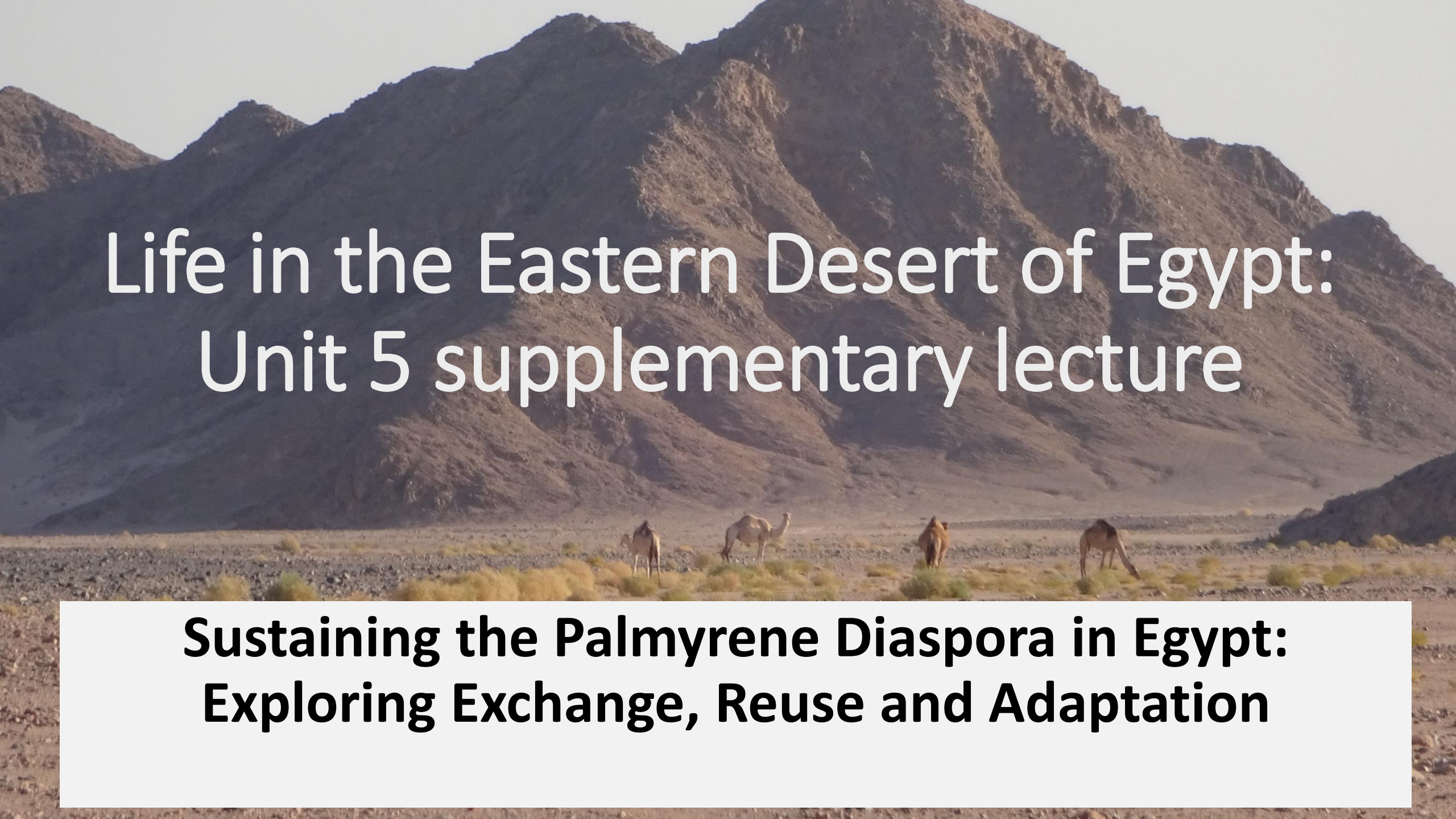


The background image is a photograph of a desert landscape. In the foreground, four camels are visible, standing on a sandy, rocky plain with sparse, low-lying yellowish-green shrubs. In the background, a large, rugged, brown mountain with sharp peaks rises against a clear sky. The overall scene is arid and desolate.

