

Berenike and Aynuna: Polish research on the Red Sea

Foreword

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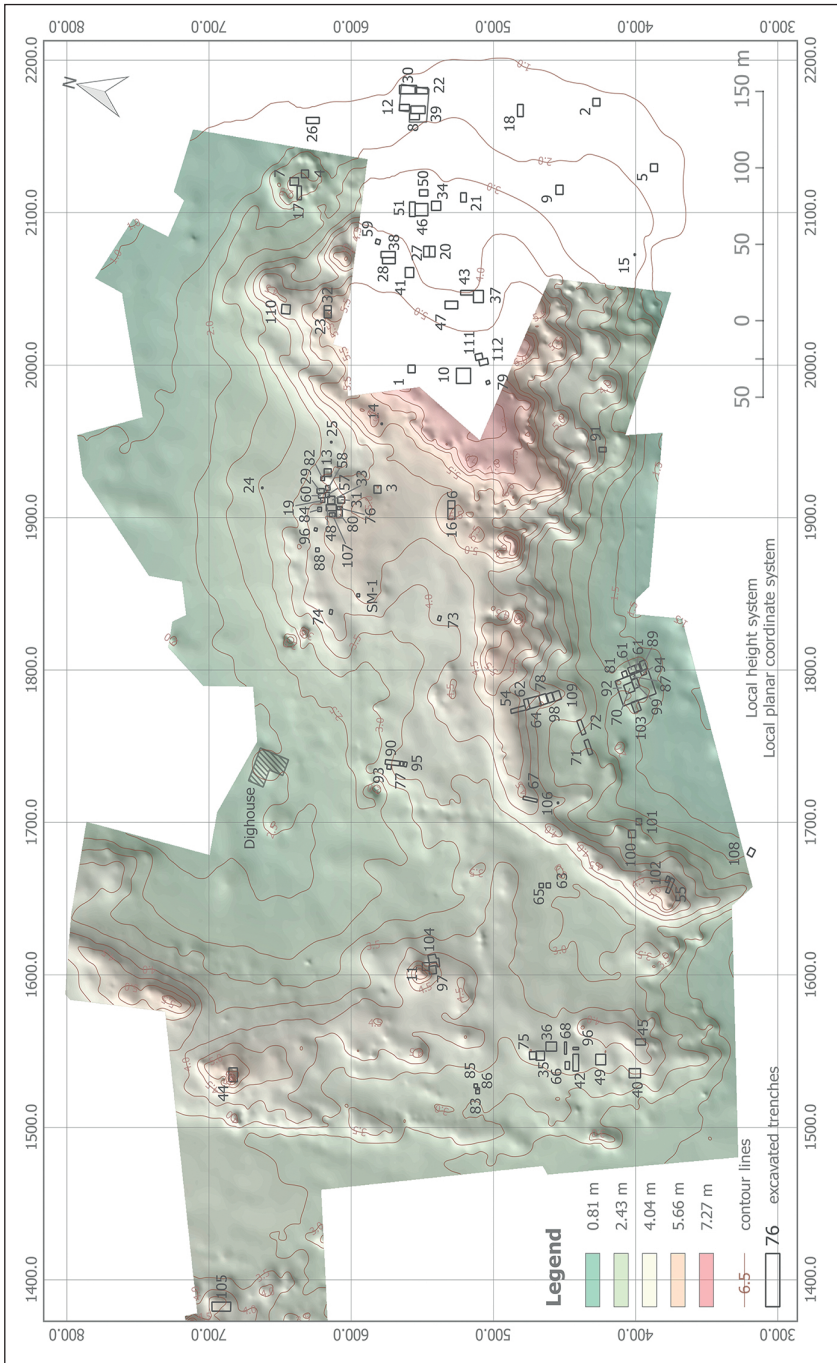
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In 2016, the Berenike Project could not go afield. A rudimentary team waited in blocks in Cairo for all the permits to arrive. It must have been like that for the ancient merchants waiting in Berenike for the sailing season to begin, for the ships to come to port after the long monsoon-driven journey across the Indian Ocean and up the Red Sea, for the camel caravans to labor their way across the Eastern Desert.

This time around the permits were delayed for too long and the season was cancelled. Instead, taking advantage of our stay in Cairo, we took the opportunity to present to a Cairene audience of Egyptian and international archaeological professionals a review of Polish research being conducted in the Red Sea region. Beside the work at Berenike, carried out by an American–Polish team, the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw had also recently initiated a survey and excavation program at the site of Aynuna on the Saudi Arabian coast of the Red Sea, probably identical with the ancient Leuke Kome.

Polish research in Berenike in Egypt started with the invitation from Prof.

