

Security and water on the Eastern Desert roads: the prefect Iulius Ursus and the construction of *praesidia* under Vespasian

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During recent years several teams have surveyed and excavated along the roads between Coptos in the Nile Valley and the Red Sea. This article is the result of co-operation between two of them, namely the Dutch-American team working in Berenike since 1994 and the French team that has excavated stations on the Coptos–Myos Hormos road between 1994 and 1997 and later at Didymoi in the N end of the Coptos–Berenike road.¹ A chance visit to Berenike gave the key to a deeper understanding of the origins and history of the road that leads there from Coptos, because an inscription, that could easily have been understood in a purely local context, was suddenly seen to have at least two rather exact, though almost illegible, parallels at other stations. The three inscriptions are published below, two of them for the first time.

1. The Sikayt inscription

Sikayt is one of 10 forts that encircle Berenike from southwest to northwest (see fig. 1). These include: (1) a hill top fort at Shenshef; (2) a large *hydreuma* in Wadi Kalalat; (3) a small fort in Wadi Kalalat; (4) the fort at Sikayt; (5-9) 5 forts in Wadi Abu Greiya (Vetus Hydreuma); and (10) the small fort in Wadi Lahami. These forts range in date from Ptolemaic

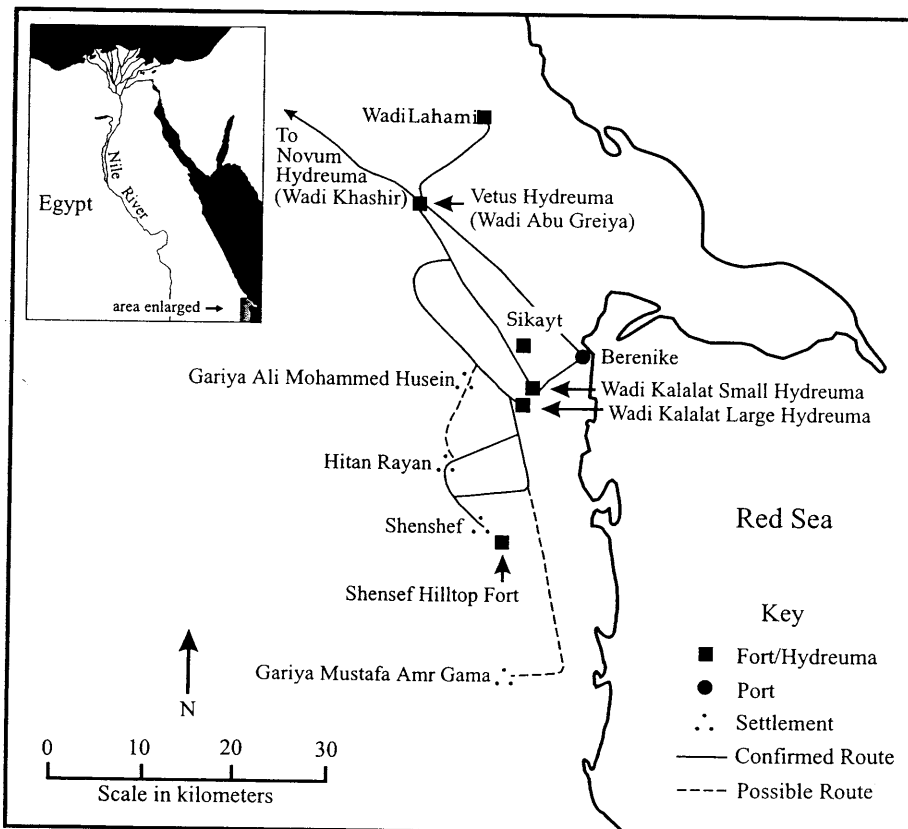


Fig. 1. Map of the environs of Berenike.

¹ Results from Berenike are published in annual reports: S. E. Sidebotham and W. Z. Wendrich (edd.), *Berenike 1994* (Leiden 1995); iid., *Berenike 1995* (Leiden 1996); iid., *Berenike 1996* (Leiden 1998); iid., *Berenike 1997* (Leiden 1999). The first monograph on the Coptos–Myos Hormos road is expected to appear towards the end of 2001: H. Cuvigny (éd.), *La route de Myos Hormos* (IFAO, Cairo).



Fig. 2. The Sikayt inscription.

to late Roman. Some are only from one period, while others seem to span longer periods.

The small *hydreuma* at Sikayt is c.7 km west-northwest of Berenike (GPS coordinates 23° 55' 88" N/35° 24' 46" E). It has four round towers at the corners and two semicircular towers flanking the N gate. The W wall measures 38.4 m, the east wall 32.15 m, the N wall 24.9 m and the S wall 23.85 m. Fort walls are built of locally obtainable cobbles and small boulders. Surface pottery and the small amount excavated at the N gate from the 4 x 4 m trench, in which the inscription was found, suggest activity at the *hydreuma* between the 1st and 3rd c. A.D. The gate threshold and locking mechanism were found *in situ* and intact. The threshold was a monolithic carved block made from anhydrite/gypsum, which is also the material of the inscription. The white gypsum columns that held the inscription were also found in the gate area, fallen onto the inscription. These were in extremely poor condition and did not survive removal from the trench.

