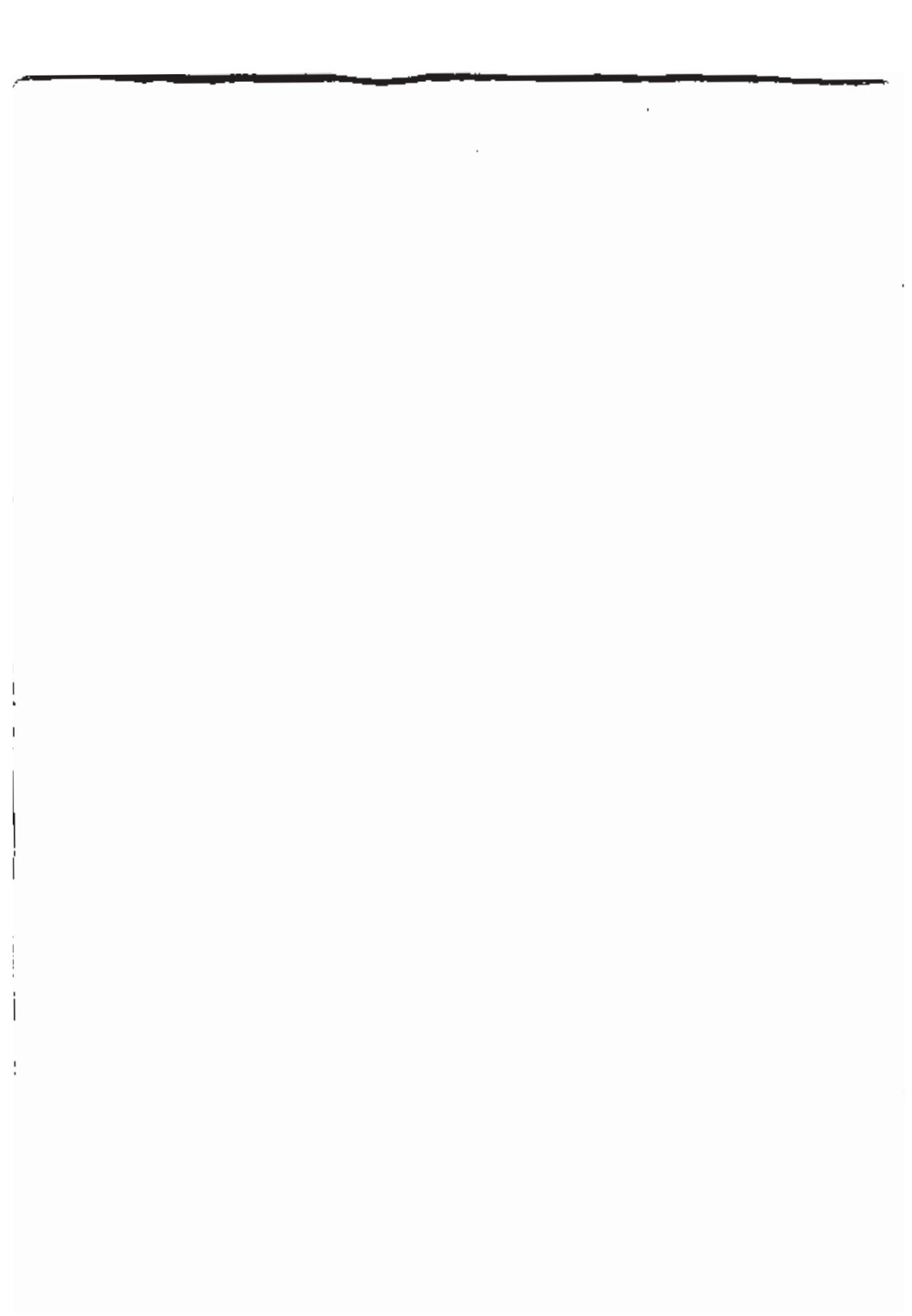


**A COMPOSITE SPHINX
FROM KARANIS**

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A Composite Sphinx from Karanis

The excavations of the University of Michigan at Karanis (modern Kom Aushim in Fayyum) have yielded a great many monuments and finds such as houses, temples, granaries, barracks, textiles, glass, coins, etc (1).

A coloured wall painting in a house belonging to the third century A. D. (2) will be the subject of this study.

