



## **The Ancient Egyptian harbor of Mersa Gawasis from a touristic perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Mersa/Wadi Gawasis is located 80 km south of Hurghada, it is the shortest overland route from the Red Sea to the Nile Valley. The site was surveyed many times; it was first misidentified as a Greco-Roman watering station. Later, in 1976, the site was discovered by Abdel Monem Sayed (Alexandria University), who identified the site as the Pharaonic harbor of (S3ww)  or <sup>1</sup> which was used for sea-faring expeditions to Punt. The archaeological expeditions at Mersa Gawasis were continued by the Italian-American team from 2001 until 2011. They uncovered seven man-made caves in the fossil reef; they were used as storage rooms for disassembled ships, stelae, limestone anchors, foreign ceramics, ropes, and wooden boxes labeled “Punt”. This paper delves into the historical development and emergence of Mersa/Wadi Gawasis as a strategic harbor in ancient Egypt. This study provides insight into the transformation of a historical coastal site that could be used as a tourist site.

**Key Words: Mersa Gawasis - Punt – Trade – Red Sea – Ancient Egypt**



### **Introduction**

The Red Sea trade dates back to Naqada I period. The route started from Coptos at the Nile Valley to Mersa Gawasis, on the Red Sea. Many texts were found in this route stating the names of great kings starting with the 1<sup>st</sup> Dynastic King Narmer, until the latest hieroglyphic inscriptions of Nectanebo II of the 30<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, followed by many Greek texts from the Ptolemaic and the Roman Periods, these many inscriptions indicate the site’s extraordinary importance to the ancient Egyptian culture. Around 20 expeditions to Punt were documented during the Middle Kingdom, and then the most famous expedition led by Queen Hatshepsut was documented on the walls of her temple at El-Dier El-Bahari giving us rich information about this exotic trade.<sup>2</sup>

Mersa/Wadi Gawasis is located about 23 km south of the modern port of Safaga and about 80 km south of Hurghada. This location is the shortest overland route from the Red Sea to the Nile Valley (about 170–180 km), specifically in Coptos (Qift).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Sania Ibrahim, Mofida El Weshahy, Mahmoud Abdel Raziq, ‘Mersa\Wadi Gawasis as a Waterway on the Red Sea to the Land of P3.wn.wt’, *The Journal of Association of Arab Universities for Tourism and Hospitality*, Vol 15, 2018, p.28.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Kitchen, *The land of Punt*, In *The archaeology of Africa*, Routledge, 1993, p. 593.

<sup>3</sup> (Gebtw - Qebt), a small town in Qena Bend, in hieroglyphs  or  After: Ernest Wallis Budge, *An Egyptian hieroglyphic dictionary: with an index of English words, king list and geological list with indexes, list of hieroglyphic characters*, *Coptic and Semitic alphabets*, London, 1920, p. 1044.

Based on inscriptions, since the Pre-dynastic period, Coptos was the main starting point in the Nile Valley for expeditions to Mersa Gawasis, and for quarrying missions to Wadi Hammamat. An inscription dating to king Pepi I (2321-2287 BC) is one of the earliest attestations of the ithyphallic god Min, lord of Coptos.<sup>4</sup> Some stelae at Marsa Gawasis mention Min of Coptos as a protector of the missions to Punt which proves the domination of the god Min the whole region of the eastern deserts.<sup>5</sup>

The Presidential Decree No. 341 of 2017 created a new economic zone known as "the Golden Triangle" as a potential area for facilitating the socioeconomic advancement of both the nation and the region. It encompasses a portion of the Eastern Desert, the Red Sea highlands, and the coastal plain and stretches between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea coast. This region (9200 km<sup>2</sup>) has exceptional mineral potential (up to 75% of the nation's resources); in addition to mining,<sup>6</sup> development and investment in transportation infrastructure, tourism, agricultural, and environmental projects are planned.<sup>7</sup> (Fig 1)



Fig 1: The Golden Triangle stretching between Qena, Safaga, and Al-Quseir.

After: <https://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2016/06/14/golden-triangle-big-hopes-bigger-challenges/> Accessed on 15-9-2023.

