

Map 79 Oasis Magna

Compiled by G. Wagner, 1995

Introduction

The Great Oasis (Oasis Magna), referred to today as the New Valley (Wadi el-Gedid), consists of two depressions, Khargeh and Dakhleh. Khargeh is the more easterly. It is situated approximately 95 to 125 miles from the Nile Valley, and extends over 115 miles from north to south, although it is no more than 10 to 20 miles wide. It is fringed by parallel dunes to the west, and lies about 110 miles from Dakhleh. This second depression is oriented east-west and runs for over 60 miles, with a width of 10 to 15 miles. In Arabic, the names for both depressions maintain their designations by the Greeks as “exterior” (exotero) and “interior” (esotero), with “interior” meaning further away, as seen from the Nile.

In the absence of rainfall (a condition that must go back as far as the Predynastic period), life was centered around either springs or wherever aquifers broke through to the surface, and around artesian wells. Only recently has it come to light that the many types of hydraulic installations developed also included *qanawât*, subterranean drains laid on a gentle gradient and linked to cesspits. They occur in the Kysis region especially, where it is now certain that they date back to the first period of Persian rule (525-401 B.C.). Altogether, it is the distribution of water sources that accounts for the widespread dispersal of settlements in such a broken pattern, markedly different from that in the Nile Valley. The Great Oasis in effect comprises a collection of micro-oases, resembling “islands in the ocean,” as Strabo described them (17.1.5). Indeed the same pattern prevails to this day, despite modern methods for sinking wells and pumping water.

In general during ancient times, and in particular during the early Roman empire, water was plentiful in the Great Oasis, and it was tapped energetically. Over the course of the third and fourth centuries, however, a reduction, and then exhaustion, of the supply evidently occurred. Major ecological and geopolitical problems led to the abandonment of a large number of sites early in the fifth century, and to the desertification of the Great Oasis. It is clear that by the sixth century there was significant contraction of settlement and population: in the case of Khargeh, only Hibis, Um Dabadib and el-Deir are known to have still been inhabited.

The oldest known accounts by western travelers go back to the end of the seventeenth century and give a cursory description of Khargeh, which was crossed from north to south by pilgrims making their way to Sennar in Sudan. D’Anville’s map of 1765 reflects these contacts. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Cailliaud de Nantes and Edmonston first discovered the temples of Deir el-Hagar (ancient *Sioua), el-Khargeh (ancient Hibis), Qasr el-Ghoueita (ancient [Per-ousekh]), Qasr el-Zaiyan (ancient Tchonemyris), and Douch (ancient Kysis). With the help of the Greek inscriptions, they identified Douch as Kysis, and Qasr el-Zaiyan as Tchonemyris. The draftsmen who accompanied them drew these monuments, which were among the best preserved. In the mid-nineteenth century, Letronne published some Greek inscriptions from the Great Oasis; at the beginning of the twentieth, the papyrologist Wilcken identified ancient Mothis, and the Egyptologist Lefèbvre elucidated the toponym Tchonemyris as meaning “great well” or “great spring” in Egyptian.

As late as 1970, our knowledge of the region might be summarized as follows: the city of el-Khargeh was identified as Hibis, Qasr el-Zaiyan as Tchonemyris, Qasr el-Ghoueita as the Egyptian Per-ousekh, and Douch as Kysis. In Dakhleh, Mut (el-Kharab) was identified as Mothis, and the site of the temple of Deir el-Hagar as the Egyptian Set-ouah (*Sioua). The Hibite nome was considered to comprise both Khargeh and Dakhleh (recent evidence, however, has shown that at some point in the Roman period a Mothite nome was created, apparently covering the whole of the Dakhleh oasis).

