

**Publishing and Studying  
a Statue of a Reclining Lion from Tebtynis**

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**Abstract:**

This study publishes one of the limestone statues of a reclining lion preserved in the Egyptian Museum. The statue is from Tebtynis and came as a result of the excavations of the Italian-French mission that has been working in the region for some time. The research paper aims to publish the statue for the first time, specifying its style, the time period to which it belongs, determining its function, and an attempt to accurately determine its location in the region in which it was found.

**Key Words:**

Publishing, Tebtynis, lion, symbolism, Greco-Roman

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## A Statue of a Reclining Lion from Tebtynis

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This study is based on the publication of a reclining lion statue preserved in the Egyptian Museum, made of limestone. The statue is from Tebtynis and was discovered as a result of excavations by the Italian-French mission working in the area for some time.

The research paper aims to publish the statue for the first time, specifying its style, the time period it belongs to, defining its function, and attempting to accurately determine its location in the area where it was found.

**Subject:** Full statue of a reclining lion on a small base.

**Material:** Limestone

**Current preservation number and location:** Egyptian Museum (E 2019.02.39).

**Previous preservation location:** Bibliotheca Alexandrina Museum (Inv. No.4771).

**Statue condition:** Good

**Measurements:** W.9, 8cm. / H.6, 7cm.

**Description:** Statue of a reclining lion on a rectangular small base. The size of the statue is detailed, with the head facing towards the left side of the statue. Its front paws are crossed so that the right foot is parallel to the direction of the face, and the left front foot extends over it. The claws on the paws are detailed, appearing complete and clear on the left foot while only a part is visible on the right foot.

The mane is depicted around the head with sharp lines in a geometric shape lacking smoothness, which is also evident in the facial features, with almond-shaped eyes, mouth, and moustache depicted accurately. The tail is depicted curving upwards on the base, with only the upper part visible between the feet, disappearing under the bent left hind foot in a crouching position, with only a part of the claws visible.

**Analytical study:** The lion is one of the most famous living creatures that have been widely accepted in depictions throughout history. The lion, this majestic creature symbolizing strength and grandeur, held great importance in ancient civilizations

due to its various symbols and meanings beyond being just a predatory animal. Its awe-inspiring nature held a significant place in the hearts of ancient Egyptians, therefore, they made it a symbol for several deities, and perhaps the choice of the lioness as a symbol for deities came from the ancient Egyptian understanding of its nature as fiercer than its male counterpart; thus, making it a symbol for dozens of deities, including the most important ones<sup>1</sup>.

The symbolism of the lion varied, including religious and political symbolism, with the most important being the symbolism of protection. Therefore, it resembled most of the pharaohs as the king was the protector of his people and the lion was a symbol of his victorious dominance. As a result, what is known as the Sphinx appeared, with the head of a king connected to the body of a lion while wearing a lion's tail on his clothes<sup>2</sup>.

There is no better evidence for the elevated status of lions in ancient Egypt than many individuals adopting names related to lions. They also gave their kings titles derived from lions' names, and many cities and villages were named after them. This status enjoyed by lions in ancient Egyptian thought was reflected in art through various forms such as sculpture, engravings, paintings, and minor arts<sup>3</sup>. Lions also appeared prominently in ancient Greek civilization, with one famous appearance being common decoration on shields in classical times. Of course, there is also the well-known image of Heracles either killing or wearing the skin of a lion<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> - Wit C. de, "*Le Role et le sens du lion dans l'Egypte ancienne*", Leiden, 1951, PP.123-137.

<sup>2</sup> - Erman A., "*life in ancient Egypt*", New York, 1971, P. 55, 59

<sup>4</sup> - Ragheb, Ashraf Abdel Raouf, *The Lion in Ancient Egyptian Art*, unpublished master's thesis, Faculty of Arts, Tanta University, 1996, a b/c/d.

<sup>4</sup> - Kitchell, JR., & Kenneth, F., *Animals in ancient world, from A To Z*, London & New York., 2014, 109-111.

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Lions were also frequently mentioned in Greek literary sources as a unique animal used in comparisons for warriors by Homer. In Hellenistic times, Macedonia showed great appreciation for hunting lions as Alexander the Great was depicted hunting them on mosaics in Pella city. He was also portrayed wearing a lion's skin resembling Heracles on coins<sup>5</sup>.

