

Ancient Egyptian Anchors: New Results from Wadi Gawasis

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The major problem in the study of the ancient Egyptian stone-anchors of the Pharaonic Period is that all the anchors were found in land contexts, the lack of clear representations of the anchors in ancient Egyptian scenes, reliefs and model boats, led to various interpretations about their use in the navigation by sea or by river. Moreover, the finding of anchors in land context focused the discussion on the function and the use and/or reuse of the anchor in land, and on the possible perception of their symbolic value.

More than 30 Egyptian anchors were recognized in archaeological context dating from the Old Kingdom to the New Kingdom,¹ 25 of which were found in the Pharaonic port of Wadi Gawasis (Ⲙⲉⲛⲱ) on the Red Sea.² The discovery of stone-anchors composing the 'Ankhow and Antefiqer monuments at Wadi Gawasis by Abdel-Moneim Sayed in 1976/1977 represented the first most important evidence in the study of ancient Egyptian stone-anchors.³ After this discovery it was possible to individuate the main features of the Egyptian stone-anchors. The anchors found by Sayed have been also the object of an important debate on the ancient Egyptian navigation by some scholars considering Egyptians did not navigate by sea and those supporting the opposite opinion.

During the 2001–2006 UNO-BU* joint expeditions at Wadi Gawasis, additional anchors and fragments of anchors were found and new information on the ancient Egyptian stone-anchors were recorded. Currently, the anchors from Wadi Gawasis represent

the major source of information in the study of the ancient Egyptian stone-anchors.

This paper discusses the preliminary results of these recent researches with an outlook on the studies conducted until now on the ancient stone-anchors found in Egypt and in the Eastern Mediterranean during the second millennium BCE.⁴

The site of Wadi Gawasis is located on a coral terrace on the northern bank of the Wadi, *ca.* 25 km south of the Port of Safaga and 50 km north of Quseir. Different types of features recorded on the site confirm the complex organization of this ancient harbor.

The anchors were found in different sectors of the site and reused in diverse contexts (Fig. 1). A complete anchor and fragments of anchors are recorded on the terrace near the seashore associated to commemorative structures (A2, A13, A14, A15, A16, A17, A18) (Fig. 1a).

Four complete anchors (A1, A3, A4, A5) and four fragmentary (A6, A7, A8, A12) were found on the western slope of the coral terrace, in man-made caves that were used for dismantling ships hulls, to store ship timbers and cordage, to work and to live.

On the eastern slope two anchors left in the sand (A9, A10) are also recorded and one that was lying in the Wadi bed (A11) (Fig. 1b).

Typology

Egyptian stone-anchors are triangular in shape, in some cases asymmetric, with a rounded top that is