

# **PROFILING PUNT: USING TRADE RELATIONS TO LOCATE 'GOD'S LAND'**



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## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this research thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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06/02/2008

## **ABSTRACT**

The geographical location of Punt has been the subject of much scholarly controversy for years. Numerous locations have been provided, favouring either regions in southern Arabia or East Africa. The latter being the more accepted theory in this case. Locating the region of Punt is linked to the foreign trade relations of Egypt during the Dynastic period. The practices that governed the Egyptian economy and thus its trade relations are studied, along with textual translations and visual sources in order to determine the kind of contact Egypt had with Punt, the trade relations between these two regions and the commodities they traded. These things determine the landscape that Puntites traversed, providing a profile of their habitat, the people that lived in it and thus a possible location for the region, which is believed to encompass the Gash Delta, on the borders of modern day Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan.

## **KEYWORDS**

Punt; Ancient trade; God's Land; Gash delta

## OPSOMMING

Die geografiese ligging van Punt is jarelank 'n akademiese twispunt. Verskillende liggings is voorgestel - die gunsteling gebiede is of suidelike Arabië of Oos-Afrika. Die laasgenoemde is die meeste aanvaarbaar. Die plekaanwysing van Punt is gekoppel aan die buitelandse-handelverhoudings van Egipte gedurende die Dinastiese-tydperk. Die oorheersende regeringspraktyk van die Egiptiese ekonomie en dus handelverhoudings, is in hierdie studie behandel. Die teksvertalings en visuele bronne is getuienis vir die kommoditeite verhandel en dus kontak tussen Egipte en Punt. Hierdie inligting is aanwyser tot die omgewing waarin die Puntiete beweeg het, die profiel van hul omgewing en die volk wat daar gewoon het. Dus is die moontlike plekaanwysing van Punt, die Gashdelta naby die grens van moderne Eritrea, Ethiopië en Sudan.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Ancient Egypt can be viewed as one of the most self-sufficient civilisations in antiquity. Their uniqueness stems from two things, the circumstances of their immediate surrounding environment and their concept of the universe and their existence in it. Egypt is described as the ‘gift of the Nile’ (Brewer & Teeter 1999:16). However, it was not the Nile alone that resulted in the uniqueness of the Egyptian civilisation but rather the intertwining of the main geographic landscapes<sup>1</sup> with this river. Egyptian cultural history is marked by the interaction between the inhabitants of these areas and the natural environment. Daily life was dependant on and influenced by this interaction. These interactions were in turn governed by the principles of cosmic order: *Maaat*<sup>2</sup>. Eternal and unchanging, *Maaat* was viewed as a benevolent, unthreatening principle that would always prevail over any form of disorder (Tobin 1989:78). This view implies that the universe was all encompassing. Everything in it was once part of the original order of creation and therefore anything in the universe could choose to act against or according to the principles of *Maaat*.

Egypt and its environment were understood by the Egyptians to represent an ideal and perfect environment inhabited by a civilised society. The same view did not, however, apply to its immediate neighbours and other foreign states further afield, which were considered uncivilised and disorderly so long as they ignored their place in the Egyptian structure of the cosmos, i.e. as loyal subjects and allies of the pharaoh. Foreigners in literary and visual sources are therefore represented as subservient or inferior to the Egyptians. Such representations are problematic when one studies the nature of trade relations that existed between Egypt and other ancient countries. Egypt was definitely one of the more powerful states in antiquity but to assume that it was *the* most powerful would be short sighted. Literary and visual sources of foreigners bringing tribute before the pharaoh abound throughout Egyptian history. However, it is difficult to differentiate between commodities that were intended for tribute, trade or as diplomatic gifts. The islands of the Aegean, Syria,

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<sup>1</sup> The Egyptian landscape is divided into four areas, namely Upper Egypt, denoting the Nile valley, Lower Egypt, denoting the delta, the Eastern desert and the Western desert (Brewer & Teeter 1999:17).

<sup>2</sup> *Maaat* forms one of the most prominent positions in the ideology of Egyptian thought. The actual concept that defines *Maaat* is a complex one, it can be an abstract principle, a symbol or a goddess and yet *Maaat* represents more than all these definitions as the foundation of Egyptian thought. In its simplest form *Maaat* represented ‘the unity of all things, the basis of cosmic and political order, morality, life, art and science and even good etiquette in normal everyday affairs’ (Tobin 1989:77).

Syro-Palestine, Nubia and Punt are the most prominent foreign regions with which Egypt had contact. The ethnicities of the above states are confined to distinguishable racial groups that correspond to each region, with the exception of Punt. Artistic representations present the Puntites as a multi-cultural race, that appears to consist of Africans and an Egyptian-like race. The identity of this Egyptian-like race is one of many mysteries concerning enigmatic Punt.



**Figure 1.1:** Tile inlays of the enemies of Egypt in the palace entrance of the mortuary temple of Rameses III at Medinet Habu. The bottom registers of the palace entrances are decorated on both sides by depictions of the enemies of Egypt. The above five tiles (from left to right) represent: a Libyan, Nubian, Syrian, Shashu-bedouin and a Hittite.

(Shaw 2000b:321)

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

Punt is mentioned abundantly in Egyptian literary and visual sources from the third millennium BC through to the first millennium BC. It is alleged to be one of the few foreign regions that Egypt was involved with, purely for its commercial advantages. This thesis will focus on the relationship between Punt and Egypt in order to determine its location. As a trade<sup>3</sup> partner the Egyptians considered it a place of importance as it was one of its primary suppliers of luxury goods, in particular aromatic resins and gums, used in temple rituals, gold, electrum, wood, animals and to a lesser extent people (Kitchen 1982:1199). When

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<sup>3</sup> Trade in ancient Egypt can not be equated with any modern counterpart. This is largely due to the fact that the Egyptian economy functioned on a system different to any modern model.

considering its importance it is surprising that a physical location for Punt has yet to be found. This fact may be attributed to a late development in the interest of Punt as a topic of study in the field of Egyptology. Punt only grew into popularity in the 1850s when the Antiquities Services of Egypt began the clearance of temples of Upper Egypt (Meeks 2003:53). Two schools of thought emerged with regards to Punt's physical location. Heinrich Brugsch<sup>4</sup> first located Punt somewhere on the Arabian Peninsula. His research was based on texts from Hellenistic temples. These created the impression that Punt was a supplier of aromatic substances and that it was situated in a region to the east of Egypt. Unfortunately records in temples and other inscriptions from the Ptolemaic period (c.332-20 BC)<sup>5</sup> onwards are focused more on traditional accounts as opposed to actual historical accuracy (Meeks 2003:53).

A contemporary of Brugsch, Auguste Mariette<sup>6</sup>, discarded his theory after his discovery of the geographical lists of Thutmose III (c. 1479-1425 BC) at the Temple of Amun at Karnak and then the reliefs of Hatshepsut's expedition to Punt in her mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri. He located Punt in Africa on the Somali coast, basing his claim on the reference to Punt in the toponyms listing countries to the south of Egypt in the Temple of Amun and the detailed images of the Puntite landscape that is found on the Deir el-Bahri reliefs (Meeks 2003:53). Rolf Herzog furthered Mariette's studies in his book *Punt* (1968). He proposed that the journey to Punt took place over land and on water, the Nile to be specific, but in doing so he ruled out the possibility of any trade occurring via the Red Sea, locating Punt in the present day Sudan, bordering parts of Ethiopia on the Blue or White Nile or the Atbara River (Kitchen 2001:85 and Kitchen 1971:185). In a counter argument K.A. Kitchen criticises Herzog for his dismissal of the possibility of a sea route, which is confirmed by numerous textual references that pre - and post date the Deir el-Bahri reliefs (Kitchen 1971:189). Punt is found in Egyptian texts as early as the Fifth Dynasty (c. 2494-2345 BC) during the reign of Sahure (c. 2487-2475 BC). The direct mention of a Red Sea trade route only occurs during the Middle Kingdom (c. 2055-1650 BC) on a rock inscription, left by the high official to

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<sup>4</sup> Karl Heinrich Brugsch was a German Egyptologist who led the way in deciphering demotic. In 1853 he was sent by the Prussian government to Egypt where he met and worked with another renowned Egyptologist Auguste Mariette (Britannica Encyclopedia 1998-2002b).

<sup>5</sup> All dates referring to the general chronology of Egypt and the reigns of its pharaohs are from Shaw (2000a).

<sup>6</sup> Auguste Mariette was a French archaeologist who began excavating in Egypt in 1850. He excavated many major sites and monuments in Egypt and was the founder of the Egyptian Antiquities Service. In 1855 he returned to France and became the assistance conservator at the Louvre. Two years later he returned to Egypt where he spent the rest of his life. In 1858 he was appointed the director of the Egyptian Antiquities Service, which allowed him to establish a national museum at Bulaq, near Cairo. His numerous excavations have revealed a great deal of information about the earlier periods of Egypt's history (Shaw & Nicholson 1995:170).



Mentuhotep III (c. 2004-1992 BC), Henu, in the Wadi Hammamat. It describes an expedition from Koptos to Punt via the Red Sea and back. Another inscription left by the vizier of Sesostris I, Intefoker describes a similar route. Sources from the New Kingdom (c. 1550-1069 BC) all support the theory of the Red Sea trade route, these include Hatshepsut's reliefs and relief paintings in the tombs of Theban officials and a section of the Papyrus Harris I, dating from the reign of Rameses III (c. 1184-1153 BC) (Kitchen 1993:587-603).

Recently Dimitri Meeks<sup>7</sup> again supported Brugsch's theory of an Arabian Punt. He reinterprets some of the same texts used by Herzog and Kitchen but includes inscriptions from Serabit el-Khadim in Sinai which associate Punt with turquoise producing regions and 'Dwellers-of-the-Sand' (Asiatic Bedouin). He proposed a trade route through Sinai and along the east coast of the Red Sea, locating Punt in the region of present day Yemen (Meeks 2003:63-65,79).

The variety of locations offered by the above scholars present two possible locations for Punt, the southern Arabian Peninsula and the East African coast from Nubia (present day Sudan) to Somalia. This thesis seeks to substantiate the location of Punt along the African coast by regarding trade routes that may have existed between Dynastic Egypt and Punt in order to determine a more exact location for the region and resultantly provide a further understanding of a possible profile for this region. The proposed method of study is largely historiographical in nature, utilising ancient textual sources and iconographic material in the form of reliefs and tomb paintings. Primary Egyptian textual sources will be studied in the form of translations and iconographic material in the form of published sources. A collection of additional archaeological, anthropological, geographical, botanical and zoological information will further assist in locating the region of Punt.

## **1.2 CHAPTER LAYOUT**

A basic overview of the Egyptian economy is provided in the second chapter of this thesis. It will serve the purpose of providing background knowledge of the practices governing trade in ancient Egypt both within the country and abroad. The chapter begins by highlighting a few contemporary economic theories, in particular Karl Polanyi's theory of redistribution, and by

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<sup>7</sup> Dimitri Meeks is the Director of Research with the *French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* and is a resident Egyptologist at the *Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* in Cairo. His fields of interest are Egypt's relations with its neighbouring countries, the history of technology and ancient Egyptian lexicography. He also directs a programme that is devoted to hieroglyphic palaeography (O'Connor & Quirke 2003:ix).

combining this theory with another presented by John Maynard Keynes it seeks to provide a possible model for the economy of ancient Egypt. This model is then applied to the practices of domestic trade. To apply the same model to foreign trade is complicated by the fact that the pharaohs and their officials did not differentiate between trade, tribute and diplomatic gift giving. Defining each will therefore assist in determining the practices that govern foreign trade. Once these have been determined a brief overview is presented of the northern and southern trading partners of Egypt during the dynastic period.

The third chapter presents a chronology of the Egyptian sources that mention Punt from the Palermo stone of the Fifth Dynasty to Rameses III's Papyrus Harris, dating from the Nineteenth Dynasty (c.1295-1186 BC). Presenting these sources in a separate chapter allows for two advantages. The text translations assist in providing detailed overviews of how Punt was experienced by the Egyptians from the Old Kingdom through to the New Kingdom. This provides a background for chapters four and five, because it allows the use of texts out of their chronological order, which assists in obtaining a more complete picture of the profile of Punt. Chapter four outlines the southern trade routes that existed in Egypt. The overland trade routes of the Old Kingdom assist in determining the location of some of Egypt's southern neighbours, e.g. Yam, in relation to Punt, while Middle Kingdom trade routes highlight the establishment of a maritime route from Koptos to the ports of Mersa Gawasis and Mersa Gasus on the Red Sea coast. During the Second Intermediate a general interruption in the use of these trade routes occurred, however, many were re-established during the New Kingdom. There is also evidence during this period that overland and maritime trade routes to Punt existed and these are discussed in detail. Finally the reality of actual voyage from the Red Sea ports to the shores of Punt is discussed. The seaworthiness of Egyptian vessels is considered and whether or not a voyage down the Red Sea coast would have been possible in light of the sailing conditions presented by the Red Sea environment. Chapter five focuses on the commodities obtained from Punt through trade, i.e. incense, other botanical commodities such as ebony and wildlife. Investigating the distribution of gum resins, used to produce incense, and ebony will help to determine if any possible contact, whether direct or indirect, could have existed with Egypt. Examining the distribution of wildlife depicted as trade commodities and in their natural environment, as is depicted in Hatshepsut's mortuary temple, will serve a similar purpose. It would be difficult to primarily use the distribution of this fauna and flora to locate Punt. This is because it is difficult to define accurate distribution patterns in antiquity from modern distribution patterns. This

information has to be used in conjunction with other evidence that is discussed in chapter five to collectively determine a plausible location for Punt. This thesis focuses on an African location for Punt. The depictions of the different racial groups inhabiting Punt, in Hatshepsut's mortuary temple, support this proposal but they also present the possibility that the Puntites may have been immigrants from the southern Arabian coast. A study is made of archaeological sites in east Africa and southern Arabia, along the coast and interior to determine whether any kinds of civilisation existed in these regions at the time the Egyptians were journeying to Punt.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE STATE, ECONOMY AND TRADE IN ANCIENT EGYPT**

It is important to first consider the components that brought about the creation of the pharaonic state, i.e. ideology, power and economy, if one is to understand the way in which trade was conducted in ancient Egypt both within the country and abroad. The study of economic history and the study of economics are not one and the same. Economic history seeks to answer questions from a historical point of view, by reviewing and incorporating social history rather than economics to answer these questions. Economics is a relatively new science that emerged with the industrial revolution, therefore its use in the study of history is complicated by the fact that it is ‘the study of the laws governing the functioning of modern capitalist economies’ (Warburton 1997:74). It is very challenging to try and equate any modern western economic system or model to one that existed in antiquity. This section seeks to provide a possible view of an economic system that may have existed within the Egyptian state.

### **2.1 THE EMERGENCE OF THE EGYPTIAN STATE**

Political organisations are evident in Egypt as early as the fifth and fourth millennium BC, a time when constant clashes occurred between two dominant cultural groups in Egypt. The north consisted of an agrarian, pastoral and merchant community-based society, while the south was organised into a system of hierarchical principalities with an embedded cultural belief system. The unification of Egypt (c. 3000 BC) brought about the amalgamation of these two cultures, creating a state where a single ruler possessed power over a confederacy of provinces and the products produced from their surrounding resources (Menu 2001a:422-423). The structure of the early Egyptian state is difficult to determine, i.e. trying to define an ancient concept with modern definitions like ‘feudal’, ‘tribal’ and ‘chiefdoms’ is often risky. For example, tribal structures developed alongside and after the emergence of the Egyptian state, feudalism is specific to medieval Europe, however, it is possible that aspects of it may have existed in the Egyptian socio-political structure and the same is true when defining chiefdoms. Thus to try and pinpoint an exact definition of the Egyptian state from modern terms is impossible. Modern terms must merely be understood as examples of what could

possibly have existed in terms of an emerging social structure in ancient Egypt (Warburton 1997:59).

Egypt's socio-political structure eventually allowed a single person to claim exclusive rights to ruling both Upper and Lower Egypt as "Lord of the Two Lands." The pharaoh became synonymous with the god Horus. As his incarnation on earth, he was granted divine powers which he could use to ensure the happiness of his people by guaranteeing the fertility of the land and livestock and thus the subsistence and also the protection of his people. They in turn were required to work for him and show him allegiance (Menu 2001a:424). In an ideal world such an explanation would suffice, however, it must be understood that the emergence of pharaonic Egypt did not necessarily imply that the pre-existing socio-political structures of Neolithic Egypt ceased to exist. It would be highly unlikely that the unifier of Egypt possessed enough military power to completely overthrow pre-existing socio-political structures and rule as a dictator or tyrant. It is perhaps more realistic to consider that the right to rule was awarded by the general population to a single person in return for security. This included not only security of person but also security of wealth, which included property (Warburton 1997:62).

By the end of the Old Kingdom (c. 2686-2125 BC) the political structure of the Egyptian state consisted of a number of institutions. Administrative (or governmental<sup>1</sup>) and religious institutions form the two most prominent components of the state. What complicated matters here is that professions within these institutions often overlapped so much that it is difficult to separate them into specific entities. Administrative and religious functions merge creating a situation where it could have been perceived that temple institutions and their functionaries possessed the same amount of power as the pharaoh himself (Warburton 1997:301). Pharaoh claimed his legitimacy from the gods, who sanctified his rule; as such the gods and their temples cannot be considered part of Egypt's administrative institutions because they are the source from which it claims its legitimacy. Although this provided the temples with a large amount of power, they were prevented from completely utilising it by the pharaoh who maintained their dependency and allegiance to him by retaining the monopoly for the most important components of their ritual activities (Warburton 1997:301, 308). Therefore the relationship between the pharaoh and his religious institutions was one of mutualism. The

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'governmental' cannot be understood in terms of its modern meaning; here it implies the network of viziers, officials and scribes that carried out the pharaoh's commands (Warburton 1997:301).

pharaoh, as the proprietor of *Maat* bore the responsibility of attending to the gods in order to ensure the well-being of his people. He achieved this by providing them with land, buildings, income and the necessary commodities to perform their ritual ceremonies. They, in return, assured his legitimacy gaining the approval of his people who consented to his rule (Warburton 1997:319).

## 2.2 THE ECONOMY OF EGYPT

It is difficult to provide a general economic model that would be applicable for the entire pharaonic period (Bleiberg 1995: 1375). Many scholars have tried to create models that are applicable, however, due to the lack of substantial evidence there is much controversy. In the previous section it was concluded that the Egyptian state consisted of a number of institutions, within these institutions a hierarchy of profession is evident and this also perpetuated most levels of society. It would therefore be foolish to assume that the politics of self-interest did not exist and that it would not be evident in the country's economic structure. This implies that the possibility of private enterprise can not be disregarded in the Egyptian economy (Kemp 1989:232). Karl Polanyi<sup>2</sup> believed that because there is no evidence of a monetary system in ancient Egypt, the concept of the accumulation of commodities (as equivalents to money) as a measure of material wealth did not exist. However, the Egyptians can hardly be said to be uninterested in the accumulation of wealth (Warburton 1997:84). These theories present two opposing schools of thought as to what constituted the ancient Egyptian economic system. This section reviews some of the models suggested by scholars and by combining them, seeks to determine a coherent example of the Egyptian economy during the period of the pharaonic state.

### 2.2.1 REDISTRIBUTION

Karl Polanyi's theory of redistribution is successful in as far as it helps gain an understanding of how the Egyptian economy functioned without a monetary system. However, it is idealised to the extent that it becomes improbable. *Redistribution* entertains the idea that all the land occupied by Egypt was considered first and foremost the property of the pharaoh. All commodities would have been collected by a central power, in this case, the pharaoh and

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Polanyi was a Hungarian economic anthropologist, whose primary interest in his field of study was 'the development of an overall view of the functioning of economic relationships' within different societal structures, both ancient and modern (Britannica Encyclopedia 1998-2002c).

the temple institutions under his control. These commodities were then redistributed to the rest of the population via a system based on social status where the allocation of food supplies and other goods was determined by a person's personal requirement (Bleiberg 1995:1375 & Altenmüller 2001:445). People received as much as they needed or as much as society afforded them.

Polanyi believed that the lacking monetary system in the Egyptian economy corresponded with a lack of 'market.' He determined that although a 'market' may have existed it did not correspond with any contemporary understanding of one, i.e. a market is driven by a general demand for a commodity which creates a demand for production (supply) and thus competition and private enterprise. Polanyi proposed that the availability of a commodity on this 'market' was determined by its supply, irrespective of the demand for it. Commodities that were redistributed were therefore based on supply and not demand. Localised provincial trade, on the other hand, was governed by demand which, Polanyi supposes, would have encompassed trade that produces a variety in lifestyle, i.e. trading one food from another to create variety in diet or the acquisition of objects such as furniture, as opposed to trade for profit (Bleiberg 1995:1383 & Warburton 1997:83).

There are a number of problems with this theory. First and foremost is the idea that the Egyptians were obliged to relinquish all their land and its produce to the pharaoh. This meant that land could not have been bought or sold or that wage labour would not have existed. The very structure of the pharaonic state was not like this at all and there are numerous inscriptions that provide evidence that the latter practices did exist (Warburton 1997:93). The lack of a market also seems improbable when one considers the production of tomb items. For example copies of the "Book of the Dead" inscribed without names have been found, suggesting that the name of the deceased may only have been added by a scribe once it had been purchased. *Shabtis*, models representing servants in the afterlife, were produced in their masses from moulds during the latter part of the pharaonic period. A few have also been found without inscribed names that once again suggest a similar practice may have occurred, as with the Book of the Dead. These two items provide evidence that a market and the production of commodities for it did exist (Warburton 1997:106-107). A further problem is Polanyi's idea that the Egyptians did not comprehend the meaning of material wealth. It is obvious from tomb robbing that precious metals were understood as an equivalent of money and/or wealth (Warburton 1997:84). Further this assumption also undermines the whole

Egyptian understanding of life. For an Egyptian one's life on earth was a preparation for one's life after death. This was desired above all and all wealth (no matter how large or small) obtained on earth was used for the provision of this.

On a more practical level collection and redistribution would have been physically impractical if one considers the implications of geographical distance and administrative problems that may arise with ration distribution (Warburton 1997:94). The likelihood of a completely flawless administrative system for centuries is also rather impossible. There is conclusive evidence that the pharaoh and his administrative institutions did collect an 'income' or 'rent' from their dependants but there is little evidence that this was redistributed.

### **2.2.2 RE-APPROACHING REDISTRIBUTION**

John Maynard Keynes<sup>3</sup> seeks to improve upon Polanyi's theory of redistribution by combining the principles of redistribution with demand and the market. He determines that the agrarian culture which constituted early Egyptian society is characterised by an economy where the production of commodities is only enough to sustain the demand of consumption. Because nothing would come of producing more than is needed there is little incentive to do so, also the Egyptian physical geography was able to effectively support such production. This resulted in there being no demand and therefore a lack of incentive for a market. The demand that was needed was created by the state. By creating specialised professions and increasing the rent or taxes on farmland, farmers were required to produce more than their subsistence level. The rents and taxes were utilised by the state for major construction projects and to support the bureaucracy that developed along with this. The class of craftsmen employed by the state for the construction and decoration of temples and tombs etc. further created a stimulus because it decreased the number of agricultural labourers and stimulated employment in other sectors of the economy. Thus demand extended beyond the norms of subsistence production, because farmers were required to produce more to pay higher rents on land, but because of the decrease in agricultural labour they could barter for higher prices with their remaining surplus (Warburton 1997:115).

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<sup>3</sup> John Maynard Keynes was an English economist, journalist and financier. He was the brainchild of Keynesian economics, which is concerned with the study of the causes and effects of prolonged unemployment. His theories were considered revolutionary during the years of the Depression (Lekachman 1998-2002).



Polanyi was not completely incorrect with his notion of state collection. It was not, however, a complete collection of produce but rather the collection of surpluses produced through taxation and labour (Liverani 1990:205). The collection of produce was a means by which the state sought to expand its economic enterprise and fund some of its national projects. On a local level this created the impetus for a lucrative trade market and suggests that the practice of private enterprise may even have existed.

### **2.2.3 THE EGYPTIAN ECONOMY: A POSSIBLE REALITY**

The great difficulty in understanding the economic system of Egypt derives from an understanding of the place of religious institutions within this system. They are physically part of the pharaonic state but because of their function to determine the pharaoh's legitimacy they cannot be part of the administrative institutions. Possibly the best way to understand this situation is to regard religious institutions as a smaller image of the state.

The pharaoh, upon the formation of the state, granted land to its various institutions. This they would have been expected to use to maintain their upkeep. By giving portions of this land to smaller institutions and individuals they were able to generate an income by instituting a levy for the use of the land (Menu 2001b:427). The detail of this levy still remains at large but there are two possibilities. Dependants were required to give some of their produce to the pharaoh and some to their institution. If this portion was greater than the portion they retained it can be termed 'tax' or 'rent.' If the portions are reversed, it can be seen as 'income' generated by the institution's employees (Warburton 1997:304). This system seems relatively simple when just administrative institutions are considered. The pharaoh provides the institution with land from which to derive an income and in return expects a portion of this income. The situation with religious institutions is, however, more complicated. They received an income from their dependants, yet it would appear that temples did not have to pay tax to the pharaoh but in some cases their dependants were obliged to. In this way temple institutions did contribute indirectly to state income (Warburton 1997:320-321).

The production and collection of grain was one of the most important elements in state income. Administrative and temple treasuries stored 'tax' grain and other commodities that were used in trade exchanges or redistributed to smaller institutions where they were used as wages for conscript labour, their own employees and contract work from private industries (Warburton 1997:314). These wages were consumed and any surpluses that remained would have been used for domestic bartering. This system characterises a market economy –

dependants receiving a salary to do with what they wish – not one of redistribution (Warburton 1997:312- 313). Also the nature of land distribution, i.e. temples were awarded land in exchange for services to the pharaoh and his bureaucracy and the dependants of administrative and temple institutions were awarded land in exchange for their skills and services, this meant that the majority of land owned in Egypt was the property of the people and therefore a redistribution program could not have existed. The Egyptian economy is therefore characterised by a pre-capitalist market economy, in which the state plays an important role not only as a recipient of income, through taxation but also as a participant in its exchange through remuneration and trade relations (Warburton 1997:328-329).

## 2.3 CURRENCY AND THE MONETARY SYSTEM

Money has three basic attributes: it is a unit of value, a store of value and an exchange value. If these attributes are applied to unit values in the Egyptian economy, the following becomes evident. The *deben* can be considered a unit and a store of value but it was hardly ever used as an exchange in a pre-currency economy like ancient Egypt's. While the *khar* was a unit of value and of exchange, however, as a unit of storage, grain is not the most ideal substance as a measure of one's savings and wealth. Finally physical objects such as beds, vases and livestock were used in exchanges and can be a measure of stored value but they are not units of value. It is therefore impossible to determine a controlled monetary system and currency in ancient Egypt (Warburton 1997:116).

To better understand how the units of value were determined, and thus how economic transactions would have been conducted, it is perhaps best to consider them as units of weight. Metals, such as copper, silver and gold, and grain were used as standards of weight and units of exchange<sup>4</sup> but never in the concept of 'money.' They were commodities that could be bartered like any other produce. Standard weight units were the *deben* (approximately 91 grams) and the *kite* (a tenth of a deben, 9,1 grams). These were used primarily for the measuring of metals, while grain and other cereals were measured in *khar* (a

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<sup>4</sup> It was only during the New Kingdom, c. 1580 BC that weights and measurements were given definite fixed values to assist in Egypt's growing commerce with foreign countries (David 1998:278). However, these units provide a good indication of the values allocated to various commodities and show how trade would have been conducted throughout Egypt's history and are therefore being used as a general example.

sack containing two bushels<sup>5</sup>). One *khar* was the equivalent of two *debens* of copper. Another unit of weight the *shaty*<sup>6</sup> is also evident. It is primarily associated as a measure of silver, consisting of a round piece of metal equivalent to one twelfth of a *deben* (approximately 7,6 grams), but during the Eighteenth Dynasty (c. 1550-1295 BC) it was used occasionally as a measure for gold (James 1984:260). Gold was considered to have twice the value of silver, which became so common as a measure of exchange that the Egyptian word for it, '*HD*', was synonymous with the word 'payment.' Yet silver was still considered to be a hundred times more valuable than copper (Watterson 1997:133 & David 1988:279). Sometimes the sale of commodities was not always subject to the exchange of metals or grain, there could be an exchange of a variety of other commodities that equalled an agreed value (2.1)<sup>7</sup> (Watterson 1997:133). Thus the Egyptian word for bartering, '*rdit m isw*' or '*rdit m D'w*' came to be described as 'giving in substitution or exchange' (Altenmüller 2001:446). This can be described as the most basic form of trade in Egypt.

## 2.4 DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN TRADE

### 2.4.1 DOMESTIC TRADE

Domestic trade was conducted by means of barter trade between regions, or perhaps more accurately institutions within these regions. The latter is two-fold as it encompassed both trade on behalf of an institution and provided a system that facilitated private enterprise (Altenmüller 2001:448). The bulk of such trade was carried out on the Nile. Surpluses, for example grain, would have been transported on large vessels that were owned by the institutions for which they traded. Thus merchants did exist but they traded on behalf of various institutions as their employees. In Egyptian they are referred to as the *Swtj* or *shuty* (Bleiberg 1995:1383). Officially these merchants were primarily interested in trading surpluses and unwanted commodities for those required by their employer but unofficially they would have had an opportunity to trade on their own behalf (James 1984:250 and Kemp 1989:224). Official trade was still conducted by means of bartering but because of its official nature commodities would have been traded at set values, determined (as explained above) by the weight of certain metals and cereals. Any profit that was obtained from this kind of trade

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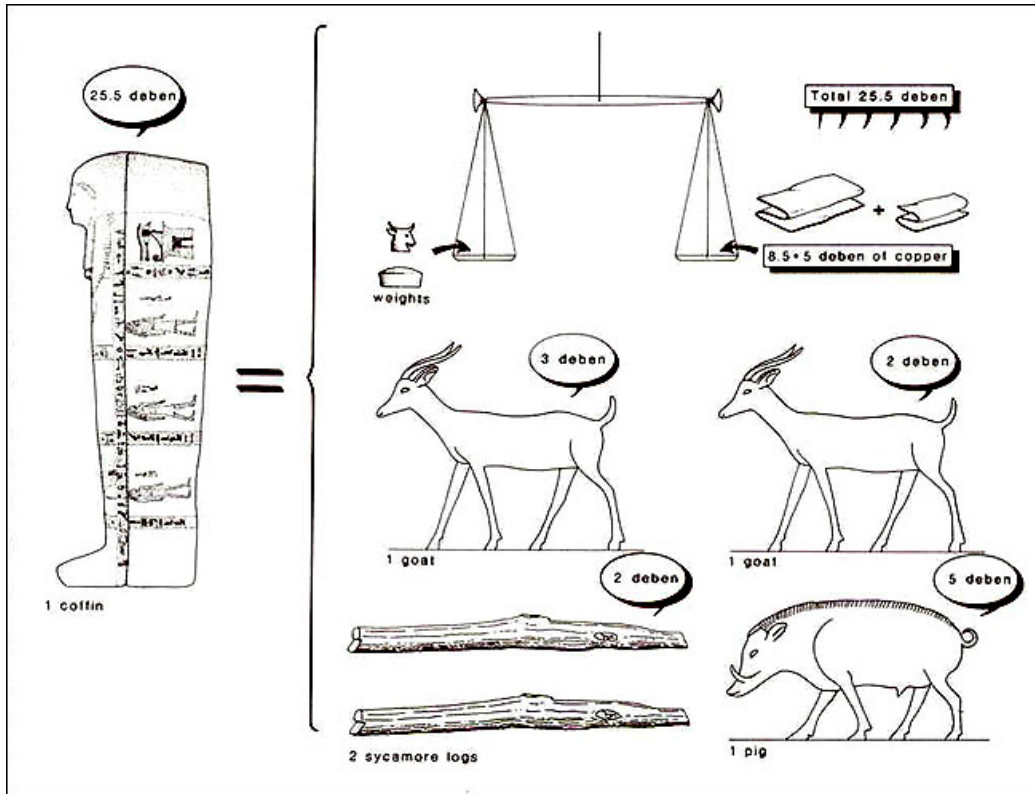
<sup>5</sup> A bushel is a standard unit of measurement that is the equivalent of about thirty-five litres in a dry capacity (Britannica Encyclopedia 1994-2002a).

<sup>6</sup> Throughout the pharaonic period this word has numerous derivatives: *shenat*, *shena*, *seniu* and *shat*. In New Kingdom sources *seniu*, *shat* and *shaty* are used specifically to designate a measure of silver (James 1984:258).

<sup>7</sup> Small bracketed numbers in bold in the text correspond with the appropriate figures.

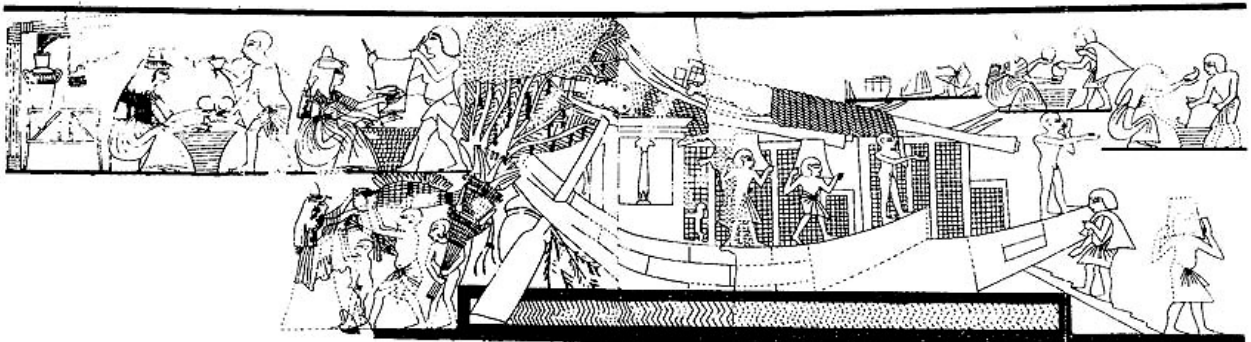
was utilised by the institutions for private purposes, like the financing, maintenance and decorating of, for example, temple complexes (Altenmüller 2001:448). The specifics of private merchant trade aboard these vessels is not certain. They may have been allowed to use a portion of whatever they were trading for their own use, perhaps as 'wage in kind' or they may have used the transport network for the private trade of additional commodities. Tomb paintings from Thebes illustrate that this practice of private trade was not only subject to the merchants in charge of the trade vessels. The tomb of Ipuy (TT 217) shows crew members of a docked vessel taking part in private transactions with women on a quayside (2.2). Whether this was trade for personal profit or merely trade to increase the variety of subsistence, is hard to determine (James 1984:250-252).

On a more localised level trade between individuals was determined by the rural or urban setting. Trade in rural areas was governed by a basic barter system, where the most common items of exchange were largely foodstuffs, such as figs, vegetables, cereals, fish and beverages. Bartering was subject to the fluctuation of seasonal availability and the quality of such produce. The use of set values was therefore seldom applied and most items would have been traded by exchange in kind (James 1984: 245). In an urban setting the system of barter trade was more intricate. This was because trade commodities, i.e. agricultural produce as well as uncommon luxury commodities were more varied, however, the trading practices would have been more standardised and simpler because trade was a recurrent activity (James 1984:247). Localised trade generally encompassed the acquisition of commodities to create variety in lifestyle, yet the existence of private trade for personal profit cannot be ignored, however, its impact on the overall economy of Egypt was probably not that great owing to its scarcity in ancient records (Bleiberg 1995:1384).



**Figure 2.1:** An example of domestic barter exchange from Deir el-Medina. In this example a coffin, valued at  $25 \frac{1}{2}$  *deben* is exchanged for a variety of commodities of equal value. These commodities are converted to values of copper *deben* by weighing to ensure that the desired price is met.

(Kemp 1989:250)



**Figure 2.2:** Crewmen taking part in private transactions at quayside stalls. Tomb of Ipuy (TT217), c. 1250 BC.

(James 1984:250-251)

## 2.4.2 FOREIGN TRADE

Egypt, in spite of being a relatively prosperous country, was devoid of many raw materials. These had to be obtained through trade with foreign countries. Yet the difficulty in understanding the process of such trade is complicated by the arrogance of the Egyptian rulers and their officials, i.e. the line distinguishing trade, tribute and diplomatic gifts is very fine. The annals of Thutmosis III make specific reference to 'imported' commodities, which aids in further understanding foreign trade relations. Four classifications are apparent, each determined by the status of the country supplying the commodity, the kind of commodities supplied and the uniformity with which this supply occurs (Liverani 1990:256).

### 2.4.2.1 Differentiating 'trade' in ancient Egypt

The word *Hq* designates commodities obtained through campaigns, as plunder or booty. This included commodities directly from the battlefields such as weapons, chariots and horses as well as prisoners and others plundered from the surrounding town or cities such as cattle, stores of grain, precious metals and gem stones (Liverani 1990:255, 257). Conquered regions and their cities fell under control of the Egyptian administration, the commodities produced by these regions were referred to as *bak*. It can be understood as tribute or tax and was only subject to the foreign regions that were in close proximity to Egypt, such as Kush and Wawat in Nubia and parts of southern Syro-Palestine. Commodities included agricultural products (cattle and cereals), people and other luxury items that characterised a specific region (Liverani 1990:256, 258). Commodities obtained from beyond these regions are referred to as *inw* and *biAt*. *Inw* designates the supply of a commodity, yet it is uncertain as to whether these were trading commodities, diplomatic gift exchanges or tributes because the Egyptians made no distinction between independent rulers or the vassals, who presented their commodities to the pharaoh. Many tombs depict parades of foreigners that are conveying gifts for the pharaoh. Such gifts are described in Egyptian as 'diplomatic gifts' and it is probable that their function was a social or cultural custom, in other words more a gesture of respect than an economic exchange or a forced tribute (Bleiberg 1995:1380). There is evidence in the Amarna letters from the reigns of Amenhotep III (c. 1390-1352 BC) and Akhenaten (c. 1352-1336 BC) that suggests that such diplomatic gift giving was a reciprocal activity. This activity would have played an important role in maintaining social relationships amongst foreign rulers and thus contribute to foreign trade relations (Bleiberg 1995:1381). The regions from which *inw* supplies came, include parts of east Africa, south west Asia (Syro-Palestine, Anatolia, Mitanni and Assyria and Babylonia), Cyprus and parts of the Aegean. In

general they fall outside the boundaries of Egyptian political influence and their appearance in the annals is more irregular and their type of commodities and amounts thereof are not as precise as *bAk*. It can therefore be concluded that commodities were obtained through trade or gift-exchanges rather than as tributes (Liverani 1990:256-258). The final term, *biAt*, designates ‘marvels,’ the commodities obtained from regions far beyond Egypt (or beyond the reach of its militia). These regions lie ‘outside the ‘civilised’ world’ of state formations and therefore are often associated with a certain amount of mystery, regions like, Punt (Liverani 1990:257).

It is apparent from the above discussion that ‘trade’ was understood by the Egyptians as any commodity that was imported, irrespective of its designation as *HAq*, *bAk*, *inw* or *biAt*. In searching for a more contemporary understanding of trade relations propaganda becomes an issue. It complicates matters, since commodities that may have originally been obtained through trade or gift-exchange are not differentiated from tribute, all to enhance the prestige of Egypt. Diplomatic relations therefore serve both as political relations and channels of commodity acquisition. The best association with contemporary trade in ancient Egypt would be the practices governing *inw* and *biAt*.

#### **2.4.2.2 Foreign expeditions**

Trade expeditions to foreign countries were undertaken to grant the wishes or demands of the pharaoh. His demands were carried out by one of his high officials, whose area of expertise would have been organisation as opposed to commerce. The economic infrastructure of Egypt provided the official with the resources necessary to carry out the pharaohs wishes. No one but the pharaoh could have commanded the services of skilled and non-skilled labourers needed for such expeditions, which often ranged in number from a hundred to thousands of individuals. Royal support would also have been needed to obtain the large quantity of foodstuffs to support the expedition staff and military protection for their security. Egyptian expeditions were almost always semi-military in nature, even the Egyptian language did not distinguish between an expedition envoy and the army (Bleiberg 1995:1381-1382). Thus expedition leaders, with the support of manpower provided by the pharaoh, sought merely to fulfil the request of the pharaoh; once again there was no interest in trade for profit.

### **2.4.2.3 Northern 'trade partners'**

The most important foreign countries with which Egypt traded were Nubia, Punt, Syro-Palestine and the islands of the Aegean (2.3). There are records from as early as the Old Kingdom that attest to foreign trade with Syro-Palestine and military expeditions to establish mines in Sinai (Manley 1996:24). Trade between the towns of the Delta and the region of Retjenu in southern Palestine had been longstanding though were largely based on custom and tradition. During the Middle Kingdom Egyptian control of these trade routes was consolidated by Amenemhat I (c. 1985-1956 BC) (2.4). He built a series of forts, 'The Walls of the Ruler,' which controlled all movement across northern Sinai, especially along one of the most utilised caravan routes, the 'Ways of Horus.' Maritime trade existed with Byblos, although this was primarily a royal undertaking. Byblos supplied Egypt with Lebanese cedar, brought from the interior to the coast, it was vital for Egyptian vessel construction as there were no adequate sources within the country itself. The port of Byblos connected Egypt with other trading networks, in particular that of Ugarit, which was an important trade centre for commodities (lapis lazuli, copper, iron and silver) from Anatolia, Assyria and Babylonia. These were exchanged for gold, gem stones and other luxury items (ebony, ivory, monkeys, animal skins) obtained through southern trade (Manley 1996:48). During the New Kingdom, Egypt's focus was occupied by its expansion and exploitation of resources and commodities to the south of its borders, yet interest in the ports, from Byblos to Ugarit was maintained. The region of focus was a large area that, in addition to the ports, included inland towns, from Meggido, along all the major caravan routes to the domain of the Mitanni in the north (Manley 1996:63, 70-72).

