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Lucas Baqué-Manzano

# Further Arguments on the Coptos Colossi.

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# Further Arguments on the Coptos Colossi

*Lucas BAQUÉ-MANZANO*

In 1894, in the course of excavations carried out by W.M.Fl. Petrie[1] in the Ptolemaic temple of Coptos (1893-1894), some fragments belonging to three large sculptures were discovered. Such a finding made a deep impact on Egyptologists, since those statues could be the "earliest known representations of the god Min". Up to the present, the study of these colossi – the "Coptos colossi" – continue to pose two serious problems to scholars; the first is related to their unusual shape, according to the iconographic Egyptian conventions for representing the god Min, the second has to do with their chronology.

In a wider study of the Coptos colossi recently undertaken by us,[2] we have tried to examine these important works of art from a different perspective. This article is not only a report, but also a reflection, of the most important conclusions reached from our research.

## Part I. The Coptos Colossi and Human Figure Representation in the "Preformal Tradition"

### *I.1. Methodological Objectives*

Our aim in the following section is to demonstrate that the Coptos colossi belong to the Preformal artistic tradition,[3] which was mainly developed during the Egyptian Predynastic period.[4] The preliminary arguments adduced in this section are:

a. The absence of sculptural parallels outside that tradition;

1 W.M.Fl. Petrie, *Koptos*, London, 1896.

2 The present article is a summarized work, containing some new arguments, from our unpublished doctoral thesis, *Los Colosos del dios Min en el templo de Coptos: etiología conceptual de una gran figura divina (iconografía, iconología y mitología)*. It was submitted to the Université Paul-Valéry - Montpellier III and the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona in November 13th, 1998.

3 Term coined by B.J. Kemp, *El antiguo Egipto. Anatomía de una civilización*, Barcelona, 1992, p. 85.

4 According to B.J. Kemp, *op. cit.*, p. 85, within "Preformal art" are included the works of art of the Predynastic period together with others chronologically pertaining to historic times.


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b. An elementary technical development : the statues were shaped by hammering ;[5]

c. The presence of numerous representational ingredients that connect these figures to the iconographic universe of the Predynastic period.

### *I.2. The Coptos Colossi : Formal Description, Museographic and Archaeological Data*

COPTOS COLOSSUS 1 = COPTOS 1 [fig. 1-3]

Museographic situation : Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) ; register number : 1894.105d. Material : sandstone ; height : 1.55 m ; width statue at level of chest : 530 mm ; waist : 600 mm ; legs (just to knee level) : 540 mm. Diameter of phallus hole : 151 mm.

Formal description : the figure shows a naked man in standing position, his right arm fixed beside his right flank and clenched fist. The fist shows a horizontal fissure in the metacarpal bone, which would originally hold some kind of object. The left arm is represented in a slightly forward position, whereas the left hand holds the phallus, of which at present only a little piece in the genital area remains. The scrotum is shown just below the left hand as a simple curved sac. A six-banded belt was modelled round the waist, one end hanging on the right from the waist along the right leg down to the thigh. This part of the belt has a series of carved reliefs : a horned mammal head placed in vertical position, showing four pairs of budding horns placed symmetrically in the two antlers. The mouth of the animal has a wedge-shaped element ; below this motif two seven-fingered conches are inscribed. As to the legs of the figure, these are joined and parallel, from the waist to the lower part. The statue is seriously damaged and only has at present part of the trunk and upper and lower extremities. The missing sections are head, shoulders and part of thorax, right hand and legs, from the knees to the feet. The surface of the front side is quite damaged. There are deep cavities in the chest, both legs, scrotum and abdomen. The back of the statue is less damaged ; however, some parts are missing from the left upper region, comprising shoulder blade, lumbar area and gluteus. The surface is eroded with slight granulation, possibly due to environmental exposure or to a deficient polish of the material. The uneven finish of the right flank of the statue shows this.

Archaeological data : discovered by W.M.Fl. Petrie in the south wall sand bed of the foundation of the temple of Coptos, year 1894.

Archaeological bibliography : W.M.Fl. Petrie, *Petrie Notebooks*, microfiche n° 52, Petrie Museum, University College (London) ; *id.*, *Coptos : Petrie Journal of Excavation*, p. 27-30, 40, 44-45, Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) ; *id.*, *Koptos*, London, 1896.

Museographic bibliography : J.C. Payne, *Catalogue of the Predynastic Egyptian Collection in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford, 1993, n° 2, p. 13.

5 H.G. FISCHER, *LÄ* III, 1980, col. 738, *s.v.* Koptos.


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COPTOS COLOSSUS 2 = COPTOS 2 [fig. 4-6]

Museographic situation : Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) ; register number : 1894.105e. Material : sandstone ; height : 1.77 m ; width statue at level of chest : 680 mm ; waist : 660 mm ; legs (just to knee level) : 555 mm. Diameter of phallus hole : 115 mm.

Formal description : like Coptos 1, Coptos 2 represents a naked man in standing position, his right arm fixed beside his right flank and clenched fist, with a horizontal fissure in the metacarpal bone. Likewise, the left arm is represented in a slightly forward position, whereas the left hand holds the phallus, of which nothing has remained. The legs stand in parallel position, from the waist to the lower end of the statue. The knees are roughly indicated. The missing parts are : head, shoulders and legs, from the lower knees to the feet. An eight-banded belt is modelled round the waist. There are some reliefs carved on the hanging end of the belt : two standards (Min standard), each one of them formed by a pole crowned with two overlapping triangles facing symmetrically two others. The end of the pole is bent to the left as a bird feather. A similar motif hangs in the left side of the emblem. On both sides of the two standards there are two saw shapes, the one on the right has twenty-two teeth and the left one has twenty-seven. Below the previous motifs there are two conches, between them a residual pole and next a couchant lion looking to the right with the tail curved on its back.

Coptos 2 shows less surface damage than Coptos 1. However, most of it seems to have been caused on purpose, especially the deep cavities in the abdomen, chest and legs. In the upper part of the statue, we find a protuberance, which probably represents the end of a beard. The back of the statue does not show serious surface damages, but it is interesting to note the triangular depression at the base of the spine.

Archaeological bibliography : W.M.Fl. Petrie, *Petrie Notebooks*, microfiche n° 52, Petrie Museum, University College (London) ; *id.*, *Coptos : Petrie Journal of Excavation*, p. 27-30, 40, 44-45, Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) ; *id.*, *Koptos*, London, 1896.

Museographic bibliography : J.C. Payne, *Catalogue of the Predynastic Egyptian Collection in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford, 1993, n° 3, p. 13.

COPTOS COLOSSUS 3 = COPTOS 3 [fig. 7-8]

Museographic situation : Cairo Museum ; JE 30770 bis, S.R. 5797. Material : sandstone ; height : 1.72 m.

Formal description : for its similarity to Coptos 1 and 2, Coptos 3 could have represented also a naked man in standing position, his right arm fixed beside his right flank, and the left arm forward, whereas the left arm holds the phallus. However, from this hypothetical reconstruction only the legs, part of the scrotum and the right hand remain. The hand is pierced so as to place some kind of object in it. The missing parts are : trunk, ankles and feet. The front side of Coptos 3 does not show deep cavities in its surface, but it has serious


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damages affecting the sculptural block, *i.e.* a deep crack placed below the knees, apart from between ten and twelve incisions along the legs probably made with a cutting object. The remaining parts show the scrotum in detail, and a line dividing the testicles. A deep groove divides the legs of the statue. The knees are well modelled and the remaining part of the right hand has its little, ring, middle, index and thumb fingers. Below the hand there is the hanging end of a missing belt. On this latter element there are a number of reliefs : two standards (Min standard) of the type described in Coptos 2 and, placed in between, two rectangular shapes slightly scored and crossed by a vertical element. A bird is inscribed on the lower end of the right standard. Below all these elements we find two seven-fingered conches and at the bottom a group of four motifs : a badly preserved relief, of which part of a tail remains and a triangular shape ; the remaining elements are an elephant, a bull and a lion, all of them treading on triangles. The back of the statue cannot be described, as its present position in the room of the museum does not allow an analysis.

Archaeological bibliography : W.M.Fl. Petrie, *Petrie Notebooks*, microfiche nº 52, Petrie Museum, University College (London) ; *id.*, *Coptos : Petrie Journal of Excavation*, p. 27-30, 40, 44-45, Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) ; *id.*, *Koptos*, London, 1896.

Museographic bibliography : not catalogued yet. See G. Daressy, *Statues de divinités (CGC n. 38001-39384)*, Le Caire, 1906, vol. I, p. 25, n. 1.

FRAGMENT OF A PHALLUS

Museographic situation : Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) ; register number : 1894.105f. Material : sandstone ; length : approx. 20 cm.

Formal description : the remaining fragment of a phallus corresponds perhaps to Coptos 1. It is made of a separate piece of stone. It does not show any remarkable elements.

Archaeological bibliography : W.M.Fl. Petrie, *Petrie Notebooks*, microfiche nº 52, Petrie Museum, University College (London) ; *id.*, *Coptos : Petrie Journal of Excavation*, p. 27-30, 40, 44-45, Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) ; *id.*, *Koptos*, London, 1896.

Museographic bibliography : J.C. Payne, *Catalogue of the Predynastic Egyptian Collection in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford, 1993, nº 4, p. 13.

HEAD [fig. 9]

Museographic situation : Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) ; register number : 1894.105c. Material : sandstone ; height : 52 cm.

Formal description : discovered next to Coptos 3, the head probably belonged to that statue. Its shape is rounded, with the frontal side smooth and flat, although vague hollows could indicate certain features. There is a big crack in the area comprising the mouth and chin. The ears are large and protruded. The rest of a beard marked with horizontal grooves


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begins in the whiskers. At the temples there is a slight incision, which led some authors to the conclusion that the head could have been covered by a close-fitting cap,[6] or its face had a carved mask of wood.[7]

Archaeological bibliography : W.M.Fl. Petrie, *Petrie Notebooks*, microfiche nº 52, Petrie Museum, University College (London) ; *id.*, *Coptos : Petrie Journal of Excavation*, p. 27-30, 40, 44-45, Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) ; *id.*, *Koptos*, London, 1896.

Museographic bibliography : J.C. Payne, *Catalogue of the Predynastic Egyptian Collection in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford, 1993, nº 1, p. 13.

### *I.3. Compositive Analysis : the Coptos Colossi (Coptos 1-3)*

In their form, the Coptos colossi seem to be submitted to a similar compositive scheme : standing position, joined legs, right arm fixed in the right flank, left arm slightly advanced with hand grasping the phallus. However, we have noticed in Coptos 3 a more organic formal evolution, less rigid in the design of its parts. This is more evident in the treatment of the knees and the right hand. Another common characteristic of the three statues is the integrity shown by the sculptural block. Apart from the phallus (made separately), none of the elements in these sculptures is detached or adopts a free position. In this way, we have verified in the Coptos colossi the formal subjection of their different parts to the limits of the big rectangle that structurally formed the statues.

The spatial conception in the Coptos colossi is subordinate to the preference for the frontal and back plane over the laterals, these being only complementary visions. Accordingly, we have to refer to different degrees of importance related to the visual analysis of the statues, *i.e.* preferential planes : first the frontal plane with a large visual information, second, the back plane, and third, the two laterals with no strictly necessary information in the formal meaning and comprehension of the work of art.

FRONTAL PLANE [fig. 10]

The frontal plane in the Coptos colossi reveals an accurate application of symmetry rules. Two imaginary axes : one longitudinal (y-y') and a perpendicular one (x-x') divide the figure bisecting it in the central point (z) formed by the circle of the left hand and phallus. This structural characteristic confers this circle a key role in the composition.

Above the y-y' axis, we find the rectangular form of the belt. From a compositive point of view, the situation of this ornament – halfway between the central point and the upper part of the sculptural block – adjusts the visual lack of balance between the upper and lower parts, giving more symmetry to the whole.

6 B. WILLIAMS, "Narmer and the Coptos Colossi", *JARCE* 25, 1988, p. 39.

7 W.M.Fl. PETRIE, *op. cit.*, p. 8.


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Below the same y-y' axis we also find the knees, represented in Coptos 1 and Coptos 2 by way of two opposite triangles. This element conveys a visual interruption, adjusting the strong tendency to verticality of the perpendicular axis. In Coptos 3, this problem seems solved through a softer modelling in its different parts, we have to refer especially to the more naturalistic treatment of the knees.

To the right and to the left of longitudinal axis x-x', the same principle of symmetry is observed too. In spite of a strong tendency towards verticality present in the right arm, this is balanced by the enormous circle shaped by the left hand, thus conveying an area of greater visual weight. The result is that the central point (z) of the figure is again the most interesting within the composition as a whole.

POSTERIOR AND PROFILE PLANES

The same principle of symmetry is shown in the posterior and profile planes of the Coptos colossi. Two big circles formed in the gluteus region balance longitudinally and transversely the figure. The profile planes are determined by the central point where the phallus was located originally, establishing an important visual weight and dividing symmetrically the upper and lower part of the sculpture.

### *I.4. Final Valuation. Formal and Compositive Analysis of the Coptos Colossi*

From a formal point of view, we can say that the Coptos colossi were made following a simple scheme. There are no high tension zones in their structure except in the central part where the axes of the figure converge. There is, in their development, an orthodox tendency towards symmetry in each of their planes. Their manifest verticality is stabilized in two important visual weight points :

a. The circle that constituted the head ;

b. The central circle formed by the left hand and phallus.

The total form and volumes in the Coptos colossi respond to a geometric pattern, unnaturalistic and rough in their final result. There is an outstanding significance of male sexuality. The standing position of the figure, grasping its phallus, synthesizes, *a priori*, the essence of an ideological concept probably related to the notion of fertility.

### *I.5. Three-Dimensional Human Figure Representation. Formal and Typological Description*

In this part of our study we have discussed the different forms adopted by the three-dimensional human figure representation in the Preformal tradition, obviating the absolute chronological data. According to that we have classified the three-dimensional human figure representation into five types :

1. Human figure representation from a Horned form (H corresponding to our type Ac) ;[8]


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2. Human figure representation from a Geometric form (G corresponding to our type G);[9]

3. Human figure representation from a Sexed anthropomorphism (Sa corresponding to our type As);[10]

4. Human figure representation from Anthropomorphism (Bird beak) (ABb corresponding to our type APp);[11]

5. Human figure representation from Expressive naturalism (En corresponding to our type Ne).[12]

### *I.6. Formal and Comparative Analysis*

A common claim by scholars is that the Coptos colossi are exceptional works of art. Certainly this is ratified *a priori* when we consider the statues in their original size and we compare them to the lesser dimensions of supposedly contemporary materials. But can we consider them exceptional when we study the different structural elements of these sculptures?

The study of the different examples and the comparative analysis of the human figure in the Preformal tradition, through its bidimensional or tridimensional representation, suggest the following conclusions:

1. The human figure is developed from a rude, extremely simple compositive scheme. Triangles, circles and rectangles, are the structural and formal base of the geometric pattern;

2. The human figure is submitted to a rigid symmetry;

3. Within the Preformal tradition, the circle shape is extremely important in the representation of the human figure;

4. The resulting forms are subordinate to the materials, the shape of the objects, and to a low technical development.

8 Figura humana a partir de formas Acornadas (Ac). See W.M.Fl. Petrie, *Naqada and Ballas*, London, 1896, pl. 62 nº 35; *id*., *Prehistoric Egypt*, London, 1920, pl. 1, nºs 3, 4, 13; J.C. Payne, *Catalogue of the Predynastic Egyptian Collection in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford, 1993, p. 238, nº 1964-1965.

9 Figura humana a partir de formas Geométricas (G). See W. Kaiser, *Ägyptisches Museum Berlin*, Berlin, 1967, nº 61; W.M.Fl. Petrie, *op. cit.*, pl. 2, nºs 1-2, 4, 6-7, 29-30, pl. 45, nº 44, pl. 46, nº 1; *id*., *Naqada and Ballas*, London, 1896, pl. 59, nº 1-2, 4, 7, 11; J.C. Payne, *op. cit.*, nº 43; Chr. Ziegler, *Le Louvre. Les antiquités égyptiennes*, Paris, 1990, p. 15; B. Krampe, *Ägyptisches Museum der Karl Marx Universität*, Leipzig, 1897, nº 1/17; W. Seipel, *Gott, Mensch, Pharao*, Wien, 1992, p. 70-71; J.-L. de Cenival, in *L'Égypte avant les Pyramides. 4e millénaire*, Grand Palais. 29 mai - 3 septembre 1973, Paris, 1973, fig. 3.

10 Figura humana a partir de Antropomorfismo (sexuado) (As). See M. Bonicetti, *Chefs d'œuvres de l'Art: de la naissance de l'art à l'Égypte ancienne*, Paris, 1963, p. 141; A.J. Spencer, *Early Egypt,* Oxford, 1993, p. 23, fig. 9; E. Bresciani, *Civilisation des Égyptiens: les croyances religieuses*, Milan, 1988, p. 28, fig. 16, 19; P.J. Ucko, *JRAI* 95*,* 1965, p. 225, nºs 1-2, p. 227, nº 12; J.C. Payne, *op. cit.*, Oxford, 1993, nºs 5, 39, 41, 43, 47; E.R. Ayrton, W.L.S. Loat, *El Mahasna,* London, 1911, pl. 11, nº 1, pl. 16, nº 1; W. Needler, *JARCE* 5, 1966, pl. 7, nº 11; *id*., *Predynastic and Archaic Egypt in the Brooklyn Museum*, New York, 1984, p. 344, nº 275; P.J. Ucko, *JRAI* 95, 1965, p. 232, nºs 32, p. 233, nºs 33-34; J. Capart, *Les débuts de l'art en Égypte*, Bruxelles, 1904, p. 151, fig. 110; W. von Bissing, *Denkmäler Ägyptischer Skulptur*, München, 1911, Ch. 5-A, n. 11.