In 1969-70, there occurred the celebrated finds at Balat/Ain Assil by the Egyptologist A. Fakhry, which revealed that already under the Old Kingdom (VIth Dynasty) Dakhleh was a governorate. During the 1970s, both the publication of papyrus texts and survey archaeology drew attention to the entire region. When Parsons published

his 1971 article, scholars were abruptly made aware of the existence of at least 86 *hydreumata* to the south-west and north-east of Hibis that are listed in a survey of the mid-third century A.D. The name most frequently attached to them is *Pmoun*, “the water,” or “well of ...,” or sometimes *Tchon*, “the spring of.” It is impossible to reconstruct what each of the *hydreumata* actually comprised: they could be hamlets, isolated farmsteads, even villages. There is also no way of knowing how extensive a radius this ancient survey covered: it could be anything from 1-2 miles to 20-25. It has proved impossible to identify any of the 86 *hydreumata*, and thus none can be marked on the map.

My own ongoing researches in the region date back to 1974, and were the basis of Wagner (1987). In 1976 the Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale in Cairo (IFAO) began to conduct systematic excavations at the site of ancient Kysis. These still continue today, and have brought to light a considerable number of Greek ostraca. During the same period the Egyptian Antiquities Organization (EAO) carried out a short-term excavation at Ain Waqfa (ancient Pege Sykaminia?). In ODouch 1-3 and Hussein 1993, thirteen new toponyms make their appearance, but only two or three of them can be identified. It should be noted that all this documentation is very homogeneous and relates to the half-century A.D. 350-400 (within the Late Antique period). I am quite convinced, however, that the ancient sites thus revealed were settled during the Roman period too, if not earlier. Excavations conducted by IFAO at Manawir el-Biyut in the autumn of 1994 brought to light the amazing discovery that the temple of Manawir dates from the first period of Persian rule.

From time to time, excavations have been conducted by EAO at Bagawat (the necropolis of Hibis), at Beleida (an ancient village on the outskirts of Hibis), and at Ain Labakha, a village to the north and site of the principal temple of that area, dedicated to the god Piyris (*temenos Piyrios*).

For many years now, the Dakhleh Oasis Project has carried out a systematic survey of the entirety of this oasis, so far registering well over 200 Romano-Byzantine sites. Most recently, as part of this project, an Australian team has focused its attention on two sites whose ancient names it has proved possible to identify, Esment el-Kharab (ancient Kellis) and Ain Birbiyeh (Egyptian Jmr-t). The *Agricultural Account Book* (Bagnall 1997) and other Greek documents discovered at Esment (Worp 1995) have revealed nearly twenty ancient toponyms, of which fifteen or so are new. While none of these can be identified, they can be situated in the Trimithis-Mothis-Kellis region and are listed as Unlocated Toponyms. The mid-late fourth century date of this material places these sites in the Late Antique period, but here again I am convinced that their occupation goes back to the Roman period.

Since 1979 regular reports of the Dakhleh Oasis Project’s activities have appeared in the *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* (Toronto), and since 1988 in its Australian counterpart (Sydney), as well as in the *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology*. IFAO’s activities at Douch are published within the framework of the various series issued by it, especially BIFAO. Excavations conducted by EAO in the Great Oasis have been partially published in collaboration with IFAO, but most often remain unpublished.

Directory

All place names are in Egypt

Abbreviation

ODouch 1-4

H. Cuvigny and G. Wagner, *Les ostraca grecs de Douch*, 3 vols., IFAO, Cairo, 1986-99

Names

Grid	Name	Period	Modern Name / Location	Reference
B2	<i>Abu Gerara</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 146
B2	<i>Ain Amour</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 145
D4	<i>Ain Borek</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 184
D3	<i>Ain Elwan</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 174
D3	<i>Ain Hussein</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 174

