

3. Central Sector Area 221

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The Temple of “Atum, Lord of Heliopolis” – Area 221 in Heliopolis

Stephanie Blaschta

Area 221 is situated in the middle of the south half of the temple of Heliopolis, where W. M. F. Petrie discovered the western part of this embankment in 1915. The excavation of Area 221 at Heliopolis was carried out in order to relocate the western section of the “fort bank” (PETRIE/MACKAY 1915, pl. I). The archaeological research in this area has revealed the presence of a temple for “Atum, Lord of Heliopolis” (Fig. 1). Moreover, the finds made by the Egyptian-German mission¹ during six excavation-campaigns since 2012 have been beyond expectation.²

The oldest findings in Area 221 date well back to the Predynastic Period (mostly in the form of pottery sherds and small flint flakes from the drillings). Furthermore, small pottery fragments dating to the Old Kingdom have been found in higher layers. The discovery of a fragment of a classical pillar belonging to Senusret I (1971–1926 BC) also indicates the presence of a temple dating to the Middle Kingdom (Fig. 2). A possible interpretation of this is that the *ḥw.t-ḥ.t*³

once stood here, in which case the location of Area 221 would be at the center of Heliopolis.

Apart from a temple of Senusret I, with the results of the latest seasons of excavation it is possible to assume the existence of at least two more temples in this area. One dating to the Ramesside Period during the reigns of Ramesses II/Merenptah⁴ (19th Dynasty) and one from the Late Period belonging to Nectanebo I (30th Dynasty). Since the temple was destroyed between around the 4th – 8th centuries AD,⁵ the findings made here are scattered around the area and in many cases only small fragments were found. Nevertheless, the original position of the temple can be assumed to be parallel to the dromos, and the orientation to be from East to West.

Most of the Late Period finds have been made in the middle of the excavation area. The blocks show the name of Nectanebo I. In a vertical line from the dromos (S-SW to N-NE) many basalt, quartzite and granite blocks have been found.

¹ The excavation is directed by Aiman Ashmawy and Dietrich Raue. The work in this area is done by up to 70 Egyptian local workmen and some specialist workmen from Quft, under the supervision of Rais El-Amir Kamil Saddiq and Ashraf el-Amir. The documentation is done by Egyptian and German archaeologists and students. For reports from the previous excavations in this area, see: <https://www.dainst.org/forschung/projekte/heliopolis/5724> (last accessed: 11.10.2023): ASHMAWY/RAUE/BEIERSDORF 2015, ASHMAWY ET AL. 2016. The findings in this area are currently being studied as the PhD project of S. Blaschta.

² Until 2019 within an area of about 2500 m², 25 half-squares (each 4 × 9m) had been excavated. Furthermore, the excavations have been accompanied by geophysical research done by Tomasz Herbich, and by geomorphological drillings by Morgan De Dapper from the University of Gent. Excavations in this area face many difficulties, two of the most important of which are the mountains of garbage that have to be removed before starting digging. Due to the growing population in Matariya, the area of the temple and especially Area 221 has been used as a modern garbage dump. Before any archaeological research can take place in this area, mountains of garbage, that range to 13 m height must be removed, which is a very time consuming and costly activity. Another problem is the rising ground water table. In order to reach somewhat deeper levels, the work has to be accompanied by the use of water pumps.

³ *ḥw.t-ḥ.t* is the designation of the main temple at Heliopolis. In the Heliopolitan annals of Senusret I, he is mentioned as “seigneurs de la Houtâat, à l’avant de l’Est d’Héliopolis (?)”: POSTEL/RÉGEN 2005, 238–241.

⁴ In Heliopolis there should have been a House of Millions of Years (dating to Ramesses II and Merenptah) which has as yet not been located. Moreover, objects from the building consist of medium sized obelisks, a column with inscriptions related to his victory over the Libyans in his 5th regnal year, a Mnevis-burial chamber, and other objects have been found: RAUE 1999, 94–95; SOUROUZIAN 1989, 55–62.

⁵ The final destruction of the temple can be dated with aid of the pottery and coins (from Constantin I through Justinian I until the early Umayyad Period) to around the 4th – 8th AD.

This can be interpreted as the façade of the former temple. Most of the quartzite blocks belonged to a gate (or maybe two gates) dating to Ramesses II and Nectanebo I.

The basalt blocks belong to the *soubassement* of the temple that was dedicated to “Atum, Lord of Heliopolis” (BLASCHTA 2019, 6). They are part of a geographical procession of Nectanebo I and show male fecundity figures kneeling and delivering the goods and products of each nome of Egypt (Fig. 3; BLASCHTA 2019, 9–10). Until the season of spring 2018 only blocks from the Upper Egyptian series were uncovered.⁶ All these objects were excavated south of the quartzite gate. During spring 2019 the first blocks from the Lower Egyptian series were found to the north of the gate (Fig. 4). This arrangement reflects the real geographical situation in Egypt: The Upper Egyptian part of the procession was arranged in the south of the temple and the Lower Egyptian one in its north. Considering the findings thus far, the façade of this temple should have been about 50 m in width. Other inscribed basalt blocks, with horizontal inscriptions, also belonged to the *soubassement*, and their original position is to be reconstructed above the geographical procession. These bear the names “Atum, Lord of Heliopolis, the Great God, Lord of the Main Sanctuary”, as well as “Hathor, Nebet-hetepet”, the main female deity of the Heliopolitan temple.

The remains of the gate dating to Ramesses II and Nectanebo I were made of yellowish-brown quartzite, that was quarried from nearby

Gebel Ahmar (Fig. 5). The gate of Nectanebo I depicts the king being named “with effective monuments in [Heliopolis/house of Ra]” (*ꜣḫ-mnw m [Jwn.w/pr-Rꜥ]*). Blocks with reliefs from the reign of Ramesses II displaying different aspects of the sun were found among the blocks of Nectanebo I. It remains unclear if the two gates stood beside each other during the same period, or whether perhaps the gate of Ramesses II was reused by Nectanebo I. For now, the only evidence of a re-used block by Nectanebo I is one made of granite that has the cartouche of *Nḫt-nb-f* on one side and an older relief with three pairs of legs (according to the proportions probably dating to the New Kingdom) on the other side.

To the east of the façade the finds suggest a building dating to Merenptah. Not only the torso of a statue, but also granite blocks that belonged to a gate made out of granite show the name of this king. In addition to the aforementioned pieces, some in-situ finds should also be noted. In the season of spring 2018 it was possible to document a limestone floor potentially dating to the New Kingdom in three different parts of the excavation area. Moreover, the situation on the most north-eastern squares was very interesting. Here, a limestone floor was found, including a limestone vessel (subsequently inserted into the floor, Fig. 6). Slightly to the north, a granite block from a door slab was situated. Because of the connection to the adjoining limestone floor and the granite block, which is part of a gate of Merenptah, both of these features can be assumed to have belonged to a temple of Merenptah.

⁶ The Upper Egyptian fragments have been published in BLASCHTA 2019, 3–74.

3.1

To the west of the façade an open area in front of the temple can be postulated. Here, in front of the quartzite gate, just a couple of meters away, three fragments of a falcon-frieze (c. 120×80 cm) made of granite were found (Fig. 7).⁷ The frieze depicts falcons with sun discs on their heads. Because the paint of the

falcons was applied directly to the granite instead of having an undercoat paste added beforehand, and also because of its findspot in front of the gate, it seems likely that the frieze had been placed somewhere above the gate at a noteworthy height, and with the destruction of the gate has fallen a couple of meters away from it.

