

## The hybrid Animals and Birds in Coptic Textile Art (Siren and Sphinx) as Examples in Byzantine Era – An Artistic Comparative Study in Byzantine Era

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### ARTICLE INFO

**Received** 11 July 2024  
**Revised** 29 August 2024  
**Accepted** 05 December 2024

### JOURNAL ARTICLE



[10.21608/THALEXU.2024.303519.1134](https://doi.org/10.21608/THALEXU.2024.303519.1134)

### Keywords:

**Bâ – Siren – Sphinx – Human headed bird - Coptic**

### ABSTRACT

The hybrids appeared in ancient Egypt and the Near East and that continued in Greece which took a lot of hybrid Creatures from Egypt and Mesopotamia they were symbols of superpower and mystery or even evil power, it was by mixing two or many creatures or humans in the same body to express the unseen thoughts.

The hybrids are contained in Coptic art specifically in Coptic textiles but some hybrids were more than others Centuries appear much more than sirens It appeared in the form of a sea bird with long legs and the torso of a woman, and sometimes the Siren appeared in the form of an indistinct flying body with a human head, and in other cases it appeared in the form of a duck-like flying body, a human torso and the head of a dog, and sphinx with a natural appearance so it motivated me to think about it and find out their development through the ancient civilization up until the Coptic art and found out the reason of its appearance.

### Introduction:

The hybrid is an important motive in ancient arts to express the human fairness of unknown superpowers by referring to that power as a massive and unusual multi-power character, in ancient Egypt it sometimes referred to the deities and powerful creatures in the afterlife also by far many hybrids appeared in the book of the dead, like Ammit, in spell (125), it was a monster with a head of Crocodile and back of hippo and front of leopard it appeared in the scene of deceased heart weighting against feather of Maat in front of Anubis checks the accuracy of balance and Touch ready to write down the result (Faulkner, 1985, 14) Fig. (1) and throw out the research I will trace the

<sup>(1)</sup> Scroll of Papyrus was placed in the coffin with the mummy starting from the new Kingdom, the text of the Book of the Dead differs

siren and Egyptian sphinx in the art and analyses those motives and guess the reason of their appearance.



Figure (1) scene of deceased heart weight anni dead book scroll, British Museum After: Faulkner, 1985, 14

from one copy to another, it includes about two hundred spells, but it must include four main topics arriving at the cemetery and descending to the tomb along with supplications to Osiris and Ra flowing by restoring in the afterlife and the integration into the sun and in the end the dead coming during the daylight and return to the underworld, and in the end the scroll glorification of the dead, it was written by hieroglyphic or Hieratic script and the title, and the subtitles written by red ink, it was derived of the text of pyramids. (Shaw, Nicholson, 1995, 53)

### 1) Siren in Coptic Textile:

Sirens appeared rare than many hybrid in Coptic textiles but before talk about it, I will discuss the sirens and its origin in Ancient Egypt

#### 1-1) Siren since Ancient Egyptian Era:

It appeared in ancient Egypt as a bird with a human head in ancient Egyptian art, but in religion, it was a part of personality after death. The human is considered made up of many elements: The Ka - The Bâ was the vital power of the human being - the physical body - The Name - The shade) (Shaw, Nicolson, 1995, 47), and when the Bâ unites with the Ka it becomes the (AKH) transfigured spirit (Wilkson, 2005, 38).

In the heliographic inscription, Bâ has the same pronunciation of Jabiru stork bird and they have the same sign, so Bâ was depicted as a bird despite of it can adopt any form she wishes and it can transfer from the tomb to the underworld it was a free soul so it depicted as a bird with human head and beside it the sign of Censer (Janák, 2016, 2), and in the prehistory period and old kingdom the Bâ was related to gods and the king as a manifestation of the god as a divine power or the resurrected king as a superhuman and the sometimes associated with the heavenly bodies like stars, sun, and moon might have appeared as the Bâ of one of the deities as the Orion the Osiris' Bâ (Janák, 2016, 3). And at the end of the new kingdom, it is depicted with human arms (Shaw, Nicholson, 1995, 47).

