



NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE EXPEDITIONS TO THE LAND OF PUNT

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ABSTRACT

The geographic location of Punt and its itinerary occupied a great part of the scientific literature in Egyptology since the discovery of the bas-relief of Deir el-Bahari by the end of the XIXth century. The discussion was concerning its location where several hypothesis were realized varied and extended sometimes in Somalia, in Arabia, on the Nile River or one of its tributaries or on around the Sudan-Eritrean borders. The way to arrive it had also its place in these assumptions, whether it was by the Nile, across the Red Sea or even by land throughout Sinai Peninsula.

By the second half of XXth century, major studies not only enriched this scientific debate but also changed the current theories of scholars such as the study of Herzog published in 1968; the recent discoveries of archaeological evidences on the Red Sea Shore in the seventies of last century and the last ten years and finally the articles of Meeks appeared in 2002.

This study will deal with this problem in the light of the geo-politic changes in Egypt and in Nubia in exposing the principal sources of information about Punt from the Old Kingdom, through Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom, ending by the Late and Greco-Roman periods.

Therefore, this article will show that the geopolitical situation in Nubia and its relationship with Egypt were a major factor in directing the relationship between Egypt and the land of Punt and the Egyptian way to deal with exotic and important land.

KEYWORDS

Punt – Kerma- Wadi Gawasis - Deir el-Bahari – Hatchepsout – Red Sea – Nile – Nubia

المخلص

احتل موقع بونت الجغرافي وطريق الوصول لها قدرا كبيرا من اهتمامات الأوساط العلمية في علم المصريات منذ اكتشاف مناظر بعثة بونت المؤرخة بعهد الملكة حاتشبوت في معبد الدير البحري في نهاية القرن التاسع عشر. وكان النقاش حول موقعها حيث تم تحقيق العديد من الفرضيات المتنوعة والموسعة في بعض الأحيان في الصومال أو في شبه الجزيرة العربية أو على نهر النيل أو على أحد روافده أو حول الحدود السودانية الإريتيرية.

كما كان لطريق الوصول إليها مكانها في هذه النقاشات سواء كان ذلك عن طريق النيل أو عبر البحر الأحمر أو حتى بالبر عبر صحراء شبه جزيرة سيناء.

ظهرت خلال النصف الثاني من القرن العشرين نظريات جديدة، لم تثر النقاش العلمي فحسب، بل غيرت أيضا النظريات التي كانت موجودة مثل دراسة رالف هرتزوج التي نُشرت في عام ١٩٦٨. والاكتشافات الحديثة لأدلة أثرية على شاطئ البحر الأحمر في سبعينيات القرن الماضي والعشر سنوات الماضية وأخيرا مقال ديمتري ميكس الذي ظهر عام ٢٠٠٢.

سيتعامل هذا المقال مع هذه المشكلة في ضوء التغيرات الجيوسياسية في مصر وفي النوبة في الكشف عن المصادر الرئيسية للمعلومات حول بونت في عصر الدولة القديمة، ثم في عصر الدولة الوسطى وعصر الدولة الحديثة، وأخيرا في العصر المتأخر واليوناني الروماني.

وبالتالي ستظهر المقالة أن الوضع الجيوسياسي في النوبة وعلاقتها بمصر كان عاملا رئيسيا في توجيه العلاقة بين مصر والنوبة والطريقة المصرية للتعامل مع الأرض الغريبة والمهمة.

الكلمات الدالة

بونت – كرمة – وادي جواسيس – الدير البحري – حاتشبوت – البحر الأحمر – النيل – النوبة

INTRODUCTION

The Egyptians were interested in the distant land of Punt for its local productions, mentioned in Egyptian texts as "the wonders of Punt". These are exotic products, more specifically aromatics and especially myrrh-incense whose use was essential in the context of funeral and religious rites. (Falk 2013, 51-61) The land of Punt also offered other products, including metals and animals highly coveted by the Egyptians, that appeared in the list on the bas-relief of *Deir el-Bahari* are not found in Egypt such as gold, electrum, ebony, ivory, but also baboons and long-tailed monkeys. The products. It looks interesting also to notice that Punt, unlike the others foreign countries, was never mentioned as an enemy or as part of the Nine-Bows, with the exception of a *dipinto* from the tomb of Sobeknakht. Except for this testimony, we do not know anything other than peaceful relations with this country (V. Davies 2003, 38-44) (Valbelle, BIFAO 112, 2012, 450-451)

For more than a century, Punt has become a real object of study by many specialists, who have discussed the location of this region as well as the routes taken to reach it, focusing on its cultural, ethnic, and economic specificities. After having placed Punt, for a certain time, in Arabia, and more particularly in Yemen, (BRUGSCH 1858, 14-16) (Gauthier 1925, 46) (Hilzheimer 1932, 112-114) (Alliot 1951, 1-7) (Vycichi 1967, 45-46) since the publication by August Mariette of the bas-relief representing the expedition of Queen Hatshepsut in the temple of Deir el-Bahari, specialists have also located this country in Africa, because of the African criteria that characterize the scenes. (Mariette 1887).

Problematic and Methodology

Rolf Herzog's study in 1968 sparked a new debate on this question. Herzog proposed to locate Punt on the Nile or on one of its tributaries in present-day Sudan and rejected a location on the Red Sea. In addition, his study suggested that access to Punt was by the Nile and not by sea. (Herzog 1968) This hypothesis was based on his own study of the terms in the texts that had hitherto been used to locate Punt on the African coast of the Red Sea, as well as on his personal and literal interpretation of the bas-relief of Deir el-Bahari. Since this study, a passionate debate has opened between supporters of the location of Punt on the Nile with exclusively river access and those who prefer to locate it on the edge of the Red Sea with access only by sea. (Tallet, RdE 64 2013, 203) (Bard and Fattovich, The Land of Punt 2013, 2-10).

Archaeological research carried out on the shores of the Red Sea in Egypt, particularly in the site of Wadi Gawasis or in the region of Wadi Gach and, on the other hand, in Kassala, Sudan, has provided indisputable evidence in favor of maritime access to the land of Punt and its location near the Sudanese-Eritrean borders. (Sayed, RdE 29 1977, 176-177) (Sayed, CdE 58 1983, 23-37) (R. Fattovich 1991, 257-272) (Breyer 2016, 466-511).

Nevertheless, at the beginning of this century, Dimitri Meeks once again upset the question and turned to Arabia, thus returning to the original theory of its location. (Meeks, Locating Punt 2003, 53-80) (Meeks, Coptos 2002, 267-335) (Michaux-Colomot 2004, 353-363) (Breyer 2016, 442-466). Similarly, Pierre Tallet, after the discoveries of a series of rock inscriptions bearing the royal names of Ramses III on a track leaving the Eastern Delta passing through Sinai and ending at the oasis of Tayma in Arabia, supports the hypothesis of Meeks and suggests that Punt, between the end of the Eighteenth dynasty and the beginning of the Twentieth dynasty, was located in the Arabian Peninsula. (Tallet, MIFAO 130 2013, 203). Nevertheless, some recent studies appeared after Meeks' article about the location of Punt refuting his theory about the Asiatic or Arabian location. (Espinel 2011, 59-120) (Breyer

2016, 466-511) (Taterka, CRE 16 2016, 114-123) (Quack 2018) (Taterka, CRE 16 2016) (Taterka, JARCE 55, 2019, 189-203) (Taterka, CdE 96/191, 2021) (Taterka, historical reliefs 2022, 35-79).

