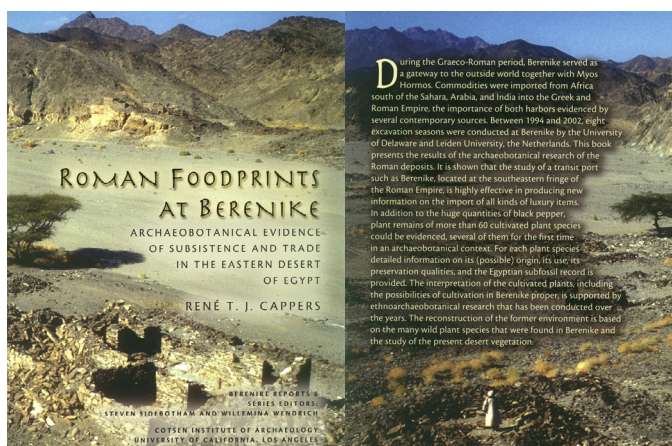




BOOK REVIEWS

Cappers, R.T.J. 2006. Roman foodprints at Berenike. Archaeobotanical evidence of subsistence and trade in the Eastern Desert of Egypt. – Los Angeles, Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles (Berenike Reports 6, Monograph 55)

A.J. Clapham



Berenike is situated on the Egyptian Red Sea Coast just south of Ras Banas which, if a line is drawn westwards across the Red Sea Hills, would hit upon Aswan just above the First Cataract of the River Nile. Even in modern times the site of Berenike is very difficult to get to as experienced by this author. It involves a long overnight journey on an Egyptian bus, which is most likely to break down at anytime and if it doesn't you can hardly get any sleep due to the average Egyptian coach traveller's (and the driver for that matter) predilection for loud and very violent videos. So, bleary-eyed you are dropped off at some makeshift tea hut alongside the road wondering what made you want to come here in the first place. After a bumpy ride across the coastal plain a sea of white military style tents greets you. This is your home for your length of stay. The wind is constantly blowing and the flies greet you like old friends, never wanting to let you go. This is now, but imagine what the site of Berenike must have

been like at the time of its' occupation during the Ptolemaic and Roman times (it was founded around 275 BC and was abandoned by the Romans at the beginning of the 7th century AD just before the Arab invasion of Egypt) when it operated as one of the major import and export ports for the Roman empire. Spices, and other treasured goods such as cotton textiles being imported from further down the African coast south of the Sahara, Arabia and India for the wealthy of the Roman Empire, and wheat and other products from the fertile Nile Valley being exported in exchange.

The work presented in this book is the results of excavations undertaken jointly by the University of Delaware (USA) and Leiden University (The Netherlands) between 1994 and 2001. There are eight chapters entitled: 'The introduction', 'Rome's eastern trade', 'Natural vegetation', 'Living in the desert', 'Archaeobotanical research', 'Peaches in the desert', 'Interpretative summary' and 'Conclusion and catalogue of

Taxa'. These are followed by the Bibliography, Index to Scientific Plant names, General Index and a Colour plate section.

The first two chapters basically cover the history of research and exploration in the area of Berenike and also consider the usefulness of historical texts. One example of such a text is discussed: the Alexandrian Tariff, which was issued by Marcus Aurelius between AD176 and 180, enumerates 54 items subject to import duty at Alexandria on their way to Rome. Another example is the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* which dates between AD 40 and 70 and describes in great detail the trade routes from Myos Hormos (identified as Quseir al-Qadim) and Berenike to India (Casson, 1989). The *Periplus* enumerates a vast number of import and export commodities as well as describing many of the port of the Red Sea coast that were visited by merchants at that time. The Introduction goes in to some detail on how useful written texts can or cannot be for aiding archaeobotanical research, the main stumbling blocks being the translations of the commodities which, although they appear to refer to something that we know by that name today, in the past could have meant something entirely different. There is of course always discussions between scholars of ancient texts what certain words mean and this can add to the confusion. The other major stumbling block is that the product being described might not actually appear in the archaeobotanical record of the site due to either not being preserved or being in a form that defies normal methods of identification, *i.e.* powders. This is an excellent approach and should act as a warning to any student of archaeobotany who is tempted to use the written record as a short cut to interpretation.

