

El-Sayed Mahfouz

## New Epigraphic Material from Wadi Gawasis

**T**HIS PAPER provides an overview of ancient Egyptian occupation at the Wadi Gawasis site according to the available epigraphic documentation.<sup>1</sup> The sources were gathered progressively over nearly two centuries, from observations made by J.G. Wilkinson and J. Burton to the current research conducted by Rodolfo Fattovich and Kathryn Bard, with significant finds in the late 1970s by Professor Abd el-Moneim M. Sayed. In order to give a clear idea of the contribution of the recent campaigns and of the major reappraisal they have brought about, we have tried to establish an exhaustive catalogue of all the Middle Kingdom expeditions that are now attested on the site, using all the available documentation for each one.

### 1. The expedition in Year 24 of Senusret Ist

The names of Senusret Ist were found carved on a limestone fragment during the first excavation campaign at the site, in 1976. Inscriptions discovered by Professor Abd el-Moneim M. Sayed then confirmed that an expedition was sent to the land of Punt in year 22 of the reign of Senusret Ist. We suggest that there were three different stages to the expedition.

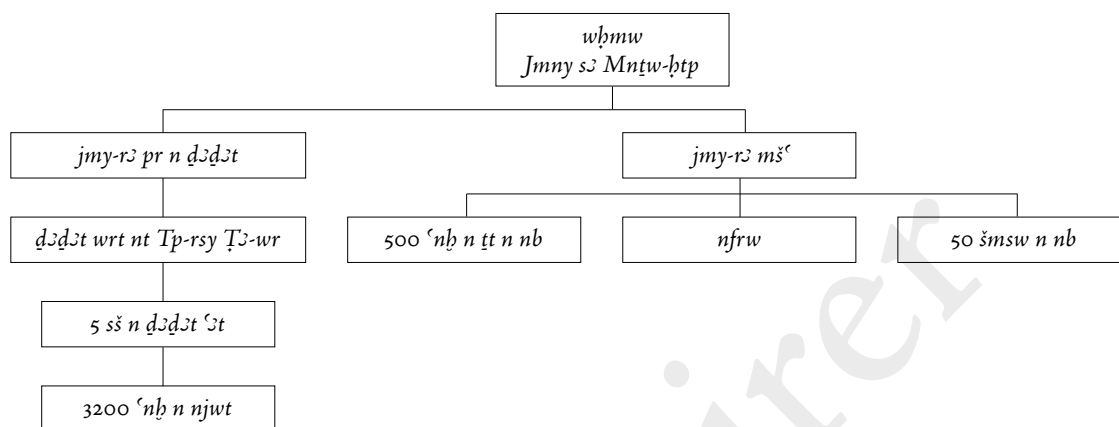
The Stela of Antefoker and Ameny [fig. 1,2], which was discovered at Wadi Gawasis, some 400 metres from the shore, accounts for the first two stages, which are clearly separated in the text by the use of the enclitic particle *sk*. To start with, the king officially instructed his vizier Antefoker to build a fleet at the Koptos dockyards.

The second stage, which is described in the second part of the same stela, was carried out on the Red Sea coast by the herald *Ameny*: it consisted in reassembling the ships that had been dismantled for easier piecemeal transportation across the Eastern Desert from Koptos to the port.<sup>2</sup> Ameny's men were divided into a military section headed by the general, with fifty retainers of the Lord, each commanding ten men, (*'nhw n tt n nb*) and a civil section of 3 200 men

1. I would like to take this opportunity to pay homage to Professor Abd el-Moneim M. Sayed, a pioneer who discovered the site at Wadi Gawasis and lay the foundations for Red Sea studies, and to Professor Mahmoud Abd-el Raziq, who discovered the Ayn el-Soukhna site.

2. SAYED 1983, p. 29-30.

(*nḥw n njwt*) supervised by the Court of the thinite nome of «the Head of the South». Five “scribes of the great Assembly” were in charge of the recording, the accounting and probably the decoding of reassembly marks registered on the pieces of the dismantled ships.<sup>3</sup>



The third and final stage of the expedition, the maritime journey to the land of Punt, was led by the Overseer of the cabinet Ankhu. The shrine that he left at Wadi Gawasis (about 200 meters from the sea shore) to commemorate the event was made up of eight limestone anchors, four for the base and four<sup>4</sup> for the shrine itself. The dignitary Ankhu who carried the titles of *jmy-rꜣ ḥꜣw ḥrp ꜣprw jmy-rꜣ nfrww jmy-rꜣ ḥnwty* “director of the fleet, controller of the crew, director/ of recruits, overseer of the cabinet” was accompanied by:

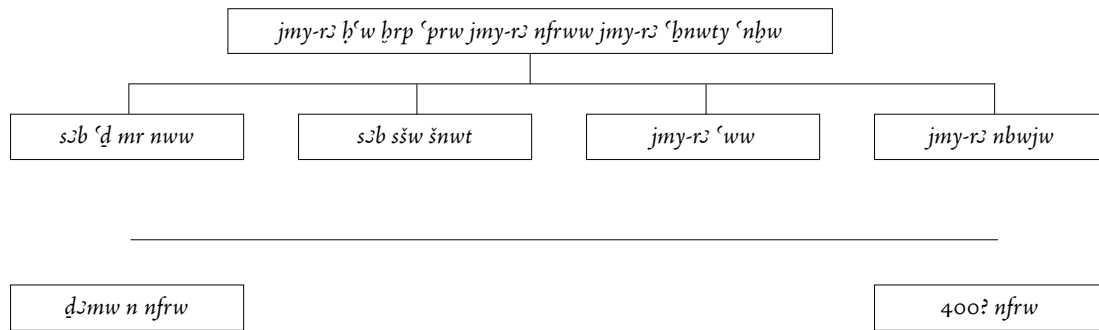
*sꜣb ḏꜣ mr nww* 1 “administrator major of Noun”, and *sꜣb sšw šnwt* “Senior of the scribes of the granaries”.

*jmy-rꜣ ꜣw* 1 “overseer of auxiliaries”,  
*jmy-rꜣ nbwꜣw* 1 “overseer of goldsmiths”,  
*ḏꜣmw n nfrw* “regiments of recruits”,  
*nfrw* 400 [+x...] “recruits: 400”,  
*dmḏ* 400 [+x ] “total of 400[+x]”.<sup>5</sup>

3. SAYED 1977: 173, pl. 15 d-f, 16 a-b; SAYED 1978b, p. 70-71; NIBBI 1981, p. 69-74; SAYED 1983, p. 29-30; BRADBURY 1988, p. 127-156, fig. 7-II; FAROUT 1994, p. 143-144, 151-155, 169 pl. I; OBSOMER 1995, p. 380-382, doc. 172; 7II-712; VANDERSLEYEN 1999, p. 51, 58, 132-5, 245, doc. 136; FABRE 2005b, p. 41, 82-84, 147; FAROUT 2006a, p. 43-52.

4. Professor Sayed has on several occasions commented on the nature and function of these anchors, and on their recycling as parts of commemorative monuments after the boats had returned from an expedition.

5. SAYED 1977, p. 150, 157-169, fig. 2-6, pl. 13 (d-e), pl. 14; SAYED 1978, p. 69-71, pl. XI; SAYED 1980, p. 154-155; NIBBI, 1981, p. 69-72; AUFRÈRE, GOLVIN, GOYON, 1994, p. 202-203; OBSOMER, 1995, p. 380-85, doc. 173, 713-715; FABRE 2005b, p. 41, 194; FAROUT 2006a, p. 45-48.



## 2. The expedition in Year 28 of Amenemhat II

The stela of Khentykhetyur<sup>6</sup> provides evidence of an expedition to Punt in the year 28 of Amenemhat II, that landed at the harbour of S3ww on the way back (fig. 3). The head of the expedition was a high-ranking official from the central administration. The list of his titles on the stela confirms his status in the royal palace: *jry-p't ḥ3ty-ḥtmty-bjty jmy-r3 rwyw*, namely “hereditary prince, governor chancellor of king of Lower Egypt/wearer of the royal seal, overseer of the justice court”. The text records that the mission made it safely back from Punt. The stela thus provides the expedition’s return date, Year 28 of Amenemhat II’s reign, the name of the leader, the overseer of the justice court Khentykhetyur, the destination, Punt, and finally the port where the fleet came to shore, attested by the toponym S3ww. It is worth noting that this latter indication is the only mention of a maritime port in Egyptian textual documents.

