

(<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/ancient-egypt/buddha-in-ancient-egypt/>, retrieved 1/8/2024)

Buddha in Ancient Egypt

Statue of Buddha discovered in Roman period temple

Nathan Steinmeyer,¹ January 08, 2024

While excavating the ancient Red Sea port of Berenike in southeastern Egypt, an international team² discovered a remarkable statue of Buddha dating to the Roman period (c. 31 BCE–330 CE). Along with several other finds, the statue highlights the far-reaching trade connections that existed between Egypt and India at the time.

A Buddha Statue and More

Standing a little over 2 feet tall, the marble statue of Buddha was uncovered in the forecourt of a Roman-period temple in the ancient seaport of Berenike. The statue depicts Buddha standing beside a lotus flower with a halo behind his head. The statue's prominent place in the temple serves as an example of the religious pluralism that characterized Egypt³ at the time. The marble likely came from western Turkey, but the statue itself was carved locally, possibly by one of the many Indian merchants who did business in Berenike.

Inside the temple, the archaeologists also discovered a Sanskrit inscription dating to the time of the Roman emperor Philip the Arab (c. 244–249 CE), two second-century coins that originated in the Indian kingdom of the Satavahanas, and multiple Greek inscriptions from the first through fourth centuries. Although the statue could not be dated precisely, researchers believe it was likely in place by the early Roman period.



Statue of Buddha discovered at Berenike, Egypt. *Courtesy Szymon Popławski, Berenike Project.*

While Buddhism was certainly not native to Egypt, having originated around the Ganges River in India in the fifth century BCE, the important trade network connecting Egypt to India allowed for the continual flow of ideas along with traded goods. Indeed, Egypt was the main connection between the Roman Empire and India, with Berenike serving as the main seaport. From there, goods coming from India would be carried across the desert to the Nile River via camel caravan and then transported to the rest of the empire. Among the goods imported from India were pepper, textiles, and ivory.

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² <https://pcma.uw.edu.pl/en/2023/04/27/buddha-statue-found-at-berenike-egypt/> [see below p.2]

³ <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/ancient-egypt/temple-of-zeus/> [see below p.3]

Buddha statue found at Berenike (Egypt)

Andrzej Szotek, April 27, 2023



Egypt was at the center of a trade route that connected the Roman Empire with many areas of the ancient world, including India. There were several Roman-era harbors on the Red Sea coast of Egypt involved in this commerce, the most important of which was Berenike.⁴ Ships from India arrived there with products, such as pepper, semi-precious stones, textiles, and ivory. At Berenike, they were offloaded, and the cargo was transferred to camels that conveyed the goods across the desert to the Nile. Other ships then transported the merchandise to Alexandria and, from there, to the rest of the Roman Empire.

Excavations by an American-Polish expedition uncovered striking evidence for this trade. The most recent discovery was made by Rodney Ast from the University of Heidelberg and his team. It is a marble statue of Buddha placed in the forecourt of the main early Roman period temple of the town dedicated to the goddess Isis. The statue is 71 cm high and depicts Buddha standing and holding part of his clothing in his left hand. Around his head is a disc (halo) with sunrays depicted on it, which is a reference to his radiant mind. Next to him stands a lotus flower. The workmanship is very fine. It is the best evidence thus far excavated for Buddhism in Egypt.

Apart from this statue, archaeologists also found an inscription in an Indian language (Sanskrit) dating to the rule of the Roman emperor Philip the Arab (244–249 CE). This inscription seems not to be from the same time as the statue of Buddha, which is probably much older. Other inscriptions in the same temple were in Greek, dating from the early first century CE up to 305 CE. Archaeologists also found in the temple two 2nd-century CE coins from the central-Indian kingdom of the Satavahanas. The Buddha statue was made from stone probably quarried in the region just south of modern Istanbul, Turkey but it must have been sculpted locally at Berenike and dedicated to the temple by one, or more, of the rich merchants from India.

The discoveries took place in January–February 2022 but they have only recently been publicized by the Supreme Council of Antiquities of Egypt. Steven Sidebotham (University of Delaware) and Mariusz Gwiazda (Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, PCMA UW) co-direct this Polish-American expedition, with a permit held by the PCMA UW, in cooperation with the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Excavations in the Isis Temple have been most recently financed principally by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, with additional support from the Honor Frost Foundation and private benefactors. Excavations at Berenike began in 1994 and since

⁴ [see below p.5]

then, the history of this fascinating site has been reconstructed by a large team of international scholars.