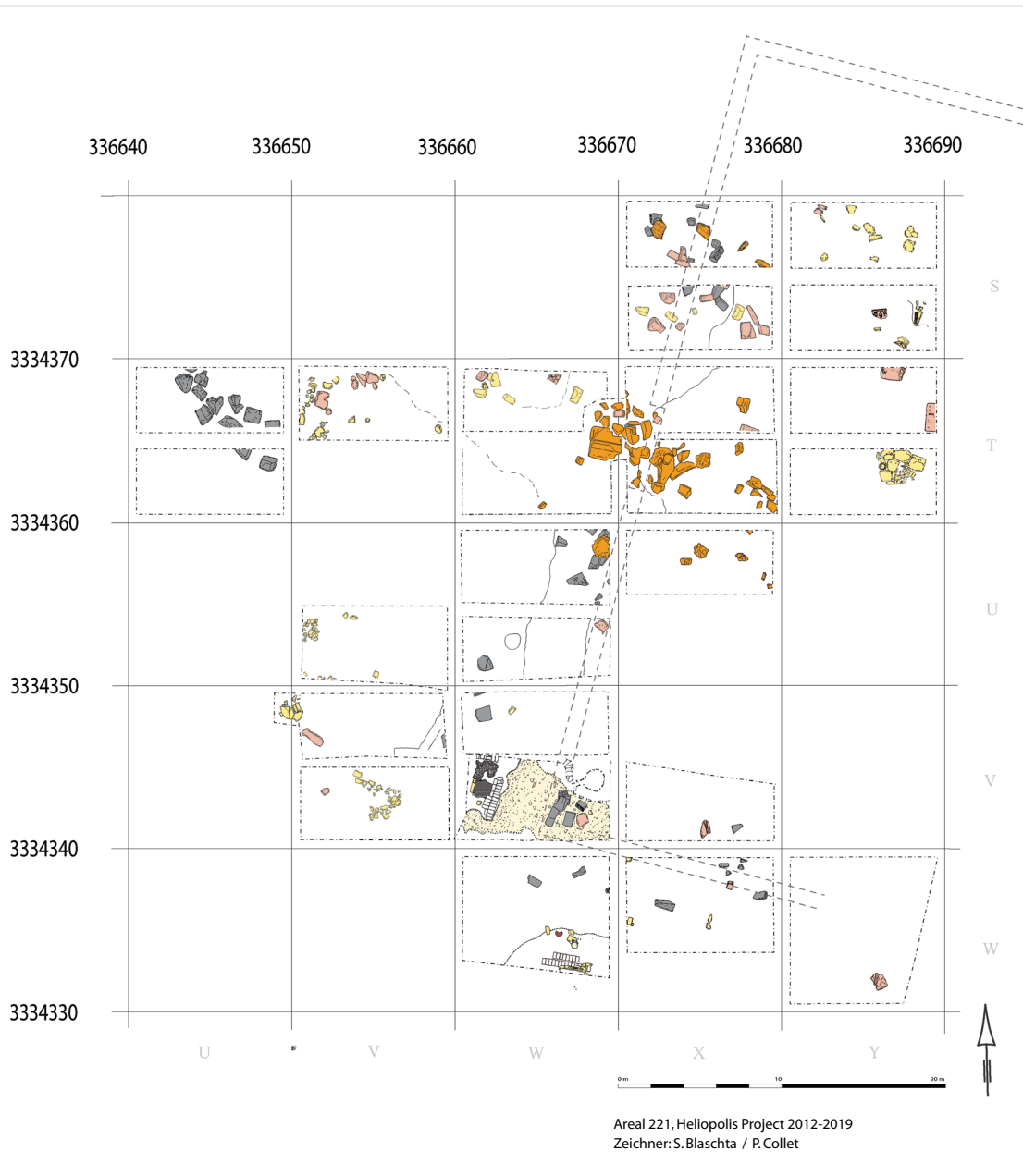


Fig. 1: Plan of Excavation Area 221 with reconstruction of possible temple-plan (S. Blaschta, with preliminary work from P. Collet).

⁷ An example of a frieze with falcons is the one from the gate of the New Year-pavilion dating in the 26th Dynasty from the time of Psamtik I or II, now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Inv. 213: <https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/318038/> (last accessed 12.11.2021). Nevertheless, it must be stated, that the object in Heliopolis is clearly larger. One example of a (three times larger) frieze on the facade of a temple, this time with baboons, not falcons, is the frieze on the temple of Abu Simbel.

3.1

Other findings in this open area belong mostly to statuary. There are fragments of a Ramesside sphinx, a larger than life size torso of king Merenptah in a lunging pose (ASHMAWY / RAUE/BEIERSDORF 2015, 8) and two Ramesside heads of a king that are made out of granite

(c. 50×96×100 cm). The heads show a somewhat flat top which indicates the original presence of a crown made from a separate block.⁸ Also befitting an open area are the basalt slabs found to the west of the excavation area that probably once formed part of a pavement (Fig. 8).



Fig. 2: Relief from a pillar of pillared wall dating to Senusret I, Area 221, found during spring 2016 (Photo: P. Collet).



Fig. 3: 1st Upper Egyptian Nome, Area 221 (Photo: M. Wenzel).



Fig. 4: Blocks from the Lower Egyptian Series, Area 221 (Photo: D. Raue).

⁸ For some examples of crowns made from another block, see the southern row from the sphinx alley in the first courtyard of the temple of Ramesses II at Wadi es-Sebua: MASPERO 1911, pl. CXX.



Fig. 5:
Fragments of a gate
of Nectanebo I and
Ramesses II, Area
221 (Photo: D. Raue).



Fig. 6:
Limestone pave-
ment with in-situ
limestone-vessel
and lid, Area 221
(Photo: S. Blaschka).



Fig. 7:
Falcon-frieze
standing in the
El-Matariya Museum,
Area 221 (Photo:
D. Raue).



Fig. 8:
Basalt slabs on the
north-west of the
excavation, Area 221
(Photo: S. Blaschta).

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Area 221: Sculpture

3.2.1 Fragments of Sphinxes from Misraa es-Segun

(Inv. No. OAM 86, U5013-1, OAM 186, U4950-2)

Simon Connor

Several fragments of sphinxes have been excavated in the central area of the archaeological site in Matariya, called Misraa es-Segun; they were among the fragments of quartzite blocks of Nectanebo and those of the granite gate of Merenptah.

The dating of these fragments can only be approximate; their state of preservation hardly allows one to ascertain whether they belonged to the Middle or to the New Kingdom. However, it is unlikely that they date from the Late Period since the modelling of the lion body and paws, in the last centuries BC, is much more naturalistic.

The pieces found in Misraa es-Segun show, on the contrary, a schematized and “geometrized” appearance, which corresponds to the style of the 2nd millennium BC.

The archaeological context in which they were found, together with several blocks dating to the Ramesside Period and the two (sphinx?) heads attributable to Ramesses II (Inv. No. U4936-1 and U5070-6, see p. 207–214), make it likely that all these statues were contemporary with the Ramesside structure whose remains were found in Misraa es-Segun.¹

1. OpenAir Museum Inv. No. 86²

Three granite fragments, all probably belonging to the same sphinx (Fig. 1). The chest and waist can be joined, while the front paws are probably from the same statue, according to its dimensions and the similarity of material.

Dimensions:	a) front paws: 34.5 × 76 × 70 cm b) chest: 60 × 85 × 55 cm c) waist: 56 × 83 × 52 cm
Estimated original dimensions of the sphinx:	140 × 85 × 270 cm
Dating:	Middle–New Kingdom (stylistic criteria: shape of the paws).

¹ For further analysis of these sphinx fragments, see the contribution “A City of Sphinxes” p. 377–390.

² Paws: U4828-2 (ex: 213VX4-2); back: U4807-14 (ex: 213VW5-14); middle: U4855-3 (ex: 213WX-5-3).

2. Inv. No. U5013-1

Granite proper left front paw of a sphinx (Fig. 2–4).

Dimensions:	31 × 44 × 97 cm
Estimated original dimensions of the sphinx:	280 × 170 × 540 cm
Dating:	Middle–New Kingdom (stylistic criteria)

3. OpenAir Museum Inv. No. 186³

Granite proper left front paw of a sphinx (Fig. 5–8).

Dimensions:	49 × 42 × 90 cm
Estimated original dimensions of the sphinx:	310 × 180 × 580 cm
Dating:	Middle–New Kingdom (stylistic criteria)

4. Inv. No. U4868-5 (ex: 213VV-6-5)

Base and lower part of the body of a granite sphinx (Fig. 9–12).

Dimensions:	46 × 58 × 151 cm
Estimated original dimensions of the sphinx:	120 × 58 × 200 cm
Dating:	Middle–New Kingdom (?)

5. Inv. No. U4950-2 (ex: 213TX-4-2):

Quartzite proper left front paw of a sphinx (Fig. 13–17).

Dimensions:	27 × 29 × 54 cm
Estimated original dimensions of the sphinx:	250 × 150 × 420 cm
Dating:	Middle–New Kingdom (stylistic criteria)

³ U5078-32.

3.2.1

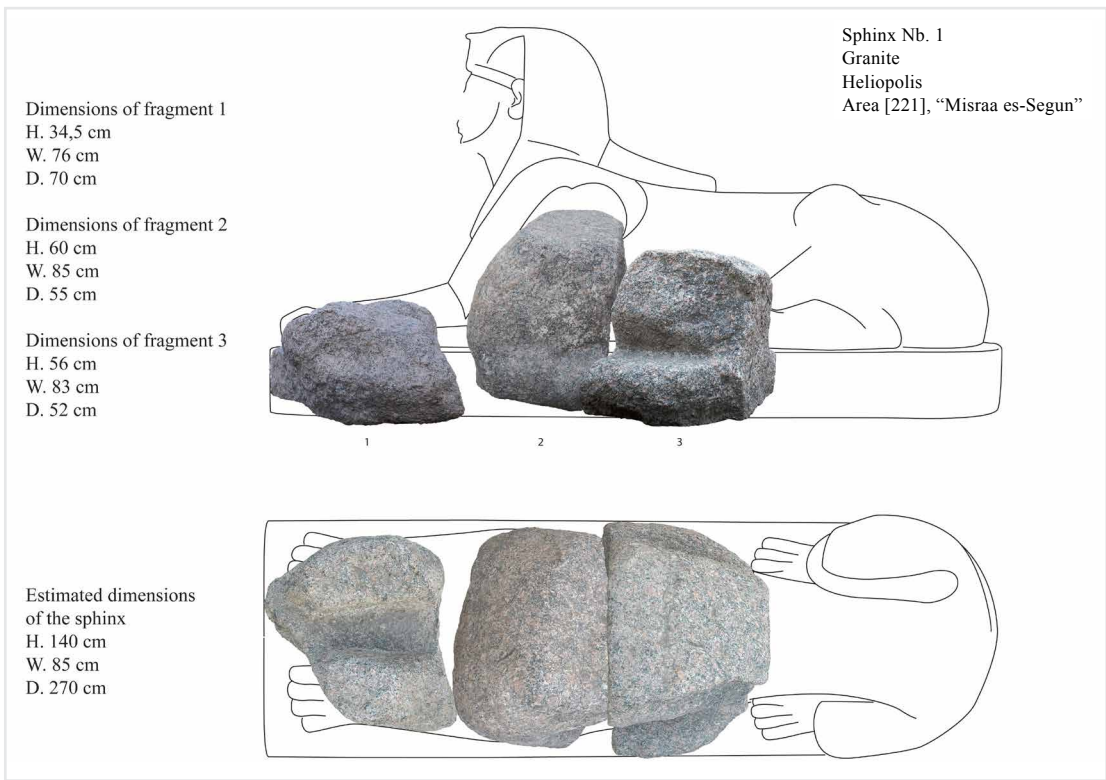


Fig. 1:
Three fragments
of a sphinx
[Inv. No. OAM 86]
(Reconstruction:
S. Connor).