### The site:


The area of Wadi Gasus/Gawasis was the point of interest by many professors through the ages; their work provided us today with rich information and better understanding to the site. Although no single study can comprehend the entire geo-

<sup>4</sup> Jules Couyat, Pierre Montet, *Les inscriptions hiéroglyphiques et hiératiques du Ouâdi Hammâmât*, IFAO, Cairo, 1912, p. 59-60, 81-84.

<sup>5</sup> Barry Kemp, The Colossi from the Early Shrine at Coptos in Egypt, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 2000, p. 233.

<sup>6</sup> Dmitry A. Ruban, Emad S. Sallam, Tarek M. Khater & Vladimir A. Ermolaev, *Golden Triangle Geosites: Preliminary Geoheritage Assessment in a Geologically Rich Area of Eastern Egypt*, No 54, Spring Link, vol 13, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.riad-riad.com/en/publications/declaring-golden-triangle-special-economic-zone> Accessed on 15-8-2023.

heritage of this area, field investigations and literature analysis permit us to identify the site. It was first surveyed in 1820s by Sir John Gardner Wilkinson, and then in 1865 Schweinfurt discovered the site and misidentified it as a Greco-Roman watering station as no ancient Egyptian monuments were found.<sup>8</sup> Later, in 1976-1977 the site was discovered by the archaeological expedition of Dr Abdel Monem Sayed (University of Alexandria). He began his work near Wadi Gasus and Mersa Gasus; the research did not reveal any remains, then he moved 2 km to the south to excavate another site called Mersa Gawasis, (Fig 2) he discovered stelaes and other monuments inscribed in hieroglyphs. Based on these results Sayed identified the coastal site with the ancient Egyptian harbor of (S3ww)  which was used for sea-faring expeditions to the land of Punt during the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.<sup>1011</sup>

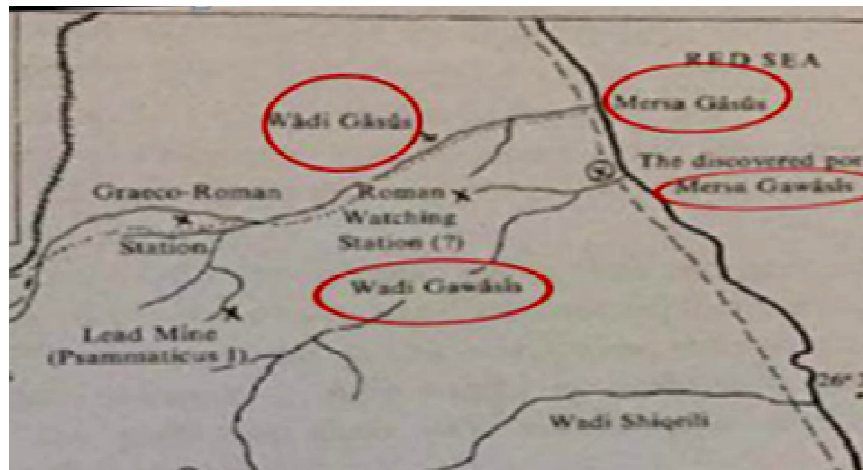


Fig 2: The location of Mersa/Wadi Gasus and Mersa/Wadi Gawasis.

After: Abdel Monem Sayed, Discovery of the Site of the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Port at Wadi Gawasis on the Red Sea Shore, Klinckeick, 1977, p. 149.

The archaeological work at Mersa Gawasis was continued by the Italian-American team from University of Naples, L'Orientale led by Radolfo Fattovich in collaboration with Boston University led by Kathryn Bard between 2001 until 2011. From 2011 until today the findings of the site were studied closely by a number of professors such as the archaeologists Cheryl Ward, Chiara Zazzaro,<sup>12</sup> Dr Abd El-Moneim Abd El-

<sup>8</sup> George W. Murray, 'The Roman Roads and Stations in the Eastern Desert of Egypt', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 1925, p. 138-150.