11 Figura humana a partir de Antropomorfismo (Pico de pájaro) (APp). See G. Brunton, G. Caton-Thompson, *The Badarian Civilisation and Predynastic Remains*, London, 1928, pl. 24, nº 3; W.M.Fl. Petrie, *Prehistoric Egypt*, London, 1920, pl. 3, nº 4, pl. 5, nº 3, 6, pl. 6; W. Needler, *PreArEg Brooklyn Museum*, New York, 1984, nº 268, 274; *id*., *JARCE* 5, 1966, pl. 6, fig. 6-7; J.C. Payne, *op. cit.*, nº 28; E. Bresciani, *Civilisation des Egyptiens: les croyances religieuses*, Milan, 1988, p. 29, fig. 20.

12 Figura humana a partir de Naturalismo expresivo (Ne). See W.M.Fl. Petrie, *op. cit.*, pl. 3, nº 3; *id*., *Diospolis Parva*, London, 1901, pl. 10, nº 17; M. Bonicetti, *op. cit.*, p. 142; K.H. Priese (éd.), *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ägyptische Museum und Papyrussammlung*, Berlin, 1991, p. 10; H.W. Müller, *Ägyptische Kunstwerke Kleinfunde und Glas in der Sammlung E. & M. Kofler-Truniger, Luzern,* Berlin, 1964, A-37-38, A-44, A-53, A-57-A-60; P.J. Ucko, *JRAI* 95, 1965, nº 6; W. Needler, *op. cit.*, nº 277; A.J. Spencer, *Early Egypt*, Oxford, 1993, fig. 52; J. Capart, *op. cit.*, fig. 152.


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In light of these arguments, the Coptos colossi are not exceptional in their structural form, but only in their size, in comparison to other specimens of the Preformal tradition. In fact, the Coptos colossi show common features with tridimensional male figures, especially figures we have classified under the type: Human figure representation from Sexed anthropomorphism (subtype Sa-B). This, along with other elements, such as the knees, the triangled beard, the position of the arms, ithyphallism, or the smooth modelling of their different parts, suggest that the Coptos colossi are the first attempt to go beyond the size limits of Preformal sculpture. Why? Here lies, in our opinion, their singularity, which is not simply aesthetic but mainly conceptual.

## Part II. The Coptos Colossi. Identification of Images (Iconographic Analysis and Chronology)

### *II.1. Methodological Objectives*

The identity of the character depicted in the colossal statues of Coptos has become one of the controversial points in the study of these works. What or who they stand for is the subject of this second part.

Soon after the Coptos colossi were discovered, the idea that they could be a primitive representation of god Min was advanced. Their location within the perimeter of the temple of Coptos, as well as the presence of some iconographic motifs, led *a priori* to that conclusion. Nevertheless, later works opposed that hypothesis.[13] Thus, for some scholars, the different formal attitude of the colossi, as compared to that of traditional Min, was the main objection against the identification of the statues as Min figures. This situation has given rise to two opposing theses. The first theory admits that the sculptures are an archaic form of the god Min; the second one rejects the former, although it accepts a certain relation, more or less direct, between the Coptos colossi and that deity.

The divergences referred to are developed around three main aspects [table 1]:

1. The shape adopted by the Coptos colossi vs. that adopted by the god Min in historic times;

2. Supplementary details – head, triangled beard, six or eight-banded belt, general nudity – considered, among others, as distinctive elements of the Coptos colossi vs. the representation of the Dynastic god Min;

3. The reliefs carved in the Coptos colossi as controversial elements in the iconographic identification.

13 See Table 1, Historiographic antecedents.


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### *II.2. The Mythographic Representation of the God Min : Iconographic Identification*

The figure of the ithyphallic man[14] in ancient Egypt becomes a key element in understanding the process leading to the visual formation of certain abstract concepts – some of which had a religious nature – which were included as iconographic attributes of the image of certain deities. That is the case of the god Min of Coptos, personification of fertility and regeneration, or god Amon of Thebes, to whom we have established he was closely related.

During Naqada I, within hunting and dancing scenes depicted in pottery, we find men and women in various attitudes showing marked sexual traits. Likewise, in Naqada II pottery decoration or in carved relief from the *wadis* the introduction of ithyphallic men or men with penis sheath representation,[15] confirms the existence of very important stylistic parallels. The recurrence of this iconographic motif is especially relevant because ithyphallic male characters are represented in the sculpture of the so-called Preformal tradition[16] too. The case of the Coptos colossi is, of course, an important example.

On the other hand, within the "Formal tradition" in Dynastic Egyptian art, the use of ithyphallic male characters is attested in the representation of certain deities. We have referred to the god Min or Amon, but we can mention others, e.g. ithyphallic Osiris or certain composite gods and goddesses such as ithyphallic Mut-Min, ithyphallic Sekhmet, ithyphallic Min-Horus, etc. where ithyphallism reaches, as an iconographic element, a greater protagonism. In conclusion, the personification of the notion of "fertility" or "regeneration" – conveyed through the visual formulae of human beings with a great sexual capacity – was added as a formal quality of fertility-regeneration deities in mythographic descriptions of historic times.

However, the similarities between the Coptos colossi and the model of the historic god Min representation should not let us obviate the differences between both of them. Certainly, most scholars who identified – we insist *a priori* – the Coptos colossi as early representations of the god Min, did not explain the reasons for the iconographic distinctive characteristics of both models. This apparent dichotomy between the "notion" and the "motif" used to represent it has been a fundamental aim of our research.

14 J.C. PAYNE, *op. cit.*, nº 389 ; J. VANDIER, *Manuel I*, Paris, 1952, fig. 192 ; W.M.Fl. PETRIE, *op. cit.*, pl. 18, nº 74 ; *id.*, *Corpus of Prehistoric Pottery and Palettes*, London, 1921, pl. 34, nº 46-D ; R. ENGELBACH, B. GUNN, *Harageh*, London, 1924, pl. 29,2 ; H.J. KANTOR, *JNES* 3, 1944, p. 126, fig. 8-F ; A. WEIGALL, *Travels in Upper Egyptian Deserts*, London, 1909, pl. 29, nº 2 ; H.A. WINKLER, *Rock-Drawings of Southern Egypt* II, London, 1938-1939, pl. 34, nº 20, 38, nº 58, 38, nº 61 ; M.A. BERGER, "Animal-headed Boats from Hierakonpolis and Southern Egypt" in *Followers of Horus*, Oxford, 1992, p. 117, fig.12-109 ; Z.Y. SAAD, *Royal Excavations at Saqqara and Helwan (1941-1945)*, *CASAE* 3, Le Caire, 1947, p. 166, fig. 14.

15 The penis sheath would be in our opinion an object that emphasizes "ithyphallism".

16 For A. MCFARLANE, *The God Min to the End of the Old Kingdom*, The Australian Centre for Egyptology : Studies 3, 1995, p. 351 : "*It seems most probable that the symbol and a male fertility figure, frequently taken to be the chief god of Naqada II, must seriously be considered to be identified with Min or his prototype*".


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### *II.3. The Traditional Image of the God Min : Identification and Iconographic Meaning*

From the Dynastic period on, the image of the god Min is that of a standing man placed on a base with his legs joined, the body wrapped by bandaging and his left hand advanced holding his erected member. As to his right arm, it is represented lifted to head level with his elbow and forearm forming a right angle, while the palm of his hand is open. Above the hand is a flail hanging loose. Other attributes of Min are his cap with two tall feathers and the architectural structure behind him, identified as his primitive campaign shrine.[17] The last one of the iconographic motifs of this god is the lettuce plant, also placed behind him.

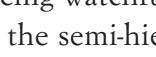
This stereotyped vision of god Min – formed, according to evidence, at the beginning of Dynastic times – presents, as we have pointed out before, relevant differences with the Coptos colossi. Differences are found not only in the structural morphology of both models but, even more importantly, in their symbolic contents. Examining closely each one of the elements of historic Min, we have established the following :

1. UPPER EXTREMITIES : right arm and the attitude *f3-ʿ* ;
the flail ; left arm, left hand and phallus

*1.1. Right Arm and the Attitude f3-ʿ*

The position adopted by the right arm is one of the most characteristic features in the representation of this deity. We have defined three roles corresponding to three of the functions attributed to Min :

a. To act as flail support (*jwḥ nḫ3ḫ3* ; *f3-ʿ wṯs nḫ3ḫ3*) :[18] in this sense, the iconography of Min is revealing. Certainly, the god placed above his base takes the shape of a support (cf. U 39 / C8 : / ) ;

b. To act as surveyor :[19] the standing figure of the god with his raised arm and looking ahead, justifies the action of "being watchful, vigilant" whose verb  *rs* introduces as determinative, besides the eye, the semi-hieratic sign U40, the support or post . According to that, the image of the god Min could have been the iconographic representation of a surveying deity ;

c. To carry out offensive and protective actions with his arms :[20] Min, with his raised arm, is in a protective-offensive attitude. In this case the god, in the role of Horus, causes the defeat of the enemies of his father Osiris.

17 I. MUNRO, *Das Zelt-Heiligtum des Min*, *MÄS* 41, 1983.

18 Ex. : *Edfou*, I, 375, 14 ; P. Leiden I, 350, pl. 29, 497 (J. ZANDEE, *De Hymnen aan Amon van Papyrus Leiden I 350*, Leiden, 1947).

19 A. MORET, *Le rituel du culte divin journalier en Égypte. D'après les papyrus de Berlin et les textes du temple de Séti I^er^ à Abydos*, Paris, 1902, p. 131.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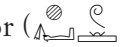
Further evidence reveals, however, that the attitude of Min could be related to his Uranian role. That is the case when Min is depicted as the moon's protector (  ),[21] linking his relation to the satellite through his quality of generating deity. Thus, the attitude of Min raising his arm would link earth and heaven giving shape to some of the phenomena of cyclical nature, which pervaded the religious beliefs of ancient Egyptians.[22]

### *1.2. The Flail*

Concerning the iconographic relation between Min and the flail we have verified two possible meanings :

a. The flail as a symbol of force and authority :[23]

The flail (*nḫ3ḫ3*), together with the sceptre (*ḥq3.t*), is considered a symbol of royal power. According to Plutarch (*Isis and Osiris*, § 55) the flail would be raised up by Min as a kind of trophy. The god in his role of Horus, after defeating Seth, shows the proof of his victory, *i.e.* the lifeless (flaccid ?) member of Seth = the force of the enemy. In this Osirian context also, the flail of Min-Horus in combination with his phallus produces an element of protection and a symbol of his authority against the enemies of the god ;

b. The flail as a symbol of fecundity :

As to the flail as a symbol of fecundity we have found different approaching arguments. In the opinion of some authors [24], the flail was related to the singular generating functions of deities such as Min, Khonsu, ithyphallic Amon and Osiris. Thus the flail in the hands of these gods could be regarded as a symbol of their generative power.[25]

Throughout our study, we have been able to establish a correspondence between the shape of the flail and the notion of a flux of light.[26] In the case of Min, his origin as a lunar deity would reinforce, in our opinion, the iconographic association established between him, the flail and his fecundative capacity as a god of fertility. The god who supports the flail, a cosmic object, made of precious minerals and metals, probably a symbolic element of the moon as the origin of life-giving light.

20 Ex. : S. HASSAN, *Hymnes religieux du Moyen Empire*, Le Caire, 1930, p. 141 ; H. JUNKER, *Die Onurislegende*, Wien, 1917 (reprint 1988), p. 36.

21 H. GAUTHIER, *Les fêtes du dieu Min*, Le Caire, 1931, p. 74.

22 *Edfou* I, 394, 9 ; S. HASSAN, *op. cit.*, 1930, p. 170.

23 M. LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* I, Berkeley, 1975, p. 204 ; *Edfou* I, 381, 10-11.

24 A.C. MACE, H. WINLOCK, *The Tomb of Senebtisi at Lisht*, Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition, New York, 1916, p. 97 ; see also C. SOURDIVE, *La main dans l'Égypte pharaonique. Recherches de morphologie structurale sur les objets égyptiens comportant une main*, Berne, 1984, p. 586.

25 The possible relation established between the flail and the verb *ms* ("give birth", "create") could confirm the former argument. In Roman times, flagellation was considered as a stimulus to enhance female fecundative capacity. In the festivals in honour of the god Lupercus (Pan), flagellation was used to guarantee pregnant women a good childbirth or to make sterile women fertile ; in the same way, in Sparta, during the festival devoted to the goddess Artemis, flagellation was used to improve male sperm. It consisted of a ritual in which the initiate was flogged until the lashes induced an erotic reaction and he ejaculated, fertilizing the land with semen and blood, R. GRAVES, *The Greek Myths* II, Harmondsworth, 1990, p. 79.

26 See J.-Cl. GOYON, *Rituels funéraires de l'ancienne Égypte*, *LAPO* 4, Paris, 1972, p. 74 ; Pyr. § 49 ; P. CLÈRE, *La porte d'Evergète à Karnak*, *MIFAO* 84, Le Caire, 1961, pl. 9 ; A. ERMAN, *Ancient Egyptian Poetry and Prose*, New York, 1995, p. 284 ; cf. *Edfou* I, 400, 11-12 ; S. AUFRÈRE, *Le propylône d'Amon-Rê-Montou à Karnak-Nord, MIFAO* 117, 2000, § 234.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### *1.3. Left Arm, Left Hand and Phallus*

Among the phallic features of the god Min, we find those linking him to fertility, although also to the idea of power and authority embodied by this god.

The phallic exhibition, seen as an intimidating act,[27] was complementary to the protective functions attributed to Min. In the same way, Min's ithyphallism becomes an adequate iconographic resource to elevate his male condition. A virile strength of enormous dimensions which leads to the exaltation of the god's generative quality and thus to the necessary continuity of birth – life – death cycles.[28]

## 2. TRUNK AND LOWER EXTREMITIES : the *Ḫtyw* ; the mummiform bandage

### *2.1. The ḫtyw*

For H. Gauthier,[29] the fact that Min was represented on a kind of platform (*ḫtyw*) has great importance from a symbolic point of view. Certainly, the role of this element in the festivals in honour of that god seems to confer a more complex meaning than that of a simple platform or pedestal. The conclusion of this author was that the *ḫtyw*, the "*reposoir*" of Min, could have defined not only a symbolic space inside the temple but also, *in extenso*, the *ḫtyw* represented the hilly countryside of the Oriental Desert.

Analysing the valuable information provided by the Brooklyn Papyrus (47.218.50) [30], we have confirmed the following :

a. In a broad sense, the synonymous terms *ḫtyw* and *s.t wr.t*, would define, referring to Min, the area this deity ruled over, *i.e.* the territorial domains conformed by the harvest area and the Eastern Desert of the Coptos region ;

b. *Stricto sensu*, the above-mentioned terms referred also to a specific area within the temple where, in a symbolic way, the geographic space defined before was recreated.

This correspondence between real and symbolic spaces made us wonder about those aspects concerning geographic symbolism and their importance in the formation of a religious awareness of the environment.[31] The close relation of Min to the eastern region gives the latter the status of Primeval Hill, *i.e.* the place where the god acted as the demiurge in the beginning of time. The abundant archaeological and epigraphic evidence found, from Predynastic times on, in the eastern area between the villages of Akhmim and Edfu (*wadi* Hammâmât to the north and *wadi* Mia and *wadi* Abbad to the south) corroborate the importance acquired by that region as a preferential site for the cult of Min.[32]

27 J. OGDON, "Some Notes on the Iconography of the God Min", *BES* 7, 1985-1986, p. 29-41 ; S. AUFRÈRE, *op. cit.*, 2000, § 235, p. 342 (L).

28 H. GAUTHIER, *op. cit.*, 1931, p. 140, 141 ; see also *P. Leiden* I, 350, pl. 29, 497.

29 *Id.*, ""Le reposoir" du dieu Min", *Kêmi* 2, 1929, p. 79.

30 J.-Cl. GOYON, *Confirmation du pouvoir royal au nouvel an [Brooklyn Museum papyrus 47.218.50]*, IFAO & Brooklyn Museum, Le Caire, 1972, p. 33-37.

31 See. L. BAQUÉ, "The Island of the *Kꜣ* or the Notion of Utopia in the Story of The *Shipwrecked Sailor*", in press (1998).

32 A.E.P. WEIGALL, "A report on the So-Called Temple of Redesiyeh", *ASAE* 9, 1908, p. 76 ; J. LECLANT, "Fouilles et travaux en Égypte et au Soudan, 1967-1968", *Orientalia* 32, 1969, p. 273.


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### *2.2. The Mummiform Bandage*

At first sight, the mummiform bandage wrapping the body of the god would visually reinforce the image of Min as an immobile or immobilized deity.