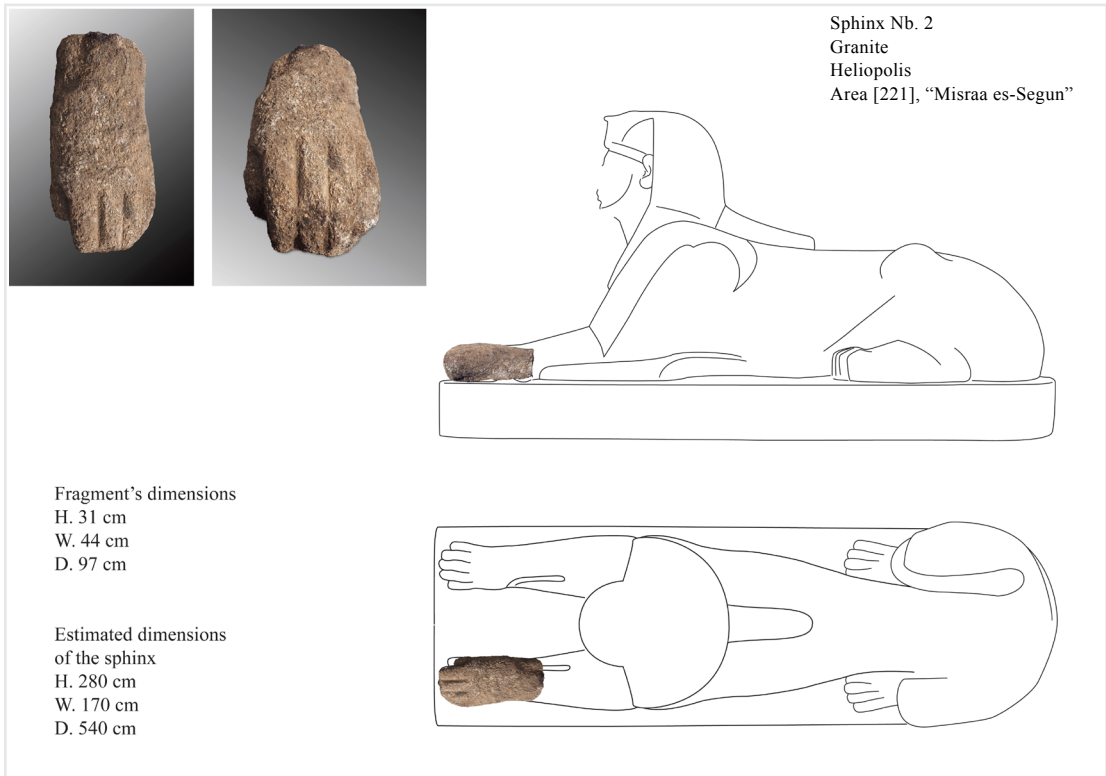


Fig. 2:
Paw of a
lion or sphinx
[Inv. No. U5013-1]
(Reconstruction:
S. Connor).

3.2.1



Fig. 3:
Paw of a
lion or sphinx
[Inv. No. U5013-1]
(Photo: S. Connor).



Fig. 4:
Paw of a
lion or sphinx
[Inv. No. U5013-1]
(Photo: S. Connor).



Fragment's dimensions
H. 49 cm
W. 42 cm
D. 90 cm

Estimated dimensions
of the sphinx
H. 310 cm
W. 180 cm
D. 580 cm

Sphinx Nb. 3
Granite
Heliopolis
Area [221], "Misraa es-Segun"

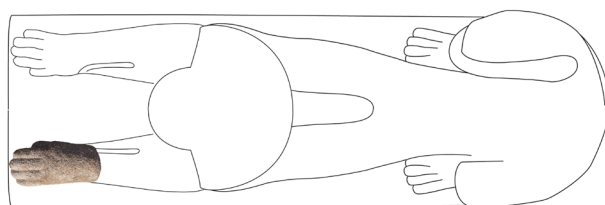
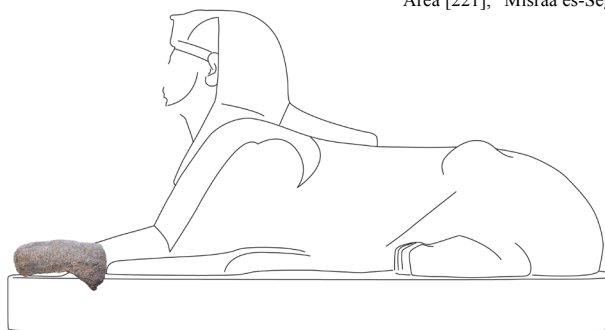


Fig. 5:
Paw of a
lion or sphinx
[Inv. No. U5078-32]
(Reconstruction:
S. Connor).

3.2.1



Fig. 6:
Paw of a lion or
sphinx [OpenAir
Museum
Inv. No. 186]
(Top view; photo:
S. Connor).



Fig. 7:
Paw of a lion or
sphinx [OpenAir
Museum
Inv. No. 186]
(Left view; photo:
S. Connor).



Fig. 8:
Paw of a lion or
sphinx [OpenAir
Museum
Inv. No. 186]
(Front view; photo:
S. Connor).

Sphinx Nb. 4
Granite
Heliopolis
Area [221], "Misraa es-Segun"



Fragment's dimensions
H. 46 cm
W. 58 cm
D. 151 cm

Estimated dimensions
of the sphinx
H. 120 cm
W. 58 cm
D. 200 cm



Fig. 9:
Body of a lion
or sphinx
[Inv. No. U4868-5]
(Photos and
reconstruction:
S. Connor).

3.2.1



Fig. 10:
Body of a lion
or sphinx
[Inv. No. U4868-5]
(Top view; photo:
S. Connor).

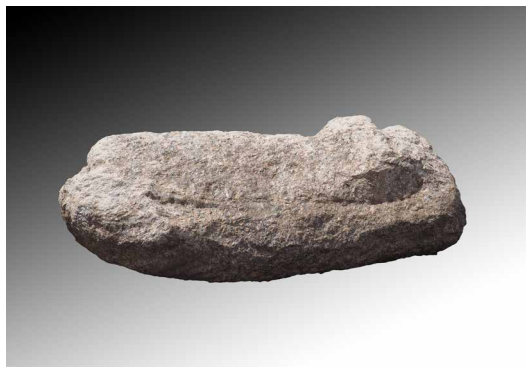


Fig. 11:
Body of a lion
or sphinx
[Inv. No. U4868-5]
(Side view; photo:
S. Connor).

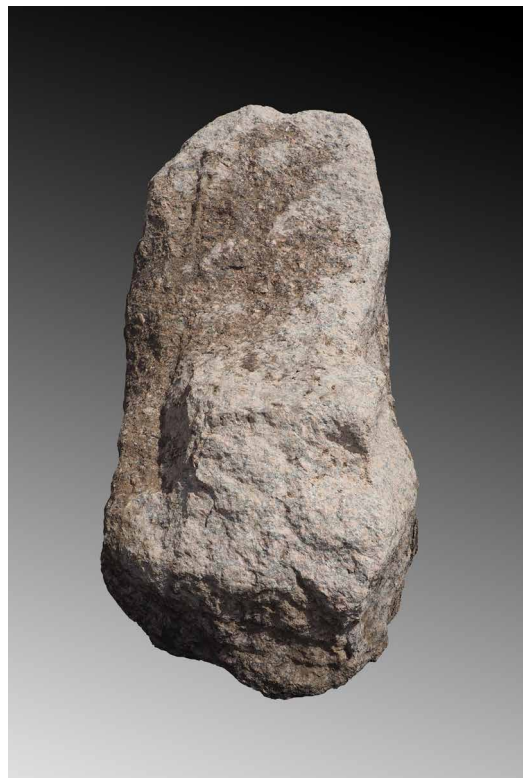

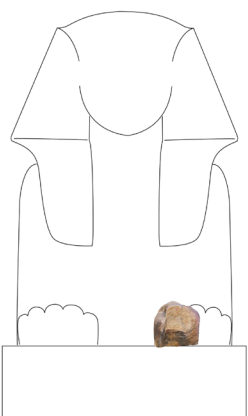


Fig. 12:
Body of a lion
or sphinx
[Inv. No. U4868-5]
(Front view; photo:
S. Connor).





Sphinx Nb. 5
Quartzite
Heliopolis
Area [221], "Misraa es-Segun"

Fragment's dimensions
H. 27 cm
W. 29 cm
D. 54 cm

**Estimated dimensions
of the sphinx**
H. 250 cm
W. 150 cm
D. 420 cm

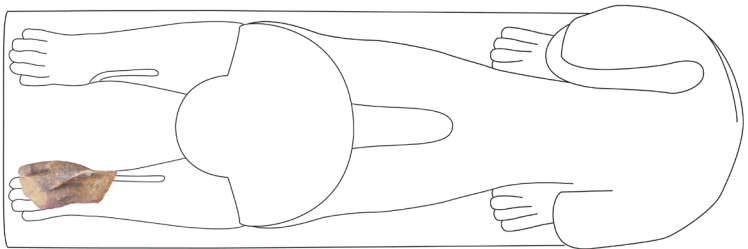


Fig. 13:
Left paw of a quartzite
lion or sphinx
[Inv. No. U5078-32
and U4950-2]
(Photos and
reconstruction:
S. Connor).

3.2.1



Fig. 14:
Left paw of a quartzite
lion or sphinx
[Inv. No. U4950-2]
(Right view; photo:
S. Connor).



Fig. 15:
Left paw of a quartzite
lion or sphinx
[Inv. No. U4950-2]
(Front view; photo:
S. Connor).



Fig. 16:
Left paw of a quartzite
lion or sphinx
[Inv. No. U4950-2]
(Top view; photo:
S. Connor).

