K. A. Worp

Observations on Some Military Camps and Place Names in Lower Egypt


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The Notitia Dignitatum (hereafter: Not.Dig.), Or. § 28, dating from the end of the 4th century A.D., contains a listing of the military camps in Lower Egypt under the command of the ‘comes limitis Aegypti’. As such, it is a source of primary importance both for military historians of early Byzantine Egypt and for students of the geography of this part of the country.

Another semi-literary source of primary importance concerning the geography of Egypt is found in the so-called Itinerarium Antonini Augusti (hereafter: Itin.Ant.), more especially pp. 151-171 in the edition by P. Wesseling, the basis of later editions.\footnote{1} This part of the itinerary (in its present form dating from ca. 300 A.D.) contains a list of place names in Egypt with the distances between the various stops.

Since the 18th century certain place names occurring in the Not.Dig. have been identified with similar names occurring in the Itin.Ant. or vice versa. In some cases, however, twentieth-century publications of papyrological sources have shown that such identifications are least questionable.\footnote{2}

In an interesting paper R.W. Price has dealt with the geographical and military aspects of Or. § 28 of the Not.Dig.\footnote{3} Most of his findings are convincing enough, esp. his suggestion to transfer the contents of ll. 37-39 to a place between ll. 24-25 or 25-26 (cf. Price, 152, n. 7). If this suggestion is taken over, the following picture of the military units mentioned in the ‘laterculum minus’ (§ 28.23ff.) emerges:

Aegyptus:
- alae at Terenuthis and possibly also at Nea (ll. 24-25; cf. below); cohorts at Cephro and Busiris (ll. 35-36);

Augustamnica:
- alae at Thaubastis, Tacasiria, Scenae Mandrae, Selle, Rhinocorura, Scenae extra Gerras, Scenae Veteranorum (ll. 38-39, 26-30); cohorts at Naithu, Thou, Castra Iudaecorum (ll. 40-42);

Arcadia:
- alae at Thmoinepsis, Hipponos, Psobthis, Dionysias (ll. 31-34); cohorts at Aphrodite, Alyi, Muson, and Narmuthis (ll. 43-46).

Most of these place names are attested well enough, with each name confirmed by at least two independent sources; one finds the pertinent papyrological and (para-)literary evidence in A. Calderini - S. Daris, Dizionario dei nomi Geografici e Topografici dell’Egitto greco-romano.\footnote{4} Only

\footnote{1} The most recent edition of this work is given by O. Cuntz, Itineraria Romana, I (Liepzig 1929). Pp. 151-171 Wesseling correspond with pp. 21-23 Cuntz.
\footnote{2} Cf. the case of Papa (Itin.Ant. 159.4 Wesseling) /Pampane (Not.Dig. Or. § 31.52), now to be separated from each other; see S. Timm, Das Christlich-Koptische Ägypten, IV 1822-23 s.n. Pampane.
\footnote{4} S.nn. Aphrodito (§ 28.43); II 292f. # 3; Busiris (§ 28.36); II 66 # 2, Suppl. 85; Dionysias (§ 28.34); II 107, Suppl. 96; Hipponos (§ 28.32); III 32; Castra Iudaeorum (§ 28.42); III 84; Cephro (§
very few of them could until now not, or at least not without reservations, be further identified;\(^5\) it is especially these, of course, which deserve our further attention. Below, I wish to concentrate on an enigmatic place name, Tacasiria (\textit{Not.Dig.} Or. \S 28.39). At the same time I present a few notes on some other place names occurring in \textit{Not.Dig.} Or. \S 28, viz. Parembole, Nee, Hipponos and Aiy. These are, to be sure, only marginalia to Price’s fundamental study.