Egypt's contact with the Aegean probably began through cross-cultural exchanges in the Levantine ports. There is evidence of such exchanges occurring as early as the Middle Kingdom but it was during the New Kingdom that more direct trade relations were established between Egypt and the islands of the Aegean. Tombs dating from the Eighteenth Dynasty depict envoys from the Aegean bringing tribute to Egypt (Wachsmann 1987:27-40). They are referred to as



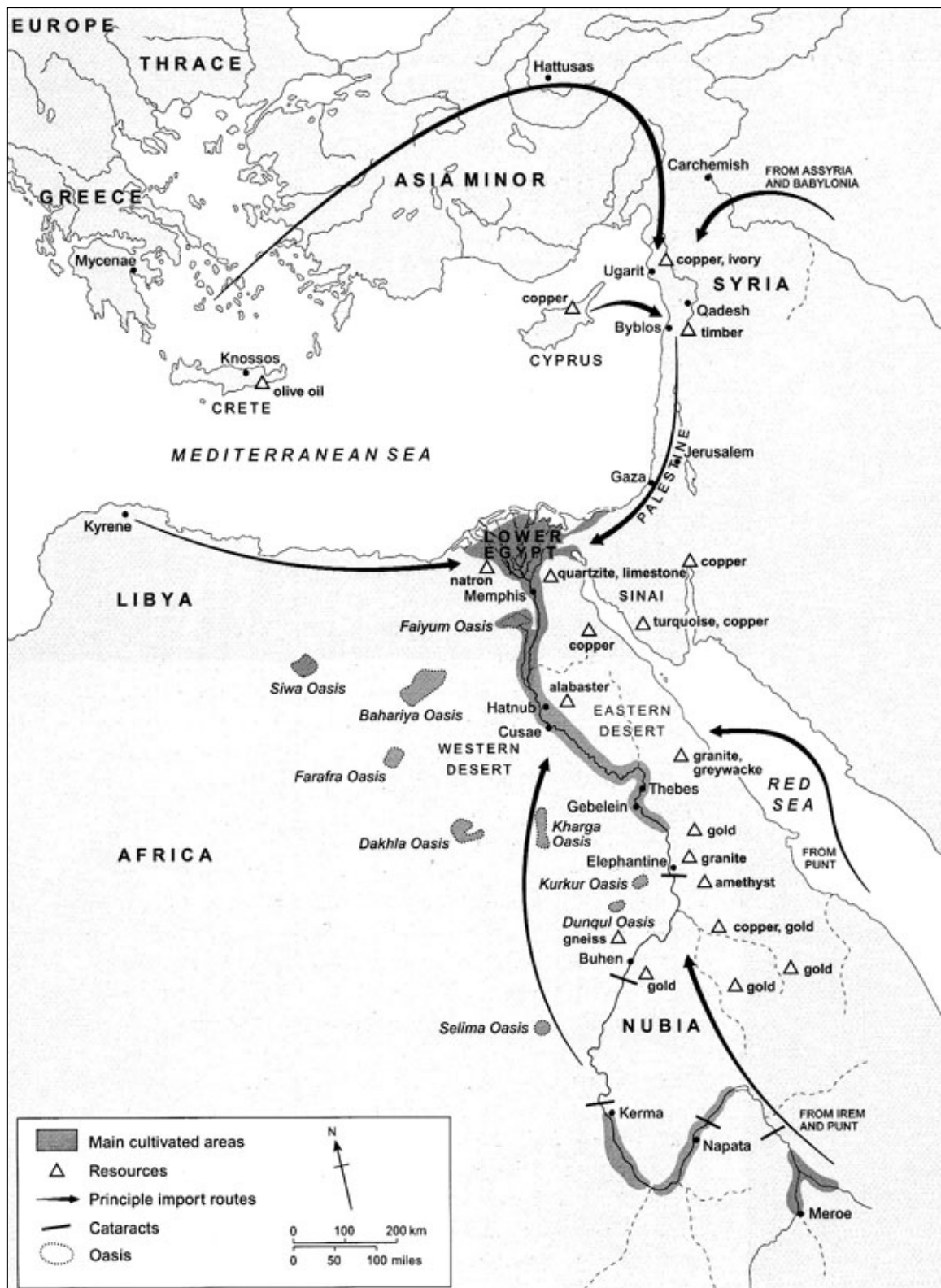


Figure 2.3: Major trade routes between Egypt, the Aegean and the rest of the ancient Near East. (Shaw 2000b:319)

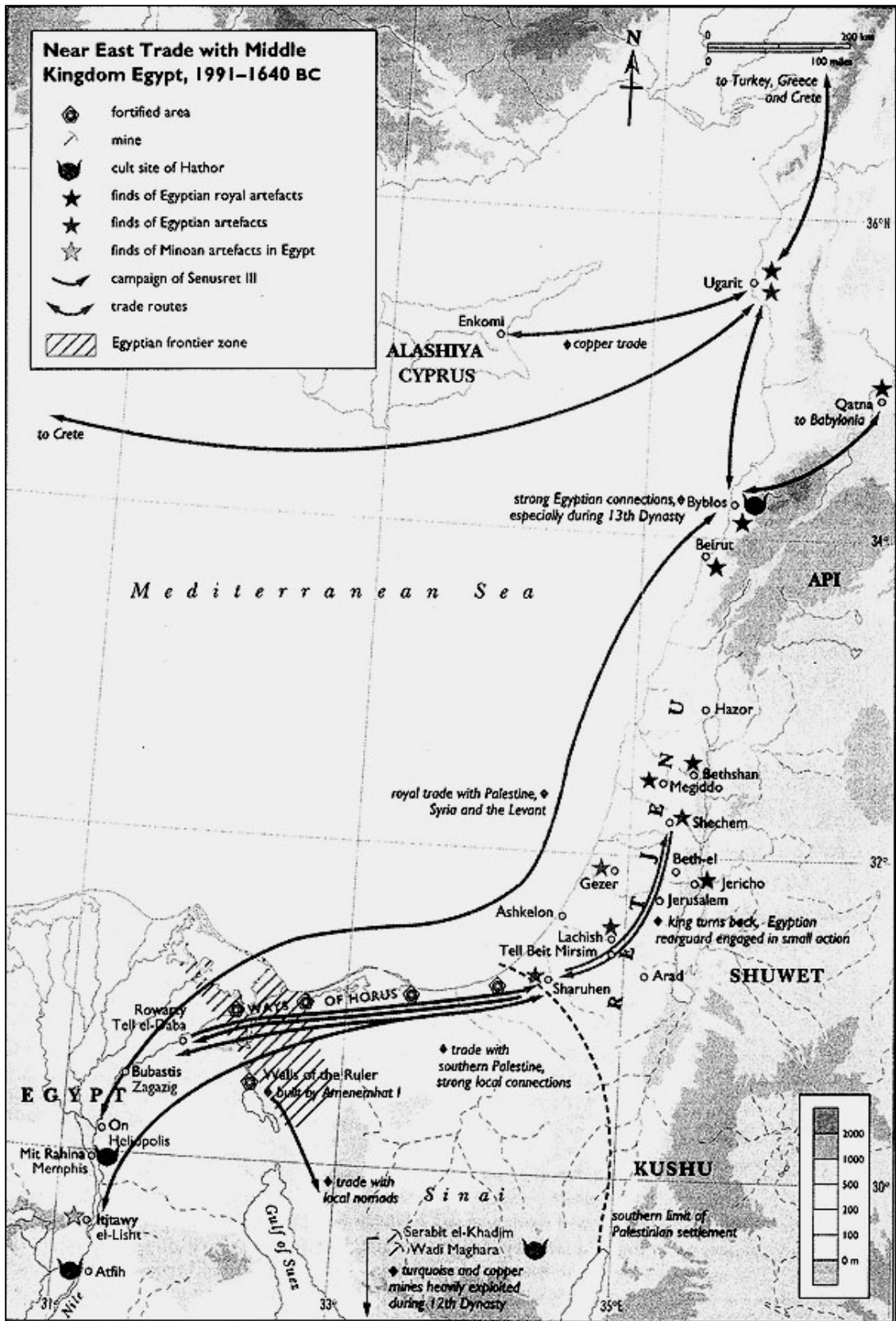


Figure 2.4: Trade routes between Egypt and ancient Near East during the Middle Kingdom (c. 2055-1650 BC). (Manley 1996:48)

“Men of Keftiu” and “Princes of the islands in the Great Green<sup>8</sup>” (David 1998:268). Although their designation is uncertain it is generally accepted that these titles refer to the envoys sent to Egypt from Minoan Crete and Cyprus<sup>9</sup>. Since these islands were never subject to Egyptian rule and it is likely that these envoys visited Egypt as ambassadors with the purpose of establishing trade relations between the two countries. The tomb of Rekhmire depicts some of their wares for trade (2.5); silver, copper, lapis lazuli, ivory, decorative vases, pitchers, drinking bowls, amphorae and metal rhytons in the shape of bull, ibex and lion heads (Hodel-Hoenes 2000:146 and Altenmüller 2001:449).

Egyptian records governing the maintenance of trade relations provide an interesting predicament. The Thutmossides and their successors maintained their influence in the Near East by presenting a constant military presence, in the form of numerous campaigns, however, international communication during the reign of Akhenaton presents an alternative. It would appear that a kind of ‘brotherhood’ existed between foreign rulers and the pharaohs of Egypt, whereby diplomatic gift-exchanges ensured the tolerance and success of trade transactions. It is therefore most likely that international trade, with regions to the north of Egypt, was conducted according to diplomatic gift exchanges which maintained the channels through which commodity acquisition could freely take place.

#### **2.4.2.4 Southern ‘trade partners’**

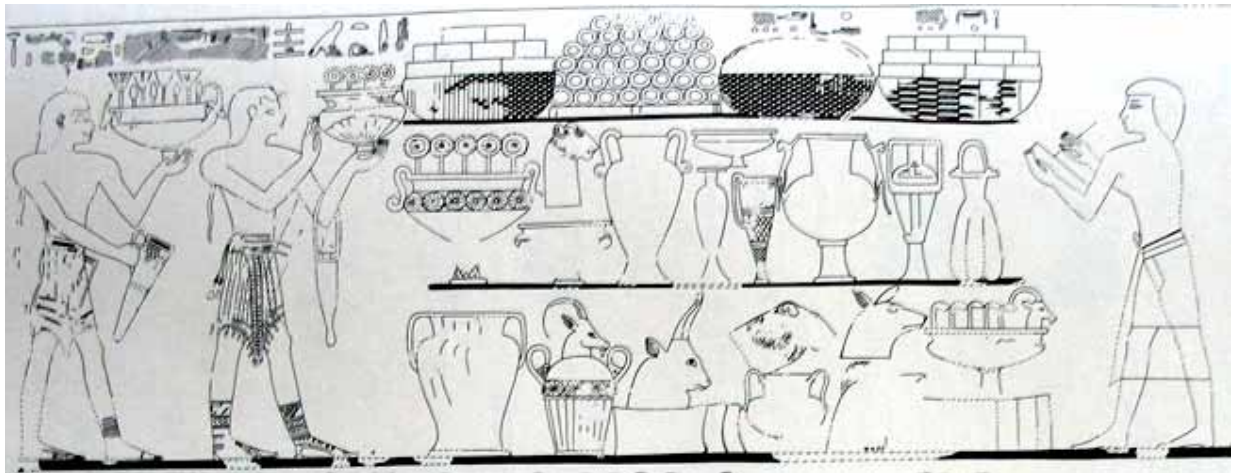
Egypt’s interest in Nubia (4.3), situated to its immediate south was as a result of its rich mineral resources. During the Fourth Dynasty (c. 2613-2494 BC) Egyptian influence extended as far south as Buhen, which was established as an Egyptian trading post, while Egypt exploited gold from the mines of Wadi Allaqi and the diorite-quarries at Toshka, however, this dominance was short lived and during the Fifth Dynasty Egypt was forced to withdraw as the population of the native Nubian C-Group<sup>10</sup> began to increase in influence and power (Manley 1996:26).

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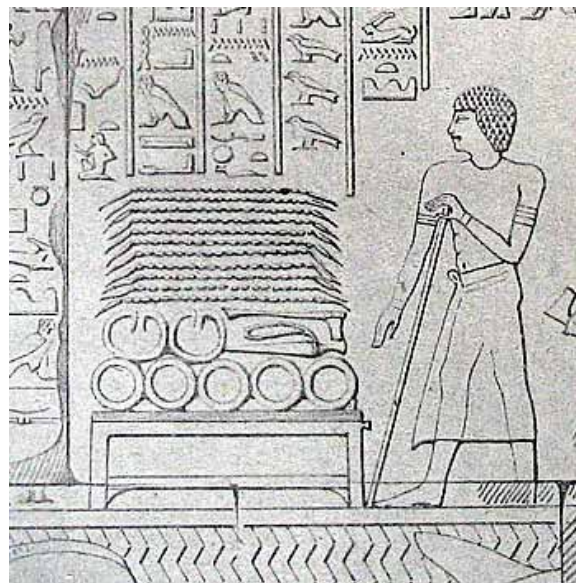
<sup>8</sup> The ‘Great Green’ was used in the Egyptian language to designate any large body of water, whether it be lake or sea. In this instance it is a reference to the Mediterranean Sea (Hodel-Hoenes 2000:305).

<sup>9</sup> Other possible locations for Keftiu include the north African coast in the vicinity of Cyrene and the southern coast of Anatolia (Manley 1996:75).

<sup>10</sup> The C-Group was a population that grew alongside Egypt’s Old Kingdom. Originally pastoralists, they occupied an area extending from Kubanniya (north of the First Cataract) to the Batn el-Hagar (upstream from the Second Cataract). Egyptian expeditions from later periods record four regions associated with these peoples. Wawat occupied most of Lower Nubia, while Irtjet and Setju were situated further upstream and Yam lay beyond the Fifth Cataract. (Welsby 2001:258-259)



**Figure 2.5:** The Men of Keftiu and the products they offer for trade in the tomb of Rekmire (TT 100).  
 (Davies 1973:Plate18)



**Figure 2.6:** Egyptian commodities offered for trade with the Puntites.  
 (Neville 1898:Pl. 69)

During the Middle Kingdom the conquest of Nubia continued. Mentuhotep II (c. 2055-2004 BC) extended his control into Wawat and strengthened his influence by employing Nubian mercenaries as part of his army. Thus successfully concluding any threat of conflict and gaining control of trade to the south. Wawat became a vassal of Egypt and was therefore expected to pay annual tribute. Kurkur oasis was occupied to control trade from the southern caravans and Buhen was re-established as a trading centre. During the reign of Sesostri I (c. 1956-1911 BC) Wawat was completely annexed and a series of forts were built to control river and desert trade as far as the Second Cataract. The forts at Ikkur and Kuban secured the continued extraction of gold from the Wadi Allaqi. In addition to Buhen, new trade centres were established at Mirgissa and Sai so that trade with the kingdoms of Upper Nubia could be conducted directly. During the reign of Sesostri II (c. 1882-1872) these were fortified and further forts were built from Askut to Semna to aid in the safe passage of trade commodities. A Red Sea port also seems to have been established at Sa'waw, to facilitate maritime trade with Sinai and the distant kingdom of Punt (Manley 1996:50).

The consolidation of the Egyptian state and its territorial expansion during the New Kingdom would not have been possible without the wealth obtained from its southern neighbours and vassals. Annexed parts of Nubia were integrated into the administrative state under the control of the 'King's Son of Kush,' who bore the same status and responsibility as the vizier in Egypt. Local chieftains were awarded the status of high officials and courtiers to aid in their 'Egyptianising' and the exploitation of their land by the Egyptian state. The expansion south took two forms, i.e. expansion along the river and expansion further into the eastern desert in search of further gold resources, resulting in the complete annexation of Wawat. Naturally this brought about conflict between Egypt and Kush as Wawat had been used as a buffer zone for the latter. Nevertheless, Egypt continued its southern expansion along the river and during the reign of Thutmose I (c. 1504-1492 BC) the region of the Third Cataract was brought under Egyptian control and a fort was established at Tombos and in spite of numerous conflicts Thutmose III managed to send a campaign as far as Gebel Barkal, close to the Fourth Cataract. It was only with the establishment of an Egyptian town at Napata during the reign of his son, Amenhotep II (c. 1427-1400 BC) that conflicts appear to decrease to the point that they were reduced to routine incidents to be dealt with. Napata became a trading centre between the Egyptians, Kushites and other African chiefdoms. It is likely that the Kushites acted as intermediaries for many of these chiefdoms (Manley 1996:60-62). Trade

caravans were not the only source of commodities from the African sub-continent, the Red Sea port, abandoned during the Second Intermediate period, was again in use.

Two possible routes are evident from the New Kingdom. Both began on the banks of the Nile at Koptos and lead via the Wadi Gawasis to Sa'waw or the Wadi Hammamat to Quseir and then south along the Red Sea coast to Punt (Manley 1996:74). The Egyptians conducted a few expeditions to obtain Punt's much sought after myrrh and incense but there is also evidence of Puntite envoys journeying to Egypt to conduct trade. The most detailed documentation of one of these expeditions is depicted in Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri. Once again the exchange is described as a payment of tribute to Egypt by the Puntites, however, a definite exchange of Egyptian and Puntite commodities does occur before the Puntite officials are given gifts of beer, bread, wine, figs and meat and the Puntite commodities are weighed and measured before they are loaded onto the boats (2.6). It can therefore be concluded that this is a portrayal of foreign trade customs (David 1998:267).

Depictions like the reliefs in Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri allow the conclusion that foreign trade was conducted in much the same way as domestic bartering. Commodities were exchanged according to a standard set of weights and measurements<sup>11</sup>, however, if these were not present exchanges by giving in substitution were also accepted. It is also worth noting that it appears to have been customary to provide the foreign trading partner with a 'gift' over and above the commodities traded (David 1998:280). Egypt's foreign trade did not consist primarily of commercial trade, commodities obtained through tributes from countries under its control were further utilised in commercial trade with the northern countries of the Near East and to satisfy the need for commodities that were not found in Egypt (Menu 2001b:429).

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<sup>11</sup> The foreign trade of metals in other near eastern countries forced Egypt to develop their standard system of weights and measurements. Although these systems were theoretically based on a standard unit, i.e. the weight of a grain of wheat, they differed from country to country (David 1998:280).

# CHAPTER 3: PUNT IN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN SOURCES

## 3.1 OLD KINGDOM SOURCES

A physical location for Punt continues to elude scholars. It is known to us through references in Egyptian textual and visual sources throughout dynastic Egypt. The first references to Punt are brief, detailing only the products brought from this region as tributes, however, due to the often propagandistic nature of Egyptian inscriptions and artworks these can also be considered to include imported commodities. The earliest of these references dates from the Fifth Dynasty (c. 2494-2345 BC). It is found on the Palermo stone which documents royal annals, forming an invaluable source of early Egyptian chronology and cultural history from the First through to the Fifth dynasties (3.1) (Shaw 2000c:4-5). In year 13 of his reign, the pharaoh Sahure documents:

The king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Sahure; he made it as his monument for:

...

RE... of land in the North and South;

Hathor of land in the North and South;

... of land in the North and South;...

... all things

There were brought from:

The Malachite-country, ... 6000.

Punt, 80,000 measures of myrrh, 6000 ... of electrum, 2,600 ... staves ... .

Year after the seventh numbering.

(Breasted 1962a:70)

During the Sixth Dynasty (c. 2345-2181 BC) the official Harkhuf provides a comprehensive account of four expeditions he undertook during his service to two of the Sixth Dynasty pharaohs – Merenre (c. 2287-2278 BC) and Pepi II (c. 2278-2184 BC). These are all to a region known as *Iam* or *Yam*<sup>1</sup>. Although Punt is, again only mentioned briefly, the inscription does provide evidence that Egypt sought to establish trade routes to the southern interior of Africa to obtain

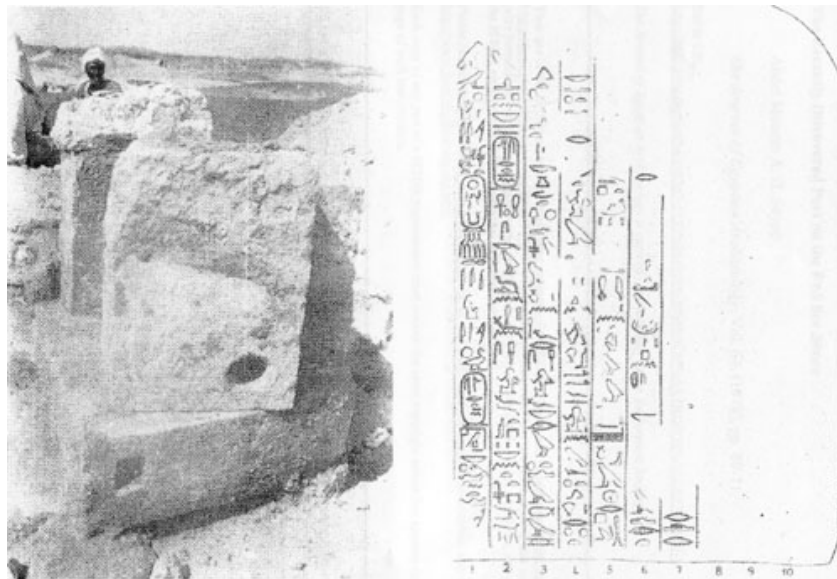
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<sup>1</sup> Yam and another southern neighbour, Irem are often synonymous with Nubia. Traditionally the region is considered to have extended from the first cataract at Aswan to Khartoum (Shaw & Nicholson 1995:204).



**Figure 3.1:** Inscribed fragment of a basalt slab, known as the Palermo stone. This Fifth Dynasty king-list records the names of pharaohs from the Old Kingdom to Pre-Dynastic times and significant events that took place during their regnal years.

(Shaw 2000a:5)



**Figure 3.3:** Anchors used in the shrine of Ankhu and the inscription from the shrine.

(Sayed 1978:Pl. 11)



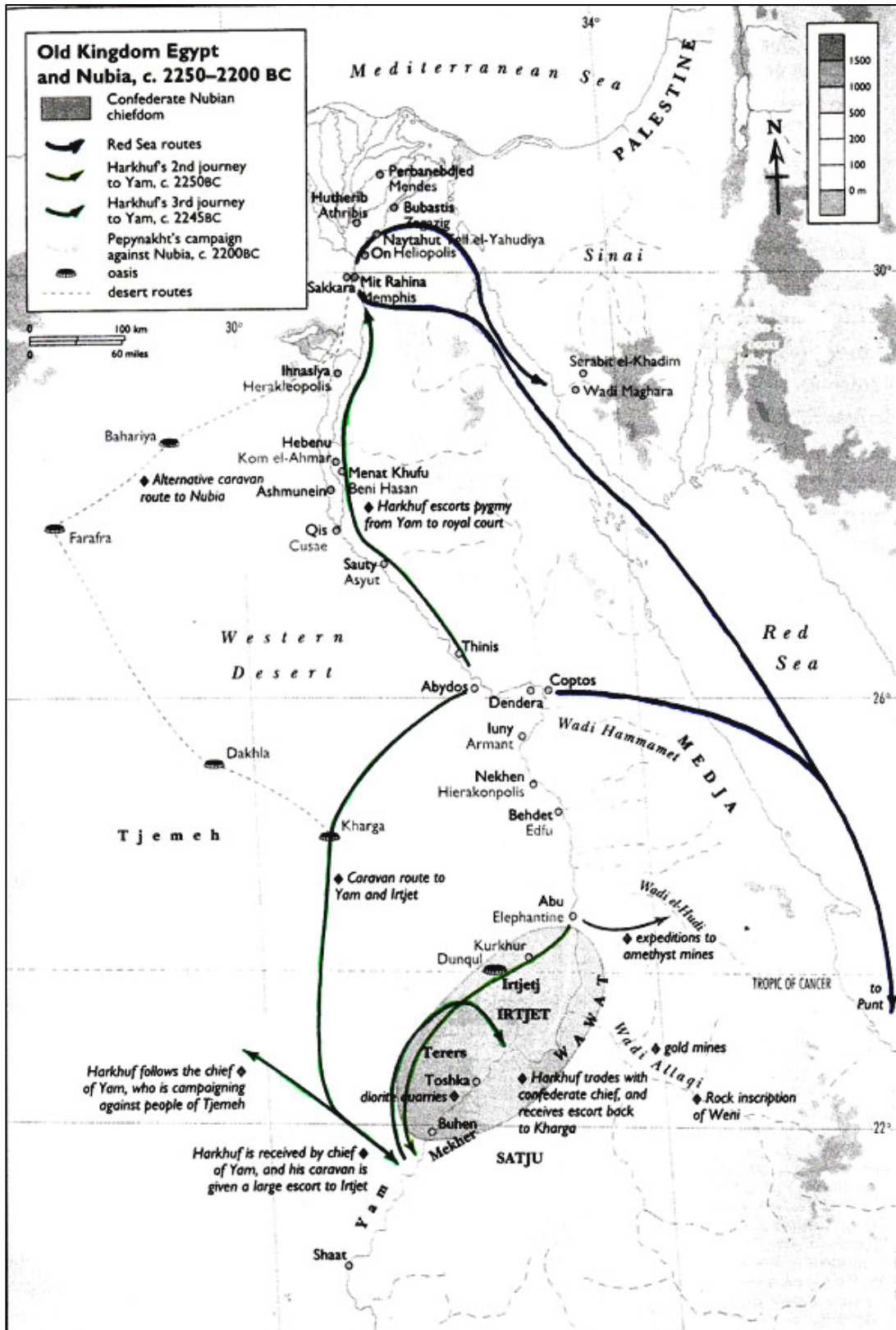


Figure 3.2: Harkhuf's expeditions for Yam during the Old Kingdom.

(Adapted from Manley 1996:27)

luxury commodities and that these ‘routes’ had been in existence for sometime as there is mention of a previous expedition to Punt by ‘god’s seal-bearer Bawerded,’ who brought back a dancing pygmy from Punt during the reign of Izezi (Djedkare) (c. 2414-2375 BC) in the Fifth Dynasty:

The King’s own seal: Year 2, third month of the first season, day 15. The King’s decree to the Sole companion, Lector-priest, Chief of scouts, Harkhuf. Notice has been taken of this dispatch of ours which you made for the King at the Palace, to let one know that you have come down in safety from Yam with the army that was with you. You have said in this dispatch of yours that you have brought all kinds of great and beautiful gifts, which Hathor mistress of Imaau has given to the ka of King Neferkare, who lives forever. You have said in this dispatch of yours that you have brought a pygmy of the god’s dances from the land of the horizon-dwellers, like the pygmy whom the god’s seal-bearer Bawerded brought from Punt in the time of King Isezi. You have said to my majesty that his life has never been brought by anyone who did Yam previously. ...

Come north to the residence at once! Hurry and bring with you this pygmy whom you brought from the land of the horizon-dwellers ... When he goes down with you into the ship, get worthy men to be around him on deck, lest he fall into the water! When he lies down at night, get worthy men to lie around him in his tent. Inspect ten times at night! My majesty desires to see this pygmy more than the gifts of the mine-land<sup>2</sup> and of Punt.

(Lichtheim 1973:26-27)

The significance of the dwarf is minor, however, it does provide a link for two expeditions that would have occurred some one hundred and fifty years apart. The fact that Bawerded’s expedition is retained in the official’s memory suggests that it was indeed important. Unfortunately there is no further evidence dating from this period to suggest this importance. However, hieratic ostraca found at Mersa Gawasis that date from the Middle Kingdom may help in providing an acceptable argument to signify its importance. Two of the ostraca are inscribed with the phrase “Bawerded is strong.” The name Bawerded is known only for the chancellor of Izezi and so it can be concluded that these ostraca may refer to the same person as in Harkhuf’s account. The ostraca phrase is identical to the format of Egyptian boat names. One of the ostraca reinforces this idea as other boat names are inscribed on it, one is “Sesostris is enduring in life” and the other, “Bawerded is strong.” The appearance of a chancellor’s name as a boat title is unusual as boat names were normally reserved for the pharaoh. It is also of significance that his

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<sup>2</sup> The term ‘mine-land’ appears to be a reference to Sinai where copper and turquoise mining were prominent industries during the Old Kingdom (Kessler 2004:43).

name remains a part of Egyptian collective memory some six centuries later. A plausible explanation for this could be that Bawereded's expedition was perhaps one of the first successful nautical expeditions to and from Punt (Meeks 2003:72).

Apart from this account Harkhuf's other three expedition inscriptions relate the establishing and maintaining of a trade route to the south of Egypt with the primary aim of extracting luxury goods from the regions to the south (3.2). On the first expedition, Harkhuf accompanied his father, Iri, to establish a trade route between Egypt and Yam:

The majesty of Mernere, my lord, sent me together with my father, the sole companion and lector-priest, Iri, to Yam, to open the way to that country. I did this in seven month; I brought from it all kinds of beautiful and rare gifts, and was praised for it very greatly.

(Lichtheim 1973:25)

The next two expeditions served to preserve the trade relations between the official, as an envoy from Egypt, and the ruler of Yam. They also provide a more comprehensive description of the trade route that was followed to and from Egypt:

His majesty sent me a second time alone. I went forth on the Elephantine road and returned via, Mekher, Terers and Irtjetj (which are in) Irtejet in the space of eight months. I came down bringing gifts from that country in great quantity, the likes of which had never before been brought back to this land...

Then his majesty sent me a third time to Yam. I went up from the nome of This (Thinis) upon the Oasis road<sup>3</sup>. I found the ruler of Yam had gone off to Tjemeh-land, to smite the Tjemeh to the western corner of heaven. I went up after him to Tjemeh-land and satisfied him, so that he praised all the gods for the sovereign...

Now when I had satisfied this ruler of Yam... [I came down through]... south of Irtjet and north of Setju... I came down with three hundred donkeys laden with incense, ebony, *Hknw*-oil, *sAt*, panther skins, elephant's-tusks, throw sticks and all sorts of good products.

(Lichtheim 1973:25-26)

The events of Harkhuf's third expedition provide an indication that Egypt was very much concerned with maintaining peace in this region, so that it did not affect their trading network.

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<sup>3</sup> A route that passed through the western desert of Egypt, following a path connecting main (Bahriya and Dhakala) and subsidiary (Kurkur, Selima and Dungul) oases that led to a region beyond the Third Cataract in the south (Kessler 2004:45).

From Harkhuf's inscription it is evident that the ruler of Yam was in conflict with the Tjemeh<sup>4</sup>. Harkhuf, one can best assume in an act of diplomacy, searches for the ruler and aids him in suppressing the Tjemeh-Libyan forces, for which he is greatly rewarded. The regions of Irtjet and Setju that Harkhuf mentions on his return journey with the donkey caravan are believed to be part of a confederacy of states, that together with Yam, formed part of Upper Nubia. A fourth region, to the north, Wawat was, according to Harkhuf also part of this confederacy. However, it would appear that while these regions functioned as single entities they were still all subject to the might of their southern most state, Yam (Welsby 2001:258-259). This would explain why Harkhuf is able to journey back safely through all these regions, under the guard of the not only the Egyptian militia but also Yamite mercenaries. Harkhuf's four expeditions provides tangible evidence that trade networks outside Egypt were being established or were already in existence by, at least, the Old Kingdom. If a beneficial relationship with the ruler of Yam and the rest of its confederacy were maintained there is no reason to disregard that idea that this state may have been acting as an intermediary in overland trade between Egypt and other African states that were located to its south.

A second reference to Punt has been found that also dates from the reign of Pepi II. Pepi-nakht, a nobleman from Elephantine, claimed the title of 'Overseer of Foreigners' (amongst others). (Kadish 2001:33) He was responsible for controlling and subduing the tribes in Nubia, fore mentioned by Harkhuf, and those on the Red Sea coast, both of which seem to have been affecting Egypt's trade expeditions to the south and east. On one such occasion he mentions an expedition to the Red Sea coast to retrieve the body of a fellow official that had been murdered by nomadic desert dwellers of the region:

Now the majesty of my lord sent me to the country of the Asiatics to bring for him the sole companion, commander of sailors, the caravan-conductor, Enenkhet, who was building a ship there for Punt, when the Asiatics belonging to the Sand-dwellers<sup>5</sup> slew him, together with a troop of the army which was with him.

(Breasted 1962a:163)

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<sup>4</sup> The word Tjemeh or Tjehen are two terms that once designated two separate regions to the west of Egypt (through which Harkhuf's trade route would have existed) but soon began to be used interchangeably. Tjehen denoted a region west of the delta that extended as far as Faiyum and Tjemeh a region that extended south into Nubia perhaps as far as the Third Cataract. Their generic designation came to be part of Libya (Leahy 2001:290-291).

<sup>5</sup> Asiatics and the 'Sand-dwellers' are synonymous with the tribes that inhabited Egypt's eastern desert.

These two Old Kingdom sources reveal that there were two trade routes that connected Egypt with the countries to its south in existence during this period. The first, as mentioned by Harkhuf, concerns a route that was travelled partly through the western desert and partly along the Nile. Although this is never clearly stated it is safe to presume that on his return journey the official would have been forced to travel in close proximity to the Nile, because in addition to the laden donkey caravan there were cattle and goats that would have needed to be watered as well (Wicker 1998:155):

Now when the ruler of Irtjet, Setju and Wawat saw how strong and numerous the troop from Yam was which came down with me to the residence together with the army that had been sent with me, this ruler escorted me, gave me cattle and goats, and led me on the mountain paths of Irtjet – because of the excellence of the vigilance I had employed beyond that of any companion and chief of scouts who had been sent to Yam before.

(Lichtheim 1973:26)

In spite of the fact that Harkhuf never actually travels to Punt, he does provide some important information about the region. It is not situated in the immediate vicinity of Egypt but somewhere far to the south. He brings back goods via donkey caravan from this and perhaps other foreign lands to the south and east<sup>6</sup> of Egypt (Phillips 1997:426):

I came down with three hundred donkeys laden with incense, ebony, *Hknw*-oil, *sAt*, panther skins, elephant-tusks, throw sticks and all sorts of good products.

(Lichtheim 1973:26)

Harkhuf's inscription provides the first indication that Egyptians did not always travel to the land of Punt. It would be short sighted to assume that Egyptian trade with the rest of Africa was one sided, later in Egyptian history there are records of Punt envoys travelling to Egypt. There is even the further possibility that such an envoy served as an intermediary between Egypt and the rest of the African countries, south of its border. Pepi-nakht's inscription exposes the possibility that trade extended far to the south, with boat materials transported from the Nile to the Red Sea coast in order to construct vessels for expeditions to regions such as Punt (Kitchen 1993:589).

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<sup>6</sup> The 'horizon-dwellers' is a term that is used somewhat loosely to designate the people that were to be found east and southeast of Egypt (Lichtheim 1973:27).

## 3.2 MIDDLE KINGDOM SOURCES

There are only four recorded expeditions to Punt during the entire Middle Kingdom (2055-1650 BC), however, they are more comprehensive and detailed than previous sources. The first occurs during the Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2055-1985 BC) in Year 8 of Mentuhotep III's (c. 2055-2004 BC) reign. The high official Henu was dispatched with a brigade of three thousand militia to oversee the building and launch of a boat on the Red Sea shore. It is also a mission to subdue the Bedouin of the Eastern desert, which one can presume in light of Pepi-nakht's inscription, caused the Egyptians some bother from time to time:

My lord, life, prosperity, health! sent me to dispatch a ship to Punt to bring for him fresh myrrh from the sheiks over the Red Land...

Then I went forth from Koptos on the road, which his majesty commanded me. There was with me an army of the South ...

The army cleared the way before, overthrowing those hostile toward the king, the hunters and the children of the highlands were posted as the protection of my limbs ...

I went forth with an army of 3,000 men. I made the road a river, and the Red Land (desert) a stretch of field, for I gave a leathern bottle, a carrying pole, 2 jars of water and 20 loaves to each one among them every day ...

Now, I made 12 wells in the bush and two wells in Idehet [and] I made another in Iheteb. Then I reached the (Red) Sea; then I made this ship, and I dispatched it with everything, when I had made for it a great oblation of cattle, bulls and ibexes. Now, after my return from the Red Sea, I executed the command of his majesty, and I brought for him all the gifts, which I had found in the regions of God's-Land. I returned through the valley of Hammamat, I brought for him august blocks for statues belonging to the temple.

(Breasted 1962a:209-210)

Henu's inscriptions provide evidence that expeditions to Punt via the Red Sea did indeed occur. His association of Punt with 'God's Land' is clear but he does not provide any further hints as to its location. To increase the possibility of finding its location it is necessary to consider sources from the Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1985-1773 BC) that concern Red Sea coastal activity. Several stelae and inscribed stone anchors have been found close to the Mersa Gawasis inlet. They date from the reign of Sesostri I (c. 1956-1911 BC). A shrine (3.3) consisting of three discarded stone anchors and belonging to the official Ankhu states that:

24, 1<sup>st</sup> Month of Winter, Day...Superintendent of ship's captains...to reach...with troops of recruits...

The Superintendent of ships' captains, Superintendent of recruits,...sent to the mining region [of] Punt... I returned... for the Majesty of King Sesostris I...ship[s]...their land, the products of God's Land with them...all that [the god] Tatonen had created, from everything of this land...these products, which they had assembled for revenue...

(Kitchen 1993:590)

Close to this monument, farther inland, a stela of the vizier Intefoqer has also been found (Sayed 1978:70). It also dates from the reign of Sesostris I and states that:

His majesty commanded the Vizier Intefoqer to construct this fleet at the Koptos dockyards, [for] travelling and reaching the mining-region of Punt, both to go safely and return safely, all their construction being [so well] provided to be good and sound beyond anything done in this land formerly. He did [this] most excellently, according as he had been commanded by the Majesty of the Palace. Now, the Herald, Montuhotep's son Ameni, was on shore of the sea, constructing these vessels, along with the assembly from Thinis of southern Upper Egypt who were with him; and able-bodied men who were at the sea-shore as expeditionaries, along with the herald –

Retainers of the Lord [= King]	50 men
Stewards of the Assembly	1 man
Personnel of the crew of the Lord	500 men
Scribes of the great Assembly	5 men
Citizen-militia	3200 men

(Kitchen 1993:590)

Together these two monuments provide an account of an expedition to Punt during Year 24 of Sesostris I's reign. It can be concluded that the Vizier, like Henu, was merely responsible for overseeing the construction of the vessels in the Koptos dockyards, while the Herald Ameni and the assembly from the Thinite nome were responsible for their reconstruction at the Red Sea coast (Bradbury 1988:138). This process of constructing, dismantling, transporting along the eastern desert route (3.4) and reconstructing on the Red Sea shore would further explain the construction of anchors in the vicinity of the harbour and their use as shrines. It would have been senseless to further complicate the desert journey by having to transport heavy stone anchors that weigh approximately 250 kg (Sayed 1978:71) across this difficult terrain. The two monuments also provide evidence of a possible sailing season as the Vizier's stela appears to have been set up before the expedition left, while Ankh's commemorates the expeditions return. The anchors

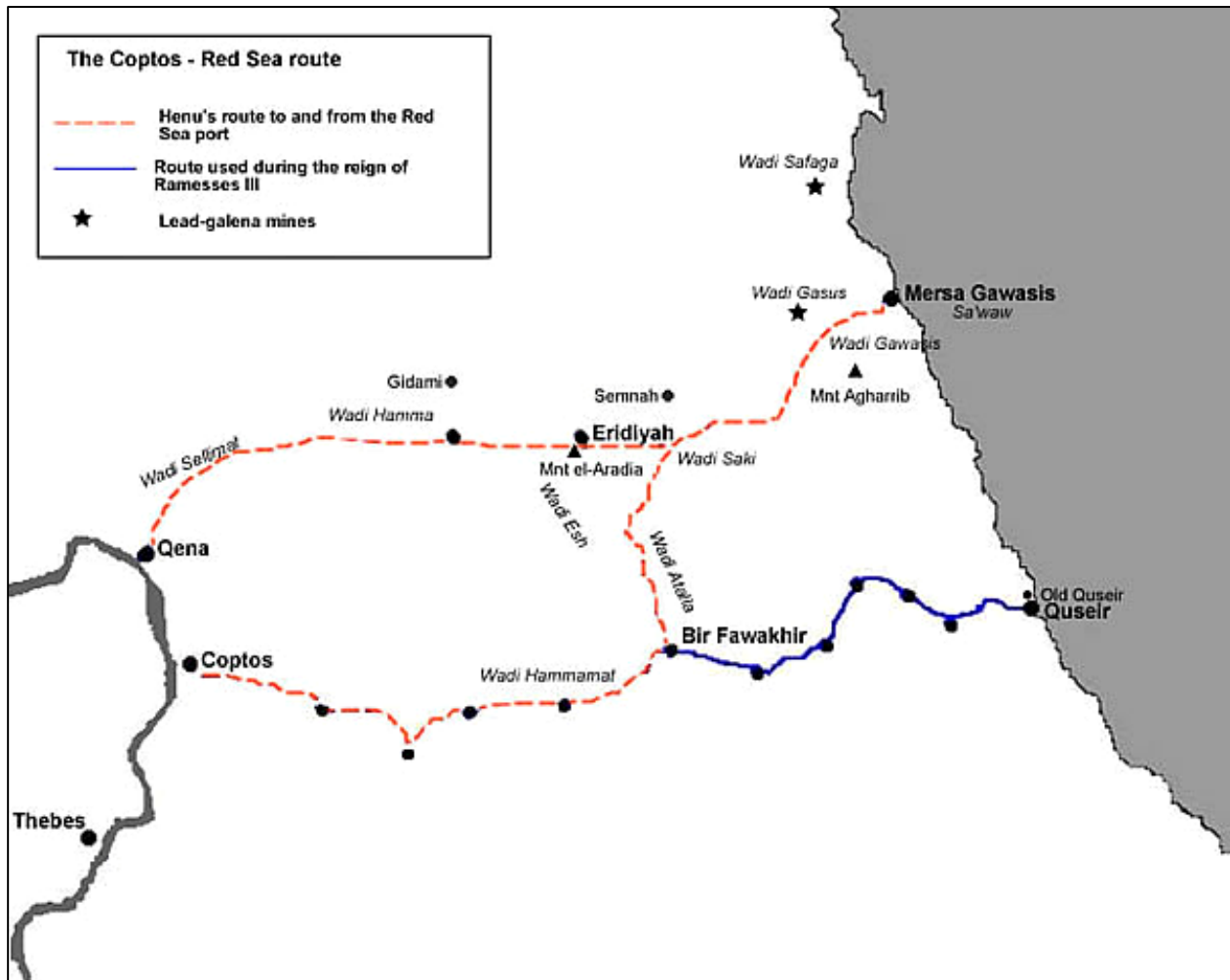


Figure 3.4: Map of the Eastern desert Koptos-Red Sea route.

