



AN ARTISTIC AND MYTHOLOGICAL STUDY OF A NABATAEAN FEMALE SPHINX FROM PETRA, JORDAN

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ABSTRACT

In 1967 a group of sculptures was discovered in Petra during clearance works organised by the Department of Antiquities in Jordan in the Temenos of Qasr el Bint around the Temenos Gate. One of these sculptures was a high relief statue of a female sphinx.

Due to the paucity of information about this statue, this paper has been written to answer a number of questions: What was its original site or monument? When was it made? Who was the deity or deities it represented? Could there be another interpretation of its existence?

The answers to the above provide enlightenment of Nabataean styles of carvings and an insight into their religious thoughts.

Regarding the interpretation of the Female Sphinx. Three ideas have been suggested. First, it can be the main Nabataean goddess Allat, "the mother of the gods". Second, it is an image of Petra as a goddess. Third, it is carved on the Temenos Gate as a guardian of Petra city in general and its holy monuments like temples and tombs in particular.

KEYWORDS: Nabataeans, Petra, Sphinx, Sculpture, relief statue, Sandstone.

INTRODUCTION

The ancient city of Petra is situated in the south of the present day Hashemite Kingdom of. Lying hidden in the mountains east of Wadi Araba, it runs south from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba. An amount of sculpture has come to light at Petra among the free-standing buildings of the city centre, within the encircling cliffs.

The so-called 1967 Group of Sculptures comprises the largest find of sculptures made of sand stone from the Temenos of Qasr el Bint. The group was found in the south-east vestibule when the Department of Antiquities organised the clearance of the Temenos around the Temenos Gate (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Temenos Gate, Sand Stone, Petra (McKenzie 1990, pl. 56, a).

Most of the pieces are very fragmentary and many of the figured pieces of sculpture have been deliberately mutilated, whether by Moslem or Christian iconoclasts (Littleton and Blagg 1990, 269). In the initial publication, made shortly after their



Figure 2, a. mutilated Sphinx (Wright 1967-8 20-25, pls. XVII, Fig.2).

discovery in 1967-8, (Wright, 1967-8) Wright confined himself simply to publishing photographs of what he considered were the most interesting and representative pieces; these are described below:

A group of reliefs representing an eagle standing on a thunder-bolt; a griffin emerging from a floral scroll; several panels decorated with arms and armour; bust of Dionysus-Dushara, Ares; a panel with a bust of Athena on one side, bust of Hermes on an adjacent side, a fragmentary floral scroll and a female sphinx (Wright, 1967-8 20-25, pls. XVI-XVII).

A catalogue for an exhibition held in Paris of Jordanian antiquities makes clear that additional pieces were also found together with Wright's so-called 1967 Group of Sculpture. They are additional blocks of the frieze decorated with arms and armour, the panel decorated with a bust of Melpomene, and a floral capital (Zayadine 1986, 176-9). Perhaps the panel showing Apollo with his lyre and the separated head of this female sphinx were also found together with the so-called 1967 group of sculpture (Zayadine 1986, note 17, pl. 42a; McKenzie 1988, 86-7, 92-3).

The photo of the female sphinx published by Wright was of the statue before restoration of the female head (Fig. 2 a). Fig. 2 b shows the statue after restoration. The available written references mentioning this statue have neither provided us with information concerning the process of



Figure 2, b. Female Sphinx after restoration (McKenzie 1990, pl. 63,a).

restoration or the exact time of restoration. Therefore, we have tried to find an answer through personal communication with people from either the museum of Petra or the Department of Antiquities. Despite our inquiries to professionals no satisfactory answer was obtained. It must be noted here that in order to attach the head to the body of the statue, only the neck has been partially restored.

Information about the Petra Female Sphinx statue is very rare, it appears that the main writers about Nabataean sculpture did not study this statue; they just mentioned it as one of the finds of 1967 Group of Sculpture and very little information about its size and style of carvings was given (Wright 1967-8; McKenzie 1988, 1990, 2003; Lyttelton and Blagg 1990).

Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to discuss one of these sculptures; the one representing a female sphinx which is both architectural and figured.

The female sphinx statue is displayed at Petra Archaeological Museum registered as number JP7731B (Fig. 3). Unfortunately, the museum does not provide us with sufficient information concerning the statue, its exact place, or any reference to the myth of Petra Female Sphinx (Alghazawi 2011, 72).