On the other hand, D. Michaux-Colombot extended the concept of Punt to include the two sides of the Red Sea in Asia and in Africa and even the Indian Ocean relying on the analysis of the origin of the products mentioned on the bas-relief of Deir el-Bahari. She also links the name with the toponym « l'Inde mineur » that appeared in the classical sources. (Michaux-Colombot 2004, 353-363)

After many years of research, it seems possible to provide, on this question, a synthesis based on a set of significant epigraphic and iconographic testimonies, treated chronologically.

Discussion

Testimonies of the Old Kingdom

Tallet recently proposed the existence of an expedition to Punt at the beginning of the 4th Dynasty. (Tallet, RdE 64 2013, 190-198) This opinion is based on several elements, including the representation of a person with Puntite characteristics on the walls of the tomb of a certain Sachat-hotep, in Giza cemetery. The date of this mastaba (Porter and Moss 1981, 149-150(G 5150)) has recently been revised according to the dating criteria proposed by Nadine Cherpion and Michel Baud. (Baud 1999, 58) (Cherpion 1989, 108-181,185) The second element of Tallet's proposition relates to the recent discovery of the port remains of the site of Wadi el-Jarf, 25 km south of the city of Zafarana, on the shores of the Red Sea which date from the beginning of the 4th Dynasty. (Tallet, Marouard and Laisney, BIFAO 112, 2012, 399-446)

According to the Tallet, the location of Sinai, geographically opposite, to the east, explains neither the gigantic structure of the site, nor the importance of water reserves, and therefore suggests that Punt was the destination of ships from there. (Tallet, RdE 64 2013, 197) Nevertheless, no evidence of a direct relationship between the Land of Punt and Wadi el-Jarf, or even further to the north at Ayn-Sokhna has been found until now.

Some blocks from the funerary temple of Sahure at Abusir provide new information about an expedition sent to Punt, with the aim of bringing back frankincense trees to grow in Egypt, an idea that later inspired Queen Hatshepsut. (El-Awady 2006, 37-44) Despite the arrival of these trees at the Residence, as shown in the scene, this objective was not achieved, certainly because of the climate not favorable to their growth. (Breyer 2016, 595-597, Dok. 2.)

The text of the Palermo Stone mentions another expedition dated from the 5th Dynasty in connection with the contribution of incense and electrum. Some products were brought from the "Terrace of Turquoise", i.e. the terraces of South Sinai, and others, from Punt. (Breyer 2016, 594-595, Dok. 1) The association of the two toponyms led Meeks to consider the two locations to have been visited in the same expedition. (Meeks, Coptos 2002, 313) He adds that the use of the verb *ini* "to bring back" is compatible with a sea journey and could fill the gap preceding the mention of Punt. (Meeks, Coptos 2002, 313) The inscriptions would thus mention two expeditions, one in Sinai, the other in Punt.

Moreover, Herkhuf's biographical text (Urk. I, 128, 16-129, 1) states that King Pepi II asked him, during his fourth expedition, to bring him a pygmy from the "land of the horizon people", similar to that brought back from Punt by the chancellor of Wer-Djeded-Baou, a contemporary of King Isesi. (Marcolin and Espinel 2011, 581-583) The king then specifies that this pygmy was more important to him than all the products of "*Bia-Punt*". (Urk. I, 129,

15-130, 5) (Dixon 1958, 40-55) (Edel, Festschrift für H. Grapow 1955, 51-75) (M. Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature 1975, 26) (Goedicke 1981, 1-20) (Kadish 1966, 23-33) (Kemp 2006, 129-130) (O'Connor, JARCE 26 1986, 27-50) (Breyer 2016, 597-8, Dok. 4).

Meeks drew our attention to the mention of the pygmy carried from Punt by the chancellor of the god Wer-Djeded-Baou. He then links this, in his opinion, to the mention, on an ostrakon discovered in Wadi Gawasis, of the same anthroponym of the chancellor used as the name of a ship immortalizing the memory of the official of the Old Kingdom. (Meeks, Coptos 2002, 313-314) However, the reading George Posener (Sayed, CdE 58 1983, 23-37) on which Meeks's hypothesis is based, was corrected by Pascal Vernus (Vernus 1986, 139-140) and republished in my article on the hieratic ostraca of Wadi Gawasis. (Mahfouz, RdE 59 2008, 283, doc. 10-11).

The exact translation is "... what the chamberlain of Jed-baou, Senwosret, brought", which has no connection with the name of the official of the Old Kingdom. Similarly, the royal order as well as all the details of Herkhuf's expedition refer to the land of *Yam*, in Nubia, and to the "land of the horizon people" which probably has nothing to do with Arabia, the inhabitants of *Yam* playing the role of intermediaries between Egypt and "the land of Horizon People" at that time, (O'Connor, JARCE 26 1986, 35) (Obsomer, Abgadiyat 11 2016, 127-134) regardless of the imprecise location of the latter.

Several Egyptologists (Gardiner, Egypt of the Pharaohs 1962, 59) (Peet, Gardiner and Černý 1955, 1-2) (M. Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature 1975, 27, note. 7) believe that this same text links Sinai and Punt based on the expression "Bia-Punt", interpreting "Bia", which literally means "mine", (Hannig 2010, 262, no 9529) as designating "the mines of Sinai" and coordinating it with Punt. The grammatical relationship between *Bia* and *Punt* is a direct genitive to be translated as "the mine of Punt", which can be compared with other texts that refer to it with the indirect genitive "Bia-n-Punt". (Sayed, RdE 29 1977, 176-177)

Nevertheless, in a recent study, Filip Taterka identifies the term "Bia-Punt" with the coastal region of the Red Sea encompassing the harbour site. This identification explains the extensive presence of the geographical term in Wadi Gawasis epigraphic materials and its absence in other testimonies dealing with Punt especially during the New Kingdom. (Taterka, CdE 96/191, 2021, 60-75)

The biographical text of Pepinakht, also from the same cemetery of Qubbet el-Hawa, (Urk I, p. 134, l. 13-15.) indicates that King Pepi II sent him to the land of 'Aamou to bring back the body of a certain 'Anankhta. The last one was a "director of the dragomen" —a title that often appears in the titulary of Aswan nomarchs during the Old Kingdom— who had been killed while assembling a *kebenet*-boat to be sent to Punt.

Once again, the discussion over the meaning of the terms 'Aamou and "bateau-kebenet" -a type of boats that was used often to travel to the country of *Punt*- muddied the waters. (Tallet, RdE 64 2013, 190-192) 'Aamou is a term for the Bedouins who inhabited the deserts east of the Nile Valley in general, not just "Asiatics", and the *kebenet*-boat refers to a large ships made of cedar imported from Byblos.

The previously appointed leaders were from Aswan and responsible for the policy concerning the southern regions of the state. (Bissing 1955, 319-338) (Roccati 1982, 61-63) Furthermore, the historical and geopolitical data relating to their autobiographies, including the mention of Punt and its access, was part of this policy.

