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**The Land to its Limits:
Borders and Border Stelae in Ancient Egypt**

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Prohlášení:

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Jan Rovenský

Abstrakt

Diplomová práce zkoumá tzv. hraniční stély a věnuje se i konceptu hranic ve starověkém Egyptě. Na základě historické, archeologické a epigrafické analýzy daných artefaktů dochází k závěru, že by se v egyptologii měla přestat používat kategorie „hraniční stéla", jelikož existuje jen jediný monument, který lze označit jako hraniční stélu, jmenovitě stélu z 8. roku vlády Senusreta III. objevené v pevnosti v Semně.

Abstract

This M.A. thesis examines so-called border stelae in ancient Egypt, as well as the concept of the border. This is done by analysing historical, archaeological and epigraphic data. This thesis concludes that the category of the border stela in Egyptological research should be scrapped, as there is only one monument that lives up to this description, namely the year 8 stela of Senusret III discovered at the fortress of Semna-West.

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<u>Introduction</u>

One of the clearest symbols of sovereignty of the modern nation state is its border. These simple black lines, visible on our maps, separate one autonomous country from another. In our world, these simple black lines enable states, in theory at least, to exercise total control over their territory for those living within (typically by their legal systems), and for those leaving or arriving from abroad (by controlling the influx and outflow of goods and people). On an even more basic level, borders differentiate between citizens and foreigners, between *us* and *them*.

To the modern reader a border is a commonplace concept, something clearly marked and jealously guarded at times. However, this was not so during most of mankind's recorded history. In fact, the concept of the state's exclusive sovereignty over its territory, which forms the bedrock of modern international relations, would seem unusual and unfamiliar to people living before the end of the Thirty Years' War. To be sure, borders did exist, but were considerably more permeable, fluid and local than they are today.

Before the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, borders were predominantly natural, i.e., followed the contours of the terrain and major environmental barriers such as rivers, lakes or mountain ranges. Centralised and exclusive control of borders was rare, and the power of local rulers was rather limited and often overlapping. In addition, not all territory was carved up between political entities – up until the 17th century AD, states, if indeed we could call them that, existed amidst large swathes of shifting marchlands. In contrast, borders of many contemporary states are clearly established, political, drawn using a pencil and a ruler, at times totally irrespective not only to the landscape around them, but also to the historical, cultural and social realities, artificially dissecting communities and wreaking havoc. A case in point might be the Sykes–Picot Agreement of 1916 the aftershocks of which are still felt in the Middle East more than a century later, or the borders of many modern African states, which were drawn thousands of miles away without much thought to the land and people living within them.

Luckily, Egypt escaped such a fate. Despite acquiring large swathes of territory or being under the occupation of another power, the two most basic and crucial features – the Nile valley and delta – which defined Egypt for over 5000 years, have never been cast into doubt. Without question, the Nile *was* Egypt. Yet over the past five millennia its border

shifted, expanding and contracting in light of the political situation at home and abroad. Yet, what do we mean by the term "border" in relation to ancient Egypt?

Koyano (2001: 6–11) proposed five different types of borders or frontiers with regards to ancient Egypt: (1) natural, (2) administrative, (3) political, (4) religious, and (5) ethnic. According to him, *natural borders* were geographically and geomorphologically stable and limited to the Nile delta in the north, and the Nile valley to the first cataract in the south. *Administrative borders* were in fact the borders of nomes, that during the Dynastic era closely copied the natural divisions of the land but during the Greco-Roman new nomes were established outside the traditional territory of Egypt. *Political borders* were the mutable limits of the Egyptian "state" defined by the control and influence exercised by the pharaoh, his army and his administration, which at times expanded or contracted very dynamically and significantly. *Religious borders* together with *ethnic borders* are perhaps the most ephemeral and difficult to grasp of the lot, as the distinction by faith, language and custom was not always clear, especially following the collapse of the Old Kingdom. In addition, ethnic borders create another problem as there never was a clear definition of ethnic Egyptians (for example, the region between Gebel es-Silsila and the first cataract was an ethnic mix of Egyptians and Nubians), if one does not take into account pictures of foreigners, such as the famous depiction on the wall of the tomb of Khnumhotep at Beni Hasan. Koyano's classification illustrates just how complex the concept of the border really is, and that it is certainly not a simple black line.

Equally tricky is also the terminology occurring in Egyptology which boils down to three terms: "border", "boundary" and "frontier". These words have often been used as synonyms, with scholars interchanging one with the other. Though this is understandable from a stylistic point of view, it does create confusion. Even more problems arise when talking about borders and stelae – such monuments have been called a "border stela", "boundary stela", "frontier stela" or "border marker", to cite the most common terms.

Quirke (1989: 261) suggested a useful differentiation between a fixed and loose boundary. According to him a frontier was a loose boundary, an indefinite zone where a polity came to an end, whereas he saw a border as a fixed line. Though Quirke's reasoning is sound, I feel an additional step needs to be taken to avoid terminological confusion. In this M. A. thesis I will therefore make a distinction between a *"border"* on the one hand – understood as the limits of actual direct political control of the (in this case Egyptian) state – and *"frontier"*

on the other – understood as a territory with significant (Egyptian) dominance or influence – which to an extent overlap with the Egyptian terms *tš(.w)* and *ḏr(.w)*. I will wilfully omit the use of the term "boundary", as I shall reserve this term exclusively for the Amarna boundary stelae; these monuments, however, will not be the elaborated on in this thesis.

Having made this distinction clear, we can address the core of this thesis: border stelae. So, what are they? Though many scholars would immediately dismiss such a question as silly, and its answer as clearly obvious, it is nevertheless a valid point. In fact, it illustrates just how much are some terms taken for granted and how much they are used repeatedly in academic discourse without a second thought. Though everyone seems to know what border stelae are – for example Eyre (1990: 136) in his discussion of Senusret III's stelae noted that "the basic rationale behind setting up border stelae requires little commentary" – delving deeper into the matter will reveal that there is no broad consensus, nor was one ever sought. To be sure, I believe that the idea stems from our own unconscious notion of the border, and our assumption that the signs and markers which we see at borders between states today have always existed, is simply foolish. In fact, there are telltale signs that in ancient Egypt this never was the case (Goelet 1999: 23).

What do we mean by the term "border stela"? Is it a stela set up on the border, or set up in no man's land where the pharaoh wished his border to be? How crucial is the wording of the text to classify an artefact as a border stela? Is any monument mentioning the establishment of borders or their enlargement a border stela, or is the artefact's original location more important? Or is both the text and the stela's location crucial? What if there is no text at all? Does the stela necessarily need to look like a stela, or do rock inscriptions also count? Does the stela need to be described by the Egyptian word *wḏ*? How crucial is the authorship of the pharaoh? The list of questions could go on and on and on.

The ancient Egyptians were not familiar with the term "border stela". Instead, they used the umbrella term *wḏ*, which we tend to translate as stela, but that is more of our interpretation based on archaeological data than Egyptian culture. The term *wḏ* was surely used to describe a stela – most often accompanied by the determinative O26 (stela), or alternatively O39 (stone block), though there is also the rare case of the V12 determinative (rope) on the Memphite foundation stela of king Taharka (Cairo JE 36861) – but primarily it was a verb with the meaning "to command", "to decree". In other words, while we describe what we *see*, the Egyptians' chief concern was what the stela *says*.

The stela determinative O26 can also be seen in the much rarer expression *ꜥḥꜥ.w* attested from the New Kingdom onwards, which the Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae translates not only as "stela" but also as "Denkstein", i.e. memorial stone;[1] in addition, one can assume that etymologically it is connected to the verb *ꜥḥꜥ* "to stand", which would describe its appearance rather than its meaning.

The only other term attested is *ꞽs.t*, translated as "Grenzstein" ("boundary stone" or "landmark" in English) by the Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae. Again, there are only a handful of attestations for *ꞽs.t*, which do not provide us with many details. The first use of the term comes from the Old Kingdom, where *ꞽs.t* is mentioned twice in the Pyramid texts (PT 1142, 1236), then appears on the Middle Kingdom stela of Montuhotep (Cairo CG 20539), and finally on the New Kingdom Boundary Stela K from Amarna. But what exactly the Egyptians considered a "Grenzstein" is difficult to determine. Espinel (1998: 26–27), for example, speculated whether *ꞽs.t* could have been inscriptions carved into the diorite quarries of Toshka in the Western desert with the names of Old Kingdom rulers Radjedef, Djedkara, Sahura and Khufu. The debate is, obviously, far from over.

Despite these apparent difficulties, in Egyptology the term "boundary stela" and "border stela" is used frequently without much thought. The term "boundary stela" actually appears to be more common, possibly because of the seminal work of William Murnane and Charles van Siclen called *The Boundary Stelae of Akhenaten* published in 1993. Over time, scholars applied the terms "boundary stela" and "border stela" to a very diverse spectrum of monuments. Vogel (2011) made the first attempt to classify the different types of stelae, making a useful distinction between two broad categories: (1) stelae which were set up to define Egypt's external frontiers, and (2) stelae which were set up to define the kingdom's internal frontiers.

Stelae intended for use within Egypt are a motley lot. Being inspired by Vogel, I propose to group here the aforementioned (a) boundary stelae of Amarna, (b) stelae set up between different nomes, (c) royal donation stelae known especially from the Third Intermediate Period, (d) other boundary stelae denoting property, usually as field markers, and (e) alamats or street stelae which served as (at times also inscribed) way markers erected on streets and roads in ancient Egypt. Neither of these "internal stelae" will, however, be examined in this thesis.

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[1] https://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/servlet/GetWcnDetails?u=guest&f=0&l=0&wn=40420&db=0 (accessed March 18th, 2021).

As to monuments intended to be set up on the borders of Egypt, all we have to go on are five specimens. Scholars usually speak about three stelae dating to the Middle Kingdom, all of them commissioned by Senusret III – the stela from Semna-West dated to year 8 and two almost identical monuments from Semna-West and Uronarti dated to year 16 – and two from the New Kingdom – the stelae of Thutmose I and Thutmose III on the Hagr el-Merwa at Kurgus. Similar royal monuments from other eras have not been discovered to date.

It is specifically and exclusively this group of five stelae, which will be at the focus of this thesis, together with the discussion of the dynamics between the natural border and the political border. From a chronological point of view, the thesis will focus on pharaonic Egypt, i.e., from the 1st Dynasty to the arrival of Alexander the Great in 332 BC, concentrating mainly on the Middle and New Kingdoms when the aforementioned five monuments were created, though events will obviously be put in a wider historical context. However, due to the fact that there are no border stelae attested in the Old Kingdom and earlier, nor are there any such monuments documented between the collapse of the New Kingdom and the arrival of the Macedonians, other periods shall only be mentioned briefly.

This work will argue that the term border stela or boundary stela in relation to the external border of pharaonic Egypt is not only inaccurate, but that the group as such is non-existent and should be scrapped. In Egyptological research it has become an umbrella term for a wide range of incompatible artefacts, and more than anything else, it mirrors our modern perceptions and expectations, rather than the experiences of the ancient Egyptians and the royal ideology of the rulers of the Nile.

I claim that only the year 8 stela of Senusret III from Semna-West is the closest to what we can consider a "border stela", i.e., a royal monument placed on the actual border which clearly and directly acknowledges its existence. The other two stelae of Senusret III from year 16 I call "victory stelae", and the monuments of Thutmose I and Thutmose III "frontier markers". My reasoning follows Vogel's (2011: 338) assertion that we need to consider the individual monuments in context – the interpretation of the text and/or image does not make sense without looking at the original location of the stela, the political and historical circumstances of its erection and the surrounding landscape. Only then can we make a reasonable deduction concerning the function of these monuments.

The structure of this thesis is divided as follows. Following this Introduction, **Chapter One** is dedicated to the concept of the border in ancient Egypt. This part focuses on the

differences between immutable natural borders and the mutable political borders of ancient Egypt, their link with the terms *tꜣš(.w)* and *ḏr(.w)*, the policy of border expansion *(swsḫ tꜣš)*, and the concept of maʿat and isfet. Attention is paid to the southern, eastern and western borders (the northern one – the Mediterranean coastline – is, obviously, not examined) and changes throughout history of pharaonic Egypt. With regards to the shifting political borders in the south, east and west, special attention is placed on the existence of strongholds and fortified settlements, which, I maintain, are crucial in understanding the actual extent of Egyptian control, and thus of the political border.

Chapter Two focuses on the supposed border stelae in the Old Kingdom. This short chapter dismisses the suggestion, that the markers found in and around the Step Pyramid complex of king Netjerykhet are in fact first examples of border stelae in ancient Egypt.

Chapter Three focuses on border stelae from the Middle Kingdom – the stela from Semna West from year 8, the stela from Semna-West from year 16 and the stela from Uronarti from year 16 of Senusret III's reign as well. This chapter examines the monuments in their historical and geographic context, and looks at each monument with regards to its appearance, its inscription, its find spot, and probable original location. This part of the thesis clearly shows that the year 8 stela and the two year 16 stelae are very different in nature – whereas the former could indeed be seen as a border stela, the two latter monuments are in fact victory stelae that only happen to mention the border; this, however, is not sufficient to put them in the same category as the year 8 stela.

Chapter Four deals with border stelae from the New Kingdom. Egyptologists typically speak of two carvings from the reigns of king Thutmose I and Thutmose III on the Hagr el-Merwa deep in Nubia at Kurgus and, in addition, two stelae of Thutmose I and Thutmose III far north on the upper Euphrates, of which there is only epigraphic evidence. I shall argue that not one of the above cited examples could be considered a border stela; if anything, I would call them "frontier markers". Finally, the Conclusion will wrap things up and suggest other areas of possible research in connection to the study of borders in ancient Egypt.

Concerning dating, this thesis draws on the chronology presented in the *Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* published in 2000 and edited by Shaw. As to sources and literature, the most crucial starting point are the five stelae themselves, all of which have been studied

and translated many times over the years; this thesis will provide its own transliteration and translation of the text.

With regards to secondary literature, the most detailed study to date is Galán's *Victory and Border* published in 1995. Though the book primarily deals with imperialism, borders, their expansion in the 18th Dynasty, the author addresses the concept of the border from other time periods, as well as stelae on the border. A very good introduction with several fundamental points is Vogel's article "This far and not a step further! The ideological concept of ancient Egyptian boundary stelae" from 2011. Török's *Between Two Worlds*, published in 2009, is an indispensable source for the southern border describing the relations and dynamics between ancient Egypt and Nubia over the course of four millennia. Other important sources relate to the stelae themselves. As for the monuments of Senusret III, Obsomer's article "Sésostris III et la frontière de Semna" from 2017 is the most up to date piece of research. It analyses in great detail the two year 16 stelae from Semna-West and Uronarti, but also deals with the year 8 stela from Semna-West and lists an extensive bibliography of earlier works. As for the Hagr el-Merwa carvings of Thutmose I and Thutmose III, the most important research is that of Davies who has been working at Kurgus for many years.

The rest of the sources this thesis draws on concern specific issues encountered during research. For example, there are many remarkable books and articles focusing on the concept of maʿat and isfet, the relations between Egyptians and foreigners, the worship of deities in liminal areas, the imperial policies of the New Kingdom, topography etc. In addition, there are numerous studies concerning the relations between Egypt and the city-states of the Levant; scholars have dealt with warfare, fortifications, geography, trade, but there is no comprehensive publication such as Török's monography covering the northeastern border and frontier. Research on the western border is even sparser and focused primarily on the archaeology of individual sites in the oases and the western delta. One wonders what other secrets the sands of the Sahara conceal, and how much does this lack of research distort our understanding and appreciation of the Egyptian border.

As a final note on sources and bibliography, I must point out that I do not adhere to the heaping of citation upon citation for every detail imaginable (especially for common knowledge), which does tend to happen in Egyptological research. My aim is for this thesis not only to be thoroughly researched and methodologically clear, but also to be an enjoyable read. Heaping bibliographical references betrays such a purpose, as it is tedious and

distractive. For this reason, sources are cited mainly with respect to their relevance with a preference for most recent studies, while bearing in mind other earlier seminal works. This does not mean that other sources have been omitted, a brief glance at the bibliography clearly indicates otherwise. The reader interested in particular details will surely find additional information in the cited studies, which offer even more sources.

Finally, it must be emphasised, that though this thesis opens up numerous avenues of further research, it remains limited in scope. This thesis is primarily a study of the five monuments – the stelae of Senusret III, and the carvings of Thutmose I and Thutmose III – along with a survey pertaining to the concept of the border in pharaonic Egypt. Yet even such a limited thesis shows, that "border studies" in ancient Egypt are a very worthwhile, fascinating and prospective area for further research.

<u>Chapter 1 – The concept of the border in ancient Egypt</u>

1.1 – Introduction

Not many countries in the world can claim such well-defined, natural borders as ancient Egypt. Even when controlling large swaths of territory in Africa and across the Near East during the New Kingdom, or when cut up into many competing principalities during the three Intermediate Periods, the Nile had always remained *the* defining point for the ancient Egyptians; and quite predictably so due to the surrounding inhospitable desert. The choice between life and death could not have been more apparent. Even today, though the Arab Republic of Egypt covers an area of over one million square kilometres, around 95% of the country's 100 million inhabitants live along the course of the Nile, much as the ancient Egyptians did thousands of years ago.

In this light, one might say it was not the border that defined Egypt, but the Nile that defined Egypt's natural border – traditionally this was the floodplain between the first cataract in the south, and the delta's Mediterranean coastline in the north.[2] To the east and west lay inhospitable deserts, though very different in nature – whereas the Eastern desert is mainly composed from badlands and wadis, the Western desert is made up of, mostly flat, rocky and sandy wastes. This, however, was not bad news only: these deserts created natural barriers which, for the most part, isolated and protected Egypt from foreign incursions and aggression from abroad. The Nile and the surrounding desert created the basic duality of "life" and "death", "good" and "evil", "domestic" and "foreign". Little wonder that this dichotomy, which arose from clearly defined natural borders, played a crucial role in the conceptualisation of the ideology of the pharaonic state (Espinel 1998: 18), ultimately expressed by the terms maʿat and isfet.

Yet throughout its three millennia of statehood, pharaonic Egypt did not confine itself to its natural borders only. During the Middle Kingdom the pharaohs acquired large swathes of land in Nubia, and during the New Kingdom Egypt achieved its greatest territorial

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[2] It is important to note that though the traditional borders are between the first cataract and the Mediterranean coast, the original southern border of Egypt was actually located at Gebel es-Silsila, better known for its New Kingdom sandstone quarries, tombs, temples and shrines. The border at Elephantine was established only towards the end of the Old Kingdom (Koyano 2001: 20). Before that, the 70 kilometre stretch between Gebel es-Silsila and modern-day Asuan was a zone which I would identify as a frontier.

expansion not only in the south, but in the north as well. On the other hand, during the Second and Third Intermediate Period, the realm of the pharaohs was cut up into different competing dominions with new political borders being drawn within Egypt's traditional, natural borders.

1.2 – Natural borders and political borders

In the eyes of the ancient Egyptians, the Nile valley and delta were the centre of the universe chosen and created by the gods. This was the terrestrial realm where divine order, maʿat, reigned supreme,[3] and the king, the gods' representative on earth, ruled over this land. This was home, a well-known non-divisible territory where life was safe and predictable. It was called simply *Tꜣ-mry*, the "beloved land", and eventually *Kmt*, the "black land".[4] *Tꜣ-mry* and *kmt* stood in stark opposition to *ḫꜣs.t*, the "desert country" or "hill country" of the foreigners, later known as *dšr.t*, the "red land". These were territories controlled by the forces of chaos (*isf.t*). This was an unknown, foreign land inhabited by strange people with alien customs, speaking exotic languages, worshipping false gods, and ruled by kings with no divine legitimacy. It was an area set apart and loathed, yet at the same time its existence was absolutely crucial for pharaonic ideology – for without chaos there could be no order, without the foreign, there could be no Egyptian. The Egyptian king was thus charged by the gods to maintain order within his realm, which also meant keeping Egypt's borders safe from foreigners and other disciples of the forces of chaos (Meeks 2012: 12–13; Goelet 1999: 27).[5]

This is not to say that the concept of maʿat or Egyptian borders remained constant throughout the three millennia of pharaonic statehood. As any student of ancient Egypt is well

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[3] On the walls of the temple of Edfu one may find several depictions of Horus of Behdet together with the epithet "The one who demarcates the Two Lands with his wings" (*ꜥḥmw špsi wp tꜣ.wy m dḥn.wy=f*). This does not refer to physical borders but to the fact that the god delimits the domain of maʿat, making it difficult to separate the creation of physical borders with metaphysical ones (Koemoth 1995: 17–18).