The inscription forms a triangular pediment with the following dimensions: max. length, 2.46 m; max. height, 1.07 m; max. thickness, 0.17 m. The letters are shallow. Many preserve remains of red paint. Above the text, somewhat off-center, there is a solar disk in relief (fig. 2).

Anno (*leaf*) VIII (*leaf*) Imp(eratoris)
 Caesar(is) Aug(usti) Vespasiani
 L. Iulius Ursus pr(aefectus) Aegy(pti) *vac.* rediens a
 4 Bern(icide) hoc *vac.* loco *vac.* ydreuma *vac.* quaeri praecepit.
 hoc cum esset *vac.* inventum *vac.* praesidium et
 lacus aedificari iussit cura(m) agente
 M. Trebonio Valente *vac.* pr(aefecto) mont<i>s
 8 Bernicidis.
 4 l. hydreuma 6 cura 7 pr'

In the 9th year of Emperor Caesar Augustus Vespasianus, L. Iulius Ursus, prefect of Egypt, returning from Berenike gave instructions for a well to be sought in this place. When it had been found, he ordered a fort and cisterns to be constructed, under the direction of M. Trebonius Valens, prefect of the desert region of Berenike.

- 1-2 Vespasian's Greek titulature in Egypt normally reverses the order of Vespasianus and Augustus given here, but P. Bureth, *Les titulatures impériales* (Brussels 1964) 39, lists a few instances of the order used here, all early in the reign. Vespasian's 9th year was 76/7.
- 4 The form *Ber(e)nicis* co-existed with *Ber(e)nice* in Roman usage; that it was the form used here is shown by l.8, where the genitive is written in full. The spelling of *Berenice* or *Berenicis* without the second E is common in both Greek and Latin and is consistent within this inscription (cf. l.8). It appears also in the Aphroditis copy, l.5.

2. The foundation inscriptions at Aphrodites and Didymoi

(a) Aphrodites²

The text of the foundation inscription at Aphrodites is known only through the copy which J. G. Wilkinson made directly from the stone in 1826 (fig. 3). The text was published for the first time, on the basis of this copy, by D. Meredith in *CdE* 29 (1954) 284-86, with the help of A. H. M. Jones and E. Birley (reprinted in *AE* 1956. 57 and *I.Pan* 68). The stone itself had never been seen by an epigraphist until December 1998, when we were able to reach the *praesidium* of Aphrodites thanks to the co-ordinates kindly supplied to us by S. E. Sidebotham.³ By now, unfortunately, the text has totally disappeared, the surface being eroded by water and frost. With imagination and good-will, we could only recognize *ANN* at the beginning of l.1. The stone is a lintel,⁴ the inscribed field being surrounded by a frame; the material is the coarse limestone, full of fossils, from the ancient quarries at Hegaza.⁵

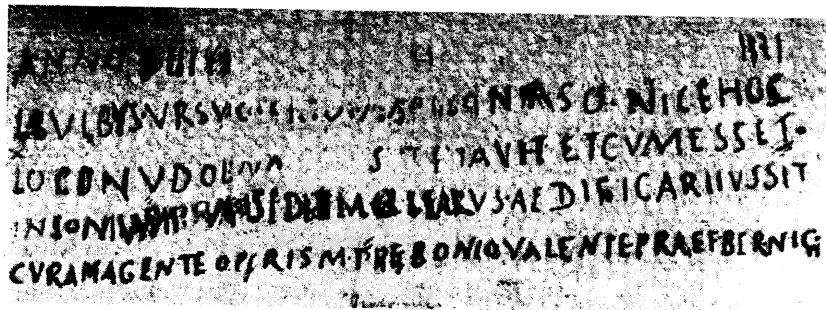


Fig. 3. J. G. Wilkinson's copy of the Aphrodites inscription.

Meredith gives two transcriptions of the text; the first one, which we reproduce, is what can be seen (or guessed) with some degree of security; the second, which we mention in the commentary notes, included restitutions which Meredith considered hypothetical.

anno ... [.....] ...
 L Iulius · Ursus hoc
 loco hydreuma iavit et cum esset
 4 in ... um praesidium us · aedificari iussit
 curam agente operis M · Trebonio Valente praef · Bernic

