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SANDSTONE SPHINXES OF QUEEN HATSHEPSUT FROM DEIR EL-BAHARI: PRELIMINARY REMARKS

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Abstract: Fragments of sandstone sphinx statues of Hatshepsut from the excavations of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (1911-1932) were “rediscovered” recently in storage in Deir el-Bahari. The pieces (altogether 4500) have now been collected together, studied and recorded, the objective being to evaluate whether a reconstruction of any of them is possible. The project has been undertaken under the auspices of the Polish–Egyptian Archaeological and Conservation Mission to the Hatshepsut Temple at Deir el-Bahari. The statues, which were all sculpted and painted, represented three different types of recumbent androsphinxes wearing either a *khat*-headdress, a *nemes*-headdress or a tripartite wig.

Keywords: Deir el-Bahari, Temple of Hatshepsut, sphinx statues, sandstone, statuary, causeway restoration

Numerous fragments of royal sculptures were found during the excavations of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (1911–1932), headed by Herbert Winlock, in the area of Deir el-Bahari and the Asasif. These included some pieces of sandstone sphinxes which were studied only superficially by the American expedition.¹ The largest fragment was a head, referred to as Head A in the MMA records. This piece was sent to Cairo, where it was registered in the Egyptian Museum under the number

JE 56263. The fate of the other fragments was not known² until 2005 when they were rediscovered by an Italian mission led by Francesco Tiradritti, working in the vestibule of Harwa’s tomb TT 37.

The fragments were subsequently transferred to the Carter House storeroom and from 2008 have been under study and restoration by the Polish–Egyptian Archaeological and Conservation Mission to the Hatshepsut Temple at Deir el-Bahari. In 2008/2009, by decision of the Supreme

¹ Mentions in egyptological literature have been based on notes left by H. Winlock in his notebooks and short articles published in the *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*. For the most part they repeat the information about the number and original position of sphinxes in the temple, as well as copy the same set of photos taken by the Americans shortly after the discovery of the sandstone pieces (Winlock 1928: 17–18 and Winlock 1932: 10–14).

² In unpublished notebooks left by H. Winlock the location of the fragments of sandstone sphinxes was given tentatively as “Luxor magazine?”. One should think that the final destination of the pieces had not been fixed at the time that the MMA expedition was leaving Thebes (Winlock *Notebook VIII*: 112, 117).

Council of Antiquities of Egypt, the pieces were moved to the Hatshepsut Temple to facilitate their conservation and to update the documentation records (see Szafrński 2010: 265 and Fig. 13; 2011: 201).

The number of sandstone fragments from the queen's sphinx statues totals 4500. All the pieces are sculpted and painted. They were identified as representing three different types of recumbent androsphinxes:

1. wearing *khat*-headdress
2. wearing *nemes*-headdress
3. wearing tripartite wig [Fig. 1].

Originally there were about 60 statues along the Causeway leading from the Bark-Station halfway from the Valley Temple to the Upper Temple's Main Gate and another 12 to 14 sphinxes in its Lower Court, the average distance between successive statues being 15.50 m (Hauser *Notes*).

