

The rise and development
of the solar cult and architecture
in Ancient Egypt

Edited by
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Cover illustration: Ra-Horakhty sitting on the throne, representation on the inner surface of the lower part of the outer sarcophagus, shaft tomb of Iufaa, Abusir, Saite-Persian Period.
Photo Martin Frouz, Archives of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague

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Index

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <i>Miroslav Bárta</i> | |
| Preface | VII |
| <i>Massimiliano Nuzzolo – Jaromír Krejčí</i> | |
| Introduction | 1 |
| <i>Ayman Ashmawy – Dietrich Raue</i> | |
| Heliopolis in the Old Kingdom | 5 |
| <i>Marie Peterková Hlouchová</i> | |
| Significance of Shu for the king's afterlife according to the Pyramid Texts | 33 |
| <i>Katarína Arias</i> | |
| Beer for the king, beer for the sun god | 55 |
| <i>Massimiliano Nuzzolo – Jaromír Krejčí – Mohamed Osman – Kathryn E. Piquette</i> | |
| Royal annals of ancient Egypt. Recent investigations on the Palermo Stone and its associated fragments | 71 |
| <i>Richard Bussmann</i> | |
| The <i>ka</i> -chapel of Pepy I in Elephantine | 103 |
| <i>Antonio J. Morales</i> | |
| Ascension texts in transmission: reaching the skies from Unas to Pedamenopet .. | 117 |
| <i>Adela Oppenheim</i> | |
| The solar cult in the pyramid complex of Senusret III at Dahshur: an overview | 133 |
| <i>Martina Bardoňová – Mohamed Ismail Khaled</i> | |
| Vessels for the lion goddess. Contextualizing the New Kingdom royal name faience from Central Abusir | 159 |
| <i>Rosanna Pirelli</i> | |
| Sahura's and Hatshepsut's Punt reliefs in comparison | 181 |
| <i>Martin Pehal</i> | |
| New Kingdom royal succession strategies and their possible Old Kingdom antecedents | 199 |
| <i>Nenad Marković</i> | |
| “Apis is Ptah, Apis is Ra, Apis is Horus, son of Isis”: the solar aspect of the divine Apis bull and the royal ideology of the Late Period (664–332 BCE) | 235 |

Sahura's and Hatshepsut's Punt reliefs in comparison

Rosanna Pirelli (University of Naples, l'Orientale)

Abstract

The discovery of some new blocks from the causeway of Sahura's pyramid at Abusir (1994–2004) and their publication (El-Awady 2009) have already given a fundamental contribution to Egyptology. They made it possible both to revise the history of the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty, with a particular focus on the question of royal kinship, and to update our knowledge on the figurative repertoires of Old Kingdom royal temples. Among the bas-reliefs, those referring to the expedition to the land of Punt¹ have been the object of great interest among scholars, as they confirm a historical datum previously known only from the Annals of the Palermo Stone. Obviously, this exotic and demanding journey also recalled the well-known scenes from the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari, so that some studies have already been published and different opinions expressed on Hatshepsut's "debts" towards earlier figurative programs, although El-Awady himself was extremely cautious in dealing with this.² In one of my articles of some years ago, I suggested that we should not read the Punt reliefs solely as a realistic representation of that land and of the events that occurred, but analyze the complex of scenes within the entire figurative and textual program of the temple. The present paper intends to return to those considerations and compare the two groups of scenes in order to discuss and verify *whether, to what extent and why* part of Hatshepsut's figurative program (and not only the "Punt scenes") might have been, in some way, borrowed from Sahura's bas-reliefs.

Keywords: Punt Expedition, Hatshepsut's Bas-Reliefs, Sahura's Bas-Reliefs, Royal Ideology, Models from the Past

1 The name of Punt was not found in the inscriptions commenting the scenes, but many iconographical elements support this identification. The subject however is not among the purposes of this paper, where I would like to draw attention to the evident parallels between the figurative program of the temple of Hatshepsut and that of the complex of Sahura's pyramid. For this reason, I will leave aside some of the most debated themes, including the identification of uncertain products, for which the Egyptian terms will be mentioned with a transcription from the hieroglyphic form, while the localization of Punt will be just alluded to in the Excursus on the products from Punt (see below).