Life in the Eastern Desert of Egypt: Unit 5 supplementary lecture

**Sustaining the Palmyrene Diaspora in Egypt:
Exploring Exchange, Reuse and Adaptation**

Introduction

Considering cultural choice, self-sufficiency and resource reuse in relation to the Palmyrene diaspora of Egypt.

Benefits:

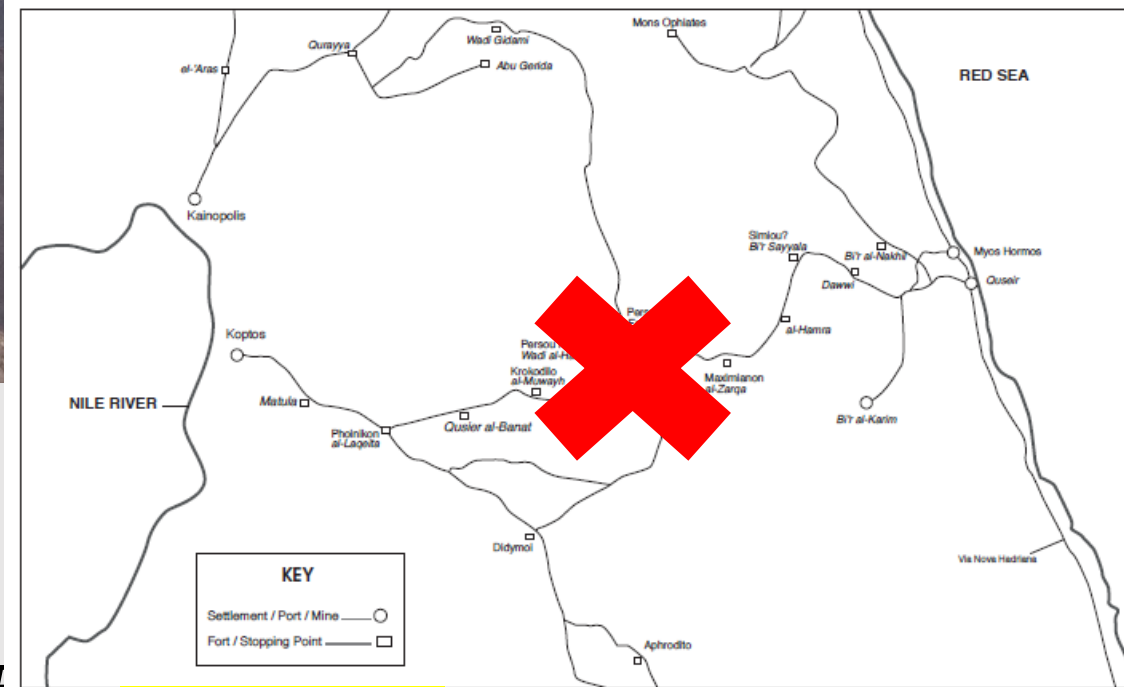
- Comparative analysis with Palmyra.
- Adding to the case studies considering economic activity and sustainability.
- Environmental conditions of Eastern Desert and Red Sea and preservation of material.

