

*Antinoopolis*  
*Antinoopolis*<sup>(\*)</sup>

Antinoopolis is an ancient city on the east bank of the Nile in Middle Egypt about 8 km north east of Mallawi. It was founded by the Roman Emperor Hadrian on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October AD 130<sup>(1)</sup>. The name Sheikh Ibadah refers to the village on the mound called MadinetAnşina<sup>(2)</sup>. Medieval Arabic sources refer to it by the name Besa, or Tisa, sometimes as Atsa or Itsa, but most commonly it is referred to by the name Ansina. The geographer Idrisi relates that during the lifetime of the Prophet Moses, Ansina was the city from whence Pharaoh's magicians came. Hence, it was named in Arabic Madinet el-Sahharah (City of Magicians)<sup>(3)</sup>. The recent name for the city Sheikh Ibadah refers to IbadAlbn Al-Samet who came to the site during the Islamic rule and established a mosque that held his name and it is worthy to mention that Mariah the wife of Prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him) was also born<sup>(4)</sup> in the city<sup>(5)</sup>.

The desert cliffs behind the site are composed of fine white limestone broken by the large entrance to a desert "wadi" which can be travelled as far as the Red Sea<sup>(6)</sup>. The Nile here actually runs from south-west to north-east.

In the fourth and fifth centuries the town of Antinoopolis flourished, it was the capital of the province of the Thebaid as far as Aswan. The nuns were numerous, and the hermits and monks lived in the vicinity. One of the monks living there speaks of the twelve convents of women in the town and the 1200 hermits living around the town<sup>(7)</sup>.

Emperor Hadrian visited Egypt in AD 130<sup>(8)</sup> accompanied by his wife and a great train<sup>(9)</sup>. Hadrian came from Arabia to Alexandria through Pelusium, the only possible route over land to Egypt from the east<sup>(10)</sup>. After their arrival, Hadrian journeyed to

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(\*) This topic is a part of the Researcher PhD thesis "El-Ashmunein and its Vicinity (An archaeological and touristic study), supervised by Prof. Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim Aly & Prof. Dr. Huda S. Latief.

(1) T., Swelim, "Antinoopolis", *Encyclopedia of the Archeology of Ancient Egypt*, London and New York, 1999, p. 139.

(2) S., Donadoni, "Antinoopolis", *L'Ä I*, col. 323.

(3) Swelim, "Antinoopolis", p.139.

(4) The birth date is unknown

(5) زبيدة محمد عطا، إقليم المنيا في العصر البيزنطي في ضوء أوراق البردي، القاهرة، ١٩٨٢، ص ٣١.

(6) G., Rosati, "The Temple of Ramesses II at El-Sheikh Ibada", in *EA XXVIII*, London, 2006, p. 39.

(7) R., Coquin, and J., Maurice, "Antinoopolis" in: *The Coptic Encyclopedia I*, New York, 1991, p. 144.

(8) He spent about 8 months in Egypt, but unfortunately the record of the journey that was written by Emperor Hadrian himself was lost. Cf. P., Sijpestejin, "A New Document concerning Hadrian's Visit to Egypt", *Historia XVIII*, Wiesbaden, 1969, p. 110.

(9) One member of which was the court lady Julia Balbilla who left mementoes of the tour in the shape of some very indifferent Greek poems inscribed on the colossus of Memnon. Cf. H., Bell, "Antinoopolis: A Hadrianic Foundation in Egypt", *JRS XXX*, London, 1940, pp. 133-147.

(10) Pelusium was a fortified city at the mouth of the Pelusiatic branch of the Nile on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt. Cf. J., Stanley, M., Bernasconi, T., Jorstad, "Pelusium, an Ancient Port Fortress on Egypt's Nile Delta Coast: Its Evolving Environmental Setting from Foundation to Demise", *JCR XXIV No. II*, Florida, 2008, pp. 451-462.

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Upper Egypt<sup>(1)</sup>. With the Emperor was his favorite Antinoos, and on the voyage up the Nile the handsome boy was drowned in the river. The reason of his death is unknown, may be was pushed by someone, or he commit suicide, or gave himself as a human sacrifice, and maybe he slipped and drowned by accident.

The town was officially founded on the 30<sup>th</sup> October AD 130 as a memorial for Antinoos who was declared as a hero-god in accordance with the Egyptian practice of defying those who drowned in the Nile.

Antinoos was born in Bithynium in Bithynia-Pontus<sup>(2)</sup>, probably in AD 110-12. The details of Antinoos' life are mostly unknown but his image however is certain based on so many surviving sculptures. After Antinoos' death Hadrian set up statues of his boyfriend throughout the empire<sup>(3)</sup>. He also claimed to have seen a star representing Antinoos<sup>(4)</sup>. The body of Antinoos, was mummified and encased in a golden sarcophagus, most likely went back with Hadrian to Rome.