## 3. The monument commemorating Sesostris II’s first year in the Land of God

The second stela found in the Roman station of Wadi Gawasis [fig. 4-5] attests that an expedition was led by the overseer of the cabinet Khnumhotep in the first year of Senuset II’s reign<sup>7</sup>. The text on the stela does not mention any actual expedition but the erection of a

6. Stèle Durnham N 1934 was discovered by J. Burton at the Roman station of Wadi Gawasis about 7 km from the Red Sea shore. It was published in a Sotheby catalogue in July 1936, transported to Alnwick Castle, the residence of the Duke of Northumberland, and is now kept at the Gulbenkian Museum of Oriental Art, University of Durham: it is a basalt stela measuring 52 × 30 cm. In the upper half, king Amenemhat II is seen presenting *nw* vases to Min of Koptos. The line which describes the rite is engraved vertically. This upper part of the stela is separated from the lower private section concerning the official, which features six vertical lines and shows a man in an adoring position (BURTON 1836, p. 33-4; LEEMANS 1838, pl. V (no. 46); BIRCH 1880, p. 267, pl. 3; ERMAN 1882, p. 203-204; VERNUS 1970, p. 157, n. 1 (no. 34); NIBBI 1976: 46, 50; SAYED 1977, p. 141; OBSOMER 1995, p. 709-710, doc. 170.

7. Stèle Durham N 1935 was discovered by Sir John Gardiner Wilkinson in a sanctuary (he called it a temple) of Wadi Gawasis and is currently kept at Alnwick Castle. It is a basalt stela measuring 66 × 35 cm. A scene represents the king before the god Soped. A horizontal line and eight vertical lines make up the lower register with the representation of a man and another vertical line behind him (BIRCH 1880, p. 267, pl. 4; ERMAN 1882, p. 203-204; NIBBI 1976, p. 47, 50; SAYED 1977, p. 141; FRANKE 1991, p. 59-60; JANSSEN 1946; SAYED 1983, p. 31-32; OBSOMER 1995, p. 710-711, doc. 171.

monument in the ambiguous “Land-of-God”, *T3-ntr*, under the supervision of the high courtier Khnumhotep. He was accompanied by two assistants, whose names are engraved below his: *ḥry-pr Nfr-ḥtp jry-ʿt Nb-š3bt* “the majordomo Neferhotep and the hall keeper (?) Nebshabet”.

In a recent study, D. Franke showed that this Khnumhotep was not the famous nomarch of the 14th nome of Upper Egypt (Beni Hassan), but one of his sons who had links with the royal court.<sup>8</sup> He is the one mentioned on the wall mural in Khnumhotep II’s tomb at Beni Hassan, as the person who sent 37 Asiatics who are being introduced to the nomarch by his scribe Neferhotep.

This stela could well be related to Wadi Gawasis. The question is whether it bore any relation to Punt. The information it provides is different from the information found on other stelae, such as the stela of Khentykhetyur, which clearly records an expedition to Punt and return at *S3ww*, or the stela of Nebsu (see *infra* & 5), the shrine of Ankhu and the ostraca that mention Punt. The differences in content and iconography compared with the other stelae at Wadi Gawasis, especially the mention of Soped, lord of Ta-sechemet, suggest that this particular stela commemorates an exceptional expedition to another destination, which could be the mines of South Sinai.

#### 4. The expedition in Year 5 of Senusret III

The hieratic ostraca found by A. M. Sayed in 1977 at Wadi Gawasis during his second field season provide indisputable evidence of an expedition to Punt in Year 5 of Senusret III.<sup>9</sup> They also confirm the administrative connection between the town of Sekhem-Senusret at El-Lahun and the harbour at Wadi Gawasis.

Several officials are mentioned in these documents, among whom:

a. *ḥ3ty- Nbw-k3w-R* “governor Nebukaure,” who was responsible for importing food from Sekhem-Senusret. It is quite plausible that he oversaw all the activities at the port of Wadi Gawasis, including reassembling the ships. His role could be somewhat similar to that of Ameny under the reign of Senusret Ist. Alternatively, he could be the head of the sea-faring expedition to Punt, like Ankhu under Senusret Ist.

b. *wḥmw*, whose first part of the name is *W3ḥ*. He could be the same Wahka who bears the title of *wḥmw* on a the stela Berlin Museum no. 21822 from Qaw el-Kebir that dates to the end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th dynasty.<sup>10</sup>

c. *jmy-r3 ḥnwty n Dd-b3w*, an anonymous “overseer of the cabinet of the Firm-of-power”.<sup>11</sup>

d. *jmy -r3 pr n Hr sš n wḥmw* an anonymous “steward of the temple of Horus, scribe of the herald”.

e. *wḍpw* “cupbearer” *Hr-nḥt, jmy-r3 ḥnwty* “overseer of the cabinet” *Nwb-[...]*, and an anonymous *fty* “brewer”.

