

Ayn Sukhna and the Red Sea: A Preliminary Report on the Excavations of the Site 2001–2006

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Mersa Gawasis happens to be known for 30 years as a harbor on the Red Sea and in particular as the starting point of many expeditions leading to the Land of Punt (which appears in the Egyptian sources since the reign of Sahoure). The epigraphical material found there indicates expeditions loading at Mersa Gawasis under the reign of Sesostris I and Amenemhat III.¹ Recently discovered at the end of a track between Memphis and the Gulf of Suez, Ayn Sukhna now shows a new example of Middle Kingdom's harbor, once more, certainly closely linked to Sinai.

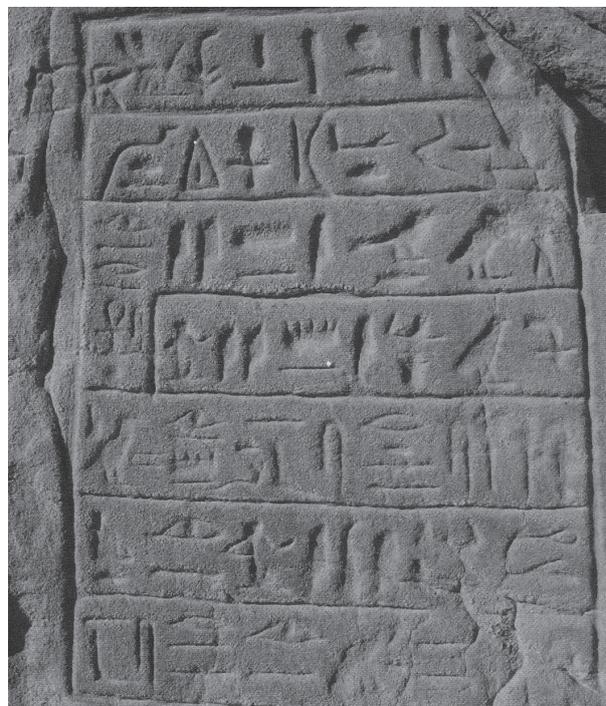
Ayn Sukhna stands out as an important site offering about 80 inscriptions, located on several rocks around the site and at the entrance of mining gallery as well.² Each and every historical period represents from Ancient Empire until Late Arab Times, New Kingdom, Ptolemaic and Byzantine periods being represented too. About 40 inscriptions can be related to the Middle Kingdom which corroborates that Ayn Sukhna was at that time an utmost important site between the Eleventh and the Twelfth Dynasties.

During 2001 started the archaeological work in Ayn Sukhna. Only nine mine galleries were discovered, implying that the mining zone was rather small.³ The mines seem to have been under Chephren or just before his reign (sealing with his name have been discovered on the site). Those galleries have been mostly changed into storage places by the expeditions. A huge quantity of archaeological material, which study is still in process, was discovered there. During the excavations in 2006, many metallurgical workshops were found, more than 20 'malachit smelting kilns' were dug up.

Those Middle Kingdom devices are the most well preserved known in Egypt nowadays. Ayn Sukhna was not only a mining site, it also used to be a harbor linked to Sinai as many epigraphical evidences show.

A stele dated from Mentuhotep IV (AS 4), describes how expeditions headed from Ayn Sukhna to Sinai search of turquoise. It is well known that this semi-precious stone was mostly extracted at Serabit al-Khadim and in the mining place of Wadi Maghara (South Sinai).

A stele, from Year 2 of Amenemhat III (AS 6) quotes the name of a scorpion expeller Ity, son of Isis



(Fig. 1) Inscription AS6, dated Year 2 of Amenemhat III, mentioning (L. 6), Expeller of the scorpions, Ity son of Isis.