The painting is represented on a wall of an alcove at the courtyard of the house. It is about one metre above the floor level and measures 1.14m in width and .68m in height. The background of the scene is a coat of thin grayish - white plaster.

The central figure depicts Harpocrates seated on a throne with his left hand holding two lotus flowers and his right hand to his mouth. On both left and right of the legs of the throne stands an Apis bull with a sun disc between his horns. In front of each bull there are traces of an altar. On a maroon stand to the left of Harpocrates there is a three-headed Sphinx outlined, as the figure of the god, by a narrow band of maroon. The Sphinx has a lion's body dotted with maroon and a curved tail in the form of a cobra in maroon and black. The central main head is a human one wearing an Egyptian headdress with a radiate nimbus. On the two sides of the neck's base project a black head of a jackal on the right and a pale red head of a dog on the left. The animal holds

an upright black dagger in each paw and a black cobra is entwined around each leg ⁽³⁾. See the picture.

The composite sphinx, which comprehends such diverse elements, will be our objective.

The sphinx with a lion's body and human head has a solar significance connected with Horus ⁽⁴⁾. The first direct reference to the grand Sphinx goes back to the XVIIIth dynasty. He was called Hor - em - Akht, i. e., "Horus in the Horizon"; Harmachis of the Greeks. He was conceived as the deity and the guardian of the dead in the New Kingdom ⁽⁵⁾.

The walking type of the sphinx with a single head had occurred as early as the Old Kingdom ⁽⁶⁾ but the sphinx with plurality of heads seems to have no traces before the Graeco - Roman period ⁽⁷⁾. Graeco - Roman Egypt introduced several instances of Sphinxes combining human and animal heads ⁽⁸⁾.

The lion was conceived as a solar animal associated with solar deities ⁽⁹⁾. Among the titles of Horus we find "Horus who is a lion" ⁽¹⁰⁾. Harmachis was represented as a lion - headed man ⁽¹¹⁾. By virtue of his solar attributes, the types of Harpocrates as a sun - god occurred in Graeco - Roman period on some magical gems riding a lion with a radiate nimbus around his head ⁽¹²⁾. He also appears riding a crouching Sphinx in terracotta ⁽¹³⁾ as well as on the Roman Alexandrian coins ⁽¹⁴⁾.

The dotted body of the Sphinx is apparently simulating the spotted body of the panther but in a crude version. The panther was a companion of Dionysus whose cult found its way into Egypt due to its adoption by the Ptolemies in accordance with claiming their descent from the god ⁽¹⁵⁾. The indication to an attribute of Dionysus might be expressive of fertility ⁽¹⁶⁾. Another suggestion that the artist might have intended to confer vividity on the painting to render it more effective and impressive by adding the dots, is possible.

The Egyptian sphinxes are commonly represented as androsphinxes. Nevertheless, instances of female sphinxes exist ⁽¹⁷⁾. Conversely, the Greek types are confined to female sphinxes ⁽¹⁸⁾.

The male head represented here is encircled by a radiate nimbus; an attribute that maintains the solar significance in the Greek manner. Harpocrates, in many figures from Graeco - Roman Egypt, appears connected with solar attributes through the solar disc ⁽¹⁹⁾ which he wears in addition to the radiate nimbus with which he is indowed in various types ⁽²⁰⁾. He replaced Helios as being associated with Selene in one instance ⁽²¹⁾.

The other two lateral heads of a jackal and a dog might have been connected with Anubis. The jackal was sacred to Anubis ⁽²²⁾. The dog was confounded with the jackal as it was mistakenly looked upon as the sacred animal of Anubis in the Graeco - Roman period ⁽²³⁾. Diodorus

narrated that the dog guarded the body of Osiris and guided Isis in her search for it ⁽²⁴⁾.

Also there might be a connection between the representation of the dog and the goddess Isis as she, in Egyptian mythology, was associated with the star Sothis whose appearance in the sky marked the inundation. The Greeks called Sothis the dog star, consequently Isis got the dog among her attributes and appeared riding it with a sparkling star over its head ⁽²⁵⁾.

Equally, Horus was identified with Sothis since we find among his epithets "Horus the dog - star" ⁽²⁶⁾. Another epithet "The Dog of Horus" ⁽²⁷⁾ might interpret the appearance of Harpocrates in association with the dog in some of his figures ⁽²⁸⁾.

