

Religion and Burial at the Ptolemaic-Roman Red Sea Emporium of Berenike, Egypt

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Abstract Partial excavation of five or possibly six religious edifices at the Ptolemaic-Roman (third century BC-sixth century AD) Red Sea emporium of Berenike, Egypt, chronicles many aspects of the sacred, especially in the middle and late Roman periods. We know far less about Ptolemaic and early Roman era religious life at the port. Epigraphic remains and artifacts of a devotional nature also provide insights into the spiritual lives of those residing in or passing through the city. Egyptian, classical Greco-Roman and Hellenistic hybrid deities predominated with evidence of Christian, Palmyrene, South Arabian, and Zoroastrian religious activities as well. There may also be some data on the religious practices of indigenous desert dwellers, the Blemmyes, the Trog(l)odites/Trogodytes, the Ichthyophagi, and people from Nubia and, perhaps, Meroë. We know far less about the burial practices of Berenike's inhabitants. Aside from a few makeshift interments and disarticulated remains, only a small portion of a cemetery at the edge of the site has been excavated and many hundreds of tombs, mostly robbed, have been examined southwest and west of the city. Both necropoleis are late Roman in date; the one adjacent to the city preserves different modes of burial depending, most likely, on the economic circumstances, ages, or ethnic identities of the deceased entombed there. Paradoxically, though there is ample documentation for peoples from South Asia and the African Kingdom of Axum residing at or regularly passing through Berenike, little or no recognizable evidence of their religious proclivities or burial customs has been recorded.

Résumé Excavation partielle de cinq ou peut-être six édifices religieux à la ptolémaïque-romain (III^e siècle av JC-sixième siècle de notre ère) Mer Rouge emporium de Berenike relate de nombreux aspects du sacré en particulier dans le milieu et romaine tardive. Nous savons beaucoup moins sur ptolémaïque et au début de la vie religieuse de l'époque romaine au port. Épigraphique restes et les artefacts de nature religieuse donnent aussi une idée sur la vie spirituelle de ceux qui résident ou de passage à travers la ville. Divinités hybrides classiques gréco-romaine et hellénistique égyptiens ont prédominé avec preuve de Christian, Palmyre, l'Arabie du Sud et des

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activités religieuses zoroastrienne ainsi. Nous savons beaucoup moins sur les pratiques funéraires des habitants de Bérénice. Mis à part quelques enterrements de fortune et des restes désarticulés, seule une petite partie d'un cimetière à la périphérie du site a été fouillé et plusieurs centaines de tombes, la plupart du temps volé, ont été examinés sud-ouest et l'ouest de la ville. Les deux nécropoles sont en retard dans la date romaine; l'un à côté de la ville conserve différents modes de sépulture en fonction, probablement, sur la situation économique, l'âge ou identifie ethniques du défunt enseveli là. Paradoxalement, bien qu'il y ait suffisamment de preuves pour les peuples d'Asie du Sud et le Royaume d'Aksoum africaine résidant à ou qui passent régulièrement si Bérénice, aucune preuve de leurs penchants religieux ou les coutumes funéraires a été enregistrée.

Keywords Late Roman Harbor Temple · Sunken feature · Shrine of the Palmyrenes · So-called Serapis Temple · Northern Shrine · Christian ecclesiastical facility · South Asians · South Arabians · Axumites · Blemmyes · Trog(l)odites/Trogodytes · Ichthyophagi · Nubia · Meroë

Introduction

Ptolemy II Philadelphus founded Berenike on the Red Sea coast of Egypt sometime in the second quarter of the third century BC and named it after his mother (Pliny, *Natural History* 6.33.168); the emporium was gradually and peacefully abandoned sometime before the mid-sixth century AD. Our excavations at Berenike between 1994 and 2014 documented numerous aspects of the long-distance “international” commerce that was the city's raison d'être (Fig. 1). Our fieldwork also recorded evidence that revealed many facets of the daily lives of those dwelling in or passing through the port including their languages, culinary and sartorial preferences, the pets they owned, decoration of their homes, and religious practices and burial customs. This paper focuses on the latter two topics.

Excavations documented large quantities of data on religious activities at Berenike, but much less on burial practices. The vast majority of the evidence derives from the Roman period (late first century BC to the mid-sixth century AD); we know far less about the Ptolemaic era (second quarter of third century to late first century BC). Most of the deities honored at the port throughout its 800-year history were the same as those venerated elsewhere in the wider Mediterranean world and in Egypt at that time. There were classical Greek and Roman divinities, purely Egyptian ones and Greek-Hellenistic-Egyptian hybrids. There is also evidence for honoring a god from the Syrian Desert caravan city of Palmyra. Some data suggest the worship of at least one deity from southern Arabia and one from Persia. However, despite abundant archaeological evidence for their presence and likely residence in Berenike, no positively identifiable objects or structures of a religious or funerary nature associated with South Asians have thus far been documented from our excavations (*cf.* Sidebotham 2011, pp. 75, 227–229).

Fourteen seasons of survey and excavation at Berenike itself (1994–2001 and 2009–2014) have identified five significant structures with religious functions. Inscriptions, graffiti, and ostraca also document religious activities at the port. In addition,



Fig. 1 Map of Egypt. (Drawing: M. Hense)

representations of deities, their epithets, or religious symbols in bronze, stone, terracotta, wood, glass, eggshell, and faience excavated from numerous contexts, both

sacred and profane, provide insights into the spiritual lives of Berenike's residents. Portions of one necropolis have been excavated as have some individual skeletons and disarticulated human remains.

Religious Practices

Architectural Evidence and Evidence from within the Shrines

Thus, far five substantial structures have been excavated in whole or in part, which clearly had religious functions. From west to east these are the following: the Late Roman Harbor Temple, the Shrine of the Palmyrenes, the so-called Serapis Temple, the Northern Shrine, and a Christian ecclesiastical facility. A sunken structure adjacent to the Late Roman Harbor Temple may have had religious associations, but this is by no means certain (Fig. 2).

Late Roman Harbor Temple

The Late Roman Harbor Temple, where excavations of the interior began in 2010 and continued through 2014 (Sidebotham and Zych 2010, pp. 15–19; Sidebotham and Zych 2012a, pp. 33–36; Sidebotham and Zych 2012b, pp. 141–147; Rądkowska *et al.* 2013), lay on what was originally an island, later joined to the rest of the silted-up basin, in a Ptolemaic and early Roman harbor situated in the southwestern part of the city. This shrine, oriented north-south, had internal dimensions of 8.5 m north-south $\times$ 4 m east-west. It was built of fossilized coral heads, but the northern wall, eastern wall at its northern end, and western wall at its northern end, also incorporated gypsum/anhydrite ashlar from the nearby sunken feature discussed below. This latter structure was likely a Ptolemaic or early Roman era construction. The Late Roman Harbor Temple had a single narrow entrance facing south; a small courtyard lay just outside the entrance. Abutting the southern exterior wall of the temple—the northern end of the courtyard—were benches/*mastabas*. The temple preserved no evidence for a roof, but there must have been one (Fig. 3a–c). Excavations thus far have shown that activities inside this structure took place mainly in the later fourth-fifth centuries AD and, perhaps, into the sixth.

The Late Roman Harbor Temple had several major phases of use and seems to have been dedicated to more than one deity. The earliest phase thus far excavated recorded a faience figurine of Bes, an Egyptian god associated with childbirth; he also promoted fertility and guarded against snakes and misfortune.

In a phase subsequent to the one containing the Bes figurine, the temple interior comprised two rows of bench-like features made of stones and coral heads; these lay parallel to the exterior eastern and western walls of the shrine. Between these “benches” and the outer walls were layers of matting woven from local tamarisk shrubs (J. Zieliński, personal communication). The matting had scattered atop it numerous bones of young ovicaprids, representing choice cuts of meat (M. Osypińska, personal communication), mixed with fragments of terracotta bowls made in Aswan (R.S. Tomber, personal communication; Sidebotham and Zych 2010, p. 16; Sidebotham and Zych 2012a, p. 34). These faunal and ceramic remains suggest that high-quality meals,

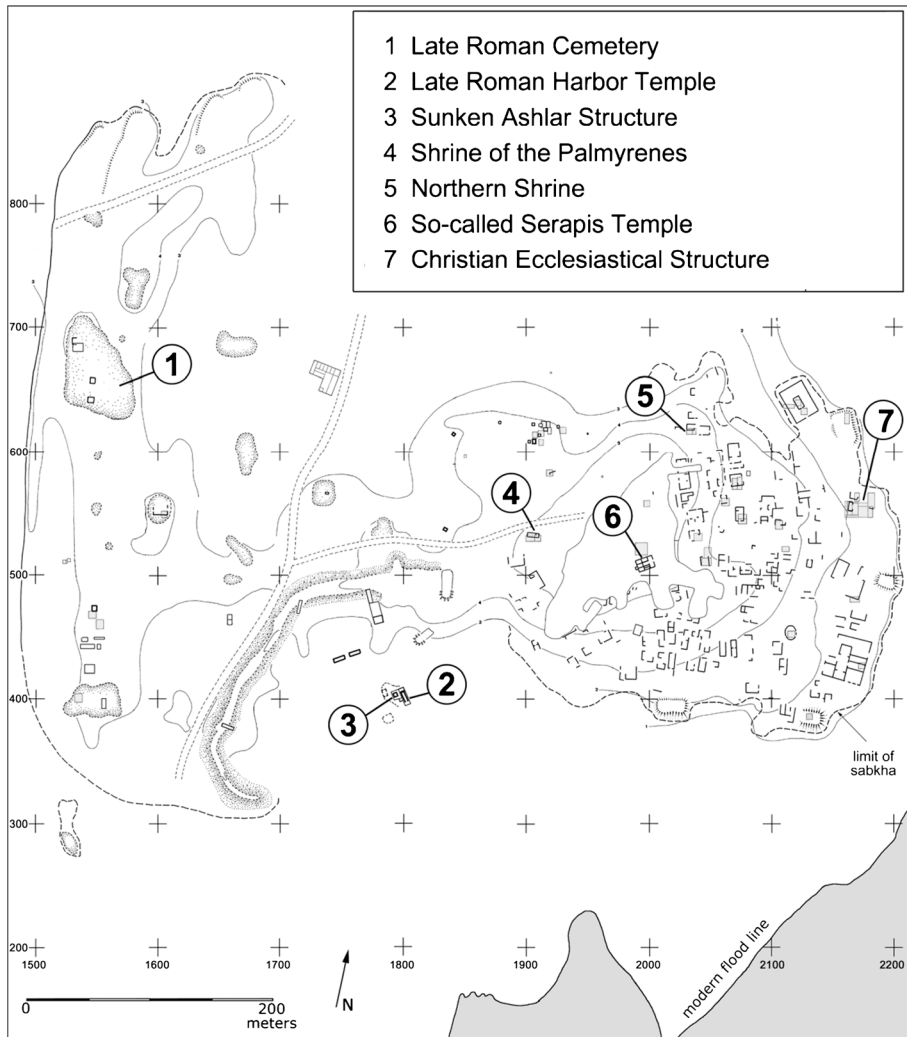


Fig. 2 Plan of Berenike locating major religious structures. (Drawing: M. Hense)

undoubtedly sacred in nature, had been consumed here sometime likely in the fifth century AD.