Also by far, it was depicted as a falcon body Fig (2) like the Bâ statue is made out of painted wood as a bird human-headed standing over a base, the head wearing a tripartite hair wig, it was dated back to a late period, it's coming from Thebes (Asassif) height 6cm,

preserved at Cairo Museum No. JE94594 (Elbehairy, Zaki, 2022, 119-122).



Figure (2)

Wooden Bâ statue, late period, Thebes, Egyptian Cairo Museum

After: Elbehairy, Zaki, 2022, 123, fig. 1/a-b

Sometimes it is depicted as a marine bird's body with long legs as in the amulet heart, scarab engraved with the Bâ bird, and benu bird found in Egypt date back to the Third intermediate preserved in British Museum No. EA 154986, Fig. (3).



Figure (3)

Scarab bird amulet, third intermediate, British Museum  
After:

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/859311001> accessed: 27/03/2024 3:45 p.m.

The Greek siren in Egypt appeared in a Parisian monopole stela depicted as a deceased in his bed and behind his headstand two women in the morning and at his feet two men in welling in eastern costume and above the deceased in both sides mythical siren with women torso and bird body and both are

mourning the deceased and behind the left one man with horse maybe it was the horse of the deceased, the stela is in limestone found in Memphis and it dates back to third intermediate and preserves in statlish museum in Berlin Fig. (4) (Alsorogy, Alkaradaui, Others, 2024, 7).

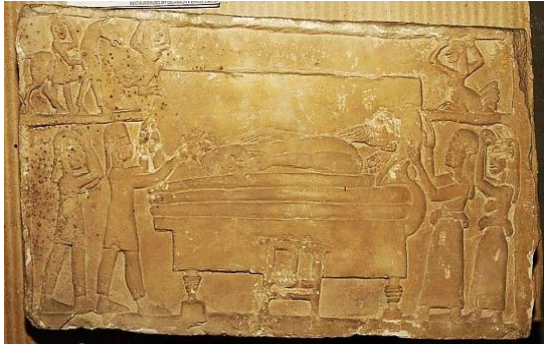


Figure (4)  
Stela of Parisian Nople, Memphis, Third intermediate  
Statlish Museum  
After: Alsorogy, Alkaradaui, Others, 2024, Fig. (5)

The Bâ bird appeared in Meroitic civilization as in limestone shaped like a woman with massive wings it dates back to the second century AD and is preserved in the British Museum Fig. (5) (Alsorogy, Alkaradaui, Others, 2024, 3).



Figure (5)  
Ba Bird statue, lime stone, second B.C., British  
Museum  
After: Alsorogy, Alkaradaui, Alkaradawy, 2024, 4, fig 1.a

At the beginning of the twentieth Century (A.D) was believed that the Greek siren <sup>(2)</sup> was the equivalent of the Egyptian Bâ or referred to as the evil soul, but it was individual creatures were mentioned in Odyssey<sup>(3)</sup> epic and it was carved on tombstones as a guard for the tomb to draw attention to the tomb or in the morning or carrying a lyra to relieve the pain of losing the deceased by melodies or as a refer to the innovation of the deceased (Oldfield, 2014, 59), and their role in the odyssey is unforgettable as that she captive the hearts of sailor with her singing as a creative talent (Mourao, 2015, 555).

It was associated with the Persephone <sup>(4)</sup> myth because they failed to find her so Demeter <sup>(5)</sup> turned them into birds' bodies as a punishment so they prayed to Demeter to have wings to help them find Persephone, Maybe the wings that enable them to move between mortal and immortal realms that is the reason for depicting the angles with wings (Oldfield, 2014, 60-61).

It appeared in red painted vessel dated back to (475-460 B.C.), preserved in the British Museum, No. (1843.11.3.310) depicted in the body of The Pot five Sailors in a ship rowing, and another sailor tide to the mast and looks to the sky, which is certain Odysseus and three of Sirens, one on each side stand on the rocks and the third fall towards the ship, fig. (6) (Oldfield, 2014, 26-27)

<sup>(2)</sup> They were said to be the daughters of Achelous, the river god, the Muse (melopimene) or Teresichori, them name: Agpaop – Pisinoe – The Lixiope, (Rooman. I, Roman. M, 2010, 443)

<sup>(3)</sup> It is an epic for Hommer containing 24 Books dating back to the 8th century B.C, and it has an oral origin it tells about Odysseus' return journey and what dangers he faced after he participated in the Trojan War for ten years (Roman I, Roman. N, 2010, 334/366 )

<sup>(4)</sup> The daughter of goddess Demeter and Zeus, it was kidnapped by Hades the god of the underworld and agreement was made after Demeter anger, so the =gods commanded that Persephone would spend a third of the year in the underworld and the rest of the year with her another (Romani, Roman. N, 2010,391-392; Grimal, 1990, 341-342).

