

Sphinx Statue from the Temple of Kom Ombo

Sphinx Statue from the Temple of Kom Ombo

Ahmed Faraman¹, Mohamed Aly Elnaggar²

Department of Egyptology, Faculty of Archaeology, Aswan University¹
Director of Kom Ombo Antiquities Area, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities²
ahfaraman@yahoo.com/ ahmedlibri@gmail.com & mohamed270275@gmail.com

Abstract

The Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquity conducted in 2018 a project within the enclosure of the temple of Kom Ombo, which aimed to lowering the groundwater, in order to safe target level, to prevent continued capillary rise and salt attack in the temple foundations. The local team of inspectors uncovered several stone objects within the area of the small Eastern gateway of the temple, which dates back to the reign of queen Hatshepsut (1502-1482) and king Thutmose III (1483-1450). The primary object was a completely preserved sphinx statue of small size, made from sandstone, without inscriptions; in the same context there were two stelae, one is belonging to the time of Ptolemy V (204-180), while the other belongs to Seti I (1291-1278). The location for the adjoining finds, together with the artistic features push us to put the sphinx within the Ptolemaic period. The following pages are focusing on its functional purpose at the location of discovery.

Keywords: Sphinx, Eastern gateway, New kingdom, Ptolemaic period, processional avenue.

Introduction

It was very exciting to discover the present objects within the temple of Kom Ombo, which historical sequence remained for many decades obscure, since there were discovered objects date back to the New Kingdom (PM, VI, 199, 201; De Morgan, J., 1895, 978, 979, 980), it was always convinced that excavations must be carried out, to uncover additional objects, in order to pinpoint the succession of the

city and the temple, fortunately a project of different purpose had been achieved, which gave the opportunity to dig and find out the relevant objects. We would like to see further work carried out within the temple complex, as well as the surrounding area, in order to reveal more chapters of the history of Kom Ombo.

The sphinx statue was uncovered during the work of lowering the groundwater within the temple of Kom Ombo. This project was directed by the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquity. The statue has been found along with other objects, dating to the New Kingdom and the Ptolemaic period. The accompanying objects are two limestone stelae, one dates back to Seti I and the other to Ptolemy V, they were buried in the sandy mound located on the south eastern side of the mud brick enclosure of the temple. The sphinx statue and the two other mentioned objects were uncovered at three meters depth. The Egyptian team of inspectors of Kom Ombo has carefully dealt with the uncovered objects, which are temporarily placed in the local inspectorate magazine. It is complete and in a very good condition. The sphinx was moved to be exhibited in the Egyptian Civilization Museum in Cairo.

Characterization

- **Dimensions:**
 - Height 53 cm.
 - width of the base 42 cm.
 - Depth 91 cm.
- **Material:** Nubian sandstone.
- **Patina:** Medium.
- **State of Preservation:** very well preserved, but eroded in some places.

Sphinx Statue from the Temple of Kom Ombo

Description

The statue depicts a human headed lion, recumbent on a rectangular pedestal. The human head wears a plain “nemes” headdress, which entirely covers the forehead, it has two long shaped lappets. The head is surmounted by a delicate upstanding cobra, the human head has a long broad face, and it is equipped with a straight false beard. The eyebrows are straightly designed, with large goggling eyes, the pupils are painted in black colour. The ears are small and asymmetrical, not mirrored. The face transmits an attentive impression of the king; around the neck is a necklace of large disc-shaped beads in raised relief. The shoulders are very narrow, outline and some details of the chest are clearly visible in the side view (figure 2). the right front leg is partially eroded, the lion`s tail is curved around the right hind leg (figure 3), muscles are marked on the forelegs (figure 3), testicles are clearly marked between the hind legs (figure 4).