The second chapter, 'Rome's eastern trade', describes the trade sea routes to India at that time as well as the overland routes that linked Berenike to the Nile Valley. The sites to be investigated are also described in this chapter including some other installations in the vicinity of Berenike. The two sites that compose the research in this volume are Berenike and Shenshef which is located around 30 kilometres southwest of Berenike.

The following chapter is also a good example of what every archaeobotanist should do when beginning to work on a new site: which is to study the present vegetation. This will give you some idea of what you might expect to find in

your samples, especially the wild species. It also enables the researcher the possibility of collecting seeds and other plant parts for a modern reference collection, without which, of course, an archaeobotanist cannot do without.

Chapter Three, 'Living in the desert', is more anthropological in nature and describes how the local nomadic people (The Ababda) cope with such a demanding environment. This again is good practice for an archaeobotanist as it will give you the feel of how people may have coped with this environment in the past.

The next chapter, 'Archaeobotanical research', is by far the largest. In this chapter, each species that has been identified from the rubbish deposits at Berenike and Shenshef is described in detail, especially those that are either cultivated or possible imports or exports including the wild species, and where they have been found on other archaeological sites both in Egypt and elsewhere. The most outstanding find from Berenike was the large amount of black pepper (*Piper nigrum* L.). The chapter is well illustrated with, in most cases, very clear black and white photographs that have proved to be very useful to this author already. There are slight problems with this chapter, which has to do with the processing of the samples. For one, there is no mention of the actual sample size taken from the deposits. This information is of great use to other archaeobotanists who are lucky enough to find themselves working in similar conditions. Therefore, some guidance to the sample size taken would have been of some use. All samples were dried sieved from Berenike and Shenshef, which is very commendable as it is always best practice to maintain the state in which the deposits were found. I am slightly worried by the size of the smallest mesh size used, which was 0.5 mm. This means that some of the smaller seeds might be passing through the finest mesh, such as the tiny seeds of *Glinus lotoides* L. There may only be a small number of species with such small seeds but it must be regarded as lost information. The use of smaller mesh sizes is always a dilemma as it adds to the time required to sort samples and can be quite frustrating if time is tight. Overall, this chapter (and the last) is the one that archaeobotanists will be constantly referring to and for that purpose it is very good indeed.

The next chapter, 'Peaches in the desert', discusses the problems of long distance trade and

how plant materials may have been processed in order to prevent them from spoiling before they reach their intended destination. The possibility of local cultivation of certain species is also discussed.

Chapter six is the interpretative summary and conclusion and basically considers the problems of trying to tie in the results of archaeobotanical studies to the written sources and what information can be gleaned from the final assemblage when it reaches the microscope after being through the numerous possible taphonomic filters. This again is good practice and archaeobotanists should always beware that the sample in front of them is only part of what was there originally, no matter how well the material is preserved. The former vegetation of the site is discussed and the conclusion appears to suggest that very little has changed, although there may have been some degradation through overexploitation in the past. This is bound to be the case once the population of an area reaches and goes beyond the carrying capacity of the environment. It is suggested that some local cultivation was carried out, but this would have been limited to garden plots and obviously would not have supplied a bustling port. Therefore, possible sources of the main staples are considered and as can be expected there is always some connection to the Nile Valley, even though miles away. The Nile valley is considered to be the main source of the staples and would have followed the same route down from Qift to Berenike as did the material for export. One interesting conclusion was the source of the sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor* (L.) Moench ssp. *bicolor*). Apparently, there are a number of amphorae at Berenike that are similar to those at Qasr Ibrim. It is therefore suggested that the sorghum may be coming from Qasr Ibrim, where sorghum starts to appear in great quantities about the time that Berenike was operating. This is interesting because by this time Qasr Ibrim was no longer under Roman rule but part of the Meroitic Empire: this suggests that there was some trade between the two Empires.

