

# Ramses II and the Land of Punt in the light of Nubian Enigmatic Inscriptions

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This article is dedicated in honor of my Professor Doctor Abdel Moneim A.H. Sayed who has a lot of love, veneration and consideration in my life, as he has great respect and estimation from specialists of Egyptology and the history of Ancient Near East. Doctor Abdel Moneim A.H. Sayed guided me since I was an undergraduate student, was my mentor to learn the basics of scientific research presenting me the perfect example and beacon in ethics and endless guidance. He supported me during the most difficult times in my professional and academic career. He not only allowed me to access his personal library, as well as all my colleagues in Alexandria, but also gave me the precious time to teach me the methodology and how to translate and express in a scientific language. For this, I find in writing this article, a simple expression of my gratitude and appreciation to the great teacher, who endlessly supported me and my colleagues, and his endless support to offer help to his disciples scattered across the country to conserve its heritage and teach generations of archaeologists to be guardians of the Ancient Civilization and Culture that is Egypt.

I decided to write in this subject because Punt occupied a considerable part of Abdel Moneim A.H. Sayed interest. Since the official mission to Punt during the reign of Hatshepsut, the State documentation had not mentioned any indication of another official intervention. The sources throughout the Eighteenth Dynasty and even at the beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasty were limited to: scenes of receipt of Puntites with their products, scenes of commercial exchange between Egyptians and Puntites or even a mention of

a mission led by a scribe Amenmes as part of a larger one conduct by the overseer of the Treasury, Panehesy.<sup>1</sup>

However, the documentation of the reign of Ramses II referred to the relations between Punt and the State on the inscriptions of the Temple of Amara West, Aksha, the Temple of Hathor at Serabit el-Khadim, on the royal calendar of Abydos, and in the hymn to Amun of the Leiden papyrus. So this contribution will uncover the documentation with an analysis to its forms as well as its contents.

## The Enigmatic Inscription of Aksha

The enigmatic inscription was part of the superscription of the Asiatic topographic list on the lower part of the north of the rear wall of the forecourt. The publication of A.D. Rodrigo<sup>2</sup> represents actually the most completed and coherent one because it was based on J.H. Breasted photograph further than Sayce's copy<sup>3</sup> or K. Kitchen corpus.<sup>4</sup>



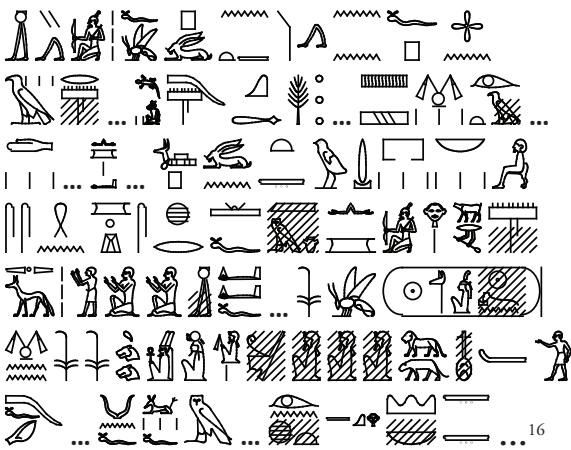
*sby mš<sup>c</sup>f r<sup>6</sup> pwnt<sup>7</sup> ini n<sup>8</sup> f p(w)ntyw<sup>9</sup> im<sup>10</sup> ...  
h<sup>c</sup>w<sup>11</sup> 3tp<sup>12</sup> (w) (m) inmw mn(w<sup>13</sup>) šntyw išš sty  
irtyw ʿnd šw ʿw bi3w(t) pwnt<sup>14</sup> wd3 prw nbw špss(w)  
šnn(t) r<sup>c</sup> h r) shr=f*

(The King) has sent his expedition to Punt. The Puntites, there, brought him... The vessels were loaded

(with) skins, trees to incense, perfumed *ishesh*, *irtiou* [...] and dry *aned*. The marvels of Punt are secure, all the noble houses prosper, all that Re encircles is under his governance.