(<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/ancient-egypt/temple-of-zeus/>, retrieved 1/8/2024)

Temple of Zeus Uncovered in Egyptian Sinai

New temple reveals religious pluralism in ancient Egypt

Nathan Steinmeyer, May 02, 2022

As announced by Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities,⁵ archaeologists have uncovered the ruins of an ancient temple of Zeus Kasios at the site of Tell el-Farma in the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula. The discovery sheds further light on the religious multiculturalism that thrived in Egypt during antiquity. Zeus Kasios was an amalgamation of the Greek god Zeus and Mount Kasios (biblical Mount Zaphon) in Syria, the latter long revered as the home of the Canaanite god Ba'al and his sister Anat.



Archaeologists excavate the Temple of Zeus in the Egyptian Sinai. *Courtesy Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities via Twitter.*

The temple of Zeus Kasios was uncovered at the archaeological site of Tell el-Farma, known in Roman times as Pelusius.⁶ The excavations focused on the temple's entrance, where two collapsed, massive granite columns were visible on the surface. The temple was constructed out of mudbrick and set atop a raised platform with a marble-covered stairway leading into the temple. The temple ceiling was supported by massive columns of pink granite. Other architectural elements, including Corinthian capitals, were also found, many likely having been incorporated into later churches that were built at the site. In



Excavations in the Egyptian Sinai. *Courtesy Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities via Twitter.*

⁵ <https://egy monuments.gov.eg/en>

⁶ <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-senate-building-found-in-north-sinai/>

addition, several inscribed granite blocks indicate that the Roman Emperor Hadrian⁷ (r. 117–138 C.E.) supported renovations at the temple. The Egyptian archaeological team plans to perform a photogrammetric⁸ survey of the excavated blocks to aid in the reconstruction of this ancient temple of Zeus Kasios.



Although Zeus was the head of the Greek pantheon, he came to be associated with the ancient cult center at Kasios (modern Jebel al-Aqra) in Syria, which had long been an important religious center for Levantine religion when it was known as Mount Zaphon. Within Canaanite and Phoenician religions, Zaphon was the home of the god Ba'al. The mountain was so important that the Hebrew word for north, *tsafon*, is derived from the name of the mountain. In Greek mythology, the mountain was also the site where Zeus defeated the monster Typhon.

Large granite stone from the Temple of Zeus. *Courtesy Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities via Twitter.*

The site of Tell el-Farma, in the northern Egyptian Sinai, dates back to the pharaonic period. It was a provincial capital under Roman rule and later a Christian spiritual center. The site was an important border stronghold and was strategically positioned to defend against invasions from the sea as well as those coming from the east. The city was almost invaded by the Assyrian king Sennacherib during his campaign to Judah⁹ in 701 B.C.E. and was the site of a pivotal battle between the Achaemenid Persians¹⁰ and Egyptians in 525.

⁷ <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/news/rare-inscription-dedicated-to-hadrian-found-in-jerusalem/>

⁸ <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/archaeology-today/biblical-archaeology-topics/practical-uses-for-photogrammetry-on-archaeological-excavations/>

⁹ <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-places/sennacheribs-siege-of-lachish/>

¹⁰ <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/news/ancient-sewer-systems-excavated-at-persepolis/>

Berenice Troglodytica

Coordinates: 23°54'31" N 35°28'21" E

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Berenice Troglodytica, also called **Berenike** (Greek: Βερενίκη) or **Baranis**, is an ancient seaport of Egypt on the western shore of the Red Sea. It is situated about 825 km south of Suez, 260 km east of Aswan in Upper Egypt and 140 km south of Marsa Alam.^[2] It was founded in 275 BCE by Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 BCE), who named it after his mother, Berenice I of Egypt.^[3]

A high mountain range runs along the African coast and separates the Nile Valley from the Red Sea; Berenice was sited upon a narrow rim of shore between the mountains and the Red Sea, at the head of the Sinus Immundus,^[4] a south-facing bay sheltered on the north by a high peninsula then called Lepte Extrema, and to the south by a chain of small islands scattered across the mouth of the bay.

One of them was called the Island of Ophiodes (Ὀφιώδης νήσος^{[4][5]}) and was one of a few sources of gemstones local to Berenice. The harbour is marginal, but was improved by engineering.