[4] Goelet (1999: 28) noted that terms describing Egypt as *Kmt* and *Tꜣ-mry* are noticeably absent from Old Kingdom textual evidence and appear only during the First Intermediate Period. Why this is so is not clear, though one could speculate that the turbulent times of the First Intermediate Period were to blame. Ladynin (2014: 175) pointed out that from a cosmological point of view even the term for "land" (*tꜣ*) was significant, as it denoted territory fit for agriculture and, as a result, for the production of sacrificial food offerings for the gods. The word would eventually be mainly used to describe to the fertile flood-plain surrounding the course of the Nile.

[5] The pharaoh, however, was not the only one responsible for maintaining the borders safe and secure. Redford (1986: 13, ft. 86) pointed out several gods were charged with the protection of Egypt's borders as well, for example Sopdu in Wadi Tumilat, Thoth in Sinai, Seth in the eastern delta and Horus in the northeastern delta.

aware of, the ancient Egyptians were a pragmatic bunch, always ready and willing to accustom their history, myths, ideology, religion, culture, art etc. to adapt to the changing circumstances without betraying their most basic beliefs. In relation to the concept of the border in ancient Egypt, this pragmatism clearly appears when faced with the clash between the immutable reality of its natural borders and the, at times significant, shifts to its political borders, especially from the First Intermediate Period onwards. Indeed, Hornung (1966) and Englund (1999: 105) mentioned the continuous re-adaptation of the Egyptian myth to fit the circumstances of the moment. Liverani (2001: 29–33) spoke about the static, natural borders and the dynamic, political borders, which reminds one of the Egyptian concepts of eternity expressed by the words *ḏ.t* ("enduringly") and *nḥḥ* ("eternally").

At first, the political and ideological borders overlapped with the natural ones. During the Old Kingdom the process of demarcation of borders was virtually unknown (Bárta 2010: 23), but things changed significantly following the First Intermediate Period (Assmann 2014: 53; Espinel 1998: 29). Bárta (2010: 37) noted that the First Intermediate Period was a watershed which caused a significant change in the Egyptian mindset, as it was during the Middle Kingdom that the concept of the border as a clear-cut line developed. Probably partly due to the memories of foreign incursions, the pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom initiated a policy of border expansion *(swsḫ t3š)*, which became particularly aggressive during the New Kingdom when ancient Egypt became a massive empire.[6] Ironically, the acquisition of new land was done whilst invoking ma'at, which seems rather curious, since ma'at should have been a fixed constant.

This apparent contradiction, however, did not bother the ancient Egyptians. For them two realities were at play: on the one hand there were the natural boundaries, which were regarded as sacred, given, immutable and non-divisible, and on the other hand there were domestic and foreign developments, which caused the political frontiers to expand and contract throughout the years. In other words, though borders changed, *Kmt* – the land between the first cataract and the northern coast of the delta – was the essence of Egypt which could never really be, at least in the minds of ancient Egyptians, diminished. In support of this argument, Kootz (2013: 34–35) pointed out that the meaning of *km* could be understood as "the complete one", and that the reading supports the concept of static boundaries set up in

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[6] Galán (1995: 156) stressed that the Egyptian language lacks a term for "empire" or "imperialism", and the closest meaning of such a term is *swsḫ/îrï t3š*. Interestingly enough, the phrase became obsolete on royal monuments after the time of Ramesses III (Zibelius-Chen 1996: 201).

accordance with the immovable divine order.[7] Even when Egypt was dominated by foreign rulers, or when the pharaoh controlled just a shadow of his former realm, *Kmt* ideologically remained the same.

This, on the other hand, did not mean that new territory could not be added to Egypt. Indeed, kings were actually to be judged by their ability not only to maintain but even enlarge Egypt's borders. For example, queen Hatshepsut claimed on her fallen obelisk "F" in Karnak (Urk. IV: 372, 5–11) that her southern border reaches to the shores of Punt, her eastern border reaches the marshlands of Asia (*pḥww stt*) and her western border to the western mountain (*mȝnw*) where the sun sets (sadly, the description of the northern border did not survive), though the reality of political control was obviously very different. On his Tombos stela Thutmose I even claimed, not very modestly, that his souther border reaches to the beginning of this land (*r ḫntỉw tȝ pn*; Urk IV: 85, 13).

Despite territorial gains, the true essence of Egypt, *Kmt*, remained the same. This, however, did not hinder the Egyptians in seeking new land. For the pharaoh it was not only possible, but indeed it was justifiable and reasonable to enlarge Egypt's borders when circumstances presented themselves. The Egyptians were too pragmatic to ignore such an opportunity. The result was, that the newly acquired territory became officially part of the Egyptian realm, but it never could really become part of *Kmt*. A case in point was that after the pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom pushed Egypt's border past the second cataract, the fort at Semna-West became known as "Southern Elephantine" (Vogel 2013: 80) suggesting that the newly acquired lands were officially part of Egypt, yet not quite Egyptian.

The contrast between the natural borders and the political borders is, to a point, reflected in the Egyptian language. There are several terms which we associate with the border, boundary or frontier, the two most important and frequent being *tȝš(.w)* and *ḏr(.w)*.[8]

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[7] Nibbi (1999: 83–84) came up with the unorthodox, and at times ridiculed idea, that the delta had never been an integral and secure part of Egypt due to the considerable amount of foreigners living there. Nibbi claimed the delta was in fact a foreign land. For her the term "Two Lands" did not mean Upper and Lower Egypt, but the two banks of the Nile. Nibbi maintained that the assumption, that there were two kingdoms, distorted our understanding of the geography and history of ancient Egypt. Her conclusions were never accepted by the majority of Egyptologists.

[8] There is also *sp.t* which is used in connection to the riverbank, or the human lip, and *smd.t* which has been attested only once and denotes an edge or rim. Espinel (1998: 30) also lists *ṯn(.w)*, *ỉḫm.t*, *r-ꜥ* but these are specific terms relating to geographical features in ancient Egypt, notably the desert and the river.

Tȝš(.w) – translated as "Grenze; Gebiet" by the Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae[9] – was seen by scholars in different ways. One group, following Galán's (1995: 101–135) study on the extension of borders, saw *tȝš(.w)* either connected with a tangible border-line drawn up by the pharaoh, or it was applied to an area where the Egyptian ruler had considerable influence but not direct control, such as a frontier zone (Török 2009: 8; Koyano 2001: 4–5; Espinel 1998: 13). The other group of scholars did not see *tȝš(.w)* connected to an area but adhered to Hornung's (1992: 73) definition that *tȝš(.w)* were concrete, political borders created by humans, which could change in time (Liverani 2001: 29; Zibelius-Chen 1988: 201; Schlott-Schwab 1981: 74). I believe that linking *tȝš(.w)* with a concrete border makes more sense than to consider it as denoting territory, which the pharaoh controlled either directly or indirectly through his considerable influence, as Galán claims.

To support his assertion that *tȝš(.w)* could describe an area of the pharaoh's influence, Galán (1995: 124) recalled, that on her aforementioned obelisk queen Hatshepsut claimed her southern border (*tȝš*) to reach all the way to Punt. However, this assertion seems out of place given that Punt (probably modern-day Eritrea) was located more than a thousand kilometres from the third cataract. I believe in these and similar cases *tȝš(.w)* was just boastful artistic license, wishful thinking and an idealized description of the pharaoh's realm (Hornung 1992: 88) – the descriptions of the other borders in Hatshepsut's case suggest that this indeed is the case. The same could be said of the Tombos stela of Thutmose I. I thus believe that *tȝš(.w)* is to be seen as the mutable political border drawn by men, which was either made (*irỉ tȝš*) or expanded (*swsḫ tȝš*). It was also *tȝš(.w)* that the ruler-to-be was supposed to guard (*mkỉ*) and strengthen (*srwḏ*), as king Merikare was instructed by his father.[10] *Ḏr(.w)* – translated as "Ende; Grenze; Bereich" by the Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae[11] – is also interpreted in different ways by different Egyptologists. Galán (1995: 130) saw *ḏr(.w)* as the opposite of *tȝš(.w)*, basically the dominions of foreign rulers. Török (2013: 54) claimed that *ḏr(.w)* denoted a territory or region defined by a natural boundary, much like Schlott-Schwab (1981:

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[9] https://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/servlet/GetWcnDetails?u=guest&f=0&l=0&wn=169650&db=0 (accessed 15th March, 2021).

[10] Borders are mentioned twice in the *Instruction of King Merikare*: "Strengthen your borders, your frontier patrols" (Lichtheim 1973: 100); "Guard your borders, secure your forts, Troops are useful to their lord" (Lichtheim 1973: 101).

[11] https://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/servlet/GetWcnDetails?u=guest&f=0&l=0&wn=184990&db=0; and https://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/servlet/GetWcnDetails?u=guest&f=0&l=0&wn=184530&db=0 (accessed 15th March, 2021).

74) according to whom it was a natural, unchangeable border. Similarly, Hornung (1992: 73) considered *dr(.w)* the absolute, unalterable limit that was part of the cosmic structure itself. Liverani (2001: 29) agreed with his assertion of *dr(.w)* as a mythical and fixed border. On the other hand, Lorton (1974: 75) claimed it to be a state-border, and Kootz (2013: 36–37) asserted, that *dr(.w)* was a more suitable term for a fixed border, whereas *tꜣš(.w)* should be reserved for a changeable sphere of influence. I believe that *dr(.w)* is indeed associated with the metaphysical, abstract notion of the limits of time and space, combining political, spiritual, and religious sensibilities evident in the phrase *tꜣ r dr* "to the border", "to the limits" as the Egyptian desire to expand maꜥat, and by design their own, as well as their gods' territory.[12]

Summing up, it seems reasonable to assume that *tꜣš(.w)* is closer to the concept of the moveable political border, and *dr(.w)* to the unchanging natural border, with the caveat that the term referred not to physical borders *per se* (i.e. first cataract and the Mediterranean coast), but more to their symbolism and metaphysical concept, as something established by the gods, something connected to the cosmological principles of the universe and virtually boundless. Finally, it is interesting to note, that though *tꜣš(.w)* and *dr(.w)* already appear in the Pyramid Texts, it is only after the First Intermediate Period that the word *tꜣš(.w)* is used in the sense of the border in strictly secular texts (Meeks 2012: 10).[13] Whether the turbulent events of the First Intermediate Period had anything to do with this development, is a matter of speculation. Unfortunately, the constraints of this thesis do not permit to delve more deeply into the linguistic analysis and epigraphic investigation of the terms *tꜣš(.w)* and *dr(.w)*.

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[12] Throughout the 3rd millennium BC *tꜣš(.w)* was never used in reference to Egypt's external borders, though Meeks (2012: 10) noted that this may be due to the lack of archaeological and epigraphic evidence, in addition to the fact that Egypt's natural borders were not contested during the Old Kingdom, and therefore were not at the centre of the political attention. For a detailed discussion on the importance of borders in the Old Kingdom in connection to administrative titles, see Espinel (1998: 19–26).

[13] This, however, does not mean that there were no internal borders within Egypt: after all, the contrast between the Nile valley and the delta is a well-known fact, one of the five royal names of the pharaoh was *nsw.t-bity*, translated as the "Dual king" or the "King of Upper and Lower Egypt", and the land was administratively divided into 42 nomes reflecting the ancient chiefdoms that remained fairly constant throughout the history of ancient Egypt. In one respect, the Nile valley and delta could be seen as natural internal borders, whereas the divisions between individual nomes as political internal borders.

1.3 – The borders of ancient Egypt

As already stated, the Nile defined Egypt. The topographical features lying along its route helped in turn define Egypt's natural borders. In the south, the first cataract presented more of a symbolic barrier rather than an impassable boundary, whereas the northern border – the Mediterranean coastline – could not have been defined more clearly. The eastern and western borders were much blurrier, as the deserts lying along the course of the Nile stretched to infinity and beyond, seemingly without end. Yet, as we are well aware of, throughout the history of ancient Egypt the natural borders did not always overlap with the political ones. But whereas the natural borders were for everyone there to see, how can we determine that we are dealing with a political border?

In our world when talking about political borders, we have come to expect a marker of some kind. This marker can be as inconspicuous as a border stone on a tourist footpath leading from the Czech Republic to Germany, or large as the signs erected beside major roads linking different countries. But coming across only such a marker without anything else, is somewhat rare. Even to this day, more often than not, borders are closely guarded – a case in point might be the border between India and Pakistan, the floodlights of which are clearly visible at night from Earth's orbit.

Though the ancient Egyptians had no minefields, motion detectors or infrared cameras, they were watchful of their borders as much as we are. Though they did not erect signs on their border announcing to travellers "Welcome to Egypt, land of the pharaohs", they did set up defensive structures, without which the control of a political border would be impossible to maintain. It is therefore in our examination of Egypt's borders, that we will look not only for natural features but also for defensive structures to determine the interplay between the political and natural borders.

1.3.1 – The southern border

Though the natural border at Elephantine was clearly defined by the first cataract, this did not pose any real obstacle to trade and the movement of people. The border here was porous, permeable and highly symbolic. Yet this did in no way diminish its strategic importance, quite the opposite. After all, Egypt's oldest known fortress has been discovered on Elephantine island, and the area of the first cataract always had some sort of fortifications (Vogel 2013: 76–78). Elephantine was known as the "Southern gate", and from the 6th

Dynasty the governor of the island used the title "Keeper of the Door to the South" (Adams 1984: 43).

The ease of passage through the area of the first cataract helped foment interaction between the Egyptians and the Nubians. Strong trading contacts were in place during the Early Dynastic Period and possibly even earlier, though archaeological evidence suggests Egyptian presence was sporadic during this time (Morkot 2001: 230). By the Old Kingdom the pharaohs sent trading parties and expeditions seeking raw materials to exploit Nubia's valuable resources (human, animal, and mineral), but saw no need to colonise the lands further south. Apart from the lack of archaeological evidence, this may have been motivated by the fact that the pharaohs did not consider the indigenous late A-Group culture much of a threat. Thus, the natural and the political borders overlapped. If there were military campaigns sent to Nubia, these were short-lived incursions intended as raids to procure slaves, livestock, and precious metals and minerals (Vogel 2013: 78; Meeks 2012: 11; Török 2009: 53–74). The rulers of the Old Kingdom thus never really controlled Lower Nubia, nor did they need to, but this situation changed significantly following the events of the First Intermediate Period.

After assuming power, the kings of the 12th Dynasty were much more concerned with the protection of Egypt's borders and territorial integrity. To this end, they set up a standing army, built a massive seven kilometre long wall protecting the land route leading into Egypt at the first cataract, and in Nubia established a series of forts past the second cataract with the intent to occupy, dominate trade and to create a buffer zone for *Kmt*. Such developments were surely unique even for the Egyptians themselves but, as usual, they found a way to cope with the new circumstances: for example, the fact that the fortress at Semna-West – which became the southern border some distance upstream of the second cataract – became known as "Southern Elephantine", was a telling example of a disjunction and a new conjunction of Egypt's natural and political border. Whether the conquered territories beyond the first cataract were perceived as non-Egyptian, or as a part of Egypt proper, is still a matter of dispute among scholars (Meeks 2012: 11–12; Török 2009: 85–89, 97; Shaw 2000b: 311–313), though by the 1800s BC Egyptian governors became permanent settlers, and Egyptian officials and their families were buried in Nubia (Smith 1995: 51). Perhaps both sides are right to a point; in a sense, the territory in Nubia was more "Egyptian" than any other controlled region, a quasi-extension of Egypt on more than a purely geographical level, but never really Egypt proper. (Kemp 1978: 21).

New Kingdom Nubia became even more integrated into Egypt. From a symbolical point of view the lands of Wawat (first to second cataracts) and Kush (second to fourth cataract) had their own ruler who, at least by name, was part of the royal family – the Viceroy of Kush dubbed the "King's son of Kush" (*S3 nsw.t n K3š*).[14]   The nature of Egyptian occupation also changed significantly: the erstwhile forts of the Middle Kingdom were rebuilt and demilitarised, their fortifications scaled down. In place of the fortress, a new urban concept emerged, with a prominent temple at the heart of a settlement. These temple-towns were constructed as far south as the fourth cataract, where the city of Napata with its monumental temple of Amun was built. In addition, the voluntary Egyptianisation of the local population, already identified in some Nubian rulers during the 11th Dynasty (Morkot 2001: 232), became commonplace. Furthermore, the migration of Egyptians into Wawat and Kush helped to cement the ties between the two peoples. Egyptianisation saw the indigenous Nubian population accept the culture, religion, art and iconography, the system of writing, administration, and even ancient Egyptian burial customs (Török 2009: 263–283). This process truly took off early in the New Kingdom: during the reign of Thutmose I (1504–1492 BC) Lower Nubian elites were likely educated in Egypt, and in the days of Thutmose II (1492–1479 BC) children of rulers of Upper Nubia were regularly sent to the Egyptian court (Morkot 2001: 239). Egyptianisation meant "citizenship" for Nubians with opportunities for climbing the social ladder in the pharaonic state.[15] Not all scholars, however, saw Egyptianisation as natural: for example, Trigger (1976: 114–131) claimed it be a much more involuntary and coercive process which benefited only the Egyptians and the Nubian elite.

The gradual decline of the New Kingdom and the authority of the later Ramesside rulers went hand in hand with the erosion of Egyptian domination of Nubia. These events culminated around the year 1087 BC when the armies of the Viceroy of Nubia, Panehsy, invaded Egypt and occupied Thebes. The border at Elephantine was re-established seven years later, when the armies of Piankh finally succeeded in pushing Panehsy south of the first

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[14] As opposed to the traditional administrative division of Wawat and Kush, Morkot (2001: 234–237) proposed that the viceregal domain of Kush extended only to the third cataract, and that the region between the third and fourth cataracts was a frontier zone under the control of the "Overseer of the Southern Foreign Lands" (*imy-rꜥ ḫ3s.wt rsy.wt*). Morkot argued that this region was left in the hands of indigenous rulers loyal to the Egyptians, who probably supplied the local chieftains with military and economic support in exchange for luxury commodities. However, given the lack of archaeological excavations between the third and fourth cataracts, Morkot's thesis cannot be proved or disproved.

[15] For some examples of the Egyptianisation of individual Nubians, see Kemp (1978: 34–37).

cataract, but Egypt lost control of Nubia forever. For a time, the political and natural borders in the south overlapped. Not much is known of the developments in Nubia from then on, but towards the end of the 8th century BC the Kushites re-emerge. Right in the middle of the stormy Third Intermediate Period, the armies of the Napatan king Piye (747–716 BC) swept through Egypt in 728 BC subjugating the whole kingdom on the Nile before returning south to Kush. Piye's successors eventually came back to Egypt, uniting it with their homeland to form the largest realm since the collapse of the New Kingdom. During this time it was actually the Kushites who saw themselves as exporting authentic Egyptian culture to Egypt, no doubt a result of the Egyptianisation of their elites several centuries earlier. And even after the Kushites were driven out of Egypt by the Assyrians, they still considered themselves as Egypt's rightful rulers and attempted several times to take back "their" kingdom.

The rulers of the 26th Dynasty managed to unite Egypt into one kingdom stretching, yet again, from the delta to the first cataract. It was, however, at Elephantine where the ambitions of these pharaohs ended. Though several military campaigns targeted Nubia, no serious attempt at colonisation of the lands south of the first cataract was made ever again. The natural and political border in the south became one and, despite the Persian conquest and the arrival of he the armies of Alexander the Great, did not shift.