Discussion

Lion figures were the common manifestations of the Egyptian Kings, as a symbol of the powerful sovereign, who attack and submit enemies of Egypt (Hassan, S., 1953, 141, 142; Cooney, K., and Tyrrell, J., 2005, 37; Pier, G., 1906, 89, 90; Houlihan, P., 1996, 91, fig. 65; Graham, G., 2001, 165; Peck, W., 1978, pl. 94; Helk, W. & Otto, E., 1984, 1141- 1147.); it was common for the Egyptian Kings possessing domesticated lion, usually depicted recumbent beside the royal throne, As well as it was shown while accompanying the king to punish foreign enemies (Petrie, F., 1920, 113; Ricke, H., 1967, pl. 15; PM, VI, 197.), the mighty symbol of royal power was usually placed in front of the temples, they appeared commonly in the form of sphinx headed sculptures, for ornamental and protective purposes, the human head or at least small royal image applied between the paws of the lion, which usually symbolized the king`s presence at the temple (Wilkinson, R., 2000,

54, 55; Kadish, G., 2001, 87; Stadelman, R., 2001, 310.); linguistically, the sphinx image had been used as part of the words indicated to the significance of gateway such as: “*ryt*”  (Urk, IV, 1021:1.), and “*rwf*”  (Urk, I, 247: 4; Spencer, P., 1984.), which define the function of these sculpture as a substantial part of the temple entrances.

Moreover, dedicatory texts describing the processional avenue of sphinx are fortunately survived, these statues were usually preceding the temple façades and gateways, one example belonging to Ramesses II (1279-1213), the text describes the various royal images preceding the pylon of the temple of Luxor, including sphinx statues (Abd El-Razik, M., 1974, 147; Abd El-Razik, M., 1975, 128.), another dedicatory text, located at the temple of Sebye in Lower Nubia (Kitchen, K., 1979, 727; Gauthier, H., 1912, 11, 12, 13, 17-19, PM, VII, 55: I, VI; PM, VII, 57.), written on the pedestals of the sphinx statues, which form the processional avenue leading to the temple, the text mentions the great avenue of sphinx preceding the temple façade, comparing them with the temple, as a great monument dedicated to Amun-Re, King of the Gods; actually, the text refers to the sphinx statues, with both human and hawk heads in front of the temple façade (Gauthier, H., 1912, 12.). They are also considered a sacred image of the King, confirming the presence of his sacred image within the temple (Stadelman, R., 2001, 307.).

During the Ptolemaic period, sculptures which depicted kings, including these showing them in the sphinx shape had maintained the same artistic outlines prevailed before, as well as they conserved equal function as part of the processional avenue (Freed, R., Art, in Redford, D., 2001, 135.). The facial features of this sphinx shows many similarities with the sculptures manufactured during the Ptolemaic period (Bothmer, B., 1960, pl. 101:270, pl. 106:284; Lawrence, A., 1925, 187.), furthermore, depictions of sphinx are widely spread in the reliefs of the temple of Kom Ombo, they could be depictions of real statues, preceded and flanked the gateways of the temple (De Morgan, J., 1895, 153; PM, VI, 183.).

Sphinx Statue from the Temple of Kom Ombo

Concluding Remarks

There are three points of interest in connection with this sphinx, the provenience, the function and the date. Regarding the provenience and function: this sphinx was discovered in the south eastern side of the temple, at the context of the New Kingdom gateway, remained in use by Ptolemaic sovereigns, which suggests that it was one of two sphinxes flanking the entrance, or part of an avenue preceded the lateral gateway.

Regarding the date; the statue could be dated to the Ptolemaic period for two reasons: the style is not consistent with the sculptures of the period from the Old Kingdom to the End of the New Kingdom (Hawass, Z., 2010, 223, 224;

Hartwig, M., K., 2015, 191- 218.), it is rather familiar to the Ptolemaic sculpture; since it has the body raised from the pedestal; the face is naturalistic, the ears are very small, the uraei on the front is very delicate, the testicles are clearly marked between the hind legs (Hawass, Z., 2010, 224).

On the other hand, uncovering a stelae from the same context belonging to Ptolemy V, it is originally suggests an attribution of the sphinx to the reign of this king.

