



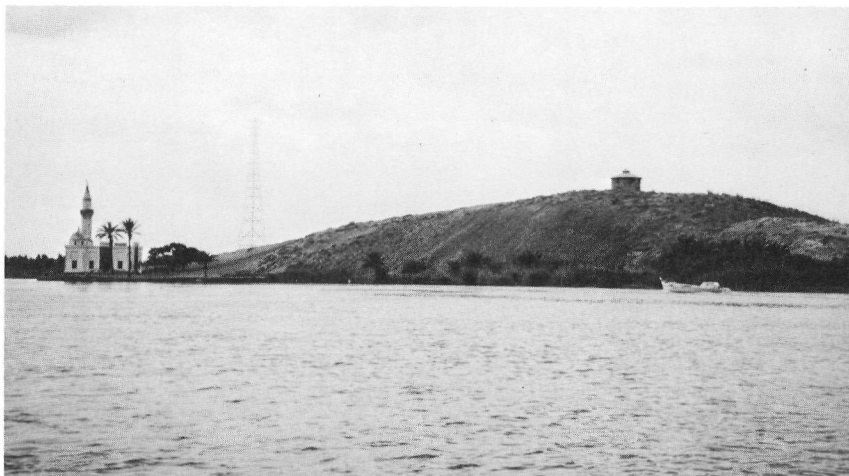
## Quseir al-Qadim

*Donald S. Whitcomb*

The research undertaken this year for the study of Quseir al-Qadim might be described as an examination of the archaeological environment of this ancient and medieval port. Our examination did not consist of a survey of the immediate environment of the site, as is normally undertaken by modern archaeologists; such a survey had already been done for Quseir in conjunction with the first season of excavations in 1978. Rather, this year's survey studied other Egyptian ports contemporary with Quseir, that is, of the Roman and medieval periods. This survey or reconnaissance was necessary as we begin the final publication of the results of the seasons of excavation at Quseir because of the general lack of archaeological comparanda for Egyptian ports of these periods. In addition to comparative collections of artifacts, the examination of other ports was a useful geographical expansion of the primary goals of the Quseir project—understanding of patterns of economic development and urbanization. Ports, which are by definition on the outer perimeter of Egypt, were chosen as the type of settlement on which to focus our attention because that is where interregional interaction was most salient while the background of the agricultural economy was correspondingly minimized.

As we have noted before, in both periods of its occupation Quseir failed to grow or develop; rather, it withered away and died twice over—very unusual for an Egyptian town! This made excavation and

interpretation of stratigraphy relatively easy, but to understand ports and their functioning more fully one must also look at successful ports, including ones still occupied, such as Rosetta, Damietta, and Suez. The fascinating remains of Tell Farama and el-Tor in the Sinai were briefly described in “News and Notes” 86 (March, 1983). Suez and Damietta proved to be disappointing in that the remains reported for these cities have been destroyed by modern development, with the only remnants lying under modern cemeteries. Aswan, the riverine port on the traditional southern edge of Egypt, was also investigated. Not far from the beautiful monuments in the Fatimid cemetery, some indications of the Coptic and medieval town were found; however, just as in Fustat (Old Cairo), these remains are presently being covered over by modern buildings.



*Pre-Islamic mound of Rosetta at Abu Mandur. (Photo by Donald Whitcomb)*

Perhaps the most interesting port visited was Rosetta. This city is famous for the Rosetta stone found in the Qaitbey fort (and indeed, we noted at least seven additional stones with hieroglyphic inscriptions there). The town also deserves to be visited for its magnificent Ottoman houses which have been carefully preserved. South of the medieval town is a large mound with Coptic and early Islamic materials, unfortunately covered by an even larger — truly enormous — sand dune. Since the modern town of Rosetta is expanding toward the ancient city, it is feared that this, one of the few remaining vestiges of Egypt’s early ports, may soon disappear like the others visited.

It is hoped that studies such as this will encourage both foreign and Egyptian specialists to look for regular patterns of urban growth, and that these patterns will add to our appreciation of the economic and social history of Egypt. Such patterns will have applications in the present day and will also serve as models for deeper understanding of the greatness of Egypt's Pharaonic past.

Closer to home, we would like to thank our trio of volunteers who are helping us sort and analyze the Quseir materials: Beth Mosher, Paul Zawa, and, especially, Sally Zimmerman, whose regular commitment of time and effort for over three years is very much appreciated.