

PUNT AND AKSUM: EGYPT AND THE HORN OF AFRICA

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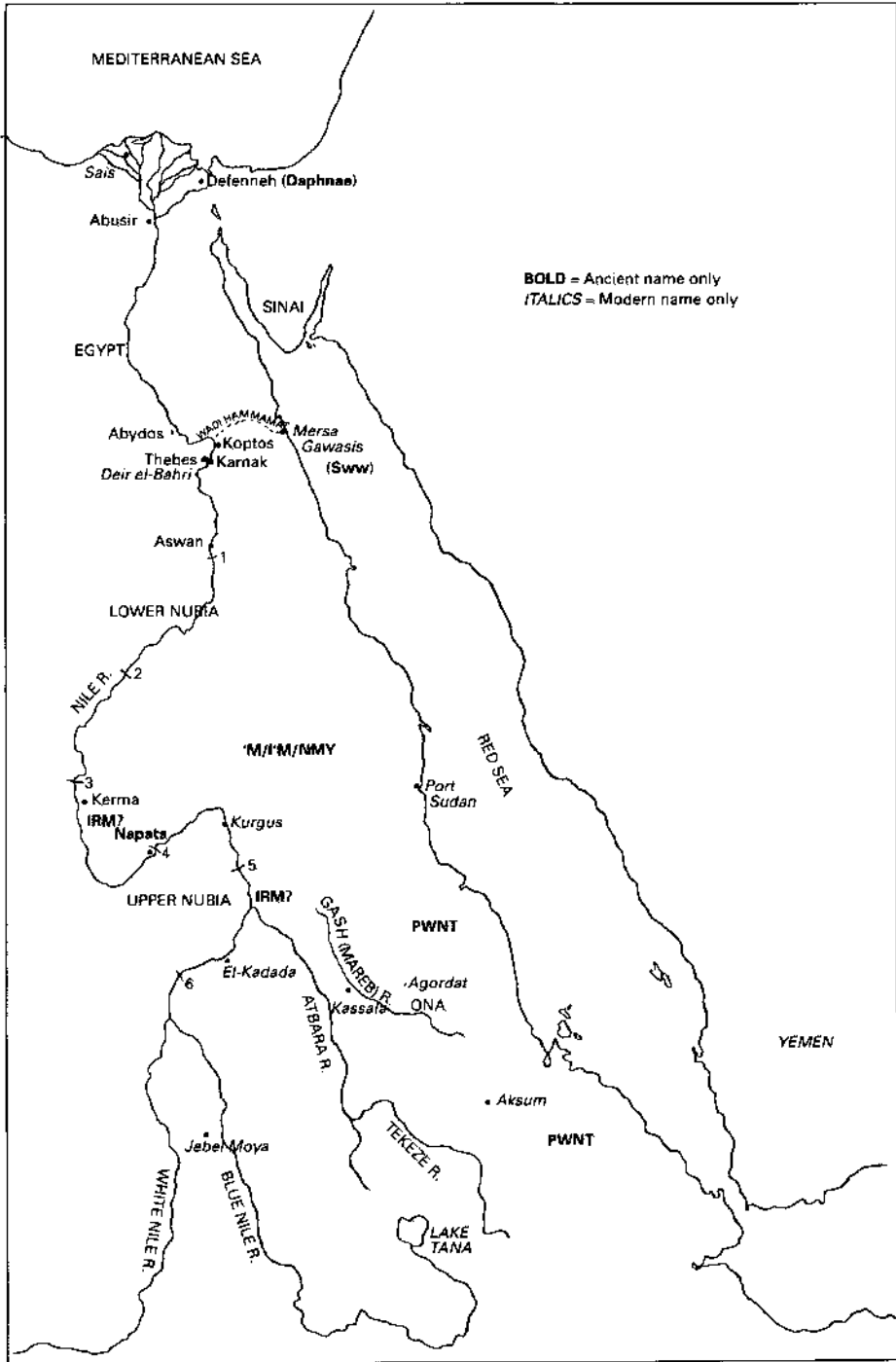
THE ancient Egyptians tended to consider both their immediate and more remote neighbours either as excellent sources of luxury trade items and slaves, at times of political power and strength, or as uncivilized forces threatening to destroy and overwhelm the Egyptian Nile Valley. This was true not only of cultures within Africa; those in the Aegean, the Levant, Cyprus and Mesopotamia also were viewed from one or the other perspective, occasionally both at the same time. All these, together with Nubia and Libya, have received much scholarly attention and, whilst we probably will never fully understand their ancient relationship to Egypt, we have a fairly good idea, 'hearing' the story from both sides when surviving evidence allows, what their attitudes towards each other were at various times in their history.¹

This article deals with what is surely the least investigated aspect of ancient Egyptian relations with its neighbours, simply because we know comparatively little about the two major successive cultures concerned – Punt and Aksum – in the ancient world. There is, nonetheless, an extensive body of literature available on the subject, much of it written not by Egyptologists but by specialists elsewhere who have had to deal with the Egyptian evidence.² The land of Punt has not yet been located with certainty on any map and no archaeological remains have ever been identified, even tentatively, as 'Puntite'. Punt exists, for us, only in the Egyptian records; even the name we use is taken directly from the Egyptian name *Pwnt*. These sources have given us a general idea of where Punt was located, what it was like, and the period of its existence (generally, c. 2500 to ?600 B.C.), and from this information scholars have attempted to identify its position in Africa.³

¹ This article originated as a lecture at Birkbeck College, University of London, in June 1995, one in a series of four on the cross-cultural theme 'Egypt and Africa', organized by Dr Olga Krzyszkowska. Dr Stanley Burstein of California State University, Los Angeles, kindly read a preliminary draft of the 'Ptolemaic' section of this paper, and Louise Bradbury the 'Puntite' section. Research was continued under the auspices of the British Institute in Eastern Africa for the Aksum Archaeological Research Project.

² I have, where possible, emphasized recent titles with good further bibliographies. The Egyptian dates quoted are those of J. Baines and J. Málek, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 1980), 36–7. Although several differing 'absolute' dates and period subdivisions continue to be defended by scholars on various grounds, the *Atlas* has become a standard reference. Dates prior to 664 B.C. are not precise, although the Middle Kingdom dates are nearest to being so.

³ Major reassessment began with R. Herzog, *Punt* (Glückstadt, 1968). But see also the review of Herzog by K. A. Kitchen, 'Punt and how to get there', *Orientalia*, XL (1971), 184–207, and 'The land of Punt', in T. Shaw, P. Sinclair, B. Andah and A. Okpoko (eds.), *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals and Towns* (London and New York, 1993), 587–608. See also the triple contribution of R. Pirelli, 'Punt in Egyptian myth and trade';



Map 1. The Pharaonic period, third millennium to c. 500 B.C. (Sites not all contemporary.)

Aksum, on the other hand, is a known place and culture of a datable period (generally, first century B.C./A.D. to seventh/eighth century A.D.) and, again, texts speak of its importance and to some extent its character. However, little archaeological work has been done there and most of our information is derived from not always entirely reliable sources. The intervening period also is very little known. This article provides an overview of Egypt's relations with these successive cultures, more or less chronological in arrangement, as a general guide to the changing nature of Egypt's interest. It is, in some respects, highly simplified.⁴

PUNT

The importance of Punt, for Egypt, lay almost entirely in its ability to supply luxury goods. It was too far away to be any major threat to Egypt itself and, more importantly, Egypt was to a large extent protected from any possible trouble by the Eastern Desert. Punt seems to have been one of the few areas with which ancient Egypt was in contact that was viewed purely in a commercial light. There is no suggestion that the Egyptians ever considered invading Punt (as they did other areas), despite its profusion of luxury goods. Virtually all relevant surviving ancient Egyptian texts indicate Punt (and Aksum) were reached by travelling south along the Red Sea after crossing the Eastern Desert. It was this sea route through which almost all known direct trade was conducted, although Punt was also indirectly accessible via the southern reaches of the Nile river. The ancient Egyptian world-view placed Egypt, of course, in the centre, and the four directions were represented by their neighbours: Nubia to the south, the Aegean to the west, Syria to the north and Punt to the east. This is best exemplified by the tribute scene in the Eighteenth Dynasty tomb of the Vizier Rekhmire (TT 100), that depicts the world at Egypt's feet.⁵ The two cultures reachable only by sea (Punt and the Aegean) were not considered threatening to Egypt, whilst those accessible by land (Nubia and Syria) were; a telling detail is the additional Egyptian standing between the vizier and the 'tribute bearers' from these latter cultures who present themselves to him. Scholarly interest has focused on relations with those cultures to the north and south, but has been less concerned with trade east and west. The result, especially for Egyptologists, is the impression that the latter areas were marginal and of no great importance for Egypt. This is misleading; Egypt simply had – and, in fact,

C. Cozzolino, 'The land of Pwnt'; and R. Fattovich, 'Punt: the archaeological perspective', in G. M. Zaccane and T. R. di Netro (eds.), *Sesto Congresso Internazionale di Egitologia Atti* (Turin, 1993), ii, 383–90, 391–8 and 399–405 respectively.

⁴ The following topographical bibliographies for the areas of modern northern Ethiopia, Eritrea and coastal Sudan are useful for further reading: E. Godet, 'Repertoire de sites Pre-Axoumites et Axoumites du Tigre (Ethiopie)', *Documents pour servir a l'Histoire des Civilisations Ethiopiennes* (= *Abbay*), viii (1977), 19–58, and 'Repertoire de sites Pre-Axoumites et Axoumites d'Ethiopie du Nord. II^e partie: Erythree', *Abbay*, xi (1980–2), 73–113; F. W. Hinkel, *The Archaeological Map of the Sudan* vi: *The Area of the Red Sea Coast and Northern Ethiopian Frontier* (Berlin, 1992).

⁵ N. de G. Davies, *Paintings from the Tomb of Rekh-mi-re'* (New York, 1935), pl. XXII, and *The Tomb of Rekh-mi-re' at Thebes* (New York, 1943), pl. XVII. See further discussion of this scene below. The designation 'TT' is the standard 'Theban Tomb' reference number for private tombs on the west bank at Thebes.

needed – comparatively little knowledge of the areas with which it was not in direct (that is, land) contact, and the goods it desired from them were not always the products of those people who actually traded with Egypt.

Our most famous reference to the land of Punt is found on the southern and western walls of the middle colonnade or second portico of the mortuary temple of Queen Hatshepsut (1473–1458 B.C.) at Deir el-Bahri. It is also the most substantial reference we have, but there are a surprising number of others. References to Punt go back to the early Fifth Dynasty, long before Hatshepsut, the earliest being on the so-called ‘Palermo Stone’ which lists some Puntite products imported during the reign of Sahure (2458–2446 B.C.): ‘There was brought from ... Punt: myrrh (*ntyw*), 80,000 [measures]; electrum, 6,000 [measures]; *sn-šsmt*, 2,000 [measures]; staves, 23,020.’⁶ A group of four captives carved on Sahure’s temple at Abusir may also depict a man from Punt, together with two Libyans and an Asiatic, but the identification is questionable and extrapolated from later representations. Another document notes there was ‘a pygmy whom the God’s Sealbearer Bawerdjed brought from Punt in the time of Isesi’ to Egypt some 60 years later, near the end of the Fifth Dynasty. A vase belonging to Teti, the first king of the Sixth Dynasty, is inscribed with a symbolic figure of ‘Punt’ and mentions its product, myrrh (*ntyw*). The eight year old Pepi II, last king (2246–2152 B.C.) of the Sixth Dynasty and of the Old Kingdom, wrote to his expedition leader, Harkhuf, whilst the latter was returning by ship to Egypt from Yam (*I’m*) laden with goods, saying he wanted to see the dancing pygmy aboard ‘more than the tribute from the ‘mining-region’ (*bi3*) of Punt’.⁷ The child was far less interested in the incense and ebony wood being brought than with the pygmy. Harkhuf travelled via the Nile river and, although his expedition did not go to Punt itself, he was bringing back goods from that land which he had presumably acquired in *I’m*, a country south of Egypt and east of the Nile river. Another of Pepi II’s expedition leaders, Pepinakht, was sent to collect the body of yet another expedition leader, Anankhti, who together with his troops had been killed by Asiatic nomads whilst building a ship in the ‘desert of the Asiatics’ (that is, the Eastern Desert of Egypt) with the stated intention of going to Punt.

All this tells us a great deal about Punt. One had to travel down the Red Sea to get to Punt, a ‘mining region’ far to the south of Egypt and on the eastern side of the Nile valley, from which one could get electrum as well as myrrh, *sn-šsmt*, staves and even pygmies and presumably also other slaves. Similar products could also be obtained by travelling south along the Nile river, which may have provided an alternative access to Punt.

Whilst no records prior to the Fifth Dynasty survive, there is earlier evidence for Nile valley contact with the Red Sea which has, unfortunately, been quite underrated. This is particularly in the form of cowrie shells,

⁶ *Sn-šsmt* is a product not yet identified, and the staves presumably are of wood, perhaps ebony. Unless otherwise specified, translations of Egyptian texts are taken (sometimes with minor emendments by the present author) from Kitchen, ‘Land of Punt’, *passim*. Note that only a small selection of texts mentioning Punt are included in the present article.