8. FRANKE, 1991.

9. MAHFOUZ 2006, p. 31-34; MAHFOUZ 2008b; MAHFOUZ forthcoming.

10. FRANKE 1984, p. 151, no. 202; Steckweh (1936, p. 9, no. 1 p. 53, pl. 18) thinks that *W3ḥ-k3* is an abbreviated form for *W3ḥ-k3-snb*.

Another stela, discovered in 2007, is made up of two registers: the upper register features Senusret III’s titulary, consisting essentially of the five royal names, next to a representation of Min of Koptos; the lower register, which is heavily damaged, shows two people under an illegible text in columns. This stela provides additional evidence of activity at the site during the reign of Senusret III.<sup>12</sup>

## 5. The expeditions of Amenemhat III

R. Fattovich and K. Bard discovered three stelae in the coral terrace above the entrances to the galleries, all dated to the reign of Amenemhat III.

– WG 16 [fig. 6,7] is dated from Year 23 of Amenemhat III and refers to the responsible of the sealing halls in the Great House Ameny;

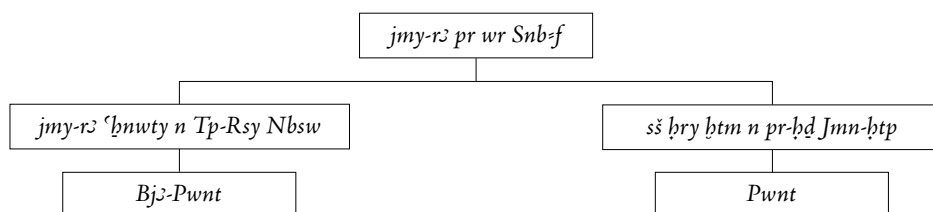
– WG 23 [fig. 8,9], which is heavily damaged, provides only the date, year 41, together with the titulary of Amenemhat III;

– The first part of the date line in WG 06 [fig. 10-11] has been lost, leaving only two vertical strokes that indicate an even year. It undoubtedly commemorates a third occupation of the site during Amenemhat III’s reign since the other two mention uneven years (year 23 and year 41).<sup>13</sup>

In 2004-2005, the Italian-American archaeological mission discovered a new stela WG 05 [fig. 12-13] dated to Amenemhat III. This stela is divided into two parts: an official upper register representing king Amenemhat III making an offering to the god Min with, behind him, a certain “overseer of the cabinet of the Head of the South, Nebsu”; a lower register, which is itself made up of two parts, each consisting in three horizontal lines of text above the representation of a standing official next to two adjacent columns of text<sup>14</sup>.

The organization of the expedition or two expeditions mentioned on the stela is not altogether clear. Three officials are listed: *jmy-r pr wr Snb=f* “the high steward Senbef” considered as the highest dignitary; *jmy-rꜣ ḥnwty n Tp-rsy Nbsw* “the overseer of the cabinet of the Head of the South, Nebsu” and his brother *sš ḥry ḥtm n pr-ḥd Jmn-ḥtp* the scribe responsible for the seal of the Treasury, Amenhotep. Two destinations are mentioned: Punt and Bia-Punt.

Several hypotheses can be ventured in this case: either there were two missions under the supervision of the high steward Senbef, one to Bia-Punt led by Nebsu and the other to Punt led by his brother Amenhotep;

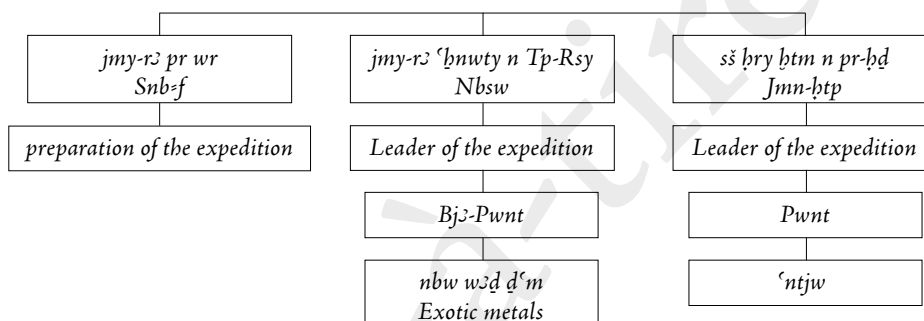


11. QUIRKE 1986, p. III.

12. MAHFOUZ, PIRELLI, 2007.

Or there was only one mission sent under the auspice of the high steward towards the vast country of Punt, where the two officials decided to split up, Amenhotep going on towards the main destination, Punt, while Nebstu led his troops into the desert towards the mining region called Bia-Punt; another would be that Senbef himself actually led the expedition and dispatched one unit to Punt and the other to Bia-Punt upon arrival.