Steven E. Sidebotham from the University of Delaware, USA, to reopen the Dutch–American project that had investigated the site over eight fruitful seasons from 1994 to 2001. In 2008, the new Polish–American project, co-directed by Sidebotham and Iwona Zych (PCMA UW), started work with a week-long magnetic survey that picked up on earlier geophysical prospection done in Berenike by the previous team. Since then the Berenike Project has put in seven (at the time of printing) seasons of excavation and one study season recently in September–October 2017, coupled with a number of study periods devoted to the finds in storage in the SCA storeroom in Qift. The work in Berenike is supported by grants from the National Science Center of the Republic of Poland for the investigation of the religious buildings on the site in context of religious practices and beliefs in the “Red Land” (I. Zych, UMO-2014/13/N/HS3/04400) and an exploration of the Hellenistic beginnings and evolution of the port, from military base to international emporium (M. Woźniak, UMO-2015/17/N/HS3/00163). Another important sub-project is Martin Hense’s work



Plan of Berenike with the location of excavation trenches (PCMA Berenike Project/plan update A. Szeszko, 2017)

on the Great Temple of Berenike, which kicked off in 2015 with some spectacular finds.

The Berenike Project also acts as an umbrella program for projects in the Eastern Desert, such as the long-lasting survey of the hinterland carried out from year to year by Steven E. Sidebotham, coupled with a survey of the emerald mines and associated settlements in Wadi Sikait and Wadi Nugrus, field directed by Jean-Louis Rivard. Recently, the prehistoric cattle and sheep burial enclosure at Wadi Khashab, discovered by the survey in 2010/2011, has been excavated by a Polish team, Piotr Osypiński (Patrimonium Foundation) and Marta Osypińska (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poznań), under a grant from the

National Science Center of Poland (UMO-2012/07/N/MS3/04056).

Comprehensive season reports have appeared in the journals *Sahara Journal*, *Journal of Indian Ocean Archaeology*, *Egyptian Archaeology* and PCMA's own *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*; full excavation reports to date have presented the findings of the 2008 and 2009 seasons (2011) and the 2010 and 2011 seasons (2017); seasons 2012 through 2015 are now in preparation, all published in the PCMA Excavation Series.

Polish interest in Aynuna, a port on the other, eastern side of the Red Sea and, in a sense, a sister port for Berenike, started at the invitation of Prof. Ali Al-Ghabban from the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage and is carried out

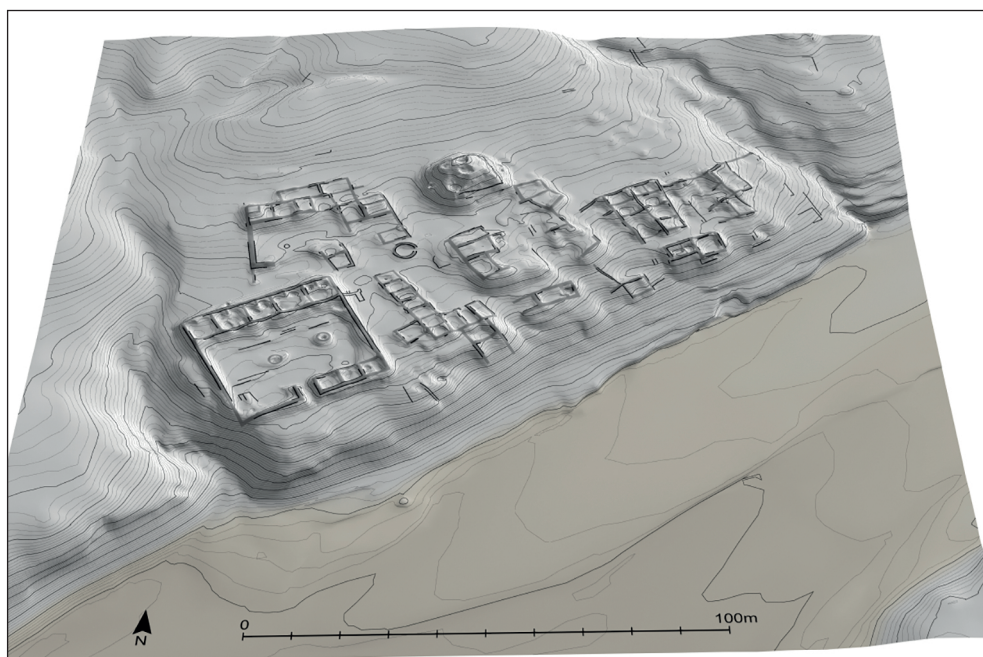


Fig. 2 Plan of Lower Aynuna
(PCMA Aynuna Project/J. Kaniszewski, 2017)

in collaboration with the Saudi side within the frame of a study of the infrastructure of international trade in the Red Sea area in the Roman period, funded from a Polish National Science Center grant UMO-2014/14/M/HS3/00795. The project is headed by Prof. Michał Gawlikowski and in the seven fieldwork seasons to date has surveyed the immediate environs of the modern port of Khoraiaba, which is regarded by some scholars as the site of the Nabatean port of Leuke Kome, known from the historical record. The harbor itself has not yielded much of interest in terms of ancient substance. Instead, the team has focused on an archaeological site located some 3 km away from the shore, in Wadi Aynuna, consisting of at least five large rectangular structures spread over an area approximately 160 m long by 80 m wide. These structures were most probably *caravanserais*. They were all built on a very similar plan, bearing a definite resemblance to a type of monument usually called a *khan*, such as were built in later times along the Darb al-Hajj. Only one of them is complete, a nearly square building (36 m by 37 m), centered on a huge courtyard. Other structures are fragmentary and seem older. The buildings, which seem to have been storage facilities, served a brisk commercial exchange over a long period of time from the 1st century AD through the 8th century AD.

