# PUNT IN EGYPT AND BEYOND

Comments on the impact of maritime activities of the 12th Dynasty in the Red Sea on Egyptian crafts with some historical and ideological thoughts

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## Introduction

Since the discovery by Abdelmoneim Sayed of the 12th Dynasty harbour on the Red Sea from where the expeditions to the land of Punt were launched,[1] there has been a dramatic accumulation of evidence suggesting a high level of Egyptian maritime activity in the Red Sea at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. The investigations at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis, resumed in 2001 by an Italo-American team, collected fresh data about regions in the south of the Red Sea involved in the trade network reaching Egypt,[2] ancient Egyptian naval technology,[3] the administration[4] and organization of the expeditions.[5] In addition, the harbour has been shown to have been in actively use, as borne out by the number of inscriptions commemorating maritime expeditions,[6] as well as by stratigraphic evidence.[7] Furthermore, it has proved possible to correlate the intensity of use of the harbour with the political and economic situation in North-Eastern Africa at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, and to put forward a comprehensive explanation of why the Egyptians invested so much energy in enterprises such as the maritime expeditions around the Red Sea.[8]

Nevertheless, even if there is no longer any question mark over Egyptian activities in the Red Sea, with their general driving forces, other aspects remain unexplored, notably the consequences for Egyptian culture of this strong interaction with the Red Sea and its coastal regions. One problem is the impact these enterprises had on Egyptian crafts and culture in general, in terms not only of the availability of raw materials, but also of the objects to be reproduced and new ideas. Moreover, it is still to be clarified whether and how these empirical interactions with a largely exotic maritime theatre may have been incorporated into the Egyptian view of the world and religion, at least at official if not at popular level.

## Shell Pendants

Sporadic use of shells or reproduction of shells as pendants has been recorded since the Archaic Period and the Old Kingdom,[9] when they may have had an amuletic protective significance.[10] For this reason shells had also been reproduced in stone since very ancient times.[11] Nevertheless, the occurrence of shells seems to increase in the Middle Kingdom.

In this respect, a very distinctive class of pendants is represented by the mother-of-pearl ones bearing the royal name and which appear to be very popular in Middle Kingdom times.[12] These pendants, ca. 10–11 cm in diameter, were produced from *Avicula Meleagrina margaritacea*, a Red Sea shell and were marked out by holes which were drilled for suspension whilst the edges were ground to produce a uniform, circular outline, the outer surface being ground off, leaving only the mother-of-pearl linings.[13] Usually, in a cartouche, they bear the name Senwsert or, alternatively, *ḫpr kꜣ rᶜ*, the royal name of Senwsert I, *nbw kꜣw rᶜ*, the royal name of Amenemhet II, *ḥᶜ kꜣw rᶜ*, the royal name of Senwsert III.[14]

It has been suggested that these real oyster-shells inscribed with royal names may have been

[1] Abdelmoneim Sayed 1977.
[2] Manzo 2007, 2010a.
[3] Ward and Zazzaro 2010.
[4] Manzo and Pirelli 2006.
[5] Bard and Fattovich 2007, 250–253; see in general Bard and Fattovich (ed.) 2007 and the reports published in the web site www.archaeogate.org.
[6] ElSayed Mahfouz 2007a, ElSayed Mahfouz 2007b, ElSayed Mahfouz 2007c; Pirelli 2007a, Pirelli 2007b.
[7] Bard and Fattovich 2007, 242.
[8] Manzo 2010a, Manzo 2010b.
[9] Aldred 1979, 43, 117–118, fig. 2; Andrews 1990, 19, fig. 11, Andrews 1994, 43.
[10] Andrews 1994, 9, 102.
[11] Andrews 1994, 102, fig. 5, j.
[12] Aldred 1979, 124; Andrews 1990, 65; Bourriau 1988, 154; Winlock 1932.
[13] Bourriau 1988, 153–154; Winlock 1932, 389.
[14] Winlock 1932, 389; Aldred 1952; Arkell 1944; Bourriau 1988, 153, n. 171; Petrie 1914, 27, pl. XLIV, 112 a-a5.

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military decorations because, in a couple of cases from Gebelein and Aswan, such objects were discovered in funerary assemblages marked out by the presence of weapons[15] while one was discovered in the fortress of Uronarti, i.e. in an evidently military context.[16]

The royal name carved on these shells was deemed something which added a protective value to the pendants[17] as was the case with other objects and ornaments.[18] The fact that some of these shells were discovered in assemblages which can be confidently ascribed to a date later than the reign of the kings whose names they bear[19] may support the interpretation that these objects were also considered protective amulets. Of course, this does not automatically mean that they can be equated with the scarabs bearing royal names of kings of the first part of the 12th Dynasty and which were demonstrated to have been produced after the reign of these rulers.[20] The repair marks on some of our shell pendants testify to a lengthy period of use,[21] which may be justified if we consider the inscribed shells either as amulets or awards. Although some of these objects could well have been used as amulets for many years after their production because of their magic, protective quality due to the presence of the royal name, the palaeography of the inscribed royal names at least in some cases seems to confirm that the inscriptions were not chronologically far off the reign of the said ruler.[22]

In the light of the recent investigations on the Red Sea revealing that this region was actively visited by expeditions launched by the 12th Dynasty kings, we would venture to suggest that this type of pendant, whose raw material was actually collected on the coast of the Red Sea, may have been in some way related with these enterprises, not least because of the increased availability of the raw material they were produced from. It may also be true, as suggested by Aldred,[23] that the increased use of shells from the Red Sea in this phase was linked to Nubian influence on Egyptian culture, as Nubian cultures always appreciated the use of mother-of-pearl in ornaments.[24] Actually, we now have clear evidence of the involvement of groups of Nubians as members of the Egyptian expeditionary corps at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis.[25] That is why these objects may have been first produced by the Nubian members of the Egyptian expeditions or as an imitation of such objects of Nubian prodction, but adding the protective and benevolent name of the reigning king. In this way, these objects may have turned into a symbol of the part played by the wearer in expeditions to the Red Sea and, accordingly, could have been looked upon as a kind of insignia or even an award. The aforementioned association of some of these inscribed shells with assemblages which in some way were linked to weapon-bearers, if not actually to military figures, ties in with this proposition, knowing – as we do – from epigraphic evidence that soldiers were actively involved as escorts and perhaps even as man-power in the expeditions.[26] Of course, the inscribed shell pendants could have also, at the same time and because of the magical power of the royal name carved on them, been considered an effective talisman, to be used and handed down from one generation to the next.