The discovery of these testimonies revealing the travels and adventures of a high official in Nubia and in neighbouring countries, including desert lands, undoubtedly confirm that the access to Punt, as well as to "the land of the Horizon People" passed most often through Aswan, with the exception of the third journey of Herkhuf. This expedition, which

departed from *This* (Abydos) took the track of the forty days (Darb Al-Arbaien), and was done, at least at that time, under the responsibility of the leaders of the first Nome of Upper Egypt.

Testimonies from the Middle Kingdom

The inscription of *Henenu* in Wadi Hammamat (M 114) recounts in detail a composite mission sent by King Mentuhotep III, in the year 8 of his reign, under the command of the steward *Henenu*. It was a question of exploiting stones from the region of Wadi Hammamat, including the famous stone of *bekhen*, and to prepare a maritime expedition to bring back incense from the country of Punt. (Porter and Moss 1981, 331) (Cuyat and Montet 1912, 81-84, pl.31) (Bradbury, JARCE 25 1988, 127-138) (Gasse 2016, 44-50) (Breyer 2016, 599-602, Dok. 7.)

The geopolitical significance of this testimony is indisputable since it indicates a path passing the Eastern desert through Wadi Hammamat to reach the Red Sea, where an operation of reassembling of the *kebenet*-boats was carried out, probably in the port of Wadi Gawasis. Thus, a departure was planned from the coast of the Red Sea to Punt. A second observation to be drawn from the content of the text is that the interlocutors are not inhabitants of Punt but, "the chiefs of the desert" *Heqau desheret*, and thus were located halfway between the production areas and the Nile Valley. These people represented, at that time, a commercial intermediary between the producers probably located in Punt and the consumers. (Saleh, *Orientalia* 42 1973, 370-380)

Abdel Aziz Saleh tried to develop this idea about commercial intermediaries by translating the term *Heqau desheret* as "the *sheikhs* of the desert". Consequently, he expanded the territory of Punt to include Arabia or, at least, the Arabian coast of the Red Sea where the desert *sheikhs* lived. His hypothesis is also based on the mention "*genebtyou*" in the Annals of Thutmose III. (Saleh, *Orientalia* 42 1973, 370-382) The term refers to a people whose messengers came to pay their tribute consisting of myrrh, gum, and other products. Saleh considers this expression to be an ancient form of the term semitic "*gebbanitae*", mentioned in the writings of the Greek geographer Pliny, which probably refers to the *Qatabanians* of Yemen. (Saleh, *BIFAO* 72 1972, 258-261) This analysis, however, ignores the chronological gap between the Middle Kingdom, the reign of Thutmose III and the first appearance of *Qataban* in history. A theory that was totally refuted by A. M. Sayed who wrote an accurate study about the non-existence of relations between Egypt pharaonic and Arabia. (Sayed, *Proceedings Arab.* 19 1989, 155-166) Nevertheless, the recent discoveries of pharaonic inscriptions and objects in the peninsula Arab and even in Gulf Area could upset his hypothesis. (Sperveslage, 2019).

Rodolfo Fattovich took up the hypothesis of Saleh and proposes the existence of an Afro-Arab trade circuit between 2300 and 1400 BC, with the population of the *Gach* group ensuring an important role in this circuit. Spices were imported from southern Arabia directly through the routes of Western Arabia and indirectly through the African coast of the Red Sea. Therefore, the "concept" of Punt had been expanded to include the sources of incense from Yemen. (R. Fattovich 1991, 257-272) (R. Fattovich, *BSF* 6 1996, 399-405) (R. Fattovich, *Punt* 1993, 399-405) (Fattovich and Bard, *Harbour of the Pharaohs* 2007, 17-24) It is also possible that the sailors depicted in *TT* 143, which dates from the 18th dynasty, came from the south of the Arabian Peninsula. (R. Fattovich 1991, 267)

(Farout, *Expeditions to the Red Sea at the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty* 2006) All the epigraphic testimonies discovered on the maritime site of Wadi Gawasis since the discovery of the stele of Khentykhetyour, those of the archaeological mission of the

University of Alexandria in 1977-1978, (Nibbi, JEA 62 1976, 46-50) (Obsomer, Sesostris I, Chronological and historical study of the reign 1995, doc. 170, 709-710.) and finally those of the Italo-American mission in 2002-2010, (A. M. Sayed, 1977, 140-178, pl. 12 (b)) (A. M. Sayed, 1980, 154-157) (Farout, BIFAO 94 1994, 143-4, 151-5, pl. I, p. 23-37) (Farout, Expeditions to the Red Sea at the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty 2006, 48) (C. Obsomer, Sesostris I, doc. 172-174, p. 711-714) commemorate a series of expeditions to the land of Punt to look for exotic products, "the wonders of Punt", by way of the Red Sea. Posener affirmed that the discoveries of pharaonic monuments, by Sayed, on the site of the Wadi Gawasis, on the Red Sea, confirm that this place was used as a starting point for voyages to the land of Punt. (A. M. Sayed, RdE 29, 1977, pp. 138-179) (A. M. Sayed, CdE 58 (1983), pp. 23-37.)

The missions attested throughout the epigraphic materials discovered *in-situ* according to chronological order are:

- expedition of the year 22 of the reign of Senusret I; Vandersleyen believes that the two operations mentioned on the stele of Antefoker/Ameny would, in fact simply designate two levels of administrative responsibility and not two separate actions in two different regions: the vizier is responsible to the king and the herald is responsible to the vizier. In this sense, *Wadj-Wer*, associated with the Nile Valley, can no longer be translated as "the sea" and the road of *Punt* no longer needs to go through the Red Sea. This note was intended to deny the existence of a maritime expedition departing from the port at that time, but with the recent discoveries at Wadi Gawasis of several stelae mentioning trips to *Punt*, pieces of boats, sailors' ropes and stone anchors *in situ*, the use of the site as a seaport is now indisputable (Vandersleyen, Oudj our 1999, 13, 413-5). Besides, the theory of Taterka about the location of Bia-Punt on Wadi Gawasis itself and perhaps its hinterland makes any discussion about ignoring the sea voyages across the Red Sea to Punt during the Middle Kingdom maritime pointless. (F. Taterka, CdE 96/191, 2021, 60-75)
- expedition of the year 28 of Amenemhat II; the expedition of the year 1 of Senusret II;
- expedition of the year 5 of Senusret III;
- expedition of the year 23 of Amenemhat III ;
- expedition of the year 42 of the same sovereign,
- expedition of the year 8 of Amenemhat IVth. (Mahfouz and Pirelli, Epigraphy 2007, 31-34) (Mahfouz, BIFAO 108 2008, 253-279) (Mahfouz, BIFAO 110 2010, 165-175) (Mahfouz, RdE 59 2008, 275-322) (PIRELLI 2007) (Mahfouz, Abgadiat 6 2011, 51-67) (Mahfouz and Pirelli, Epigraphy 2007, 117-132) (Bard and Fattovich, Egyptian Long-Distance 2015, 1-10) (Bard and Fattovich, The Land of Punt 2013, 3-11) (Breyer 2016, . 603-620, Dok. 8-26) (Obsomer, Bulletin de l'académie 8 2019, 6-66)

