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## Quseir al-Qadim and the location of Myos Hormos

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### Citer ce document / Cite this document :

Whitcomb Donald S. Quseir al-Qadim and the location of Myos Hormos. In: Topoi, volume 6/2, 1996. pp. 747-772;

doi : <https://doi.org/10.3406/topoi.1996.1693>

[https://www.persee.fr/doc/topoi\\_1161-9473\\_1996\\_num\\_6\\_2\\_1693](https://www.persee.fr/doc/topoi_1161-9473_1996_num_6_2_1693)

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Fichier pdf généré le 27/10/2018

## QUSEIR AL-QADIM AND THE LOCATION OF MYOS HORMOS

There is more than a little irony in the present discussion of the archaeological remains at Quseir al-Qadim. The pronouncement of Couyat in 1910 that Quseir al-Qadim was only a medieval site carried much weight for subsequent explorers.<sup>1</sup> The excavations conducted by the author from 1978 to 1982 sought an Islamic port of the Abbasid period, as claimed in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*.<sup>2</sup> While the medieval remains are there (and have much interest), most of the site is an early Roman settlement (1st and 2nd centuries A.D.). Apparently this Roman port may now be identified as Myos Hormos, an identification (and prestige) conferred on this site by others. While the location of Myos Hormos at Quseir (or Quseir al-Qadim) has had its proponents from early days, the site of Abu Sha'ar is thoroughly embedded in the literature as this ancient port. The excavations at Abu Sha'ar<sup>3</sup> have resulted in the collapse of this

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1. « ... Couyat rendered a real service in pointing out that *Ḳusêr el-Ḳadîm* is a mediaeval and not a classical site. I have examined the site and found there potsherds of Arab ware, fragments of matting, and date-stones of very recent appearance. », G.W. MURRAY, « The Roman roads and stations in the eastern desert of Egypt », *JEA*, 11 (1925), 142 ; his reference is to J. COUYAT-BARTHOUX, « Ports gréco-romains de la Mer rouge et grandes routes du désert arabe », *CRAIBL*, 10 (1910), 526. At the same time, R. Weill suggested that Myos Hormos might be Quseir in the excavation report, *Koptos* : « Relation sommaire des travaux exécutés ... en 1910 », *ASAE*, 11 (1911), 101.
  2. M. PLESSNER, « *Ḳusair* », *EI*, 1 (1927), 1158.
  3. S.E. SIDEBOTHAM, « Preliminary report on the 1990-1991 seasons of fieldwork at 'Abu Sha'ar (Red Sea coast) », *JARCE*, 31 (1994), 133-58. (This article represents an advance for those following results of these excavations — the site plan now has the north at the page top.)

traditional identification and attracted renewed interest in Quseir al-Qadim.

Myos Hormos and Berenice were « designated » or « restricted » ports (*apodedeigmenos hormos*), according to the *Periplus*. The traditional identification of Quseir al-Qadim with the ancient port of Leukos Limen led Sidebotham to comment, « the discovery of the import-export trade between South India, South Arabia and Egypt at Leukos Limen proves, however, that the Erythraean Sea trade was not confined to [Berenice and Myos Hormos]. »<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, the *Periplus* could be used to argue that Quseir al-Qadim must be Myos Hormos and not Leukos Limen. Indeed, Reddé and Golvin have shown clearly that the distance between Berenice and Myos Hormos in the *Periplus* (1800 stades) is the exact distance from Ras Banas (Berenice) to Quseir al-Qadim.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of this paper is a reconsideration of the results of the archaeological excavations at Quseir al-Qadim in light of this suggested identification with Myos Hormos. As the following discussion will fully demonstrate, the process of archaeological research is not only one of discovery but one of interpretation.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FROM QUSEIR AL-QADIM

### A. Artifacts

The locational debate will not be resolved short of finding a dedicatory inscription firmly attached to an architectural monument. Lacking this, one may begin with documentary evidence as the category most acceptable to historians. Bagnall's reading of the papyri and ostraca suggested two apparent attestations of Leukos Limen, though this interpretation has been challenged.<sup>6</sup> There is,

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4. S.E. SIDEBOTHAM, *Roman economic policy in the Erythra Thalassa 30 BC - AD 217*, Leiden (1986), 96-97.

5. M. REDDÉ and J-C. GOLVIN, « Du Nil à la mer rouge : Documents anciens et nouveaux sur les routes du désert oriental d'Égypte », *Karthago*, 21 (1986-87), 63. L. CASSON, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, Princeton (1989), 97, keeping the traditional identification of Myos Hormos with Abu Sha'ar, dismisses the distance as an underestimate (elsewhere he finds the distances given in the *Periplus* quite accurate).

6. R.S. BAGNALL, « Papyri and ostraka from Quseir al-Qadim », *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, 23 (1986), 1-60. See A. BÜLOW-JACOBSEN *et al.*, « The Identification of Myos Hormos : New papyrological evidence », *BIFAO*, 94 (1994), 27-42.

however, one ostrakon with reference to Myos Hormos.<sup>7</sup> Further, internal documentation shows that Quseir supported a military detachment, a garrison under a *curator praesidii* which may have numbered 50 to 100 men.<sup>8</sup> Internal documents suggest the garrison was in place from the beginning of the 1st through the first quarter of the 2nd century.<sup>9</sup> This agrees with numismatic evidence of occupational activity ; the three seasons of excavations produced only one worn Ptolemaic issue and one coin of the third century. The vast majority of the coins were bronze (*aes*), with a few billon tetradrachms. The identifiable coins are attributable to the reigns of Claudius, Nero and the Flavian emperors (41-96 A.D.) and a later coin of Hadrian (117-138 A.D.) ; this suggests an activity in the first and early second centuries. One should caution that of the coins identifiable as Roman only 1/5 could be attributed more precisely, due to wear and salt damage.<sup>10</sup>

The excavations produced an impressive list of languages used in or around this settlement : Latin, Greek, Demotic Egyptian, Tamil, Nabataean, and South Arabian. The occurrence of Tamil is perhaps the most interesting for the India trade. Two inscriptions on pottery have been shown to record personal names in old Tamil.<sup>11</sup> Not only do these graffiti correspond to Tamil on pottery at Arikamedu, but one of the names is actually found in the Arikamedu corpus.<sup>12</sup> The sherds were found in the structures across the road from the Roman « villa » ; these buildings seems to encroach over the original street (see below), suggesting a second century date ; such a date appears to agree with the palaeography.

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7. BAGNALL, *op. cit.*, cat. 45.5.

8. *Idem*, 5.

9. *Idem*, 4.

10. S.E. SIDEBOTHAM, « Ancient coins from Quseir al-Qadim (an unpublished report) » ; see his comments in *Roman economic policy*, 55.

11. D. WHITCOMB and J. JOHNSON, *Quseir al-Qadim 1978, Preliminary report*, Cairo, American Research Center in Egypt (1979), Pl. 27j (hereafter, *Quseir 1978*), and *idem.*, *Quseir al-Qadim 1980, Preliminary report*, Malibu, Undena publications (1982), 263-64, Pl. 61o (hereafter, *Quseir 1980*). The original discussion of the Tamil was contributed by I. Mahadevan.

12. R.E.M. WHEELER, « Arikamedu : An Indo-Roman trading-station on the east coast of India », *Ancient India*, 2 (1946), 109-114. This was noted by R. SALOMON, « Epigraphic remains of India traders in Egypt », *JAOS*, 111 (1991), 731-36 ; Salomon also discusses an ostrakon written in Prakrit said to be from Quseir in the Cairo Museum.

This area also showed evidence of iron working, a traditional Indian activity ; more important are the numerous ceramic types which appear to be in Indian style, if not actual manufacture. The nearby Roman « villa » had a cellar door made of cedar ; and in the northwest, other architectural elements made of teak. Analysis of other small wood artifacts of the Roman period indicated that virtually all came from outside of Egypt, and most from species native to Iran and India.<sup>13</sup> Connections with Arikamedu have been explored before ; one might repeat here that the *terra sigillatas*, amphorae, and coinage (with the exception of gold) found at Arikamedu are precisely duplicated in the assemblages recovered at Quseir.