Figure 3. The display method of the Petra Female Sphinx (Alghazawi 2011, Fig. 3.34)

THE PETRA FEMALE SPHINX STATUE AND THE 1967 GROUP OF SCULPTURES

The female sphinx statue is made of sand stone. Its height is 0.56 m; its width is 0.62

m. This architectural fragment is a high relief statue carved on a stone panel. It is a mythological creature consisting of two parts; the upper part is made of the female head, the neck. The female head is decorated with polis crown and laurel wreath. The hair consists of braids fallen down on the shoulders in a spiral form. The lower part consists of a lion's body and detailed wings spreading out from the shoulders and up. The lion is sitting and loads his weight on back feet; female breasts are projecting between its legs and its tail appears on its right leg towards its right. The upper hands are broken.

As already mentioned, almost none of these pieces of sculpture come from a stratified excavation, so that we do not know the exact structure where the pieces originated. From the artistic point of view and with having a statue of an eagle with a thunder-bolt within the same group leads us to say that they may belong to the same monument.

Since these sculptures were found near the Temenos Gate it was assumed to attribute them to the fallen parts of the Gate or to the earlier gate which was thought to have preceded the existing gate which Parr noticed as archaeological evidence (Parr 1967-8, 17). McKenzie has argued that the pieces which Wright published do form a homogeneous group (McKenzie 1988, 87), but neither she nor Wright has offered a reconstruction of the scheme of decoration in which the pieces are supposed to have had a place. McKenzie can be right in saying that the fragments do not come from the standing Temenos Gate but from a hypothetical structure which preceded the standing one (McKenzie 1988, 87), While Wright tentatively suggested that they may belong to the present Gate or to a completely destroyed one which preceded it (Wright 1967-8, 21).

Lyttelton and Blagg suggested that although the Group were all apparently found together, and are all of approximately

the same size, they may not all have come from the same monument in view of the differences in the style of carving. They suggested that a few pieces of sculpture which were used in the previous Gate were reused in the existing Temenos Gate. And some of the blocks decorated with arms and armour and the zoomorphic capitals may come from the Propylon to the Temple of Winged Lions (Lyttelton and Blagg 1990, 271, 272, 279).

GROUP OF SCULPTURES

Finding the 1967 Group of Sculptures at the area extending from the Temenos Gate to Qasr el Bint (the Temenos of Qasr el Bint) makes the relation between these monuments and the sculptures clear. The sandstone material of the 1967 Group of Sculpture and the Temenos Gate, the winged lions and Qasr el Bint makes the relation more strong. Parr in his study of Qasr el Bint cited that the epigraphic, architectural and archaeological evidences leads to the conclusion that it was constructed not later than the early years of the first century A.D. (Parr 1967-8, 16). McKenzie mentioned that all the sculptures from the Group is approximately of the same date; that is, the end of the first century B.C., contemporary with the Qasr el Bint and the Khasneh, this may be a little earlier (McKenzie 1988). Lyttelton and Blagg suggest that most of the Group of Sculptures dates from before the Roman annexation of 106 A.D. and is due to Nabataean rather than Roman patronage. Stylistically, the bust of Dionysus and that of Melpomene (the female bust holding a mask), both found with the Group, appears not to be later than the first century A.D., so they can be assigned to the Nabataean period (Lyttelton and Blagg 1990, 279). The style of carvings and the facial features of the Sphinx statue (the subject of this paper) is the same style and features of the two statues mentioned before, it is even close in

the treatment of the eyes, nose, mouth, chin and hair of the Melpomene bust (McKenzie 1990, pl. 62b); it also has an identical wreath on its head. The feathers of the wings of the eagle are the same as those on the sphinx, so we can say that it returns back to the same period not later than the first century A.D. (McKenzie 1990, pl. 63c).

FEMALE SPHINX REPRESENTATIONS IN NABATAEAN AND OTHER CULTURES

Nabataean kingdom

Few sphinx statues were found at different Nabataean sites, the main distinctive one is a female one (the subject of this article) found at the Temenos of Qasr el Bint at Petra (Wright 1967-1968, pl. XVII, Fig. 2), The head of the statue was destroyed, but some restoration has been made (Fig. 3). In addition, two relief statues representing a sphinx carved on a tomb façade were found at Hegra (Mada'in Saleh) (Fig. 4) (Glueck 1965, 242, Pl. 8a).



Figure 4. Two relief statues made of sandstone represents a female sphinx carved on a tomb façade at Hegra (Mada'in Saleh) (Glueck 1965, 242, Pl. 8a).

Palmyra

Two representations of sphinx in relief made of limestone have been found in Bel



Figure 5. Two representations of sphinx in relief limestone, Palmyra. (Colledge 1976, Fig. 24).



