

w3d-wr, Punt, and Wadi Hammamat: The Implication of Verbs of Motion Describing Travel*

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Over the past twenty-five years at least, there has been considerable debate about the meaning and location of the place the Egyptians called the *w3d-wr*, which J.P. Allen felicitously renders literally as ‘the Great Blue-Green’ in his grammar.¹ Since I offered a contribution to this area of Prof. Sayed’s field of expertise nearly fifteen years ago, I thought that I might once more explain the significance of the use of certain verbs of motion in a number of inscriptions that pertain to the oft-debated question of the connection between *w3d-wr* and the Red Sea.²

Before I go any further in this discussion, I would like to point out immediately that the word *w3d-wr* is a relatively frequent toponym in Egyptian texts. It occurs not only in historical inscriptions, but also in temple texts, and in a variety of ‘religious’ texts as well, usually connected with the topography of the next world.³ The very fact that many scholars connect this word with the ‘sea’ should alert us to an invaluable methodological principle when one investigates common words in particular—it is very risky to suppose that such a term can be assigned one meaning. Consider for a moment, the use of ‘sea’ as it appears in dictionaries of modern European languages. Most good of these dictionaries will doubtlessly provide a large number of definitions. Some of these meanings will apply only to a very specialized context, other meanings will have become obsolete or rare, while still others might represent metaphorical extensions of the term; there may even be some slang expressions or misuses included in the list. Examining a common word can lead to some valuable insights into other

lexicographical pitfalls as well, especially by reminding us that language is a dynamic phenomenon. In short, we should expect that common words by their very nature will acquire several meanings including some rare and unusual ones. A wide range will be normal, so all apparent exceptions need not be explained away. When considering such words, it is therefore often better to examine the evidence not case by case, but rather context by context.

Some of the most interesting examples of *w3d-wr* connect that word with travel to the exotic Land of Punt, and occasionally, the *ḥ-ntr* ‘the God’s Land’ as well. The exact locations (if such can be said to exist) of these places are problems far beyond the scope of this paper, but I will examine here certain aspects which may have a bearing on our study.⁴ In the hope of trying to establish the meaning of the word at least within a given context, I shall limit myself largely to examples from the Eastern Desert region during the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom, essentially repeating and supplementing an argument made previously by K. Kitchen.⁵



The *locus classicus* for Punt travel before the New Kingdom is the much studied inscription of an Eleventh Dynasty official named Henu, who described his activities in a long graffito in Wadi Hammamat, dated to the eighth year in the reign of King Sankhkare Mentuhotep. The text relates the route he took in the following fashion (Hammamat 114, with omissions):⁶




‘[My lord, L.P.]H. sent me forth to dispatch ships (*sbit knbywt*) to Punt to bring back for him fresh incense (*ꜥntyw*) from the rulers dwelling in the Red Land, fear of him pervading the uplands (*h3swt*). Thereupon, I went up from (*pr.kw m*) Koptos upon the road which his Majesty had commanded me (to take), I (being) accompanied by a force (*mꜥꜥ*) of Upper Egypt from the *w3bw* of the Theban nome from Imioteru to Shabet (The text goes on to describe the personnel and the outfitting of the 3,000 men) . . .’

‘Now I made 12 wells on the valley floor (*b3t*)⁷ and two wells in *Id3ht*, one measuring twenty cubits, the other 30. I made another in *I3htb*⁸ of 10 by 10 cubits at all water levels.⁹ Then I reached the *w3d-wr* and then I built this fleet. I loaded it with everything when I had made for it a great sacrifice of cattle and goats.’

‘When I returned from the *w3d-wr*, I had done that which his Majesty had commanded me (to do), bringing back for him all sorts of produce that I had found on the shores of the God’s Land (*t3 ntr*). I descended from (*h3.kw m*) *W3g* (an unidentified place) and (or: of?) Rahenu (*R-hnw*, the Egyptian name for Wadi Hammamat), bringing for him precious stone (blocks) for the temple statues.’

At this point Henu stops describing his activities and concludes the narrative with several self-laudatory lines.