## B. The Settlement

The overall character of the site is an orthogonally planned complex, arranged against the steep, western edge of the raised coral beach (see **figs. 1 and 2**). There was no wall around the settlement. The principal buildings are two large complexes of mounded earth, labeled Central Building A and Central Building B. To the northwest and southwest are extensive ranges of low structures and midden debris. To the southeast is the flat expanse of the *sabkha* or mud flats sloping toward the beach and small bay.

### 1. Central building A

Portions of this building were excavated in all three seasons, revealing a series of rooms with vaulted ceilings on the southwestern side.<sup>14</sup> A corresponding series of rooms may be postulated under the mounding to the northeast, as well as closing rooms and walls to the north and south. Some indication of the unity of this structure is provided in a staircase located in the northwest corner of the building.<sup>15</sup> Other than one amphora and a few vessels fallen from upper floors, most materials had been cleaned from these rooms before abandonment. Attached to the west of this building was a row of rooms,

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13. J. JOHNSON, *Quseir 1980*, 337. F.T. HIEBERT, « Commercial organization of the Egyptian port of Quseir al-Qadim : Evidence from the analysis of the wooden objects », *Archéologie islamique*, 2 (1991), 127-59.

14. The fallen brick vaulting rested on piles of debris, suggesting a period of abandonment before its collapse. Walls were standing 2.5-3.0m high, but the solid mass of caliche or rock salt near the surface made it feasible to excavate only alternate squares. Much of this information is included here, since the 1982 season has not yet been published.

15. This staircase turned around a pillar and was made a limestone treads ; controlled access was from an anteroom with locking doorway.

each measuring 9 x 4m, called the White Building (due to the light yellow bricks used).<sup>16</sup> The floors were carefully tiled with bricks and one room had a series of holes against the wall, presumably for standing amphorae. A burial wrapped in Roman textiles was placed in the collapse of the vaulting, indicating destruction during the Roman period.

Central Building A may be provisionally identified as an *horreum*. Following Rickman's analysis, warehouses of the Roman period tended to be courtyard in plan. The *Horreum* of Epagathiana in Ostia (**fig. 3a**), dated to the mid-2nd century A.D., provides a startling parallel to the elements excavated and suggested by surface contours at Quseir.<sup>17</sup> This *horreum* measures 28 x 36m, with an attached row of shops (8m deep) opening on to the street. Storerooms are ranged around a courtyard with two corner staircases leading to the second floor. This building is a distinctive type at Ostia and opinions vary as to its character ; it seems to have been a private storehouse for expensive goods, one in which individual merchants might rent a storeroom, rather like an oriental khan.<sup>18</sup> The plan is not unlike the granary C65 excavated at Karanis in the Fayyum (**fig. 3b**).<sup>19</sup> While the courtyard, stairs and arrangement of rooms are similar, the size is about 1/4 the area and dominated by two floors of grain bins. The details of construction techniques at Karanis have many parallels in Central Building A and others at Quseir. The Ostian « khan » is no doubt the more immediate functional model.

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16. Most of the bricks used at Quseir are a red-brown (all are unfired). The superior quality of these yellow clay bricks led to extensive robbing out and reuse during the Islamic period, a millennium after abandonment.

17. G. RICKMAN, *Roman Granaries and Stone Buildings*, Cambridge (1971), 30-38, fig. 3. See G. BECATTI, « Horrea Epagathiana et Epaphroditiana », *Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità*, 18 (1940).

18. RICKMAN, *op. cit.*, 37-38. He notes the emphasis on locking mechanisms for each door. Further parallels may be sought in Syria and the Levant from this period and later times.

19. E.M. HUSSELMAN, *Karanis : Topography and Architecture*, Ann Arbor (1979), map 12, plans 19-21.

## 2. *Central Building B*

This high mound forms the most prominent feature on the site, lying above the beach and east of the remainder of the site. Several small soundings revealed a complex of mud brick walls and fallen debris cemented into a hard mass of caliche. Little of the architectural character of this building was revealed ; the artifactual assemblage was consistent with the remainder of the site. A relative depression in the center suggests a courtyard arrangement.

A working hypothesis is that, in the absence of a city wall, this was the locus for administration and protection of the town, the *castellum* defending the town. Small forts of the early Roman empire are relatively rare in the East and, based on better known models from European provinces, probably conformed to the « playing-card » shape, rectangular with rounded corners and internal towers (if any).<sup>20</sup> The size of these forts ranges from 1.5 ha. to a more regular 3.5 ha. Fortunately there is just such a fort in the eastern desert of Egypt, that of Mons Claudianus in the Wadi Umm Hussein (see **fig. 3c**).<sup>21</sup> The earlier phase of this fort is dated to the mid-2nd century and has a rectangular plan without towers (its area is *ca* 3.85 ha.). The dimensions of this *castellum* are 75 x. 52m, a configuration which fits comfortably in the mounding at Quseir.<sup>22</sup> Constructions at Mons Claudianus are arranged against the exterior walls with the center left relatively open. The discovery of a small temple in this fort suggests the possibility that Central Building B may have also contained an otherwise unattested religious focus for Quseir al-Qadim. One might also note that the fort at Mons Claudianus forms an irregular rectangle ; a failure to achieve four right angles may also be observed in Central Building A.

## 3. *A Northeast structure*

The original survey of the site revealed a rectangular structure north of Central Building B. In contrast to that complex, however, the limited structural debris in the northeast suggests only a simple enclosure. This suggests a function as a stable, or « animal-lines. » Parallels may be drawn from Mons Claudianus (also in **fig. 3c**) and a number of stations on the Abu Sha'ar road, most of which

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20. D. KENNEDY and D. RILEY, *Rome's Desert Frontier from the Air*, Austin, University of Texas (1990), 138ff.

21. T. KRAUS *et al.*, « Mons Claudianus — Mons Porphyrites : Bericht über die zweites Forschungsreise 1964 », *MDAIK*, 22 (1967), 116-29, Abb. 5.

22. Another *castellum* in the eastern desert is Abu Zawal (= Fatira ?) with very similar dimensions and architecture ; see REDDÉ and GOLVIN, *op. cit.*, 40.

have stables in a similar position relative to the principal building.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. The Northwest and Southwest areas

At this point, one might inquire about the strong resemblances between the remains at Quseir and Mons Claudianus. Indeed, both places had similar functions, they were specialized settlements for an economic purpose — the one for extracting architectural stone and the other for facilitating the India trade. Neither settlement was a Roman city in its classical sense.<sup>24</sup> These were not loci for entertainment or comfortable living, much less intellectual pursuits. The potential for urban embellishments might have been felt by the inhabitants of Quseir, but the key factors of administrative, religious, and commercial functions were rudimentary, or more accurately, geared toward the primary purpose of international trade.

Thus, beyond the individual structures described above, the remainder of the site exhibited an homogenous archaeological character, plentiful indications of thin mud brick walls and piles of refuse, concentrations of sherds and organic remains. A number of soundings into these structures were made ; one of the most substantial was labeled, not without some irony, the Roman « villa. » This structure seems typical of the architecture of the entire western part of the site ; that is, this was the residential sector of the settlement. This residence fronted a street and, with surface remains planned, gave some indications of the axial organization of this area (**fig. 2**). One may posit the beginnings of city plan, that the site may have received attentions from some *agrimensores*. These land surveyors were normally responsible for centuriation of country areas in founding new colonies ; this work also involved laying out of new towns. The basic unit of measure was the *actus* (120 Roman feet on each side, or 35.5m) ; four *actus* made an *heredium*.<sup>25</sup> In practice, the layout of cities was in *insulae* of

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23. Such animal lines are ubiquitous and discussed in D. MEREDITH, « The Roman remains in the eastern desert of Egypt », *JEA*, 38 (1952), 96. This same reference makes a back-handed admission that the road to Myos Hormos described by Strabo (17.1.45) fits the Quseir road better than that to Abu Sha'ar (*idem*, n. 1). See REDDÉ and GOLVIN, *op. cit.*, 56.