The city of Antinoopolis was inhabited mainly by Greeks, who were encouraged to move to the new city. The first settlers called themselves the "New Greeks"<sup>(5)</sup>. Most of the new citizens seem to have been selected by lot from high-status individuals. Some Antinoits came from Ptolemais to the south<sup>(6)</sup>. Other new citizens with Roman names are attested in the reign of Antoninus Pius<sup>(7)</sup>, but they probably came to Antinoopolis earlier<sup>(8)</sup>. It seems that about that time an attempt was made to increase the population of the city by new settlers<sup>(9)</sup>.

The new city had the traditional governmental organs of a Greek polis plus some of the advantages of a Roman municipality<sup>(10)</sup>. The new Hellenes of Antinoopolis were divided into ten phylae<sup>(11)</sup> (each of ten demes)<sup>(12)</sup>. Most phylae names refer to Hadrian and member of the imperial house, including Antinoos, and most deme names refer to

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(1) Sijpestejin, "A New Document", p. 111.

(2) Bithynia was an ancient region, kingdom, and Roman province in the northwest of Asia Minor.

(3) Hadrian also honored him by erecting an obelisk, now in Rome. Cf. A., Grimm, D., Kessler, and H., Meyer, *Der Obelisk des Antinoos*, München, 1994.

(4) C., Adams, "Antinous", in: *The Cambridge dictionary of Classical Civilization*, Cambridge, 2009, p. 52.

(5) Swelim, "Antinoopolis", p. 139.

(6) E., Bevan, *A History of Egypt under the Ptolemaic Dynasty*, London & New York, 2014, pp. 104-108. 108.

(7) He was the fifteenth Roman Emperor who ruled from 138-161AD. Cf. C., Scarre, *Chronicle of the Roman Emperors*, London, 1995, pp. 106-111

(8) M., Boatwright, *Hadrian and the cities of the Roman Empire*, New Jersey, 2000, p. 194.

(9) Bell, "Antinoopolis", p. 139.

(10) N., Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule*, Oxford, 1983, p. 25.

(11) A large citizens' organization, constituting the largest political subdivision of an ancient Greek city-state.

(12) Population centers in the city and countryside of varying size and complexity.

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Athens. The citizens had a council, demos, and magistrates. Their laws were modeled on those of Naukratis<sup>(1)</sup> in an anachronistic touch<sup>(2)</sup>.

Hadrian made citizenship so attractive that many people who had property and social ties elsewhere were glad to accept it, but without the intention of making the new city their permanent home. The citizens enjoyed certain privileges they did not have in their native towns<sup>(3)</sup>, these included the exempt from civic duties in the cities of their possessions, as well as from the care of minors of non-Antinoites. Antinoites did not have to pay sales tax or any transaction made in Antinoopolis, and they paid no tolls for goods they imported for their own use. If they became involved in any judicial proceedings in Egypt, they had the right to return to Antinoopolis for trial. Antinoites could enroll in the Roman legions. At least some new citizens seem to have been allotted land<sup>(4)</sup>. The children of an Antinoite man, and an Egyptian woman were citizens, citizens, but not so those of an Antinoite woman and an Egyptian man<sup>(5)</sup>. Hadrian set up a fund to provide for the children of citizens<sup>(6)</sup>.

It seems that the town in prior to the time of Hadrian was of little importance and the absence of any reference to it in later times makes it probable that Hadrian found little or nothing to hamper him in planning his new foundation<sup>(7)</sup>. There is evidence of previous settlement at the site from the Proto-Dynastic period to the Roman era, at least up to the time of Augustus<sup>(8)</sup>.

Antinoopolis was surrounded by a double enclosure wall from three sides, leaving the western side towards the river open.<sup>(9)</sup> The enclosures built during the Roman period were of stucco while the one dating back to the Byzantine period were of mud brick. The city was built on the gridiron plan in which streets run at right angles to each other, forming a grid<sup>(10)</sup>. The city has two gates in the eastern and northern enclosure walls.

The eastern gate (15-20m wide) was a part of the eastern wall of the city decorated with granite Corinthian columns. The north gate is also decorated with columns of an unknown style. A third stucco portal, composed of a triple-arched passageway of two stories, was found in the western side overlooking the harbor and the Nile. In front of

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(1) A Greek city of Egypt, 83 km south-east of Alexandria, that was founded in the mid 7th century BC by Milesians in the Saitenome (west Delta) as a trading station. Under the Ptolemies, Naukratis was one of just three cities (Alexandria and Ptolemais are the others) in Egypt with Greek political institutions.

(2) Boatwright, *Hadrian and the cities*, p. 194.

(3) Swelim, "Antinoopolis", p. 139.

(4) Boatwright, *Hadrian and the cities* p. 195.

(5) Bell, "Antinoopolis", p. 142.

(6) R., Alston, *Soldier and Society in Roman Egypt*, London and New York, 2002, p. 62.

(7) Bell, "Antinoopolis", p. 135.

(8) Rosati, "The Temple of Ramesses II", p. 39.

(9) Swelim, "Antinoopolis", p. 140.

(10) Bell, "Antinoopolis", p. 135.

