



**REVIEW**

**PUNT:**

**DIE SUCHE NACH DEM "GOTTESLAND"**

by Francis Breyer

Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 80

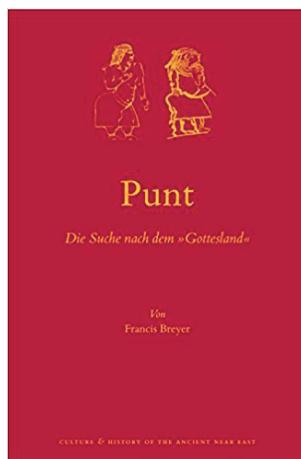
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This is the publication of the author's habilitation thesis of the same title, accepted in 2013. Now accessible in both internet and printed formats via Brill, it seems not to have been internally updated from the original thesis itself, but it does include a short addendum of important recent discoveries and new references. The extremely dense and lengthy text includes just about everything related and possibly related to the subject. As such, it presents a valuable synthesis of earlier research and brings it up to date in eight main chapters, multiple illustrations, and the evidentiary documentation.

Breyer re-examines the evidence for the land of Punt, known only through the ancient Egyptian records in which it is also called "God's Land." The volume, bringing topical research up to date, centers on these ancient Egyptian records and modern scholarly research. While emphasis focuses heavily on texts and linguistics, visual imagery, and non-Egyptian comparanda are discussed in some detail. Non-academic interpretations, uses, and abuses of the concept of the "Land of Punt" are also presented. Breyer's study begins with Prolegomena (Chapter I), outlining the methodological and technical bases for his approach to the topic. He then continues with discussion of the word *Pwnt* (Punt) as a toponym



and a lengthy overview of relevant sources in Chapter II ("Die Grundlage"). These are the "bases" for the remaining text, which generally considers Punt from multiple different viewpoints and through many individual features separately discussed.

Chapter III ("Die Neuzeit auf der Suche nach Punt") presents different aspects of the search for ancient Punt itself, mostly through discussion and comparison of different interpretations published by previous scholars, albeit with

little critical comparison and few conclusions. He begins with the ancient Egyptian texts and visual records, examining individual aspects details that would help locate Punt on a modern map (examples: "Namen und Wege: Die Suche der Epigraphiker;" "Nasehorn und Giraffe: Die Suche der Zoologen"). The former is Breyer's forte, as is evident also throughout the volume; see also Chapter VIII. He then moves into more modern academic and non-academic uses and abuses of the concept of "Punt" inherent in (as examples) politics, colonialism, anthropology, ethnology, and linguistics. Most intriguingly, he also examines the various presentations of "Punt" in modern theater and children's literature.

Chapters IV and V consider Punt through ancient

perspectives and modern archaeology. “Die altägyptische Suche nach Punt” (Chapter IV) details from the Egyptian sources the logistics, personnel, and commodities involved in travelling to Punt both by land and by sea, and considers the different routes as extrapolated or inferred from the ancient records. As the most comprehensive visual source, the Eighteenth Dynasty reliefs on the south porch of Hatshepsut’s Deir el-Bahri temple figure extensively in his discussion, but Breyer also includes the considerable new material from the results of recent excavations at Mersa Gawasis of mostly Twelfth Dynasty date. The Deir el-Bahri reliefs are used to consider how Punt and the Puntites may have been visualized and interpreted by the ancient Egyptians who did and did not encounter them. Chapter V (“Zu neuen Ufern”) focuses on the ancient cultures inhabiting the various regions in and around the various locations of Punt proposed by different scholars over the past two centuries. These include modern southwestern Arabia (mainly the Yemen) and the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somali states), as well as southern and southeastern Sudan. Considerable archaeological fieldwork has been conducted in these areas and much new evidence has been recovered and evaluated, especially in the last quarter century during lengthy bouts of relative regional peace, much of which is listed, summarized, and discussed here. Some but not all of the more peripheral suggested locations (e.g., Egyptian delta, southeastern Africa, India, others) are only briefly discussed in Chapter III, although they are noted on the maps of Chapter XII.

Chapter VI (“Ein ethnohistorischer Versuch”) attempts to consider the land of Punt itself and its characteristics from the evidence presented above and from modern linguistic comparanda. The author’s earlier discussion of Egyptian interpretations of Punt and Puntites is reviewed before he attempts an initial philological investigation into Puntite language and grammar. He begins by analyzing the names of the “Ruler of Punt” and his family inscribed at Deir el-Bahri and, from there, launches into phonological comparisons with the Saba’an and early Ge’ez inscriptions and ancient Greek place-names within the region, and identifies a possible Puntite inscription. These place-names introduce an attempt at outlining Puntite social and political structures, again with comparison to those of later *D’MT*, Aksumite, Napatan, and Meroitic kingdoms, including their royal regalia and its possible antecedents as shown in ancient images. Comparison of recent anthropomorphic and environmental situations and linguistic comparison of certain activities found in the

ancient records over the general Horn of Africa and southwestern Arabia regions round out this chapter. The following Chapter VII (“Gefunden...”) announces his conclusion of Punt’s location.

