

LIFE IN THE EASTERN DESERT OF EGYPT

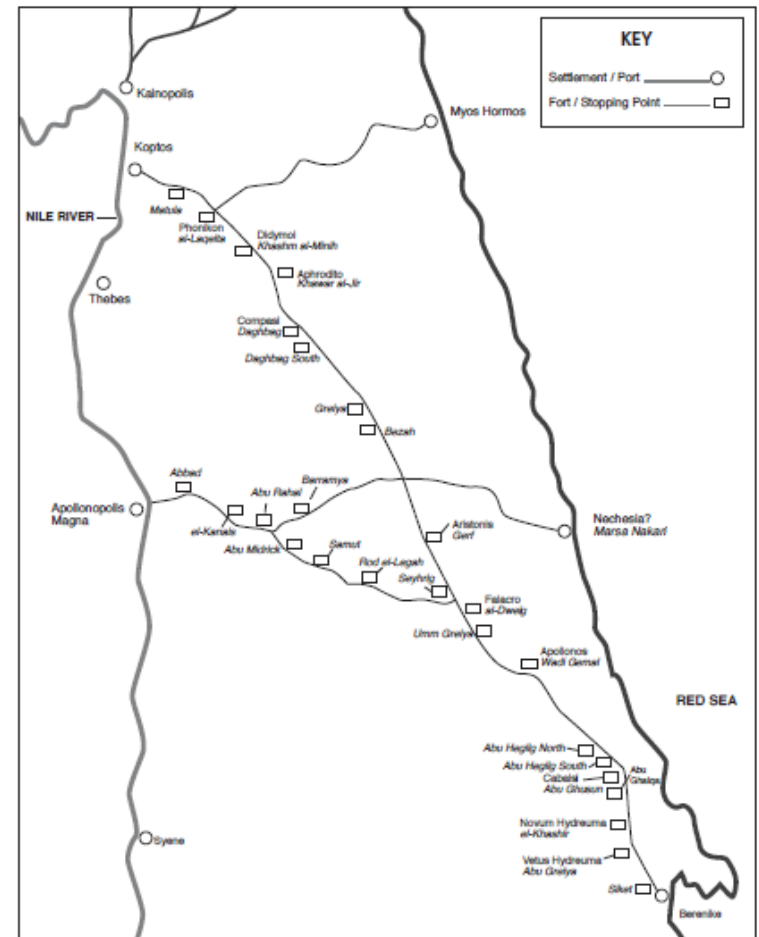
Unit 5 – Life in the praesidia of the
Eastern Desert and ports on the Red Sea

HPAH7006

Overview

- The routes leading across the ED provided a key link in the exchange of goods between the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean spheres.
 - Ports to facilitate trade
 - Fortlets to protect, monitor and control water resources.
- A series of *praesidia* (fortlets), *hydreumata* and *lakkoi* (wells and cisterns), and *skopeloi* (towers), were maintained along ED routes.

Map 2



The Routes to Berenike

Hydreumata, Lakkoi and Praesidia

- ❑ The *praesidia* were the fortlets which enclosed the *hydreumata* (wells) and *lakkoi* (cisterns).
- ❑ Capacity varied: Rod Umm Farraj cisterns – c. 39,000 litres; Krokodilo – c. 200,000 litres.
- ❑ Most fortlets in an advanced, but exceptions such as El-Zerkah (Maximianon). Surviving evidence indicates that stations covered an area ranging from 140-220 m².
- ❑ Maximianon (incomplete), Persou, and Simiou (complete). For Maximianon 15 names survive, 18 at Persou, and 15 at Simiou

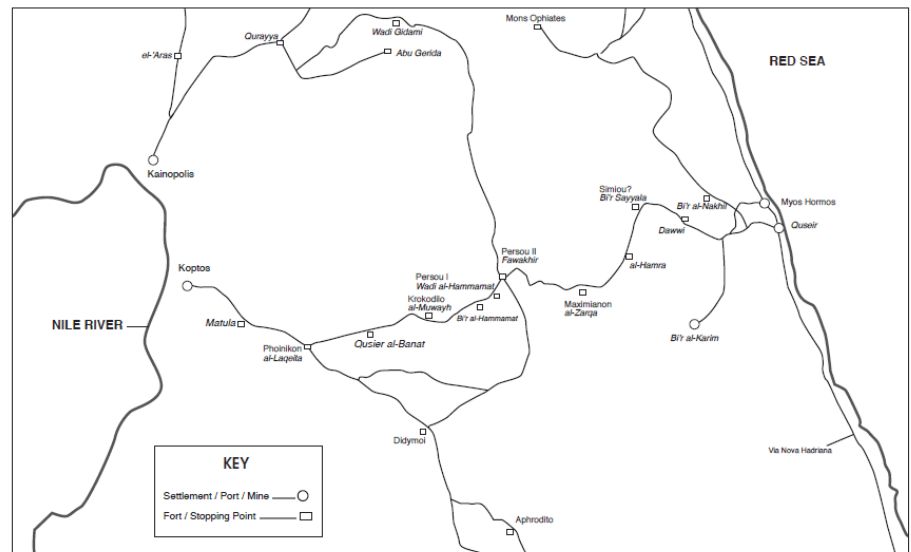


Praesidia (continued)

- ▣ Presence of civilian population alongside military (families, business people, prostitutes).
- ▣ Supplies received from Nile region (*O. Krok* 605, 703; *O. Petr.* 245); also presence of pigs and poultry.
- ▣ Remains of fruit stones (mostly dates), onion, and leek fibres, fish-bones and various animal bones.