The lion was not just a predatory animal for the Romans, but it became a powerful symbol associated with power, courage, and superiority. This transformation can be attributed to the increasing communication between Rome and Eastern civilizations, bringing with it the secrets and myths associated with this majestic creature. With the availability of communication channels between Rome and Eastern civilizations, the lion played an important role in Roman thought. In Eastern civilizations, the lion was associated with many gods and heroes, such as the god Mithras in Persian religion, and the goddess Cybele in Phoenician religion. Therefore, the Romans brought these Eastern symbols and meanings into their thinking, and the lion came to represent strength, courage, and sovereignty in Roman culture as seen in literary and artistic sources. The image of the lion spread in Roman art whether in sculpture or mosaic or minor arts like coins and gemstones<sup>6</sup>. As well as in funerary art, in Roman tombs, it was depicted as a guardian of the tombs especially on soldiers' tombs as a symbol of bravery and courage<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> -for more details about the lion in Greek art see:

Rambo, E, *Lions in Greek Art*, PhD, Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, 1918, 1-56

Richter, G., *Animals in Greek sculpture*, Oxford University, 1930, 3-9

<sup>6</sup> - for more details about the lion in the roman art see:

Issa, Rehab Eid Mohamed, *The lion in Roman art from the Augustan period until the end of the third century AD*, unpublished master's thesis, Faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> - for more details about the lion in funerary art see:

Rehaan, D., *sculpture in the Severian dynasty (193-235 A.D.)*, unpublished master's thesis, Faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University, 2010.

The symbolism of the lion continued to evolve in the Coptic art where one symbol could be interpreted in multiple ways. Moving on to the Islamic era, we find that the symbolism of the lion did not receive great acceptance in Egypt during that time despite being a distinctive artistic element in Fatimid art<sup>8</sup>.

From the above presentation, we can conclude how the lion has been an important artistic source throughout history. Of particular interest are Greek and Roman arts where it always symbolizes nobility, courage, and supreme power. The lion in both Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt appears in various forms, but most of them are focused on the images of protection and guarding. The guarding lion is the most common form in Egypt during the Ptolemaic and Roman eras. Traditionally, it is not the Sphinx which represents the king's head and a lion's body. We notice multiple positions of the guarding lions, with the most common being:

**The first position** where the lion is lying down with its legs extended in front of it.

**The second position** is where the lion is lying down with its legs crossed, one above the other, and turning its head to one side.

**The third position** is where the lion is resting on its hind legs and base while its front legs are straight in a state of readiness<sup>9</sup>.

The statue style, which is the subject of this study, it belongs to the protective lion style that belongs to the second style. It has crossed front legs and turns its head to

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<sup>8</sup> - for more details about the lion in islamic art see:

Ahmed,Mahmoud,H.: *The symbolism of the lion in Coptic and Islamic art in Egypt ,an artistic archeological study*, (MKAQ), Journal of faculty of archeology of south valley university , No.13,2018 .

<sup>9</sup> - For more details about guard lions and their most famous types, see:

Magdy,H: *The guardian lion statues in Egypt during the Graeco-Roman Period*, Annal of Arab archaeologists , Volume 16, Issue 16, 2013, Page 57-73

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the left side. It was found in Tebtynis (Umm el-Barigat)<sup>10</sup> in Soknebtynis Temple area during excavations that started in 1929 by Breccia. Then between 1930-1936 by Anti C. and finally by French-Italian mission since 1988, where large parts belonging to the temple and surrounding area were discovered<sup>11</sup>.

Many houses and public baths were found indicating that this area was inhabited from Ptolemaic era until Roman era, as well as being an important centre for economic and cultural activities<sup>12</sup>.

Excavations around the temple area continued intermittently until 2018 when work resumed with a goal to fully uncover it.

The excavation season for 2018 was very fruitful as new buildings were discovered around Soknebtynis Temple dating mostly to late 3rd century BC.

Luxurious houses with distinctive spaces and layouts testify that the Roman Ptolemaic city Tebtynis was home to a prosperous society with significant wealth<sup>13</sup>.

The Dromos of Tefresudjty road is located to the east of the Soknebtynis temple in which the excavations had stopped in 1992 but resumed in 2020, revealing numerous buildings in the area. Among the discoveries, especially in the southern part, were several symposiums and triclinium halls dating back to the mid-2nd century BC to the 1st century AD. One of the halls precedes a staircase with four steps surrounded by two rectangular bases for statues resembling those that preceded

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<sup>10</sup> - Galazzi, C. & Minaglou, G. H., *Fouilles anciennes et nouvelles sur le site de Tebtynis*, Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale 89 (1989), p. 179-191

<sup>11</sup> - Chronique d'Égypte, *les fouilles*, Volume 7, Issue 13-14, Bruxelles, 1932, pp. 57-95.

for more details about the different parts of the region, see:

Minaglou, G. H., *Tebtynis et l'urbanisme gréco-romain dans le Fayoum*, Topoi, volume 5/1, Paris, 1995, pp. 111-118.