Structure:

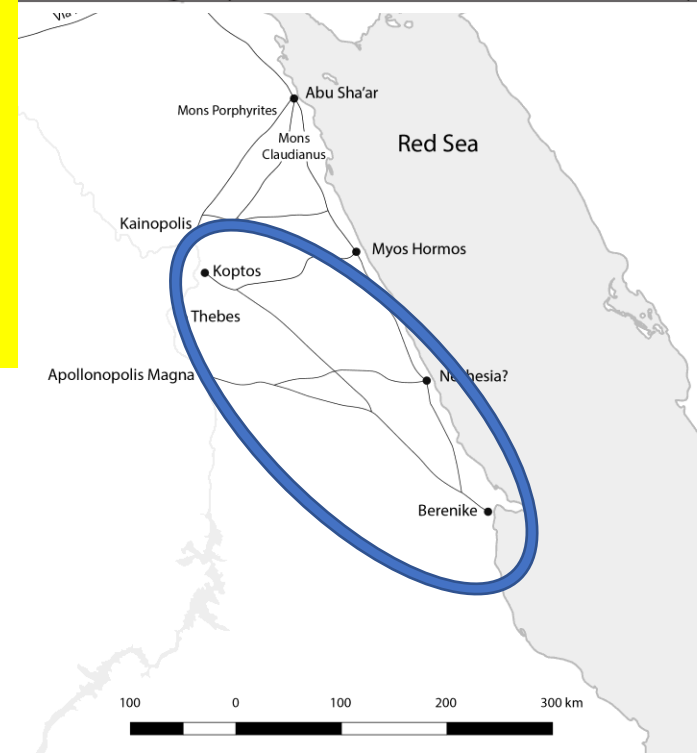
- Historical and Geographical Context.
 - Identifying our Palmyrene community.
- Environmental Context and Resource Sustainability.
- Sustaining the Palmyrene Community.

Historical and Geographic Context

- Inscription honouring Zabdalas (Koptos) – *I. Portes* 103 = *AE* 1912, 55 no. 171.
- A unit of Palmyrene archers based at Koptos (*Hadriani Palmyreni Antoniniani sagittarii*) – *IGR* 1169 = *OGIS* 639 = *SB* 8810.
- A bilingual Greek and Aramaic inscription that originally formed the base for a statue of the Palmyrene deity Yarhibol/ Hierobol, Shrine of the Palmyrenes, Berenike – Dijkstra and Verhoogt (1999).
- Dedication by Marcus Aurelius Mokimos – Shrine of the Palmyrenes, Berenike – Verhoogt (1998).



Mid-2nd into the 3rd century CE (probably not later than 270 CE.)



Identifying Palmyrenes

- Evidence from:
 - content of inscriptions and ostraka, language, script, and naming practices, as well as archaeological context.
 - Julius Aurelius Makkai/Makkaïos (Tentyris).
 - Palmyrenes “hidden in plain sight”?
 - Palmyrene military unit ([Παλ]μυρηνοί) at Didymoi.
 - Epigraphic material used to help connect structures / locations with Palmyrenes:
 - Shrine of the Palmyrenes.
 - *Praesidia* (small forts) of the Koptos-Berenike route.

“Zabdalas son of Salmanos, also (called) Aneinas, of the merchants of the Red Sea from Hadriane Palmyra...” – *I. Portes* 103 = *AE* 1912, 55 no. 171 [Trans. from Young (2001)]

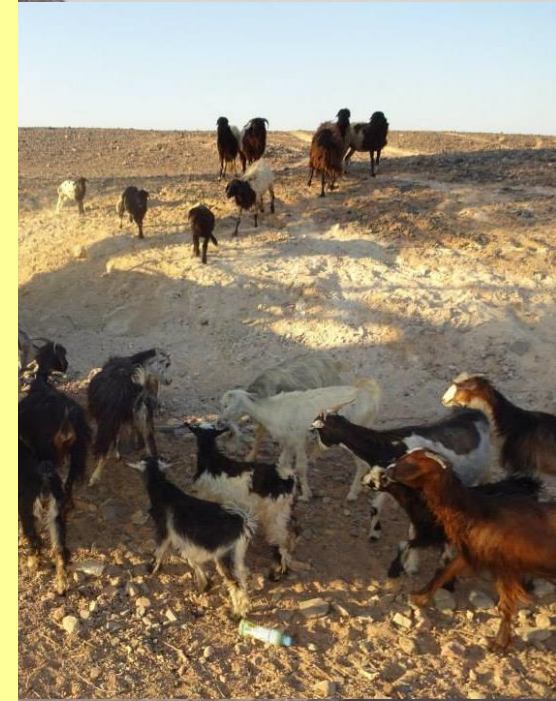


Praesidium of Didymoi – Google Earth Image, from ENEMA project: <https://eamena.org/remote-sensing-archaeology>