Grid	Name	Period	Modern Name / Location	Reference
D2	<i>Ain Labakha</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 168-69; 1996
D5	<i>Ain Mabruka</i>	RL?		Wagner 1987, 185
D3	<i>Ain Marraga</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 173-74
D4	<i>Ain Rammah</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 187
D2	<i>Ain Tauleib</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 169-70
D4	<i>Ain Ziyada</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 183
B3	Anhydra Ore	L		Wagner 1987, 144
D4	<i>Badaran</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 184
D3	<i>Bagawat</i>	L		Wagner 1987, 62-76, 362-64
inset	<i>Balat</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 195
D4	<i>Baram</i>	R?L		Wagner 1987, 184
D4	Baris?	R?L	Baris	Wagner 1982, 294; 1987, 185; Osing 1985, 55-57
inset	<i>Bashendi</i>	HRL		Wagner 1987, 194-95
C3	<i>Beleida</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 172-73
C5	Blemmyes		EGY / SUD	See Map 81
G1	Chenoboskion			See Map 77
D4	<i>Dakhakhin</i>	R?L		Wagner 1987, 187
D2	<i>el-Deir</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 170
D3	<i>Deir Mustafa Kashef</i>	L		Wagner 1987, 171
G1	Diospolis Mikra			See Map 77
C3	Enoria Hibeos	RL		Wagner 1987, 157-66
inset	Esotero (Oasis)	L		Wagner 1987, 131
D2	Exotero (Oasis)	L		Wagner 1987, 131
D4	<i>Gebel Tafnis</i>	L		Wagner 1987, 144, 188
D2	<i>Gebel Teir</i>	L		Wagner 1987, 145, 306, 337-38, 364
D4	<i>Germeshin</i>	L		Wagner 1987, 187
D2	<i>el-Gib</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 168
D4	<i>Hatteiyet Zakaran</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 187
D3	Hibis	HRL	el-Khargeh	Wagner 1987, 155-57
	§ Hibiton polis	R		
C4	Hibites Nomos	RL	Khargeh	Wagner 1987, 131
inset	<i>Hindaw</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 196
	Hodoi			See Roads
inset	Jmr-t	RL	Ain Birbiya	Kaper 1992, 122-24
inset	*Kalamon	R?L?	Qalamun	Wagner 1987, 196
inset	Kellis	RL	Esment el-Kharab	Worp 1995
G2	Krokodilopolis/ Terkythis			See Map 80
D4	Kysis	RL	Douch	Wagner 1987, 176-79
E2	Libyaigyptioi	RL		Wagner 1987, 216
C3	<i>Mahabat Khanafiss</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 173
D4	<i>Manawir el-Biyut</i>	CH?R?		Wagner 1987, 184-85
D4	<i>Mansuriya</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 187
A2 / inset	Mazikes	RL		Wagner 1987, 397-98
D4	<i>Meks Bahari</i>	R?L?		Wagner 1987, maps 3, 4
D4	<i>Meks Gibli</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 186
inset	Mothis	HRL	Mut	Kaper 1992, 130-32
	§ Mothiton Polis	R		
inset	Mothites Nomos	R?L	Dakhleh	Worp 1995
	Mounesis = (P)Mounesis			

Grid	Name	Period	Modern Name / Location	Reference
D3	<i>el-Nadura</i>	H?R		Naumann 1939
G1	Nilus fl.			See Map 74
D5	Nobatai	RL		Wagner 1987, 396-97
B2	Oasis Magna/ Thebaidos	RL		Wagner 1987, 131-32
inset	Oasitai	RL		Wagner 1987, 214-15
D3	[*Parammon]?	RL	Qasr Baramuni	Wagner 1982, 293; 1987, 175
D4	Pege Sykaminia?	RL	Ain Waqfa	Hussein 1993
D3	[Per-ousekh]	H	Qasr el-Ghoueita	Wagner 1987, 165-66
D4	(P)Mounesis	L	Chams el-Din	Wagner 1987, 182-83; G. Wagner
D5	<i>el-Qasr</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 186
inset	<i>el-Qasr</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 193
D3	<i>Qasr Nessima</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 175
D4	<i>el-Qosseir</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 186
inset	*Sioua	RL	Deir el-Hagar	Kaper 1992, 124-29 (n. 54)
D2	<i>Someira</i>	RL		Wagner 1987, 168
D4	*Tabennese	L	Tafnis	Wagner 1987, 188
D4	Tabennese Oros	L	Gebel Tafnis	Wagner 1982, 294; 1987, 188
D3	Tchonemyris	RL	Qasr el-Zaiyan	Wagner 1987, 166-67
	Ten(...) = *Thenete			
	Terkythis = Krokodilopolis			
	Thebaidos (Oasis) = Oasis Magna			
inset	*Thenete/ Ten(...)	RL	Tenida	Wagner 1987, 196
B2	Thinodes Oros	R	Gebel Ramliya	Ptol. 4.5.10; C-D 2, 281
C4	Toparchia Kyseos	RL		Wagner 1987, 179-80
inset	Trimithis?	RL	Amheida	Wagner 1987, 190-92
C2	<i>Um Dabadib</i>	L		Wagner 1987, 169

