

EGYPTIAN ROCK CRYSTAL RING WITH A SPHINX

Egyptian, 1295 - 1069 BC.

Rock crystal

Height; 4.1 cm Length: 3.2 cm

Reference: 29944



The design and execution of the sphinx is masterful. It rests with its tail characteristically following the contour of its right, hind leg, around which it rests. Like most Egyptian sphinxes, the head of this example is covered by a nemes-headress, here plain, to the front of which has been affixed a uraeus, or sacred cobra, its tail undulating over its top. Attention has been paid to the detailed rendering of the toes on the extended front paws. The round face of the sphinx is dominated by large, almond-shaped eyes, set into fairly deep sockets with its eyebrows rendered by incision. The nose exhibits wide wings, its nostrils drilled and prominent. A faint philtrum, or depression, under the center of the nose separates it from the wide, horizontally aligned mouth with its fleshy lips. The resulting physiognomy gives one the impression of strength and power, devoid as it is of the bland, idealizing features which often characterize the faces of such composite beasts. That impression contributes significantly to the monumentality inherent in this miniature, jewel-like masterpiece.

Whereas it is difficult to compare the face on our sphinx, despite its inherent monumentality, to much larger examples in stone in order to suggest the identity of the pharaoh represented, its round face and non-idealizing features with their pronounced cheek bones resonate with physiognomic features encountered in some representations of Rameses II.

Rock crystal, perhaps termed *menu hedej*, in the hieroglyphs was a stone much coveted for amulets and miniature, deluxe vases but its use, because of its rarity, was very restricted.

CONDITION

Complete. Excellent state of conservation

PROVENANCE

Ex collection S.A., 1960's, ex English private collection

BIBLIOGRAPHY

For the innovations in finger rings under the reign of Tutankhamun, see

Carol Andrews, *Ancient Egyptian Jewellery* (London, 1990), 166; 165 for the finger ring of Rameses II with the paired horses; and page 50 for the Egyptian phrase *menu hedej*.

For the examples in Zagazig, see

Mohamed I. Bakr, Helmut Brandl, and Faye Kalloniatis (ed), *Egyptian Antiquities from Kufur Nigm and Bubastis* (Cairo/Berlin, 2010), 215-215-

For the sources and restricted use of rock crystal, see

Carol Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt* (Austin, 1994), 103-104

For rings worn on the ring finger to protect one from heart disease, see

Sydney Aufrère. *Le c ur, l'annulaire gauche, Sekhmet et les maladies cardiaques.* *Revue d'égyptologie* 36 (1985), 21-34.

For the guardian, protective character of Egyptian sphinxes in general, see

Eugène Warmenbol, *Sphinx: les gardiens de l'Égypte*, in idem (ed.), *Sphinx: les gardiens de l'Égypte* (Brussels, 2006)13-25