⁷ But see also comments on this term below. Pepi took the throne aged six. The entire letter, carved on Harkhuf’s tomb wall, is translated by M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Vol. 1: *The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1973), 26–7.

whose natural habitat is no closer than the Red Sea coast and as far away as the Maldive Islands and other areas of the Indian Ocean. These imports from the Red Sea and possibly beyond are found in graves and tombs along the entire Nile valley at least as early as the Neolithic period in Nubia.⁸ There are a number of cowrie types, many of which are both distinctive and quite localized in origin. A detailed study and identification of those excavated in the Nile valley and its surrounding areas would surely provide additional indication of the geographic extent and chronological development of Nilotic trade eastwards.⁹

In the early Middle Kingdom, during the Eleventh Dynasty reign of Mentuhotep III (2010–1998 B.C.), the high official Henu in Year 8 was sent to obtain fresh myrrh. He travelled across the desert from Koptos to the sea, where he built a ship and sent numerous items for trading there, although it is unlikely he himself travelled aboard to Punt. All this he recorded in a large inscription in the Wadi Hammamat, a major desert route between the Nile and the Red Sea.¹⁰ Further expeditions were conducted under Senwosret I (1971–1926 B.C.) in the Twelfth Dynasty, and the harbour at *Swww* from which they sailed has been recently located around modern Mersa Gawasis, one of the eastern destinations of the desert route from Koptos through the Wadi Hammamat. A large number of Middle Kingdom inscriptions mentioning Punt have been recovered at or near this harbour, none later in date than the reign of Senwosret III (1878–?1841 B.C.), together with a large quantity of stone anchors.¹¹ Another stela (see Fig. 1), found in the valley of the Wadi Gawasis leading to this harbour, was dedicated by the Royal

⁸ See, for example, A. Gautier, 'La faune de l'occupation néolithique d'el Kadada (secteurs 12-22-32) au Soudan central', *Archéologie du Nil Moyen*, 1 (1986), 64, pl. I.4. An 'A-Group' example is H.-Å. Nordström, *Neolithic and A-Group Sites*, Uppsala, 1972, 25, 125, 186, pl. 196.2 [lower left]. A systematic search would reveal many more examples, the majority only in passing in the literature; the two quoted are remarkable in their detailed publication. The El Kadada example in particular is best seen as representing overland trade with the east coast, rather than river trade with the north, as the site is located on the east bank of the Nile, near modern Shendi in the Sudan.

⁹ Little work has been done on cowrie shells found in the Nile Valley. They are not even mentioned specifically in A. Lucas and J. R. Harris, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries* (London, 1962), 59–60, although Red Sea shells are briefly discussed. An updating of most aspects of that volume, I. Shaw and P. T. Nicholson (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology* (Cambridge, 1997) does *not* discuss Red Sea shells, although other relevant materials (e.g. ivory) are included. I would like to thank Dr Gunnar Håland of the University of Bergen for providing further information on the subject of cowrie shells from his work, and emphasizing the realistic possibilities and benefits of such research into the excavated shells for understanding ancient trading connections. The extent of the trade is exemplified by D. S. Reese, 'The trade in Indo-Pacific shells into the Mediterranean basin and Europe', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, x (1991), 159–96, and the potential of such research by P. J. Mitchell, 'Prehistoric exchange and interaction in Southeastern Southern Africa: marine shells and ostrich eggshell', *African Archaeological Review*, XIII (1996), 35–76.

¹⁰ See L. Bradbury, 'Reflections on traveling to "God's Land" and Punt in the Middle Kingdom', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, xxv (1988), 127–56, for an analysis of this and other Middle Kingdom texts. Also see T. Säve-Söderbergh, *The Navy of the Eighteenth Egyptian Dynasty* (Uppsala and Leipzig, 1946), 11–12.

¹¹ A. M. A. H. Sayed, 'Discovery of the site of the 12th dynasty port at Wadi Gawasis on the Red Sea shore', *Revue d'Égyptologie*, xxix (1977), *passim*, and 'New light on the recently discovered port on the Red Sea shore', *Chronique d'Égypte*, LVIII (1983), 23–37.

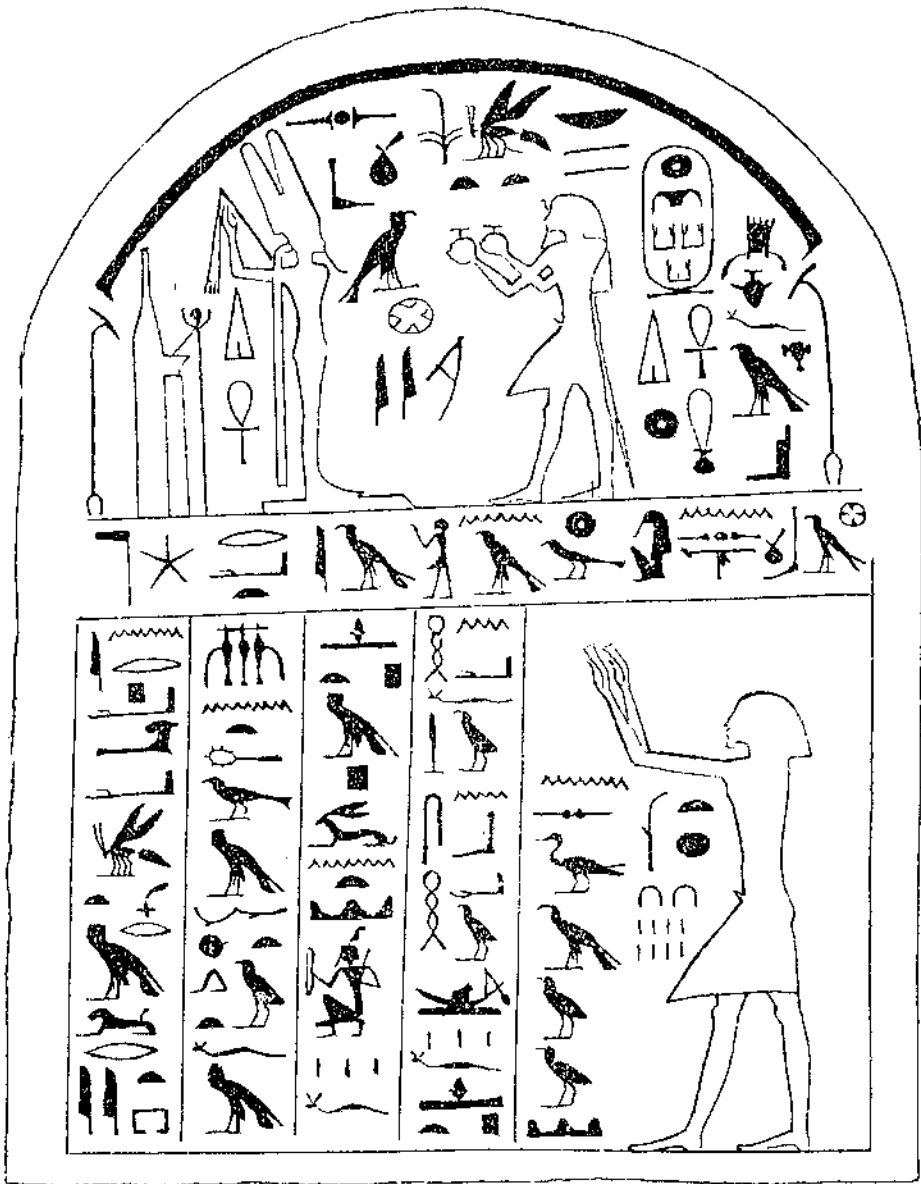


Fig. 1. Stela of Khentykhetywer, recovered in the Wadi Gawasis, describing his return from Punt. The relevant portion of the text reads: '... after his return in safety from Punt, his expedition being with him, sound and healthy, and his fleet resting at *Szw...*' (from A.M.A.H. Sayed, in *Revue d'Égyptologie*, xxix [1977], 139, pl. VIII; translation of A. Nibbi, in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, LXII [1976], 50)

Sealbearer Khentykhetywer after he and his ships (note the plural) had returned safely to *Suzu* from Punt in Year 28 of Amenemhat II (1929–1892 B.C.).¹² Middle Kingdom sources refer several times to the 'mine' or 'mining region' (*bi3*, in singular form) of Punt, and often stress the presence there of myrrh. In *The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor*, a story dated to the Middle Kingdom although preserved only in a later copy, an Egyptian sailor is washed ashore on a magical island in what is clearly the Red Sea. The serpent he meets there calls himself the 'Lord of Punt' and says 'all myrrh belongs to' him. Whilst only a story, this statement nonetheless reflects the direct and clear association of Punt with myrrh in the Middle Kingdom. When the sailor is rescued, the serpent presents him with many gifts to take back with him. These include a 'load of myrrh, *hknw*-oil, laudanum, *hsyt*-spice, *tšps*-spice, perfume, eye-paint, giraffe tails, great lumps of incense, elephant tusks, greyhounds, long-tailed monkeys, baboons, and all kinds of precious things'.¹³

It is, however, from the reliefs at Deir el-Bahri that most of our information about Punt derives.¹⁴ This is the historical record of a voyage perceived as important by Hatshepsut (1473–1458 B.C.) herself, undertaken not later than Year 9 of her joint reign with Thutmose III. Its prominence on her mortuary temple walls underlies its importance to the queen, underscoring her ability to undertake the venture, especially if, as is suggested by the text itself, it was the first voyage so far afield for over three hundred years and before the Second Intermediate Period (1640–1532 B.C.). Unlike earlier texts and images that stress only the difficulties in travelling, the products received, or the royal recognition bestowed upon the expedition leader, these reliefs provide us with a visual glimpse of Punt and its people. The Egyptian ships again sailed via the Red Sea, a point confirmed by the character of the aquatic life illustrated below the ships.¹⁵ The five ships illustrated first travel south, sails unfurled before lowering them upon arrival, and then are repeated above with furled sails to travel north in two separate registers of the reliefs.¹⁶ The number of ships underlines the substantial nature of the Egyptian presence, and hence its importance to Egypt – an importance itself confirmed by Hatshepsut's decision to commemorate the voyage on the walls of her own funerary temple. The accompanying texts clearly state they travelled both by land and by sea,

¹² J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* (Chicago, 1906), I, §605; see also A. Nibbi, 'Remarks on the two stelae from the Wadi Gasus', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, LXII (1976), 50.

¹³ M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, I, 214.

¹⁴ E. Naville, *The Temple of Deir el-Bahari*, III (London, 1898), pls. LXIX–LXXXVI; see also W. S. Smith, 'The Land of Punt', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, I (1962), 61, for a reconstruction of the south wall scene.

¹⁵ E. Danelius and H. Steinitz, 'The fishes and other aquatic animals on the Punt-reliefs at Deir el-Bahri', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, LIII (1967), 17.

¹⁶ Geographical directions are physically oriented on the temple walls, where the scenes of Punt are located on the south wall and the scenes depicting the voyage itself and events in Egypt on the west wall of the colonnade, which faces east. Thus, the ships face the appropriate sailing directions on the temple walls, and the Puntites present not only themselves and their goods to the Egyptian commander, but also to the queen in the inner (western) reaches of her temple. This close attention to appropriate orientation is often found in Egyptian wall scenes. Note also the one small row-boat, which may be a Puntite vessel, at the extreme left of the 'arrival' scene.

probably through the Eastern Desert via the Wadi Hammamat to the Red Sea, and then south to Punt. Whether the possibly historical meeting between the Egyptian commander and the Puntite chief and his wife depicted on the reliefs was immediately ashore or further inland is unknown, and it may be that the Egyptians had to travel inland to do their trading; the reliefs can be interpreted either way.

The Puntite 'chief' Parahu and his wife Atiya are the only Puntites identified by name. They come together with their products, represented by the myrrh, gold rings and ebony wood piled between them, to meet the Egyptians who have arrived in Punt. The Egyptians took not only these goods but themselves also hewed ebony trees, collected myrrh and removed whole myrrh shrubs to be later transplanted in front of the temple dedicated to Amon.¹⁷ Other Puntite products are either depicted or listed in the accompanying texts. They include:

'good herbs' of *T3-ntj*, pure ivory, 'green' gold of 'm, *tšps*-wood and *šsy*t wood, *šhmt*-myrrh *ntyw*-myrrh, other unspecified incense, eye-paint, baboons, monkeys, hounds, cattle, southern leopard-skins, and slaves and their children.¹⁸

This list of goods for Hatshepsut is remarkably similar to that given by the serpent to the shipwrecked sailor. These were exchanged for 'bread, beer, wine, meat, fruit, everything found in Egypt', according to the accompanying text. The reliefs are laudatory and, whilst clearly a trading expedition is being depicted, the intended impression was that of Egypt receiving the 'tribute' of Punt, an impression wholly characteristic of Egyptian royal propaganda.

It is unfortunate that the reliefs are incomplete in the area depicting the land of Punt itself, but much can be said about it from what remains.¹⁹ The background is pink, suggesting a desert-like setting despite the quantity of foliage present. The animals depicted not only include the baboons, monkeys, hounds and cattle traded to Egypt, but also giraffes, rhinos, ibexes, and domesticated donkeys, together with various kinds of birds. Trees include the ebony and other kinds of wood listed, and date-palms also shown in quantity. Puntite housing (Fig. 2a and b) appears to be round hut 'pile-dwellings' woven as basketwork (the paint no longer visible but recorded by Howard Carter in 1896), standing on stilts and reached by ladders, which might suggest either a swampy land near the sea or a protective measure

¹⁷ No archaeological evidence has been recovered at Deir el-Bahri for any trees planted there, although the 'Punt reliefs' do include a scene of such trees in a 'garden of Amun' (Naviile, *Deir el-Bahari*, pl. LXXVIII) and the texts tell us specifically they were planted beside Amon's temple. See D. M. Dixon, 'The transplantation of Punt incense trees', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, LV (1969), 61 and n. 3. Breasted, *Ancient Records*, II, §246-95, remains the most complete, although now outdated, translation of the accompanying texts into English.

¹⁸ 'God's Land' (*T3-ntj*) is a generalized location south and east of Egypt, which included not only Punt but also areas such as Irem (*Irm*) and 'Am(au)' ('m). The latter is a region accessible both from Punt and from Nubia, and most likely is the same as *I'm* reached by Harkhuf in the Old Kingdom. See Bradbury, 'Reflections', *passim*, and D. O'Connor, 'The location of Irem', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, LXXIII (1987), 99-136.

¹⁹ The present article includes illustrations not usually reproduced, but the reader also should consult the more complete illustrations in the references cited, especially Naviile, *Deir el-Bahari*; Smith, 'Land of Punt', and Herzog, *Punt*.

