

**Objective:** The discovery by Polish archaeologists of a cemetery of companion animals from the 1st and 2nd centuries AD in the ancient port of Berenike on the Red Sea has made the headlines worldwide, in academia as well as with the general public. Nowhere else have the close relations between ancient man and animal, also in the emotional sphere, been so well attested. Dogs, cats and small monkeys—these are the species that were kept as pets in ancient Berenike and the research, carried out within the frame of the first Polish National Science Centre (NSC) grant awarded for this subject, has already produced extensive new data on the appearance of these animals, their health, dietary habits and human care.

While this information is invaluable to research in different fields: archaeology, history, zoology, veterinary medicine, sociology, it has gained in importance also in terms of a general human interest at a time when societies today are often in crisis and the need for closeness, also with other species, is so overbearing. From this standpoint, the project addresses **three major research issues:**

1. why is it that the “animal pet cemetery” in Berenike finds no good parallels in the ancient world;
2. what is the definition of the concept of “pet/companion animal”; and, perhaps foremost,
3. how can archaeozoological data help to study concepts of value (both material and emotional) and identity (ethnic, cultural, religious etc.) in ancient societies.

**Description:** In order to determine the extent of the animal pet cemetery in Berenike and its internal organization, the project aims to continue dedicated archaeological fieldwork based on a tested methodology, custom-tailored in terms of both archaeology and recording the results. The living conditions of the animals and their health will be examined in association with veterinarians, covering animals newly discovered in the course of the planned project, as well as those excavated in 2016–2020. An important part of the present project is the issue of the relations between man and his pet animals in the cultural milieu which had contact with the Berenike population: Europe, India, East Africa. Study visits and cooperation with specialists dealing with this question in other cultural and geographic areas should open new vistas for interpretation. It follows that all the artifacts found with these buried companion animals—coins, personal adornments, ostraka—are in need of a full and comprehensive study. The archaeological and archaeozoological results will be consulted with sociologists working on modern human-animal relations, their meaning for human communities, as well as for man’s health and interpersonal relations.

**Study reasons:** The archaeological data acquired by the Project PI in the course of earlier research will support a broader multi-disciplinary scientific debate even as they add to the general discourse about social issues today. Insight from a perspective of close to two millennia helps to ascertain the influence of factors like origins, religion, social status and gender. What value did these animals have for people? Was it strictly utilitarian and material, or emotional as well? In a world of instability, migration and displacement from the homeland, answers to these questions could help to understand modern human-animal relations.

**Anticipated effects:** Archaeology can play an active part in community life, helping to highlight issues that trouble modern societies. The discoveries from Berenike have already shown the general public how modern behavior can be traced in practices 2000 years old and more, and how modern man can find his place in a global community of animal owners thousands of years old. The measurable way of working toward this effect is through a series of articles in high-ranking academic journals, a monograph published by a recognized publisher, a forum to be established for exchange of information between researchers from different fields dealing with human-animal relations, today and in the past, and popular articles spreading knowledge on the subject.