Contemporary with these benches and located toward the northern interior end of the temple was a columnar-shaped altar made of regionally quarried gypsum or anhydrite. The column/altar was broken and missing the top-most portion. Also associated with this phase were two smaller altars or incense burners made of gypsum or anhydrite situated in the northwestern corner. One of the altars/incense burners decorated in a South Arabian/Axumite style preserved on its top incinerated remains and bone fragments (Rądkowska *et al.* 2013 p. 216, Fig. 4, altar to right). There were many cultural, linguistic, and religious affinities between southern Arabia and Axum throughout antiquity (*cf.* Isaac and Felder 1984), so attributing this altar to one region or the other, at least prior to the advent of Christianity in Axum, would be difficult. This altar

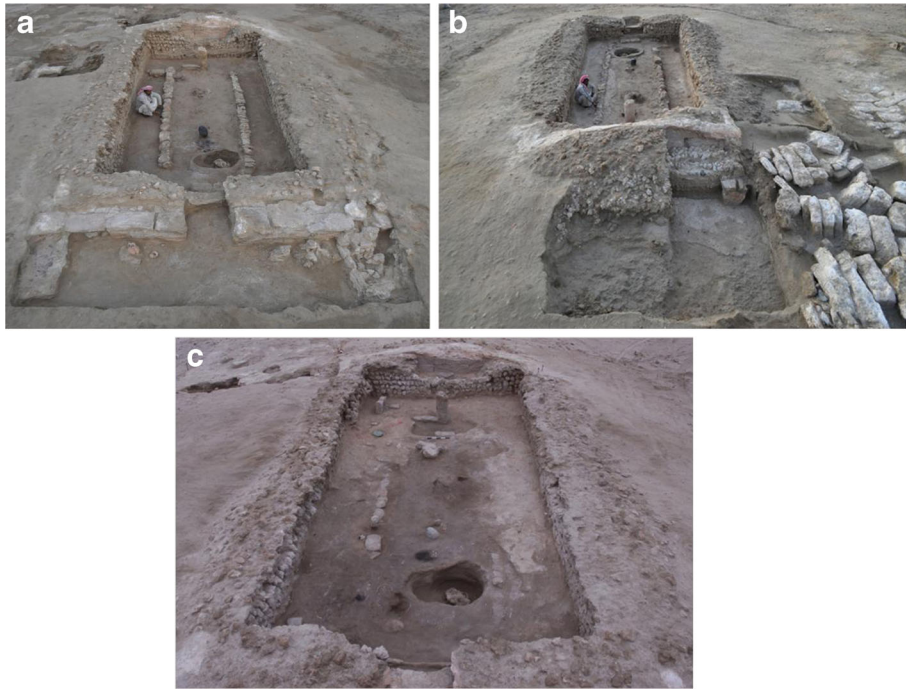


Fig. 3 **a** Late Roman Harbor Temple looking north (earlier phase) (*above left*). Courtyard with benches abuts south side of facility (bottom of photo). **b** Late Roman Harbor Temple looking south (earlier phase) with portions of the sunken structure to the right (west) (*above right*). **c** Late Roman Harbor Temple looking north (later phase) (*bottom*). Scale=50 cm (Photos: by author)

had had its base cut down to fit into its final setting. This indicates that it had been recycled, perhaps, from some other location, and that it was, very likely, old by the time of its latest use in the temple. Since the Kingdom of Axum had officially converted to Christianity sometime in the first third of the fourth century, it is possible that the altar in question, clearly reused here from an earlier context, was Axumite, and that it had been made prior to that time. Otherwise, the presence of Axumite religious activities in this clearly later fourth- to fifth-century pagan shrine would be most unlikely; any Axumite visitors to Berenike in the later Roman period would have gravitated to the fifth-century church at the eastern edge of the site discussed below. If of later fourth-century manufacture prior to use in this phase of the temple, it is more likely that the altar decoration was inspired by South Arabian worshippers rather than Axumite ones. This South Arabian/Axumite-style altar rested upon a damaged miniature stone temple pool/offering table/libation table of the type commonly found at other shrines in Berenike (Sidebotham and Zych 2010, pp. 17–18) and appearing throughout Nubia and in Meroë for extended periods of their histories (Kuentz 1981; Cunningham-Bryant 2012). Other miniature stone temple pools found in religious contexts throughout Berenike were likely offering or libation tables and must be evidence of cultic activities rather than funerary ones; none of these offering tables has been found associated with any burials in or near Berenike. Whether these objects can be connected with the veneration of Isis, who was popular in many periods throughout Egyptian history,

remains uncertain. The association of these temple pools/offering tables/libation tables with indigenous desert dwellers who also made and used the so-called Eastern Desert Ware pottery is an intriguing idea, as is the possibility that these cult objects might reflect Meroitic or Nubian groups dwelling at the port in late antiquity (*cf.* Cunningham-Bryant 2012: *passim*).

Remains of 80–85 wooden bowls preserving charred residue of burned offerings lay in the central part of the temple between the parallel benches. Such bowls were features appearing in or associated with all shrines thus far identified at Berenike (Sidebotham and Zych 2010, p. 18–19), except the church. In most instances, these bowls were badly decayed and the species of wood from which they had been carved could not be identified. One specimen, however, was sufficiently well preserved in that analysis determined the material to be doam palm wood (J. Zieliński, personal communication), a species found throughout the Nile Valley.

In 2012, excavations near the columnar altar uncovered a small hollow bronze head of a bull partially filled with lead, which had likely been removed from a larger statuette. The head had subsequently been soldered onto a bronze plate pierced with two holes, no doubt for mounting onto some surface. Excavations during the 2013 season documented the remains of a bronze *protome* representing the upper torso of a human wearing what appeared to be Egyptian garb, likely some deity. Its head was missing except portions of the mouth and chin; remains of a pole made of wood of an unknown species protruded from the bottom of the image. Given the dimensions of the bull's head found in 2012 and those of the top of the protome found in 2013 and the close proximity inside the temple of the two finds, it is possible that the bull's head might originally have been part of the bronze protome (Fig. 4a, b). If so, then the result of joining these two fragments would reveal a figurine with a human torso and a bull's head. The closest artistic parallels for the bull's head recovered in the harbor temple are with small-scale stone and bronze sculpture, both relief and in the round, from southern Arabia dating between the second century BC and second century AD (*e.g.*, Antonini 2000, p. 317 [no. 156]; Sima 2005, p. 57, Fig. 6; Gunter 2005, p. 135, Plate 10; 'Alī 'Aqīl and Antonini 2007, pp. 175 [I.B.c.1 & I.B.c.2], 176 [I.B.c.4]). Clearly, the bull's head was at least several hundred years old when it was associated with fourth-fifth century activities inside the temple. In Southern Arabia, the bull was predominantly a symbol of Almaqah, a solar divinity also having Dionysiac attributes; the bull was, however, also sacred to/a symbol of other South Arabian deities (Breton 1999, pp. 124–125). A hybrid human-animal religious image is something that is, however, unknown in South Arabian art (A.V. Sedov, personal communication). Perhaps, then, the protome in the form of a human torso represents yet another deity not related to the bronze bull's head and whose identification remains unknown. There is no evidence that the bull's head from the harbor temple was associated with either a Mithraic cult or the Egyptian Apis Bull. Though Mithras was popular with the army and businessmen throughout the Mediterranean during much of the early and middle Roman periods, the cult seems not to have been fashionable in Egypt and few Mithraea have been identified there (Sidebotham 2011, pp. 265–266).

Nearby on the other side of the columnar-shaped altar from where the bronze bull's head was found, excavations uncovered a very worn AE1 coin of the Roman emperor Julian II (Augustus, AD 361–363) on the reverse of which was the representation of a bull. Three holes drilled through the coin suggest that it served as a pendant or



Fig. 4 **a** Bronze bull's head from the Late Roman Harbor Temple. Each black and white increment on the scale=1 cm (left). **b** Bronze protome from the Late Roman Harbor Temple (right). Each black and white increment on the scale=1 cm (Photos: by author)

decoration. We cannot be certain if this coin had any cultic connotations or whether it could be functionally associated with the bronze bull's head or protome discussed above, but the representation of bulls in two forms found in close proximity inside the shrine is likely more than coincidental. The wear on the coin indicated that it had been in circulation for at least several decades before its loss inside the temple. Depictions of the bull may be an allusion to the ruler as protector of his subjects. It also had connotations of physical power and survival after death (Breton 1999, p. 125). There are old Near Eastern literary parallels and also classical Greco-Roman ones for the bull as ruler/protector (*viz.* Bull of Heaven in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Iliad 2.480–483; Dio Chrysostom, *Second Discourse on Kingship* pp. 66–74). There was a long tradition of cattle and bulls associated with burials and religious functions from prehistoric times and later in the Eastern and Western Deserts of Egypt and in Sudan (Murray 1926; Wengrow 2001; Brass *et al.* 2003; Brass 2007; *cf.* Judd 2007a, 2007b; *cf.* Sidebotham and Zych 2010, pp. 23–24 and Fig. 59; Sidebotham and Zych 2012a, pp. 41–42 and Figs. 29–31).

Another cult contemporary with the bronze bull's head and protome seems to have been purely Egyptian and has antecedents dating back many millennia. In the center interior of the harbor temple in the area between the benches were numerous seeds of lotus flowers, Yemeni iris, *helichrysum*, other as yet unidentified botanical remains (J. Zieliński, personal communication) and a broken terracotta container, likely a flower pot (*cf.* Macaulay-Lewis 2006; Kenawi *et al.* 2012; Netzer 2013, pp. 110–111); the wooden bowls noted above were also found in this confined area. In addition, in this central part of the temple between the benches, there was a large piece of vesicular

basalt roughly in the shape of an egg and also a pit, oval/egg shaped in plan, originally surrounded by a wooden partition, portions of which were extant. The inside of the pit preserved the tip of a natural reef. This combination of finds taken together suggests the representation of one of the very early Egyptian creation myths. This story recounts the receding primeval watery chaos (*Nun*) from which emerged the first *terra firma* in the form of a pyramid-shaped mound (*benben*). The cosmic egg was also a representation of *Nun* and *benben* (Tyldesley 2010, pp. 37–41; cf. Wilkinson 2003, pp. 117–118). Atop this appeared the first terrestrial life in the form of the lotus plant.

It is also possible that the vesicular basalt object served as a type of baetyl, venerated in pre-Islamic southern Arabia, and that the putative benches were, in fact, areas upon which visitors could circumambulate the stone in a clockwise direction (J. Rądkowska, personal communication). We cannot determine whether the ritual meals consumed in this area, and noted above, took place in conjunction with this putative circumambulation or whether this was related to other cult activities. The arrangement at the entrance to the temple and its interior between the benches in this period precluded any other access to the shrine interior except in a clockwise direction around the cult objects (columnar-shaped altar, lotus flower pot, basalt stone, wooden bowls, and pit with the coral) that lay between the benches.

Other charred remains included frankincense, fig seeds, emmer wheat, barley, celery, citrus leaves, cedar, acacia, and tamarisk (J. Zieliński, personal communication). They indicate the wide array of botanical offerings made inside the temple in the late Roman period.