### Shell-Shape Jewels

During the same period, the mother-of-pearl pendants described above were also imitated by pendants made of precious metals.[27] Some of these shell-shape pendants bear a royal name and were made out of a sheet of gold or electrum using different techniques such as granulation, filigree, *cloisonné* and casing.[28] They are clearly linked to the previously described pendants of real mother-of-pearl bearing the royal name, the occurrence of which may have been highly valued as it added a protective value to the pendants. The cartouches featuring on these gold and electrum pendants are the ones of Senwsert III and Amenemhat III.[29] A

[15] Winlock 1932, 388, 390.
[16] Arkell 1944.
[17] Aldred 1952, 131, 1979, 44; Bourriau 1988, 154.
[18] See e.g. Ben-Tor 2004, 26.
[19] Lilyquist 1993b, 47.
[20] Ben-Tor 2004, 26–27.
[21] Bourriau 1988, 153, n. 171; Winlock 1932, 389.
[22] See e.g. Bourriau 1988, 154.
[23] Aldred 1952, 132.
[24] See also Andrews 1990, 65.
[25] Manzo 2007, Manzo 2010a.
[26] See e.g. Abdelmoneim Sayed 1977, 170, pl. 16, b; Couyat and Montet 1912, 82–83, lines 11–12.
[27] Aldred 1952, 131–132; Andrews 1990, 65, 1994, 11, fig. 43.
[28] Wilkinson 1971, 60–61, fig. 38, pl. I B, XIV.
[29] Aldred 1952, 131–132; Engelbach 1915, 12, pl. I, 4; Petrie 1914, 27, pl. XIV, 112 c, 1917, pl. XIV, 26.

single item with the inscription *s3 Rᶜ Tᶜ3 di ᶜnḫ* referring to the later king Tao II of the 17th Dynasty was recorded.[30] Thus, in general, the names of the 12th Dynasty rulers on these metal pendants appear to be later than the ones featuring on most of the mother-of-pearl pendants. In any case, it may be suggested that in the 12th Dynasty and, possibly, more specifically in its second part, these shell-shape pendants became part of the repertoire of the jewellery workshops.

As a matter of fact, pendants similar to the previously described ones but which are uninscribed, were also discovered among the jewels found in the tombs of the 12th Dynasty royal ladies at Lahun and Dashur.[31] Similar shell-shape pendants were recorded in the jewellery of several royal ladies of the 12th Dynasty, Sit-Hathor-Yunet, Sit-Hathor and Meret,[32] some of them possibly linked to Senwsert II but, in at least two cases, still living during the reign of Amenenhat III.[33] Other examples in gold, electrum and silver show the popularity of this type in the Middle Kingdom,[34] as also demonstrated by the jewellery from the tomb of lady Senebtisi,[35] dating to the 13th Dynasty but close to the pyramid of the founder of the 12th Dynasty at el-Lisht.[36]

These types of shell-like pendants introduced in the 12th Dynasty continued in use up to the very end of the Middle Kingdom/Second Intermediate period[37] and the early New Kingdom.[38]

The jewels found in the tombs of the royal ladies of the 12th Dynasty were deemed innovative amongst the panoply of Egyptian jewellery,[39] One reason is that most of them were actually worn during their owner's lifetime and were not produced specifically for a funerary context which might have favoured a more traditional and conservative repertoire.[40] Among all the innovations, a remarkable one in the jewels of these 12th Dynasty princesses was represented specifically by pendants made of precious metals and mirroring the shape of shells.[41] The jewellery ascribed to the princesses Sit-Hathor-Yunet, Sit-Hathor and Meret is so similar in design that it may have been made by the same craftsmen or, at least, by the same workshop.[42] This suggests that, since the early 12th Dynasty the shells, real or reproduced by pendants made of precious metals, became a part of the repertoire of the workshops which may have been attached to the Court.[43]

In the tombs of the 12th Dynasty princesses and queens, as well as in other Middle Kingdom assemblages, gold and electrum griddles and beads in the shape of cowri-shells were discovered as well and are considered typical of this phase.[44]

In this case, too, the shells mirrored by these gold beads could have been collected on the seashore of the Red Sea, although, of course, the possibility that the Mediterranean varieties of the *Cypraeidae* were reproduced cannot be ruled out.

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[30] Petrie 1914, 27, pl. XIV, 112 d, 1917, 25, pl. XXIII, n; Winlock 1924, 259.

[31] Aldred 1952, 131.

[32] It should be stressed that doubts about the real owners of the jewels in the case of the ones linked to the royal ladies buried in the complex of Senwsert III at Dashur have recently arisen, see Arnold 2002, 70. As a result, until the question has been solved by a new appraisal of the jewels and their original context, the traditional reference to these specific royal ladies should be regarded as provisional and tentative. Nevertheless, the general cultural and chronological context of the tombs of the royal ladies in the complex of Senwsert III at Dashur is firmly anchored in the reigns of Senwsert III and Amenemhat III, see Arnold 2002, 56, 73, 76, 116–117.

[33] Aldred 1979, figs. 15, 31; Andrews 1990, 180, fig. 154, 1994, p. 43; Wilkinson 1971, 51, 53–54; Winlock 1933, 138, pl. XXXIII, H; de Morgan 1895, 60, 64–65, pls. XVI, 7 ; XVII, 5 ; XX, 4 ; XXII, 3 ; XXIII, 5, 10.

[34] See e.g. Andrews 1990, 180, figs. 157, 166; Arnold 1995, 36, n. 41; Bourriau 1988, 148, n. 158; Garstang 1901, 4, 26, 29, pl. I.

[35] Andrews 1990, 180; Mace and Winlock 1916, 60, ps. XXII–XXIII; Wilkinson 1971, 52, pl. II B.

[36] Williams 1975–1976; Lilyquist 1979.

[37] Bietak 1986, 242, pl. XIII; Garstang 1901, 26; Vercoutter 1975, 198, fig. 82, 73–74, 204, fig. 85, 9, 312, fig. 12, a–c.