<sup>(5)</sup> The daughter of Kronos and Gaia and the sister of Hastia and Hera and Hades and Poseidon and Zeus and the mother of Persephone and Dionisos and she was a wife of ZUES (Grimal, 1990, 122-124).



Figure (6)  
Odysseus and the Sirens depicted on red painted vessel,  
(475-460 B.C.), British Museum  
After: Oldfield, 2014, fig. 8

Latterly it was depicted with a fishtail and in the medieval ages it was depicted with twin tailed to refer to her Demonic nature (Cirlot, 2001, 297), Sirens are symbolized in Christian art as temptation and sensual pleasure and death wishes or death bearers woman incarnation of the earth spirit (Olderr, 2012, 184, Cirlot, 2001, 297-298).

It appeared in Byzantine art and Coptic art as a part of mythical attractive creatures which the artist used despite the prohibition of the fathers of the church who considered those motives evil symbols despite that it was depicted on daily life things like dishes and boxes of jewelry and also jewelry (Maguire, 1991, 192-194).

### 1-2) Depicting Siren in Coptic Textiles:

It appears and their likeness on textiles as in *clave* <sup>(6)</sup> textile strip with circles one of them contains lozenges and the other circle contains a siren with a female head and her hair flying back with two strips or a clock and her body is a naked human torso and bird body like sea

<sup>(6)</sup> It was a purple stripe on the Roman toga one on each side and it was a mark of excellence it was worn by senators, knights, and emperors, lately in the Byzantine era it was a normal decoration in the toga for everyone, and it appeared in the early Christian and Byzantine art (Murray P., Murray, L., 2004,121)

bird body with long legs and at the end of the *clave* circle contain a duck the textile made of wool and linen in tapestry style, founded in Egypt, preserved in Louvre museum No. AF 5773 date back to 395 – 641 A.D. Fig. (7) (Du Bourguet, 1964, 150;  
<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010365573>, accessed: 20/02/2024, 1:17 p.m).



Figure (7)  
Depicted Siren in shredded *clave* tapestry, (395 - 641  
A.D.), Louver museum  
After:  
<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010365573>,  
accessed: 20/02/2024, 1:17 p.m

The Siren appears in a textile-shaped leaf containing a flying bird with a human head with two arms, above a horned peacock<sup>(7)</sup> with four legs as a mythical creature, the leaf has a decorated border with many lines, made of wool and linen in Tapestry style<sup>(8)</sup>, found in Egypt dating back to (395 - 641 A.D.), and preserved in the Louvre museum, No. E 26370 Fig. (8) (Du Bourguet, 1964, 437;  
<https://collections.louvre.fr/>).

<sup>(7)</sup> It was a symbolism of resurrection and because it was believed the flash of the peacock was immune to spoilage and it was a symbol of saint because when it raise its tail it became a halo, so it refer to saints, and it's feathers refer to ST. Barbara (Copper, 1992, 1271; 155, 2009, دعاء يحيى الدين)

<sup>(8)</sup> Hand-waving fabric on a Loom usually wool or silk or Linen repetitive patters created during the process (Clarke, 2010, 243).



Figure (8)

Depicted Siren on Tapestry Textile, (395 - 641 A.D.),  
Louvre museum

After:

<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl0100045447>,  
accessed: 20/02/2024, 2 p.m.

Composed creatures with dogs headed and human torsos and bodies of birds with webbed feet maybe like duck feet appeared in red textile in the middle of the strip a medallion with the unrecognized creature, and in the upper part of the textile a row of red Greek crosses<sup>(9)</sup>, it is made of wool in Tapestry style, height 10 cm, length 13.5c.m, date back to (395 - 641 A.D.) and preserved in Louvre Museum No. E26307 Fig. (9) (Du Bourguet, 1964, 397; <https://collections.louvre.fr/>).



