

The Sealings from Marsa Gawasis* (S3W): Preliminary Considerations on the Administration of the Port

Andrea Manzo**

Rosanna Pirelli

Introduction

The authors of this paper consider it a great privilege to participate in this publication in honor of Professor Abdel Moneim Sayed. Not only do we share in the esteem for the great scholar, but we feel a filial affection for the *Maestro* and Egyptologist who wrote an important new page in the history of Ancient Egypt with the discovery, some thirty years ago, of the Middle Kingdom Port of *Saw*.

As members of the Italo-American Archaeological Expedition to Marsa Gawasis,³ we present here the initial information and some preliminary interpretation of the administrative activities carried out in *Saw*, in the hope that they may be appreciated by Professor Sayed and may constitute a small contribution to knowledge of this important site.

The first item of an administrative marker (a cretula without any seal impression) was found at Marsa Gawasis during 2004/2005 field season.⁴ It was however an isolated item; a larger collection of clay sealings was discovered instead in 2005/2006.⁵

Although their study is still in a preliminary phase, it is already evident that these materials may greatly contribute to our understanding of the chronology and function of the sectors of the site and of the practical and administrative organization of the expeditions sailing from Mersa Gawasis to Punt. Actually, the number of sealings found so far at Marsa Gawasis is still too restricted either to trace a general outline of the administrative organization of the Port, or to identify a sufficient number of persons and/or

specific functions linked to it. Nonetheless a first series of observations can be sketched by comparing our material with that of other coeval sites, both in Egypt (Elephantine and Abydos) and Nubia (Uronarti, Mirgissa, Askut),⁶ where the remarkable amount of sealings found in the new excavations in the last years has considerably enlarged our knowledge on the life and functioning of the different sectors of the Egyptian administration, above all during the Middle Kingdom.

The cretulae of Marsa Gawasis, both with seal impressions and without, come from a well-defined area of the site, the area on the two sides of the entrance to Cave 2 (WG 24), which is subdivided into two trenches: WG 16 to the North, and WG 32 to the South. Only one fragment of depurated clay was discovered at WG 31, North–West of WG 16.

After a short description of the two areas, we are going to present a complete catalogue of the cretulae found so far, followed by a short discussion on the two types (with and without seal impressions) and by a preliminary attempt at interpreting the data.⁷

The archaeological context

The clay sealings were collected in three excavation units, WG 16, WG 24, and WG 32 (Fig. 1).

WG 16/24

The two excavation units WG 16 and WG 24 are contiguous and are located on the western slope of the coral terrace close to the entrances of a large