(Adapted from Bradbury 1988:132)



comprise his shrine may have been those used on the actual expedition (Bradbury 1988:138). Of further interest is the mention of Punt specifically as a mining-region.

The *Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor* is one of a few complete fictional stories that date from the Middle Kingdom. It relates the adventures of a sailor, shipwrecked during an expedition to a mining region<sup>7</sup>. The use of fiction to support historical fact is a debatable matter and is beyond the scope of this thesis. This tale does, however, include a few detailed elements that when considered on a factual basis is relevant to the contents of this thesis:

I went to the mining country<sup>8</sup> for the sovereign. I went down the sea in a boat 120 cubits long and 40 cubits wide. One hundred and twenty sailors from among the best in Egypt were in it... A stormwind broke out while we were at sea, before we had touched land... Then the boat died<sup>9</sup>. And of those who were in it not a single one survived. Next I set upon an island by the surf of the sea, and I spent three days alone, my heart as my companion. ... Then I heard the sound of a thunderclap, but I thought it was the surf of the sea. ... I discovered it was a serpent coming along. ... his body was plated with gold.

He said to me: Do not fear, little one, do not turn white. God has allowed you to live. He had brought you to this Island of the Ka. ... You shall spend month after month until you complete four months within the island. A boat shall come back from home with sailors in it who you know. You shall go home with them, and you shall die in your village. ...

I said to him: I shall relate your prowess to the sovereign, and I shall inform him of your greatness. I shall have brought to you laudanum, *henku*-oil, *iudeneb*, cassia and incense for the temples with which to satisfy every god. ... Then he laughed and he said to me: Myrrh is not abundant with you... I am the Prince of Punt; myrrh belongs to me... *henku*-oil is the main product of this island!... Then that boat came, as he had foretold before... And he gave me a cargo consisting of myrrh, *henku*-oil, *iudeneb*, cassia, *tishepses*, *shasekh*, black eye-paint, giraffe tails, large cakes of incense, elephant tusks, hounds, apes, baboons and every kind of precious thing. I then loaded them onto this boat... I went down to the shore in the vicinity of this ship, and I called out to the troops who were in this ship. I gave praise upon the shore to the lord of this island, and those who were in the ship did likewise. ... We sailed northward to the Residence city of the sovereign, and we arrived at the Residence in two months. (Simpson 1973:51-56)

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<sup>7</sup> The relevant mining regions associated with this tale are thought to be situated on the coast of the Red Sea, either in the Sinai Peninsula or the eastern desert (Simpson 1973:51).

<sup>8</sup> The mining country could refer to Sinai or another mining region. The region of Egypt's eastern desert can be ruled out because the sea voyage would not have been necessary. It is therefore possible that the sailor was travelling to another mining region further down the Red Sea coast (Simpson 1973:51).

<sup>9</sup> The vessel was shipwrecked.

The tale provides further evidence that voyages to Punt were not purely commercial in nature. It would appear that over and above the trade in incense and African luxury commodities Punt was also an associated mining region. This implies that two types of expeditions to the region could have existed, each with a different purpose. Trade in the perishable commodities would have been largely influenced by growing and harvesting seasons whereas mining would not have been. The detailed information conveyed by the serpent concerning the sailing movements of Egyptian vessels, although being a characteristic of Egyptian literature, also provides further information concerning voyage duration. These two factors will be discussed in more detail in the latter part of this thesis.

The stela of Khentkhetwer (3.5), although found in a Roman station in the Wadi Gasus<sup>10</sup>, is believed to have come from some location close to the Red Sea port (Sayed 1978:69). It is dated from Year 28 of Amenemhat II's (c. 1911-1877 BC) reign and provides conclusive evidence that nautical expeditions to and from Punt did occur from a Red Sea harbour, whether it was Mersa Gasus or Mersa Gawasis (Sa'waw):

Giving divine praise and laudation to Horus, to Min of Koptos, by the hereditary prince, count, wearer of the royal seal, the master of the judgment-hall Khentkhetwer after his arrival in safety from Punt; his army being with him, prosperous and healthy; and his ships having landed at Sa'waw. Year 28.

(Breasted 1962a:275)

A second stela found in the Wadi Gasus, dedicated to the god Sopdu and belonging to Khnumhotep (3.6), dates from Year 1 of Sesostris II's reign (c. 1877-1870 BC). It provides evidence of an Egyptian erecting a monument in God's Land, but there is no mention of Punt. The name Khnumhotep is more often than not associated with one of the families at Beni Hasan. This stela as well as inscriptions in one of the tombs at Beni Hasan both mention a contemporary, Neferhotep<sup>11</sup>. This association is therefore justifiable, however, it must not be assumed that this Khnumhotep and Khnumhotep II of tomb 3 at Beni Hasan are one and the same. The titles given

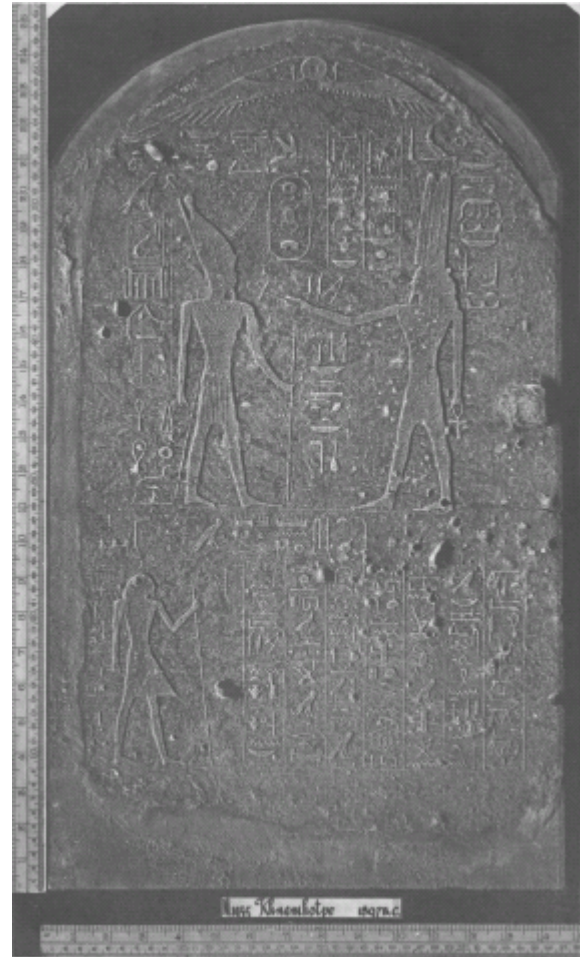
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<sup>10</sup> To clarify any confusion, the Wadi Gasus and Wadi Gawasis refer to two different locations, with two different harbours, Mersa Gasus and Mersa Gawasis, each within 2km of one another. In Arabic 'wadi' means valley and 'mersa,' 'small harbour.' The present names of the wadis and the harbours are of little significance in this thesis because they apply to later Islamic times. 'Gasus' is the general term for 'spy' but in this case it is used to describe a boat that was used to detect the movements of enemy ships, at night. 'Gawasis' is merely the plural form of 'gasus' (Sayed 1978:70).

<sup>11</sup> Neferhotep bears the title of 'Scribe of the Royal Documents' and must therefore be considered a court official and not a member of Khnumhotep II's household, as is often thought (Bradbury 1988:142).



**Figure 3.5**



**Figure 3.6**

**Figure 3.5:** Stela of Khentkhetwer dates from Year 28 of Amenemhat II's reign and provides conclusive evidence that nautical expeditions to and from Punt did occur during the Middle Kingdom for a port on the Red Sea coast.

(Nibbi 1976:Pl. 9)

**Figure 3.6:** Stela of Khnumhotep dedicated to the god Sopdu, dates from Year 1 of Sesostris II's reign.

(Nibbi 1976:Pl. 10)

to the owner of the Wadi Gawasis stela and its dating do not correspond with those borne by the latter at the time. In Year 6 of Sesostris II's reign Khnumhotep II bears the titles of 'the hereditary prince, count, king's-confidant, whom his god loves, governor of the eastern highlands...' (Breasted 1962a:282), these do not correspond with those of the Khnumhotep referred to in the Wadi Gasus stela:

Year I, his monument in God's-Land was executed. The treasurer of the god, real king's-confidant, his beloved, his favorite, the darling of his lord, knowing the law, discreet in executing it; zealous for him who favors him; not trespassing against the injunction of the palace, the command of the court; favorite of the crown, being in the palace, praiser of Horus, Lord of the Two Lands; presenting the court to the king, truly accurate like Thoth, master of the double cabinet, Khnumhotep.

(Breasted 1962a:279)

They are therefore thought to be those of his son, Khnumhotep III (Bradbury 1988:142).

This stela and an event recorded in the tomb of Khnumhotep II are of significance. The stela reports that in Year 1 of the reign of Sesostris II, Khnumhotep III, accompanied by Neferhotep and another official Nebshabit (who bears the title of 'Hall Keeper'), journeyed to the Wadi Gasus. The stela does not provide a clear reason for this journey but its location in the vicinity of a lead-galena mine<sup>12</sup> in the wadi, that was operational in ancient times, is of significance. (Bradbury 1988:142) In Year 6 of Sesostris II's reign Khnumhotep II recorded the arrival of a group of Aamu, a Bedouin tribe of Asiatic origin, to Beni Hasan (5.12). They bring him 'black eye-paint,' (Bradbury 1988:142) which was made from crushed galena. These Aamu may have arrived in Egypt to prospect the eastern galena mines. The relocation of Asiatic workers and captives was a practice in Egypt from as early as the Old Kingdom. It is therefore not impossible to suppose that the Aamu's destination may have been the galena mines in the Wadi Gasus and Wadi Safaga. These mines may have been the closest to Beni Hasan. Khnumhotep III's journey to the Wadi Gasus makes no mention of Punt, but there is a reference to God's Land. If he had undertaken an expedition to Punt then surely he would have recorded it on the Wadi Gasus stela and surely his father would have seen fit to record it amongst the family achievements in tomb 3? Therefore the journey to the Red Sea coast was not motivated by an expedition to Punt but rather by a mining expedition for galena (Bradbury 1988:142). The reference to 'God's Land' and the lack of a direct Punt association brings into question whether these two places were considered

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<sup>12</sup> Another led-galena mine has been found at Safaga (Bradbury 1988:142).

synonymous during the Middle Kingdom. Khnumhotep III's dedication to the god Sopdu<sup>13</sup> provides a possible clue. This god governed the eastern frontier of Egyptian territory, i.e. the Wadi Tumilat, a gateway to foreign countries east of Egypt, including the mining regions of Sinai. This association with these foreign regions caused him to acquire Asiatic associations. The stela provides a very clear connection between God's Land and Sopdu, since he is the only god honoured on the stela. This suggests that God's Land may have been associated with the regions beyond the eastern boundaries of Egypt, such as Sinai and Arabia (Nibbi 1976:55). It also explains the relocation of the Aamu to a region governed by a god, which they were already familiar with (Bradbury 1988:142). It needs to be stated that within the boundaries of the Egyptian state, the god Min is given titles similar to those of Sopdu (Guirand 1959:37). However, there are no inscriptions or dedications to Min in Sinai, but many throughout the western desert and even regions as far as the fourth cataract, while Sopdu is never mentioned in texts from Upper Egypt (Nibbi 1976:56). It is therefore possible that the cult of Min may have only encompassed the eastern regions within Egypt's boundaries. The stela of Khentkhetwer only associates Min with Koptos and not the Wadi Gasus region. Therefore the wadis close to the Red Sea coast may have been viewed as gateways to Sopdu's domain; the foreign eastern frontier.

The last recorded Middle Kingdom expedition dates from the reign of Sesostri III (c. 1870-1831 BC). The hieratic text is dated "Year 5, III prt 18(?)" (Bradbury 1988:144) and includes the names of Sesostri II's mortuary temple at el-Lahun. The mention of the temple rules out the possibility that this text refers to Sesostri II as it would have been highly unlikely that in year five of his reign the construction of the temple would have been completed, only two years after the death of his father Amenemhat II. Fragments of potsherds at the Red Sea harbour have also been found that bear Sesostri III's cartouche. One is inscribed in hieratic, stating its contents is destined for "Punt" having come from "the establishment of the herald of the portal, Khenty" and another with the name of an official that served during the reign of Sesostri III (Bradbury 1988:144). It is therefore highly possible that in year 5 of his reign Sesostri III sent an

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<sup>13</sup> A god associated with Egypt's eastern frontier but he also embodies a cosmic falcon, similar to Horus. He bears the titles 'Lord of the east,' emphasising his dominion and protection of Egypt's eastern most border posts, in particular the mines in Sinai. Another title, 'Lord of the foreign countries,' is also given to this god. It alludes to his role as the provider of certain eastern resources and his function of assisting the pharaoh in controlling the Bedouin populations of these regions (Wilkinson 2003:211 and Nibbi 1976:55).

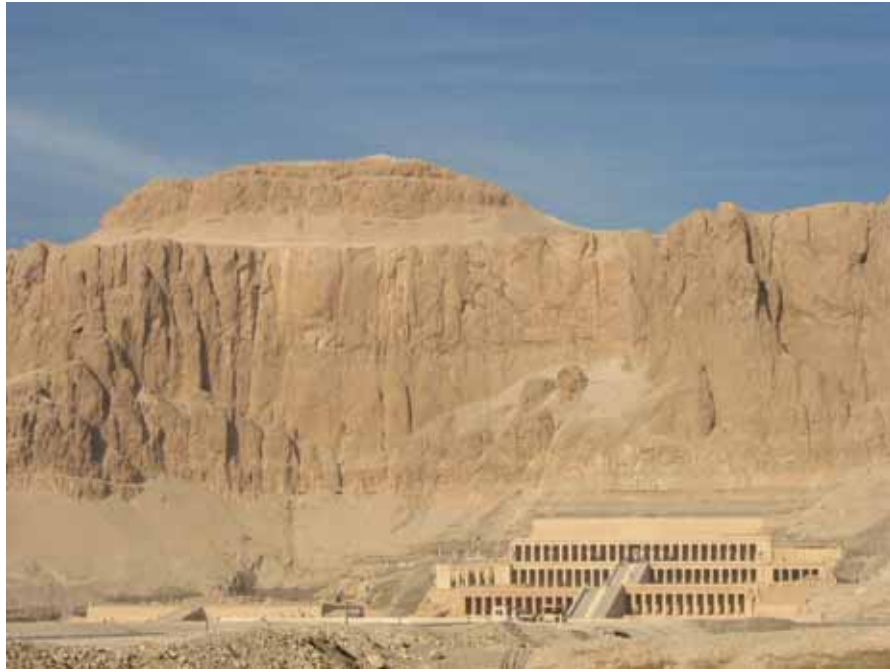
expedition of trading vessels to Punt. This is the last recorded expedition in Egyptian sources that provides irrefutable evidence of the use of Mersa Gawasis until the reign of Ramses III. The reason for so few expeditions to Punt during the Middle Kingdom can only be speculated, however, it is plausible to consider that political and economic situations, in Egypt, Punt and the other African countries from which trade produce was acquired, would have played some role (Bradbury 1988:145). This is particularly evident towards the end of the Middle Kingdom and the unrest that followed during the Second Intermediate Period. The interruption of Egyptian political superiority corresponds with rise in the power of Kerma. The Kushites would have taken full advantage of their weakening neighbour to establish themselves as the trade intermediaries between the Lower and Upper Nile Valley and the surrounding African states (Bourriau 2000:201, 207).

### **3.3 NEW KINGDOM SOURCES**

New Kingdom sources that mention Punt provide the most detailed inscriptions and visual data of all the pharaonic periods. They are also the most numerous. The pharaoh Hatshepsut (c. 1473-1458 BC) immortalised an expedition to Punt on the walls of her mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri. The private tomb-chapels of some of Egypt's high officials depict similar scenes of trade with the Puntites, dating from the reigns of Thutmose III to Amenhotep III. There are brief references to the region from the reign of Akhenaten to Rameses II (c. 1279-1213 BC) and finally during the reign of Rameses III, an expedition to Punt is detailed in the Great Papyrus Harris.

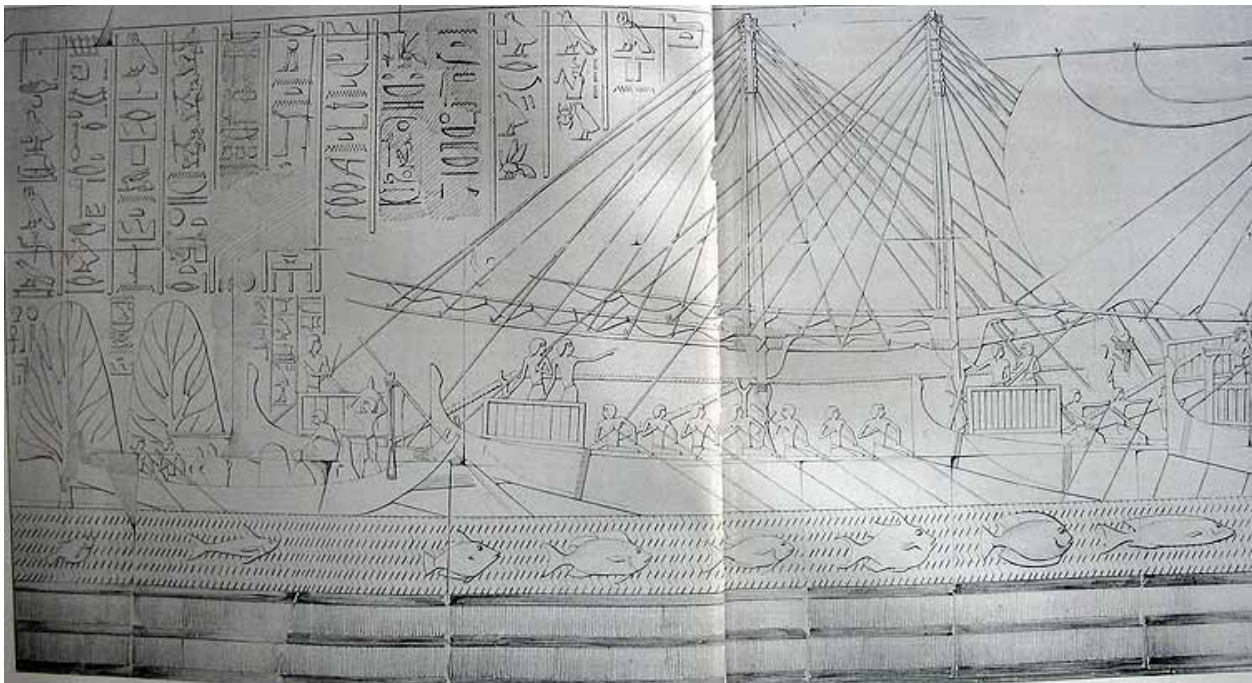
#### **3.3.1 HATSHEPSUT'S MORTUARY TEMPLE AT DEIR EL-BAHRI**

The valley of Deir el-Bahri was known by the Egyptians as *Djeseret* or 'Holy place.' It was considered 'the threshold between this life and the next' and it was the sight for the worship of Hathor, as the patron goddess of western Thebes (Schulz & Sourouzian 2004:184). Hatshepsut chose to build her mortuary temple here, mirroring the first temple built in the valley, by the unifier of the Middle Kingdom, Mentuhotep II, yet on a much grander scale. It was called *Djeser-djeseru*, 'the Holiest of Holies' and has been dubbed by some in modern society as 'the greatest monument to a women in human history' (3.7) (Schulz & Sourouzian 2004:184). The



**Figure 3.7:** Hatshepsut's mortuary temple (right) stands along side the temple of Mentuhotep II (left) in the valley of Deir el-Bahri.

(Glenister 2006)



**Figure 3.8:** The arrival/departure of Egyptian vessels on the western wall in the Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri.

(Naville 1898:Pl.72)

limestone terraces and colonnades parallel the cliff face, on to which the temple backs and its walls are decorated with scenes depicting important events in the life of this pharaoh; her divine birth that legitimised her right to the throne, the transport and dedication of two obelisks at the temple of Amun at Karnak and her expedition to Punt (Watterson 1997:160-162).

The pharaoh made an official announcement of the success of the expedition in year nine of her reign:

Year **9**, occurred the sitting in the audience-hall, the king's appearance ... in the midst of the splendours of his palace... Said my majesty : "I will cause you to know that which is commanded me, I have hearkened to my father that which he hath commanding me to establish for him a Punt in his house, to plant the trees of God's-Land beside his temple, in his garden, according as he commanded. It was done in order to endow the offerings which I owed... I have made for him a Punt in his garden, just as he commanded me, for Thebes.

(Breasted 1962b:120-122)

This dates the undertaking of the expedition within her eighth and ninth year of rule (Kitchen 1993:392). The scenes of the expedition to Punt occupy the southern wall of the middle colonnade on the middle terrace. The motivation for the expedition according to the reliefs is a request by the god Amun, but in reality divinely ordaining such an arduous journey was a clever propaganda ploy on behalf of this pharaoh. Hatshepsut is often criticised for her 'lack' of military campaigning<sup>14</sup>, in relation to that of her father and stepson. It just so happens that the majority of the Eighteenth Dynasty pharaoh's only undertook campaigns during the beginning of their reign, most probably to emphasise the legitimacy of their right to rule. Thutmosis happens to be unique in that he was a pharaoh that devoted his entire life to military campaigns. His stepmother on the other hand seemed to apply a different military policy, i.e. the defence of Egypt's borders as opposed to their expansion. This she endeavoured to achieve through maintaining international trade. She commanded expeditions to the Lebanese coast to obtain wood for the building of her vessels as well as expeditions to exploit the copper and turquoise mines in Sinai. These expeditions culminate in her expedition to Punt and all bare witness to a successful rule. It is therefore not surprising that it was included in the inscriptions of her mortuary temple (Tyldesley 1996:143-144).

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<sup>14</sup> There are a few, brief references to the military campaigns of Hatshepsut in Nubia (Spalinger 2005:59). Though, it is likely that these were merely to maintain Egyptian supremacy in the region by quelling any local uprisings.



It would appear that the expedition sought to eliminate intermediary trade. Amun, in addressing the pharaoh, implies that no Egyptian has actually set foot in the region of Punt:

“I have given to thee all Punt as far as the lands of the gods of God's-Land... No one trod the Myrrh-terraces, which the people knew not; it was heard of from mouth to mouth by hearsay of the ancestors. The marvels brought thence under thy fathers, the Kings of Lower Egypt, were brought from one to another, and since the time of the ancestors of the Kings of Upper Egypt, who were of old, as a return for many payment; none reaching them except thy carriers.”

(Breasted 1962b:117)

The exact meaning of Amun's remark is shrouded in speculation. It may have been 'enhanced' by propaganda because, although prior accounts of expeditions to Punt are less detailed than this one, there is nothing that verifies nor disproves that the Egyptians set foot in the region. On the other hand it may also imply that trade with the Puntites was conducted only on the shore line of the Red Sea, through intermediaries and not directly within the region itself. If this was the case then Hatshepsut's expedition would have been important (Saleh 1973:370-372). Amun's next statement of: “I have led them on water and on land,” suggests that Hatshepsut's envoy did indeed have to do some overland or inland travelling, whether it was on their departure, arrival or return. The journey from the shores of Egypt is the only part of the expedition that is not detailed. It is generally accepted that the expedition would have followed the Old and Middle Kingdom route that led from Koptos into the eastern desert, via the Wadi Hammamat to the ports of Sa'waw or Qesir. It is clear that a major part of the expedition was conducted on the sea and not the Nile. The reliefs depicting Hatshepsut's vessels all sail on water that is abundant with marine life (3.8-3.10) (Kitchen 1993:593).

The scene depicting the arrival of the Egyptian envoy in Punt occupies a portion of the western wall and the entire southern wall (3.8). The western wall depicts Hatshepsut's fleet of five ships. Naville (1898) and Breasted (1962b) seem to provide alternate meanings to this portion of the relief. Breasted refers to it as the departure of the fleet from Egyptian shores as the smaller craft moored to a tree bears the following text above it:

An offering for the life, prosperity, and health of her majesty, to Hathor, mistress of Punt that she may bring wind.

(Breasted 1962b:104)

It would appear that this offering was customary in the hopes of ensuring a successful expedition. Henu's inscriptions from the Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2055-1985 BC) also record such practices:

"Then I reached the Red Sea; then I made this ship, and I dispatched it with everything, when I had made for it a great oblation of cattle, bulls and ibexes."

(Breasted 1962a:210)

Naville states that the two vessels, already moored, are sending a smaller craft loaded with trade commodities towards the shore. The inscription above these vessels reads:

The navigation on the sea, the starting on the good journey to the Divine Land, the landing happily in the Land of Punt by the soldiers of the king, according to the prescription of the lord of gods, Amun, lord of the thrones of the two lands, in order to bring the precious products of the whole land because of his great love towards Hatshepsut, never did such a thing happen to the kings who were in this land eternally.

(Naville 1898:14)

In all probability either of these scholars could be correct. Egyptian scribes often compact scenes so that they portrayed simultaneous narration, i.e. where multiple instances from the same 'narrative' occur in a single scene (Shapiro 1994:8). This particular scene could therefore represent both the departure from Egypt shores and the arrival on the shores of Punt.

The accompanying scene on the south wall of Punt is divided into six registers and that are 'read' from bottom to top (3.9a&b). The first register depicts the arrival of the Egyptian envoy before the chief of Punt and the presentation of gifts and the commodities of trade:

The landing of the royal messenger in the Divine Land, with the soldiers who accompany him, in presence of the chiefs of Punt, to bring all good things from the sovereign (l.p.h.) to Hathor, the lady of Punt, in order that she may grant (l.p.h) to her majesty.

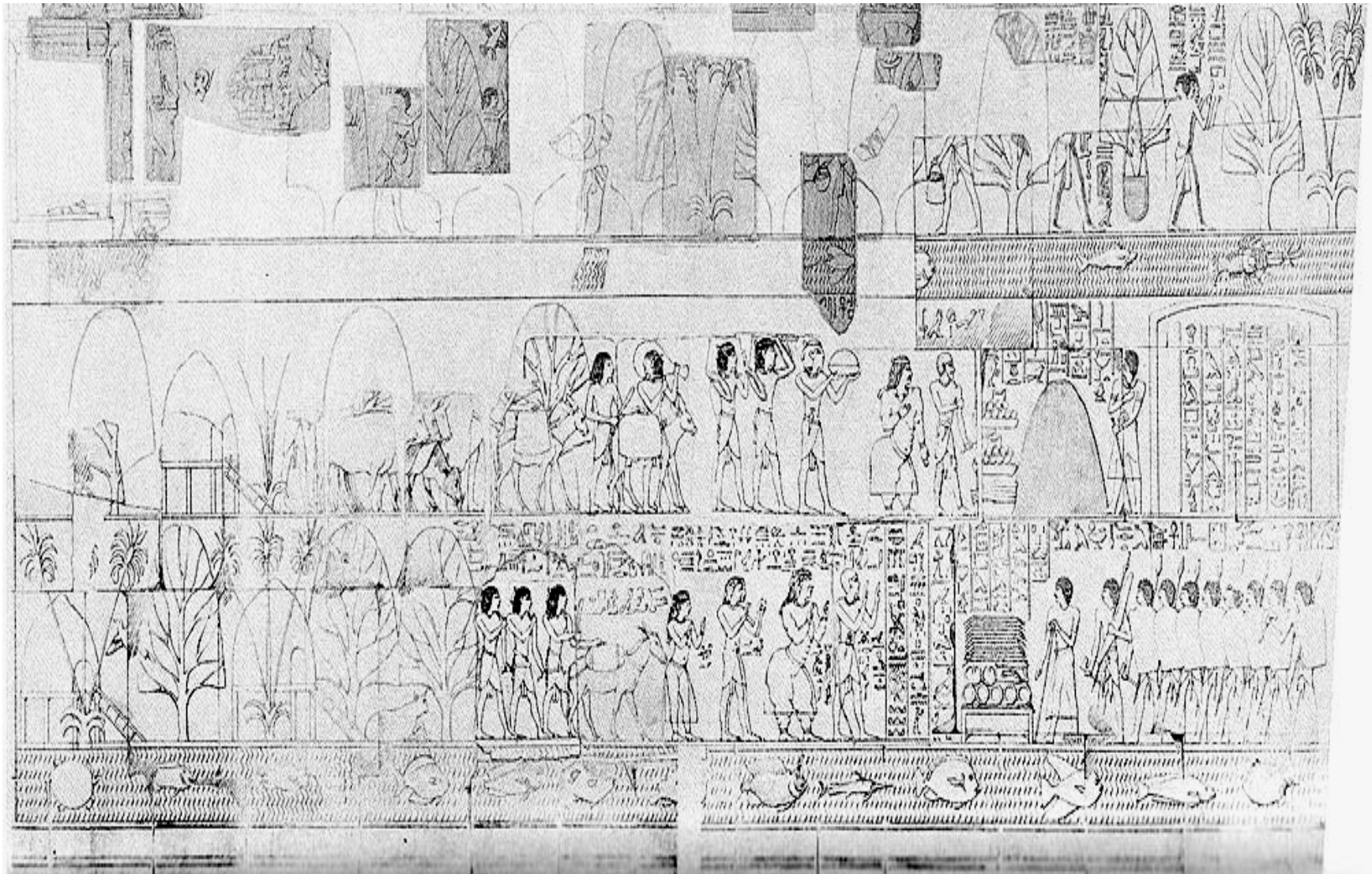
(Naville 1898:14)

Naville (1898) suggests that because this first scene takes place above a small register of marine life, the Egyptian envoy could have been met on the shore of the Red Sea before journeying inland to the chief's village. The Chief, Perehu, his wife, Eti and their sons and daughter are shown in a gesture of greeting. They enquire:

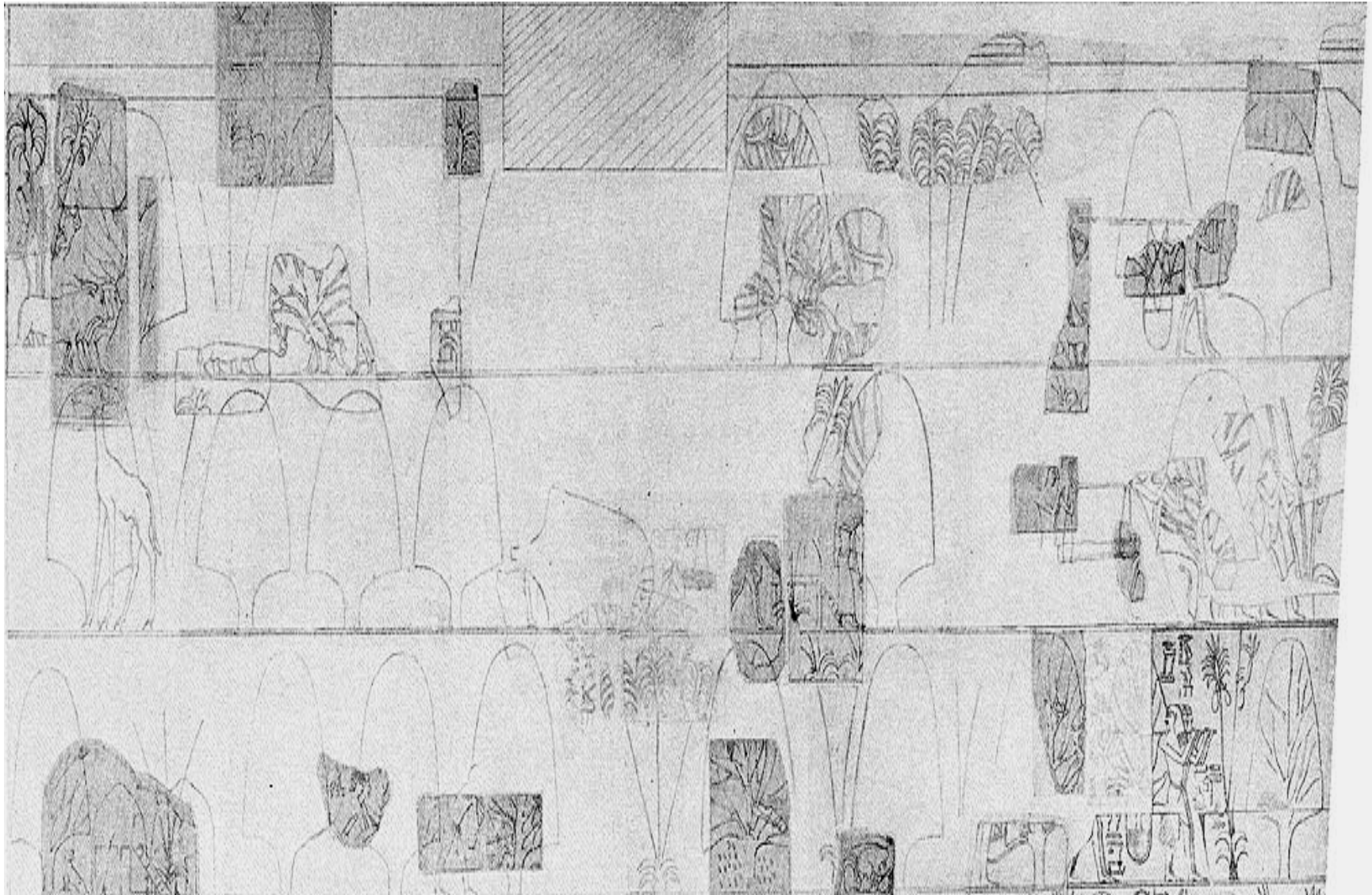
"You have arrived here in what way, to this land which the Egyptians did not know? Have you come through the ways of the sky, or have you travelled on water to the green land, the divine land to which Ra had transported you?"

(Naville 1898:15)

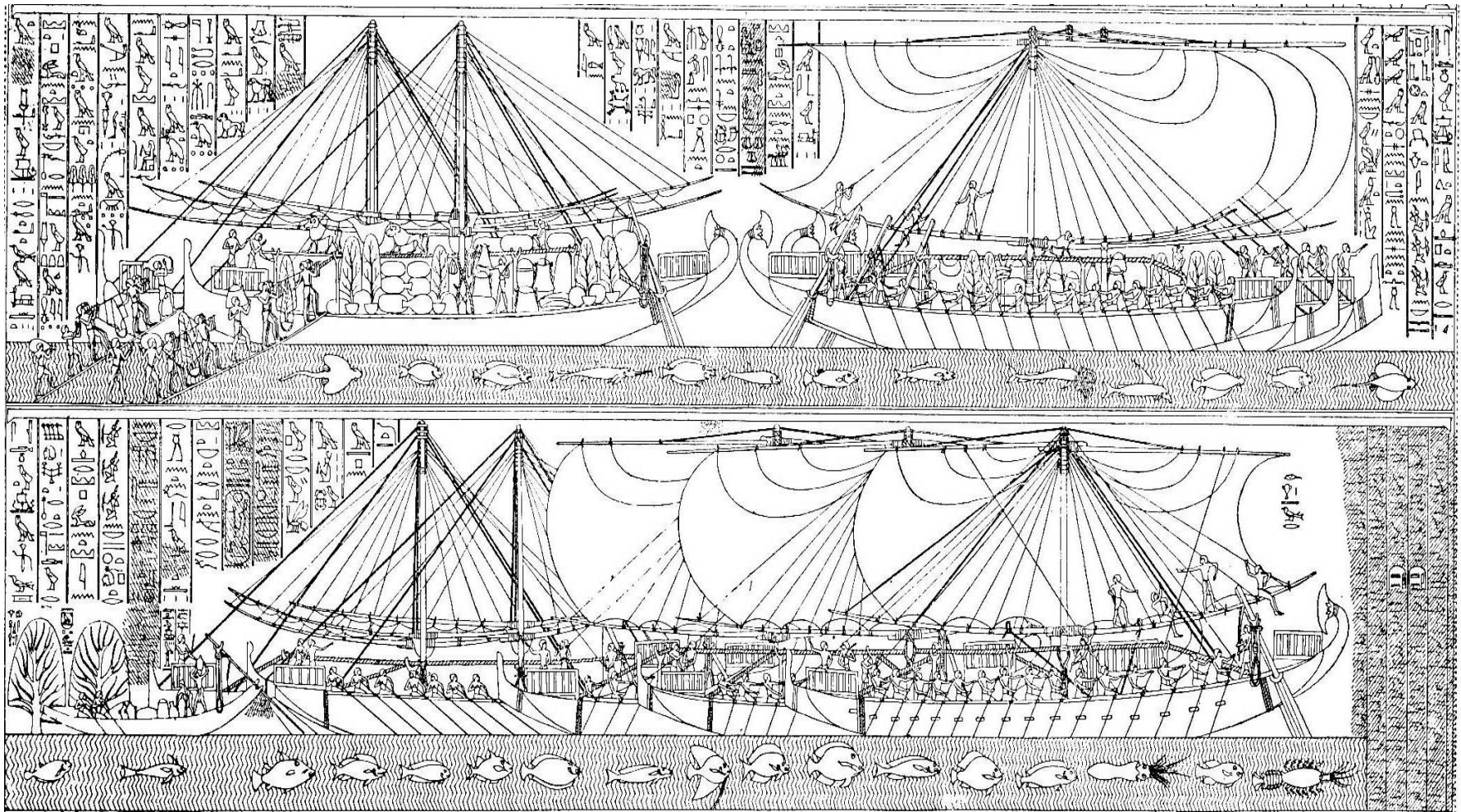
Although the chief's speech may purely have been an invention by a scribe it may imply that the Puntites had not seen an Egyptian expedition for a long time (Kitchen 1993:594).



**Figure 3.9a:** Lower registers depicting the arrival of the Egyptians on Puntite shores and the collection of commodities on the southern wall in the Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri. (Herzog 1969:Tafel 2)



**Figure 3.9b:** Upper registers depicting the arrival of the Egyptians on Puntite shores and the collection of commodities on the southern wall in the Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri. (Herzog 1969:Tafel 2)



**Figure 3.10:** The loading and departure of the five Egyptian vessels from Punt on the western wall in the Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri.  
(Herzog 1968:Tafel 1)

The second register depicts the head official before his tent, receiving Perehu's commodities for exchange. These include a large heap of myrrh, gold rings and ebony. The text within the official tent describes how an exchange could have taken place, it reads:

The preparing of the tent for the royal messenger and his soldiers, in the harbours of frankincense of Punt, on the shore of the sea, in order to receive the chiefs of this land, and to present them with bread, beer, wine, meat, fruits and all the good things of the land of Egypt, as has been ordered by the sovereign.

(Neville 1898:15)

The next four registers, although badly damaged, depict the gathering of Puntite commodities; the felling of ebony trees, the collection of myrrh and the uprooting and transport of myrrh trees. (Kitchen 1993:594) These upper registers direct the eye to the adjoining west wall again, which depicts the loading and departure of the five Egyptian vessels (3.10). The vessels are loaded with great quantities of commodities:

... All the good woods of the divine land, heaps of gum of anti, and trees of green anti, with ebony, with pure ivory, with pure gold of the land of Amu, with cinnamon wood, *khesit* wood, with balsam, resin, antimony, with cynocephali, monkeys, greyhounds, with skins of panthers of the south, with inhabitants of the country and their children.

(Neville 1898:15)

Their arrival in Egypt is only depicted at Thebes, but it is presumed that a transshipment of some kind would have occurred to between the shores of the Red Sea and banks of the Nile, as was the practice during the Middle Kingdom. The rest of the western wall is occupied with the receiving of the Puntite commodities by the pharaoh, her presentation of them to Amun and a royal announcement decreeing the success of the expedition to the Egyptian court (Kitchen 1993:597).