The three - headed animals were known in Greek and Roman arts. One of these animals, Kerberos, the guard - dog of Hades became associated with Serapis as early as the beginning of the Hellenistic period ⁽²⁹⁾. According to Macrobius a statue of Serapis was accompanied by a three - headed animal with a central head bearing the likeness of a lion and two lateral heads, a dog's head on the right and a wolf's head on the left. A serpent connects these heads with its coil and turns back to the right hand of the god ⁽³⁰⁾. In some respect, the description is fairly comparable to the composite sphinx.

Creatures with multiform heads were not peculiar to Egyptian men-

tality. Gods with human bodies surmounted by multiform animal heads occurred occasionally in Egyptian art. For example, the god Hersephthi appeared with a human body and four animal heads of a bull, a ram and two falcons⁽³¹⁾.

As for the cobra which replaced the tail of the sphinx and coiled around each leg, it is supposed that serpentine characteristics express protection and fertility⁽³²⁾. In Graeco-Roman Egypt it appeared associated with Harpocrates as well as many other gods⁽³³⁾.

The daggers held by the sphinx are presumed to have some connotation related to it and to the other attributes included in its representation. A composite form of Horus dates from the late dynastic period appears holding a dagger in his right hand and a serpent in his left⁽³⁴⁾. Harpocrates, occasionally, occurred on the magical amulets of Graeco-Roman Egypt holding a dagger or a cobra with his right hand⁽³⁵⁾.

It is obvious that this composite sphinx is connected with Harpocrates, the main figure in the painting⁽³⁶⁾. As one of the forms of Horus, it combines all the attributes of the gods with whom Horus or Harpocrates was identified. This pantheistic type, which manifest the theological syncretism that was dominant in Egyptian mythology, occurred in previous representations of Horus whose appearance in a pantheistic composite form attained the description of Budge as "The god comprehending all the gods"⁽³⁷⁾.

The combining of the jackal as a symbol of Anubis with solar symbol seems to be neither peculiar nor objectionable since Anubis was identified with Horus⁽³⁸⁾ and there are parallel instances of similar cases. Serapis for example, was conceived as a chthonic deity. Nevertheless, he was endowed with solar attributes and identified with Helios. Consequently, he occurred on the Roman Alexandrian coins as Helios - Serapis⁽³⁹⁾. Similarly, Apis had coalesced with Horus⁽⁴⁰⁾. In Graeco - Roman period Harpocrates appeared surmounting Apis' back⁽⁴¹⁾. Accordingly, his presence in the painting is presumed to accord with the other elements i. e., Harpocrates and the sphinx.

Another interpretation might be introduced regarding the accumulation of such diverse elements in the sphinx as most of them could be traced to foreign influences.

The lion, the human radiate head, the dog, the serpent, the dagger and the bull are all elements related to Mithraic mythology⁽⁴²⁾. Mithra was a sun - god and his myth symbolizes the sun's gift of fertility to crops and creatures⁽⁴³⁾.

As a sun - god, Mithra was assimilated to Helios and Apollo in Kommagene in the first century B. C.⁽⁴⁴⁾. From the beginning of the second century A. D. the Roman Empire witnessed a considerable extension of his cult which remained the most important pagan cult down to the end of the fourth century⁽⁴⁵⁾.

The ease of communications, the exchange of products and ideas and the mingling of races increased the extent of the the diffusion of Mithraism and other oriental cults whose propagation in the Roman Empire must have been achieved through merchants, soldiers and even slaves ⁽⁴⁶⁾.

Votaries of Mithra spreaded in Egypt as well as in the other provinces of the Roman Empire ⁽⁴⁷⁾. The adherents of his cult had been exclusively men and mostly soldiers ho played a great role in the diffusion of Mithraism ⁽⁴⁸⁾.

Most important for a possible Mithraic influence is the discovery of bulidings presumed to be military barracks and a Mithraeum in addition to a wall painting representing the Mithraic sacrifice of slaying the bull "Tauroctone" at Karanis ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

To sum up, the conception of the composite sphinx with multiform heads must have been introduced into Egypt under Greaco - Roman influence. The melange of symbols and attributes which coincide in their connotations are supposed to activate the powers of fertility and protection embodied in the sphinx with the aim of achieving the utmost efficacy. Taking into consideration the solar nature of both harpocrates and Mithra and the attributes they have in common we may infer that the symbolism of the Mithraic conceptions must have been appealing to the Egyptians owing to the similarity in ideas ⁽⁵⁰⁾. Therefore the composite sphinx is supposed to come under a synthesis of Graeco - Egyptian and Mithraic influences.