Environmental Context and Resource Sustainability

- Sparse rainfall (but occasional flash floods).
- Indigenous transhumance.
- Official rations for soldiers and cavalrymen (wheat, barley chaff).
- Private commercial transaction, including vegetables, fruit, wine, olive oil and meat.
- Transactions with the indigenous “*barbaroi*”.

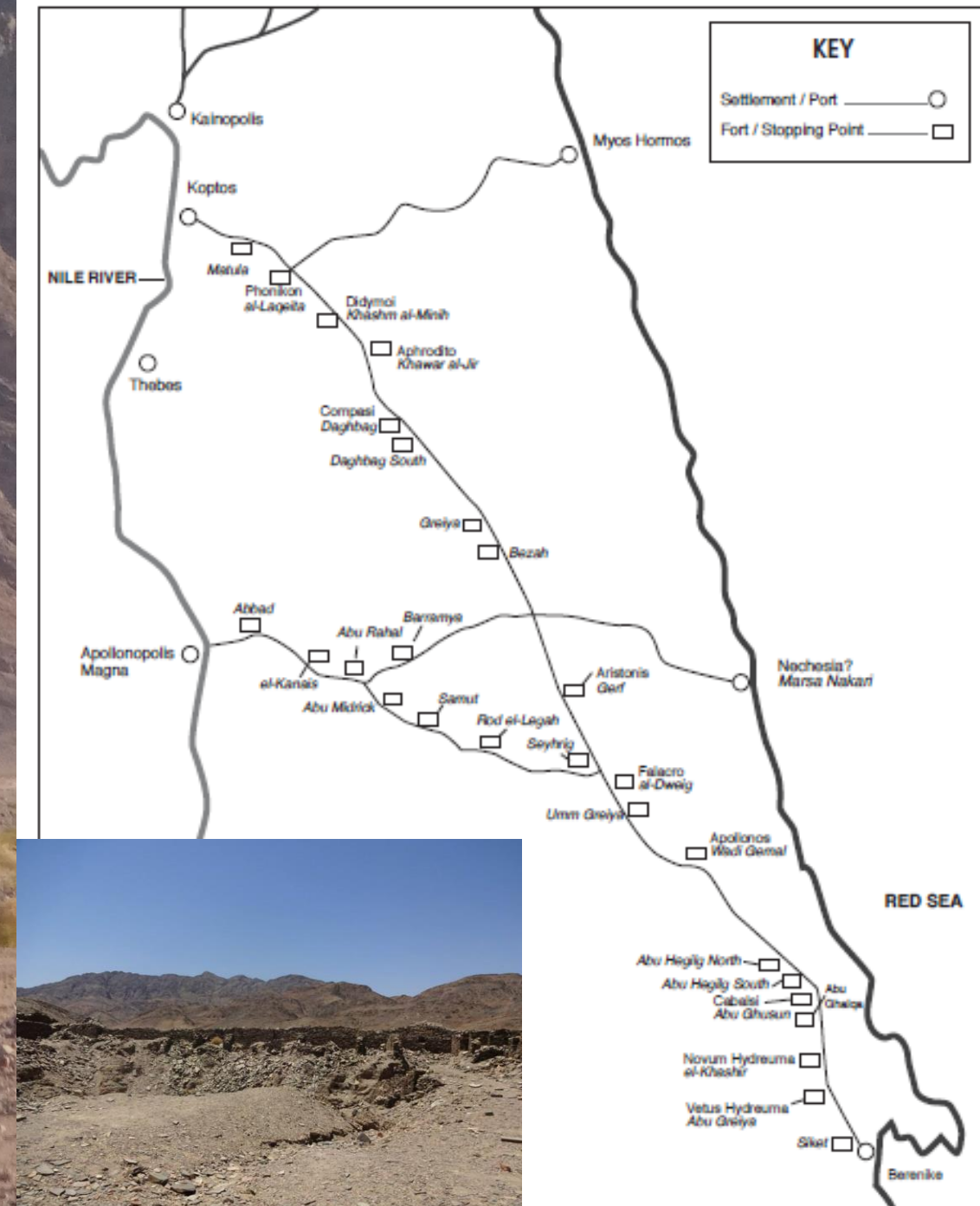
“I want you to know that the oil flask contains 6 kotylai [1.5 litres] [...] Know that for the *barbaroi*, the price of the chous [= 12 Kotylai], is 24 drachmas.” – *O.Xer* inv. 465 (ca. 115-130 CE) [Trans. from Cuvigny 2014]