The final chapter is the 'Catalogue of taxa'. As said, this chapter will be a very useful guide to identifying those bits of plant or seed which occur in low frequency. A selection of those found at Berenike and Shenshef are illustrated and described. Again, the black and white pho-

tographs are good enough for identification purposes.

The final chapter is followed by the bibliography, which is extensive. There seem to be a few contradictions in dates of references between the main text and the bibliography, which can be a little frustrating. The indexes both for the scientific names for the plants and the general one appear to work well and finally, the last section consists of full colour versions of many of the black and white plates in the main text.

There are a few niggles (besides the mentioned one on the contradiction of date of publication of certain references mentioned in the text and in the bibliography) which must be pointed out even though they do not detract from the overall usefulness of this book. On pages 14/15 there is a discussion on the use of elephants during the Punic Wars assuming that they were African in origin. Evidence is produced to support this including ancient graffiti on a *wadi* wall near the Abra q fort, around 100 kilometres southwest of Berenike. The elephant in the graffiti is described as having relatively small ears and is ascribed to the African species (Sidebotham & Zitterkopf, 1996: 376). Surely, this is incorrect as the Indian elephant is the species with the smaller ears. Also, in one instance on page 117, Qasr Ibrim is incorrectly spelt as 'Quasr Ibrim' and then later on the same page, spelt correctly. Then on page 118, Qasr Ibrim on the map showing finds of black pepper is wrongly sited as being below the first cataract, *i.e.* near Aswan, when in fact it is much closer to the second cataract at Wadi Halfa. This is an unfortunate error considering that one of the series editors has worked at Qasr Ibrim several times. There are a few inconsistencies in the text with regards to spelling and references but this is most likely to be an oversight of the copying editor rather than anything else. There are also some mistakes in the synonyms for the plant names, the major one being that *Corylus maxima* Mill. is not a synonym for *Corylus avellana* L. and usually the common name 'filbert' refers to the former species not the latter.

Apart from these oversights, this book is a welcome addition to the slowly growing number of volumes and papers on Egyptian archaeobotany. It is well researched, well written and well presented with images of the remains, which will help other archaeobotanists with

their identifications of those often infuriating unknowns. Every serious archaeobotanist working in Egypt or in the vicinity should have a copy of this book on their shelves.

Cappers, R.T.J. 2006. Roman foodprints at Berenike. Archaeobotanical evidence of subsistence and trade in the Eastern Desert of Egypt. – Los Angeles, Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles (Berenike Reports 6, Monograph 55). 229 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1-931745-26-0, ISBN-10: 1-931745-26-9 Price £ 21.99 (paperback).

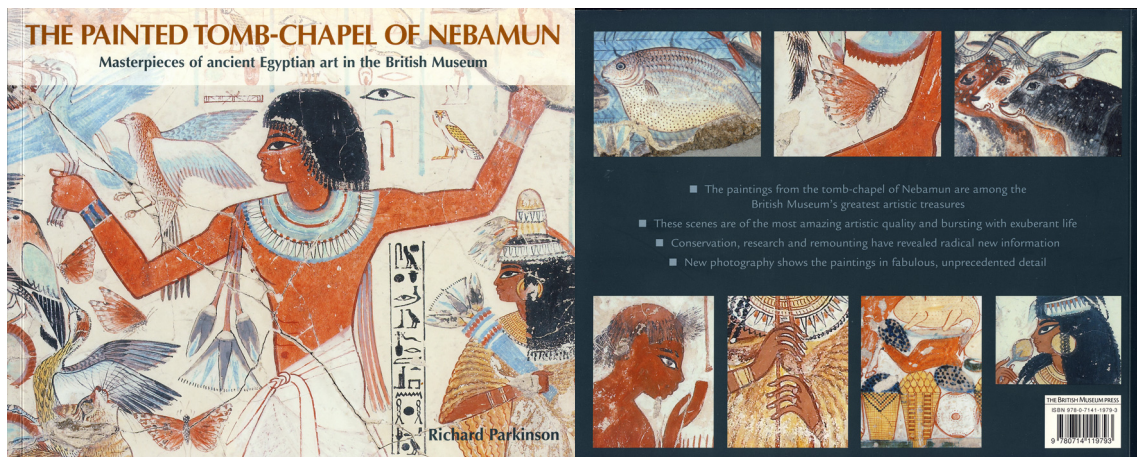
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Casson, L. 1989. The Periplus Maris Erythraei. Text with introduction, translation, and commentary. – Oxford, Princeton University Press.