1. Part of the year number is visible on Wilkinson's drawing, in the shape of more or less hesitating vertical strokes; there is a kind of blot at the place where the V was. Meredith interpreted them in his second transcription as follows: *Anno (III or IV)*. That was to suit the common opinion that Iulius Ursus had been prefect in 83-84 (see below section 4). Since this was under Domitian, the natural erosion of the stone was thought to be the result of *damnatio memoriae*.
2. Before *hoc*, Wilkinson's drawing has *NICE*. We can be fairly sure that *Ber(e)nice* was not abbreviated at the end, whereas in the Sikayt inscription it is. According to the drawing, the *n* of *rediens* and the *a* before *Ber(e)nice* were visible. Note that the form *Bernicis*, gen. *-idis*, is used in the Sikayt inscription.
3. *hydreuma*. Correctly guessed by Jones. The drawing has *loco nudo*; *n* must be a misreading for *h*. *avit* looks as if it was clearly legible. Was the phrasing different? End of *curavit* (*quaerendum curavit*)? If the drawing is reliable, however, there is not space enough for *quaerendum curavit*, nor for *quaeri praecepit* as read in the Sikayt

2 This fort is traditionally called Aphrodito, because of the spelling of its name (Afrodito) in the Antonine Itinerary. However, two ostraca from Didymoi show that its name was the fossilized genitive 'Αφροδίτης; in *O.Did. inv.* 241, we read twice εἰς 'Αφροδίτης and in *O.Did. inv.* 131 ἐν πραισιδίῳ 'Αφροδίτης ὄρους, which was the full name of this fortlet. The genitive form survived in the Peutinger Table (*Affrodites*) and in the Ravenna Anonymous (*Afroditis*).

3 25° 36' 22" N, 33° 37' 27" E.

4 The dimensions are l. 1.67 m x h. 0.57 m x br. 0.20 m.

5 To the southeast of Qus. Coordinates for the quarries are: 32° 52' 30" E, 25° 51' 30" N (L. Pantalacci and Cl. Traunecker, *Le temple d'el-Qal'a I* [Cairo 1990] 4, n.18).

version. Meredith proposed here *amplavit ? restauravit ?* which was misleading from an historical point of view (see section 3).

et instead of *hoc*.

4. *inventum* and *et lacus* fit perfectly in the space. *Inventum* is not readily recognizable in the drawing which has *inson--*, hence *insecurum* proposed by Meredith. Instead of *et lacus*, Meredith suggested *fortius*.
5. *operis* not in the Sikayt version.

(b) *Didymoi*

Kindly invited to Berenike by W. Wendrich, we had the opportunity to see the Sikayt inscription on Jan. 8, 2000. It reminded us at once of the Aphrodites text. Back in Didymoi a few days later, we wondered whether the same text could not fit in a poor fragment of a Latin inscription which had been discovered during the first season, in 1997-98, in one of the cisterns.⁶ The stone was so fragmentary and erased that we had then decided not to register it, and reburied it on the spot. It was unearthed again that month and we found that our assumption was probably correct: the stone had *ventum[* and *agentel[*. Fortunately, confirmation came a few days later. While clearing the upper part of the staircase to the well, J.-P. Brun found several other pieces of the same inscription, which had been systematically broken to pieces at this very place. Most of these fragments were very small or were not part of the engraved surface; others could be positioned thanks to our knowledge of the expected text. Enough was found to make out the general shape of the inscription, which has many points in common with the Aphrodites document: it was originally a long rectangular lintel in Hegaza limestone and the inscribed surface, slightly depressed, was surrounded by a frame. The original length could not be precisely calculated; it can be approximatively deduced from the length of the preserved text on the left, for we know the number of letters at l.4 at least and the engraving is neat and regular; we also know that there is a margin at least to the left, and we must take the frame into account: the total length must have been roughly the same as in Aphrodites, about 1.60 m. However, the *ordinatio* was not absolutely identical.