24. Thus Sidebotham characterizes the Red Sea ports as « surprisingly squalid places ; » see his « Ports of the Red Sea and the Arabia-India trade », *Rome and India : The Ancient sea trade*, V. BEGLEY and R.D. DE PUMA, eds., Madison, University of Wisconsin (1991), 12-38. He also recognizes the underlying Hippodamian plan at Quseir al-Qadim, *idem*, 27.

25. One hundred *heredia* made a *centuria* ; O.A.W. DILKE, *Greek and Roman maps*, London (1985), 88ff. The Roman foot (*podes*) was 0.296m and the *actus* measured 71



widely varying size.

Given the size of the Quseir ruins, it seems unlikely that standard imperial *insulae* were contemplated, even if a potential for expansion and prosperity was imagined. Nevertheless, an analysis of these remains in terms of *heredia* may reflect the initial layout or foundation of the port. A base line or *limites* west of the shops attached to the *horreum* was taken as the line of the *cardo*, the principal north-south street. The northwest corner of this structure produces a « best-fit » for a series of *heredia* along the western part of the site.<sup>26</sup> The northern *heredium*, Reg. I, was only incompletely developed and seriously encroached over the *cardo*. The *limites* between this and Reg. II follows a major drainage line (possibly worn down from travel) and may be extended as a line north of the stables. This line may have been a « wall » of the original rectangle ; this suggestion is strengthened by surface remains of a square structure at the crossing of the *cardo* and this line, possibly marking an original gate or tetrapylon. This street might have been the *decumanus* connected to the principal route inland (see below). Reg. II contains the « villa » fronting the *cardo*. The less regular structures across the street seem to be encroachments on the original street, a pattern which may have predominated over the idealized plan presented here. Two further *heredia* may be plotted to the south, Reg. III and IV ; numerous lines among the surface remains seem to indicate planning according to this orientation. There is some indication that additional *actus*, possibly an *heredium* labeled Reg. V, were planned toward the southwest. The ground becomes very dissected at this point, limiting the scope (or need) for planning.

##### 5. The Harbor area

South of the above ruin fields is a relatively uniform *sabkha*, or mud flats. The northeast and southwest edges, where the sloping ruins began, were marked by parallel wall fragments. The slope behind the southwest wall was excavated as L8c, attention was focused on surface indications of intensive burning. The 1980 excavations revealed a circular structure set into a rectangular building with a number of small rooms or bins. These bins and much of the surrounding area were filled with ashes and numerous heat-cracked basalt grinding stones. This complex may now be identified as a bakery on the strength of a better

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x 71m. Some indication of early imperial *insulae* may be seen at Carthage, measuring 1 x 4 actus. This information is taken from F. CASTAGNOLI, *Orthogonal Town Planning in Antiquity*, Cambridge, MA (1971), 112-115.

26. In the same spirit of aggrandizement which led to the « villa, » each of these units will be labeled *regio* in this report.

preserved example found at Abu Sha'ar.<sup>27</sup> It may be noted that the bakery at Abu Sha'ar was associated with *horrea* identical to the « White Building » (see below).<sup>28</sup>

Between the parallel walls edging the *sabkha* was a sort of spine extending into the *sabkha*; this mounding resembled nothing so much as a mole and contained several walls of similar orientations, seen in 1978 test trenches and surface indications. A number of walls joined this spine at right angles, suggesting shallow structures. The northwest limit of the *sabkha* was a heavily eroded slope with numerous lengths of a wall again at right angles to the spine and peripheral walls. The resulting configuration of these planned walls is a rectangle measuring 60m by 48m, a structural element of the port labeled Reg. VI. This space is less than the *heredia* posited for the above regions. If this area was developed as a structural complex, its area corresponds precisely with that occupied by the internal structures of Abu Sha'ar, *i.e.* the functional elements of that *castellum* stripped of its fortifications (fig. 3d). Like that site, the spine may be interpreted as a central passage or street with *horrea* and other structures on either side.<sup>29</sup> The structures of Reg. VI have with an orientation differing from the remainder of the town; this characteristic of quays and other harbor elements is well attested in other ports, Alexandria being an obvious parallel (fig. 3e).<sup>30</sup>

An extension of the western wall of this area also marks the limit of the « island, » extensively excavated in 1978. This mound was hypothesized to have been the spoil of dredging operations, an ancient effort to keep the harbor clear.<sup>31</sup>

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27. This trench was the subject of many frustrations as various hypotheses were tested as the complex was dissected; its field designation was « confusion hill. » There is no small satisfaction in seeing a better preserved parallel, nearly identical in numerous details (AS91-N); see S.E. SIDEBOTHAM, « Preliminary report on the 1990-1991 seasons », 153.
28. The *horrea* were AS91-R; both this structure and the bakery appear to belong to the earlier, 4th century occupation, *idem.*, 154. A similar installation, another probable bakery with a corner location, is reported at al-Zarqa in N. Grimal, *BIFAO*, 94 (1994), 421 (see BÜLOW-JACOBSEN *et al.*, *op. cit.*).
29. Over half of Abu Sha'ar contained barracks, which structures would be located in the *castellum* postulated above.
30. There is some question as to whether this open, central area might have been the forum for this town. If one rejects the necessity of a central temple and other ceremonial structures, there may have been some overlap in functions.
31. D. WHITCOMB, *Quseir 1978*, 43. The excavators remain indebted to Prof. Fred Wendorf, who visited the site in 1978 and offered his experience with harbor facilities

This interpretation was apparently overlooked by Peacock, who also failed to notice the series of sondages placed into the *sabkha* in a preliminary effort to determine the existence of the harbor.<sup>32</sup> Presuming some shallow holding capacity in the *sabkha* area, the relatively narrow entry from the bay suggests a *cothon* type of harbor, such as at Carthage or Motya.<sup>33</sup> It is nevertheless difficult to imagine these quays and even this small bay servicing more than a dozen dhows, let alone 120 Roman merchantmen which Strabo reports sailed from here to India yearly. A careful reading of Strabo gives a somewhat different picture. He stresses the increased trade under Roman rule (of his friend Aelius Gallus) by saying that as many as 120 ships were *available* for the India trade after 25 B.C. (It can be surmised that these were the remnants of the Arabian campaign invasion fleet, over 200 vessels of burden and warships ; 16.4.23.) This fleet was presumably distributed among several ports, especially the arsenal at Arsinoe.<sup>34</sup> The mention in connection with Myos Hormos reflects only this port's predominance in the India trade (Strabo 16.4.24, 17.1.45).

The presumed existence of a lagoon (see fig. 4) functioning as a shallow harbor may have had a minimal size of 700 x 200m (14 ha).<sup>35</sup> This lagoon was gradually silted from the Wadi al-Anz (Wadi Abu Unis) on the north and the Wadi Quseir al-Qadim on the south. That the catchment area for these wadis is not as large as that of modern Quseir (the Wadi Ambagi system) may have offered a relative advantage to harbor facilities here. The Wadi Quseir al-Qadim was the only practical route to the Wadi Hammamat and the Nile valley ;<sup>36</sup> this suggests that land transportation would have followed a track west and north of

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in the Fayyum.

32. D.P.S. PEACOCK, « The site of Myos Hormos : a view from space », *JRA*, 6 (1993), 226-32. Whether satellite image or ground truth, a careful attention to antecedent observation and interpretation seems a useful procedure. The beginnings of such investigation of the *sabkha* are of course inadequate for a comprehensive reconstruction of the ancient landscape ; see *Quseir 1978*, 61-62.
33. B.S.J. ISSERLIN, « New light on the 'cothon' at Motya », *Antiquity*, 45 (1971), 178-86.
34. On the character of this fleet, see S.E. SIDEBOTHAM, *Roman economic policy*, 69-71.
35. Peacock suggests a lagoon about 5 times larger, stretching farther to the south, *op. cit.*, fig. 2.
36. This wadi also leads to Bir Nakheil (*praesidium* and mining settlement, QRS-16 and 18) and northwest to the Semna gold mines and Mons Claudianus ; see M. PRICKETT, « Quseir regional survey », *Quseir 1978*, 320-22 and fig. 47. The pass between the Wadi Quseir al-Qadim and Wadi Nakheil has a guard tower (QRS-26) with early Roman ceramics (PRICKETT, *op. cit.*, 314, fig. 44).

the lagoon and entered the town in line with the street between Reg. II and III, convenient to both the *horreum* and animal lines.