Survey work in the vicinity of the site also uncovered a well preserved town at the top of the plateau. Upper Aynuna, in opposition to Lower Aynuna with the *caravanserais*, appears to have been a settlement of some substance. This small

town stands atop a fossil coral reef (in this being like Berenike). A surface survey and very limited trenching has shown that the two sites, Lower and Upper Aynuna, are contemporary.

The one-day conference mentioned above, entitled “*Imperial Berenike and its antecedents on the Red Sea coast*,”¹ was held on 23 March 2016 in the Ahmed Basha Kemal Hall of the Supreme Council of Antiquities’ main office in Cairo-Zamalek. Speakers included members of the Berenike and Aynuna teams, as well as Hany Abo el Azm, then Director of the Foreign Missions Affairs Department of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, presenting the results of his archaeological survey of the *nawamis* in Wadi Solaf and Ein Huderah in South Sinai. Rounding off the presentation of current archaeological projects in the Red Sea region were poster presentations of the French work in the harbor of Wadi el-Jarf (Pierre Talet, Sorbonne University, Paris) and the mines of Samut in the Eastern Desert (Bérangère Redon, HISOMA, CNRS, and Thomas Faucher, IRAMAT-CEB, CNRS), and the Italian research in Adulis in Ethiopia (Enzo Cocca, Andrea Manzo, Dario Nappo, Valentina Perna and Chiara Zazzaro, University of Naples “L’Orientale”).

The present volume gathers together several of the Berenike and Aynuna presentations from this conference, but it actually opens with a paper on the Indian trade between the Gulf and the Red Sea that was read by Michał Gawlikowski at the workshop *From the Red Sea to the Gulf. New directions in PCMA UW archaeological research*, held at the Uni-

¹ For the conference materials, see <http://www.pcma.uw.edu.pl/2016/02/19/seminarium-imperial-berenike-and-its-antecedents-on-the-red-sea-coast-w-stacji-w-kairze/>

versity of Warsaw on 18–19 October 2013. This is followed by a brief presentation by Karol Juchniewicz of background nautical and topographical studies, the evidence from which may be marshalled in favor of the interpretation of the site as the ancient Leuke Kome of the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*.

It is only natural that with so many more years of research behind it, the Berenike Project dominates the rest of the volume. Marek Woźniak's research into the Hellenistic beginnings of the harbor is presented as an appraisal of the archaeological data for the early fortifications and their role in shaping the new settlement. The environmental conditions for the establishment of the harbor in this spot are investigated in Anna Maria Kotarba-Morley's landscape and seascape reconstruction based on her doctoral program of geoarchaeological research carried out within the frame of the Berenike Project. Iwona Zych gives an overview of the archaeological excavation in the southwestern embayment, taking this material as a point of departure for a "lived experience" picture of the harbor of Berenike in early Roman times — the "Imperial" Berenike at the peak of its development. The archaeological section finishes with Martin Hense's summary of the findings made by the Berenike Temple Project, a convenient collection of information concerning the discovery and exploration of the so-called Serapis Temple. It was after all the first structure in Berenike to be investigated by early archaeologists.

Two of the articles delve into investigations of specific finds. Renata Kucharczyk takes a closer look at the early Roman

luxury glass tableware, which is found both in the harbor trenches and in the early Roman trash dumps. Joanna Then-Obluska reflects on the finds of beads and pendants from the late Harbor Temple and the harbor temenos that was identified in the mouth of the bay that had been the natural landing place of the Berenike harbor. Her interest is in materials, techniques, functions and cultural attribution, the latter of special importance for the study of the ethnical make-up in the town of the late period in the late 4th through early 6th century AD.

Finally, the article by Marta Osypińska and Piotr Osypiński, treating on the human–pet relation in early Roman Berenike, presents new evidence, archaeological and archaeozoological, coming from the excavation of the animal cemetery located in the northern quarter of Berenike, amid the early Roman trash dumps. In Egypt of the Roman period, this particular cemetery finds no evident parallel in view of the fact that the cats and dogs (in the main) buried here were not mummified and appear not to have been treated like the sacred animals of the Nile Valley.

Last but not least, Delia Eguiluz Maestro, the Project's talented field conservator, takes her turn in presenting the challenges she faces in the field and the solutions that can be applied in such difficult desert conditions.

All in all, the volume is a modest but important contribution, giving an idea of the research that is being done in this region by Polish researchers and their international associates within the frame of a developing program of Red Sea and Gulf studies at the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology.

"IMPERIAL" BERENIKE AND ITS ANTECEDENTS ON THE RED SEA COAST

SEMINAR
23 MARCH 2016

AHMAD BASHA KAMAL
LECTURE HALL
MINISTRY OF ANTIQUITIES

CAIRO-ZAMALEK



PHOTOS BY STEVEN SIDEBOTHAM



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