Map 4



The Koptos to Myos Hormos Route

Skopeloi

- ❑ Towers typically built of dry stone and are about three metres high and three metres square, with rubble filled interiors.
- ❑ Distance between them varying from a few hundred meters to as much as five kilometres, usually depending on the terrain. Inter-visible.
- ❑ One survey recorded at least 65 on the Koptos-Myos Hormos route alone (Zitterkopf and Sidebotham 1989).
- ❑ Function: communicating the arrival of ships, requesting supplies for the ports, and warning of attacks from bandits?
- ❑ Two or four men in rotation (*O. Amst* 8-14).
- ❑ Also a system of communication via “postal service” – on Myos Hormos route would take about average of 2-3 hours to deliver a message from one station to the next.



The Ports – Myos Hormos

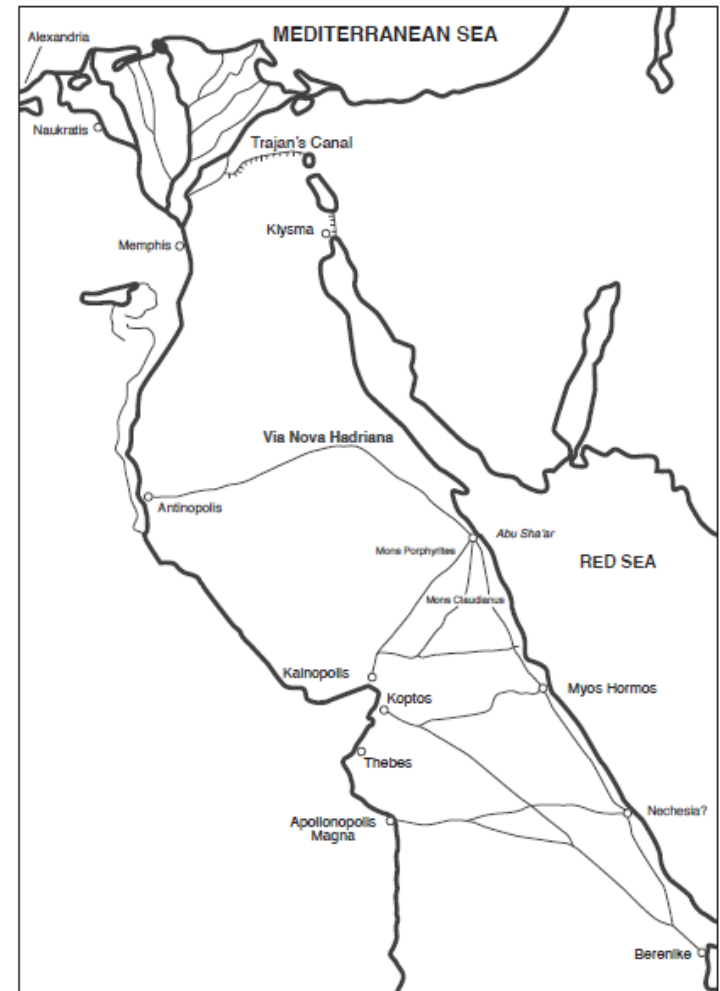
- ❑ Quseir al-Qadim the location of the ancient site of Myos Hormos.
- ❑ A jetty made from a line of amphorae covered with packed earth sealed by a stone wall, facilitating access from the surface to the shore; open area further north could have been used to beach boats for repair.
- ❑ Nikanor archive (18 BC-AD 69) - a series of receipts acknowledging delivery of goods from Koptos to Myos Hormos (28 receipts) and Berenike (30 receipts).
- ❑ West of the town area a “poor quarter”?
- ❑ Various industries at Myos Hormos: smelting, the production of lead sheets to protect the hulls of ships, and ship repair.
- ❑ A ‘work-a-day place’?



The Ports – Berenike (1)

- ❑ Located at Foul Bay near the cape of Ras Banas.
- ❑ Third century BC to sixth century AD – peak phases in third century BC, first century AD, and mid-fourth to fifth century AD.
- ❑ Metal working and the production of iron and copper nails for ship building/repair and general building construction.
- ❑ Evidence for the production of bronze jewellery and utensils, including spatulas; glass working.
- ❑ A population of 500 to 1000 people in the late Roman period?

Map 1



Egypt and the Eastern Desert

The Ports – Berenike (2)

- ▣ “Luxury” consumption at the port?
 - Numerous pepper finds; escargots (snails); marble slabs from quarries on the island of Proikonesos in the Propontis (Sea of Marmara).
- ▣ Presence of women and children – jewellery: a bracelet, a pendant, an object made from elephant ivory, earrings of gold and pearl, and a ring made from hippopotamus ivory, etc.
- ▣ Number of camel loads of supplies needed – a few hundred per month?
- ▣ Satellite stations for the provision of water and protection?
 - Wadi Kalalat, 8.5 kilometres away: cistern could have held c. 800,000 litres of water for every metre of depth.
 - Station also at Sikyat 7.2km northeast of Berenike.