#### 6. *Town organization*

This settlement was founded from outside the region rather than arising from a local population concentration. As such, the settlement is artificial and totally dependent on external relationships. The principal players were a diverse group of the Romans, Egyptians, Indians, and Arabs of the Red Sea region, as implied from the languages discovered. The analysis of the organization of the settlement suggests a separation of residential from official structures, the *castellum*, *horreum*, and harbor. The community had two foci, the *castellum* embracing administrative, protective, and possibly religious functions, and the harbor localizing economic functions.

The analysis of the original design of the town, that laid out by the *agrimensores*, is only one aspect of its physical organization. It seems unlikely that further excavations would find only this precise configuration. There are two reasons for this expectation. The first is that close adherence to this town plan would require constant governmental supervision, one resulting from incremental investment in urbanization typical of a classical town. Manifestly, this did not occur ; the profits (and reinvestments) from commerce were taken elsewhere. In other words, the urban identity of this settlement did not take root, presumably because of the hostility of the environment. The second reason is that its population of very diverse origins, as noted above, brought a variety of settlement experience and expectations of urban environment. Little is known of the structural organization of Arabian and Indian settlements of size (whether or not « cities ») ; and the extent to which traditional Egyptian town organization might be applied outside the agriculturally based Nile valley remains to be studied. The point here is that the study of Roman period remains at Quseir has a strength in the interlocking lines of evidence from different regions ; but this situation also implies a marginalized, temporary settlement which ultimately cannot be a typical phenomenon, except perhaps at another port.

### REGIONAL HISTORIC CONTEXT

The long-standing debate on the location of Myos Hormos illustrates the peculiar nature of classical studies, one which either ignores or improperly evaluates archaeological data. Reddé and Golvin clearly illustrate the variety of

port sequence attested in the various classical authors.<sup>37</sup> One little-noticed feature is the tendency of Philostras to wander up and down the coast with little creditable evidence to pin this « city » to one spot. On the other hand, the port of Leukos Limen (Albus Portus) is accepted with great confidence by the majority of observers solely on the basis of a single mention in Ptolemy. The identification with Quseir has continued to be accepted (even by the excavators) in spite of the fact that this new name appears in Ptolemy's text *after* major occupation ceased on this site (witness the coins, epigraphy, and Arretine wares discovered at Quseir al-Qadim).

The long-standing identification of Abu Sha'ar with Myos Hormos invites comparison of these archaeological remains. The harbor area and architectural details in the bakery and *horreum*, as described above (**fig. 3d**), suggest that these ports share a commonality in the architectural traditions from which they have drawn. The structure of Abu Sha'ar, stripped of its defensive shell, seems to coalesce the elements found at Quseir, ranged along either side of a main street. Excavated evidence indicates that Quseir al-Qadim was abandoned by the early third century and Abu Sha'ar may have begun later in that same century ; in other words, there may be a sequential relationship between these two ports. The identifying features of Myos Hormos, as described in the Classical authors, are well known. Both sites have fortified ruins, nearby springs,<sup>38</sup> a harbor with winding entrance, and a dazzling red hill (more convincing as the Jebel Hamrawein at Quseir). The three wooded islands in tradition of Agatharchides is another matter ; such islands do not exist at Quseir, but find ready identifications near Abu Sha'ar. The islands are, indeed, one of the main underpinnings of this localization of Myos Hormos.<sup>39</sup>

A careful reading of Strabo suggests an alternative explanation for the three wooded islands at Myos Hormos. In the presentation of the northeast coast of the Red Sea, the textual tradition from Agatharchides includes the Aelanite gulf (the gulf of Aqaba), Nabataea, a fertile plain and large island, and a gulf of 500 stadia with three islands full of olive trees.<sup>40</sup> The large island may be

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37. *Op. cit.*, 62.

38. The spring (the *Fons Tadnos* of Pliny) is found at Abu Sha'ar (MURRAY, *op. cit.*, 141, with earlier identifications) and at Bir Kareim (*Quseir 1980*, 391-96).

39. The three islands, once covered with trees are said to be Shadwan, Tawila, Jubal ?, MURRAY, *op. cit.*, 141. One of the islands is said to have had numbers of guinea-fowl (*Numida meleagris*) ; the excavations at Quseir al-Qadim have produced quantities of Roman bird bones, mainly *Gallus gallus* (chickens).

40. Strabo 16.4.18 ; Agatharchides 87a. The olive trees are specified as an Ethiopic type,

modern Tiran, known as Iotabe in late antiquity ;<sup>41</sup> the three wooded islands may be the modern Shusha, Barqan, and Sinafir islands, opposite 'Aynuna. The wadi 'Aynuna has an extensive archaeological site and port of the Nabataean and Roman periods (see **fig. 5**) ; these ruins have been proposed as those of the port of Leuke kome.<sup>42</sup> Further, it has been suggested that Leukos limen might be a corruption by Ptolemy of the better attested Leuke kome.<sup>43</sup> In addition to the three wooded islands, 'Aynuna claims a famous water source in its springs and an approach through a « tortuous channel ».<sup>44</sup> Finally, one of the islands had the remains of a shrine of Isis, a deity associated with Aphrodite (see below). Thus the islands in the description of Myos Hormos may have been copied from that of Leuke Kome in this geographical tradition and have no bearing on the association of Quseir al-Qadim with Myos Hormos.<sup>45</sup>

### MYOS HORMOS OF THE PTOLEMIES

The foundation of Myos Hormos by Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 BC) has been widely assumed, yet there is no direct evidence. The attribution is implied from the tradition of Agatharchides, written over 150 years later and available only in quotations (Diodorus, Strabo, and Photius). As Burstein has pointed out, the name implies an unofficial, non-royal foundation ; the other

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one which may be identified as the mangrove or *shora* ; see BURSTEIN, *op. cit.*, 136, n. 4. For a concise discussion of the mangrove in Roman context, see J. DESANGES and M. REDDÉ, « La côte africaine du Bab el-Mandab dans l'antiquité », *Hommages à Jean Leclant*, vol. 3, 183-85.

41. P. MAYERSON, « The Island of Iotabê : A Reprise », *BASOR*, 287 (1992), 1-4. The continuing presence of a customs facility, presumably under Roman control, is suggestive of a similar early role.
42. M.L. INGRAHAM *et al.*, « Saudi Arabia Comprehensive Survey Program : c. Preliminary report on a reconnaissance survey of the northwestern province », *Atlat*, 5 (1981), 76-78. This identification has been accepted by CASSON, *Periplus*, 143-44.
43. BÜLOW-JACOBSEN *et al.*, *op. cit.*, n. 7.
44. BURSTEIN, *op. cit.*, 152, n. 2. Only the brilliant red mountain and guinea-fowl remain unaccounted, see n. 35.
45. For a discussion of the location of Leuke Kome, see P-L. GATIER and J-F. SALLES, « Aux frontières méridionales du domaine nabatéen », *L'Arabie et ses mers bordières*, Lyon (1988), 186-87. It is a disquieting thought that the way to Leuke Kome led on toward another Berenice, that of Aila (Aqaba) ; Josephus, *Jewish Antiq.* 8.6.4 .

ports of Ptolemy II are all named for his female relatives.<sup>46</sup> The text of Agatharchides, as found in Photius, states that a later name for the port was Aphrodite's harbor.

