus Leiden Z, the letter of Appion, bishop of Syene, asking Theodosius I and Valentinian II for military support against the incursions of the Blennytes, and for an earlier dating of the fort (which was probably built in the late 4th c.), cf. Arnold 2003, 20.

7 At *Diospolis Magna* in or around the temple of Amun-Re at nearby Karnak there might have been installed a second fort for the *equites sagittarii indigenae* (*Not. Dig. Or.* 31.27).

8 El-Saghir et al. 1986; Golvin and Reddé 1986.

9 Grossmann et al. 1994; id. et al. 1998.