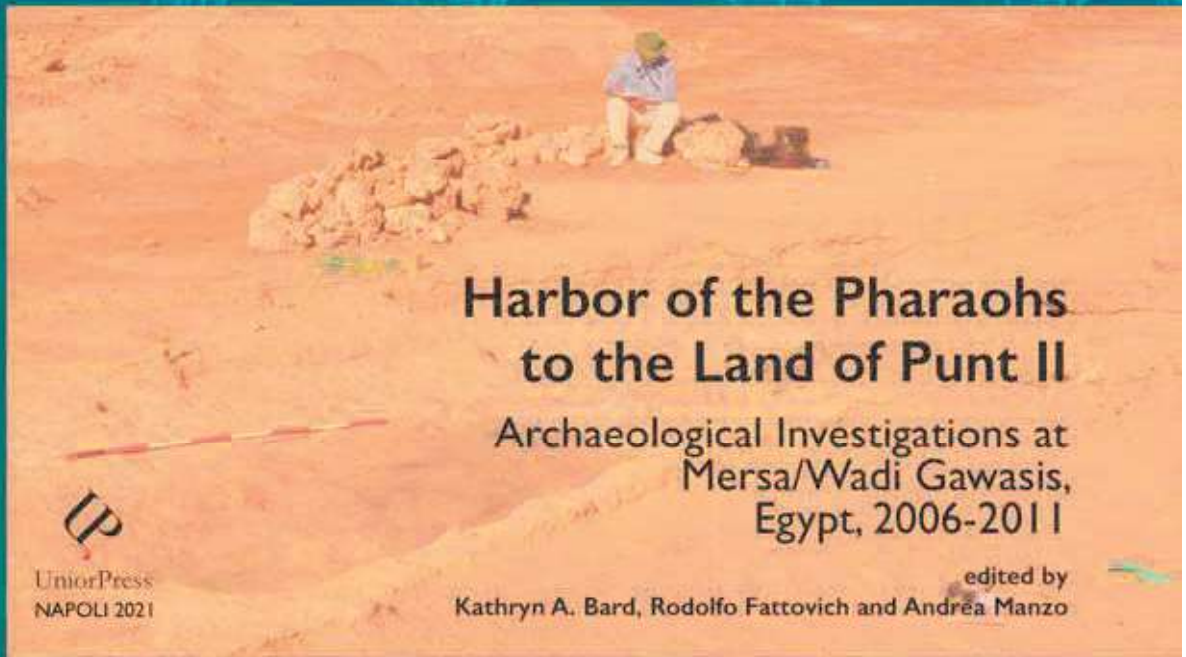




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## Harbor of the Pharaohs to the Land of Punt II

Archaeological Investigations at  
Mersa/Wadi Gawasis,  
Egypt, 2006-2011



UmorPress  
NAPOLI 2021

edited by  
Kathryn A. Bard, Rodolfo Fattovich and Andrea Manzo







Rodolfo Fattovich (1945-2018)

*“Those having torches will pass them on to others” (Plato)*



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DIPARTIMENTO ASIA AFRICA  
E MEDITERRANEO

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with several small hearths and one large hearth concentrated in the shelter area, and wood debris associated with shells, a few rope fragments and animal bones scattered throughout the cave area. The most significant activity recorded during this phase involved the burning of ship timber parts. The assemblage of timbers placed on the floor characterizes an earlier phase of occupation. Activities recorded during this phase included the reworking of ship timbers, and food processing. This phase was only partially investigated because of the collapsed rocks lying on top of the timbers.

The excavated evidence suggests that Cave 3 was occupied at least twice during different periods, followed by a phase of abandonment during which a deposit of windblown sand formed and portions of the cave roof subsequently collapsed.

### *3.2.f Excavations, western terrace slope, Cave 8*

ANDREA MANZO

Cave 8 consisted of a single chamber, ca. 5 m × 6 m in area discovered in the 2009-2010 field season (Figure 71). The chamber has a rectangular shape, with a SW-NE axis and a 0.8 m wide entrance on the SW side. The floor consisted of the horizontally carved fossil coral rock into which the chamber was excavated, while the roof consisted of a curved vault. The maximum height inside is ca. 1.7 m.

A wall of sandstone blocks was constructed on the southwestern side of the cave entrance. The edges of three of these blocks in the western part of the wall could be clearly distinguished, while the eastern part was completely covered by salt incrustation. Some of these blocks may have been anchors or parts of anchors. Since this wall consisted of sandstone blocks, the rectangular cave chamber was probably excavated in the coral terrace starting at a natural rock shelter, whose shape was carved into a rectangular area, while its opening was reinforced to prevent bedrock collapse. The wall of sandstone blocks was also built to delimit the entrance to the cave in order to protect the materials inside, provide privacy and guarantee a more controlled access to the inner space.