Wikipedia

Etymology

The name *Troglodytica* refers to the native people of the region, the "Troglodytai" or "cave dwellers". Although the name is attested by several ancient writers, the more ancient Ptolemaic inscriptions read *Trogodytai*, which Huntingford (1980)^[6] speculated could be derived from the same root as Tuareg. It is possible that later copyists confused this name with the more common term *Troglodytai*.^[6]

History

Ptolemaic era

Berenice was prosperous and quite famous in antiquity. The city is noted by most ancient geographers, including Strabo,^[9] Pliny the Elder,^[10] and Stephanus of Byzantium.^[11] Its prosperity after the third century was mostly due to three reasons:

1. patronage by the Ptolemaic kings
2. safe anchorage
3. being at the eastern terminus of the main road from Upper Egypt.

The other terminus of that road is Coptos (now Qift), an Egyptian city on the Nile, which made Berenice and Myos Hormos the two main shipping centers for trade between Aethiopia and Egypt on the one hand, and Syria, Tamilakkam, and Tamraparni (ancient Sri Lanka) on the other.^[12] The road across the desert from Coptos was 258 Roman miles long, or 11 days' journey. Watering stations

(Greek *hydreumata*, see Hadhramaut) were built along the road; the wells and resting places for caravans are listed by Pliny,^[13] and in the *Itineraries*.^[14]

In the 19th century Belzoni^[15] found traces of several of the watering stations.

Main article: Mining industry of Egypt

Berenice was able to generate some commerce locally: The mines of Gebel Zabara and Wadi Sikait in the adjacent mountains, and the island of Ophiodes (now Zabargad Island) in the mouth of Berenice's harbor, were rich sources of gemstones (peridot?) at that time called "topaz" and "emerald".^[16]

Imperial Roman era

From the 1st century BCE until the 2nd century CE, Berenice was one of the critical way-stations for trade between India, Sri Lanka, Arabia, and Upper Egypt. It was connected to Antinoöpolis on the River Nile in Lower Egypt by the Via Hadriana in 137 CE.

The trade from Berenice along the Red Sea coast is described in the 1st century CE travelogue *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, written by a Greek merchant based in Alexandria. The *Periplus* states that "on the right-hand coast next below Berenice is the country of the Berbers", thereby placing Berenice Troglodytica just north of ancient Barbara.^[17]

In the 4th century Berenice had again become an active port. Under the Roman administration, Berenice itself formed an entire district with its own prefect, who was called *Praefectus Berenicidis*, or *P. montis Berenicidis*.^[18]

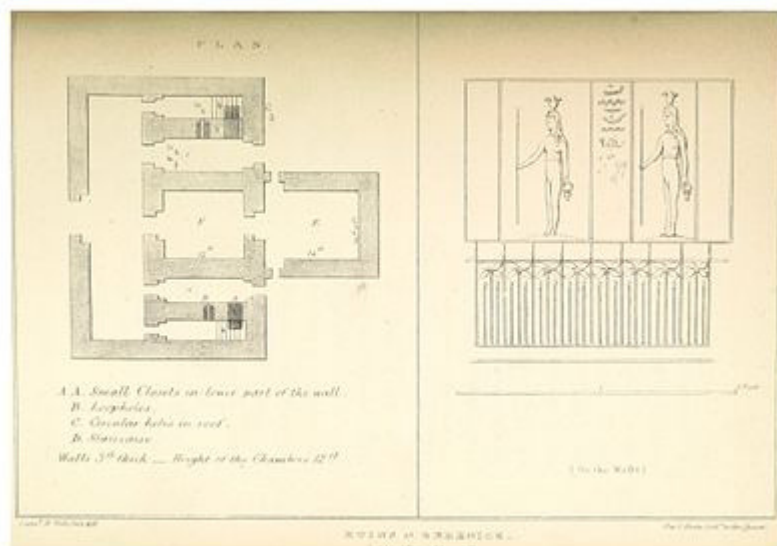
Despite its favorable location, after the 6th century the port was abandoned and the bay has since nearly filled with sediment; it has a sand-bar at its entrance that can only be crossed by shallow-draft boats.^[19] The gemsites on Zabargad Island are flooded.^[20]

19th century archaeology

In 1818, the ruins of Berenice were identified by Giovanni Battista Belzoni, confirming an earlier opinion of d'Anville. Belzoni wrote that the city measured 1,600 feet (490 m) from north to south, and 2,000 feet (610 m) from east to west. He estimated the ancient population at 10,000.^[21] Since then, several excavations have been undertaken.^[19]

The most important ruin is a temple; the remnants of its sculptures and inscriptions preserve the name of Tiberius and the head magistrate of the Jews in Alexandria under Ptolemaic and Roman rule. Excavations have also produced small figures of many deities, some obscure, including a (goddess?) Alabarch or Arabarch.