Sidebotham, S.E. & R.E. Zitterkopf. 1996. Survey of the hinterland. In: **Sidebotham, S.E. & W.Z. Wendrich. Eds. 1996.** Preliminary report of the excavations at Berenike (Egyptian Red Sea Coast) and the survey of the Eastern Desert. – Leiden, Centre of Non-Western Studies (special series no. 2): 357-409.

Parkinson, R. 2008. The painted tomb-chapel of Nebamun. Masterpieces of ancient Egyptian art in the British Museum. – London, British Museum Press

A.J. Veldmeijer



Sometimes a book needs only few words to express one's feelings about it. Parkinson's book on Nebamun's lost tomb chapel is a good example. According to the cover of this beautifully illustrated and well written book "The eleven sections of wall-painting [...] from c. 1350 BC are among the greatest and most famous of the British Museum's treasures. [...] Their [the paintings] beauty and vitality are admirably captured in the new detailed photography which has been taken especially for this book."¹

1. Note that Strudwick's 'Masterpieces of ancient Egypt' (2006: 170-177; see also Veldmeijer's review in PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology) also shows photographs of some of the fragments. It is interesting to

Interesting as it may be, the description of the fragments is sometimes a bit tedious to read, as plain descriptions often are, but, as the author points out at page 9, referring to art historian Michael Baxandell, one needs to develop a period eye, as the conventions of ancient Egyptian art are so different from our own. In order to establish this, not only are detailed descriptions indispensable but it is also important not to overlook those small but interesting details and understand "even the meanings of the simplest gestures [...which] are not immediately obvious

compare these and discern a distinct difference in colour intensity.

to the modern viewer. And in this, Parkinson is truly successful!

The book is divided in three chapters: 1) A modern view of ancient paintings; 2) In a tomb-chapel; 3) The paintings. In the first chapter, the history of the painting is discussed from its discovery to its exhibition on the British Museum. The second chapter starts with a general account on tomb chapels, discusses the uncertainty of the exact position of the tombs as well as the uncertainty of the name of the owner. The last part of this second chapter touches on the subject of modern analyses of ancient paintings, a kind of research in which the British Museum has a lot of experience (see for example Davies, 2001). The last chapter describes each of the eleven fragments in detail and includes the translation of the hieroglyphic texts and reconstruction of the scenes from which the fragments came.

This excellently written book is a must for everyone who is interested in ancient Egypt, but especially for art historians and those who researches paint, painting and colour in ancient Egypt. The printing is incredible (though we

are used to this with The British Museum Press) and much attention has been given to the presentation of the beautiful paintings and with much success. Go and buy it!

Parkinson, R. 2008. The painted tomb-chapel of Nebamun. Masterpieces of ancient Egyptian art in the British Museum. 152 pp. ISBN 9780714119793. Price £14.99 (paperback). Distributed by Oxbow Books (www.oxbow-books.com)

Cited literature

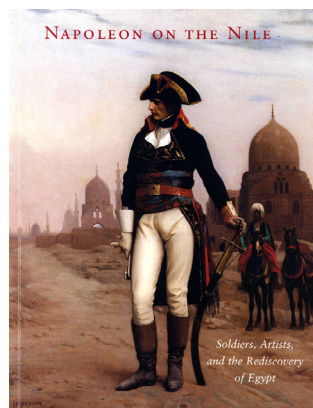
Davies, W.V. Ed. 2001. Colour and painting in ancient Egypt. – London, The British Museum Press.