L. Bradbury traced the overland route of the expeditions of the Middle Kingdom. Those who left Wadi Gawasis by sea, towards Punt, took the road from Wadi Hammamat to *Bir el-Fawakhir* where all the inscriptions end; from this point, they went north, via Wadi Attala, where are the *graffiti* of both Senusret I and Ramses III; then the expeditions entered Wadi Saqi which leads to Wadi Gawasis, the starting point of the maritime trip intending to reach the land of Punt. (Bradbury, JARCE 25 1988, 127-156) Moreover, two fragments of a stela dated to the seventh year of the reign of Amenemhat IV were discovered on the site of Berenice whose text mentions a certain Ptah-hotep, official at the Royal Palace invites us to suggest the existence of a marine station on the maritime itinerary reaching Punt. (Hense, Kaper and Geerts 2015, 585-601)

The end of the Second Intermediate Period is marked by important evidence concerning the localization of Punt in the tomb of the Sobeknakht of El-Kab (No. 10). A *dipinto* reveals that the kingdom of Kush, whose capital was at Kerma, organized a coalition of several Nubian tribes, including the inhabitants of *Wawat* (Lower Nubia), those of the islands of *Khenthennefer* (Upper Nubia), the Puntites and the *Medjayu* to attack the southern part of Egypt towards the end of the 17th dynasty. (V. Davies 2003, 38-44) (Valbelle, BIFAO 112, 2012, 450-451)

Punt, according to this text, does not seem far from Nubia. The presence, on the site of Doukki Gel, of African-culture architecture, different from that of the neighbouring city of Kerma also implies the presence in this ceremonial city of populations from other regions of Sudan, engaged in the resistance against Egypt. (Bonnet, BIFAO 115 2015, 1-14) (Bonnet, CRAIBL II 2013, 807-823)

Testimonies from the New Kingdom

I. The bas-relief of Deir el-Bahari

The iconographic program of the Punt expedition evoked in Queen Hatshepsut's temple in Deir el-Bahari has been used as essential and irrefutable evidence dealing with the location of Punt, the access routes to this country, the physical characteristics of its inhabitants, as well as the specificities of its fauna and flora. (Smith 1962, 59-60) (Servajean 2016, 179-226) (Breyer 2016, 520-289, 622-642, Dok. 28.) (F. Taterka, CRE 16 2016, 114-123) (F. Taterka, JARCE 55, 2019, 189-203) (F. Taterka, historical reliefs 2022, 35-79).

The peculiarities of the Queen of Punt and her daughter in the representations have been interpreted by R. Herzog as being characteristic of the "pygmies of *Khoismid*", the tribes of Bushmen and Hottentots who lived, perhaps at that time, further north than in the present Kalahari Desert. (Herzog 1968, 56-61) Nevertheless, according to him, the presence of pygmies has never been demonstrated on the African coast of the Red Sea. Herzog also relied on a geobotanical argument to say that the production of incense from southern Sudan was sufficient to supply all that Egypt needed. (Herzog 1968, 56-61) By sea and, more particularly in southern Somalia, only the palm trees depicted on the bas-relief of Hatshepsut are attested and there were, however, no incense trees. This second argument has been used to argue against the location of Punt in a coastal area. (Herzog 1968, 62-67)

The presence of cattle with deformed horns, giraffes, and rhinoceros in the scenes of Punt in Deir el-Bahari is also considered as a clue to its location in the interior of Africa. The huts on stilts depicted on the bas-relief are unique in Egyptian art. Herzog believes that the construction of these types of structures occurred in southern Sudan, but never existed on the shores of the Red Sea. (Herzog 1968, 67-71) Ch. Bonnet the presence of ladders in the bas-relief of Deir el-Bahari -rare in Egyptian iconography- on a painted base fragment of the funerary temple K XI of the necropolis of Kerma, to access the huts on stilts. (Bonnet, *Edifices et rites* 2000, 107, fig. 68, 75-76)

Finally, Herzog (Herzog 1968, 78-80) suggested that the Nile was the only way to get to Punt since he translates *Wadj-Wer* as "the Nile" and not as "the sea", believing that the Egyptians would not have been able to build adequate boats to navigate the Red Sea. (Herzog 1968, 73-77) A. Nibbi took the reasoning of R. Herzog and C. Vandersleyen to postulate that the Egyptians of the pharaonic period never navigated the Red Sea. Their hypotheses are multiple but remain vague such as: the Egyptians had a natural fear of the sea; in addition, there was no single original word for the sea in the Egyptian language; finally, Egyptian religion never had a god of the sea. (Nibbi, *The Mariner's Mirror* 65 1979, 201-208) (Nibbi,

Neighbours 1981, 72) Moreover, Cl. Vandersleyen who translates the term *Ouadj-our* by "Nile Valley" refuted its translation as "the sea". (Vandersleyen, *L'Égypte et la vallée du Nil* 1995, 282,n.4) In 1999, he published a book on *Wadj-wer* in which the 401 examples taken from Egyptian texts are analyzed to prove his hypothesis. (Vandersleyen, *Ouadj our* 1999, 30-31, 53-54, 73-74,132-142, 156.) According to him, the representations of fish in Deir el-Bahari are not precise and do not give a real idea of the aquatic environment. (Danelius and Steinitz 1967, 21)

Kenneth Kitchen accepted the location of Punt, proposed by R. Herzog, however, he extended his proposal for the location to the Blue Nile region and integrated the Sudanese Red Sea coast. (Kitchen, *Punt* 1971, 184-206) (Kitchen, *the land* 1993, 587-608) (Kitchen, *Further Thoughts* 1999, 173-178) The representations of Punt on the bas-relief of Deir el-Bahari would thus correspond to images of the African coast of the Red Sea to the east — between Port Sudan to the north and Marsa Ibrahim to the south— and the Nilotic region — between Berber to the north and Kassala to the south. This area covers 400 km in distance from the sea to the Nile inland. (Kitchen, *Punt* 1971, 202-203)

On the other hand, Kitchen translates the expression *Wadj-Wer* as "Red Sea" and not as "Nile"; he criticizes Herzog's hypothesis regarding the journey to Punt and does not support the Nile as a route. Kitchen analyzed the geomorphological nature of the Red Sea and its ports between Suez and Marsa Ibrahim and the ability of Egyptian ships to navigate the Red Sea, to confirm that the Red Sea was the route that led to Punt. (Kitchen, *Punt* 1971, 189)

K. A. KITCHEN depended on Middle Kingdom texts, such as the stele of *Khentkhetour* found at Wadi Gasus or the inscription of *Henenu* in Wadi Hammamat, and on New Kingdom texts, such as the Harris I Papyrus, to support his theory. He hardly used late texts, such as those of the temples of Dendera and Edfu, studied by R. HERZOG. (Kitchen, *Punt* 1971, 197-202) According to his studies, the journey between Suez and Suakin, about 900 km, lasted between 30 and 45 days. (Kitchen, *Punt* 1971, 196) Moreover, he claims that from their port of arrival, Egyptians would have walked inland to reach the areas with exotic products. (Kitchen, *Punt* 1971, 196) This 400 km journey overland would have taken about 25 days to reach the Sudanese-Eritrean border (Kassala and its surroundings). It is this route that would have been taken by the expedition under Hatshepsut to bring back 31 incense trees and ebony wood with the help of the Puntites. (Kitchen, *Punt* 1971, 203)

G. Posener (Posener 1977, 370) stated that only archaeological excavations can reveal traces of the Egyptian presence in Punt. Unfortunately, the territory likely to correspond to this country is far too vast to allow systematic investigations. Moreover, Posener stated that the scribes of the bas-relief of Deir el-Bahari did not seek to imitate reality by arranging the subjects, but rather that "the *guiding idea that presided over the design of the bas-relief is the search for exoticism*". However, he considered several mentions such as products from Punt: gold-*wadj* of 'Aamu; (Posener 1977, 371) electrum of 'Aamu; white gold of 'Amu. 'Amu, according to him, is a toponym related to the sector of the Third Cataract, (Vercoutter, *Kush* 6, 1958, 70-71) because, on the list, appearing in the temple of Luxor of the mining areas exploited during the reign of Ramses II, the term 'Amu is placed after the Gebel Barkal region and before the land of Kush (Upper Nubia). (KRI II, 618, 2-10) (Posener 1977, 337-342) (Vercoutter, *Kush* 7, 1959, 120-153).