Above the vessel scenes is the reception of Puntite commodities by the pharaoh. The two registers of Egyptians and Puntites are further divided into four half registers, depicting various chieftains prostrating themselves before the cartouche of Hatshepsut (3.11). They are identified as the chiefs of Punt (bottom registers) and above them the chiefs of Irem and Nmy<sup>15</sup>. Behind the chieftains, Egyptians and Puntites alike parade the commodities from the expedition (Breasted 1962b:110 and Neville 1898:16). These are listed in great detail in Hatshepsut's offering to Amun:

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<sup>15</sup> The exact location of neither of these countries is known, however, Irem is thought to have been part of the Nubian confederacy. (Breasted 1962b: 110)

The King himself, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Hatshepsut; presentation of the marvels of Punt, the treasures of God's Land, together with the gifts of the countries of the South, with the impost of the wretched Kush, the baskets of the Negro-land...

Thirty-one fresh myrrh trees, brought as marvels of Punt for the majesty of this god, Amun, lord of Thebes...

Electrum; eye-cosmetic; throw-sticks of the Puntites; ebony; ivory, shells...

A southern panther alive, captured for her majesty in the countries...

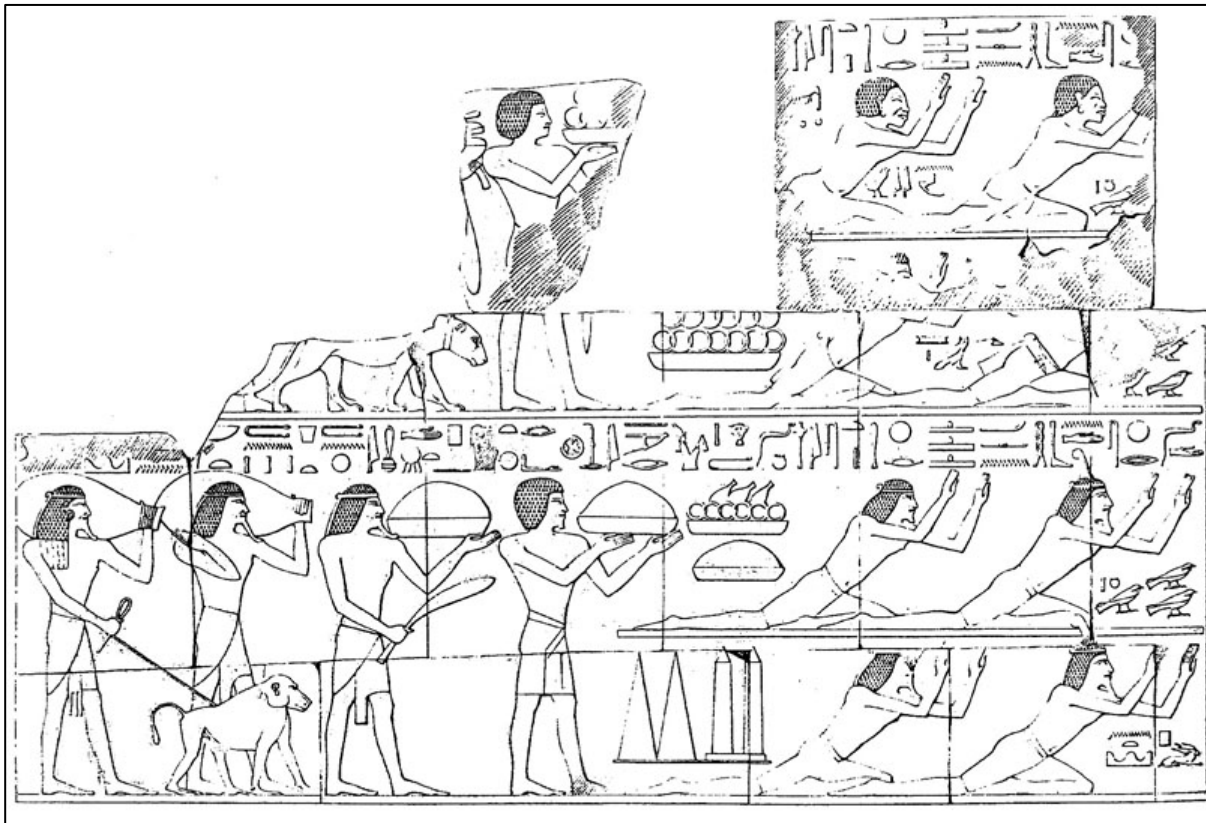
Electrum; many panther-skins; 3,300 small cattle.

(Breasted 1962b:111-112)

These commodities are not all entirely Puntite in origin. This further provides evidence that Punt may have acted as an intermediary in the trade of southern commodities. The inclusion of Nubian commodities, apart from enhancing the pharaoh's glory, could further suggest that trade existed between these two regions. Egyptian scribes seem to group people, commodities and regions according to their general geographical location, irrespective of their existence as individual states or chiefdoms. In this way commodities are often classified as tributes when in fact they were obtained through foreign trade. The Egyptians traded with Punt via the Red Sea but it may also have been possible that the Nubians traded with them overland. This would warrant the possibility of an overland trade route with Punt, through Nubia's confederate states. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in the latter part of this thesis.

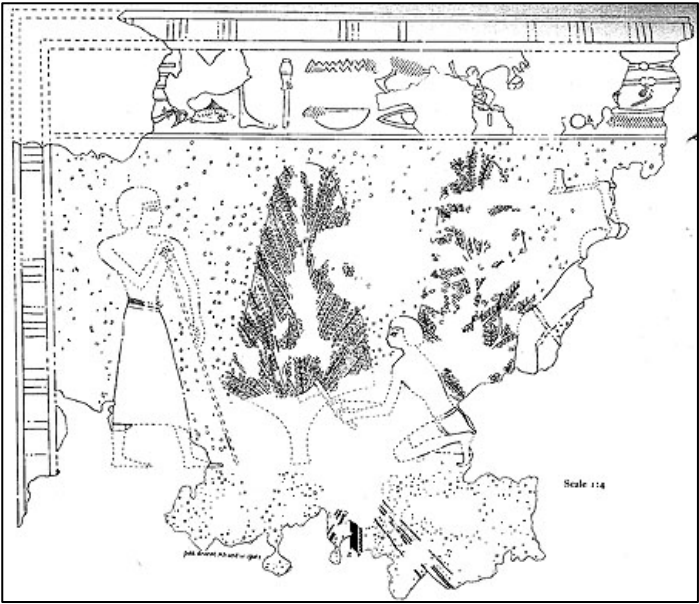
### **3.3.2 TOMB 67**

This tomb belonged to the First Prophet of Amun, Hepusonb during the reign of Hatshepsut (2.12). The paintings of the walls are, however, almost completely destroyed. It is believed the destruction was intentional as buried fragments of the paintings can be dated to just after the succession of Thutmose III, who sought to erase the name of his stepmother from Egyptian history (Davies 1961:19). Fortunately a fragment of a Punt scene remains, depicting the felling of incense trees. The images are similar to those of the tree felling in the Deir el-Bahri reliefs. The activities are supervised by an official, leaning on a long staff (a customary accessory that is carried by most Egyptian officials), it is assumed that this is the tomb owner. His rank would certainly have meant that he would be responsible for maintaining the supply of incense, used in temple rituals, for the temple of Amun (Davies 1961:20). This would explain the depiction of this scene on Hepusonb's tomb wall. Of further interest is the background of this painting. It is



**Figure 3.11:** Egyptians, Puntites and other southern chiefs bringing commodities before the pharaoh Hatshepsut on the western wall in the Hatshepsut’s mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri. The bottom two registers depict the chiefs of Punt and the upper two, the chiefs of Irem and Nmy.

(Phillips 1997:432)



**Figure 3.12:** Felling incense trees in Punt in the tomb of Hepusonb (TT67). (Davies 1961:Pl.4) decorated by a pink-red landscape; the usual way that Egyptians colour deserts. It therefore signifies that Punt may be located in a coastal or inland desert region (Davies 1961:20).



References to Punt during the New Kingdom are abundant, however, the reliefs in this tomb as well as those in the Hatshepsut's mortuary temple are the only images that portray the land of Punt, itself.

### 3.3.3 THUTMOSIS III'S ANNALS AT KARNAK AND THE TOMBS OF THEBAN OFFICIALS

The Karnak annals provide two records of commodities received from Punt. The first occurs in Year 33 (c. 1447 BC) (Kitchen 1993:597) of Thutmose III's reign:

Marvels brought to his majesty in the land of Punt in this year: dried myrrh, 1,685 *heket*<sup>16</sup>; gold, 155 *deben*, 2 *kidet* ; 134 slaves, male and female; 114 oxen, and calves; 305 bulls; total, 419 cattle; beside vessels laden with ivory, ebony, skins of the panther; every good thing of this country.

(Breasted 1962b:204)

The second dates from Year 38 (c. 1442 BC) (Kitchen 1993:597):

Marvels brought to the fame of his majesty from Punt: dried myrrh, 240 *heket*.

(Breasted 1962b: 210)

The concise nature of these records makes it difficult to determine whether these commodities were obtained through expeditions like Hatshepsut's or not. Had a similar expedition taken place, it would be expected that it receive more than a modest entry in the royal annals. There is further evidence to suggest that expeditions to Punt were not undertaken because the Puntites travelled to Egypt to conduct trade. This is obtained from Theban tomb paintings dating from the reigns of Thutmose III (c. 1479-1425 BC) to Amenhotep III (1427-1400 BC) (Kitchen 1993:597).

The oldest of these is the tomb of Puyemre (TT 39), the Second Prophet of Amun during the reign of Thutmose III (3.13). It depicts a tribute scene of Thutmose III viewing the weighing, recording and reception of commodities:

Reception of the tribute of the products of the marshes of Asia, of Watet-Hora ('the way of Horus') and the tribute of the southern and northern oases; presentation for the king, to the temple by the hereditary prince, count, wearer of the royal seal, sole companion Puyemre, triumphant...

the tribute of the ends of Asia...

Recording the tribute of Watet-Hor. The chief of the vineyards of this god, Amon...

Recording the tribute of the oasis-region. The chiefs of the southern and northern oases...

Inspection of the weighing of great heaps of myrrh and receiving the marvels of Punt... ivory, ebony, electrum of Amu, all sweet woods... living captives, which his majesty brought from his victories...

Thutmose III.

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<sup>16</sup> The measurement of *heket* is the equivalent of about 4.54 litres (Kitchen 1993:608).

The scene is composed of the large figure of Thutmose III on the left and three smaller registers. The upper register depicts scribes measuring and recording heaps of myrrh. The middle register depicts Asiatic and Puntite commodities; incense trees, ebony, tusks of ivory, two model obelisks made of myrrh or incense, and gold, while the lowest depicts the reception of either a tribute or trade envoy (Kitchen 1993:597).

A similar tribute scene exists in the tomb of Rekmire, who bore the title of vizier during the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II (c. 1427-1400 BC). The walls of the tomb are decorated with produce and commodities that are being collected by the vizier as 'tax' and tributes from the provinces of Egypt and its surrounding territories. Such tribute scenes are often propagandistic in nature and it is therefore possible that items of foreign tribute were commodities obtained via trade. The paintings do provide an important study of the anthropology of these foreign nations as well as the commodities they traded. The southern part of the west wall depicts six registers of these foreigners. The upper most register is concerned with the Puntites and their commodities, which includes myrrh and myrrh trees, obelisks of incense, tusks of ivory, gold, gemstones, a cheetah, leopard skins, a Hamadryas baboon and another small monkey, an ibex, ostrich eggs and feathers (3.14) (Hodel-Hoernes 2000:145). The Puntites are depicted as dark-skinned with either a shaven head or a hairstyle similar to that of the Egyptians. They are dressed in kilts decorated by coloured hems and waists. In the registers below are the Princes of Keftiu, the inhabitants of Nubia and the Sudan, Syria and the lowest depicts slaves and captives (Hodel-Hoernes 2000:147-148). The accuracy of these depictions is often brought into question, i.e. the portrayal of the Puntites does not correspond with those depicted in the Deir el-Bahri reliefs. It is possible that the above tribute scenes were generalised

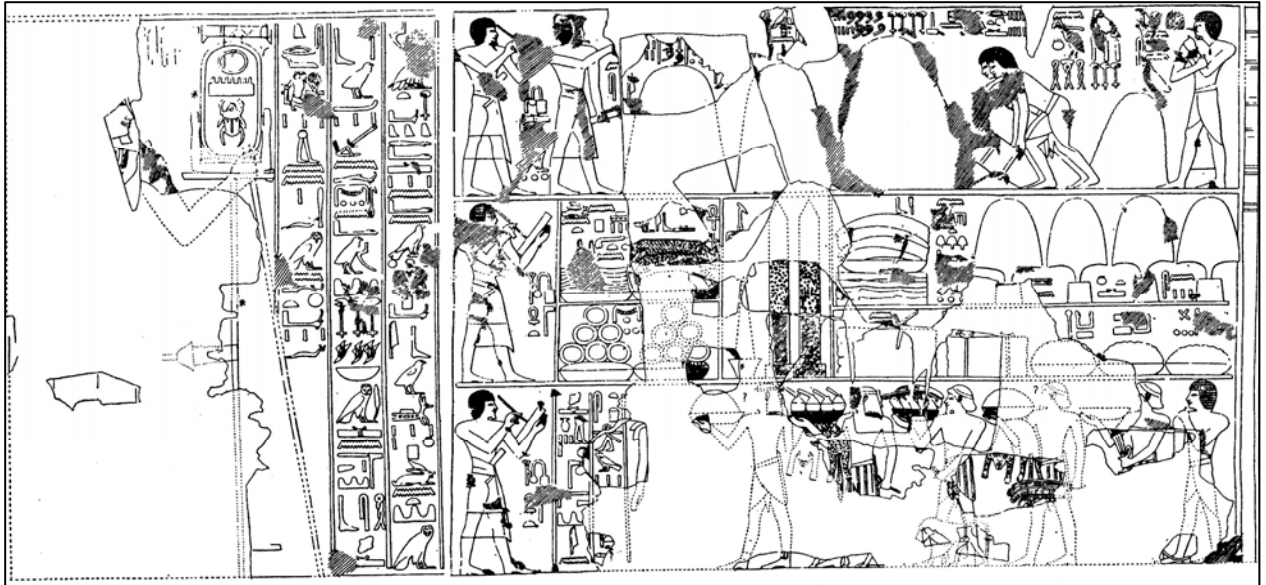


Figure 3.13: Tribute and trade in the tomb of Puyemre (TT 39).

(Kitchen 1993:598)

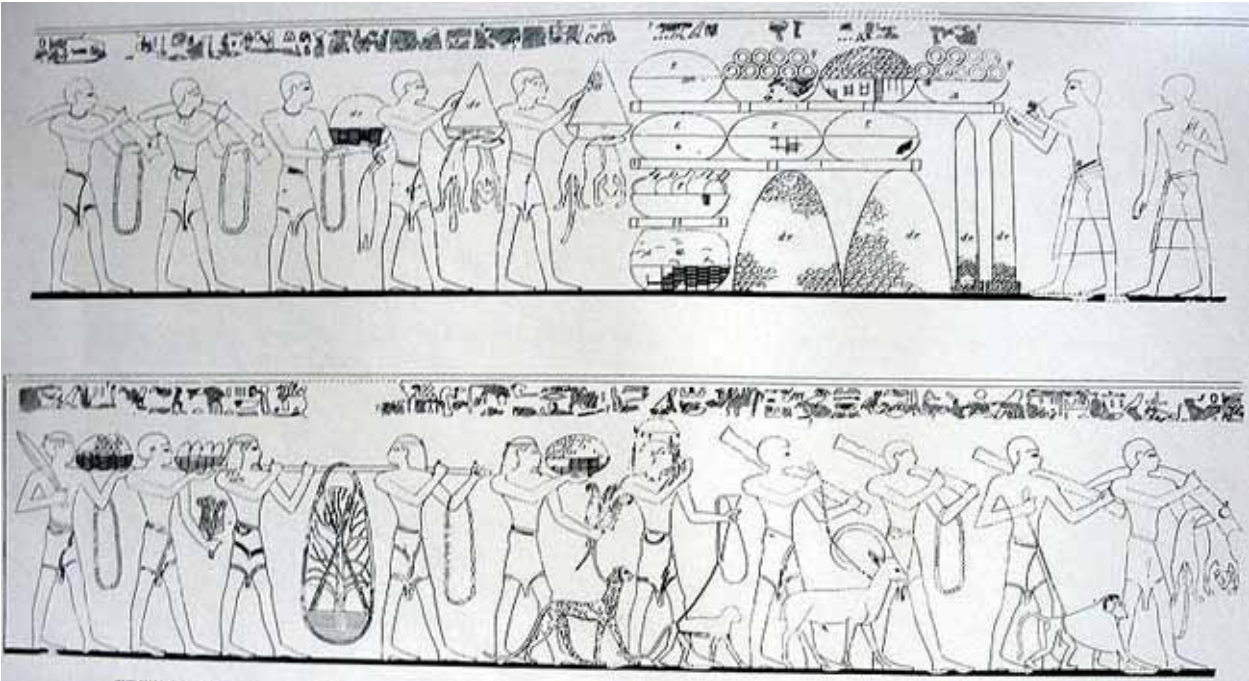


Figure 3.14: Puntites and their commodities in the tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100).

(Davies 1973:Pl. 17)

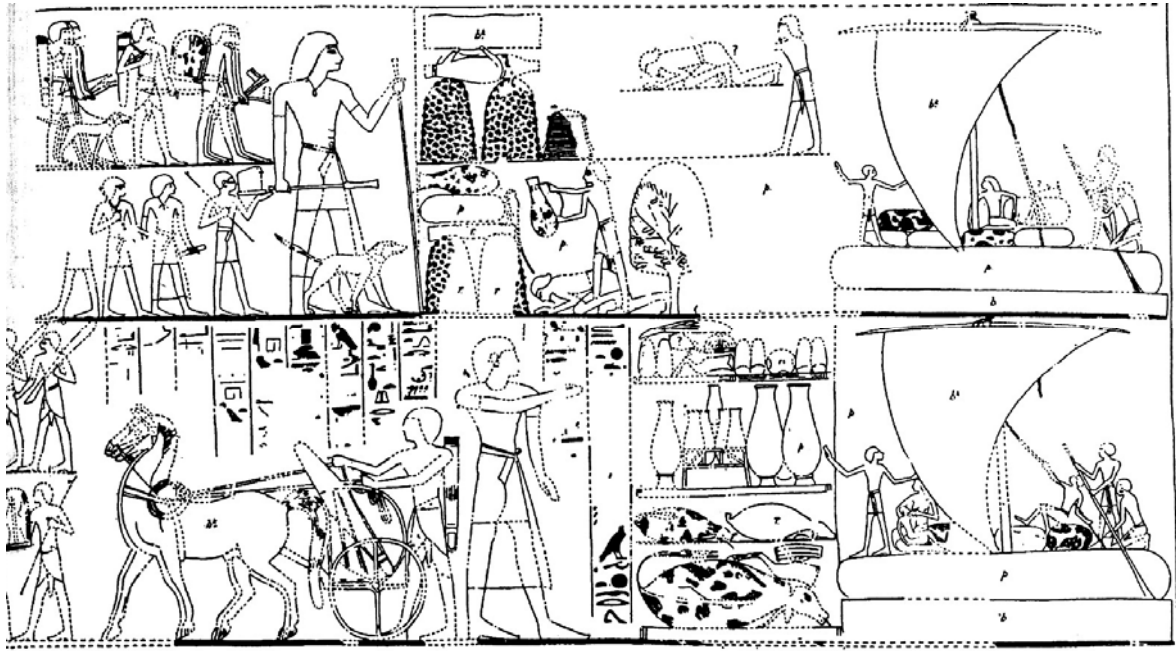


Figure 3.15a: Sketch of the arrival of a Puntite envoy via rafts in Egypt in TT 143.

(Kitchen 1993:599)



Figure 3.15b: Fragment of the wall of TT 143, depicting the arrival of the Puntite rafts.

(Meyer 1973:Photo 620)

representations and can therefore not be considered the portrayal of completely true events (Phillips 1997:435). There is evidence in another tomb (TT 143) that suggests that the Puntites did indeed send envoys to Egypt (3.15a&b). The tomb owner's identity is uncertain, though some scholars identify him as Min, a Chief Treasurer during the reign of Amenhotep II. The scene consists of five registers portraying the arrival of a Puntite envoy to Thebes, on small raft-like vessels. These bases of the vessels are pink in colour with a mast and single triangular black sail. Each raft appears to be manned by three sailors, with a fourth, using an oar to steer the raft (Phillips 1997:436). The upper register depicts an Egyptian envoy, who welcomes the Puntites who have already landed and set out their commodities for trade. The damaged text reads:

‘Travelling to ..., starting on the high road, carrying thousands of various excellent products of Punt, myrrh, ... incense trees...’

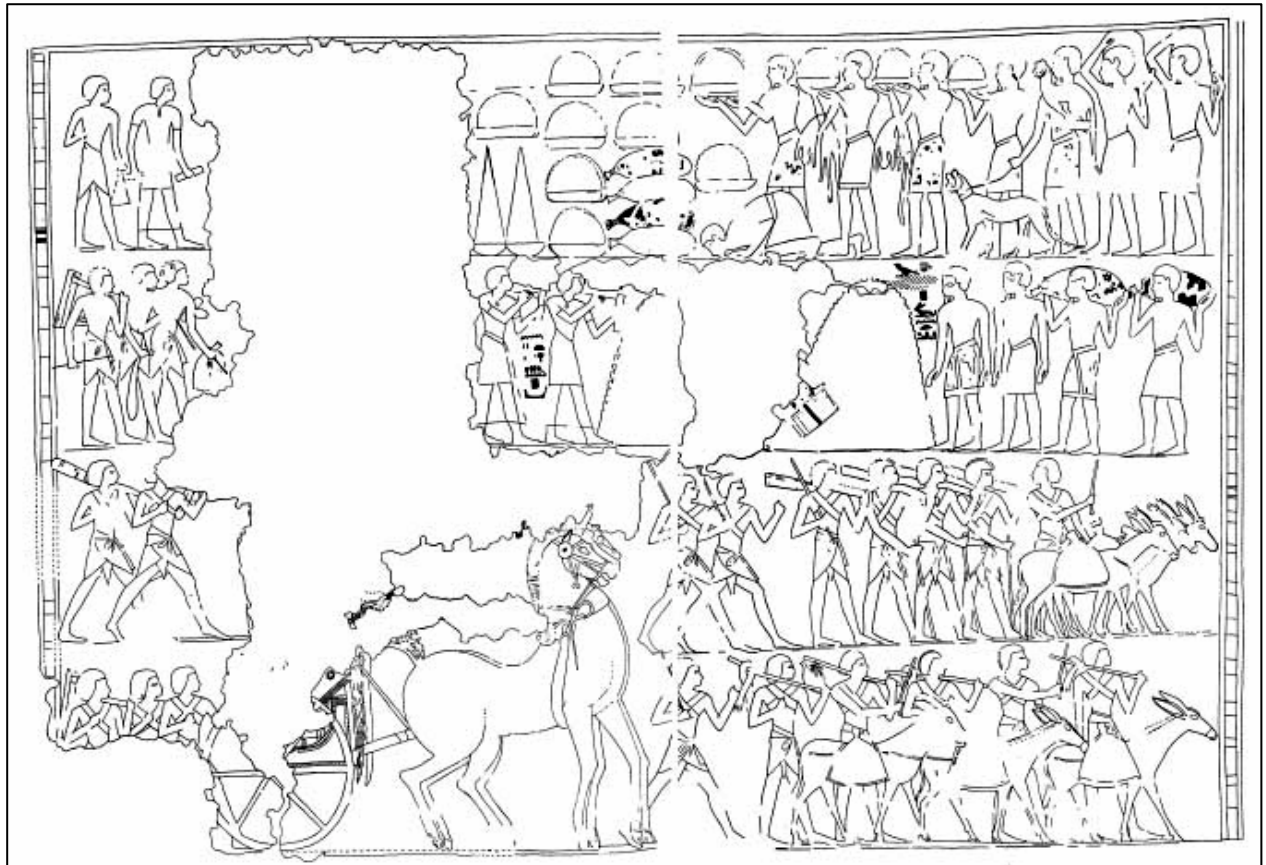
(Davies 1935:48)

The lower register is occupied by a similar scene. The official gestures towards commodities that are of Egyptian origin; bread, jars, perhaps containing wine or beer and packed skins, perhaps filled with grain (Bradbury 1996:40). Behind him, his chariot and escort can be seen departing and it is presumed that the exchange of commodities is complete and the Egyptian and Puntite envoys part their separate ways (Bradbury 1996:40). This lower register is paralleled in a later tomb depiction that dates from the reign of Thutmose IV (c. 1400-1390 BC) or Amenhotep III. It belongs to Amenmose, another Treasurer (TT 89) (3.16). The official arrives on a chariot with his escort to welcome a Puntite envoy. Two chiefs are part of the expedition and they stand in front of the two piles of myrrh as Amenmose's scribes record the commodities for exchange. Once this has been completed the official and a now laden donkey caravan head off into the desert with their newly acquired commodities (Bradbury 1996:56).

The depictions in all these tombs, as well as inscriptions found in Sinai, assist in painting a picture of the manner in which trade exchanges between these two regions existed. A commemorative inscription left by the official Sobekhotep (also known as Panehsi) (Phillips 1997:436), dates from year 36 of Amenhotep III's reign, it reads:

‘I reached the seacoast, to announce the marvels of Punt, to receive aromatic gums which the chiefs brought ... as revenue from lands unknown.’

(Kitchen 1993:600)

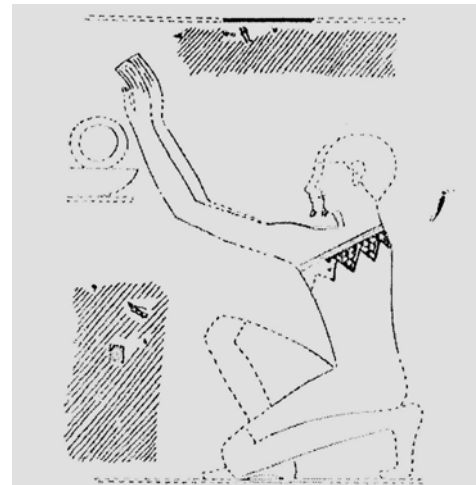


**Figure 3.16:** The Puntite envoy in the tomb of Amenmose (TT 89).

(Davies & Davies 1941:Pl.25)



**a**



**b**

**Figure 3.17:** A robed Puntite envoy presenting their commodities directly to a pharaoh in TT 143.

(a: Phillips 1997:435 and b: Meyer 1973:Photo 724 )

Amenmose's tomb (TT 89) does not show the arrival of any rafts, however, it depicts what is being described in Sobekhotep's inscription. There is much controversy surrounding the Puntite rafts and whether or not they can be considered sea-worthy. It is more probable that they would have been used as transport down the Nile to an outpost of the Egyptian border, where trade would have been conducted. The many depictions of Egyptian envoys greeting the Puntites suggest that this was a common practice. For example the text in the tomb of Min (TT 143) even suggests that the Puntites may have made use of this route to trade along the Nile at Koptos or even Thebes. A second relief in the tomb depicts a robed Puntite envoy presenting their commodities directly to a pharaoh (3.17a&b). Amongst these are large animals, for example, oxen and ibex, which would not have been able to be transported on the primitive Puntite rafts. An overland trade route may therefore have existed through the Nubian Desert, which once it joined the Nile would have provided the trade envoys with a direct route to the Theban court (Bradbury 1996:57 and Kitchen 1993:599).

### **3.3.4 NINETEENTH DYNASTY SOURCES AND THE PAPYRUS HARRIS**

Inscriptions concerning Punt continue during the later Eighteenth through to the Twentieth Dynasty (c. 1186-1069 BC). At Akhentaten (El-Amarna), the capital of Egypt during the reign of Akhenaten, a tomb belonging to the official Meryre depicts an envoy from Punt bringing incense to be measured. Years later the last ruler of the Eighteenth Dynasty, Horemheb (c. 1323-1295 BC) recorded a Puntite envoy on the wall connecting his two pylons in the Temple of Karnak: a scene of Puntite chiefs in the Temple at Karnak:

Speech of the great chiefs of Punt: "Hail to thee, King of Egypt, Sun of the Nine Bows! By thy ka! We knew not Egypt; our fathers had not trodden it. Give us the breath which thou givest. All lands are under thy feet."

(Breasted 1962c:21)

Unfortunately the commodities offered by the chiefs are bagged and their content is therefore unidentifiable (Kitchen 1993:600). These appear to be the last visual sources that concern Punt, sources from later dynasties are all in textual format. A hymn dedicated to Amun from the Nineteenth Dynasty (c.1295-1186 BC) reads:

The dwellers of Punt come to you,

Lord's Land is verdant for love of you.

To you, ships are brought by water, laden with gums, to make your temple festive with fragrances.

(Kitchen 1993:601)

At Abydos the temple of Seti I (c. 1294-1279 BC), dedicated to Abydos' divine triad (Osiris, Isis and Horus) and the chief gods of Egypt (Re, Amun and Ptah) (Schulz & Sourouzian

2004:208) contains an inscription referred to as the Nauri decree that contains a fleeting reference to Punt:

The treasuries are full of valuables... myrrh is there from Punt, measured put by heaps... Created for him (Osiris) are fleets of ships to multiply herbs in his temple – their sheer number covered the sea – each vessel a hundred cubits long, laden with herbs from God's Land.

(Kitchen 1993:601)

His successor Rameses II expresses a similar sentiment in his temple at Abydos:

'...he planted many gardens, planted with all kinds of trees, all sweet and fragrant herbs, the plants of Punt.'

(Kitchen 1993:601)

The final source concerning Punt from the pharaonic period dates from the reign of Rameses III. The Papyrus Harris records all the prestigious deeds and activities undertaken by Rameses III during his entire reign. It served as a mortuary text that would guarantee the pharaohs favour with the gods in the afterlife. Part of the papyrus is dedicated to historical events amongst these is an expedition undertaken by pharaoh to Punt:

I hewed great galleys with barges before them, manned with numerous crews, and attendants in great number; their captains of marines were with them, with inspectors and petty officers, to command them. They were laden with the products of Egypt without number, being in every number like ten-thousands. They were sent forth into the great sea of the inverted water<sup>17</sup>, they arrived at the countries of Punt, no mishap overtook them, safe and bearing terror. The galleys and the barges were laden with the products of God's Land, consisting of all the strange marvels of their country: plentiful myrrh of Punt, laden by ten-thousands, without number. Their chief's children of God's-Land went before their tribute advancing to Egypt. They arrived in safety at the highland of Koptos; they landed in safety, bearing the things which they brought. They were loaded, on the land-journey, upon asses and upon men; and loaded into vessels upon the Nile, (at) the haven of Koptos. They were sent forward down-stream and arrived amid festivity, and brought (some) of the tribute into the (royal) presence like marvels. Their chief's children were in adoration before me, kissing the earth, prostrate before me. I gave them to all the gods of this land, to satisfy the two serpent goddesses every morning.

(Breasted 1962d: 203-204)

The inscription, putting aside its ideological and propagandistic nature, is short, but very comprehensive and provides possible evidence of a Red Sea trade route existing between the Egyptians and the Puntites. It also confirms that the Red Sea route, referred to in numerous inscriptions during the Middle Kingdom, from Koptos to the ports on the coast was a reality.

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<sup>17</sup> This is a reference to the Red Sea, it is described in this way because its seasonal currents flow in the opposite direction to the Nile's, i.e. south (Kitchen 1993:608).



However, this was not the only route travelled to Punt, other routes existed overland and these and the Red Sea route will be discussed in the next chapter (section 4.2.2).

## **CHAPTER 4: TRADE ROUTES**

Egypt's surrounding neighbours play an important role in determining a possible location for Punt. Sources from as early as the Old Kingdom onwards provide accounts of overland and maritime trade routes that can be used to determine their locations in relation to the location of Punt.

### **4.1 ESTABLISHING TRADE ROUTES DURING THE OLD AND MIDDLE KINGDOM**

#### **4.1.1 HARKHUF AND YAM**

During the Sixth Dynasty, an official Harkhuf, undertook four expeditions into the region of Yam. The inscription of his first journey is too brief to be of any consequence, however, the inscriptions detailing the other journeys are more helpful. The starting points of his journeys are not certain but all of them concluded at the pharaoh's residence, in Memphis. It is likely that the official was expected to present any commodities he had obtained on these expeditions and provide the pharaoh with a general report of the various expeditions. On his second journey Harkhuf sets out 'on the Elephantine road,' (Breasted 1962a:153) this is generally thought to be a road that led from Elephantine and is often assumed to be his starting point (3.2). However, if the official remained in Memphis until his next 'assignment,' he would have departed from Memphis and presumably travelled along the Nile on the road which leads to his home of Elephantine before departing for Yam (Dixon 1958:40-42). Two routes of travel are possible from Elephantine; the Nile can be followed most of the way into Nubia or if Lower Nubia needed to be avoided (in times of tribal conflict) then a route could be followed through the desert from Elephantine to the oases of Kurkur and Dunkul, rejoining the Nile at Tumas (situated in Irtjet) or continuing through the desert to the Selima oasis before returning to the Nile. The latter would, however, have been difficult with a large donkey caravan (Dixon 1958:51,53). On his return to Tumas he passed through the regions of Irtjet (a tribal confederate consisting of Mekher, Terers and Irtjetj) (Lichtheim 1973:25). Harkhuf records on both his first and second expedition that such a journey took approximately seven to eight months. The route he followed for both these journeys would no doubt have been the one mentioned above, however, his third expedition to Yam begins in

the nome of Thinis. He would have crossed the Nile and departed from Abydos across the western desert via the Oasis road. His destination was most likely the oasis of Kharga as it is the first oasis encountered on this road from Abydos. The reason for this diversion on the way to Yam would most probably have entailed some kind of official business, perhaps even trade (Dixon 1958:45). From Kharga a southern desert route existed to Selima, from where Harkhuf would have travelled to Yam (Dixon 1958:51).

The events of Harkhuf's arrival in Yam paint an interesting picture. Once the official has learnt of the Yamite chiefs plans to go to war, he hastens after him to try and prevent any conflict. His reaction suggests a number of possibilities. All of the expeditions to Yam were to obtain commodities that were only available in that country. Hence Yam was a trading partner, not only of luxury items but also people, in particular mercenaries. Trading activities were conducted in the presence of the chief, so his absence would present a problem, but not one big enough to send Harkhuf chasing after him into the western desert. It is therefore more likely that the official feared that any form of tribal conflict would affect Egypt's commercial activities and the inflow of militia into the country and hastened to prevent such a situation from taking place (Dixon 1958:45). Harkhuf is successful in dissuading the Yamite chief. The fact that he is accompanied by a Yamite escort on his return journey suggests that Yam and its neighbouring regions were prone to tribal conflict but because Harkhuf experienced no difficulties with his large laden donkey caravan it can be understood that the Yamites had supreme influence. The reaction of the ruler of the confederate of Setju, Irtjet and Wawat, as recorded by Harkhuf supports this suggestion:

Now when the ruler of Irtjet, Setju and Wawat saw how strong and numerous the troop from Yam was which came down with me to the residence together with the army that had been sent with me, this ruler escorted me, gave me cattle and goats, and led me on the mountain paths of Irtjet – because of the excellence of the vigilance I had employed beyond that of any companion and chief of scouts who had been sent to Yam before.

(Lichtheim 1973:26)

Inscriptions from the Old Kingdom locate Wawat in the vicinity of Lower Nubia.<sup>1</sup> From Harkhuf's inscription it would appear that Wawat was the last of the three confederate states reached before his return into Egypt. Another Elephantine official, Pepi-nakht also reports subduing Wawat and then Irtjet on a royal expedition:

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<sup>1</sup> Attempting to provide a precise location for Wawat is not possible. The boundaries of this region seem to shift throughout the entire period of pharaonic Egypt.

The majesty of my lord sent me, to hack up Wawat and Irtjet. I did so that my lord praised me. I slew a great number there consisting of chiefs' children and excellent commanders of... I brought a great number of them to the court as living prisoners, while I was at the head of many mighty soldiers as a hero.

(Breasted 1962a:163)

Wawat was therefore the northern most region of Harkhuf's confederate, with Setju occupying the southern region and Irtjet in the middle, south of Wawat (Dixon 1958:47). In relation to this confederate, Yam can be considered to have lain beyond all of them in a southerly location. The authority it seems to possess in relation to Wawat, Irtjet and Setju imply that it was a rich, prosperous and powerful state. It was able to supply Egypt with mercenaries but was never under their control or considered a threat. Harkhuf's conduct towards the Yamite chief is one of mutual respect, which is in contrast to later descriptions of these southern tribal states. The picture that Harkhuf provides of Yam is that it was situated in a southern region beyond the boundaries of Egyptian control but was considered too far removed to ever pose a threat to the state. A similar situation is brought to mind when one considers the contact Egypt had with Punt. Both Yam and Punt were important intermediate trade partners of commodities that came from the African countries situated south of these two regions (Dixon 1958:50). The routes travelled by Harkhuf on his four expeditions suggest that Yam's location can be placed somewhere beyond the Second Cataract, perhaps even as far as Kush. The site of Kerma was a well developed city settlement from about 2400 BC (Shinnie 1991:50). Vases bearing the names of the pharaoh's Pepi I (c. 2321-2287 BC) and II have also been found at the site, which places its existence in the same time period that Harkhuf conducted his expeditions, so perhaps the site of Kerma was the commercial centre where Harkhuf traded (Shinnie 1991:50).

#### **4.1.2 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE RED SEA TRADE**

The Egyptian civilisation has been generalised as a nation that did not take eagerly to nautical explorations. Yet there is evidence dating from as early as the Old Kingdom that suggests otherwise. The Egyptians may not have been as at home on the sea as other ancient civilisations, for example the Phoenicians, but this does not imply that they did not utilise it as a means of transport or for trading purposes. During the reign of Pepi II, an Elephantine official, Pepi-nakht provides the first account of the preparation practices for trade with Punt:

Now the majesty of my lord sent me to the country of the Asiatics to bring for him the sole companion, commander of sailors, the caravan-conductor, Enenkhet, who was building a ship there for Punt, when

the Asiatics belonging to the Sand-dwellers<sup>2</sup> slew him, together with a troop of the army which was with him.

(Breasted 1962a:163)

His inscription provides definite evidence that vessels were constructed on the Red Sea shore, before they departed for Punt. His description is brief and to the point, its focus is not the interruption of a Punt expedition but rather the death of a fellow official at the hands of a Bedouin tribe.

The next inscription concerning the Red Sea as a port occurs almost three hundred years later. During the Middle Kingdom the high official Henu records a journey to the sea shore to launch a vessel, in the Wadi Hammamat:

My lord, life, prosperity, health! sent me to dispatch a ship to Punt to bring for him fresh myrrh from the sheiks over the Red Land...

...Then I reached the (Red) Sea; then I made this ship, and I dispatched it with everything, when I had made for it a great oblation of cattle, bulls and ibexes.

(Breasted 1962a:209-210)

It appears that he never accompanied the vessel to its final destination but was merely the overseer of its construction. The inscription is dated 'Year 8, first month of the third season (ninth month), day 3,' (Breasted 1962a:208) according to the calculation of Twelfth Dynasty calendars two dates have been suggested according to the modern calendar – August or September 2002 B.C. (Bradbury 1988:127). Both of these months correspond with the sailing season to and from East Africa as recorded in later antiquity. The Greek author Pliny the Elder, recorded in volume IV of his *Natural History*, as well as the unknown merchant author of *The Periplus*, that the sailing season for the vessels leaving Egyptian shores for the Bab-el-Mandeb straits began in July but the main season was often considered September-October. The seasonal wind and sea current systems were most advantageous for a voyage south as they caused a north-to-south surface current which made sailing down the Red Sea relatively uncomplicated (Bradbury 1988:128). The earlier departure of Henu's vessel in August would have resulted in it reaching its destination in late September to mid-October, in time for the trading season. This was determined by the tapping season of incense trees. The main tapping season was just after the end of the rainy season, probably in July. This meant that the market season would have been only during the dry season from October to April (Bradbury 1988:130). Henu's inscription must therefore have commemorated the departure of the vessel to Punt and not its return.

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<sup>2</sup> Asiatics and the 'Sand-dwellers' are synonymous with the tribes that inhabited Egypt's eastern desert.

Henu's target would most likely have been the small harbour of Mersa Gawasis (Sa'waw), which was more navigable than the Wadi Hammamat's reef-filled harbour, Quseir<sup>3</sup> or Old Quseir (3.4) (Bradbury 1988:133). Other stelae dating from the Twelfth Dynasty, also attest to the use of this harbour throughout the Middle Kingdom. Henu's inscription in the Wadi Hammamat presents the possibility that he travelled along two different routes to and from the Red Sea coast. His journey to the Red Sea coast would have followed the most direct route possible. He departed from Koptos, following the Nile north until he reached Qena. From here he journeyed through the Wadi Sellimat and the Wadi Hamama, which rise in the Gidami Hills. There is little doubt that it was along this long desert path that the wells, Henu mentions in his inscription, were dug. From these hills the Wadi Hamama leads into the Wadi Esh and Wadi Saki and finally to the Red Sea coast. Of interest is a triangular highland that borders the Wadi Esh and is near to the watershed of Mount Gidami. Here, near Mount el-Aridia is a place called 'Æridiyah.' It bears a remarkable similarity to the spelling of 'Idehet' mentioned by Henu and could perhaps be one of the two regions where Henu built further wells. *Iheteb* could then have been a region in the vicinity of Mount Agharrib, which would have been the final station before Mersa Gawasis. Equating ancient and modern names is, however, a risky matter, yet the argument is plausible because the two sites are in a geographical sequence along the route that leads to the Red Sea harbour (Bradbury 1988:134-138). Henu's return journey followed a route that left the Wadi Gawasis and headed west along the Wadi Saki before branching south into the Wadi Atalla<sup>4</sup>. This led to Bir Fawakhir and turned west into the Wadi Hammamat passing the greywacke quarries and finally concluding at Koptos (Bradbury 1988:134).