<sup>9</sup> Sania Ibrahim, Mofida El Weshahy, Mahmoud Abdel Raziq, 'Mersa\Wadi Gawasis as a Waterway on the Red Sea to the Land of P<sub>3</sub>.wn.wt', *Journal of Association of Arab Universities for Tourism and Hospitality*, Vol 15, 2018, p.28.

<sup>10</sup> Abdel Monem Sayed, *The Recently Discovered Port on the Red Sea Shore*, London, 1978, p. 69.

<sup>11</sup> منى عبد الغني علي حجاج، الميناء في مصر القديمة قبل الفتح العربي، رسالة ماجستير، جامعة الإسكندرية، 1984.

<sup>12</sup> Cheryl Ward, Chiara Zazzaro, Evidence for Pharaonic Seagoing Ships at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis, Egypt', *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*, No 39, 2009, p. 27 – 43.

Haleem Sayed,<sup>13</sup> Dr El-Sayed Mahfouz<sup>14</sup> and many others. Seven man-made caves in the fossil reef were uncovered; they were used as storage rooms for the imported goods and for disassembled ships. Significant amounts of material were recovered inside these caves and from the surrounding areas; stelaes, as well as ritual structures, hearths, several limestone anchors, jars, foreign ceramics, 26 coils of thick ropes still tied in original knots, hundreds of Red Sea shells and 40 empty cargo wooden boxes labeled “Punt” dating back to the time of the Middle kingdom King Amenemhet III (1831–1786 BC).<sup>15</sup> (Fig 3)



Fig 3: Top left: Entrance to Cave 2, excavated into fossil coral bedrock.  
Bottom left: Some of the 40 cargo boxes found outside the caves.  
Top right: Ration bowls piled in front of the entrance to Cave 6.  
Bottom right: Ship rope, used for rigging, found in Cave 5.

After: <https://www.bu.edu/cas/magazine/fall10/Egypt/> Accessed on 5-10-2023

The coastal site functioned as the temporary staging point for a number of official expeditions under Pharaonic administration over several centuries. Written accounts describe how ship timbers constructed in the Nile Valley were transported across the desert and then re-assembled on the Red Sea shore. Some of the remains of sailing ships were found; they were 30 meters long, made of imported Lebanese wood such as cedar and pine. They were kept in the caves to be reused for some later journey that never occurred. This evidence is considered the oldest seagoing ships ever discovered

<sup>13</sup> عبد المنعم عبد الحليم سيد، الكشف عن موقع ميناء الأسرة الثانية عشرة الفرعونية في منطقة وادي جواسيس على ساحل البحر الأحمر، تقرير عن حفائر قسم التاريخ كلية الآداب جامعة الإسكندرية في الصحراء الشرقية في الأعوام 1976م – 1977م، جامعة الإسكندرية. ص 73-145.

<sup>14</sup> El-Sayed Mahfouz, ‘The Maritime Expeditions of Wadi Gawasis in the Twelfth Dynasty’, *Abgadiat*, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Issue No: 6, 2011, p. 51-67.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.bu.edu/cas/magazine/fall10/Egypt/> Accessed on 5-10-2023

dating back to at least 3,800 years.<sup>16</sup> (Fig 4) Based on the discovered evidences at the site, approximately 12 to 20 Middle Kingdom expeditions were launched from Mersa Gawasis.<sup>17</sup>



Fig 4: Left: A disassembled part of the oldest seagoing ships ever discovered. Top right: An example of the founded Red Sea shells at Mersa Gawasis. Bottom right: A storage jar from the Middle Kingdom.

After: <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna11705263> Accessed on 5-10-2023

A model was made based on two sources; the first is imitating the design of the boats depicted on the walls of Deir el-Bahari temple and other monuments to determine the outer design and the number of the sailors and the paddles. The second source is the recovered remains of the disassembled ships from the site of Mersa Gawasis to determine the size of the wooden slaps used to build the ship and the way of connecting the pieces together.<sup>18</sup> The model was called Min of the Desert after the name of the god Min of the Eastern desert.<sup>19</sup> This model took 8 months to build under a direct supervision of the archeologists to imitate the ancient style. The first sailing trail was in 2008 on the Nile followed by a second sailing trip between Safaga and