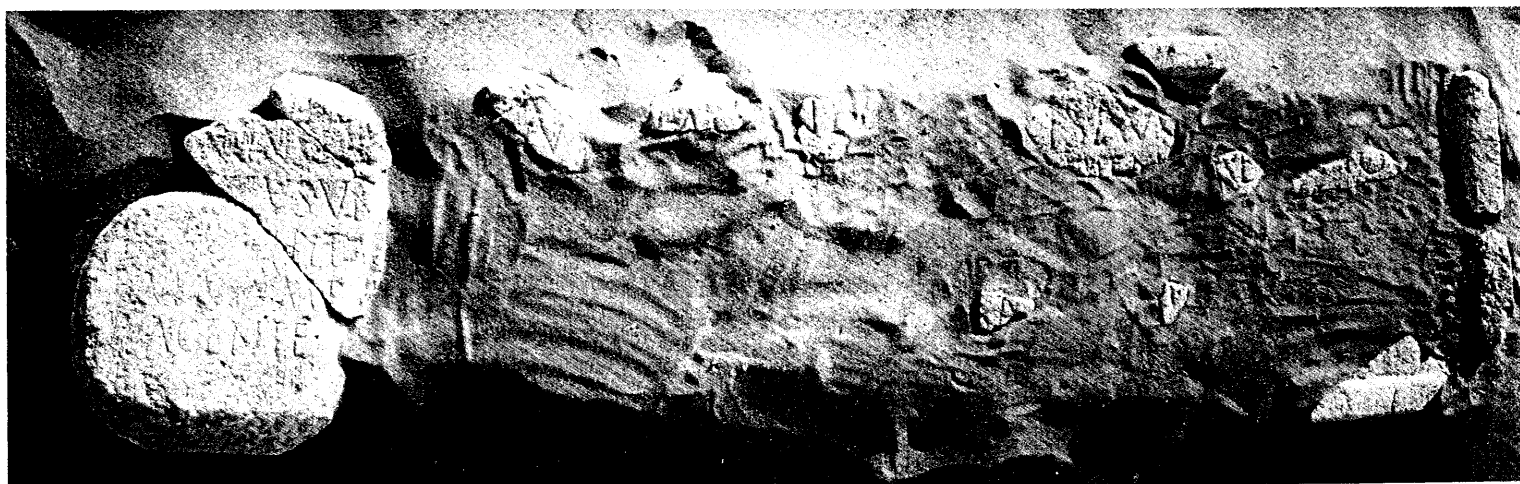


Fig. 4. Didymoi copy of inscription.

The group of the 3 joined fragments on the left measures 33 x 45 x c.16 cm. Letters are taller at l.1 (7 cm), then decrease: they are 5.2-5.4 cm high at l.2, 4.5-4.7 cm in the following lines (fig. 4).

[a]nno · V[III Imp(eratoris)] · Ve[s]pasi[a]ni Caesa]ris Aug[usti]
 [L. Iul]ius · Ur[sus praef(ectus) Aegy(pti) re]dien[s] a · B[ern(icide)] hoc
 [loco] hyd[reuma quaeri praecepit. hoc] cum e[sset in-]
 ventum p[raesidium et lacu]s a[edifica]ri · i[ussit curam]
 agente · [M Trebonio Valente praef(ecto) Montis Bernicidis]
 vac. [

⁶ The one to the right when one enters the fort. The fragment was found deep in the sand which filled the cistern.

The text in the lacunae has been restored after the Sikayt version; the restitutions remain hypothetical in detail, however, since Wilkinson's drawing of the Aphroditis version shows that discrepancies existed: words were or were not abbreviated, or were not abbreviated in the same way; *hydreuma* has an *h* at Didymoi and probably Aphroditis, but not at Sikayt; *operis* in the Aphroditis-inscription is omitted at Sikayt; Trebonius Valens' title is *praefectus Mont<i>s Bernicidis* at Sikayt, *praefectus Bernic()* at Aphroditis, perhaps from lack of space. Moreover, it looks as if the prefect's order to search for a well was expressed differently at Aphroditis.

When the new group of *praesidia* was built, a model-text for the foundation inscription was sent; it was probably contained in a circular letter from the prefect of Berenike to the *curatores praesidiorum*, and copied by each of them before being sent on to the next *praesidium*.⁷ The inscriptions were engraved on the spot after these copies by a local stone-mason (the fact that he worked from a locally made copy could explain some discrepancies). As far as Didymoi and Aphroditis are concerned, the lintels may have been ordered together from the Hegaza quarries. It should be noticed that, for the foundation inscriptions, white stone was preferred to the local sandstone (the same choice was made, later, at Qusûr al-Banât). It was not a matter of quality only: at Bir al-Hammamat the foundation inscription was carved in a very fine limestone, perhaps from the Ptolemais quarries. The local, dark *bekhen*-stone, also a prized material for sculpture, was much harder, but gave inferior contrast and legibility.

3. From the *hydreumata* to the *praesidia*⁸

The discovery of the Sikayt inscription and the recognition of the same text at Aphroditis and Didymoi are extremely important for the chronology of the road-equipment in the *Mons Bernicidis*. Didymoi and Aphroditis belong to the second generation of wells which were sunk along the Berenike road. Wells of the first generation are known thanks to Pliny's description of this road in the 50s (*NH* 6.102-3). Their names are given by the Antonine Itinerary,⁹ where we also find the names of the stations which, afterwards, filled the gaps between the first *hydreumata*. Before these new stations were built, the caravans had to stop *in monte*, as Pliny puts it — that is, to camp in the desert.¹⁰ Here is the list of the stations, the first ones, mentioned by Pliny, being in bold (fig. 5): **Phoinikon** (Pliny: *hydreuma (a Copto) XXII*), Didymoi, Aphroditis, **Compasi** (Pliny: *altero hydreumate a Copto LXXXV*), Iovis, Aristonos, Phalakron, **Apollonos Hydreuma** (Pliny: *hydreuma Apollinis a Copto CLXXXIV*), Cabalsi, **Kainon Hydreuma** (Pliny: *Novum Hydreuma a Copto CCXXXVI*). The same foundation inscription as the one found at Didymoi and Aphroditis would probably be found at other stations along this road.