Footnotes

- 1- See the bibliography of the works dealing with Karanis, Elionr M. Husselman, Karanis Excavations of the University of Michigan in Egypt, 1928 - 1935, Topography and Architecture, Ann Arbor, 1979, pp. 2 - 4.
- 2- Originally the building had been used as a granary in the latter half of the second century. In the third century it was converted into a house and re - used for housing, see Husselman, op. cit. pp. 9, 16, 59, 61. I think that this painting must have been ascribed to some time before the beginning of the fourth century when the house fell out of use and became in ruins. Considering the nature of a painting on a thin layer of plaster applied over mud coats, we believe that it can hardly resist the destructive effect of an inhabited place. Recently the Egyptian village began to turn to the use of the burnt brick for the purposes of construction at the expense of the sun - dried brick which has been the traditional material for thousands of years. Nevertheless, a lot of buildings with sun - dried brick are still extant. A house of a sun - dried brick might stay for over a hundred years but only with a constant maintenance of the mud coats which erode quickly. A coat of plaster might stay longer but not too long. Therefore, the latter half or quarter of the third century might be acceptable as a date for the painting.
- 3 - Husselman, op. cit. pp. 61 - 62. p1. 102a.

- 4 - selim Hassan, *Le Sphinx*, Cairo, 1951. p. 83; E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, 2 vols. London 1904, vol. 2. p. 360.
- 5- Hassan, *op. cit.* p. 84; Christiane M. Zivie, "Sphinx", in *Lexicon der Ägyptologie*, vol. V, Wiesbaden, 1984, col. 1140. The sphinx had been a guardian of the living as well, hence the gate of the palace of Sinwesert I was flanked by a pair of sphinxes. Not exclusively constricted to a particular type; the name Seshep - Ankh was used to indicate the sphinx in general during the Middle Kingdom. See Hassan *op. cit.* pp. 82 - 83.
- 6- The other types of the sphinx are the crouching, the seated and the standing. See Zivie, *op. cit.* cols. 1140 - 1144.
- 7- *Ibid.*, col. 1143.
- 8- For example, we have a relief in the Egyptian Museum with the figure of a composite sphinx. It is depicted with a lion's body, a female human head and a head of a crocodile projecting from the chest. Another head of a falcon is protruding from the winged body. The tail is shaped as a cobra and around each leg coils another one. This relief is dating from the first half of the second century A. D. See, Hassan, *op. cit.* pp. 71 - 72, fig. 27. The Roman Alexandrian coins have introduced also examples of androsphinxes on the coins of the 31st year of Trajan and the 18th year of Hadrian. the sphinx appears with a man's head, a lion's body, a head of a crocodile emerging

- from the breast and a tail in the form of a cobra. In addition, it is treading over a serpent. See, R. S. Poole, catalogue of Greek Coins, Alexandria and the Nomes, London, 1892, p. lxxxvii. pl. xxvi no. 835; G. Dattari, Numi augusti alexandrini, 2 vols, Cairo, 1901, pl. xxxi nos. 1180, 2002.
- 9- Budge, op. cit. p. 360; Campbell Bonner, Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco - Egyptian, Ann Arbor, 1950, p. 36.
- 10- Samuel A. B. Mercer, Horus, Royal God of Egypt, Grafton, Massachusetts, 1942, pp. 221, 225.
- 11- Ibid, p. 124,
- 12- Bonner, op. cit. p. 288, pl. X no. 211.
- 13- Wilhelm Weber, Die Ägyptisch - Griechischen Terrakotten, 2 vols., Berlin, 1914, vol. 1 p. 66.
- 14- Dattari, op. cit. pl. xiv nos. 1726, 3464.
- 15- H. I. Bell, Cults and Creeds in Graeco - Roman Egypt, Liverpool, 1953. p. 18. As for the panther as a companion of Dionysus, we have examples of Alexandrian coins on which the god appears riding a biga of banthers. See J. G. Milne, A History of Egypt under Roman Rule, 3rd edition, revised and enlarged, London, 1924, p. 201, fig. 94; Dattari, op. cit. pl. XII no. 849.
- 16- Being a god of fertility, Dionysus was identified with Osiris. See Bell, op. cit. p. 19.

