

Why the Sphinx Lost Its Nose

Target Practice

When I was told, in grade school, that Napoleon's soldiers used the Sphinx for target practice, I instantly discounted it as ridiculous. Until a few years ago, I had always assumed that it meant practice with muskets, but, lately, I have heard that cannon were used. What *can* you say to that?! 'They must have really needed the practice!?' the head is only 20' wide. How many direct hits would it take to shatter it. 1} If the nose were the object, and muskets were used, they couldn't have needed much practice. A] It has been removed with a degree of precision which indicates that only it was targeted. B] So little has been removed, it could have been done by a single marksman. 2} If only 10% were shooting (10,000) for any part of the head, and unless almost every shot missed entirely, the head would be gone. Even allowing for how many shots would have missed, altogether, the head would have been gone before 1% had taken their turn.

Parameters of the Damage

The damage is intentional. 1} No other part of the face is so traumatically damaged but merely by weather. 2} The damage extends equally far from center, on both sides. > Localized and symmetrical damage, each indicate intent, in their own right. Combined, it's case closed, and the large width of the damaged area, indicates a wide nose.

The fact that only the nose was attacked, means that there was something about it, which provoked the vandals.

Why Bother?

Conquerors like to legitimize their endeavors with propaganda, and symbols speak louder than words. In justifying conquest, the claim of prior ownership, is a popular choice. The motive for the rhinoplasty, is to foist an hereditary claim upon Egypt, by erasing the past with a three dimensional argument.

1) Egypt, geographically African and Middle Eastern, was forcibly adopted by Europe, in the forms of Alexander and Rome, and is, now, culturally Middle Eastern. Whoever removed the nose, might have been unhappy with the racial appearance of the sphinx, but, perhaps, more so with the implication that Egypt is in the African subdivision of world real estate.

2) I have never heard of anyone claiming to have seen the sphinx with its nose. There is no way to guess how old the damage may be. (Many drawings add one.) A Nubian dynasty, the "Kushite", ruled Egypt starting in 712 B.C. If a black dynasty built the sphinx, the list of suspects must begin with Egyptian Pharaohs of a later dynasty, who did not relish the African connection, whether for its alien racial appearance, or for the unmistakable implication of foreign rule, expressed so boldly by that nose. Why shouldn't ancient Egyptians want to erase the memory of foreign occupation, regardless of where the foreigner came from, but especially if the racial appearance of the statue

seemed too alien to represent later rulers? To erase the disgrace of having once been conquered, is as strong a motive as to punctuate a conquest over the natives who built it.

If the Nubian hypothesis is true, the Sphinx would be much younger than anyone has previously thought, at least within my hearing. [747-656] Most estimates are based on the known age of the Great Pyramid. I have heard only one hypothesis which dates the statue by any measure except the pyramids, and that would make it much older than anyone has dared to guess. If it is that old, that explains the choice of that site for the Pyramids. The significance of the Sphinx, whatever that was, or, perhaps, even its mere presence, would have attracted the pyramid builders. We don't know the attitude of the ancients toward their southern neighbors. There is no reason to assume that Nubians were not seen in some kind of ideal light, as a special breed, the way White people were seen by the Aztecs, when they first arrived. There is certainly no reason to assume they were viewed as detestable, just because they have been, elsewhere, in other eras.

Self Image

All the portraits of Egyptians I have seen, look so much alike, you would think the entire population sprang from a single zygote! Obviously, this is an idealized 'look' which the entire society, or some segment of it, had decided to agree, was attractive. Perhaps, it was the prejudice of the ruling class. That is who is depicted, in those paintings. Given the indulgence of that class, in incestuous marriage, in all times and places, it could be that they had bred a genetic monoculture, although probably not as uniform as we see in those portrayals. If it was an appearance which the upper crust cultivated by breeding, we don't know how everyone else looked. Ancient Egypt was adjacent to sub-saharan Africa because it extended so far to the south, and, because they were connected by a river, there's no reason to believe that race mixing was not commonplace over millennia. The proximity of sub-saharan people could mean that there was another racial group living among them who were distinct from them in appearance, and whom they saw no reason to represent. We can recognize this situation in the U.S., where one complaint of African Americans, is that White aesthetic ideals have erased them from the American family portrait. For some time, Black people were never seen in commercials or movies, except when they were the target audience, or, in which, race was the subject. If one Egyptian upper-class came from another region, they might not have lasted long enough to impose their look, but, if the Sphinx was created in a moment of racial pluralism before the haughty aesthetic took hold, a latter day upper crust, bent on showing only their own faces, uniformly idealized, were confronted with their own little riddle, when looking at the sphinx. If we acknowledge, as is obvious, that their painted self-portraits, are artificially uniform, then it could be that the nose was as big a concern as skin color. They might not have wanted to destroy such an icon. They just wanted it to look like them, and destroying the nose, doesn't make it look like anyone. It was probably re-fashioned and the new model could have lasted for centuries.

Just as a new aesthetic sensibility might take hold, anywhere, the African 'look' may have had its day, then been repudiated by a later generation or dynasty. We are witnessing this in today's America, where the whiter-than-white ideal has lost some appeal because of greater Black / White integration and Latin immigration. Even people

who live in areas where almost everyone is White, see Black, Asian and Latin people, all the time, through media, because commercial advertising must try to appeal to new demographic groups.

2001 – 02/03/26