1.3.2 – The eastern border

When talking about the eastern border one must bear in mind that there were typologically two "eastern borders", very different in nature: the Eastern desert and the Sinai peninsula.

The inhospitable Eastern desert represented a wall stretching parallel to the Nile valley. Its numerous wadis were chiefly a source of precious metals and minerals for the ancient Egyptians, so expeditions were quite common. Though there certainly was traffic coming from the Red Sea ports and through the badlands, this was negligible when compared to trade and migration flowing to and from Egypt from the Levant along the northern coast of the Sinai peninsula. This was logical given the much greater population living in the Levant than in the Eastern desert. The nomadic tribes of the desert did not, on the whole, pose a serious threat to the pharaohs. The eastern border was basically situated where the Nile floodplain ended, but due to the presence of the Eastern desert, it did not really matter, as there was no one to dispute it. In this sense, the natural border and the political border in the

east were one. The whole of the Eastern desert, despite Egyptian presence or temporary outposts, should therefore be considered a frontier.

The north-eastern border is much more complicated. The only natural feature of the north-eastern border in ancient times was the Pelusiac branch of the Nile delta. Beyond the river lay the Sinai peninsula and much further east the city-states of the Levant. This was a very different situation than in the south, where the pharaohs acquired territory almost organically as they continued to advance along the Nile. The river gave the Egyptians access to an unlimited supply of fresh water, a commodity which was sorely lacking in the arid and inhospitable Sinai. Despite these obvious difficulties, Egyptian rulers from Dynasty 0 were already active in the Levant. What was the nature of their activity remains a contentious subject among scholars – some associate it with trade, others with colonisation, immigration or even military campaigns and occupation (Bárta 2010: 24–26; Sowada 2009: 27).

From a military point of view, the city-states of the Levant during the 3rd millennium BC did not threaten Egypt's security, nevertheless already during the Old Kingdom the eastern delta and parts of the Sinai peninsula were protected from would-be invaders by a number of fortresses. Kees (1961: 191–192) believed that Egypt's eastern border was defended as early as the 24th century BC, basing his assumption on the title "Overseer of the barriers, the deserts and the royal fortresses in the nome of Heliopolis" which made an appearance during the 5th Dynasty. According to Redford (1986: 133) the fortifications of the delta were constructed mainly from the time of Djedkara (2414–2375 BC) until the reign of Pepy II (2278–2184 BC).[16] These fortifications may well have been part of the so-called "Ways of Horus" which, very likely, was a coastal road linking Egypt and the Levant in use already during the 4th millennium BC, though there is an ongoing debate among scholars, some of whom argue that this actually may have been a name for a region.[17] In any case, a

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[16] Defensive structures were not only built in the north of the peninsula but also on the mountainous coast in the southern part of the Sinai as was the case of the fortress at Ras Budran, which was one of the earliest and largest ancient Egyptian stone structures built outside Egypt's borders prior to the Middle Kingdom; the other two being the aforementioned fort at Elephantine and the walled settlement at Ayn Asil (Mumford 2006: 59). In contrast to the defensive structures along the north-eastern border and the northern part of the peninsula, which were intended to monitor and regulate the flow of people and goods into Egypt, the primary function of Ras Budran was linked to copper and turquoise mining and to protect Egyptian expeditions against the local Bedouin population.

[17] For a discussion on the Ways of Horus, whether it designated a region or an actual road, see Hoffmeier (2013: 164; 2006: 9–10), Vogel (2004: 95) and Valbelle (1994).

string of (most likely military) fortified installations were built on the Ways of Horus. These forts were periodically attested from the Middle Kingdom onwards, located either at prominent water sources and/or a days journey from one another, providing not only security for merchant caravans but also bases for the military campaigns of the pharaohs in the Levant (Hoffmeier 2013: 164–165; Smoláriková 2013: 106; Vogel 2013: 85–86).

The reasons to have defensive structures on Egypt's north-eastern border became even more obvious during the mid 2nd millennium BC – this was caused not only by the rise of the other great regional powers (Assyria, Kassite Babylonia, Hittite Anatolia, and the Hurrian confederation of Mitanni) but by the considerable expansion of Egypt's presence and influence in the Levant, as well. From the reign of Amenemhat I (1985–1956 BC) the Ways of Horus were strengthened by the so-called "Walls of the Ruler", probably located around Wadi Tumilat, as the *Story of Sinuhe* and the *Prophecy of Neferti* before that tell us. (Hoffmeier 2006: 7–8). However, if and how the Ways of Horus were connected to the Walls of the Ruler remains unclear. If conflict did arise during the 12th Dynasty, it seems to have centred around Sinai and the Egyptian mining expeditions. Though there are reports that Amenemhat I fought the Asiatics, military activity north of the Sinai peninsula is limited to his reign only (Gee 2004: 29–30).

To date, despite of what Hoffmeier (2006: 10) describes as a "flurry of archaeological activity" in northern Sinai during the 90s and 00s, no evidence of the Walls of the Ruler from the Middle Kingdom has been discovered whatsoever; archaeological evidence of fortifications only appears from the New Kingdom onwards.

It was also only during the New Kingdom that a serious attempt to establish hegemony in Syropalestine was made. Yet, even then, Egypt on the whole retained only informal control in the Levant, as opposed to formal control of Nubia which was already established by the Middle Kingdom (Langer 2018: 49). During the New Kingdom the nature of Egyptian presence in the Levant went through very different phases, ranging from political and economic domination in the second part of the 18th Dynasty, during which the city-states continued to retain their rulers once they had sworn an oath of allegiance to the pharaoh, to traditional military occupation in the 19th and early 20th Dynasties (Weinstein 1981: 12, 17). Levy (2017: 15–16) suggested that the nature of Egyptian presence in the Levant was very different to the north and south of Beth Shean, located in modern-day northern Israel not far from the Sea of Galilee. Whereas the southern region was dominated by the Egyptians (as

supported by hieratic, mostly administrative, texts and inscribed architectural elements suggesting long-term presence of Egyptian officials), the northern part with its numerous victory stelae, was an area under much looser Egyptian control, mostly void of material witnesses of long-term Egyptian activity. Levy proposed that the victory stelae north of Beth Shean provide evidence of short-term military incursions, crowned by the rapid erection of such monuments. Yet despite the Egyptian dominance in the southern Levant, the region had never been regarded as an integral part of Egypt, as opposed to Nubia (Streit 2019).

From the New Kingdom we also have irrefutable archaeological evidence placing the north-eastern border on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, where a series of forts was built taking advantage of the watery landscape of the delta to create a well-defendable border (Hoffmeier 2013: 163; Smoláriková 2013: 101–102). Archaeological evidence suggests that this natural border remained the same as the political border for most of Egypt's history. The reason why the political border was not established somewhere further afield was likely due to the arid environment of the Sinai. In effect, both the peninsula and the Levant were two, albeit very different, frontiers. Whereas the Egyptians' control over the Levant was much stronger than that of the Sinai peninsula, it was its distance from Egypt that made it a frontier zone. The Sinai, on the other hand, was right next door to Egypt but remained a frontier mainly due to the geographical features, which made effective control of the peninsula exceedingly difficult, if not impossible – as is the case even to this day. In contrast to Nubia, neither the Sinai, nor the Levant could be fully integrated into Egypt. This, however, in no way did diminish the interest of the Egyptians in both regions. In any event, the natural and political border did not shift throughout pharaonic history.

After the collapse of the New Kingdom the pharaohs lost control over the Levant. Though the Egyptians did continue to send expeditions and conducted forays into Canaan, their rulers never re-established such a strong presence as their predecessors. In the end, it was from the Levant that the Assyrians and the Persians launched their invasions of Egypt, and from where the forces of Alexander the Great ultimately arrived. Similarly, as in the south, though, the north-eastern border, made up by the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, remained in place.

1.3.3 – The western border

The western border is a complicated beast. Much as was the case with the eastern border, there are also two "western borders": the Western desert with its string of oases, and the north-western Nile delta and the territory stretching west along the Mediterranean coast. In contrast to the southern and eastern border, though, it must be stressed from the outset that archaeological research in the west has been very scarce. This necessarily creates an incomplete and perhaps even distorted picture.

When compared to the Eastern desert, not much of interest lay to the west. True, there were caravan routes criss-crossing the Sahara, though in light of the trade and activity on the northern, eastern and southern borders, this traffic was negligible. The Western desert had none of the rich mineral deposits of its eastern counterpart – only the diorite quarries at Toshka, lying some 60 kilometres north-west of Abu Simbel, were exploited by the ancient Egyptians since the time of 4th dynasty king Khafra (2558–2532 BC). The oases of the Western desert, however, were known for their agricultural and animal produce. From north to south, Siwa, Baharia, Farafra, Dakhla and Kharga provided perfect conditions for growing dates or grapes and made for an ideal grazing ground for cattle (Mills 2001: 499). Unsurprisingly, most of what we know of the western border and frontier comes from these five oases – they support life today, much as they did thousands of years ago, which makes them the best possible place to conduct archaeological research in the Western desert.

Human activity in the oases has been recorded since prehistory, though the settlement pattern was not always constant, as the Sahara experienced wetter and drier phases. Most archaeological data, however, comes from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, including numerous fortifications which we are looking for. From the pharaonic period the evidence of defensive structures but even other settlements is meagre and diachronically irregular across the five oases; most archaeological data pertains to minor lithic, ceramic, palaeographic or epigraphic objects. Nevertheless, from written sources and administrative documents we are aware of the fact that the Egyptians lived in the oases, and that the oases were regarded as being officially part of Egypt; thus it is reasonable to assume that many settlements have not been discovered yet.

The oldest monuments at Farafra are from the Roman period, whereas in Baharia (the rock-cut tombs of Qarat Qasr Salim) and Siwa (Temple of the Oracle of Amun and the necropolis of Gebel al-Mawta) they date back to the 26th Dynasty. Archaeological evidence

from Kharga is more substantial, but from the pharaonic period it is chiefly the Temple of Amun-Ra at Hibis (the most intact structure in Egypt from the Saite and Persian periods), and the Temple of Qasr el-Ghuweita dated to the 25th Dynasty from the reign of Taharka (690–664 BC). As Kharga was the trade gateway to Darfur, Chad, and other regions located deep in Africa, it is perhaps not surprising that a chain of late Roman fortresses guarded the oasis; from the time of the pharaohs there is, however, nothing.

Dakhla, on the other hand, has provided the oldest archaeological evidence of note from the pharaonic era dated to the late Old Kingdom. Near the modern village of Balat, the fortified town of Ain Asil, the administrative centre of the oasis in the late Old Kingdom until the reign of Pepy II (2278–2184 BC) has been unearthed, together with its cemetery of Qila' el-Dabba, well known for its mastaba field. Further west near the village of el-Qasr the trading post of Ain el-Gazzareen was discovered and surveyed thanks to the Dakhleh Oasis Project, which has been operating on site since 1978.[18] In fact, the Dakhleh Oasis Project has to this date discovered more than 50 sites of Old Kingdom activity in the area. Dakhla is by far the most surveyed of the five oases, but even so wielded archaeological finds mainly from the Roman period – e.g., the temple of Amun-Nakht at 'Ain Birbiyeh, the settlement at Ismant el-Kharab (ancient Kellis) together with its temple dedicated to Tutu (the only one of its kind in Egypt), or the fortress at el-Qasr. The only other pharaonic site of note in Dakhla is the temple of Mut el-Kharab (ancient Mothis) from the 18th Dynasty, with Seth as its principle deity alongside Amun-Ra.[19] It is striking that there are only two fortified settlements in the oases from the pharaonic era, and from the Old Kingdom at that. One would expect to see many more defensive structures on Egypt's presumed western border, as was the case with the Nubian forts in the vicinity of the second cataract and the military garrisons in the north-eastern delta and the Sinai. In addition, it is somewhat surprising that Dakhla, which is situated deep in the Western desert (about 350 kilometres to the west of Luxor and 150 kilometres to the west of Kharga) has only two fortified settlements, whereas at Kharga, which is much closer to the Nile valley, ten or more such structures have been discovered

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[18] See https://dakhlehoasisproject.com (accessed Feb 7th, 2021). Research pertaining not only to Dakhla but to the other oases and the Western desert in general, can be found in the proceedings of international conferences known as the Oasis Papers. To date, nine volumes of the Oasis Papers have been published.

[19] For a recent overview of the oases of the Western desert and the not well known oases stretching west towards the Libyan border, see Mattingly et al. (2020).

(Mattingly et al. 2020: 123; Vogel 2013: 89–92). Whether this due to the numerous trade routes leading to and from Kharga, or simply lack of excavated sites, is unknown. If, however, the archaeological data is reflective of the overall situation in the Western desert, then there are serious questions to be asked with regards to the assumption, that the five oases formed the western border of Egypt.

Though the Libyans had been active in the Western desert throughout pharaonic history and lived side by side with the Egyptians there, they began to be perceived as an existential threat only towards the end of the 18th Dynasty, when the tribes of the Tjehenu, Libu, and Meshwesh started pushing into Egypt's western delta in considerable numbers mainly along the Mediterranean coast. This is also when the north-western border becomes increasingly important, and it is here where we find numerous defensive structures. Though the first fortress was built by the 12th Dynasty king Amenemhat I at Wadi Natrun around the same time when the pharaoh commissioned the Walls of the Ruler in the north-eastern delta (see above; Török 2009: 87), most archaeological evidence comes from the Ramesside period. During this time, settlements on the edge of the western delta such as Kom Firin or Kom el-Hisn were fortified by large walls, and a chain of forts stretching along the Mediterranean coast to the west was built. These forts terminated at the stronghold of Zawiyet Umm el-Rakham some 20 kilometres from modern Mersa Matruh, itself lying on the coast some 300 kilometres west of Alexandria (Vogel 2013: 92–93; Smoláriková 2008: 19–30). Whether these forts were similar in purpose to those found east of the delta on the Ways of Horus is difficult to determine, but their location would suggest it to be the case.

So, where does this leave us in our debate concerning the western border? On the one hand, there are the oases of the Western desert, where very few fortified settlements have been unearthed, and on the other, there is ample evidence suggesting a robust defensive system in the western delta and along the Mediterranean coastline was in operation. Bearing in mind the possibility of insufficient archaeological research, it seems that the western border was virtually non-existent, or more precisely non sequitur, much like its eastern counterpart. The pharaohs had a strong interest in the oases and trade routes of the Sahara, but it seems that the vast expanse of the Western desert provided sufficient protection that the Egyptians did not need, on the whole, to concern themselves with the construction of forts. Though the oases were officially considered part of Egypt and were under the rule of the pharaohs, and though it is tempting to see the string of oases running along the course of the Nile as the

western border of Egypt, this would be a false presumption. Their considerable distance from the river valley made the oases for all intents and purposes a frontier zone. This argument is supported not only by the demographical mix living in the oases, but also by the deities worshipped there.[20] The true border to the west as well as the east lay just beyond the fertile floodplain of the Nile, but due to the geographical realities of both deserts, there was no real need to guard it from an external threat throughout most of Egypt's history.

In the north-western delta the situation was similar to the north-eastern side – much as the Pelusiac branch of the Nile constituted the border to the east, so did the Canopic branch form the Egyptian border to the west. In this regard, the political border copied the natural border. The series of strongholds stretching west along the Mediterranean coastline towards Cyrenaica strongly remind us of the Ways of Horus fortifications in the northern Sinai. And, similarly, these forts should not be seen as the extension of the border, but as a frontier with Egyptian presence.

1.4 – Conclusion

Our discussion of the concept of the border has illustrated several things. Firstly, that it is important to distinguish between the border – natural or political – and the frontier. Egypt was blessed not only by the Nile, but by its geographical position as well. Thanks to the Eastern and Western deserts, which created natural barriers for ambitious invaders, the pharaohs needed to concern themselves mainly with the southern border with Nubia, and the north-eastern border leading to the Levant. In the south, the political border did not usually overlap with the natural one drawn at the first cataract, especially during the Middle and New Kingdoms. In the east and in the west the natural border and political border were one, but this was chiefly due to the topography of the land and the character of the deserts, not historical events. The strongholds, walls and fortified settlements along the southern, north-eastern and north-western borders represent silent witnesses to where the actual border was drawn.

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[20] Turriziani (2013: 166–167) noted that in border areas where Egyptian culture came in contact with foreign elements, hybrid divine beings appeared, and it was difficult to determine, whether the gods were Egyptian divinities disguised as foreign ones, or imported foreign deities that have been Egyptianised. Though there surely were foreign imports, she claimed that in most cases during the Old Kingdom, frontier divinities were generally Egyptian deities disguised as foreign gods.

Apart from the natural and political borders there were also frontiers – areas with Egyptian presence, but not under the unquestionable authority of the pharaohs. One of the most typical characteristics of the frontier was, on the one hand, its distance from the Nile valley and delta, and on the other, hazardous environmental conditions. Whereas the Sinai peninsula was next door to Egypt, its arid character made life difficult, and confined it to areas with a sufficient water-supply. On the other hand, the Levant easily supported life, but its lack of a direct link to Egyptian territory made it a frontier, much like the oases of the Western desert. To the south, past the second cataract, the distinction between the border and the frontier becomes blurry. More archaeological data, especially from the regions of the third and fourth cataract and beyond, would shed much more light on this subject.

Be it as it may, this chapter clearly illustrated that our notion of the border is very much different from the one of the ancient Egyptians. In our world, political borders are prima facie the most important, yet are very often ignorant to the natural contours of the landscape. For the ancient Egyptians, the political dimension was just one aspect of the border, and not the most important one at that. The immutable natural borders linked to the Nile were far more meaningful as a symbolic, ideological, and cultural fault-line between the ordered society of Egypt and the rest of the world, rather than a physical barrier defining the limits of the sovereignty of the pharaohs.

Chapter 2 – Border stelae in the Old Kingdom

2.1 – Introduction

Our debate on border stelae in ancient Egypt begins in the Old Kingdom. Galán (1995b: 44) and Espinel (1998: 27–28) proposed that the first monuments of this kind appeared already in the 3rd Dynasty during the reign of king Netjerykhet (2667–2648 BC) on site of his famous Step Pyramid.

The stelae in question come in two types: rectangular – with a rounded top, rather rough in design, and measuring up to 1.40 metres in height (*fig. 1*) – and conical – with a flat top, more aesthetically pleasing, and about 2 metres high (Firth and Quibell 1935: 119; pl. 86, 87; Lauer 1936: 187– 190; *fig. 2*). To date, several dozen of these monuments have been discovered, all sharing the same design.[21] Unfortunately, most of the stelae have survived only in fragments.

The historical and political context will not be examined in this case, as Saqqara was at the very core of Egypt and far from any real border. In line with Chapters 3 and 4, the stelae will, however, be scrutinised with regards to their 1) appearance, 2) inscription, and 3) location.

fig. 1: Round-topped stela (after Espinel 1998)

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[21] Firth and Quibell (1935: 119; pl. 86, 87) listed about 50 rectangular stelae and 29 conical blocks with inscriptions though they noted that there "must have been many more". Porter and Moss (PM III 2/I: 407) enumerated several dozen of these stelae, about 40 of which were inscribed. Köhler (1975: 6) mentioned 64 stelae adorned with a relief. Kahl, Kloth and Zimmermann (1995: 70–89) also listed a number of examples with inscriptions. The exact number of stelae is difficult to determine due to the fragmentary nature of the finds and new discoveries being made.