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.discovermagazine.com/the-sciences/egypts-ancient-fleet-lost-for-thousands-of-years-discovered-in-a-desolate> Accessed on 5-9-2021

<sup>17</sup> Kathryn A. Bard, Rodolfo Fattovich, *Seafaring Expeditions to Punt in the Middle Kingdom: Excavations at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis, Egypt*, Brill. 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Cheryl Ward, Mohamed Abdelmaguid, Patrick Couser, *Reconstruction and Sailing Performance of an Ancient Egyptian Ship*, paper presented at 12<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Boat and Ship Archaeology, Istanbul, 2009, p.287-293.

<sup>19</sup> Cheryl Ward, *Min of the Desert, Reconstruction of Ancient Egyptian Ships*, In Marsa/ Wadi Gawasis a Pharaonic Harbor on the Red Sea, Supreme Council of Antiquities, Cairo, 2010, p. 33.

Quseir (200km) to prove the ship's ability to stand the difficult marine nature and facing high winds and 3 m high waves. This model is now displayed in the Suez Museum.<sup>20</sup> This project and the documentaries made about it helped in shedding the light on the maritime activities in the ancient Egyptian time. (Fig 5)



Fig 5: Min of the Desert, a full scale recreation of an ancient Egyptians ship in its voyage between Safaga and Quseir in which we could test the capability of the ship.

After: Stéphane Bégoïn, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00pq9gs> Accessed on 4-10-2023

### Historical Documents:

The Red Sea trade could be dated back to as early as the Naqada I period about 4000 BC, as the foreign obsidian trade took place into Egypt through the Red Sea and then on the road its center base at Coptos.<sup>21</sup> Textual evidence dating back to the 4<sup>th</sup> Dynasty state that a son of Khufu had a slave from Punt.<sup>22</sup> Also king Sahure of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, for the first time in recorded history; dispatched a royal fleet from Egypt's Red Sea ports to visit the land of Punt; it was recorded in his burial temple with the details of the imported goods like myrrh, malachite, electrum and ebony.<sup>23</sup> (Fig 6) Also during the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty in the time of King Djedkare Isesi, a dancing dwarf was brought from Punt.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore in the 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty king Pepi II sent the governor of Elephantine Pepynakhat on a remarkable expedition to the Red Sea to rescue the body

<sup>20</sup>د/عماد خليل، الأثار البحرية والتراث الثقافي الغارق، الإسكندرية 2016، ص 112.

<sup>21</sup> Juris Zarins, *Ancient Egypt and the Red Sea Trade, the case for obsidian in the Predynastic and Archaic period*, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1989, p.339-368.

<sup>22</sup>أدولف ارمان وهرمان، مصر والحياة المصرية القديمة، ترجمة: عبدالمنعم أبو بكر ومحرم كمال، مكتبة النهضة المصرية، 1950، ص 581.

<sup>23</sup> Bjorn Landstorm, *Ships of the pharaohs : 4000 years of Egyptian shipbuilding*, London, 1970, p. 63.

<sup>24</sup>شحاتو آدم، الرحالت والبعثات برا وبحرا في مصر الفرعونية منذ أقدم العصور حتى نياية عهد الدولة الوسطى، رسالة دكتوراه، كلية أداب، جامعة القاهرة، 1966، ص. 349.

of a nobleman who was killed by Asiatic sand dwellers while building a ship for a voyage to Punt.<sup>25</sup>



Fig 6: Egyptian seagoing ship of the earliest attested naval expedition to Punt, depicted in the bas-relief discovered in the pyramid of King Sahure at Abusir, Cairo. Courtesy of the Science Museum, London

After: Björn Landström, *Ships of the Pharaohs*, London, 1970, p. 63.