Figure 6. A terracotta female sphinx in relief, Palmyra (Colledge 1976, 57).

temple in Palmyra (Fig. 5) (Colledge 1976, Fig. 24). Another female sphinx in relief has been presented in a terracotta plaque (Fig. 6) (Colledge 1976, 57). The pose of this female sphinx is close to the Petra one.

Egyptian

Perhaps the most famous monument to have survived from ancient Egypt is the Great Sphinx which crouches beside the Valley Temple of recumbent lion with royal human head; it has the features of King Khafre and was considered later by ancient Egyptians as an image of the sun god. It is believed to guard the Giza necropolis. The sphinx form itself, however, was essentially symbolic of the majesty and power of the king (Andrews 1994, 78).

Sphinxes in general were very common in different Egyptian periods; it appears in many shapes and materials. A female sphinx as an amulet has already been known in the Middle Kingdom and continued in the New Kingdom (Andrews 1994, 78, Fig. 78).

Mesopotamian

Groups of female sphinx have been uncovered in different Assyrian sites such as Nineveh (Reads 2003, Fig. 60). It is close to Petra female sphinx in two features, the crown and the wings. Another two female sphinx were recovered in Dur Sharokin (Fig. 7) and Kalekh (Fig. 8) (Parrot 1980, Figs. 180, 188). Both of them were highly influenced ancient Egyptian art. In addition

to that, some Nimrud ivories representing female sphinx have been found in many Assyrian sites (Safer and Sa'id 1987, figs. 32, 37-39, 72, 122). The majorities of these ivories were characterized with details and ornamented with many signs, especially the crowns.



Figure 7. Assyrian female sphinx, Dur Sharokin (Parrot 1980, Fig. 180).



Figure 8. Assyrian female sphinx, Kalekh (Parrot 1980, Fig.188).

Phoenician

The winged female and male sphinxes were also well known among the Phoenicians. Groups of relief and round statues made of ivory, terra-cotta and



Figure 9, 10, 11. Phoenician female sphinx, Salamis, Ibiza, Aradus (Moscati 2001, Figs. 219, 439, 360).



Figure 12, 13. Phoenician female sphinx, Nimrud (Moscati 2001, Fig. 459).

alabaster have been found at different sites. The majority of them were female sphinx ornamented with lotus flowers and wearing a crown resembling the crown of Upper Egypt (Figs. 9-13). One was found at a royal tomb at Salamis in Cyprus. It may have been used for protection purposes and it helps in life after death (Moscati 2001, figs. 38, 219, 361, 399, 439, 458, 458).

Greek

In Greek Mythology, a fabulous monster with the head and breasts of a woman, the body of a dog or bull, the claws of a lion, tail of a dragon and the wings of a bird was known. It is described in Greek mythology such as the story of Oedipus as fierce guardians of the crossroads (Stewart 1998, 354,355).

A number of female sphinx made of marble, Bronze and terracotta have been

found in different Greek sites, some of them were found above gravestones at a cemetery, while others were set upon tall columns. (Figs. 14-16) (Boardman 1973, Fig. 72; Andronicos 1975, Acropolis museum, Fig. 16; Delphi Museum, Fig. 6). They are close to the Nabataean one in many aspects such as the crown and wings.

It is worth mentioning that all of the female sphinx statues found in other civilizations sites are close to the Petra one in many features such as the crown, wings, lion body, but only the Palmyra one (Fig. 6) portrays the female breasts. Petra one is the only one that loads its weight on its back legs. The majority of them are portrayed in frontal pose while the Petra one (Fig. 2.b) and few others are portrayed in profile (Figs. 6,7, 14).



Figure 14, 15, 16. Greek female sphinx, Attica, Athena, Delphi (Boardman 1973, Fig. 72; Andronicos 1975, Acropolis museum, his Fig. 16; Delphi Museum, his Fig. 6).

ART STYLE

Nabataean sculpture in general is divided into three main groups. The first one is the non-figurative group (Patrich 1990a, 1990b), or sometimes it is called Abstraction or Cubism style. This includes what is called some times by scholars Eye Idols or betyls or stelae; it is in general relief rectangular stone block and few round ones were found. The Nabataeans carved the statues of their deities in this style because they believed that nothing looked like the god. This style is widespread in the southern part of the Nabataean Kingdom, particularly in Petra, concentrated mainly on the Siq (the main entrance of the city), in Hegra (Mada'in Saleh) and in Wadi Rum.