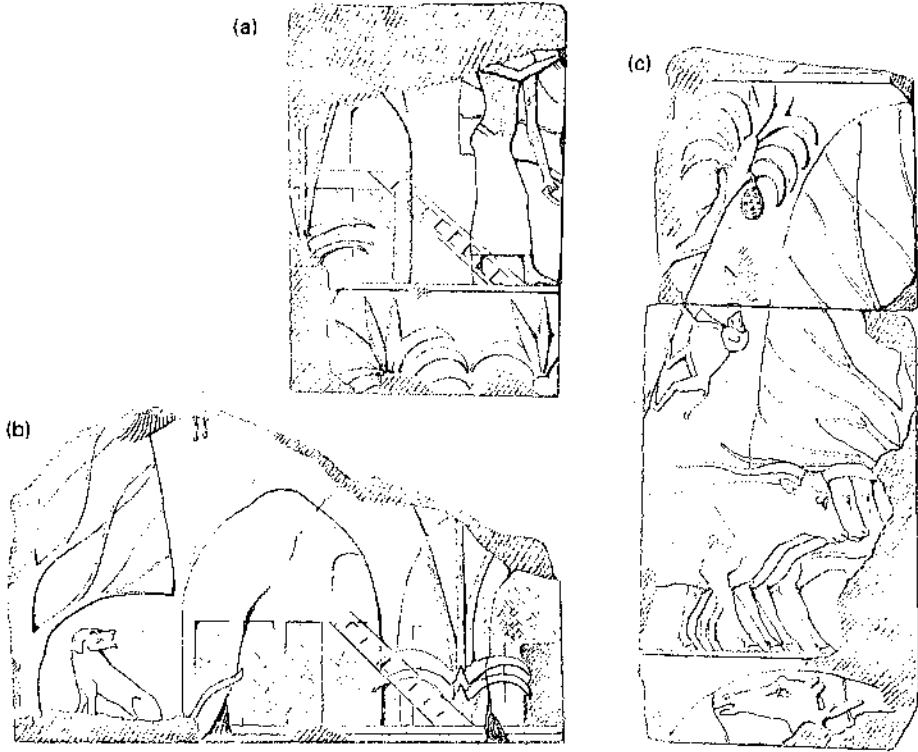


Fig. 2. Three loose fragments from the south wall of the Deir el-Bahri colonnade : (a) dwelling and figure (possibly a woman?), with dom palm in the lower register; (b) dwellings; (c) long-horned cattle, with baboon climbing a dom-palm, and a giraffe in the register below. Note the indication of woven 'basketwork' on both upper and lower levels of the housing. (From E. Naville, *Deir el Bahari*, III [London, 1898], pl. LXX; with permission, Committee of the Egypt Exploration Society.)

against marauding animals or, since the basketwork extends to the ground level, perhaps the domestic animals were kept there and the people lived above.²⁰ The Puntites generally are described as 'cattle-herding pastoralists', for the reliefs clearly show domesticated cattle strolling and lying about. The cattle are not humped but are, unusually, short-horned.²¹

The Puntites themselves, if the Egyptian artist portrayed them accurately, are of reasonably thin and wiry stature, except for the queen and her daughter. We need not debate the various theories concerning whatever ailed these two women since we cannot judge whether this was a hereditary disease

²⁰ See J. S. Phillips, 'A note on Puntite housing', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, LXXXII (1996), 206-7.

²¹ In the uppermost register, behind the prostrating Nubians from *Irm* and *Nmy*, and together with the rhinoceros figures, are two groups of the more usual long-horned cattle as well as one of short-horns. Whether they should also be associated with Punt, or perhaps with Nubian peoples, is unclear. In the areas around the Puntites and their housing, only short-horned cattle are seen. These upper registers are composed of fragments, based on comparative figure scales, as reconstructed by Smith, 'Land of Punt', 61, and by O'Connor, 'Location', 112-4, fig. 3.



Fig. 3. Punites (below) and Nubians (above) presenting their goods, from the upper registers of the south wall in the Deir el-Bahri colonnade. (From E. Naville, *Deir el Bahari*, III [London, 1898], pl. LXXVI, with permission, Committee of the Egypt Exploration Society.)

(as has often been suggested) or a Puntite cultural affectation or beauty feature.²² The men illustrated mostly have closely shaven heads or skullcaps and small blunt-ended beards, some with longer dressed hair and long beards almost of the Egyptian divine style with curled end (Fig. 3). In most cases they are clearly distinguished from the Egyptians and, although they wear superficially similar clothing, the frontal ties of their kilts either bifurcate or terminate in three fringes. A rear 'tail' is also shown on some figures such as Parahu, which might be interpreted as indicating an animal skin rather than a cloth material, but presumably the majority wear cloth. Naville did not record the coloration of the kilts and the paint no longer survives, but he describes 'a loincloth with a belt in which a dagger is fixed',²³ suggesting it was cloth and presumably white in colour. The variety of the figures seen as Puntite suggests strongly that the inhabitants were closely observed by their visitors, possibly on the orders of Hatshepsut herself in preparation for carving the temple reliefs. Nubians also are depicted in these reliefs, their physiognomy clearly differentiating them from Puntites, and this may reflect the correlation of Punt and other southern lands such as Irem and *Nmy*.²⁴ An inland setting is possible, as the date-palm does not grow near the coast.

There is only one other (damaged) scene fragment apparently depicting Punt. In the tomb of Hepusoneb (TT 67), dated to Hatshepsut's reign, two men are shown felling incense trees with axes under the supervision of an overseer. The pink background suggests a desert-like setting that may be on the sea-shore.²⁵ They are all Egyptians, and the preserved remnants of the rigging of a large Egyptian ship with unfurled sails below suggests they had travelled to arrive there. Pointedly, Hepusoneb was a high-ranking priest ('First Prophet') of Amun during Hatshepsut's reign, and it is possible the scene commemorates his involvement at some stage of her Punt venture.

This was not the only voyage to Punt in the New Kingdom, nor the only record of one. Later New Kingdom references abound but none, unfortunately, depict Punt itself. The *Karnak Annals* of Thutmose III (1479-1425 B.C.) record that goods (the usual myrrh and gold) were received from Punt in Years 33 and 38 and possibly also Year 31. These and other records in his and later reigns may have been the result of Egyptian trading expeditions, but some equally could have been the result of Puntite voyages to Egypt. Wall scenes in the chapels of four tombs, dating to the reigns of Thutmose III and IV and Amenhotep II and III (1479-1353 B.C., as a group), may depict such visits to Egypt. In a formal 'tribute' scene in the tomb of Puyemre (TT 39), Thutmose III receives a group of Puntites together with their products - ivory tusks, ebony logs, gold of 'm' and a variety of sweet herbs, myrrh-trees and fresh myrrh, and incense.²⁶ A near-

²² But see also discussion on TT 143, below. ²³ Naville, *Deir el-Bahari*, 19.

²⁴ See O'Connor, 'Location', *passim*, esp. 112-22. O'Connor equates *Nmy* and 'm'. Interestingly, Naville also notes (*Deir el-Bahari*, 19) that Puntite hair is 'flaxen'.

²⁵ N. M. Davies, 'A fragment of a Punt scene', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, XLVII (1961), 19-23, pl. IV. The fragment corresponds to others at Deir el-Bahri (Naville, *Deir el-Bahari*, pl. LXX), and suggests the destroyed majority of the wall may also have been decorated with variations of scenes on the temple reliefs. See also Smith's reconstruction, 'Land of Punt', 61, second and third registers from the top.

²⁶ N. de G. Davies, *The Tomb of Puyemrê at Thebes* (New York, 1922), pl. XXXII.

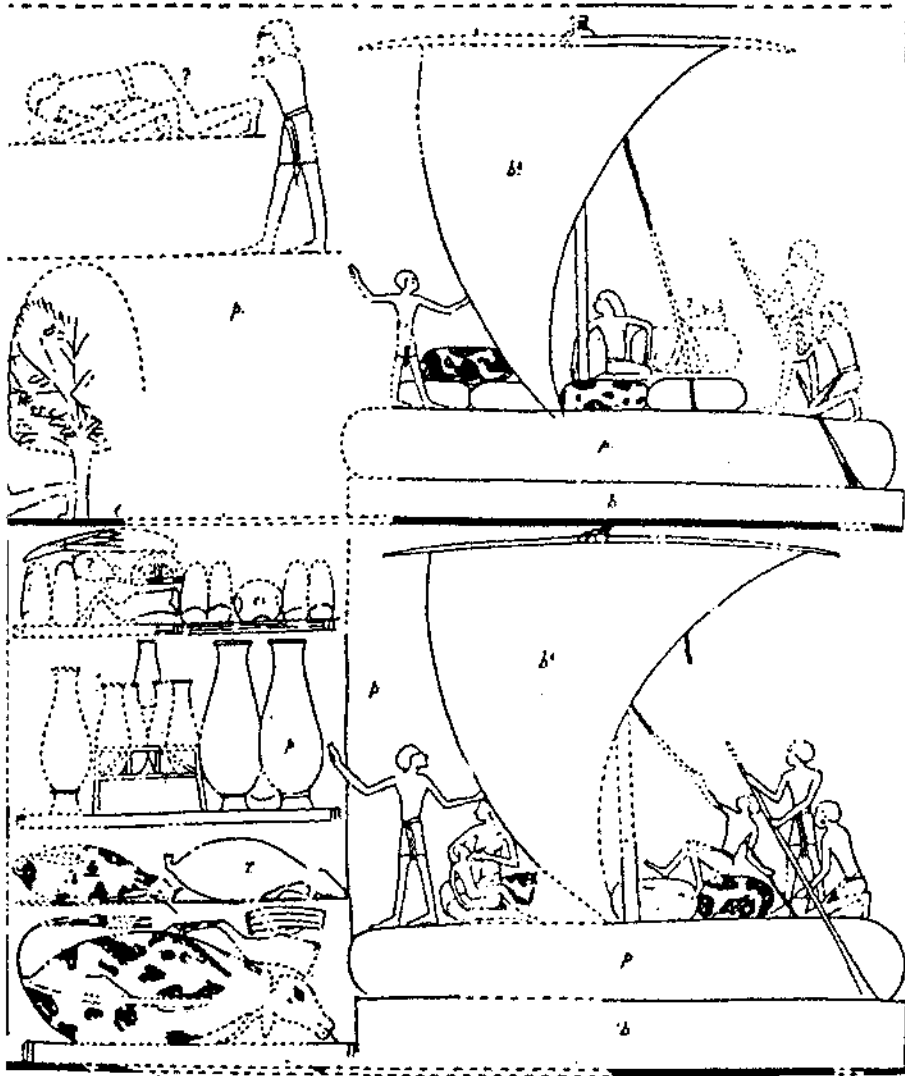


Fig. 4. Puntites arriving by boat and (on the left) presenting their goods : restored line drawing of a wall scene in TT 143 (tomb of Min) at Thebes. The letters signify the painted colours. (From T. Säve-Söderbergh, *The Navy of the Eighteenth Egyptian Dynasty* [Uppsala and Leipzig], fig. 6.)

contemporary scene from late in his reign, in the tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100),²⁷ also shows leopard skins, ostrich plumes and eggs, ibexes, monkeys, cheetahs, baboons and necklaces of unknown materials being delivered. These are the usual types of propagandistic tribute scenes, and the Puntites are not carefully or even accurately depicted, so far as we can tell. They wear, for example, different clothing from the Deir el-Bahri figures, either quite Egyptian or virtually of 'Keftiu'/Cretan-type, and also have different personal details. These Thutmocide scenes may not reflect historical events,

²⁷ See n. 5, above.

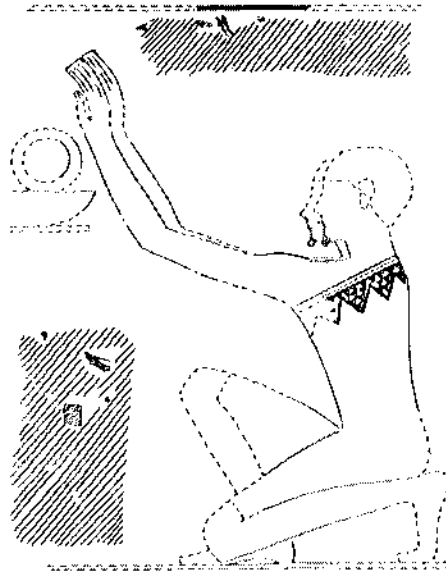


Fig. 5. Two 'Chiefs of Punt': restored line drawing of wall scene in TT 143 (Tomb of Min) at Thebes. The letters signify the painted colours. (From N. de G. Davies, in *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 30 [1935], Suppl. II, 47 fig. 1.)

and may not even depict the actual arrival of Puntites in Egypt since their presentation has been 'generalized' or 'Egyptianized'. Alternatively, if they did visit, perhaps they were not seen by the artists who portrayed them; such 'stock' portrayals of foreigners depicted with intermixed and elaborated features of Egyptian and other cultures have been observed elsewhere in similar scenes dating to these reigns.