Lexicographical questions can seldom be answered by examining only the word(s) under investigation. Often, as in the present instance, other terms as well as the very context in which they appear, should also play a significant role in the process. The key verbs of motion in Henu’s inscription -  *pr* and  *h3i* - form a well-known pair of antonyms respectively meaning ‘to go up, ascend’ and ‘to go down, descend,’ or just

simply ‘go’ and ‘come back.’¹⁰ These two verbs, either singly or together, are used during the period from the Old to the Middle Kingdoms in many of the graffiti left by quarrying expeditions at such places as Hatnub, Wadi Hammamat, and Wadi el-Hudi¹¹ to describe the trip into the desert and the return to the Nile Valley. This is no minor point, but rather one that cuts to the core of the discussion. In the present inscription *pr* and *h3i* apparently refer to Henu’s journey upland from Koptos into Wadi Hammamat and his return back to Koptos where he started.¹² As we know from their frequent use in the *appel aux vivants*, Egyptian texts are much more apt to use the contrasting pair  *hdi* ‘to go downstream/northwards’ and  *hnty* ‘to go downstream/southwards,’ when referring to travelling North and South along the Nile Valley, by boat or otherwise. Unlike the verbs *pr* and *h3i*, which are never attested with a boat-determinative, the verbs *hdi* and *hnty* by contrast will occasionally have the ‘walking legs’ determinative,  Sign-list D54.¹³ In Henu’s inscription the association of *pr* with travelling in the desert seems assured not only by the designation of Koptos as the starting point, but also by the association of the ‘rulers dwelling in the Red Land’ with that part of the trip.

Bearing in mind this specialized usage of the verbs *pr* and *h3i*, we can summarize Henu’s itinerary in and out of Wadi Hammamat. After describing his royal commission, Henu starts his travel narrative by setting out (*pr m*) from Koptos, the logical place to begin if one’s intent was to travel through Wadi Hammamat and/or Wadi Gawâsis.¹⁴ He dug wells or cisterns along his route before reaching the *w3d-wr*, where he built the ships his assignment called for. He then descended (*h3i m*) from *W3g* and (?)Wadi Hammamat, perhaps stopping to quarry stones along the way. In fact, it seems likely that the present graffito was inscribed at

this stage. That this inscription describes or implies any extensive travel along the Nile in the execution of Henu's assignment seems most improbable. Whatever the word may mean elsewhere, *w3d-wr* almost surely refers to the Red Sea and not the Nile in this inscription and this context.

A few years after Henu's expedition, during the reign of Nebtawyre Mentuhotep, an individual named *Sʿnh* left a much cruder graffito in Wadi Hammamat that also mentions the *w3d-wr*, but in a more obscure context.¹⁵ It is difficult to say much about this man's occupation from his brief titulary of three otherwise unattested titles, except that he may have been a quarryman or desert scout. What is important concerning the question of travel to *w3d-wr*, however, is his use of the significant verb-pair *hdi* and *hnti*: '(1) Nebtawyre, may he live eternally! (2) The troop leader (or foreman) in the hill-countries,¹⁶ steward in Egypt(?),¹⁷ (3) overseer of drillers on stone(?),¹⁸ *Sʿnh* says: (4) I was (*ir.n.i*) a troop-leader for this entire land in this hill country, they (being) outfitted with waterskins and loin-cloths(?), (5) with bread and beer and every vegetable of Upper Egypt. I made its valleys into green fields and its heights (6) into pools of water,¹⁹ they (the high and low places?) being supplied with young (animals?), southwards <to> *T3ʿw*, northwards to *Mnʿt-Hwfw*. I went up to (*pr.kw r*) the *w3d-wr*. I speared birds (*3pdw*); I speared (short-horned) game (*ʿwt*?).²⁰ It was as a man of 60 years (of age) and with 70 recruits (*idw*?) from a single unit (?)²¹ that I went up to (*pr.n.i r*)²² this highland. I did everything correctly for Nebtawyre, may he live eternally.'

This inscription is much more carelessly constructed than Henu's; there seems to be neither a chronological nor a geographical framework underlying this text. In fact, it is hard even to

understand what *Sʿnh* mission was. The mention of *w3d-wr* is tantalizing, but ultimately uninformative.

Unfortunately, there are no further Middle Kingdom inscriptions from Wadi Hammamat that describes travelling either to the *w3d-wr* or to Punt with as much detail as Henu's graffito. In the absence of such information, it would be useful to examine any texts which might have bearing on the route Middle Kingdom Punt travel may have taken. Perhaps the next best description of one such expedition's itinerary appears in the historical prologue of Papyrus Harris I, where the recently deceased Ramesses III left an account of the great deeds of his reign. Although there is no mention of the term *w3d-wr*, one section of the document describes the return of an expeditionary fleet from Punt (Pap. Harris I 77, 12 to 77, 13):²³

st spr(.w) iw.w sw3d.w r h3st Gbtyw
st mni(.w) m htp hry iht ini.n.w
st 3tp(.w) m hryt hr ʿ3w rmt
 (13) *ʿhʿw hr itrw <hr?> mrit Gbtyw*
wdi(.w) m hd n hr.w

'They reached the hill-country (*h3st*) of Koptos healthy. They moored safely, carrying the things which they had brought back. They (the products) were loaded for the trip upland on both donkeys and men. (13) The cargo boats (were loaded) upon the river (at) the harbor at Koptos. (Then) they proceeded northwards in festivity.'