Comparison with the stela of Antefoker and Ameny and with the mission undertaken during the reign of Senusret Ist, allows us to favor the hypothesis of a single expedition in three distinct stages: the first might have occurred in the Nile valley to prepare for the expedition and set up the logistics under the supervision of Senbef; the second would be the journey to Punt led by Amenhotep to fetch incense, the region’s main product, while the third would be the journey to the “mines of Punt” (*Bj3-Pwnt*) to bring back exotic ore such as green gold and electrum.<sup>15</sup>



Finally, I would like to mention an ostracon that acknowledges the arrival of ships, some of which bore the name of Amenemhat III.

## 6. The expedition in Year 8 of Amenemhat IV

The Italian-American mission in Wadi Gawasis made a nice discovery during the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 field seasons.<sup>16</sup> They unearthed wooden boxes piled up outside the entrances to the caves where the workers, craftsmen and sailors sheltered and stored their materials. Two of these boxes bore the same hieroglyphic text on one side [fig. 14-17]. This text, which consists of four horizontal lines, informs us of an expedition sent in Year 8 of Amenemhat to fetch the “marvels of Punt” (*bj3wt Pwnt*). The expedition was led by one Djedy, royal scribe and inspector of recruits.

13. MAHFOUZ 2008a.

14. PIRELLI 2007a: 219-224, fig. 90-91; PIRELLI 2007b.

15. See the reliefs of Hatshepsout, NAVILLE 1898, pl. 74; *Urk.* IV, 328-329.

16. MAHFOUZ 2007, p. 238, fig. 99-100 ; MAHFOUZ 2010.

Other findings, such as an ostrakon mentioning Year 8 (ostrakon WG O105) and another one with the name of Amenemhat IV (ostrakon WG O111) seem to provide further evidence of the mission.

R. Fattovich, K. Bard and their team have also unearthed a small stela bearing a very rare epithet for Osiris, "Osiris of Wadj-wer", and a papyrus fragment with two vertical lines in hieratic script (PWG 01). The sealings, which are still under study and seem to feature a significant boat sign, should give us a good idea of the relationships between the harbour and the central administration.

The epigraphic data thus provides evidence of an uninterrupted series of expeditions departing from the Wadi Gawasis harbour towards the remote land of Punt in the 12th dynasty. According to the written sources at our disposal to date, these expeditions began under the reign of Senusret I and continued up to the reign of Amenemhat IV, the last but one king of the dynasty. In the meantime, the use of the site for missions under the reigns of Amenemhat II, Senusret II, Senusret III and Amenemhat III is now firmly established and documented by abundant epigraphic evidence. The Italian-American mission needs now only uncover mentions of Amenemhat I and of Queen Neferu-Sobek, the first and last sovereigns of the 12th dynasty, for the whole lineage to be represented at Mersa Gawasis.