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Small, L. 2006. Napoleon on the Nile. Soldiers, Artists, and the Rediscovery of Egypt. – New York, Dahesh Museum of Art

C.H. van Zoest



It is well known that Napoleon Bonaparte's campaign to Egypt marked a momentous change in the history of both the western world and Egypt itself. While the expedition was a military fail-

ure, it produced a scientific success in the form of the 'Description de l'Égypte' and the consequent decipherment of the hieroglyphs. Europe's contacts with Egypt, be it for trade or sci-

entific interest, entered a new era. In Egypt, the downfall of the Mameluks who had ruled the country for centuries started at the Battle of the Pyramids. After France's retreat, the new ruler, Mohamed Ali finished them off and pushed the country into a new age of modernization.

The beautifully illustrated catalogue to the exhibition 'Napoleon on the Nile: Soldiers, Artists, and the Rediscovery of Egypt' does not aim to present new research on Napoleon's Egyptian campaign, but rather to present its legacy through a combination of 'Description' plates, documents from the period and later Orientalist paintings. The Dahesh Museum's collection consists of European academic art of the 19th and 20th century, including works from the Orientalist painting school, and so it was able to draw paintings and objects from its permanent collection.²

The catalogue is an overview of the French campaign in Egypt and of the 'Description'. As this is a subject that has been treated by many authors, the significance of the present book lies more in the fact that it combines a very readable, concise text with a small number of documents that are not always found in publications on the expedition: several English caricatures by James Gillray and a number of actual documents from the French campaign. The caricatures give the English perspective: 'the ogre Buonaparte'³, eager to conquer the whole world, is kept in check by the superior English forces.

The realities of the difficulties of the French are illustrated by documents such as 'Orders of the day', a proclamation to the Egyptian people, and petitions to Bonaparte. The French, as many conquerors before them, reaffirmed local administrators who were willing to work for the new rulers. One of these, Mustapha Aga, sent a letter to Bonaparte asking him to take action against a troublesome person who refused to pay his taxes.

A proclamation issued by General Marmont in French and Arabic neatly captivates the

French trying to reign over an unwilling populace, with the argument that they have come to deliver them from their evil former rulers. The text however ends menacingly: "I love those who love us, but I know how to punish our enemies".

It is a pity that the above-mentioned documents and the military orders could not be discussed in more detail in the catalogue for the sake of conciseness. Surrounded with more background information they would give more insight into the day-to-day business of running the conquered land, which was only done with much difficulty and through the bloody oppression of revolts.

Finally, the Dahesh Museum's specialty, 19th century paintings show the lasting influence of the Egyptian adventure including and beyond the famous examples of Egyptianizing tableware and the paintings of Lawrence Alma Tadema.

Since the exhibition deals exclusively with the western legacy of the Egyptian expedition, the Egyptian point of view is entirely left out. The catalogue presents a picture that is itself firmly rooted in the Orientalist tradition it describes. For instance, the text fails to mention Al-Jabarti's Chronicle of the French occupation, though it is mentioned in the bibliography. The present book is a very conventional one and contains no new viewpoints. It is however the companion to a well-received exhibition containing many spectacular paintings and documents. I would have preferred the catalogue to be more extensive and depict all exhibited pieces, since to my regret I have not been able to visit the reportedly outstanding exhibition.

Small, L. 2006. Napoleon on the Nile. Soldiers, Artists, and the Rediscovery of Egypt. – New York, Dahesh Museum of Art. 48 pp. ISBN 0-9654793-9-0. Price: \$ 22.95 (softcover).

2. The exhibition 'Napoleon on the Nile' is now touring the USA: it will next be on display at the Frye Art Museum in Seattle (September 20, 2008 - January 4, 2009). At present, the Dahesh Museum has no permanent exhibition space and is looking for a new home in New York City. The collection can be viewed on the museum's website www.daheshmuseum.org.

3. The English disdain for General Napoleon Bonaparte was expressed by calling him "General Buonaparte" (the original Corsican version of his last name) and later by not recognizing his title of Emperor.