2 During a lecture by Tarek El-Awady in 2011, organized by myself in Cairo, where I was responsible for the Italian Archaeological Centre, I tried to encourage a discussion between the speaker and the Director of the Polish Mission at Deir el-Bahari, Zbigniew E. Szafranski, on this subject, but the two scholars did not rise to the challenge.

Back to the Punt reliefs

The literature on Punt and on its localization has been increasing steadily since the discovery and first publication of these scenes from the temple of Hatshepsut in Deir el-Bahari (Mariette 1877; Herzog 1968).³ Moreover, in the past decades, a new series of papers (O'Connor and Quirke 2003) and monographs on this subject (Espinel 2011; Breyer 2016) have appeared, while new archaeological investigations at El-Kab (Davies 2003), Abusir (El-Awady 2009) and Mersa/Wadi Gawasis (Bard and Fattovich 2007; Bard and Fattovich 2018)⁴ have stimulated further interest in that land and the Punt reliefs both from Deir el-Bahari and from Abusir (Ćwiek 2014: 61–93; Breyer 2014: 47–91).

In the conclusions of a rather earlier article of mine (Pirelli 1993: 383–390), I suggested that we should not read Hatshepsut's Punt reliefs as a completely realistic representation of that land and of the events that occurred, but rather insert and contextualize the complex of scenes within the whole figurative and textual program of the temple.

Considering the very recent contributions noted above, I find it necessary and stimulating to go back to this complex of reliefs, to again analyze some details of the sequence of scenes there represented and compare them with the scenes from the causeway of Sakhura's pyramid, in order to verify whether my previous statements can be still maintained and finally whether some new observations can be added to the topic.⁵

Intrinsic nature of the Punt reliefs

Although the Punt reliefs are fairly well known, a synthetic report on their content and a diagram of the arrangement of the scenes are necessary to give a clearer context to the observations that I present in the following paragraphs (fig. 1).

The scenes are incised on the walls of the south wing of the Middle Colonnade at Deir el-Bahari (Naville 1898: pls. LXIX–LXXXVI) and represent the expedition that, according to the texts there engraved, Hatshepsut sent to the land of Punt in the ninth year of her reign.⁶ The narrative generally develops from south to north, except for the arrival of the Egyptian expedition at Punt, placed on the southern edge of the west wall, with

3 For a fairly complete bibliography on this topic, see the recent papers mentioned below.

4 The papers of the members of the Italian-American mission at Wadi/Mersa Gawasis are very numerous and will be mentioned individually only when they concern specific aspects of the investigations. For the general results, reference will be made to the two monographs of 2007 and 2018.

5 In 2015, I presented a communication on this subject at the International Conference *Flora Trade between Egypt and Africa in Antiquity*, held at the University of Naples, l'Orientale (13 April 2015), but previous engagements prevented me from being in time to publish it in the proceedings. On that date, however, I had not yet had the opportunity to read the articles by Ćwiek (2014) and Breyer (2014). I here take the opportunity to thank Diego Espinel and Massimiliano Nuzzolo, who drew my attention to those studies. I immediately found it interesting that we had reached similar opinions on several aspects of the Punt reliefs, even while tackling the question from different perspectives (see below, § Discussion).

6 On the possible chronology of the expedition, see Ratić 1979: 140.

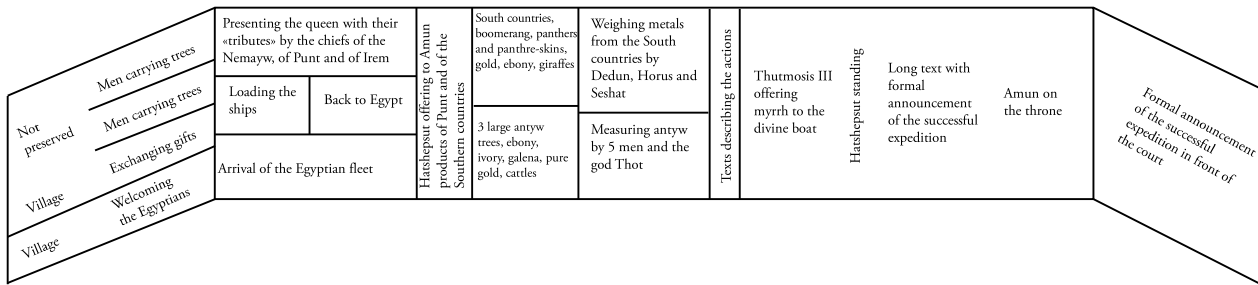


Fig. 1. Diagram of the content of the Punt reliefs. (Drawing: R. Pirelli)

the prows of the ships oriented towards the south. The reason for this choice is certainly twofold: on the one side, to leave the whole south wall saved for the representation of the land of Punt and, secondly, to indicate the geographical coordinates of the journey.