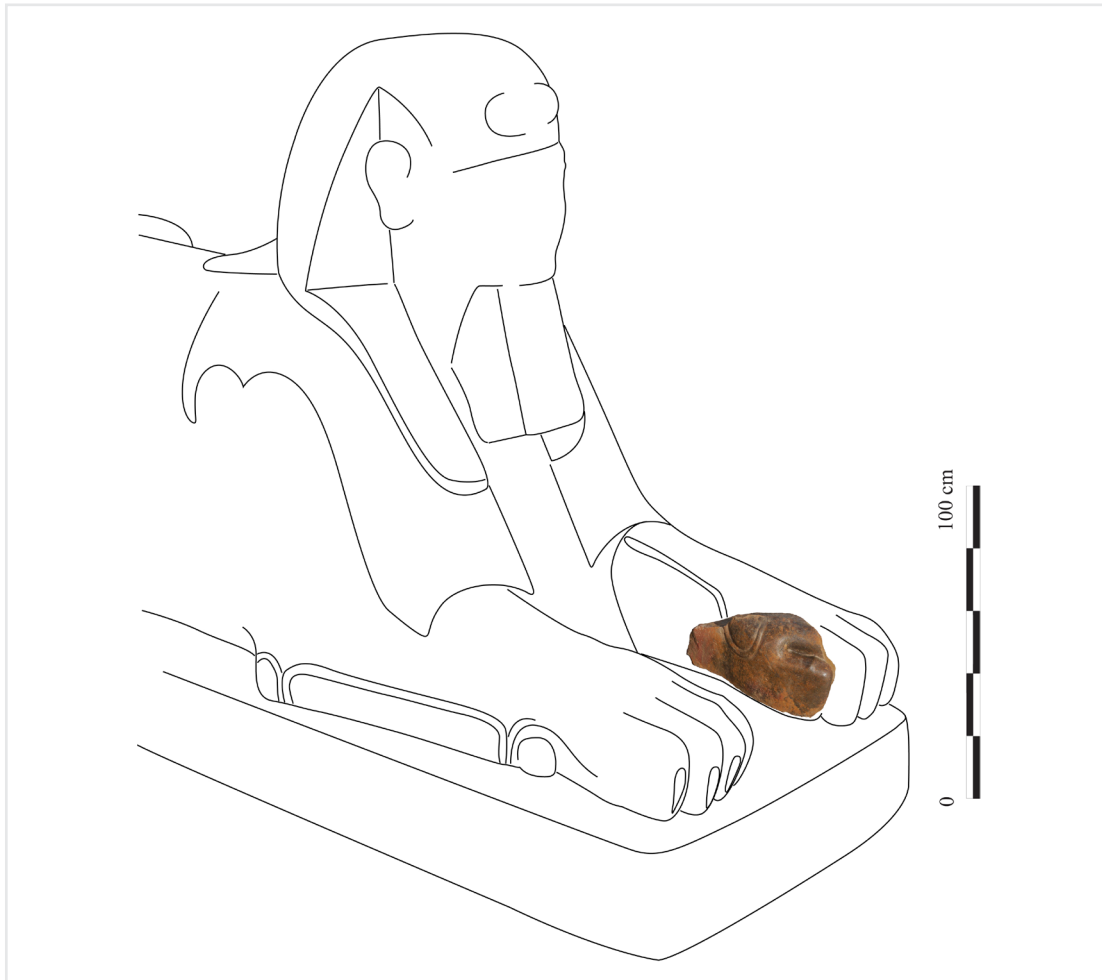


Fig. 17:
Left paw of a quartzite
lion or sphinx
[Inv. No. U4950-2]
(Reconstruction:
S. Connor).

Two Ramesside Granite Heads (Inv. No. U4936-1 and U5070-6) Simon Connor

These two fragments of granite heads of statues were found in the same context as the fragments of sphinxes excavated in Misraa es-Segun (Area 221), among the remains of the temple of Nectanebo and of the monumental gate of Merenptah. The first one (U4936-1, Fig. 1–4)¹, pre-

served from the top of the head until the chin, and whose surface is very eroded, was found in 2016, while the U5070-6, more fragmentary (the forehead is missing, Fig. 5–10) but with a surface in much better condition, was excavated in square 667/437 (South) during the Spring season 2018.

The dimensions of the two fragments are the following:

1) Inv. No. 4936-1:	H. 71; W. 104; D. 102 cm
2) Inv. No. 5070-6:	H. 52; W. 98; 107 cm

They can reasonably be identified as two members of the same group of statues, due to their stylistic similarity and the exact same dimensions of the mouth (20 cm wide) and of the eye (13.5 cm wide).

Their state of preservation does not allow the statuary type to which they once belonged to be ascertained; nevertheless, the absence of slab or back pillar renders improbable a standing or a seated colossus. Most of the preserved Ramesside statues of such a size show a dorsal panel or a back pillar, which reaches the top of the head and covers the rear part of the *nemes*. It is therefore most likely that these fragments belonged to a pair of sphinxes. The position of the break or cut of the heads speaks also in this favour, since it takes place just a bit above the neck, appro-

ximately where the rear of the head would have made a right angle with the back. It would have been therefore the logical area for cutting off the head from the body to obtain approximately rectangular blocks that could be reused in masonry (see below). Seated statues cannot be excluded, but are less likely, since the position of the break, so high on the neck, would be less explainable.

The top of head U5070-6 is flat. Despite the absence of a hole to serve as a mortise, it is probable that a double crown was originally placed above the *nemes*. The original dimensions may be estimated as follows: if sphinxes, they would have measured approximately 255 cm high (c. 380 with the double crown), 150 cm wide and 470 cm long. If seated – which is less probable

¹ Former Inv. No.: 213TV-3-1, from square 665/436 (North).

but not impossible – the colossus would have been one of the biggest found so far in Heliopolis: H. 600 cm (c. 730 with the double crown); W. 220 cm; D. 360 cm.

Head U4936-1 is in a poor state of conservation, due to a long stay in soil full of water and temperature changes, which caused the loss of almost all its original surface and polish. It is nevertheless still possible to recognize, under these conditions, the features of Ramesside style, which are even more recognizable on the other head, whose surface is better preserved: the oval-shaped face, with high cheekbones and rounded cheeks, the protruding eyebrows, the wide almond-shaped eyes, half-closed and looking down, and the characteristic smiling small mouth of Ramesses II, with deeply-cut corners.

When dealing with a (probably) Ramesside colossus, one cannot avoid the question whether it is an original Ramesside statue, or if it was reused from an earlier piece, since a large part of the corpus of this period includes statues originally made for previous kings (especially from the 12th Dynasty and from Amenhotep III), reinscribed and sometimes transformed and adapted, mainly for Ramesses II, Merenptah and Ramesses III.² In the case of these two heads – especially U5070-6 – no element so far allows detecting a transformation of the physiognomy from earlier statues. We have every reason to

believe that these statues are “original” representations of Ramesses II. Very close parallels are the large standard-bearing granite statues found in various sites of the Delta, with a particularly wide face and rounded cheeks.³

The upper part of the head, flattened in order to serve as support for a crown (most probably a double crown) above the *nemes*, follows a tradition which appears during the reign of Amenhotep III⁴ and which becomes particularly common during the Amarna, post-Amarna and Ramesside Periods. Colossal statues of this time may, in some cases, have been conceived from the beginning with this juxtaposition of crowns, while on other cases, the crown has been added later above the top of the head, thanks to a system of tenon and mortise. This is the case for the statues of earlier periods reused by Ramesses II and his successors.⁵ Nevertheless, the addition of a double crown above the *nemes* is not a proof of transformation and reuse of a statue. Indeed, some colossi which show no traces of modification on their features and on their inscription, and have to be considered as original representations of Ramesses II, also show the double crown as a separate piece, fixed above the *nemes*. This may be due to changing plans during the sculpting process of the statue, or when installing it in its architectural setting. Purely practical reasons may also be at the origin of this separate headdress, since this

² Concerning reuse of statues by the Ramesside sovereigns, and particularly those which bear modification of the physiognomy, see SOUROUZIAN 1988, 229–254; ID. 1995, 505–543; CONNOR 2015, 85–109; HILL 2015, 294–299; EATON-KRAUSS 2015, 97–104; GILLI 2016; CONNOR 2022.

³ Alexandria NM 359, Berlin ÄM 10835, Cairo CG 574, 575, 636, 640, JE 44668, as well as the head in display in the open-air museum of Tell Basta. About this statuary type, see SOUROUZIAN 2020, 131–172, with linked bibliography.

⁴ See for example the seated statue of Amenhotep III, reused by Merenptah (New York MMA 22.5.2, SOUROUZIAN 1989, 159, cat. 98, pl. 30a), the head in Hannover 1935.200.112 (KOZLOFF ET AL. 1992, 168–170, cat. 12), or the little head from the Karnak Cachette (LUXOR Museum J. 16, ROMANO ET AL. 1979, 76–77, cat. 98, fig. 57–58).

⁵ See for example the triad of a king seated between Hathor and Isis, modified and reinscribed for Ramesses II, cf. EATON-KRAUSS 1991, 19; VANDERSLEYEN 1997, 285–290; LORAND 2011, 73–87). The torso of Amenhotep II in Cairo CG 615 (SOUROUZIAN 1991, 65) might have been also reused or at least adapted in the Ramesside Period, since a circular unpolished disc with a mortise at the top of the head is visible, which once allowed to add a high crown above the *nemes*.

high crown increases considerably the dimensions and weight of the original block to be carved. This is particularly true for the sphinxes:⁶ sculpting them directly with a double crown from a monolithic block would have caused a considerable loss of material.

Head U5070-6 shows on its upper part four regular tool-marks, 11 cm wide (Fig. 9–10). These traces of the dismantling of the statue were probably made in order to reduce it into construction blocks for new building purposes. Such traces are observable on a wide range of granite fragments found in Matariya, notably in Suq el-Khamis. Similar traces of (interrupted) dismantling can be found, among many other examples from other sites, on the colossi of Marmesha (Cairo JE 37466 and 37467) or on the Middle Kingdom colossus reused by

Ramesses II and Merenptah (Berlin ÄM 7264; New York MMA L.2011.42). Dating the dismantling of Matariya's statues is not easy, in the current state of knowledge of the archaeological context. However, such regular tool marks must have been made with chisels in very hard metal alloys or iron, since copper alloys can hardly produce any kind of tool capable of cutting granite. Although it is not easy to date the development of the common use of iron in Egypt for tools, it does not seem to have predated the mid-1st millennium BC (OGDEN 2000, 166–168). This does not provide a precise indication, but it is likely that the large scale dismantling of Matariya's statues for new building purposes did not occur before the Ptolemaic Period, and may have happened even much later, in the Roman Period or even perhaps on the occasion of the construction of Islamic Cairo.