Slightly later in date, probably during the reign of Amenhotep II (1427–1401 B.C.), in the tomb identified by Helck as that of Min, Chief Treasurer of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II (TT 143), is a scene possibly commemorating an historical event in which Puntites did arrive in Egypt, although perhaps only in an Egyptian Red Sea harbour or port.²⁸ The entire scene spans five registers but, unfortunately, they have never been published together and many sections have not been published at all. It depicts, in part, two large pink raft-like boats (Fig 4) manned by at least four sailors, each raft complete with one black triangular sail supported by a single mast

²⁸ N. de G. Davies, 'The work of the Graphic Branch of the expedition', *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, xxx (1935, II Suppl. Nov.), 46–9; other scenes are found in M. Baud, *Les Dessins Ébauchés de la Nécropole Thébaine (au Temps du Nouvelle Empire)*, being *Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*, LXIII (1935), 169–70, fig. 78, and W. Wreszynski, *Atlas zur altaegyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, I (Leipzig, 1923), pls. 347–8. Unpublished watercolour facsimilies of the two major scenes are held in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and I must thank the Keeper of Antiquities, Dr Helen Whitehouse, for allowing me to study them. L. Bradbury, 'Kpn-boats, Punt trade and a lost emporium', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, xxxiii (1996), 37–60, argues for a Nile setting for this scene (possibly at Kurgus between the Fourth and Fifth Cataracts) on several grounds, although problems and inconsistencies still remain. W. Helck's identification of the tomb owner, in *Zur Verwaltung des mittleren und neuen Reiches* (Leiden and Cologne, 1958), 352, 468, is not universally accepted.

and apparently steered by a single oar at the stern. Each boat also has a woman aboard, one nursing a child. The wall is badly damaged, and nowhere does it actually say the boats themselves are from Punt, but a green monkey climbs one rigging and the goods unloaded include fresh myrrh or incense, an incense tree, ebony logs, gold, ostrich feathers and eggs, skins, antelopes (?), a monkey, oxen and apparently two child slaves. The surviving damaged text states: 'Travelling to [...], going on the road, carrying thousands(?) of various [...] products of Punt, myrrh, [...], incense trees, [...]'. The Puntite (?) sailors all wear bifurcating kilts (painted white, presumably of cloth), and have closely shaven heads or short wigs, some with a short pointed beard that curls slightly outward. While this may not be conclusive, the figures depicted here are surprisingly individual, and certainly are portrayed closer to the Hatshepsut Puntites and in more detail than those of the Thutmose III and other tribute scenes. Some are unique. Two bowing 'chiefs' in a separate scene (Fig. 5), with short blunt-ended beards, wear unusual toga-like garments of red with blue triangular trim, the two women are quite slim (unlike the Puntite queen and her daughter at Deir el-Bahri),²⁹ whilst the boats themselves are unparalleled elsewhere. The most complete published scene shows that the goods were then transported across the desert land by the Egyptians, under an official who may have been Min himself. A similar transportation scene in the tomb-chapel of Amenmose (TT 89), dated to the reign of Thutmose IV or Amenhotep III (1401-1391-1353 B.C.), shows a group of Puntites delivering the by now standard products of their land, including myrrh, and laden donkeys and Amenmose's chariot in other registers.³⁰ No ship or boat is depicted, but the figures again are similarly dressed with some foreign elements to their kilts, and they are identified specifically as Puntites in the accompanying texts although they are portrayed with no more variety than in the propagandistic 'tribute' scenes.

The inscription of Sobekhotep called Panehsi, dated to year 36 of Amenhotep III, states this official 'reached the coast, to announce the marvels of Punt, to receive aromatic gums which the chiefs had brought... as revenue from unknown lands'.³¹ This particular text is but one of several inscriptions mentioning Punt that have been recovered in the Sinai, and is interesting in that this translation of it suggests that the chiefs of Punt who had brought their goods to Sobekhotep were themselves middlemen. He had travelled to the coast to meet them, and - more importantly - the goods brought were not from Punt itself but 'unknown lands'. If this was the case, we can entertain the possibility that at least some of their goods may have

²⁹ A third female figure may be represented in a loose fragment of the Deir el-Bahri reliefs (Navelle, *Deir el-Bahri*, pl. LXXI, upper left). 'She', too, is quite slim, and wears similar clothing to the TT 143 women (Fig. 9a). Both this figure and the 'Queen of Punt' have dark-painted skin, so the usual Egyptian male/female skin colour convention cannot help to identify the sex of the figure. The women depicted in TT 143 are light-skinned.

³⁰ N. M. and N. de G. Davies, 'The tomb of Amenmosē (no. 89) at Thebes', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, xxvi (1940), 31-6, pl. XXV.

³¹ The translation here is that of Kitchen, 'Land of Punt', 600, but the original publication of the text, A. H. Gardiner, T. E. Peet and J. Černý, *The Inscriptions of Sinai* (London, 1952-5), no. 211, and others (e.g., Bradbury, 'Kpn-boats', 56, n. 3) give different translations in English that cannot as easily provide the same implications, although the probability that the chiefs were middlemen remains inferred. See also Dixon, 'Transplantation', 62.

come from even farther afield, within Africa from the area of modern Somalia or further inland in more tropical areas, as well as further south along the East African coast, from the southern Arabian peninsula across the Red Sea, or possibly even from India.³² It is apparent from the inclusion of 'gold of 'm' (a land distinct from Punt) in the Deir el-Bahri list of goods traded by the Puntites, that they must have been acting as middlemen in this instance at least. Whether Sobekhotep had himself travelled to the coast of Punt to be met by the various 'chiefs', or they had travelled north from Punt to the Egyptian coast to meet him, also is unclear. If the latter, there seems to be no earlier evidence for such an event, except an interpretation of the TT 143 scene and possibly that from TT 89.

There also are a number of textual references and tomb scenes from the later Eighteenth through Twentieth Dynasties,³³ including a scene from the tomb of Meryre at Amarna, of Puntites bringing myrrh and incense. Another scene on walls decorated under Horamhab (1319-1307 B.C.) in the Karnak temple depicts Puntite chiefs bringing a number of unidentified goods. Textual references are found from the reigns of Seti I (1306-1290 B.C.) and Ramesses II (1290-1224 B.C.) and III (1194-1163 B.C.), also listing unspecified incense, 'gums' and herbs in great quantities. Ramesses II, like Hatshepsut, planted Puntite trees and plants in the garden of his temple at Abydos. Less well-known than the Hatshepsut reliefs, the textual record of an expedition to Punt during the reign of Ramesses III found in the *Great Harris Papyrus I*, confirms the trans-shipment of goods from Punt by sea, and then

They landed in safety, bearing the things which they brought. They were loaded, on the land journey, upon asses and upon men; and loaded into vessels upon the Nile, (at) the haven of Coptos. They were sent forward downstream and arrived amid festivity, and brought (some) of the tribute into the (royal) presence like marvels...³⁴

This is the last apparently historical account we have of trade with Punt in the Egyptian records, apart from a few clearly archaizing texts, as Egypt lost its power and ability to sustain its hold over its surrounding territory. Punt itself seems to have lost its identity. The only later text that even resembles an historical event proves, however, to be very useful: a damaged stela found at Defenneh (ancient Daphnae), the king's name unfortunately not preserved but of Twenty-sixth Dynasty (664-525 B.C.) date. It relates, in part:

[...] Oh mighty king, most beloved of all the gods, a great marvel occurred in your reign such as had not been seen or heard before. The heavens rained on the mountain of Punt, rain being scarce in the southern fields, [...] in this month when

³² Evidence for the existence of such a far-flung contact even a millennium earlier than the Eighteenth Dynasty, either direct or indirect (but more likely the latter) has recently been recognized. A pendant recovered in a grave dated to c. 2500-2400 B.C. at Tell Asmar near modern Baghdad is now identified as copal from the area of Zanzibar, Madagascar and Mozambique; see C. Meyer, J. M. Todd and C. W. Beck, 'From Zanzibar to Zagros: a copal pendant from Eshnunna', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, L (1991), 289-98. (I thank Dr Mark Horton of the University of Bristol for this reference). The identification has since been questioned, although not in print. (I thank Dr Randi Håland of the University of Bergen for this information.)

³³ See Kitchen, 'Land of Punt', 600-2. ³⁴ Breasted, *Ancient Records*, IV, §407.

rainfall occurred, when rain was unseasonable, even in the north land. Your mother Neith of the temple of Sais came to you to bring you the Nile, giving life to your soldiers...³⁵

This connection between the southern rains and the unseasonal inundation of the Nile (even in the north, farthest from the source) was an important observation, and again provides us with some clue as to the geographical location of Punt, at least as it was perceived at this time.

Punt has never been identified with certainty. The textual records that have survived, when their information is pooled, provide us with enough information to suggest strongly a generalized area within the eastern coastal regions of the modern Sudan south of modern Port Sudan, Eritrea, and northern-most Ethiopia, or somewhat further inland. Earlier opinion that Punt was even farther south, in the northern coastal area of modern Somalia, generally has been rejected in recent years.³⁶ The variety of goods traded from Punt need not be limited to those available only from the country itself, if the Puntites also acted as middlemen for goods from elsewhere, and some of these goods we know were available from other sources (such as ebony wood and ivory which also came from or via Nubia). Suffice to say that both coastal and inland locations for Punt have been inferred from the different texts, and it is likely both were considered to lie within the boundaries of Punt as the Egyptians saw it, since both the Red Sea route and the Nile route would put Egypt in contact with Punt.

It may be that the name of the country, like the country itself, was identified more with its most important products than with a single specific geographical location in the millennium and a half from the time of Sahure to the time of Ramesses III and, like a number of the early names of areas within Nubia or even the elastic use of the terms 'Abyssinia' and 'Aethiopia' in the Classical sources and the past millennium of European exploration, the term 'Punt' was used by the Egyptians for different localities at different periods. Given the long stretches of time during which we have no references to Punt and large trading ventures were unlikely to have been contemplated

³⁵ F. Ll. Griffith, in W. M. F. Petrie, *Tanis*, II (London, 1888), 107, pl. 42, modernized; see also A. B. Lloyd, 'Once more Hammamat inscription 191', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, LXI (1975), 54-6. Both Daphnae and Sais are cities in the Egyptian Delta. Similar observations were later recorded by various Ptolemaic explorers and the phenomenon was well-known by the time of Nonnosus, about 560 A.D. See S. Burstein, *Agatharchides of Cnidus: On the Erythraean Sea* (London, 1989), 29-30; N. G. Wilson, *Photius: The Bibliotheca* (London, 1994), 28. The four parallel 'inundation' inscriptions dated to Year 6 of Taharqa (Twenty-fifth Dynasty) found on stelae at Kawa, Koptos, Tanis and Mata'nah, although not mentioning Punt and specifically noting that this inundation occurred in the appropriate season, are sufficiently similar to the Defenneh stela that we may suspect that they are at least partly a source for its text - if only as political upstaging by a pharaoh of the succeeding dynasty that had overthrown the Nubian kings. For the Taharqa stela text, see M. F. L. Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa*, Vol. 1: *The Inscriptions* (London, 1949), 22-32 and, more recently, T. Eide, T. Hägg, R. H. Pierce and L. Török (eds.), *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum*, Vol. 1: *From the Eighth to the Mid-fifth century B.C.* (Bergen, 1994), 135-45. My thanks to Dr Pawel Wolf of Humboldt University, Berlin, for drawing my attention to these stelae.

³⁶ See Herzog, *Punt*; Kitchen, 'Land of Punt'; Bradbury, 'Reflections', and other references cited in the present article as examples favouring present opinion. However, some minor queries remain.

anyway, as during the three Intermediate Periods of Egyptian history, it is not inconceivable that the term was successively applied to several areas trading the same products to Egypt: Punt equals myrrh, therefore myrrh equals Punt.

Even if future archaeological exploration or excavation ever does reveal a specific site or area we can identify with Punt, we would not be able to limit Punt only to that one location – others may be equally and independently acceptable. No work has so far identified anything even suggestively Puntite, and in fact no imported Egyptian goods earlier in date than the Ptolemaic period have been recovered in the area, although some clay earstuds reminiscent of Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty type were recovered near Agordat in modern Eritrea.³⁷ If Hatshepsut's list of exports to Punt is any indication of the reverse traffic, we would be unlikely to find Egyptian goods in any event. On the basis of surface finds, especially of pottery fabrics and decoration, a wide-ranging trading network or at least inter-cultural relations was postulated as early as the 1920s between the ancient peoples of the Sudanese Nile valley, the savannah and desert areas to its east, Egypt, the Ethiopian highlands, and the Red Sea coast.³⁸

KASSALA, D'MT AND THE 'OVERLAND ROUTE'

This has been amply substantiated by the recent work of Rodolfo Fattovich in the Gash Delta near the Kassala mountains, on the eastern border of the Sudan. His excavations have revealed a considerable amount of pottery clearly related to the C-Group and Kerma cultures in northern Nubia, of early third to mid-second millennium B.C. date (thus connecting this area with the Nubia already known to be in contact with Middle Kingdom Egypt), as well as to material from northern Ethiopia and Eritrea, such as the little-studied and still poorly-defined 'Ona' cultures apparently centred in the Asmara area that may date as early as the second millennium B.C.³⁹ In addition to a total of 172 'New Kingdom' sherds recovered during the initial Gash surface survey, Fattovich also found a single sherd of 'New Kingdom type' in a mid-second millennium level at Mahal Teglinos. In this and a

³⁷ A. J. Arkell, 'Four occupation sites at Agordat', *Kush*, II (1954), 33–64; but see also R. Fattovich, 'The problem of Sudanese-Ethiopian contacts in antiquity: status quaestionis and current trends of research', in J. M. Plumley (ed.), *Nubian Studies: Proceedings of the Symposium for Nubian Studies, Cambridge 1978* (Cambridge, 1982), 78, for a more critical assessment of the pottery and other finds. Fattovich does relate it to the material from Kassala and Jebel Moya, in 'The Gash group of the Eastern Sudan: an outline', in L. Krzyzaniak, M. Kobusiewicz and J. Alexander (eds.), *Environmental Change and Human Culture in the Nile Basin and Northern Africa until the Second Millennium B.C.* (Poznan, 1993), 439. The latter site has recently been re-examined and redated by R. Gerharz, *Jebel Moya (Meroitica 14)*, Berlin, 1994). The ear-studs are certainly not imports. The Agordat pottery is being restudied by A. Manzo and S. Brandt.

³⁸ J. W. Crowfoot, 'Some potsherds from Kassala', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, xiv (1928), 114, 116.