Figures

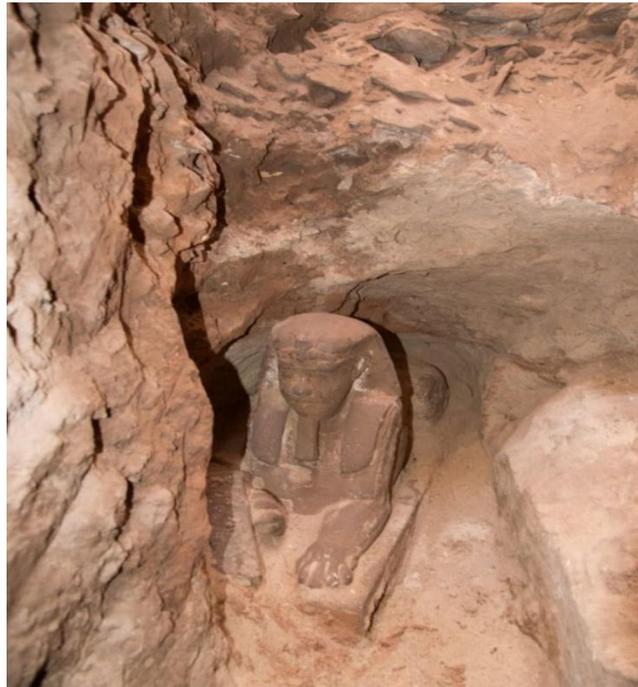


Figure 1. The Sphinx Statue in situ



Figure 2: Left side

Sphinx Statue from the Temple of Kom Ombo



Figure 3: front view



Figure 4: back view

References

- **Abd El-Razik, M.**, The Dedicatory and building Texts of Ramesses II in Luxor Temple, *JEA* 61 (1975), 128.
- -----, The Dedicatory and building Texts of Ramesses II in Luxor Temple, *JEA* 60 (1974), 147.
- **Bothmer, B.**, *Egyptian Sculpture of the Late Period*, New York, 1960, pl. 101:270, pl. 106:284.
- **Cooney, K., and Tyrrell, J.**, *Scarabs in Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, II, USA, 2005, 37.
- **De Morgan, J.**, *Catalogue des Monuments et Inscriptions de l’Egypte Antiqu*e, II, Vienne, 1895, 153; PM, VI, 183.
- **De Morgan, J.**, *Catalogue des Monuments et Inscriptions de l’Egypte Antiqu*e, III, Vienne, 1895, 978, 979, 980.
- **Freed, R.**, Art, in Redford, D., (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, I, Oxford, 2001, 135.
- **Gauthier, H.**, *Le Temple de Ouadi Es-Seboua`*, Le Caire, 1912, I, 11, 12, 13, 17-19.
- **Graham, G.**, Insignias, in Redford, D., (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, II, Oxford, 2001, 165.
- **Hartwig, M., K.**, “Sculpture” in, Hartwig, M., K., (ed.) *A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art*, UK, 2015, 191- 218.
- **Hassan, S.**, *The Great Sphinx and its Secrets*, Cairo, 1953, 141, 142.
- **Hawass, Z.**, “Five Old Kingdom Sphinxes found at Saqqara” in, Hawass, Z., & Wegner, J., H., (eds.) *Millions of Jubilees Studies in Honor of David P. Sliverman*, *CAHIER* 39, 205- 225.
- **Helk, W. & Otto, E.**, “Sphinx”, *LA*, V, Wiesbaden, 1984, 1141- 1147.
- **Houlihan, P.**, *The Animal World of the Pharaohs*, Cairo, 1996, 91, fig. 65.
- **Kadish, G.**, “Pylon” in; Redford, D., (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, III, Oxford, 2001, 87.
- **Kitchen, K.**, *Ramesside Inscriptions*, II, Oxford, 1979, 727.
- **Lawrence, A.**, Greek Sculpture in Ptolemaic Egypt, *JEA*, 11 3/4, 1925, 187.
- **Peck, W.**, *Egyptian Drawings*, London, 1978, pl. 94.
- **Petrie, F.**, *Egyptian Decorative Art*, London, 1920, 113.
- **Pier, G.**, Historical Scarab Seals from the Art Institute Collection, *AJSL* 23, No. 1 (1906), 89, 90.
- **PM**, VI, 197, 199, 201.
- **PM**, VII, 55, 57.
- **Ricke, H.**, *The Beit El-Wali Temple of Ramesses II*, Chicago, 1967, pl. 15.

Sphinx Statue from the Temple of Kom Ombo

- **Spencer, P.**, *The Egyptian Temple, A Lexicographical study*, London, 1984.
- **Stadelman, R.**, Sphinx, in, D. Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, III, Oxford, 2001, 307, 310.
- **Urk**, IV, 1021:1.
- **Urk**, I, 247: 4.
- **Wilkinson, R.**, *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*, USA, 2000, 54, 55.