### An Enigmatic Inscription of Amara West

A phraseology written in cryptographic mode incized in the Nubian Temple of Amara West, in the end of the Syrian list, on the South–East walls of the Hypostyle Hall. The text refers to an expedition sent to the Land of Punt:<sup>15</sup>



... in *mš<sup>c</sup>.f<sup>17</sup>* *bi3(wt)* *pwnt<sup>18</sup>* *iw.n n.f pwntyw<sup>19</sup>* *r* *m<sup>20</sup>[3<sup>c</sup>w]* *š3w 3tpw km3yt ... [i] šš irt3 [d ...<sup>21</sup>]* *šd<sup>22</sup>* *[w ...]* *bi3(wt)* *pwnt wdw nbw špssw šn-wr hr šhrw.f* *m m3<sup>c</sup>-ib (?) nn mš<sup>c</sup> hr(.f) hn.s m i3w si didi.f [n=sn* *t3w-n-<sup>s</sup>nh] nsw-bity wsr-m3<sup>c</sup>t-r<sup>c</sup>-[stp-n-r<sup>c</sup>] dmd nn m* *phty imn-r<sup>c</sup> nb ntrw ... sdm ... wp.n.f m ... ir n[h.t]* *kn[.t] hr h3s[wt] nb[wt] t3w [nbw]...*<sup>23</sup>

.... His expedition brings the marvels of Punt. The Puntites came to him carrying the tri[bute(?)]: ...gum, *ishesh*,<sup>24</sup> *Iretiou*<sup>25</sup> [...<sup>26</sup>] *šdj* ..... the marvels of Punt (in) all the storehouses, and the treasures from the outer Ocean through his plans, willingly(?), without a(ny) expedition carrying it, in adoration, seeking(?) his gift [of the bearth of life], (even) the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Usimare-Setepenre who has assembled these (things) by the power of

Amun-Re, Lord of the gods... *m.f*, hearing (?) ... he has revealed his secrets(?) in [...] achiev[ing] vi[ctory] and val[our] over all hill countries and [all] plains (...).<sup>27</sup>

The marvels of Punt mentioned in the two texts are *inmw* means ‘skins’;<sup>28</sup> *mnw šntyw* which means ‘incense’<sup>29</sup> trees<sup>30</sup>; *išš<sup>31</sup> sty<sup>32</sup>* which means ‘odoriferous plant’; *irtyw<sup>33</sup>* which could mean a kind of medicinal plant, *šnd šw<sup>34</sup>* which may correspond to a kind of fragrance.<sup>35</sup>

D. Meeks employed the presence of these two inscriptions beside the Asiatic list to verify that Punt was not in Africa but in Arabia.<sup>36</sup> If we have a close look to the context for the two texts, we realize its correctness as they are situated beside the Asiatic list, but there is no relation between both of them. The structure of the two inscriptions is totally different from the Asiatic list. The expedition texts composed of phrases and have some kind of narrative style although in the Asiatic list, we have only a list of toponymes for foreign countries encircled in an oval form to indicate that these countries were under the Pharaoh authorities.

Otherwise, Punt appeared in other texts from the same period: the passage of the bandeau-texts, below the royal festival calendar and scenes, in the Temple Ramses II in Abydos on the south wall reveals<sup>37</sup>:



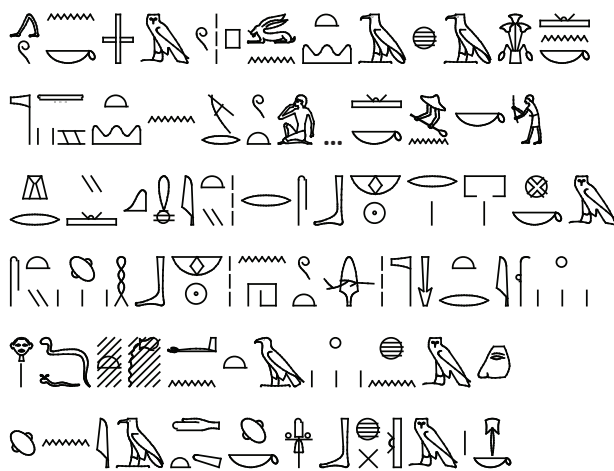
*srd-n=f b3hw š3(w) wdy m ht nb h3w nb(w)* *bnr st nrpwt nw pwnt ir.n n.f s3-r<sup>c</sup> nb h<sup>c</sup>w r<sup>c</sup>-mss-* *mry-jmn mry wisr hnty imntyw ntr š3 nb 3bdw*

