

# BI'R MINAYH

## Report on the Survey 1998–2004

edited by  
Ulrich Luft

with contributions by

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Front cover: *View of Field J from the Wadi Minayh*  
Frontispice: *Map of the Etbai District by D. Meredith, 1958*  
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## Preface

My search for an area of archaeological interest, untouched by the boom of excavation in Egypt, was stimulated by the late László Kákosy. The plan for the survey in the Eastern Desert of Egypt was born in 1994 when I was a visiting professor at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. It was Rosemarie Klemm who enthusiastically spoke about her field-work in the Eastern Desert. She mentioned Bi'r Minayh as an unexplored site, situated in a remote place that few explorers had visited. The vague idea that I was nurturing needed further outlining by a visit to Egypt. There, on a preparatory journey, Mohammad El-Saghir<sup>1</sup> encouraged me to take on the project, praising the desert conditions. Many colleagues living in Egypt boosted my preparations for the project with useful pieces of advice.

After the preliminary visit to the site in 1998 it became clear that the envisaged survey could not be a task for Egyptologists alone. As an interdisciplinary project, it required me to choose the members of the expedition from among students of different fields, that is, beyond Egyptology – from Archaeology, Geodesy, and Geology. Archaeological technicians were excluded because of insufficient funding. With the exception of two members, nobody on the team had any experience in fieldwork, and the experience of these two was only of limited value under the specific desert conditions. All members were thus faced with the ambiguous conditions of fieldwork in the desert area, most of us mastered the unexpected challenge, however.

The project was fully supported by the authorities of the Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities headed by General Secretaries Gaballa A. Gaballa and Zahi Hawass, but also by the Cultural Councillors of the Hungarian Embassy in Cairo, László Vida and Imre Lázár. We remember with gratitude the Bedouins who always safely carried us to the site.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, we can also attest that, even in special vehicles, drivers unfamiliar with desert conditions did not master the terrain.

In the beginning, the survey was planned as an opportunity for practical teaching of Egyptology under the conditions of fieldwork. Hence, for the first season, only students of Egyptology and Architecture were chosen, knowing how unfamiliar students of Egyptology are with drawing. Some of them joined the expedition only for one season, others stayed for every season. István Klinghammer, the Rector of the Eötvös Loránd University, supported our wish to increase the interdisciplinary character of the expedition with the agreement of the joint expedition of the Eötvös Loránd University and the Budapest University of Technology and Economics, signed in 2001. When the term of Rector Ákos Detrekői ended in 2004 the agreement was not prolonged, thus the Eötvös Loránd University had to cover the costs of the publication of the survey from 1998 to 2004 alone, which was enabled by the support of the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA), the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and an anonym sponsor. We had planned to publish it in 2006, but the team members who had obtained their university degrees in the meantime were occupied with the activities of their professional positions. This circumstance explains the delay of the publication, but I confess that the quality of the publication has improved with the additional time.

The edition of the publication was my responsibility, with the exception of Chapters 7.4.2, 8.1 and 8.3, the author of which insisted on them being printed as submitted. The contributors delivered their texts in English or in Hungarian. I am thankful that Andrea Hasznos translated the Hungarian texts with great empathy. With the exception of the catalogue of the petroglyphs which was read by Adrian Hart, all the texts were proofread by the Academic Editing Service, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire, United Kingdom. Zsolt Vasáros was always ready to give assistance with the difficult questions of presenting the material. Krisztián Vértes and Zsolt Vasáros have made the proficient drawings of Chapters 5 and 6.

Tamás Bács, head of the Department of Egyptology at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, invited us to publish the manuscript in the *Studia Aegyptiaca Series Maior*. We accepted this kind invitation because our survey would then rank together with other archaeological activities of the Department in one series. Two volumes of the series that were issued within a relatively short time of 2003 set the standard for the lay-out that we wished to maintain in the present volume. The publishing house *Archaeolingua* and the *Narmer Architecture Studio* headed by Zsolt Vasáros created a pleasing lay-out without transgressing the guidelines of scientific edition.

The editor owes thanks to all the people who have helped to verify the survey at Bi'r Minayh, actively contributed to the publication and created the elegant presentation.

Budapest, February 2010

Ulrich Luft

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<sup>1</sup> Then Director of Egyptian Antiquities in Upper Egypt and the Red Sea.

<sup>2</sup> Different Bedouins assisted us, under the guidance of Mohammad Ali of El-Quseir.