

## Guy Wagner

1941 – 2000

The 3rd of September 2000 Guy Wagner collapsed and died in the street on a Sunday morning in Strasbourg, on his way to buy a newspaper.

All deaths, not least the sudden ones, make you think about a lot of things. Very often, and the present case was no exception, you regret all the things you would have discussed with or said to the departed, but never did because there was plenty of time. In Guy's case also because, like most other people, I had imperceptibly lost contact with him of late. And yet, I knew him well. Guy was the person who taught me how to travel in Egypt and first of all, who showed me the Eastern Desert, Mons Claudianus, Mons Porphyrites, the tracks from the Red Sea to the Nile, places that have been of profound importance to my later work and life. He also showed me, the desk-trained papyrologist, that the phenomena of the papyri corresponded to a physical reality on the ground. Guy who had such knowledge of the country and its people was always able to show how little things had changed in essentials since antiquity.

It was on my first visit to Egypt in 1978 that I first met him. We, the photographic mission of the AIP, Revel Coles, Wilfried Van Rengen, myself, and in later years Walter Cockle, were working in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo and were cordially received by him at his office in the IFAO and at his home, where he and Jenny knew how to make people feel welcome. For Guy lived permanently in Cairo and had married there.

But he was also an *Elsaßer*, equally sceptical of anything German and anything French, who would constantly remind you what this or that expression *really* was in his native Alsatian dialect. After his university studies with Jacques Schwartz in Strasbourg, he first became a high-school teacher in Saint Avold

from 1963 to 1967. That year he was sent, as a member of the *coopération*, a kind of alternative military service abroad, to teach in Ain Shams university in Cairo. From 1969 to 1973 he was a member, *pensionnaire*, of the IFAO in Cairo and from 1973 he was employed by the CNRS, but stayed in Egypt until 1986 when he returned to his native Strasbourg, but often came back to Egypt to participate in both French and German archaeological projects. Most important for him was always Doush and the Western Oases. He had been among the first scholars to participate in the excavation of Doush when Serge Sauneron opened the site in 1976 and he continued to come back there until 1993. For a time in the early 1980'ies he was *chef de chantier* and I shall never forget his vivid recital of negotiations with the local sheikh. For Guy knew how to tell a good story and did so with gusto.

From 1981 to 1985 the annual visits of the photographic archive team gave us several occasions to get out of Cairo with Guy, who drove his newly acquired Lada Niva to the Fayum and later, when it became possible, to Mons Claudianus and Mons Porphyrites. In 1988 we visited together the Dakhleh Oasis Project in Bashandi in order to see the newly found wooden codices and I still remember Guy's excitement over what we then called 'the Farm Account Book', now published by R.S. Bagnall, *The Kellis Agricultural Account Book*, 1997. (Dakhleh Oasis Project: Monograph No. 7 = *Greek Papyri from Kellis* vol. IV, 96). Guy had recently published his doctoral thesis *Les Oasis d'Égypte à l'époque grecque, romaine et byzantine d'après les documents grecs* (Recherches de papyrologie et d'épigraphie grecques). (Bibliothèque d'étude. 100. IFAO, Le Caire 1987) and was probably the person who had the most detailed knowledge of the region and its documents. On that occasion he immediately saw answers to questions that he would have liked to have before publishing the book.

In 1993 disaster struck, as far as Guy was concerned. In the nervous climate created in Egypt after the first terrorist attacks, a suitcase of his, which he was sending back from Doush to Cairo with a car while he himself went to another excavation, was opened at a police road-block and found to contain a few worthless, uninscribed potsherds, which for some reason he had wanted

to bring to Cairo. Guy had to leave Egypt in great haste and could never come back. Under different circumstances in Egypt, the whole affair would have been deemed a silly misunderstanding, but just then tempers were short. For someone whose most important contribution to scholarship had always been the publication of stray texts, be they ostraca, inscriptions, graffiti or papyri, which he found on his travels in Egypt, this was a catastrophe. He had always refused to participate in the electronic age which was dawning, and now he isolated himself even further - presumably to avoid pity, or even sympathy, from colleagues, which to his tormented mind would have been unbearable. He stopped going to libraries, no longer took part in congresses, generally avoided colleagues, but worked at home on texts already found with the means to hand in his apartment. Like most others, I lost contact with him then, but many are the occasions, not least in the desert, when a one of Guy's pregnant descriptions of situation in his special choice of words will come to mind.

*Copenhagen*

ADAM BÜLOW-JACOBSEN