During a later phase of the Late Roman Harbor Temple, the internal benches were no longer used although the columnar-shaped altar continued to function. Portions of the pit with the tip of the reef were still evident, but their significance was no longer recognized. It is not completely clear which deities were honored in this phase, but there is evidence suggesting that one of these, at least, might have been Isis. Excavations in this later phase documented an inscription carved on stone dated to the first year of the Roman emperor Trajan's reign (AD 98); Trajan's name had been misspelled. The inscription was dedicated to Isis, Tyche, and perhaps Serapis (R. S. Bagnall, personal communication; Sidebotham and Zych 2010, pp. 17, 18 [Fig. 32]). Whether, of course, this text had any connection to the cult or cults practiced in the shrine in the fifth century, several hundred years after its carving, cannot be determined. Other evidence from this later phase of the temple, however, points to Isis. In the southeastern portion of the interior were what appeared to be two worn and recycled column drums that seemed to demarcate this area of the shrine. At the entrance and throughout the southern interior end of this temple were approximately 80 cowry shells that had been deliberately pierced or had their dorsal tops removed; these may have originally been strung on one or more cords and may have been used for prognostication or divination (Sidebotham and Zych 2010, pp. 15–16). There were numerous fragments of at least two ostrich eggs, many of which preserved painted decoration in red. These red dipinti appear to have been magical or religious incantations (Sidebotham and Zych 2010, p. 19; Wilburn forthcoming). Texts from the Temple of Isis at Philae note that the goddess used magical formulae to repel Apopis, an incarnation of evil and chaos (Dunand and Zivie-Coche 2004, p. 237). Isis was a powerful magician and healer and her resurrection of Osiris was an impressive example of this capability (Wilkinson 2003, p. 147). Her cult made regular use of spells and

charms (McCabe 2008, p. 20), such as cowry shells, to achieve its objectives. Likely, the eggshells with the red dipinti from the Late Roman Harbor Temple also contained apotropaic formulae similar to those mentioned in the Philae texts.

One of the eggshell fragments preserved a pentagram painted in red while the bottom of a late Roman era terracotta lamp also preserved a graffito of a pentagram. The pentagram was a symbol of the Dog Star Sopdet/Sothis/Sirius, which rose in the Egyptian heavens in late August. It marked both the start of the Egyptian New Year and also the beginning of the inundation season. Sirius was also a symbol of Isis (Witt 1971, pp. 15, 19, Plates 63–64; Pinch 2002, p. 151; Wilkinson 2003, pp. 147, 167–168; Waraksa 2009, pp. 140–141). In the Classical Mediterranean world, Isis played a major role in the protection of mariners and seaborne activities. Each spring, there was a symbolic reopening of the sailing season marked by a religious event known as the *Ploiaphesia* or *Navigium Isidis* (Witt 1971, pp. 101, 179; Dunand 1973, pp. 223–230); it would not be surprising and, in fact, might be expected that a similar ceremony took place in this temple during the appropriate sailing times in the Red Sea each year.

The basin-type temple pools/libation tables/offering tables with miniature sets of stairs inside their corners (cf. Cunningham-Bryant 2012, p. 219) have, as noted above, been found in a number of shrines and cult centers in Berenike including the Late Roman Harbor Temple; these were associated with purification and rejuvenation connected with the Choiak Festival (reconstitution, proper burial, and rebirth of Osiris). Anubis, who served as a mortuary priest for his brother Osiris, was a key figure in the Choiak festival, which was especially popular at the temple of Philae (Cunningham-Bryant 2012, pp. 220–225). These libation tables also symbolized navigation of the sacred lake, an event which took place in a number of Greco-Egyptian cult centers during the Festival of Tybi; these ceremonies were especially popular at the Greco-Egyptian temples of Esna, Denderah, and Tod (Cunningham-Bryant 2012, p. 220). The possible association of these libation tables with the *Ploiaphesia* or *Navigium Isidis* ceremony postulated to have taken place in the Late Roman Harbor Temple noted above is quite possible, especially in view of the importance water played in the cults of both Isis and Serapis.

A number of these types of libation tables have been found throughout the Kingdom of Meroë and in areas of Upper Egypt/Lower Nubia. They represent an acculturation of Meroitic and Egyptian funerary traditions in the Greco-Roman period (Cunningham-Bryant 2012, pp. 233, 249, 259). Perhaps, their purpose in the Late Roman Harbor temple at Berenike was similar to that associated with the festivals noted above and not directly connected to funerary rituals found in Meroë. These libation tables may have been used by Meroitic peoples living at Berenike, but equally, they could have appealed to a number of inhabitants of Upper Egypt/Lower Nubia resident in the city. So, the direct association of these offering tables with people from the northern areas of the Kingdom of Meroë is possible (Cunningham-Bryant 2012, pp. 249, 259), though this cannot be conclusively proven at this time.

Another possible symbolic purpose for these temple pools/libation tables, especially those preserving internal staircases, may have been as miniature representations of Nilometers. Measuring the level of the annual Nile inundation was central to the lives of those living along its banks, and the origins of these temple pools can be traced back many centuries to peoples in Nubia and Meroë whose survival depended on the river and their ability to measure and predict its annual flood.

In the southwestern corner of the Late Roman Harbor Temple in its later phase was a small terracotta jar with a lid made from the base of another clay vessel of similar size. Inside this container were several dozen thin convex/concave lunate-shaped *repoussé* pieces made of silver. These had been pierced with small holes, some of which still contained tiny bronze tacks or nails. Clearly, these silver pieces had been removed from some surface. They had originally served as decoration for a larger object, which we tentatively speculate might have been the prow of a ship. Other objects from this later phase included another miniature stone temple pool, a terracotta incense burner, and a bronze *patera* or *phiale* with indistinct floral decoration preserved on the convex exterior; stubs of iron legs of a tripod clung to the bottom. There were also two decorated copper alloy handles likely used to support lamps or small religious images (Sidebotham and Zych 2010, pp. 15–19). In a later phase at the southern end of the temple interior was a large shallow basin made of some concreted material. A few burned pieces of wood and some ash lay inside it. This feature likely functioned as some type of altar or brazier.

The location of this Late Roman Harbor Temple and its relatively rich interior appointments suggest that it may have benefited from or participated in the revived Roman commerce in Berenike at that time. It is not clear when this harbor temple ceased to function, but it appears to have fallen out of use before the port itself was finally abandoned sometime before the middle of the sixth century AD.

Sunken Feature near the Late Roman Harbor Temple

Immediately west and northwest of and closely associated with the Late Roman Harbor Temple, physically at least, was a large rectilinear-shaped sunken structure where excavations began in 2010. It was built of large white gypsum/anhydrite ashlar similar in appearance and construction techniques to those blocks used in the so-called Serapis Temple described below. Some, at least, of these ashlar seem to have been recycled from an earlier edifice. The interior of the sunken structure itself measured 3.91–5.15 m N-S × 5.23 m E-W. There was no extant evidence of roofing, and it is unclear at this point whether it ever had a roof or was a *hypethral* construction. Discarded into the sunken area was a mixture of items ranging from early to late Roman in date including fragments of kiln fired bricks, shards of ostrich eggshells, some preserved red paint, black peppercorns, and some pottery and architectural elements. An inscription of the Roman emperor Domitian (reigned AD 81–96), whose name had suffered *damnatio memoriae*, was also discarded here (R.S. Bagnall, personal communication; Sidebotham and Zych 2012a, p. 37 and Fig. 19). A large digit (toe or thumb) made of bronze and insets for eyes made of bone or ivory for two different sized bronze statues (Sidebotham and Zych 2012a, p. 37 and Fig. 18) provided a glimpse likely of cult images that once existed in this area of the city.

Excavations immediately north and outside of the Late Roman Harbor Temple and east of the sunken ashlar structure documented a few other bronze fragments from larger statues. Perhaps, these fragments and eye insets represent the remains of effigies deliberately mutilated by persons unknown. Alternatively, it is possible that at least some of the remnants of bronze statuary had been intentionally destroyed as part of a religious ritual (*cf.* Waraksa 2009, pp. 69–71, 121, 122, 141, 144, 145, 148, 153, 155, 161, 165, 166, 167, 168, 172, 174 for statuettes made of clay). Large numbers of

ashlars lying flat, and resembling fallen walls, abutted the sunken area immediately to the north, west, and south. If these were fallen walls, they must have been deliberately toppled as they align in rows evenly, are flat lying, and fell exactly aligned with the base walls and corners of the foundations on which they once stood. These “fallen” walls also have on the northern side what appears to have been a door with a corresponding “door” on the southern side. It is also possible, however, that these ashlar had been laid initially as pavement given the relatively even surface their positioning has created. Immediately east of the sunken feature were ashlar that had clearly fallen from a wall (Sidebotham and Zych 2010, pp. 16–17) (Fig. 5a, b). Some of the ashlar from this sunken structure had been incorporated into portions of the northern wall and the northern ends of the eastern and western walls of the Late Roman Harbor Temple described above (Sidebotham and Zych 2010, p. 16; Rądkowska *et al.* 2013, p. 212). The original date of construction (at least early Roman, perhaps, Ptolemaic) and purpose of this sunken feature remain enigmatic as does its functional relationship with the Late Roman Harbor Temple immediately adjacent to it.

Given its physical appearance, however, and materials and construction methods that are similar to those of the so-called Serapis temple located in the city farther to the northeast (discussed below), it is most likely that this sunken structure and the so-called

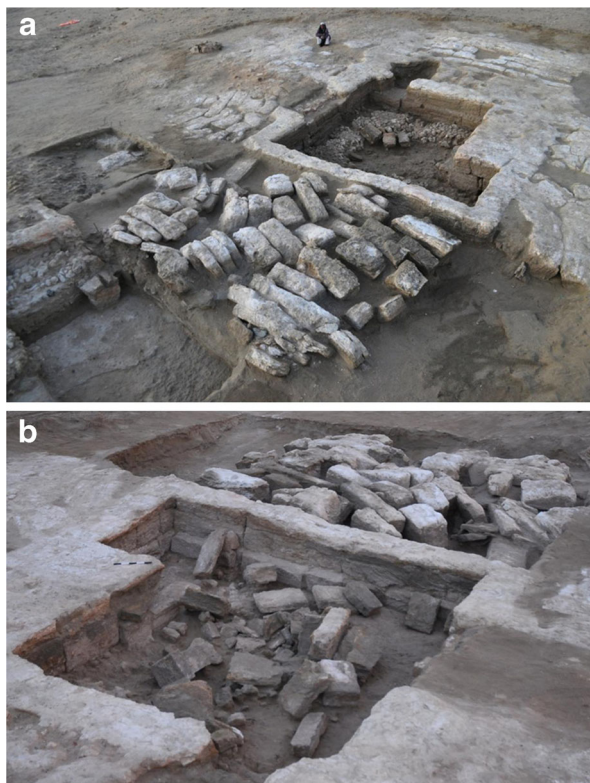


Fig. 5 **a** Sunken structure near Late Roman Harbor Temple looking southwest (*above*). **b** Sunken structure near Late Roman Harbor Temple looking northeast (*below*). Scale=50 cm (Photos: by author)

Serapis temple were built at the same time and were intended to be seen as functionally related structures. It is tempting to identify this sunken structure as a small-scale Nilometer and also a larger version of the miniature lustral basins with interior steps. These are features often closely associated with Serapis in the Hellenistic and Roman periods in Egypt (*cf.* Pfeiffer 2008, p. 393). Its location in the harbor area near the late Roman Harbor temple, which may also have been, in part, dedicated to Serapis, and the presence of extant holes toward the bottom of the face of the southern interior wall, may well have measured the tides as symbolic representations of the rising and falling of the Nile similar to calculations made by traditional Nilometers. Close inspection of the interior walls of this sunken feature, however, did not reveal that it had ever contained or had ever been affiliated with any lustral or hydraulic function. None of the ashlar preserved any type of waterproofing agent, but it seems many extant Nilometers lacked such interior waterproofing as well. Undoubtedly, additional excavation inside will reveal more about this enigmatic structure.