Figure (9)

Composed creature in tapestry textile, Antinoe, (395 -  
641 A.D.), Louvre museum

After:

<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010000267>,  
accessed: 20/02/2024, 12 p.m

Coptic textile square in the central square a circle Aphrodite in a shell and beside her Eiros on each side, and the shell carried by two of the Sirens hold the shell in one hand, and in the other hand a bowl, they didn't have wings, but I can identify the bird orange leg in the end of the bodies, but the body with a blue feathers, so I think the bird body of the siren may be duck body, that scene surrounded by Nilotic scenes like boys in boats and ducks and birds and Loutas and Papyrus flowers and Tilpia fish as well as those scenes surrounded by Zigzag line that textile made of Linen and wool in tapestry style founded in Antinoe, date back to 395-641 A.D. and preserved in Louvre museum No. AF 5470 Fig. (10)(Cortorassil, 2001, 22; Pfister, 1932, PL. 18, Rustshouscaya, 1990, 122).



Figure (10): Depicting Aphrodite with Eiros, and Sirens,  
Coptic textile, Antinoe, (395 - 641 A.D.)

After:

<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl0100045224>,  
28-08, 2024; 5,10 p.m

## 2) Sphinx in Coptic Textiles:

The Sphinx appeared in Coptic textiles in different shapes like the Ancient Egyptian Sphinx, and another Natural Sphinx deferred for The Egyptian Sphinx and The Greek Sphinx.

<sup>(9)</sup> The most widespread crosses in Christian art and they symbolized the Christ's redemption for humans and the spread of Christianity and it's blessing throughout the globe (14, 2015, أميرة عبد الملك).

## 2-1) Sphinx since Ancient Egypt:

The mythical creature depicted as a lion body and human-headed wears (nemes)<sup>(10)</sup> headdress and it symbolizes royalty and kingship and is associated with Ra the sun God the earliest known sphinx statue dates back to the old kingdom in the 4th dynasty in the region of king Djedef RA (2843-2845 B.C) only the head survived, and the great sphinx in Giza was carved as a guardian of royal Necropolis Fig. (11) (Wilkson, 2005, 234; Shaw, Nicholson, 1995, 277), Giza sphinx around 22m in height and 75m in length maybe it's the biggest statue from a single block of stone in the world, (Bassir, 2017, 1), dated back to the fourth dynasty region of Khafre (2845-2819 B.C.) sphinx wasn't a part of the master plan of Khufu (2888 – 2853 B.C), but it was integrated into the reign of his successor Khafre (Hawas, 1998, 10).

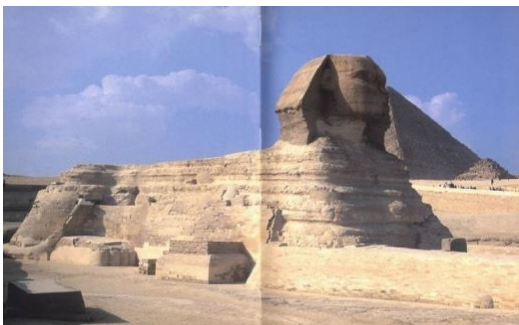


Figure (11)  
Giza Sphinx, Giza  
After: Hawas, 1998, 40-41

In the middle kingdom, there is a statue of Amenemhat III ( 2135 - 2123B.C.) of a human-headed face surrounded by a lion's mane with a lion body, height 105 cm, length 236 cm, made of gray granite and preserved in Egyptian museum no. JE15210 Fig. (12) (Saleh, Sourouzian, 1989, cat. 102).



Figure (12)  
Granite statue of Amenemhat III, Middle Kingdom,  
Cairo Museum  
After: Saleh, Sourouzain, 1989, cat. 102

In the new kingdom in the reign of Thutmose III (1590-1456 B.C.), there is an Amulet in (side A) the king Thutmose III depicted as a sphinx wearing an (Atef)<sup>(11)</sup> crown with a thin lion body like a wild cat trampling the king's enemy, (side B) Thutmoses III enthroned beneath winged solar disc, 1.8 x 1.3 cm, found in Egypt, dated back to Thutmoses III, and preserved in Metropolitan Museum, New York No. 30.8.564 Fig. (13) (<https://www.metmuseum.org/>).