The anchor shrines of Ankhu and Intefoqer from the Twelfth Dynasty concur with the location of Mersa Gawasis as the Middle Kingdom Red Sea port. During an excavation of the northern edge of the Wadi Gawasis in 1977, Abel Monem A. H. Sayed, found the remains of potsherds with hieratic and hieroglyphics on one of the slopes, wood remains from vessel assemblage, unfinished anchors and work tools. The site also contained traces of ashes and food remains, all under the shelter of a huge rock. This find suggests that this site may have been the location where the Egyptians were encamped while they assemble the vessels on the

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<sup>3</sup> No inscriptions that date from the Middle or New Kingdom have been found at this site. It seems to have only been used later during the Roman period (c. 30 BC – 395 AD) (Bradbury 1988:133).

<sup>4</sup> This southerly route that led to Bir Fawakhir was named *W3g* by the Egyptians and was one of the main routes during the latter part of the Old Kingdom (Bradbury 1988:134).

Red Sea shore (Sayed 1978:71). Intefoqer mentions that he was commanded to oversee that construction of the vessels at the Koptos dockyards:

His majesty commanded the Vizier Intefoqer to construct this fleet at the Koptos dockyards,[for] travelling and reaching the mining-region of Punt, ...

...Now, the Herald, Montuhotep's son Ameni, was on shore of the sea, constructing these vessels, along with the assembly from Thinis of southern Upper Egypt who were with him; and able-bodied men who were at the sea-shore as expeditionaries

(Kitchen 1993:590)

This would imply that he oversaw their construction at Koptos and their dismantlement and transport to the coast, where the Herald Ameni was responsible for the reconstruction of the vessels (Sayed 1978:71). However, another prospect is possible. During the Twentieth Dynasty Rameses III recorded an expedition to Punt in the Papyrus Harris. He states that the vessels 'arrived safely at the highland of Koptos' (Breasted 1962d:203). The 'highland of Koptos' has been identified as the Red Sea end of the Koptos route. This far stretching association could then also be applied to Ankhu's 'Koptos dockyards.' It would have made more sense for the vessels to be completely constructed at the Red Sea coast, expelling any theories that they were constructed on the Nile and transported in their completed state through the rugged desert terrain. It would also be senseless to construct them on the Nile, dismantle them for transport and then rebuild them at the coast. Wooden planks and other materials, such as riggings and sails, needed for the vessels construction, could have been transported by manual or pack labour, as both Henu and Intefoqer record an entourage of thousands of men on their respective expeditions. The construction of the heavy stone anchors<sup>5</sup> also favours this interpretation. In terms of Intefoqer stela it would mean that he was perhaps responsible for overseeing the specialised tasks, while Ameni was responsible for the construction and launch of the vessel on the sea shore.

Of further interest is the fact that both of the stelae refer to Punt as a mining region, a third stela belonging to Khnumhotep III, from a later date refers to God's Land, in association with mining regions as well. The date inscribed in the central block stela of Ankhu suggests that the voyage to Punt began in May, i.e. in winter and not at the onset of summer as occurred with Henu's voyage. This would imply that the purpose of Ankhu's voyage to Punt was not the incense trade, but rather precious metal such as gold or even gem stones. It is therefore possible that two sailing seasons to Punt existed. The first, concerned the acquisition of mineral resources, which began as soon as the sailing conditions favoured a south bound

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<sup>5</sup> These large blocks of stone often weighed as much as 250 kg, making their transport through the desert tedious.

voyage and the second was tied to the tapping season of incense trees a few months later (Bradbury 1988:156). Further evidence of this is provided by the fictional tale of the Shipwrecked sailor which also dates from the Middle Kingdom. Although it is a fictional tale, its content presents some consistent knowledge about the measurements of vessels and the lengths of sailing seasons. The events in the tale can not be considered as fact but the fact that the duration of sailing activities seems to be common knowledge, i.e. the next ship to pass the serpent's island will come in four months and it will take a further two months to return to the royal court, provide the possibility that such sailing ventures were regular occurrences (Simpson 1973:54). It must be remembered that while there may have been two southerly sailing seasons, return voyages would have been reliant on wind and current changes and therefore the vessels of both sailing seasons would have had to wait for the onset of winter to return to Egyptian shores (Bradbury 1988:140-141).

The stela of Khnumhotep III and the depictions in the tomb of his father do not allow the assumption that the official never conducted an expedition to Punt. The establishment of Sesostris II's monument in God's Land by this official presents the interesting possibility that Punt and God's Land were not yet considered synonymous, as they would be in years to come. The dedication of the stela to the god Sopdu can create some confusion, as Khnumhotep III clearly refers to him as 'Lord of the East.' A similar title belongs to Min of Koptos. The stela of Khentkhetwer, which is dated five years prior to Khnumhotep III's Wadi Gasus stela, praises Min of Koptos for his safe return to Mersa Gawasis from Punt. The reason for Khnumhotep II's association of Sopdu with the eastern desert is puzzling, it is the only stela, found so far that makes this association. The god that presides over the eastern desert and the Red Sea shore is generally accepted as Min of Koptos (Bradbury 1988:131). The fact that Sopdu makes an appearance could have something to do with the Aamu Bedouin that are mentioned in Khnumhotep II's tomb. If the galena mines were already working at this time, then the Aamu and other Bedouin prospectors may have already been active in this region which would explain the presence of a 'foreign' god in the region normally assigned to Min. The possibility also remains that the Red Sea wadis were considered the gateway to foreign eastern countries (Sinai and Punt included) and therefore also under the jurisdiction of Sopdu. Khnumhotep III's stela seems to further imply that the eastern desert from the Wadi Hammamat to the Red Sea shore was referred to by the Egyptians of the Middle Kingdom as God's Land. Henu, like Khnumhotep III, did not take part in his Punt expedition. His stela commemorates the vessels departure to Punt, there is no evidence to indicate that he remained



on the Red Sea shore until the vessel returned from its destination. If this is so then his inscription of his return activities does not make sense:

‘I brought for him all gifts<sup>6</sup>, which I had found in the regions of God’s Land. I returned from the valley of Hammamat.’

(Breasted 1962a:210)

Unless God’s Land, as Khnumhotep III’s stela also implies, was considered to extend from the Red Sea shore to the quarries in the Wadi Hammamat (Bradbury 1988:130). The stela of Ankhu may present another problem. His stela clearly commemorates the return of a successful Punt expedition. In it the official makes a direct association between the mining region of Punt and the products of God’s Land (Bradbury 1988:145). Henu’s inscription implies that the products of God’s Land were mineral resources so there would be a natural correspondence with the mining region of Punt but this does not mean that the two names refer to the same place. On his return to Koptos, Ankhu would no doubt have returned via the same route as Henu, he would have passed through all the mining regions and could have added their resources to those he had obtained from Punt.

To further associate this region of the eastern desert as a mining region it is necessary to consider the Turin Papyrus Map, which dates from the Nineteenth Dynasty (4.1a). Interest in the port of Sa’waw disappears after the reign of Sesostriis III and with it the significance of the mining region. During the beginning of the New Kingdom there is limited interest in the region, although during the reign of Thutmosis III, the high priest of Amun, Menkheperreseneb does report collecting ‘gold of the highlands of Koptos’ from the ‘governor of the gold-country of Koptos’ (Breasted 1962b:301). His successor Amenhotep II also obtained gold from these highlands (Bradbury 1988:146). During the Nineteenth Dynasty interest in the eastern desert region began to increase, Seti I, Seti II and Rameses II quarried stone or mined gold in the Wadi Hammamat. But it was Rameses III who reopened the Red Sea port to Punt. By this time the mining region in the eastern desert from the Red Sea shores to the Hammamat quarries would have been extensively travelled and well known by the time the Turin Papyrus map was drawn during the reign of Rameses IV, who undertook several expeditions into the Wadi Hammamat (van Dijk 2000:307). The most remarkable feature of this map is its accuracy when compared to a modern topographical map

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<sup>6</sup> The ‘gifts’ referred to here were probably mineral deposits from the galena and amethyst mines found in the Wadi Gasus and Gawasis, Bir Wasif and the gold mines at Semnah and along the route through the Wadi Atalla (Bradbury 1988:131).

(4.1b). It parallels almost perfectly the routes Henu followed in the Middle Kingdom to the port of Sa'waw.

When comparing a topographical map with the Turin map it becomes evident that the former has to be read upside-down. The upper most road [1]<sup>7</sup> on the map is the Wadi Hammamat road that led from Koptos to Quseir. It runs past the gold mines of Bir Fawakhir [6] and shows two wells [7] situated along its course. The mountain on this road is el-Sidd [5], it was called the 'Mountain of Gold' by the Egyptians (Bradbury 1988:148). From Bir Fawakhir there is a road [9] leading south. It is believed to represent the Wadi Isa which led to Mount Zeidon, where a high quality of greywacke was mined. The south western intersection of the Wadi Isa and Wadi Hammamat is considered to be the 'summit on which Amun dwelled' [14] (Bradbury 1988:149) and below it is a white building that represented a shrine to the god [10]. A second road branches from the Wadi Hammamat to the north. This is the Wadi Atalla, which happens it enter the Wadi Hammamat at a perpendicular angle, just as it does on a topographical map. [11] represents a gold mine that was situated in the Wadi Atalla, Bir el Kubbaniya, 'The Mountains in which gold is worked' (Bradbury 1988:150). A secondary road [2] intersects the Wadi Atalla,

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<sup>7</sup> Numbers correspond to Figure 4.1a.

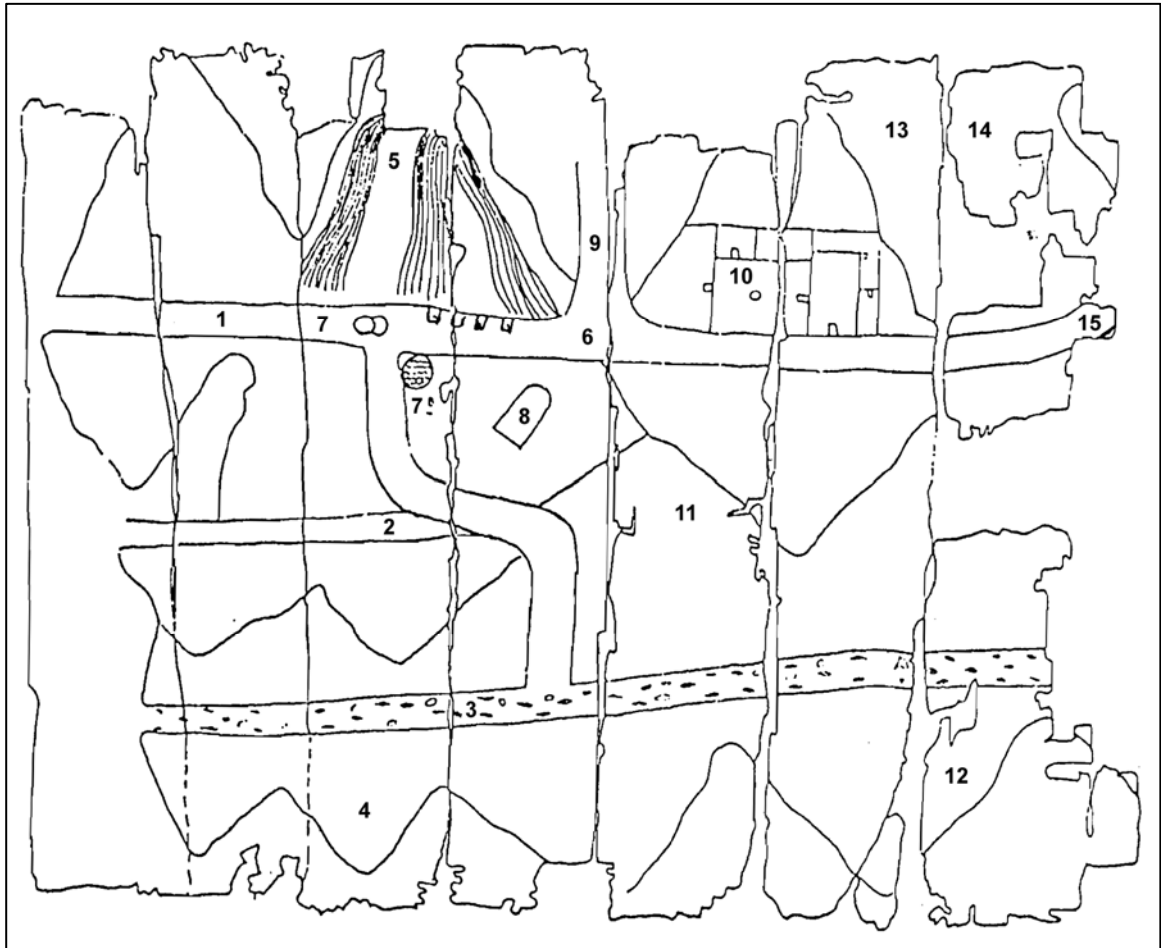


Figure 4.1a: Drawing of the Turin Papyrus Gold mine map.

(Adapted from Bradbury 1988:147)

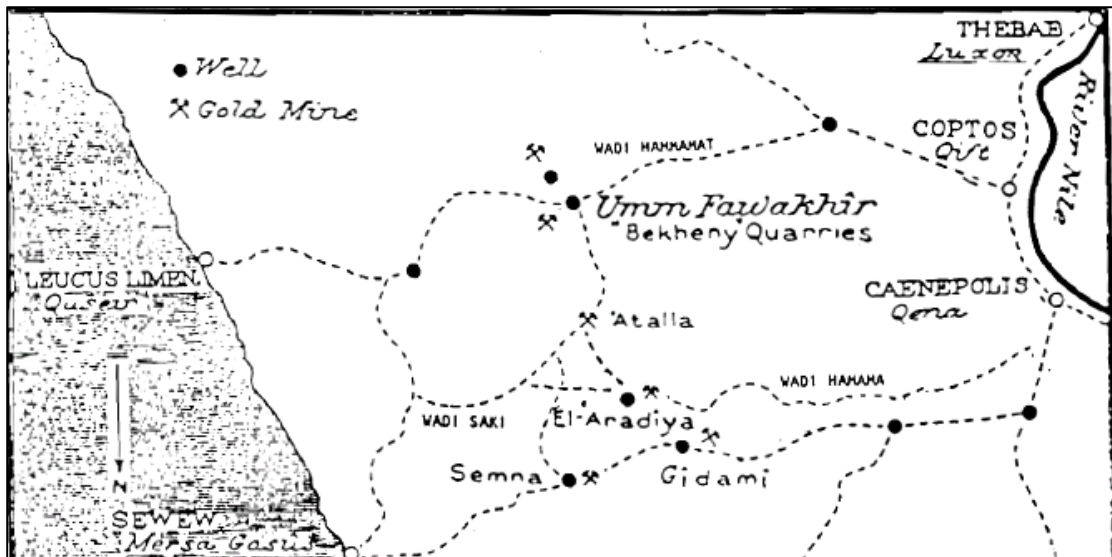
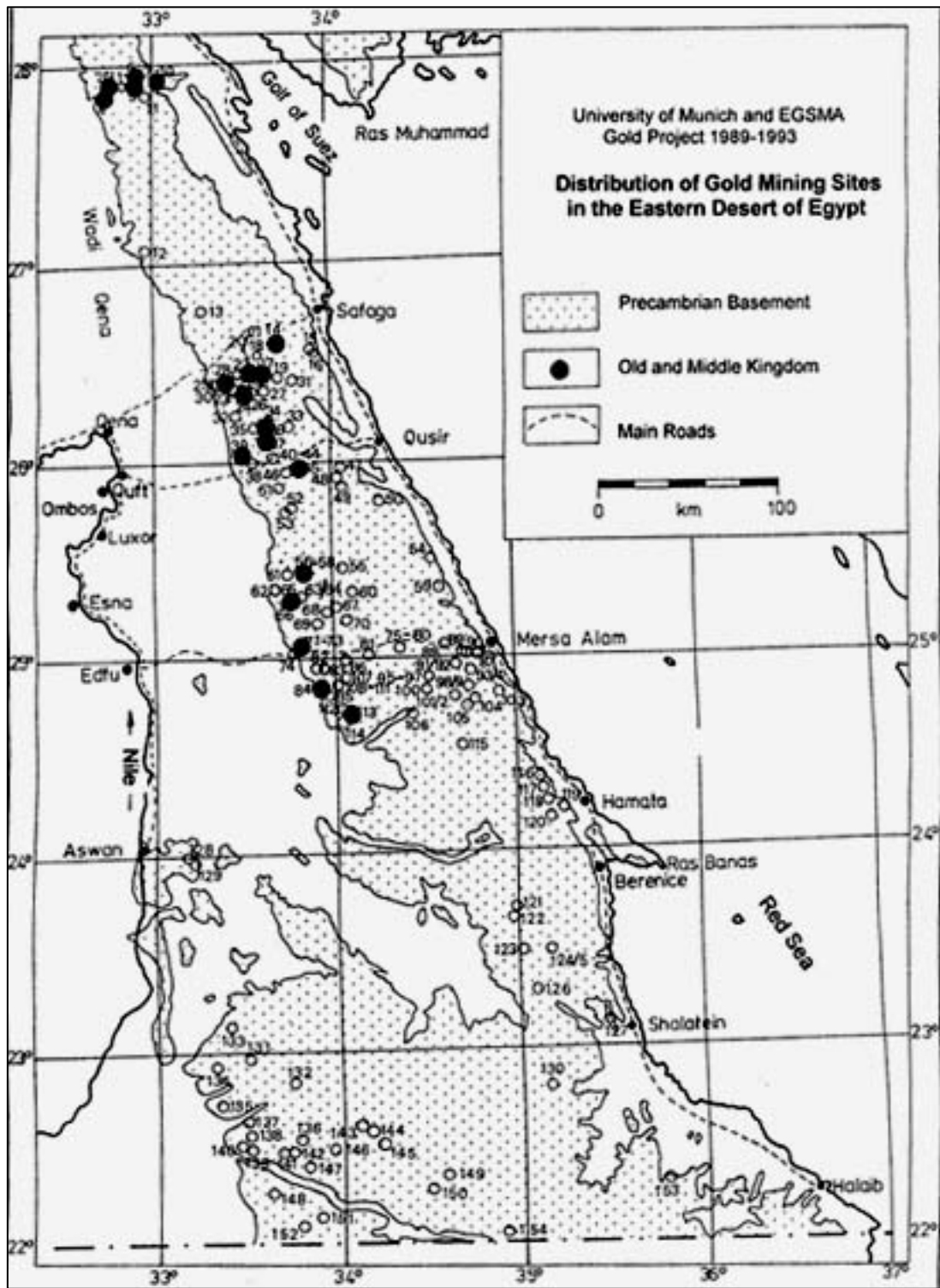


Figure 4.1b: Upside-down map of the Eastern desert, showing geographical correspondence with the Turin Papyrus Map. (cf. Figure 3.4) (Bradbury 1988:148)



**Figure 4.2:** The distribution of gold mining sites in the Eastern Desert during the Old and Middle Kingdom. Open circles represent gold production sites that were worked in later periods.

(Klemm, Klemm & Murr 2002:223)

about half way, which leads through the Wadi Saki. This route follows two paths, one to the north leads to the gold bearing regions of Semnah [4], while a second continues north east past Mount Agharibb and on to Mersa Gawasis on the Red Sea shore. The bottom road [3] represents the northerly route to the Red Sea shore, through the Wadi Hamama, past Gidami through the Wadi Saki to Mersa Gawasis. It is labelled 'The Road belonging to the harbour' (Bradbury 1988:150) and parallels the route followed by Henu almost perfectly. This map provides conclusive evidence that early in the history of pharaonic Egypt two routes were known and utilised to and from the Red Sea shore. The fact the location of mines and quarries were recorded on the Turin map implies that the Egyptians were familiar with this region as a source of precious mineral resources. This further provides evidence that during the Middle Kingdom God's Land was not synonymous with Punt but referred to the eastern desert region that extended from the Wadi Hammamat quarries to the Red Sea shore. This conjecture does not imply that this was the only supply of mineral resources. Punt, in addition to being Egypt's primary supplier of incense and other exotic commodities, could have also had a mining region of its own (Bradbury 1988:156).

## **4.2 RE-ESTABLISHING TRADE DURING THE NEW KINGDOM**

The extended periods of time between Puntite and Egyptian contact occur readily throughout Egypt's history. These periods are largely influenced by the internal and external socio-political and economic structures of the Egyptian state and its surrounding (Fattovich 1991b:263). This is particularly evident from the Second Intermediate Period onwards. The decline in Egyptian political power during the period of Hyksos domination coincides with the rise in power of southern Kerma. The monopoly for the trade networks that had been established during the preceding Middle Kingdom was now under the control of the Kerma Nubians. Trade between Egypt and Punt was only re-established well into the Eighteenth Dynasty after the successive successful Thutmosside campaigns which brought Nubia completely under Egyptian control (Bryan 2000:230-245).

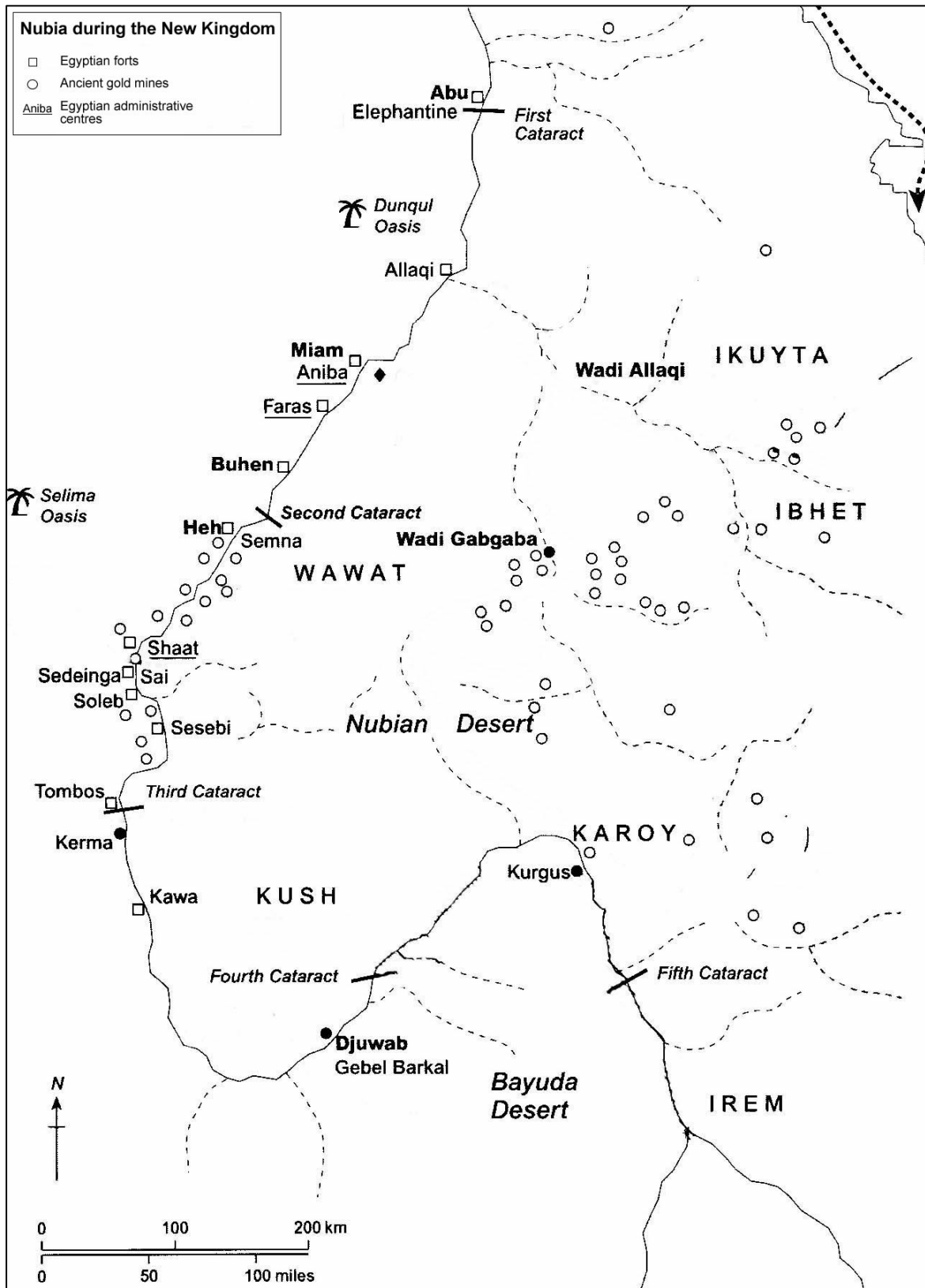


Figure 4.3: Places of importance in Nubia during the New Kingdom.

(Adapted from Shaw 2000a:227)

#### **4.2.1 OVERLAND TRADE WITH PUNT**

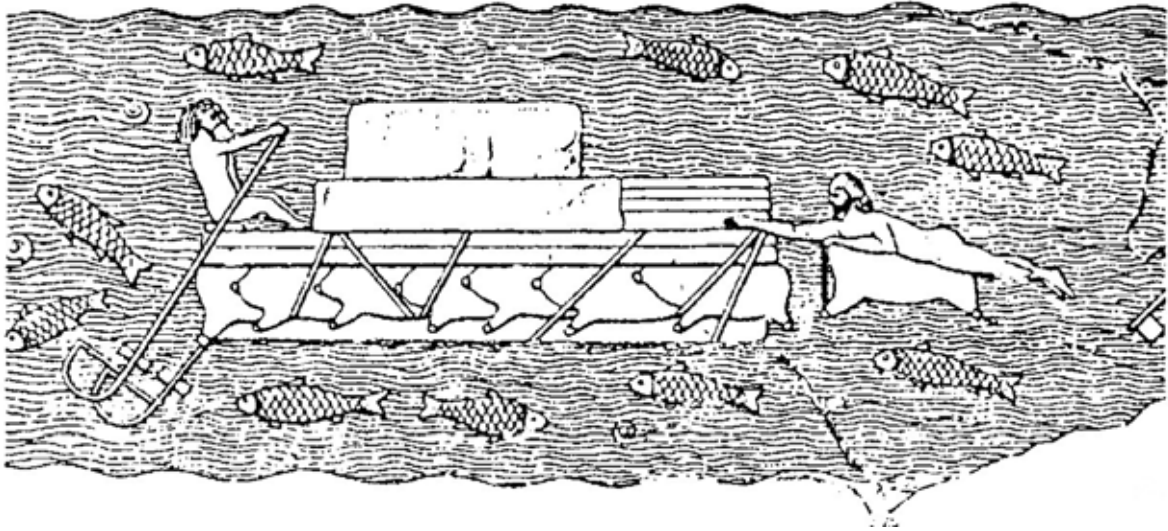
Inscriptions in temples and tombs during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties attesting to trading ventures between Egypt and Punt, abound. A few of these expeditions were conducted via the Red Sea. However, there is a surprising lack of inscriptions or graffiti to be found from the mines at Bir Umm Fawakhir along the old Middle Kingdom route to the Red Sea that date from these dynasties. Pictorial evidence in the tombs of Theban officials also record that Puntite envoys managed to reach Egypt. Their water craft do not appear to be very seaworthy and this factor together with Egypt's occupation and control of Upper Nubia, at the time, suggest that an overland trade route along the Nile may have indeed existed (Bradbury 1996:37-39).

Thutmosis I undertook a campaign into Nubia in the second or third year of his reign. His suppression of the Nubians extended Egyptian control deep into Upper Nubia. The southern boundary of Egyptian control was the fort of Tombos, just north of The Third Cataract and Kerma (4.3). It also extended eastwards, across the Nubian desert to Kurgus in the Fourth Cataract region (Bryan 2000:232-234). The extent of Egyptian influence so far south, would have allowed considerable control over trade activities in the regions of Kush and Karoy (Bradbury 1996:39). Archaeological evidence in Karoy reveals what remains of a frontier fortress at Kurgus. It was probably built during the reign of Thutmosis I and is believed to be one of several forts controlling trade between Abu Hamed and Kurgus (Bradbury 1996:37). Establishing a trading outpost in this southern region meant Egypt was able to conduct overland trade, between this outpost and the state border at Tombos, with any intermediaries that entered this territory (Bradbury 1996:39). Most trade envoys would have trekked on foot, with a donkey caravan in tow to the Egyptian outpost. But there is evidence to suggest they made use of the Nile as well.

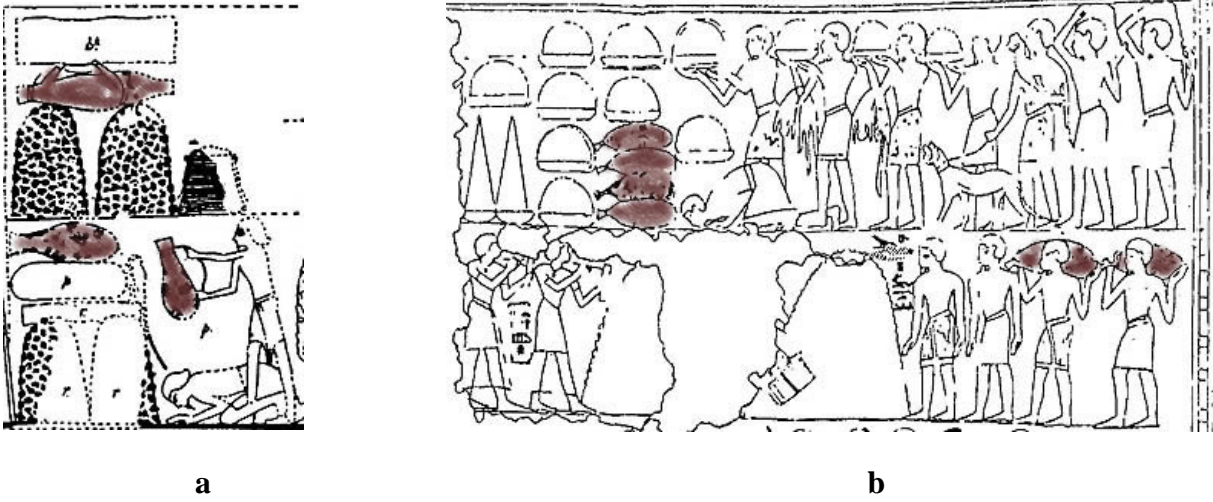
##### **4.2.1.1 Puntite rafts**

The best depiction of Puntite rafts can be found in the tomb of the Chief Treasurer of Amenhotep II, Min (3.15a). The depiction, which remains largely intact, shows the rafts to be unsuitable for any kind of sea voyage, in comparison with Hatshepsut's vessels. They bear a remarkable similarity to the inflatable-skin rafts used by inhabitants along the Tigris River, known as *kalaks* (4.4). The Puntite rafts float mainly above water, with their passengers and cargo on top of a





**Figure 4.4:** Sketch of an Assyrian relief at Nimrud c. 700 BC depicting *kalaks* on the Tigris River.  
(Bradbury 1996:41)



**Figure 4.5 a & b:** Inflated animals skins used as storage containers in TT 143 (left) and the tomb of Amenmose (TT 89) (right).  
(a: Kitchen 1993:599 and b :Bradbury 1996:57)

wooden framed deck, as with the *kalaks*. The rounded-shape of their silhouettes is even similar (Bradbury 1996:41). Current traditional methods reveal that the rafts were made by removing an animal's skin from the rest of its body. The animal would have been killed by a slit to its throat and another small slit would have been made inside a hind leg. Air is blown into this slit and moved around until the skin separates from its body. The head is then cut off and the hind-legs split to allow the skin to be pulled forward over the neck so that it remains intact, except for the openings at the neck and legs. All openings are then tied up and the skin is inflated orally (Bradbury 1996:44). To make a raft skins were lashed 'feet-up' to a wooden frame to create a 'deck.' In TT 143 and Amenmose skins are depicted as storage containers (4.5a&b). This provides evidence that the use of inflated skins was known to the Puntites and they could therefore have used them to create a buoyancy device for a raft. Such a raft could reportedly carry a considerable weight, a raft made of twenty-four skins would be able to carry approximately a ton of cargo and they were easy to steer (Bradbury 1996:44). They would have been the ideal form of transport along the tributaries and rapids of the Nile. The buoyancy created by the animal skins would have provided stability needed to ride the turbulent current over these rocky parts of the river. It is therefore quite possible that the Puntites and even other African traders to have transported their cargo along the Atbara River or White and Blue Nile, over the rapids of the Fifth Cataract, reaching the Egyptian outpost at Kurgus to trade their wares (Bradbury 1996:41-42).

The use of this river route would have been confined to the seasonal flow of the Atbara River, which was at its fullest from late October to early December. During the dry season, from October to May, it is possible that an overland route to Kurgus was used. The depiction of Puntites in the tomb of Amenmose may depict such an activity and would explain the lack of water craft. The pharaoh's treasurer, along with his donkey caravan meet a Puntite envoy and once their trading is complete the treasurer's chariot and a now laden donkey caravan set off on their return journey through the desert. It should further be noted that since the Puntite envoy did not continue on into Egypt after reaching their point of trade that it is highly likely that both trading parties met and conducted their business at an Egyptian outpost, in this case at Kurgus in Karoy (Bradbury 1996:56). This does not mean that Puntite envoys never set foot in Egypt. In TT 143 there is a scene depicting an envoy from Punt presenting their commodities to the

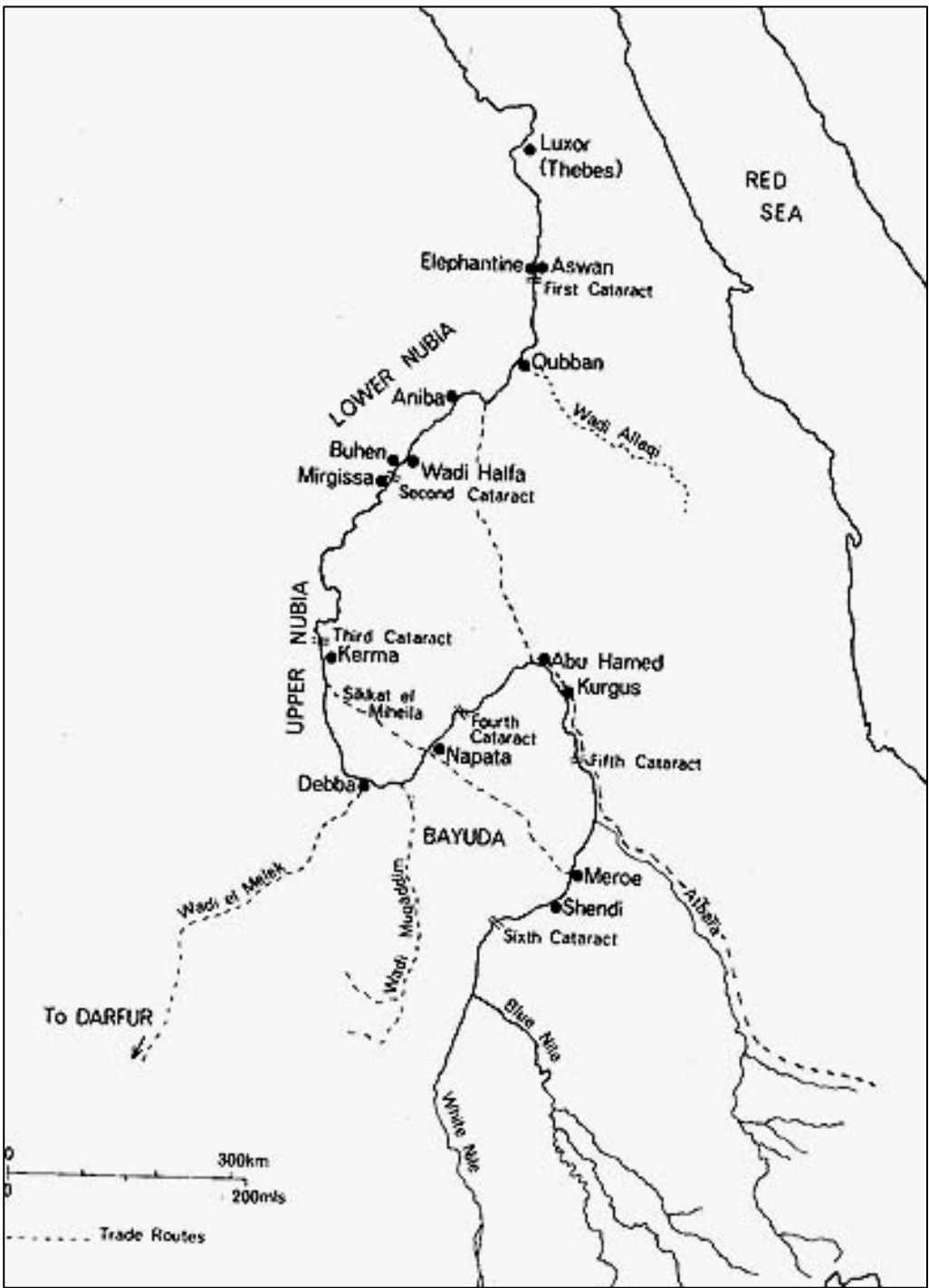


Figure 4.6: Overland trade routes during the New Kingdom.

(Adapted from Shinnie 1991:52)

pharaoh (whose name is unidentifiable) and tomb owner (3.17). Two chiefs of Punt kneel before them. The commodities they present, apart from the usual gold, incense, ebony, ostrich feathers and skins include antelope and oxen. These animals would have been too large to be transported on the rafts. Hatshepsut's envoy did not return with large animals either, there is only mention of 'baboons, monkeys and dogs' (Breasted 1962b:109). The commodities listed in the gifts given the Shipwrecked Sailor on his return voyage, also only include the latter (Bradbury 1996:57). Puntites' trading in livestock would have been forced to use an overland route to reach the Egyptian outpost at Kurgus. This involved following the Atbara River until it met up with the Nile, which would have been followed to Kurgus. At Kurgus the route following the Nile could be continued to the border post at Tombos and then into Egypt or a desert route between Abu Hamed and Korosko, north of Abu Simbel, could have been taken. This route eliminated the difficult journey through the Fourth Cataract region and allowed a faster and more direct journey into Egypt (Shinnie 1991:50-51). The best possible route that could be followed by trading caravans would have been a route that is known today as the 'Sikkat el Miheila' (4.6). The route leads from Napata through the desert to Kawa on the east bank of the Nile, just north of the Tombos border post. Once again it eliminated the most difficult part of the Fourth Cataract region and water shortages would also not have been too much of a problem over this shorter distance (Shinnie 1991:51).

#### **4.2.2 SAILING ON THE RED SEA**

It has been previously stated (in section 4.1.2) that in comparison to other ancient civilisations the Egyptians have been typecast as inadequate sea-farers. This, however, does not mean that they never used the sea as a means of trade or transport. Textual and visual resources for the Middle and New Kingdom provide sufficient evidence that the Red Sea was used as a trade route between Egypt and Punt<sup>8</sup>. All that remains to be determined is whether or not these voyages are a physical probability (Kitchen 1971:194).

##### **4.2.2.1 Egyptian vessels**

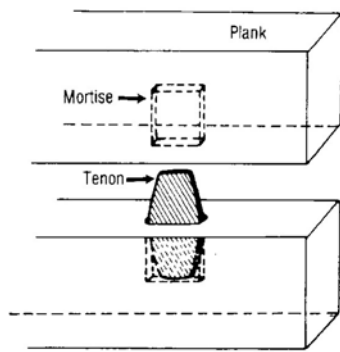
The waters of the Nile and the vessels that traversed it were an essential part of the Egyptian way of life. The earliest evidence concerning Egyptian vessels dates from around 5000 BC, in the form of simple clay models and depictions on painted pottery (Partridge 1996:10). Dynastic Egypt abounds with evidence, from temple and tomb paintings and reliefs to many

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Section 3.1 and 3.2.