<sup>12</sup> - Rondot, V., *Tebtynis II. Le temple de Soknebtynis et son dromos*. Fouilles franco-italiennes, Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire (2004).

<sup>13</sup> - Galazzi, C. & Minaglou, G. H., *Tebtynis*, Bulletin archéologique des Écoles françaises à l'étranger, Égypte, 2020, 1-28

the Soknebtynis temple<sup>14</sup>. The temple was guarded by two lions of the first type - previously mentioned - with parallel extended front paws. This lion guardian appeared not only in front of the Temple of Tebtynis but also in the city of Maadi<sup>15</sup>, where statues of linked lions flanked the sides of the Ptolemaic temple's gateway<sup>16</sup>.

**Analysis:** This statue's style is one of the most famous forms that characterized the Ptolemaic era, depicting a naturalistic reclining lion turning its head to one side with its front paws crossed and carefully sculpted mane. This form not only appeared in the Ptolemaic era but also in various models during the Dynastic period with some differences, such as head direction, execution of details, depiction of crossed paws, or tail position, This was beginning in the era of the 18th Dynasty (the period of Tuthmosis III), and it continued to appear after that during the era of the various dynasties until the late era<sup>17</sup>, we also mention the most famous of them: a granite statue dating back to the era of Nectanebo I (30th Dynasty) in the form of a reclining lion, it is likely that it is from the Saqqara Temple and is preserved in the Vatican Museum<sup>18</sup>.

This form originated in Mesopotamia, as evidenced by some figurines dating back to 3000 BC at the British Museum. The influence reached ancient Egyptian civilization

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<sup>14</sup> - Galazzi ,C.& Minaglou,G. H.,*Tebtynis*, Bulletin archéologique des Écoles françaises à l'étranger, Égypte , 2021,p.11

<sup>15</sup> -- Bresciani E. et ali, "*Medinet Madi*", Archeological Guide, Geodia Edizioni", Internazionali, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> - Aufrère,S., Golvin, J.-Cl., *L'Égypte restituée (III): Sites, temples et pyramides de Moyenne et Basse Égypte de la naissance de la civilisation pharaonique a l'époque grecoromaine*, Paris,1997,pp.198-201

<sup>17</sup> - Warmenbol E., "*Sphinx, les gardiens de l'Égypte*", Bruxelles, 2006, p. 118

<sup>18</sup> -Harby,S .:*The styles and trends in the ancient Egyptian art(3800 B.C.-332 B.C.)* , Egyptian book authority,Cairo,2014,p.209

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during the reign of Thutmose III due to military campaigns that brought Babylonian culture to Egypt<sup>19</sup>.

The lion guardian motif also appeared in Greek art from the 6th century BC onwards<sup>20</sup>. The appearance of the guardian lion in Greek art long preceded this form, as it appeared in different positions on temple gates, an example of this is its appearance in the Mycenaean civilization (Bronze Age), decorating the gate of one of its temples<sup>21</sup>.

This style also appeared in Madinet Maadi with similar details but with some variations, such as a tail next to the statue. The raw material used was consistent, indicating the widespread presence of this style and artistic technique in this region<sup>22</sup>. The style of this statue was not limited to limestone only, but extended to other materials such as wood<sup>23</sup> and some terracotta vessels<sup>24</sup>.

From the above, we can conclude that this form was not limited to being depicted and executed for protection in temples only, but also appeared in some forms for decoration in homes and palaces.

**Dating** : can be confidently traced back to the Ptolemaic era for several reasons. Firstly, the temple where the statue was found belongs to the Ptolemaic era. Secondly, the temple precinct where the statue was discovered contains many homes dating mostly from the late 2nd century BC to the late 1st century AD.