The location of the Ptolemaic port of Myos Hormos cannot be at Quseir al-Qadim from its archaeological evidence, which is consistently early Roman.<sup>47</sup> There remains the possibility of a Ptolemaic port at, or more precisely under, the modern town of Quseir. This idea hinges on four hieroglyphic inscriptions from a Ptolemaic temple discovered by Weigall in 1907. He notes that « ... on one of them was the name Duau, followed by the hieroglyph representing a town written twice to indicate the existence of the two ports. » Recent consensus among Egyptologists stands against this reading ; a more plausible reading might be « deities of the underworld, » rather than a proper name.<sup>48</sup> The stones do seem to indicate a temple to Hathor, which goddess was identified with Aphrodite. Although this was the principal Egyptian deity worshipped east of the Nile, a temple of Hathor strengthens the tradition of Aphrodite's harbor and may refer to the site of modern Quseir.

Prickett suggests that a series of square towers or route markers may lead toward the modern town and may be Ptolemaic in date.<sup>49</sup> Identification of Ptolemaic sites and, more specifically, Ptolemaic ceramics will hinge on the results of recent excavations at Coptos. This material has been used for identification of Hellenistic components of sites along routes in the eastern desert.<sup>50</sup> The architectural evidence from Coptos, also known as an *emporion* to

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46. S.M. BURSTEIN, *Agatharchides of Cnidus on the Erythraean Sea*, London, Hakluyt Society (1989), 136, n. 1.

47. There remains the possibility that the *castellum* might bear evidence of Ptolemaic occupation. Nevertheless, the cumulative evidence of three seasons of excavations can hardly be considered limited in extent and chronologically unrepresentative, as Peacock would suggest (*op. cit.*, 232).

48. A.E.P. WEIGALL, *Travels in Upper Egyptian deserts*, London (1909), 61, Pl. X, 21-24. The reading is limited by the hand-copy of Weigall, which indicates some damage. Nevertheless, the name Douaou may be ruled out. The author is indebted to Profs. J. H. Johnson, E. Wente, and L. Bell for this reading. Further stones, apparently from a Ptolemaic temple, were found in 1978 in the modern town. This was reported by Prof. A. M. A. H. Sayed but remains unpublished.

49. *Quseir 1978*, 319. This point is discussed in REDDÉ and GOLVIN, *op. cit.*, 58.

50. H. T. WRIGHT and S. HERBERT. *Archaeological survey in the eastern desert of Egypt ... 1993* (unpublished manuscript), 11. This survey was primarily concerned with routes

Strabo, seems limited to the temples, churches, and *temenos* walls recovered by Petrie and Reinach.<sup>51</sup>

### THE ISTHMUS

Strabo's conceptualization of the structure of the eastern desert may be of some relevance to the location and history of these ports and their trade (**fig. 5**). Strabo states that there was an isthmus from Coptos to Berenice, a way founded by Philadelphus (Ptolemy II).<sup>52</sup> He next offers that Berenice was not far from Myos Hormos and that Coptos was not far from Apollonopolis (Edfu), « so that there are two cities at either end defining the isthmus ». He then describes the preeminence and improvements on the Coptos—Myos Hormos route in his day, early Roman period. Finally, he mentions the Smaragdus mines « on the isthmus » no doubt referring to the emerald mines near Berenice ; this anticipates his description of Berenice. The routes describe, for Strabo, a difficult passage between the easy sailing of the Red Sea and the Nile ; it is not accidental that he likens the camel-merchants to mariners navigating this narrow, hostile zone of desert.

While we may never know the inspiration for this analysis by Strabo, one may consider the most famous isthmus in the classical world, that of Corinth (**fig. 6**). The isthmus of Corinth separates the gulf of Corinth from the Saronic Gulf. As described by Strabo, the importance of the isthmus was in the exchange of merchandise. For this purpose, there were two ports, Cenchræe and Lechaëum, « the one leads straight to Asia, the other to Italy » (8.6.20). He further notes the harbor (*limen*) of Schoenus which is connected to Pagæ in Megaris by the roadway called the Diolcus, the line of the canal (8.6.22). One may note that Cenchræe was a naval station (*naustathmon*), the same term used for Myos Hormos (8.6.4 ; 17.1.45). The isthmus was thus defined by the two roadways and two principal port cities, Cenchræe and Lechaëum standing for Myos Hormos and Coptos. This geographical configuration may have served as a model for the structure connecting Nilotic and Erythraean ports, joining the

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toward Berenice.

51. A.J. REINACH, « Deuxième rapport sur les fouilles de Koptos », *Bulletin de la Société des fouilles archéologiques* 1910.

52. Strabo 17.1.45. The author is indebted to T. Dousa and B. Precourt for assistance with implications of the Greek terminology ; they would no doubt wish to be absolved of association with interpretations written herein.



worlds of the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean.

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### Classical

Agath.7.81 [from Photius]

Red Mt, spacious plain, large port called Myos Hormos, later named Aphrodite's harbor, 3 islands (2 wooded, 1 with birds).

Diod. 3.39.1-2 [from Agatharchides]

Port called only Aphrodite's harbor, adds winding entrance.

Strabo

16.4.5 [Agath. via Artemidores]. Uses both Myos Hormos and Aphrodite, adds winding entrance.

16.23-24 Aelius Gallus builds 80 warships and 120 vessels of burden, returns via Myos Hormos ; most aromatics of Arabia and India land at Myos Hormos and are carried to Coptos.

2.5.12 Trade as many as 120 vessels from MH to India ; few under Ptolemies.

17.1.13 Under Ptolemies not 20 ships, now large fleets to India and Ethiopia.

17.1.45 Myos Hormos is a city (*polis*) with a naval station for sailors. Discusses structure of ports and cities of upper Egypt as an *isthmus*, with Myos Hormos and Coptos having the major roles in his time. (this book written after 20 AD ; BUTZER p. 18)

Pliny

5.60 Coptos, a city common to Egyptians and Arabians, a market near the Nile for Indian and Arabian merchandise, and the town of Venus (Aphrodite ?)

6.168 Philoteris (Aenum), islands of Sapirine and Scytala, then the desert stretching as far as Myos Hormos, where is the spring of Ainos [Fons Tadnos ?], Mt. Eos, Iambe Island, a number of harbors, Berenice

*Periplus 1* First of Egypt's ports was Myos Hormos, an *apodedeigmenos hormos*, designated/ restricted ports [confirms Quseir as MH from artifacts ; Sidebotham 97 ; 1800 stadia an underestimate, Casson 97]

Ptol. 4.5 [only reference to Leukos limen]

### Chronology

282-46

Ptolemy II Philadelphus, constructed MH ?

c. 116

Agatharchides, on Erythraean Sea, preserved in Diodorus and Strabo

c. 50

Diodorus Siculus. Aphrodite's harbor, winding entrance, 3 islands

30 BC

Roman conquest of Egypt

27-25

Aelius Gallus expedition to Arabia, with Strabo ? used MH for return

30BC-20AD 10-70 AD	Strabo uses Agath, city with naval station for sailors, isthmus Archive of Nicanor, ostraca from Coptos detailing trade with Myos Hormos
43-50	Camp at Myos Hormos built and repaired under Claudius (Sidebotham 65)
c. 50	Pliny the Elder mentions islands, desert, spring of Ainos (Fons Tadnos), Mt. Eos, etc.
c. 50	<i>Periplus</i> written
107-111	Trajan established fleet and <i>via mare rubum</i> .
137	Hadrian built <i>via Hadriana</i>
c. 150	Ptolemy wrote Geography

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[p. 101, suggests Myos Hormos might be Quseir]

## IDENTIFICATIONS

	<i>Abu Sha'r</i>	<i>Quseir al-Qadim</i>	<i>Quseir</i>
WILKINSON 1835		Philoterias	
WEIGALL 1909			Duau
COUYAT 1910	Myos Hormos		Leukos limen (Tâaou)
WEILL 1911		Myos Hormos	
WELLSTEAD 1838	Myos Hormos		
MURRAY 1925	Myos Hormos	Leukos limen (Duau)	
MEREDITH 1952-3	Myos Hormos		Leukos limen
SIDEBOTHAM 1986	Myos Hormos	Leukos limen	
DESANGES 1978			Myos Hormos
REDDÉ/GOLVIN 1986			

Identification of Myos Hormos with Quseir accepted by A.H.M. Jones (1970, 3).  
See summary in Casson's edition of the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, Princeton (1989), p. 96.