The rock façade of the terrace wall at the entrance to Cave 8 seems to have been smoothed, as it is very straight, and a kind of step may have been created immediately outside the original rock shelter. A rectangular sandstone block was lying vertically on this step, perpendicular to the

edge of the terrace wall and west of the entrance to the cave. This block may have been intended to protect the entrance from the prevailing winds and the transported sand. Two holes ca. 0.2 m in diameter were carved symmetrically to the east and west of the entrance in the vertical terrace wall, possibly for a canopy (of perishable materials), which would have shaded and protected the area immediately outside the cave. The post-holes and the mud-brick walls discovered in the area outside of the cave may also have been intended to sustain the horizontal beams of this canopy.

A thick salt incrustation had sealed the entrance of the cave and covered part of the collapsed and dismantled mud-brick wall, which had been built at the entrance after one of the last phases of use. After excavating the mud-brick remains, it became clear that the mud-brick wall had been broken into sometime in antiquity. This was demonstrated by the fact that while excavating the sediments covering the entrance there was no evidence of any recent human activity. The fill of the cave also looked quite undisturbed from recent disturbances. After the partial dismantling of the mud-brick wall, the cave may have been used again and was left open, allowing windblown sand to fill the cave. The inner space of the cave was covered by a mound of wind-blown sand that was higher close to the entrance than in the inner part of the cave.

After consolidating the cave ceiling close to the entrance with wooden frames and beams, a 5 m × 1 m excavation unit consisting of an east-west row of 1 m × 1 m squares was delimited inside Cave 8 to find the original floor and to collect artifacts which could give insights into its use and chronology. This excavation unit was named WG 67. The poor preservation of the ceiling near the cave entrance, which was clearly demonstrated by large pieces of collapsed bedrock from the ceiling lying on the sand stratum which filled the cave, prevented extending the excavations inside the whole cave.

Unfortunately, the only Stratigraphic Unit which was excavated in WG 67 before finding the surface of the original floor of the cave, a thick sediment stratum of soft Aeolian sand ca. 20-40 cm. thick, resulted in a paucity of finds. Only a few potsherds were collected, mainly in the squares close to the walls of the cave. These included sherds of an atypical brownish-grey handled pitcher found along the western edge of the



excavation unit in the northwestern corner of the cave. A fragment of ostrich eggshell was also found.

According to Duncan FitzGerald, large-grained sand was intentionally brought into Cave 8 to make a smooth floor in the excavated cobble layer. The windblown sand at the entrance of the cave is much finer grained, and thus the large-grained sand on the cave floor could not have been carried there by the wind.

### *3.2.g Excavations, southern terrace slope and harbor area*

#### *Excavations, Southern terrace slope, WG 37, WG 38, WG 42*

TRACY SPURRIER WITH THE COLLABORATION OF ILARIA INCORDINO AND GWENDALINE PLISSON

Excavation of the southern slope of the terrace into the wadi consisted of excavation units WG 37, WG 38 and WG 42. Eight squares were opened during the 2006-2007 field season along a N-S transect, 20 m long, beginning at the base of the slope and finishing to the south where the slope merges with the wadi surface in order to acquire information from the most extreme sides of the area in terms of elevation. The northern edge of WG 38 was approximately 140 cm higher than the southern edge of WG 37. This area had not been fully excavated in the past, although a few test trenches had been dug (one on the slope and one into the wadi). The purpose of these excavations was to determine the ancient use of this area.

The southern slope of the terrace into the wadi was thought to be the ancient harbor area. All trenches were excavated as deeply as possible. In every square, a deposit consistent with beach materials was reached. The composition matched the modern beach deposits found along the Red Sea Coast. In WG 37, beach rock and coral were reached and excavations could go no further. In WG 38, A1, 25 cm was excavated into the "beach" layer and then a geological auger continued for another 60 cm before encountering the water table and rock. In some of the squares, WG 38, A1 and B1, for example, we found Middle Kingdom pottery in the beach layer, suggesting that this was the level of the beach during that time period. In the upper layers of the trenches, much re-worked pottery, which had been moved around and worked by wind, water, and gravity over the years, was found. As the excavations continued farther south, the potsherds became larger. The geologists opened



Figure 71. Cave 8, general map.