³⁹ See G. Tringali, 'Cenni sulle "Ona" di Asmara e dintorni', *Annales d'Éthiopie*, vi (1965), 143–52; S. C. Munro-Hay and G. Tringali, 'The Ona sites of Asmara and Hamasien', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, xxxv (1993), 135–70. See also S. Jones, 'Archaeological and environmental observations in Rora Habab, Eritrea', *Azania*, xxvi (1991), 5–12.

similar level also were recovered some 'Pan Grave' potsherds, flakes of probable Ethiopian obsidian, and other foreign finds have affinities with material from the places already mentioned, including modern Yemen. Donkey remains in these two levels also suggest these were the means employed for transporting trade goods between the Red Sea and the Sudanese Nile valley, much the same as the Egyptian *wadi* routes to the Red Sea farther north.⁴⁰

This is not the only Egyptian material recovered in the extreme south. The area east of the Sudanese Nile is only now beginning to be explored archaeologically, and the results are transforming our perceptions of what was going on here. The desert areas east of the Lower Nubian Nile have long been known as sources of Nubian gold for Egypt (the 'gold of Kush'), and indeed pharaonic mining areas have been located, rock inscriptions found and land routes recognized.⁴¹ A number of inscriptions and other finds in the area of Kurgus (between the Fifth and Sixth Cataracts), again already known for some years, indicate continued Egyptian interest and indeed presence in this area, especially during the Eighteenth Dynasty when there is surprisingly little direct evidence for Egyptian use of the Red Sea route to Punt, except for the Deir el-Bahri reliefs.⁴² Until the Gash evidence, however, the Kurgus area was thought to be the southern-most limit of a pharaonic Egyptian presence. The identification of some jar rim and body fragments in the recent Sudan Archaeological Research Society survey near Meroë as of Egyptian New Kingdom type also further points to Egyptian contact farther south, and connects it to the Kassala area.⁴³ The sixth century A.D. Byzantine writer Procopius of Caesarea noted it was then a journey of thirty days from Aksum to Aswan for an 'unencumbered' traveller, a situation probably not very different throughout the millennia before, and this and other texts tell us it was no more than between eight and fifteen days travel to Aksum from Adulis.⁴⁴ This presumably main overland route from the Red Sea coast,

⁴⁰ Fattovich, 'Gash Group', 443-4. For the survey sherds, see R. Fattovich, A. Manzo and D. Usai, 'Gash Delta archaeological project: 1991, 1992-93, 1993-94 field seasons', *Nyame Akuma*, XLII (Dec. 1994), 16-17, and A. Manzo, 'Note sur quelques tessons égyptiens découvertes près de Kassala (Sud-Est du Sudan)', *Bulletin de Liaison du Groupe International d'Étude sur la Céramique Égyptienne*, XVII (1993), 41-6.

⁴¹ A general summary of these and other trade routes is given in P. L. Shinnie, 'Trade routes of the ancient Sudan, 3,000 B.C.-A.D. 350', in W. V. Davies (ed.), *Egypt and Africa. Nubia from Prehistory to Islam* (London, 1991), 49-53; this volume also includes a general summary by R. Fattovich, 'At the periphery of the Empire: the Gash Delta (Eastern Sudan)', 40-8.

⁴² See Bradbury, 'Kpn-boats', with further references.

⁴³ See L. M. V. Smith, 'Report on the pottery collection', in M. D. S. Mallinson, L. M. V. Smith, S. Ikram, C. Le Quesne and P. Sheehan, *Road Archaeology in the Middle Nile*, I (London, 1996), 176-7, 189, fig. 5, type 7.2.

⁴⁴ The *Periplus* (mid-first century A.D.) says eight days, Procopius twelve. Nonnosus, Justinian's ambassador about 560 A.D., took fifteen days by road, as described by Photius. See H. B. Dewing, *Procopius: History of the Wars*, I (London and New York, 1914), 182-5 (I, xix, 22, 27); W. G. B. Huntingford, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (London, 1980), 20, 59-60; L. Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei* (Princeton, 1989), 53. Strabo (c. 26-24 B.C.) additionally tells us it was fifteen days for a 'well-girded traveller' between inland from around Ptolemais Theron (see below) to Meroë near the Fifth Cataract; see H. L. Jones, *The Geography of Strabo* (London and New York, 1917-32), vii: 320-1; Burstein, *Agatharchides*, 8, n. 2. The *Monumentum Adulitanum*, recorded by Kosmas Indikopleustes on a throne seen at Adulis in the mid-sixth century

through the Aksum and Kassala areas, probably via or near the Gash (Mareb) and Athara rivers through to the eastern bank of the Nile valley around the Kurgus area and then up to Aswan – bypassing the Nile river almost entirely – seems to have been a well-travelled trading route for a long period of time. Whilst archaeological confirmation is tenuous, capillary and feeder routes must also have existed. The journey itself is not incompatible in length with the historically well-known and still busy *shariya* (or *darb*) *el-arba'een*, the 'forty-day road' in the western desert of Sudan and Egypt. Camels would seem to have been in use by the early first millennium B.C. in Nubia.⁴⁵

There is a major gap in our knowledge for the area east of Kassala that we can identify in general as Punt, beyond the understanding gained by Fattovich's excavations at Kassala itself. A number of confused and contradictory references to a variety of peoples and cultural groups (such as the 'Medjay') have survived in the Egyptian records and others (such as the 'Ona') from archaeological sources east of the Nile valley throughout the entire period under discussion, but these, and their possibly fluctuating role(s) in the network, are little understood. The fourth through the early first millennium B.C. is very poorly known, although we can still recognize some relations with the area of Sudan to the west and, more visibly, Yemen to the east. This is chiefly in cultural affinities that are perceived to be of common origin or otherwise related, often in traditions of form and decoration in pottery but also other material remains, related to the 'Gash Group' and other locations.⁴⁶ Some dressed and carved coral blocks, found at the Ptolemaic Red Sea port of Aqiq in a reused context, suggest an earlier monumental building may once have existed nearby.⁴⁷

By the mid-first millennium B.C., a kingdom known to us as *D'MT* had developed inland in northern Ethiopia and Eritrea, that included at its highest levels a veneer of cultural affinities adopted largely from the Saba'an

A.D., attributed to an unidentified earlier Aksumite king, states he 'had a road constructed going from the lands of my empire to Egypt'. S. C. Munro-Hay, *Aksum: An African Civilisation of Late Antiquity* (Edinburgh, 1991), seems to propose Ezana (mid-fourth century A.D.) as the royal author, 42. It is more likely the road involved was restored or reopened than constructed.

⁴⁵ P. Rowley-Conwy, 'The camel in the Nile valley: new radiocarbon accelerator (AMS) dates for Qaşr Ibrîm', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, LXXIV (1988), 245–8. Artistic evidence for the camel and dromedary go back even farther, and domestication has been argued; see M. Ripinski, 'The camel in Dynastic Egypt', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, LXXI (1985), 134–41, and E. B. Pusch, 'Ein Dromedar aus der Ramses-Stadt', *Ägypten und Levante/Egypt and the Levant*, VI (1996), 107–18. See also B. Trigger, 'Land and trade as patterns in Sudanese history', in M. Liverani, A. Palmieri and R. Perone (eds.), *Studi di Paletnologia in onore di Salvatore M. Puglisi* (Rome, 1985), 473. I thank Dorian Fuller of the University of Cambridge for this last reference, which, although somewhat outdated by later fieldwork, nonetheless remains a valuable summary of Nilotic trade patterns. See also p. 466, on the earliest use of the 'forty-day road'.

⁴⁶ In addition to Fattovich's other articles more specifically directed to work at Gash, see also his 'Status Quaestionis', 76–86, and, most recently, 'The origins of the kingdom of Kush: views from the African hinterland', *Archéologie du Nil Moyen*, VII (1996), 69–78.

⁴⁷ J. W. Crowfoot, 'Some Red Sea ports in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan', *Geographical Journal*, XXXVII (1911), 534, pl. facing p. 544 [lower]; H. E. Hibbert, 'Relics at Agig', *Sudan Notes and Records*, XIX (1936), 193, pl. X.

culture centred across the Red Sea in the area of modern Yemen.⁴⁸ At this time, a written language was introduced into the *D'MT* area that seems almost entirely Saba'an in origin, monumental buildings were first constructed in ashlar masonry, and large-scale sculpture was produced. Some form of underlying political unification must have allowed its dispersal. These influences do not seem to have been all-pervasive, however, but the phenomenon is similar to the pattern readily recognized in the succession of ancient Nubian cultures that adopted a veneer of 'Egyptian' features at the élite levels. The centre of the *D'MT* culture seems to have been at Yeha (modern northern Ethiopia), where a magnificent ashlar block temple still stands due to its later conversion into a church. A number of large shaft tombs have been excavated here, one of which (no. 12) contained an Egyptian or Napatan imported alabastron that can be dated to within the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-Seventh Dynasties (770–404 B.C.), a date that coincides with the 'inundation' inscription from Defenneh already quoted. Fattovich has suggested this grave may be the earliest royal tomb in northern Ethiopia.⁴⁹ If so, the presence of such an import gives cause for speculation. Is this a tangible remnant of some diplomatic mission? A trade item? An antique heirloom? Or something more substantial? The cemetery cannot be specifically dated, but generally is about mid-first millennium B.C.⁵⁰

We can only assume that the majority of exports to Egypt and elsewhere at this time were similar goods to those listed as coming from Punt by Hatshepsut and in other documents. The products exported from the southern Red Sea ports on the African side, according to the *Periplus* of later date, consist only of tortoise shell, ivory and rhinoceros horn. Those from farther south of the Bab el-Mandab straits add only unnamed 'spices' and incenses; not until northern Somalia can the remaining 'Puntite'-type goods be obtained. Kitchen's (and others') identification of Punt with the southern Red Sea coast, then, would be reliant on a 'middleman' hypothesis that is far from implausible.⁵¹ Such raw goods, transported by land, would not specifically be detectable in the archaeological record. The absence of texts equivalent to the *Periplus* for inland routes makes it difficult to prove the existence and strength of an earlier extensive, far-flung and heavily used network of contact,⁵² but its probability should not be minimized or

⁴⁸ This is generally acknowledged to be the biblical *Sheba*; its famous queen would have reigned in the early tenth century B.C., about the time of Solomon.

⁴⁹ R. Fattovich, 'Remarks on the Pre-Aksumite period in northern Ethiopia', *J. Ethiopian Studies*, XXIII (1990), 25.

⁵⁰ A brief discussion of Egyptian and Nubian imports found in Ethiopia is J. S. Phillips, 'Egyptian and Nubian material from Ethiopia and Eritrea', *Sudan Archaeological Research Society Newsletter*, IX (1995), 2–10, with further references for the imported objects specifically mentioned in the main text.

⁵¹ See Huntingford, *Periplus*, 22–3, and Casson, *Periplus*, 16, 55 for lists of the goods by origin in that text, which is further discussed below. The *Periplus* also refers to a number of local and capillary trading networks feeding into the main east–west route described; see L. Casson, 'Egypt, Africa, Arabia, and India: Patterns of seaborne trade in the first century A.D.', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, XXI (1984), 45–7. I thank Stanley Burstein for this last reference.

⁵² The possible extent of this inland east–west contact may be inferred by the recent identification of plantain banana (*Musa*) phytoliths in eighth-century B.C. pit contexts at Nkang, Cameroon. This plant originates in the Indo-Malaysian complex in eastern Asia.

dismissed simply because there is little or no archaeological evidence for it.⁵³ There are, however, a few other imported Egyptian or Napatan objects suggesting the connection had more to do with trade than diplomacy.

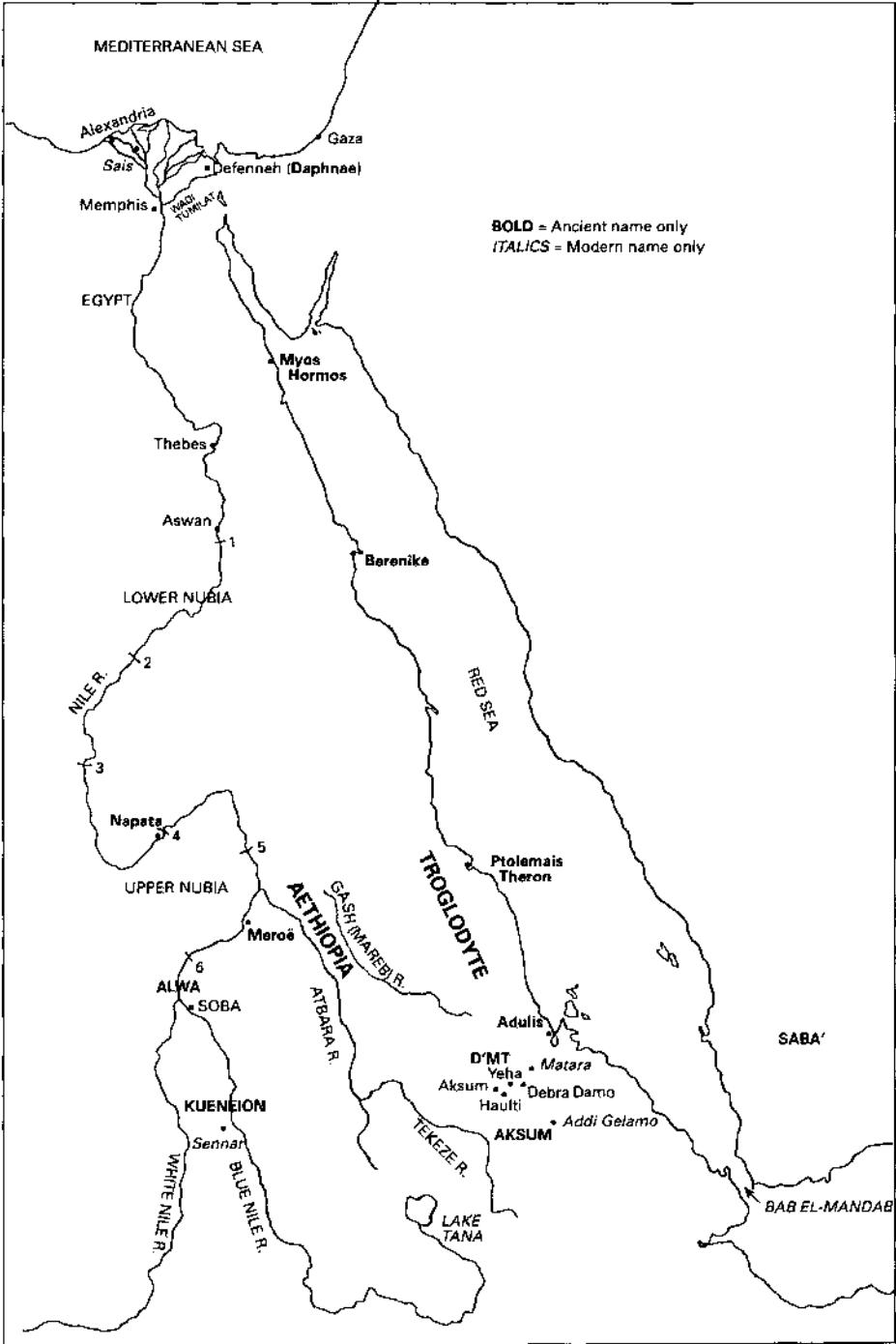
The pottery at Yeha has a fairly strong relationship to Nile valley (especially Nubian) pottery, deriving more from common tradition than contemporary cross-influence. One particularly striking resemblance is a beaker found in a tomb no. 4 at Yeha, which looks remarkably like those from Kerma at least a millennium earlier in date. Its fabric, however, indicates a local origin. Certain details in religious statuary of otherwise strongly Saba'an character found in northern Ethiopia also suggest some Egyptian or at least Napatan influence, however. These include the counterpoise to the pectoral worn by a seated stone figure, and the stick comparable to the royal emblem of both Kush and Egypt carried by the figures either side of a carved naos (itself having affinities with these areas), both objects found in a dedicatory or religious deposit at Haulti, immediately west of Yeha.⁵⁴ Other, more general, comparanda also indicate continuous association at least with Napatan (and later Meroitic) Nubia, and undoubtedly two-way trade continued unabated despite the lack of specific material evidence for it. Whether this western connection extended as far as Egypt is questionable, except via Napata which gradually had lost its own directly Egyptian influences by about 300 B.C. It is possible that the Nile route may have been avoided at this time, and trade continued farther east overland to Egypt, but there is no specific evidence for it.