Fig. 1:
Head of a monumental granite statue [Inv. No. U4936-1] (Side view; photo: S. Connor).

⁶ For example, the two giant granite sphinxes of Amenhotep III now in Saint Petersburg (SOLKIN 2007, 1713–1718), the two limestone sphinxes of Ramesses II from Karnak, Cairo JE 35811 and TR 2.11.24.2 (SOUROUZIAN 2016, 272–274, fig. 20–24), the Ramesside sandstone sphinxes from Karnak (Turin Cat. 1408–1409, CONNOR 2016, 108–111), or, even in smaller dimensions but in more precious material, the little calcite-alabaster sphinx of Tutankhamun from the Luxor Cachette (EL-SAGHIR 1991, 42–43).

3.2.2



Fig. 2:
Head of a monumental granite statue
[Inv. No. U4936-1]
(3/4 view; photo: S. Connor).



Fig. 3:
Head of a monumental granite statue
[Inv. No. U4936-1]
(Front view; photo: S. Connor).

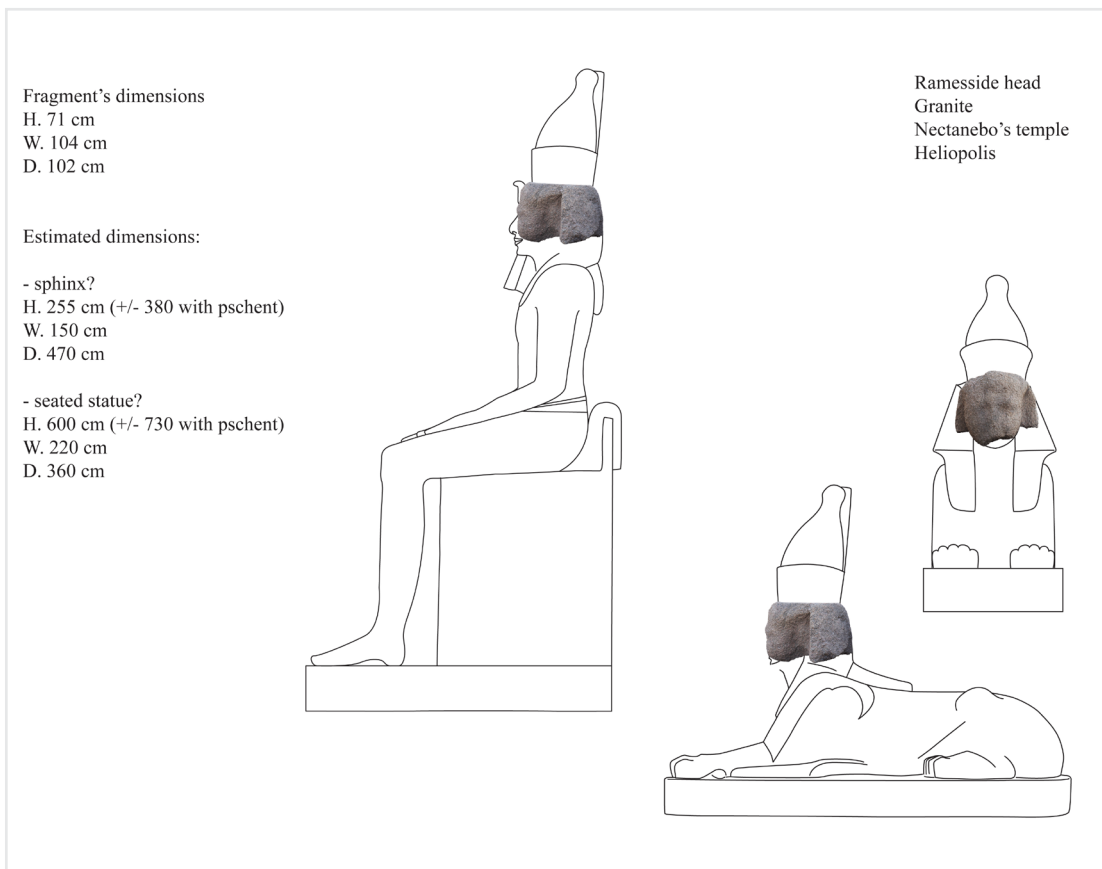


Fig. 4:
Possible original appearance of the statue
[Inv. No. U4936-1]
(Reconstruction: S. Connor).

3.2.2



Fig. 5:
Head of a monumental granite statue
[Inv. No. U5070-6]
(Front view; photo:
S. Connor).



Fig. 6:
Head of a monumental granite statue
[Inv. No. U5070-6]
(Rear view; photo:
S. Connor).



Fig. 7:
Head of a monumental granite statue
[Inv. No. U5070-6]
(Side view; photo:
S. Connor).



Fig. 8:
Head of a monumental granite statue
[Inv. No. U5070-6]
(3/4 view; photo:
S. Connor).



Fig. 9:
Head of a monumental granite statue
[Inv. No. U5070-6]
(Top view, with
several tool marks;
photo: S. Connor).



Fig. 10:
Tool marks on head
[Inv. No. U5070-6]
(Photo: S. Connor).

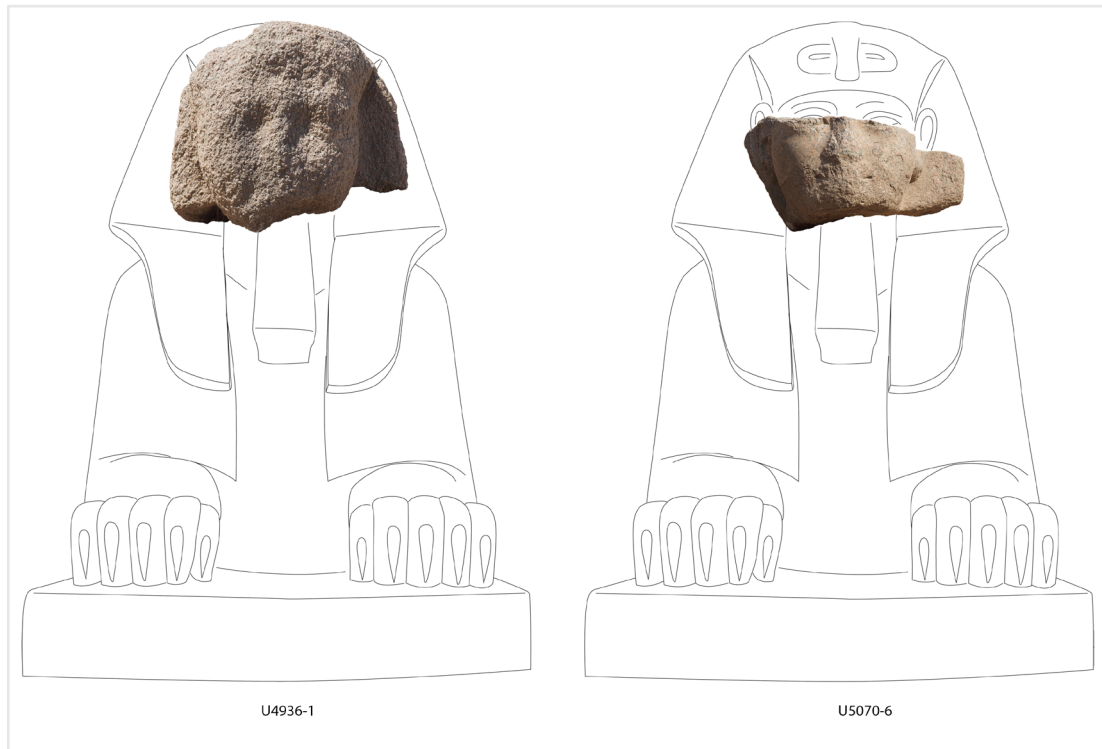


Fig. 11:
Possible original
appearance of the
two statues
(Reconstruction:
S. Connor).

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A Colossal Statue of King Merenptah Prostrating Himself

(Inv. No. U4809-2 & U4855-11)

Simon Connor

Dating:	19th Dynasty, reign of Merenptah (1213–1203 BC)
Material:	Granite
Dimensions:	Torso U4809-2 (ex: 213WY-1-2): H. 120; W. 125; D. 100 cm; rear section of the base U4855-11 (ex: 213WX-5-11): H. 54; W. 81; D. 131 cm
Find spot:	Area 221, squares 668/433 (torso) and 667/433 (fragment of base)

The excavations of 2015 in Area 221, in the middle of the archaeological site of Matariya, brought to light two fragments of a massive granite statue of Merenptah, kneeling on the left knee, his right leg stretched behind him and his arms extended forward, a position which we find in Egyptological literature called “prostrate” (even if this term is perhaps not entirely correct, since the king is not represented flat on his stomach, see Fig. 1a–d and 3a–b). Originally approximately 260 cm high and more than 360 cm long, it is the largest extant statue of a king in this pose. It offers a new glimpse into the exceptional and creative sculptural repertoire which must once have adorned the temenos of ancient Heliopolis.

These two fragments (Fig. 1–2) were discovered in the centre of the temenos of the cultic centre of Heliopolis, in the middle of the area which is today called Misraa es-Segun, west of the obelisk of Senusret I. The excavation of Area 221 was aimed at identifying and studying the

western limits of the “fort bank” or “high sand”, the mud bricks and sand embankment first identified by Schiaparelli and Petrie, in the centre of the temenos.¹ A large number of basalt, quartzite and limestone architectural fragments were found, evidence of a temple dedicated to “Atum, Lord of Heliopolis,” built (or completed or rebuilt) by Nectanebo I (ASHMAWY/RAUE/BEIERSDORF 2015, 13–16; ASHMAWY/RAUE 2016, 4–9).