\textit{Tacasiria} is identified usually with the place called \textit{Tacasarta} in \textit{Itin.Ant.} 163.1.\(^6\) Though the variants TACASIRIA / TACASARTA can be explained palaeographically rather easily in terms of one name maltreated by a scribe, this direct identification is not entirely compelling. In fact, after checking first, whether behind these name forms some Egyptian name could be hidden\(^7\) I have come to suppose that \textit{Tacasarta} may be a misspelling of what originally was \textit{Ta Kastra} (Tà Kàtorpà) and that this might be identified with a place more elaborately called \textit{Castra Iudaearum} in \textit{Not.Dig.} Or. \S 28.42. For the equation: ‘\textit{Tacasarta = Ta Kastra = Castra Iudaearum} I refer to two passages in \textit{Itin.Ant.}, 162.5 - 163.5 and 169.2 - 170.4, where the ancient route between Pelusion (east of Port Said) and \textit{Memphis} (South of Cairo) and the route between \textit{Babylon} (=Old-Cairo) and \textit{Clysma} (= Suez) is given. If one compares the two routes, their western part shows a striking similarity, though at the same time there is an important difference. In order to clarify this I list the description of each route as if starting out from about the same place at the Nile, i.e. the Memphis/Babylon region.\(^8\)

\begin{verbatim}

\begin{tabular}{llll}

\textit{Itin.Ant.} & 163.5 - 162.6 & 169.2 - 170.4 \\
\textit{Memphis} & \textit{Pelusium} & \textit{Babylon} & \textit{Clysma} \\

(Memphis) - Helius & mp XXIII & (Babylon) - Heliu & mp XII \\
Scenas Veteranorum & mp XIII & Scenas Veteranorum & mp XVIII \\
Thou & mp XXVI & Thou & mp XII \\
Tacasurta & mp XIII & Hero & mp XIXIIII \\
Daño & mp XVIII & Serapiu & mp XVIII \\
Pelusium & mp XVI & Clysmo & mp L \\

\end{tabular}

\end{verbatim}

\begin{verbatim}


\(^{6}\) Cf. Price, \textit{loc.cit.}, 153 n. 8.f.

\(^{7}\) With negative result. I wish to thank Mr. K. Donker van Heel from Leiden University for his kind help in this matter.

\(^{8}\) Therefore, I had to reverse the order of names in \textit{Itin.Ant.} 162.6 - 163.5.

\end{verbatim}
Ancient Name | Modern Name
---|---
Heliopolis | = Tell Hisn near El Matariya
Scenae Veteranorum | = Shibin el-Qanâtir (or Tell el-Jehudije?)
Vicus Iudaeorum | = Tell el-Jehudije or Bilbeis?
Thou | = Tell el-Shuqafiya, near Tell el-Kebir
Heropolis | = Tell el-Mashkuta / Pithoum
Tacasarta | = Castra Iudaeorum = Tell el-Jehudije/Bilbeis?
Dafne | = Kom Dafana
Serapeum | = Near Gebel Maryam
Clysma | = Suez
Pelusium | = Tell el-Farama

One sees that in the Itinerary there is a stop on the road Babylon - Clysma between Scenae Veteranorum and Thou at the Vicus Iudaeorum which does not occur in description of the route Memphis - Pelusium. This seems rather remarkable: why would not one have made a stop, regardless of whether one travelled from Pelusium to Memphis via Thou or from Babylon to Clysma via Thou? If one argues that the various road descriptions should reflect uniformity, and if one accepts the equation Tacasarta = Ta Kastra = Castra Iudaeorum, that question is easily solved. At the same time, however, if Tacasarta = Ta Kastra is identical with the Castra (or, for that matter, Vicus) Iudaeorum, one has to accept the consequence, that the name of Tacasarta in the sequence given in Itin.Ant. 162.6 - 163.5 is standing at the wrong place and that its position vis-à-vis Thou should be reversed, while the indication of ‘mp XIII’ should be taken to refer to the distance Thou - Tacasarta and the indication of ‘mp XXVI’ to the distance Tacasarta - Scenae Veteranorum, rather than to the distance Thou — Scenae Veteranorum. One would, therefore, have to read Itin.Ant. 162.6 - 163.3 as follows:

Dafno | mp XVI
Thou | mp XVIII
Tacasarta | mp XIII
Scenae Veteranorum | mp XXVI

(One might consider transposing not only the names, but also the distances in Itin.Ant. 163.1-2, but that is of minor consequence.)