The temple is Egyptian style, made of sandstone and a soft calcareous stone. It is 102 feet (31 m) long, and 43 feet (13 m) wide. A portion of its walls are sculptured with well-



Ruins of a temple – Wellsted (1838)

executed basso relieves, of Greek workmanship; occasionally the walls are decorated with hieroglyphics.

Recent archaeology

Excavations were launched at Berenike in 1994 by a team of archaeologists from the University of Delaware led by Prof. Steven E. Sidebotham, with partners from several other institutions and continued until 2001. Work was resumed by teams from the University of Delaware and the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, Poland, in the winter of 2007–2008 and is still continuing. Apart from the excavations, non-invasive magnetic prospecting was carried out. Tomasz Herbich from the Institute of Archeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences made a magnetic map of the western part of the site.^[2]

A large number of significant finds have been made providing evidence of the cargo from the Malabar Coast and the presence of Tamil people from South India and Jaffna being at this last outpost of the Roman Empire (see ancient Indo-Roman trade relations).

"Among the unexpected discoveries at Berenike were a range of ancient Indian goods, including the largest single concentration (7.55 kg) of black peppercorns ever recovered in the classical Mediterranean world ("imported from southern India" and found inside a large vessel made of Nile silt in a temple courtyard); substantial quantities of Indian-made fine ware and kitchen cooking ware and Indian style pottery; Indian-made sail cloth, basketry, matting, etc. from trash dumps; a large quantity of teak wood, black pepper, coconuts, beads made of precious and semi-precious stones, cameo blanks; "a Tamil Brahmi graffito mentioning Korra, a South Indian chieftain"; evidence that "inhabitants from Tamil South India (which then included most of Kerala) were living in Berenike, at least in the early Roman period"; evidence that the Tamil population implied the probable presence of Buddhist worshippers; evidence of Indians at another Roman port 300 km north of Berenike; Indian-made ceramics on the Nile road; a rock inscription mentioning an Indian passing through en route; "abundant evidence for the use of ships built and rigged in India"; and proof "that teak wood (endemic to South India), found in buildings in Berenike, had clearly been reused" (from dismantled ships)."^[22]



The *Berenike Buddha*,¹¹ discovered in Berenice Troglodytica in 2022.

In 2009 the first find of frankincense was reported and "two blocks of resin from the Syrian fir tree (*Abies cilicica*), one weighting about 190 g and the other about 339 g, recovered from 1st century CE contexts in one of the harbor trenches. Produced in areas of greater Syria and Asia Minor, this resin and its oil derivative were used in mummification, as an antiseptic, a diuretic, to treat wrinkles, extract worms and promote hair growth."^[2]

"Extensive and intensive research initiated by Iwona Zych in the area of the southern harbor bay has uncovered workshop buildings, remains of ship boards, ropes, mooring lines, as well as a so-called harbor temenos with two structures probably of sacral character – the Lotus Temple and the Square Feature. Berenike in the early Roman period was a vibrant town in the desert where the greatest fortunes of the time were made. The archaeological excavations have uncovered remains of luxury goods, precious glass, bronze figurines, ostraca, papyri."^[2]

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berenike_Buddha

The expedition also discovered a cemetery of small animals dated c. 1st–2nd century CE, which has been excavated by Marta and Piotr Osypiński from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences since 2011.^{[23][24]}

In 2019, a 2,300 year-old fortress was discovered by a team of archaeologists from the University of Warsaw and the Polish Academy of Sciences. The structure, built near the southern frontier, had thicker walls to the west, and served as a hub to transport war elephants from Eritrea.^[25] In the same year was excavated an Isis temple and there, there were found fragments of a statue of the Meroitic god Sebiumeker.^[26]

In 2020–2021, 2,000 year-old remains of monkeys, cats, and dogs were discovered at Berenike to be considered the oldest pet cemetery in the world.^{[27][24]}