Shrine of the Palmyrenes

The Shrine of the Palmyrenes, which is east-northeast of the Late Roman Harbor Temple and due west of the so-called Serapis Temple, was excavated from 1995 to 1998 (Sidebotham 1996, pp. 82–93; Sidebotham 1998, pp. 20–45; Sidebotham and Wendrich 1998a, pp. 93–94, 95 [Fig. 17]; Sidebotham 1999, pp. 57–80; Sidebotham 2000, pp. 44–73; Sidebotham 2011, pp. 64–66, 264–265). Containing evidence of several cults, this long narrow edifice measuring 4.3 m N-S $\times$ 10.8 m E-W was built of recycled white gypsum ashlar and fossilized coral heads; portions of the interior northern wall incorporated a teak wood beam as a leveling course. The beam preserved numerous dowel holes indicating that it had, likely, been recycled from a section of a ship. Such recycling of ship timbers into architectural contexts had a long tradition in Egypt dating back to at least the Middle Kingdom (2040–1640 BC) (Baines and Málek 1980, p. 36 for dates; Ward and Zazzaro 2007, pp. 135, 139, 142, 143, 145 for recycling ship timbers). This edifice had only a single narrow access at the northern end of the eastern wall. This off-center entrance recalls other cult centers of Semitic origin found throughout the Middle East in different periods, that of Bel at Palmyra being a good, if not exact, parallel (Ball 2007, pp. 218 [Fig. 3], 219; *cf.* Smith 2013, pp. 22–28, 57–68). There was no extant evidence of roofing, but the Shrine of the Palmyrenes must surely have had some protection from the elements. The Shrine of the Palmyrenes at Berenike appears to have had at least two and more likely three major phases. Built atop earlier Ptolemaic and Roman strata, which do not seem to have had religious significance, the later shrine itself was a multi-cult structure that was first used during the late Antonine to Severan periods (late second to early third century AD). There is little evidence of continuous activity here between the earlier Ptolemaic-Roman phases and religious ones of the late second/early third centuries and the fourth and fifth centuries AD.

A rich array of statuary, inscriptions, and other sacred paraphernalia adorned the interior of this long but narrow east-west oriented edifice. Undoubtedly, the most outstanding finds from the Shrine of the Palmyrenes were fragments of two large bronze statues and two associated inscriptions. Fragments totaling approximately 60 % of a bronze statue of a standing female holding either a cornucopia or a snake in her left

hand and arm represented a *simulacrum* that was not quite life size (Sidebotham *et al.* 1996, pp. 229–236). The statue had been carelessly affixed into its stone base using concrete, which spilled over onto both the base of the bronze statue and also onto its stone support. This indicates a repair or re-securing of the statue onto its stone mount some time after its original dedication. Bronze statues in the Roman period were most often secured into stone bases using lead. Portions of this bronze statue had been deliberately folded and pierced (Hense 1999, pp. 222, 223 [Fig. 103]), likely evidence of execration. The accompanying inscription in Greek records a dedication by Marcus Aurelius Mokimos, a Palmyrene archer and auxiliary in the Roman army, who donated the inscription, and presumably the bronze statue of a female, to the emperor Caracalla and his mother Julia Domna, as part of the Roman imperial cult. The inscription concluded with the precise date of Sept. 8, 215 AD (Verhoogt 1998, pp. 193–196) (Fig. 6a, b). This statue and inscription were in the southeastern-most corner of the shrine. In front of them was a coiled basket, which when excavated quickly deteriorated after exposure to the air. It may have been a *cista mystica*, most often associated with the cult of Dionysus/Bacchus, but in this context, perhaps, an allusion to the mysteries of Isis where a *cista* may also have held a snake or the missing phallus of Osiris. The other inscription was a bilingual Greek-Palmyrene text dedicated by two officers of the *Ala Heracliana*, a mounted unit of the Roman army. It mentions the “artisan/technician” by name Berechei, who made a statue (in bronze) of the greatest god Hierobol/Yarhibol, one of the Palmyrene triad of principal deities. The inscription lacked a date, but given the names that appear on the text, it was clearly carved between about AD 180/185 and 212 (Dijkstra and Verhoogt 1999). A large bronze hand with index finger pointing up, an associated large stone statue base with two holes for feet, and pieces of lead, which had been used to secure the now missing statue into the base, were all that survived of Berechei’s masterpiece (Sidebotham 1999, p. 79; Hense 1999, p. 222; Sidebotham 2000, pp. 53, 56–57).

Other objects, all found west of the statue and associated Mokimos inscription, included a very worn, petite head carved in local gypsum/anhydrite of the Egyptian god

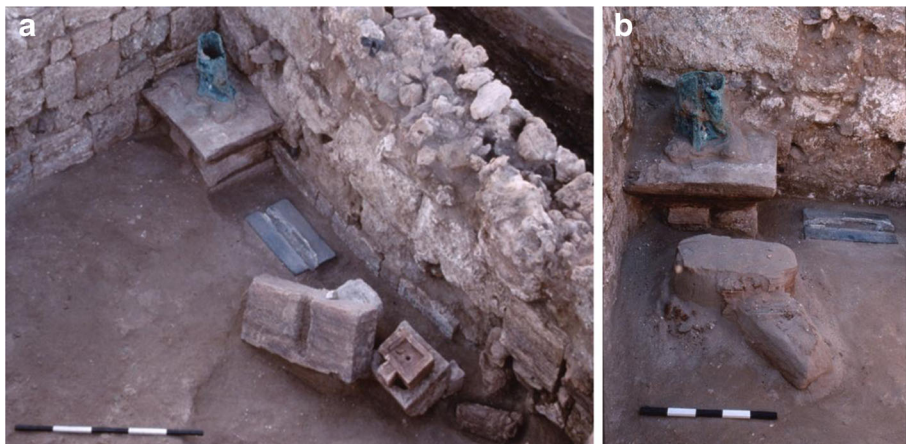


Fig. 6 **a** Shrine of the Palmyrenes looking southeast (*left*). Scale=1 m. **b** Shrine of the Palmyrenes looking south, detail of bronze statue and basket (*right*). Scale=50 cm (Photos: by author)

Harpocrates (Sidebotham 2000, p. 60 [Fig. 2-36]). There was also a stone statue of a reclining sphinx built into the lower courses of the southern ashlar wall of the Shrine of the Palmyrenes (Sidebotham 1999, pp. 59, 78, 79; Sidebotham 2000, pp. 63, 64 [Fig. 2-39]). There was a miniature stone temple pool/libation table/offering table (Sidebotham *et al.* 1996, pp. 235 [Plate 12-6], 237–238 [and Plate 12-8]) similar to ones found at other shrines in Berenike (except the church) and commonly found throughout Nubia (Kuentz 1981) and Meroë (Cunningham-Bryant 2012, *passim*). A rectilinear-shaped stone block made of gray diorite gabbro with a groove filled with lead acted as a socle for an upright stele, which was no longer extant (Hense 1996, p. 224; Sidebotham 1996, pp. 88 [Plate 3-65], 89 [Plate 3-66], 90, 93 [Plate 3-68]; Sidebotham *et al.* 1996, pp. 240 [and Plate 12-11], 241 [Plate 12-13]). There was also a medium-sized stone protome decorated with a stylized lion's head (Sidebotham 1996, pp. 92, 93 [Fig. 3-68]; Sidebotham *et al.* 1996, pp. 235 [Plate 12-6], 236 [Plate 12-7], 237). Excavations also documented a basin likely carved from a reused column drum (Sidebotham *et al.* 1996, pp. 238 [Plate 12-9], 239); the temple pool/libation temple noted above was found atop this basin/reused column drum. There was also a gypsum slab carved with floral decoration (Sidebotham *et al.* 1996, pp. 239, 241 [Fig. 12-12]). A badly decayed, flat, rectangular-shaped piece of wood with four square holes may have been the remains of a table top or a stool (Sidebotham *et al.* 1996, pp. 240, 242 [Plate 12-14]). A miniature altar made of local stone preserving charred remains and a wooden shelf fallen atop it lay amid a number of plain, undecorated terracotta bowls (Sidebotham 1999, pp. 75–76). In one of the latest subphases, there were also over 100 wooden bowls containing charred remains of some unidentified offerings (Sidebotham 1999, pp. 70–74). As noted above, such wooden bowls were objects also found in other shrines in the city, though not in the church.

The Palmyrenes were specialized mounted troops that the Roman army often deployed in desert conditions. It is no surprise that they would be stationed here to guard the Red Sea end of the desert route from the Nile. There were Palmyrenes also garrisoned at the other end of the Berenike-Nile road at the emporium of Coptos (Speidel 1984); Palmyrenes were also present at other Nile cities (Dijkstra and Verhoogt 1999, pp. 215–216).

Recent French excavations at Didymoi, a *praesidium* on the Berenike road not far from Coptos, documented a chapel and inscription as well as some ostraca and other dipinti on pottery indicating the presence or passage of Palmyrene auxiliary soldiers there as well (Cuvigny 2012a, pp. 47–50 [*I. Did.* 5]; Cuvigny 2012b, pp. 14–15; Cuvigny 2012c, pp. 135–136 [no. 71]; Cuvigny and Briquel-Chatonnet 2012, pp. 219–220 [nos. 285–286]; Cuvigny and Gagos 2012, pp. 103–104 [no. 39] records a Palmyrene horseman).

The high-quality and expensive nature of the dedications found in the Shrine of the Palmyrenes, some clearly offered by the Palmyrene auxiliaries themselves—the Mokimos inscription and accompanying statue and the bilingual text and its associated statue of Hierobol—suggests that these individuals must have had other sources of income as they surely could not have afforded such lavish donations on their meager military salaries alone. Perhaps, their participation, legal or otherwise, in the lucrative commerce that was Berenike's *raison d'être* provided them with the requisite funds.