We now know when the Koptos–Berenike road was completely equipped and which prefect of Egypt ordered this large-scale enterprise: some 8 years before escaping death and becoming consul thanks to the protection of Iulia, Domitian's niece and mistress,¹¹ Iulius Ursus had travelled to one of the remotest points of the empire, a journey which took 12 days according to Pliny, sleeping *in monte* and choosing on his way back the location of future stations. Sikayt itself was not a road station, but was probably intended as a well for the water-supply of Berenike (wells had to be at some distance from the coast, otherwise the water was brackish).

Some 30 years later, another prefect of Egypt was to travel in the Eastern Desert and yet more *hydreumata* became part of the landscape: this was Sulpicius Similis who, in 108/9, went to Mons Claudianus and inaugurated the ὑδρεῦμα Τραιανὸν Δακικόν. At least, this is how we

7 This is the way information and orders emanating from the prefect of Berenike circulated along the roads in the desert, as shown by numerous ostraca from Krokodilo.

8 The ideas expressed in this section are developed further by H. Cuvigny (supra n.1) forthcoming.

9 Pliny does not know the names of Phoinikon and Compasi, and only calls them *hydreuma*, but the mileage allows them to be identified.

10 F. De Romanis, *Cassia, cinnamomo, ossidiana. Uomini e merci tra Oceano Indiano e Mediterraneo* (Saggi di Storia antica 9, Roma 1996) 208.

11 Dio Cassius 67.4.2. On Ursus' career see section 4 below.

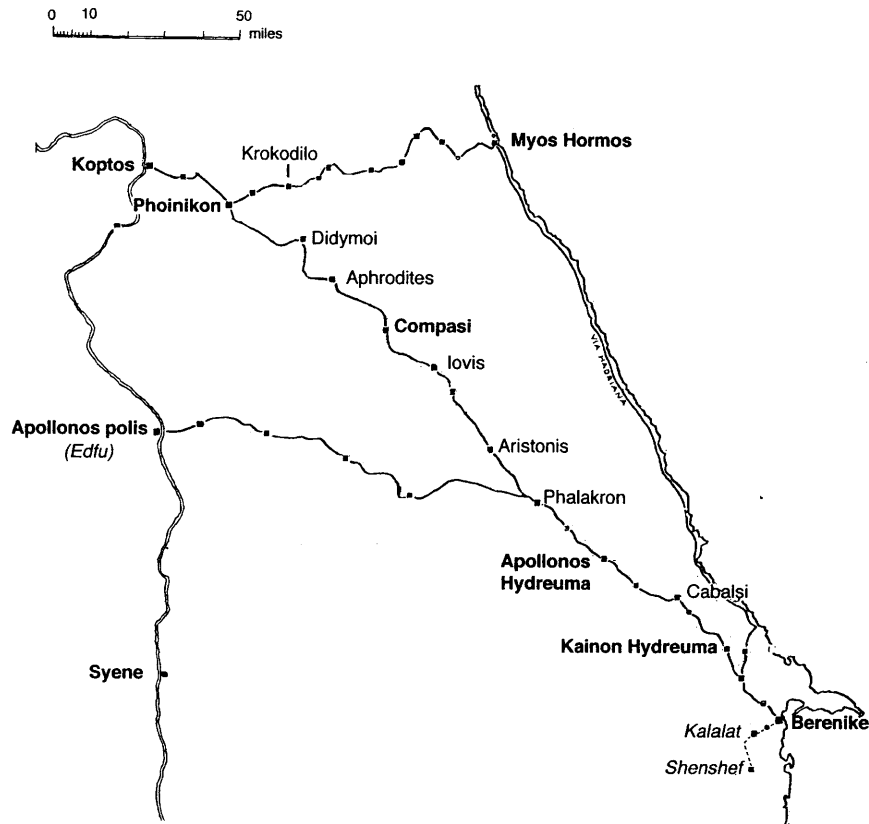


Fig. 5. The Coptos to Berenike road.

understand the phrase *per Sulpicium Similem* in *I.Pan* 37. Trajanic ostraca that mention the *parousia* or arrival of a prefect strengthen our interpretation: not only two or three Mons Claudianus ostraca,¹² but also an ostrakon found at Badia, a satellite of Mons Porphyrites. This ostrakon is a letter, presumably sent from Mons Porphyrites, stating that the prefect (was it the same Sulpicius Similis?) has arrived and that palms are needed to crown the (new?) *hydreuma*.¹³

The Sikayt text also allows us to be more precise as to the meaning of three words which occur often in the Eastern Desert: *hydreuma*, *praesidium*, *lacus* (or *laccus* under the influence of Greek λάκκος). For once, the three are used together in the same document; we understand easily that *hydreuma* is a well, *praesidium* a fortlet, *lacus* a cistern. With this semantic point in mind, it is worthwhile to reconsider the inscription *ILS* 2483, which has recently been interpreted by F. De Romanis as the birth-certificate of the Koptos–Berenike road, since it mentions the building of *pozzi* at Compasi and Apollonos Hydreuma: thanks to the two new wells, caravans could leave the Myos Hormos road at Phoinikon and cross the desert until they reached the old Ptolemaic Edfu–Berenike road.¹⁴ These ‘wells’ built at Compasi and Apollonos Hydreuma, however, are called *lacci* in the inscription. In our view, they are mere cisterns¹⁵ and, consequently, *ILS* 2483 may be less significant, from an historical point of view, than F. De Romanis thought it was.

