

The Labraunda Sphinxes

Anne Marie Carstens

The sanctuary at Labraunda

The local rulers of the Hekatomnid dynasty, Maussollos and Idrieus, renovated the rural sanctuary dedicated to the local Karian Zeus Labraundos in the mountains north of Mylasa in Karia in the fourth century BC.¹ The Hekatomnids were Persian satraps in the newly-established satrapy of Karia and they acted as both local kings and as representatives of the hegemonic power, the Achaemenid Persian Empire.

The closest² references to Achaemenid iconography in Labraunda are the two sphinxes found in 1953 in the cella of andron C and in 1960 southeast of andron B, respectively. Originally they served as corner acroteria on andron B.³ As can be seen from the drawing of the restored façade of the andron, they add quite a prominent, seemingly foreign, element to the ostensibly traditional Greek ante-style façade of the building (Fig. 1).

I have recently argued that the sanctuary at Labraunda, and in particular the androns of Maussollos and Idrieus, andron B and andron A, had a palatial function.⁴ The androns served as audience halls, and therefore the architecture and decoration of the buildings were loaded with ideological content. This is not least the case with the sphinxes.



Fig. 1. The façade of andron A, reconstruction drawing (Gunter 1995, fig. 6).



Fig. 2. *The Labraunda sphinx* (photo by the author).

The sphinxes

Only part of the head of one of the sphinxes was found. The other is far better preserved, so that it is possible to discern its original posture and general appearance, although it is heavily weathered (Fig. 2).

It is a strange sphinx.⁵ Peculiarly archaistic and severe, the long beard is depicted as a mass with regular grooves cut into it – and also the line between the beard and chest and neck is indicated by a groove. Quite a long moustache breaks the massive impression of the beard and emphasizes the lip line. The hair above the forehead is rolled up and frames the face in a semicircle; two symmetrically arranged long locks of slightly curly hair fall on the shoulders. On the head are a *polos* and fillet.

Likewise, the body and legs of the animal are quite summarily modelled, and details on the wings are again indicated more by cuttings than by modelling. It is all very impressive. Severe and powerful, the sphinx guards the building, adding symmetry and a certain amount of ruthlessness.

Persian counterparts

It is clear that the Labraunda sphinxes draw on Persian counterparts, known from court art, where male bearded sphinxes act as guards, for instance at the palace of Dareios in Persepolis, or on stamp seals, often centred around a winged sun disc symbolizing or referring to Ahuramazda.⁶ Of particular interest is a group of fifth century BC seals produced in the western Empire.

Fig. 3. Fragment of a head from the Eschmun sanctuary at Sidon (Stucky 2005, Taf. 11.B40).



Here, heraldic or single royal sphinxes are among the decorations of the seals. Some of the seals are inscribed with Lydian names, and they were probably produced and used in Lydia by the satrapal administration.⁷ This means that the motif was not unknown and the reference to the Achaemenid, satrapal administration was probably clearly understood.

Sphinxes at Sidon

Three male, bearded heads, quite similar to the Labraunda sphinxes, were found in the Eschmun sanctuary at Sidon (Fig. 3).⁸ Because of their likeness, they even bear a *polos* and fillet, they have been suggested as corner acroteria on the amphi-prostyle temple in the sanctuary.

The sanctuary at Sidon shares many features with the sanctuary in Labraunda regarding the architectural details of the temple.⁹ And an interpretation of the entire complex as a royal representation, with a palatial function, has convincingly been presented.¹⁰

Zeus Labraundos

Persian court art is not the only analogy evoked by these guardian sphinxes, they indeed also represent an important reference to the sanctuary in which they belong. The Labraunda sphinxes both carry a *polos* and fillet, and they each have two long locks of slightly curly hair arranged symmetrically over each shoulder. There can be little doubt that these elements were meant to evoke the ancient cult image of Zeus Labraundos (Fig. 4). In this way, the seemingly very Persian sphinxes all the same reveal their embedding in the ancient cult at Labraunda. When attending one of the banquets in Labraunda,



Fig. 4. Zeus Labraundos depicted on a column base kept in the Bodrum Museum (photo by the author).

the participant was under the protection and surveillance of the force of the Achaemenid Empire as well as that of Zeus Labraundos.

The architectural wrapping of the official, palatial quarters of Labraunda, the androns, underlined the Hekatomnid ideological iconography that played on a multitude of strings. It alluded and referred to a vast number of relations that all pulled in the same direction, embellishing the king as a blessed one. It was deeply rooted in an Anatolian tradition, yet oriented towards newer fields of interest, politically as well as culturally, and completely intertwined.

The androns were built as a Greek antestyle temple, yet followed the plan of the old Anatolian/Phrygian palaces at Gordion.¹¹ They were decorated with corner acroteria both referring to the Persian guardian sphinxes of the palaces of the Persian heartland and to the old Anatolian cult image of Zeus Labraundos. This reception hall inside the sanctuary of the local Zeus was used by the Hekatomnid satrap and the king of the Karians.¹²

In his publication of the Eschmun sanctuary, Rolf Stucky characterizes the style of the complex as “Phoenician eclecticism”.¹³ “Karian eclecticism” may likewise be used as a general description of Labraunda.¹⁴

I am convinced that Labraunda was the key sanctuary for the Hekatomnids, that they staged and used the rural site as an extended palace, it being suited for processions, audiences and banquets in a magnificent setting. The sphinxes concurrently demonstrated the Achaemenid presence, that meant an Achaemenid will to protect and preserve the Hekatomnids as satraps, and that the standing Persian army had secured this outstanding position, while Zeus Labraundos both accepted the rulership and blessed the ruler.¹⁵

Notes

- 1 Cf. Hornblower 1982, 59-62; Hellström 1991.
- 2 And perhaps also the only fairly clear example. Although Ann C. Gunter suggested that the relief depicting a Persian chariot may be an Iranian dedication, the style of that relief is quite *en vogue* with fourth century BC Greek sculpture, most prominently represented on the Maussoleion (Gunter 1995, 29, 38-41).
- 3 Gunter 1995, 21-30.
- 4 Carstens 2009; Carstens forthcoming a.
- 5 See Gunter 1995, 21-24 for a detailed description.
- 6 Gunter 1995, 24-29 provides a detailed interpretation of the sphinxes in Achaemenid and western Anatolian contexts.
- 7 Boardman 1970; Dusinberre 2003, 163-164, *et passim* chapter 7.
- 8 Stucky 1988; Stucky 2005, 66-68.
- 9 Stucky 2005, 85-86.
- 10 Stucky 2005, 195-200.
- 11 Carstens 2009, chapter four.
- 12 On this office and the Karian federations, see Hornblower 1982, 55-67; Carstens 2009; Carstens forthcoming a.
- 13 Stucky 2005, 200-203.
- 14 On this eclecticism, or rather on creolization as a Hekatomnid strategy, see Carstens forthcoming b.
- 15 Sekunda 1991, 88-91.

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