The mines of 'Amu were as accessible from Nubia as from Punt. As the gold zone stops at the 18th parallel, Punt should not have been too far from this boundary in a southerly direction. Kitchen (Posener 1977, 337-342) places Punt, more precisely, between Ras Shagara and Suakin (KITCHEN, *RITANC* II, 416) while Louise Bradbury situated it at the latitude of Kurgus (Abu Hamad). (Bradbury, *JARCE* 33 1997, 37-60)

Meeks (Meeks, Coptos 2002, 317) considered other sequences of toponyms such as that of Ramses III in the temple of Medinet Habu who places the gold of 'Amu in the same context as the lapis lazuli of *Tefrer* and the turquoise of *Ro-Chaout*, as well as those attestations on a hieratic papyrus of Tebtynis, and in the texts of the temples of Edfu, Dendera and Kom Ombo. Based on these, Meeks points out that an African localization of Punt is far from proven. (*KRI V*, 328, 4) Anyway, it is not a list of toponyms such as that of the temple of Luxor, but a scene representing the valuable products in the treasury of the temple.

He added that Egyptian had arrived Punt by land called sometimes by "from above" (*Urk IV*, 324, 10 et voir *supra*, 24) (Posener 1977, 370). The explorers of the king knowing these routes through the Eastern Desert. Since it was also possible to reach it by sea as mentioned in some sources, then it is a land that could be reached by both land and sea. Meeks hinted here that Punt situated in Asia and could be reached through the Red Sea and also by land through Sinai. The French Egyptologists enhanced that the Egyptians in their writings place Punt to the East and take the route throughout the Eastern Desert to get there; they also place it with the southern countries.

Nevertheless, in the lists of tributaries of the New Kingdom the Egyptians always seem to locate Punt on the coast of East Africa. In addition, according to the Sinai inscriptions No. 238 and No. 427 (Edel, *Beiträge zu den Ägyptischen* 1983, 176-182) which refers to the harvest of myrrh of Punt, as well as the indirect reference to Punt in the tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor, G. Posener assumed that combined expeditions to Sinai and Punt were carried out across the Red Sea. (Posener 1977, 371)

Posener added that Egyptians were able to change their point of loading or unloading on the coast of Punt. They may have simply moved it over time or modified it according to their desire to explore virgin lands. Nevertheless, the centre of Punt must not have varied from one time to another and the remains of the chapel that the Egyptians built for the goddess Hathor should always be there. In fact, the eastern boundary of Punt was precisely located on the edge of the Red Sea, but its western, southern, and northern borders could not be clearly defined. (Posener 1977, 370)

The hypothesis of G. Posener eliminates the localization of Punt in Somalia or in the region of *Atbara* or in the regions of the White Nile and Blue Nile. He proposes to situate Punt in the southern part of the Sudanese coast and the coastline of Northern Eritrea, between Port Sudan and Adulis. (Posener 1977, 374) N. Beaux assumed that Punt appears in fact as a distant land about which the Egyptians apparently knew only the landscape by the sea and not its extent or borders. Consequently, Punt was, in her point of view, rather a land than a country, and its geographical location, if it was never precise, most likely changed over time, and perhaps even according to the expeditions or crews. It is possible that the Egyptians landed in different Punts, which contained the same products, and which were brought together in a stereotyped image under the general expression of countries of "Punt". (Beaux 1990, 301)

On the other hand, D. Valbelle supports hypothesis of the presence of Punt between the southern Sudanese coast and Northern Eritrea. (Valbelle, *Les Neufs Arcs* 1990, 60) D. O'Connor considers that Punt extended over the coastal zone and the eastern mountainous region between latitudes 17° and 12° North. This location, therefore, includes a small semi-desert zone to the west of the mountains and savannah to the east. O'Connor also agrees with the writers mentioned above that the Egyptians went to Punt by the Red Sea, and that the Puntites also made the trip in the opposite direction. Relations between the two countries were always peaceful. He also mentions that during the expedition of Queen Hatshepsut a chapel for the god Amun was built. (O'Connor, *Punt* 1982, 917-918)

R. Fattovich, who sought to confirm Posener's theory, carried out archaeological work in the eastern part of Sudan, notably at Kassala, in the Gach-Delta and *Khachem el-Girba*. He tried to reopen the discussion of the location of Punt in light of his discoveries by following in the footsteps of the Egyptian presence in the region. Fattovich identified objects of Egyptian type, especially dating from the 18th dynasty, in *Agordat*, including earrings and several stone axes, and in *Aqiq* on the Red Sea where he noted some granite blocks carved according to Egyptian construction techniques. (R. Fattovich, SAK, 4 1991, 261-262). His excavations at Kassala, in the Gach Delta and at *Khachem el-Girba* on the Atbara, suggest that the population of these regions was not marginal, since, the area was well placed to act as an intermediary between the Nile Valley and the resource-rich regions of northern Ethiopia and southern Sudan. (R. Fattovich, SAK 4 1991, 266) (Manzo, BCE 17 1993, 41-46) (Manzo, CISA 4 2013, 253-271) (Manzo, CISA 5 2014, 375)

Archaeological data added to the geographical aspects of the region with natural resources such as gold, incense, ivory, ebony, and exotic animals, the role of the inhabitants of the Gach Delta and Baraka Valley as intermediaries in trade relations and climatic conditions, show that the image of a country of Punt is very close to its representation in Egyptian sources, the most important of which remains the bas-relief of Deir el-Bahari (R. Fattovich, SAK 4 1991, 162).

The discoveries in the Sudanese-Eritrean border region show the general dynamics of trade relations between Egypt and this region. For this, Fattovich compared his discoveries with the Egyptian documents that mention Punt in the New Kingdom, the testimonies of Egyptian objects from the *Baraka* Valley and the dissemination of the *Gebel Mokram* culture at the sites of Kassala and *Khachem el-Girba*. He added that the arrival of drought in the African Horn led to the suspension of these trade relations between Egypt and the region at the end of the 20th dynasty. (R. Fattovich, SAK 4 1991, 266)

Abdel Monem Abdel Halim Sayed, in returning to the earlier ideas of Mariette and Maspero, suggested that there are two clues in the bas-relief of Hatshepsut which locate Punt in Somalia: first, the existence of incense trees by the seashore; and second, the representation of a man harvesting terebinth resin from incense trees growing by the sea. He drew in particular on the writings of classical authors such as Strabo (Strabo n.d., vol.16) and Pliny (Pliny n.d., chap.34) to compare the changes in climate and environment between the Pharaonic era and the present day and thus ensures that there have been no significant changes that would have disturbed the fauna and flora.