However, it is interesting to note that for the Egyptians, the objective of mummification was not only to preserve the body for eternity but, surely more important, to lead the being into a real rebirth in the Netherworld and his transformation into a god.

From some relevant arguments we can deduce that the mummiform bandage was closely linked to the notion of gestation previous to rebirth in Egyptian afterlife beliefs; so we should not be surprised when, in the final process of wrapping the corpse, some mummies actually took the appearance of a new born.[33]

The cosmic properties attributed to linen,[34] due to its association with the sun and the moon, definitely support this conception of the mummiform bandage as an element of regeneration. Therefore, the iconographic representation of certain gods, wrapped in mummiform bandage, reinforced their qualities of (re-)generating deities, such as demiurge Ptah, Khonsu, born during new moon, or Osiris, the god that better exemplifies the notion of resurrection.[35]

Finally, in our opinion, the iconographic role of the mummiform bandage, especially in the case of the god Min, would not be contradictory with the vital meaning that his image implied, which, in fact, represented fertility and (re-)generation in the life-cycles of nature.

## 3. THE HEAD : the Tall-plumed and *nfr-ḥr*

### *3.1. Tall-Plumed*

The cap with two tall feathers, another characteristic element in the iconography of Min, would support the Uranian role of this god.

The qualities of Min feathers would be explained on the one hand by their association with the goddesses Isis and Nephthys, who were recognized as the Two Maat, *i.e.* the sun and the moon, and on the other hand by their identification with the Two Eyes, again the sun and the moon.[36]

In this context, the feathers would be closely related to the flail – in the same way Min was clearly defined as the "Lord of the two feathers" –,[37] so they both symbolized the triumph of light.

33 W.C. HAYES, *The Scepter of Egypt* I, New York, 1990, p. 304, fig. 196.

34 S. AUFRÈRE, "De l'influence des luminaires sur la croissance des végétaux. À propos d'une scène du papyrus funéraire de Nebhepet, musée de Turin (ancienne collection Drovetti)", *Memnonia* 6, 1995, p. 116-117.

35 See the description of Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, § 51, § 77.

36 See S. HASSAN, *op. cit.*, p. 141, 142.

37 *Edfou* I, 394, 13-14.


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*3.2. Nfr-ḥr*

Min is named by the sources *nfr-ḥr*, an epithet that admits different meanings, complementary one to each other: "fair of face", "the one of favourable look", "the one of perfect visage" or "the one of regenerated face". Some other deities – for example Ptah, Hathor, Anubis or Osiris – were also called, like Min, *nfr-ḥr*.

In the opinion of some scholars, the term *nfr-ḥr* referred to "hearing gods" (e.g. Ptah and other deities described as "oracle gods"), because the face symbolized their quality and capacity for answering prayers, meeting requests or dispensing remedies.[38] In the case of Min, there is some evidence that confirms this sense.[39]

Likewise, *nfr-ḥr* referred to the generative qualities of Min and his role as a Uranian deity, as a moon god.[40] In order to complete this argument, we must especially refer to the description of Min as a bull-god, the inflamed bull (*kȝ ps*)[41] when he is rising in the sky (crescent moon), on its way to the full moon, to the *nfr-ḥr*, but an ox (*sʿḥ* = castrated bull) when he decays (waning moon).[42] In the same context, Hathor *nfr-ḥr*, the goddess with the turquoise face, acted as a symbol of fertility, whereas the epithet *nfr-ḥr* (="the one of regenerated face"), with regard to Osiris, was related to the regeneration of the being, *i.e. Wnn-nfrw* (Onnophris).

In the last analysis, *nfr-ḥr* is a beautiful metaphor, which explains part of the ontological process in the comprehension of certain celestial phenomena.

## *II.4. The Coptos Colossi vs. Traditional Min Representation: Arguments for a Comparative Iconography*

If in previous sections we have tried to show the god Min figure through the descriptions provided by religious sources, now it is time to consider it through comparison with the Coptos colossi. Certainly the formal differences between these two models are too relevant to think *a priori* that they represent the same entity. The logical answer to this seems to be not only in a different representative tradition, but also in the intellectual distance between the Predynastic and Dynastic. However, before any opinion is given with respect to that, we consider it necessary to refer to those differences.

In the first place, we must observe the peculiar position taken by the right arm in the two models. In the god Min representation, the right arm is shown raised with its hand open, whereas in the Coptos colossi the right arm is resting aside with its hand showing the action of grasping some kind of object.

38 P. VERNUS, *Athribis. Textes et documents relatifs à la géographie, aux cultes, et à l'histoire d'une ville du Delta égyptien à l'époque pharaonique*, *BiEtud* 74, 1978, p. 382-283.

39 See W.M.Fl. PETRIE, *Koptos*, London, 1896, pl. 20 lines 14-15.

40 *Edfou* I, 398, 12-13.

41 See S. AUFRÈRE, *L'Univers Minéral dans la pensée égyptienne*, *BiEtud* 125/1, 1991, p. 221-222.

42 H. BRUGSCH, *Dictionnaire géographique de l'ancienne Égypte*, Leipzig, 1879, p. 1022.


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Some scholars [43] have referred to this fact, alluding to the technical difficulty represented by a detached arm in large sculptures such as the Coptos colossi. Besides that, there is the added problem of working with limestone, a soft stone of low density, with a tendency to fissure and fracture, especially in the case of an enormous sculptural block.[44]

However, though the material and its quality could have determined in certain cases the sculptural result, that would only be up to a point and not as a whole. It would be a reductionist argument to think that materials conditioned all representations in Preformal art, and would ignore the technical and expressive capacity of the artists. In our opinion, the Coptos colossi, by comparison to the formal and stylistic parallels of Preformal art, should not be considered an exception or a sculptural *hapax*, but the variation of the archetype, that of the ithyphallic bearded man, widely extended in the Preformal tradition. According to that, the differences in shape between the traditional representation of the god Min and the Coptos colossi are due to different criteria of iconographic meaning.

Min's attitude, with his raised arm and suspended flail, expresses a dynamic act (god supporting the flail) that is clearly opposed to the static attitude of the Coptos colossi, whose arm is relaxed, although they firmly grasp the flail [45]. Only in the position adopted by the left arm, left hand and phallus do we find elements that approach the two models, but with respect to the trunk, lower extremities and the head, we observe again differences: mummiform bandage vs. nudity and the eight- or six-banded belt, the *ḫtyw*, beard, tall feathers...

However, if formal differences are significant, their iconographic meaning could have been even more. Can we interpret the image of Coptos through the meanings previously considered? Or, moreover, how can we give it the same religious symbology linked to Min, without being anachronistic? In our opinion, this argument would be enough to partially invalidate those who accept *a priori*, without explaining why, that the Coptos colossi were images of Min. In fact, the very same formal differences we have pointed out were important because they express the result of two different traditions, apart from being the irrefutable proof of changes affecting mentalities. In our attempt to study in depth this principle of disjunction between the Coptos colossi and the traditional representation of the god Min, we have tried to analyse the iconographic aspects of the inscribed reliefs of the statues.

43 H. SCHÄFER, W. ANDRAE, *Arte del Antiguo Oriente*, Barcelona, 1933, p. 50-51.

44 C. MALTESE, *Las técnicas artísticas*, Madrid, 1981, p. 24.

45 Many Predynastic representations show men grasping objects, see for example J.C. PAYNE, *op. cit.*, nº 389; J. VANDIER, *op. cit.*, fig. 192.


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## *II.5. The Coptos Colossi : the Inscribed Reliefs*

COPTOS 1 : DEER (*DAMA MESOPOTAMICA-DAMA SCHAEFERI*)

The representation of deer (*Cervidae* family) in Egyptian art is very rare. L. Keimer, in a study of this subject,[46] registered only twenty-five, six of which correspond, according to him, to the Pre- or Protohistoric period, including the deer of Coptos 1. This fact shows how unusual the presence of deer in the Egyptian territory might have been.

For L. Keimer, the "Egyptian deer" was a variety of the *Dama mesopotamica*, introduced in Egypt through Palestine, or the *Dama schaeferi*, a species present in North Africa, including the Egyptian territory, but only in very ancient times.[47]

It is important to point out that deer habitats are diverse, including forests, swamps, tundra and high mountainsides. The decrease of deer in the Egyptian territory has a reasonable explanation :

a. The gradual replacement of *Cervidae* by *Bovidae*, the latter better adapted to dry conditions, as a consequence of climatic changes in the Sahara fringe during the Neolithic ;

b. The human activity that could have caused, at best, the retreat of this and other phitophagous species to territories where the human presence was not constant and where the humidity level was satisfactory to provide favourable substratum plant for their normal development. In this sense, some paleoclimatic studies point the Arabian Desert as a privileged area, especially during Predynastic times, due to its uneven orography and hydrographic system.[48]

It is not clear to us what the deer in the Coptos colossi carved relief meant, but in our opinion its role is on a conceptual level. In Naqada II pottery, for example, the representations of horned herbivors are relevant : oryx, gazelles, antelopes, addax, etc., placed on a mountainside background, grouped and treated by the artist as iconographic units. In the same way, in Pitt-Rivers and Carnarvon handle-knives, we can recognise among the fauna motifs represented a deer, together with other horned animals, mainly from the *Bovidae* family.

For the so-called "primitive societies", there are not clear-cut elements of separation between the different animal species and classification levels. This leads us to a different method of taxonomy in which the animal – in our case the deer depicted in Coptos 1 – could have merely constituted a reference to a whole. Subsequently, we face a much wider notion of species, whose classification criterion remains unknown. We have suggested a relation of the type : *Cervidae-Bovidae* = horned animal = desert fauna, but logically this is only hypothetical. Anyway, it seems clear enough that the deer relief in the Coptos statues points to this animal

46 L. KEIMER, "Sur des fragments de cornes de daim trouvés à Deir el-Medineh", in *Mélanges Maspero*, *MIFAO* 66, 1961, p. 273-312.

47 Cf. J. BOESSNECK, *Die Tierwelt des Alten Ägypten untersucht anhand kulturgeschichtlicher und zoologischer Quellen*, München, 1988, p. 36, pl. 21.

48 D. HAMMERTON, "The Nile River. A Case History" in *River Ecology and Man. Proceedings of an International Symposium on River Ecology and the Impact of Man*. University of Massachussets, Amherst, Massachussets, June 20-23, 1971, p. 171-214.


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as a symbolic element. Perhaps trying to consecrate[49] the species or its habitat through its relation to the idol? The debate is open. However, it is still surprising that in another Predynastic palette, found in Matmar[50] [fig. 11], a young animal, maybe a deer or a gazelle, has been represented under the Min standard. Although we can find this insufficient, such evidence would establish a principle of relation between the Coptos colossi and the Egyptian god of fertility.

### COPTOS 1-3 : SEA-SHELLS (*LAMBIS TRUNCATA SEBAE*)

This mollusc, with spider conch or finger conch, is a very common species of the Red Sea.[51] Its habitat is located in the shallow water of reef flats, or sandy bottoms near coral and algae.

In Egypt, the use of sea-shells as jewellery objects,[52] *ex-voto*, etc., can be traced from Prehistoric to Ptolemaic times. Concerning the specimen described above, we have to mention for example the archaic period deposit of *Lambis* found in the Egyptian Oriental Desert by a French expedition,[53] or the sea-shell deposit discovered in the temple of Karnak,[54] among whose specimens (seventeen in total) were found some pertaining to genus *Lambis*. It is necessary to point out that the soft part of this mollusc is edible and highly appreciated, even today, by the inhabitants living near the coast of the Red Sea.[55]

In our attempt to approach the subject, we have paid attention to the following :

1. The presence of this iconographic motif in the Coptos colossi carved reliefs confirms again the symbolic role of certain animals ;

2. Through our study we have attested that the shape of the conch (*Heptadactylus*) could have been an evocative trait of fecundity related to the moon.[56]

The arguments that link sea-shells and other marine species (e.g. sea-urchin, coral) to the moon phases refer not only to ideological or religious aspects, but also to the physical behaviour and the vital cycles of these animals. In tropical areas, it has been observed how, in full moon periods, molluscs and corals ejaculate sperm into the water for fertilizing their eggs ; this phenomenon, called "sea of light", produces an ocean tinged with the fluorescence of these beneficent fluids.

49 The fact that the *Cervidae* head is shown impaled, would point out that it could have had the same function as Min standard in Coptos 2 and 3. The motif of impaled animal heads is not unusual in Predynastic times ; some of them can be seen as part of boat prows. M. A. Berger, "Predynastic Animal-headed Boats from Hierakonpolis and Southern Egypt" in R. Friedman, B. Adams (ed.), *The Followers of Horus. Studies Dedicated to Michael Allen Hoffman (1944-1990)*, Egyptian Studies Association Publication nº 2, Oxbow Monograph 20, Oxford, 1992, p. 107-120.

50 G. Brunton, *Matmar*, London, 1948, p. 175, nº 28, pl. 22.

51 D. Sharabati, *Red Sea-shells*, London, 1984, pl. 9, 1, 1a, 1b.

52 E. Vernier, *Bijoux et orfèvreries* (CGC nos 52001-53855), Le Caire, 1927, II, pl. 75, 77, 78, 81.

53 F. Debono, "Expedition archéologique royale au désert oriental (Keft-Kosseir)", *ASAE* 51, 1951, p. 67, 83, pl. 16 a, b.

54 C. Gaillard, G. Daressy, *La faune momifiée de l'antique Égypte* (CGC nos *29501-29733 et 29751-29834*), Le Caire, 1905, p. 75-76 ; Y. Bérard, Chr. Carpine, A. Toulemont, *Arts de la nacre. Coquillages sacrés*, Musée océanographique, Monaco, 1993, p. 64 cat. nº G-189, p. 171.

55 Also as bait for fishing.

56 Cf. S. Aufrère, "Poissons du Nil, coquillages de la mer Rouge et fossiles marins dans la pensée de l'Égypte ancienne", *Dossier-cours dans la Société Menkheperrê (30 octobre-20 novembre)*, Atlantide Parc, Saint-Jean-du-Gard, 1995, p. 4-5.


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Here again the possible relation between the Coptos colossi and Min, the god of the Oriental Desert and fertility, is not arbitrary, but is completely justified by the analogies that can be deduced of such an event. The presence of *Lambis* conch joined to the Min standard has been attested in the decoration of some Egyptian cylinder-seals [fig. 12] from the Archaic period.[57]

## COPTOS 2, 3 : THE MIN STANDARD

The representation of the Min standard among the carved relief of the Coptos colossi is undoubtedly essential in the identification of these sculptures as images of that deity. In our analysis we have tried to approach the Min standard considering basically its possible use as an object. The different hypotheses with respect to this emblem and its meaning are manifold, ranging from a symbolic role, which sees it as a kind of light weapon in the hands of the god Min,[58] to more prosaic ones, as for example a garland of flowers,[59] a gnomon,[60] etc. The most recent hypothesis interprets it as an object used for circumcision.[61]

The object of reference probably used for its design has also been up for discussion. Two well known theories are those that identify the Min standard as two fossil *belemnites* or a multiple arrow.[62] Although some of these arguments could be sound – we have pointed as a conjecture to the possibility that in origin it was a harpoon[63] – we think the debate should be directed in a different way. The fact that the Min standard could have represented such-and-such object is not really important ; it is, though, its unusual shape – variable and often *quasi* abstract – which tells us about something in our opinion more significant, namely its proper condition as a useless object. This reasoning led us to consider the Min standard as a real fetish, *i.e.* an element deprived of an ordinary use, but with an important function, probably in a magical or animistic sense. This circumstance would account for the shape changes of this emblem until it took an aberrant form.

## COPTOS 3 : CICONIIFORME BIRD (*EPHIPPIORHYNCUS SENEGALENSIS ?*)

Another relief in Coptos 3 is a wading bird, placed under one of the Min standards, that we have identified, although not very clearly, as a *jabiru* (*Ephippiorhyncus senegalensis*).[64] From an iconographic point of view, the *jabiru* or Saddlebill Stork was used by Egyptians to represent the divine *ba* and frequently depicted in a group of three birds, e.g. the deified kings of Pe (Buto) and Nekhen (Hierakonpolis).[65]

57 Z.Y. SAAD, *Royal Excavations at Saqqara and Helwan (1941-1945)*, *CASAE* 3, 1947, p. 166, fig. 14 ; P. KAPLONY, *IÄF* III, Wiesbaden, 1963, pl. 22, nº 47, pl. 50, nº 186.

58 G.A. WAINWRIGHT, "The Emblem of Min", *JEA* 16, 1931, p. 186.

59 W.M.Fl. PETRIE, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

60 M. ISLER, *JARCE* 28, 1991, p. 155-185.

61 See H. GOEDICKE, "Min", *MDAIK* 58, 2002, p. 247-255.

62 G. WAINWRIGHT, *op. cit*., p. 194.

63 In Ch. 7, § 172-§ 173 of our thesis (cf. *supra*, n. 2).

64 P.F. HOULIHAN, *The Birds of Ancient Egypt*, Warminster, 1986, p. 177, n. 119.

65 R.H. WILKINSON, *Reading Egyptian Art. A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture*, London, 1992, p. 99.