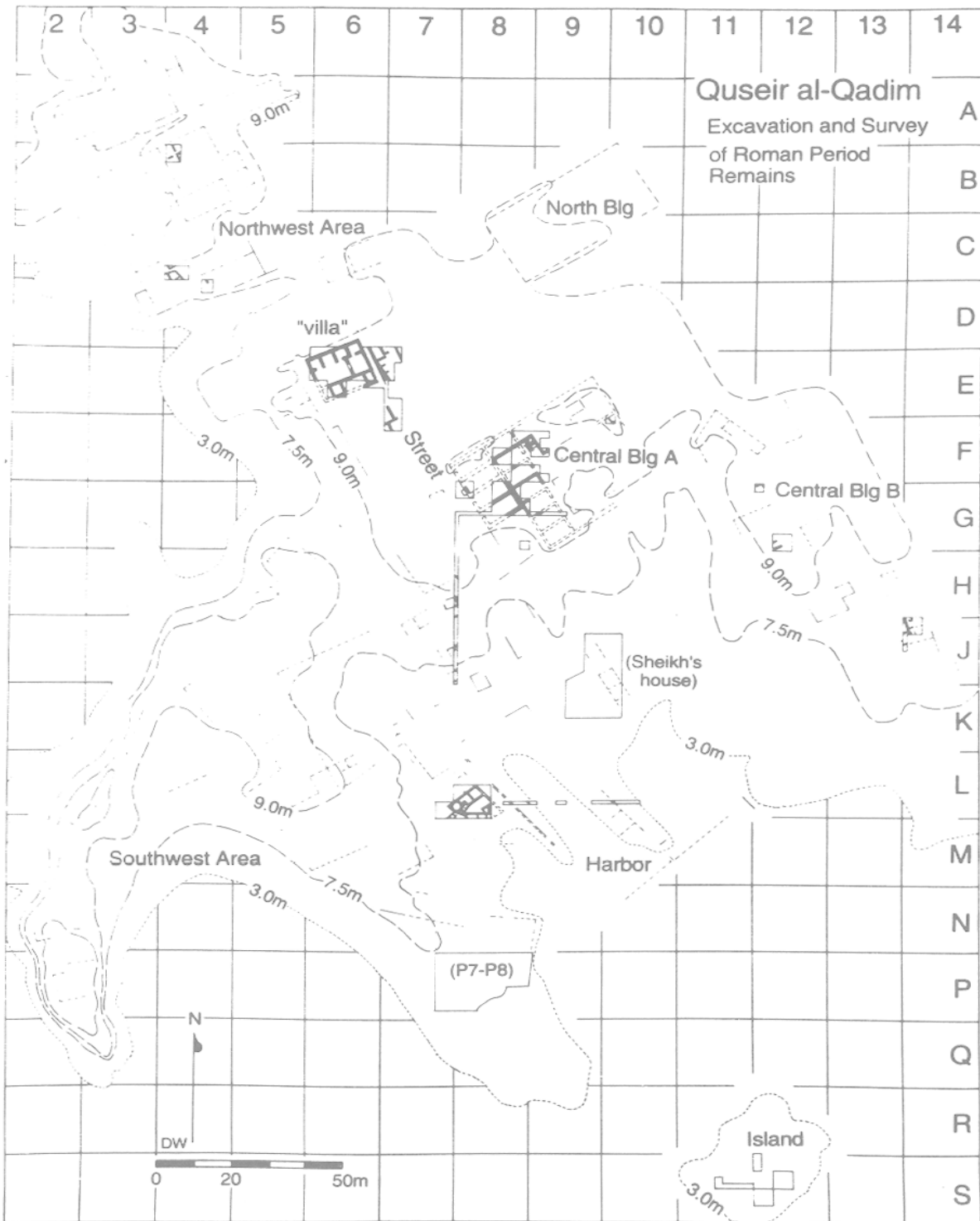


Figure 1 — Plan of the Roman remains at Quseir al-Qadim.

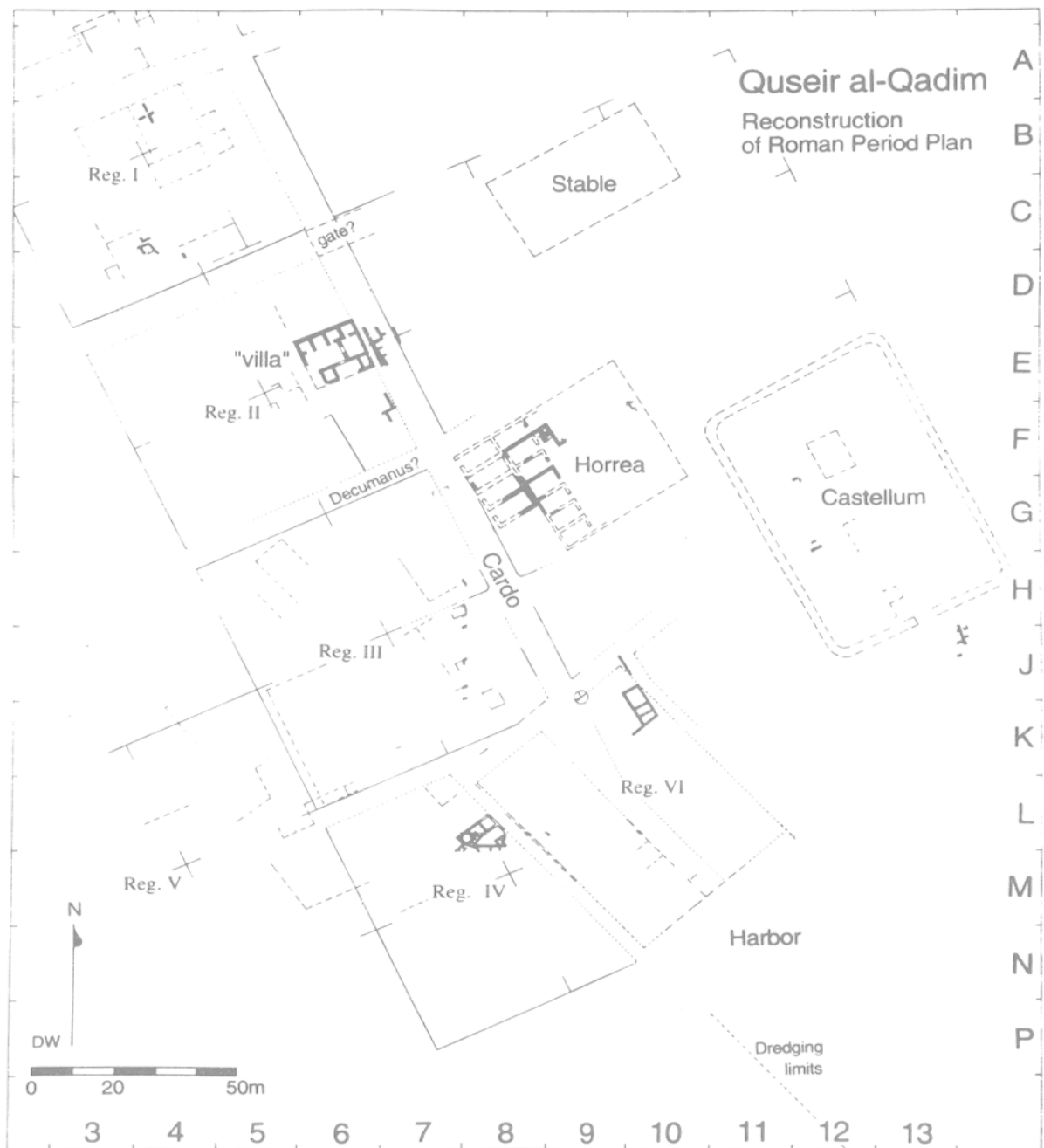


Figure 2 — Reconstruction of the Roman town plan at Quseir al-Qadim.

