

Wadi Hammamat on the Road to Punt

Annie Gasse*

Among the major contributions which Egyptology science owe a lot to Dr. Abdel Moneim Sayed, one of the most fascinating ones is the discovery at Marsa Gawasis of the harbor or “harbor station”,¹ very probably the Egyptian *š3ww*, from which the expeditions of Punt, in the Middle Kingdom, embarked or where they disembarked. Being a close neighbor of the Eastern Desert, I would like to dedicate these pages to my distinguished colleague.

On some monuments found in Wadi Gawasis, as well as on the very site of Marsa Gawasis, principally dated Middle Kingdom, the Land of Punt seems to be related with some texts detailing the usual titles of the members of the faraway expeditions. Three of the Sesostris I reign mention the Mine of Punt (*B13-(n)-Pwnt*), another one, carved under Amenemhat II reign, and which was found a few kilometers from there, only mentions Punt. Besides, three of these documents allude to the God’s Land.²

Whatever the location of Punt, whether in Arabia or in Africa, it is clearly and emulously admitted that Wadi Hammamat was one of the compulsory roads to or back from it. Let us give the precision that the name “Wadi Hammamat”, in the Egyptology literature, only indicates the breccia and greywacke—the famous *bekhen*-stone—quarries located, nowadays, in between the road which links Coptos to Quseir, but not the whole of this road or even the first part, as indicated in some geographical maps.

This contribution gives me the opportunity of comparing the data well-known since the earlier publications³ and the discoveries of Dr Abdel Moneim

Sayed with the inscriptions cleared out within my works at *IFAO* (years 1987–1989; I am, currently, preparing the publication of these inscriptions). Let us put it that way, immediately, the inscriptions I brought to broad daylight do not reveal any direct allusion to whatever expedition to Punt. As far as the already known inscriptions are concerned, whose list will be found below, they are not very explicit, indeed.⁴

The only mention of Punt *in situ* appears in the famous text engraved by Henu (or Henenu), in Year 8 of Mentuhotep III:⁵

“[My Lord, life, prosperity,] health! sent me to dispatch some *kebenyt*-ships to Punt to bring for him fresh incense from the Sheikhs over the Red Land, thanks to the fear that the King provokes all through foreign countries. Therefore, I left Coptos (11) by the way His Majesty had commanded me to follow”.

In this text whose passages are not all very clear, Henu (or Henenu) mentions a travel to Punt from Coptos and a travel back from the God’s Land and maybe another destination,⁶ carrying precious products exclusively for the monarch,⁷ that he is conveying through Wadi Hammamat and which seem to have been carried through the Red Sea. The text does not point out if Henu joined the expedition but it indicates that he sent ships and conveyed the products for the king. This extraordinary mission was certainly the most striking episode in Henu’s career and so, deserved to appear clearly in his biographic inscriptions, wherever they were located; the one in his tomb in Deir el-Bahri⁸ obviously alludes to it in