

**Fabbri Arte**  
*Alto Antiquariato*



# FABBRI ARTE



## **Sculpture depicting a sphynx**

*Basalt*

*Southern Italy*

*12th-14th Century*

*Measures: 20 x 47 x 14 in*

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## Work analysis

The work under analysis is a large stone sculpture depicting a Sphinx.

It is a mythological creature characterized by its hybrid nature: in fact it usually has the body of a lion, and a human head (androsphinx), a hawk (hieracosphinx) or a goat (criosphinx); sometimes it is also equipped with wings.

Generally the sphinxes are symbolically placed to guard architectural structures such as royal tombs or religious temples.

The construction material is a basalt of lava origin, with a porous composition and a rather warm dark gray color.

This leads us to hypothesize that it is a work from southern Italy, as this basalt, commonly referred to as lava stone, was often used for different uses: already in ancient times it was used, for example, for the construction of sculptural works.

An interesting example is the monumental "Elephant Fountain", located in the center of Catania's Piazza del Duomo.



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The architectural part was built between 1735 and 1737 by Giovanni Battista Vaccarini (Palermo, February 3, 1702 - Catania, March 11, 1768), but we want to dwell on the particular sculpture depicting an elephant placed on it, a famous symbol of the city that goes to give the name to the fountain itself.

It is a work made of volcanic basalt, so much so that it shows a strong resemblance to the material that makes up our sphinx, especially if we observe its color, graininess and porosity.

There is no reliable data on the author of the statue, nor on its dating.

However, the interpretation formulated by the geographer Idrisi during his trip to Sicily in the twelfth century is now accepted.

He reported that the people of Catania considered the elephant a statue with magical properties, able to protect the city from the eruptions of Etna.

Also according to the Arab geographer, the statue would have been built during the Carthaginian or Byzantine domination.

In fact, when he visited Catania (12th century), the lava stone elephant was already inside the city walls.





We believe that the dating of the elephant statue, the style of construction and the executive material may be an interesting comparative element with respect to the work under analysis; consequently, for this sculpted sphinx we assume a dating between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, and we believe that it may come from southern Italy.

We exclude the hypothesis that it is an Egyptian artifact, as the basalt used in Ancient Egypt is much more compact, smooth and less porous, and consequently its hardness is much higher.

The executive style also differs, as the Egyptian sphinxes presented a more geometric and archaic line.



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## **Bibliography**

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*Pursuant to Art. 1490 - 1491 of the Civil Code, with the signature of this document, Fabbri Arte by Juri Fabbri certifies and guarantees the authenticity and lawful origin of the work, as per Legislative Decree 42 of 22 January 2004.*



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