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It is interesting to note that during their migration across the African continent, storks usually fly great distances towards the south-east, making their nests in rocky promontories or high areas where they raise their chicks. This habit probably led ancient Egyptians to establish all kinds of analogies between this species and its natural environment. Certainly, birds were a source for myths and fostered the belief of a *genius loci*; besides the above-mentioned Souls of Pe and Nekhen, we have referred in our work to the Souls of the East (*bꜣ.w jꜣbty.w*), whose important role in the Min festival was already established by H. Gauthier.[66]

COPTOS 2, 3 : SAW OF A SAW-FISH (?) (*PRISTIS CLAVATA*)

The saw shapes carved in Coptos 2 and 3 have been identified by Egyptologists as a saw of saw-fish or a frond. The unusual shape of this relief – more schematic and rectangular in Coptos 3 – prevents us from giving an objective argument about it or even about its possible function and iconographic meaning. B. Williams[67] has compared this element with the frond (?) motif carved into a cylinder seal found near an archaic tomb at Helwan and with other Naqada period representations, establishing that such combination, a deity with a frond, or a deity, a frond, and a shell or fish, comprises a group of figures with a recurrent message. This turns out to be very interesting indeed, because the group of carved reliefs in the Coptos colossi show a close relation to the Min standard.

COPTOS 2 : VERTICAL ELEMENT NEXT TO COUCHANT LION

The lower register of Coptos 2 consists of two motifs. The first one is a vertical line that looks like a staff or pole, perhaps the remains of an obliterated standard (?) and the second is a little figure of a couchant lion with its tail curved onto its back [fig. 13].

The typology of the lion reproduced here was widely used during Pre- and Protodynastic Egyptian periods.[68] We have an example in the so-called Coptos lions, also discovered by W.M. Fl. Petrie during his archaeological campaign in Coptos, as well as in a considerable number of lion figures made of different materials and dated as Predynastic.[69]

The image of the lion has helped to build, among many human societies, mainly hunter groups, the paradigm of fierceness and strength. The couchant or stalking lion usually stands near water streams, patiently waiting for its prey to come for a drink and thus start the hunt. In ancient Egypt, such an image probably expressed the notion of the lion as a guardian animal, watching over deserts and *wadis*, a motif that emphasizes the symbolic meaning

66 H. Gauthier, *op. cit.*, p. 103-104, 183-184.
67 B. Williams, *op. cit.*, 1988, p. 44.
68 See for example J. Capart, *Les débuts de l'art en Égypte*, 1904, fig. 128.
69 B. Adams, R. Jaeschke, *The Koptos Lions*, Milwaukee Public Museum, *Contributions in Anthropology and History* nº 3, Milwaukee, 1984, p. 22-29.


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of the lion and its representation before the primitive *Pr-wr* shrine; see the sentinel lion[70] in some decorations of Proto-historic cylinder seals.[71]

The lion, linked to these desert territories, was related also to powerful deities – Sekhmet, Pakhet, Menit – including Min, which were endowed with the shape and qualities of this feline.[72]

## COPTOS 3: GROUP OF ANIMALS

### *a. Indefinable Relief: Bird with Spread Wings (?) / Narmer Group (?)*

The first motif examined in the group of animals of Coptos 3 is a relief of an indefinable shape. W.M.Fl. Petrie described it as a flying bird (?) and certainly some parallels can be found according to one of the two conventions of flying birds already set in Predynastic times,[73] that is for example in the bird attitude shown in the so-called Battlefield palette, where the wings spring from the upper and lower outlines of the body in a similar shape to this relief in Coptos 3.

However, B. Williams states that this relief actually corresponds to a Narmer group composed by the *nʿr*-fish and the chisel (*mr*) [74]. This recent explanation, although tempting, shows, in our opinion, some methodological and interpretational mistakes:

a. The inscribed relief is a residual relief and any kind of restoration should be considered hypothetical;

b. The general shape of the upper part of this relief – tail, width of body – hardly corresponds to the shape of the *nʿr*-fish in Narmer's name representation, whose silhouette is shown extended and narrower in most specimens;

c. The presumed chisel is incomplete and not well defined; likewise, it is not represented independently of the upper part of the motif as B. Williams suggests in his restoration.

In order to reinforce his Narmer group theory, this author offers as proof some other supposed graffiti inscribed in Coptos 3:

1. A *nʿr*-fish on the left side of the figure;

2. A *serekh* on the right side;

3. A harpoon on the right leg; but, here again, the limits of evidence have been exceeded.

Our objections are the following:

a. The presumed graffiti are too rough, badly defined, excessively scattered and kept out of sight to allow us to claim that such elements could have constituted a hieroglyphic group designed for emphasizing the "royal name" of the presumed owner;

b. It is very difficult to distinguish this "graffito" from some other (accidental?) marks distributed along the statue. Only on the right leg we have observed, besides the "harpoon",

70 Cf. R. H. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art. A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture*, London, 1992, p. 69.

71 P. Kaplony, *IÄF* III, 1963, pl. 6, nº 8, 40, nº 137, 138, 41, nºs 139-143, 42, nº 145-146.

72 C. de Wit, *Le rôle et le sens du lion dans l'Égypte ancienne*, Leiden, 1951, p. 234-235.

73 W.S. Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom*, London, 1949, p. 129.


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about ten or twelve more incisions that could have been produced after the statue was abandoned;

c. From a museographic point of view, we should consider also the present location of this sculpture in the museum, to be exact, in a room deficiently controlled and where the statue is, unfortunately, too accessible to visitors.

*b. Elephant Treading on Triangles* (Loxodonta Africana)

The motif of the elephant in Preformal Egyptian art is not unusual; in fact it appears frequently in Naqada period[75] artefacts: theriomorphic palettes, pottery decoration, etc. We can find some fine examples in the Brooklyn handle-knife, the Davis comb or in the Sayala mace-handle. Likewise, the representation of the elephant treading on triangles – such as this Coptos 3 carved relief – appears in two ivory labels, one from Hierakonpolis[76] and another from Abydos U-j tomb.[77]

Some paleozoological studies[78] have attested that elephants lived in all of Egypt from the Palaeolithic until the end of the Eneolithic era, being displaced, during Predynastic times, to the Arabian Desert probably to the south of the line formed by the present day villages of Qena-Qoceir (26° N, 32°-34° E).

The presence of this big mammal in the Egyptian oriental territories during the Predynastic period would confirm, on the one hand, the adequate hydrological conditions of this habitat and its availability for plant resources; on the other hand, the close relation probably established between the elephant and the Eastern Desert. From an iconographic point of view, the representation of the elephant treading on triangles is not unjustified, but its presence would ratify the former arguments, as triangles were a representation of the oriental hill country, probably a prefigured shape of the hieroglyphic sign (*ḫ3s.t*) of historic times.

A sort of cult to the elephant could have extended in Upper Egypt and Lower Nubian territories in Predynastic times.[79] This hypothesis can be justified by the elephant's standard in some boats of Naqada II pottery decoration and the numerous elephant petroglyphs carved in Oriental Desert rocks.

The elephant has played the role of a great symbol in many ancient cultures and it has been related to the water element. In this sense, did the fight between elephants and snakes, one of the common motifs in the decoration of many Predynastic objects, express this same kind of connection? Speculation may be made that the elephant was regarded, because of its

74 B. WILLIAMS, *op. cit*., p. 39.

75 W.S. SMITH, *op. cit.*, p. 129, has attested that the motif of the elephant dissapeared from Old Kingdom carvings, although it remained as hieroglyph, and did not reappear until much later.

76 W. DAVIS, *Masking the Blow. The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art*, Los Angeles, 1992, p. 57, fig. 13.

77 G. DREYER, "Die Datierung der Min-Statuen aus Koptos", in *Kunst des Alten Reiches Symposium in Deutschen Archaeologischen Institut Kairo am 29 und 30 Oktober 1991*, *DAIK* 28, 1995, p. 53, pl. 3e.

78 F. VAHALA, "Der Elefant in Ägypten und Nubien", *ZÄS* 98, 1970, p. 82; M. ALMAGRO BASCH, M. ALMAGRO GORBEA, *Estudios de arte rupestre nubio* I. *Yacimientos situados en la orilla oriental del Nilo, entre Nag Kolorodna y Kars Ibrim (Nubia egipcia)*, Comité español de excavaciones arqueológicas en el extranjero. Memorias de la misión arqueológica en Egipto X, Madrid, 1968, p. 282-286.

79 I. HOFFMANN, "Eine neue Elefantengott-Darstellung am dem Sudan", *JEA* 58, 1972, p. 245-246.


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trunk – compare it with the typical Seth long curved snout –, enormous body, tusks and forked tail, as a Sethian animal. Therefore, we advance the hypothesis, that the Predynastic representation of the elephants fighting against the snakes could be a primeval allusion to the historic role of Seth combating Apopis. In this case the probable relation between Min and Seth would be established through the fact that both deities ruled over the desert or foreign lands. As H. Te Velde[80] points out: "*It does not seem to have been coincidence of historical and local circumstance or an exact religico-phenomenological comparison of functions which led the Egyptians to interpret the principal gods of foreign peoples* (of course including Min) *as forms in which Seth revealed himself*".

From the former argument we might conclude that the elephant acted as a mediator within a context of disorder (of strangeness, of foreignness), and as a kind of powerful beast of desert areas, which could have become a sacred and numinous (Sethian?) figure in the mentality of the primitive hunter.

*c. Bull Treading on Triangles* (Bos Primigenius - Bos Taurus Africanus - Bubalus Bubalis)

The relief of a bull treading on triangles leads the second register of the group of animals inscribed in Coptos 3. Again in this case the relation between certain animal species and the hill landscape of the Oriental Desert can be established as an important element in the iconography of these statues. Concerning the taxonomic description of the animal motif, three different species have been considered as possible candidates: 1) *Bos primigenius*,[81] 2) *Bos taurus africanus*,[82] 3) *Bubalus bubalis*.[83]

Certainly, various races of bulls lived in the Egyptian environment during Predynastic times. Their representation in numerous documents related to this period confirms it. Thus, we must briefly refer to the gradual process of expansion of desert areas, due to the climatic changes at the end of Epipaleolithic period (6th - 5th millennium BC), of which cattle migrations are a valuable proof.

The identification and inventory of these mammals is necessary for the comprehension of the sedentarization phenomenon at the beginning of the Predynastic period, because some of these animals were an economic source for the first human societies settled in the Nile Valley and also an origin of myths.

From the beginning of Egyptian history, the bull was considered one of the most important animal symbols, filled with a cosmic significance. Thus, the bull was related to the sun and the moon, and worshipped as a sacred animal: the bull of Heliopolis, the Apis bull of Memphis. In the Predynastic period it was identified with the emerging ruler; the Narmer palette or the Bull palette, are good examples of a kind of association such as: bull = the

80 H. Te Velde, *Seth, god of confusion. A Study of his Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion*, Leiden, 1977, p. 119.

81 D. Paton, *Animals of Ancient Egypt*, Princeton, 1925, p. 10.

82 Cf. G. Goyon, *Nouvelles inscriptions rupestres du Wadi Hammamat*, Paris, 1957, p. 143-145.

83 N. Sweydan, "Buffles et taureaux au prédynastique" in *Atti VI° Congresso Internazionale di Egittologia, Torino, 1-8 settembre 1991*, Torino, 1992, vol I, p. 589.


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mighty one, the conqueror of the Two Lands. In the royal protocol, the king was named (*kȝ nḫt*) "strong bull" or "victorious bull", an epithet referring to the pharaoh overthrowing his enemies as the "bull of Horus".

As to the bull motif inscribed in Coptos 3, it is depicted as an animal treading on mountains, climbing with a firm step, whereas its snout and horns are directed towards the sky. Here the image of the bull represents, in our opinion, the genesic force of a mighty animal, which tramples on its dominion. The fertility connotations of this bull are perfectly described through its erect head and its horns, whose profile could have been a recurrent image of the crescent moon. Well known is the relation that the Egyptians established between the bull (as an image of regeneration) and some astral deities, especially within a funerary context (e.g. Osiris-Apis), or the procreative-cosmic image of gods such as Min or ithyphallic Amon.[84]

We must not forget, on the other hand, the epithet *Kamutef*[85] ("bull of his mother"), which emphasized the generative and fertility qualities of the ithyphallic gods : Horus, Amon and, of course, Min. Finally, the bull relief inscribed in Coptos 3 brings new evidence for the identification of the Coptos colossi with the Egyptian god of fertility.

*d. Lion Treading on Triangles* (Leo leo)

The last motif we have examined in our iconographic analysis of the inscribed reliefs in the Coptos colossi is the figure of a lion, again, treading on triangles. Some authors have identified it as a hyena[86] (*Hyaena hyaena*) ; however the anatomical features do not agree with the former argument. See, for instance, the way in which the animal sits, as a feline, its paws on the triangles, or the shape and size of its neck, too short and wide to belong to a hyena. Likewise, the head is large, with a triangular and compact snout, compared to that of the hyena, which is long and blunt.

In historic times, the lion was an exponent of fierceness and a manifestation of the king. This image of the ruler as a wild beast defeating his enemies is already shown in some protohistoric documents, for example in the Battlefield palette, where a lion is devouring a man.

Thus, the lion in Coptos 3, as an animal that lived in the hill countries, could have been, as well as the elephant, an exponent of this physical strength, conveying – in relation to the bull on triangles described before – a complementary message by means of which the idol's unlimited physical and genesic supremacy over "desert" territories was proclaimed.

84 For Min, see H. GAUTHIER, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

85 See L. Baqué, "Min-Osiris, Min-Horus : a propósito de un relieve del templo de Hibis en el oasis de El Jarga" in J. CERVELLÓ, A.J. QUEVEDO (ed.), *...ir a buscar leña. Estudios dedicados al Prof. Jesús López, AÆs* 2, 2001, p. 35-49.

86 See Table 1, Historiographic Antecedents.


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### *II.6. The Coptos Colossi : Absolute Chronology*

As we have said in the introduction to this paper, the absolute chronology of the Coptos colossi is undoubtedly one of the most controversial points in the analysis of these statues. Through the first part of our study, we have tried to prove that the Coptos colossi were not an exception in the artistic context of Preformal art. Now, the question is : can we establish the chronological stage they really occupied ? The results obtained in W.M.Fl. Petrie's excavation have been the starting point in our approach to the subject.

The location of the Coptos colossi, inside the temple area, was established[87] as follows : Coptos 1 and 3 and a head beside the last statue, were placed in a hole against the south-west wall of the temple area, lying deep down in the sand bed foundations next to the great pit (south flank). Coptos 2 was discovered some days later at a similar depth in the sand bed of temple foundations but far from Coptos 1 and 3, next to the east flank of the wall of the temple area [fig. 14].

From an archaeological point of view, the information revealed by WM.Fl. Petrie's journal (season 1893-94)[88] has only allowed us to establish a chronology previous to the Ptolemaic period. However, some other elements have been essential to place these statues with more accuracy in time :

a. The first element refers to the discovery – together with the Coptos colossi – of three lion sculptures inside the temple area. The typology of these statues, whose chronology has been established between the Predynastic and the First Dynasty,[89] shows important parallelisms with the lion silhouette inscribed in Coptos 2. Furthermore, the other inscribed reliefs (shells, lion, elephant treading hills, etc.) combine pre-existing motifs, perfectly developed in the iconographic universe of the Naqada period ;[90]

b. The differences in size and style between the three Coptos colossi might be due to three different attempts to make a large statue of a god. Actually, Coptos 1 shows a rougher shape if we compare it to Coptos 2 and 3. Coptos 2 differs in shape from Coptos 3 ; the knees or right hand are better modelled in the latter. The surface imperfections, especially the big fissure at knee level, suggest their replacement because of fracture, probably at three different moments ;

c. Besides technical and iconographic reasons, we have taken into account the important stylistic parallels with the statuary and relief in Preformal art ; stylistic parallels in representing the human figure that were already submitted to a comprehensive comparative analysis in the first part of our study. For instance, the extreme dependence of the human figure to the sculptural block (cylindrical torsos, rudimentary arms joined to the body), the nudity and marked ithyphallism, or the round head with protruding ears and a triangular beard. A figure, therefore, whose monolithic, geometrical nature shows an undeniable sequence of similarities with Preformal patterns [fig. 15].

According to the former arguments we have to conclude that the Coptos colossi belong to a chronological period between the end of Naqada II and the beginning of Naqada III, not beyond the First Dynasty.

87 W.M.Fl. PETRIE, *op. cit.*, pl. 1.

88 We want to acknowledge the Griffith Institute and Dr Jaromir Málek and Ms Diana Magee for allowing us to use W.M.Fl. Petrie's journal for the season 1893-1894 (Coptos).

89 B. ADAMS, R. JAESCHE, *op. cit.*, p. 21-22, 29.

90 G. DREYER, *op. cit.*, pl. 3.


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### *II.7. The Size of the Coptos Colossi : Reconstruction*

In the formal study developed in the first part of our work, we have stressed the perfect symmetry of the Coptos colossi, and of course the area of greater visual weight formed by the phallus hole, central point (z), around which the whole figure seems to be organized. Besides that, a more accurate inspection of the frontal plane will allow us to establish the following :

IN COPTOS 1

– The diameter of the phallus hole is approximately equal to the width of the six-banded belt.

IN COPTOS 1 AND 2

– The central point formed by the phallus hole divides the figure symmetrically (right and left).