FIG. 1. Stela of Antefoker, photo



FIG. 2. Stela of Antefoker, drawing



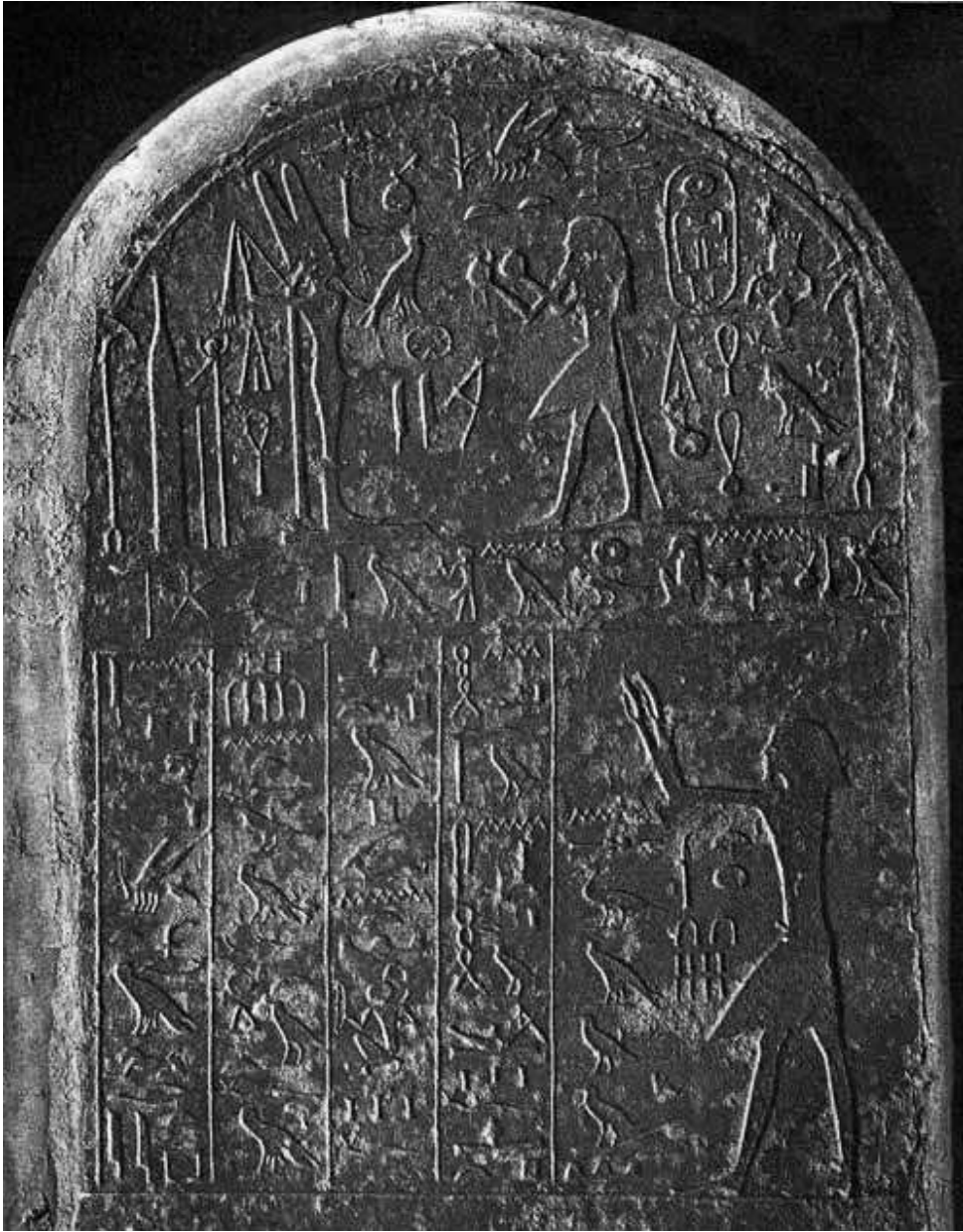


FIG. 3. Stela of Khentykhetur, photo



FIG. 4. Stela of Khnumhotep, photo.



FIG. 5. Stela of Khnumhotep, drawing.