2.2 – Netjerykhet's stelae

Addressing the first two points, i.e. appearance and inscription, each stela was engraved with Netjerykhet's serekh, which was surrounded on the right by the *imy-wt* fetish[22] with the attached sign for life (*ꜥnḫ*) and dominion (*wꜣs*), above which lay the jackal of Anubis or Wepwawet with an epithet typical for both gods "Foremost of the Sacred Land" (*ḫnty tꜣ-ḏsr*). To the left of the serekh, the names of two princesses, Intkaes (*Int-kꜣ=s*) and Hetephernebty (*Ḥtp-ḥr-nbty*) are inscribed.[23]

Concerning the third point, location, it has been already pointed out that most of these stelae were fragmentary, and were discovered as filling material for the construction of Netjerykhet's funerary complex itself (Firth 1925: 149). Some, however, were found in secondary burials around the Step Pyramid (Kuraszkiewicz 2011: 184–185). For example, El-Aguizy (2007) reported the most recent discovery of such a stela in the New Kingdom tomb of Wadjmes (*Wꜣḏ-ms*) at Saqqara, where it was used to strengthen the burial shaft.
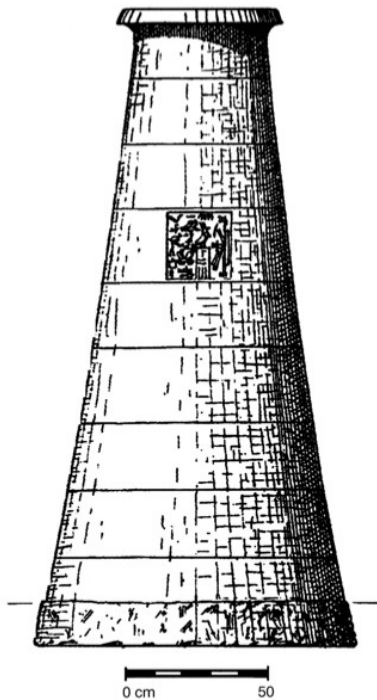

fig. 2: Conical-shaped stela (after Ćwiek 2003)

This fact adds to the uncertainty surrounding these artefacts. There is no consensus among scholars regarding the exact function of these monuments, though there seems to be at least agreement that the stelae served as markers delimiting some sort of sacred space, be it the outline of the enclosure of the funerary complex, or possibly a wider space including the trench surrounding the sacred area.

Firth (1925: 149) speculated that the fragments were the remains of the boundary stelae used to mark the royal cemetery, Aly (1998: 225) argued for funerary stelae pointing out the depiction of Anubis of the cemetery. Furthermore, Aly added, all the known fragments have been found on the eastern side of the Step Pyramid which

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[22] For more on the fetish, see Köhler (1975; for Netjerykhet's stelae specifically pp. 6–11) and Logan (1990).

[23] These two women also appear on Netjerykhet's reliefs from the temple at Heliopolis (O'Neill 1999: 175, 7b).

weakens the argument that they were used to mark a perimeter around the whole complex, and suggested that they had been originally erected on the eastern side of the original mastaba. When the tomb was altered to become a step pyramid they lost their purpose and were reused as construction material.

Espinel (2003) suggested that the stelae were connected with Netjerykhet's *sed*-festival celebrations, claiming that the markers reassembled those depicted on block 33a (Berlin 14906; von Bissing, Kees 1923: pl. 13) from the Sun Temple of king Niuserra (2445–2421 BC) at Abu Ghurab. In this particular relief, the *imy-wt* fetish is depicted, and next to the markers there is a caption "reaching the beginning of the roads of the necropolis (*šsp tp-wꜣw.t ḥr.t-nṯr*)".[24] Oppenheim (2007) considered Netjerykhet's round-topped stelae as temporary markers which were used only during the foundation ceremonies for the purpose of delimiting the sacred precinct of Netjerykhet's pyramid complex, and the conical-shaped ones as offering stands. Kuraszkiewicz (2006: 280–281) proposed that the conical-shaped stelae could have held lamps or vessels filled with oil, which were lit during for example jubilee celebrations.

2.3 – Conclusion

From the above debate it is evident that there is no scholarly consensus regarding these "stelae". To suggest that these monuments were border stelae is wholly unsubstantiated, certainly with regards to the categories set out in the Introduction to this thesis.

Moreover, such a suggestion ignores the existence of the two very different types of the stelae – the round-top one, and the conical one – for the sake of making an argument about border stelae. The use of the term "border stela" in this context is entirely wrong. If anything, the stelae found in the Step Pyramid complex seem to serve the role of ornamental fence posts, perhaps the conical ones with an added ritualistic function. There is nothing to indicate that they were connected to the concept of the border in any way.

Provided that these stelae served the purpose of demarcating a sacred space, which seems the most plausible explanation, they would have had a similar role to the numerous funerary stelae of the rulers of the 1st and 2nd Dynasty discovered at Abydos and dating to the

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[24] Espinel (2003: 218) also pointed out that 14 square shaped objects on the gateway of Osorkon II at Bubastis (Naville 1892: pl. XI) erected during the 22nd Dynasty (945–715 BC) and suggested that they were probably containers with offerings of food and drink which served to mark the funerary space, though this claim is more tentative than the one concerning the relief from Niuserra's Sun Temple Abu Ghurab.

early 3rd millennium BC, the most iconic of which is the stela of Djet (Louvre E 11007; Wilkinson 1999: 61–62) or Peribsen (London BM 35597; Wilkinson 1999: 75–76). A later analogy from the 18th Dynasty could be seen in the boundary stelae of king Akhenaten (1352–1336 BC) at Amarna that were also used to highlight the sacred city, though their function is much more complex.[25] In addition, it must be stressed that these stelae from Netjerykhet's complex were broken up into pieces and used as building material practically from the onset, as most of them were discovered within the Step Pyramid itself. This is sound evidence that the ancient Egyptians did not consider these monuments as particularly important in order to preserve them for future generation. After serving their purpose, they were no longer needed and being a pragmatic bunch, the Egyptian builders used the stelae in the most logical way they could.

In conclusion, to consider these artefacts border stelae would lead to an unnecessary inflation of the term. There is no evidence whatsoever that they were connected to a border (as Saqqara was located at the very core of Egypt), and to claim otherwise would mean that almost any commemorative stela could be classified as a border stela. This is obviously false. If one were to categorise these monuments, one should see the round-topped stelae as sacred-space markers, and the conical-shaped ones as votive stands. Thus, it is safe to say, that to date no border stelae from the Old Kingdom have been discovered.

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[25] For the seminal study of the Amarna boundary stelae, see Murnane and Van Siclen (1993).

Chapter 3 – Border stelae in the Middle Kingdom

3.1 – Introduction

If one name immediately springs to mind when the term "border stela" is uttered, it is Senusret III (1878–1840 BC). It from his reign that three monuments, which are commonly called border or boundary stelae in Egyptological research, survive. All three stelae were discovered some 60 kilometres south of the second cataract during excavations at Semna-West and Uronarti – two of the four Egyptian fortresses clustered together in the area, the other two being Semna-South and Kumma. Apart from Uronarti, the fortresses are now beneath the surface of Lake Nasser (known as Lake Nubia on the Sudanese side).[26]

At Semna-West two very different stelae had been discovered – one dated to year 8 of Senusret III's rule (Berlin 14753; also known as the smaller Semna stela), and the other to year 16 (Berlin 1157; also referred to as the larger Semna stela). The third stela, unearthed at Uronarti (Khartoum 451), is also dated to year 16 and is almost a word for word copy of the larger Semna stela. All three artefacts are typical stelae in shape and appearance, with prominence clearly given to the text, as the iconographic elements are somewhat schematic and daresay simplistic. It is also worth pointing out that the stelae are relatively large, on average a metre and a half high, though they are nowhere near the epic proportions of stela U, the largest of the Amarna boundary stelae towering over 7.5 metres in height, or the famous monumental victory stela of Merenptah (Cairo JE 31408) which stands over 3 metres tall.

Before progressing further, it is worthwhile to set the monuments into the political and historical framework of the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC.

3.2 – The historical context

As the Old Kingdom was slowly drawing to an end, the power of the pharaohs was waning as well. Whereas the authority of the kings of the 4th Dynasty was unquestioned, from the time of the 5th Dynasty, Egypt was slowly being pulled apart by its own bureaucracy and the ambitions of influential families. With the court and the elite increasingly torn between conflicting loyalties, the pharaohs no longer commanded the funds nor the manpower to keep Nubia in check. As a result, local chieftains quickly asserted their independence, even turning

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[26] This was a rather recent and somewhat unexpected discovery (Davies 2017b: 83), as Uronarti was for many years assumed to have been swallowed by the lake as well (Van Siclen 1982: 11; Seidlmayer 2000: 242).

against the weakened kingdom in the north and leading raids into Egypt. During the First Intermediate Period, Egypt had to deal with so many home-grown problems, that the lands south of the first cataract were no longer at the centre of the pharaohs' attention, even when the natural, and for centuries undisputed, border at Elephantine fell into Nubian hands.

The first pharaoh to return to Nubia was the founder of the 11th Dynasty Mentuhotep II (2055–2004 BC). Before reuniting Egypt, he recaptured the fort at Elephantine, and re-established the political border at the natural border on the first cataract. After bringing the whole of Egypt under his control, Mentuhotep II resumed forays into Lower Nubia. Though he and his successors did not have the resources to do much more, this move foreshadowed a new Egyptian policy towards its southern neighbour (Török 2009: 83; Callender 2000: 140). This shift in strategy became apparent from the onset of the 12th Dynasty – no longer would the pharaohs maintain trade outposts and send irregular expeditions into Nubia, but they would make the lands south of the first cataract their own.

The territorial expansion into the area between the first and second cataracts, which the Egyptians knew as Wawat, began during the 29th year of Amenemhat I (1985–1956 BC). The inscription at Korosko (PM VII, 84; Žába 1974: 31), located midway

fig. 3: Nubia and the area around the second cataract (after Adams 1977)

between the first and second cataract, commemorates the defeat of the Nubians by Egyptian troops led by the king's vizier Antefoqer, suggesting that it may have already been during
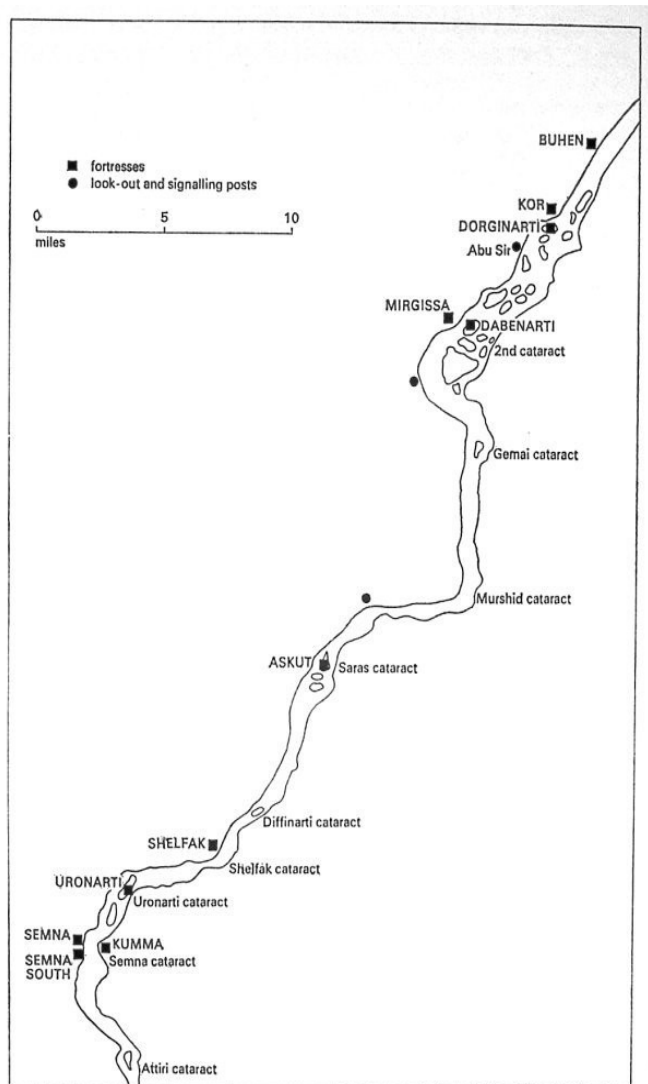
Amenemhat I's reign that the Egyptians occupied Lower Nubia as far as the second cataract (Török 2009: 84). From the time of the 6th Dynasty the Egyptians were opposed by the indigenous C-Group culture, which was a force to be reckoned with – its members more organised and more assertive than the docile A-Group culture that lived in Wawat during the 4th millennium BC (Vogel 2013: 78). Perhaps the desire to control the territory between the first and second cataract, and the resistance of the C-Group culture played an important part in the decision to construct a series of mud-brick strongholds through which the Egyptians controlled and exploited the lands of Wawat. It was during Amenemhat I's reign that the fortresses of Ikkur, Kuban, Aniba (half-way between the first and second cataracts) and Buhen (just north of the second cataract) were built. Each stronghold was strategically located, Aniba on the fertile floodplain, Ikkur and Kuban on the way to the gold mines in Wadi Allaqi and Wadi Gabgaba (*fig. 3*). The southern border was at that time almost certainly guarded by the massive fortress and trade centre of Buhen (Török 2009: 84).

Egyptian colonisation of Lower Nubia, however, began in earnest under Amenemhat I's successor Senusret I (1956–1911 BC) who during campaigns in his 17th and 18th year incorporated Wawat into his kingdom (Obsomer 2017: 3). These campaigns are recorded on Senusret I's victory stela from Buhen, on which Kush is mentioned for the first time (Florence 2540; Smith 1976: pl. LXIX,1). Senusret I also enlarged the existing fortresses in Nubia whilst at the same time enhancing their defensive capabilities. The colonization process itself was described as ruthless, with descriptions of massacres, the slayings of livestock and the destruction of crops (Török 2009: 93–94; Žába 1974: 98–109). This was not only fuelled by the desire for resources but also by an aggressive ideology of domination, the personification of which was the cult of Heqaib, a local saint from Elephantine (Raue: 2014). This new policy was evident not only due to the appearance of titles denoting colonization, occupation and military surveillance, but also by the very names given to the individual Egyptian fortresses in Nubia, where the verbs to repel, to ward, to destroy, and to subdue figure frequently (Vogel 2010: 16). This mindset of domination consciously or unconsciously elevated Egypt's fierceness towards Lower Nubia into the sphere of religion and political ideology (Török 2009: 81–83, 88–89; Redford 1992: 79–80).

Senusret I eventually drew his border at Buhen, after the Kushites of Kerma agreed to pay tribute (see the biography of Ameny from his tomb Beni Hassan; BH 2; Newberry 1893: 9–38, pl. VIII). This deal, nonetheless, was short lived and halted the pharaohs' advance only

for a couple of years; the Egyptians' presence further south at Semna, some 50 kilometres upstream of the second cataract, is attested already during the reign of Senusret II (1911–1870 BC), Senusret I's successor (Obsomer 2017: 4).

Egyptian domination of Nubia is, however, connected particularly with Senusret III who was the most active of the Middle Kingdom rulers in Nubia, especially thanks to his numerous military campaigns.[27] The exact number of these expeditions is still a matter of debate among scholars – for example, Callender (2000: 154) listed four campaigns for years 6, 8, 10, and 16, Tallet (2005: 31) mentioned the campaigns in the years 8, 10, 16 and 19, whilst Obsomer (2017: 4) spoke of only three clearly recorded military campaigns when the pharaoh led his troops personally in years 8, 10 and 19, noting that during year 16 the pharaoh's presence at Semna is attested, but there is no evidence of a military confrontation with the Nubians.

It was during the year 8 campaign that Senusret III pushed the Egyptian border to Semna, as attested by the smaller Semna stela (see below).[28] From a strategic point of view, this location was well chosen – the Semna gorge was the narrowest part of the Nile valley in the area, which made it an ideal lookout point to monitor traffic on the Nile and along the river as well, when the Nile became impassable by boat (Trigger 1976: 67).

During his 38-year reign, Senusret III not only upgraded existing fortifications but he also built new strongholds at Faras and Serra-East (north of the second cataract), Dabenarti and Mirgissa (at the second cataract), and Askut, Shalfak, Uronarti, Semna-West, Semna-South and Kumma (south of the second cataract; Török 2009: 86).[29] The chain of fortresses between the first cataract and the new border at Semna served multiple purposes – not only did the strongholds defend Egypt against aggression from the south, but they also facilitated

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[27] There is no definite answer for why the hostilities resumed, though Obsomer (2017: 4) speculates this could have been due to the fact that the Kushites stopped sending tribute, and the rising power of Kerma posed a security risk to Egypt, as it developed into its equal during the Middle Kerma Period (2050–1750 BC). This is supported not only by the Kushites' own forts and fortifications, but also by Kerma's location in a fertile basin at the crossroads of desert routes connecting Egypt, the Red Sea and territories lying deeper in Africa (Vogel 2013: 80).

[28] This event was also corroborated by an inscription on Sehel island at the first cataract also dated to Senusret III's 8th year. Though the carving deals with the renewal of a river channel, at the very end the text mentions the fact, that this event happened after the pharaoh's campaign against wretched Kush (PM V: 250; SEH 147; Gasse and Rondot 2007: 79–80, 456–457).

[29] Vogel (2013: 79–80) does not list Faras or Dabenarti.

long-distance trade and the extraction of valuable resources from Wawat, and acted as supply depots. Some forts were more specialised than others, for example Askut was responsible for grain storage, Uronarti for administration, and Semna-West had a considerable garrison posted within its walls. Furthermore, the fortresses dominated the landscape by their very presence serving as symbols of pharaonic power for all to see (Török 2009: 87–89; Smith 1991: 131–132).[30]

Senusret III, however, campaigned even further downstream. During year 10 he made his way to the Dal cataract some 80 kilometres south of Semna (Davies 2016: 15; Tallet 2005: 43; Delia 1980: 39–40). There is, however, no evidence suggesting that Egyptian presence here was permanent. Be it as it may, Senusret III's achievements were long remembered, the king was soon deified after his death, if not during his lifetime, and he became an inspiration for later rulers, especially for Thutmose III of the New Kingdom (Vogel 2017). The pharaoh's cult became particularly popular in Nubia, where the deified Senusret III was seen considered a warrior-saint during the New Kingdom, as attested by the Hemispeos of Ellesija.[31]

The Dal Cataract was as far south as the Egyptians got during the Middle Kingdom. Further territorial expansion had to wait until the mid-2nd millennium BC when the pharaohs of the 18th Dynasty pushed all the way to Tombos located at the third cataract some 200 kilometres south of Semna, and later on to Kurgus, half-way between the fourth and fifth cataracts, 300 kilometres south from Senusret III's border as the crow flies (see Chapter 4 below).

3.3 – Year 8 stela of Senusret III from Semna-West (*smaller Semna stela*)

Senusret III had three new fortresses built around the area of Semna: the main fortress at Semna-West (often referred to only as Semna), a secondary fortress on the east bank named Kumma (also called Semna-East), and an advanced observation post about a kilometre upstream on the western bank called Semna-South.

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[30] Hoffmeier (2013: 184–186) drew attention to the doubling of forts on the eastern and western bank, such as the case of Kumma and Semna-West, or Kuban and Ikkur. He speculated whether this dual system could have its origins in the 1st Dynasty fort at Elephantine and the fortified town of *Swnw* on the east bank.

[31] The Hemispeos of Ellesija was originally located near the fortress of Aniba, but is now in the Egyptian Museum in Turin. Its decorative programme and the references of Thutmose III to his ancestor Senusret III are particularly striking (Konrad 2002: 229–231, 236–327). Thutmose III built and refurbished other temples in Lower Nubia in which Senusret III was worshipped, e.g., at Semna-West or Uronarti. The rock-cut chapel at Jebel Dosha stands out, as it is located in Upper Nubia.

fig. 4: Year 8 stela of Senusret III from Semna-West (after Meurer 1996)

The border stela of Senusret III dating to year 8[32] was discovered during excavations of the Egyptian fortress at Semna-West, though its original location is unknown (Berlin 14753; PM VII: 151; *fig. 4*). Out of the three so-called border stelae of Senusret III, this is the smallest: it measures about 83 centimetres in height and 81 centimetres in width, though these dimensions are somewhat misleading, as the stela is missing its lower half; it is thus safe to assume it was originally much larger, probably around 1.5 metres, on par with the other two stelae described below.