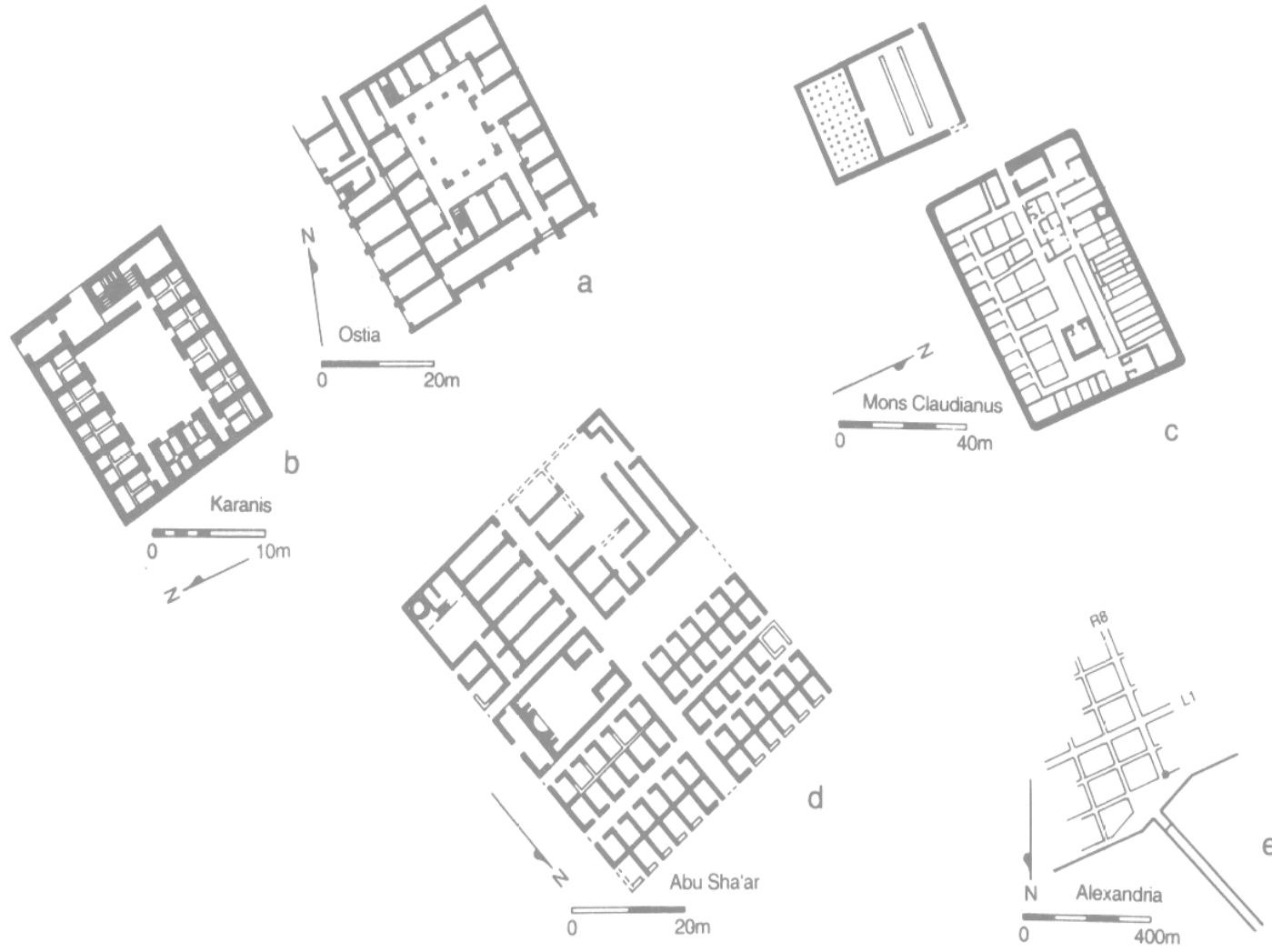


Figure 3. — Plans of architectural comparisons.



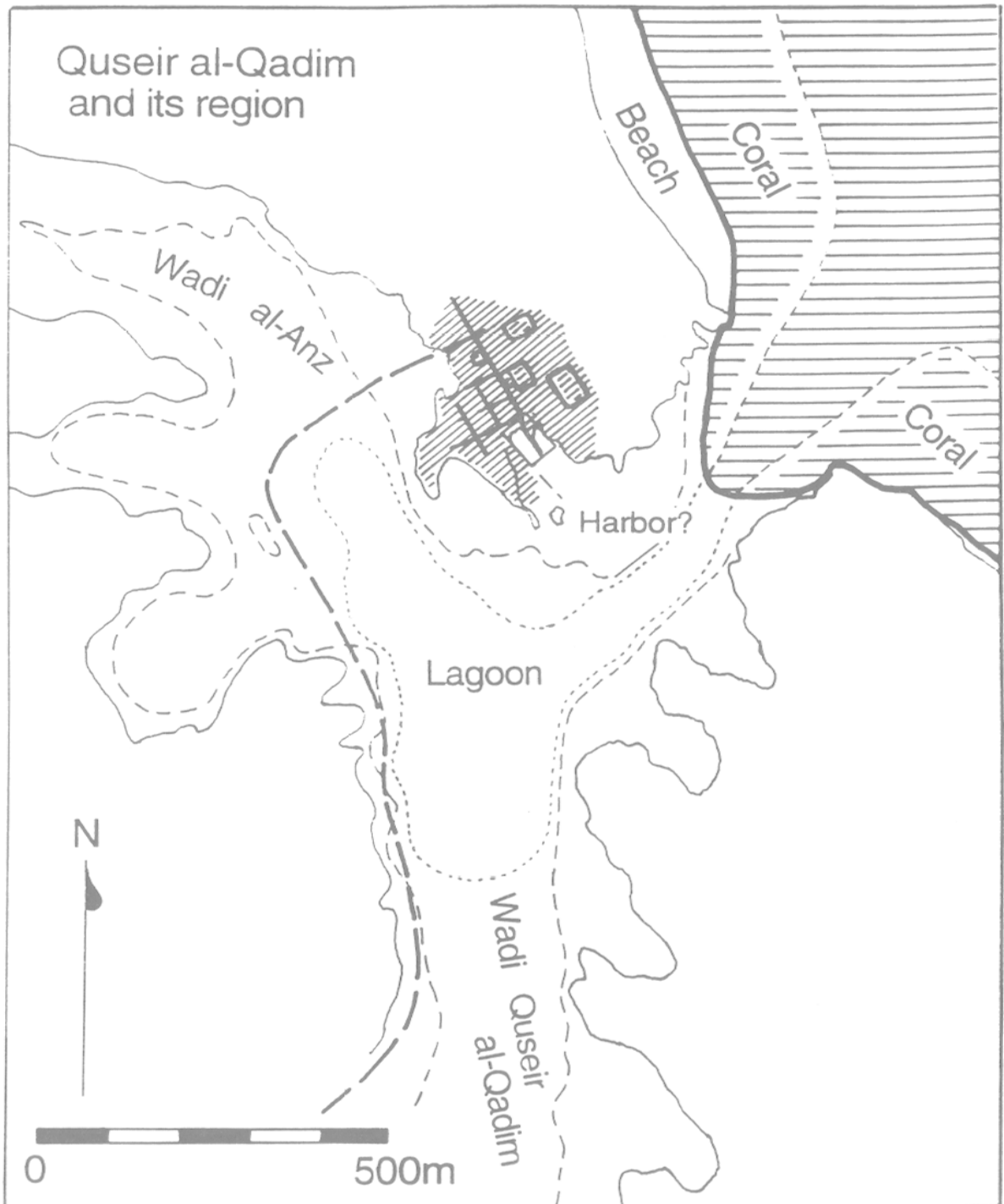


Figure 4 — Map of the region around Quseir al-Qadim.