- 17- Hassan, op. cit. p. 75.
- 18- Ibid. pp. 75 ff; Hans Wolfgang Helck, "Sphinx" in *Der kleine Pauly*, vol. 1, München, 1979, cols. 307 - 309.
- 19- *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC)*, IV, 2, München 1981, p. 249, no. 181, p. 255 no. 243a.
- 20- Ibid, pp. 242 no. 12, 255 no. 240a, 259 no. 300.
- 21- Abdel - Mohsen El - Khashab, "the Cocks, The Cat and the Chariot of the Sun" in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*. 55, 1984. pl. XV a.
- 22- Budge, op. cit. p. 367.
- 23- Ibid, p. 366.
- 24- Diodorus Siculus, i, 85.
- 25- Adolf Erman, *A handbook of Egyptian Religion*, translated by A. S. Griffith, London, 1907, p. 226.
- 26- Mercer, op. cit. p. 214.
- 27- Ibid, p. 218.
- 28- Weber, op. cit. p. 65; LIMC, op. cit. pp. 245 nos. 112c, 113a, 121c, 121a; 260 no. 309.
- 29- Susan Woodford & Jeffrey Spier, "Kerberos" in LIMC, VI, 1, München, 1992, p. 32.

30- Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, I, 20, 13 - 14. Many of literary sources mentioned the three - headed kerberos without specifying what kind of heads. They are presumed to be canine unless otherwise specified explicitly. Some authors gave it more than three heads describing it as hundred - headed. See Susan woodford & Jeffrey Spier, *op. cit.* pp. 24 ff. Another triple - headed animal is the Chimaira which was killed by Bellerophon. It was frequently depicted with three heads of a lion, a horse and a serpent surmounting a lion's body. For more details see Anne Jacquemin, "Chimaira" in *LIMC*, III, 1 München, 1986, pp. 249 ff; Ingrid Krauskopf, "Chimaira" in *LIMC*, III, 1, München, 1986, pp. 259 ff.

31- Mercer, *op. cit.* p. 134; k. Sethe, *Zur altägyptischen Sage von Sonnenauges das in der Fremde war*, Leipzig, 1912, p. 5.

32- El - Khashab, *op. cit.* p. 219.

33- *LIMC*, IV, 2, pp. 245 no. 121a, 248 no. 157, 262 no. 344a; Dattari, *op. cit.* pl. XXII nos. 1827, 3517; XXIV no. 1849, 5039; Erman, *op. cit.*, fig. 111. The serpent appeared associated with Harpocrates in the late dynastic period on a number of magical stelae known as "Cippi of Horus". These stelae were used to protect the inhabitants of the house against beasts, insects, illness, etc., see Budge, *op. cit.* pp. 267 ff, Erman *op. cit.* p. 161; Mercer, *op. cit.* p. 133. Another explanation for the representation of the cobra might be

traced to an old cult in Fayyum. The cobra - goddess Renenut was the deity and the protector of the harvest. Amenemhat III and his son Amenemhat IV dedicated a temple to her in Fayyum; the province in which Karanis was located. The agricultural and economical conditions in the third century A. D. were on the wane. Therefore, symbolizing such deity might be suitable for the situation. For Renenut see W. C. Hayes, "The Middle Kingdom in Egypt" in Cambridge Ancient History, vol. 1, part 2, Cambridge 1971, pp. 511, 517.

34- Horus is depicted with a human body surmounted by seven animal heads. See Budge, *op. cit.* II, p. 493; Mercer, p. 128.

35- Bonner, *op. cit.* p. 152.

36- A point of view regarded the composite sphinx of the Graeco - Roman period as the god Toutou - Tithéos who was conceived as a victorious deity developed out of Heka. Obviously, the connection of this composite sphinx is more evident with Horus than with Heka for the evidence mentioned above. For Toutou - Tithéos see Zivie, *op. cit.* cols. 143 - 145.

37- Budge, *op. cit.* vol. 1, p. 493.

38- mercer, *op. cit.* p. 143.

39- Poole, *op. cit.* pl. xv no. 284.

40- Mercer, *op. cit.* p. 144.

41- LIMC, IV, 2, p. 258 no. 290a.