He has laid out numerous irrigated tracts, planted with all (kinds of) trees (and) all the sweet-smelling herbs of Punt, being what (was) made for him (by) the son of Re, Lord of Crowns, Ramses II, the beloved of Osiris, Chief of Westerners, great god, Lord of Abydos.<sup>39</sup>

The texts revealed information about a project to cultivate the incense trees in the Temple's garden. This was not the first essay; the inscription of King Sahure had just indicated a similar operation very early in the Fifth Dynasty.<sup>40</sup> Then Queen Hatshepsut tried also to do the same process after the successful return of her famous expedition.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, the process was always related to the official expeditions which aimed at breaking the monopoly of Punt and the productions area and for having this strategic product indispensable for the religious and funerary practices.

The echo of the Puntite expedition arrived to the hymn of Amun written on the Leiden papyrus:<sup>42</sup>



...iw n.k imyw pwnt 3h3h n.k t3-ntr n mrwt=k hn [...] =k [...] hry qmyt r shb r3-pr.k m styw hbw nhwt sntr hr df [d ff]... °ntyw hnm n j3dt.k j3bh m fnd=k

...Came to you those who were in Punt. The Land of god was grateful to you in devoting you. [...] sail to you [...], carrying the gum to celebrate your temple with odoriferous feasts. Frankincense trees are harvested ... incense. A fragrance of joy is in your nose.

This passage of the hymn referred to a successful return of an expedition sent to Punt, could be that mentioned in the two enigmatic inscriptions carrying with them the incense and the gum necessary to achieve celebrating feasts of the State god Amun.

Moreover, Punt is mentioned on the rear and the base of a statue of the King associated with Princess Bint-Anath discovered in the sanctuary of Hathor at Serabit el-Khadim.<sup>44</sup>

This mention is unexpectedly in the epithet of god Thoth.



*dhwtj nb pwnt*

Thoth, Lord of Punt.<sup>46</sup>



*°nh nsw bity hk3 pdwt 9 nb t3wy wsr-m3°t-rc-stp-n-rc s3 rc nb h°w rc-ms-sw-mry-immn di cnh mry dhwtj nb pwnt*

Live the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, ruler of the Nine Bows, Lord of Both Lands Usimare Setepenre, Son of Re, Lord of Crowns, Ramses Meryamen, given life and beloved of Thoth, Lord of Punt.<sup>48</sup>

K.A. Kitchen described Thoth's epithet as a less-usual role for the god of learning and writing.<sup>49</sup> Otherwise, he dated the statue at about Year 34, at the time where Princess Bint-Anath bears the title *hmt wrt nsw*, in parallel with its original *s3t-nsw* title.<sup>50</sup>

D. Meeks who located Punt in Arabia propose a connection between the Nile Valley and Punt via Sinai.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, P. Tallet believes that the present monuments contemporary to Ramses II mentioning Thot, Lord of Punt in Sinai could be significant in the light of the land road to Punt located in Arabia via Sinai.<sup>52</sup>

However, I discussed the problem of the location of Punt and its access in details in another article. Briefly, its African emplacement at least during the Pharaonic period based on the sources from the Old Kingdom to the Late period is now beyond any doubt. The presence of monuments referring to Punt and its products in Sinai has not any significance with its location nor the way to arrive but the relation here could be goddess Hathor, Lady of the Turquoise and Lady of Punt in the same time, with the same features.

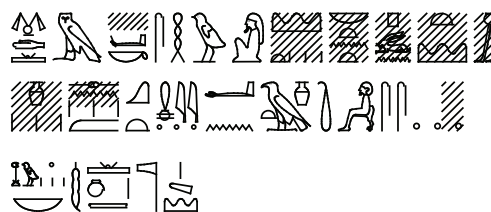
In conclusion, an official expedition had been sent to Land of Punt during the reign of King Ramses II seeking its exotic products especially the incense needed for funeral and religious practices. The two enigmatic inscriptions of Amara West and Aksha provide brief information about products of Punt. The traces of this intervention can be found on other official documentation such as Temple of the King in Abydos, the hymn of Amun and in the sanctuary of Hathor in Serabit el-Khadim. No other details about the way or the location of this territory and the emplacement of the inscription in Nubian temples, as well as its position above the Asiatic toponyms has no indication concerning Punt location nor its access.