[38] Aldred 1952, 132; Andrews 1994, 43; Winlock 1948, 25, pl. XII A, B.

[39] Aldred 1979, 23; see also Wildung (ed.) 1984, 89.

[40] Brunton 1920, 42; Winlock 1934, 23–24, see also Ben-Tor 2004, 25–26.

[41] Aldred 1979, 44, 121, 124.

[42] Wilkinson 1971, 51, 66; Winlock 1934, 57.

[43] Bourriau 1988, 127.

[44] Aldred 1979, 122, figs. 19, 22, 31; Andrews 1990, 140, 173, fig. 39, fig. 61; Andrews 1994, 42, fig. 69; Bourriau 1988, 145–146, n. 154; Brunton 1920, 22, 30–31, pl. III; de Morgan 1895, 60, 65–66, pls. XVII, 6; XXIII, 7; XXIV, 11; Garstang 1901, 4, 29, pl. I; Oppenheim 2002, 128, 132; Wildung (ed.) 1984, 90, n. 79, 1997, 83, n. 90; Wilkinson 1971, 80–81, fig. 46, pl. XIII; Winlock 1933, 137, pl. XXXIII, A; Winlock 1934, 38–40, pl. VIII.

Cowri-shells were, at least up to Middle Kingdom times, used as ornaments from Badarian times, possibly as fertility amulets especially by ladies on account of their evocation of the vulva.[45] Yet cowri-shells are also reminiscent of the shape of an eye, which – in view of the meanings of the "Eye of Horus" or the "Eye of Ra" – may have given them their power as amulets.[46] In fact, the two possible identifications with the vulva and the "Eye of Ra" are interrelated. The "Eye of Ra" may be looked upon as the organ of creation as it is *irt*, "the one who creates" and contains the tears which spawned both deities and humankind.[47] In turn the "Eye of Ra" is also identified with the lion goddess Sekhmet, the violent manifestation of Hathor.[48]

The apparent popularity of these beads reproducing cowri-shells in the Middle Kingdom[49] and more particularly in the 12th Dynasty is worth noting. This may be linked to the frequency of other shells or reproductions of shells in precious metals as components of the jewels of the same time phase. Thus, the prevalence of this type of bead also tends to bear out our comments on the popularity of the sea shells and of their reproductions in precious metals in 12th Dynasty jewellery.

Other comments seem to confirm the centrality of the aspects linked to the marine environment in inspiring jewellers of the 12th Dynasty. At Dashur, in the tomb of princess Khnmet, a royal lady possibly linked to Senwsert II, but who died well after the end of his reign, pendants in the shape of five-pointed stars decorated with granulation associated with shell-shaped pendants were found.[50] These stars also feature a central disk between their rays, which is in keeping with the anatomy of star fish.[51] The possible association in the same necklace of the stars with shell pendants may also be consistent with their identification with star fish.[52] In this case, the innovation is linked not only to the design, which may again be linked to the reproduction of a marine animal, but also to the technique which was deployed to obtain a more realistic reproduction, as these pendants may stand out as the earliest example of the use in Egypt of granulation, a technique which appears to be of Near Eastern origin.[53] This new foreign technique may have been suitably used to reproduce, in a more realistic way, a subject such as the star fish whose surface often features small knobs.

In terms of the general meaning of all these pendants linked to the marine environment, it has been suggested that shells may have been used as amulets concerning "health" and have been considered typical of woman.[54] Nevertheless, as has been rightly stressed,[55] this is largely unproven: as shown above for the mother-of-pearl pendants, bivalves could be worn by both sexes. These pendants may also be linked to the idea of sea shells being considered a symbolic reference to the navigating of death on the ocean of the underworld.[56] Of course, this does not rule out the theory that, sometimes, the precious metal imitations of mother-of-pearl pendants may have been linked in some way to hathoric symbolism, as is more explicitly shown by an example decorated with a *repoussé* emblem of Hathor.[57]

Conversely, given the symbolic meanings linked to fertility and female sexuality with a possible reference to Hathor which may have been associated with cowri-shells, a special relationship with female users is feasible for the cowri-griddles. But, here too, this symbolic meaning could not have been exclusive since, in some contexts, cowri beads were associated with male burials.[58]

In any case, the references to the female world and Hathor seem to be at one with the possible Hathoric symbolism which may have inspired the design of specific jewels and the general composition of the jewellery of most of the 12th Dynasty princesses buried at Dashur and Lahun,[59] possibly

[45] Arnold 1995, 36, n. 41; Andrews 1990, 141–142, 173, 1994, 42; Petrie 1914, 27; Wilkinson 1971, 81, see also 177.

[46] Aldred 1979, 11–12.

[47] Roberts 1995, 9; Troy 2003, 110.

[48] Roberts 1995, 11; Troy 2003, 111.

[49] Andrews 1994, 42.

[50] Aldred 1979, fig. 15; Andrews 1990, 124; de Morgan 1903, 66–67, pl. XII, 63; Wilkinson 1971, 66, pl. XIV.

[51] Beaux 1988, 200–201.

[52] See also Aldred 1979, 121.

[53] Aldred 1979, 33, 120–121; Lilyquist 1993a, 36–37; Scandone Matthiae 1985, 328; see also Andrews 1990, 88.

[54] Andrews 1994, 43; Bourriau 1988, 158; Wilkinson 1971, 55, 57, 60, 199.

[55] Andrews 1994, 43; Arnold 1995, 36.

[56] Beaux 1988, 202.

[57] Andrews 1990, fig. 166.

[58] See e.g. Bourriau 1988, 148; Garstang 1901, 4, 29.