¹² *O.Claud. inv.* 369 and 1823.

¹³ V. A. Maxfield and D. P. S. Peacock, “The archaeology of an industrial landscape: an interim report on the work of the imperial quarries (Mons Porphyrites) project,” in O. E. Kaper (ed.), *Life on the fringe* (CNWS Publications 71, Leiden 1998) 188. The name of Sulpicius Similis appears in a fragmentary inscription found in the fort of Kalala (see section 1), but what remains of the text does not seem to indicate that the prefect had been there; the Kalala inscription is to be published in S. E. Sidebotham and W. Z. Wendrich (edd.), *Berenike 1998* (in press). It shows at least that there was a significant investment in the Eastern Desert under this prefecture.

¹⁴ De Romanis (supra n.10) 172–74.

¹⁵ A study of the word *lacus*/λάκκος in the Eastern Desert will be found in Cuvigny (supra n.1).

Pliny very often mentions *hydreumata* in his description of the Berenike road, while he uses the word *praesidium* only once, for the garrison occupying a side station called *Trogodyticum hydreuma*. Conversely, in the numerous Trajanic ostraca recently found on the Myos Hormos and Berenike roads, the stations are never called *hydreumata*, but *praesidia*. As a matter of fact, the Sikayt inscription and its two parallels provide the earliest occurrence of the word *praesidium* in a document from the Eastern Desert. This change of habit may reflect a militarization of architecture; on the Myos Hormos road, J.-P. Brun has noticed that buildings dating back to the Julio-Claudian period, although soldiers lived there, were not fortified and looked different from the familiar square fortlets called *praesidia*: the most striking example is the village facing the *paneion* at Wadi Hammamat, where military ostraca were found.¹⁶ Was the construction of the *praesidia* under Vespasian justified by increasing insecurity in the desert? In this connection we should remember that, according to Strabo, the nomads of the Eastern Desert were particularly calm, or hardly existent in the first years after the conquest.¹⁷ Up to now, however, the first pieces of evidence for troubles caused by barbarians (as they are called) in this region are dated to the reign of Trajan.¹⁸ It remains striking that, during the peak trading periods documented by literature (Strabo, Pliny) and/or archaeology, that is the Early Roman Empire and the second half of the 4th and 5th c.,¹⁹ no need for fortifications along the roads appears to have been felt.

4. L. Iulius Ursus, prefect of Egypt

L. Iulius Ursus, prefect of Egypt, has for a century been one of the most elusive holders of that position. The literature about him has accumulated in layers, without much effort to dig deep enough to lay secure foundations. Our inscription provides for the first time a secure date for his tenure of the prefect's office and renders the older literature and its speculations obsolete. The history of the discussion does, however, help to explain why Ursus was such an interesting figure.

Ursus first came to light in 1901 in *P.Amh.* II 68, which contains references to him in context of a dispute over land, in which he had made a ruling. From ll. 65-67 it emerges that he preceded Vegetus, who also was involved in another stage of the dispute. The document itself is not earlier than the prefecture of Mettius Rufus (i.e., c.89-90). The editors concluded: "Hence in about A.D. 85 Ursus, who seems to have preceded C. Septimius Vegetus as prefect ... gave orders ..." The date was based on the assumption — which was to have a long life — that Ursus not only preceded Vegetus but preceded him immediately.

An important new piece of information was provided in 1937 by an inscription from Heliopolis (Baalbek) in Syria, dedicated to a former assistant of Ursus, Sex. Attius L.f. Suburanus Aemilianus, in which we learn that this man served as *adiut(or) Iuli Ursi praefecti) annonae, eiusdem in praefect(ura) Aegypti*. That is, Ursus had been *praefectus annonae* before becoming prefect of Egypt.²⁰ But the inscription, which must have been erected before 98,²¹ provided no help in dating Ursus's holding of either office.²²

The matter was complicated by the publication in 1940 of *P.Berl.* inv. 8334, a Latin papyrus (now *CPLat.*

16 Fr. Kayser, "Nouveaux textes grecs du Ouadi Hammamat," *ZPE* 98 (1993) 111-56; map of the village on 156.

17 Strabo 17.1.4 and 53.

18 *O.Krok.* inv. 137, 534, 693. Military ostraca from Krokodilo (al-Muwayh, on the Myos Hormos road) are being studied by H. Cuvigny.