## Notes

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1 For the reign of Seti I, we have no precise documents on relations between Egypt and the Land of Punt. Otherwise some official figures include some indications. For example, Punt is mentioned on the scene of triumph, on the wall of the great hypostyle hall of the Temple of Amun-Re at Karnak, where the King is

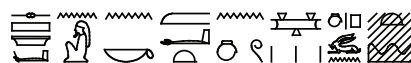
represented. Punt appeared also in the speech of the god Amun to the King (PM VII, 392; BAR, III, §116; KRI, I, 26, no. 10, b, l. 10-11; RITA, I, 21-22, no. 10, b, l. 10-11).



*dmd(.i) mk shw [h3swt nbwt nt pwnt inw].sn m km3yt  
‘ntyw tišps hw nbw ndm(w) nw t3-ntj.*

(I) gathered the hill [Land of Punt and its tribute] of gum, incense, myrrh and spices (?), and all sweet herbs of god's Land

Punt is also mentioned in the side of the room (PM VII, 392; BAR, III, § 155; KRI I, 30, no. 11, b, l. 12-3; RITA I, 25, no. 11, b, l. 12-3), especially in the speech of god Amun to the King.





*sš.n.i n.k mtnw nw pwnt*

I opened for you the Roads of Punt

The famous incense of Punt (*‘ntyw im nw pwnt*) is mentioned on the stele of Nauri among the products stored in the Treasury (KRI I, 48, l.11.).

- 2 A.D. Rodrigo, 'An Enigmatic Inscription at Aksha', *JSSEA* 15, 2 (1985), 68-71.
- 3 A.H. Sayce, Gleanings from the Land of Egypt, *Rec. Trav.* XVIII, 3-4 (1895), 163-4.
- 4 KRI II, 211.
- 5 Rodrigo, *JSSEA* 15, 2, 68-71; KRI II, 211, 1.
- 6 The cryptic value of the bee sign is the sign for 'r'.
- 7 Punt was inscribed with determinative of the land instead of the hill country usually used with this toponym.
- 8 The Neith sign is the cryptic value for the sign 'n', see, E. Drioton, 'Recueil de cryptographie monumentale', *ASAE* 40 (1940), 419.
- 9 The sign (Gardiner sign list 42) can be restored in comparison with its complete orthography in Amara West text, see below.
- 10 This word is written with cryptic value of the flesh sign to be read as 'i', the standing man and woman as the cryptic value for the sign 'm'.