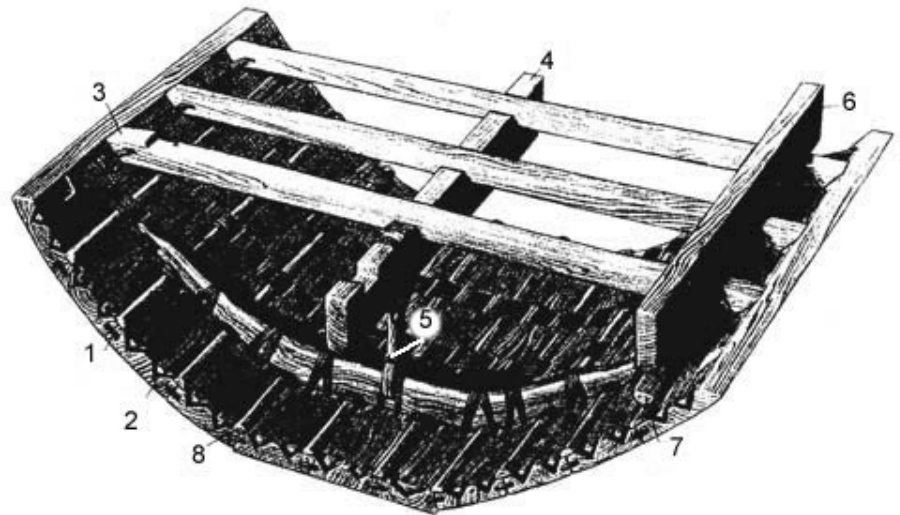
tomb models, for example those found in the tomb of Meketre (TT 280), and even the physical remains of full-sized vessels. A combination of these sources and a general knowledge of boat building techniques reveal that two types of vessels existed in Egypt, papyrus rafts, which were the most common form of river transport, and wooden vessels. The latter consisted of vessels that were primarily ceremonial in nature, serving religious and funerary purposes and those that were used to transport passengers and cargo, in other words 'working' vessels (Partridge 1996:11-12). It would appear that the Egyptians were very capable boat builders, at least when it came to the construction of vessels to be used on the Nile. The construction of vessels for use on the sea is a different matter. In order to determine whether or not they can be considered seaworthy enough to make the long voyage that would have been required to reach Punt via the Red Sea, an assessment of the construction of Egyptian vessels is required.

The complexity of boat construction was inseparable from technological development. Depictions dating from the Naqada II period suggest that wooden vessels were constructed as early as c.3300 BC (Schulz & Seidel 2004:530). The introduction of copper tools during the Early Dynastic period greatly enhanced methods of construction and resulted in the faster construction time (Ward 2001:281). Most of the indigenous woods found in Egypt, for example sycamore and persea, are unsuitable for boat building. The acacia tree has a hard wood that is suitable but the tree is generally small and so obtaining sizable timber planks would have posed a problem. Egypt required an alternative source of timber. The most successful timber for boat building was cedar, but other woods included cypress and juniper. Cedar was favoured because it is a very durable wood that is more resistant to rot and insects than other wood and it has a pleasant aroma (Partridge 1996:24). During antiquity Lebanon became known for its abundant supply of timber. The Lebanon mountain range was in fact one of three ranges with abundant timber resources. (Meiggs 1982:50) The Phoenician ports, in particular Byblos, were where the Egyptians obtained most of their timber. Trade with these ports was established during the early Old Kingdom and objects that date from as early as the Second Dynasty have been found at Byblos (Shaw 2000b:327).



**Figure 4.7:** A diagrammatic representation of a mortise-and-tenon joint.  
(Patch & Haldane 1990:27)

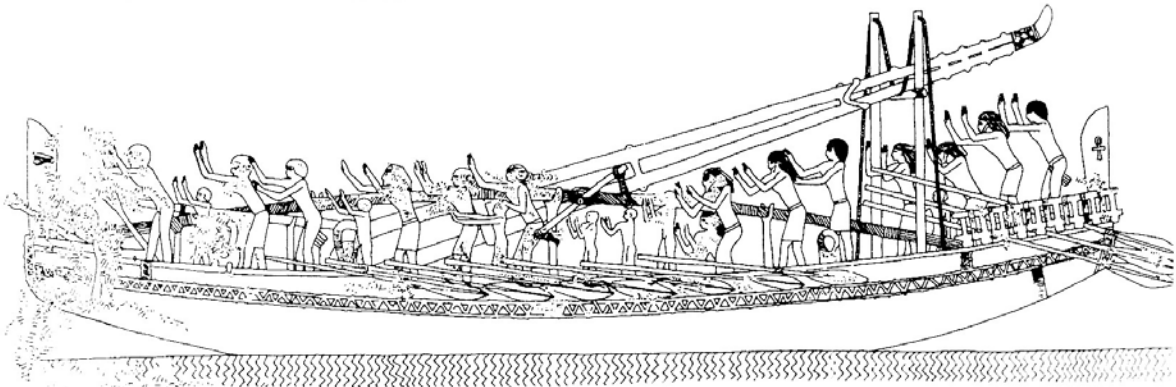
**Figure 4.8:** A cross-sectional diagram of the hull construction of Khufu's vessel.  
(Jones 1995:77)



**Figure 4.9:** Relief in the tomb of Seshemnefer depicting a bipod mast of a riverine vessel. The mast is secured by a fore-stay and a back-stay. The sail is resting on the deck and some of the crew can be seen sitting in the hull space.  
(Heyerdahl 1971:Pl.13)

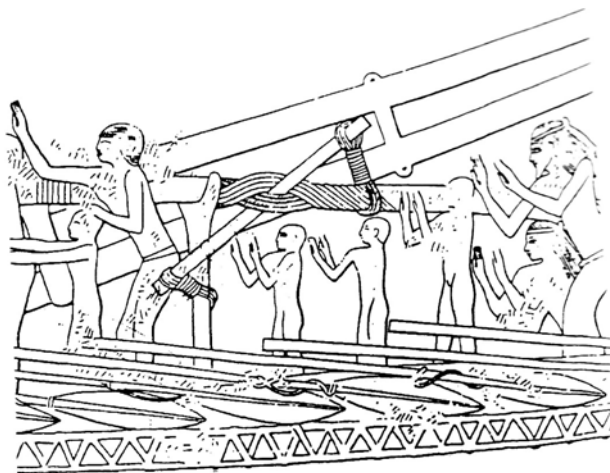
These early wooden vessels resembled papyrus vessels in shape. This is probably because boat-builders merely followed the design of the vessels with which they were most familiar. An important feature of most Egyptian vessels is that the hulls of the vessels were built first, i.e. the outer shell was built before an inner frame was added for structural support. During the Old Kingdom a distinction can be made between vessels that were constructed for Nile use and those used on the sea. Their overall construction was relatively similar, but the vessels destined for sea voyages had a few modified features to deal with more turbulent waters.

Few vessels have survived. However, a large wooden vessel was uncovered in one of the boat pits found near to the pyramid of Khufu at Giza. The excavation of the pit found a pile of timber which formed a complete boat once it was reconstructed (Partridge 1996:29-41). Although this vessel is considered to be primarily ceremonial in nature and not actually meant for physical use (on water) it does provide the best example of the construction of wooden vessels during the Old Kingdom. In its fully restored form it measured 43,63 metres in length and is 5,66 metres wide. The cedar planks that form the body of the vessel are about 14 centimetres thick and vary in length from 7 to 23 metres in length, with slots in them through which ropes passed that lashed the hull together. In contrast to modern day boat construction the hull was formed around a central keel-like plank. The hull consists of symmetrical planks that are held together by mortise-and-tenon joints [1] and V-shaped slots [2] which were lashed together with ropes (3.8). The rope was 'made from flax, halfa grass and esparto grass' (Partridge 1996:26), which shrank when it was wet and this together with the expansion of the wooded planks formed a watertight seal (Partridge 1996:26). The seams of these planks were covered by thin hemispherical planks [8], forming a watertight seal once lashed to the hull. The internal frame consisted of a central shelf [4] that ran down the middle of the boat. It was supported at intervals by forked pieces of wood [5] that were inserted into frames at the bottom of the hull. Forty-six cross-beams [3], supported by the central shelf, slotted into the sides of the hull (Jones 1995:77). The cross-beams supported the deck, which on most vessels appears to have been partially removable. This space may have been occupied by the crew, who are often shown at a lower level than passengers or riggers, particularly in scenes where rowing is depicted (Jones 1995:38).



**Figure 4.10 a:** Nautical vessel depicted in the solar temple of Sahure at Abusir. The crew of the vessel are depicted in a gesture of greeting to the pharaoh Sahure.

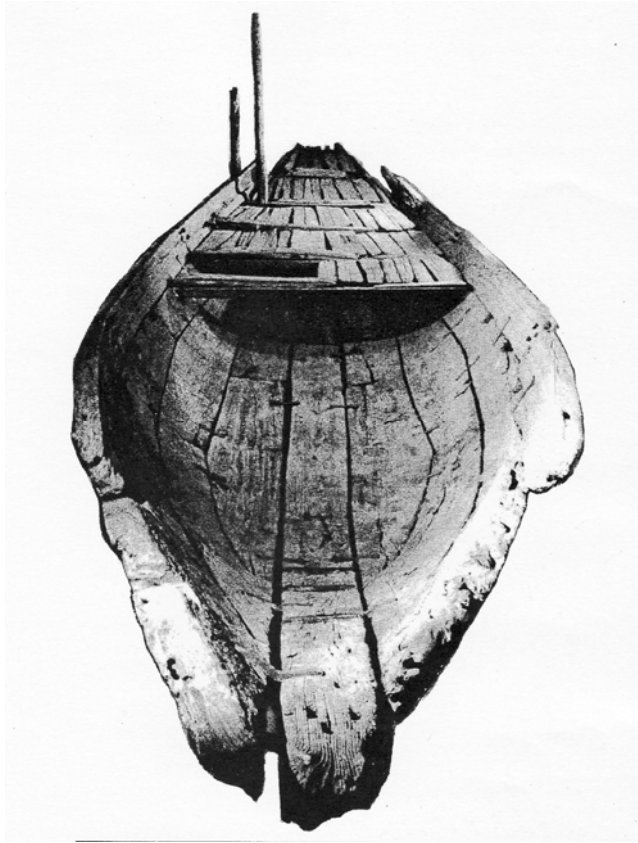
(Vinson 1994:23)



**Figure 4.10 b:** Close-up view of the hogging-truss (centre) and truss-girdles (bottom centre) on Sahure's vessel.

(Jones 1995:41)



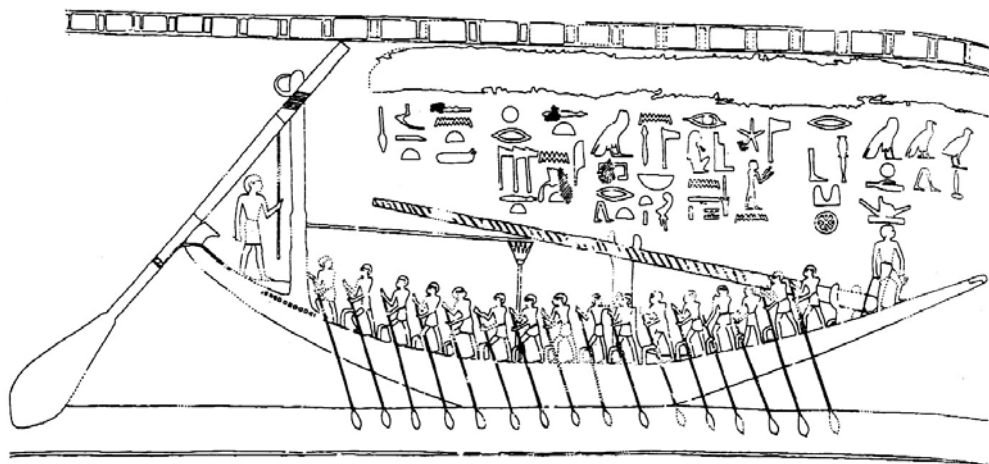
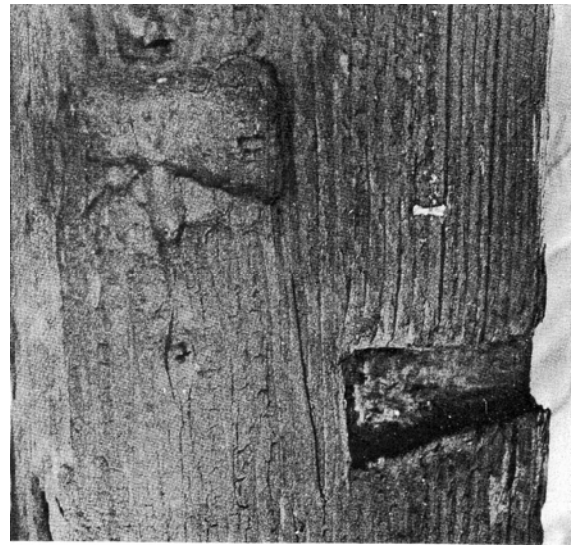


**Figure 4.11:** One of the reconstructed Dahshur vessels, in the Carnegie Museum. The vessels construction shows an absence of rope supports. The symmetrically placed planks are held together by mortise-and-tenon joints and strengthened by dove-tail fastenings.

(Patch & Haldane 1990:33)

**Figure 4.12:** Dove-tail fastenings can still be seen on the Dahshur vessel.

(Patch & Haldane 1990:42)



**Figure 4.13:** An example of a typical riverine vessel of the Middle Kingdom, in the tomb of Intefiqer.

(Jones 1995:48)

Since Khufu's vessel was created for ceremonial purposes it does not contain all the elements of a working vessel. Most vessels were steered by hand-held steering oars, suspended on either side of the stern. They were secured to the boat by rope or leather loops or grooves cut into the extended cross-beams (Jones 1995:38). Khufu's vessels was not designed with these secures and although two steering oars do accompany the vessel it is difficult to envisage the amount of control these oars would have permitted. It was accompanied by twelve oars that would have aided in propelling the vessel through the water but the amount of control they would have had is questionable. This is the reason why it has been suggested that Khufu's vessel was merely towed through the water by other smaller vessels (Partridge 1996:38). The cabin on board does not allow any room for a mast. Working vessels, until the Sixth Dynasty, were equipped with a bipod mast located in a forward position that could be stepped or unstepped as required (4.9). In an upright position the mast was secured by a rope brace attached to the stern (the back-stay) and another that ran from the mast-head to the bow (the fore-stay) to provide extra stability. The sail was attached to an upper and lower yard, which extended from the mast-head to the deck, tapering slightly. It was raised and lowered by ropes referred to as halyards that were tied to the stern along with the back-stays (Jones 1995:37 and Vinson 1994:24).

Vessels constructed for use on the seas were very similar to their riverine counterparts. There are no physical examples in existence but a relief in the solar temple of Sahure (c. 2496-2483) does provide depictions of a fleet of sea-going vessels (4.10a). The hulls of these vessels were shaped differently. Instead of a square bow and stern the hulls were long and slender, ending in 'upright knife-shaped finials' that would cut the water easily and thus provide less strain on the vessel as a whole. The structural support that a conventional keel provides was absent on both riverine and nautical vessels. To overcome a vessel sagging under its own weight two structural features were added. A heavy rope, known as a hogging-truss, was attached to a cross-beam in the bow and stern (4.10b). It extended the full length of the deck and was held at intervals by forked crutches. A lever was placed between the rope strands and twisted by the crew until an appropriate tension was reached to prevent the effects of any sagging. The lever was lashed into place, one end attached to the hogging-truss and the other to a crutch (Jones 1995:40-41 and Vinson 1994:22-23). To alleviate the pressures of the hogging-truss and provide extra support to the hull a second series of ropes, referred to as truss-girdles encircled the upper hull, just below the gunwale (4.10b). Smaller girdles were lashed to the main girdle over the gunwale to keep it securely in place. This prevented the hull planking

from collapsing under the pressure exerted by the deck planks (Jones 1995:42). Further two half-decks or platforms, at the prow and helm, are evident. The latter was railed-in, most probably for the protection of the captain or helmsman, while the former was used as a look-out for obstructions in shallow water, such as reefs and sand banks or when steering the vessel for mooring (Jones 1995:42). The rest of the vessel, i.e. the mast, sail and rigging, was constructed in the same way as the already mentioned riverine vessels. Yet these did not become set methods of construction and elements of both riverine and nautical vessels evolved during the Middle and New Kingdom.

The construction of the Old Kingdom vessels shows that the Egyptians were aware of the differing sailing conditions presented by the sea and the Nile. Although textual references during this period only allude to voyages on the Red Sea it appears that nautical vessels were sea-worthy enough to survive such a journey, it is therefore possible that even though direct reference to expeditions to Punt only occurs from the Middle Kingdom onwards they could have occurred as early as the Old Kingdom.

Considerable advancements in vessel construction are evident in the examples of Middle Kingdom vessels. These occur mostly in the form of tomb depictions and tomb models but physical examples have been found at an excavation of the mud-brick pyramid of Sesostris III (c. 1872-1852) at Dahshur (4.11). These vessels were much smaller than Khufu's and were constructed in a different way. The hulls were not square and angular but had a softer spoon-shape with a rounded instead of a flat bottom (Jones 1995:45). Each hull was approximately 10 metres in length with a shallow body and narrow sides. In contrast to Khufu's vessels they are not held together by rope. A central plank ran the entire length of the hull and from this smaller planks were attached symmetrically on either side using mortise-and-tenon joints. This method of construction would have prevented strain over the entire vessel's structure (Partridge 1996:51). In place of the rope lashings planks were attached to one another using a bow-tie shaped clamp called a dovetail fastening (4.12). The inner structure of the vessels is absent, which suggest that these vessels were only meant to fulfil a single journey or that they were life-size models (Vinson 1994:28). Smaller tomb models identify that four types of vessels were evident during the Middle Kingdom; 'travelling vessels, kitchen boats, yachts and papyrus fishing craft' (Vinson 1994:30). Some of these models exhibit masts with fully intact rigging. From these it is clear that the bipod mast is replaced by a single pole mast. In a stepped position it was held in place on deck (and at the bottom of the hull) by one or more

knee-pieces but the mast could also be unstepped and stored on a forked crutch as with Old Kingdom vessels. The shape of the sail also changed. It was broader which meant that it could no longer rest on the deck. The weight of the yard and boom were supported by lifts that passed through semicircular rings on either side of the mast. The boom was therefore lashed to the mast while the yard was free to be lowered when the sail was not in use. Mast rigging was much more simplified, consisting of a fore-stay and two shrouds that provided lateral support for the mast. When the sail was not in use the boat was propelled by oarsmen. Oars maintained their loop mountings but the oarsmen no longer sat below deck level. In most depictions they can be seen above deck accompanied by small rowing-stools. The steering oars were also replaced by a large single oar, which was mounted axially over the stern (on large vessels two would have been mounted on either side of the vessel), a tiller extended down vertically from the oar post which was used to control its rotation and thus the vessels direction (4.13) (Jones 1995:46-47).

Pictorial evidence of nautical vessels dating from the Middle Kingdom is scarce. However, textual sources provide indisputable evidence that expeditions through Egypt's eastern desert, from Koptos to the Red Sea ports of Mersa Gawasis and Mersa Gasus, were repeated occurrences. The reconstruction of Khufu's boat also provides evidence that once a vessel had been constructed it could be dismantled, transported and rebuilt. Therefore the possibility that vessels were constructed in the Koptos dockyards and then transported to the Red Sea coast in pieces to be reconstructed could have been a reality. It is therefore safe to presume that the Koptos-Red Sea expeditions were primarily concerned with the reconstruction of the nautical vessels at the coast that would have been sailed to Punt. Unfortunately all that remains of these work stations are a few stone anchors and wooden mortised blocks, but it is possible to suppose these vessels were merely large scale versions of their riverine counterparts (Sayed 1980:156). The tale of the Shipwrecked sailor provides the only recorded reference to the size nautical vessels. The sailor states that his vessel was '120 cubits long and 40 cubits wide' (Simpson 1973:51). The vessel therefore measured approximately 60 by 20 metres. The reliability of these measurements spark much controversy because of the literature in which they are found, however, the accuracy expressed in the knowledge of the sailing seasons suggest that this tale is not entirely fictional and may contain some fact. The only other reference to the size of nautical vessels occurs in the accounts of the dockyards of Sesostri I (c. 1956-1910). Although no actual measurement is given, the number of oars is recorded suggesting that a crew of sixty oarsman (thirty a side) would have occupied a vessel

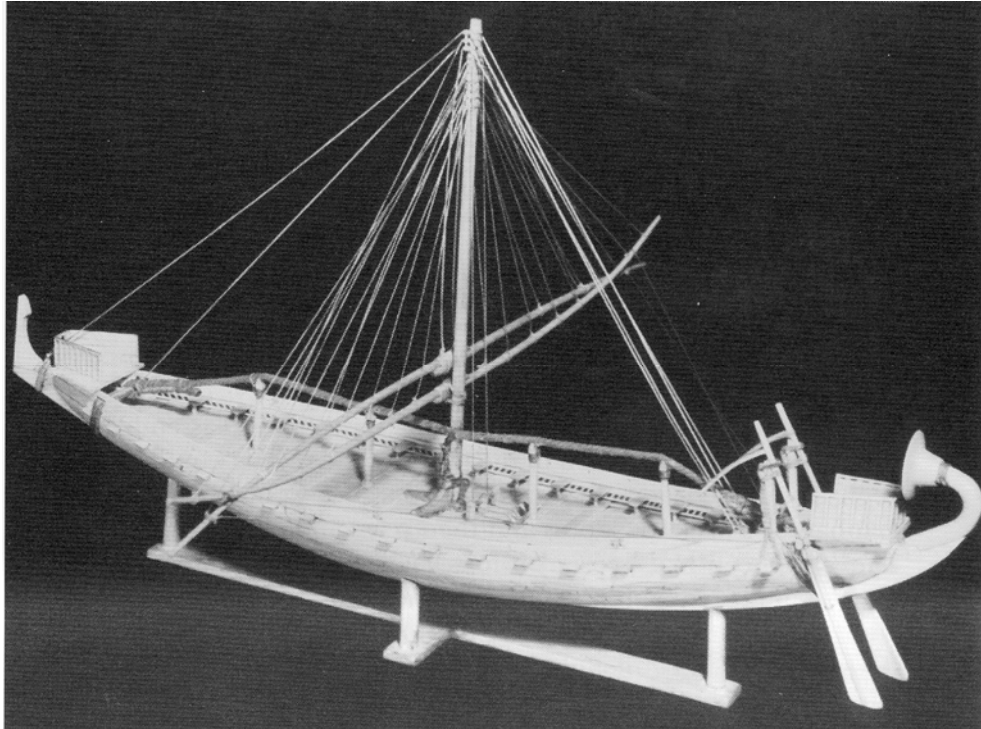
approximately 30 metres long (Vinson 1994:36). Recent research conducted from models of the Hatshepsut vessels and size-relational studies of the depictions of the Egyptians and their vessels in the Deir el-Bahri reliefs at the Science Museum in South Kensington in London (4.14) and in the Naval Museum in Venice reveal that the overall length of the vessels were roughly 25 metres and the width, 5 metres. The draught would have been 1.2 metres, which meant that each vessel could have carried 2,5 tons of cargo, including the weight of the crew, which would have consisted of between 36 and 38 people (Wicker 1998:163).

The New Kingdom has yet to produce any physical remains of actual vessels. However, the depictions at Deir el-Bahri and other reliefs and paintings do provide 'blueprints' for the reconstruction of vessels dating from this period. The depiction of a sailing vessel in the tomb of Rekhmire can be considered a standard riverine vessel of the New Kingdom (4.15). Most vessels were constructed in the same way as Middle Kingdom vessels. The hull of the vessel maintained its rounded shape. The internal structure is difficult to determine from paintings and reliefs and the detailed deck plan, characteristic of the previous period, is absent on New Kingdom tomb models (Jones 1995:49). All that can be determined is that the deck planks extended through the hull, along the sides of the vessels to provide it with extra lateral support. All large vessels had a single mast that was fixed permanently to cross-beam, supported at deck level and at the bottom of the hull, like the Middle Kingdom vessels. The sails of vessels maintained the shape and size of their predecessors but innovations occurred with the rigging to provide greater support to the yard and boom. The mast-head was mounted with a grid-like structure through which the halyards ran and below this was structure with holes through which the lifts ran to support the yard. The boom was fixed in a higher position and was lashed in such a way that allowed for turning but was not removable. Other steering gear remained the same as on Middle Kingdom vessels (Jones 1995:49-52).

The clearest depictions of nautical vessels are found at Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri. Their hulls are deeper than Sahure's vessel and the design also became more streamline. The knife-shaped finial at the bow was retained but the stern finial was replaced by a curved finial, ending in a lotus flower (3.10). The latter was so shaped to counteract any waves that broke over the stern from tipping the vessel on to its side (Jones 1995:53). The main structural support for the hull was still provided by a hogging-truss (4.16). The rope was secured to the girt-rope at the bow and stern. Above deck it was supported by two forked crutches and the mast served as the middle crutch. On either side of the mast two smaller twisted ropes extended from a cross-beam, encircling the main rope and the mast. These were

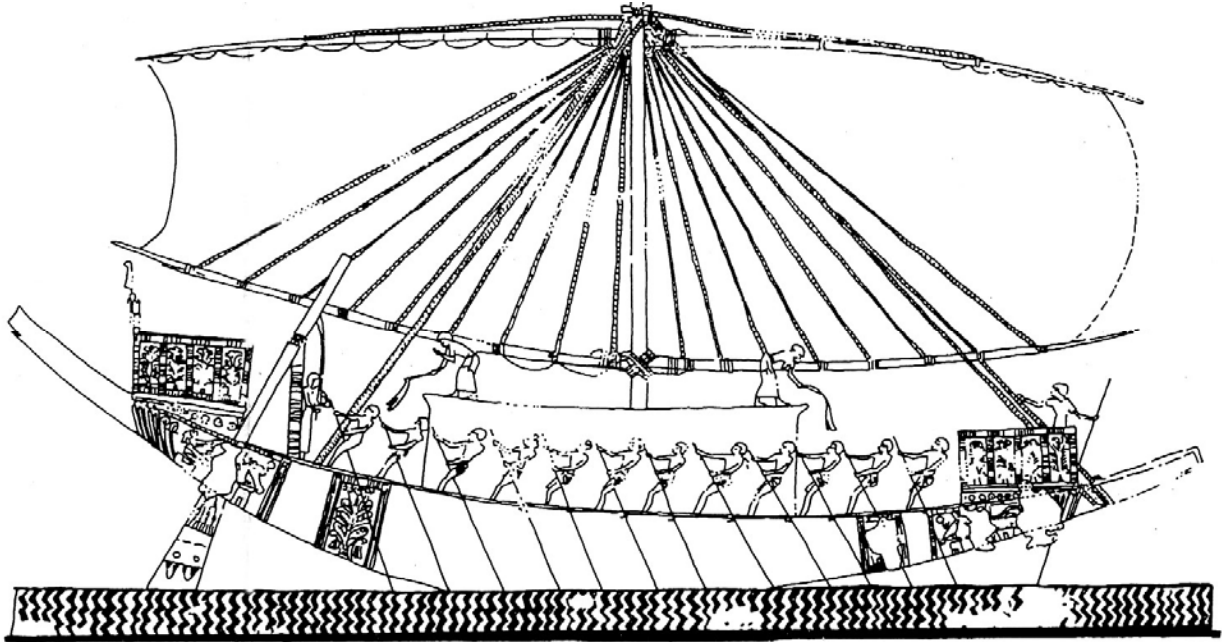
then twisted until the right degree of tension was reached in the hogging-truss. This method of structural support provided two advantages. It was easier to adjust the tension in the hogging-truss with the twisted ropes and these ropes also provided extra support for the mast (Jones 1995:53, 55-56). The sail riggings were the same as riverine vessels, except they were doubled for extra support. Steering gear consisted of two oars mounted on either side of the stern (4.17). They were lashed to forked crutches which were lashed firmly to a cross-beam. This was not the only support, the blades of the oars were kept in place by a rope that was lashed to the gunwales. These oars were manoeuvred by the same system of a vertical tiller that developed on Middle Kingdom vessels (Jones 1995:54-55). The rowing oars were also mounted and secured the same way as on Middle Kingdom vessels.

These nautical vessels of 25 metres in length would have provided space for fifteen oarsmen aside. There was no space on board for a central cabin, as most of the cargo is stored above deck, but some may have been stored below as well. This would have resulted in the even distribution of weight over the entire vessel (Partridge 1996:60). The improved structural design of nautical vessels during the New Kingdom resulted in streamlined vessels that were strengthened to cope with the rough waters of the Red Sea. There can be little doubt that they were sea-worthy enough to make the voyage from the Egyptian Red Sea ports to Punt and back.



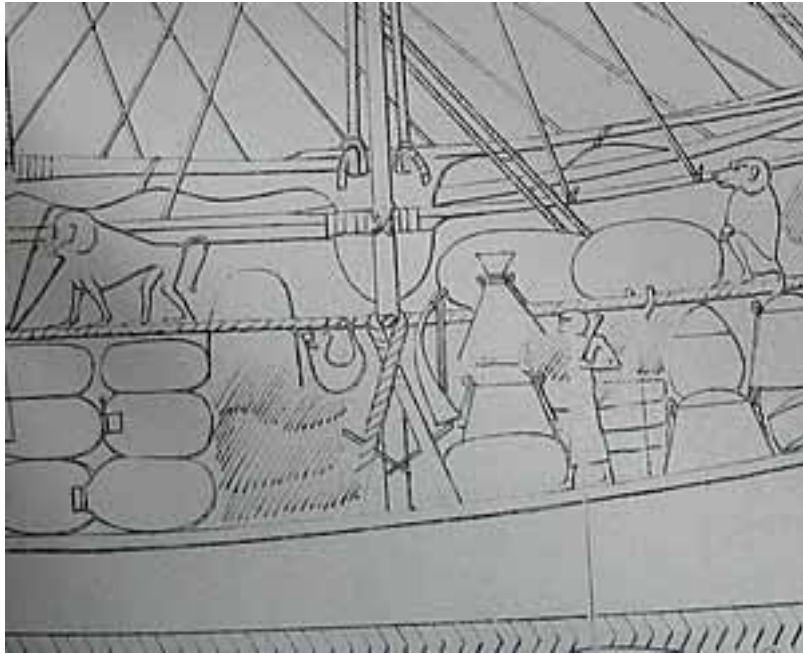
**Figure 4.14:** Modern model, in the Science Museum in South Kensington in London, of a vessel from Hatshepsut's Punt expedition.

(Partridge 1996:62)



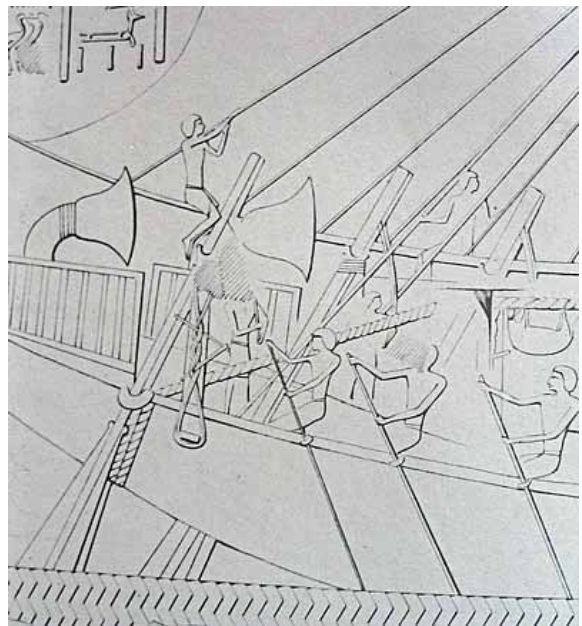
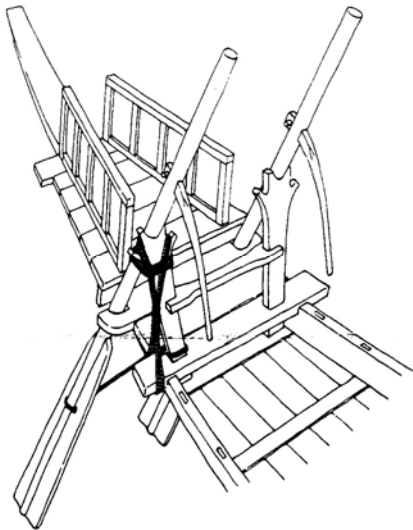
**Figure 4.15:** An example of a typical riverine vessel from the New Kingdom, depicted in the tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100). It shows the innovations that occurred during this period with the rigging of vessels.

(Vinson 1994:39)



**Figure 4.16:** The hogging-truss on Hatshepsut's vessels. The rope is secured to the girt-rope at the bow and stern. It is supported by two forked crutches, above the deck and the mast serves as the middle crutch. On either side of the mast two small ropes twist from cross-beams, encircling the main rope and the mast. These were twisted to reach the right degree of tension in the hogging-truss.

(Neville 1898:Pl. 74)



**Figure 4.17:** The enhanced steering-gear on Hatshepsut's nautical vessels. It consists of two oars mounted on either side of the stern, lashed to forked crutches which were lashed firmly to a cross-beam to provide support.

(Jones 1995:55 and Neville 1898: Pl.75)



### 4.2.3 SAILING CONDITIONS

Egyptian nautical vessels may be considered sea-worthy, but it is unrealistic to consider visions of an Egyptian vessel sailing 'the open sea'. The sailing conditions in the Red Sea are determined by its three main channels; a main central channel and two inshore channels, separated from the central one by islands and coral reefs (Kitchen 1971:194.) The proposed measurements of Hatshepsut's vessels in the previous section (4.2.2) reveal that in order for the vessels to sail without much hindrance or danger of hitting the coral reefs in the Red Sea a channel of 18 metres wide and between 3 and 4 metres deep would have been needed (Kitchen 1971:195). The Egyptian vessels would have sailed in the western inshore channel, hugging the coastline, which is characterised by many inlets that served as shelter for overnight stops. The average sailing speed would have been 'a brisk-walking pace,' 5 to 6 kilometres per hour (Kitchen 1971:196). If it is considered that a sailing day was roughly nine hours then a distance of 48 kilometres a day would have been covered (Kitchen 1971:196). The distance covered between Sa'waw and Aqiq equates to approximately 1173.96 km and if the vessels sailed further to the port of Adulis the distance is 1603.37 km (Kitchen 1971:197-202). This would mean that any voyage would take approximately just over a month to complete, one way.

Wind direction and currents on the Red Sea determined the sailing seasons. North westerly winds prevail over the entire Red Sea area during the summer months (June-September) these are accompanied by a surface current that flows from north to south, creating ideal conditions for sailing down the Red Sea. During winter the current is reversed and it flows from south to north and the wind direction south of Sa'waw blows in a south easterly direction. North of Sa'waw the wind direction changes, blowing north west. This change in wind direction provides an explanation as to why Sa'waw was favoured as the Red Sea port. Vessels wanting to sail further north, for example all the way to Suez, would have had to row against the wind, extending an already lengthily voyage (Kitchen 1971:194-195). The likelihood of this is therefore improbable.

The general sailing season to Punt was towards the end of the summer months. The voyages of Henu, Hatshepsut and Rameses III would have then taken place in order to reach Punt in time for the trading season between October-April. This meant that the Egyptians, once they had reached Punt, would have had to spend a month or two there waiting for the sailing conditions to reverse. This period was not wasted as it would have allowed for the

exploration of the interior regions passed the Red Sea hills and the acquisition of a greater variety of commodities (Kitchen 1971:202-203).

# **CHAPTER 5: PROFILING PUNT – COMMODITIES, PEOPLE AND CULTURE**

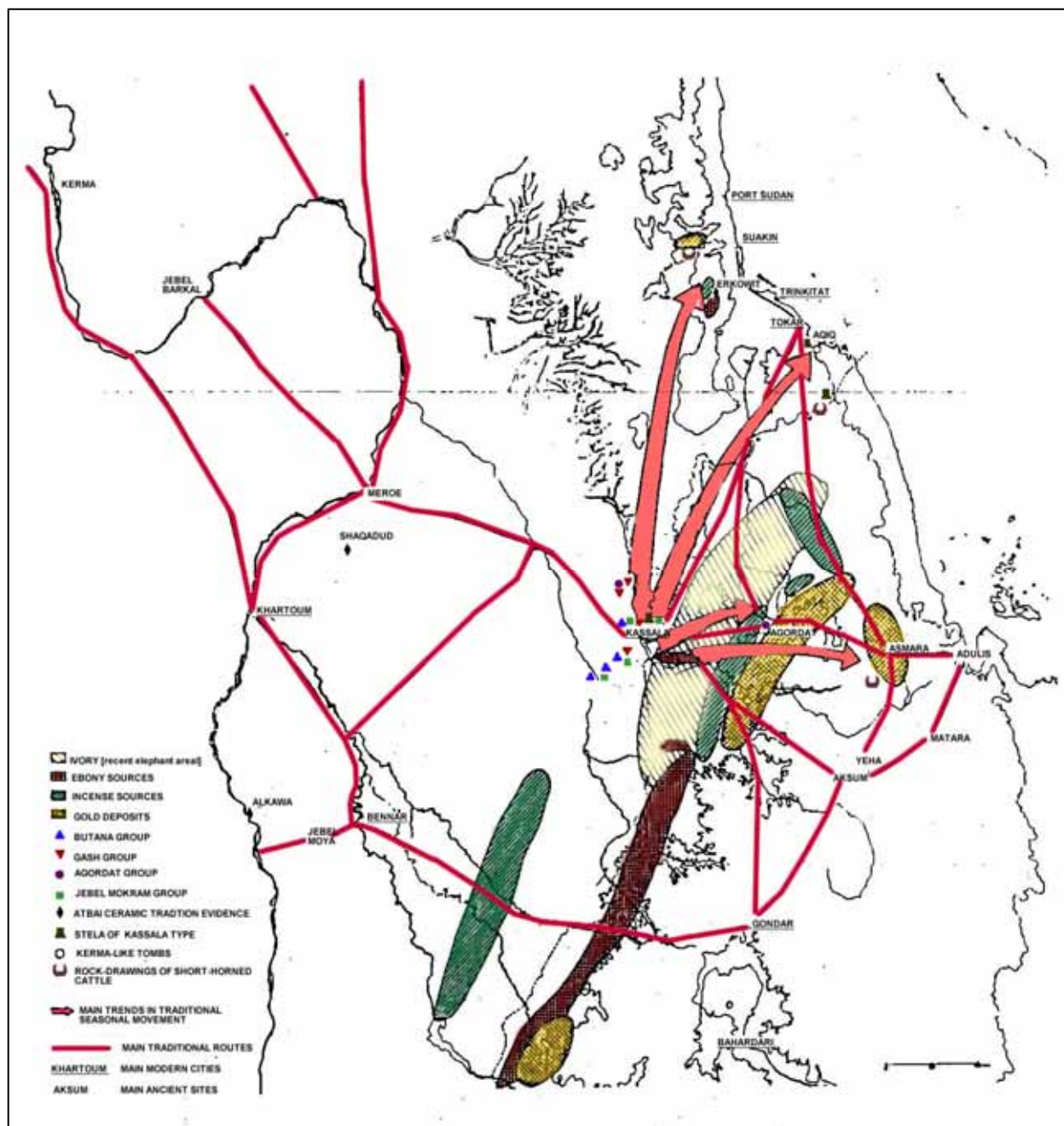
## **5.1 COMMODITIES**

Thus far the sections of this thesis have revealed that Punt is an actual place and that it was possible for the Egyptians to have had direct contact with the region through the Red Sea trade. However, the region was far enough removed from Egypt to thwart any ideas of political domination. This also applied in reverse, i.e. Punt and its people were not considered a threat to the Egyptian state, in spite of their situation as an important and perhaps powerful trading partner. The geographical region that is being considered as a possible location for Punt is the coastal region and interior south of the port of Suakin (5.1). The depictions of Puntites in New Kingdom sources will be considered along with the trade commodities that are mentioned in these and other sources, which have already been discussed. Archaeological sites in this vicinity will also be reviewed along with the cultural composition of Punt to determine if there is any possibility that people of a similar culture to that of the Puntites inhabited this region during the period of time when Egypt had contact with Punt.

### **5.1.1 FLORA AND FAUNA**

#### **5.1.1.1 Aromatic produce**

The difficulty in locating plant species in order to determine their distribution in antiquity is wrought with problems, for example any landscape altering activities; fires, human activities for example, cultivation and grazing, deforestation and wars, as well as invading plant species, prevent the discovery of accurate distribution results. Not to mention the generalised depictions of plant species by Egyptian scribes. Regarding this thesis the distribution of certain plant species, depicted in reliefs and tomb paintings, will be considered, not as primary evidence but in conjunction with other evidence in order to collectively provide a possible location for Punt.



**Figure 5.1:** A geo-archaeological map of the eastern Sudan and northern Ethiopia. Natural resources of these regions as well as population settlements and movements in antiquity are also shown.

(Adapted from Fattovich 1991b:264)

Of all the commodities traded with Punt, the gum-resins used in the production of incense are the most important. They were obtained primarily through middle-man trade, as there is little evidence to suggest that the Egyptians themselves were involved with the tapping process on site in foreign locations. However, the scenes depicted in Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri and the tomb of the official, Hepusob (3.12) as well as the records of Rameses III's expedition to Punt in the Papyrus Harris, suggest that the Egyptians did occasionally visit the regions where these aromatic products were produced (Serpico & White 2000a:430). Investigating the distribution of these gum resins will help to determine if any possible contact, whether direct or indirect, could have existed with Egypt and whether any one of these regions provides a verifiable location for Punt.