It was made from red granite, smooth on the anterior surface, whereas the back of the stela was left rough and coarse. Its lunette is undecorated, apart from the sign for "west"

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[32] Delia (1980: 34) pointed out that the strokes forming the number 8 were damaged and that it was impossible to tell for sure this was indeed the eighth year.

(*ỉmnt*) underneath which are six lines of hieroglyphic text. Below the inscription are carvings of three bound captives, under whom the stela was broken off. The monument mentions the creation of the new southern border and at the same time stipulates the rules under which Nubians – as merchants or emissaries only – could enter Egypt, and which locations they were allowed to visit.

The transliteration and translation of the stela is as follows:

1) Tȝš rs(y) ỉry m rnpt-sp 8 ẖr ḥm n nsw.t-bỉty H̱ʿỉ-kȝw-Rʿ dỉ ʿnẖ ḏ.t

Southern border created in year 8 under the majesty of the Dual king Khakaura, given life enduringly

2) r nḥḥ r tm rdỉ sn sw Nḥs nb m ẖd

and eternally, in order to prevent any Nubian to cross it (by) sailing downstream

3) m ḥrt m kȝỉ mnmn.t nb.t n.t

or by foot, in a ship, or any herds of

4) Nḥs.w wpw-ḥr Nḥs ỉw.t(ỉ)=f(y) r ỉr.t swn.t m Ỉkn

the Nubians, except a Nubian who shall come to make trade at Iken (Mirgissa)

5) m wpw.t rȝ-pw jrt.tw nb.t nfr ḥnʿ=sn nn swt rdỉ.t

(or) with a message, or anything good that may be done with them, but without letting

6) swȝ kȝỉ n Nḥs.w m ẖd ḥr Ḥḥ r nḥḥ

a ship of the Nubians sail downstream past Heh, eternally.[33]

Our investigation of the stela will, as in the previous chapter, focus on three crucial aspects: 1) its appearance, 2) its inscription and 3) its location. The same will be done with the larger Semna stela and the stela from Uronarti.

Firstly, the appearance of the smaller Semna stela. As it has already been pointed out, the back of the stela is rough and has not been worked on. This seemingly unimportant detail,

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[33] Obsomer (2017: 6, ft. 18) also provides a transliteration and translation of the text and lists a range of other translations.

however, can tell us a great deal about the monument's location and use. Its coarse posterior surface could indicate that the stela was originally placed outside the fortress at Semna-West, likely against a wall or rock face, though this does not rule out the possibility that the stela could have been placed against a wall inside a building, as the front has weathered rather well (Obsomer 2017: 6).

Furthermore, the sign for "west" in the lunette is somewhat odd, which led scholars (e.g. Obsomer 2017: 6; Meurer 1996: 4) to speculate that a sister stela could have existed on the other bank of the Nile at the fortress of Kumna with the sign for "east" (*iȝbt*). Unfortunately, no such marker has ever been excavated, nor is there any other evidence to support this assumption. Nevertheless, such a theory does sound plausible, and indeed there could have been a third stela with the sign for "south" (*rsy*) made for the observation post at Semna-South.

There is also the issue with the three bound enemies depicted underneath the inscription and the missing lower half of the stela. Loeben (2001: 281, *fig. 5*) suggested that the three enemies should be accompanied by six more – three bound enemies in three rows – for a total of nine enemies, symbolizing the Nine Bows. There are, however, several sticking points to this theory.

fig. 5: Year 8 stela of Senusret III from Semna-West (after Loeben 2001)

The Egyptians had no issue with depicting the Nine Bows as weapons of war, i.e. nine bows, three in rows of three. The enemies of Egypt could, and often were depicted as bound enemies yet they were usually in a row, one following the other, all tethered to the same rope. In this respect, it seems unusual the Egyptians would break with tradition and depict the Nine Bows on the smaller Semna stela in such a way as Loeben suggested. Furthermore, even though in the Old Kingdom the Nine Bows referred exclusively to Nubians, during the Middle Kingdom the list encompassed other enemies, typically Libyans and Asiatics and in the New Kingdom the Nine Bows became a common collective expression for the nations of mankind,

including the Egyptian people (Shaw 2000b: 309–311; Kemp 1978: 10). To make matters even more complicated, the term did not have to denote any specific enemy but stood for enemies of Egypt in general.

As the lower part of the stela is missing, we cannot be sure that the three depicted enemies do not simply stand for Nubians (similar to an Old Kingdom plural), as the determinatives in lines 4 and 6 look almost the same as the three bound prisoners. Incidentally, these three bound captives also appear in line 1 from on the year 16 stela from Uronarti in the toponym of the fortress (see below). Also, not once are the Nine Bows mentioned in the names of the strongholds in Nubia, the closest one gets is with Kumma (Semna-East) which is called *Ỉtnw pḏ.wt*, i.e. "Warding off the Bows".[34] The debate about the missing lower half of the stela thus proves to be highly speculative and any conclusions should be taken with a very large grain of salt.

The second unresolved issue is connected to the inscription. Even though the first word on the stela is indeed *tꜣš*, the rest of the text does not concern itself with lofty cosmological principles, such as the maintenance of maꜥat or the detailed description of the pharaoh's achievements, by which he wants to be remembered by future generations. Rather, the text sets out Senusret III's policy towards the Nubians and offers a very hands-on approach to common problems which might arise at the border at Semna.

The conditions under which a Nubian was allowed into Egyptian territory were unusually explicit, seemingly out of place on such a monument – one would rather expect such particular rules on an administrative document like a papyrus. Adams (1984: 48) claimed that the pharaoh's concern was purely economic and called the stela history's first recorded decree of commercial monopoly. Galán (1995: 147) noted that the text only addressed foreigners, and that the stela served as a sort of functional definition of the border. On the other hand, the fact that these conditions were carved into stone, could suggest this policy was very important to Senusret III. In addition, though the stela deals with rather mundane matters, the inscription is not only bureaucratic in nature – scholars have pointed out multiple possible readings due to its grammar[35] and, for example, Obsomer (2017: 7) was not the first

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[34] Semna-West was called "Khakaura is powerful" (*Sḫm Ḫꜥ-kꜣw-Rꜥ*), Semna-South "Subduer of Nubia" (*Dꜣỉr sty*) and Uronarti "Repelling the Iuntiu" (*Ỉtnw pḏwt*).

[35] On line 5 the phrase *ỉrt.tw nbt nfr* has also been interpreted as passive prospective – *ỉr.t(w) (ḫ).t nb.t nfr(.t)* - "we will do all kinds of good things" – Delia 1980: 36–37; Meurer 1996: 24–25; Loeben 2001: 273–277), though the omission of "*ḫ*" would be somewhat odd. The phrase *nn swt rdit* – usually translated as *nn* +

Egyptologist to note the onomatopoeic quality of the expressions at the end of line 6: ḥr Ḥḥ and r nḥḥ. Thus, there is a notable contrast with *what* the inscription deals with, and *how* the text is presented.

Finally, the inscription highlights an interesting topographic question. As already pointed out, year 8 of Senusret III's reign was significant for the extension of the southern border to Heh (*Ḥḥ*). Before his rule, the border of Egypt was located at the second cataract, guarded by the massive fortresses of Buhen and Mirgissa, which are nowadays also submerged under the waters of Lake Nasser. Before the construction of the Aswan High Dam, the area around the second cataract was dominated by the natural landmark on the western bank called the Rock of Abusir, a steep cliff on the western bank overlooking a labyrinth of rocky islets on the Nile.[36]   As usual, scholars disagree what does the toponym Heh actually describe. Obsomer (2017: 5) suggested it was the name of the rocky outcrop on the Nile at Semna, Smith (1991: 126–127) proposed it described the whole area between Uronarti and Semna-South, whereas Vercoutter (1964: 187) equated Heh with the Rock of Abusir. Scholarly consensus does, however, tend to lean towards the area around Semna, which also seems as the most logical choice. Interestingly enough, the toponym Heh appears only on the year 8 and the two year 16 stelae of Senusret III. Vercoutter (1964: 187) pointed out that this is somewhat odd; given the supposed importance of the border, one would expect much more references to Heh.

The third and final issue we need to address is, where was the stela originally located. The problem is, that the information regarding the find-spot is wholly absent, so all we are left with are educated guesses.

The fact that the lower half of the stela was broken off, does not help either. The stela's presumed dimensions lead Eyre's (1990: 137) to suggest, that the monument was on public display. He claimed that it was not important whether observers could read the inscription. According to Eyre the stela served its purpose of being a royal statement by its physical presence. This is reminiscent of the Egyptian strongholds in the Nubian landscape that from a symbolic point of view were a reminder of the power of the pharaohs. Eyre's claim is well argued, but there are other possible places where the stela could have stood – for

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infinitive – has also been understood as the negation of a prospective and translated as an independent proposition (Meurer 1996: 11, 25).

[36] At least this how Amelia B. Edwards described the scenery in "Chapter XVII: The Second Cataract" in her travelogue *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*.

example, in a temple, next to the outer gate, at a checkpoint, etc. To say that the stela was on public display is fine, however, there are different types of "public display" depending on the intended audience. A stela placed in a temple would attract a wholly different crowd (also it would depend *where* in the temple it was located) than at a border post. Unfortunately, since there is no other monument quite like the smaller Semna stela, all we are left with are guesses.

3.4 – Year 16 stela of Senusret III from Semna-West (*larger Semna stela*) and year 16 stela of Senusret III from Uronarti

The two boundary stelae from the 16th year of Senusret III's reign are almost identical, and thus it is sensible to compare the two monuments at the same time.

The stela from Semna-West (Berlin 1157; PM VII: 151, Obsomer 2017, *fig. 6*) often commonly referred to as the most famous Egyptian border stela ever, is by far the better known of the two monuments. This logically has to do with the fact that it is on display in the Neues Museum in Berlin. The monument was unearthed by Karl Richard Lepsius in 1844 and has a very unusual history. It was discovered at Semna-West in two pieces and given to the Royal Prussian Expedition as a gift by the Egyptian Viceroy Mohamed Ali. However, during shipping to Berlin, its upper half was forgotten at Semna by Lepsius' expedition, where it lay for more than four decades before being rediscovered, quite by coincidence, by the Dutch art dealer Jan H. Insinger in 1886. Eventually both halves were reunited in Berlin in 1899 (Seidlmayer 2000: 234–235).

Luck would also have it, that in the same year, about 4 kilometres downstream from Semna-West, during excavations of the fortress of Uronarti Ludwig Borchardt, Georg Steindorff and Heinrich Schaefer unearthed a sister stela (Khartoum 451; PM VII: 143; Janssen 1953, *fig. 7*), which in 1905 found its way to the museum in Khartoum thanks to E. A. Wallis Budge and John Winter Crowfoot (Budge 1907: 491–493). However, to this day, its existence is still overshadowed by its more famous counterpart in Berlin.

Both stelae are made from red granite measuring 150 centimetres in height and 80 centimetres in width.[37] Like with the smaller Semna stela, prominence is clearly given to the inscription on both monuments. There are 19 lines of text in sunken relief covering both stelae

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[37] Priese (1991: 46) listed even larger dimensions of the larger Semna stela: 160 centimetres high and 96 centimetres wide, but claimed it to be made from silicified sandstone. Janssen (1953: 51) listed the Uronarti stela as 150 centimetres high, 80 centimetres wide and maintained it to be made from brown sandstone. The museum in Khartoum labels it as granite (Obsomer 2017: 10).

from top to bottom. The semicircle of the lunette in the larger Semna stela and the stela from Uronarti is framed by an elongated sky sign (*p.t*), under which a sun disk spreads its wings. As already pointed out, the larger Semna stela is broken into two pieces, approximately a third of its length from the bottom; despite this, the text is still legible. The stela from Uronarti has its lower left corner broken off beginning at line 12, resulting in the loss of a considerable part of the inscription; the missing text can luckily be reconstructed from the larger Semna stela.

On both stelae Senusret III describes himself as a responsible leader and recalls his achievements and exploits in Nubia. Special attention is given to the extension of the Egyptian border southwards which, the pharaoh maintains, is his legacy to his heirs, and calls on them to maintain the kingdom's territorial integrity. Though there are minor spelling variations in both texts, the inscriptions are basically the same – only towards the end the Uronarti stela adds after the mentioning "my majesty" (*ḥm=ỉ*) from line 14 onwards the usual wishes of "l(ife), p(rosperity), h(ealth)" – *ꜥ(nḫ), w(ḏꜣ), s(nb)*. Only the first line differs – where the larger Semna stela mentions the frontier at Heh, its sister monument speaks of the construction of the fortress of Uronarti.

The transliteration and translation of the larger Semna stela is as follows:

1) Rnp.t-sp 16 ꜣbd 3 pr.t ‖ Ỉr.t ḥm=f tꜣš rs(y) r Ḥḥ

Year 16, third month of Peret: setting up the southern border at Heh by his majesty.

2) Ỉw ỉr.n=ỉ tꜣš=ỉ ḫnt=ỉ ỉt(ỉ).w=ỉ ‖ Ỉw rdỉ.n=ỉ

I made my southern border further upstream than my forefathers.

3) hꜥw-ḥr swḏt n=ỉ ‖ Ỉnk nsw.t ḏd.w ỉrr.w ‖ Kꜣt

I added to that which was handed over to me. I am a king who speaks and who acts. What

4) ỉb=ỉ pw ḫpr.t m-ꜥ=ỉ ‖ ꜣd.w r ỉṯ.t sḫm.w r

my mind pictures, is that which happens by my hand. (I am a king) fierce to conquer, eager to

5) mꜥr tm(.w) sḏr(.w) md.t m ỉb=f ‖ Ḫmt(.w) twꜣw ꜥḥꜥ(.w) ḥr

succeed, in whose heart does no matter sleep. (I am a king who) takes notice of those of low stature (whom he) faces with

6) sf tm(.w) sfn.w n ḫrwy pḥ sw ‖ Pḥ.w pḥ.t(w)=f gr.w gr.t(w)

mercy,(but) is not merciful to the enemy who attacks him. (I am a king) who attacks when he is attacked, who is at peace when one is at peace,

7) wšb.w md.t mỉ ḫpr.t ỉm=s ‖ Ḏr-ntt ỉr gr m-ḫt pḥ sšḫm

who answers a matter according to what happened by it. For to be at peace after an attack is to strengthen

8) ỉb pw n ḫrwy ḳn.t pw ȝd ḫst pw ḥm-ḫt ‖ Ḥm pw mȝꜥ

the heart of the enemy, (therefore) bravery is fierceness (and) cowardice is retreat. Truly a weakling

9) ȝr.w ḥr tȝš=f ‖ Ḏr-ntt sḏm Nḥs r ḫr n rȝ ỉn

is the one who is driven away from his border. For the Nubian listens so that (he can) fall on (his) mouth,

10) wšb=f ḏd ḥm=f ‖ ȝd.t(w) r=f ḏd=f sȝ=f ‖ Ḥm-ht wȝ=f r ȝd

(so) answering him causes his retreat. If one is fierce towards him,

fig. 6: Year 16 stela of Senusret III from Semna-West (after Obsomer 2017)

he causes his back (to show). But to retreat puts him into (a state of) fierceness,

11) n rmṯ ỉs n.t šft st ‖ Ḫwrw.w pw sḏ.w ỉb.w ‖ Ỉw

for they truly are not people of dignity. They are wretches (with) broken hearts.

12) m33.n st ḥm=ỉ nn m ỉwms h3ḳ.n=ỉ ḥm.wt=sn ỉn.n=ỉ

My majesty observed them, this is no lie. I captured their women, I took away

13) ẖr.w=sn pr(.w) r ẖnm.wt=sn ḥw.(w) k3.w=sn wḫ3.(w) ỉt=sn

their relatives, emptying (water) from their wells, driving off their oxen, cutting their barley.

14) rdỉ(.w) sḏt ỉm ‖ ꜥnḫ n=ỉ ỉt(ỉ)=ỉ ḏd=ỉ m-m3ꜥt nn ḫn {n} ỉm

(and) setting it on fire. As my father lives for me, I speak truthfully, there is no boasting

15) n ꜥbꜥ pr(.w) m r3=ỉ ‖ Ỉr grt s3=ỉ nb srwd.t(ỉ)=fy t3š

which comes from my mouth. As for any son of mine who shall affirm this border

16) pn ỉr.n ḥm=ỉ s3=ỉ pw ms.t(w)=f n ḥm=ỉ ‖ twt S3-nḏty-ỉt(ỉ)=f which my majesty set up, he is my son, born of my majesty, the likeness of the Son-who-protects-his-father,

17) srwd(.w) t3š wtt sw ‖ Ỉr grt fḫ.t(ỉ)=fy sw tm.t(ỉ)=fy ꜥh3(.w)

who affirms the border (of) his sire. As for him who shall loose it and shall not fight

18) ḥr=f n s3=ỉ ỉs n ms.t(w)=f ỉs n=ỉ ‖ Ỉsṯ grt rdỉ.n ḥm=ỉ ỉr.t(w) twt

for it, he is truly not my son, he is truly not born of me. Here truly, my majesty had a likeness

19) n ḥm=ỉ ḥr t3š pn ỉr.n ḥm=ỉ n-mrwt rwd=ṯn ḥr=f n-mrwt ꜥh3=ṯn ḥr=f

of my majesty made at this border, which my majesty set up so that you may be firm at it and so that you will go to war for it.

As already pointed out, only the first line of text on the Uronarti stela differs from its sister stela from Semna-West.

1) Wḏ ỉry rnp.t-sp 16 ȝbd 3 pr.t ḳd mnnw Ḫsf-Iwntyw

Stela made in year 16, third month of Peret: (commemorating) the building the fortress "Repelling the Iuntiu".

fig. 7: Year 16 stela of Senusret III from Uronarti (after Obsomer 2017)

Much as the smaller Semna stela, the larger Semna stela and the stela from Uronarti should also be examined bearing in mind their 1) appearance, 2) inscription and 3) location.

Though both year 16 stelae look alike, careful investigation will reveal slight variations between the two artefacts. Both monuments had their front polished, as well as their sides. The Uronarti stela has the first 10 to 20 centimetres of its upper part and sides polished, on the larger Semna stela only its top sides are polished. In addition, the larger Semna stela has notches visible on its sides, probably remnants of some form of attachment. The Uronarti stela has a rough back, the larger Semna stela had had its back cut in modern times, but it seems plausible it could have had an unworked reverse side as well (Seidlmayer 2000: 235). This seemingly trivial detail is important for our interpretation of

the stela, as a smooth back would suggest that the monument was free-standing. Though Seidlmayer (2000: 235) did not dismiss this possibility, he thought it more probable the larger Semna stela was embedded in a wall, a view Vogel (2011: 331) subscribed to whilst rejecting the idea of a free-standing stela.

The stelae also show subtle iconographic differences. Whereas the sun disk on the larger Semna stela has two urei with *šn* rings hanging from them, the Uronarti stela lacks this feature. On the stela from Semna, the names and titles of Senusret III are arranged horizontally underneath the sun disk's wings, beginning with the serekh name without the serekh itself ("Divine of being" *Ḥrw nṯr-ḫprw*), followed by the Two Ladies ("Divine of birth" *nbty nṯr mswt*), the prenomen ("Dual king Khakaura (the kas of Ra are appearing)" *nsw.t bỉty Ḫꜥỉ-kꜣw-Rꜥ*), the Golden Horus ("Living of being" *Bỉk-nbw ꜥnḫ ḫpr*), and the nomen ("Son of Ra, Senusret" *sꜣ-Rꜥ S-n-Wsr.t*), accompanied by the usual epithets. On the Uronarti stela the names are arranged vertically with the Horus name in the serekh forming the centrepiece of the royal titulary. The Uronarti stela also had the phrase "like Ra" (*mỉ Rꜥ*) added. In both cases, the wings of the sun disk spread over the axisymmetrically mirrored toponym Behdet (Edfu), the main cult town of Horus in Upper Egypt. In addition, the lunette is subtly separated from the 19 lines of the text by a dividing line on the Semna stela, and by the framing of the whole lunette on its sister monument.