As we have no inscriptional evidence confirming such connections between Egypt and Ethiopia via the Nile valley, we are left only with visual comparanda and association. What we do have are a number of imported objects, either Egyptian or (more probably) Napatan in origin. The nearest parallels for each seem to come from the royal Napatan tombs at the Fourth Cataract. From Haulti, in the same deposit as the naos and statue, came two faience figurines, one of Hathor or Isis and the other of Ptah-Pataeus. Both are pierced for suspension, and may be considered amulets; they are relatively undatable, but are at least Third Intermediate Period (1070–712 B.C.) or later in date. They may have been dedications to the deity worshipped at Haulti. A carnelian amulet of the god Harpokrates as a child,

See H. Doutrelepon, L. Vrydaghs *et al.*, 'Banana in Africa', *Abstracts of Papers, 13th Biennial Conference, Society of Africanist Archaeologists* (Poznan, 1996), 31. The location and contexts suggest an overland route through sub-Saharan Africa to be more likely than a sea route around it.

⁵³ An excellent article illuminating just such an intensive and extensive trading network on land, in early second millennium B.C. Mesopotamia and Anatolia, is M. T. Larsen, 'Commercial networks in the Ancient Near East', in M. Rowlands, M. Larsen and K. Kristiansen (eds.), *Centre and Periphery in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1987), 47–56. The evidence is derived almost solely from texts, without which we would have absolutely no idea of the sheer quantity of goods transported such long distances at that time, as listed on the few documents that have survived. The lack of early evidence for a similar network east (and, surely, west) of the Nile valley in no way precludes the near certainty that it existed.

⁵⁴ J. Pirenne, 'Haouli et ses monuments: Nouvelle interpretation', *Annales d'Éthiopie*, VII (1967), 125–33; see also H. de Contenson, 'Les monuments d'art sud-arabes découverts sur le site Haouli (Éthiopie) en 1959', *Syria*, XXXIX (1962), 68–83.



Map 2. The Post-Pharaonic period, first millenium B.C. to c. 700 A.D. (Sites not all contemporary.)

found in the excavations at Matara (a city in what is now Eritrea), is more clearly of Napatan origin, for the double uraeus on its forehead is characteristic of the Kushite kings, including Egypt's Twenty-fifth Dynasty of Nubian rulers (770-657 B.C.). Another religious or dedicatory deposit, at Addi Gelamo much nearer the Red Sea coast, yielded not only another strongly Saba'an-influenced statue of a seated deity quite different from the Haulti figure, but also four individual bronze bowls of Meroitic origin. Two of the latter are undecorated and two incised with the elaborate designs.

These few items are all we have of Napatan/Egyptian imports to Ethiopia, but their presence and their types reflect more strongly the trading ventures that must have continued between Nubia and *D'MT* in the mid- and later first millennium B.C. That we have very few items is, I suspect, merely because so little excavation work has been conducted in the relevant area. The scale of this contact must have been considerable throughout this entire period, and later, for Procopius' and other travelogues suggest it was common knowledge in relevant circles at the times of writing.⁵⁵

THE PTOLEMIES AND THE 'SEA ROUTE'

We should not, however, neglect the other and more obvious contact route via the Red Sea. Whilst little excavation work has yet been conducted, we do have considerable textual information concerning this route. The most important, since it was actually found in the area, is quite instructive, although it is known only through a copy of a copy. This is a broken stela made of basalt, apparently seen and its inscription copied by the writer 'Kosmas Indikopleustes'⁵⁶ at Adulis (on the Red Sea coast in Eritrea) in the mid-sixth century A.D. Kosmas' writings survive only in later copies, and it is from these that we get the text on the stela, as well as its physical description. Erected by the Egyptian king Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-221 B.C.) at the port at Adulis, the text, inscribed in Greek, reads in part:

The great king Ptolemy... set out on a campaign into Asia with military and cavalry forces and a naval armament and elephants both Troglodyte and Ethiopic which his father and he himself first captured by hunting from these places, and, bringing

⁵⁵ See n. 44, above.

⁵⁶ Kosmas, 'sailor to India', a suggestive nickname for this trader and former monk, whose *Christian Topography* is a much more detailed account of the Red Sea area than the earlier Hellenistic writers. It was, however, bestowed upon him only in the eleventh century and there is no evidence that he ever travelled there. See texts edited by W. Wolska-Conus, *Cosmas Indicopleustes: Topographie Chrétienne*, 1 (Paris, 1968), and J. W. McCrindle, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk* (London, 1897), and the commentary of L. P. Kirwan, 'The Christian topography and the kingdom of Aksum', *Geographical Journal*, cxxxviii (1972), 163. W. Wolska-Conus, 'Stéphanos d'Athènes et Stéphanos d'Alexandrie. Essai d'identification et de bibliographie', *Revue des Études Byzantines*, XLVII (1989), 28-30 has identified 'Kosmas Indikopleustes' as one Constantine of Antioch; see also *idem*, 'La "Topographie Chrétienne" de Cosmas Indicopleustes: Hypothèses sur quelques thèmes de son illustration', *Revue des Études Byzantines*, XLVIII (1990), 155, n. 2. I would like to thank Dr Marilyn Heldman for the last two references.

them to Egypt, trained them in military use. But having become master of all the country this side of the Euphrates and of Cilicia and Pamphylia and Ionia and the Hellespont and Thrace, and of all the military forces in these countries and of Indian elephants, and having made the local dynasts in all these regions his vassals, he crossed the river Euphrates, and having brought under him Mesopotamia and Babylonia and Susiana and Persis and Media, and all the rest as far as Bactriana and having sought out whatever sacred things had been carried off by the Persians from Egypt, and having brought them back with all the other treasure from these countries to Egypt, he sent back forces through the canals [...]⁵⁷

This text provides a number of important points: The 'Troglodyte and Ethiopic... places' incorporates the Red Sea coasts of modern Sudan and Eritrea earlier generally identified with Punt, and those areas farther inland behind it. It was rich in wild elephants, enough so that these two kings mounted campaigns to hunt them. The location of the stela observed by Kosmas, at Adulis, suggests the king had ordered it to be erected somewhere around there, possibly in gratitude for providing the means to conquer (he boasts) virtually all of Western Asia; it could hardly have been brought there by chance. This suggests, in turn, that Adulis (or the nearby place where it originally was erected) and by extension the area immediately inland, was sufficiently controlled by Egypt that its king could erect a self-laudatory stela there.

Such a close connection is supported by other texts, that also indicate the range and type of contact, as well as the extensive scale of these hunts.⁵⁸ In the reign of Ptolemy's father, Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.), an Egyptian official stationed at the port of Gaza was specifically responsible for the flow of frankincense, a product obtained from both shores of the southern Red Sea, from whence it was shipped to Egypt and elsewhere throughout the Mediterranean Sea.⁵⁹ One is reminded of the organization of trade described in the New Kingdom inscriptions found in the Sinai and the Middle Kingdom stelae from Gawasis. Even before Ptolemy, Alexander the Great had dispatched an expedition, commanded by a naval officer named Anaxikrates, to survey the west coast of Arabia and into the Indian Ocean in 324/323 B.C. Shortly afterwards, Ptolemy II and his immediate successors sent other expeditions to do the same for the African coast.⁶⁰ The southern Red Sea, together with the Indian Ocean, was then known as the 'Erythraean Sea', from whence came to the Classical world all the spices and incenses from Somalia, southern Arabia, the Horn of Africa and indirectly from India and the East. It was, however, early Ptolemaic interest in directly securing war elephants that most influenced their continued interest in the African coast of the Red Sea.⁶¹ Elephants by this time were essential war machines,

⁵⁷ H. H. Scullard, *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World* (London, 1974), 134; see also McCrindle, *Cosmas*, 57-9 for a slightly different translation. The text breaks off at this point, where a small portion is missing at the end according to Kosmas; McCrindle has concluded '... which had been dug' in his translation.

⁵⁸ Scullard, *Elephant*, 133-7.

⁵⁹ Burstein, *Agatharchides*, 3, n. 5.

⁶⁰ W. W. Tarn, 'Ptolemy II and Arabia', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, xv (1929), 13-14. Although now outdated, this article remains a basic reference.

⁶¹ See S. Burstein, 'Ivory and Ptolemaic exploration of the Red Sea: The missing factor', *Tonno Orient-Occident*, vi (1996), 799-807.

the armoured tanks of their day already employed by the hostile Seleucid armies of Western Asia. The Seleucids controlled the land routes from India where elephants could otherwise be obtained. The ability to independently obtain elephants in Africa was therefore a great advantage to the early Ptolemies, and undoubtedly was a major reason for Ptolemy III to commemorate his Asiatic victories with the stela at Adulis.⁶² The Adulis stela specifically states Ptolemy III was 'master of' not only the list of conquered Asian territories but also the 'Indian elephants' they had unsuccessfully employed against him.

Ptolemaic activity was not limited to trade. Like earlier pharaohs who had invaded the Nubian Nile valley, the Ptolemies set about controlling routes to the source of the goods that interested them. Numerous new port cities were founded as the Ptolemaic navy patrolled the Red Sea. Inland routes to the Nile through the Eastern Desert were also reopened and maintained. This included the canal dug along the Wadi Tumilat across the south-eastern delta in Egypt, which Ptolemy II began to dredge beginning in the late 270s: this is clearly one of the 'canals' mentioned in the Adulis stela. One port, Ptolemais Theron or 'Ptolemais of the Hunt(ing)s', a name blatantly stating its original *raison d'être*, near present-day Aqiq (some fifty miles south of modern Port Sudan), was founded in the early 260s B.C. by Ptolemy II as the eastern Sudanese equivalent of Mersa Gawasis for the inland area behind it. It was also the main shipping port for the elephants captured under Ptolemy II, that were then taken to the port of Berenike⁶³ farther north, and from there to Thebes and Memphis. Adulis apparently became a main shipping port at the time of Ptolemy III, under whom it was probably founded after the area behind Aqiq was depleted of elephants.⁶⁴ Thus, the specific reference to 'elephants both Troglodyte and Ethiopic' under the two successive Ptolemys would reflect both the locations of their respective elephant hunts and the intensity at which they were conducted. Other texts reinforce this impression.⁶⁵

The declining power and fortunes of succeeding Ptolemaic kings after Ptolemy III did not allow them to maintain control of the coast, nor the farther reaches of Nubia. The elephants proved in the end not to be so overwhelming against the enemy 'tanks' at Raphia in 217 B.C., and the Ptolemies lost not only this decisive battle but their interest in continuing the hunts. Egyptian hold over its surrounding territories gradually shrank until, at the death of the famous Kleopatra (VII) in 30 B.C., it reached no farther than Aswan and the Egyptian Red Sea coast. All Egypt could do to encourage and enforce Red Sea trade was to purchase its products. A few ports, such

⁶² Note, however, that the African elephants employed by the Ptolemies were not the larger and more imposing 'savannah' type generally envisioned as the 'African' elephant, but the 'forest' type of approximately the same scale as the Indian elephant: see Scullard, *Elephant*, 133-7.

⁶³ New excavations have begun at this site. See S. Sidebotham and W. Wendrich, *Berenike '95* (Leiden, 1996), with earlier references.

⁶⁴ Burstein, *Agatharchides*, 9-10, and n. 5, *contra* S. C. Munro-Hay, 'The foreign trade of the Aksumite port of Adulis', *Azania*, xvii (1982), 108, on the founding of Adulis. If Adulis (as the Romans knew it) did not exist in the Ptolemaic period, there must have been a Ptolemaic port in the vicinity. Others have suggested that Ptolemy II founded the port.

⁶⁵ Scullard, *Elephant*, 133-7; Burstein, *Agatharchides*, 7-9.

as Berenike, Ptolemais Theron and Adulis, continued to function as self-sufficient entities not under direct Egyptian control. Their survival depended in part on the Greek 'discovery' in the later second century B.C. – but already long known to Indian Ocean traders – of the 'monsoon route' by which ships could travel to India and back, although few attempted to do so.

These ships were rarely Ptolemaic. By this time, the Mediterranean cultures of Greece and Rome had established themselves in the Red – or Erythraean – Sea trade, and it is chiefly from their records that we obtain our knowledge of events. The earliest references we have are those of the mid-third century B.C. geographer Eratosthenes of Kyrene, who accurately describes the Red Sea coast in a surviving portion of his *Geography*.⁶⁶ Either he or his informants evidently had travelled there about the same time as Ptolemy III hunted his elephants.