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<sup>19</sup> - For more details about the relationship of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia see:  
Jane A. Hill, Philip Jones, Antonio J, *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of kingship in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia*, Philadelphia, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> - Boardman, J., *Greek art*, 2016

<sup>21</sup> - *ibid*, pl. 14

<sup>22</sup> - Bresciani E. et al., 2010, pl. 14

<sup>23</sup> - Massoud, A: *the wooden artwork in Egypt in Greco-Roman age*, unpublished PHD's thesis, Faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> -- Magdy, H, 2013, p. 62, pl. 6



**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, we can date this statue between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. and the 1st century A.D., especially during the Ptolemaic era, as evident from the depiction of the head and mouth which bear a strong resemblance to statues from the ancient city of Maadi executed in the same style. Regarding its use, based on the excavations that have been found, most of which represent service buildings, whether houses or banquet halls and meeting rooms, due to its size, it may have adorned the entrance of one of those halls (as previously mentioned from finding two rectangular bases). Therefore, its size was probably not as large as the statues on temple gates. This conclusion is further supported by the way the head with the turban and the geometrically executed facial details were crafted, indicating that the statue was from one of the modest artistic workshops. Since it did not adorn a temple, there was not much emphasis on its execution source; rather, the focus was on its presence in the place regardless of the quality of manufacturing and skill.

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The statue under study

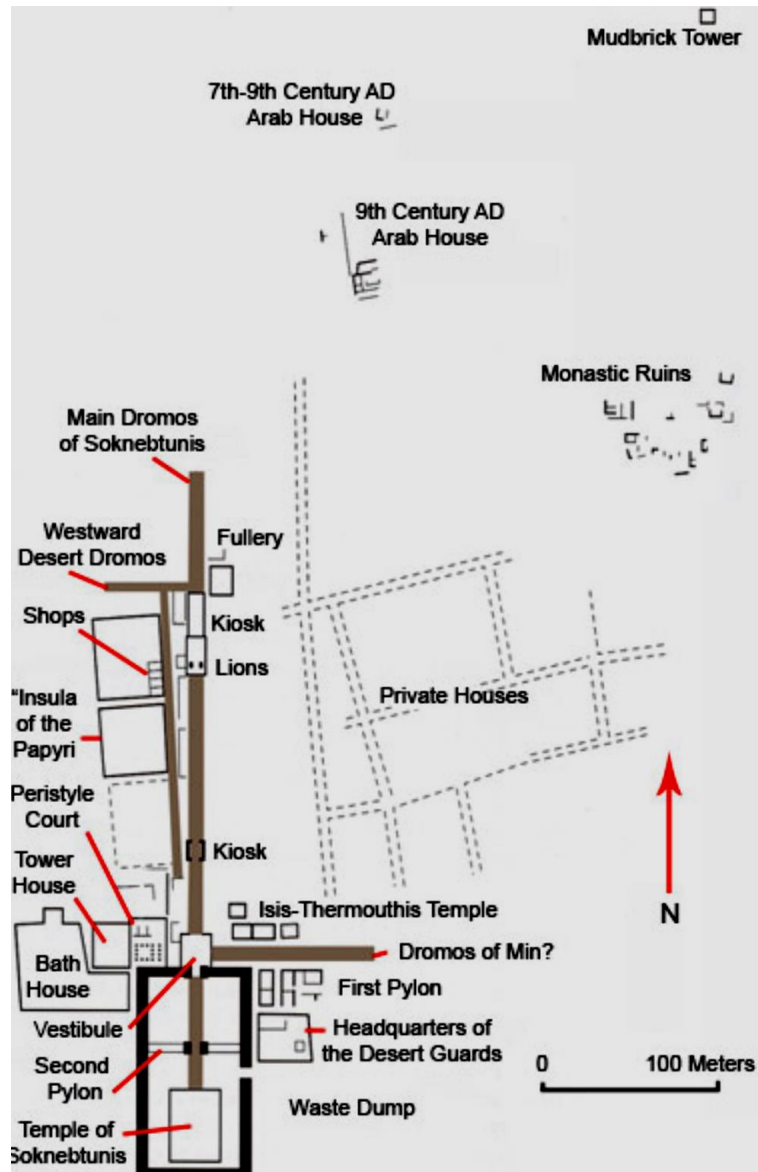


Fayoum and its most important archaeological sites

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Soknebtunis temple



Dromos of *Tefresudjty*



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Discovered areas south of dromos of *Tefresudjty*



One of the halls of Symposion



Statue of barkal (Amenhotep III, 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty)  
(The British Museum, No.EA2)



Statue from Dendara (30<sup>th</sup> dynasty)  
(The Walters Art Museum, No.22.40)



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Saqqara temple statue (Necatnebo I, 30<sup>th</sup> dynasty)



Statue of Madinet Maadi





The guardian lion of Soknebtynis temple

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