– The diameter of the phallus hole is approximately equal to the radius of the higher circumference formed by the left hand.

– The diameter of the phallus hole is approximately the same width as the scrotum and the wrist of the left hand.

– The diameter of the phallus hole is approximately equal to the width of the fist of the right hand.

IN COPTOS 2

– The diameter of the phallus hole is approximately equal to the width of the rhombus that forms the knees.

IN COPTOS 3

– The width of the scrotum is approximately equal to the width of the knee marks.

The evidence altogether confirms the phallus zone, and especially the central circle formed by the left hand, as the focus point around which the colossi were built. The tendency to strict symmetry reveals the principle of frontality governing the sculptural design. Thus, through this central circle a principle of proportion between the different parts of the statue is verified. The diameter of the circle has been fixed, in Coptos 1 and 2, in 12 cm, and 13 cm in Coptos 3. According to these two measures, which we have called "module", we have built a crisscross pattern used for our reconstruction of the Coptos colossi dimensions [fig. 16].


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1. RECONSTRUCTION IN MODULES : HEIGHT

*A. From Central circle to the Base of the Statue*

7 modules from central circle to knees
7 modules from knees to ankles
1 module from ankles to base
Total : 15 modules

*B. From Central Circle to the Head*

7 modules from central circle to the end of beard
8 modules from the end of beard to top of the head
Total : 15 modules

Total height of the Coptos colossi in modules :
15 modules (A) + 15 modules (B) + 1 module (central circle) = 31 modules.

2. APPROXIMATE HEIGHT IN CM

Coptos 1 : 31 modules × 12 cm = 372 cm
Coptos 2 : 31 modules × 12 cm = 372 cm
Coptos 3 : 31 modules × 13 cm = 403 cm

3. RECONSTRUCTION IN MODULES : WIDTH

*A. Head : approximately 3 modules*

*B. Shoulders : approximately 5.1 or 5.5 modules*

*C. Waistline and arms : approximately 5.1 or 5.5 modules*

*D. Legs (knee level) : approximately 4.5 modules*

4. APPROXIMATE WIDTH IN CM

*A. Head*

| | |
|---|---|
| Coptos 1 and 2 | 3 modules × 12 cm = 36 cm |
| Coptos 3 | 3 modules × 13 cm = 39 cm |


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*B. Shoulders*

| | |
|---|---|
| Coptos 1 and 2 | 5.1 or 5.5 modules × 12 cm = 61/66 cm |
| Coptos 3 | 5.1 or 5.5 × 13 cm = 66.3/71.5 cm |

*C. Waistline and Arms*

| | |
|---|---|
| Coptos 1 and 2 | 5.1 or 5.5 modules × 12 = 61/66 cm |
| Coptos 3 | 5.1 or 5.5 modules × 13 = 66.3/71.5 cm |

*D. Legs (knee level)*

| | |
|---|---|
| Coptos 1 and 2 | 4.2 or 4.5 modules × 12 = 50.4/54 cm |
| Coptos 3 | 4.2 or 4.5 modules × 13 = 54.6/58.5 cm |

### *II.8. Iconographic Analysis*

The connection between the Coptos colossi and the traditional image of the god Min can only be understood through the transformation of the representational codes in figurative art which occurred at the end of the Predynastic period.[91] This was a process of transformation, or reinterpretation that caused the development of a new model which would remain unchanged in Egyptian history, *i.e.* the "classical" Min representation. In fact, the paths of this process can be traced in Preformal antecedents, especially the bi- or tri-dimensional Preformal images of ithyphallic man, which possess most of the attributes that, as we have observed, were developed in the Coptos colossi. For B.J. Kemp,[92] the "Formal tradition" would slowly take over together with a new visual culture that was to encourage the development of an "official" or "academic art".

However, from an iconographic point of view, the image of Min would be invested with a succession of meanings hardly found in the Coptos model, and which we can only appreciate in embryo in the Coptos colossi. The idea of fertility, a fundamental concept in both models, invested Dynastic Min with religious values not present in the colossi. As way of example, see the "significant structure" ordering the raised arm, the flagellum and the ithyphallism in the figure of classical Min. A more complex formal development than in the Coptos model, where verticality rules over the whole work. Likewise, the absence of tall-plumed head or the nakedness – only dressed with a banded belt – investing the Coptos statues and their male sexual qualities with solemnity; a kind of *nuda virtus*, which gives a sublime quality.

Used as mythographic illustrations, the reliefs carved in these statues introduce some meanings that underline the relationship attested here between the colossi and the "Formal" figure. On that score, we must consider the presence of the Min standard as fundamental

91 B.J. Kemp, *op. cit.*, p. 107-108.
92 *Ibid.*, p. 106.


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in Coptos 1 and 2, and thus an irrefutable element for the identification of the character. On a similar level of importance are the rest of iconographic motifs : the deer, birds, lion, bull or elephant, whose presence reveals a *quasi* totemic feeling, an evocation of a time in which game hunting had a primordial role, not as an economic activity but as a builder of religious and social sensibility.[93] While constituting an allusion to a certain natural environment – the Eastern Desert – the presence of those animals confirms that in Predynastic times this territory was an irrigated savanna covered with vegetation, a mountain "desert" which in those times benefited from an earlier humid phase. Within this area – both strange and marvellous[94] –, we must also include the Red sea, a continuation of sandy plains holding life such as sea-shells, sawfish (?) ; elements that were objects of curiosity and fascination, and which could have evoked in their shape the astral cycles, especially those referring to the moon, which for ancient Egyptians guided the procreative force of nature.

This universe, perceived as a numinous space, leads us to consider the Coptos colossi as the prefiguration of a hunter and sea god, a deity ruling over the eastern regions, a Proto-Min, counterpart of that Min of historic times who, in his agrarian facet, reaffirms, through fertility, his authority over the desert and the Nile Valley.

## *II.9. The Coptos Colossi : Factors of Discussion and Final Remarks*

### A. ORIGINS OF THE CULT OF MIN

One of the arguments that remains uncertain is that referring to the source of the cult of Min. Regarding this, A. Bellucio has recently adduced that the presumed south-eastern origin of this god must be understood in an "astronomical sense" and not as an ethnographic or geographical reality.[95] Likewise, according to this author, the epithet *nḥs* – and extensively others such as *ḥqꜣ Jwnty.w*, *nb ḫꜣs.wt* – assigned to Min in religious passages, were assumed by ancient Egyptians to be descriptions of an astro-geographical sense. However, this "geographical", "astro-geographical" or "sidereal" division in relation to the mythical origins of Min, besides being a simplistic assessment, obliterates the holistic principles of myth and, of course, its sociological function in culture. In our opinion, the attributed south-eastern origin of this deity, in the way it is shown in the sources, offers different possibilities of approach.

In the first place, the historical reconstruction from myth, considered irrelevant on a theoretical understanding, has to be seen, however, in a different way from the point of view of the living reality of the believer. In short, for ancient Egyptians the difference between historical and mythical space is not as clear as it may seem to us. In fact, the south-eastern region was accurately located in space and time in secular beliefs.

93 Ph. BORGEAUD, "L'animal comme opérateur symbolique" in *L'animal, l'homme, le dieu dans le Proche-Orient ancient, Actes du colloque de Castigny 1981*, *CCEPOA* 2, 1984, p. 13-19.

94 S. AUFRÈRE, "L'étrange et la curiosité. Minéraux, coquillages, fossiles, météorites, et plantes curieuses dans les mentalités des anciens Égyptiens et des habitants du désert", in *ERUV* 1, *OrMonsp* 10, 1999, p. 69-85.

95 A. BELLUCCIO, "Le statue di Min "Medja" a Coptos", *CRIPEL* 17/3, 1998, p. 32.


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Secondly, the notion of "God's-Land" (*Tɜ-nṯr*) that crystallized, in historic times, into a solar-lunar theology – because the sun and the full moon rise in the East – was implicitly linked to the generous benefits that these territories supplied to the Egyptian state. In this sense, the myth of "God's Land" and the goods produced there reflected also the components of an important real economic activity.[96] Thus, Min, the ancient deity worshipped in Coptos, would be described as *Mḏɜ nfr n(y) ḫɜs.t jɜb.t* or *sr-bjɜ n(y) Pwn.t*, epithets that insist on the above mentioned south-eastern relationship of the god, linked especially to mining prospecting.[97] On the other hand, the image of a prospector god, besides his role of safeguarding desert roads, is related to the Medjay tribes, who became also specialists in mining, and were appointed police functions[98] in order to protect the desert fringe from invasions of other nomad populations. Consequently, the ethnographical or geographical data surrounding Min epithets are not trivial at all, but confirm, through analogy and the liturgical tradition, the important links between this cult centre of Upper Egypt and the above mentioned Medjay ethnic groups. As a matter of fact, the tribes used, from ancient times, the Coptos region and the wadi Hammâmât as a conduit for the exchange of products between the desert and the Nile Valley, and vice versa.

In this case, we observe how the myth reflects, in spite of its possible internal contradictions, the significance of certain spaces, considered geographical and mythical entities too, where deep historical changes took place. Therefore, it is unreasonable to refuse the influences that history or natural environments have had on cultural processes, including myths. The return of the lunar Eye (Hathor), and the god Min as a nomad deity coming from the Medja land, is related to the myth of Onuris : the good Medjay, the man of the East, Min, as the god who brings the Distant One,[99] *i.e.* the rich goods (Hathor = the beneficent emanations of the moon) that would contribute, just like the inundation, to the prosperity of Egypt. Again, a sociological principle that, from myth, recognizes the role of the nomads and the Coptite deity in the traditional economy of the neighbouring deserts.

The presumed foreign influences on the cult of Min related to nomadic populations, particularly the Medjay tribes, is not a simple conjecture but has a certain degree of credibility, especially when we consider the sociological factors already described. Furthermore, the epithets distinguishing Min as *nb ḫɜs.wt* or *ḥqɜ Jwnty.w* provide some information on legal principles concerning these territories : a) about the eminent property that Min holds on the Oriental Desert (*nb ḫɜs.wt*) and b) about the notion of the ruler (*ḥqɜ*) and his hereditary rights (Min as a prototype of a primordial ruler) on nomadic communities (*Jwnty.w*). The latter

96 S. Aufrère, "L'univers des minéraux et des métaux précieux dans l'Égypte ancienne", in *Cornaline et pierres précieuses. La Méditerranée, de l'Antiquité à l'Islam, Actes du colloque, Musée du Louvre 1995*, Paris, 1999, p. 360-361 ; *id.*, "Religious Prospects on the Mine in the Eastern Desert in the Ptolemaic and Roman Times (*Autour de l'Univers Minéral* VIII), in O.E. Kaper (ed.) *Life on the Fringe*, *Research School CNWS in Cairo, 9-12 December 1996*, Leiden 1998, p. 5-19.

97 J. Yoyotte, "Une épithète de Min comme explorateur des régions orientales", *RdE* 9, 1952, p. 125-137.

98 D. Michaut Colombot, "The *mḏ.y.w*, not Policemen but an Ethnic Group", in Ch. Bonnet (ed.), *Études Nubiennes* II, Genève, 1994, p. 29-36.

99 Likewise, the integration of foreign elements by an acculturation process in the myth of the Distant One has been attested in the Mediterranean basin during Late Period. See S. Aufrère, "Un prolongement méditerranéen du mythe de la Lointaine à l'époque tardive", in N. Grimal, B. Menu (ed.), *Le commerce en Égypte ancienne*, *BiEtud* 121, 1998, p. 19-39.


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an important element that would ratify, on the other hand – through the social function of myth – the legal rights of tribesmen (the *Mḏꜣy.w*) on the above mentioned territorial property.

According to this new approach, the alluded epithets, such as *Mḏꜣ nfr n(y) ḫꜣs.t jꜣb.t*, *sr-bjꜣ n(y) Pwn.t*, or *s n(y) jꜣb.t*, could have been related not exclusively to the benefits obtained from "God's Land" but also to the notion of an *externus* god, probably assimilated,[100] working as a *clef de voûte*, as a sacred mediator, between Egypt and the surrounding cultures.

This possible thread of cultural influence comes from the south-east and this is the orientation referred to, direct or indirectly, in most cosmogonical and liturgical texts in which Min is mentioned. Likewise, this geographical area was involved in a process of cultural osmosis, which gave rise to a religious ideal ("God's Land") emerging from a real space. Another consequence was the development of local myths related to an economic axis.[101] Last but not least, south-east is the direction which some present historiographic researches point to as the origin for religious and technological novelties during 6th - 5th millennium BC in Egypt.[102] All these elements, joined to the ancient cult of Min, revealed by the presence of the Coptos colossi, make more acceptable the traditional theories[103] on the south-eastern origin of this deity or, at least, on the external influences on his cult.

## B. ICONOGRAPHIC MOTIFS ON THE COPTOS COLOSSI

The evaluation of the iconographic motifs inscribed on the Coptos colossi is another point of discussion that we have to undertake in this section. What was the function of these reliefs ?

In the first place, debates about the interpretation of these inscriptions have not taken into account the important iconographic value that they have as emblems or symbols related to the idol. To this argument we must add, secondly, the supposed presence of other signs, presumably encoding linguistic enunciation, such as the hieroglyphic group *nṯr-mry* (maybe *mry-nṯr* ?),[104] recently adduced by A. Bellucio in her inspection of one of the Ashmolean statues (Coptos 2) or the above mentioned presence of the Narmer group alleged by B. Williams in Coptos 3 and, finally, G. Dreyer's interpretation,[105] who considers most of the inscribed reliefs a sequence of Predynastic kings' names.

In order to better approach this puzzle we have to consider the following :

1. Apart from the fact that the presence of the hieroglyphic group *mry nṯr*, inscribed in Coptos 2, might be hypothetical, the argument proposed by A. Bellucio that : "*la testimonianza di tale graffito indica chiaramente che la statua non poteva appartenere ad uno strato arcaico ed*

100 Does the term *nfr*, in the epithet *mḏꜣ nfr*, refer to an abstract notion of this acculturation phenomenon ?

101 See J. Majer, "The Eastern Desert and Egyptian Prehistory", in R. Friedman, B. Adams (ed.) *The Followers of Horus. Studies dedicated to Michael Allen Hoffman 1944-1990*, Egyptian Studies Association Publication, nº 2, Oxbow Monograph 20, 1992, p. 227-234.

102 M. Cornevin, "Paléoclimatologie et peuplement de l'Égypte ancienne", *RdE* 47, 1996, p. 197-198.

103 H. Gauthier, *op. cit*., p. 183. See also É. Chassinat, *Le Mystère d'Osiris au mois de Khoiak* II, Le Caire, 1968, p. 691-694.

104 By transposition with honorific intent, see *Wb* II, 101, 3.

105 G. Dreyer, *op. cit*., p. 56.


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*ormai obsoleto del Tempio*" seems to be misleading reasoning, even more when one takes into account the earliest inscriptions of group *mry nṯr* or *mr* + god – including *mry.t-n-Mnw* or *mr.t Mnw*[106] –, already attested to from the archaic period as examples of theophoric names or royal epithets.[107]

2. As to B. Williams's statement on king Narmer's name inscribed in Coptos 3, whose supposed presence has been previously discussed in this article, we have only to consider the purpose of this kind of graffiti including the king's name in the earliest stages of writing. On that score, two functions have been proposed:[108]

a. Administrative, in order to determine exactly the owner of the object and;

b. Ideological, in order to assert his power joining his authority to the object, which in the present case is imbued with sacred qualities.

According to these two proposals, the individuality of the king's name (distinguishing ownership and authority) and its clearness, with regard to the rest of elements, both symbolic motifs and writing signs, was satisfied with the help of the following representative resorts:

i. The *serekh* (combining Horus standard or not), as a pictogram designed for setting, and above all, recognizing the king's name;

ii. The persistent repetition of the king's name, using the traditional *serekh* or a kind of square shape including the name;

iii. The gathering of clear writing elements that constituted the king's name, also grouped under *nebti* or *nesu-bit* titles. To sum up, unity through the *serekh*, reiteration or individuality of the writing elements (marked under different royal titles) conforming the name, which we do not find in the supposed graffito discovered by B. Williams in Coptos 3. In these inscriptions, the so-called *serekh* (on the right side of the statue) is too far away from the presumed *nʿr*-fish (on the left side of the statue) or from the supposed harpoon, which is located in the upper part of the right leg. On the other hand, the "second Narmer group", besides being too damaged to provide a positive identification, does not show any of the features of collocation of royal names, *i.e.* there is no *serekh*, no reiteration and the elements are liable to be confused with the rest of iconographic motifs. One way or another, the same situation applies to G. Dreyer's interpretation, therefore his hypothesis concerning a sequence of Predynastic kings (among them the so-called "Red Sea-shell" (?) king)[109] starting from the Coptos colossi inscribed reliefs, may be considered unlikely.

In our opinion, only Min standards confer, by their outstanding position, iconographic unity to the whole, so we must consider them as the key that will help us to understand, through iconographic analysis, the complex message contained in such symbols and their "intrinsic meaning" in close relation to the ancient god of Coptos.

106 A. McFarlane, *op. cit.*, p. 109, 111.
107 E. Hornung, *Les dieux de l'Égypte. Le un et le multiple*, Paris, 1986, p. 34-35.
108 P. Vernus, "La naissance de l'écriture dans l'Égypte ancienne", *Archéo-Nil* 3, 1993, p. 89-90.
109 Cf. G. Dreyer, "Umm el-Qaab: Nachuntersuchungen im frühzeitlichen Königsfriedhof. 5/6 Vorbericht", *MDAIK* 49, 1993, p. 35.