Amphorae fragments from Myos Hormos

Self-sufficiency and cultural choice: food and water sustainability

- *hydreumata* (wells) and *lakkoi* (cisterns), which were fortified (at least from Flavian period onwards).
- Local resources / self-sufficiency:
 - Fish and molluscs.
 - Faunal remains (sheep, goats, poultry and pigs).
- Brun (2018) and Leguilloux (2018) – change in meat consumption patterns due to Palmyrenes?



Recycling and the Construction of the Shrine of the Palmyrenes

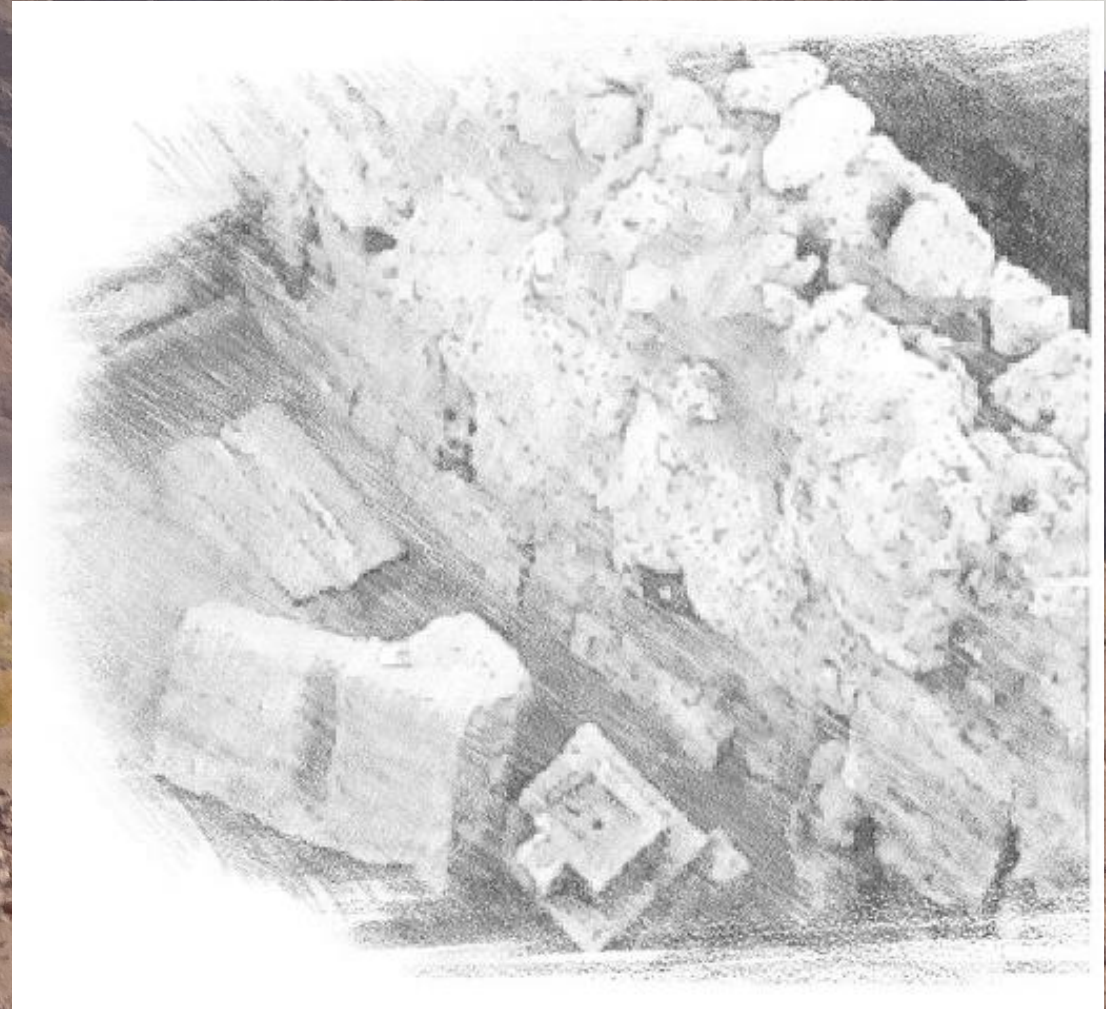
Recycling of materials:

- Disused ships planks (traces of dowel holes)
- “Robbed” gypsum-anhydrite blocks and coral heads

Comparative evidence:

- Inscription celebrating Zabdalas (Koptos)
- Earlier inscription detailing benefaction of Marcus Laelius Cosmus (Great Temple / Temple of Isis (Berenike)) – R. Ast (2021).

“off-center entrance recalls other cult centers of Semitic origin found throughout the Middle East... that of Bel at Palmyra being a good, if not exact, parallel.” – Sidebotham (2014): 611.



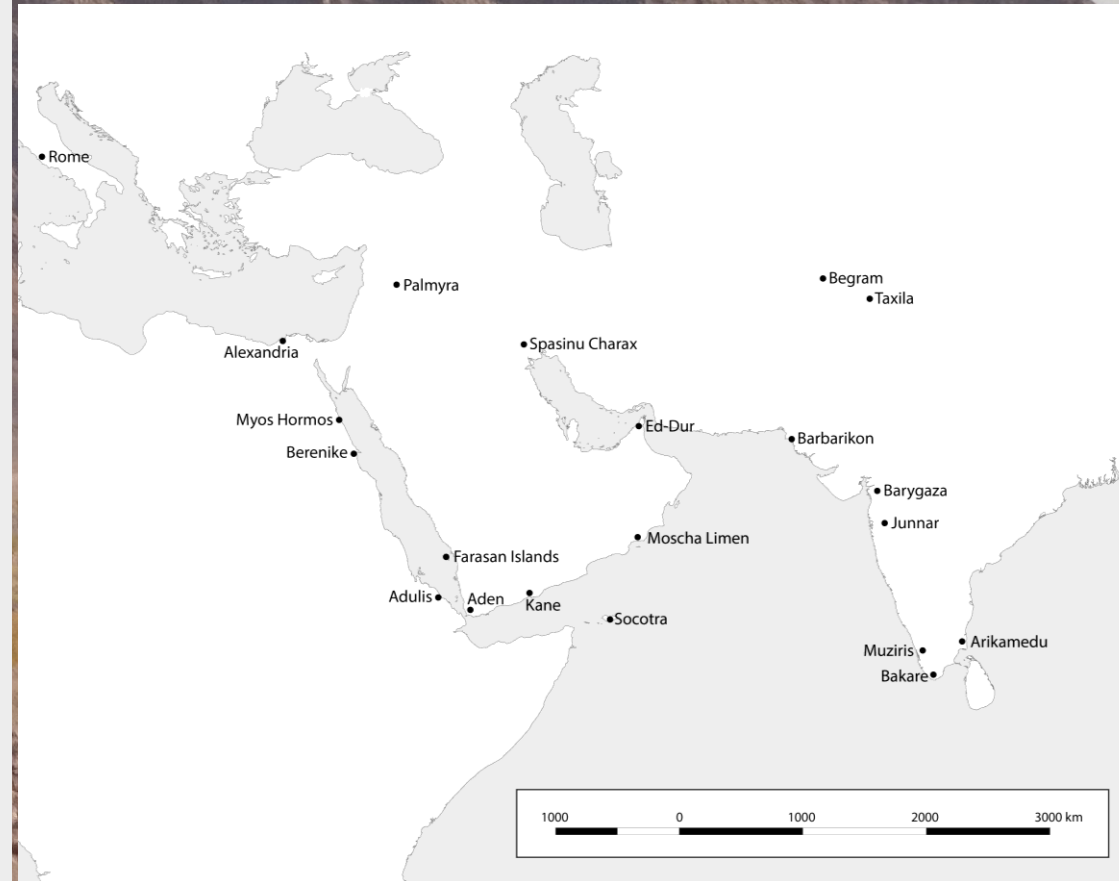
Reuse, Local Resources and Luxury Imports at the Red Sea ports

