

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

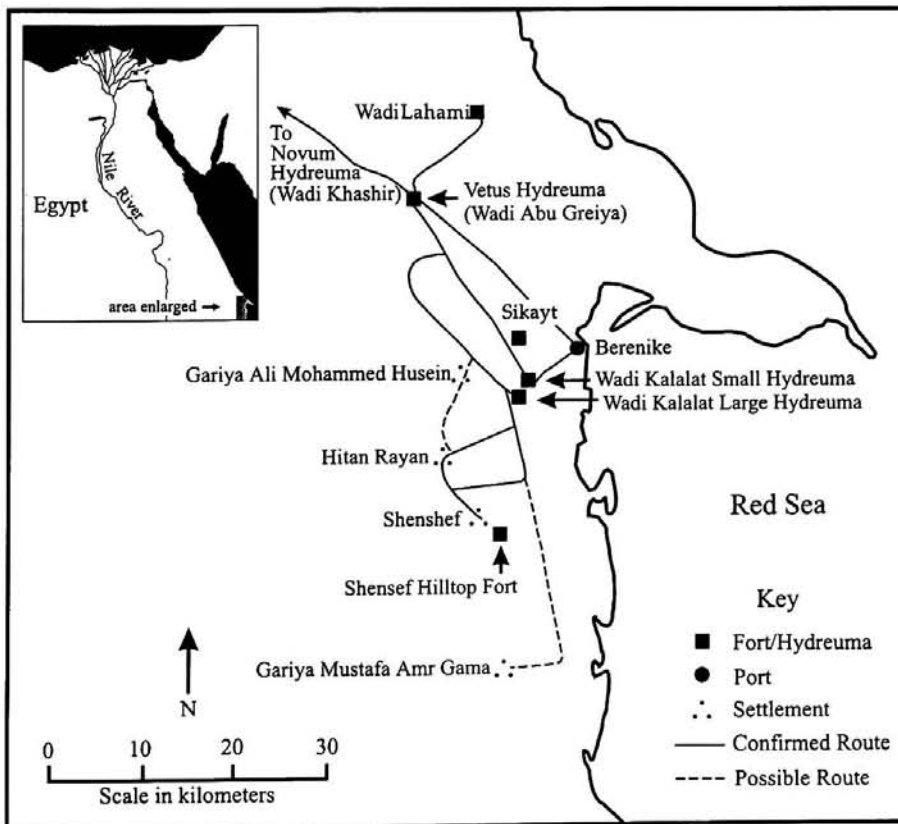


Fig. 1. Map of the environs of Berenike.

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).