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The Great Sphinx of Giza

Lead: In recent decades the Great Sphinx of Giza has shown signs of advanced deterioration. It may actually be older than was once thought.

Tag: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The Sphinx has fired the imagination of poets, scholars, and tourists for generations. Recently stones have begun falling off this massive statue, masonry veneer from the left hind paw in 1981, and a huge piece of bedrock from the right shoulder in 1988. This has led to

speculation that the giant lion-shaped figure is actually much older than had been estimated. Heretofore, archeologists have dated the Sphinx as originating in the Old Kingdom about 2500 years B.C.E. The recent decay has led some scholars to assert that the monument is more like 5000 to 7000 years B.C.E. However this dispute is resolved, it has led to heightened interest in the origins of the statue and to what use it was put in the cultic life of the ancient Egyptian religion. The Sphinx sits within a cluster of burial monuments and temples near Giza just south of the Nile Delta. The three giant pyramids of Pharaohs Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure dominate the skyline. Each of the giant structures had a long causeway or narrow ceremonial

boulevard that ran from a temple beside the pyramid down to another temple close to the River itself. This last was called the Valley Temple and served as an entrance to each pyramid complex.

The Giant Sphinx, which is the largest and only remaining of several similar statues, is close to the Valley Temple and causeway of Pharaoh Khafre. This suggests that he built it as a giant sentinel guarding the Nile entrance to his pyramid. It is carved directly from the rock. Ancient quarrymen cut a horse-shoe-shaped ditch which isolated a huge rectangular block of limestone. From that they began to shape the gigantic lion with its massive limbs stretching

out as testimony of the power and wealth of its builder. Topping the statue was a human-shaped head, quite possibly modeled after that of Khafre himself.

The actual use to which the Sphinx was put will remain a mystery. No Old Kingdom texts refer to it or its Temple, but it will continue to fascinate and intrigue scholars and visitors alike as archeologists attempt to halt the damage caused with the passing of time.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Hawass, Zahi and Mark Lehner. "The Sphinx: Who built it, And why?" Archaeology , September and October (1994) , 30-41.

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