Turning our attention to the second point, the inscriptions, the texts on the two stelae provide a wealth of information. Though scholars have also noted the literary qualities of the larger Semna and the Uronarti stelae, the wording of which would have been emulated by future kings (Obsomer 2017: 11–12; Eyre 1990: 154; see both authors for a detailed textual study), these monuments are very different when compared to the smaller Semna stela. Whilst the latter concerns itself with mundane conditions of who, how, where and when can a Nubian cross the Egyptian border, I maintain that the larger Semna and Uronarti stelae are in fact victory stelae celebrating Senusret III's accomplishments by which he wants future generations to remember him by, i.e., as an honourable, strong and wise ruler. Though some scholars (Török 2009: 81, ft. 15; Meurer 1996: 32; Galán 1995: 148; Trigger 1976: 75) also referred to these monuments as victory stelae, on the whole these artefacts are described as border stelae.

Eyre (1990: 135–136) pointed out that the text combines elements found in narrative, autobiographical and wisdom literature, as well as declarations of policy and a direct address

to the audience, placing the stelae among the belles lettres of the Middle Kingdom. Eyre (1990: 149, 151) also called the text on the year 16 stelae a fragment of a teaching (*sbꜣy.t*) which was intended for the ears of the pharaoh's son.[38] If indeed this is the case, it would be a rare example of a royal teaching akin to the *Instruction of Merikare* or the *Instructions of Amenemhet* (Galán 1995: 147). The text also echoes the *Hymns of el-Lahun*, composed in honour of Senusret III (Sethe 1928: 65–67), in which the border is a recurring theme. The king was called "Horus who widens his border" (*Ḥr swsḫ tꜣš=f*), an epithet apparently created for this particular occasion (Obsomer 2017: 25–26; Eyre 1990: 141–142; Goedicke 1968).

Eyre (1990: 142–143) pointed out that royal stelae with self-laudatory texts are rather uncommon, though he admitted this impression may arise due to the lack of archaeological data, as self-praise was often seen in private autobiographies during the Middle Kingdom (Blumenthal 1970: 434–435). According to Eyre (1990: 164–165), autobiographical self-praise and teachings, which appear in non-royal Old Kingdom tombs, slowly trickled down into royal context during the Middle Kingdom, eventually becoming canon as evidenced by the so-called *Königsnovelle* of the New Kingdom. Coulon (1997: 123, 137) added that proclamations of veracity are a legacy of inscriptions of the First Intermediate Period, pointing out that the very fact that a king chooses to proclaim his truthfulness, seems very odd when compared to the king's status in earlier periods. Any Egyptian living in the Old Kingdom would find it very strange for a ruler to declare his veracity, as truthfulness of the pharaoh was never doubted. Actually, it was the authority of the pharaoh that gave statements appearing in non-royal tombs the hallmark of truth. During the First Intermediate Period though, there was no single person commanding such authority, so local rulers, who needed to build up their legitimacy, used claims of truthfulness. On the other hand, one should not dismiss the possibility that by the time of the Middle Kingdom such statements became a rhetorical device, incorporated in inscriptions due to tradition without a second thought.

Finally, both stelae employ blessings and curses which have been attested in both private and royal contexts (Obsomer 2017: 18). Threats against the living first appeared during the Old Kingdom in private tomb inscriptions and were quite prominent during the First Intermediate Period, as attested by the biographies of local governors such as Ankhtify

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[38] It must be noted that the father-son relation should be understood in a more generic rather than genetic sense, i.e. the wise words were intended for a wider audience, not only Senusret III's son. Delia (1980: 76) pointed out the apparent paradox that the stela was intended as a message for the pharaoh's son, yet Senusret III had the monument set up at the southern border, far from the royal palace at Thebes.

of Moalla (Vandier 1950: 206–215). However, royal threats against one's own progeny are very rare indeed, as only two other examples have been discovered to date: the royal decree of Intef V at Koptos and the temple inscriptions of Seti I from Kanais at Wadi Mia (Morales 2010: 387–388, 391–392).

In comparison with the diction of the smaller Semna stela, the text on the two year 16 stelae could not have been more different. The purpose of the year 8 stela – notwithstanding its literary qualities – seems primarily to have been as a reference for Egyptian officials mimicking an administrative or legal document. One is hesitant to imagine the year 8 stela set up in a temple, whereas the two monuments from year 16 could certainly belong there. Alternatively, the larger Semna and Uronarti stelae might have been displayed in a public place. Eyre (1990: 149, 152–153) suggested that the inscription in fact recorded a speech made by the king following the conclusion of his military campaign, and that the text on the stela was read out in public. Eyre argued that assertions of truthfulness are a common device in storytelling and oral narrative, not features of written administrative documents.[39] Vogel (2011: 334) proposed the text may have been read in public, but only during special occasions – for example during the inauguration ceremony – as the inscriptions not only enumerate the king's achievements but also speak of his legacy and issue a warning to his heirs. If the stela was in a temple, this would certainly limit access to it (Eyre 1990: 138), though Redford (1992: 142) speculated that triumphal stelae stood at the approaches to temples and their texts were read aloud.

As to the text proper, the two year 16 stelae differ only in the first line of the inscription, which is topographical in nature. Whereas the stela from Uronarti mentions specifically the building of the fortress "Repelling the Iuntiu" (*Ḫsf Iwntyw*), the larger Semna stela speaks of the establishing of the border at Heh (*Ḥḥ*).

Delia (1980: 45, 99–100) found it curious that Senusret III announced the establishment of the border in year 16 when he had already done so in year 8, stressing that the pharaoh did not do this "anew" (*mꜣwt*). According to him, this was no coincidence. Delia proposed that Senusret III could have lost the border at Heh to the Nubians between years 8 and 16 of his reign, and that the larger Semna stela and the stela from Uronarti are subtle reminders of these events, though Senusret III tacitly chose to omit such embarrassing details

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[39] For Eyre (1990: 162) it was during the Middle Kingdom that the process of a conscious union of the genre of so-called literature (until that time the transmission of which was generally oral) and writing (which until that time was generally recording of events) happened.

on both stelae. This was the reason his inscription states that he established, not to re-established, the southern border at Heh in year 16.

Obsomer (2017: 22–26) also found it hard to believe that the pharaoh's presence on the southern border was solely motivated by the inauguration of the new fortress at Uronarti. He suggested that after Senusret's two military campaigns in Nubia in years 8 and 10, Egyptian troops became lax, forcing the pharaoh to return to Semna-West in person to re-establish the border and chastise his men in year 16. Obsomer claimed that the stelae from Semna-West and Uronarti are evidence of this event, pointing out the king had them made to motivate his troops, and to make sure they preserve the frontier in the years to come. Obsomer could only provide indirect evidence for his assertion: after the king's visit to Semna in year 16, the border garrison worked hard to strictly control the slightest movements of Nubians at the border, as demonstrated by the Semna letters found in Thebes (Liszka and Kraemer 2016; Smither 1945). In addition, Obsomer saw a connection between the stelae from year 8 and 16: whereas originally the king's plan was to regulate the flow of Nubians into Egypt, eight years later he re-evaluated his policy and led a coordinated attack against the women, livestock and fields of the Nubians – all things necessary for a tribe to lead a sedentary lifestyle.

At the same time though, Senusret III stressed that he is not a warmonger and that he fights only when provoked. However, he also added, as a word of advice to his successors: when a ruler does choose to fight, he must be more aggressive than his opponent to show his dominance. To do otherwise, would be interpreted as weakness and would invite the enemy to launch further attacks against Egypt. Senusret III maintained that the greatest transgression a ruler can commit, would be to lose territory. Taking an aggressive stance against the Nubians, whom the king described as wretches who turn tail when faced with a determined opponent, was the only possible and prudent course of action, at least so Senusret III claimed.

That the Nubians were the proverbial dog whose bark was worse than its bite, is supported by the pharaoh's declaration that the Nubian troops turned tail – Delia (1980: 66) noted that the fate reserved for Nubian men was not mentioned – leaving their wives, livestock, fields and houses for the pharaoh to capture, kill and destroy.[40] Showing that the Nubians are cowards, Senusret III added that his son had no reason to withdraw from Semna – he who neglected his duties would be disowned by the pharaoh, cursed, and the king would

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[40] Obsomer (2017: 17) suggested the king may have carried out such actions against the Nubians during his campaign in year 16. This, however, would contradict his claim that there is no attestation for a military campaign from this year.

no longer consider him his son.[41] Morales (2010: 398) claimed that from the warning of Senusret III to his heirs it was clear that his successor would only be considered a legitimate king as long as he lived according to Senusret III's tenets and maintained Egypt's borders intact. Allon in his forthcoming article entitled "War and Order in Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt (1550–1295 BCE)" pointed out that Senustret III did not invoke maʿat as a reason to war on his stelae, nor did he try to extend it – the pharaoh claimed to fight only when attacked and he did not require his son to push the border further south, only to maintain it.

Finally, what needs to be mentioned in this section is the word *twt*, the translation and interpretation of which has divided the opinions of scholars for many years (Delia 1980: 72–75; Seidlmayer 2000: 236–237). The most common translation of *twt* is "statue" (Seidlmayer 2000: 236–237; Janssen 1953: 54; Breasted 1906: 297), other scholars opted for a more generic term as "image" (Eyre 1990: 135; Lichtheim 1975: 119; Van Siclen 1982: 25), "likeness" (Delia 1980: 75), "Bild" (Säve-Söderbergh 1941: 78), "représentation" (Obsomer 2017: 19–20). Barta (1974: 53) proposed that *twt*, which he translated as "Abbild" ("image"), could be a reference to the five royal names in the lunette, though this would only be possible for the Uronarti stela. Sottas (1913: 143) suggested that *twt* in line 19 could relate to the same term in line 16, meaning that the king's behaviour and policies should be seen as an "example" or "model" for his offspring (see also Galán 1995: 150; Kaplony 1966: 405). Rowińska and Winnicki (1992: 133) proposed that in this particular case, *twt* should be translated as "Grenzstele" (border stela).[42]   The debate about *twt* is relevant due to the

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[41] An interesting debate surrounds the word *ḥm* used on both stelae to denote a coward. Morenz (2008: 167) pointed out that the following determinative of a urinating or ejaculating penis (D 53), which he calls the "phallus of a coward", was employed to symbolise unmanly behaviour. Morenz claimed that the sign is a graphic representation of premature ejaculation; Vogel (2011: 332–333, ft. 34) considered this assumption too far-fetched, suggesting urination would be a more logical choice. Obsomer (2017b: 16) pointed out, that the word *ḥm* should be read as someone effeminate which, he claimed, was an allusion to the god Seth. Obsomer felt that Seth was set in contrast to Horus, who in turn was alluded to by the phrase "the son who avenges his father" (*sꜣ nḏty it(i)=f*; see Säve-Söderbergh 1941: 77; Kaplony 1966: 404–405; Delia 1980: 70, Obsomer 2017: 19; Seidlmayer 2000: 239). Ladynin (2014: 174) noted that the noun *ḥm* sounds the same as the verb *ḥm* meaning "to run away, to retreat". Delia (1980: 54–57) noted that the term is reminiscent of the word for "woman" – the only difference being the phallus determinative – and therefore chose to translate *ḥm* as "fag".

[42] Rowińska and Winnicki (1992: 140–143) reinterpret lines 106–109 of Merikare, especially *ḳd ḥw.t n twt=k* as "Baue (auch) eine Festung für deine Grenzstele" ("Build a fortress for your border stela").

discovery of four statues of Senusret III at Uronarti and Semna-West. Whether the *twt* mentioned on the stelae is somehow connected to these statues, is unclear.

The first three statues, discovered by E. A. Wallis Budge and John Winter Crowfoot in 1905, are currently housed in the National Museum of Sudan. The fourth statue was discovered by George Andrew Reisner in 1924 at Semna-West and is currently in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (for an extensive bibliography of the statues, see Davies 2017b).

The first statue came from the New Kingdom temple of Thutmose III at Semna-West. It is a severely damaged piece of red granite (Khartoum 448; PM VII: 150, Davies 2017b: 79–80) showing the lower half of a back-pillared statue of the kneeling king on a pedestal containing his titles and prenomen, together with other severely weathered inscriptions.

The second statue was also found in the temple of Thutmose III at Semna-West. It is a headless back-pillared seated sandstone statue of the pharaoh dressed in a jubilee cloak with a broad collar, also severely damaged (Khartoum 447; PM VII: 147–148; Davies 2017b: 77–78; Seidlmayer 2000: 237). The inscription identifies the figure as the deified Senusret III from the fortress of Semna made in "retro" style imitating Middle Kingdom traditions (Rilly 2013: 34).

The third statue – possibly also carved from hard sandstone, headless, smaller than life and with a back pillar – comes from Uronarti (Khartoum 452; PM VII: 144; Davies 2017b: 75–77; Seidlmayer 2000: 237–238). It depicts a seated king in his jubilee cloak, his feet placed on a rectangular pedestal incised with the symbolic Nine Bows. The king's names and titles are listed with epithets calling him to be beloved of Montu and Ptah.

Obsomer (2017: 21–22) noted that the three statues were clearly cult statues from local temples associating Senusret III with Osiris and the *twt* referred to on the year 16 stelae, though he finds it unlikely that they date from the reign of Senusret III. Davies (2017b: 81) presented a different opinion – he suggested that Khartoum 447 and 452 were indeed the *twt* mentioned on the year 16 stelae, pointing out that the stelae and statues in question were in proximity to each other at Semna-West and Uronarti at the time of their discovery.

The fourth statue (Boston MFA 24.1764) was discovered in two fragments near the temple of Taharqa at Semna-West. Made from red granite most likely extracted from the region of Aswan, one fragment preserves the right upper side of the face with the head covered with a nemes, the other shows part of a pleated kilt. The image shows the typical

facial expression of Senusret III, which makes it tempting to see this statue as the *twt* mentioned on the larger Semna stela (Obsomer 2017: 22).

Finally, let us move to our third and final point, the original locations of the two stelae. As for the larger Semna stela, scholars deduced its find-spot from a plan drawn in 1844 by a member of the Lepsius' expedition, the architect Georg Gustav Erbkam. According to Seidlmayer (2000: 233–234, pl. 4) the half round object, which Erbkam drew on his map, was almost certainly the larger Semna stela. If this is true, the find-spot was on the eastern glacis of the fortress, close to the edge of the rock plateau facing the Nile. This would correspond with the find-spot of the Uronarti stela, which was discovered overthrown at the edge of the temple bastion close to the steps leading down to the Nile (Vogel 2011: 328; Seidlmayer 2000: 240; Van Siclen 1982: 13, fig. 3 marked x).

The obvious problem is that the locations where the two monuments were discovered, did not likely correspond to the locations where the stelae were originally on display. Seidlmayer (2000: 240, 242) assumed that the larger Semna stela stood outside the main wall close to the steps leading to Nile, where he suggested a Middle Kingdom chapel of Senusret III once stood. Vogel (2011: 330–331), however, pointed out that no remains of such a structure were ever found, and that the New Kingdom temple at Semna-West dedicated to the deified Senusret III and the Nubian god Dedwen was located within the fortress.[43] This means that either the supposed Middle Kingdom temple was dismantled without a trace, that it was located always behind the walls of the fortress and was renovated during the New Kingdom, or that there was no Middle Kingdom temple at all.

Vogel offered two possibilities, why the larger Semna stela was found outside of the fortress. Either someone attempted to move the monument from inside the temple, or the stela had never been part of the New Kingdom temple and its find-spot corresponds to its primary location, i.e., next to the stairs leading down to the river. The stela would thus have stood on its own, outside the wall in full view of anyone approaching fortress.[44] This would correspond to Van Siclen's (1982: 25, fig. 10) proposal that the Uronarti stela also stood on the terrace leading to the Nile and near the New Kingdom temple of Senusret III, though Budge's

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[43] The temple was built by Hatshepsut in the 2nd year of Thutmose III. The temple was dismantled as part of the Nubian salvation project and is now located in the National Museum of Sudan in Khartoum alongside the temple from Kumma (Semna-East). For more on both temples, see Caminos (1998).

[44] One cannot dismiss the possibility that the stela was embedded in an elevated niche in the wall, though this could not have been very high given its dimensions.

impression was that the monument must have been dragged out of the temple at Uronarti (Budge 1907: 492; see also Vogel 2004: 73–77; Konrad 2002: 230–237).

3.5 – Conclusion

The debate about the smaller Semna stela, the larger Semna stela and the stela from Uronarti lead us to the biggest question of all: what was their purpose? Why did Senusret III, eight years after establishing the southern Egyptian border at Heh and commemorating this event by a stela, feel compelled to have (at least) two other stelae created, the inscriptions of which confirmed the extent of his kingdom's territory?

As already mentioned, much of the scholarly literature takes for granted that these monuments are border stelae, without actually elaborating what does this term denote. Careful examination reveals considerable differences in small details that paint two very different pictures: one for the year 8 stela, the other for the two monuments from year 16.

I have focused on three aspects: on the appearance, on the inscription, and the supposed original location of the monuments. I have suggested that the smaller Semna stela significantly differs in tone and in substance from the larger Semna stela and its sister monument from Uronarti. Whereas the year 8 stela reads more like an administrative document, the monuments from year 16 merge autobiographical, didactic, and literary styles into a victory stela. The difference in tone between the monuments is truly striking.

The inscription can also help us make an educated guess concerning the original locations of the three monuments, a crucial piece of the puzzle in trying to solve their purpose, and the ideological concepts lying behind these monuments. Unfortunately, these questions are very difficult to answer also due to the fact that we must rely on archaeological notes and plans, and we cannot double check the sites ourselves as most of them have been submerged for several decades.

Information is especially absent with regards to the smaller Semna, whose original location and find-spot remains a mystery. In this case, we are left solely with the inscription and the appearance of the stela.

Though the larger Semna stela is often considered as *the* Egyptian border stela, it is the year 8 stela that lives up to this criterion much more. The regulations it contains suggest that this stela was placed, if not on the border, than at least very close to it, perhaps at a border post with the inscription serving as a (symbolic) reminder for the guards, under what conditions Nubians could gain entry into Egypt. The sign for west appearing in the lunette

could indicate the original placement of this monument – west for Semna-West, and possibly east for Kumma and south for Semna-South. It is questionable whether a similar stela with the symbol for "north" (*mḥ*) would have been placed in Uronarti, as the fortress was located more than 6 kilometres downstream and not on the border as such. Furthermore, the border regulations would not be of much use here, as visiting Nubian merchants and messengers would have already passed through the checkpoints around Semna. On the other hand, Mirgissa lay even further north, so such a possibility should not be dismissed out of hand. In any case, if one was pressed to select a monument which would stand out as a border stela, this would certainly be it, though it is still very different from a sign saying: "Welcome to Egypt, land of the pharaohs".

As for the larger Semna stela and the Uronarti stela, their find-spots do give us a better starting position in our attempt to decipher their purpose. This, coupled with the inscription and the existence of Senusret III's cult led Vogel (2011: 330, 334–335) to suggest that they were placed in prominent and visible positions such as beside the entrance to the fortress. Vogel added that the text could have been read aloud in the presence of the garrison during the inauguration ceremony at the fortress, so placing the stelae beside the entrance to the fortress seemed like a good place to start. To this I add that the recitation of the text in public need not had been limited for such an exceptional occasion, but portions of the inscription could had been read aloud during the morning line-up of the garrison or during the changing of the guard – an everyday ritual which we can witness in prominent locations around the world to this day.

However, due to their inscriptions, I would also not dismiss the possibility that the two stelae were located within a temple. One should also bear in mind that the stelae could have been moved: they could have stood in a temple during the Middle Kingdom and moved outside of it during the New Kingdom, or vice versa. There are many possible explanations.