Not only is the itinerary here quite clearly delineated, but also many aspects of this Twentieth Dynasty narrative parallel in Henu's inscription. Wherever Punt may have been located, once Ramesses III's expedition had returned from there, it landed in the hill country (*h3st*) of Koptos, a statement which in itself would make travelling along the Nile inefficient and improbable for the return leg of the journey, especially if a northern canal between the Red Sea and the Nile had existed at the time. The

goods were removed from the ships, then loaded on men and donkeys for the intermediate trip overland (*m hr̄yt*) to the Nile Quay at Koptos (*hr̄ itrw <hr̄?> mrit*). At that point the goods were (re-)loaded on ships bound northwards (*m hd*) for the royal residence. Although this Ramesside text does not mention *w3d-wr*, it nonetheless lends more weight to the theory that one section of the route taken by products from Punt involved an overland journey from the Red Sea shore to Koptos. This does not exclude the possibility that there may have been other way products from that distant land that reached Egypt, such as direct or indirect trade along the Nile. These considerations lead me to believe strongly that the discussion of Punt's location, Punt-trade, and *w3d-wr* have been hampered by desires to find only one solution to the problems involved in each question.²⁴ C. Vandersleyen and several other authors are quite right in noting that *w3d-wr* can refer to the Nile or the Delta, but can never refer to either the Red Sea or the Mediterranean.

Notes

* The following contribution is a slight reworking of an article entitled 'W3d-wr and Lexicographical Method' that originally appeared in U. Luft (ed.), *The Intellectual Heritage of Egypt* (Kákosy Fs.), *Studia Aegyptiaca* 14 (Budapest, 1992), 205-214.

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1 J.P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian. An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (Cambridge, 2000), 456b, 'sea' (literally, great blue-green).' For a discussion of the color *w3d*, see: Goelet, in Luft (ed.), *The Intellectual Heritage of Egypt* (Kákosy Fs.), *Studia Aegyptiaca* 14, 205-207 with references. I might add to my observations, especially in warm climates, waters immediately off the seacoast often have a blue-green appearance.

2 Since the number of books and articles on this subject has now become so extensive, I will not attempt to supply a bibliographic review in this subject.

Instead, I will mention here, out of very many sources, only C. Vandersleyen, 'Oudj our *w3d-wr*. Un autre aspect de la vallée du Nil', *Connaissance de l'Égypte Ancienne* 7 (Brussels, 1999) with an extensive bibliography on p. 399-431 and two statements of the contrary viewpoint K.A. Kitchen, '[Review of] Vandersleyen, *DE* 46, 123-138 and idem, 'Further Thoughts on Punt and its Neighbors,' in A. Leahy and J. Tait (eds.), *Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honour of H.S. Smith*. Occasional Publications 13 (London, 1999), 173-178.

3 See, for example, E. Feucht, 'Fisch- und Vogelfang im *w3d-wr* des Jenseits,' in I. Shirun-Grumach (ed.), *Jerusalem Studies in Egyptology. ÄAT* 40 (Wiesbaden, 1998), 37-44.

4 Much of the recent bibliography on this subject has been summarized by L. Bradbury in her article 'Reflections on Travelling to 'God's Land' and Punt in the Middle Kingdom', *JARCE* 25 (1988), 127-156; and B. Couroyer, 'Pount et la Terre du Dieu', *Rev. Biblique* 80 (1973), 53-74. One should also note K.A. Kitchen's recent additions to this discussion, in Leahy and Tait (eds.), *Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honour of H.S. Smith*. Occasional Publications 13, 173-178.