- 11 The boat sign used as an abbreviated form for ‘*ḥw*’.
- 12 The man (Gardiner sign list A9) used as the abbreviated form for *f3i*.
- 13 The sign for *ḥbs* has the cryptic value *mn* although E. Drioton gave it the value of *mn*.
- 14 Egyptian texts named the products of this territory by ‘the marvels of Punt’ since the Middle Kingdom texts discovered in Wadi Gawasis, namely the text of the royal scribe Djedy (Amenemhat IV reign) passing by the bas-relief of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari.
- 15 PM VII, 161, 24-7.
- 16 *KRI* II, 215-6, § 55.S.
- 17 The beginning of this phraseology was written in normal orthography, which is considered, by E. Drioton, as frequent procedure in the enigmatic texts (‘La cryptographie du Papyrus Salt 825’, *ASAE* 41 (1942), 112).
- 18 Egyptian texts named the products of this territory by ‘the wonders of Punt’ since the Middle Kingdom texts discovered in Wadi Gawasis, namely the text of the royal scribe Djedy (Amenemhat IV reign) was written on a wooden box. (El-Sayed Mahfouz, ‘The Maritime Expeditions of Wadi Gawasis in the Twelfth Dynasty’, *Abgadiyat* 6 (2011), 1267-) Otherwise, it looks interesting to notice that Punt was inscribed with the determinative of the land instead of that of foreign land.
- 19 The bilateral sign used here is different from the usual one, but anyway the toponym of Punt is attested with this orthography in some of the texts of Old Kingdom.
- 20 This sign could have a cryptic value for *m*.
- 21 Name of another Puntite product.
- 22 K. Kitchen copied here  but in the footnote he proposed the possibility of . This last one looks more logical in comparison with its parallel in the text of Aksha. This group can be transliterated as ‘*d*’ or ‘*nd*’ indicated in the *Wörterbuch* as unguent or perfume (I 237).
- 23 *RITANC* II, 127-8.
- 24 Could be a perfumed substance.
- 25 *irtyw*: according to J.R. Harris, it is a pigment of purplish-blue color mentioned in several medical texts, so could be employed in medical uses (J.R. Harris, *Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals*, Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Institut für Orientforschung, Veröffentlichung (Berlin, 1961), 229).
- 26 Other kinds of Puntite products.
- 27 Cf. the translation of K. Kitchen: ... His army brings/ conveys the marvels of Punt - There came the Puntites to pre[sent] abundant [tribute(?)] Their children carried ...s ...s, making the ... without limit(?) ... marvels of Punt (in) all the storehouses, and the treasures from the outer Ocean through his plans, willingly(?), without a(ny) expedition convoying it, in adoration, seeking(?) his gift [of the breath of life], - (even) the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Usimare-Setepenre who has assembled these (things) by the power of Amun-Re, Lord of the gods... *m.f.* hearing (?) ... he has revealed his secrets(?) in [...] achiev[ing] vi[ctory] and val[our] over all hill countries and [all] plains (...). (*RITA* II, 74).
- 28 *Urk* IV, 329, l. 10.
- 29 R. Hannig, *Die Sprache der Pharaonen, Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch (2800-950 v. Chr.)* (Mainz, 2006), p. 355, no. 12880.
- 30 *Wb* I, 206; Hannig, *Die Sprache der Pharaonen*, 160, no. 5504.
- 31 Hannig, *Die Sprache der Pharaonen*, 119, no. 3987 (Produkt aus Punt).
- 32 *Wb* I, 135, 13.
- 33 *Wb* I, 116, 8-9; Hannig, *Die Sprache der Pharaonen*, 106.
- 34 *Wb* I, 208; cf. Hannig, *Die Sprache der Pharaonen*, 160, no. 5507.
- 35 These products can be compared with the list mentioned in Hatshepsut’s bas-relief.
- 36 D. Meeks, ‘Locating Punt’, in: D. O’Connor and S. Quirke (eds.), *Mysterious Lands, Encounters with Ancient Egypt* 5 (London, 2003), 53-80; D. Meeks, ‘Coptos et les chemins de Pount’, dans *Autour de Coptos, Actes du colloque organisé au musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon (17-18 mars 2000)*, *Topoi*, supplément 3 (2002), 296.
- 37 PM VI, 39, 71-4: S. El-Sabban, *Temple Festival Calendars of Ancient Egypt* (Liverpool 1999), Chapter 4.
- 38 *KRI* II, 514, § 204, l. 15.
- 39 *RITA* II, 330, 514:15.
- 40 T. el Awady, ‘King Sahura with the Precious Trees from Punt: A unique scene’, in M. Barta (ed.), *The Old Kingdom Art and Archaeology: Proceedings of the Conference held in Prague, 31 May - 4 June 2004* (Prague, 2006), 37-44.
- 41 El-S. Mahfouz, *La politique des souverains du Nouvel Empire au désert oriental* (PhD Diss., Université de Lille, 2002), 22-31.
- 42 A.H. Gardiner, ‘Hymns to Amun from a Leiden Papyrus’, *ZAS* 42 (1905), 14-18.

- 43 A term designating 'ships' could be restored.
- 44 PM, VII, 357 (BM 697): W.F. Petrie, *Researches in Sinai* (London, 1906), 128, Fig. 136-7; A.H. Gardiner, T. Peet and J. Černy, *Inscriptions of Sinai* (Oxford 1952), n° 263, pl. 72; A.H. Gardiner, T. Peet and J. Černy, *Inscriptions of Sinai* (Oxford, 1955), n° 263, p. 181.
- 45 *KRI* II, 401-402, § 149.
- 46 *RITA* II, 228-9, § 149.
- 47 *KRI* II, 401-402, § 149.
- 48 *RITA* II, 228-9, § 149.
- 49 *RITANC* II: 263, n° 149.
- 50 *RITANC* II: 263, n° 149.
- 51 Meeks, dans *Autour de Coptos, Actes du colloque organisé au musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon*, 296.
- 52 P. Tallet, 'Deux notes sur les expéditions au pays de Pount', *RdE* 64 (2013), 203, note 40.