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C. ABOUT THE MIN COLOSSI AND THEIR DISCOVERY ON THE PTOLEMAIC TEMPLE OF COPTOS

It is our aim in this last section to pay attention to a matter which we consider closely related to the chronology of these statues, namely, their discovery lying beneath the thick sand bed of foundations of the Ptolemaic temple. On that score, W.M.Fl. Petrie proposed the following argument : "*The older sculptures which were lying still about the sacred site were put out of the way into the hollows of the basal clay, and thus the three statues of Min, the slabs of Pepy, the vulture of Amenemhat, the stele of Rahotep, and other fragments, were all disposed of beneath the grand platform of sand and pavement which made a clear space for the Ptolemaic work*".[110]

W.M. Fl. Petrie refers, of course, to the restoration works led in the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphos (283-246 BC) which were properly registered in the inscription of the high official and priest Senushep. In this third great period of reconstruction of the Coptos temple during Ptolemaic times, one might think that the workers in charge of the rebuilding found the Min colossi among the remains of the ancient structure. Therefore, as objects of worship, it seems plausible to reason that they were buried beneath the foundations of the enclosing wall of the new temple. This is not strange if we consider, for example, the statues also buried this way in the Luxor temple,[111] in order to perpetuate their devotion as foundation elements in a sacred place. This would also account for the scattered position of the statues and of other presumably contemporary elements when they were discovered by W.M.Fl. Petrie.

However, the question is, why were the Coptos colossi preserved for such a long time? We might find an answer in the conservative atmosphere on which Egyptian religion was supported. As B.J. Kemp[112] points out, despite the fact that the substitution could have taken place during the Old Kingdom, the Coptos colossi continued being sacred objects. Multiple hollows on the surface of Coptos 1 and 2 must be considered at least as evidence of the devotion evoked by these statues, long after they had been rendered unfit for a cult.[113] From this perspective, it is appropriate to think that they were never completely rejected. Perhaps, as the oldest statues of the deity, they were considered a historical-mythical point of reference for a long time afterwards.

The problem is difficult to evaluate without taking into account the religious, sociological and political context in Egypt from the Predynastic period on. A context in which most ancient religious traditions, still living, were submitted to different interpretations and discussions, not only theological in nature, but also political and cultural.

At the beginning of Dynastic times, and throughout most of the Old Kingdom, one of the tasks accomplished by the pharaonic state was the adaptation of those old surviving religious conceptions so that they would suit the new ideology crystallized after unification.

110 W.M.Fl. PETRIE, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
111 M. EL-SAGHIR, *Das Statuenversteck in Luxortempel*, Mainz-am-Rheim, 1992.
112 B.J. KEMP, *op. cit.*, p. 105-106.
113 This seems to us a more reasonable hypothesis than that of A. Belluccio, *op. cit.*, 1998, p. 40-41, who states that the Coptos colossi were made by a Medjay nomad group settled in Egypt during Greek-Roman times.


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An adaptation that was established under a conception of continuity, both in action and thought, that would invest the new order with stability and prestige.

There can be no doubt that in this complex process of change, the old symbologies and their forms of representation opened the way to others, more suitable for the nascent ideology. However, the thread of that previous tradition (or traditions) was never lost forever but remained latent, leaving its indelible trace through liturgy and rites.

Within this scheme of evolution, the image of the god Min would be invested with new attributes. From that moment on, his strength, *i.e.* fertility, would serve the fields. Thus, the god who formerly was considered a deity of the desert and the sea, would eventually become one of the main gods in the sacred agrarian cycle.

## ADDENDUM[114]

During the last few years, the interest in the Coptos Colossi has seen a steady increase among the scholars devoted to Predynastic Egypt. Since our article was submitted for evaluation to the IFAO in March 2000, and while the work was being accepted for *BIFAO* 102, 2002, I received news of B. J. Kemp's article, "The Colossi from the Early Shrine at Coptos in Egypt", which appeared in *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 10:2, 2000, p. 211-242 and also that of H. Goedicke, "Min", *MDAIK* 58, 2002, p. 247-255. Indeed, these two new contributions deserve full discussion here. But logical limitations of space and time (the present work was already in the process of publication) have made the analysis in a very brief form more convenient.

### *1. B.J. Kemp's Reinterpretation of the Coptos Colossi*

*a. Material and technique*: in B.J. Kemp's opinion, the Coptos colossi could have been made following a hybrid technology (hammering/chiselling/drilling) and consequently this "*is not a means of assigning a particularly close date of manufacture*" (p. 214). Nevertheless, B.J. Kemp's argument on this point is not so significant in relation to (internal) form as to (external) shape. At the approach of the Coptos colossi, it is not only apparent that in their design these sculptures are very compact and rough. At the same time, the principles that govern them, as well as their characteristic pose and spatial composition, express material hardness and rigidity. In our opinion, the discussion about the possible date of manufacture of these statues involves inevitably not only a search for tool traces in the process of carving, but especially a valuation of their internal organization and design. In other words, the criteria

114 The initial intention of the publishers was to include this article in *BIFAO* 101, 2001. However, due to room restrictions (*BIFAO* was filling rapidly), it was considered more suitable to publish it in *Recherches d'archéologie, de philologie et d'histoire* (*RAPH*), at that time in course of reactivation. Unfortunately, new adjusts in IFAO's series have compelled at last to reconsider its inclusion in *BIFAO* 102, 2002. I must here express my gratitude to the publishers for incorporating this *addendum*, which is, no doubt, an indispensable adjunct to the text.


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for the recognition of a work of art in its full context (even temporal) concern not only the physical manner of working materials (of course fundamental) but other textural, aesthetic effects not divorced from the creative process.

We agree with B.J. Kemp when he objects that "*the history of transition from the use of hammer to chisel is inevitably not that well-documented in Egypt*" (p. 214). However, although one assumes this argument, the conception of the Coptos colossi seems closely related to the working qualities of the material (limestone). Because stone is extremely heavy and lacks tensile strength, there is some doubt as to the technical capacity of sculptors and the efficacy of their implements ; especially concerning the design of vulnerable projections, which were extremely dangerous for the integrity of the block (perhaps this also would explain the fact that the phallus was made separately in the Coptos colossi). Consequently, the nature of the task (the Coptos colossi could represent one of the first attempts to produce large scale human figures in Egypt) and the compact result of the finished work, producing surfaces not deeply hollowed out and a simplification of bodily forms, lead us to consider their massive treatment by hammering as an indirect proof of an early stage of sculptural development. A feeling that, in this particular case, remains, regardless of the possible contribution of other techniques.

*b. The petroglyphs* : in order to complete table 1, col. 3 (Historiographic Antecedents) of our article we include here the new iconographic identification of petroglyphs presented by B.J. Kemp (p. 215-220).

**Coptos 1.** a. A gazelle/oryx (?) head with tongue or support pole ;
b. Two *Lambis* shells.
*Observations* : there are no signs of Min-standards and no traces of other earlier designs.

**Coptos 2.** a. Two Min-standards and two branched poles ;
b. Two *Lambis truncata* and a couchant quadruped (lion or dog). Between the shells a long narrow vertical pole (a serpent ?) ;
*Observations* : all the signs belong to a unitary composition.

**Coptos 3.** Row 1 : two Min-standards and two branched poles. Below the right hand standard is a long-legged bird (stork/ostrich ?). Beside the right of the left-hand standard is a long thin tapering object (a serpent ?).
Row 2 : two *Lambis* shells.
Row 3 : elephant standing on mountains and a falcon.
Row 4 : a bull and a lion (or hyaena) standing on mountains.
*Observations* : all signs are probably the product of a single period of carving.


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On the discussion concerning the presence of a Narmer group, presumably attested by B. Williams, or about G. Dreyer's arguments suggesting that the inscribed reliefs in the Coptos colossi correspond to a range of Late Predynastic kings' names, B.J. Kemp's position has to be considered complementary to our own.

In a recent analysis of these reliefs we have taken into account the possibility that, besides their own symbolic value, the close link between the gazelle's head, the Min-standards, the *Lambis* and the "branched poles" – all of them represented in pairs, including the horns of the gazelle – was perhaps an allegoric way of expressing the dual character of the idol. This would lead us to consider the significance of these signs within a religious conception of territorial coalescence : that involving the Eastern Desert and the Valley, at the head of which we find this Predynastic form of Min. In such a context, the Min-standards, the *Lambis*, the "branched poles" or the gazelle's head could have really been used as a specific indication for the "estate of Min".

*c) The archaeological context* : in evaluating B.J. Kemp's approach to the archeological context of the Coptos colossi, we find two aspects that raise discussion. There is, first, that referred to the presumed situation of these statues within the perimeter of the temple. For this author, they "*had originally stood widely spaced and free-standing*" (p. 229). The second and perhaps most important concerns his view of sacred space in Predynastic times. B.J. Kemp's position shows, on this matter, a considerable divergence in relation to previous hypotheses which, in his opinion, have proved to be much influenced by pharaonic architectural traditions (p. 230).

In his intention to emphasize the diversity of early cultic traditions, B.J. Kemp tends to restrict common features, focusing (in some respects excessively) on the fundamental differences between the Predynastic and Dynastic worlds. His view (p. 230) of an open sacred space (Predynastic), opposite to the so-called "sacred box" (Dynastic) is summarized in his reconstruction of the original setting of the Coptos colossi (fig. 13). In our opinion, however, this sketch is affected by rather subjective impressions. Taking into account that delimiting the holy place is a prevailing idea in any form of religious cult, in order to protect the sacred element and its mystery, an earlier form of cult permitting direct public access to the nakedness is hardly admissible.

On the other hand, B.J. Kemp goes beyond the evidence when he places a total of five colossi around the base of the "*gezira*". This spontaneous proliferation of statues is justified by comparison with the erect pillars surrounding Hierakonpolis temple. But this is a rather questionable point. Actually, there is no evidence for assuming that the Hierakonpolis pillars responded to the same (ithyphallic) religious belief that the colossi manifest. Likewise, concerning shape, it may also be doubted whether ithyphallic figures and pillars could have really interacted at the same level of external demonstration within a specific religious ideal of fertility. This is surely a mistake since in certain aspects this author seems to interpret different "megalithic" monuments under the mistaken scope of a "megalithic religion".

Finally, J.A. Harrell's report (p. 237-239) about petrology is not conclusive, as the Tarawan-Serai formation occupied far too extensive an area in Egypt. Such a circumstance makes it


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difficult to establish firmly a common origin (el-Gebelein) for the limestone and therefore, the Coptos-Hierakonpolis connection only proves to be possible but not probable. In fact, the analysis previously made by A.J. Lloyd from samples of the Coptos lions, also discovered by W.M.Fl. Petrie during the same campaign, revealed a different source for the limestone, to be precise Gebel Qum and Gebel Agula, both quarries located in the Eastern Desert near Coptos.

### *2. H. Goedicke's New Arguments on the Coptos Colossi and on Min's Emblem*

In H. Goedicke's recent contribution to the subject of the colossi, he suggests (p. 254) that "*Min's ithyphallic presentation is not a reflection of engendering strength but rather due to the practice of circumcision*" and also that the emblem of Min was "*directly connected with it and appears to depict the instrument used for this process*". In his opinion, such a (foreign ?) practice was carried out by fighters as synonymous with entering into the ranks of professional fighting. Although difficult to prove by evidence, this tentative hypothesis must be retained for discussion. Any objection to the identification of Min's emblem as a circumcision tool is not really relevant, though such an argument is, in our opinion, within the limits of speculation. The same applies to the ritual practice of circumcision and its supposed connection with the god Min, despite the fact that its widespread use in Egypt and the different contexts in which circumcision appears could support a kind of relation in this sense (on this subject see A. M. Roth, *Egyptian Phyles in the Old Kingdom*, *SAOC* 48, Chicago, 1991, p. 62-74 ; cf. also, S. Grunert, *SAK* 30, 2002, p. 137-151). This supposition, after all, has also been assumed in the case of the goddess Hathor and certain tomb scenes associated with a rite that presumably marked the beginning of a young man's sexual life (see E.F. Wente, in *Studies in Honor of J.A. Wilson*, *SAOC* 35, Chicago, 1969, p. 86). However, we have reservations about H. Goedicke's interpretation. For this author, circumcision and engendering strength seem to be contradictory and not complementary in Min's ithyphallic representation. As a phenomenon of great religious significance, circumcision represents, in fact, a beginning of the initiation into manhood. This would imply that circumcision was not only a proper way to get social rank, but also an operation signaling the leaving behind of chilhood and the achievement of sexual maturity. Consequently, circumcision must not be seen as an end in itself, but rather a means of reaching an ideal of human fertility. The same religious ideal that the Coptos colossi represented.


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| Author/Year | 1. Colossi Attitude | 2. Supplementary Elements | | | 3. Inscribed Reliefs | | | 4. Chronology |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Right hand object | Belt | Head | Coptos 1 | Coptos 2 | Coptos 3 | |
| Petrie I (1893-1894) Journal of excavation (Griffith Institute) | Min/Khem | Flail | Not mentioned | Pertaining to Coptos 3, no face/mask carved on wood | not identified at the first moment | a. 2 Min standards with feathers ; b. 2 palm branches ; c. 2 conch shells from Red Sea | a. 2 Min standards with feathers ; b. 1 elephant ; c. 1 hyaena ; d. 1 young bull ; e. 2 conch shells from Red Sea ; f. 2 palm branches | Prehistory |
| Petrie II (1896) *Koptos* | Min | Flail | 6 + 8 bands (Coptos 1 & 2) ↓ parallels within Egyptian cultural context | Pertaining to Coptos 3, no face/mask carved on wood | a. 1 stag head ; b. 2 *Pteroceras* shells | a. 2 Min standards with feathers ; b. 2 saw of saw-fish ; c. 2 *Pteroceras* shells | a. 2 Min standards with feathers ; b. 1 additional pole with knobs on it ; c. 2 saw of saw-fish ; d. 1ostrich ; e. 1 elephant resting on conical hills ; f. 1 flying bird (?) ; g. 1 hyaena chasing a young bull ; h. 1 young bull on conical mounds | Prehistory ↓ subsequently in W.M.Fl. Petrie, "The Rise and Fall of Egyptian Art", *Journal of the Society of Arts*, 1901, p. 594, the Coptos colossi were qualified by this author as "*the most ancient work of Dynastic Race*" |
| | | | | | (↑) The identification of the animal species inscribed in these reliefs points to a foreign origin of the idol. The nucleus of his cult would be connected with a people from the Red Sea (New Race). | | | |
| Capart (1904) | Min | Flail | 6 + 8 bands (Coptos 1 & 2) | not mentioned | *Idem* Petrie II except : a. 1 deer head | *Idem* Petrie II | *Idem* Petrie II except : h. 1 ox on conical hills | Prehistory |

**Table 1.** Historiographic Antecedents.


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| Author/Year | 1. Colossi Attitude | 2. Supplementary Elements | | | 3. Inscribed Reliefs | | | 4. Chronology |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Right hand object | Belt | Head | Coptos 1 | Coptos 2 | Coptos 3 | |
| Bissing (1910) | Min | Flail | 6 + 8 bands (Coptos 1 & 2) | Face destroyed + rests of painting | The reliefs are only mentioned but not described | | | 1st Dynasty |
| Baumgartel (1948) | Attendants of Min (Mesopotamia) | Hands with traces of perforations for holding something in their fists (?) | " Not pertaining to Egyptian cultural context | Not pertaining to the colossi/ rest of a moustache and whiskers (Mesopotamia) | *Idem* Petrie II | *Idem* Petrie II | *Idem* Petrie II | 1st Intermediate Period |
| Smith (1949) | Min | Flail | 6 + 8 bands (Coptos 1 & 2) | Face destroyed | *Idem* Petrie II | *Idem* Petrie II | *Idem* Petrie II | Dynasty - 0 |
| Williams (1988) | Min | Flail | " The simple banded belt is a version of that found on many figures of Naqada II-III | Within Naqada II-III context | *Idem* Petrie II except: a. Gazelle (?) head with the pointed tip of staff | *Idem* Petrie II except: b. 2 fronds + partly obliterated standard or a harpoon | *Idem* Petrie II except: c. 2 fronds; f. Narmer's name + 1 Narmer Graffito | Naqada Period |
| | | | | | (↑) The reliefs were modified from a pre-existing composition. | | | |
| Kemp (1989) | God of fertility | Flail | Not pertaining to pharaonic tradition | Long and thick beard | *Idem* Petrie II | *Idem* Petrie II | *Idem* Petrie II | Preformal tradition |
| Payne (1993) | Min | Flail | 6 + 8 bands (Coptos 1 & 2) | Bearded head/ features completely destroyed | *Idem* Petrie II except: a. Bovidae head | *Idem* Petrie II | Not mentioned in Ashmolean Catalogue | Naqada II (?) |
| Dreyer (1995) | Min | Flail | 6 + 8 bands (Coptos 1 & 2) | Not mentioned | *Idem* Petrie II except: a. Oryx (?) head | *Idem* Petrie II except: b. 2 fronds + 1 *canis* | *Idem* Petrie II except: c. 1 stork; d. 2 fronds; f. Narmer group + 1 *canis* | Naqada IIIa |
| | | | | | (↑) The inscribed reliefs and their replacement would confirm a sequence of predynastic kings ("Herrscher"). | | | |