Vogel (2011: 331) proposed that the stelae had their indisputable role in the ideological framework of ancient Egypt insofar as they provided magical support for the fortresses in Nubia which, she claimed, were seen as a microcosm of maʿat in a foreign territory dominated by the chaotic forces of isfet. Though this does sound plausible at first, there are several questions which create dents in her theory. If these territories had been incorporated into Egypt, where maʿat already reigned, why would they need extra protection against chaos? If a territory became Egyptian, why would the Egyptians need to create small

islands of order? After all, the border had been set at Heh, so why would Uronarti need the same kind of magical protection as Semna-West – provided that we accept that the border needed some special treatment in the first place.

Summing up, the exact reason why Senusret III commissioned these stelae eludes us. What we can be sure of, is, that the smaller Semna stela and the larger Semna stela together with the Uronarti stela were created for very different purposes – the former to be used as a reference, a handbook, the two latter stelae as monuments celebrating Senusret III and his rule. It is for these reasons that I maintain that only the smaller Semna stela could be classified as a border stela, whereas the larger Semna stela and the stela from Uronarti should in fact be considered victory stelae.

Chapter 4 – Border stelae in the New Kingdom

4.1 – Introduction

In contrast to the three monuments of Senusret III examined in Chapter 3, the two only known examples of "border stelae" from the New Kingdom are anything but border stelae.

Deep in the Sudan, half-way between the fourth and fifth cataract, lies the village of Kurgus. About a kilometre east of the present course of the Nile a distinctive rock formation known as the Hagr el-Merwa (Rock of Quartz) juts out from the surrounding plain. It was here, where Thutmose I (1504–1492 BC) and his grandson Thutmose III (1479–1425 BC) had had their monuments carved, which Davies aptly described as "tableaux", a term which I shall as well.

Also, as this thesis focuses on stelae set up at the border (presumed or real), I wilfully omit the stela of Amenhotep III (1390–1352 BC) from Konosso island dated to his 5th regnal year, on which the king mentions his Nubian campaign, the fact that he made his border (*tꜣš*) as far as he wished and set up a victory stela (PM V: 254; Urk IV: 1661.10–1663.6; Klug 2002: 425–430). This monument only talks about the erection of a stela at the border, and was set up nowhere near the actual border around the third cataract at that time, though some scholars like Müller-Wollermann (1996: 10) count this monument among border stelae. The same caveat applies to the Tombos stela of Thutmose I (PM VII: 174; Urk IV: 82–6; Klug 2002, 71–8, 504–6, pl. 7) which also mentions expanding the borders (*swsḫ tꜣš.w*) but otherwise does not concern itself with the matter.

Before proceeding further, a brief review of the developments in Egypt from the time of Senusret III is in order.

4.2 – The historical context

In the previous chapter we left Senusret III's Egypt an undisputed regional power controlling not only the whole of Lower Nubia but also stretching well beyond the second cataract. This situation, however, would not last very long, as the erosion of Egyptian borders began much earlier than Senusret III would had imagined.

Less than a hundred years after the pharaoh's death in 1831 BC, the 13th Dynasty king Khasekhemra Neferhotep I (1740–1729 BC) lost control of the north, and during the reign of

Sobekhotep IV (around 1725 BC) trouble began brewing in Nubia with records of first uprisings.

Not long afterwards the Second Intermediate Period was in full swing – central government collapsed, and Egypt became divided yet again. Whereas the north of the country came under the control of the Hyksos, who ruled from Avaris, in Nubia the authority of the pharaohs was quickly substituted by the Kushite kings based at Kerma, despite a short-lived effort of the local Egyptian expatriate population to establish their own independent kingdom in Wawat (Török 2009: 100; Callender 2000: 160–161; Kemp 1983: 168–169). The Egyptians found themselves between the proverbial rock and hard place, seeing their once proud kingdom shrink considerably – the northern border was eventually drawn at Cusae about 40 kilometres south of Hermopolis, at the modern-day village of el-Ashmunein, the southern border was located, yet again, on the first cataract.
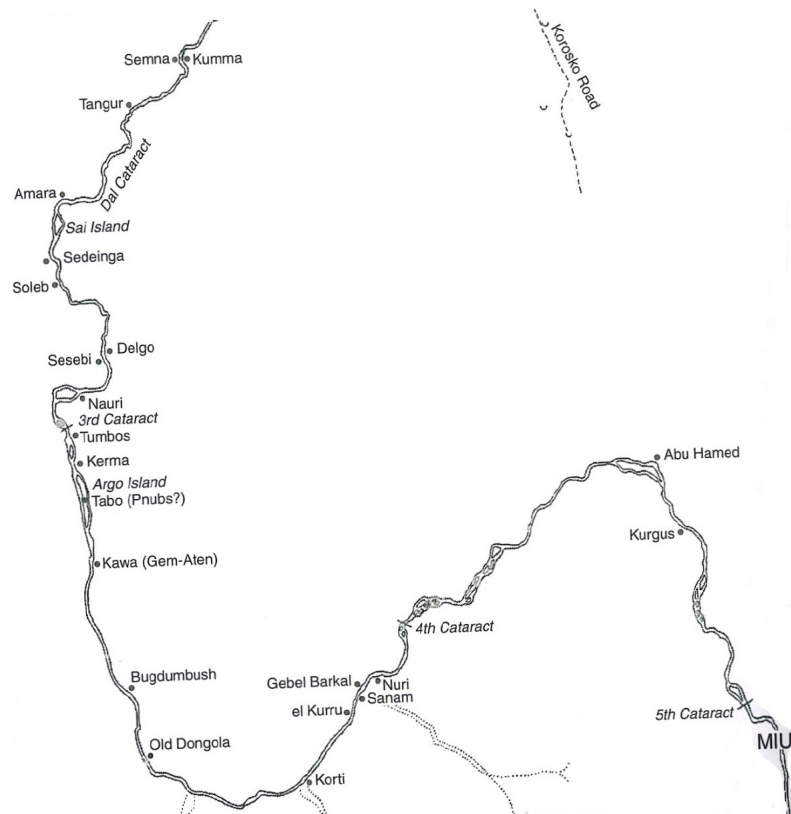

fig. 8: Archaeological sites in Upper Nubia (after Morkot 2001)

Though there were contacts and trade between the Egyptians, the Hyksos and the Nubians, the increased interaction between the rulers in Avaris and Kerma lead to the creation of an alliance which not only bypassed Egypt, but eventually threatened its very existence. No wonder the 17th Dynasty king Kamose (1555–1550 BC) had cause to lament, claiming on his second stela from year 3 of his reign: "To what effect do I perceive it, my might, while a ruler

is in Avaris and another in Kush, I am sitting joined with an Asiatic and a Nubian, each man having his (own) portion of this Egypt, sharing the land with me." (Simpson 2003: 346).

Kamose waged war against Avaris, but it was his brother Ahmose (1550–1525 BC), the first pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty, who managed to drive out the Hyksos from Egypt for good, and reunite the two lands into one kingdom yet again, albeit in its natural borders from the first cataract to the Mediterranean Sea. After accomplishing the territorial consolidation towards the end of his reign, Ahmose set his eyes on enlarging Egypt's borders, leading limited campaigns into the Levant and Nubia. His successor, Amenhotep I (1525–1504 BC), continued in his father's footsteps, conducting another successful military operation against the Kushites (Török 2009: 159–160; Bryan 2000: 214).

Intense territorial expansion, however, happened during the short six-year reign of Thutmose I, whose campaign in Nubia has been described as a true death knell to the Kushite kings at Kerma, with the pharaoh allegedly killing the Kushite king himself and having his body strapped to the bow of his ship on his return voyage to Thebes (Bryan 2000: 223). It was Thutmose I who during his campaign against the Kushites established the border at Tombos not far from the third cataract, and later pushed all the way to Hagr el-Merwa for reasons unknown. After his campaign in Nubia, the pharaoh turned his attention north and conducted raids in the Levant though he avoided a direct confrontation with the technologically superior Mitanni.

The reigns of Thutmose II (1492–1479 BC) and his sister Hatshepsut (1473–1458 BC) were rather uneventful from a military point of view, though both rulers were forced to deal with several local uprisings in Nubia.

The greatest territorial expansion of Egypt came with Hatshepsut's nephew Thutmose III who, shortly after assuming the throne following the death of his aunt, turned his attention to the Levant. Here the pharaoh successfully clashed with Mitanni and her allies, securing considerable spoils of war and obtaining a hefty tribute (Bryan 2000: 238). Gold and coveted luxury goods such as Syrian-style metal and glass vessels flooded Egypt. In the south, around 1450 BC Thutmose III pushed Egypt's border beyond its limits to the area of the fourth cataract. Here, under the shadow of Jebel Barkal, a prominent local andmark, he founded the city of Napata (modern day Karima), which became the southernmost permanent settlement of New Kingdom Egypt and the main cult centre of Amun in Nubia (Török 2009: 165).

In this light, it is interesting to note that the character of Egyptian presence changed: no longer would the pharaohs build great strongholds like those between the first and second cataracts. The Middle Kingdom forts lost their significance and Egyptian territories in Nubia were controlled via less fortified towns such as Sai, Tombos, Sesebi or Soleb, often dominated by a temple (Vogel 2013: 80; Adams 1984: 56–57). The New Kingdom pharaohs built 24 temples in Nubia, but no real fortresses like during the Middle Kingdom (Koyano 2001: 9). This could indicate peaceful relations between the Egyptians and Nubians, or it could indicate that the Kushite forces, after the fall of Kerma, were routed and left without a leader.

Eventually, the Egyptians, yet again, made their way to Kurgus, some 300 kilometres further downstream from Napata, where Thutmose III added his name to the name of his grandfather on the Hagr el-Merwa (*fig. 8*). The empire of the New Kingdom reached its peak expansion. For another three centuries Egypt would dominate the Eastern Mediterranean and Africa, before seeing its empire erode and finally collapse in the 12th century BC as many other kingdoms in the region.

4.3 – The tableaux of Thutmose I and Thutmose III at Kurgus

The two royal tableaux located on the southern end of the east face of the Hagr el-Merwa are near duplicate (PM VII: 233, *fig. 9*). Their most important element consists of a serekh facing a ram-headed Amun with four lines of hieroglyphic text running underneath, i.e., the "stela" proper (*fig. 10*). The inscription warns the local population of the dire consequences, should anyone decide to violate the monument.

Both tableaux are accompanied by depictions of a bull and a lion, and there are two complementary inscriptions – in the first Thutmose I claims that no king has reached this far south, in the second Thutmose III makes the same claim but also expands on the words of his grandfather (Davies 2017: 67–73; Davies 1998: 26–29). Apart from this, the text shows only minor spelling differences.[45] While the inscriptions were carved into the rock, the depicted figures and animals were originally drafted in red paint and their outlines were then chiselled, though not always in full. Some of the red paint is still visible today, meticulous details can be seen particularly on the lion of Thutmose III (*fig. 11*).

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[45] For the finer points on the palaeography and the graphic variations of both inscriptions, see Davies (2001: 50 and 2017: 72).

In addition, names of the members of the royal family, courtiers, soldiers and officials also appear on the Hagr el-Merwa, most likely members of the expeditions sent by the two pharaohs. The last recorded Egyptian activity on the Hagr el-Merwa comes from the time of Ramesses II (1279–1213 BC), the king being invoked by the cartouches with his nomen and prenomen, alongside a few other names of officials probably added during the 19th Dynasty (Davies 2017: 73–87; Davies 2001: 53–56).
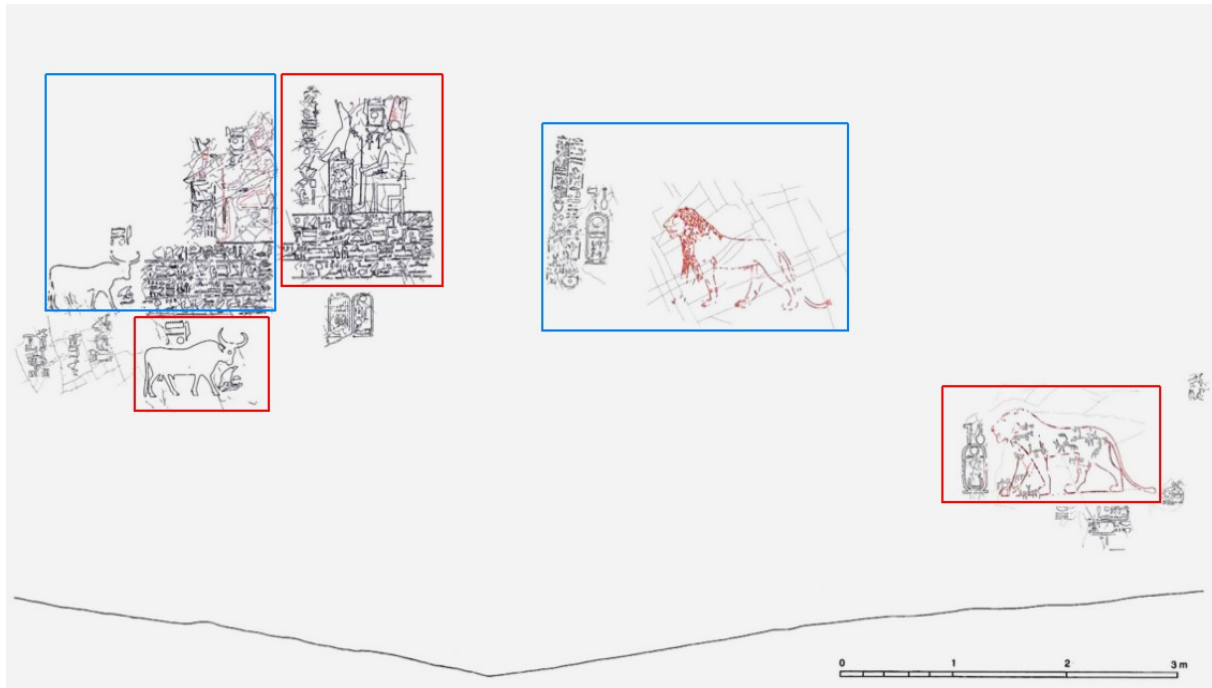

fig. 9: The tableaux of Thutmose I (highlighted in red) and Thutmose III (highlighted in blue) on the Hagr el-Merwa (after Davies 2017)

The inscriptions on the two stelae are almost identical (*fig. 10*). The transliteration and the translation is as follows:

1) Ỉr Nḥsy nb ḫȝsty nb th.t(ỉ)=fy wḏ pn
As for any Nubian (or) any foreigner who would violate this stela,

2) rdỉ.n n=ỉ ỉt(ỉ=ỉ) Ỉmn dn wr.w=f ‖ Mn Rꜥ-
which my father Amun has given to me, his chieftains shall be killed. Ra-

3) -Tm ‖ nn šn n=f p.t ‖ nn ms mnmn.t=f

-Atum shall endure, the sky shall not rain for him, his cattle shall not calve

4) nn wn ἰwꜥ.w=f tp tꜣ

his heirs shall not exist upon the earth.

fig. 10: The stela of Thutmose I with his accompanying inscription (left) and Thutmose III (after Davies 2017)

The transliteration and translation of the line of text running beside the stela of Thutmose I is as follows:

1) Nn pḥ nsw.t (s.t) ṯn ḏr rk Ḥr wp-ḥr ḥm=ἰ

No king has reached this (place) since the age of Horus except for my majesty

The transliteration and translation of the two lines of text to the left of the lion of Thutmose III (*fig. 11*) is as follows:

1) *Nn pḥ nsw.t s.t ṯn ḏr rk Ḥr wp-ḥr it(i)[=i ‖ … ???]*

No king has reached this place since the age of Horus except (my) (grand)father [???][46]

2) *r-ntt ꜥnn ḥm=i tꜣš n mḥt.t n [rsy] r Miw n nḫ.t*

in that my majesty returned to the border of the north and [the south] to Miw, in victory.[47]
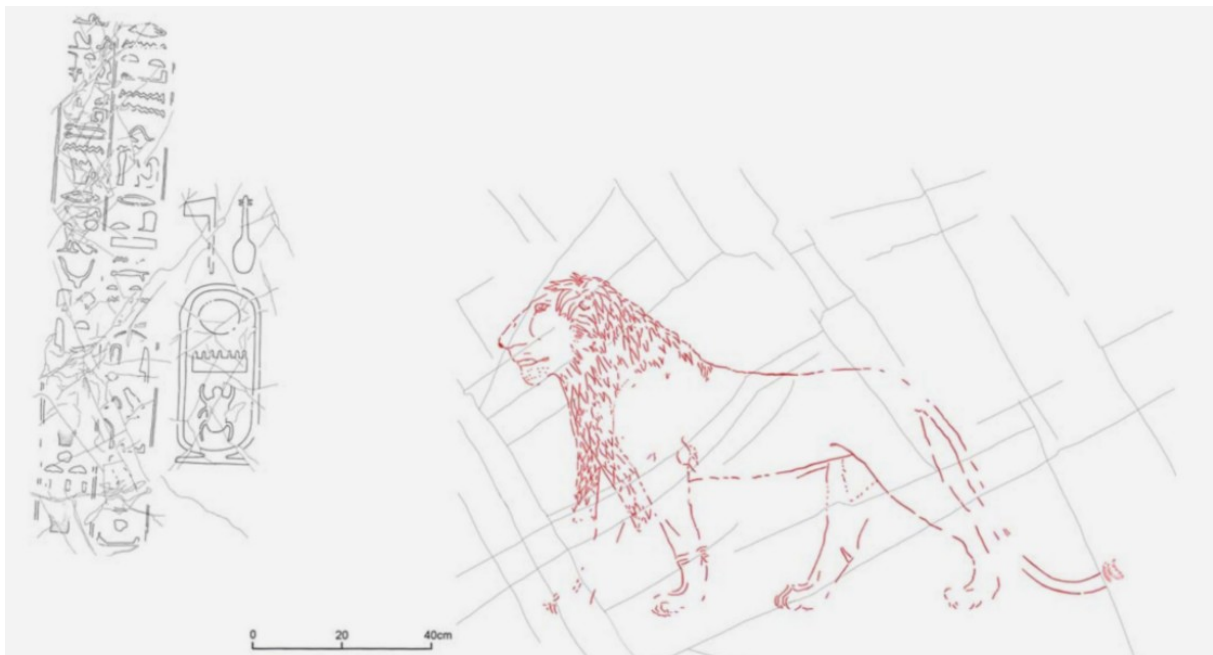

fig. 11: The inscription of Thutmose III concerning borders with the king's lion
(after Davies 2017)

As with the two year 16 stelae of Senusret III from Semna-West and Uronarti, it makes sense to examine the tableaux of Thutmose I and Thutmose III at the same time.

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[46] Davies (2017: 72) translates the second part of the first column as: "[Not] has the like [occurred] since the (time of) the primeval ones." I seriously doubt that is the case not only because of the remaining hieroglyphs but also due to the fact that there would not be enough space for such an inscription.

[47] Miw encompassed at least part of the Nile Reach south of modern-day Abu Hamed, including the area of Kurgus. For a debate on the location of Miw, see O'Connor (1987: 122–124), Zibelius-Chen (2013: 137; 1988: 79, 165, 192).

Similarly, three important points concerning the 1) appearance, 2) inscription and 3) location of the tableaux in Kurgus will be examined.

As to the appearance of the tableaux themselves, I have already pointed out that the two central depictions resemble a stela: the serekh of each king, surmounted by Horus in his falcon form wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, faces a seated, ram-headed Amun-Ra – the Nubian form of the god from the New Kingdom.[48] Next to the god is the same caption which reads: "Amun-Ra, may he give life and dominion" (*Imn-Rˤ di=f ˤnḫ wȝs*), the life and dominion "given" to Horus also by the *wȝs* sceptre and the *ˤnḫ* sign extending from the sceptre to Horus's beak (*fig. 10*).