In Berenike in March 2022 an American-Polish archaeological mission excavating the main early Roman period temple dedicated to the Goddess Isis uncovered in the forecourt of the temple a marble statue of a Buddha, the Berenike Buddha.^{[28][29]}

See also

- Red Sea Riviera
- Berenice Epideires

Footnotes

- [1] *Final Report for 5th season - Pattanam Excavation (PDF) (Report)*. Tiruvananthapuram, India: Kerala Council for Historical Research. 2011. Archived from the original (PDF) on 7 August 2015. Retrieved 13 September 2015.
- [2] *"Berenike"*. *pcma.uw.edu.pl*. 2019-04-17. Retrieved 2020-05-27.
- [3] Michael Peppard (2009). "A letter concerning boats in Berenike and trade on the Red Sea." *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Bd. 171, p. 196.
- [4] Strabo xvi. p. 770;^[full citation needed]
- [5] Diod. iii. 39^[full citation needed]
- [6] *Huntingford, G.W.B. (1980). "The ethnology and history of the area covered by the Periplus". Periplus of the Erythraean Sea. London, UK.*^[full citation needed]
- [7] *Gauthier, Henri (1928). Dictionnaire des Noms Géographiques Contenus dans les Textes Hiéroglyphiques. Vol. 5. p. 107.*
- [8] *Wallis Budge, E.A. (1920). An Egyptian hieroglyphic dictionary. Vol. II. John Murray. p. 1038. With an index of English words, king list and geological list with indexes, list of hieroglyphic characters, coptic and semitic alphabets, etc.*
- [9] Strabo, *Geography*, xvi.770, xvii.815.
- [10] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, vi.(26).103, vi.(33).168.
- [11] Stephanus of Byzantium s. v.^[full citation needed]
- [12] *Sidebotham, Steven E. (2019). Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route. Univ. of California Press. pp. 237–238. ISBN 9780520303386. Retrieved 18 June 2019.*
- [13] Pliny the Elder vi. 23. s. 26^[full citation needed]
- [14] *Antonine Itinerary* p. 172, f.^[full citation needed]
- [15] Giovanni Battista Belzoni, *Travels*, vol. ii. p. 35^[full citation needed]

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- [18] Orelli, *Inscr. Lat.* no. 3880, f.^[full citation needed]
- [19] Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). "Berenice". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Vol. 3 (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press. pp. 769–770.
- [20] See article [Luminous gemstones § Island of Ophiodes](#).
- [21] [Giovanni Battista Belzoni](#), *Researches*, vol. ii. p. 73.^[full citation needed]
- [22] ["South Indians in Roman Egypt?"](#). *www.frontline.in*. 2010-04-23. Retrieved 2018-02-26.
- [23] Osypińska, M.; Osypiński, P. (2017). ["New evidence for the emergence of a human–pet relation in early Roman Berenike \(1st–2nd centuries AD\)"](#). *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*. **26** (2): 167–192. doi:10.5604/01.3001.0012.1825. S2CID 189400184.
- [24] Grimm, David (2021-02-26). ["Graves of nearly 600 cats and dogs in ancient Egypt may be world's oldest pet cemetery"](#). *Science Magazine. Archaeology, Plants, & Animals. American Association for the Advancement of Science*. doi:10.1126/science.abh2835. Retrieved 2021-03-16. Archaeozoologist Marta Osypinska and her colleagues at the Polish Academy of Sciences discovered the graveyard just outside the city walls [of Berenice], beneath a Roman trash dump, in 2011. The cemetery appears to have been used between the first and second centuries CE, when Berenice was a bustling Roman port that traded ivory, fabrics, and other luxury goods from India, Arabia, and Europe.
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- [26] Geisburch, Jan (Autumn 2019). ["Digging Diary 2019"](#). *Egyptian Archaeology*. Vol. 55. S. 27.
- [27] ["Monkeys found buried in 2,000 year-old Egyptian pet cemetery"](#). *Smithsonian Magazine*. 27 August 2020.
- [28] ["Garum Masala: Dramatic archaeological discoveries have led scholars to radically reassess the size and importance of the trade between ancient Rome and India"](#). *New York Review*. 20 April 2023.
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Berenike Project run by Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw

External links

- Fordham.edu: *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* — Schoff translation.
- The Berenike Project