- 42- For the various types of Mithra in which he appears associated with these elements see Rainer Vollkommer, "Mithras", in LIMC, VI, 1, Zürich & München, 1992, pp. 583 ff.
- 43- Ibid, p. 583; Joscelyn Godwin, *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World*, London, 1981, p. 68.
- 44- Vollkommer, op. cit. p. 583.
- 45- Franz Cumont, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, translated by Grant Showerman, New York, 1965, p. 140.
- 46- Ibid, p. 24.
- 47- Samuel A. B. Mercer, *The Religion of Ancient Egypt*, London, 1949, p. 414, Erman, op. cit. p. 228.
- 48- Bonner, op. cit. p. 139; Cumont, op. cit. p. 24; Vollkommer, op. cit. p. 622.
- 49- Husselman, op. cit. pp. 55 - 56, 77 note 64.
- 50- For example, the idea of the rising and the setting sun in the mysteries of Mithra agrees with the same idea expressed by a different way in a terracotta showing Harpocrates emerging from a lotus flower in front of a solar disc while, beneath him, Serapis, flanked by serpents, is sinking down into the lotus flower Harpocrates is the rising sun and Serapis is the setting sun. For more details about the similarity of solar functions of both Harpocrates and Mithra see El - Khashab, op. cit. p. 217.





(صورة رقم ٧) : ضروس غير ناضجة (لاحظ الاختلاف طوال قرون الضروس)
على شاطئ تصفارة .

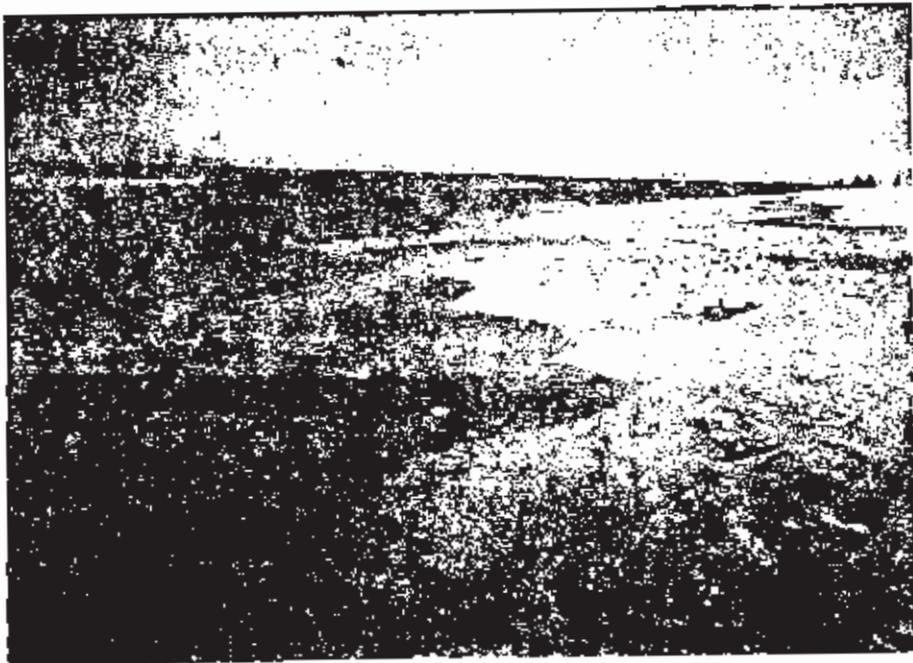


(صورة رقم ٨) : ضروس ناضجة على شاطئ تصفارة (الخط الممتد على اليمين)