The data we have of the route from Coptos to Mersa Gawasis is based primarily on inscriptional evidence. The first relevant text dates back to King Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II from the 11<sup>th</sup> Dynasty who re-opened the Wadi Hammamat route and possibly sent quarrying expeditions there. His son, Sankhkare Mentuhotep III also sent a large expedition of 3000 men in Year 8 of his reign, attested by a text of his Chief Steward Henenu to establish a trade contact with Punt through a route from Coptos to the Red Sea and dug wells to keep his men provisioned.<sup>26</sup> (Fig 7)



Fig 7: A Middle kingdom text with the cartouche in the upper right: (*nb-hpt-R<sup>f</sup>*) Mentuhotep II and a curved boat at the bottom, Wadi Hammamat route.

After: <https://egyptsites.wordpress.com/2010/09/14/wadi-hammamat/> Accessed 11-1-2023

Speaking about this route; the world's oldest mine map, made of papyrus is the Turin Papyrus mining map, found by Drovetti in 1820 at Deir el-Medina, it is the oldest topographical and geological map known from Egypt, drawn by a scribe named

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<sup>25</sup> James Henry Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, University of Chicago Press, 1906, p.162.

<sup>26</sup> Jules Couyat, Pierre Montet, *Les inscriptions hiéroglyphiques et hiératiques du Ouâdi Hammâmât*, IFAO, Cairo, 1912, p. 81-84.

Amen-nakhte, son of Ipuy, who was commissioned to make the map during an expedition of Rameses IV, who sent one of the largest recorded quarrying expeditions to Wadi Hammamat, greywacke stone quarries<sup>27</sup> and gold mines.<sup>28</sup> The map shows part of the route through wadi routes, included numerous notes written in the hieratic script. It depicts the hills, together with distances between the quarry, the gold mine and settlement at Bir Umm Fawakhir, using different colors to identify different features in an innovative way.<sup>29</sup> (Fig 8)



Fig 8: Part of Turin Papyrus mining map the oldest topographical and geological map known from Egypt, Deir el-Medina, 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, Museo Egizio, Turin, Italy.

After: [https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/enGB/material/Cat\\_1879\\_1969\\_1899](https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/enGB/material/Cat_1879_1969_1899) Accessed on 11-1-2023

Many texts containing the names of famous kings from various eras were discovered along the route between Coptos and Wadi Hammamat. These texts began with the Serekh of King Narmer of the First Dynasty and continued until the most recent hieroglyphic inscriptions in Wadi Hammamat, which date back to the reign of Nectanebo II of the 30<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. These were followed by numerous demotic or Greek texts from the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods. These numerous inscriptions arranged in a condensed area within the wadi clearly demonstrate the exceptional significance of this location to the ancient Egyptian society. The researcher is left with the inevitable deduction that the expeditions going to Mersa Gawasis out of the Nile Valley must carry enough water; at least until the next supply station (water well), also must be equipped with food and hunting tools. There is evidence in the area of prehistoric man, desert dwellers and nomads who carved petroglyphs of reed boats, hunters and long-gone animals, including elephants and ostriches, suggesting that the desert was at that time a more hospitable place. The area hosted wild animals too like wild cats and

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<sup>27</sup> Greywacke, bekhen stone, basanite: is sandstone to mainly siltstone, dark gray or grayish green; was highly prized by the ancient Egyptians and Romans for the construction of statues, tombstones and stelae. It required huge effort for extracting it from the mountains of Wadi Hammamat and the long overland transportation to the Nile, under difficult, waterless conditions.

<sup>28</sup> James A. Harrell, V. Max Brown, Harrell, The oldest surviving topographical map from ancient Egypt (Turin Papyri 1879, 1899 and 1969), *Journal of the ARC*, Egypt Vol. 29, 1992, p.81-105.

<sup>29</sup> Ahmed Hassan Ahmed, *Mineral Deposits and Occurrences in the Arabian-Nubian Shield*, Springer International Publishing, 2022, p. 471-473.



hyenas; the travelers must be prepared with weapons to face any attack.<sup>30</sup> Another record from the Middle Kingdom of the vizier of the Amenemhat I documents a mission to quarry greywacke stone for the King's sarcophagus and how a gazelle gave birth on the block they had chosen, an auspicious omen which greatly encouraged the workforce of 10,000 men.<sup>31</sup>