19 Sidebotham and Wendrich (edd.), *Berenike 1996* (supra n.1) 453-54; iid., *Berenike 1997* (supra n.1) 451-52.

20 Published by H. Seyrig, "Heliopolitana," *BMBeyr* 1 (1937) 80-82; reprinted as *AE* 1939, 60.

21 At the time it was erected, Suburanus was not yet praetorian prefect, an office to which Trajan named him in 98, as Seyrig observes. He became consul in 101 and consul II in 104. Bastianini, *ZPE* 17 (1975) 277, is mistaken to assign the inscription from Heliopolis to 101.

22 Three of his offices precede his service with Ursus, and four follow it. His service in Hispania Citerior with Q. Vibius Crispus, preceding his position with Ursus when the latter was in charge of the *annona*, will have to be fitted into the period between Crispus's proconsulate of Africa (71?) and 75, by which time presumably he was with Ursus.

238) described by the editor as a "codicillus" of a Roman emperor whom he identified as Domitian.²³ A. Stein immediately explored the consequences of the papyrus.²⁴ In this papyrus, the emperor addresses a man named Maximus, telling him that, as a reward for his virtues, he will elevate him beyond his previous office of prefect of [Egypt] and make him [con]legam con[.....] / [.....].sco. In addition, he has decided to "transfere" Iuliu[m]] "in amplissimum ordinem". Maximus was immediately identified as L. Laberius Maximus, prefect of Egypt in 83, and the lacuna after Iuliu[m] was filled with *Ursum*, thought to have been Maximus's immediate successor as prefect of Egypt. The other lacuna was restored as [con]legam con[sulatus mei cum Pedanio Flusco]. Questions then arose about the possibility of equating Ursus with the suffect consul of 84 (*Inscr. It.* XIII.1, 192) and a politician of this name who appears in Dio (67.3.1; 67.4.2) as an adviser to Domitian and eventually, after barely escaping danger at one point, becoming consul. Stein distinguished them all individually, seeing the prefect, the politician, the suffect consul of May 84, and the later consul L. Iulius Ursus as being all different people.²⁵

In 1947 A. Piganiol published an innovative discussion of the Berlin papyrus, arguing that it was in the praetorian prefecture, not in the consulate, that the Maximus of the papyrus was to become a colleague of someone; to be precise, that he was to be the colleague of Cornelius Fuscus as prefect in 83.²⁶ Piganiol believed that the Iulius figuring as adlected to the Senate was indeed Iulius Ursus the prefect. Indeed, he thought it likely that Ursus had become praetorian prefect between his Egyptian assignment and the consulate. For his prefecture of Egypt, Piganiol therefore preferred a date of c.79. He explicitly rejected the view that *P.Amh.* II 68 had to be interpreted as showing Ursus immediately preceding Vegetus.

Stein's book on the prefects dealt with Ursus once again.²⁷ For the date, he continued to opt for 84: "Da er zwischen L. Laberius Maximus und C. Septimus Vegetus Ägypten verwaltete, ergibt sich ungefähr das J. 84 als Zeit seiner Amtsführung." There was, however, no evidence that he followed Laberius; only preceding Vegetus rested on any evidence. R. Syme (*JRS* 44 [1954] 116-19) noticed this weakness in Stein's reasoning: "An earlier date is not wholly excluded. He might have preceded Tettius," and he gave 76-85 as the outer limits of possible dates; he was apparently the first to realize that a date earlier than 79 was conceivable.

In 1954 the transcript of the Aphroditis version of our inscription was published by D. Meredith.²⁸ Meredith read the traces of the numeral as III or IIII on the basis of the presupposition that the date must fall in 83/4 or 84/5. On the drawing provided by Meredith (fig. 3), one can see that the remnants of the V at the start of the date were present, but went unrecognized in the face of a prior commitment to the Domitianic date.

This inscription remained unknown to H.-G. Pflaum when he published the first volume of his great work on equestrian careers.²⁹ The article on Ursus in *PIR*² IV.3 (1966) 295-96, no. 630, concluded, with some hesitation, that in all likelihood the identification of the men named Ursus and earlier date favored by Syme and Piganiol were correct. Despite citing Meredith's inscription, however, the article did not directly confront its proposed date. By contrast, O. Reinmuth's "Working list of prefects" published in 1967³⁰ missed the Aphroditis inscription and, not knowing the supposed support of that inscription for a date under Domitian, found Syme's arguments convincing, placing Ursus "between Aeternius Fronto, latest date 23 June 79, and the earliest date for C. Tettius Africanus 80/81" (88-89). The next list of prefects, by G. Bastianini (1975),³¹ reverted to 84. Bastianini, who did not cite Syme but did mention Reinmuth, was aware of the Aphroditis inscription and opted for a queried 83/84. The supplement to Bastianini's list (1980) maintains the same date.³²

23 H. Kortenbeutel, "Ein Kodizill eines römischen Kaisers," *Abh. Berlin* 1939 [1940] 13.

24 "Zu dem kaiserlichen Ernennungsschreiben in P.Berol. 8334," *Aegyptus* 20 (1940) 51-60.