The second group is figurative, with Greek influence and oriental features such as the group of statues from Khirbit Al-Tannur. It can be called Realistic style because it includes Hellenistic influence with local elements. This style reflects common features of sculpture in the Nabataean Kingdom and other Arab centres like Palmyra in Syria and Hatra in Iraq. It also has some sculptural elements from the Moabite and Ammonite who lived in Jordan before the Nabataeans.

The third group is Greek-Roman influence, such as some of the statues which were found at Petra and on the façade of the

Treasury. It can be called Classical style because it reflects features of the Classical period of Ancient Greece around 4th century B.C. in Greece. The female sphinx (the subject of the paper) can be classified in the third group, the Classical style.

As it is shown on the female sphinx statue, the Nabataean sculptor reflects freedom of composition and subject; He transcended ordinary figures into extraordinary universal signs. He gives attention to proportion; human anatomy, movement of the body, details, and texture.

He expresses the human head in a more naturalistic manner and studied the facial features for its aesthetic. The rigid and silent facial expression in the realistic Nabataean style or what is called local Hellenistic style was replaced by a solemn facial expression.

As can be seen from the statue, the sculptor succeeded in putting each element or symbol in the appropriate place and size, the result was a harmonious art work and a beautiful and meaningful statue.

THE PURPOSE AND MYTH OF PETRA FEMALE SPHINX STATUE

The Petra female sphinx is a mythological creature; it includes different kinds of symbols: human, such as the female head: plant, such as laurel wreath: animal, such as eagle wings and the lion or lioness body

and breast, in addition to the polis crown which is considered as still life symbol. These symbols are originally signs of other gods and goddesses, the Nabataeans gathered these symbols into one fabulous creature to embody a specific idea or a specific chief god or goddess in a composite form. In order to understand Nabataean ideas from this mythological creature we need to analyse the symbols used in this art work.

Symbols

The symbols appearing in this statue can be classified into four categories depending into their origin:

A. Human symbols

Human female head

The Petra female sphinx consists of a lion or lioness body with human female head. If we compare it to the Egyptian great sphinx, which was considered in later periods by ancient Egyptians as an image of the sun god, we can say that the Petra one may represent a goddess.

Female breast

The idea of representing the human female breast goes back to the stone ages. The ancient people used to form female statues representing a nude woman with exaggeration of her breast as a sign of fertility.

Among Nabataean sculpture we find many examples reflecting this idea, such as terracotta figurines (Parlasca 1990; Khouri 2002, 9) and also the important statue from Khirbit Et-Tannur representing the bust of Attargatiss, the main goddess worshipped in this temple (Glueck 1937, 1965, 31; Hammond 1990, 118). In this bust the Nabataean sculptor covered all her body, cheeks and neck with plant leaves and left her breast uncovered to reflect the idea of fertility.

B. Plant symbols

Laurel wreath

The laurel leaf or wreath so frequently employed in Nabataean and in general Hellenistic-Semitic art was a symbol of victory and of immortality, as were other leaves and fruits, particularly in relationship to the phenomenon and promise of regeneration and rebirth, survival and restoration in this world and in the next (Glueck 1967, 37).

C. Animal symbols

Animals form an important part of symbolism in the ancient art particularly in Mesopotamian and Egyptian art. They also played an important role in Nabataean art; they appear in a wide range of Nabataean sculpture and architecture. In the female sphinx two of them were used:

Eagle wings

The eagle is a symbol of height; from its lofty height it takes a broad look at the ground below and for that it symbolises control. Because it flies higher than any other bird, it is symbolic of divine majesty. It also symbolises the father. The headed eagle symbolises the permanency of that country's power and might (Stewart 1998, 140,141).

As a familiar symbol of divinity, the eagle was well-known in the ancient Near East and among the Nabataeans in particular. It was the most common animal symbol used at Petra and other sites. It is represented at Si'a in the Syrian Hauran and in many examples at Petra, such as the Bold relief of an eagle, with opened wings, dominating the eagle shrine. The round statue of an eagle was found within the 1967 Group of Sculptures around the Temenos Gate (Glueck 1965, 474, pl. 143; Lyttelton and Blagg 1990, 27) and the four eagles appearing at the top of the Treasury at Petra are indicative of its importance.

In Khirbet Tannur in southern Jordan, the eagle symbol appears above the statue

of the goddess Attargatiss (Glueck 1965, 66, pl. 32). In Hegra (Mada'in Saleh) in northern Arabia, eagles are comparatively common on the doorways of tombs where the eagle served as an identifying attribute of the deity (Jaussen and Savignac 1909, figs, 182, 184, 186, 399, 400; Glueck 1965, 471-4).