South wall

The lower register shows the exotic village (eastern half) and the Puntites with their sovereigns (Parehu and his wife) welcoming the Egyptians (western half);

- 1) On the second register, the eastern half is still occupied by the representation of the village, while, on the west side, Puntites and Egyptians are shown exchanging gifts;
- 2) The upper registers (3 and 4) show, on the western half, men carrying *ntyw* trees towards the Egyptian ships, while the eastern half is not preserved; however, on this part of the wall, we are certainly licensed to place various activities, whose fragmentary remains are shown in one of the plates of Naville's publication (Naville 1898: LXX).

– Excursus on the products from Punt

I would like to draw the reader's attention, for a while, to four of the fragments published by Naville in plate LXX.

The first one (fig. 2a) shows a man cutting the branch of a tree (there growing) with an adze; the second (fig. 2b) contains a caption to such an image, saying “*šc hbnj r ʕ wrt hr...*” (cutting ebony in great quantity for...); the third (fig. 3a) and fourth (fig. 3b) depict men collecting resin in a basket from living *ntyw* trees. These images point to the fact that here we are not faced with the simple action of delivering products ready made, which might come from different countries,⁷ to the Egyptian expedition, but with the contextual production and preparation of those precious products, then to be loaded on the Egyptian ships.

If we compare this assumption with some of the recent data resulting from the recent excavations of the Italian-American mission to Wadi/Mersa Gawasis (Fattovich 2018), I

⁷ Already in 1993, and again in 2007 (Pirelli 2007: 95, n. 42), I suggested that the land of Punt was an extensive region, and that its products were collected from different countries.

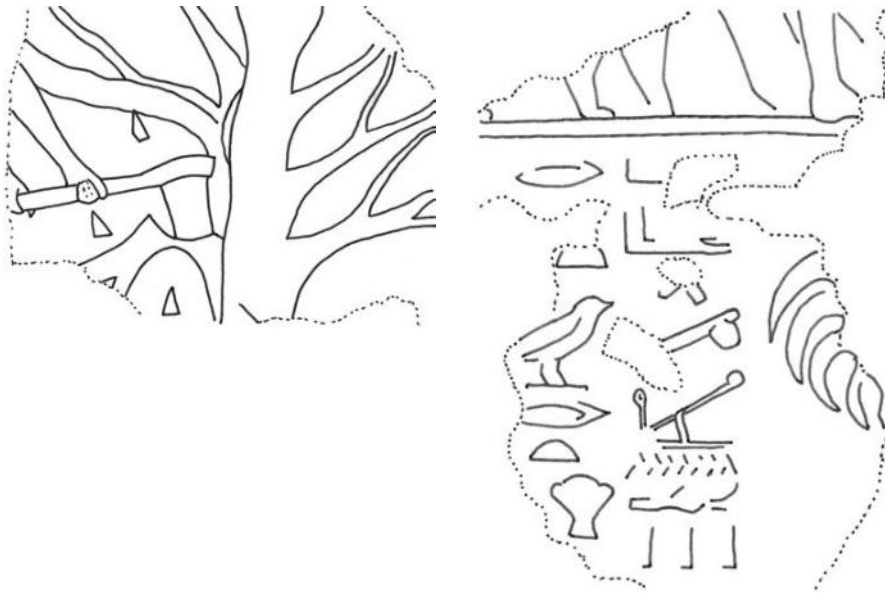


Fig. 2a–b. Cutting ebony from the terraces of Punt (after Naville 1898: LXX)

think we can try to give a contribution to the hypotheses on the provenance of the *ꜥntyw*, and on the placement of the harbour where the Egyptians used to land to trade with Punt.⁸ Significant information comes from the analysis of three categories of materials found at Wadi/Mersa Gawasis: a) pottery; b) obsidian; c) ebony.