As commonly attested in Pharaonic history, the statue of Merenptah, some eight hundred years older than this temple, may have been brought to this later structure – unless the temple of the 4th century BC was built to replace a Ramesside structure, as is suggested by the numerous architectural blocks with cartouches of Ramesses II and Merenptah that were found in the area: this location, in the middle of the sacred temenos of Heliopolis, can hardly have been left empty during most of the Pharaonic Period. Another possibility that could explain the presence of

¹ PETRIE/MACKAY 1915, 3–4; QUIRKE 2001, 115–119; VERNER 2013, 55–59; SBRIGLIO/UGLIANO 2015, 278–293 (particularly 284–288).

a statue of Merenptah among the remains of a temple of Nectanebo I may be the reuse of ancient sculpture as building blocks in a more recent structure, a practice well known in Pharaonic Egypt.² Although the state of preservation of the surface does not allow us to identify traces of intentional cutting, the shape of both fragments corresponds quite well to construction blocks: the rear part of the base forms a perfect rectangle since the leg is almost completely missing (destroyed?), while the upper part is without all the protruding parts (arms, face, beard). If these two statue fragments were indeed reused as blocks for a building, the statue might have originally stood in any other temple in Heliopolis, in disuse at the time of Nectanebo I.

The two pink granite fragments consist of a torso and head, and the rear part of a base (Fig. 3a–b). Although they have no joining surface, their dimensions, material and shared archaeological context indicate that they were once parts of a single statue. Due to the long period in wet soil, and the variations of temperature throughout the centuries, the whole surface is very eroded. The king wears the *nemes* headdress and a beard.

The wide angle between the torso and the upper arms and lappets of the *nemes* prevent us from reconstructing the position as a standing or seated figure; a kneeling position might have been an option at first glance, but the torso would probably have been more vertical. According to the known statuary repertoire, such an angle

of inclination can only fit with a lunging figure, kneeling on only one knee. The shape of the other fragment confirms this reconstruction: the base appears to have been long and narrow, and only the right leg appears on the preserved part. The foot and knee were directly attached to the base, which means that the lower part of the leg was in a horizontal position, while the left leg must have been placed in front, just under the torso, as suggested by the comparison with other statues in the “prostrate” position (see list on Tab. 1).

The king was shown presenting an object in front of him, but this has not (yet) been found. On this type of statue, the angle of the upper body varies according to the height of the offering; in this case, like in that of the statue of Sety I reused by Osorkon II (Cairo CG 1040 + CG 881 + Philadelphia E 16199), the object must have been quite high, forcing the king to raise his upper body; it may have been a stela or an offering table on a sort of podium or pedestal.³

This statuary type, although relatively rare in the repertoire, clearly relates to a sort of ritual or cultic activity. The king is not only kneeling, but stooping in a submissive attitude in front of the deity. On one small example of a prostrate statue found in Karnak, Ramesses II offers his name, formed by three little figures seated on the hieroglyphic sign *mr*, as a kind of rebus (*R^c-ms-sw-mr.y-Imn*), while on two others, the bases of the statuettes are engraved with persea branches, the leaves of which bear the cartouches

² See, among many other examples, the fragments of Amenhotep III’s monumental sphinxes and jackal statues from Kom el-Hettan, reused as construction blocks for the Temple of Millions of Years of Merenptah in Western Thebes (JARITZ 2003, 235–236).

³ For the statue of Sety I, the object was transformed, probably when the statue was reused for Osorkon II, into a stela. Originally, it seems to have been an offering table or maybe, as suggested by H. Sourouzian, a model of a temple (SOUROUZIAN 2010, 97–105).

of Ramesses.⁴ According to M. MATTHIEW (1930, 31–32) and H. G. FISCHER (1956, 27–42), these statues were a representation of the sovereign performing the submission of his name to the gods, as part of the coronation ceremonies.⁵ The perseba branches might be a reference to the sacred *ished* tree of Heliopolis, on the leaves of which the gods are supposed to write the name of the king (KÁKOSY 1980, col. 182–183).

The first attestations of the half-kneeling or prostrate position in royal statuary are depicted in the Theban tomb of the vizier Rekhmira (TT 100): Rekhmira is supervising the delivery of royal statues to the temple of Amun in Karnak, among which are two figures that represent Thutmose III in the prostrating position, one presenting an offering table and the other with his hands turned down, as a sign of veneration (DAVIES 1943, 37, pl. 36–38). A head in Brussels (MRAH E 2435), stylistically attributable to Thutmose III, is the first fragment known so far of an example of this type of statue (LABOURY 1998, 349–351, 430, cat. A 16; ID. 2009, 413–426). Depictions of sacred barques, on the walls of the temples, show one or two figures of the king in this position, facing the shrine. In sculpture in the round, only a few pieces from the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period, and a large one from the Late Period, are known (see Tab. 1).

Despite the crumbling state of conservation of the surface, the cartouche of Merenptah can still be recognized on the proper right shoulder: *B3-n-[R']-mr.y-Imn* (Fig. 4a–b). When dealing with this king, we can of course wonder whether the statue is an original of his reign, or if it was reused from an earlier period. The Ramesside sovereigns, in particular Ramesses II, Merenptah, and Ramesses III, are some of the most prolific re-users of ancient statues and monuments, to such an extent that in many cases, doubt remains concerning the dating of a piece, particularly when the physiognomy of the sculptures was modified in order to correspond better to Ramesside style and the identity of the new “owner”.⁷

In the case of this statue, the absence of a face renders the task difficult. The vertical grooves on the side of the shoulder, although attested earlier, are particularly deep and frequent on large Ramesside statues. The statue shows a striking musculature, with massive shoulders, a feature that reminds us of Amenhotep II’s sculpture,⁸ but which is hardly sufficient to attribute it to this king.

If most of the statues that have come to us with the name of Merenptah are indeed reused from earlier periods, a few others, also in granite and of large dimensions, show no signs of recarving

⁴ Cairo CG 42144, CG 42142 and CG 42143. MATTHIEW 1930, 31–32.

⁵ See also comments of LABOURY 2009, 413–426, particularly 422–424.

⁶ About this statuary type, see SOUROUZIAN 2020, 203–209.

⁷ Concerning reuse of statues by the Ramesside sovereigns, and particularly those which bear modification of the physiognomy, see SOUROUZIAN 1988, 229–254; ID. 1995, 505–543; CONNOR 2015, 85–109; HILL 2015, 294–299; EATON-KRAUSS 2015, 97–104; GILLI 2016; CONNOR 2022.

⁸ Concerning statues attributable to Amenhotep II and reused by Ramesses II, I take the liberty to refer to my article: CONNOR 2017.

and are therefore probably original productions of Merenptah's sculptors (Fig. 4).⁹ They show, like the prostrate colossus of Matariya, a vigorous technique, and a quality of sculpture which is absolutely comparable to the productions of the previous reign.

Although one cannot exclude the option of reuse of a mid-18th Dynasty sculpture, no argument allows us so far – in the absence of other fragments which might give us more indications – to regard the prostrate king of Matariya as a statue of an earlier king adapted for Merenptah. The site of Heliopolis has already provided

us with a large amount of surprises and rare material, and this statue, the largest one belonging to a quite unusual type and perhaps one of the rare original colossi of Merenptah, has for sure to be numbered among that group of exceptional pieces.

⁹ Cairo JE 37481 (SOUROUZIAN 1989, 83–85, pl. 16, cat. 39), JE 37483 (Id. 1989, 79–82, pl. 15, cat. 38), JE 66571 (Id. 1989, 89, 107–108, pl. 19, cat. 61), CG 1240 (Id. 1989, 172–173, pl. 33, cat. 103), Copenhagen NM 345 (Id. 1989, 85–88, pl. 17, cat. 40), probably also the two dyads found in Kafr Matboul (Id. 1989, 75–76, cat. 33–34). Their typology, headdresses, attributes and body proportions exclude a pre-Ramesside dating. If re-used, the original owner would have been Ramesses II, but, according to the known repertoire, Merenptah usually only adds his name on his father's statues, without replacing his father's name or modifying his features. Therefore, they are most likely actual statues of Merenptah, produced during his own reign.

Tab. 1: Preliminary list of statues showing the king in a prostrating position.

	Current location and Inv. No.	Represented king	Dating criteria	Material	Dimensions	Provenance	Object(s) in hands
1	Brussels E 2435	Thutmose III	Style	Granodiorite	H. 10 cm (head)	Unknown	Unknown
2	New York 66.99.28	Amenhotep III	Inscription	Steatite	13.7 × 5.3 × 13 cm	Unknown	Offering table
3	Cairo CG 1040 + Philadelphia E 16199	Sety I (reused by Osorkon II)	Inscription and style	Granodiorite	123 × 44.5 × 116 cm	Tanis	Originally offering table, transformed into a stela
4	Cairo JE 38585 - CG 42142	Ramesses II	Inscription	Steatite	28 × 12 × 75 cm	Karnak, Cachette	Altar
5	Cairo JE 37427 - CG 42143	Ramesses II	Inscription	Limestone + base in greywacke	H. 15; P. 67 cm	Karnak, Cachette	Ram-headed altar
6	Alexandria NM (be- fore Cairo JE 37423 - CG 42144)	Ramesses II	Inscription	Steatite	H. 27.5; P. 39 cm	Karnak, Cachette	Altar with divine figures forming royal name
7	Matariya, open-air museum	Merenptah	Inscription	Granite	260 × 125 × 360– 400 cm	Matariya, “Nectanebo’s temple” area	So far unknown
8	Edinburgh A.1965.1	Ramesses IX	Inscription	Greywacke	20.8 × 12 × 49 cm	Unknown (probably Heliopolis)	Altar with a scarab
9	Florence 5625	Amasis?	Style	Quartzite	73 × 58 × 37 cm	Unknown	Unknown
10	Cairo CG 42197	Osorkon III	Inscription	Limestone	17.5 × 7.5 × 38.5 cm	Karnak, Cachette	Presenting a divine barque

3.2.3



Fig. 1a:
Upper part of the
granite prostrate
statue of Merenptah
(Front view, photo:
S. Connor).