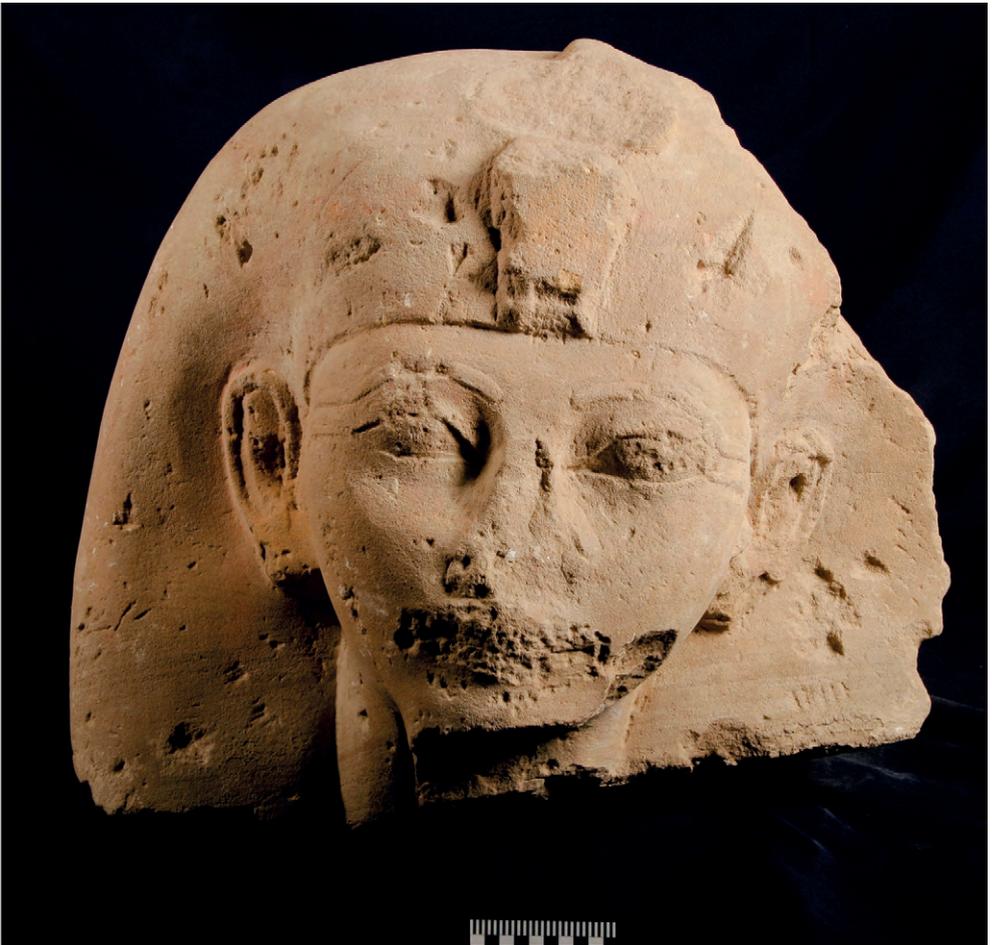


Fig. 1. Winlock's Head F, current state of preservation after dry cleaning
(Photo M. Jawornicki)

The exact number of sphinxes remains unknown; none was found complete and they were too poorly preserved to be reconstructed by the MMA expedition. Like other statues from Deir el-Bahari, these sandstone images of Hatshepsut were destroyed by Tuthmosis III in the 42nd year of his reign or slightly later, after he had declared *damnatio memoriae* of the queen (Dorman 1988: 46–65). Most of the pieces were found by the American expedition in the so-called “Senmut Quarry” and the “Hatshepsut Hole”; some were discovered near the tombs of Pabasa (TT 279) and Mentuemhat (TT 34), and in the Lower Court of the Hatshepsut Temple. Before the MMA excavations there were only two known fragments, which had been brought to Berlin by Richard Lepsius in 1845: a head wearing a *nemes* and a paw (Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Berlin, Inv. Nos. 2300 and 2301, see Lipińska, Aksamit 1997: 98–99). Another sandstone paw, found by the Polish expedition during work in the temple of Tuthmosis III at Deir el-Bahari, was described as a piece from one of Hatshepsut’s sphinxes (Lipińska 1984: 18, Fig. 55), but it is unlikely that it was one of the statues that flanked the temple Causeway due to its smaller dimensions.

Each statue consisted of two parts: the figure of a sphinx and a base. The human-headed lion was carved from a single block of sandstone and was approximately 1.40 m high. The sphinx was erected on a rectangular monolithic base with rounded back end. Each pedestal was erected on a rectangular rubble plinth placed in a shallow foundation trench. The plinth was made of a single course of bricks, interspersed with limestone and sandstone blocks (Hauser *Causeway*). No mortar was used as bonding and the trench was filled

with soil and sand once the statue had been completed, thus concealing the plinth.

The dimensions of the sphinxes were originally about 3.15 m long and 1.05 m wide; the estimated height was about 2.10 m including the pedestal (approximately 6 x 2 x 4 cubits, if converted to ancient Egyptian units of measurement). It is likely that all of the sandstone sphinxes and their decorated bases were finished during the reign of Hatshepsut.

All the sculptures were polychrome. The lion’s body was painted entirely yellow; only the claws were marked and painted white. The queen’s skin on the face and neck was painted yellow as well (Tefnin 1979: 121). The details of the face were vividly marked with bright colors. The wide beard was painted flash blue and the eyes white with black pupils. Other elements and details were painted according to the rules of Egyptian art during the reign of the Eighteenth Dynasty (e.g. the *khat* was entirely white, the *nemes* yellow-blue, etc.). The paint is best preserved on the smaller fragments [Fig. 2, top row].

Each of the sphinxes bears a single line of chest inscription in sunken relief painted blue [Fig. 2, bottom]. The hieroglyphic text was composed of one of the royal titles: *ntr.(t) nfr.t, nsw.t biti* or *s3.t R^c*, and followed by Hatshepsut’s *prenom* or *nomen* respectively. Also the bases (painted white) were decorated with hieroglyphic texts arranged in columns and with scenes in sunken relief (painted yellow). No base is complete, but it is possible to reconstruct such motifs as kneeling *rekhyt*-birds, the goddess *Sm.(t)* with captives, and the symbol *sm3-t3wy*. The bases were split into very small fragments and only a few of them are now bigger than an A4 sheet of paper and bear more than one readable sign. The total

