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The port of Berenike Troglodytica on the Red Sea: a landscape-based approach to the study of its harbour and its role in Indo-Mediterranean trade

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The port site of *Berenike Troglodytica,* located on the Egyptian Red Sea coast, served the spice and incense routes that linked the Mediterranean World (specifically the Roman Empire) to India, Southern Arabia and East Africa. Founded by Ptolemy II (285–246 BC), in the Greco-Roman period the site was at the cutting edge of what was then the embryonic global economy, ideally situated as a key node connecting Indian Ocean and Mediterranean trade for almost 800 years.

Given the port's importance over such a long period of time it is perhaps surprising that very little is known about the foundation, evolution, heyday and subsequent decline of the city, or about the size, shape and capacity of its harbour. This thesis addressed this shortfall in knowledge by examining the drivers behind Berenike's rise and fall and by exploring the extent to which the dynamics of the physical landscape were integral to its story. Using an innovative Earth Science approach, changes in the archaeological 'coastscape' of Berenike were reconstructed and correlated with periods of occupation and abandonment, shedding light on the nature, degree and directionality of human-environment interactions at the site. This geoarchaeological work revealed profound changes in the configuration of the coastal landscape and environment during the lifespan of Berenike, highlighting the ability of people to exploit variations in their immediate environment and demonstrating that the port's decline was ultimately in part due to these landscape dynamics.

To further explore these themes the landscape reconstructions were supplemented by semi-quantitative analyses of a suite of variables likely to influence the initial siting of new ports of trade. These showed that although the site of Berenike was ideal in terms of its coastal landscape potential, possessing a natural sheltered bay and lagoon system, its location was not solely influenced by its environmental conditions. Detailed review of the vessels that plied the Red Sea and Indian Ocean routes additionally helped to identify the potential capacity and functioning of Berenike's harbour basin.

By using this multi-scalar approach it was possible to reconstruct the site's 'coastscape' through the key periods of Berenike's occupancy and the phases immediately before and after its operation. This has wide-ranging implications for researchers studying ancient ports along the Red Sea/Indian Ocean trade network as it demonstrates how influential the landscape was in the initial siting of ports and their subsequent use and decline.

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