- a) The foreign pottery from the southern Red Sea region include potsherds mainly from the Southern Yemen and the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands, and are pertinent to a chronological horizon perfectly consistent with the Egyptian ceramics found on the site (Manzo 2010; Fattovich 2012)
- b) At Wadi/Mersa Gawasis, the archaeologists also collected fragments of obsidian: this volcanic glass is found on both sides of the Southern Red Sea region: Eritrea, Ethiopia and South Arabia (Zarins 1989; Fattovich 2012)
- c) Finally, particularly revealing were the results of the analyses of the ebony: according to Reiner Gerisch, the fragments of the precious wood found so far at Wadi/Mersa Gawasis are samples of *Diospyros* sp. (Gerisch 2007: 183–184); it is widespread in Africa, including the lowlands of Eritrea.

⁸ Although the structures and the documents from the harbour of Mersa Gawasis all belong (with a few exceptions from the late Old Kingdom and of the beginning of the New Kingdom) to the Middle Kingdom, the archaeological evidence (Fattovich 2018) perfectly fits with the information provided by the reliefs of Deir el-Bahari; see further below.

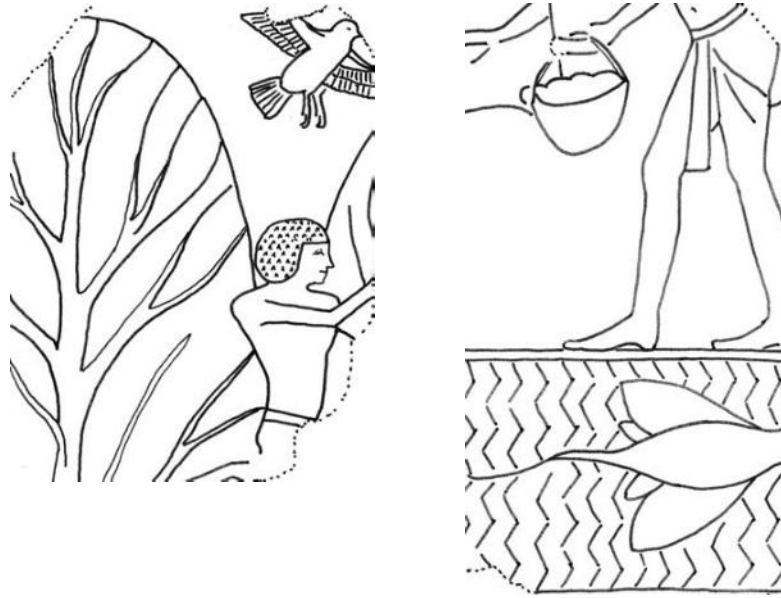


Fig. 3a–b. Collecting resin from the $\epsilon ntyw$ trees (after Naville 1898: LXX)

Based on these data, the lowlands of Eritrea prove to be the only common denominator for ceramics, obsidian and *Diospyris* sp.

It is indeed a very slender thread, which would connect the archaeological evidence of the Middle Kingdom harbour at Wadi/Mersa Gawasis with the figurative/textual documentation of the New Kingdom at Deir el-Bahari. This correspondence is, however, further confirmed by the discovery, in Wadi/Mersa Gawasis, of fragmentary rod-like pieces of ebony, closely matching the images of stacked pieces of the precious wood represented in Deir el-Bahari (Naville 1898: tav. LXX). According to Gerisch (2010: 51–52, 56), the wood was cut in this shape in Punt to be more easily transported to Egypt.

In my opinion, the observed correspondence of the Puntite products represented at Deir el-Bahari with those listed in the texts, represented in private tombs,⁹ and attested in the Middle Kingdom harbour enables us to very cautiously suggest that the $\epsilon ntyw$ and the ebony – imported by the Egyptians – were produced in the same place, somewhere on the coasts of Eritrea, and it was there that these and other exotic products were collected and from where they were sent to Egypt,¹⁰ at least from the Middle to the New Kingdom.¹¹

9 In the tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor and in the tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100), for instance.