Local resources and reuse-recycling:

- Lead sheathing from hulls for hydraulic tanks.
- Local wood for charcoal vs. shipbuilding wood.
- Textiles transited vs. textiles reuse at Berenike.

Stratification:

- Poorer members of community at Berenike (support activities) – “make do and mend”
- Well-to-do individuals, like merchants, business agents, soldiers and (minor) officials.
- Wealthiest financiers (likely based at Koptos, Alexandria or elsewhere).
 - Palmyrene ἔμποροι and ναύκληροι at Koptos.



Sustaining the Palmyrene Community

Limitations:

- Difficult to assess population size.
- Also socio-economic composition.

Hierarchy and support networks?

- Chronological overlap between presence of merchants and soldiers.
 - Mokimos inscription – Sidebotham (2011)
- New (more mobile) merchant “class” likely to be those who emigrated to Egypt? – Cobb (2020); Seland (2020).



Reconstruction of statue base and remains of statue (Mokimos inscription), Shrine of the Palmyrenes (after Hence 2008).

Identity and Community Cohesion

Engagement and heritage:

- Bilingualism, but also maintenance of “cultural heritage).
 - Worship of Hierobol/Yarhibol (Berenike and Koptos)

Community cohesion:

- No direct evidence for dispute resolution mechanisms.
- Some argue that the Zabdalas inscription implies a merchant *collegium* – Sidebotham (1986); Smith II (2013); Evers (2017).

“Zabdalas son of Salmanos, also (called) Aneinas, of the merchants of the Red Sea from Hadriane Palmyra, who has set up anew from the foundations the **propylaia** and **three stoas** and the **chambers**, entirely from his own funds, his colleagues the merchants of Hadriane Palmyra (set this up) to their friend, for this friendship and distinction.”
– *I. Portes* 103 = *AE* 1912, 55 no. 171 [Trans. from Young (2001)]

Conclusion

- A community that sustained itself of roughly a century (or more)?
- Outward facing, but maintaining aspects of cultural heritage.
 - Embedded in a multi-cultural, multilingual region, connected to international trade.
- Logistical and ecological challenges posed by Eastern Desert environment.
 - Interplay between resource scarcity and reuse, versus cultural habits and preferences.
 - Meat consumption patterns at the praesidia; Shrine of the Palmyrenes.
- Perhaps not possible to study this diaspora in the holistic manner advocated for Palmyra by Romanowska, Bobou and Raja (2021).