Egyptian texts refer to incense by two different terms: *sntr* and *ntyw*. These terms have also been used interchangeably to signify frankincense and myrrh. Both of these small trees belong to the *Burseraceae* family of resin producing trees and shrubs. Frankincense is obtained from the genus, *Boswellia* and myrrh, from the genus, *Commiphora*, both of which exist in Arabia and regions to the south of Egypt (Serpico & White 2000a:438). An alternative to these two are a few of the resin producing trees from the genus, *Pistacia*, although their distribution is very extensive; the Mediterranean, Syro-Palestine, East Africa and Arabia (Serpico & White 2000a:434-435). Recent scientific studies, concerned with the chemical structure of resin remains dating from the New Kingdom provide a means of pin pointing the resin's botanical identity (and thus its location) as well as providing a possible definition for one of these terms. New Kingdom texts refer to *sntr*, being obtained in large quantities from Syro-Palestine but there is also reference to *sntr* of Puntite origin. *Boswellia* does not occur in Syro-Palestine and the distribution of *Commiphora* is very limited, therefore the possibility of the *sntr* from Syro-Palestine being of the genus *Pistacia* is highly likely (Serpico & White 2000b:884). Evidence obtained from a fourteenth century BC (Bass 1987:693) shipwreck off the southern coast of Turkey near Ulu Burun and from Amarna, the capital city of Egypt during the reign of Akhenaten, supports this theory. Part of the shipwreck cargo included no less than a hundred and forty-nine Canaanite amphorae, filled with resin that amounted to a mass of over a ton. GC/MS (gas chromatography/mass spectrometry) testing identified the resin as being of the genus *Pistacia*. At Amarna resin-coated pottery sherds have been found throughout the city, i.e. access

to resin was not restricted to temple and royal usage, but was also utilised in the domestic sphere, for offerings in small family chapels (Serpico & White 2000b:886-890). GC/MS testing, once again revealed that the resin on these sherds was of the genus *Pistacia*. In addition to this find, sherds from Canaanite amphorae were also found throughout the city. They all contained traces of *Pistacia* resin on their interior surface, providing definite evidence that incense trade between Syro-Palestine and Egypt did exist. Some of the Canaanite sherds from Amarna, now in the British Museum, were inscribed with the contents of their jars - *sntr*.

The resin remains found on the Ulu Burun wreck and Canaanite sherds at Amarna confirm that incense trade between Syro-Palestine and Egypt did exist on a large scale during the New Kingdom. The inscriptions on the Canaanite amphorae sherds also provide a possible botanical identity for *sntr*; resin from the genus *Pistacia*. In the Memphite section of the Papyrus Harris Rameses III records the planting of both *sntr* and *antyw* trees in the surrounds of Ptah's sanctuary at Memphis:

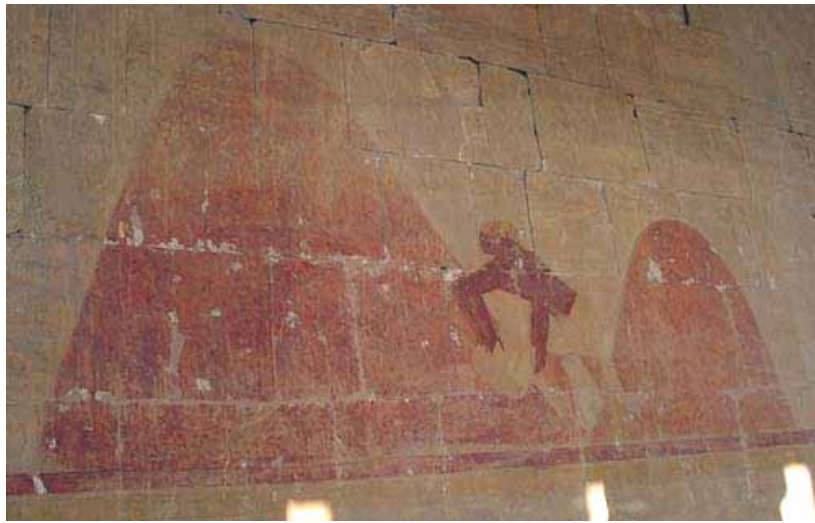
I brought to thee plentiful tribute of *antyw*, in order to go around thy temple with the fragrance of Punt for thy august nostrils at early morning. I planted *sntr* and *antyw* -trees in thy great and august court in Ineb-Sebek, being those which my hands brought from the country of God's-Land, in order to satisfy thy two serpent-goddesses every morning.

(Breasted 1962d:169)

Of the many species of *Pistacia* there are three that can be found on the African continent. *Pistacia khinjuk*'s distribution includes the wadis of the eastern desert in Egypt, the south eastern border between Egypt and Sudan and southern parts of Sinai. *Pistacia aethiopica* distribution includes Somalia, Eritrea (although it appears the species has reached extinction in this region) and the southern parts of Ethiopia. *Pistacia chinensis* var. *falcata* also occurs in Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan (Serpico & White 2000a:435). The evidence concerning a supply of *sntr* from Syro-Palestine is more conclusive than the evidence of an African supply, however, if it is presumed that the Egyptians were able to correctly identify the resins from various species of *Pistacia*, occurring on these two different continents as one and the same, then it is possible that they may have exhausted their local supplies before they were forced to utilise sources further afield. This would explain the presence of *sntr* in Syro-Palestine and Punt and further strengthens the identity of *sntr* as incense made from *Pistacia* resin. It is therefore safe to draw the conclusion that the botanical identity of *antyw* refers either to frankincense or myrrh (Serpico

& White 2000b:894-895). For the purpose of this thesis, the identity of *antyw* is of paramount importance. It is the resin that was traded from Punt, therefore its identity would produce a region or location where the species was present, and hence a possible location for Punt itself. Frankincense is produced by the resiniferous *Boswellia* species, all of which prefer rocky and dry places. There are four species on the African continent from which frankincense could have been produced; *Boswellia carteri*, *Boswellia frereana*, *Boswellia papyrifera* and to a lesser extent *Boswellia bhau-dajiana* (Hepper 1969:68 and Serpico & White 2000a:438). *Boswellia papyrifera* possesses the widest distribution of all the species. It is found in the north eastern province of Kassala and the western provinces of Darfur and Kordofan in Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, the Central African Republic and Uganda (Herzog 1968:65). *Boswellia frereana* and *Boswellia carteri* are not so widely distributed, found primarily in Somalia, but they do produce the most and highest quality resin. A fifth species exists, *Boswellia rivaie*, native to southern Ethiopia and Somalia (Hepper 1969:68-70 and Serpico & White 2000a:438-439). The distribution of these species has caused many scholars to favour Somalia as Punt, because *Boswellia frereana* are concentrated on its coastal regions and *Boswellia carteri*, inland. However, *Boswellia papyrifera* could provide further locals for Punt as its distribution coincides with overland trade routes (Hepper 1969:68-70) and although Hatshepsut's trade envoy traded with Puntites on the coast there is a very great possibility that they acted as intermediaries, therefore the presence of *Boswellia* on the Somali coast is not inconclusive evidence to providing an exact location for Punt.

Myrrh is also obtained from the resiniferous species of the genus *Commiphora*. The distribution of this genus is huge, extending from Africa to India. The botanical identity of myrrh is generally accepted as the species *Commiphora myrrha*, which can be found on rocky slopes in semi-desert regions. These include south west Arabia, eastern Ethiopia and Somalia. Other species include *Commiphora erythraea*, *Commiphora samharensis* and *Commiphora gileadensis* or *opobalsamum*. The odour emitted by *Commiphora samharensis* is similar to some of the *Pistacia* species and it is possible that it could have been used as an alternative source of *sntr*, or interchangeably by the Egyptians (Serpico & White 2000a:439, 442.) It would then follow that if



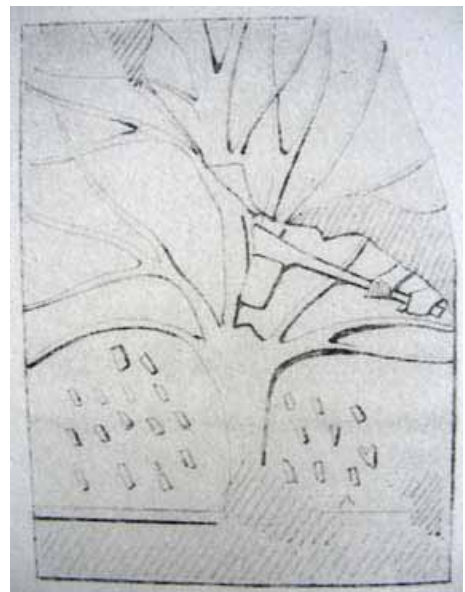
**Figure 5.2:** Piles of red-coloured incense from Punt in Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri.

(Glenister 2006)



**Figure 5.3:** Fragments of the Puntite reliefs at Deir el-Bahri showing the felling of ebony trees.

(Neville 1898:Pl. 70)





*Pistacia* and *Commiphora* species are associated as designating sources of *sntr*, then *Boswellia* species would designate the source of *antyw*. A further problem in determining the identity of *antyw* is evidence obtained from the depictions of it in Egyptian reliefs and tomb paintings. It is generally painted in a red-brown hue (5.2). Since the resin produced by *Commiphora* is also red-brown in colour, the identity of *antyw* is favoured by some scholars as myrrh. Although *Boswellia* resin ranges in colour from pale yellow or green to yellow-brown, once it is exposed to the atmosphere it changes to a red or greenish colour (Van Beek 1960:71 & Saleh 1972:145). Therefore the exact botanical identity of *antyw* therefore continues to remain at large.

### 5.1.1.2 Other botanical commodities

Ebony is another commodity that was definitely traded from the Puntites. A fragment from the reliefs at Deir el-Bahri depicts the felling of trees (5.3), which are identified textually as ‘*Sat hbnyw r aAt wrt*,’ “cutting of ebony in great quantity” (Kitchen 1971:187). Two species have been suggested for its botanical origin – *Diosyros ebenum* and *Dalbergia melanoxylon*. Herzog (1968) favours the former stating that it occurs widely in Sudan and Somalia. However, his evidence to support its distribution in Sudan is not provided and its distribution in Somalia does not correspond with the distribution of either *Boswellia* or *Commiphora* species (Kitchen 1971:187). The botanical identity of ancient sources of Egyptian ebony that are still in existence have been confirmed as *Dalbergia melanoxylon* (Kitchen 1971:187). Its distribution is vast, occurring in the dry savanna woodland regions of tropical African, on an east-west axis from Senegal to Eritrea and on a north-south axis from northern Ethiopia to Angola (Gale, Gasson, Hepper & Killen 2000:338).

### 5.1.1.3 Fauna

The reliefs in Hatshepsut’s temple at Deir el-Bahri provide the greatest source of information concerning the natural environment of the Puntites, the animals which lived in their surrounds and those with which they interacted. These depictions have been used conclusively to support an African location for Punt and also to confirm that Hatshepsut’s expedition was conducted via the sea. The predicament that presents itself is the creator of the images. It can never be determined whether or not a scribe or scribes actually accompanied Hatshepsut’s fleet to Punt with the purpose of undertaking an anthropological and zoological study of this region, its people

and animals. Yet this proposal is not an impossibility. Egyptian artistic representation is governed by a set of standard rules, ‘the narrative’ does not usually form part of these. The Punt expedition scenes are not dominated visually<sup>1</sup> by a central figure, but are rather a collage of miniature scenes that present a specific landscape complete with fauna, flora and human life. In a sense it appears to be an ancient documentary of an actual place (Harvey 2003: 89). This attention to visual detail of a foreign environment is paralleled in Thutmosis III’s festival hall in the Temple of Karnak. A room between the royal and sun cult area has a lower register decorated with the so-called ‘botanical garden.’ The reliefs depict fauna and flora that is Syrian in origin, most likely viewed and recorded on the numerous campaigns undertaken by the pharaoh into Syro-Palestine during his reign (Schulz & Sourouzian 2004:160-161). The suggestion that scribes were included in the expedition party certainly seems to be a valid conclusion. A stela belonging to the vizier of Sesostris I, Intefoker lists five scribes amongst expeditionaries waiting on the Red Sea shores to depart for Punt. It is logical that scribes would have accompanied these expeditions to record the commodities received via tribute or trade. It is therefore also possible that they may have been instructed to record, in detail, the surroundings of the foreign environments they found themselves in, during such expeditions. The depictions of Punt at Deir el-Bahri can therefore be considered a plausible portrayal of this region and its inhabitants.

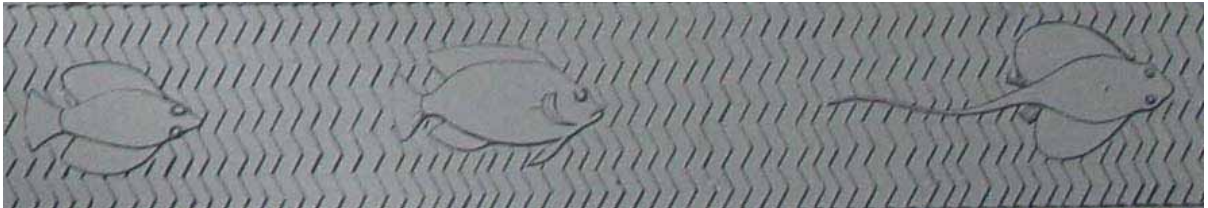
The bands of water that underlie the fleet sailing to and from Punt can be identified as sea water. The majority of the fishes depicted in these bands have been identified as marine in origin. The attention to detail is quite remarkable. Most of the fish are depicted from a lateral view, in order to render their most recognisable features. Those that are not, for example the squid, lobster, stingrays and the flat fish are still depicted from a perspective that portrays their most distinct characteristics (5.4a&b) (Danelius & Steinitz 1940:19). In an article by Danelius and Steinitz (1940), a number of ichthyologists from around the world were asked to provide possible identities for the fishes depicted in the reliefs. They all concluded that the marine life was Red Sea – Indian Ocean fauna, that could be found anywhere from the Gulf of Suez, to Aqaba and the coasts of the Indian Ocean (Danelius & Steinitz 1940:17).

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<sup>1</sup> The visual structure is usual as it does not complement the content of the texts that occur alongside it. The textual structure of the reliefs reflect the traditional royal narrative, i.e. the pharaohs’ accomplishments reinforce the superiority of the Egyptian state, its gods and its ruler through the conquering and submission of foreign peoples and the tribute of their native commodities. While the visual structure focuses primarily on the representation of the landscape and its inhabitants (Harvey 2003:89).



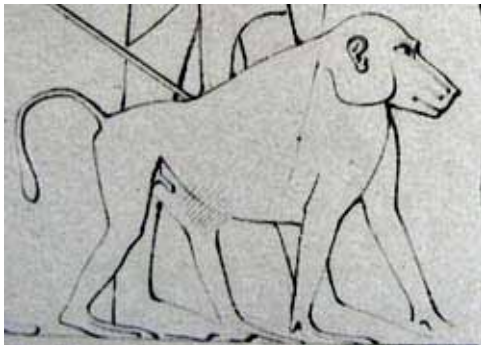
**a**



**b**

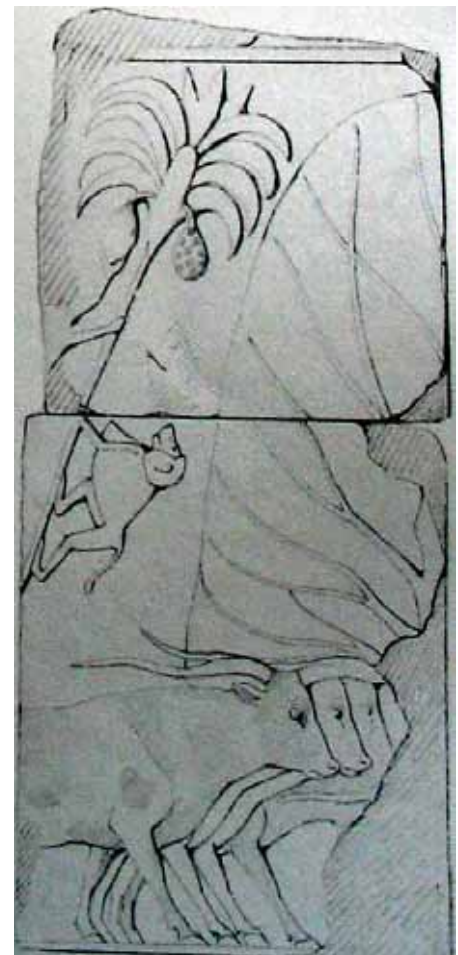
**Figure 5.4 a&b:** The bands of water that underlie the fleet sailing to and from Punt contain a variety of marine life. These two bands show how Egyptian scribes depicted these creatures to render their most recognisable features. Hence the squid and lobster in **a** and the flat fish and stingray in **b** are depicted from above as opposed to the other fish, which appear laterally.

(Neville 1898:Pl. 73 (a) & Pl. 75 (b) )



**Figure 5.5:** A baboon, one of the animals presented to the pharaoh on the return of the Punt expedition to Egypt.

(Neville 1898:Pl. 76)



**Figure 5.6:** A fragment of the Punt relief depicting a baboon climbing a dom-palm above some long-horned cattle.

(Neville 1898:Pl. 79)

Land fauna depicted in the reliefs consists of both wild and domesticated animals. Baboons and monkeys clamber up dom-palms (5.6) and there is even a rather comical scene of what appears to be a confrontation between a mother baboon, with her young clinging to her back, and a large animal, either a rhinoceros or hippopotamus (5.9). Baboons can also be seen amongst the cargo loaded on the Egyptian vessels in preparation for their return voyage (4.16). A baboon is also amongst the commodities presented to the pharaoh on the arrival of the expedition to the Egyptian court (5.5). These baboons have been identified as the Hamadryas and Anubis baboons. A Hamadryas mummy found in the tomb of Thutmose III as well as the remains of Hamadryas and Anubis baboon mummies in Gabanet el-Giboud near Thebes provide further evidence that the Puntite baboons may have been part of this subspecies' natural habitat (Osborn 1998:69 and Brandon-Jones & Goudsmit 2000:112). The latter inhabits present day eastern Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and the Red Sea Hills in the south western Arabian Peninsula, while the Anubis baboon has a more extensive distribution across central Africa, from Sierra Leone, east to Sudan and south to Zaire and Tanzania (Osborn 1998:32 and Brandon-Jones & Goudsmit 2000:111). The ancient distribution of these primates is not completely known, but evidence from the Predynastic period confirms that a baboon cult did exist early in Egyptian history, perhaps at a time when these species could still be found natively in Egypt. The importation of the primates is suggested to have begun during the early part of the Old Kingdom and by the New Kingdom the importation of primates formed part of international trade. Baboons are not the only primates that appear to have been traded. Although none occur as trade commodities in the Deir el-Bahri reliefs, the long-tailed monkey is one of the commodities presented amongst the tribute from Punt<sup>2</sup> and Nubia in the tribute scenes in the Eighteenth Dynasty tomb of Rekhmire (5.7) (Osborn 1998:33, 36). These monkeys have been identified as Green monkeys. They were never considered to be sacred, unlike the Hamadryas and Anubis baboons, but they were favoured as pets amongst the Egyptians and also used as diplomatic gifts. These monkeys were not native to Egypt and it is therefore very likely that they were obtained through southern trade (Osborn 1998:39-40).

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<sup>2</sup> Long-tailed monkeys are depicted in the dom-palms alongside baboons in Punt in the Deir el-Bahri reliefs.

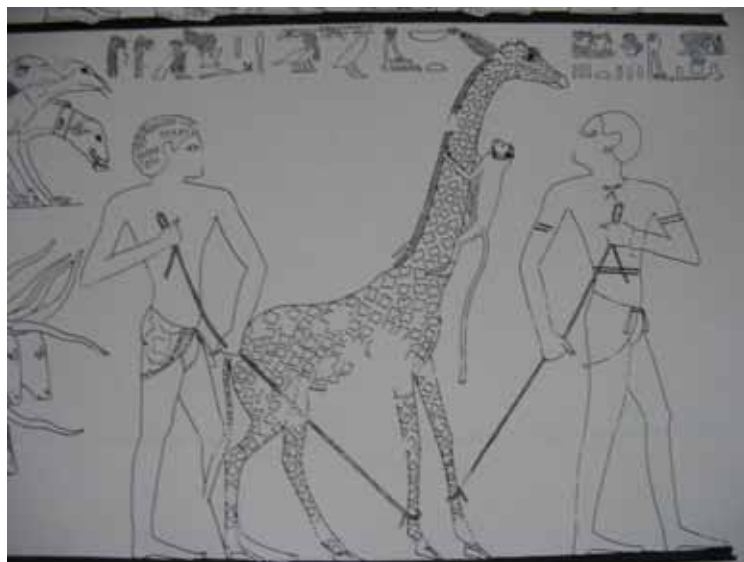


**Figure 5.7:** Nubian tribute in the tomb of Rekmire (TT 100), depicting a long-tailed monkey, baboon, leopard and the pelts of wild dog and a desert fox.

(Davies 1973: Pl.19)



**a**



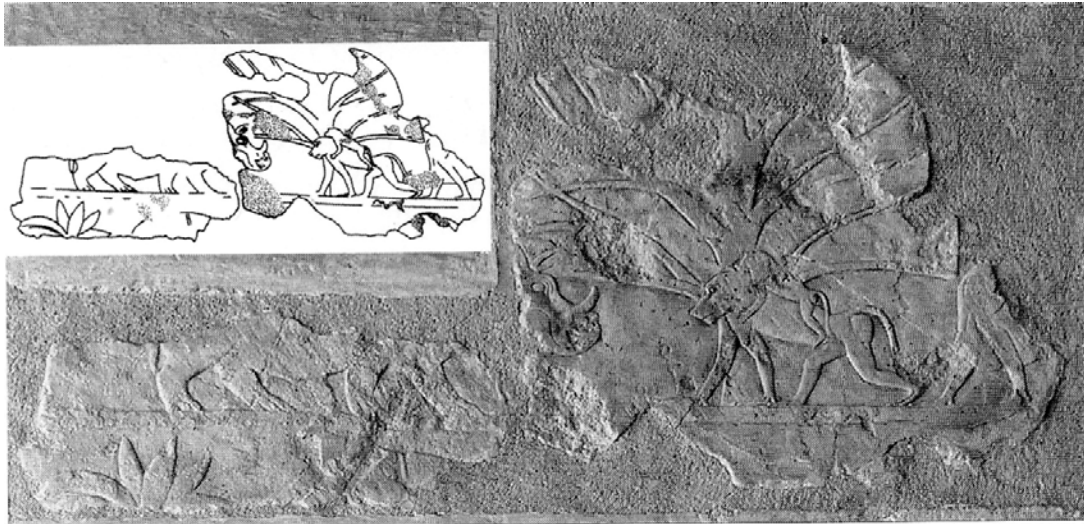
**b**

**Figure 5.8a:** The remains of giraffe's body in the scenes of tributes from southern countries, excluding Punt in Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri.

(Glenister 2006)

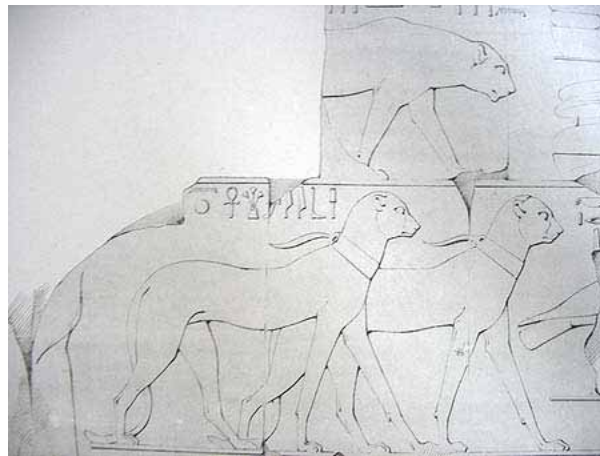
**Figure 5.8b:** Nubian tribute in the tomb of Rekmire (TT 100), depicting giraffe and a long-tailed monkey.

(Davies 1973: Pl.19)



**Figure 5.9:** Mother baboon and her young confronting a rhinoceros on the Punt relief in Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri.

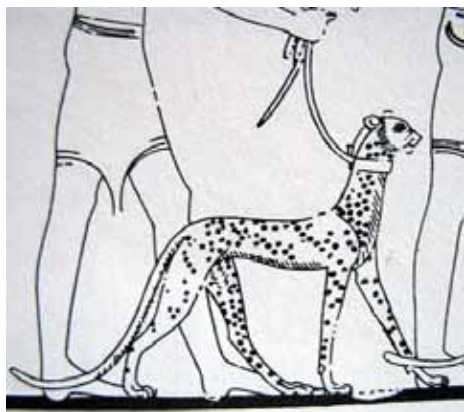
(Meeks 2003:55)



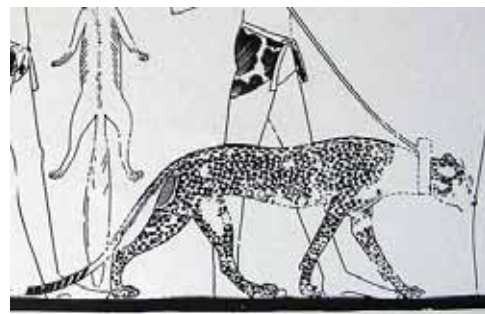
**a**

**Figure 5.10a:** Leopard and cheetahs in the scenes of tributes from southern countries, excluding Punt in Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri.

(Neville 1898:Pl.80)



**b**



**c**

**Figure 5.10b&c:** The depiction of a cheetah and leopard in the tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100). (b: Davies 1973:Pl.17& c: Pl.19)

The presence of larger mammals, such as the giraffe and rhinoceros, in these reliefs help to marginally determine the geographical extent of Punt. The reliefs at Deir el-Bahri contain two images of a giraffe. Only a fragment depicting the animal's head remains from the Punt part of the relief, therefore it cannot be determined whether the animal is captured or free, however, it is involved in the natural action of eating leaves from the top of one of the trees (Meeks 2003:55). A second giraffe is depicted in the Deir el-Bahri reliefs but as part of the commodities presented to Amun from the other countries in the south (5.8a). This association corresponds with its present distribution in the open, dry bush of the southern Sahara. Although in Predynastic antiquity its distribution included the region west of the Nile as far north as Memphis. An alteration in the regional climate and the lack of food sources that resulted from the developing Egyptian civilisation forced the migration of the giraffe further south. Paintings of tribute scenes in tombs provide evidence that the giraffe was associated as an animal from Nubia but it is also possible that the Nubians obtained these creatures from the African countries in the south (Osborn 1998:149). The giraffe was amongst the large African animals that were favoured as diplomatic gifts throughout antiquity. This explains its presence here as well as in the tomb of Rekhmire (5.8b), where it again appears as part of the tribute from the lands of the south (Osborn 1998:150). It is highly unlikely that these large animals would have been able to be accommodated on any vessel, which rules out the possibility of a sea voyage from Punt to Egypt. This supports the suggestion of the existence of an overland trade route to Egypt's southern most outpost at Kurgus, as discussed in section 4.2.1. This route may even have been an extension of the Old Kingdom route into Yam, was used by Puntites and other African tribes to bring commodities to Egypt.

Close to the giraffe in the Punt relief is a creature confronting the mother baboon and her youngster (5.9). It is more likely to be the seldom depicted rhinoceros, than a hippopotamus, which are normally depicted in or near water. Smith (1962) in his reconstruction of the Punt relief placed this creature in the upper most register, in close proximity to the giraffe in the register below (3.9b). The left side of these upper two registers appear to be occupied primarily with animal life and so it can be suggested that the rhinoceros, like the giraffe is depicted here in its natural environment; the other registers are occupied with the human activities namely, the felling of ebony, gathering gum resin and birds eggs and the removal of tree saplings. There

seem to be many confusing and erroneous depictions of the rhinoceros in Egyptian art, while depictions of the hippopotamus are constant. Although the body and jaw of the animal in the Deir el-Bahri reliefs may be similar to usual depictions of the hippopotamus, the tail is much longer and the single horn can be ascribed to an error on the part of the scribe who had likely never seen such a creature before (Osborn 1998:148). There are two species of rhinoceros that are present on the African continent. Both occur in scattered regions south of the Sahara. There are rock drawings in the eastern desert and a few archaeological remains, found at Dakhla Oasis and at Bir Tarfawi and Bir Sahara to the south of the western desert. These remains provide evidence that the rhinoceros did inhabit the Nile valley during Predynastic times. Evidence from the dynastic periods is scarce, but it suggests that the rhinoceros' habitat extended south from Nubia's southern desert. It is in this region that Thutmose III is reported to have hunted and killed one of these creatures, which he depicted on a pylon in the Temple of Armant (Osborn 1998:139-140).

A similar confusion also seems to occur with the identification of the leopard and cheetah. Both are present in the Deir el-Bahri reliefs (5.10a). Although colour and markings have disappeared, the representation of the different body forms of the two animals help to distinguish between them. Leopards are depicted as a much stockier animal, usually with a lowered head, in accordance with their natural stance. Where colour and markings are evident, for example in the tomb of Rekhmire, the leopard is depicted with black rosette or solid spots (5.10c). The end of its tail is ringed in black, with a black tip. The pelt of the leopard was favoured as a symbol of status, worn only by priests and the pharaoh. It is probable that, while the leopard may have been native to Dynastic Egypt, it was wiped out because of this association and so became an animal of status with which to trade. Its distribution would have included the deserts surrounding Egypt, Sinai, southern central Africa and the Arabian Peninsula (Osborn 1998:119-121). Cheetahs tended to inhabit similar regions, favouring semi-desert and open bush, although they are not considered to have been native to Egypt. In contrast to the leopard they are depicted as leaner animals with slender bodies and a shorter muzzle and small round ears. Their heads are also almost always depicted upright, with a pronounced jaw line and where marked depictions exist, their bodies are covered in sporadic solid spots (5.10b). Like the leopard pelt, the cheetah's pelt was also a highly prized commodity. The cheetah was also considered to be an animal that could



be tamed, explaining the depictions of collared cheetahs in many trade and tribute scenes. It has also been suggested that they could have been trained to hunt, although evidence to support this theory is scarce (Osborn 1998:121-123). In the Deir el-Bahri reliefs collared cheetahs and leopards are presented to Amun as the commodities from other southern countries. The tombs of Rekhmire and Amenmose also show a cheetah and leopard as part of the tribute from Punt and Nubia.

The distribution of these wild animals conclude that Punt can be placed nowhere other than on the African continent. Their general habitats cover vast expanses of varying environments but collectively they provide important information concerning Punt's geographical composition. The habitat of the giraffe and rhinoceros do not include any of the coastal regions along the western shore of the Red Sea. These large animals would have had difficulty navigating the hilly terrain between the inland and coastal regions of modern day Sudan and Ethiopia. In Somalia the natural habitat of the giraffe and rhinoceros does not include any coastal region and it can only be found far inland. The extent of their habitat is vast; the northern most region inhabited by the giraffe, along the East African coast is the district of Kassala, in north eastern Sudan while the southern extent of the habitat encompasses the dry bush regions south of the Sahara (O'Connor 1987:116). The texts from the temple of Deir el-Bahri provide conclusive evidence that the Egyptians arrived on the shores of Punt via the Red Sea. This identifies the location of Punt somewhere along the western Red Sea shore, however, the presence of these animals suggest that Punt also extended a great distance inland from the coast. Although cheetahs are only present as collared tribute commodities there is a fragment in the Puntite relief that reveals two large cats roaming freely, unfortunately only the hind leg and tail of the second animal can be seen. It would appear that, according to bodily form, this is a depiction of two leopards in their natural habitat (5.10d), which along with that of the giraffe and rhinoceros in the registers above included the open inland bush.

The presence of domesticated cattle in the Punt reliefs further supports the idea that Punt extended inland from the coast. Two species of cattle are depicted, long-horned cattle and short-horned cattle. Their species always seem to be segregated, i.e. they never occur as a mixed herd as one might expect to find in a pastoralist community. This has resulted in the suggestion that

they inhabited two different areas. The short-horned cattle appear along with the Puntites on the Red Sea coast while the long-horned are depicted in the same reliefs as the wild animals, i.e. inland (3.9a&b). Long-horned cattle are also among the animals offered as tribute by the Nubians in the tomb of Rekhmire. It is tempting to suppose that this species was familiar among the African races that inhabited the Nile valley and was thus associated with them. Unfortunately tangible evidence to confirm this supposition is scarce (O'Connor 1987:116-117). Finally, the cataloguing of the animals present in depictions concerned with Punt would not be complete without mention of the ibex. In the tomb of Rekhmire an ibex is depicted amongst the commodities from Punt (3.14). Two types of ibex are evident in Egypt, the Nubian and Syrian ibex. The former is duller in colour and has less definite facial markings than depictions of the latter. It is therefore the Nubian ibex that is depicted in Rekhmire's tomb. These ibexes inhabit rocky landscapes; mountain cliffs, plateaus and wadis. During Dynastic Egypt their habit would have included eastern parts of Egypt and Sudan, Sinai, Eritrea and northern Ethiopia (Osborn 1998:180). All these animals reveal that the geographical composition of Punt consisted of a coastal region that was separated from the interior by an undulating landscape of coastal hills, which gave way to savannah and semi-desert regions in the west.

## **5.2 PEOPLE**

### **5.2.1 PUNTITES: THE REPRESENTATION OF FOREIGNERS**

There are often many discrepancies when it comes to determining the genus of a plant or species of an animal in Egyptian paintings and reliefs, however, the one thing the Egyptians were very specific about was the representation of people that were not natives of their country. This is largely due to the role their representation played in religious (and political) propaganda, more often than not the foreigners depicted in reliefs and paintings were being subdued, smote or bringing tributes and offerings to the pharaoh or some official. Each foreign culture, with which the Egyptians came into contact, can therefore be identified by their characteristic skin tone, hair style, dress and accessories (O'Connor 2003:155).

### 5.2.1.1 Defining ‘the foreigner’<sup>3</sup>

The terms given to foreigners, as well as some stereotyped imagery, represents the cosmology determined by *Maaat*. The most common terms used for foreigners in the Egyptian language were *ḫAstyw*, meaning ‘people of the *ḫAst*’ or ‘foreign lands,’ and *psdt-pdwt*, ‘the Nine Bows’. In this context, the former, *ḫAst*, referred to the inhospitable regions of the ‘hill country’ or ‘desert lands’ (O’Connor 2003:155). This association is generalised and unrealistic, in reality foreigners would have inhabited a variety of environments and so it is clear that this connection must be understood as symbolic. According to Egyptian understanding the Nile Valley presented an ideal and perfect environment inhabited by a civilised society. In contrast, Egypt’s immediate neighbours and other foreign states further afield were considered uncivilised (from an Egyptian perspective) and were thus equated with the hostile environments familiar to most Egyptians, the hill and desert regions (O’Connor 2003:155). Egypt and its Nile Valley can therefore be viewed symbolically as a central order in the surrounding peripheral chaos, thus embodying the cosmology of *Maaat*.

The exact meaning of ‘the Nine Bows’ varies throughout Egyptian history. It is represented by a bow and nine vertical lines, placed next to or above the bow. It appears to refer to a list of nine specific foreign lands (which vary in content). The bow is presumed to represent any resistance that must be overcome. The ‘Nine Bows’ have also been associated with the term *pd*, meaning ‘wide’ (O’Connor 2003:155-156). Coupled with the Egyptian definition of the number nine, which is plurality tripled or pure plurality, the term is an expression of totality (O’Connor & Quirke 2003:12 and Wilkinson 1994:146-147). It may therefore refer to countless foreign regions and their peoples. From an Egyptian perspective, this innumerability is viewed as a representation of chaos in contrast to the order of the Egyptian state which had fixed borders and countable people (O’Connor 2003:156).

These two terms present an image that encompasses very negative aspects of the ‘foreigner.’ Yet this is not the only image of the foreigner. It is one that is presented by a particular body of texts and depictions that are concerned with the ideology of foreign relations. This ideology is influenced by two factors. The first, as already mentioned, is Egyptian cosmology. It

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<sup>3</sup> The singular term, ‘foreigner,’ will be used here to collectively refer to all foreigners in this part of the thesis.

encompasses an understanding of the creation and operation of the Egyptian universe according to the principles of *Maat*. The structure of this universe, as with most aspects of Egyptian society, is arranged according to a hierarchy. Naturally all foreigners occupy a subordinate place in this structure (O'Connor 2003:160). Ideology surrounding the foreigner therefore seems to migrate between the 'good' and the 'bad' foreigner (O'Connor 2003:167). The 'good' were those who retained their subordinate position in Egypt's societal hierarchy (O'Connor 2003:168). Examples of such foreigners, in literature and art, are few but do appear in tomb-chapels dating from the New Kingdom. Foreigners are depicted in idealised representations of loyal subjects bringing tribute to the tomb owner for the pharaoh. In most situations this was not the reality. Military conflict was frequent throughout the history of pharaonic Egypt. Aggressive relationships that resulted from these conflicts fuelled the characteristics of the 'bad' foreigner. Once again in literature and art resistant foreigners were typecast to be subdued, slaughtered or imprisoned by the pharaoh and his militia, who, as the proprietor of *Maat* would always prevail against chaos (O'Connor 2003:168-169).

The second factor is inseparably linked to this idea. The Egyptian elite largely controlled the way in which the general populace conceived many aspects in society. Conceptions of the 'foreign' were thus created to maintain the legitimacy of the elite and their authority. Foreign resources were an important source of additional wealth for Egypt, by exploiting such resources the elite contributed to the wealth of their state. They also defended the state against the foreigners they were, more often than not, exploiting. These actions were deemed services to the Egyptian state and provided their legitimacy as the elite of society (O'Connor 2003:160-161). These factors tend to support images of the 'bad' foreigner in order to legitimise Egyptian power and control. This relationship is exemplified in most temple complexes in Egypt. The themes of temple decorations and their placement is significant regarding the function of the temple and its purpose in society (O'Connor 2003:171). Previously it was stated that the pharaoh claimed his legitimacy from the gods. By presenting prisoners and plunder to temple estates and their treasuries the pharaoh acknowledged the divine source of his power. The divinities, in turn, sanctified his rule. These scenes are most often found in the peripheral regions of the temple, for example the pylons. Their position here serves a dual purpose. Pylons are generally considered to be the literal place of presentation but also represent the regions that were foreign or peripheral to

Egypt. Depictions of the pharaoh smiting his enemies found on these walls serve as a metaphor. The temple becomes analogous with the Egyptian state as the centre of order, while the outside world (and the foreign regions) represent surrounding chaos (O'Connor 2003:171, 174).

It is difficult to separate ideology from religious beliefs, particularly in Egypt. Religious thought concerning foreigners on the whole tends to be more positive than the ideological view (O'Connor 2003:161). The Egyptian understanding of the universe was all encompassing. This meant their universe included foreigners, which were 'part of the substance of the creator deity' (O'Connor 2003:174). Further it was understood that all humans had free will and could therefore choose to act against or according to the principles of *Maaat*. Foreigners were therefore viewed as having the potential to be 'good' (O'Connor 2003:161). In other words they were considered benevolent so long as they retained their place in the structure of the cosmos, i.e. as loyal subjects and allies of the pharaoh (O'Connor 2003:176).

In reality, the Egyptians experienced foreigners as both positive and negative components of their universe, as enemies, allies and trade partners. The above mentioned views of the foreigner are broad overviews of a general understanding that appears to have remained static throughout the history of pharaonic Egypt, however, historical events often influenced the Egyptian perception of foreigners (O'Connor 2003:159). These perceptions are closely linked to the relationship between external trade and diplomatic relations and internal political stability. During periods of stability, i.e. when a centralised government was present, the pharaoh undertook expansive foreign campaigning. This of course does not just imply military campaigns to subdue foreign regions but includes the establishment of diplomatic and trade relations. Conversely during periods of internal strife, namely the Intermediate Periods of Egyptian history, Egypt became vulnerable to foreign forces. One of the first foreign forces to rule Egypt were the Hyksos, during the Second Intermediate Period and from the Third Intermediate Period onwards Egypt was governed by many foreign races, the Libyans and Nubians, Assyrians, Persians and finally the Greeks and Romans (O'Connor 2003:160, 165). Egypt's experience of the foreigner therefore varied between their supremacy over the foreign and the threatening supremacy of the foreign over Egypt. In Egypt the concept of the 'foreigner' was determined according to three things; abstract ideology and the closely associated religious beliefs, and actuality. In each

sphere the foreigner is presented as both benevolent and threatening, depending on the circumstances and the context within which they are found. But in all circumstances they are viewed as ‘different’ because they lacked the human characteristics that were customary of orderly society, namely Egyptian ethnicity, culture and language (O’Connor & Quirke 2003:17).

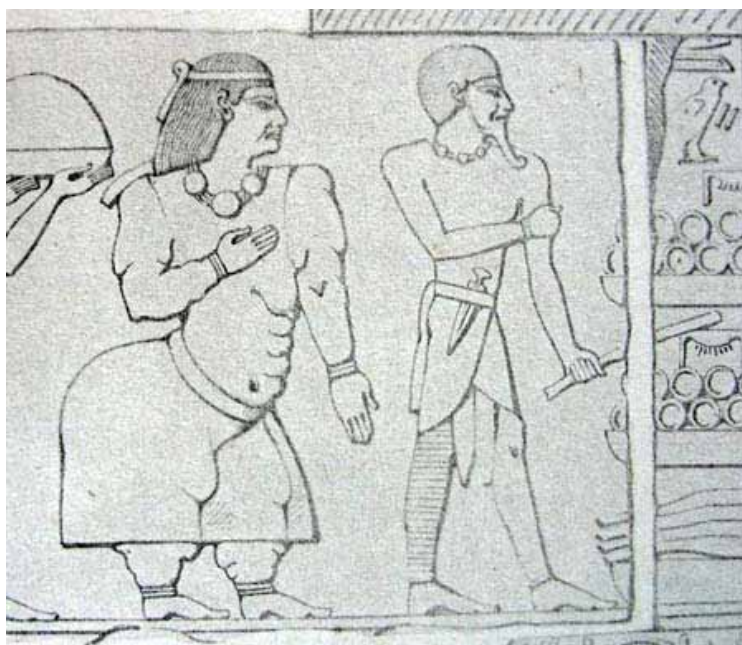
### **5.2.1.2 The Puntite race**

Foreigners are generally classified according to the regions with which Egypt had contact, i.e. the Libyans, Nubians, Puntites, Canaanites, Syrians, Hittites and Aegean peoples. Each is depicted according to a specific set of characteristics that identify their race and differentiate them from the Egyptians. However, depictions of the Puntites do not seem to belong to one specific racial group.