(side A) (side B)  
Figure (13)

Depicted The king Thutmoses III in amulet, New Kingdom, Metropolitan Museum  
After:

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/561705>, accessed 01/04/2024, 3:20 p.m.

When Ra merged with the Amun sphinx depicted with a ram-headed and lion body (Wilkson, 2005, 234), the female sphinx appeared in Greece but in Egypt, it didn't

<sup>(10)</sup> Striped cloth worn by the king on his head it was attached to the crown with royal symbols such as the uraeus on urraeu itself made of linen or leather (Bunson, 2002, 274).

<sup>(11)</sup> It was a white crown accompanied with feathers on each side and a small circle on the top of the crown it was worn by the king in religious rituals in general composite crowns became the most visible in the Greco-Roman era (Wilkinson, 1995, 159).

appear even Queen Hatshepsut appeared as a male sphinx, it was featured in Greek myth like Oedipus epic (Wilkson, 2005, 234; Shaw, Nicholson, 1995, 277), it was a mythical creature with lion body and a woman head and torso sent by Hera to punish Thebes for the supernatural lust of the Thebes king, it resided on a high place near Thebes and caused countless harm to people of Thebes, there was no way to eliminate her except by solving the puzzle (riddle) that would recite she killed anyone who failed to solve the puzzle, Creon vowed to give up the throne, and married his sister to whoever could rid Thebes of this affliction, Oedipus answered the Sphinx puzzle, so the sphinx was terrified and killed herself, and in another traditions Oedipus Killed (Grimal, 1990, 407), Greek Sphinx like a terracotta statue in lion body and woman head with a naked torso and the woman's head surrounded with a crown the lion body crouching on a rectangular base the diminutions (14.2 x 17.2 cm) founded in Tounah El-Gebel date back to 300-100 B.C. preserved in Louver museum (<https://collections.louvre.fr/>) fig. (14), it was symbolized the riddle of human existence that human challenged to answer (Bidermann, 1992, 361).



Figure (14)

Greek Sphinx in Ptolemaic Era, Tounah El-Gebel,  
Louver Museum

After:

<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010260991>

## 2-2) Depicting Sphinx in Coptic Textiles:

A Shredded Coptic textile depicted on it standing Egyptian Sphinx, and I can identify the headdress nemes, with a floral decoration spread over the Coptic textile, made of wool and linen, in tapestry styles, founded in Antioe, dating back to 395-641 A.D preserved in Louver museum No. (E28838). Fig (15) (<https://collections.louvre.fr/>)



Fig. (15)

A Shredded of Coptic textile, Antioe, Louver museum  
After:

<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010050134>,  
28/08/2024, 6 p.m

In another example The Egyptian Sphinx appeared in the Coptic textiles in tapestry style dating back to the century and was found in Akhmim and preserved Victoria and Albert Museum, it was a square panel from a tunic, made of linen and wool, in tapestry style Sphinx depicted in the central circle of the textile square, Sphinx was sitting like the Sphinx in Giza, and I can identify the headdress (nemes) of the sphinx and the central circle bordered by vine-stems fig. (16)(<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/>).



Figure (16)

Egyptian Sphinx depicted on textile square, Akhmim,  
5th A.D. V. & A. museum

After:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O264458/ween-linen/woven-linen/>, 26/08/2024, 6:30 p.m.

In another example the sphinx appeared in round Coptic textile made of wool depicted in it a lying down man wearing an Eastern costume and Phrygian hat and a sphinx with a woman headed with a big round eye with short hair looking back and standing in her back legs and stretching the front leg towards the man, the border decorated it made of wool and linen in tapestry style, dates back to (5-6) century A.D and preserved in Coptic museum fig. (17) (سعاد ماهر محمد، حشمت مسيحة، 1957، 88)



Figure (17)  
Depicted Sphinx in roundel textile, (5-6 A.D.), Coptic Museum  
After: تصوير الباحث، 2024/1/16، 12:30 ظهرًا

It was close to the terracotta female sphinx statue dating back to the Hellenistic era and is preserved in a Greco-Roman museum in Alexandria the head is close to the depicted one in Coptic textile and the whole body of the statue Fig. (18) (سليم حسن، 1992، 102).