In the 70s, Abdel Monem Sayed uncovered a stela of the vizier Antefoker at Mersa Gawasis. This stela dates back to the reign of Senwosret I (1956–1911 BC). In this inscription, over 3000 men are listed as being part of the expedition to the "Mine of Punt" that began at the "dockyard" (*wḥr.t*) of Coptos. According to Antefiker, workers built sailing ships of imported wood at Coptos, these boats were disassembled, and then transported overland across the desert wadis of the Red Sea. On the shore of the Great Green the ships were reassembled and launched. No archaeological evidence for these shipbuilding facilities has yet been uncovered at Coptos or Qena.<sup>32</sup>

The main harbor facilities were located on the northern side of a paleo-bay, no longer in existence, and about 700 m inland from the present-day shoreline. There is evidence of small tent structures on the top of a western fossil coral terrace, as well as camps on a beach that lies below this terrace to the southeast, where fish bones, mainly sea bream and parrot fish, were identified. These fish were caught locally, but there is also evidence (dung and a ram horn) that live sheep were brought to the harbor from the Nile Valley. Sayed also found the remains of another camp on the southern slope of the western coral terrace, just to the west of the beach camps.<sup>33</sup>

New Kingdom sources that mention Punt provide the most detailed inscriptions and visual data of all the pharaonic periods. The King/Queen Hatshepsut (18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) immortalized an expedition to the land of 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 back to the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep III. There are brief references in the region from the reign of Akhenaten to Rameses II and finally during the reign of Rameses III (20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) who recorded an expedition to Punt on the Harris Papyrus. He states that the vessels 'arrived safely at the highland of Coptos' The 'highland of Coptos' has been identified as the Red Sea end of the Koptos route.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, the New Kingdom expeditions followed the Old and Middle Kingdom route from Coptos into the eastern desert, via Wadi Hammamat to the port of (*S3ww*). A major part of the expedition to Punt was conducted by the sea and not the Nile River as the reliefs depicting Hatshepsut's

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<sup>30</sup> Mona Farid Ibrahim, *Archeological study of the wild animals in the New Kingdom*, Masters Degree thesis, University of Sadat City, 2018, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander John Peden, *The Graffiti of Pharaonic Egypt Scope and Roles of Informal Writings (c. 3100-332 B.C.)*, Brill, 2001, p. 22.

<sup>32</sup> El-Sayed Mahfouz, 'The Maritime Expeditions of Wadi Gawasis in the Twelfth Dynasty', *Abgadiyat*, issue no 6, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2011, p. 54-56.

<sup>33</sup> Kathryn A. Bard, Rodolfo Fattovich, *Spatial Use of the Mersa/Wadi Gawasis Harbor in the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, Seafaring Expeditions to Punt in the Middle Kingdom*, 2018, p. 193.

<sup>34</sup> James Henry Breasted, *Ancient records of Egypt IV*, New York: Russel & Russel Inc, 1962, p. 203.

vessels all sail either going or returning on water that is abundant with marine life.<sup>35</sup> (Fig 9)