In addition, each king had a bull and a lion pictured as well. Both depictions of the bull are accompanied by the text "Amun-Ra, Bull-of-his-Mother" (*Imn-Rˤ Kȝ-mwt=f*) with the bull serving as the image of the god and its horns as the hieroglyph *kȝ*. The images of the lions – aspects of the king – are accompanied by the cartouche with the prenomen of the particular king. The lion on the far right belongs to Thutmose I (*ˤȝ-ḫpr-kȝ-Rˤ*) and the one, closer to the central inscriptions, to Thutmose III (*Mn-ḫpr-Rˤ*). The only notable difference between the two tableaux can be seen in the one-line vertical inscription located to the left of the serekh on the stela of Thutmose I. Thutmose III clearly copied the inscription of his grandfather, though in this particular case he elaborated on Thutmose I's one-line vertical inscription with two lines of vertical text, which appear between his lion and the central stela of his grandfather (*fig. 11*).

What is striking to any student of Egyptology, is how the two tableaux are asymmetrically arranged, especially the one of Thutmose I. There is, however, a very good explanation for this: the natural hardness of the Harg el-Merwa posed a significant challenge to any would-be carver, as the legibility of some of the hieroglyphs clearly indicates (Davies 2017: 69; Davies 2001: 46–47). This is especially true of the inscription of Thutmose III: due to the fact his grandfather's workmen already secured the best possible places on the unwieldy rock face, albeit at the expense of making the whole composition – stela, bull and lion – asymmetrical, Thutmose III was forced to make due with the rougher parts of the rock. At least he aligned the individual elements of his tableaux more, whilst paying respect the

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[48] This is probably the first depiction of the Nubian Amun of its kind (Török 1997: 303, ft. 540). As to the depiction of the serekh, Davies (2001: 57) claimed that the human figure of the king was avoided, and was alluded to through Horus and by the large lion as a symbol of strength and ferocity. I am not convinced that this was the real reason.

inscription and carvings of his grandfather. Both pharaohs were, however, totally heedless to the earlier indigenous drawings, chiselling over them without any scruples.[49]

With regards to the second point, the inscriptions, the text underneath both stelae is in fact a threat (Nordh 1996: 12–13, 86, 96–99; Morschauser 1991: 28, 56, 108–109, 246). In addition, the wording of this threat has been specifically tailored to fit the conditions in Nubia, as the local pastoral population was dependent on rain and cattle for their livelihood (Davies 2001: 50). On the other hand, the one line of vertical text next to the serekh of Thutmose I is a typical example of self-praise, commonly encountered in autobiographical inscriptions and royal eulogies, reminiscent of the achievements Senusret III listed on his larger Semna and Uronarti stelae. Thutmose III at Kurgus elaborated on the words of his grandfather and added additional information alluding to his military campaigns in the Levant and Nubia, but his text is also typical self-praise. Similarly, as was the case with Senusret III, neither pharaoh invoked maʿat as the reason to war (Allon forthcoming).

Neither text, unfortunately, mentions the date when the tableaux were created, thus forcing scholars to make educated guesses from indirect references and other inscriptions from the reigns of both pharaohs.

The dating of the stela of Thutmose I poses considerably less problems – one year after ascending the throne, the king initiated his Nubian campaign and with it began the systematic colonisation of the south, symbolised by the building of new fortresses and the reorganisation of the territory's governance. It is therefore generally assumed, that Thutmose I's stela at Kurgus must have been carved in year 2 or year 3 of his reign during his Nubian campaign (Davies 2017: 93–95; Morkot 2000: 70–72).

Establishing the date of the stela of Thutmose III is much trickier. The Annals of Thutmose III in the temple of Amun in Karnak (Urk. IV: 625–756) tell us that the pharaoh erected his stela at Naharin during the 33rd year of his reign and then proceeded to campaign in Nubia – thus it logically follows that the stela at the Hagr el-Merwa must have been established some time after his 33rd year – maybe as early as year 34, though there is only indirect evidence to support this claim (Davies 2001: 52–53). Another possibility is, that the gap between the erection of the two stelae is much longer than epigraphic evidence would lead us to assume. It has been suggested – with reference to two rock-stelae of Thutmose III on Sehel Island, on which the pharaoh recalls his campaign in the south mentioning Senusret

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[49] Vogel (2011: 335) suspected the Egyptians of more sinister motives, suggesting that this was done so on purpose to show their dominance.

III as his inspiration (SEH 242–243; Gasse and Rondot 2007: 77–80, 137–8, 483; Tallet 2005: 73–75; Klug 2002, 165–6, 514), that Thutmose III could have had tableaux carved on the Hagr el-Merwa as late as year 49 or 50 (Davies 2017: 94–95; Redford 2003: 58).

As regards to royal presence at Kurgus, this remains a matter of contention. Davies (2017: 67) claimed that there are indications that Thutmose I and Thutmose III visited the Hagr el-Merwa in person, each at the head of an army and accompanied by an elite entourage. The stelae and historical inscriptions suggest that both pharaohs may well have visited Kurgus during their campaigns, though there is no conclusive evidence of this.

It is worth noting, that the border as such is only mentioned in the additional inscription of Thutmose III, which hardly justifies calling the pharaonic monuments on the Hagr el-Merwa "border stelae". In addition, it seems that it is not the border which is the most important part of the message, but the fact that Thutmose III established it following a military victory against the Nubians. This is alluded to on other monuments, and at this point it makes sense to examine this evidence.

Thutmose III's military campaigns outside the natural borders of Egypt are, *inter alia*, corroborated by events described on Thutmose III's Armant stela (Urk. IV: 1245.18–20, 1246.1–5; Redford 2003: 157–159; Galán 1995: 149) and the Jebel Barkal stela (Urk. IV: 1232.11–12; Redford 2003: 116–119; Galán 1995: 148).

Beside praising himself as a hunter, warrior and strategist, lines 7 to 9 of the Armant stela mention that the king, upon returning from a military campaign in Naharin, set up his "victory stela" (*wḏ n nḫt*) after crossing the Euphrates, and then proceeded to Nubia to crush a rebellion at Miw, where he erected a "stela" (*wḏ*) as well.[50] In line 13 of the Jebel Barkal stela Thutmose III adds further details, stating that the stela (*wḏ*) in the north was carved out of the mountain on the western side of the Euphrates. The Annals also mention the crossing of the

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[50] For a discussion concerning the location of Naharin, see Vandersleyen (1994). Vandersleyen (1994: 27–28, and ft. 8) also pointed out that there was no Egyptian term for the Euphrates as such, and this particular river was inferred from the terms *pḫr wr* ("great bender"), *pꜣ mw n Nhrn* ("the great water of Naharin") or *pḫr wr n Nhrn* ("great bender of Naharin"). The "bending" may have been connected to the fact that the course of the river ran south, whereas the only river in Egypt, the Nile, ran north. Scholars deduced this must have been the Euphrates from the assumption that Naharin was related to the Hebrew word *Naharaïm*, meaning the region of the two rivers, i.e., the Euphrates and the Tigris. Vandersleyen also proposed that Naharin could well have been the area between the Orontes and the Jordan rivers.

Euphrates by Thutmose III[51] and the setting up of his stela (*wḏ*) alongside a similar monument left by the pharaoh's grandfather (Urk. IV: 697.5; Wilson 1969: 239–240).[52]

We can only speculate why Thutmose III choose on his Armant stela to call the monument set up by the Euphrates a "victory stela", whereas on other occasions he used the term "stela". Perhaps there is some deeper meaning, after all Thutmose III did return from a successful campaign against Mitanni, on the other hand it could well have been just a figure of speech. There is no way to know for sure.

Though where and when the stelae of Thutmose I and Thutmose III were set up in the northern Levant is a matter of ongoing debate, as well as their exact appearance, there is little doubt that these monuments existed.[53] Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing whether the tableaux at Kurgus were directly inspired by the monuments set up on the upper Euphrates, or whether the Hagr el-Merwa merely happened to provide Thutmose I and Thutmose III a convenient site where to carve their stelae.

This brings us to the last point, the location of the tableaux. At least on this occasion we can be absolutely sure that the find-spot corresponds with the original location of the two monuments.

It was no coincidence that Thutmose I and Thutmose III chose to have their names carved on the Hagr el-Merwa. This monumental rocky outcrop clearly stands out in the surrounding plain, measuring over 40 metres in length, almost 24 metres in height, and 9 metres in width, making it a natural point of reference. Little wonder that this prominent landmark drew the attention of the indigenous tribes long before the arrival of the pharaohs.[54]

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[51] The crossing of the Euphrates by Thutmose III in his year 8 campaign was such an important event that a number of individuals chose to mention it in their biographies, such as the soldier Amenemheb (TT85; Urk IV 891,11; Redford 2003: 168, ft. 16), where the river is referred to as *pḥr wr* (see footnote above).

[52] It has been widely accepted that the stela mentioned in the Annals, the Jebel Barkal stela and the Armant stela, was the one and the same monument, but recently Mizrachy (2012: 37–38) suggested that there were in fact two stelae erected by Thutmose III in the north – the first is the one set beside the monument of his grandfather Thutmose I, and the second erected during the pharaoh's year 8 campaign which was placed in close proximity to Thutmose III's first stela (Klug 2002: 82), Vogel (2011: 337), however, voiced her scepticism of the possibility that there once stood three stelae on the bank of the Euphrates.

[53] Klug (2002: 213) claimed the pharaoh would not have erected a free-standing stela in a foreign country without an existing temple complex and suggested the monument must had been carved into the cliffs beside the river.

[54] Thum (2016: 72–76) noted that another set of possible border stelae could have been commissioned by Ramesses II on the limestone rocks above the Nahr el-Kalb, a river that runs into the Mediterranean south of the

The Nubians decorated the rock with dozens of primitive drawings of people, cattle, and wild animals, the exact symbolism of which still eludes us.[55]

There can be no doubt that it was the appearance of the rock that made the two Egyptian expeditions stop at the Hagr el-Merwa. However, in order to appropriate it for themselves, the Egyptians had to overcome the demanding desert journey into Upper Nubia, probably via the so-called Korosko road (Davies 2017: 94).[56] Whether the Hagr el-Merwa was their final destination or just a pit stop on the way further south is impossible to tell without further archaeological evidence. Be it as it may, the fact that the pharaohs chose to carve their names into the rock formation at Kurgus, is closely connected to the Egyptian practice of appropriating significant places, something not unusual during the New Kingdom (Edwards 2006: 58–59). Bárta (2010: 24) spoke of these "areas of interest", already being marked during the Old Kingdom, as overlapping spaces dominated temporarily by different competing groups. In this light, it should come as no surprise that the Egyptians chose to build Napata in the shadow of Jebel Barkal, another prominent landmark alongside the Nile.

4.4 – Conclusion

So, why did the two Egyptian kings have their names carved on the Hagr el-Merwa? Scholarly opinion tends to prefer the explanation, that after the pharaohs conquered and incorporated the kingdom of Kush into their own realm, Kurgus became the southernmost border of Egypt. Davies claimed (2017: 94) that by adding their inscriptions, Thutmose I and Thutmose III transformed the Hagr el-Merwa into an imperial boundary stone. Eyre (1990: 137) like Ladynin (2014: 174) also had no doubt of the purpose of this rocky outcrop, maintaining that the stelae beside the Euphrates and the tableaux in Nubia marked Egypt's northern and southern borders, and the extent of the dominion of the pharaohs.

Though at first glance this theory coincides with the general expectations regarding border stelae, there are sound arguments against such a line of reasoning. First of all, there is no evidence whatsoever of a permanent pharaonic settlement or a military garrison at Kurgus,

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ancient city of Byblos. The stelae from year 4, 8 and 10 are still there, unfortunately their texts are illegible. Thum added that due to their prominent position above the coast, it is tempting to make a connection with the Hagr el-Merwa.

[55] Kleinitz (2013: 350), for example, suggested that the depiction of cattle could have been connected to funerary symbolism of the Kerma cultures.

[56] For an overview of the survey of the Eastern Nubian desert and the Korosko road, see Davies and Welsby (2020).

nor did Egyptian presence seem to have reached beyond this point (Török 2009: 17).[57] This is in stark contrast to the fortified area around Semna and Uronarti, where Senusret III established his southern border some 400 years earlier. In fact, judging from the lack of archaeological evidence and its location practically in the middle of nowhere, the rock at Kurgus is somewhat of an anomaly. Why would the Egyptians bother to create a border without the necessary military infrastructure and administrative support in place, without which they could hardly control the flow of goods and people? The nearest city of note, Napata, was located several days' travel downstream. Furthermore, available evidence tells us that after the Egyptians' departure from Nubia, no attempt was made to reintroduce native decoration or to interfere with the two tableaux and other Egyptian carvings (Davies 2017: 97).

Török (2009: 15) was more cautions in designating Kurgus as the border. According to him, Thutmose III's inscription on the Hagr el-Merwa referring to the border cannot be taken literally. Morkot (2001: 233) claimed that in 1446 BC Thutmose III reached the fourth cataract which marked the establishment of the Egyptian southern frontier at Jebel Barkal, not Hagr el-Merwa which already had Thutmose I's inscriptions adorning its rock face. Kemp (1978: 28) pointed out the navigational difficulties at the fourth cataract and upstream to Kurgus, whilst adding that the Hagr el-Merwa served probably as a natural waypoint for travellers making the journey via the desert by the Korosko road and continuing deeper into Africa.

Thus, to claim that the southern border of Egypt in the New Kingdom was at Kurgus, is to ignore available evidence and common sense. But this does not solve the puzzle, why did Thutmose I leave his name on the rock. We can speculate about several motives: perhaps this was done to set a new record, and to mark a place where no Egyptian had gone before; perhaps the pharaoh set up a temporary camp here with his expeditionary force; perhaps the pharaoh was drawn by the monumentality of the Hagr el-Merwa; or perhaps he did so just because he had the means and the time to do so. The fact that Thutmose III left his tableau

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[57] Remains of a fort and a cemetery were found not far from the Hagr el-Merwa, but archaeological evidence suggests that they come from a later, probably medieval date (see Sjöström 1998). There is some evidence of an Egyptian garrison 40 kilometres to the north at modern-day Abu Hamed (Davies 2001: 57; Morkot 2000: 72; Zibelius-Chen 1998: 235–236; Török 1997: 94). Kemp (1978: 28) speculated that there might had been a market town at Kurgus.

beside the one of his grandfather could, in addition, be interpreted as a spiritual pilgrimage following the footsteps of Thutmose I.

Davies (2001: 57) also stressed another aspect and one which I believe deserves much more attention. Building upon Edwards' idea of significant places, and with regards to the content and iconography of the tableaux, Davies suggested that the Harg el-Merwa symbolically marked one end of organised cosmos, a frontier between the Egyptian world of order and the world of chaos, which was ultimately symbolized by the Nubians themselves (see also Vogel 2011: 335). That was why the two tableaux were designed to impress and intimidate both on a secular and cosmic level (Davies 2017: 67), much like the Middle Kingdom fortresses in Nubia. In addition, the symbolism of maʿat certainly played a key role in the magical protection of Egypt from its enemies.

I believe that the reason why Thutmose I and Thutmose III ordered to have their names carved on the Hagr el-Merwa was certainly symbolic. The rock formation had to be regarded as an impressive local landmark, but not a real political border carefully guarded against foreign incursions. The lands upstream of the fourth cataract, where the Hagr el-Merwa is also located, should be seen as a frontier, and one of the symbolic ends of the earth beyond which the pharaohs saw nothing of interest.

As to the tableaux themselves, a curse complemented by self-praise is certainly uncommon. Though the wording of Thutmose III's additional text reminds us of a victory stela, it is the stelae which are the most important element of the two tableaux. By appropriating the Hagr el-Merwa with symbols and titles of royal authority, the whole rock became a protective magical ward located on the frontier, a small island of maʿat in the liminal zone. In no case should the tableaux of Thutmose I and Thutmose III be regarded as border stelae. I call them frontier markers, i.e., monuments in an area with some form of Egyptian presence (permanent or semi-permanent) that did not designate the border, but created a small island of Egyptian maʿat on the frontier.

__Conclusion__

The aim of this M.A. thesis was to examine a series of monuments commonly referred to as border or boundary stelae in Egyptological research. This study specifically focused on three artefacts from the Middle Kingdom – the year 8 stela from Semna-West, the year 16 stela from Semna-West and the year 16 stela from Uronarti commissioned by Senusret III – and two monuments from the New Kingdom – the tableaux carved on the face of the Hagr el-Merwa at Kurgus by Thutmose I and Thutmose III.

Before proceeding with the investigation of the aforementioned monuments, this thesis looked at the concept of the border in ancient Egypt, effectively differentiating between the terms "border" and "frontier". Whereas the border was defined as the limits of actual direct political control of the pharaoh, the frontier was seen as a territory with significant Egyptian dominance or influence, but not part of Egypt as such. The study also addressed the dynamics between the immutable natural borders of Egypt, stretching from the first cataract along the Nile valley and delta to the Mediterranean coastline, and the kingdom's political borders, which often changed through the course of time.

Building on this, all five monuments were analysed in their historical, archaeological and linguistic context, with special focus on their appearance, inscription and location. This thesis found considerable differences between the five monuments.

I claim that only the year 8 stela from Semna-West could be considered a border stela, as it was not only found on the actual Middle Kingdom border, but also the inscription concerned itself with the border and the conditions under which visitors from Nubia could cross it. I argued that this effectively made the stela an administrative document.

The other monuments are, however, very different in nature. Though Senusret III's year 16 stelae have also been found at the border area of Semna, their inscription is very different to the year 8 stela. The border was not at the centre of attention on these monuments, and their inscriptions combined autobiographical and narrative elements with wisdom literature, a curse, a direct address to the audience as well as declarations of policy – this, together with the assumption that the stelae were on public display, clearly identifies the monuments as victory stelae.

Finally, I suggested that the tableaux of Thutmose I and Thutmose III are frontier markers, given the fact that the border was mentioned only passingly, but more importantly

because no archaeological evidence whatsoever of a more permanent Egyptian presence at Kurgus has been discovered to date. Claiming that the Hagr el-Merwa marked the Egyptian border, is thus simply wrong.

So, where has this left us in our debate concerning border stelae? This thesis has demonstrated, that to date there is only one monument which could be considered a border stela – namely the year 8 stela of Senusret III. This argument is based on my definition of the border stela as a royal monument placed on the actual border of Egypt which clearly and directly acknowledges its existence. As there are no other similar examples, the habit of referring to a category of border stelae should be scrapped, as the year 16 stelae of Senusret III and the tableaux of Thutmose I and Thutmose III do not live up to this definition.

This demonstrates not only the risk of grafting our modern perceptions and expectations onto the study of ancient Egypt, but also underlines the fact that we need to examine ancient Egypt, its culture, monuments and artefacts in a wider context, not focusing on the interpretation of just one particular aspect. If we do not carefully navigate between these two factors, we will inadvertently distort our understanding of the past. A case in point can be seen when considering the category of the border stela – as has been proven, the fact that an artefact was discovered at the border does not automatically make it a border stela, nor does the fact that the inscription on the artefact mentions the border automatically make it a border stela, as well. Furthermore, this thesis has highlighted just how selective the archaeological data on which we base our assumptions and conclusions really is: for example, compared with the southern border in Nubia, excavations in the Western desert have been very limited. Every scholar should keep such facts in mind, when making conclusions: we must ask ourselves, we really express the experiences of the ancient Egyptians and the ideology of their rulers, or are have we just fallen victim to our own modern perceptions and expectations? Such a cautionary approach is especially warranted when examining Egyptian borders and frontiers.

Finally, this study illustrated that the topic of border studies in ancient Egypt is a very promising avenue of further research. There are numerous topics and questions that this thesis alluded to, though it was not within its scope to address them. To name just a few: the examination of the use of the terms *tš(.w)* and *dr(.w)*, the role of gods in liminal areas, the role of titles in relation to the border, the predynastic frontier between Gebel es-Silsila and Elephantine, the role of temples on the border and in frontier regions, borders of nomes within

Egypt, research into living rock stelae or the connection of setting up stelae on the border with the royal ideology and the concept of maʿat.

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