So-Called Serapis Temple

The so-called Serapis Temple (Meredith 1957, p. 62) sits atop the highest part of the site. G. Belzoni, who (re)discovered Berenike in 1818, first identified this large multiple storied edifice as a temple. The extant horizontal measurements are 14.80 m E-W $\times$ 10.70 m N-S; the structure was originally about 2.8–2.9 m high (Sidebotham and Zych 2012a, pp. 40, 41 [Fig. 28]; M. Hense, personal communication) [Fig. 7a, b]. It was built of brilliant white ashlars made of regionally quarried gypsum or anhydrite; dovetail style wooden clamps bound at least some of the ashlars together. While most portions of the roof are no longer extant, the building most surely had originally been totally covered using, no doubt, the same material employed in the rest of the edifice. Given its prominent location and Belzoni's description, subsequent European visitors also targeted the building for "clearing." In the 1820s, J.G. Wilkinson recovered some fragments of sculpture including an image of Serapis and an accompanying text, a miniature double temple pool/libation table/offering table made of stone and portions of other inscriptions in Greek, all now deposited in the British Museum (Meredith 1957, pp. 65, 69, 70). Later European visitors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,



Fig. 7 **a** The so-called Serapis Temple looking east southeast (*above*). **b** The so-called Serapis Temple room in the northwestern corner looking southwest (*below*) (Photos: by author)

who also cleared portions of the temple, noted hieroglyphic texts adorning portions of the interior walls and dating to the Roman era: the emperors Tiberius (AD 14–37), Trajan (AD 98–117), and the joint reigns of Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–169) (Meredith 1957, pp. 61, 69). These intramural inscriptions and pictorial representations reference many traditional Egyptian deities including Horus, Isis, Isis-Hathor, Osiris, Geb, Khem/Min, Harpocrates, possibly Mut, and others (Meredith 1957, pp. 60–69). These texts and images most likely do not reflect the earliest construction and use of this building, which may, in fact, have been initially erected sometime in the Ptolemaic period; an inscription from the reign of Ptolemy VII from inside the temple (Meredith 1957, p. 69) may confirm this. The reigns of Ptolemy VI–VIII (180–116 BC) were ones of extensive temple construction in Egypt (Hölbl 2001, pp. 257, 259), and this edifice may have been initially erected in this era.

There is no extant evidence for how late this temple remained in operation. Large cedar wood beams, some preserving dowel holes and iron nails, lay at the northern exterior edge of the temple. These beams also appear to have been recycled from portions of a dismantled ship or ships. Evidence was not clear enough to determine if these beams were directly associated with the temple itself or whether they served in an architectural capacity for some abutting structure. Excavation of a small shallow trench flush with the rear (western) exterior wall of the temple recovered a small, green stone image of a crocodile with the head of Horus (Sidebotham and Zych 2012a, p. 39, Pl. F, 40). Embedded into what appeared to be a courtyard of the first century AD, and likely associated with the temple to its south, excavations recorded two large Indian-made terra cotta storage and shipment containers resembling Mediterranean-made *dolia*. One to the east preserved portions of a wooden lid while the one to the west lacked a lid. In the later was 7.55 kg of black peppercorns (Sidebotham and Wendrich 2001–2002, p. 30; Cappers 2006, pp. 114–119; Sidebotham 2007b, pp. 74–75). Clearly, this significant import from the Kerala/Malabar coast of southwestern India did not simply pass through Berenike en route to other destinations but was also consumed by elements of the port's population. It is very likely that this sizeable quantity of black peppercorns from the courtyard—the largest ever found in the Classical Mediterranean world—was temple property. It may have been destined for resale or for immolation as part of the temple ritual, as was also clearly the case in the Late Roman Harbor Temple noted above. The find of numerous black peppercorns in religious contexts as well as in domestic areas and trash dumps at Berenike suggests relatively widespread use of this condiment for many purposes in the city throughout the early to late Roman periods. Later levels in this large trench north of and abutting the Serapis temple comprised a series of walls, installations, and small-scale industrial facilities.

The similarity in construction materials and building methods of this temple and the sunken feature located in the southwestern harbor has already been noted. Their simultaneous construction has also been postulated above. There may have also been a functional, in this case a religious, connection between the two as well with the so-called Serapis temple and putative Nilometer having related cultic functions. The worship of the Hellenistic hybrid deity Serapis, that combined the Egyptian gods Osiris and Apis, was invented by and closely related to the early Ptolemies (*cf.* Pfeiffer 2008). Serapis served as a focal point for the Ptolemaic cult of deification of the ruler. This would have combined the new with the old and would have been a clever political move to ingratiate the Macedonian interlopers into traditional Egyptian modes

of religious/political practice. The Serapis cult and its association with the deification of the Ptolemaic rulers had as its goal securing the fealty of the indigenous population to their new foreign masters who would have wanted to be seen as a continuation of an Egyptian kingship extending back many millennia. The perpetuation of this connection with the Roman emperors is also evident in the hieroglyphic cartouches of several of those rulers inside the temple itself.

Northern Shrine

Located about 80 m north of the so-called Serapis Temple, the Berenike project excavated the Northern Shrine in 1998 and 1999 (Sidebotham and Wendrich 1998a, pp. 94–95; Sidebotham 2000, pp. 134–144; Sidebotham and Wendrich 2001–2002, pp. 30–31; Sidebotham 2007b, pp. 77–89). It was built of fossilized coral heads and measured 4.5 m N-S × S 7.5 m E-W. The slight arching inward of the tops of the extant northern and southern exterior walls of the building suggested that its original roofing had been in the form of a barrel vault constructed, at least in part, of fossilized coral heads. The Northern Shrine functioned in the late fourth and fifth centuries, perhaps, into the sixth, making it contemporary with the Late Roman Harbor Temple. Like the harbor temple, the Northern Shrine also had several major phases. Oriented east-west with a single narrow entrance facing east, the interior layout of this shrine closely resembled that of the Late Roman Harbor Temple discussed above; it was also similar in size with interior dimensions of 33.75 vs. 34 m² for the Late Roman Harbor Temple. In the earlier phase, low walls or benches in the interior were parallel to the outer northern and southern walls of the shrine. Atop the eastern end of the northern bench was a fragment of a relief that had clearly been reused; made of regionally available gypsum/anhydrite, it represented an individual, perhaps, a statue of a deity, standing on a raised dais to the right and to the left a priest or devotee standing and facing the figure on the dais (Sidebotham and Wendrich 2001–2002, p. 28 and Fig. 8; Sidebotham 2007b, p. 84, Plate 4-53 and Fig. 4-54); it is not clear whether the relief originated from this temple or had been recycled from elsewhere in the city. Another feature was a stone box, also recycled onto the northern bench, which contained remains of unidentified seeds; perhaps, it originally served as a planter inside the shrine (Sidebotham 2007b, pp. 83 Plate 4-52, 84) and had a function similar to the terracotta flowerpot found inside the Late Roman Harbor Temple. A columnar-shaped altar made of gypsum/anhydrite—intact and preserving burning on its top—lay near the interior back (western) end of the structure. The later phase included five small temple pools/libation tables/offering tables made of stone, an intact ostrich eggshell preserving some red paint and a small bronze statuette, too poorly preserved to identify the deity it might have represented; perhaps, it was Isis (Hense 2000, pp. 195–196). A fair quantity of teakwood survived inside the edifice in both phases; the most impressive was a beam placed on the floor of the earlier phase behind (west of) the columnar-shaped altar, the ostrich egg, and the temple pools. This beam ran north-south from under the northern to under the southern exterior walls of the shrine (Fig. 8a, b). Measuring over 3 m long and pierced with multiple rectilinear-shaped dowel holes, this beam had clearly been recycled from a dismantled ship.

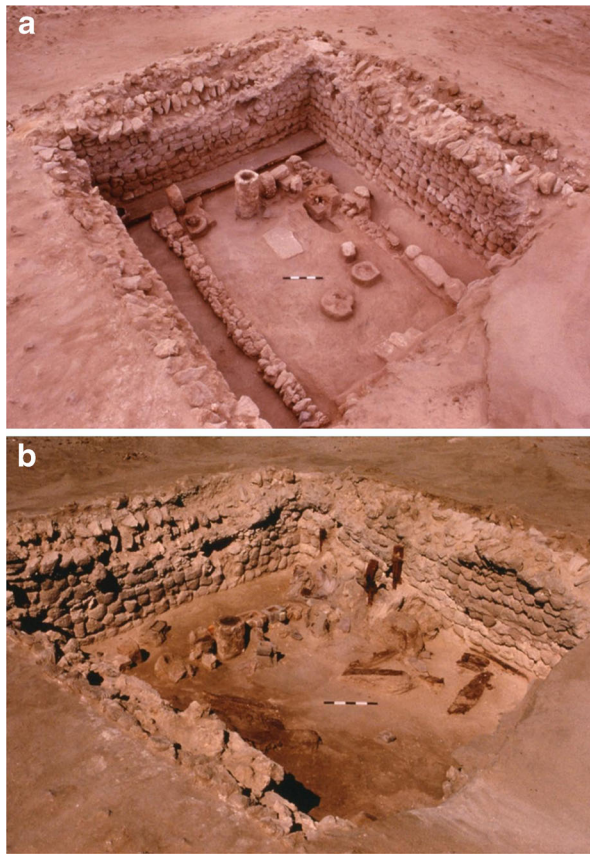


Fig. 8 **a** The Northern Shrine (earlier phase) looking northwest (*above*). Scale=50 cm. **b** The Northern Shrine (later phase) looking northwest (*below*). Scale=50 cm (Photos: by author)

Christian Ecclesiastical Facility

At the eastern-most edge of the site excavations between 1996 and 2001 recorded a Christian ecclesiastical facility (Sidebotham 1998, pp. 63–79; Sidebotham 1999, pp. 29–46; Sidebotham 2000, pp. 25–44; Sidebotham 2007b, pp. 145 [Fig. 4-123], 146–164; Sidebotham and Wendrich 1998a, pp. 87–88 [Figs. 4 and 5]; Sidebotham and Wendrich 2001–2002, pp. 32–34; Sidebotham 2011, pp. 272, 274–275). This included a church on the southern side of the compound, which was excavated *in toto*. A hallway running the entire east-west length of the facility separated the church on the south from the area to the north, which was not completely excavated. This northern portion included a kitchen and food storage facilities, and presumably, it also contained living accommodations for the facility's caretakers. The overall measurements of this ecclesiastical structure are 26.0 m E-W $\times$ 19.0 m N-S while the church within it is 21.5 m E-W $\times$ 8.8 m N-S. The church itself preserved three main areas. At the western end was a separate room with benches; in the center was a large main area with remains of eight square roof supports made of stone, forming two rows of four. Clearly, the roof, at least

in this part of the facility, was a trabeated (flat) feature probably made from timber. The extreme eastern end of the church was paved with nicely cut gypsum/anhydrite ashlar, which had likely been recycled from some earlier structure (Fig. 9a, b). Oriented east southeast-west northwest, the interior eastern and collapsed southern walls of the central section of the church had niches. Some of these originally held terracotta oil lamps, which had fallen on the floor of the building when portions of the walls collapsed. These lamps, decorated with crosses and in one case with a Sahidic Coptic religious aphorism, which read “Jesus, forgive me” (Sidebotham 2000, pp. 43 [Fig. 2-27], 44; Bagnall *et al.* 2005, pp. 106 [no. 260] for text, translation and commentary), together with substantial fragments of a bronze lamp from which had broken a Christian cross-shaped handle (Sidebotham 2007b, pp. 160 [Plate 4-137], 161), aided in the identification of this large facility. Intriguingly, the only two non-Roman coins identified from excavations anywhere in Berenike thus far were found inside this facility; one was a late third- to early fourth-century issue of the last pre-Christian Axumite king Aphilas and the other was a silver specimen minted in AD 362 by the Western Kshatrapa king Rudrasena III (Sidebotham 2007a, pp. 209 [nos. 114-15], 210 [Plates 8-14 and 8-15]; Sidebotham 2011, p. 248). The large size of this fifth century church suggests that it may have played a role in and benefited from the lucrative commerce at Berenike in this period. This would not have been unusual, as many Christian institutions in Egypt in the fourth through early eighth centuries owned large



Fig. 9 **a** The church looking west (*above*). Scale=1 m. **b** The church looking southeast (*below*). Scale=1 m (Photos: by author)

amounts of land (Wipszycka 2007, p. 335); they also participated in commercial activities (Wipszycka 1972, pp. 163–164), which undoubtedly included riverine and maritime trade (Tomber 2008, p. 169; *cf.* Sidebotham 2011, p. 275).

