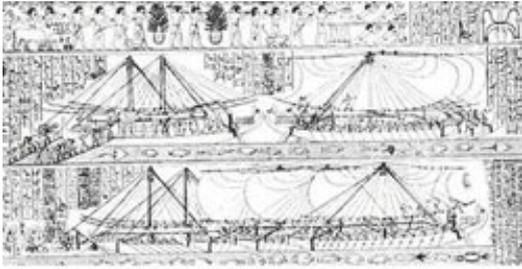


The Land of Punt is Eritrea (part II)

Written by Magazine theme by StudioPress



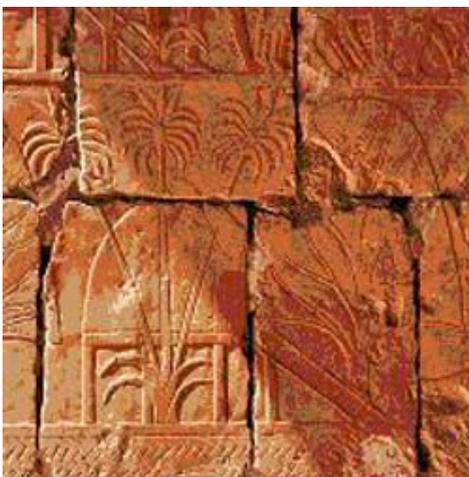
The New Egyptian Kingdom, founded around 1600 BC, witnessed many direct sailings from Egypt to Punt. By far the best known expedition to the latter region was dispatched by Queen Hatshepsut (1501-1470 BC), whose achievements are recorded in inscriptions and pictorials found on the walls of her famous temple of Dair El-Bahri at Thebes in southern Egypt.

"As beautiful in execution as they are important in content" they constitute veritable archives in stone, and provide by far the most detailed source for the study of Punt foreign trade ever produced. This expedition was, however, far from unique. The modern Swedish historian Saveo Soderberg observes that 'many, or ever perhaps most' of the Pharaohs dispatched fleets to Punt, though almost every ruler tried to claim that was the first to do so."

Queen Hatshepsut, after completing her expedition to Punt stated that

"I have given to thee all lands and all countries, wherein thy heart is glad. I have given to thee all Punt as far as the lands of God's Land I have led thy army on water and on land to explore the waters of inaccessible channels, and I have reached the myrrh-terraces (Punt). It is a glorious region of God's land; it is indeed my place of delight."

Upon Hatshepsut's arrival to Punt, her Egyptian troops and commander were greeted by the chief of Punt called Parehu, along beside him was his wife, Aty, their two sons and daughter. Behind them is their town; the houses are built on piles and entered by ladders, while palms growing beside them overshadow them. Aty's Obesity has been much speculated upon; as their daughter shows much the same tendency.



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With the arrival of Queen Hatshepsut troops, the chief and his wife, quoted on Hatshepsut's mortuary temple, stated: "How have you arrived at this land unknown to the men of Egypt? Have you come down from the roads of the Heavens? Or have you navigated the sea of Ta-nuter? You must have followed the path of the sun. As for the King of Egypt, there is no road which is inaccessible to His Majesty; we live by the breath he grants to us."

The people of Punt were also Sea loving people. Within half a century of Hapshetsut's great expedition, the people of Punt themselves were undertaking commercial voyages to Egypt as painted in Egyptian officials' tombs in Thebes.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the relief, however, is the representation of two small Punt sailing vessels. Their presence, as the archaeologist N. de Garis Davies has argued, reveals for the first time that the people of Punt were themselves making long sea journeys. Discussing these voyages he comments that the commerce revealed in Hatshepsut's inscriptions seems to have been continued, in part at least, by Punt vessels which brought their flight to an Egyptian port, probably near Koseir, where the Egyptians met them and bartered their manufactures for such produce as the Punt had been able to transport.

The Precise character of the Punt vessels unfortunately cannot be established from the relief. Their hulls, Davies remarks, are depicted as "bolster-like shapes, rounded at both ends, and, like the background, colored pink. Their shape, color and absence of the marking seem to conclude that it constitutes a heavy wooden structure, which seems to protect the vessels, not only from the storms and defy coral reefs, but also to hold firm the high mast and steering gear of such a vessel.