Fig. 1b:
Upper part of the
granite prostrate
statue of Merenptah
(Side view, photo:
S. Connor).

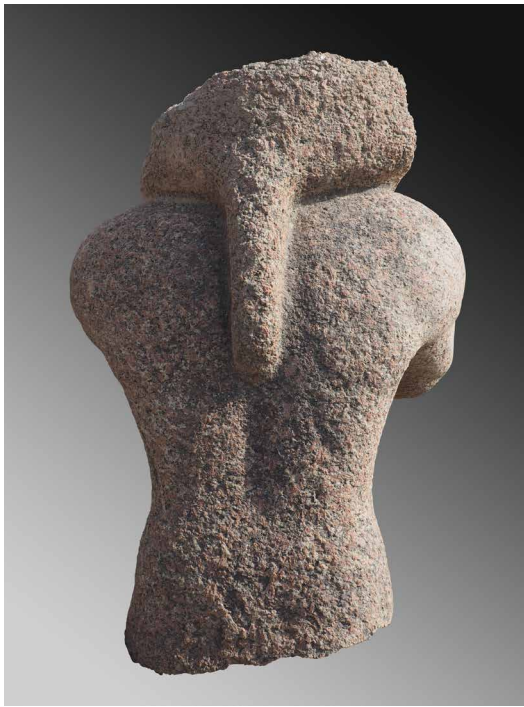


Fig. 1c:
Upper part of the
granite prostrate
statue of Merenptah
(Rear view, photo:
S. Connor).

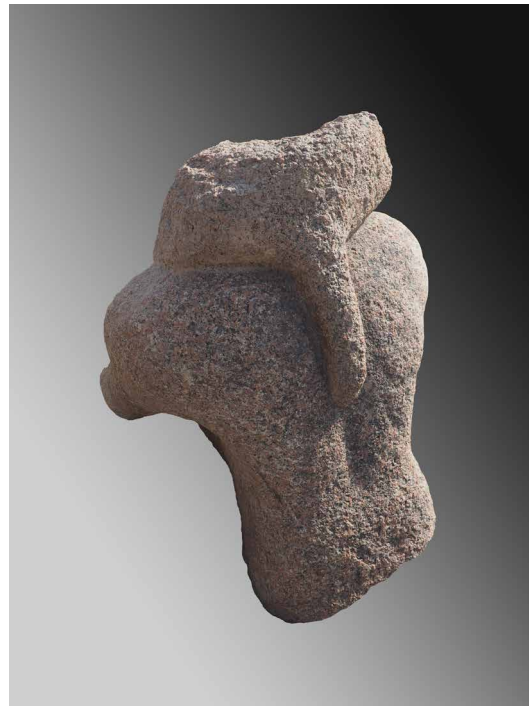


Fig. 1d:
Upper part of the
granite prostrate
statue of Merenptah
(3/4 rear view,
photo: S. Connor).

3.2.3

Fig. 2a:
Rear part of the
base of Merenptah's
granite prostrate
statue (Top view;
photo: S. Connor).



Fig. 2b:
Rear part of the
base of Merenptah's
granite prostrate
statue (Side view;
photo: S. Connor).



Fig. 2c:
Rear part of the
base of Merenptah's
granite prostrate
statue (Front view;
photo: S. Connor).

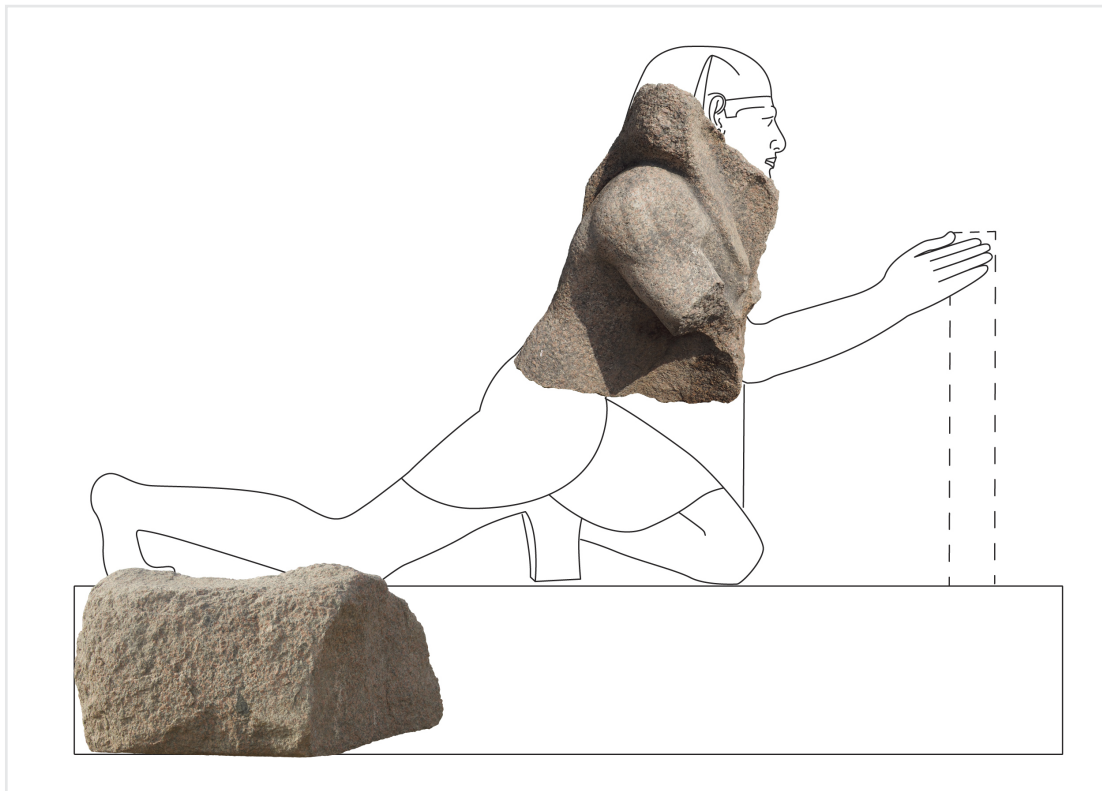


Fig. 3a:
Possible original
appearance of
Merenptah's granite
prostrate statue,
with a stela
(Reconstruction:
S. Connor).

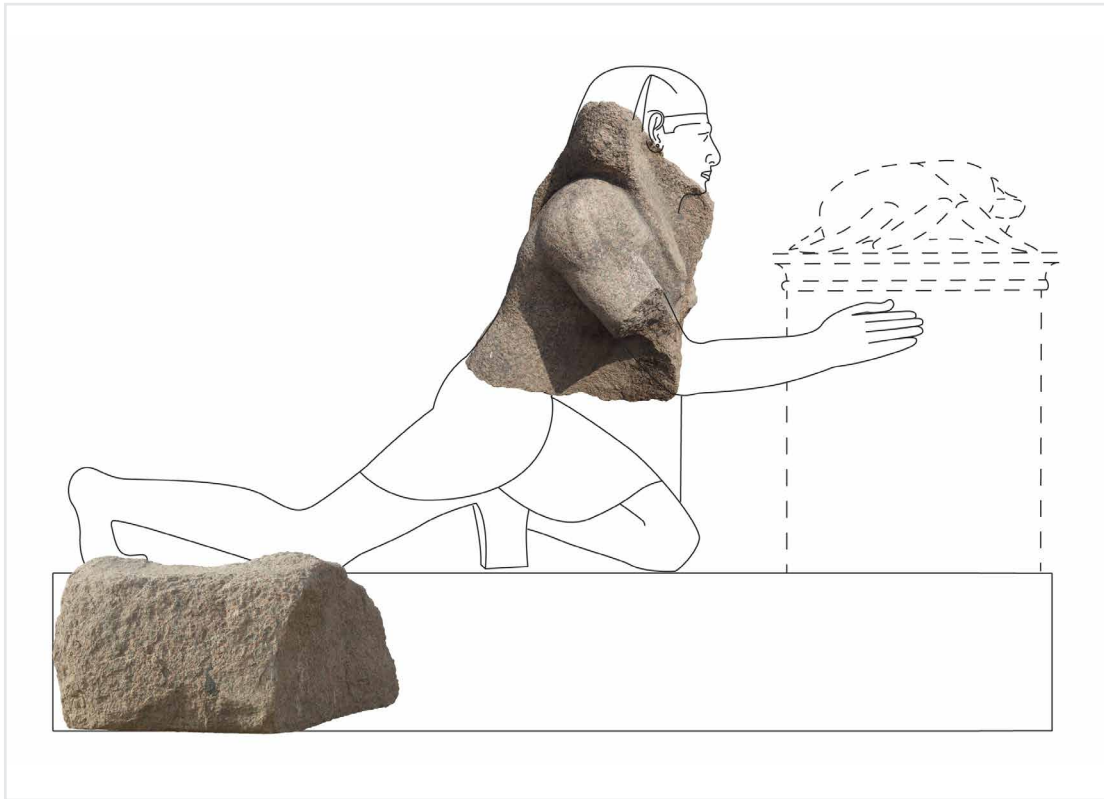


Fig. 3b: Possible original appearance of Merenptah's granite prostrate statue, with an altar (Reconstruction: S. Connor).