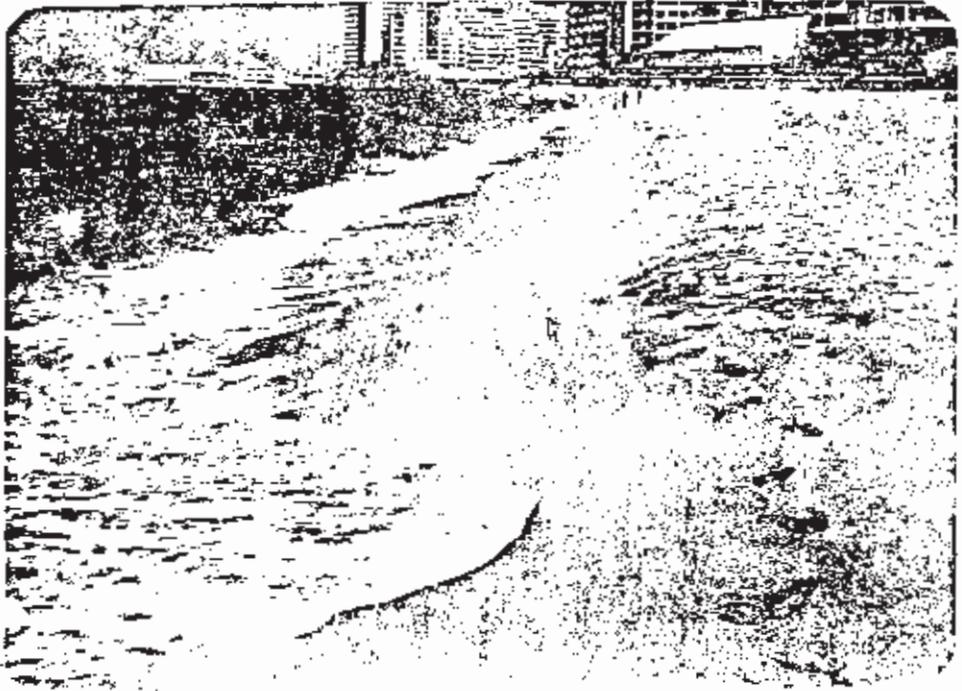
(صورة رقم ٥) : نحت الضروس وتآكلها مع زيادة فعل الأمواج على شاطئ

العنبرة .



(صور رقم ٦) : ضروس صغيرة تكونت على شاطئ أملي ضعيف الأحدور -

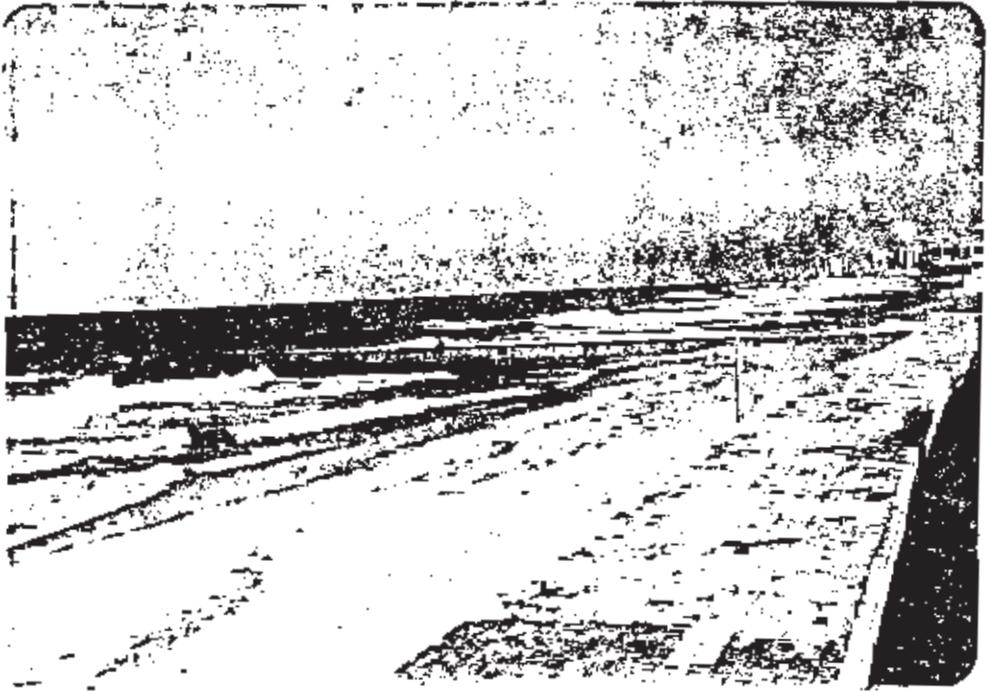
شاطر العمارة .



(صورة رقم ٣) : زحف العوج على شاطئ ميامي وبداية تكوين تضاريس



(صورة رقم ٤) : عتة الشاطئ وعنفية زحف العوج على الشاطئ الأمامي



(صورة رقم ١) : تأثير حاجز الأمواج على عملية الترسيب التي تظهر بوضوح على الجانب الغربي للحاجز .



(صورة رقم ٢) : ضروس تتكون من مواد خشنة وهشة جدا على شاطئ الأمامية .