The eagle is a common symbol of Zeus the main Greek god, Jupiter the main Roman god and Dushara the main Nabataean god.

Lion or lioness body

The lion is assigned a kingly status; authoritative, independent, and brave (Stewart 1998, 252). It is used for protection purposes and sometimes appeared in front of the city gates, the entrances of palaces and temples, and doorways of tombs.

Groups of lion statues have been found at different Nabataean sites such as Khirbet Tannur; in one of them with the statue of Attargatiss as one of her symbols (Glueck 1965, pls. 160, 161). Two-faced lions appeared on the façade of the treasury at Petra, at Qassr Alrabeh (Glueck 1965, Pls. 163 a, b) and also above one of the tomb façades at Hegra (Mada'in Saleh) (Jaussen and Savignac 1909, B17).

D. Still life

The only still life symbol that can be seen in the female sphinx statue is the Polis crown. Crowns, in general, have been worn since ancient periods; some examples were detected in the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Persian, Greek, Roman and other cultures' art in different shapes. It symbolises sovereignty, high rank, eternal life, rewards, kingship, and victory or another special condition (Stewart 1998, 119, 120).

The Polis crown is a symbol of the fortification walls which were used to surround ancient cities. It distinguishes the sculptures of Tyche as a city protector. Almost every Hellenistic and Roman town and temple was graced by her presence. She

was very popular at different Nabataean sites such as Khirbet Tannur as evidenced by her presence there in several sculptures (Glueck 1965, pls. 46, 48).

DISCUSSION

It seems that the Nabataeans saw in symbols in general, and in specific the symbols which appeared in the Female Sphinx like the eagle wings, female breast, laurel wreath, lion body and the Polis crown, the handiwork or agents or portents of the design and will of the deities, upon whose favour their fortunes depended both in the temporal present and curtailed hereafter.

So, who was the deity or deities represented in the female sphinx? Or does it reflect another idea? From our previous discussion about the symbols and their relation with specific deities we can suggest three ideas:

The first is that the female sphinx represents one of the Nabataean deities. The female features of the sphinx, the female face and the breast, lead us to say that the deity who is represented is a goddess. It seems that she was a very important goddess at the Nabataean pantheon who deserves to appear with all these signs. It can be the main Nabataean goddess Allat, in regard to the frequency and distribution of her references in Nabataean inscriptions; by the time of Rabbel II she could be referred to as "the mother of the gods" (Hammond 1990, 123).

Unlike Al-Uzza, Allat went beyond her purely Arabic origin and followed the path of Dusares in the wider Hellenistic world (Hammond 1990, 123), not only in her look but also in her role. She became guardian goddess; this can be seen from the Polis crown which appears on her head. She became also a warrior and victory goddess; the laurel wreath on her head and the eagle wings on her back reflect these ideas. Sourdél would carry these syncretism still farther and see a fertility aspect developed

having already possessed herself of the feline surrogate symbols that goddess also had acquired. From the fertility aspect could likewise come a vegetation aspect as well (Sourdel 1952, 72-74, 118-119; Glueck 1965, 416; Hammond 1990, 123); the feline symbol in the lower part of the statue represents a body of a lion which usually accompanies the goddess of fertility (Glueck 1965, pls. 44, 161, a, b). Fertility can be reflected by the female breasts appearing between the legs of the lion or lioness.

This result is compatible with the result of Hammond about the supreme goddess of the Temple of the Winged Lions Allat; as was the goddess of the temple of Et-Tannur (Hammond 1990, 123). We discussed before that the 1967 Group of Sculptures found at the Temenos Gate of Qasr el Bint which leads also to the Propylon to the Temple of Winged Lions; this was a previous suggestion in this paper about the origin of the 1967 Group of Sculptures. This ensures the strong relation between the female sphinx and Allat, the supreme goddess of the Temple of the Winged Lions.

The second suggestion is that the female sphinx represents Petra as a goddess. It seems that Nabataeans sometimes used to deify their cities; a Nabataean inscription found at Qattar ed-Deir at Petra, interpreted by Milik, that the city of Bosra was worshiped among Nabataeans as a god; Starcky also agreed (Augé 1990, 131). Petra, in this case, deserves more than Bosra to be worshiped as a god or goddess because it is the capital of the Nabataean kingdom and it is a very important religious centre for the Nabataeans all over the kingdom.