On the other hand, it may seem unduly rash to assume a textual corruption in Itin.Ant., to be remedied by a (equally assumed) transposition of lines. Is it absolutely necessary to assume that the descriptions of the two journeys were given in identical terms for the same parts of the roads?

9 Some of these identifications are subject to discussion, cf. E. Kettenhofen in Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica 20 (1989) 77 nn.15-18. Kettenhofen adds to his paper two maps of the region under review.

10 For this place see now the exhaustive study by E. Kettenhofen in Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica 20 (1989) 75-97.

11 The missing stop was also noticed by E. Kettenhofen, loc.cit. 78 n.19, but he did not pay further attention to this, probably because it laid outside the scope of his article.

12 On ‘castrum’ = ‘vicus’ see BAR Supplementary Series 15 (1976) (supra n.3) 134-35. The discrepancy between the two names can be explained by thinking of route descriptions composed by different people which were not made uniform by the original ’editor’ of the Itin.Ant. On this cf. also below.
Given the variant distance indications for certain identical parts of both journeys (cf., e.g., the distance between Heliopolis - Scenea Veteranorum) one may assume that these distances originated from different road descriptions and were not made uniform by the final editor of the *Itin.Ant.* Moreover, if we suppose that for travellers from Pelusium towards Memphis the next stop after Daphne were at Thou, we would have to accept that these people had to make a rather long march through the desert (in fact, this is ca 36 miles, i.e. twice as much as would have been indicated in the Itinerary)\(^{13}\) without any resting place in between. Though one could compare the length of the journey between the Serapeum and Clyisma (50 miles) and though manuscript errors in the indications of distances in the Itinerary are not infrequent,\(^{14}\) such a scenario does not seem appealing. In fact, it seems more attractive, then, to reckon indeed with a stop, possibly in El-Salhieh (almost halfway between Tell el-Kebir and Kom Dafana on the ancient caravan route towards Syria, as the map in Baedeker tells us).\(^{15}\) Of course, such a stop could have been made at a local military post, hence an independent homonymous place name *Ta Kastra* = ‘The Camp’ could have come into use.

What then of *Tacasiria* in *Not.Dig.* Or. § 28.39? Like in the case of *Tacasarta* I suppose that this name may reflect another name and that behind *Tacasiria* an original form *Ta Kaisareia* (Τὰ Καίσαρεια) is hidden. In principle one would be dealing, then, with the name of a camp somewhere in *Aegyptus Augustamnica* which is still unidentified.\(^{16}\) But it cannot be excluded, of course, that, after all, this is the very name of a camp supposedly situated half way in between Thou and Daphne. In that case, an identification ‘Tacasarta = Tacasiria’ can be maintained. The character, however, of such an identification is different from its supposed earlier counterpart, as this identification would be only ‘indirect’.

**Parembole** (1. 19): such a place name occurs in the *Itin.Ant.* 161.2, 16 miles from Contra-Syene on the left bank of the Nile. The pertinent entry in the *Dizionario Geografico* (IV 53 #3) states that this was indeed the ‘luogo di stanza’ of the Legio II Traiana in *Not.Dig.* § 28.19. On the other hand, S. Timm (*op.cit.* IV 1843) supposes that the camp of Parembole should be looked for in the village Parembole in the Aphroditopolite Nome; he compares SB I 4672.8. In spite of these scholarly opinions one should, of course, interpret the reference in the *Not.Dign.* as pertaining to the military garrison of and barracks at Alexandria, cf. already Price, 145, 147, and D. v. Berchem, *op.cit.* (n. 16) 62. J. Ball states: \(^{17}\) ‘It is remarkable that Alexandria is nowhere mentioned in the *Notitia*’. This is, of course, literally correct, but Parembole constitutes at least an indirect reference to the ancient metropolis in the *Notitia*.