10 For a recent overview on this subject see Espinel (2011) with previous bibliography, and Fattovich (2012: 2–3).

11 However, if one accepts the hypothesis here stated, and rather commonly shared by many scholars, that Hatshepsut's reliefs were partly realized on an Old Kingdom model (see below), we could extend this chronological datum to the Old Kingdom.

West wall

As we have previously alluded to, the southern edge of the western wall, shows, at the base register, the arrival of the Egyptian boats in Punt (Naville 1989: LXXII). Continuing with the narrative, the intermediate register shows the loading of the Egyptian ships and their departure from Punt (Naville 1989: LXXIV), while on the upper register, foreign chiefs of various southern countries (*wrw nw Nm3yw*, *wrw nw Trm* and *wrw nw Pwnt*) present tributes to the queen, symbolized by her names/cartouches (Naville 1989: LXXVI).

The next group of scenes (Naville 1989: LXXVII–LXXX) shows the queen (erased) with the *atef* crown followed by her *ka*, presenting the god Amun with the products of the foreign countries, placed on two registers. The products of the southern countries are on the upper register; some of them are being weighed on a scale by the gods Horus and Dedun, and recorded by the goddess Seshat. Those from Punt are on the lower register; they are measured and weighed by men and are recorded by the god Thot (Naville 1989: LXXXI). It may be interesting to have a look at them:

- a) The products of the southern countries include: panthers, cheetahs, one giraffe, bovines, panther skins, wooden clubs, electrum and gold in rings, bows;
- b) The products of Punt include ivory, bovines, ebony, wooden clubs, electrum, galena, and, of course, living *ntyw* trees and stockpiled *ntyw* resin.

The next scene is an offering scene, largely erased and partly restored by Ramses II after the Amarna period. Thutmose III (whose names are partly effaced) presents the divine barge (brought by priests) with two cups of choice *ntyw* (Naville 1989: Pls. LXXXII–LXXXIII).

Following this, the queen is represented standing in front of the god Amun enthroned; between them, a long text describes the success of the expedition: both the figures and the text were completely effaced (Naville 1989: pls. LXXXIII–LXXXIV).

North wall

The final scene is depicted on the north wall: here Hatshepsut is represented sitting in a pavilion, while addressing her courtiers and announcing the success of the expedition (Naville 1989: pls. LXXXV–LXXXVI).

– Arrangement of the Punt reliefs within the architectural and figurative space of the temple

In 1993, I highlighted the central position of the “Punt reliefs” within the architectural and figurative space of the temple (Pirelli 1993: 384; fig. 4 here). The following points were stressed:

- a) The picture occupies the whole complex of walls of the southern wing of the Middle Colonnade. The colonnade is contiguous to the Hathor Shrine (immediately to the South), where important rituals connected to coronation ceremonies were depicted,