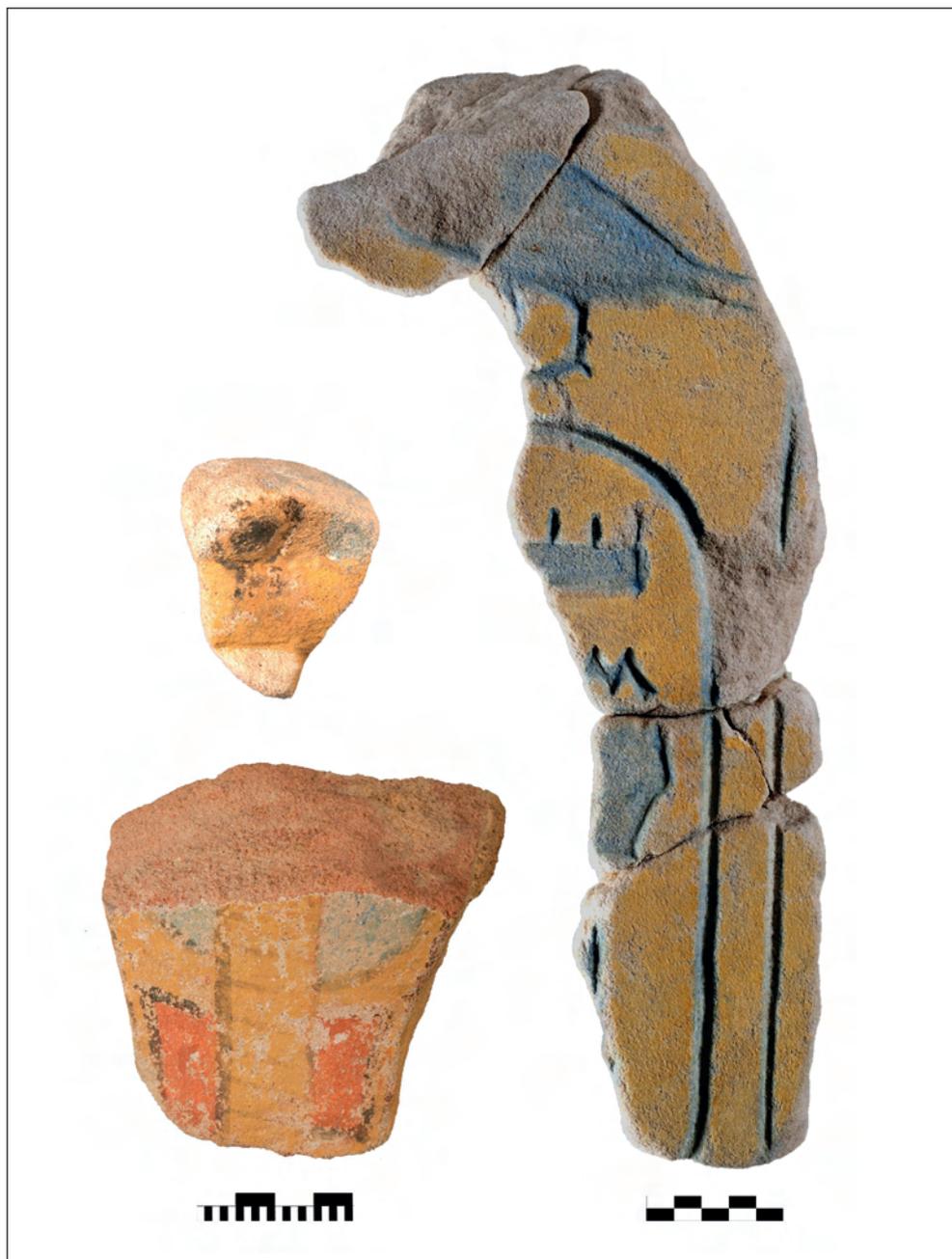


Fig. 2. Fragments of uraei with brightly preserved colors (bottom left) and of a chest inscription with Hatshepsut's nomen (Photos M. Jawornicki, A. Kamińska)

number of preserved fragments with texts is 110; the rest are missing.

GEOLOGICAL NOTES

Preliminary material studies carried out by geologist Michał Wasilewski (Jagiellonian University, Kraków) have identified the stone used for the sphinxes as the so-called Nubian Sandstone Formation. All fragments are fine-grained or medium-grained sandstone; color varies from white, gray and flesh yellow to brown, red and violet in some cases. The general state of preservation of the sandstone is good; a few badly weathered examples were probably exposed to adverse atmospheric factors (M. Wasilewski, personal communication, February 2009). Further studies will be geared to identifying the quarry from which the sandstone was extracted; the most probable location is the zone extending from Gebel el-Silsileh to Shatt er-Rigal.

CONSERVATION NOTES

Conservation of the sandstone fragments was undertaken by restorers from the Polish–Egyptian Archaeological and Conservation Mission to the Hatshepsut Temple at Deir el-Bahari and was directed by Andrzej Sośnierz. Top priority was given to cleaning of the decorated fragments, which were covered with a thin layer of mud and dust accumulated during storage in TT 37 where they were exposed to rainwater. No chemical treatment was applied, only dry cleaning (A. Sośnierz, personal communication, February 2009).

The fragments were sorted by sandstone texture, iconographical details

and dimensions of particular elements of the lion's body, such as the paws or torso. An effort will be made to reconstruct one or two sphinxes, as well as to estimate with greater precision the original number of statues of each iconographical type.

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