The next major description is rather different. Dated to the mid-second century B.C. or later, and written by Agatharchides of Knidos, *On the Erythraean Sea* is an account of the geography and ethnography of both Red Sea coasts, together with what essentially is a history of the area compiled from military sources.⁶⁷ The majority of Agatharchides' sources are in fact of the previous century (that is, the time of Ptolemy II and III), and so much of the text reflects the earlier situation when the sea was under Egyptian control. Whilst it describes in some detail the peoples inhabiting the coastal regions, little information is provided on inland areas. This was, after all, a work reflecting the interests of its potential readers, who apparently had little need to venture inland. As long as goods were brought by others to the coast to be traded, as described above, it was still not considered worthwhile to attempt to control the interior. Its sharply rising landscape, climbing some 7,000 feet in less than 200 miles, probably was an added deterrent. Several later references and allusions to Greek, Roman and other traders at Aksum and elsewhere substantiate the need for – and use of – the later itineraries and travelogues such as those already mentioned,⁶⁸ but none are known for this period in the Classical sources beyond allusions to and implications of traders coming from inland to the coast. The clear dichotomy of information for the overland and sea routes strongly suggests that they were employed by completely different groups of people, who presumably interacted at the coast and then returned to their respective origins until the next journey.

Since virtually no excavation work has been attempted at coastal sites in this area, little can be said of archaeological evidence for contact with

⁶⁶ Although one Scylax of Caryanda, a sixth century B.C. Carian shipmaster, published an account of his voyage from India to Egypt while in the service of the Persian king Darius I, who also ruled 521–486 B.C. as the second king of the Twenty-seventh (Persian) Dynasty in Egypt; see Burstein, 'Ivory and Ptolemaic interest', 799. This text itself does not survive, but was known to the later Classical authors.

⁶⁷ Burstein, *Agatharchides*.

⁶⁸ For example, 'Pseudo-Arrian' [*Anabasis et Indica*] in the second century, Nonnosus (as recorded by Photius [*Bibliothèque*]) about 560 A.D., and Ioannis Malalas [*Chronographia*] in the late sixth century; see L. A. Thompson, 'Eastern Africa and the Graeco-Roman world (to A.D. 641)', in L. A. Thompson and J. Ferguson (eds.), *Africa in Classical Antiquity* (Ibadan, 1969), 59; Huntingford, *Periplus*, 59–60; Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527* (Oxford, 1972), 21, 32, n. 4; G. Vantini, *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia* (Warsaw and Heidelberg, 1975), 5; Wilson, *Photius*, 28; Y. M. Kobishchanov, *Axum* (University City, 1979), 177.

Mediterranean cultures.⁶⁹ Little imported material has been recovered from inland sites, reflecting the apparent lack of contact. One find can be mentioned, however, although it unfortunately lacks an excavated context. A cippus (a small votive stela) of Horus as a child, Ptolemaic in date, was found at Aksum, some 200 kilometres inland from the coast, and shown to the eighteenth century traveller James Bruce during his journey. Lost for two centuries and known only through Bruce's engraving in the published account of his travels, it has recently been re-'found' and identified by Heike Sternberg-el Hotabi as one presented anonymously in 1955 to the National Museum of Scotland.⁷⁰ Its recovery at Aksum strongly suggests at least one ancient Egyptian may have made it that far inland, as it is unlikely to have been a simple trade item. However, we have no means of inferring when it may have been brought to Aksum.

AKSUM

There are extensive remains of a Pre-Aksumite culture (that is, the kingdom of *D'MT* in particular) in the area surrounding Aksum, although little has been excavated until very recently at Aksum itself. Yeha is less than 60 kilometres away, Haulti less than 20, and a number of sites are in the immediate vicinity of Aksum itself. It was not, however, until much later that Aksum itself became an important centre in the archaeological record as we now understand it. Beginning in the first century B.C./A.D., Aksum rose to power and began to dominate its neighbours, apparently as the direct successor to the old *D'MT* kingdom.⁷¹ It gradually expanded the area under

⁶⁹ Apart from the excavations at Adulis, of which surprisingly little has been exposed, few excavations along the coastal area have been attempted, and even fewer published. But see M. C. Smith and H. T. Wright, 'The ceramics from Ras Hafun in Somalia: notes on a Classical maritime site', *Azania*, XXIII (1988), 115-41, which emphasizes the polyglot nature of the pottery found there that highlights the trading network in which it played a part during the first five centuries A.D. A general account of its farther reaches is A. M. H. Sheriff, 'The East African coast and its role in maritime trade', in G. Mokhtar (ed.), *General History of Africa*, Vol. 2: *Ancient Civilizations of Africa* (Paris, London and Berkeley, 1981), 551-67. Survey and excavation work now being proposed by T. Insoll at Dahlak Kebir in the Dahlak islands should prove rewarding to judge from his initial unpublished assessment: 'A report on an archaeological reconnaissance made to the Dahlak Islands, Eritrea, 23 June - 7 July 1996'. The role of Adulis is discussed in Munro-Hay, 'Adulis', 107-25, although several comments and conclusions there have been outdated by later research. On the present state of knowledge of Aksumite dating, see S. C. Munro-Hay and B. Juel-Jensen, *Aksumite Coinage* (London, 1995), *passim*, esp. 75. Anwar A. Magid's recent paper, 'Some indications of past human impact on the environment of the southern Red Sea Hills, Sudan', presented at the Thirteenth Biennial Conference of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists (Poznan, 1996) provides further archaeological evidence for inland contact with the Mediterranean cultures, and a discussion of its consequences; see his abstract in *Nyame Akuma*, XLVI (December, 1996), 100. I thank Drs Magid of the University of Bergen and Insoll of the University of Cambridge for copies of their unpublished papers.

⁷⁰ J. S. Phillips, 'Seeking Bruce's Cippus', *KMT*, VII. 2 (1996), 32-6, with further references.

⁷¹ This and other aspects of the internal Aksumite kingdom are discussed by Tekle Hagos, 'Aksumite sites in Tigray (Ethiopia). The significance of their distribution' (M.Phil. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1997).

its direct control, reaching eastward to the Red Sea coast in the later third century A.D. and then extended across to the Arabian coast. To the west, its king (Ezana) apparently provided the final blow to the dying Meroitic civilization along the Nile river before the mid-fourth century A.D. The economic reasons for Aksum's initial rise to power are as yet unknown, but the resulting authority of the Aksumite state, and eventually Empire, was based in large measure on its ability to control not only the interior but also both coasts of the southern Red Sea, and therefore the entire trade in luxury goods (including many already well known from earlier periods) that funnelled through it, from the Indian Ocean and the Horn of Africa as well as the African interior to the Mediterranean cultures of Greece and (especially) Rome. The greatest extent of the Aksumite Empire has not yet been defined, but its influence was considerable.

With the decline in Ptolemaic power, beginning about 200 B.C., Arabian Red Sea coastal peoples gained control of this trading network. Aksum rose to power at about the same time that Augustus established Roman control over Egypt (after having defeated Kleopatra and Mark Antony in 31 B.C.) and began to look beyond the borders of his new province. Roman demand for eastern luxury goods increased dramatically and Rome, like the Egyptian pharaohs and the Ptolemies before it, increased its presence in order to break or by-pass the Arabian trading monopoly that supplied not only incenses, spices and ivory from the southern Red Sea, but also the luxury goods brought from India and farther east, and the East African coast. By 25/24 B.C., Augustus had already sent an expedition under Aelius Gallus to invade the south Arabian coast in an unsuccessful effort to dominate completely the trade route.⁷² Ivory was an increasingly important commodity, and Rome could not get enough of it. Other new commodities, such as cinnamon, pepper, cotton cloth, iron and steel, were also transported through the Red Sea. Strabo noted in his *Geography* (c. 26–24 B.C.) that as many as 120 vessels annually sailed from the Egyptian port of Myos Hormos (not far north of the Middle Kingdom port of Mersa Gawasis) to India, whereas only twenty had done so before.⁷³ These were basically private commercial ventures, not state-organized or state-dominated as before. Adulis became a major meeting point between India and Egypt, as well as a source of trade goods from inland Africa.⁷⁴ Most of our information for this

⁷² Huntingford, *Periplus*, 3, 10; Casson, *Periplus*, 37.

⁷³ See Jones, *Geography of Strabo*, I: 454–5; VIII: 52–5. The collection of papers in V. Begley and R. D. De Puma (eds.), *Rome and India: The Ancient Sea Trade* (Madison, 1991) highlights the quantity and variety of imported Roman and 'Mediterranean' material found in India, and other aspects of this trading network. More recently, see also V. Begley, *The Ancient Port of Arikamedu: New Excavations and Researches, 1989–92* (Paris, 1996). An exhaustive bibliography on this subject is found in M. G. Raschke, 'New studies in Roman commerce with the Orient', *Augsteig und Niedergang der Römischer Welt*, 2.9.2 (1978), 604–1378.

⁷⁴ See, for example, the *Periplus* commentary on the ivory brought from inland to Adulis, which is in part collected at Aksum 'from beyond the Nile through the district called Kuēneion', an area strongly suggested to be around Sennar on the Blue Nile; see Huntingford, *Periplus*, 20, 90; Casson, *Periplus*, 107–8. The sheer quantity of finely worked ivory recovered from the 'Tomb of the Brick Arches' in the recent excavations at Aksum is archaeological confirmation of its bulk; see D. W. Phillipson, 'Excavations at Aksum, Ethiopia, 1993–4', *Antiquaries Journal*, LXXV (1995), 16–22, figs. 21–4.

early trading network comes from a single source, the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* [or *Circumnavigation of the Erythraean Sea*], an eye-witness account of a Greek merchant trader from Egypt dated to 40–70 A.D. Roman power in the region was at its height at this time, but the Indians and Arabs still controlled the further reaches of the trading system.⁷⁵ Whilst similar in some respects to Agatharchides' text, it was purely commercial in outlook and far more descriptive; it was, after all, written primarily as a shipping guide. Much of the East African coast, possibly as far as Tanzania, was drawn into this trading network. Although none was found in context, several hoards of Ptolemaic and Roman coins have been recovered along the East African coast, including a gold coin of Ptolemy IX Soter possibly as far south as Dar es-Salaam.⁷⁶ Some sherds of Egypto-Roman cooking or baking vessels – not, one would think, a trading item but rather ship equipment – have recently been excavated on Zanzibar.⁷⁷ In Ethiopia, a hoard of Kushana (Indus region) coins was found in an Aksumite-style box, at Debra Damo monastery 100 kilometres east of Aksum; the hoard itself dates not later than the 220s A.D., pre-dating Christianity in this region by at least a century and helping to underscore the extensive reach of the trading network as detailed in the *Periplus*.⁷⁸ It is unfortunate that similar documents for the interior network have not come to light, although detailed study of the cowrie shells from excavated inland sites might prove a useful archaeological indicator of its penetration from the coast.

When the Roman empire began to decline in the third century A.D., control of the Red Sea passed into the hands of the expanding Aksumite Empire, which by then dominated both Red Sea coasts at least as far south as Cape Guardafui. The Indian Ocean and East African coastal trade was controlled by Arabs and Persians from the third century onwards.⁷⁹ From the late third century A.D., Aksum minted its own coinage, in gold, silver, bronze and – apparently a unique feature – selectively gilded silver and bronze. It was the first sub-Saharan kingdom to mint its own coins, perhaps in competition with – or response to international use of – Roman coinage for trading

Nonnosus' mention of seeing 5,000 elephants at Aue (midway between Adulis and Aksum) provides further evidence of the quantity of elephants in this interior region and, presumably, beyond.

⁷⁵ See Casson, *Periplus*, 6–10.

⁷⁶ G. Freeman-Grenville, 'East African coin finds and their historical significance', *J. Afr. Hist.*, 1 (1960) 31–43; see also Thompson, 'Eastern Africa', 6–61.

⁷⁷ A. M. Juma, 'The Swahili and the Mediterranean worlds: pottery of the late Roman period from Zanzibar', *Antiquity*, LXX (1996), 147–54. General comments can be found in F. Chami, *The Tanzanian Coast in the First Millennium A.D.* (Uppsala, 1994), *passim*.

⁷⁸ See Y. M. Kobishchanov, 'The sea voyages of Ancient Ethiopians in the Indian Ocean', *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Ababa, 1969), 22. As the location of the monastery was chosen for its remoteness and inaccessibility – even today one can enter only by means of a rope hauled up a sheer cliff by the monks who inhabit the plateau – it is unlikely the hoard would have been placed there before the monastery was founded on top of the plateau in the sixth century A.D.

⁷⁹ Sheriff, 'East African coast', *passim*, esp. 565, although the apparently late fourth century A.D. context of the Egypto-Roman cooking vessels found on Zanzibar would suggest that Mediterranean goods may still have travelled to the far reaches of the trading network. Alternatively, they could have been around for some time before their final deposition.

purposes. So great was its influence at this time that the Persian historian Mani included Aksum as one of the four great empires of his day, together with Persia, 'Sileos' (China?) and Rome. The minting of coinage itself is evidence of Aksum's position of supreme commercial power, and it issued coins for more than three hundred years. The state was centred at the city of Aksum, and its power is amply illustrated by the monuments erected there. More than 160 stelae, Aksum's most famous monumental structures, are known today. The largest, known as ST 1, was some 33 metres in height, and is carved from a single block of granite some 520 tonnes in weight; this surpasses in scale the largest Egyptian obelisk ever erected. The largest stela still upright and *in situ*, ST 3, stands over 20 metres high from the bottom of its false door. These stelae are unrelated to the Egyptian obelisks, and appear to be grave markers for Aksumite kings.⁸⁰ The kings themselves probably lived in some of the huge stone-built palaces excavated at Aksum, which stood up to three storeys in height.