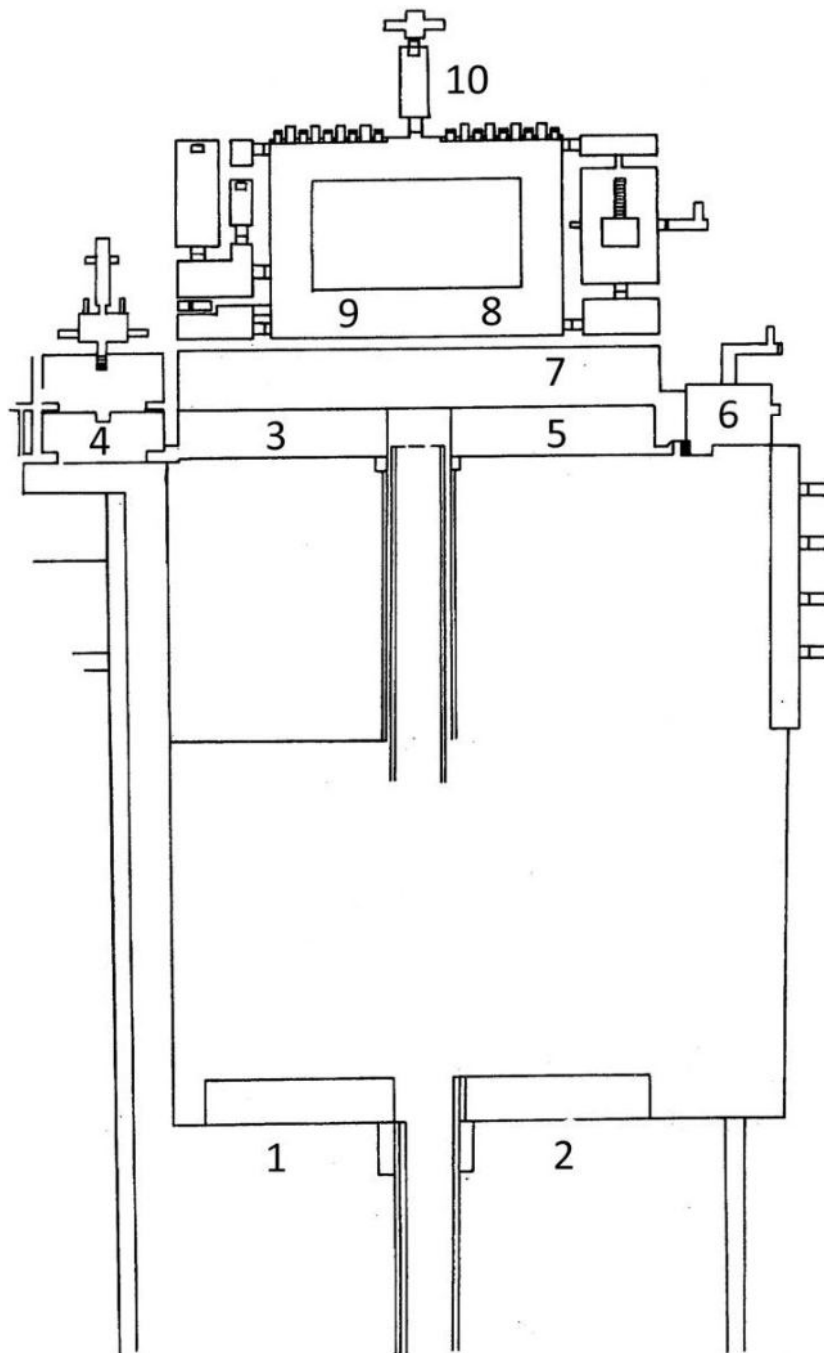


Fig. 4. Plan of Hatshepsut temple with position of the Punt reliefs within the architectural and figurative space of the temple: 1) S: God Dedum and southern enemies; W: transportation and offering of the obelisks; offering a field to Amun-Min; foundation of a pylon; 2) S: King/sphinx stepping on the enemies; W: offering of the 4 calves; procession of kings/ancestors; fishing in the marshes; N: badly preserved; 3) Punt reliefs; 4) Hathor shrine; 5) Theogamy, divine birth, pilgrimage to Upper and Lower Egyptian sanctuaries; 6) Lower Anubis shrine; 7) Coronation; 8) Beautiful Feast of the Valley; 9) Festival of Opet; 10) Sanctuary. (Drawing: R. Pirelli after Arnold 2005: 136, fig. 157)

- namely the dressing of the prince, who is suckled by the cow goddess Hathor and receives the “Menat” from a female deity (Pirelli 1994: 455–463);
- b) It is preceded, on the walls of the southern half of the First Colonnade, by the picture representing the transport of one of the couples of obelisks, which the queen consecrated to Amun in Karnak (Naville 1908: pls. CLIII–CLVI) and,
 - c) on the Northern half of the same colonnade, by a series of scenes (hunting in the reed thicket, the king as a sphinx trampling enemies, the God Dedun leading the Nubian prisoners;) which points to the role of the king as a warrantor of the state (Naville 1908: CLX–CLXIII; Tefnin 1979: 218–244);
 - d) It is opposed, in the same terrace, but on the northern half, to the group of scenes of the theogamy, the divine birth of Hatshepsut and her designation to the throne (Naville 1896: pls. XLVI–LV; Deb III: pls. LVI–LXIV);
 - e) Finally, the two halves of the Middle colonnade are on both sides of a ramp leading to the upper colonnade with its coronation texts and then to the innermost halls of the temple and to its *Sancta Sanctorum*.