Inscriptions and Other Artifacts of Religious Significance Found Outside of Religious Edifices

Ptolemaic

Little of religious or ritual significance has been excavated from any Ptolemaic contexts at Berenike thus far. This must certainly reflect the accident of survival or need for additional excavation to document the relevant artifacts and texts. Deification of Ptolemaic rulers and their families and their affiliated cults were common and drew on Egyptian practices dating back several millennia. One would expect to have evidence of these types of deification activities especially at Berenike (Pfeiffer 2008, pp. 398–408; Wellendorf 2008). The so-called Serapis temple discussed above and the putative Nilometer in the harbor may be linked to rites associated with a cult of the deified Ptolemaic rulers. Two scarabs, one made of faience and broken and the other smaller anepigraphic one tentatively identified as made of peridot, a semi-precious stone quarried from St. John's Island in the Red Sea about 80 km southeast of Berenike (Harrell and Bloxam 2010), came from a Ptolemaic trash deposit. The broken faience scarab preserved a cartouche of the 21st Dynasty pharaoh Siamun who reigned in the tenth century BC (E. Teeter, personal communication; Sidebotham and Zych 2012a, p. 40). Clearly, this was an heirloom of some seven centuries old when it finally broke and was discarded. Whether either of the scarabs had any religious significance for their last owners or were merely treasured as heirlooms or curiosities will likely never be known.

Excavations in the Ptolemaic industrial area documented what appeared to be miniature temple doors made of bronze from a small shrine (Hense 2007, p. 271 and Fig. 9-12c; *cf.* Andrews 1994, p. 23). These types of shrines were known in Egypt from at least the New Kingdom period (1550–1070 BC) on (Baines and Málek 1980, p. 36 for dates). If the identification is correct, then it seems that yet another aspect of Pharaonic era religious tradition was present at Berenike. It is not clear which Egyptian deities are to be associated with these miniature temple doors.

Roman

While objects found within the Roman era shrines themselves clearly were cult objects or had religious affiliations, our excavations in profane areas of Berenike also documented texts and other objects that were either sacred or reflected the religious beliefs of those dwelling at the port. In some cases, these must indicate shrines/temples that have not been located or identified during the course of our excavations thus far.

In addition to the inscriptions on stone from inside shrines noted above, three other texts carved in stone dating to the first and second centuries AD and dedicated to deities have been documented from a single late fourth-/early fifth-century AD context. In the courtyard of a building in the late Roman commercial-residential quarter located between the so-called Serapis Temple and the Christian ecclesiastical edifice, our

excavations recorded a number of architectural fragments recycled from earlier buildings. There were also two duplicate inscriptions, likely *stelai*, dedicated by a woman named Philotera to Zeus during the reign of the Roman emperor Nero (AD 54–68). Nero's name had been deliberately effaced on both texts, though incompletely on one (Bagnall *et al.* 2005, pp. 21–22 [nos. 118–119]). The dedication on the third stone was damaged and likely formed all or part of a door lintel or altar. The dedicant's name was lost, but his father's name—Papiris—survived as did his profession: secretary and translator. The text indicates that this son of Papiris made his offering to Isis during the latter part of the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan, in AD 113–117 (Sidebotham and Wendrich 2001–2002, p. 32 and Figs. 13–15; Sidebotham 2007b, pp. 126–127; Bagnall *et al.* 2005, p. 27–28 [no. 121]).

No identifiable shrines to Zeus have been documented at Berenike thus far. Both the Late Roman Harbor Temple and possibly the Northern Shrine might have been, in part, dedicated to Isis, but both buildings postdate by several centuries the Isis text of the son of Papiris.

Other texts, several on ostraca and one a graffito may suggest the presence of Jews in the city. Two ostraca written in Greek from a fourth-century AD context record “Jewish” (Sidebotham and Wendrich 1998a, p. 93; Bagnall *et al.* 2000, pp. 66 [no. 99] and 70 [no. 109]); one alludes to food delicacies or merely a type of food (no. 109), in the other case (no. 99), perhaps, a unit of measure of some kind or a person. Whether these ostraca reflect the actual presence of Jews in Berenike cannot be determined. More telling is a laconic graffito in Hebrew or Aramaic carved on a small sherd, which records a *laissez-passer* (Steiner 2004). The paleography of the graffito and context do not allow dating any more precise than Roman. No synagogue has yet been identified at Berenike though British excavations at Myos Hormos, a port about 300 km north of Berenike, may have recorded a synagogue of early Roman date (Copeland 2006, pp. 126, 127) and a synagogue of the second half of the fourth century AD or later has been documented from excavations at the South Arabian Indian Ocean port of Qana’ (Sedov 2005, pp. 165–166 [Fig. 77], 169–171; Sedov 2010; Bowersock 2010). The South Arabian Kingdom of Himyar, which straddled the overland caravan routes to the north, had converted to Judaism by the late fourth century but passed from history by AD 525 (Bowersock 2013, pp. 3–6, 83–86, 93–95). How extensive a role Jews may have played in the ancient commerce of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean remains to be determined, but one should expect them to have participated in this potentially lucrative activity (*cf.* Dunand and Zivie-Coche 2004, pp. 253–259; Power 2012, pp. 27–28).

The late Roman/Byzantine emperors Anastasius I (491–518), Justin I (518–527), and Justinian I (527–565) dispatched several embassies to southern Arabia and eastern Africa to interact with the Kingdoms of Himyar and Axum and, at one point, to try to forge a Byzantine-Himyarite-Axumite alliance against the Sassanians (*cf.* Bowersock 2013, pp. 108–110, 135–142). One of these Roman ambassadors, Nonnosus, purportedly accused the Jewish Himyarite leadership of confiscating Roman (Byzantine) merchandise in the Red Sea and of obstructing commerce between the Byzantines and the Axumites, an observation supported by Joannes Antiochus. Even if their statements are true and an accurate reflection of anti-Jewish Roman imperial policy at that time, their observations are not invariably pertinent to events during the previous century or earlier when the ostraca and graffito from Berenike referencing Jews were written. Furthermore, as noted in this paper and elsewhere (Sidebotham 2011, pp. 266–

267), despite Imperial decrees closing down pagan religious sanctuaries in the late Roman period—and restricting their economic activities in an attempt to force their conversion to Christianity—it is clear that pagan temples, and the commerce which supported them, continued to flourish at Berenike at that time and later. It is, therefore, possible that these same tolerant attitudes also extended to Berenike's Jewish residents with regard to their religious and mercantile activities.

Other religious finds of Roman date from Berenike include a small broken statuette of Aphrodite carved from local stone found in the early Roman trash dump (Sidebotham and Wendrich 2001–2002, p. 27 and Fig. 7; Sidebotham 2007b, pp. 45–46 [Plates 4-13, 4-14; Figs. 4-15, 4-16]) and a wooden *pyxis* (jewelry box) lid depicting Aphrodite wringing her hair inside a Graeco-Egyptian style temple from ca. AD 400 (Haeckl 1999). The latter came from excavations just north of the so-called Serapis Temple (Fig. 10a, b) in the same trench that produced the large cache of black peppercorns noted above. Both images are unmistakable in their religious messages and likely belonged to women who lived in the city.

Excavations in the early Roman trash dump north of the ancient city center also recorded a glass fragment etched with a Dionysiac scene: the head of a satyr and a *thyrsus* (Sidebotham 2011, p. 235 Fig. 12-A). Intaglios of finger rings also conveyed religious sentiments. One of the higher quality ones dating late first century BC and found on the surface near the early Roman trash dump in 2009 portrays a seated and winged female sphinx (Sidebotham and Zych 2010, p. 14, Pl. A6; Platz-Horster 2011). A broken glass cameo, unfortunately a surface find and not as well carved as the seated



Fig. 10 **a** Early Roman stone figurine of Aphrodite (left). Each black and white increment on the scale=1 cm. **b** Late Roman wooden *pyxis* (jewelry box) lid depicting Aphrodite inside a stylized temple façade (right). Each black and white increment on the scale=1 cm (Photos: by author)

sphinx, depicts a symbol for a Zoroastrian fire altar (Francis 2000, p. 223); Zoroastrianism was the state religion of Persia during the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanian periods. Other poorly carved intaglios are too indistinct to determine precisely their decoration, though the standing figures may be depictions of deities. Gorgons or heads of Medusa adorn two early Roman polychrome mosaic beads (Sidebotham and Zych 2012a, pp. 37–38, 39 [Pl. A]); these were likely used as apotropaic devices.

Burial Practices

Burial practices often reflect the ethnicities and religious proclivities of the deceased. At least 640 late Roman era donut-shaped tombs, virtually all of them thoroughly looted, lay on low hills west and southwest of Berenike (Barnard 1998, pp. 397–401; Sidebotham and Wendrich 2001–2002, p. 35; Sidebotham 2011, p. 263). Their style of construction closely resembles those in Qitna from the second half of the third to the end of the fifth century AD (Strouhal 1984, p. 265 and *passim*) and Ballana, Qustul, and elsewhere in northeast Africa from the fourth and fifth centuries AD (Williams 1991; Krzywinski 2012). These disturbed tumuli may mark the final resting places of indigenous desert dwellers and/or Trog(l)odites/Trogodytes, Blemmyes, or others who resided in or near Berenike in late Roman times.

Within and immediately adjacent to the city itself, excavations have documented human remains, but it is not certain that many of these individuals were formally buried. Excavations have also recorded human skeletons and bones of digits as well as the remains of a human fetus (Barnard 1998, pp. 390 [Table 18-1], 395). Surprisingly, however, few formal burials have been excavated at Berenike thus far. A few have been found under or near the early Roman trash dump north of the city center. One, documented during the 2011 season, was the lower half of a skeleton of a large supine adult male who died at about age 25 (M. Osypińska, personal communication; Sidebotham and Zych 2012a, p. 38); the upper half of this individual had been found years earlier in an abutting trench to the north. The other was an older child or adolescent also deposited in a supine position beneath a burial marker of stones and coral heads that was oval in plan and lay low to the ground. This type of mortuary marker can be found throughout the Eastern Desert, and while the ethnicities of the deceased associated with these types of markers cannot be determined precisely, they were likely indigenous desert dwellers. A 40–50-year-old woman was interred at some unknown date atop an abandoned early Ptolemaic brick kiln in a supine position with a potsherd covering her pelvic area; parts of her burial shroud also survived (Sidebotham 1998, pp. 107–108; Barnard 1998, pp. 389–393; Sidebotham and Wendrich 2001–2002, pp. 35–36 and Fig. 25; Sidebotham 2011, p. 279). Excavations in a large feature at the southeastern part of the site, very tentatively identified as foundations for a light house or beacon, contained the skeleton of one robust male, age about 30–40 years at the time of his death (Sidebotham 1998, pp. 84–85; Barnard 1998, pp. 390, 392, 394). Several male bodies of unknown date had been deposited in the abandoned Ptolemaic industrial area at the western edge of the site. All were in a supine position; two were missing their heads and preserved evidence that scavengers, likely rodents or dogs, had gnawed at some of their extremities suggesting that they lay exposed or very

close to the ground surface for some time after death (Sidebotham and Wendrich 2001–2002, p. 36 and Fig. 28; Sidebotham 2011, p. 279). Another skeleton lay intact in a supine position in the Ptolemaic industrial area; fragments of a burial shroud covered the remains (Sidebotham and Wendrich 2001–2002, p. 36 and Fig. 27; Sidebotham 2011, p. 279). Another skeleton in the fetal position had been deposited inside an abandoned Ptolemaic cistern (Sidebotham and Wendrich 2001–2002, pp. 35–36 and Fig. 26; Sidebotham 2007b, p. 36 and Plate 4–4; Sidebotham 2011, p. 279). It was too decayed to identify gender or age, though the individual appeared to have been an adult of short stature. Most or all of these adult skeletons had clearly been interred or deposited in the Ptolemaic industrial area at some point following its abandonment, but whether these represent later Ptolemaic era or early or late Roman period depositions could not be determined.