Very little imported material from ancient Egypt has been recovered in the area under Aksumite control, mostly 'antiques' in context such as a Twenty-fifth Dynasty scarab of Thutmose III in a post-third century A.D. context at Matara, and some surface finds such as a glass-paste pendant of a seated pharaoh found near Aksum of late Ptolemaic or possibly Roman date. Even more enigmatic is an large *ankh* sign deeply carved on the side of a rough stela at Aksum (Fig. 6).⁸¹ The stela itself is difficult to date but may belong to the first or second centuries A.D., and the *ankh* sign may be either contemporary or later. However, we do have fragments of imported glass, in millefiore and some unusual plain colours, from excavated contexts at Aksum dating to the first to fourth century. This suggests glass was being transported from the coast.⁸² The vast quantities of ivory found in these same contexts suggest this luxury item was plentiful enough both for local consumption and to exchange for imported goods. Some ivory pieces, such as the 'Venus of Aksum' figurine illustrated in figure 7, indicate the influence of 'Graeco-Roman' taste amongst the Aksumite élite; the product of an Aksumite workshop, it was recovered in a late third century A.D. élite grave at Aksum itself.⁸³

Apart from such individual objects, Egyptian and even Roman influence did not penetrate very far inland until the Aksumite kingdom became a Christian state about 330 A.D., when King Ezana was converted at Aksum by

⁸⁰ J. S. Phillips, 'Some non-Egyptian "obelisks"', *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities*, xxiv (in press); see also D. W. Phillipson, 'The significance and symbolism of Aksumite stelae', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, iv (1994), 189-210.

⁸¹ F. Anfray, 'L' archéologie d'Axoum en 1972', *Paideuma*, xxii (1972), 71, pl. IV [upper]. For a complete list of the imported finds, see n. 50, above.

⁸² H. M. Morrison, in S. C. Munro-Hay, *Excavations at Aksum* (London, 1989), chs. 11, 14 *passim*. See now also K. A. Bard and R. Fattovich, 'The I.O.U./B.U. Excavation at Bieta Giyorgis (Aksum): an interim report', *Nyame Akuma*, LXIV (December 1995), 25-7. The *Periplus* makes no mention of the extensive and archaeologically attested trade in beads, although glassware is listed as an import to this area: see Huntingford, *Periplus*, 21, 142.

⁸³ A drawing of this figure, including a profile, is found in D. W. Phillipson, A. J. Reynolds *et al.*, 'BIEA excavations at Aksum, Ethiopia, 1995', *Azania*, xxxi (1996), fig. 15.



Fig. 6. Crudely formed *ankh* sign carved onto a standing stela at Aksum. The date of both the stela and its sign are uncertain, and need not be contemporary. Now half-buried, its intended level on the stela also is unknown. (Author's photograph.)

the Syrian monk Frumentius of Tyre.⁸⁴ Aksum is therefore almost the world's oldest official Christian state, following just a few years after Constantine the Great declared the Roman Empire so at the Council of Nicaea in 325. With this conversion to Christianity, initially as an official state religion and only later filtering down to the common population, came an unprecedented amount of Egyptian influence. Frumentius was a missionary of the Coptic church, headquartered in Alexandria, and the Patriarch there appointed him the first 'Bishop of the Ethiopians'. This practice of appointing a foreigner, from then on always an Egyptian Copt, as Archbishop of the Ethiopian church by the Patriarch in Alexandria continued down through the centuries, ending only in 1951. The modern Ethiopian Orthodox Church, in consequence, owes some of its liturgy and ritual to early Coptic

⁸⁴ Frumentius was Christian who had been shipwrecked as a child on his way to India with his uncle and brother; the uncle died but the brothers were brought to Aksum as slaves.

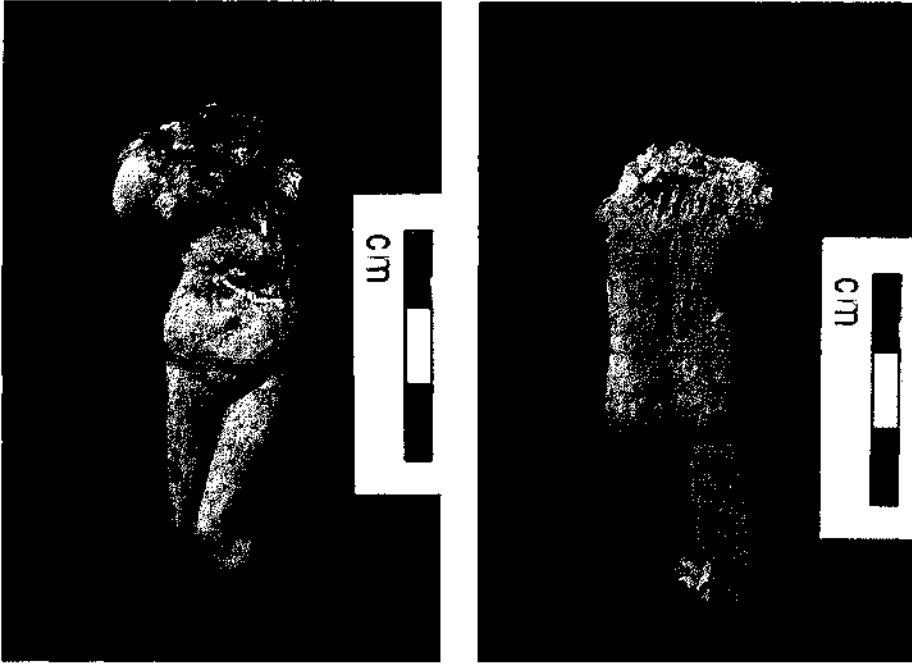


Fig. 7. The 'Venus of Aksum', recently excavated in the 'Tomb of the Brick Arches' (late third century A.D.). Although her *contraposto* pose and long flowing hair recall Graeco-Roman models, this ivory figurine is Aksumite, and highlights an aspect of the 'hellenised' veneer of the Aksumite élite. (Photographs: Michael Harlow.)

influence, and in some ways is closer to these early practices than is the modern Coptic church. Thus, some details of ancient Egyptian religious practice, as filtered through that of the early Coptic church, continue to find a late echo in modern Ethiopian Christianity.⁸⁵ The bible and other holy texts, for instance, are written in two colours of ink, red and black. Red was (and still is) employed for titles and holy utterances, and black for the ordinary words, as it was in ancient Egyptian texts. Ethiopian church ritual also includes extensive use of the closed sistrum, similar to that used in ancient Egypt. The Ethiopian calendar, still in use today, is divided into thirteen months – twelve each of thirty days, and one of five, a system also followed in ancient Egypt.⁸⁶ For ten days each month at Aksum, the 'Ark of the Covenant'⁸⁷ (according to long tradition, brought there by Menelik, the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba) is carried around the city on the shoulders of selected priests, shaded by a panoply and completely covered from the view of all onlookers by a colourful cloth. The procession involves

⁸⁵ Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* (Addis Ababa, 1972), 26, also described some parallels in modern Ethiopian daily life.

⁸⁶ This is why Ethiopian tourist posters today can truthfully advertise 'thirteen months of sunshine'.

⁸⁷ Actually a substitute of it is carried; the original remains in the 'Treasury' built to house it within the cathedral grounds, according to present-day Aksumite townspeople.

several ritual 'visits' to nearby places of religious importance, followed by the faithful. Similar processions of the god's image were made in ancient Egyptian ritual, as for example at the 'Festival of Opet'.⁸⁸

Late in the fifth century A.D. and clearly evident in the sixth, the Aksumite state began to disintegrate from within, and there are several references to internal as well as territorial revolts.⁸⁹ The Persians conquered the Yemen area about 570, effectively adding control of Red Sea trade to their supremacy in the Indian Ocean. Goods from the north were still getting through, however, and a number of Roman-style 'African Red Slip' ware fragments of north Egyptian origin have been recovered, without context, at Aksum itself; stylistically these date from the late fourth through sixth centuries A.D. Mediterranean-type fifth to sixth century transport amphorae, also provisionally identified as north Egyptian and other manufacture, have been recovered at Aksum. Most of these finds unfortunately are without context, but reused sherds have been recovered in sixth and early seventh century contexts.⁹⁰ A large quantity of similar amphorae have also been found nearer the coast at Matara, as well as at Adulis and elsewhere.

Trade connections to farther inland again are under-represented in the archaeological record, although two sherds of 'Soba ware' bowls have recently been identified from a context probably not later than the fifth century A.D. at Aksum. These are the first such pieces to be recognized in Ethiopia, and are found mostly at Soba, capital of the Nubian kingdom of Alwa.⁹¹ Despite their geographical proximity and common Christian religion, it is surprising that so little material evidence so far has been recovered for continuing relations between northern Ethiopia and the Nubian kingdoms after the latter had been converted to Christianity in the later sixth century A.D. Alwa, the kingdom geographically nearest to Aksum, even shared its Monophysite doctrine, and it seems that the earliest (before about 580 A.D.) Christian missionaries to Alwa were Aksumite.⁹²

The rise of Islam in the early seventh century and the successive Persian

⁸⁸ See The Epigraphic Survey, *The Festival Procession of Opet in the Colonnade Hall* (Chicago, 1992), *passim*, for images of the ancient festival as seen on the walls of the temple at Karnak.

⁸⁹ Munro-Hay, *Aksum*, 260-4.

⁹⁰ See Phillipson, Reynolds *et al.*, 'BIEA excavations'. For similar material found elsewhere, see Phillips, 'Egyptian and Nubian material', 3; add to this list a nearly complete ARS bowl found at Matara: see F. Anfray, 'La poterie de Matara', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, xxii (1966), 17, fig. 10, pl. XXI.3620.

⁹¹ I am grateful to Dr Derek Welsby at the British Museum for confirming my initial identification of these sherds as 'Soba ware' from photographs of the sherds now housed in the Aksum Museum. They may be from the same bowl. The complete context is no longer reconstructable, but recorded finds from it appear to be not later than fifth century in date. For 'Soba ware', see D. A. Welsby and C. M. Daniels, *Soba. Archaeological Research at a Medieval Capital on the Blue Nile* (London, 1991), 324-34. However, the 'mat-impressed ware' vessels probably did not come from the Sudan, as suggested by H. N. Chittick, 'Ethiopia and the Nile valley', *Meroitica*, vi (1982), 53 and repeated in Munro-Hay, *Excavations*, 315; the upper part of the one extant jar now in the Aksum Museum does not seem to relate to Sudanese examples. Other imported Nubian sherds, however, may be recognized from more recent work at Aksum.

⁹² See Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, 30; see also Vantini, *Oriental Sources*, 20. This whole question of why these major Christian states in north-eastern Africa, essentially cut off from the mainstream of their faith by the expansion of Islam, apparently did not maintain historically recognizable relations requires more research.

and then Arab conquests of Egypt in 616 and 641/642 effectively cut Egypt off from any remaining active association in the African side of Red Sea trade, since it would then deal with its effective rulers, the Muslim peoples on the Arabian side.⁹³ Perhaps not by coincidence, Aksumite coinage also ceases to be minted about this time and Aksum itself virtually disappears from the world stage.

CONCLUSION

Over the period of this survey, more than 3,000 years in historical length, Egypt actively sought a trading relationship in luxury goods with areas far south and east of its border. The nature of this relationship varied considerably through time, depending on the fortune, strength and needs both of Egypt and those with whom it was in contact. For much of the period, we must rely entirely on Egyptian and (later) 'Mediterranean' sources. Even though we have a decidedly one-sided view of events, our only sources being often incomplete documents that require careful scrutiny and are subject to a variety of interpretations, virtually all from one extreme of the relationship, it is evident that there is a strong symbiotic continuity in the rise and fall of all those polities involved. We also may assume that, even when no documentation is available, interaction probably continued on a more limited scale. This survey, of necessity, has been presented in the context of available sources and therefore in the main is biased in their favour, although I have attempted where possible to view development from the opposite perspective. It is this other perspective that requires further consideration.

What may be termed the broader boundaries both of Punt and Aksum have long been neglected by archaeologists and historians except as virtual *terra incognita* dividing the two major trading corridors of the Red Sea and the Nile river. Although interaction along both these 'corridors' is well attested in contemporary records and well studied by modern scholars, a major point emphasized here is the existence and importance of the barely documented 'overland networks' and the clear need to integrate this neglected aspect into the broader discussion. Recent work, especially archaeological excavation, is now only beginning to substantiate earlier suggestions of major overland trade routes and inter-cultural contact between the two extremes (and possibly continuing even farther west). This is serving to raise and reinforce awareness of the potential impact of their integration into the overall 'east-west' trading network as we now understand it. Clearly, the 'overland' network was in the hands of the various indigenous inland cultures, both geographically and temporally (including Punt, *D'MT* and Aksum, as well as those even farther inland), within which the trade goods originated and passed through in order to reach the coast and the river. Research focusing on, and consideration of, the 'overland' networks would substantially increase our knowledge of the 'other' extremes of the relationship and, in turn, our appreciation of what must be the high

⁹³ For a short discussion of Arab activities in the southern Red Sea during this early period of Islam, see V. Christides, 'New light on navigation and naval warfare in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean (6th-14th centuries A.D.)', *Nubica*, III/2 (1994), 27-30.

level of its sophistication and organization. A deeper understanding of both Punt and Aksum needs, in short, an Africanist perspective.

SUMMARY

This article offers a general review of the changing relationships between the areas of present-day Egypt and the Sudan with those of Ethiopia and Eritrea, from the third millennium B.C. until the seventh century A.D. Despite the limitations of sometimes conflicting scholarly interpretation of the available evidence, historical texts and documents, together with archaeological evidence, reveal a surprising continuity throughout this long period of fluctuating centralized powers.

The earliest historical references date to the Fifth Egyptian Dynasty, but archaeological evidence in the form of Red Sea shells found in Nile valley graves as early as the Neolithic period clearly indicates that contact had been established long before. The Egyptians saw the southern Red Sea area as a source of luxury goods, and contact (although intermittent, according to Egypt's fluctuating strength) continued at least until the Nineteenth Dynasty. The land of Punt, the name given to this area by the Egyptians, is known to us only through their records. No archaeological remains have ever been identified, even tentatively, as 'Puntite'. Archaeological remains dating to the periods of the later *D'MT* (in the mid-first millennium B.C.) and Aksum (first half of the first millennium A.D.) kingdoms, together with textual evidence chiefly derived from the Greeks, Romans, and other cultures in contact with them, have provided a more comprehensive picture of relations with the outside world, chiefly for the coastal areas and Red Sea connections. Overland relations with the Nile valley also are reviewed.

Overland connections are more tenuously seen, but some texts and archaeological remains nonetheless do aid in identifying major trading routes throughout the period under consideration. Recent excavations, especially in the Sudan, have added greatly to our understanding of such connections. This recent work has been highlighted wherever possible.