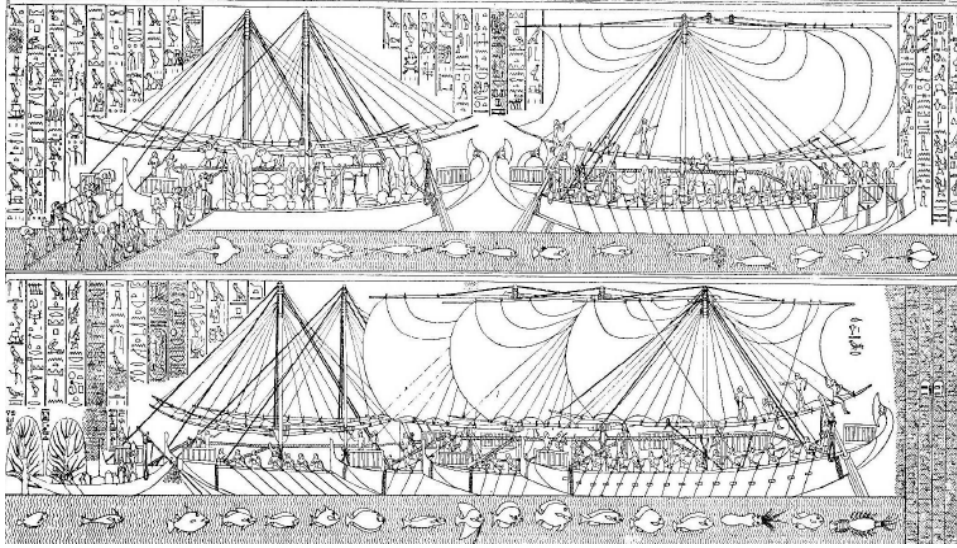


Fig 9: Hatshepsut's vessels all sail on water that is abundant with marine life, the western wall of Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el Bahri.

After: Gregory P. Gilbert, *Ancient Egyptian Sea Power and the Origin of Maritime Forces*, Sea Power Centre, Australia, 2008, p.35.

### **The Marine remains:**

The excavations seasons of 2006 and 2007 at Mersa Gawasis have revealed numerous remains such as dried seeds and fruits, wood, mammal and fish bones, shells and other marine invertebrate remains. These remains have been collected by hand picking in all strata where human activity was identified. All the data collected by very detailed study of the stratums and facies prove that the *wadi* was an open bay characterized by a mangrove ecosystem when the first Egyptian settlers arrived. The abundant sea-grass remains found during excavations also indicate that the beach stretched as far as the seafarer camp.<sup>36</sup>

The subject of archaeozoological analyses presented in the expedition work is limited to marine organism remains from stratigraphic units with evidence of human activity. The faunal assemblage examined consists of 3275 aquatic organism remains. Molluscs are generally the most well-represented phylum with 1989 gastropod specimens from 53 species, 912 bivalve specimens from 25 species and 28 scaphopod remains. Other marine invertebrate findings are represented by 16 coral fragments, 8 barnacles, 81 crab remains and 14 sea-urchin spines. Along with those of marine invertebrates, 223 fish remains and 4 sea-turtle bone fragments have

<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Kitchen, 'The land of Punt', In *The archaeology of Africa*, Routledge, 1993, p. 593.

<sup>36</sup> Kathryn A. Bard, Rodolfo Fattovich, 'Spatial Use of the Twelfth Dynasty Harbor at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis For the Seafaring Expeditions to Punt', *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections*, Vol. 2, 2010, p. 1-13.

been analyzed in order to define the exploitation of the marine environment at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis.<sup>37</sup> Some of the archaeozoological remains from Marsa Gawasis are connected with ornamental use, 186 shells show one or more holes. Most of the holes are natural and created by gastropod predators or marine abrasion but 37 shells are artificially holed by sawing or drilling, suggesting that they were used as beads or pendants, the *Nerita* winkles snail shells are the most frequently utilized as ornaments with 30 shells, followed by other types of shells.(Fig 10) In general, the *Nerita* perforated shells are reported in many Near Eastern sites from the Neolithic to Iron Age, like in Jordan, Syria, Iraq and in Cyprus. There is also evidence for the ornamental use of *Nerita* shells in several Egyptian and Sudanese sites.<sup>38</sup>



Fig 10: Examples of artificially holed *Nerita* snail shells from Wadi Gawasis, that might be used for ornament.

After: Alfredo Carannante, *Marine Resources Exploitation at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis (Red Sea, Egypt). The Harbour of the Pharaohs to the Land of Punt, Archaeomalacology: Shells in the Archaeological Record*, Oxford, 2014, p. 126.

### **The site of Mersa/Wadi Gawasis from touristic point of view:**

The strategic location of the site (on the high way between Hurghada and Quseir) with easy accessibility either to the Wadi or to the Marsa offers great opportunities for the site to be invested from a touristic perspective in the areas that were already examined and excavated through the last century, mainly by the Italian-American expedition between 2001 until 2011, who moved all the findings to Cairo (mainly to the Egyptian Museum basement). The site was left totally empty of any ancient remains, just plain desert. While the seaside (the Marsa) is accessible for travelers to have a quick rest at this beautiful, calm beach directly facing the high way The site being located among the new economic zone “the Golden Triangle” as a perspective

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<sup>37</sup> John Ernest Randall, *Red Sea Reef Fishes*, London: Immel Publishing Limited, 1983.