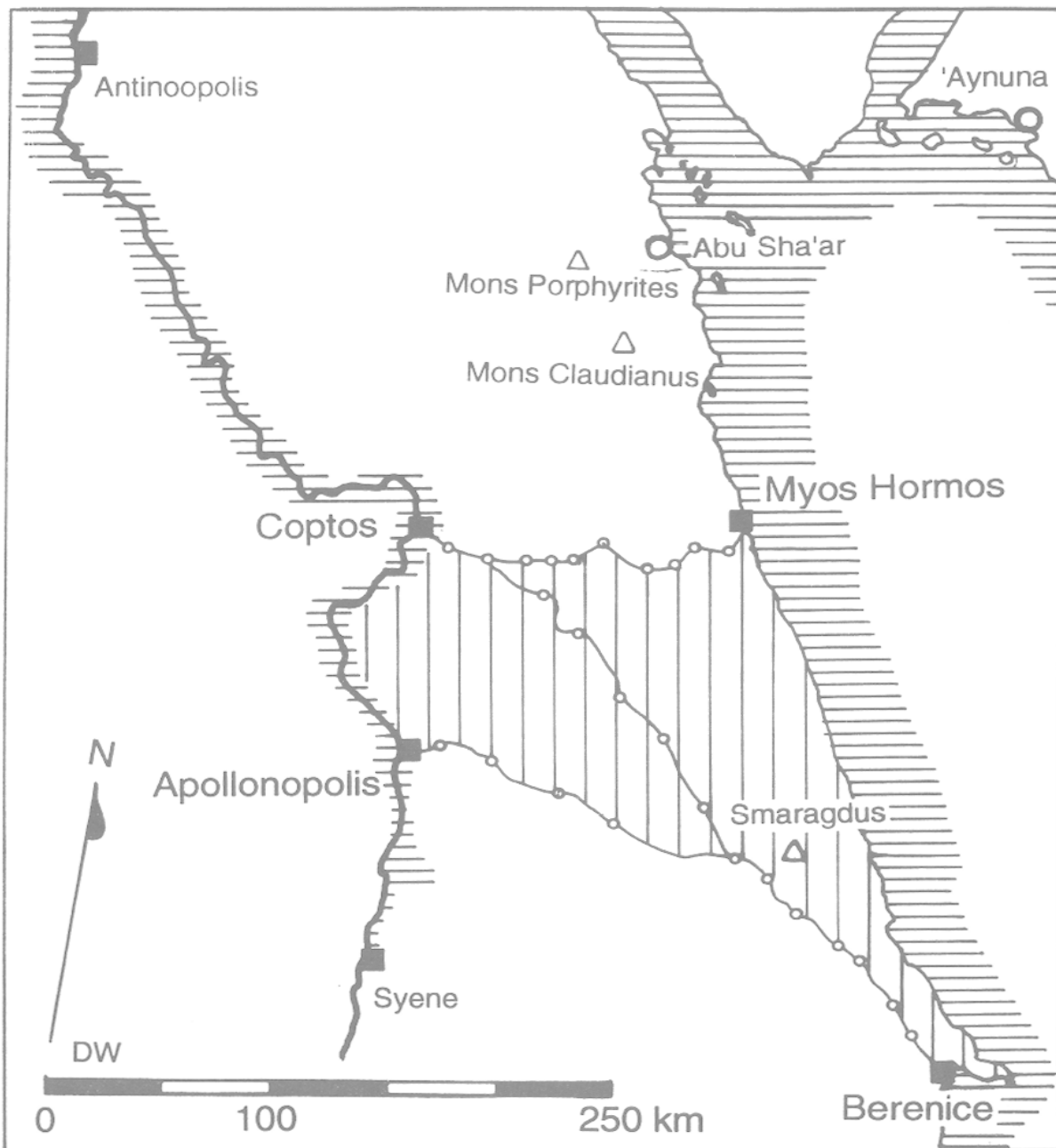


Figure 5 — Map of the Isthmus described in Strabo and sites mentioned in the text.

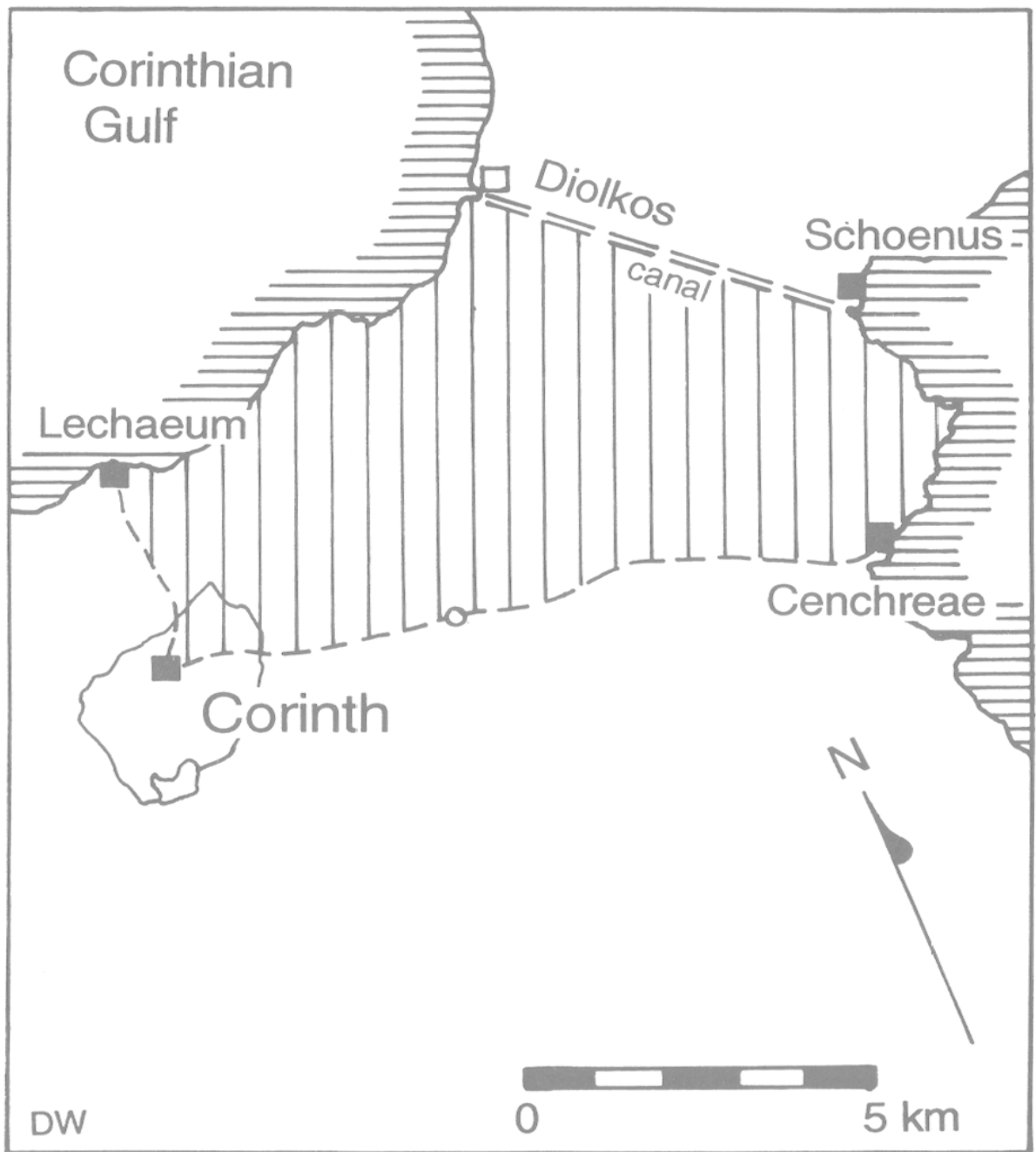


Figure 6 — Map of the Isthmus of Corinth.