[59] Scandone Matthiae 1985, 329–330; Staehelin 1978, 79, 81, 83–84.

in keeping also with the sacerdotal and ideological function of many royal ladies of the dynasty.[60]

Nevertheless, these interpretations cannot automatically rule out other possible connotations which are not necessarily alternatives to them. It has been suggested that the real mother-of-pearl shell pendants could have been a kind of insigna or decoration for members of maritime expeditions around the Red Sea, and this may also be true of some of their metal imitations bearing royal names. Unfortunately, information on the original context of these inscribed metal pendants modelled on mother-of-pearl ones is often lacking. Interestingly, the gold shell pendant bearing the inscription *ḫ*ᶜ *kȝw r*ᶜ, the royal name of Senwsert III, has been found in a tomb at Riqqeh with a set of jewels including a pectoral so similar to the ones from the tombs of the royal ladies at Dashur that it has been postulated as a royal gift/decoration,[61] whilst the same interpretation could be extended to the shell pendant with royal name. Furthermore, on the only item bearing the name of a king later than the 12th Dynasty, the king in question is Tao II, mainly renowned as the adversary of the Hyksos,[62] whilst the reference to decorations used by glorious 12th Dynasty kings can only be fully understood from his political angle of restoring the unity and strength of the Egyptian state.

From the angle of a possible additional use as decorations of some of the jewels made up with metal imitations of sea shells, there is an interesting association which distinguishes the jewellery of princess Khnemt: the necklace with stars and shells was found with a necklace which features golden flies.[63] In New Kingdom, golden flies were usually decorations connected with a show of military valour.[64] It has been suggested that these pendants from Dashur may represent bees and not flies, flies of valour usually considered to be apparently characteristic for the New Kingdom.[65] Nevertheless, the question of the meaning of fly-shape pendants before the New Kingdom is a matter of debate,[66] whilst this kind of pendant may also be postulated as already being in use as awards before flies of valour were even mentioned in the texts. Actually, as has been commented on,[67] jewellery was often used as a reward for specific ventures or activities, as is clearly shown by well-known New Kingdom examples when it used to be an established custom. Although the typology of the precious objects which were in circulation cannot be clarified, this practice is also described in texts and representations dating to the Old and Middle Kingdom when awards were, sometimes at least, presented to officials connected with the military. That is why it is an acceptable theory that jewels made up of fly and shell pendants may have been used as awards since earlier times.

In any case, whether the proposition that jewels made up of metal reproductions of sea shells were used as decorations is accepted or otherwise, the data available seems to point to their introduction into Egyptian jewellery by workshops allied to the Royal Court some time during the 12th Dynasty. That is why their production and distribution were, initially at least, dictated by the wishes of the Court and by the use to which the king and, possibly, his family intended to put these objects.

Of course, these objects could be used, if not as a royal decoration, then at least as a royal gift in the internal and external redistribution networks around the Egyptian Court. Actually, some of the few shells in gold or other precious metals – whose original context is known and which were not found in association with tombs of members of the royal family – were associated with objects such as statuettes and scarabs bearing names and titles of senior officers.[68] Furthermore, a pendant typologically similar to pendants occurring in Egypt, but locally produced, was discovered in a region of the ancient Near East which had active dealings with Middle Kingdom Egypt: a gold reproduction of a shell pendant decorated with incrustations and bearing the name, not of an Egyptian king but of a local ruler, was found at Byblos in a royal tomb.[69]

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[60] Wildung (ed.) 1984, 88.

[61] Engelbach 1915, 12.

[62] See e.g. Redford 1992, 125–126.

[63] de Morgan 1903, 66, pl. XII, 66.

[64] Andrews 1994, 62–63; Arnold 1995, 48, n. 56–57; Binder 2008, 49–55; Wilkinson 1971, pl. XIV; see also Petrie 1914, 12.

[65] Arnold 1995, 48; Aldred 1979, 121; Andrews 1990, 181, 1994, 62.

[66] Binder 2008, 55.

[67] Binder 2008, 62–77.

[68] See e.g. Garstang 1901, 5, 32.

[69] Montet 1928, 165–166, pl. XCVII, n. 618; Wilkinson 1971, 61.

As a result, our comments seem to confirm that, as stated by D. Wildung,[70] the jewellery of the Middle Kingdom reflects the policy and broad trading relationships hallmarking that phase of the history of ancient Egypt. This is evident in the inspiration and design of some items, as well as in the raw materials which were used and it has been shown that both of these aspects were affected by Egyptian maritime activity, perhaps particularly in the Red Sea. Interestingly, among the raw materials from the Red Sea regions, it is not just the shells which should be highlighted, but also electrum – an alloy of gold and silver – and pure gold, which were the metals used to produce the jewels described above and which may have been a product of Punt,[71] the region where seafaring expeditions in the Red Sea were bound for.

### Perfumes and Toiletries

What we have established for jewellery may have wider applications to Egyptian crafts in Middle Kingdom times. Interestingly, the jewels whose shape was in some way inspired by the sea were sometimes discovered in association with furniture and objects made from imported materials which may well have come from the southern regions reached by seafaring in the Red Sea.

The caskets containing jewels and the oil jars of Sit-Hathor-Yunet at El-Lahun were made from exotic wood, most likely ebony and decorated with ivory encrustations.[72] African ebony (*Diospyros* sp.) may have been imported from Punt[73] and was discovered at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis, from where several expeditions to Punt were launched in the 12th Dynasty.[74]

Furthermore, three oil jars and a khol pot associated with these boxes and the jewels were made of obsidian.[75] Five similar jars were discovered in the tomb of princess Meret at Dashur,[76] showing the popularity of this kind of vessel in the assemblages linked to 12th Dynasty royal ladies. The provenance of other, similar and most likely contemporary, oil jars unfortunately is unknown.[77] Then again, the mirror of Sit-Hathor-Yunet from El-Lahun, another component of her beauty set, was made from electrum, with a handle of obsidian.[78]

In general, on the use of obsidian in artworks, it is fitting to stress its rarity in Ancient Egypt[79] but it is also true[80] that its use apparently increased in the 12th Dynasty. Several scholars[81] have pointed out that obsidian was very popular in the Middle Kingdom. At that time the skill in manufacturing obsidian objects reached its zenith and this very hard and difficult stone was also, albeit rarely, used in sculpture, as shown by the obsidian head of king Senwsert III in the Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon,[82] as well as in the production of small scarab amulets/seals.[83]

Although this stone may have originated in present day Armenia, Anatolia, in the Mediterranean and in both the African and Arabian coasts of the southern Red Sea, analysis of some obsidian articles from different phases of the Pharaonic history have shown that the raw material originated mostly in the latter regions.[84] Additionally, fragments of obsidian which appear to have arrived from the southern Red Sea have been recovered in Middle Kingdom assemblages at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis, the harbour from where the Egyptian maritime expeditions to the land of Punt were

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[70] Wildung (ed.) 1984, 89, see also Bourriau 1988, 127.