Quarry

Grid	Location	Period	Material	Reference
D2	S Gebel Teir	RL	Ls	Wagner 1987, 306

Roads

Grid	Name / Itinerary	Period	Reference
D2	Hodos Oaseos	RL?	Wagner 1987, 118 (n. 5), 141-48, 386
B3	Hodos Tesserion Nykthemeron	L	Wagner 1987, 144, 152
	NE Abu Gerara → Abu Gerara → Palation	R?L?	Wagner 1987, 150
	NW from Um Dabadib	R?L?	Wagner 1987, 145 (n. 1)
	Ain Tauleib → Ain Labakha → Um Dabadib	R?L?	Wagner 1987, 145
	→ Ain Amour → *Thenete		
	Ain Amour → Beleida	R?L?	Wagner 1987, map 4

Grid	Name / Itinerary	Period	Reference
	Mothis → Kellis → Palation → *Thenete/Ten(...) → E	R?L?	Wagner 1987, map 5
	Baris? → Mansuriya → NW	R?L?	Wagner 1987, map 4
	W *Sioua → *Sioua → Mothis → E	R?L?	Wagner 1987, map 5
	NW from Trimithis?	R?L?	Wagner 1987, 146
	Dakhakhin → NE	R?L?	Wagner 1987, map 4
	N Ain Tauleib → Bagawat	R?L?	Wagner 1987, map 4
	Ain Labakha → Bagawat → Hibis →	R?L?	Wagner 1987, map 4
	Tchonemyris → Baris? → Ain Mabruka → S		
	Bagawat → el-Deir	R?L?	Wagner 1987, map 4
	Hibis → Ain Hussein → S	R?L?	Wagner 1987, 174

Unlocated Toponyms

Name	Period	Probable Location	Reference
Enoria Hibeos			
86 Hydreumata: Pmoun + proper name	R		Parsons 1971
Tbelo kato	R		Wagner 1987, 171-72
Toparchia Kyseos			
Chosis	R		Wagner 1987, 181
Hydreuma Sey	L		G. Wagner
Hydreuma Tmarsios	R		Wagner 1987, 180
Komai Kyseos	R		Wagner 1987, 179-80
Pege Philosarapidos	L	Toparchia Kyseos region	G. Wagner
Pinhor	L		G. Wagner; Hussein 1993, 66.2
Pmoun Ousire	L		ODouch 3, 210.3; 339.2
Pmoun Pistratou	L		G. Wagner
Pmoun Res	L	Baris?	G. Wagner
Pmoun Tae	L		ODouch 3, 248.4; 319.4, 12
Pousis	R		Wagner 1987, 181
Psenmau	L		ODouch 3, 317.1
Sebennei	L	Toparchia Kyseos region	G. Wagner
Tapaiy	L		ODouch 4, 368.9
Tsenborinou	L		ODouch 2, 60.2
Trimithis-Mothis region			
Bait(...)	L		Bagnall 1997, 235
Hei	L		Bagnall 1997, 98 (l. 243)
Heme	L		Bagnall 1997, 130 (l. 873)
Meskam(...)	L		Bagnall 1997, 116 (l. 601)
Mesobe	L		Bagnall 1997, 235
Ouala	L		Bagnall 1997, 116 (l. 584)
Pmoun Imouthou	L		Bagnall 1997, 235
Pmoun Paleou	L		Bagnall 1997, 235
Pmoun Tametra	L		Bagnall 1997, 104 (l. 343)
Pmoun Tkoto	L		Bagnall 1997, 235
Psebtanesis	L		Bagnall 1997, 118 (l. 644)
Thi(o)	L		Bagnall 1997, 116 (l. 584)
Tnabe	L		Bagnall 1997, 120 (l. 685)
Tpake	L		Bagnall 1997, 235

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