As to the texts accompanying the Punt scenes, one should underline the close relation with some texts from the Hathor shrine and from the scenes of the divine birth (Pirelli 1993: 384–385). When comparing their contents, what emerges is a close interrelation - that was intentionally created - among these three sets of scenes and texts, placed at the same level of the temple.¹² One of the most significant aspects is the interdependence between the divine manifestation and the perfumes of Punt, both when dealing with the figure of Amun, or with the goddess Hathor, or even with queen Hatshepsut. Moreover, one can observe the trend to identify god/dess and pharaoh “through a continuous interplays of analogies and oppositions, where the actions and words of the former always find a correspondence in the activities and statements of the latter” (Pirelli 1993: 385).¹³ Observing the temple in its general arrangement, either of the architectural features or of the complex of scenes and texts, it comes out very clearly that a homogeneous plan subtends all its conception: within this frame, the Punt reliefs are certainly not a lesser group of scenes; rather they strongly contribute to build up a solid picture of the queen and of her reign.

The “new” reliefs from Sahura’s causeway in Abusir

The appearance, late in the Fifth Dynasty, of the Pyramid texts remarkably changed the aspect of the funerary chambers of the royal tombs, enabling us to go further in the understanding of the religious thought of the Old Kingdom and the eschatological destiny of the pharaoh. Before that moment however, a major role – for interpreting and explaining most of the ancient royal temples and ideology – was given by Egyptologists to architectural elements and to the repertoires of scenes (with shorter texts) decorating their walls.

¹² A similar opinion was expressed some years later by David O’Connor (2009: 325–337).

¹³ On this subject, see also more recently Susanne Bickel (2014: 21–31 and in particular 23.25).

The solid architecture of the funerary complexes of the Fourth Dynasty, the refined structures of the royal tombs and sun temples of the Fifth Dynasty, along with their figurative programs, distributed among the Valley Temple, the Causeway and the so called "Funerary Temple", were, for this reason, a fundamental source to interpret royal and funerary ideology until the reign of Unas.

Until recent times, however, the fragmentary and partial situation of these repertoires and the lack of a sure context for many of them¹⁴ did not allow scholars to get a precise and exhaustive knowledge of the figurative programs of Old Kingdom temples, notwithstanding important publications in both last and this century (Ćwiek 2014 and bibliography).

The results of the archaeological investigations of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (1994–2004) of the causeway of Sahura's funerary complex at Abusir enormously changed our perception of the royal repertoires and greatly enriched our knowledge of them (El-Awady 2009), giving a fundamental contribution to this topic.

– Intrinsic nature of the Punt reliefs in Abusir

Sahura's expedition to Punt¹⁵ is represented on two of the newly discovered blocks south of the causeway leading from the Valley to the Funerary temple of the pyramid (SC/south/2003/6 and SC/south/2003/7, El-Awady 2009: 155–186, pl. 5–6). On a third block the rewarding of the officials who led the expedition is represented (block SC/south/2002/05 and 05A1, El-Awady 2009: pl. 7, 8).

Block SC/south/2003/7 (El-Awady 2009: pl. 5).

The scene – oriented towards the west – is horizontally divided into two main registers, in turn divided into more subsidiary registers.

On the upper one, king Sahura (oriented west) is represented standing in front of two subsidiary registers; he holds a walking stick in the left hand and an adze in the right, used to cut the cortex of the carvel of one of the two *'ntyw* trees, placed on the upper subsidiary register. On the lower subsidiary register, three officials are bowing in front of the king. Behind (beside) Sahura, two women of lesser proportions are standing: the queen mother, Neferhetepes, and the royal spouse Meretnebty; they are followed, on three more subsidiary registers, by bowing officials. The names and/or titles of the royal figures and of all the officials are precisely recorded.

The lower main register is occupied by four boats (two larger and two smaller) with their prows oriented towards the west, placed on two subsidiary registers. Twenty-four persons (among Egyptians and Puntites) are on each large boat, together with dogs and baboons; fourteen persons are on a small boat with monkeys and dogs.

At the eastern edge of the bottom register, a row of marching soldiers is represented.

¹⁴ Due to different reasons: ancient reuse of the precious stones, modern divestments, neglect by archaeologists of the past of some monumental structures.

¹⁵ See above, note 1.