**Nee** (1. 25): Price, 153, rightly considers Seeck’s emendation to ‘Arsinoe’ as improbable on palaeographical grounds, while he does not wish to accept v. Berchem’s idea that ‘Nee’ stands for Neapolis (in Alexandria); in view of the ‘paucity of units of the *laterculum minus* either in Aegyptus or in cities generally’ he thinks that Nee’s identification with an otherwise unknown Nea

\(^{13}\) Cf. J. Ball, *Egypt in the Classical Geographers*, Cairo 1942, 141, sub ‘4’, right hand column.


\(^{15}\) I use the English edition of Baedeker’s *Egypt*, 1929. H. Kees, PW-RA IV.A col. 198, supposed that such a stop could be found at Fakous, i.e. to the West of El-Salhieh. But this would produce a rather uneven split in the whole journey between Tell el Kebir and Tell Defenneh, and in order to reach Fakous a traveller would have had to leave the caravan route.

\(^{16}\) Price, 153 n.8.f, remarks correctly that an identification of Tacasiria with Taposiris, West of Alexandria (cf. D. v. Berchem, *L’armée de Dioclétien et la reforme de constantinienne* [Paris 1954] 65), is excluded, as this entails that Tacasiria would be situated in *Aegyptus* rather than in *Augustamnica*.

\(^{17}\) *op.cit.*, 161
(kome)’ in *Augustamnica* is ‘rather more likely’. But it seems rather unattractive to suppose that, while most of the camps listed in § 28 can be identified without any problem with place names mentioned in other sources, here one would be dealing with a village otherwise completely unknown. Furthermore, his objection against v. Berchem’s proposal on the grounds of ‘paucity of units’ etc. does not seem decisive. After all, if one located ‘Nee’ in *Augustamnica*, next to two cohorts only one ala would be left in the ‘laterculum minus’ for the defence of Aegyptus. Therefore, I prefer not to minimize the military occupation of Aegyptus more than absolutely necessary and, while comparing the case of Parembole ‘=’ Alexandria (cf. above), I think that v. Berchem’s proposal to identify Nee with Neapolis can be accepted.

*Hipponos* (1. 32): a new attestation of this camp turns out to occur in a papyrus published already 15 years ago, i.e. P.Vindob.Tandem 19.1.8, where it was not recognized by the first editors. I am grateful to my colleague Dr. H. Harrauer (Vienna) for checking and confirming my proposal to correct καστρ ( ) ἰάππωνος into καστρ ( ) ἰάππωνος. At the same time it may be remarked that thanks to Dr. Harrauer’s efforts the reading in 1.9 of the same papyrus can now also be improved, as one should read καστρ ( ) Ἀλυ ἴδ (ινδ.) rather than καστρ ( ) ά ὑπέρ (ινδ.). This means that now one is dealing with the Egyptian place name Alyi attested to date only in the *Itin.Ant.* 168.3, with a variant in the *Not.Dig.* Or. § 28.44, Αἰ.21

Amsterdam

K.A. Worp

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18 For an exception, however, see above, Tacasiria.
19 Cf. the *Dizionario Geografico* III 32 and S. Timm, *op.cit.* III 1207 for other attestations. It was identified by J. Ball, *op.cit.* 161, with ‘Ezbet Qarâra.
20 The same papyrus, i.6-7, mentions a καστρ ( ) Ἰμωνέψει, cf. *Not.Dig.* Or. § 28.28: Thûnepsi.
21 Opposite Geziret el-Wahlîya according to J. Ball, *op.cit.* 161.