5 The *locus classicus* remains K. Kitchen, 'Punt and How to Get There,' *Or.* 40 (1969), 189-191.

6 J. Couyat and P. Montet, 'Les inscriptions hiéroglyphiques et hiératiques du Ouâdi Hammâmât', *MIFAO* 34 (Cairo, 1912-1914), 81-84, with pl. 31. Major translations or commentaries have appeared in Breasted, *ARE* I, 427-433; C. Vandersleyen, 'Les inscriptions 114 et 1 du Ouâdi Hammâmât (11^e dynastie),' *CdÉ* 64 (1989), 148-158; L. Bradbury, *JARCE* 25 (1988), 127; W. Schenkel, *Memphis-Herakleopolis-Theben. ÄA* 12 (Wiesbaden, 1965), 253-258; K.-J. Seyfried, *Beiträge zu den Expeditionen des Mittleren Reiches in die Ost-Wüste. HÄB* 15 (Hildesheim, 1981), 243-244; Kitchen, *Or.* 40, 190; M. Lichtheim, 'Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies chiefly of the Middle Kingdom', *OBO* 84 (1988), 52-54; B. Couroyer, *Rev. Biblique* 80, 59-60; A. Nibbi, 'Henu of the Eleventh Dynasty and the *w3d-wr*,' *GM* 17 (1975), 39-44; F. Friedman, 'On the Meaning of *W3d-wr* in Selected Literary Texts,' *GM* 17 (1975), 15-16; Vandersleyen, *Oudj our*, 250 (#143).

- 7 This is M. Lichtheim's suggestion, see *Autobiographies* (1988), 54 n. 16; Kitchen, *Or.* 40, 190, suggests 'scrub'.
- 8 By using the so-called Turin Gold Mine Map and other sources, L. Bradbury has been able to make plausible associations of these place names with present day Arabic names of sites in the Eastern Desert, see *JARCE* 25 (1988), 137-138. C. Vandersleyen, however, feels that these same places were located in Nubia, see *CdÉ* 64, 153-154.
- 9 For this expression, see M. Lichtheim, *Autobiographies* (1988), 54 n. 18. Against C. Vandersleyen's objections in *CdÉ* 64, 154, L. Bradbury, *JARCE* 25, 137 n. 47, and others have pointed out that the number of these 'wells' (*hnmw*) is hardly excessive for supplying Henu's force and other future travelers with water along 120 to 130 miles of desert track in the summer heat. Judging from some of the dimensions given, some of these wells may have been rain-cisterns rather than wells in the strict sense.
- 10 *Wb.* I 521, 9-14.
- 11 On this point see K.-J. Seyfried, *Expeditionen*, 132, 133, 273, 280; R. Anthes, 'Die Felseninschriften von Hatnub', *UGAA* 9 (Leipzig, 1928), pls. 10 (Gr. 3, 3 and Gr. 4, 2 both OK), 11 (Gr. 11, 5 and 8 OK), 12 (Gr. 8, 2 OK?), 17 (Gr. 146, 15- and 13 both FIP), 28 (Gr. 30, 8 FIP). Undoubtedly there are examples of this usage dating to the New Kingdom as well. It is interesting to note how many times the verb *pri* is used in connection to with the preposition *r* followed by the place-name of the quarry where the inscription was found. Where *pri* is not used, the verb *ii* 'to come, arrive' often appears instead. In the case of the verb *h3i*, there is one Wadi Hammamat inscription (No. 199) which indicates returning to Egypt (*h3.n h3i.kwi r Kmt*), even though the expedition certainly did not leave Wadi during its work there. For the text and translations of this inscription, see Montet-Couyat, *MIFAO* 34 (1912-1914), pl. 38; Breasted, *ARE* I, 466-468-; and H. Goedicke, 'Some Remarks on the Stone Quarrying of the Middle Kingdom,' *JARCE* 3 (1964), 44-45.
- 12 *Wb.* I 521, 9 says of this pair of verbs: 'ausgehen und zurückkommen. Bes. von Boten und Reisedenen bei Reisen ins Ausland und zurück.' In the general discussion of the meanings of these verbs (*Wb.* I 518-519 and *Wb.* II 472-474) no variant writings with a boat are cited. The same holds true for the examples quoted in J. Janssen, *De traditioneele Egyptische Autobiografie vóór het Nieuwe Rijk* I (Leiden, 1946), 59-60; 83-84. In the roughly contemporaneous *Heqanakht Letters*, the verb *h3i* is used in the sense of 'to go down upon' a plot of land with the intention of cultivating it, see J.P. Allen, *The Heqanakht Papyri* (New York, 2002), 23, commenting on Letter I, l. 8. The verb pair *h3i* and *pri* appear in Letter II, line 38, '[p]robably with reference to the motion of plowing rather than the daily practice of 'going up' to the fields then down to home, since the verbs involved would indicate that the farmland lay at a higher elevation than Heqanakht's residence,' Allen, *The Heqanakht Papyri*, 44. Once more, *lateral*, i.e. east-west, movement on land, not movement on the Nile, is meant.
- 13 In the inscription of Sarenput at Aswan, see Sethe, *Urk.* VII 1, 12.
- 14 Bradbury, *JARCE* 25, 127-130, also notes that Henu seems to have chosen the appropriate time of the year for favorable winds and currents for boat travel down the Red Sea coast.
- 15 Hammamat I; for the text, major translations and commentaries, see Montet-Couyat, *MIFAO* 34, pl. 3 with p. 32-33; Breasted, *ARE* I, 454-456; Schenkel, *AA* 12, 269-270; Vandersleyen, *CdÉ* 64, 156-158. The text is closely related to Hammamat 241, see Schenkel, *AA* 12, 269.
- 16 *Imy-r mšw hr h3swt*. On this title, see W.A. Ward, *Index of Egyptian Administrative and Religious Titles of the Middle Kingdom* (Beirut, 1982), 29 (#214), henceforth cited here as Ward, *Index of Egyptian Administrative and Religious Titles of the Middle Kingdom*, Compare the basic title without the additional qualification *hr h3swt*, Ward, *Index of Egyptian Administrative and Religious Titles of the Middle Kingdom*, 29 (#205) which is well-attested in quarrying inscriptions. It is not necessary always to see military responsibilities in titles of this kind when they appear in such contexts, as does H. Goedicke, 'Two Mining Records from Wadi Hammamat,' *RdÉ* 41 (1990), 68-69. Perhaps *mšw* sometimes simply refers to 'expedition members'. Nonetheless, he is correct in pointing out that the Eastern Desert (or Egypt) were not at all times peaceful. Expeditions during the period between the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom often required armed escort as shown by the graffiti