A most valuable inclusion is Chapter VIII (“Die ägyptischen Quellen zu Punt”), an appendix collating, transliterating and translating all related ancient Egyptian texts. This is Breyer’s forte, as is evident also throughout the volume. Some texts (Dok.) also are illustrated in the plates but cross-referenced only in Chapter VIII. For other (mostly visual) documents, see pp. 19–23, differently numbered. “Chapters” IX–XII and XIV consist of the plates, figures and their accompanying lists, maps, an extensive bibliography, and indices of places, names, and words in several languages. All illustrations are as originally published, either as drawings or photographs, with some additional original maps. An addendum, Chapter XIII, adds a few more references and discussion either not found before or (in one case) published since the original habilitation text was completed.

The volume strongly reflects the author’s linguistic expertise and interests, with other aspects not as fully considered. Breyer has also proposed further ancient documents relating to Punt or Puntites, some of which appear valid while others I question (especially some Early Dynastic images), but he has expanded the evidence and possibilities beyond earlier publications for us to consider. This is an extremely detailed discussion of all relevant literature, with virtually every published source and possible ancient reference cited and summarized. However, Breyer offers little critical comparison or evaluation of the often contradictory published arguments and opinions, and so we remain unsure of his own opinions on each aspect presented.

Unfortunately, especially given his assiduous compilation of relevant literature, Breyer’s referencing is shambolic, leading to confusion for the reader and making it imperative that his documentation be confirmed. I cite here brief examples of some problems, representing many more throughout. The bibliography is often out of chronological and/or surname order, with titles and authors’ names (including my own) repeatedly misspelled or incomplete (see also p. 792, discussion of Cooper 2015). A surprisingly large number of bibliographic references (including half of my own) are not even cited in the text or footnotes. Footnotes are inconsistent, incomplete, laconic, or overly detailed repetitious cut-and-pastes, and some references (e.g., Mitra 1919, Michaux-Colombot 2001; see Karte 2) also are not recorded in full or not found in the bibliography (I

suggest a possibility for the latter, but could not identify the former). Illustration captions are misidentified (Taf. 5), incomplete (Taf. 1, 7-8 & 19), reversed (Taf. 23 & 29), and even unstated (Taf. 1 & 39). At least one illustration (Taf. 8) is stretched vertically. Karte 2 incorrectly and misleadingly includes portions of Karte 1 (compare captions; some references not in bibliography), Karte 4 indicates no gold sources, and Karte 5 is unreferenced, although its information is taken from Fattovich (without reference, but the latest work is 2012:26 Fig. 3 [?]), albeit with different terminology. Details of the textual documentation in Chapter VIII also need to be carefully confirmed by the reader, as at least one (Dok. 5) actually lacks the all-important word *Pwnt* in his translation (although found in his transliteration) and the published transcription of its original Egyptian hieroglyphic text is cited but not illustrated. Dok. numbering also does not correspond to his more comprehensive documents list (pp. 19-23), and neither follows its order nor is cross-referenced with it. The extremely important and unique text in the tomb of Sobeknakht at El-Kab, mentioned only briefly in the Addendum (p. 793), deserves at least some analysis and commentary. Most irritating is the excessive number of careless and easily correctable typographical errors throughout the entire volume, which pre-supposes a similar excess of less immediately apparent numerical inaccuracies.

Beyer seems to be writing mostly for other Egyptian language specialists. Ancient names (excepting royal names) referring to the same person (and the same titles) are very inconsistently cited throughout the text as either complicated or simplified transliterations, or as commonly used modern spellings. Despite the author's reasoning on p. 3, common-use names *should* be used in the main text, for the benefit of non-linguist Egyptian archaeologists, non-Egyptologists, and other non-linguists who will also consult it for their own research interests. How many of these readers would recognize "*Hr(.w)-hwi=f*" as the well-known "Harchuf," to use his own spellings on p. 3? Although this name is correlated in Breyer's index (pp. 796-797), almost all the other thirty-one names are not. The individual cited on Dok. 33 as "*Mnw (?)*" (transliterated, correctly with query as the tomb owner's name is uncertain) on p. 15 is the same

person as "Min" (common-use, without query) on p. 413. Transliterations all follow Schenkel's (1990) complicated convention scheme used almost exclusively by German speakers. Similar inconsistencies appear for transliterations in other scripts such as Ethiopic (e.g., Tigrə p. 340, but Tigray p. 347), but are not found in his index (pp. 795-796, where Tigray is not listed).

One gets the strong impression that Breyer considered accurate documentation and editing unimportant, as apparently he did not scrutinize his original dissertation text nor hire an editor to correct or clarify it for publication. Nor did Brill. This seems to be characteristic of his output (see comments in Bausi 2013) and badly detracts from his obviously detailed research. Breyer's readership will suffer forever as a result, especially when attempting to use the "search" function on the internet edition. Nonetheless, as a compendium of research to date, it is a useful addition to the literature, albeit extremely frustrating to read and use.

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