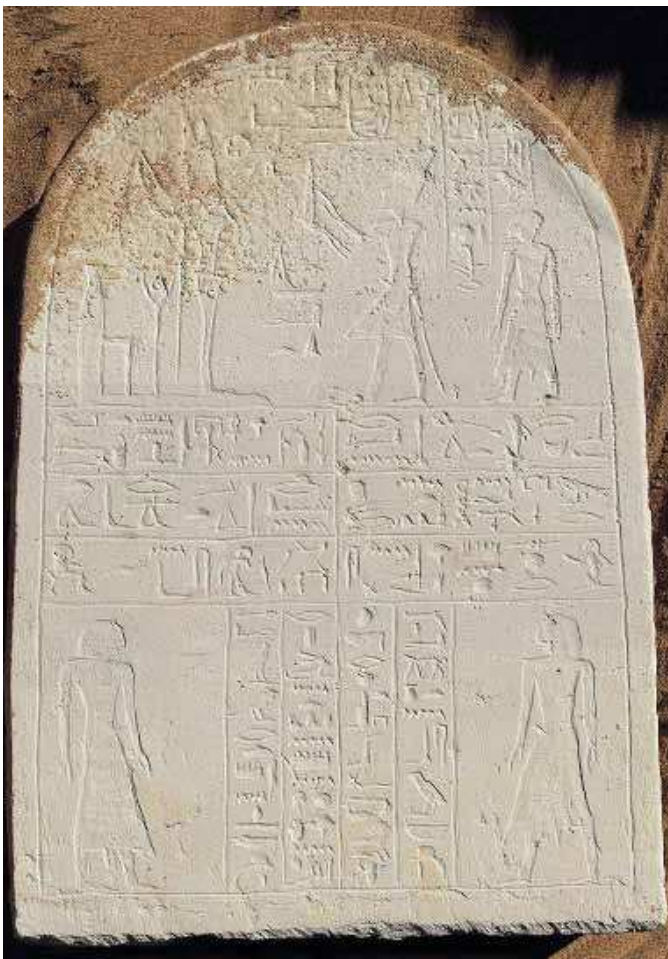


FIG. 6. Stela WG 16 – photo.

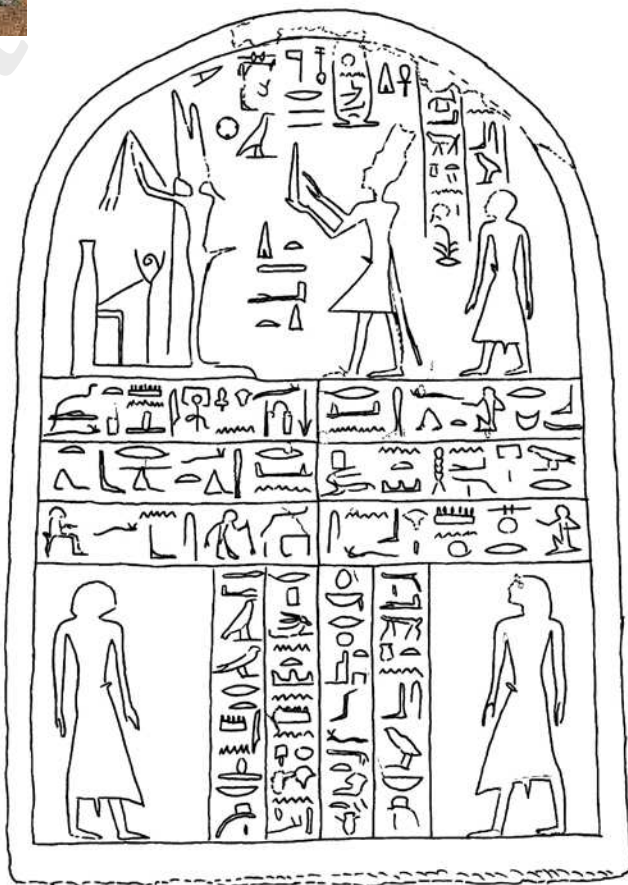
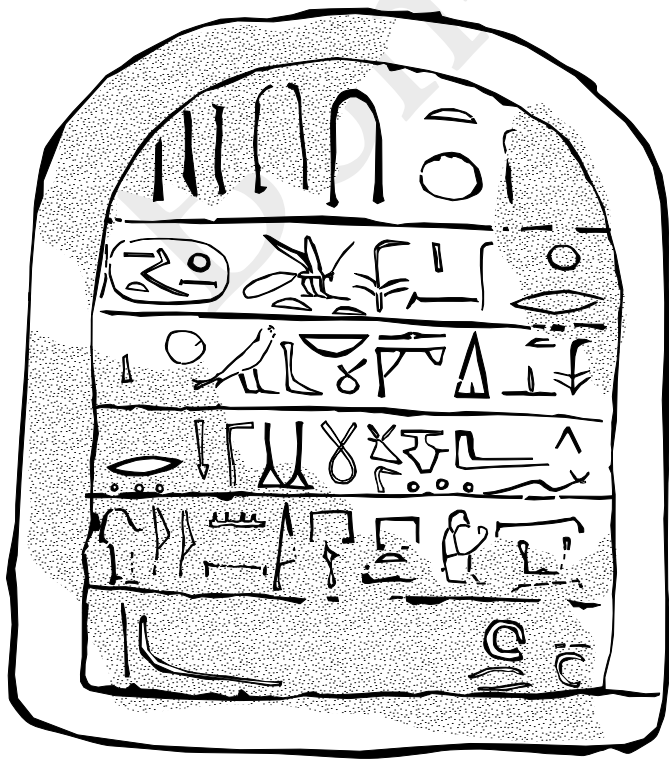


FIG. 7. Stela WG 16 – drawing.