- from the Eastern Desert recently collected by L. Bell, J.H. Johnson, and D. Whitcomb, 'The Eastern Desert of Upper Egypt: Routes and Inscriptions,' *JNES* 43 (1984), 27-46 and S.B. Redford and D.B. Redford, 'Graffiti and Petroglyphs Old and New from the Eastern Desert,' *JARCE* 26 (1989), 3-49, as well as the material previously assembled by Montet, Couyat and Goyon.
- 17 *imy-r pr hr kmt*, not in Ward, *Index*, and probably a title created with the intent of contrasting the Black Land *kmt* and the Nile Valley with the 'hill-country' in the previous title.
- 18 I follow here Ward's suggestion of *imy-r msnw hr inrw* (written erroneously $\text{Q} \begin{array}{c} \text{---} \\ \text{---} \\ \text{---} \end{array} \text{itrw}$), see W.A. Ward, *Index* 29 (#204), and compare (#203). Unfortunately, Ward's citation of *FIFAO* 10, 2, p. 36 seems faulty for *msnw*. W. Schenkel, *ÄA* 12 (1965) 270 suggests 'Harpunierer (??) auf den Wasserläufen,' but on the same page in note a, he also proposes '(Führer) der Libyer?'
- 19 There is a similar statement in line 13 of Henu's inscription (not quoted above), see Montet-Couyat, *MIFAO* 34 (1912-1914), 83; M. Lichtheim, *Autobiographies* (1988), 53 with n. 16.
- 20 The sign here is unclear; it can be read either as Sign-List E1, or more likely E8.
- 21 The phrase here is obscure. W. Schenkel, *ÄA* 12 (1965), suggests '(Ansiedlung) (??)', while C. Vandersleyen, *CdÉ* 64 (*m msw n w^c*, 1984) 157, suggests 'et de 70 enfants nés d'une seule (mère)'.
- 22 I have taken the verb *pr.n(i)* as a non-attributive relative or an 'emphatic form,' an interpretation which fits this context well. *S^cnh* is emphasizing two unusual circumstances of his presence in Wadi Hammamat. Compare the similarly phrased statement in Hatnub Gr. 14, 13, see Anthes, *UGAÄ* 9, pl. 17 with p. 32-34.
- 23 Major translations and commentaries of the critical passage have appeared in Breasted, *ARE* IV, 407; Kitchen, *Or.* 40, 189-191; Friedman, *GM* 17, 17; C. Maderna-Sieben, 'Der historische Abschnitt des Papyrus Harris I,' *GM* 123 (1991), 66-67; A. Nibbi, *Ancient Egypt and some Eastern Neighbors* (Park Ridge, 1975), 107-109.
- 24 This point is made emphatically by K.A. Kitchen in his review article of Vandersleyen.