These two elements suggest, according to him, that the "Terraces of Punt" are therefore located by the sea. In addition, he relied on a study by Hepper to select the regions where one can find the incense trees represented in Deir el-Bahari. (Hepper 1977, 129-130) Hepper found that this kind of myrrh, which bears the scientific name *Boswellia frereana*, grows in only one place; by the sea in northeastern Somalia. Sayed concluded by considering that palm trees, huts on stilts, cynocephalies, baboons and cinnamon, characteristic of Punt, still exist in this area. He confirmed his hypotheses by signaling the presence of *antiou*-trees by the sea was assured due to the representation of marine fish on the same scenes of Deir el-Bahari. (SAYED 1993, 98-126)

The fauna and flora, represented on the bas-relief, have been the subject of an in-depth analysis by Meeks, the latter noting that animals can be transported far from their natural environment. He rejected the fact that animals such as the rhinoceros, the herd of cattle and the giraffe, appearing on the bas-relief, lived in their natural environment, adding that the absence of the elephant weakened the African location of the scene of Deir el-Bahari. (Meeks, Coptos 2002, 275-279).

As for the flora represented, Meeks notes that plants are less of a problem: the doumpalm exists in Yemen, as does the ebony tree; the good quality gum-resin-‘*anty* producing tree (Baum 1988, 107) (Keimer 1946-1947, 279) with the scientific name *Boswellia Frereana* comes from the Somali coast, while the one with the scientific name *Boswellia sacra* comes from the Hadramout and Dhofar region, (Hepper 1977, 129-130) (Western and McLeod 1995, 80-81,91-92) which lie between present-day Yemen and Oman. (Hepper 1977, 69, pl. XV) (Casson 1989, 132) (Vycichi 1967, 45-46) The list of incense-producing trees from the temple of Edfu showing those with Punt’s products were excluded from those of Kush. (Meeks, Coptos 2002, 279-281) This confirms, according to Meeks, that the incense came mainly from Arabia known as Punt in the separate list of Kush. (Meeks, Coptos 2002, 280-281) F. Servajean listed the results of recent excavations in Arabia and the "Sabre culture" by proposing the identification of the latter with Punt. (Servajean 2016, 180-185)

Finally, Taterka, has recently published a paper about the presence of the Secretary bird in the bas-relief. He identified the image of a bird carried by a Nubian represented on unpublished fragments from the famous scene of Punt as having an African origin and as living in its natural Nubian environment and, therefore, could not be brought to the Arabian Peninsula as a diplomatic exchange. Therefore, Taterka refutes Meeks theory, depending on this evidence which was discovered recently as a part of Hatshepsut’s Punt reliefs from the southern Middle Portico of Deir el-Bahari’s temple of millions of years in favour of the African location of Punt. (F. Taterka, RdE 69, 2019, 231-248)

We will not study the bas-relief of Hatshepsut in details despite its importance, but some observations on the scenes and texts can be proposed: (Mahfouz and Ragab, Abgadiyat 16 2021, 52-64)

- The royal decree evokes the desire to reach the terraces of the incense trees, in order to explore their accesses, to know their periphery and to recognize the different roads. (Naville 1895, pl. 86) (Smith 1962, 59-60) (Vandersleyen, L’Égypte et la vallée du Nil 1995, 282) (Urk IV, 335)
- The Egyptian delegation arriving in Punt appeared to be like a military troop which upset the peaceful aspect of the expedition. (Naville 1895, pl.72) (Smith 1962, 59-60)
- The inhabitants of Punt ask the Egyptian delegation why they came to their land that none knew, and then they ask them how they got there: by the *hr w3wt hrt* “paths above” (Posener 1977, 370) (land road), by sea or by the valley. (Urk IV, 324)

The Egyptian fleet, on its return voyage, arrived directly in the river port of Karnak.(Urk IV, 329-30.) In order to find a solution to the direct landing of Hatshepsut's fleet at Karnak, F. Servajean returns to the idea of the existence of a direct connection between the Nile and the Red Sea through the Wadi Tumilat, (Servajean 2016, 191) a hypothesis totally rejected by G. Posener and A. M. Sayed. (Posener 1977, 269) A reject that was confirmed by the discovery of several ports on the Red Sea confirmed the opinion of G. Posener.

II. Scenes of exchange in private tombs

A scene in the tomb of the director of the treasury Min (*TT143*), contemporary of the reign of Amenhotep II, depicts the owner on his chariot, accompanied by a group of soldiers, welcoming boats from Punt (TT 143) (N. d. Davies 1935, 48-49, pl. 2. fig. 3) (Urk IV,1472-3, no. 452) (Säve-Söderbergh 1946, 22-25) (Breyer 2016, 647, Dok. 33.)

This scene shows a commercial exchange between Egyptians and Puntites. Bradbury considered that the primitive form of ships indicates that the Puntite delegation had not made an oversea voyage, but had sailed on the Atbara river, then continued its way on the Nile to

Kurgus (Abu Hamed), where they met the Egyptian military patrol and bartered with them. (Bradbury, JARCE 33 1997, 39-42) (Kitchen, Further Thoughts 1999, 173-174) This explanation seems logical, in order to explain the small size of the Puntite boats and their limited navigation capabilities. Although K. Kitchen noted that a recent excavation (Sjöström 2001, 59) of the fortress of Abu Hamed showed that it was at best post-Meroitic and probably medieval in date and no evidence of the presence of a fortress dating from the New Kingdom is preserved.

Similarly, the tomb of Amenmes in Thebes (*TT* 89) contains a scene showing a commercial exchange between Egyptians and Puntites, this time without their small boats, although the area where they may have been shown is erased. (*TT* 8) (PM I, 181-183) (Säve-Söderbergh 1946, 25) (Cabrol 2000, 404) (Breyer 2016, 648, Dok. 34) (G. Davies 1940, 136, pl. 25) The Egyptians, presented on four registers, received the exotic products of Punt, under the supervision of the steward of Thebes Amenmes, who is standing in his chariot. (*TT* 143) (*TT* 89) (*Urk.* IV, 1892, 14)) These scenes, according to Posener, indicate that the Puntites came to deliver their products to the Egyptian coasts of the Red Sea and that the Egyptian state itself sent expeditions to take delivery. (Posener 1977, 370) Bradbury, however, suggested that the traders of Punt came by the Nile in order to trade with the Egyptians. According to her, the two boats are too fragile to sail on the Red Sea and did not have enough fresh water supply for the journey. The scene is the only evidence of trade on the river between Punt and Egypt *via* the Kurgus/Kary border (Abu Hamed). (Bradbury, JARCE 33 1997, 37-60)

III. The Harris Papyrus and the Expedition of Ramesses IIIrd

A journey to Punt was described in detail in the Papyrus Harris I. This passage is organized according to the following order: (Erichsen 1933, 94, l. 1.9-1.13) (Bongrani 1997, 45-59) (Grandet, BdE 109 1994, 338)

- the preparation of the expedition and maritime journey;
- the arrival in Punt and the barter;
- the return trip and the overland crossing of the desert of Coptos;
- the river journey to the Residence in the north.