Near a badly robbed rectilinear-shaped early Ptolemaic city tower, excavations in 2012 recorded the very poorly preserved and disarticulated remains of several humans that lay mixed with sherds of amphoras (Sidebotham and Zych 2012a, p. 32). During the 2013 expedition, excavations documented two additional skeletons of adult males, deposited near a Ptolemaic-era trash dump, which lay immediately north of the southwestern harbor. One skeleton lay above portions of the third century BC Ptolemaic city wall and above an apparent early Roman trench which had robbed blocks from that enceinte; the other lay to the west and well above the aforementioned robbed out wall. Finally, excavations during the 2014 season documented a skeleton of a very tall, thin individual who lay in a shallow burial close to an extant portion of the early Ptolemaic urban defensive wall.

A formal necropolis comprising multiple internments lay on the main road leaving Berenike to the northwest. This partially excavated cemetery was late Roman (*viz.* fourth–fifth century AD) in date (Sidebotham and Wendrich 2001–2002, p. 35; Sidebotham 2011, p. 263). The burials here were of two types. The more elaborate comprised sepulchers built of fossilized coral heads inside of which were originally wooden sarcophagi containing the bodies. Except for a few nails and scraps of wood, the sarcophagi had disappeared. These burials had been thoroughly looted and the bones, apparently of adults, had been thrown into disarticulated piles at the interior ends of the tombs. Any grave goods that might have been interred with the deceased were missing; one must presume that these had been taken by the grave robbers. The second type of burial consisted of shallow cist graves cut into bedrock; the two excavated by our team were undisturbed. One contained the supine skeleton of an adolescent; there were no grave goods associated with this individual. The other preserved the skeleton of a girl approximately 2 years old, buried on her left side in a fetal position. Beads accompanied her into the afterlife, and her head, likely her entire body, had been covered with a shroud remains of which adhered to the underside of a potsherd that covered her head.

We cannot be certain why two different modes of internment appear in this cemetery. The striking dichotomy between the types of burials may be a reflection of contrasts in age of the deceased; they may also signal varying social-economic circumstances of the individuals, or they may represent a difference in ethnicities; it is also possible that a combination of these factors led to the variant modes of interment.

It may be that the western location of this cemetery *vis-à-vis* the city and the hundreds of other ring cairn tombs also west of Berenike reflect the traditional

Egyptian predilection for locating necropoleis toward the west, the land of the setting sun. Equally, since positioning any cemeteries to the east, northeast, or southeast of the city would have been impossible due to the presence of the Red Sea and in the Greco-Roman world, at least, such burial sites that traditionally lay along roads leaving cities, it is possible that this late Roman era cemetery and other tombs some distance away were positioned in order to straddle the main thoroughfares radiating from the Berenike.

The well-known Coptos Tariff, dated May 10, 90 AD, records a fee paid in order to transport the dead between the Nile Valley and the desert area (Bernand 1984, pp. 199–208 [no. 67], specifically line 31 on p. 201). This may imply that those dying in desert regions could be transported back to the Nile Valley for burial if their handlers paid a toll of 1 drachma and 4 obols. This laconic entry on the Coptos Tariff may be one explanation for the lack of fancy tombs and the apparent dearth of graves of nonindigenous desert dwellers at Berenike. Wealthier Egyptians and others not originally from the desert would, if at all possible, have wanted to be interred in less inhospitable circumstances than the desert. Whether this practice occurred at Berenike at this time or earlier or later in history cannot be determined at this point. Clearly, there would have been an element of the population, whatever their ethnicity, who could not have afforded this postmortem transport and fee and also indigenous desert dwellers resident at Berenike who would have wished to be interred in the region.

Evidence for Eastern Desert Dwellers, Blemmyes, Trog(l)odites/Trogodytes, Ichthyophagi, Nubians, and Meroitic Peoples at Berenike

Peoples indigenous to the Eastern Desert, Nubia, and Meroë as well as the so-called Trog(l)odites/Trogodytes, *Ichthyophagi*, Blemmyes, and other groups (see Török 1988; Updegraff 1988; Thomas 2007, 2012; Lassányi 2012; Barnard 2013; Dijkstra 2013) must have interacted with and resided in Berenike sometime during the course of its long history. Yet, written evidence is paltry. Aside from mentions in the third century BC in the Zenon Papyri of Trog(l)odites residing at “harbor Berenike” in the Ptolemaic period—and this Berenike may not be our port on the Red Sea (Sidebotham 2011, pp. 33–34)—we have no extant ancient written records from the Berenike itself documenting these different groups. A sherd with a Greek dipinto dating late second or third century AD and recording “Pet[—] Trogodyt[—]” was, however, excavated at Myos Hormos (Tomber 2005, p. 41); it likely attests the presence of a member of the Trogodites/Trogodytes at that Red Sea emporium. Another ostrakon from the second century AD, also from Myos Hormos, refers to “Pakubis Ichthyophagos” (Thomas 2007, p. 151). Clearly, at least at Myos Hormos, there were distinctions made between Trog(l)odites/Trogodytes and Ichthyophagi. Written testimony dealing with other areas of Upper Egypt/Lower Nubia and the Eastern Desert starting in the late third/early fourth century AD and later indicates the relative power of the Blemmyes and Nobadae (Barnard 2005; Sidebotham 2011, pp. 266–267, 280); certainly, the Kingdom of Meroë was important in this era as well (Török 1988; O’Connor 1993, pp. 70–107; Welsby 1996; O’Connor 2012). It is likely that the hundreds of graves lying west and southwest of Berenike taken together with ceramic evidence, and some floral and faunal remains, especially from the late Roman period in the city itself, provide compelling testimony

for the presence, as noted above, of individuals from one or more of these groups and their active participation in the life of the emporium. In many instances, however, it is not entirely clear how one distinguishes some of these groups from others in the literary record other than differences in their ethnic labels clearly made by nonmembers; it is also likely that, in the future, some of these groups or their individual members may be identified from some of the activities in which they engaged (*cf.* Tomber 2005, p. 41; Burstein 2008; Sidebotham 2012, pp. 1051–1052; Barnard 2013). It follows, then, that any distinguishing differences among these groups would be equally difficult to isolate and identify in the archaeological record.

Determining ethnicity from burials at Berenike is problematic as only a small portion of a formal late Roman-era necropolis has thus far been identified and described above (Sidebotham and Wendrich 2001–2002, p. 35; Sidebotham 2011, pp. 263–264). In the environs of the city toward the west and southwest and stretching as far as Shenshef and Hitan Rayan are many hundreds of ring-cairn/donut-type graves, most, if not all, of which appear to be fourth-sixth century in date (Barnard 1998, pp. 397–401; Sidebotham 2011, pp. 263–264). As noted above, these sepulchers closely resemble those seen at Wadi Qitna in Sudan dating from the third to the fifth centuries AD (Strouhal 1984) and those in Ballana and Qustul dating fourth-fifth centuries AD (Williams 1991). All those in the environs of Berenike, most likely, represent the last resting places of indigenous desert dwellers or others who were not Romans, Greeks, or Egyptians from the Nile Valley. It remains uncertain whether these individuals might have been Blemmyes, Nobadae, or “others,” *viz.* individuals from Nubia, Meroë, Trog(loid)ites/Trogodytes, or *Ichthyophagi*; often, the labels given to these groups by contemporary writers or modern scholars leads to more confusion than to clarification of their identities (*cf.* Barnard 2013).

In addition to the large numbers of late Roman-era burials near Berenike, a corpus of small hand-made and burnished vessels mainly of open forms, but a few closed forms, has also been identified from the excavations. The type is decorated in distinctive, mostly geometric, patterns, and its geographical distribution in the Eastern Desert is approximately from the Marsa Nakari-Nile road southward. It also appears at some sites along the Nile. While it seems to appear by at least the second century AD, its *floruit* at Berenike and at other sites in the Eastern Desert and along the Red Sea coast is in the late Roman era. Much speculation has surrounded the group manufacturing these ceramics, but the term Eastern Desert Ware has, for the moment, been generally accepted (Barnard 2008, 2012). It is tempting to associate the use, if not manufacture, of this type of ceramics with the indigenous group or groups’ individual members of which lie buried in the numerous graves west and southwest of the city or in the late Roman era necropolis adjacent to Berenike itself.

The presence of quantities of sorghum in the archaeological corpus at Berenike spanning from early to late Roman times might also provide evidence for the presence of peoples originally from the desert dwelling at Berenike in those periods. Food is often a reflection of cultural ethnicity, and sorghum has a long history in this part of northeastern Africa (Cappers 2006, pp. 125–127), suggesting that it might have been consumed by indigenous dwellers or others of African ethnicity. Finally, the existence in the archaeological record of quantities of ovicaprid and camel bones, some of which had clearly been butchered (M. Osypińska, personal communication), might also point to the presence of a desert-dwelling population at the port. They would have preferred

this form of protein to marine sources or to other forms of bovine or porcine meat favored by Egyptians and other peoples from the Mediterranean.

Several ancient literary sources record the significance of the Isis temple at Philae for the Blemmyes in late antiquity (Sidebotham 2011: 266–267). The temple there was so important to the Blemmyes that it was closed down only in the sixth century by emperor Justinian I (reigned 527–565), long after Christianity had been established as the official religion of the Roman Empire. This concession to the Blemmyes by Roman authorities was, no doubt, based upon the relative power and importance of these desert peoples at that time (*cf.* Frankfurter 1998, pp. 23–27). That Isis, in one or more manifestations, seems to have been popular and continued to be worshipped at Berenike into the later fourth and fifth centuries (Sidebotham and Zych 2010, p. 16; Sidebotham 2011, pp. 83–84 for earlier, 266–267 for later; Sidebotham and Zych 2012a, p. 33; Sidebotham and Zych 2012b, p. 143; Rądkowska *et al.* 2013, pp. 226–227) may also suggest the presence of Blemmyes or some other desert dwellers, Nubians, or Meroitic peoples at the port at that time.

