Ancient Egyptian Anchors: New Results from Wadi Gawasis

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The major problem in the study of the ancient Egyptian stone-anchors of the Pharaonic Period is that all the anchors were found in land contexts, the lack of clear representations of the anchors in ancient Egyptian scenes, reliefs and model boats, led to various interpretations about their use in the navigation by sea or by river. Moreover, the finding of anchors in land context focused the discussion on the function and the use and/or reuse of the anchor in land, and on the possible perception of their symbolic value.

More than 30 Egyptian anchors were recognized in archaeological context dating from the Old Kingdom to the New Kingdom,1 25 of which were found in the Pharaonic port of Wadi Gawasis (Saww) on the Red Sea.2 The discovery of stone-anchors composing the ‘Ankhow and Antefiqr monuments at Wadi Gawasis by Abdel-Moneim Sayed in 1976/1977 represented the first most important evidence in the study of ancient Egyptian stone-anchors.3 After this discovery it was possible to individuate the main features of the Egyptian stone-anchors.4

The anchors were found in different sectors of the site and reused in diverse contexts (Fig. 1). A complete anchor and fragments of anchors are recorded on the terrace near the seashore associated to commemorative structures (A2, A13, A14, A15, A16, A17, A18) (Fig. 1a).

Four complete anchors (A1, A3, A4, A5) and four fragmentary (A6, A7, A8, A12) were found on the western slope of the coral terrace, in man-made caves that were used for dismantling ships hulls, to store ship timbers and cordage, to work and to live.

On the eastern slope two anchors left in the sand (A9, A10) are also recorded and one that was lying in the Wadi bed (A11) (Fig. 1b).

Typology

Egyptian stone-anchors are triangular in shape, in some cases asymmetric, with a rounded top that is