

## FISSURE OPENING ON THE NORTH FLOOR OF THE SPHINX

On the floor of the Sphinx sanctuary, about 2 meters from the side of the north rear paw of the Sphinx, is an open crack about 1 meter long (N-S) and 30 cm. wide (E-W). This opening is part of a large natural fissure which runs through the whole body of the Sphinx and its sanctuary (rock-cut ditch). The large fissure may actually be a series of smaller fissures which run together at the site of the Sphinx. It can be traced at surface from the top of the Khafra causeway on the south side of the Sphinx sanctuary, along the south floor, and through the entire exposed bedrock core-body of the statue. It continues along the north floor, where it opens into the crack opposite the hind paw, and up through the bedrock ledge forming the north limit to the Sphinx ditch.

At the top of the back the main fissure opens to a space more than two meters wide (E-W). This space was roofed with iron bars, limestone pieces, and grey cement by Baraize in 1926. He built an iron trap door into this roofing and blocked up the sides of the fissure on its interior and down along the outside of the body of the Sphinx. It is possible to descend vertically through the body of the Sphinx, down this fissure from the trap door at the top of the back. The interior sides of the shaft formed by the fissure show the unweathered bedrock, and here and there, patches of Baraize's stone-cement blocking. The bottom of the shaft is about 11.50 meters from the top of the back, or about 1 meter short of the outside floor of the Sphinx ditch (the height of the Sphinx back is 12.50 meters). The bottom looks to be bedrock, with a much narrower crack continuing down deeper. The bottom is obscured somewhat by spilt grey cement from the Baraize restoration.

The part of the fissure running through the Sphinx core-body was first excavated by Mariette in 1853. Mariette recognized this as a natural fissure, although others have taken it as a funerary shaft. It looks as though the interior sides of the fissure in the body could have been squared off artificially; however, there is no burial chamber as such cut at the bottom.

The fissure runs through Member II, the soft bedded stone of the core body, and down into Member I, the hard crystalline limestone of the Sphinx floor. It is in Member I, opposite the north hind paw, that it opens to a space one meter in length and 30 cms. in width.

this opening was exposed during the cleaning operations of the 1978 SRI International work in the sphinx sanctuary, as it probably had been during the 1926 excavation of Baraize. It was found to be filled with sand and rubble which was left intact during the SRI work.

The rubble fill of this crack was partially cleared April 27, 1978 during work in the sphinx sanctuary under the direction of Mr. Zahi Hawass, then first Inspector of the Giza Pyramids. At this time, the rubble fill was cleared to a depth of 1.30 ms. The fill consisted of a brown or grey dirt-sand mixture with natural limestone fragments. Charcoal flecks, a few pottery fragments and spots of damp clay or mud indicated that this fill was culturally deposited. It appeared that the fissure opening at this spot had not been cleared during previous modern excavations. All the pottery was saved, and the mud spots, carbon flecks, and soil matrix were sampled. These materials are stored in the Antiquities Organization magazine west of the Great Pyramid. Excavation could proceed no further than 1.30 ms. in depth due to the narrow working space. At this depth, the fill still contained carbon flecks and pottery fragments.

On February 11, 1979 Mark Lehner visited the site just after three days of hard rain. The rain had left considerable amounts of water standing in depressions here and there in the floor of the sphinx sanctuary. The rubble fill of the fissure opening by the north hind paw had apparently collapsed, as now the crack looked to be open to a depth of 3 or 4 meters.

This opening was examined again by Mark Lehner during the first season of the ARCE Sphinx Project on July 7 and 11, 1979. At that time Lehner had himself lowered down, head-first, into the fissure with a flashlight. The crack appeared to extend nearly five meters under floor-level; however, at the bottom it appeared to narrow to a space of a few cms. wide and to angle laterally to the east. Sections of pipe were fastened together and pushed down into the fissure to a depth of approximately five meters. At about 4.5 meters the soil was quite wet, indicating the level of the subsurface water. Given the fact that the bottom of the crack appeared to narrow to a few cms., the question of where the soil fill could have fallen was not satisfactorily answered.

The opening was loosely closed with large limestone pieces at surface.