New Thoughts on Egypt’s East Frontier Defense System

The escalation of archaeological excavations and surveys, and geological investigations in North Sinai over the past thirty years has revolutionized our understanding of Egypt’s Eastern Frontier. Sir Alan Gardiner’s seminal study, now approaching a century in age, “The Ancient Military Road Between Egypt and Palestine” (Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 20, 2012), served as the standard interpretation of the east frontier defense system until recently. Owing to the survey’s of Eliezer Oren, the work of Mohamed Abd el-Maksoud of the SCA, and excavations of Dominique Valbelle, a new picture has begun to emerge. To this we add the work of Trinity International University, which I directed at Tell el-Borg between 1999 and 2008.

Our project focused both on paleo-environmental study and archaeological excavations that uncovered two New Kingdom forts that were a vital part of the East Frontier defense system. It is now evident that the placement of forts in the New Kingdom was not random, but carefully planned to work synergistically with the natural defenses of lakes, wetlands and Nile branches. Furthermore, new evidence has emerged from Tell el-Borg that chariotry played an important role in the defense of Egypt’s northeastern border region.

This presentation with review the new material from Tell el-Borg and other regional sites that will demonstrate that earlier models of interpretation are insufficient and a new paradigm is required to explain the emerging data and clarify the nature of the eastern defense network.