Evidence for South Asians at Berenike

Excavations at Berenike have identified numerous artifacts and ecofacts, the latter mainly botanical remains, attesting to extensive contacts with South Asia from the early through the late Roman occupation of the site. Included in the former category are a Tamil-Brahmi graffito of the first century AD (Mahadevan 1996; Mahadevan 2003, pp. 43, 49, 56, 61, 93, 146–147, 163, 164, 235; Sidebotham 2011, p. 75), Indian transport and storage vessels of early Roman date (Tomber 2008, p. 76) including the two large *dolia*-like jars from the Serapis temple courtyard, a coin of the fourth century AD (Sidebotham 2007a, pp. 209 [no. 115], 210 [Plate 8-15]; Sidebotham 2011, p. 248), a swastika inscribed on a fifth-century sherd [Sidebotham and Zych 2010, pp. 13–14 and Fig. 16], reed and bamboo matting or a sail (Wendrich 2007, pp. 228, 233 [Table 12–2], 236, 250; Sidebotham 2011, pp. 75, 240), remains of cotton sails (Wild 1997; Wild and Wild 2000, pp. 265–269, 271–273; Wild and Wild 2001; Wild 2002, pp. 9–10; Wild 2004: 61–63; Wild and Wild 2005, pp. 13–14; Wild and Wild 2008, pp. 230–231; Sidebotham 2011, p. 243), other Indian made textiles (summarized in Sidebotham 2011, pp. 226–227, 243–244), carpets (Wild 2013), and other finds. Many objects comprised commercial merchandise that was either consumed at the port or was in transit to other places in Egypt or to the wider Mediterranean world. These included primarily black peppercorns, textiles (Sidebotham 2011, pp. 226–227, 243–244), banded agate cameo blanks (Harrell 1998, pp. 143–144; Harrell 1999, p. 112; Sidebotham 2011, p. 238) and beads (Francis 2000, pp. 221–223, 224–225; Sidebotham 2011, p. 238). Black peppercorns have been found in many contexts both sacred and profane at Berenike (Cappers 2006, p. 114; Sidebotham 2011, p. 226). For example, excavations recorded 7.55 kg of black peppercorns from a large Indian-made jar embedded in a first century floor adjacent to the Serapis temple noted above (Cappers 2006, pp. 114, 115 [Fig. 4.58]; Sidebotham 2011, pp. 226, 227 [Fig. 12-1]). While the jar and its contents were undeniably Indian in origin, there is no evidence tying these specific finds with any South Asian religious or funerary activities in the city.

There were, however, a number of objects of South Asian provenance from the Berenike excavations that were clearly not trade items *per se*, but rather the personal belongings of those passing through or residing in the city. These included Indian-made fine table, coarse, and cooking wares that were likely used by South Asian residents in Berenike (Begley and Tomber 1999; Tomber and Begley 2000; Tomber 2000; Tomber 2002, pp. 27–29; Tomber 2004, p. 396; Sidebotham 2011, pp. 75, 231). Given the very conservative nature of most people's diets and the fact that food is often a reflection of ethnicity, comestibles including rice, which appeared in early through late Roman levels (Cappers 2006, pp. 104–105; Sidebotham 2011, p. 228), were likely consumed by South Asians. The presence of coconut husks, mung beans, amla/Indian gooseberry, Job's tears (used as beads), and perhaps sesame also suggests that these items were likely consumed or otherwise used by South Asian residents of Berenike (Cappers 2006, pp. 78–80, 108–109, 124–125, 132–133; Sidebotham 2011, pp. 227–230). Already noted are the large numbers of teakwood beams, many of which appear to have been recycled from dismantled ships in the late Roman period. Yet, despite extensive documentation indicating the presence of South Asians at Berenike or their passage through the city, our excavations have thus far recorded no recognizable evidence for cultic or funerary activities associated with any of the major religions of South Asia contemporary with the Roman period in Egypt including Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Brahmanism.

Evidence for Axumites at Berenike

Though the documentation is not as extensive as it is for South Asians, there is evidence for at least the passage through—if not residence in—Berenike of people from the African Kingdom of Axum, especially in the late Roman history of the port. Axum rose to become a prominent political and economic power at the southern end of the Red Sea beginning in the late third century AD (Phillipson 2009; Sidebotham 2012, pp. 1052–1053). The uptick in quantities of Adulite and Axumite-made pottery at Berenike starting in the fourth century compared to earlier periods is quite noticeable, though pottery of Adulite/Axumite provenance found in any period of Berenike's history is, overall, a minuscule proportion of the entire ceramic corpus (Sidebotham 2011, pp. 231, 277–278). The Axumite coin found in the church at Berenike was minted by the late third-, early fourth-century King Aphilas, ironically, the last pre-Christian monarch of that polity (Sidebotham 2007a, pp. 209 [no. 114], 210 [Plate 8-14]; Sidebotham 2011, p. 275). A dipinto from a late fourth- or early fifth-century context may be written in a South Arabian/Axumite script, but this is uncertain (Gragg 1996). At least one Axumite graffito has been documented from the road linking Berenike to the Nile (Sidebotham 2011, pp. 72, 75). Initiated by the church in Alexandria, the Axumites converted to Christianity during the first third or so of the fourth century (Power 2012, pp. 25–26). Thus, the large Christian structure at Berenike undoubtedly catered to the religious needs of any visitors from that African kingdom as well as any Egyptians or other Christian resident at the port. No identifiable funerary remains of Axumites have been documented from excavations at Berenike thus far.

Conclusion

Excavations through 2014 have revealed something of the religious activities and, perhaps, of the burial practices of Berenike's Ptolemaic-era residents. The possible association of the so-called Serapis temple, the sunken harbor structure, and the Ptolemaic and Roman ruler cults has been noted. In addition, the lower portion of the adult male found beneath the early Roman trash deposit, which joined with the top half documented in excavations in 2001, and the lower-most skeleton found near the robbed-out early Ptolemaic city wall in 2013, may also represent Ptolemaic era interments. It remains uncertain whether the pair of scarabs recovered from the Ptolemaic trash deposit had any religious meaning for the Hellenistic residents of the city. The miniature bronze temple doors reflect the continuation of traditional Pharaonic-era religion in Berenike in the Ptolemaic period, but it is not known which deity should be associated with this artifact.

We know far more about these phenomena in the late Roman period with the identification of at least four structures containing an array of artifacts and ecofacts. Objects preserving religious symbols found in non-sacred contexts also provide testimony about the role of the sacred in the lives of Berenike's inhabitants in Roman times. We still know little about Roman-period burial practices but have some hint of them from the late Roman-era necropolis lying at the northwestern edge of Berenike, and from hundreds of tombs situated on hills west and southwest of the city and stretching as far as the late Roman-era settlements of Shenshef and Hitan Rayan.

Several objects from inside the fourth- and fifth-century phases of the Late Roman Harbor Temple appeared to be at least several decades or several centuries old in the final context in which they had been used. These include the bronze bull's head, the inscription dating from the time of Trajan, the bull coin/pendant, the South Arabian/Axumite style altar (Sidebotham and Zych 2010, pp. 18 Fig. 34 bottom right, 19 Fig. 39 top of photo and to right; Rądkowska *et al.* 2013, p. 216 Fig. 4, altar to right), and, perhaps, the protome of the human torso. This evidence suggests that some earlier cult activities, several of which at least were South Arabian/pre-Christian Axumite in inspiration, took place here or elsewhere—probably close by—in the city. It is interesting that similar circumstances can be found in the Shrine of the Palmyrenes. There, the bronze statue (refitted into a base) and accompanying early third-century dedicatory text by Marcus Aurelius Mokimos appeared in a fourth-fifth-century context as did the late second/early third-century inscription and remnants of a bronze hand and stone base for a statue of the god Hierobol/Yarhibol.

There were identical construction techniques and materials used both in portions of the sunken feature adjacent to the Late Roman Harbor Temple and also in the so-called Serapis Temple; we lack solid evidence for the original period of construction of either of these two edifices, but they are at least early Roman or, more likely, originally middle Ptolemaic (second century BC) in date.

It is noteworthy that at least three of the pagan cult centers (Late Roman Harbor Temple, Shrine of the Palmyrenes and the so-called Serapis Temple) seem to have housed multiple cults; it is unclear whether that was the case in the Northern Shrine. These shrines, at least in the late Roman period, were scattered in various quarters of the city and not concentrated in a particular district. They catered to a city-wide clientele.

It is important to note that the Christian ecclesiastical facility and at least three of the cult centers (Northern Shrine, Shrine of the Palmyrenes, and the Late Roman Harbor Temple) operated simultaneously late in the history of Berenike, suggesting a high degree of religious tolerance among the city's population in the later fourth and fifth centuries. The strikingly similar dates, appearances, sizes, and internal decoration of the Late Roman Harbor Temple and Northern Shrine suggest, possibly, that they were erected by the same group of worshippers, perhaps even dedicated to the same deity or deities. The current state of our knowledge about the so-called Serapis Temple does not permit us to identify any activities inside that edifice in late antiquity, though there was extensive use of the area immediately north and adjacent to it at that time. This is a period when Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire (Pharr 1952, pp. 472–476), but clearly in this remote location, at the edge of the Roman world, non-Christian religious practices remained popular and, apparently, tolerated by Christians and by the authorities. Some hint of tension among religious groups may, however, be reflected in the deliberately mangled portions of the female bronze statue in the Shrine of the Palmyrenes, bronze statue fragments found just outside and north of the Late Roman Harbor Temple, and the bronze digit and bone or ivory eye inserts from bronze statues found discarded unceremoniously in the sunken area, also near the Late Roman Harbor Temple. Within the Late Roman Harbor Temple itself, the nearly headless bronze protome and smashed painted ostrich eggs may also be an indication of deliberate mutilation. Alternatively, this apparent wanton and deliberate destruction of cult objects might have been ceremonial (*cf.* Waraksa 2009, pp. 69–71; 121, 122, 141, 144, 145, 148, 153, 155, 161, 165, 166, 167, 168, 172, 174) rather than an act of desecration. At this point in our excavations, however, there are insufficient data to ascertain the motives behind the damage to/destruction of these religious artifacts.

Needless to say, many, if not all, of these religious edifices must have benefited either directly or indirectly from the long-distance commerce that was Berenike's *raison d'être*. In the case of the Late Roman Harbor Temple, the adjacent sunken ashlar edifice, and the Christian ecclesiastical building, a more direct link between their existence, location, and richness of their interior appointments and the maritime commerce is, perhaps, evident. It seems to be the norm at Berenike for interior temple furnishings and offerings to survive and be more or less *in situ*, something almost universally absent from shrines along the Nile. This fortuitous situation allows a much more detailed examination of cult practices in Roman Egypt than would otherwise be the case.

There is evidence for at least one South Arabian religious cult celebrated in the Late Roman Harbor Temple; a lesser case can be made for the presence of followers of Zoroastrianism in Berenike in the Roman era. A fair amount of archaeological (especially ceramic and botanical) and some epigraphic evidence strongly suggests the presence of South Asians (from India, Sri Lanka) residing at and passing through Berenike (Sidebotham 2011, pp. 69, 75, 227–229) in both early and late Roman times. Yet, we have excavated nothing at Berenike that records their religious or funerary preferences. One can only assume that this documentation will eventually be forthcoming, but that, as luck would have it, such evidence has thus far eluded us. There is also a similar lack of documentation for any recognizable Axumite and Meroitic religious and burial practices at Berenike. There is a stronger case to be made for the presence of desert-dwelling peoples at Berenike at least in the later Roman period,

whether Blemmyes, Trog(l)odites/Trogodytes, Ichthyophagi, or others: the hundreds of burial tumuli west of the city, the presence of the so-called Eastern Desert Ware, and butchered ovicaprid and camel bones.

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