Ramses III, according to the text, commanded a peaceful mission to resume with this country the commercial relations that had been suspended since Ramses II. The starting point is not mentioned, only the sea route named "the great sea of *Mou-qed*" (Grandet, Ramsès III 1993, 306-308) (Grandet, BdE 109 1994, note 931, pp. 255-260) although on the return trip, the ships docked at the latitude of Coptos (lit. the desert of Coptos), probably at Wadi Gawasis. Then the expedition crossed the desert to join the river and continued by the river until the capital to the north. The presence of the cartouche of Ramses III at Wadi Godami confirms this theory. (Bradbury, JARCE 25 1988, 146, n.69)

Claude Vandersleyen considers that the expression *Mu-qed*, which appears in the Harris Papyrus and which had already been used in the stele of the year 2 of Thutmose I (*Urk.* IV, 85, 14) (Vandersleyen, L'Égypte et la vallée du Nil 1995, 257-259) at Tombos, referred to the course of the Nile between the region of Abu Hamed and Napata, where it flows south-north. In this part of his reasoning, Cl. Vandersleyen followed L. Bradbury. (Bradbury, JARCE 33 1997, 37-60) While, L. Bradbury did not discuss the expedition of Ramesses III, but comments that private trade was carried out between the Puntites and Egyptian officials represented on the private tombs in Thebes of the XVIII dynasty. Therefore, her argument is not appropriate in this context.

Vandersleyen considered, moreover, that the toponym "desert of Coptos", thought to be an indication to the land route from the Red Sea to the Nile valley, designates the mountainous area near Coptos without any relation with either the Eastern Desert or the Red Sea shore. This means, according to him, that the expedition of Ramses III to Punt would have descended the Nile to go to Punt. (Vandersleyen, Oudj our 1999, 99-100)

Several rock inscriptions bearing the names of Ramesses III have recently been discovered respectively in Wadi el-Homr, in Wadi Abu Gada in Sinai, (Tallet, MIFAO 130 2013, no. 207, 208, 251) in the copper mines of Timna, near present-day Eilat, and in the oasis of Tayma 60 km northwest of the Arabian Peninsula. (Somaglino and Tallet, BIFAO 111, 2011, 361-369) (Somaglino and Tallet, *Africa Praehistorica* 27, 2013, 511-520)

This evidence was considered by Pierre Tallet as confirming the hypothesis of Meeks who proposed a connection with Punt *via* Sinai. Based on these discoveries and the documentation of the last two known official expeditions to the New Kingdom—that of Amenhotep III (*IS* 273) (Gardiner, Peet and Černý, *The Inscriptions of Sinai* 1952-1955, n. 273) and of Ramesses III (Harris Papyrus) (Grandet, *BdE* 109 1994, 932-951)—Tallet suggested a land route to Punt *via* Sinai that would have been in place at least between the 18th dynasty until the beginning of the 20th dynasty. (Tallet, *RdE* 64 2013, 198-203) He concluded that Punt, in this context and during this period, should be identified with a region of the Arabian Peninsula. (Tallet, *RdE* 64 2013, 203)

The inscriptions used as landmarks mentioned above surely attest to an Egyptian presence in these regions, but the nature of the activities carried out remains undetermined and the connection with the texts of the expedition to the land of Punt is not certain. Exploitation of copper and other materials is also possible either in the heart of Sinai or at the northern end of the Arabian Peninsula.

Texts from the Late and Greco-Roman Periods

The text of a Saite period stela (Breyer 2016, 653, Dok. 39.) which mentions a drought, a miraculous rain on the land of Punt and its influence on the level of the flood links this toponym to the sources of the Nile in Africa. R. Herzog used this phenomenon to approve that Punt was located in a Nilotic region. (Herzog 1968, 71-73)

G. Posener suggested that the text of this stela shows that Punt was under the influence of the prevailing climate in the southern part of the Eastern Desert, in the Wadi Kanaïs for example during the Ramesside period, where the texts often evoke episodes of drought and the need to dig wells. Thus, Punt should not be pushed too far south to an equatorial climate, nor too far north in the Egyptian zone. (Posener 1977, 373)

Finally, textual testimonies from the Greco-Roman period are often confused concerning the location of Punt. Although Meeks in locating Punt in Arabia used the texts from this period, especially the religious texts in the Egyptian temples in Upper Egypt, some scholars do not agree with his point of view and continue to locating Punt in Africa. (Breyer 2016, 123-140) (Baumann 2018, 321-332).

Nevertheless, Takerka connected Punt with the sunrise and the birth of its creator and ruler the sun god, and others located it southwards within the African continent as it was in pharaonic times. (F. Taterka 2021, 348-349) For example, an inscription in the temple of Edfu mentions the flight of king Ptolemy X Alexander I to the land of Punt. This text does not prove the location of Punt on the Arabian Peninsula as assumed by Meeks. He argues that the mention of Ptolemy X Alexander I's flight to Punt was symbolic for the king's death, which

was traditionally mentioned as the deceased king's union with his creator, the sun god, who is at the same time the ruler and creator of Punt. (Quack 2018, 53-54)

Taking into consideration the beginning of active relations and especially incense-trading between the states of southern Arabia and Egypt in the 4th century BC, (Robin 1994, 285-301) (Sayed, Proceedings Arab. 19 1989, 155-166) (Meeks, Coptos 2002, 296-306) we still do not have any proof that Egyptian texts named the Arabian Peninsula using term "Land of Punt" even during this period.

Conclusion

Egyptian documentation did not give geographical precision to the location of Punt. Nevertheless, it will be difficult to imagine the Punt mentioned in Herkhuf's text, to be dissociated from the interests of Egyptian policy towards Nubia, this policy being directed by the nomarchs of Aswan.

The recent discoveries of epigraphic documents on the maritime site of Wadi Gawasis certainly confirmed the inscription of Henenu and clearly indicated a land passage from Coptos to the seaport of Sawu (ancient name of Wadi Gawasis) to reach Punt by sea.

In this context, we must remember two points: firstly, Henenu bartered with the princes of the deserts (*heqaou desheret*), which would be on the way to the land of Punt, in contradiction with the bas-relief of Deir el-Bahari; secondly, the Egyptians arrived at this country by the Red Sea during this period. In addition, we must not forget appearance of the term Bia-Punt, "The mines of Punt", together with Punt. The region of Wadi Gawasis and its hinterland could logically be Bia-Punt. (Taterka, CdE 96/191, 2021, 60-75)

Hatshepsut's expedition probably took a waterway, thus returning to the tradition of the Old Kingdom. The queen's mission did not seek only incense this time, but all possible resources, including the incense-trees themselves to try to plant them in Egypt and probably to avoid commercial intermediaries (*heqaou desheret*).

It should also be noted that the Egyptian fleet, on the return trip, arrived directly at the port of Karnak, without the mention of a land passage, and that the princes of Punt knew that there were several ways to reach Egypt.

The encounters between the Puntites and the Egyptian military patrols depicted in the private tombs of Thebes as well as the primitive form of Puntite boats indicate undoubtedly a meeting place near the imperial borders of Egypt during the New Kingdom not far from the 4th Cataract.