The largest corpus of Puntite depictions is found in the New Kingdom. The majority of depictions are inconclusive in defining the race of the Puntites. Hatshepsut’s temple at Deir el-Bahri consists of a variety of races. The Puntite chief, Perahu, is depicted with a similar build and skin tone as the Egyptians (5.11). His features are not characteristic of the African race, which are associated with regions south of Egypt. His hair is short and he has a long beard reminiscent of the Egyptian false-beards worn by gods and the pharaoh. He is distinguished from the rest of his envoy by the rings that cover his left leg (most probably made of some metal) and the dagger fixed to his belt. This appears to have been a mark of his prestige and is also worn by one of his sons. The rest of his envoy exhibit two hair styles; long hair or a wig, tied by a headband, that extended over the shoulders or long hair that was cut unevenly (Saleh 1972:149 and Naville 1898:12). His wife is hugely obese (5.11), as is his daughter (although this fragment of the wall is now lost). The most common assumptions are that they suffered from some type of disease or that as is tradition in many central African tribes large women are considered beautiful and thus desirable wives. This tradition is the only characteristic that links the woman to an African origin (Naville 1898:13). In another scene Puntite commodities are brought before the pharaoh by representative of three southern races; the chiefs of Punt, Irem and Nmy (3.11). In this depiction there is a clear distinction between the Puntites, which are depicted again with long braided hair bound by a headband and the more African looking chiefs of Irem and Nmy. This clear distinction confirms that the Puntites cannot be considered to belong to the African race.



**Figure 5.10d:** Leopards in their natural habitat in the Punt relief in Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri. (Neville 1898:Pl. 70)



**Figure 5.11:** Peheri, the Puntite chief and his obese wife Eti, in the Punt relief in Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri. The chief has short hair and a long beard. The rings that cover his left leg and the dagger fixed to his belt appears to be a mark of his status as chief.

(Neville 1898:Pl. 69)



**Figure 5.12:** Bedouin Aamu from the tomb of Khnumhotep II (BH3) at Beni Hasan.

(Schulz & Seidel 2004:124)



**Figure 5.13:** Black and brown Africans from fragments of the Punt relief in Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri.

(Neville 1898:Pl.71)



The tribute scenes in the tomb of Amenmose also clearly differentiate the Puntites from the Nubians. The black colour of Nubian skin was one of the races characteristics, the Puntites are not depicted with black skin and can therefore not be classified as being of the same race (Meeks 2003:58) In this tomb they are depicted with short hair and a long beard, and are dressed in lion clothes with decorative edges (3.16) (Davies & Davies 1941:136). The tomb of Rekhmire contains a similar depiction (3.14). The four registers of this tribute scene and their ethnic groups can be associated with the four compass points. From top to bottom the Puntites (east), Keftiu (west), Nubians (south) and Syrians (north) are depicted bringing tribute to the official (Meeks 2003:60). Once again a distinction is made between the Puntites and the Nubians.<sup>4</sup> However, the Puntite envoy consists of two races, slender Egyptian-like individuals with red skin and long hair or wigs tied with headband and long thin beards, like those depicted at Deir el-Bahri and others with a darker skin tone and African features, similar to the Nubians (Davies 1973:19).

The different races present in Punt can be explained by considering the fact that Punt was largely a trade centre. The references to the ‘chiefs of Punt’ imply that this region was not governed by a single ruler and was perhaps best understood as tribal in organisation. This would explain the variety of races present at the trade exchanges in Egyptian depictions. However, the origin of the Puntites is still at large, if they can not be considered African then from which race did they originate? The Deir el-Bahri reliefs mention one other geographical name apart from ‘God’s Land’ and Punt, ‘the land of Amu’<sup>5</sup>. During the New Kingdom valuable metals such a gold and electrum were part of the commodities brought from Punt, however, in these inscriptions these commodities are not referred to as the ‘gold of Punt’ or ‘electrum of Punt’ (Meeks 2003:65). The inscription at Deir el-Bahri specifically refers to the ‘gold of the land of Amu’ (Naville 1898:15) and in the tomb of Puyemre there is an inscription that refers to ‘electrum from Amu’ (Breasted 1962b:160) Amu’s association with Punt meant that it must have been in the vicinity of Punt or at least within its sphere of influence. During the Eighteenth Dynasty an inscription was left at Sabu, close to the Third Cataract by the scribe Userhat of Am(u) (Meeks 2003:65 and Kitchen 1999:174). Many scholars became confident that this was conclusive evidence for the location of

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<sup>4</sup> A distinction is also made between Punt and Keftiu and Nubia and Syria. Their grouping in this tomb shows that the former regions remain beyond the Egyptian control, while the latter are considered as part of the conquered races, further exemplified by the captives and slaves in the lowest register (Davies 1973:18).

<sup>5</sup> This land cannot be directly associated with the Bedouin Aamu mentioned in the Middle Kingdom tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hasan (Saleh 1972:147).

Amu but this assumption presents a few problems. The region of the Third Cataract was within the control of the Egyptian state during the Eighteenth Dynasty and it is highly unlikely that the Egyptians would have allowed the extraction and exchange of these valuable commodities which belonged to them in the first place. The location of these commodities must have been outside the Egyptian sphere of influence otherwise they would not have been so highly sought after and it must have been within the control or influence of the Puntites, who were able to obtain it for trading purposes. Finally, graffiti is normally left in foreign regions that were visited far from ones home, it is therefore safe to assume that Userhat was merely a visitor to the Third Cataract region and his inscription can therefore not be used to locate Amu (Meeks 2003:67 and Kitchen 1999:176). Amu is mentioned later in the list of mining regions, dating from the reign of Rameses II, at the Temple of Luxor. The list is as follows: ‘Nun (the primordial ocean), the throne of the Two earths (referring to Gebel Barkal), Amu, Kush, Nubia’ (Meeks 2003:66). This proposes a location for Amu in Africa, however, an inscription from Rameses III’s Temple of Medinet Habu implies otherwise. In this inscription the gold of Amu is listed with ‘the lapis lazuli of Tefrer, the turquoise of Ro-Shaut as a standard sequence which later came to include the ‘silver of Heh’’ (Meeks 2003:66). Sources of silver within the Egyptian borders are few,<sup>6</sup> therefore almost all silver obtained was Near Eastern in origin.<sup>7</sup> The sequence of regions at Medinet Habu must have been Near Eastern in location and therefore contest an African location for Amu. The most direct Near Eastern region, with which the Puntites could have had contact, was southern Arabia (Meeks 2003:66-67 and Saleh 1972:147). It is then possible to conceive that contact between the eastern and western shores of the Red Sea did exist and that there is a possibility that the Puntites originated partly from the Arab Bedouin (Naville 1898:13). This would explain the depiction of the Puntites in the Hatshepsut’s temple. Punt is known to the Egyptians as a centre for trade, this does not mean that the Egyptians established it as one. The reality is, more likely, that it was already in existence by the time the Egyptians began their expeditions to and from this region. Throughout history the southern Arabians are famed for their exploits in commercial exchange and it is therefore highly probable that they were involved

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<sup>6</sup> Egyptian silver is thought to have been a natural alloy of silver and gold, referred to as aurian silver. The method of separating this natural alloy would not have been possible so early. Therefore the source of silver must have been less complicated, most likely a lead ore, which when heated, causes the lead and silver to separate. Lead ore is found in the Eastern Desert, but it is difficult to determine whether these sources had a high silver content that could have been exploited (Ogden 2000:170).

<sup>7</sup> It would have been imported from northern Greece or southern Anatolia (Ogden 2000:170).

in trading along the African coast before the arrival of the Egyptians to the Puntite shores (Saleh 1972:150). It is possible that some southern Arabians could have successfully completed a voyage to the western Red Sea shore and set up the monopoly for trade in Punt, by forming alliances with the African tribes present in the region and what better way to strengthen an alliance than through intermarriage. Although this possibility might sound far fetched it is not improbable. It would certainly explain the difference in the depiction of the seemingly Asiatic Perehu and his large 'African' wife (5.11). It is also supported by the association of the Puntites with the Asiatics as depicted in the tomb of Puyemre (3.13). The grouping of different ethnic races in paintings and reliefs often has underlying meanings, as is apparent in the tomb of Rekhmire<sup>8</sup>. The grouping of the Puntites and the Asiatics in this painting could perhaps imply an association between the two. Also of interest are the decorative loin cloths that the Puntites are wearing, it bears a striking (but modified) resemblance to the material worn by the Bedouin Aamu in the tomb of Khnumhotep II (5.12). The Puntite chiefs clad in their red robes with a decorative blue hem in TT 143 bear an undeniable resemblance to the clothes of the Aamu as well (3.17a&b) (Davies 1935:46).

The mixed population of Punt is thus explained. Three different racial groups can be identified in the Deir el-Bahri reliefs (Naville 1898:12-13); the Egyptian-looking Puntites and black Africans and brown Africans (5.13). The latter two, apart from the difference in skin tone, belong to similar racial groups. The Puntites can not be classified as Africans or Egyptians. The only other possibility is that they are immigrants from the opposite shore of the Red Sea. This multi-racial population definitely located Punt in Africa, along the Red Sea coast in a region that was situated in the remote south, far beyond the borders of the Egyptian state.

### **5.3 THE CULTURAL MOVEMENTS IN THE VICINITY OF THE RED SEA HILLS**

The multi-racial nature of the Puntites presents the possibility that Arabian Bedouins may have managed to reach the coast of Africa. It is therefore important to consider the movement of

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<sup>8</sup> See Footnote 47 p115.

cultural groups that fall within the western regions, i.e. the southern Sudan, Eritrea and northern Ethiopia, and eastern regions, i.e. southern Arabia, of the Red Sea coast and its interior. In order to follow any cultural movements present in these regions during antiquity it is necessary to consider archaeological sites found within these eastern and western regions.

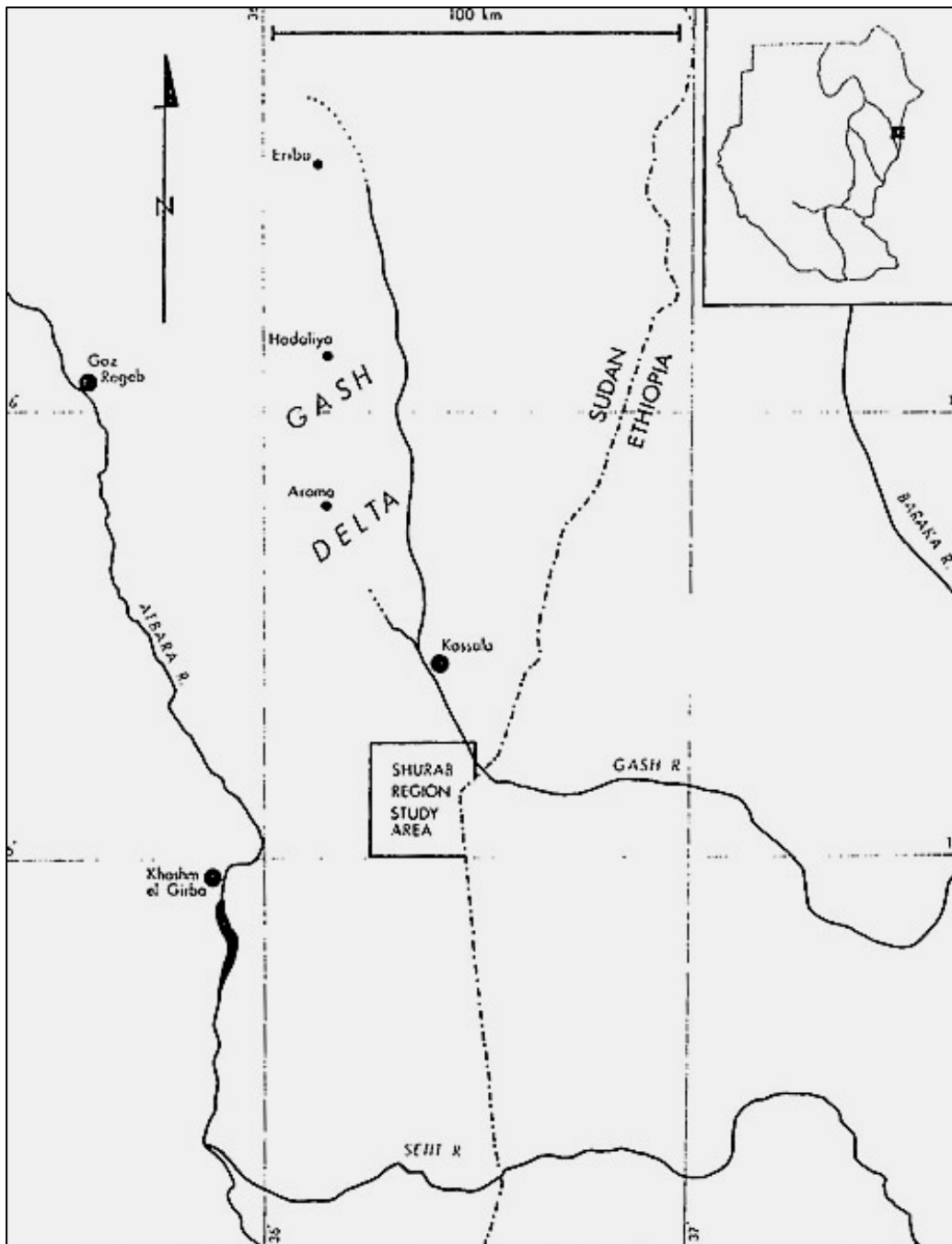
### **5.3.1 EAST AFRICAN COAST AND INTERIOR**

Archaeological evidence from both these areas is incomplete. However, during the 1980s two projects that focused on the cultural history of the eastern Sudan were undertaken by the *Istituto Universitario Orientale* of Naples and a joint venture by the University of Khartoum and Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Their region of focus was an area between Kassala in the Gash Delta and Khashm el Girba on the banks of the Atbara River (5.14) (Fattovich 1991a:40). Their results concluded that the population of this area were not as primitive as previously thought. Research indicated that from 4000-1000 BC there is a very great possibility that these people had regular contact with the Nile Valley and that they were in an ideal position to act as intermediaries between Egypt, the Eastern regions of the horn of Africa and southern Arabia (Fattovich 1991b:260).

Four cultural phases<sup>9</sup> have been identified according to the development of styles and decoration of pottery. The hundred and forty-three sites that were excavated identified a further eight differing cultural groups that are associated with certain phases of this culture's development. For the purpose of this thesis it is only the third cultural phase, known as the Kassala phase (c. fourth – first millennium BC) that is of relevance (Fattovich 1991a:40). This phase consisted of a population that inhabited a region to the east of the Atbara River (5.1). At the beginning of this phase their lifestyle would have revolved around a subsistence hunter-gatherer economy, although it is possible that a small amount of cultivation was practiced. Pastoralism was introduced during the latter part of the fourth millennium by the Butana group, whose settlements ranged in size from 1 to 10 hectares. Although there is no direct evidence of contact with Egypt, the pottery from early sites of the Butana group resembles similar pottery to the Predynastic Badarian and Naqadian cultures (Fattovich 1991b:261). During the middle Kassala phase (c.

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<sup>9</sup> These are the Pre-Saroba phase (c. sixth-fifth millennium BC), Saroba phase (c. fifth millennium BC), Kassala phase (c. fourth-first millennium BC) and the Jebel Taka phase (c. late first millennium BC – early first millennium AD) (Fattovich 1991a:40).



**Figure 5.14:** The Gash Delta region of excavations conducted by the *Istituto Unversitario Orientale* of Naples and a joint venture by the University of Khartoum and Southern Methodist University in Dallas in 1980. Their focus area was the area between Kassala in the Gash Delta and Khashm el Girba on the banks of the Atbara River.

(Fattovich 1991:42)

3000-15000 BC) the descendants of the Butana group, the Gash group, came to inhabit most of the Gash delta (Fattovich 1991a:40). Their society was also agro-pastoral in nature but the discovery of administrative tools, for example stamp seals, clay sealings and tokens<sup>10</sup>, indicate the development of a simple administrative system from c.2500 BC (Fattovich 1991a:45-46). These finds indicate a more complex and advanced social structure. During this phase a second, related group began inhabiting the Barka valley in the vicinity of Agordat. There is evidence that their influence spread as far north as ‘Aqiq on the Red Sea coast and Erkowit in the southern Red Sea hills’ (Fattovich 1991a:41). The size of these settlements appears to have been determined according to a social hierarchy that characterises chiefdoms. This is further evident in the composition of administrative tools. The simple system that arose during c. 2500 BC became more complex towards the end of the third millennium BC. By this time three different types of seals and tokens are evident and by the mid second millennium BC they had increased to five types of seals and three types of tokens. The variety in the types of these objects suggests that the centralised socio-political economy, that characterises most chiefdoms was evident on the Gash delta at this time (Fattovich 1991a:46). The ordered structure that resulted from such a system would have made it possible for commercial trade to be a reality and it is therefore during this period that contact to the north (Nubia and Egypt), east (southern Arabia) and south (Ethiopia and Somalia) would have occurred. During the late Kassala phase (c. 1500-500 BC) the cultural mixing of the Gash group with northern immigrants appears to have taken place, marked by the appearance of the Jebel Mokram Group (c. mid second-mid first millennium BC) (Fattovich 1991a:41). These immigrants have been connected to the Pan-grave culture<sup>11</sup> of the Medjay, who settled in the Nile Valley at the end of the Middle Kingdom (c. 2055-1650 BC) and during the Second Intermediate Period (c.1650-1550 BC). The lack of expeditions to Punt after Rameses III’s in the Twentieth Dynasty (c. 1186-1069 BC) corresponds with the decrease in evidence to suggest trade with Egypt. During the periods that followed the culture of the Gash delta was assimilated into the Ethiopian sphere of influence as semi-nomadic pastoralists, inhabiting small

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<sup>10</sup> A variety of tokens have been found, they include ‘hemispheres and cones with concave bases, flat discs, cylinders and cones with possible animal heads. (Fattovich 1991a:46).

<sup>11</sup> A nomadic tribe found in the eastern desert. Their presence is characterised by shallow grave burials and black-topped pottery, from which their name is derived (Shaw 2000a:476). During the Middle Kingdom (c. 2055-1650 BC) the Medjay were actively involved in Egypt’s desert surveillance, particularly on Egypt’s Nubian frontier. (Kemp 1989:176-177) This close contact with the Egyptians resulted in their cultural assimilation during the New Kingdom (c. 1550-1069 BC). During this period the term ‘Medjay’ came to denote Egypt’s police force, perhaps eluding its origin from the mercenaries of this nomadic tribe.

temporary encampments (Fattovich 1991a:41). Unfortunately their dwellings were made of perishable materials, therefore remains of any architectural structures are scarce. The huts depicted in the Hatshepsut's reliefs in her temple at Deir el-Bahri also suggest a kind of temporary shelter. They are round structures with pitched thatched roofs. They appear to consist of two levels, i.e. access to the hut is gained by a ladder that extends from a level raised on stilts (5.15b) (Phillips 1996:206). The lower level appears to be enclosed by a basket work of some kind of foliage, most probably dom-palm stalks (5.15a) (Naville 1898:12). The reason as to why these dwellings have two levels is much speculated. It is possible that it may have reduced the effects of seasonal weather, formed protection against wild animals and even the theft of goods by other humans. It has also been speculated that the lower level may have been used as a kind of stable for livestock and other domesticated animals to provide warmth at night to the living area above, however, no doorway into the lower level is visible in any of the depictions so this possibility is unlikely. Finally the space created by an enclosed lower level may have simply been used for the storage of commodities. In a trading environment such as Punt the latter is possibly the best assumption. Dwellings at trade outposts would have only needed little more than a living area and a place to store commodities during the main trading seasons. The dwellings of larger settlements may have been conducive to more permanent structures (Phillips 1996:207).

One of the most important sites on the delta is Mahal Teglinos, close to Kassala. It consists of a large settlement of 11 hectares with more than one cemetery to its south. Excavations at this site have revealed five archaeological strata that correspond to the development of the Gash group (Fattovich 1991a:41, 45). Within these strata there is sufficient consistency of pottery types showing C-group and Kerma elements to conclude that contact between the Gash cultural groups and the Kerma Nubians was evident throughout the Gash group's development. The majority of other items suggesting foreign contact occurred in the strata that corresponded with the late Gash group (c. 1700-1400 BC) (Fattovich 1991a:45). These include an Egyptian pot-herd, dating from the New Kingdom (c. 1550-1069 BC) and pieces of obsidian of Ethiopian origin (c. 1700-1500 BC) (Fattovich 1991a:45). Similar pieces have also been found at Agordat, along with an Egyptian ear-ring dating from the Eighteenth Dynasty and stone axes that are similar to copper



**Figure 5.15a:** Fragment depicting Puntite huts with basket worked lower levels in the Punt relief in Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri.

(Naville 1989:Pl.71)



**Figure 5.15b:** Puntite hut on stilts, showing the laddered entrance in the Punt relief in Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri.

(Glenister 2006)



used by Egyptians during the Seventeenth (c. 1580-1550 BC) and Eighteenth Dynasties (Fattovich 1991b:261-262). Obsidian tools have been found at Aqiq and Erkowit (Fattovich 1991b:262). Blocks of granite exhibiting Egyptian construction techniques have been found in the vicinity of Aqiq. Some have been reused as part of later monuments while others were found scattered on a ridge, suggesting that they may originally have been part of a monument at the site (Fattovich 1991b:262).

Pot-sherds dating from the Middle to the Late Gash group (c. 2300-1500 BC) are similar to pot-sherds found at sites in the Yemeni region of Tihama that date from the same time (Fattovich 1991a:45). A monolithic pillar at Aqiq also resembles examples found in the Tihama region. There are also sites that contain pot-sherds from the Jebel Mokram group that are similar to the flat handled pot-sherds found at sites in northern Yemen (Fattovich 1991b:262).

The evidence collected from the Gash delta excavations confirm that this region played an important part in the commercial activities between Egypt, Nubia and the rest of Africa, from the late Old Kingdom to the New Kingdom. The socio-political structure of the Gash culture is characterised by chiefdoms. During the New Kingdom numerous sources make reference to the 'chiefs of Punt.'<sup>12</sup> It is therefore not impossible to imagine that Aqiq on the Red Sea coast could have been one of a few satellite settlements of a larger central settlement, like Mahal Teglinos. This reality would correspond with the Punt reliefs in Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri. On their arrival in Punt the Egyptians would have been met by the inhabitants of the nearest coastal settlement and since the Egyptians had to wait a couple of months for favourable sailing conditions to prevail for a return voyage it would have been completely possible that they would have been taken to the largest or most important settlement in inland Punt, where resources would be gathered and trade conducted. Coincidentally evidence of the beginning of the Gash cultures administrative system, which would have made trade easier, corresponds with the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty, when Punt is first mentioned in Egyptian sources. Other archaeological evidence shows that regular contact did occur between these two cultures as well.

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<sup>12</sup> Punt reliefs of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri (Neville 1898:14 -15 & Pl. 76), Sinai inscription of the official Sobekhotep (Kitchen 1993:60 & Meeks 2003:63) and the tomb of Puyemre (TT 39) (Davies 1935:46), the tomb of Amenmose (TT 89) (Davies & Davies 1941:136), the tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100) (Davies 1973:20) and Rameses III's Papyrus Harris (Breasted 1962d: 203-204).

Contact with other African chiefdoms surrounding this region is also highly probably, especially since evidence of Ethiopian contact is present. The overwhelming concentrations of resources present, which correspond with the commodities for which Punt was known in antiquity, present this region as a veritable location for Punt.

### **5.3.2 SOUTHERN ARABIAN COAST AND INTERIOR**

The presence of Asiatic Bedouin in Punt, as discussed in section 5.2.1.2 is very possible. However, before any conclusions can be made it is necessary to determine whether any cultural society existed in the vicinity of southern Arabia (modern Yemen) and whether their historical development corresponds with that of the Gash delta and Egypt during its contact with Punt. In the past, historical studies of southern Arabia revealed a cultural gap of three millennia. Evidence of societies was only found dating from before 4000 BC and after 1000 BC. The discovery of new sites has, however, revealed that ancient southern Arabia consisted of a number of cultures (5.16).

The first human habitation occurred between 10 000 – 4000 BC (Edens 2002:80). These people were characterised by a hunter-gatherer subsistence economy, until about 5000 BC when domestic animals were introduced replacing the hunter-gatherer economy with nomadic pastoralism. These temporary settlements grew into large villages and even some towns during the Bronze Age of Yemen<sup>13</sup> (c. 3200 BC) (Edens 2002:81). The development of these Bronze Age cultures was not uniform due to the geography of the land and its climate. Three regions have been defined; the western highlands, desert fringe and desert regions of the Hadramawt and Mahra and the western coastal plain. It is therefore necessary to consider the development of each according to the region in which they settled.

The cultures of the western highlands and the desert fringe occupied diverse environments that ranged from the wet plains and valleys of the highlands to the seasonal wadis on the desert fringe. These environments naturally determined their settlement type and the amount of cultivation that

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<sup>13</sup> The use of the term ‘Bronze Age’ can not be understood literally in this context. It is used to refer to all new cultures that have been discovered in ancient southern Arabia, irrespective of whether these cultures utilised metals or not. It is separate from the ‘Bronze Age’ of the ancient Near East (c. 3500-1200 BC) and will be specifically referred to as ‘the Bronze Age of Yemen’ to prevent any confusion (Edens 2002:80).

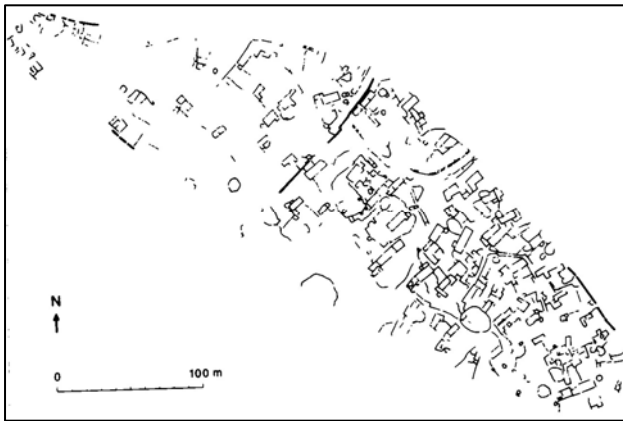




**Figure 5.17 a&b:** On the summit of this hill rests one of the best-documented Bronze Age sites, Hammat al-Qa. The aerial layout (b) reveals a well-organised settlement that could have accommodated 400-500 people. The settlement is surrounded by a town wall and gates.

(Simpson 2002:82)

**a**



**b**



**Figure 5.18:** A modern small traditional village in the Yemeni highlands, near Dhamār. The village is surrounded by terraced fields and provides an example of what an ancient highland settlement may have looked like.

(Simpson 2002:103)



**Figure 5.19:** Tomb complex on the north eastern desert fringe at the site of Jabal Jibrān. (Simpson 2002:85)

would have been possible. Two principal sites of the western highlands are Khawlān and Dhamār. Khawlān situated in the east, where the climate was drier, consisted of small circular settlements, inhabited by about fifty to a hundred people. The settlements in Dhamār, further south, date from 2800-1200 BC (Edens 2002:81). They are much larger than the settlements in Khawlān and range in size from 5 to 6 hectares. Their layout and construction is more advanced than the settlements in Khawlān, with each settlement consisting of block housing that opened on to streets and were enclosed by a wall with gates. These types of settlements could have accommodated approximately four to five hundred people (5.17a&b) (Edens 2002:81-82).

The livelihood of both cultural groups revolved around agro-pastoralism. The cultivation methods were rather advanced and crops consisted of a variety of grains; wheat, barley, sorghum and millet. In Dhamār crops were grown on terraced fields, a tradition that lives on today (5.18) and are irrigated by natural rainfall, while in Khawlān fields were irrigated by check dams. The most common livestock would have been goats and sheep but cattle were also kept (Edens 2002:82 and Wilkinson 2002:103). Other sites of significance, for example Shabwa and the Al-Jawf, border on the desert fringe in the north east. Their cultural composition is very similar to the groups in Khawlān, while little is known about the groups that inhabited the desert fringe. It may have been possible for these desert communities to cultivate using flood agricultural systems which could have existed as early as the third millennium BC but some sites suggest that animal husbandry was the more common practice (Edens 2002:82 and Wilkinson 2002:106). A lack of permanent settlements favours the latter assumption. In the Hadramawt and Mahra, residences consisted of simple circular huts, perhaps similar to those found in Punt. The spacial arrangement of storage space and stables below the living quarters is also evident in the structure of Yemen's architecture, both in ancient times and now (Phillips 1996:207). Dwellings that exhibit a semi-permanent structure are often accompanied by more permanent tomb structures. The tombs are grouped together in mortuary complexes (5.19) and interestingly enough, in places where more permanent settlement was possible no tombs are found. It has therefore been suggested that due to the temporary nature of their

earthy dwellings the nomadic pastoralists viewed their tombs as eternal ‘houses’ (Edens 2002:83-85).

On the whole the highland and desert cultural groups were united by a common material culture but divided by the landscape. This resulted in individualised characteristics developing in each group, particularly where the decoration of pottery is concerned. This division implies that each group formed a node of a larger socio-economic network (Edens 2002:82).

Sites on the western and south western coastal regions date from 1400-800 BC (Edens 2002:82). Two<sup>14</sup> kinds are prevalent from Sihi, on the west coast to Sabr in the south. Sihi merely consists of a beach ridge that contains a thick layer of ‘shell, ash and cultural debris’ (Edens 2002:82). Similar layers have been found throughout the Tihāma region further down the coast and in the vicinity of Aden. These sites were probably the temporary encampments of nomadic pastoralists. These people are characterised by human and animal figurines, stone and obsidian tools as well as copper items such as knives, fishing hooks and needles. A second group of people share these characteristics, though they were not nomads. The site of Sabr is a well established settlement that can be divided into five stratigraphic layers. The layout of the town suggests the presence of an advanced culture, as it is divided into industrial, residential and religious quarters. The architecture of houses suggests that a social hierarchy may have been in place. Houses in the centre were spacious mud-brick structures with interior courtyards while those on the outskirts were circular huts made of organic materials. Irrigation systems are evident which imply the cultivation of agricultural produce. This would have been supplemented with foodstuffs from the sea. It is the combination of these agricultural and maritime resources that would have provided the basis for the development of complex social structures, at Sabr and the surrounding Lahj area. Further excavations

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<sup>14</sup> Three kinds are in fact present but for the purpose of this thesis only two will be discussed. The third is only of religious value, revealing that the cultures of ancient southern Arabia can be considered advanced in their cultural development. Little is known about the third kind of site. They are characterised by monumental stone pillars that are concluded to have a ceremonial function. Examples can be found at Hajar al-Ghaymah and al-Midaman in Tihāma (Edens 2002:83).

have determined that large settlements like the latter could have existed as early as the third millennium BC (Edens 2002:83).

The landscape of southern Arabia resulted in a single culture, united by religious or ceremonial practices, developing into different socio-political groups. The living conditions in the highlands resulted in the establishment of small autonomous settlements that would have been impervious to any kind of political control, had it been evident. In contrast the dry conditions of the desert resulted in the congregation of groups around the nearest available water sources. Thus nomadic groups encountered others who had made more permanent agricultural settlements in the wadis at the desert fringe. It was this mobile way of life that influenced trade within this country and further afield. The movements of nomadic pastoralists along the desert fringe and on the coast would have opened the possibility for exchange even if there is little evidence of it in Bronze Age Yemen. It is possible that these nomads developed an interest in the regions beyond south-western Arabia. Arabian sources of incense can be found in the south west and south western regions of Arabia, therefore irrespective of their departure point Arab trading caravans would have both faced a long journey through the desert. If this can be achieved then it can hardly be denied that a journey across the Red Sea would not be possible as well.

The anthropology of the people that inhabited the Red Sea coast is conducive to the possibility of cultural mixing, which would have resulted in a multi-racial population like the one represented in Hatshepsut's Punt reliefs. Archaeological sites reveal that seasonal movements in the Gash Delta correspond with the trade routes that existed between Egypt and Punt and the composition and concentration of natural resources and wildlife is similar enough to present this region as a location for Punt.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The interactions between Egypt and Punt reveal much about the *true* nature of trade relations between Egypt and its foreign trade partners. The economic structure of Egypt was characterised by the structure of its governance system. The state consisted of the pharaoh, who was considered the supreme divine ruler and administrative and religious institutions that carried out his requests. He supplied the institutions with land to carry out these functions, but in return some of their income was expected. In its simplest form the Egyptian economic model involved the supply of land to generate an income. The use of this land was taxed and this is how the large administrative and religious institutions were able to generate an income. Private income was therefore also a reality, any surpluses could be used for personal transactions, which resulted in the development of domestic trade. Karl Polanyi's theory of redistribution does not therefore apply to the Egyptian economic structure, which was characterised by a pre-capitalist market economy. Since personal income was a reality, private enterprise would have been possible on a local level. However, there is no possible way to determine a controlled monetary system or currency in Egypt. Therefore domestic trade was conducted according to a system of bartering in exchange or substitution which was governed by a standard series of weights; the *deben*, *kite* and the *khar*. It is possible that foreign trade may have also been conducted in this way, but as it has been emphasised previously, the Egyptians failed to distinguish between tribute, trade and diplomatic gift-giving. Of the four terms used to designate foreign commodities only two apply to foreign trade proper. *@Aq* and *BAK* designate commodities obtained through campaigns, as plunder or booty and commodities acquired through tribute once these conquered regions and their cities had fallen under the control of the Egyptian administration. Commodities obtained from beyond these regions are referred to as *inw* and *biAt*. The former designates commodities obtained through trade or gift-exchanges rather than as tributes, while the designation of the latter as 'marvels' refers to regions far beyond Egypt's political and military control. It is here that the interesting relationship between Punt and Egypt begins. Commodities from Punt are referred to as 'marvels' this places its location in a region that lies 'outside the 'civilised' world' of Egyptian state formations and therefore Punt is associated with the mystery of the unknown.



Sources relating to Punt are evident from the early Old Kingdom onwards and throughout the history of pharaonic Egypt. The Old Kingdom sources supply only a few fleeting references to Punt. However, they do show that the Egyptians were interested in opening and maintaining overland and maritime trade routes. Harkhuf's expedition to Yam presents the region as one that is very similar to Punt, i.e. Yam is situated in a southern region beyond the boundaries of Egyptian control and despite all the conflict in its surroundings it is considered too far removed to ever pose a threat to the Egyptian state. Yam cannot, however, be considered synonymous with Punt. Its location would have been a region beyond the Second Cataract that bordered the western desert. The desire of Harkhuf to curb the conflict in this area, shows that Yam must have been an important intermediary in overland trade. The official's fourth expedition highlights the importance of the southern trade routes as channels for the acquisition of luxury commodities. The routes followed by Harkhuf would have formed part of the later, larger overland trade routes that connected Egypt to Kush and Kush to Punt or vice versa.

The use of the Red Sea to reach Punt is attested to as early as the Old Kingdom, in spite of the fact that most of the conclusive sources date from the Middle Kingdom. The vessels intended for voyages to Punt were constructed at the Koptos dockyards, dismantled and then 'shipped' through the Eastern Desert by massive expedition caravans. The vessels would then have been reassembled on the Red Sea shore. A boat building site in the Wadi Gawasis suggests that the vessels would have been launched at the port of Sa'waw from where they would have sailed down the western inshore channel of the Red Sea to the ports of Aqiq or Adulis on the modern Eritrean coast. Both these ports could have provided a safe landing site and access to the region's interior. The date provided on Henu's inscription suggests that vessels were launched in July so that they reached Punt in time for the incense trading season. This lasted a period of four to five months during East Africa's dry season, which extended from October to April-May. The seasonal wind and surface currents on the Red Sea assisted these south bound vessels, as they blew from north to south during the summer months. Incense was not, however, the only impetus for sailing to Punt. Middle Kingdom sources refer to it as a mining region. If the dating of Ankhu's stela is correct, then the launch of his Puntite expedition would have been in May at the end of the incense market season. This expedition was not journeying to Punt to obtain incense. It is therefore evident that two sailing seasons existed to Punt. One being the 'true'

market season, determined by the tapping of incense and another concerned primarily with the acquisition of mineral commodities that was only confined by the seasonal currents on the Red Sea.

Throughout the Middle Kingdom there is an increased association between Punt and 'God's Land.' During this period, at least, the two cannot be considered synonymous. The title of 'God's Land' designated Egypt's Eastern Desert from the Wadi Hammamat quarries to the Red Sea shore, which was then considered the gateway to the foreign regions in the south east. The products of God's Land were mineral resources, Middle Kingdom inscriptions as well as the Turin Papyrus Map attest to this. This does not mean, however, that Punt did not have a mining region of its own. Expeditions returning from Punt would have returned through the Wadi Hammamat route once they had landed on Egyptian shores. It is possible that the passing expeditions collected any resources that had been mined on their way to the Egyptian court, preventing the need for additional desert expeditions to collect these resources. In time it may have been possible that the mineral resources of God's Land simply became analogous with the Puntite commodities, since they were presented to the Egyptian court at the same time. This would have resulted in Punt and God's Land becoming an associated single place.

The lack of references to Punt towards the end of Middle Kingdom coincides with the waning power of Egypt and the rise in the power of Kush as a state. The control over the southern trade routes would no doubt have fallen into the hands of the latter rulers during the chaos of the Second Intermediate period. During the New Kingdom the Thutmossides sought to regain control of the overland trade routes, while the pharaoh Hatshepsut focused on consolidating existing trade routes and eliminating intermediary trade by using the Red Sea route to trade directly with Punt in the hopes of cultivating incense trees in Egypt – an endeavour that obviously failed.

Hatshepsut's reliefs in her mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri provide the most comprehensive visual source of the region of Punt. The general landscape of Punt can be determined by considering the fauna present in these reliefs. The depictions of fauna in the scenes reveal the geographical composition of the Puntites natural environment. It consists of a coastal region that

is separated from the interior by a landscape of coastal hills that gives way to savanna grasslands and woodlands. If one views the landscape at either of the ports of Aqiq or Adulis it is evident that the coastline is separated from the interior of the Gash Delta by the undulating Red Sea Hills. The savanna interior supports many types of wildlife. Ebony is also present as well as *Boswellia papyrifera* in the north eastern vicinity of Kassala.

The appearance of societal cultures along side both the eastern and western Red Sea coasts corresponds to the same time periods. These also coincide with Egyptian contact with Punt. It is therefore entirely possible that the Puntites were Bedouin that emigrated from the southern Arabian coast. Archaeological evidence on the East African coast indicates a constant population in the region of Kassala. Their cultural composition and settlement layout (or lack there of) suggest a lifestyle that was semi-nomadic in nature and one that would have revolved largely around seasonal trade. The dry season on the Gash Delta coincides with what would have been the main market season in Punt. It was only during the preceding rainy season that the Gash River would flood its banks and joins the Atbara, allowing the Puntite rafts to sail from Punt to Kurgus without having to transport their rafts over excessive expanses of land. This increase in water supply would have also aided the pastoral caravans that trekked to the Egyptian outposts. This corresponds with the information presented by Hatshepsut's Punt reliefs and the tomb paintings of the Eighteenth Dynasty officials at Thebes. The botanical and zoological commodities of trade are also concentrated in the region of Kassala and the surrounding geographical landscape is similar. Therefore the region of the Gash Delta is hypothesised to be the location of Punt, extending from the port of Suakin or Aqiq on the Red Sea coast, west to the Atbara River and south into northern Ethiopia.

## **ADDENDUM: SAILING AND VESSEL CONSTRUCTION TERMINOLOGY<sup>1</sup>**

- Backstay** A rope used to support the mast of the vessel, running from the top of the mast to deck level behind the mast.
- Boom** The lower yard to which the foot of the sail is fitted.
- Bow** Front end of the vessel.
- Central-shelf** A narrow longitudinal timber running down the middle of the vessel from bow to stern at deck level.
- Cross-beams** Horizontal timbers running from side-to-side of the vessel that support the deck and give lateral rigidity to the hull.
- Deck** A platform of planks extending from side-to-side of the vessel or part of it.
- Finials** The wooden extensions fitted to the bow and stern of the vessel.
- Forestay** A rope running from the mast-head and secured to the bow to support the mast.
- Girdle-truss** The rope that encircled the boat just below the gunwales.
- Gunwale** A line of planks above the deck-line on the side of the boat.
- Halyards** Ropes used to hoist or lower the sail.
- Hogging-truss** A heavy rope under tension secured around the hull at the bow and stern and supported on one or more forked supports above deck level. It provided longitudinal rigidity to the hull in absence of a keel.
- Keel** The lowest and principle timber of a wooden ship on which the framework of the whole boat is built.
- Mast-support** The wooden support at deck level which gave lateral support to the mast. Also known as a ‘knee.’
- Stern** The rear end of the vessel.
- Shrouds** The standing rigging of a sailing ship which gives a mast lateral support.
- Strake** The name given to each line of planking which runs the length of the vessel’s hull.
- Yard** A length of timber slung by its centre in front of the mast, which serves to support the top and extend a square sail.

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<sup>1</sup> (Partridge 1996:143-144 and Jones 1995:87-90)

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