Though the Egyptian inscriptions are almost exclusively concerned with Pharaonic activities there are indications that the Punts, within half a century of Hapshepsut's great expedition, were themselves undertaking commercial voyages to Egypt. Testimony of this is found in an Egyptian official's tomb at Thebes, dating from the reign of King Amenhotep II (1447-1420 BC). It contains a relief depicting the arrival of two chiefs of Punt, bringing supplies from their country, including gold, incense, ebony, branches of trees, ostrich feathers and eggs, skins, antelopes and oxen. There are also pictures of two Punt vessels, which are smaller than those of the Pharaohs, were evidently seaworthy. Another tomb of the period depicts the arrival of other goods from Punt, among them fragrant gum, skins of various animals, and two wild animals.

One of the last recorded Pharaonic expeditions to punt was dispatched by Ramses III (1198-1167 BC) of the Twentieth Dynasty. An inscription of his reign describes "Egyptian vessels returning with Punt products, among them many 'strange goods', 'plentiful myrrh', and a number of Punts."

The Appearance of Punts

Punts like all people of ancient kingdoms had a wide ranging looks and appearances. We can clearly see what appears to be a Punt woman walking out of her home, who's dressed in a long red dress with a dark skinned man and an animal that looks like a dog in many of the pictorials in Egypt and Punt. Rare images of Punts like this makes a strong case that the Punts were

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undoubtedly African, as the following quotes will illustrate:

"Numerous representations of Nubians, Punts and Libyans occur in Egyptian art, but only in the Nubian case can they be cross-checked against an indigenous archaeology. Such representations become standardized and stereotypical, and it is never certain when they represent contemporary reality. However, significant changes in representation are introduced over time and, at least initially, they might be thought to have been based on direct and from Egyptians-in skin color, treatment of the hair (and sometimes beard), and reddish skins, and costume and ornamentation. Punts and Egyptian males are assigned similarly reddish skins, but Nubians typically have darker ones, and Libyans at most periods have light colored, yellowish skin. Initially, Nubians and Punts may have been shown as fairly similar in appearance and dress (short linen kilts), but by ca. 1400 BC they are distinctly different."

By 2000 BC Nubians wore cloths of leather loin, sometimes decorated with beadwork patterns attested in contemporary Nubian graves as well. In the New Kingdom (1593-1075 BC) many continued to dress similarly, but others wore linen kilts or even fully representative Egyptian dresses; in both cases, skin colors and hair treatment remain distinctively Nubian. During those periods, Punts display hairstyles different from the Nubian: most were long hair, with a head band and fillet; other Punt hair style is cap-like and perhaps a mark of elite status. Short linen kilts appear typical, and some possibly elite, wore shirts as well.

The kilt-like dressing style of the people of Punt is also seen in some of Eritrea's modern ethnic group's traditional hair wear.

Land of Punt housing



The unusual form of housing applied in the land of Punt was clearly the source of much interest to the ancient Egyptian artists who decorated the southern wall of the second portico of the mortuary temple of Queen Hatshepsut: no less than seven individual dwellings, of essentially the same type, are shown. These houses, so far as we can tell, seem to have been rounded huts covered with an undulating pointed thatched roof and (their most interesting feature) raised on stilts or piles above ground level, so that they could be entered only by climbing the ladders

depicted learning against them, although no figures are seen in that activity. The logical, and indeed general, explanation is that the inhabitants lived on the 'upper floor' above ground level, the piles protecting them from marauding wild animals or other natural phenomena."

Ancient Egyptian artifacts in Eritrea

According to professor Kjetil Tronvoll, most of present day Eritrea was comprised of the ancient Kingdom of Punt, whose rulers dominated the area for a thousand years until about 1,000 BC. In this respect, this particular area one of Sub-Saharan Africa's oldest traditions of state-formations can be found. But was there any evidence of ancient Egyptian artifacts located in Eritrea? Despite the fact that Eritrea has yet to be properly excavated, there are indeed many locations demonstrating ancient Egyptian artifacts, proving the Eritrean region was indeed in contact with them.

At Agordat in the middle Barka valley (Eritrea), an Egyptian-style, ceramic ear-plug and some stones which imitate bronze prototypes of the 17th-18th Dynasties have been excavated in sites dating to the mid-second millennium BC. On the Eritrean coast at Adulis, two fragments of glass vessels typical of the New Kingdom have been found in a level dating to the late second millennium BC."