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the arch stood two huge pedestals to support statues for Antinos.<sup>(1)</sup> The gate which was considered as the principal portal to Antinoopolis, leads to a wide square open court bordered by 40 colonnades in the north and south sides in considerable lateral distance beside the gate. The columns were, according to the found remains of two materials, the Ionic of red granite and Corinthian of shelly limestone<sup>(2)</sup>.

Two main streets (*cardo* and *decumanus major*) ran from north to south and from east to west and their intersection was regarded as the central point of the city, despite it was not in the actual middle, but mainly nearer to the river than the central point of the city<sup>(3)</sup>. These two streets were adorned by many medium height Doric limestone columns and statues and were paved with basalt<sup>(4)</sup>. The north-south street (*the cardo*) started near a theater on the south (of which the portico was still standing in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century) and ended by a shrine on the north. The road was adorned by 772 columns along its length (1622m) and remains of some structures identified as houses were discovered alongside the road<sup>(5)</sup>. The *decumanus major* started from a triumphal arch on the west to a gate on the east. The street was also adorned by 572 columns along its length (1014m). On the contrary archeological evidence shows the *decumanus minor* was never colonnaded<sup>(6)</sup>. The two main streets were 16m wide with two colonnades on each side, so that the residents could walk in the shade<sup>(7)</sup>.

The streets formed two main intersections marked by a set of four large granite columns (a tetrastylon) raised on high platforms and were surmounted by statues. One of these tetrastyle had a statue of Alexander Severus commemorating his victory over the Persians indicating that the city was still being embellished a century after its foundation.<sup>(8)</sup>

The city was divided into four quarters, each carrying a letter from the Greek alphabet each carrying a letter from the Greek *alphabet alpha* (A), beta (B) gamma (Γ) delta (Δ) and epsilon (E) and at least thirteen blocks of buildings which were numbered.<sup>(9)</sup> Thus the address of a particular house was indicated by specifying both the quarter and the block.<sup>(10)</sup>

According to a 137 AD Greek inscription carved on a stone, the Roman Emperor Hadrian built the famous road "*Via Nova Hadriana*". It acted as a new road from

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(1) Swelim, "Antinoopolis", p. 140.

(2) Kühn named the gate "the triumphal arch". Cf. E., Kühn, *Antioopolis*, Göttingen, 1913, p. 36.

(3) Bell, "Antinoopolis", p. 135.

(4) J., Mckenzie, *The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt*, New Haven, 2007.p. 154.

(5) Swelim, "Antinoopolis", p. 140.

(6) *Ibid*, p. 140.

(7) Bailey, "Classical Architecture", p. 190.

(8) Mckenzie, *The Architecture of Alexandria*, p. 154.

(9) D., Bailey, "Classical Architecture", *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, Oxford, 2012, pp. 189-204.p. 190.

(10) Bill, "Antinoopolis", p. 135.

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Antinoopolis to Berenike skirting on the Red Sea coast<sup>(1)</sup>. The route was only a small part of the massive Roman imperial road network. The inscription describes the road as safe, level and supplied with stations, watch posts and fortified water points<sup>(2)</sup>.

The Via Nova Hadriana was the latest and longest of the Roman roads to be constructed across the Eastern Desert<sup>(3)</sup>. It seems that the road have been constructed as an administrative route not as a commercial route as thought. The length of the route plus being unpaved, was totally not attractive for merchants shipping goods between the Nile and the Red Sea. The more southerly and much older routes in the Eastern Desert were better situated, more direct and shorter for those purposes<sup>(4)</sup>.

The Via Nova Hadriana served some governmental administrative function. It facilitated military monitoring of the region and communication between Middle Egypt and the Red Sea coast and linked, north-south, the various Red Sea ports, installations and settlements near the road with one another<sup>(5)</sup>.

Antinoopolis did not vanish, however, it acted as an active Christian center continuing well into the medieval period. Throughout the first decades of the twentieth century the city's surface was well turned and pitted both by the locals looking for treasure and fertilizer from the silt-rich mud brick.

Unfortunately, Antinoopolis is being destroyed systematically by the residents with the complete failure from the government to protect the site. The last huge structure "the hippodrome" has been levelled to make room for cemeteries. The northwestern corner of the walled city has been bulldozed for agriculture, and the area near the temple of Ramses II temple has been also bulldozed and levelled as the town is expanding here.

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(1) Berenice or Berenice Troglodytica (Greek: Βερενίκη), also known as Baranis and now known as Medinet-el Haras, is an ancient seaport of Egypt on the west coast of the Red Sea. It is about 260 km east of Aswan.

(2) S., Sidebotham, and R., Zitterkopf, "Survey of the Via Hadriana: the 1996 season", *BIFAO* XCVII, Cairo, 1997, p. 221.

(3) Sidebotham, and Zitterkopf, "Survey of the Via Hadriana", p. 222.

(4) S., Sidebotham, *The Red Land: The Illustrated Archaeology of Egypt's Eastern Desert*, Cairo, 2008, p. 42.

(5) Sidebotham, S., and Zitterkopf, R., "Survey of the Via Hadriana: the 1997 season", *BIFAO* XCVIII, Cairo, 1998, p. 353.