Figure (18)  
Greek-Roman Terracotta statue of Sphinx (331 B.C. – 30 A.D.)  
After: سليم حسن، 1998، 117، شكل 25

## Results:

- 1- The siren appeared in several arts in the beginning in the form of Egyptian Bâ which symbolizes the vital power of the deceased and his ability to move after death addition to appeared in Greek art, in addition to Persian art and it appeared in Coptic art she appears in form as a siren with women torso most likely and the body of bird with long legs perhaps a sea bird as fig. (7).

It appeared in fig. (8) as a complex creature with a dog-headed and human torso and bird body with a short leg as domestic birds like ducks, those hybrids with their appearance were perhaps depicted to bring joy and as a touch of beauty and strangeness to the woven textile and I found out that their playful shape reminded me of cartoon characters in tom a jerry carton as the Tom alley cay buddies who are mostly lightning –meathead and Butch, in Jerry's Cousin film produced in 1951 fig. (19)

([https://ar.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%A%D9%88%D9%85\\_%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A](https://ar.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%A%D9%88%D9%85_%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A))



Figure (19)  
Sense of Tom and Jerry Cartoon, Jerry's Cousin film produced in 1951  
(<https://images.app.goo.gl/WD4qd9V9sVUDPhV67>)



2- They had the same body and torso curves and perhaps these funny characters can be used to create traditional cartoon characters that funnily talk about Coptic history as if those hybrids are jumping out of the woven textile to become alive and tell us about the Coptic artifacts in louver in entertaining and art active for children and adults as well.

3- Fig. (9) It appeared at the upper part above the hybrid peacock with two horns and four legs and perhaps it was associated unconsciously with heavenly bodies like angles, On the other hand, the strange peacock was the symbol of strangeness and wildness, and if it compared with the siren, that iconography (the goodness fights the evil), or can defeat it, and excel over it has been repeated in Coptic art as knight saint (symbol of Righteous) who trampling on a dragon the symbol of evil or an eagle catches a snake with its beak or the lion on top of wild boar in a type of Coptic censers.

4- Fig. (10) depicts the siren with a woman's naked torso, and the body of the bird with orange webbed duck feet without wings, and is normally because sometimes sirens were depicted without wings like a mosaic fountain in Caesarea, depicted on it, Ulysses and his sailors against the sirens who tried to seduce Ulysses and his crew with their songs and melodies, dimensions 60 × 98 × 260 cm and preserved in the Cherchell Museum in Algeria (Alsorogy, Alkaradaui, Others, 2024, 26-27), but in Coptic Siren in Fig. (10) the legs is too short, but in fig. (20) it was long legs like legs of the marine

bird, but both figures the body of the bird without wings.



Figure (20)

(A)

Ulysses and his crew against the Sirens, Cherchell Museum, Algeria

(B)

After: Alsorogy, Alkaradaui, Others, 2024, Fig. 12

5- Fig. (17) It was a continuous motive in ancient Egyptian art and in Greco-Roman art and it was an extension of the sphinx (Ra-Hour-Akty)<sup>(12)</sup> as it is a combination of the human represented in the head and the animal represented in the lion's body, in figure (15, 16) headdress they were close to the Egyptian Sphinx in everything, the headwear (nemes) and in Fig. (16), the Sitting position was identical to The Sphinx of Giza, but in figure (17) it was a woman headed but is a way from Greek sphinx and Egyptian sphinx as well in Fig. 0, but it represented the sphinx in dynamically and full of vitality.

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<sup>(12)</sup> The combination of more than one deity especially with the god RA appeared in ancient Egyptian religion mostly with another god such as Amun-Ra as a combination of the god Amun and the god Ra and Horus was combined with Ra as Ra Hor Akty, Horus is the guardian of the horizon (Shaw, Nicholson 1995, 239).

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