Yet the text of Ramesses III's expedition and the details of the land part through the Coptos desert suggest a journey similar to the Middle Kingdom route to Punt *via* the Red Sea. During the Saite period, a direct connection between the rain on Puntland and the arrival of the inundation confirm the presence of Punt on one of the eastern tributaries of the Nile, namely the Atbara. Finally, the late location of Punt (India Minor) in Arabia during the Lagid period remains conjectural, but still the connection of the land of Punt with the Arabian peninsula during this period is questionable.

The analysis of the documentation, in the light of geopolitical information from each document, could explain the apparent contradictions. Indeed, the logical route for an Egyptian was the Nile River, by which Herkhuf and probably Wer-Djed-Baou, could reach their intermediaries inhabiting Nubia, who gave them the exotic products of Punt.

On the other hand, the presence of the hostile kingdom of Kerma (Kush) (Bonnet, *Edifices et rites* 2000) (Valbelle, *Les Neufs Arcs* 1990, 107-111) became an obstacle for the arrival of Puntite products to Egypt and forced the Egyptian state to abandon the river-route

and look for another way to Punt. The Kushites dominated all the region of Upper Nubia and represented an economic and military power that controlled access to Africa and prevented the Egyptians from accessing the incense sources, beginning from the end of Old Kingdom until the beginning of New Kingdom.

Therefore, from the Middle Kingdom, to avoid passing Kush, the Egyptians built ships in the shipyards of Coptos, then transported them in pieces through the Eastern Desert to reach the port of departure, Wadi Gawasis, on the Red Sea shore. Then, a sea journey was undertaken to arrive at the meeting point with the Puntites or at least with commercial intermediaries inhabiting the hinterland of the Red Sea to obtain the "wonders of Punt" as described by Egyptian texts. A very detailed account of the Egyptian expeditions sent by sea to the land of Punt has recently been completed by Claude Obsomer. In his study, he begins his conclusion with the policy of the sovereigns of the Middle Kingdom toward Nubia, especially after the military intervention of the year 16/18 of Senusret I that coincided with the maritime voyages to Punt starting from Wadi Gawasis. (Obsomer, *Bulletin de l'académie* 8 2019, 6-66)

The expeditions executed this long and difficult detour to avoid the powerful hostile state of Kush (Kerma), with which Egypt had come into an open and direct conflict during the reign of Senwosret I and which controlled the tracks of the Nubian desert between the Nile and the Red Sea (Bonnet and Reinold, *Genava n.s.* 41 1993, 32), representing a military threat to the Egyptian state and its interests. Egypt's violent policy toward the Kingdom of Kush began with the conquest led by the army of the vizier Antefoker in the year 29 of Amenemhat I, followed by the construction of the fortress of Buhen, north of the Second Cataract. The next stage of this aggressive policy took place in the year 16/18 of Senusret I when a military campaign against Kerma led by the general Mentuhotep was launched while the king himself was staying in Buhen as evidenced by the triumphal stela discovered in the fortress (stela Florence 2540).

Hostility between the Egyptian state and Kush intensified under the reign of Senusret III (three campaigns against Kush have been attested), for more details on Egyptian policy towards Nubia under the 12th dynasty. (Obsomer, *BABELAO* 6 2017, 1-38) (Valbelle, *Kerma and Egypt* 2014, 107) On the other hand, P. Tallet thinks that the operations of building the boats in the arsenals of Coptos and their transport in parts to the port of Wadi Gawasis in the year 24 of Senusret I (stela of Antefoker/Ameny) would correspond perfectly to a deed of foundation and the inauguration of the port under the reign of Senusret I. (Tallet, *Nehet* 3, 2015, 65)

Expeditions to Punt, therefore, throughout the 12th dynasty (Bard and Fattovich, *Egyptian Long-Distance* 2015, 3) (Manzo, *BMSAES* 18 2012, 75-106) used the maritime route *via* the Red Sea, despite the difficulties it presented. (Manzo, *ÄgLev* 21 2011, 79) *A fortiori*, during the Second Intermediate Period, during which Punt and Kush allied against Egypt, no Egyptian trip to Punt is attested. (Bonnet, *BIFAO* 115 2015, 1-14)

In the New Kingdom, Egypt, after getting rid of the Hyksos, became interested in the southern borders' politics. Thus, at the beginning of the 18th dynasty, the victory of Thutmose I over the kingdom of Kush was questioned by a coalition mentioned on the stela of the year 1 of Thutmose II and whose traces are visible at Doukki-Gel where the *minenou* was nevertheless quickly rebuilt.

It was probably shortly after the Egyptian pacification of the land of Kush in the New Kingdom (Bonnet, *BIFAO* 112 2012, 59-75) (Valbelle, *BSFE* 167, 2006, 33-50) (Bonnet and Valbelle, *CRAIBL* 2000, 1099-1120) that Queen Hatshepsut sent her famous expedition to Punt, not only to obtain incense and exotic products, but also to explore the resources of

incense. (Creasman 2014, 395-405) The iconographic and textual program of the bas-relief shows that it was the first time that the Egyptians arrived at the incense-producing areas (Punt proper), that the Puntites were surprised and did not understand where they had come from. Furthermore, the artist who prepared the bas-relief was truly fascinated by the tropical environment of this country and showed his fascination by reproducing this exotic landscape on the wall of the temple of Deir el-Bahari.

After the conquest of Nubia and the establishment of huge administrative centre for Nubia under the leadership of the viceroy of Nubia, the Egyptian borders were moved southward to the Fourth Cataract. During this period, the contact between the Egyptians and the Puntites was easy and without much difficulty of movement since the Puntites could travel in rather rudimentary boats and arrive at the border to carry out private barter with the Egyptian military, as seen in the scenes of the tombs of the chief treasure Min (*TT* 143) and the steward of Thebes Amenmes.

The mentions of the reopening of Punt routes in the texts of Seti I (Porter and Moss 1981, VII, p. 392) (Breasted 1906, III, § 155) (Kitchen, KRI, I 1975, . 30, no. 11, b, l. 12-3) and the attestation of an expedition sent to Punt during the reign of Ramses II confirmed that relations between this country and Egypt had not been totally interrupted under the 19th dynasty (Porter and Moss 1981, VII, p. 161, 24-7) (Kitchen, KRI, II 1979, , p. 215-6, § 55). Moreover, the absence of epigraphic materials in the name of this ruler in the three ports of the Red Sea (Tallet, Nehet 3, 2015, 59) could indicate that access to Punt during this period was through the river Nile- East desert route.

The Papyrus Harris I mentioned an expedition to Punt during the reign of Ramesses III. It details more particularly the return journey: the route through the Red Sea to an unspecified berthing point and the crossing of the Eastern Desert with the transport of products, which was carried out on donkeys.

Adding the existence of inscriptions of Ramesses III in Wadi Attala, we can strongly propose the following itinerary: the expedition returned from Punt by the Red Sea and landed at Wadi Gawasis; it then crossed the Eastern Desert through Wadi Saqi and Wadi Attala to reach the Wadi Hammamat; finally, from Wadi Hammamat, the expedition continued on its way to Coptos and the Nile Valley.

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