<sup>38</sup> David Reese, *The Marine and Freshwater Shells. In The Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages of Central Tran-sjordan*, University of Pennsylvania, 1986, p. 320-332.

area for facilitation of both regional and national socio-economic progress might attract touristic investments to the site of Wadi Gawasis.<sup>39</sup>

The researcher was able to arrange a dive at this site and issue all the needed permits with the authorities of Quseir City. After preparing and transporting all the needed equipment, I made a 70-minute dive at this rich historical site. There were no underwater monuments, only the natural curves of the harbor's entrance. As a diving site, it is an easy-access shore dive. A beautiful wall ends with a sandy bottom, about 27 m deep. The site is rich with barracudas, lionfish, buffers, and eels. This diving site could be promoted from a historical point of view, which would attract a wide range of divers worldwide who are interested in both archaeology and scuba diving. (Fig 11)



Fig 11: The dive site of Marsa Gawasis, the southern corner.

Photo credit: Haitham El Hashemy [haithamelhashemy@gmail.com](mailto:haithamelhashemy@gmail.com) May 2023



Fig 12: A new picture of the northern and southern corners of Mersa Gawasis.

After: the researcher, August 2023.

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<sup>39</sup> Asmaa Ashraf, The physical potential for urban development in the Golden Triangle area in the eastern desert of Egypt, *Buhuth*, Vol 1, 2021, p. 221-252.

## **Conclusion**

The emergence of Mersa/Wadi Gawasis as a strategic harbor in ancient Egypt was the result of a complex interplay of geographical, economic, political, and administrative factors. Its evolution from a coastal settlement to a maritime hub highlights its pivotal role in facilitating trade, exploration, and diplomacy during antiquity, starting from the Middle Kingdom up to the New Kingdom. Understanding the development of Mersa/Wadi Gawasis provides valuable insights into the broader context of ancient Egyptian maritime activities and their significance in the history of the region. Thanks to the expeditions and the hard work of the Egyptologists who brought to light such valuable information through their findings and extremely hard work. The strategic location of the site with easy accessibility either to the Wadi or to the Marsa offers great opportunities for the site to be invested in from a touristic perspective in the areas that have already been examined and excavated through the last century. Also, as a diving site, the location could be promoted from a historical point of view, which would attract a wide range of divers worldwide who are interested in both archaeology and scuba diving.

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## الميناء المصري القديم مرسي جواسيس من منظور سياحي

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### الملخص العربي:

يقع ميناء مرسي جواسيس علي بعد 80 كم من مدينة الغردقة بمحافظة البحر الأحمر، في اقرب نقطة موصلة لوادي النيل في مدينة قفط. لقد تم دراسة الموقع عدة مرات ولكن تم تصنيفها بالخطأ موقعا يرجع للعصر اليوناني الروماني. لاحقا في عام 1976 قام الدكتور عبد المنعم سيد (جامعة الإسكندرية) بتقديم الموقع كميناء مصري قديم (صاو) الذي استخدم خلال البعثات الخارجية تحيدا الي بلاد بونت. وقد تم استكمال البعثات الاستكشافية بالموقع بواسطة البعثة الإيطالية الأمريكية في المدة ما بين 2001 و 2011، حيث قاموا بالعديد من الاكتشافات تشمل علي العثور علي عدة كهوف محفوره داخل الصخر استخدمت قديما بصفة مخازن للسفن المفككة والألواح الدينية والمراسي الحجرية السراميك المستورد والحبال والصناديق الخشبية المنقوش عليها بالهيروغليفية اسم بونت. يهدف البحث إلي عرض التطور التاريخي لمنطقة مرسي جواسيس كميناء استراتيجي في مصر القديمة، وكيفية الاستفادة منها كمقصد سياحي اثري و لممارسة رياضة الغوص.

الكلمات الدالة : مرسي جواسيس، بونت، تجارة، البحر الأحمر، مصر القديمة.