So, if we consider the human female head a representation of Petra as a goddess, we can say that the other deities accumulate around their city to take care of it, such as Dusares the master of Nabataean deities which is embodied here in the wings of an eagle which appeared fluttering on the back of the figure as a sign of giving power and protection to the city from its main god. This

interpretation can be applied to the statue of Khafre the Egyptian Pharaoh. It shows the king enthroned, with the falcon of the god Horus (the god of upper Egypt) enfolding the back of the head with its wings for protection (Janson and Janson, 1977, Fig. 61).

The consort of Dusares, Al-Uzza or Allat the goddess of fertility is embodied here in two symbols; the lion body and the female breast. The lion body used to accompany her representations as a guard; we know that the lion accompanies the goddess Attargatiss at El-Tannur (Glueck 1965, pl. 31). As mentioned earlier, some scholars think that the goddess of Et-Tannur is Allat or Al-Uzza. So, the goddess Al-Uzza or Allat represented in our statue by the lion give power and protection to the city and its people.

The other symbol that represents the goddess Al-Uzza or Allat as a goddess of fertility is the female breast, She symbolises birth, life, plenty, innovation and prosperity to the city of Petra and its people.

Other evidence may ensure that the Nabataeans worshiped Petra as a goddess is the widespread evidence of Tyche representations: the god of the river swimming below her foot on Nabataean



Figure 17. Nabataean coin, portray Tyche with the god of river swimming below her legs (Augé 1990, Pl. 1. Fig. 1. a, b).

coins which were minted in Petra and Damascus (Fig. 17). This representation of Tyche is a Hellenistic inspiration from the goddess of the city of Antioch (Boardman 1973, Fig. 186; Augé 1990, 131-136). This similarity in the two representations ensures that Petra was considered and worshiped as a goddess.

The Third idea is that the female sphinx statue carved on the present Gate or on the gate that preceded the present one can be considered as guardian of the crossroads. The same idea is known in Greek mythology; their protective function would be entirely appropriate to the gateway of Petra's main street and its centre.

CONCLUSION

Petra city has features and evidence that qualified it to become a holy city for the Nabataeans. In addition to its geographical differences from its surroundings, it is protected by a series of mountains; it includes many important religious monuments and features which ensure its Holiness.

Free standing temples: like the Great temple which may have been used for worshipping many Nabataean and other nationalities deities. Qasr el Bint temple dedicated to their main god Dusares and the Winged Lions temple dedicated to Al-Uzza, goddess to the consort of Dusares.

Petra also includes huge number of deities niches carved on the mountains façades, these niches are spread all over the city to keep the connection between the worshippers and their deities stronger and easier in any time and place from the entrance of the city to its inside and borders.

In addition, Petra includes a huge number of rock-cut tombs; the Nabataeans carved their tombs in solid sandstone and decorated them with symbols and deity statues and wrote inscriptions on their facades to help the tombs and their contents last forever. They took care to bury their dead inside and not outside their city because they believed that their city was a holy place or a deity who can offer them immortality and a happy afterlife.

Sacrificial places are other religious features at Petra; these places are spread-out over many sites especially above the high places around the city. They allowed the

Nabataeans to practice some of their religious rituals in an open area.

The triclinium is another religious monument featured in many places in the Petra region; it is the place where different levels of Nabataeans gathered at different religious occasions to have sacred meals, at which the king sometimes served his people.

Some of Petra habitants and Nabataean people visiting Petra from other cities took care to carve inscriptions on the rock dedicated to their deities; many of these inscriptions have been found on rock surfaces at Petra.

All of these monuments and features made the entire city holy and it allowed the Nabataeans citizens to practice their rituals at any place and any time inside their peaceful and spiritual city.

After analysing the features and elements of the Petra female sphinx statue, it can be assumed that the Nabataeans believed in Petra city as a goddess, and worthy to be worshipped as a holy site. Moreover, it is safe to adopt the idea that the statue represents Petra city as a goddess. Or it may represent one of the Nabataean deities. The female features of the sphinx, lead us to assume that it may represent the Nabataean goddess Allat, as the mother of gods. Or it is simply carved on the Temenos Gate which is mainly located on the centre of the city as a guardian of Petra in general and its holy monuments like temples and tombs in particular. As already mentioned before, the Great Sphinx of Giza is thought to protect the valley temple and the pyramids and its contents. Also one of the Greek sphinxes found above gravestone at a cemetery (Fig. 14), insure the relationship between the sphinx as a guardian to temples and tombs with its contents.

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