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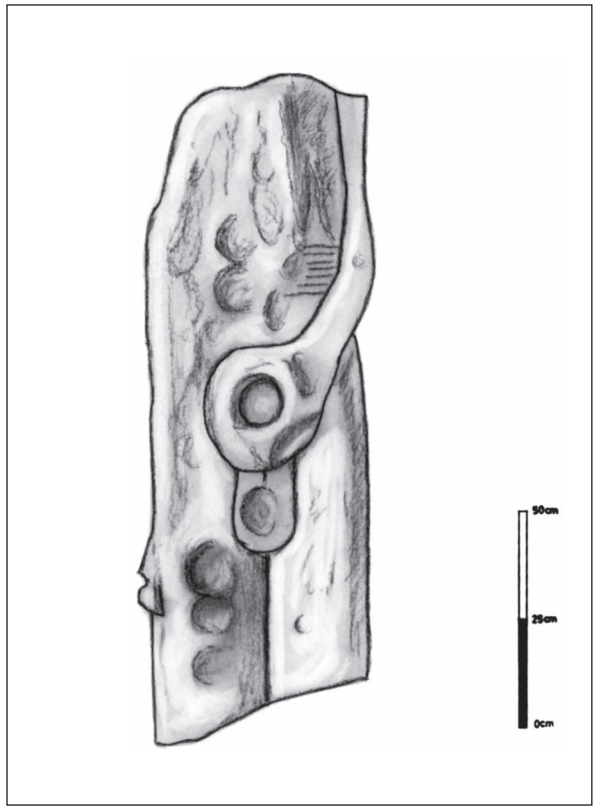


**Fig. 1.** Coptos colossus 1, frontal view. Ashmolean Museum, reg. nº 1894.105d (author).

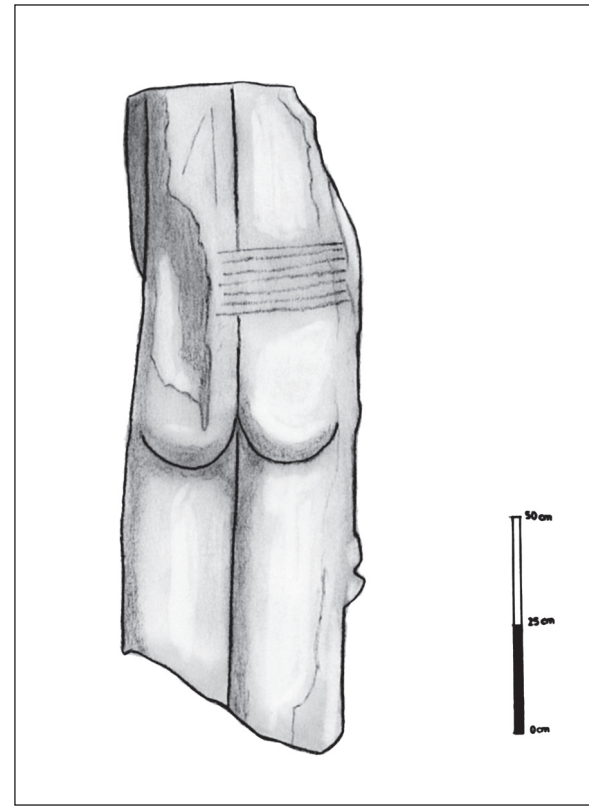


**Fig. 2.** Coptos colossus 1, back view. Ashmolean Museum, reg. nº 1894.105d (author).

**Fig. 3.** Coptos colossus 1, right leg, detail of carved reliefs. Ashmolean Museum, reg. nº 1894.105d. (author).

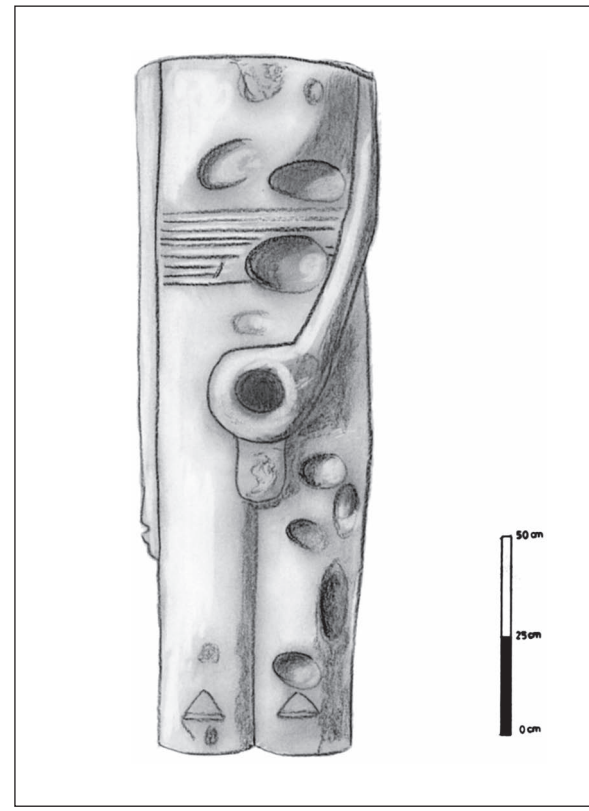


**Fig. 4.** Coptos colossus 2, frontal view. Ashmolean Museum, reg. nº 1894.105e (author).

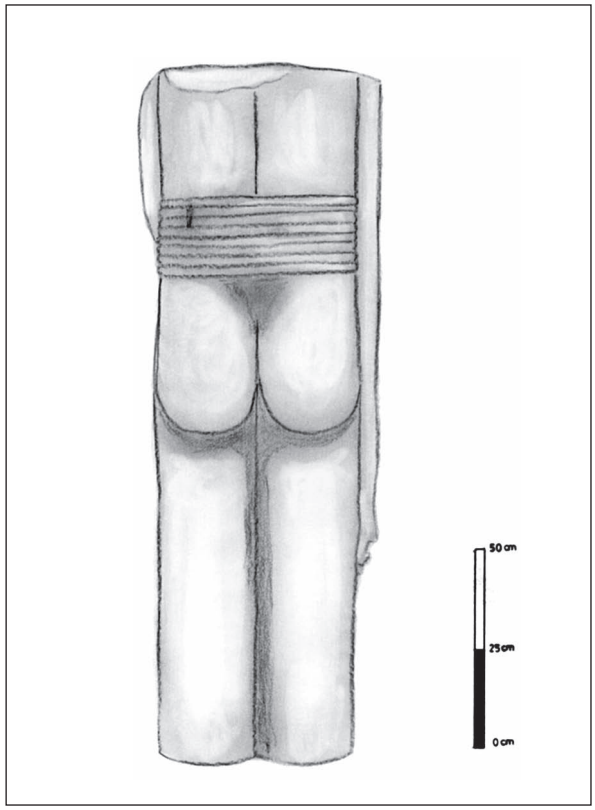


**Fig. 5.** Coptos colossus 2, back view. Ashmolean Museum, reg. nº 1894.105e (author).

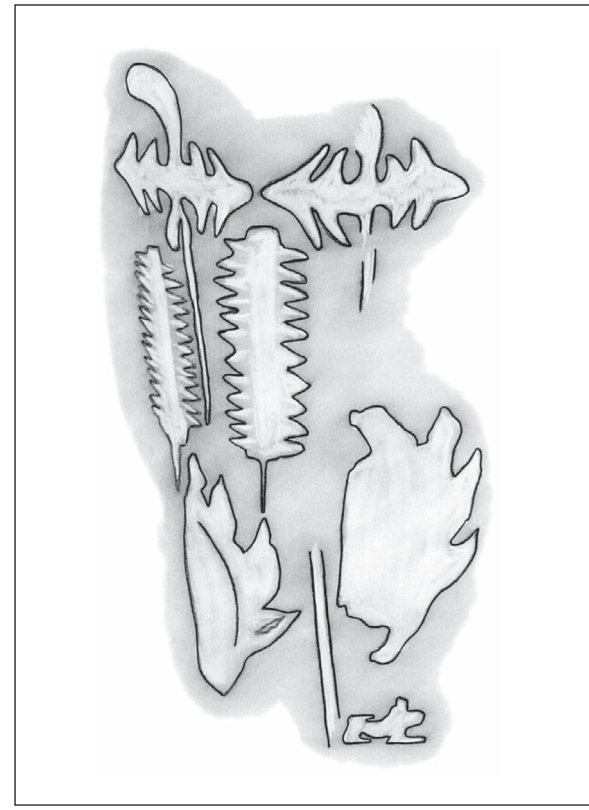

**Fig. 6.** Coptos colossus 2, right leg, detail of carved reliefs. Ashmolean Museum, reg. nº 1894.105e (author).

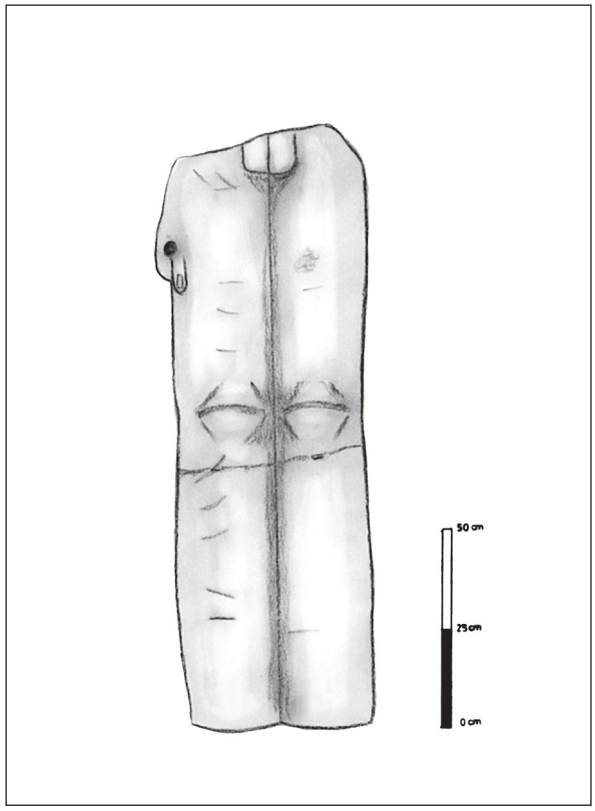


**Fig. 7.** Coptos colossus 3, frontal view. Cairo Museum, JE 30770 bis, S.R. 5797 (author).

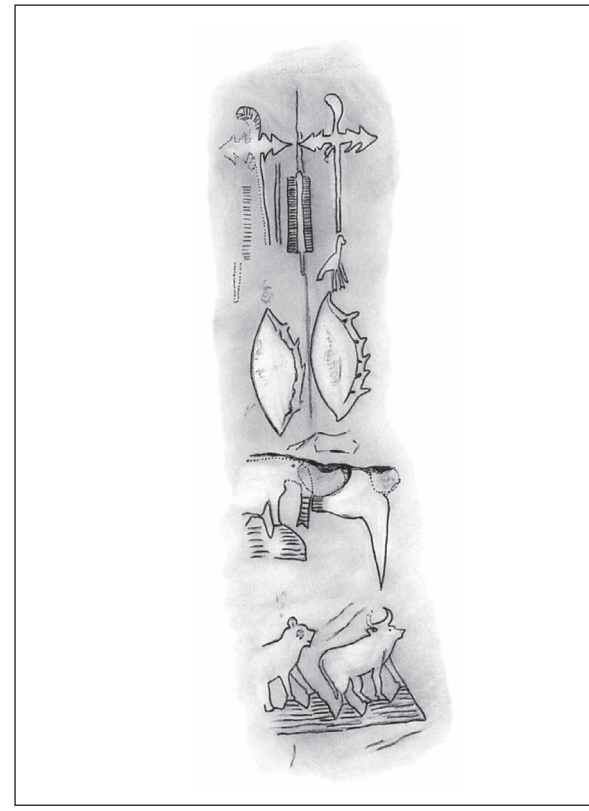

**Fig. 8.** Coptos colossus 3, right leg, detail of carved reliefs. Cairo Museum, JE 30770 bis, S.R. 5797 (author).


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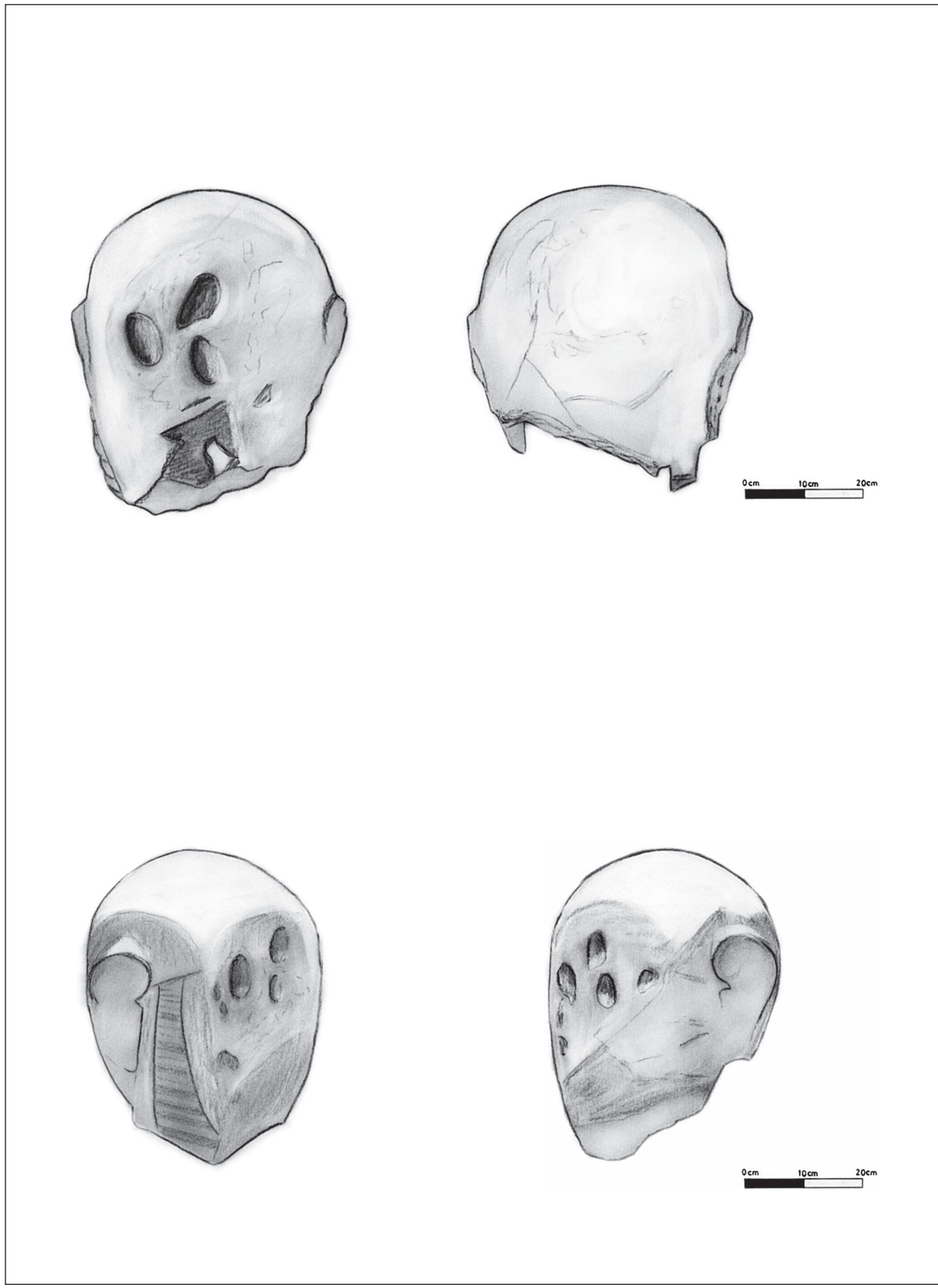


**Fig. 9.** Fragment of the Ashmolean colossus head. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, reg. nº 1894.105c (author).