FIG. 8. Stela WG 23 – photo.



0 5 cm

Stèle WG 16

FIG. 9. Stela WG 23 – drawing.



FIG. 10. Stela WG 06 – photo.

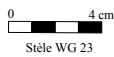
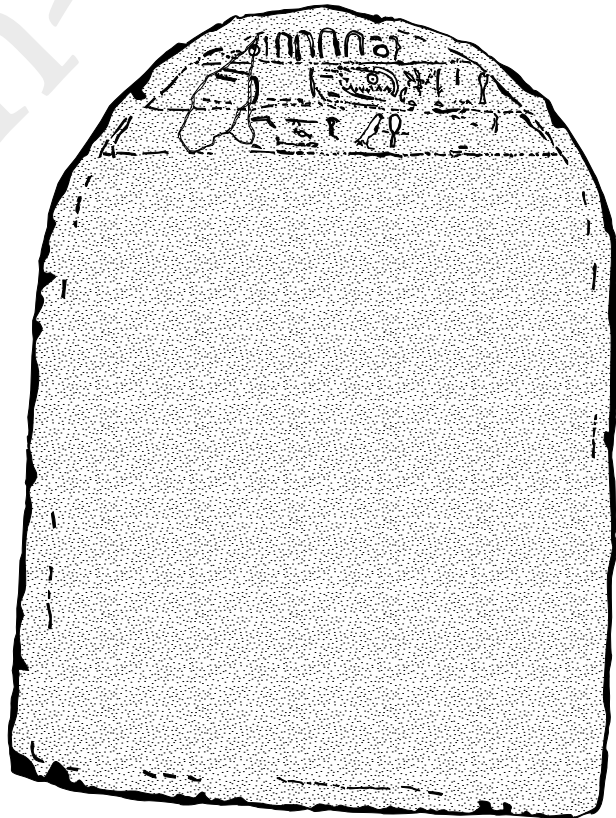


FIG. 11. Stela WG 06 – drawing.

FIG. 12. Stela of Nebsu, photo.

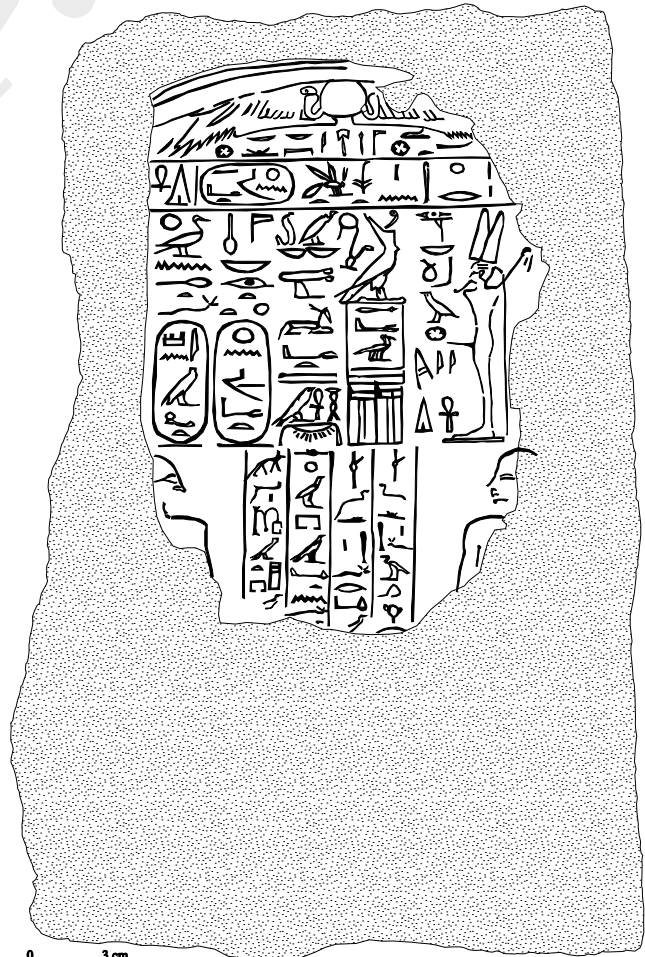


FIG. 13. Stela of Nebsu, drawing.



FIG. 14. Wooden box WG B02 – photo.



FIG. 15. Wooden box WG B02 – drawing.



FIG. 16. Wooden box WG B21 – photo.



FIG. 17. Wooden box WG B21 – drawing.