25 See also H.-G. Pflaum, *Latomus* 10 (1951) 474-75.

26 "Le codicille impérial du Papyrus de Berlin 8334," *CRAI* 1947, 376-86. Piganiol points out the impropriety of the emperor's saying that he has "made" someone consul by *codicilli*, as opposed to nominating him. For naming as praetorian prefect, by contrast, *codicilli* were indeed the correct method.

27 A. Stein, *Die Präfekten von Ägypten in römischer Zeit* (Bern 1950) 42-43. Stein accepted the Ursus of the Gnomon of the Idios Logos as the prefect.

28 *CdÉ* 29 (1954) 285-87 = *AE* 1956, 57.

29 *Les carrières procuratoriennes équestres sous le Haut-Empire romain* I (Paris 1960) 130-31. Pflaum preferred 84 to 79, rejecting the identification of Iulius in the Berlin papyrus as Iulius Ursus.

30 *BASP* 4 (1967) 86-89. His citation of "Aeg. 19, 1939, 60" is an error for *AE* 1939, 60.

31 *ZPE* 17 (1975) 276-77.

32 *ZPE* 38 (1980) 78. Since then, two further pieces of evidence have come to light, but neither contributes anything to the question: *P.Oxy.* XLIX 3468, a petition to a prefect whose name survives only fragmentarily; and *P.Harr.* II 178, a fragmentary report of proceedings before Ursus, with no surviving date.

Ursus's earlier post as *praefectus annonae* was reviewed in 1978 by K. Bradley, in the course of a study of another holder of that position.³³ Bradley followed Syme in preferring a prefecture of Egypt for Ursus around 79-81, placing his *annona* position then immediately preceding in c.77-79.³⁴ Bradley was apparently unaware of the inscription from Aphroditis and the evident difficulty it posed for a date in the 70s.³⁵

Now we have, in the Sikayt copy of the inscription, a firm date to year 9 of Vespasian, A.D. 76/77. The long dominance in the scholarship of dates around 84 can be seen to have been based mainly on the assumption, unquestioned until Piganiol and Syme, that Ursus was the immediate predecessor of Vegetus. That assumption had no basis from the beginning; all one could legitimately conclude from the Amherst papyrus was that Ursus was first in sequence. It is a curious irony that the Aphroditis inscription, apparently lending support to a date in 83/4 or 84/5 (Meredith), appeared at precisely the moment when Syme had shown that this date had no logical basis.

It remains to explore briefly the consequences of a date in 76/7 for the rest of the career — or supposed career — of L. Iulius Ursus. His term as *praefectus annonae* can be put before 76 (in 74-76, let us say); there are no other holders of the post in the 70s before 79 to contend with him for space in the *Fasti*.³⁶ The prefect of Egypt before him is presumably the holder of the office in year 8 of Vespasian, attested in *SB* XIV 11270.13, where the name is very poorly preserved. N. Lewis suggested reading there the name of C. Aeternius Fronto, who is known as prefect in year 11 of Vespasian.³⁷ This proposal, already doubtful on palaeographic grounds, is now excluded, because Fronto is most unlikely to have been prefect in years 8 and 11 but not also in year 9. The traces also seem clearly to be incompatible with reading Ursus's names here. They must be those of his predecessor. As far as our present evidence goes, however, Ursus could have remained in Egypt during Vespasian's year 10 (77/8), for which no other prefect is attested.

For the period following Ursus's prefecture of Egypt, the Berlin papyrus could then without difficulty be taken as referring (in the reconstruction preferred by Piganiol and Syme) to the elevation of L. Laberius Maximus to praetorian prefect during the course of 83 (his last known date in Egypt is 9 July, 83). At the same time, L. Iulius Ursus, who had held the prefecture of Egypt 6 years before Laberius Maximus, and who had been politically active in Rome of late (even, according to Piganiol, praetorian prefect), was advanced to the Senate and, for May of the coming year 84, given a suffect consulate. He could well have had another suffectship in 98. The new evidence can hardly be said to prove this reconstruction, but it does move Ursus's stay in Egypt to a sufficiently early date to allow him to have been back in Rome and involved in a series of court intrigues in time to receive further advancement in the second half of 83. The earlier date thus removes the one serious obstacle in the way of the reconstruction that Piganiol and Syme advanced.

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33 "Claudius Athenodorus," *Historia* 27 (1978) 336-42.

34 With the earlier date, Ursus would be the first known instance of promotion from one prefecture to the other, from this point on "a standardised feature of the equestrian career structure."

35 Cf. *ANRW* II.10.1 (1988) 480, where P. Bureth gives his dates as 79/80 or 84, missing the Aphroditis inscription, and 507, where G. Bastianini notes it, giving the date as 83/4 or 84/5 (?).

36 K. R. Bradley, "Claudius Athenodorus," *Historia* 27 (1978) 336-42.

37 *BASP* 14 (1977) 149-50, reported in the apparatus in *SB* from *ZPE* 38 (1980) 78 n.2. There G. Bastianini expresses great doubt about this proposal.