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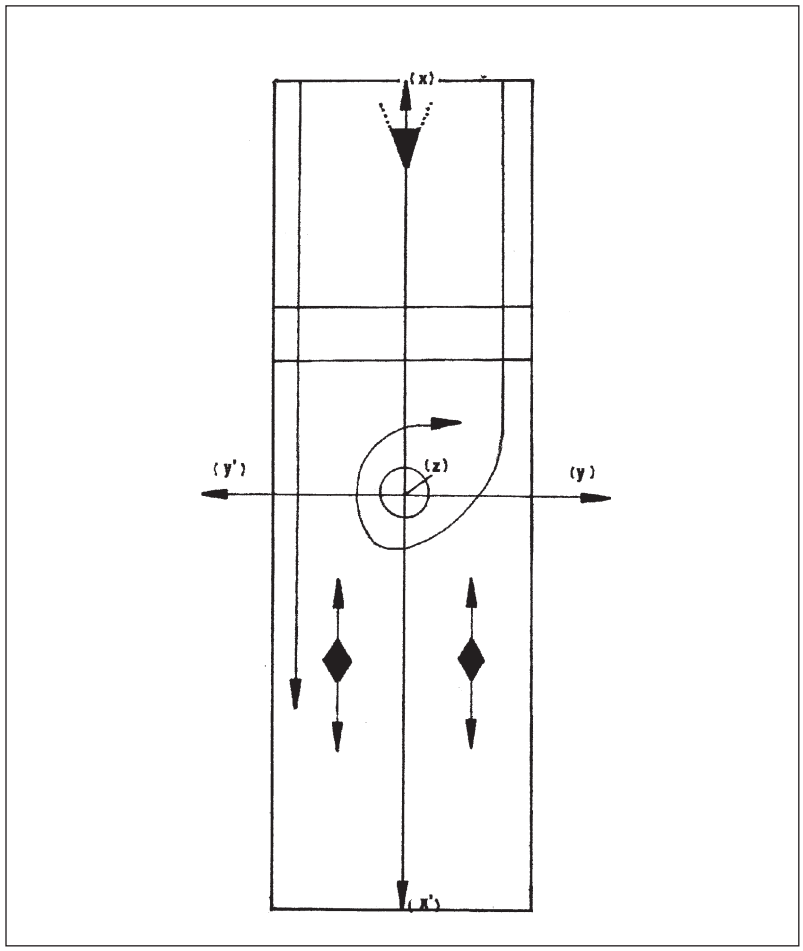


**Fig. 10.**
Diagrammatic view of the Coptos colossi (frontal plane), showing line trajectories, volumes and general structure ; from the Ashmolean Museum fragments (author).

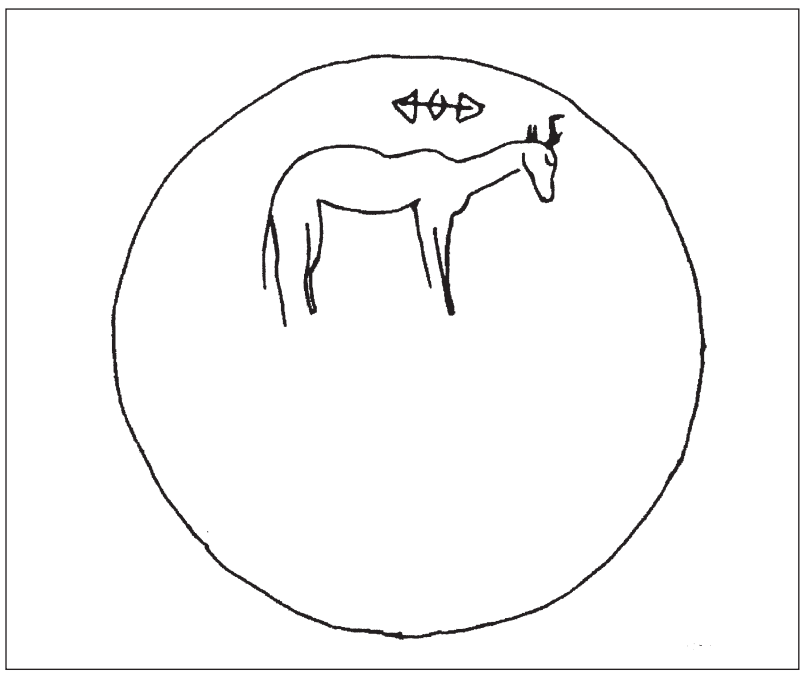

**Fig. 11.**
Predynastic palette showing a deer or a gazelle represented under a Min standard ; from Matmar (CG 54334) (redrawn by the author from G. Brunton, *Matmar*, London, 1948, pl. 22 nº 28).


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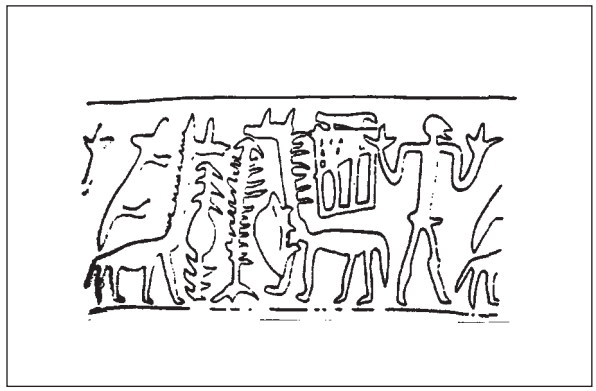

**Fig. 12.** Drawing of a seal impression and a detail showing a finger conch and a Min standard, from a cylinder seal found near an archaic tomb at Helwan (from B. Williams, "Narmer and the Coptos Colossi", *JARCE* 25, 1988, p. 39, fig. 3 b).

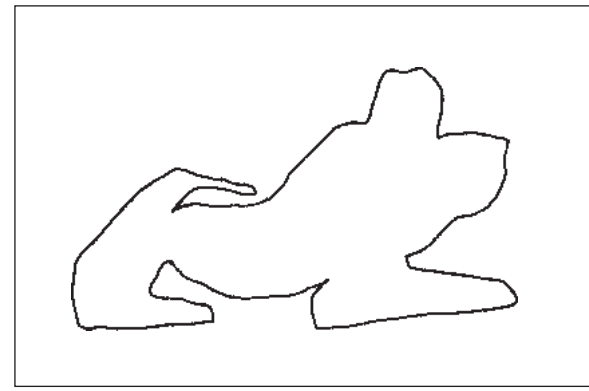

**Fig. 13.** Relief decoration on Coptos 2 showing a lying lion. Ashmolean Museum, reg. nº 1894.105e (author).

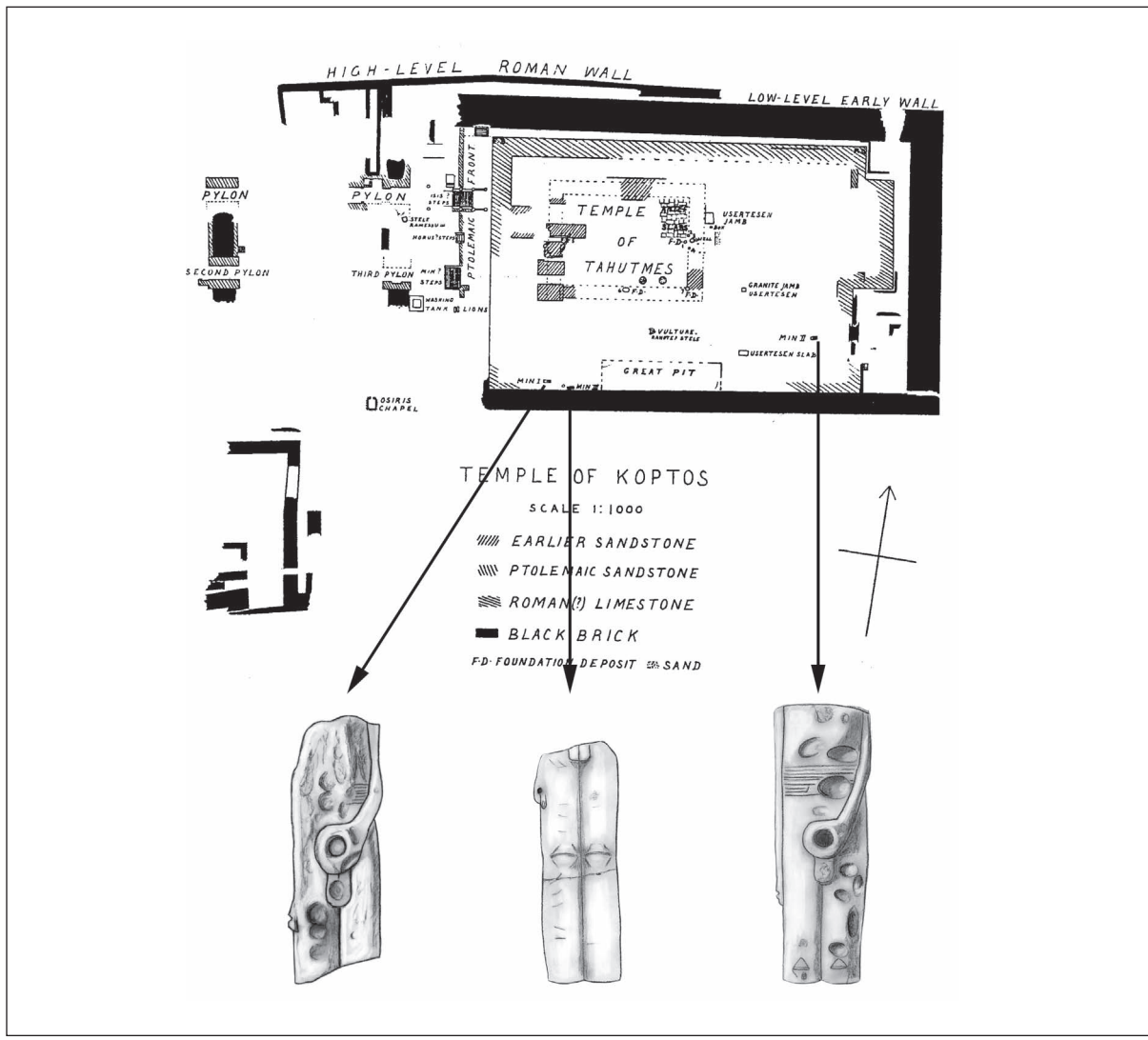


**Fig. 14.** Plan of the Coptos temple including the original situation of the Coptos colossi at the moment of the finding (from W.M.Fl. Petrie, *Koptos*, London, 1896, pl. I).


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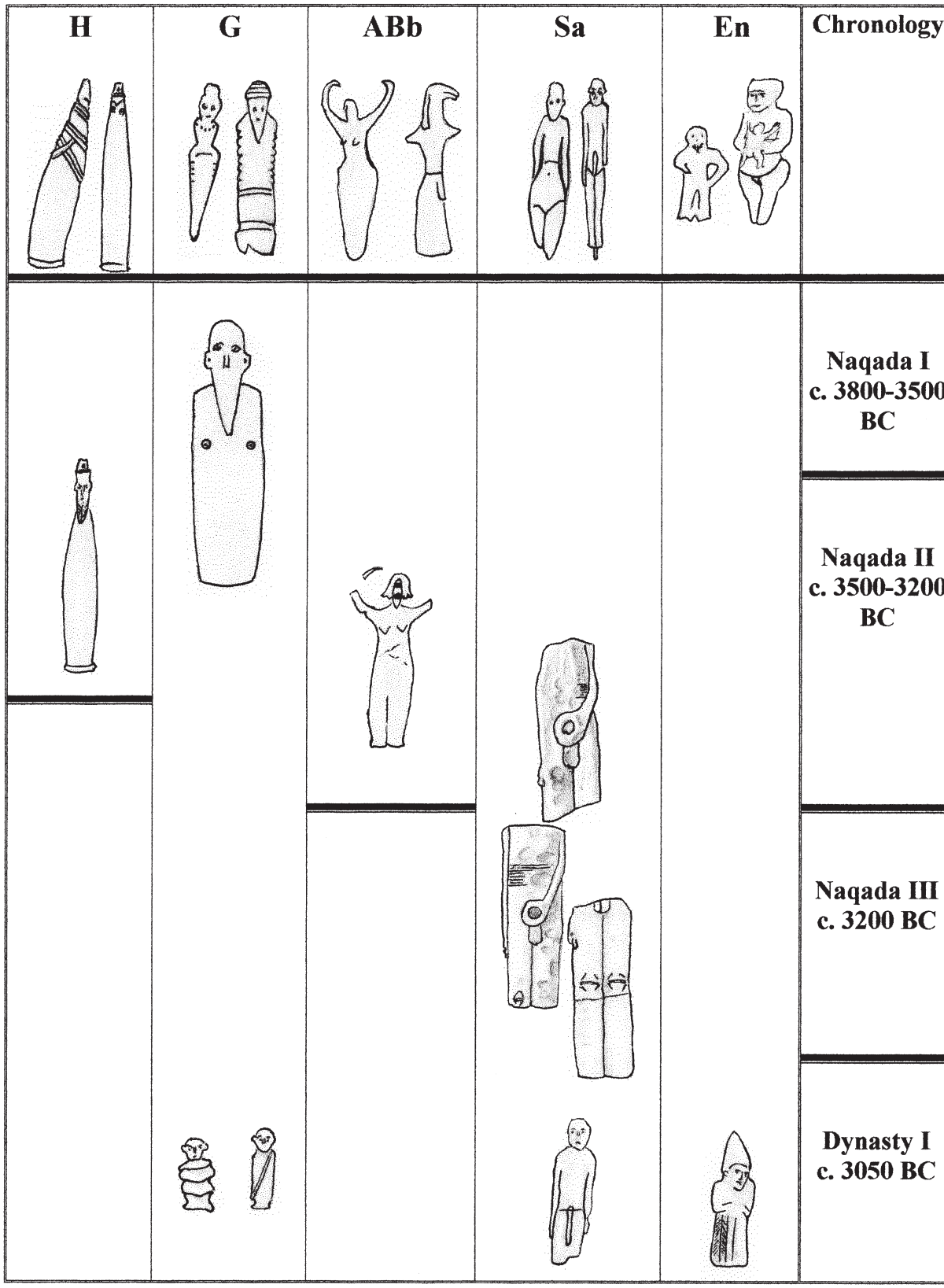


**Fig. 15.** Chronological situation of the Coptos colossi in tridimensional human figure representation typologies during Preformal tradition (author).


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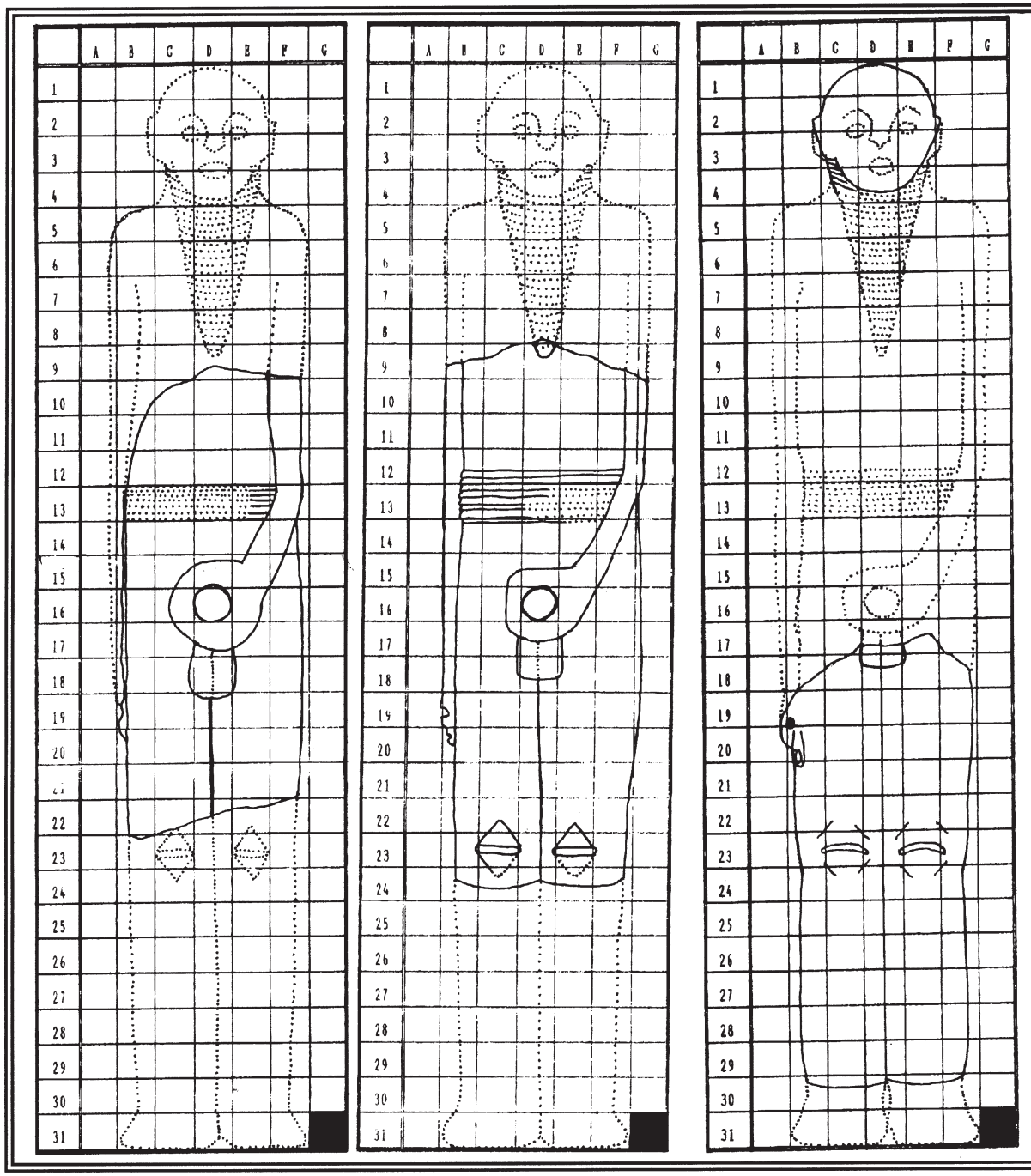


**Fig. 16.** Reconstruction of the three Coptos colossi (author).


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