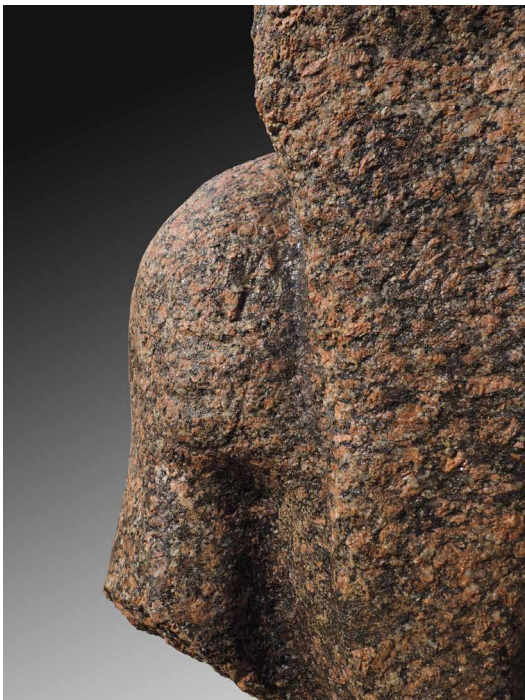


Fig. 4a: Right shoulder of the statue, with the cartouche of Merenptah (Photo: S. Connor).

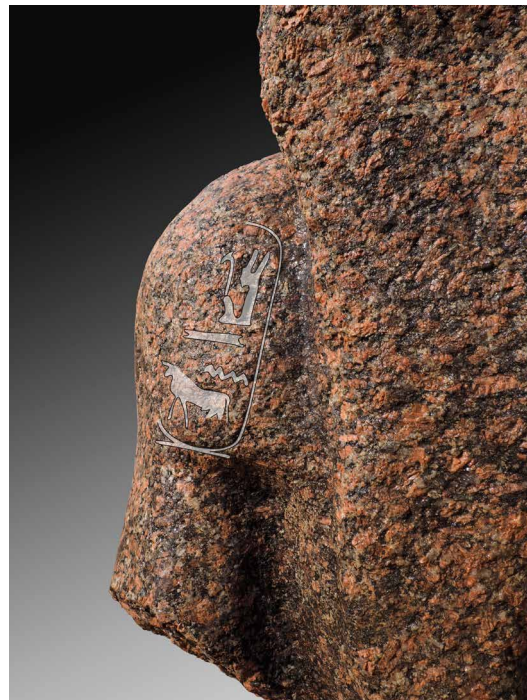


Fig. 4b: Cartouche of Merenptah highlighted on the statue (Photo: S. Connor).

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3.2.3

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Miscellanea from Area 221

Simon Connor

1. Inv. No. U4882-2 (ex 213UW-4-2)

Dimensions:	H. 10.0 × W. 6.0 × D. 10.8 cm
Material:	Limestone
Dating:	New Kingdom or Late Period
Find context:	Area 221, square 666/435

Lower part of a seated statuette (Fig. 1–4). The figure wears a plain sheath dress, long kilt or tunic, covering the legs at least until the ankles. It is difficult, in the present state of preservation, to identify whether the figure is female or male. The proper left fist is placed on the thigh, closed and placed facing down. Such a feature is common during the mid-12th Dynasty and becomes systematic from the end of the Middle Kingdom onwards; before that period, the fist was placed facing up on the thigh (EVERS 1929, 38–39, § 264–265, 274).

The sides of the throne are ornamented with a double frieze, alternating empty squares and

striations. This type of seat decoration is attested throughout most of the pharaonic period, as early as the Old Kingdom (e.g., statue of Pepy I, Brooklyn 39.120) until the Late Period (e.g., statue of Amun and Mut in Paris, Louvre N 3566). However, a pre-New Kingdom can be excluded, due to the detail of the pattern of this frieze. The lateral rear side is predominant and continues on the backrest, a feature that appears in the New Kingdom and continues during the Late Period (EVERS 1929, 53, § 370). In the absence of the upper part of the statue, it is difficult to go further in dating the piece, as well as arguing in favour of a divine, royal or private statuette.

3.2.4



Fig. 1:
Fragment of a seated
limestone statuette.
[Inv. No. U4882-2]
(3/4 view, photo:
S. Connor).



Fig. 2:
Fragment of a seated
limestone statuette.
[Inv. No. U4882-2]
(Side view, photo:
S. Connor).



Fig. 3:
Fragment of a seated
limestone statuette.
[Inv. No. U4882-2]
(Top view, photo:
S. Connor).



Fig. 4:
Fragment of a seated
limestone statuette.
[Inv. No. U4882-2]
(Rear 3/4, photo:
S. Connor).

2. Inv. No. U4883-3 (ex: 213UW-5-3)

Dimensions:	H. 13.7 × W. 16.0 × D. 6.2 cm
Material:	Quartzite (orange)
Find context:	Area 221, square 666/435

Fragment with a polished surface whose undulating modelling suggests that it was once part of a statue (Fig. 5). The preserved part makes it difficult to identify what part it could be: maybe a part from the body of a sphinx?

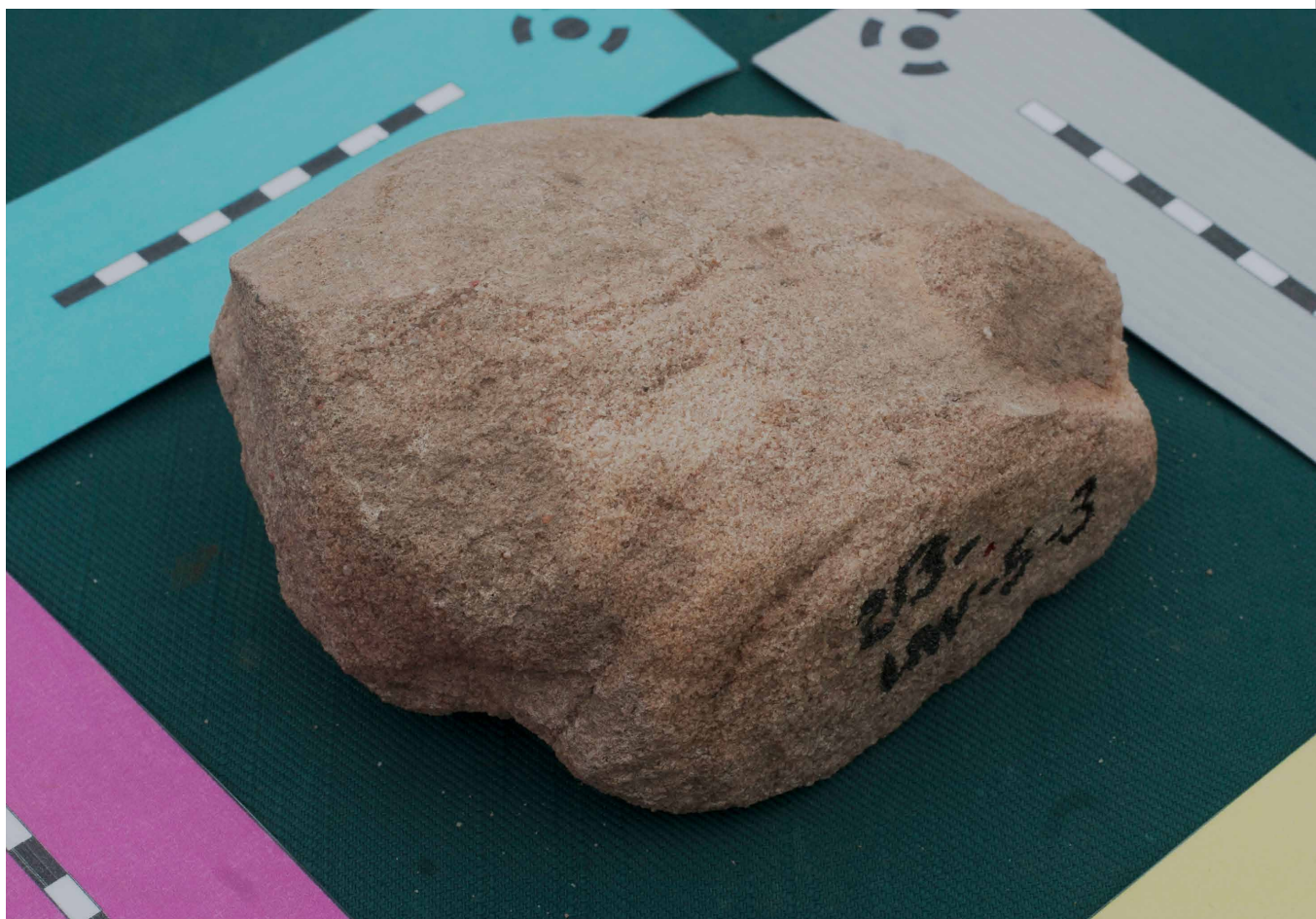


Fig. 5:
Inv. No. U4883-3
(Photo: Th. Graichen).

3. Inv. No. U4864-5 (ex: 213VV-2-5)

Dimensions:	H. 25.5 × W. 14.3 × D. 6.5 cm
Material:	Quartzite (orange/yellow)
Find context:	Area 221, square 665/434

Fragment of a limb of a statue (Fig. 6–7). The vertical concavity on the middle of the polished surface corresponds to the indication of the depression between a bone and a muscle. The angle formed by the protruding edge on one side makes it more likely to be the forearm of a seated statue, but a lower leg cannot be excluded.



Fig. 6:
Inv. No. U4864-5
(Photo: D. Raue).



Fig. 7:
Inv. No. U4864-5
(Photo: D. Raue).

4. Inv. No. U4818-4 (ex: 213VW-15-4)

Dimensions:	H. 11.0 × W. 12.5 × D. 8.3 cm
Material:	Quartzite (orange brown)
Find context:	Area 221, square 666/434

Fragment of a recipient (Fig. 8). It could be a fragment of a statue showing an individual presenting an offering bowl, similar for example to the Middle Kingdom figure of the chamberlain

Shenbu, found in Elephantine (HABACHI 1985, 93–94, cat. 70, pl. 164–165). Dating such a small fragment is, however, very uncertain.



Fig. 8:
Inv. No. U4818-4
(Photo: D. Raue).

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