[71] Lucas 1962, 227; Manzo 1999, 8–9.

[72] Brunton 1920, 24–25, 40; Mace 1920; Winlock 1934, 12–13, 17, pl. I.

[73] See Manzo 1999, 8; Lucas 1962, 434–435.

[74] Gerisch 2007, 183–184. So far, the finds from Mersa/Wadi Gawasis seem to confirm that this prized wood imported from Punt should be identified at least in the Middle Kingdom with *Diospyros* sp. and not with *Dalbergia melanoxylon*, *contra* Gale, Gasson, Hepper, and Killen 2000, 338–340.

[75] Brunton 1920, 22, 26, 36–37, pl. IX; Winlock 1934, 19, 67–68, pl. XVI A.

[76] de Morgan 1895, 71, pl. XXV, 60–62.

[77] Malek 2003, 122; see also Wildung (ed.) 1984, 90, fig. 82.

[78] Brunton 1920, 22, 26, 36, pl. XI; Winlock 1934, 60, l. XIV, XV, see also Malek 2003, 123.

[79] See e.g. Garstang 1901, 31; Naville 1923, 295.

[80] Clermont-Ganneau 1922, 297.

[81] Bourriau 1988, 26, 127; Lucas 1962, 416; Malek 2003, 122.

[82] Malek 2003, 113 see also Bourriau 1988, 26, n. 15.

[83] Bourriau 1988, 153, n. 176; Petrie 1917, 8–9.

[84] Aston, Harrell, and Shaw 2000, 46–47; Bavay, De Putter, Adams, Navez, and André 2000, 17–19; Cann and Renfrew 1964, 130, 133, Table I, n. 71, Table II, n. 71; Francaviglia 1990, 64, Table I, n. 7; Lucas 1962, 146; Tykot 1996, 179; for the sources of obsidian see in general Andrews 1990, 48, 1994, 104, Manzo 1999, 9.

launched.[85] Consequently, the great skill achieved in the Middle Kingdom in working this kind of stone as well as its prevalence in this period may well point to some link with the high level of maritime activity on the Red Sea.

Again as for the jewels, the spread of these objects, which at least in some cases may have been made from raw materials imported from the regions of the southern Red Sea, could have been affected by the wide network of relationships of the 12th Dynasty kings. An obsidian oil jar, similar to the ones from the treasures of the 12th Dynasty princesses and bearing the name of Amenemhat III, was found at Byblos.[86]

Thus, this type of vase seems to have been produced in the 12th Dynasty, possibly during the reign of Amenemhat III, in royal workshops and to have passed around members of the royal family, through the network of diplomatic exchanges and possibly internal redistribution, as was usual for stone vessels.[87] Interestingly, the passage of obsidian oil jars and aromatic substances they contained could be in some way allied to that of jewels and not just because of the gold foil often covering their rims or because they were produced in royal workshops. Actually, in the New Kingdom, use of ointments and perfumes is often linked to the presentation of jewels and decorations by the king and probably a sign of royal favour[88] and this may well have been the case earlier on.

The obsidian jar bearing the name of Amenemhat III was not the only Egyptian obsidian object discovered at Byblos. In another tomb, an obsidian box was discovered with the name of Amenemhat IV.[89] As remarked by Montet[90] these boxes, too, may have been used for aromatic resins, perfumes or ointments, as similar boxes represented on contemporary coffins are labelled as *pr ʿnty*, "the house of incense". An important import from Punt was aromatic resins for ritual use, for the cult and also for official investitures, as well as for the production of perfumes and unguents, especially the variety called *ʿnty*.[91] In this case perhaps it is not only the raw material in which the precious container was carved which could be linked to the regions of the southern Red Sea, but also the contents themselves.

Furthermore, the inscriptions on alabaster vessels found among the grave goods of the 13th Dynasty princess Nubhotep at Dashur and whose shape is similar to that of the obsidian containers described above, suggest that this type of vessel was intended for oils and perfumes made from (or named after) *ʿntyw*, *ḥknw* and *sṯḥb*,[92] i.e. again imported resins, at least some of them being imported from the regions of the southern Red Sea. The use of this type of vessels (albeit made from alabaster) for ointments and perfumes is also backed up by finds made in the tombs of princesses Ita, Khnumit, Ita-weret and Sit-Hathor-meret at Dashur.[93] Consequently, the same perfumes and anointments also may well have been kept in vessels made of obsidian with a similar shape, bearing in mind, too, that their shape is the same as the hieroglyphic sign W 1 in the list drawn up by Gardiner[94] and which is used as a determinative for words related to ointments and perfumes.

That is why we can identify an association of objects and products made of raw materials imported from the southern Red Sea, manufactured in the royal workshops and distributed via the same wide network of internal and external royal channels along which jewels inspired by the maritime environment also used to travel. Indeed, the association of objects and products in some way linked to the maritime expeditions in the Red Sea may have been even more extensive, also including ivory, often used for the incrustations decorating the ebony boxes or caskets[95] and often imported from Punt.[96]

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[85] Lucarini 2007, 208. Chemical and physical analysis of these finds is planned in the forthcoming years by the Italian-American expedition at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis.

[86] Montet 1928, 155–157, pls. LXXXVIII, LXXXIX; see also Lilyquist 1993a, 42–43, Brunton 1936, 217.

[87] Sparks 2003, 41–46.

[88] Binder 2008, 201–204.

[89] Montet 1928, 157–159, pl. LXXXVIII, XC, figs. 68, 69; see also Lilyquist 1993a, 42–43.

[90] Montet 1928, 159.

[91] Lucas 1962, 92–93; Manzo 1999, 8; Serpico 2000, 438.

[92] de Morgan 1895, 109, fig. 260; Montet 1928, 156; Naville 1922, 293.

[93] de Morgan 1903, 49, 55, fig. 108, 56; fig. 110; 74 and 76, fig. 126 respectively.

[94] Gardiner 1982, 527.

[95] See e.g. Brunton 1920, 22–23, 25, 38–41, pls. XI,XII; Mace 1920; Winlock 1934, 12–14, 16–19.

[96] Krzyszkowska and Morkot 2000, 323; Manzo 1999, 7.

### A Byblite connection

It may be no coincidence that several of the objects described above were found at Byblos. The cedar wood used in architecture and, more significantly in this context, for building seagoing ships, as also confirmed by the Mersa/Wadi Gawasis finds,[97] was imported from the region of Byblos and inland Syria.[98]

Of course, in the 12th Dynasty Egypt had very close ties with Byblos[99] and the objects made from raw materials from the southern Red Sea may have been sent to the rulers of Byblos as royal gifts. Yet, although the supply of wood was an important part of these diplomatic and economic arrangements between Egypt and Byblos, the rulers of Byblos may well have been more directly involved in the maritime activities of the Pharaos, providing not just the raw materials for the shipyards, but also trained staff and crew members. Certainly, it would be going too far to posit that Byblos had been providing Egypt with fully rigged ships since the time of Sneferu,[100] since we know from the inscription of Antefoker[101] that during the Middle Kingdom ships were built at the dockyards in Koptos. Nonetheless the discovery of ceramics from Canaan and from the Aegean at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis[102] raises the question of the direct involvement of sailors and crew personnel from the eastern Mediterranean in expeditions to the land of Punt. In the 12th and 13th Dynasties a massive influx of groups of people from the Near East including the arrival of sailors and ship carpenters working on behalf of the Egyptian state, was experienced at Avaris. This is now documented.[103]

The possibility of a Levantine contribution to Egyptian naval technology skills has been postulated for the Old Kingdom.[104] This should not be considered surprising within the context of active seafaring dealings with Byblos which were distinctive of that period.[105] A similar pattern is reported by Herodotus for the Late Period.[106] This may have also been a reality in Middle Kingdom times, as has been suggested by Montet.[107]

### A Nubian liaison (dangereuse?)

As we have pointed out, the use of shells as pendants has been viewed by several scholars as a Nubian practice. The ornaments consisting of metal imitations of shells have been considered a foreign practice, too,[108] leading their popularity in Middle Kingdom Egypt to be attributed to Nubian influence.

Although ornaments made of sea shells are widespread in assemblages of the Pangrave[109] as well as in those of C-Group cultures,[110] there are just a few cases where they are typologically similar to the mother-of-pearl pendants made from *Avicula Meleagrina margaritacea* described above.[111] Occasionally, pendants which are similar in shape and in the technique of hanging from the ones made of *Avicula Meleagrina margaritacea* were made of shells from the Nile, such as the *Spathopsis rubens* (Nile clam), as in one case from the C-Group cemetery at Hierakonpolis.[112]

Conversely, in phases earlier and roughly contemporaneous with the Egyptian pendants as described above, the use of sea shells as pendants occurs largely in Kerma assemblages in Upper Nubia. Among them feature the mother-of-pearl pendants, produced – like the Egyptian ones – from *Avicula Meleagrina margaritacea*, a Red Sea shell, and marked out by holes drilled for suspension with the edges ground to produce a uniform circular outline and the outer surface ground off leaving only the mother-of-pearl linings.

Although a single imitation in blue *faïence* of these shell pendants was discovered in a Classic

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97 See Gerisch 2007, 185–187.

98 Gale, Gasson, Hepper, and Killen 2000, 349–350.

99 See Allen 2009; Montet 1928, 274–279; Redford 1992, 96–97.

100 As sugested by Montet 1928, 272.

101 Abdemoneim Sayed 1977, 170, pl. 16, b, lines 3–4.

102 Bard and Fattovich 2008, 51.

103 Forstner-Müller and Müller 2006.

104 See e.g. Redford 1992, 40.

105 Sowada 2009, 247–256.

106 Lloyd 1977, 152–153; Pernigotti 1988, 608.

107 Montet 1954, 63, 70.

108 Aldred 1979, 44–45, 121, 124.

109 See e.g. Bietak 1966, 59–60, Taf. 28, 76058, Taf. 31, 76053, Taf. 32, 76060, 76063, Taf. 33, III, Taf. 34, 3–4, 1968, 122–123, Taf. 16, P. 16, 17; Wainwright 1920, 17–18, pl. VIII.

110 Bietak 1966, 28, Taf. 9, 76114, 76124, Taf. 10, III, Taf. 11, 3, 1968, 112, Taf. 8, P 16, Taf. 13, P16.

111 See e.g. Säve-Söderbergh 1989, 112, 238, fig. 40, A, pl. 47, s.

112 Friedman 2004, 51, pl. 6.

Kerma assemblage,[113] these pendants have been recorded only in Ancient and Middle Kerma assemblages, ca. 2400–1750 BC.[114] The fact that the mother-of-pearl pendants of *Avicula Meleagrina margaritacea* similar to the Middle Kingdom ones occur in Upper Nubia since Ancient Kerma times, i.e. earlier than in Egypt itself, may point to a possible Nubian origin for the Egyptian type.

It should be noted that, in general, the use of marine shells for producing personal ornaments was largely limited to the Ancient and Middle Kerma sectors of the cemetery at Kerma,[115] ca. 2400–1750 BC, perhaps reflecting a broader interaction between Upper Nubia and the Red Sea during these phases. More recently, shell pendants similar to the ones from Kerma and produced from Red Sea shells were also discovered in Middle Kerma graves of the Fourth Cataract region.[116]

The interpretation of the presence of these objects in the tombs of the Kerma culture has varied. They have been deemed amulets, or alternatively, by analogy with the interpretation postulated for pendants bearing a royal name in the Egyptian context, it has been suggested that they could have been a kind of award.[117] The use of these shell pendants as decorations may also be borne out by their association with the tomb of an archer dating to Ancient Kerma times at Kerma,[118] but further research and a full publication of the assemblages where these pendants were found are needed to clarify the issue. In any case, the use at Kerma of pendants similar to the ones which were used in Egypt as decorations should not be considered surprising. This is well-known for the Classic Kerma phase when gold, ivory and electrum fly pendants similar to the contemporary Egyptian flies of valour were quite common in Kerma assemblages.[119]

In both cases, whether these pendants were a kind of award or amulets, their occurrence may suggest that, in Kerma too, the relationship with the Red Sea was considered meaningful and worth highlighting, at least in Ancient and Middle Kerma times.

The prevalence of this specific type of pendant made from Red Sea shells may be linked to the economic and political situation which was distinctive of North East Africa in the first half of the second millennium BC, with Egypt and Kerma competing over control of the trade network through which African goods passed on their way to the Mediterranean and the Near East.[120] From this perspective, and also in the light of what has been said in the previous paragraph, the comments made some time ago by Stevenson Smith[121] about the similarities between materials and a number of associations between the finds at Kerma and Byblos suggesting that the two sites were located at both ends of a trade route may be correct in a way. Kerma may have been not just a crucial partner and competitor for Egypt, but also an important part of a wider system taking in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and sub-Saharan Africa. Kerma's part in this system may have started *via* Egypt in Ancient Kerma times; Kush may have changed from being a partner with Egypt to its competitor in the Middle Kerma when Egypt tried to bypass Upper Nubia *via* the Red Sea. Thereafter, in Classic Kerma times, Kush may have been even more directly involved in the system, forming a partnership with the Hyksos and giving them access to African commodities.[122] Thus, the use of sea-shells as pendants, and, perhaps more specifically, the mother-of-pearl pendants of *Avicula Meleagrina margaritacea*, may have constituted – for the Nubian aristocracy of Ancient and Middle Kerma

[113] Reisner 1923, 130.

[114] Bonnet (ed.) 1990, 176, n. 118, 184, n. 150, 197, n. 204; Dunham 1982, 88–89, 138, 143, pl. XVIIIa, pl. XXXIII, pl. XLIc; Reisner 1923, 318 see also Welsby (ed.) 2001, 365, n. 287.

[115] Bonnet (ed.) 1990, 197; O'Connor 1993, 136, n. 45; Reisner 1923, 318–319; Welsby and Anderson 2004, 85.

[116] Mahmoud el-Tayeb and Kołosowska 2005, 57, fig. 7; Paner, Pudło and Borcowski 2010, 63–65, fig. 5, HP 233/1, fig. 6, HP 735/1, HP 738/4, HP 233/1. H. Paner in his presentation "The Kerma Period in the Fourth Cataract Region" delivered at the 12th International Conference of Nubian Studies, London August 2–6, 2010, confirmed that these shell pendants used to be made from sea shells.

[117] Bonnet (ed.) 1990, 184, 197, see also Welsby and Anderson (eds.) 2004, 85.

[118] Bonnet (ed.) 1990, 176, n. 118.

[119] Bonnet (ed.) 1990, 224, n. 297; O'Connor 1993, 137, n. 50; Reisner 1923, 131–132, pl. 53, 1; see also Binder 2008, 50.

[120] See Manzo 2010a, 2010b.

[121] Stevenson Smith 1969, 281.

[122] See also Lilyquist 1993b, 47.

times – a way of showing how far the relationships of the fledging kingdom of Kush extended.

## Final comments: an ideological perspective?

All of these aspects seem to point to the importance of the use of materials imported from the southern Red Sea and of objects inspired by the marine environment in the royal redistributive network both inside and outside Egypt in the Middle Kingdom and particularly in the 12th Dynasty. Furthermore, the deployment of objects made out of raw materials from the Red Sea milieu or inspired by the marine environment as rank-markers and insignia may have not been limited to Egypt itself but, for the reasons we have seen, could have extended to Kerma culture in Upper Nubia and to Byblos.

And there may be still more. The convincing proposition that a Hathoric symbolism inspired the design and composition of royal female jewellery hallmarked by marine components, such as different kinds of shells and star fishes, in the 12th Dynasty,[123] may indicate that these designs and materials and, as a corollary, the frequent visits and access to the sea, were embedded in the broader Egyptian ideological framework of the time.

Of course, Hathor was not only a goddess of beauty and love thus referred to by all the objects linked to these aspects, such as mirrors, perfumes and cowri beads. She was also ideologically linked to the transmission of royal power and to the regenerative aspects of Egyptian royalty whose importance is evinced in the 12th Dynasty, amongst other things, by the fact that several royal ladies were priestesses of Hathor, their link with the goddess being expressed at an iconographic level by the newly introduced hathoric coiffures[124] and by their use of the uraeus, the "Eye of Ra", that is Hathor herself in her violent manifestation.[125] Interestingly, the 12th Dynasty witnessed the production of the female sphinx, a new type of royal representation characterized by a leonine body and female head with hathoric coiffure.[126] The link between queen and lion expressed by the female sphinx is not surprising in the context of hathoric symbolism because, in Egyptian mythology, Hathor was also the wild lioness and was identified with Sekhmet[127] or Hathor-Tefnut coming back to Egypt from Punt.[128] This other aspect of Hathor, as well, may have been referred to in some components of royal jewellery of the 12th Dynasty. Actually, among the grave goods of royal ladies of the 12th Dynasty, jewels reproducing shells and referring to the sea are often associated with other jewels characterized by aspects such as crouching lions, feline heads and feline claws.[129] We have already made the point that the shape of some of the shell pendants, such as those made from or modelled on cowri shells, may have referred both to the female sex organ and to the "Eye of Ra" and thus, once again, to Hathor as the mother and patron of fertility and love but also to this connotation of Hathor as Sekhmet.

Hathor was also the mistress of several foreign lands such as the turquoise and copper-bearing region of the Sinai, Byblos and also of Punt.[130] Of course, the latter identification is most interesting for us as Punt seems to be the place of origin of several of the raw materials (obsidian, aromatics, ebony, gold and electrum) which were used to produce the objects we are dealing with.

The fact that the most of these objects, such as the jewels and the toiletries, can be linked to Hathor is certainly significant. Of course, the shells and their reproduction in precious metals were also linked to the marine environment and perhaps, in particular, to the maritime expeditions to Punt, the region providing the raw materials which were used to produce the objects we are dealing with. From this perspective, too, Hathor had a crucial importance to Egyptian religion, as she is also a patron of maritime activities, being the "one who steers, who plies the steering oar".[131]

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[123] Scandone Matthiae 1985, 334–337; Staehelin 1978, 79, 81, 83–84.

[124] Pirelli 2008, 79, 98; Vandier 1958, 257–258; Wildung (ed.) 1984, 88.

[125] Roberts 1995, 10–11; Robins 1993, 23–24.

[126] Malek 2003, 112; Wildung (ed.) 1984, 88.

[127] Arnold 1995, 17; Hornung 1992, 100–102; Roberts 1995, 10–13.

[128] de Cenival 1988, 65.

[129] See e.g. Aldred 1979, pls. 12 23; Andrews 1990, 140, fig. 124; Arnold 1995, 19, n. 16; Brunton 1920, 22, 31–33, pls. II, III, VIII; Malek 2003, 125; Wilkinson 1971, 53–54, 63–64, 81–83, pls. IV, VI, XIII; Winlock 1934, 34–36, 41–43, 50–52, pls. IX, XII A.

[130] Roberts 1995, 8–10; Stadelman 1967, 2–4; Andrews 1994, 19–20.

[131] *ir.s ḥmw*, see Jones 1988, 209; see also Hollis 2009, 3.

Hathor may have been used deliberately as the deity of foreign lands because she could be readily equated with the prevalent foreign mother-goddesses,[132] thus representing a shared religious point of reference both for the Egyptians acting far from the Nile valley and local people. Given also her maritime connotations, this may have been the case for Byblos and, in general, the ports of the Syrian coast.[133] In actual fact, Hathor became the *Interpretatio Aegyptiaca* of the Near Eastern goddesses rescued by a hero/god protector of seafarers, identified in Egypt with Horus fighting with the monster-Sea,[134] in the context of the fight between the hero/storm god and the monster-serpent/sea.[135] The relationship with the marine environment and this correlation with Near Eastern goddesses of the sea make Hathor the true predecessor of the *Isis pelagia* of Hellenistic and Roman times.[136]

In Middle Kingdom times, the ties between Egypt and Syrian states are also borne out by the occurrence of the portraits of members of the royal family in Syria, which may reflect a specific political program of the Egyptian Court in relation to that region.[137] Interestingly, some female sphinxes, as well as several portraits of female members of the 12th Dynasty were found in Syria where portraits of 12th Dynasty kings were also discovered.[138] The prevalence of female sphinxes and portraits of female members of the 12th Dynasty as royal gifts to Syrian allies or their consecration in Syrian temples may well form part of the Egyptian Court's ideological program described above and centred on the correlation between Hathor, represented by royal ladies and Syrian goddesses, thereby providing a symbolic expression of the inclusion of coastal Syria in the Egyptian political sphere. This idea would have relied on using an iconographic language as expressed by the portraits of royal ladies and the female sphinx with hathoric attributes which was also understandable by the local, often Egyptianized, aristocracy because it was close to the local ideology which focused on the great goddesses.

Of course, the statues of Egyptian kings that went to Syrian courts and temples might also have fitted into the symbolic system of expression of the Egyptian political influence described above. As we have already seen, the Egyptian ruler is the living Horus and Horus, a sky-god with his solar connotation, may be the *Intepretatio Aegyptiaca* of the hero of the Syrian myth who rescues the great goddess identified with Hathor fighting with the monster-Sea-Chaos. Interestingly, Horus himself was also a deity closely allied to Min[139] who, together with Hathor, was the other deity typified by a patronage on Punt and possibly throughout the Red Sea and widely mentioned in inscriptions commemorating seafaring expeditions at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis.[140]

This interpretation may suggest that the myth of the fight between the Sea and the hero/god had not surfaced in Egypt during the New Kingdom, when it is referred to in the legend of Astarte and the Sea,[141] but earlier. This is in a way supported by the archaeological evidence as a locally made seal from Tell el-Daba of the 18th century BC represents a hero/god-protector of seafarers defeating a monster and the connected iconographical motif of the lion attacking a serpent.[142]

At all events, the postulated identification of 12th Dynasty kings with Horus-hero rescuing Hathor-goddess is also apt to enrich with symbolic meaning the royal act of presenting – as gifts and/or decorations – shells, whether real or made from precious metals, often bearing a royal name. Actually, these shells as well as the goods arriving from places across the sea may symbolically represent the victory of the king-Horus over the monster-Sea. In fact the shell-inscribed pendants and the exotic goods may well have been linked to this specific symbolism, testifying – as they do – to the effectiveness of the king's action taken after a successful maritime expedition. At the same time, the exotic goods, the shell pendants, the metal reproductions of shells and other aspects linked to the marine environment may have had a more general

[132] Bloxam 2006, 295–296.
[133] Hollis 2009, 3.
[134] Redford 1990, 826, 834.
[135] Green 2003, 176–188.
[136] Leclant 1997, 24; Malaise 1997, 93.
[137] Wildung (ed.) 1984, 188.
[138] Posener 1971, 545–546; Stevenson Smith 1969, 279–280 see also Porter and Moss 1951, 383–396.
[139] Goedike 2002, 248; Wainwright 1931, 190–191.
[140] Abdelmoneim Sayed 1977; Pirelli 2007a; Pirelli 2007b; ElSayed 2007.
[141] Collombert and Coulon 2000; Lefebvre 1949, 106–113.
[142] Porada 1984, 487–488; Green 2003, 162–163.

meaning, as the sea is ultimately an expression of Chaos. A king who is able to give away the shells, i.e. the sea, is a king who controls it, i.e. defeating Chaos.

All of these points go to suggest that the associations with the sea itself and with the regions of the southern Red Sea, as well as the enterprises launched into those regions, may have turned into a crucial activity for the 12th Dynasty kings, not only for practical, but also for symbolic reasons. On the one hand, these adventures yielded up goods which were integral to the ritual and practical manifestations of the power of the king, such as the cult of the gods and the internal and external redistribution network of gifts and awards. Most of the raw materials obtained from the Red Sea regions would have been turned, at the workshops linked to the Royal Court, into luxury goods and used as a royal gift/decoration, in shapes which were of course by no means accidental but signified specific ideological concepts to be communicated to the high-ranking officials and foreign princes. On the other hand, in view of the symbolic associations between the shapes linked to the marine milieu and deities such as Hathor and Horus, featuring both female and male components as is so often the case in the principal Egyptian theological systems,[143] it may be postulated that, in the 12th Dynasty, the launching of seafaring expeditions into the Red Sea and maritime activities in general were organically embedded in the ideological system of Egyptian royalty and became an important part of it.

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[143] See Troy 2003, 104–113.

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