

NEWS RELEASE

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THE SPHINX TAKES CENTER STAGE

PHILADELPHIA – A 25,000-pound monument will return to the limelight, as the centerpiece of the new **Sphinx Gallery** at the Penn Museum, November 16, 2019.

The colossal red granite Sphinx of Ramses II—history’s most well-known pharaoh who reigned in ancient Egypt for nearly 67 years and fathered more than 100 children—dates back to between 1293 and 1185 BCE. Excavated by the famous archaeologist W. M. Flinders Petrie and his team, it is the largest sphinx in the Western hemisphere and has served as one of the City of Philadelphia’s top cultural attractions since its arrival at the Penn Museum in October 1913.



From high atop his platform in the 2,000-square-foot **Sphinx Gallery**, the towering monument will now greet guests as they enter the new natural light-filled **Main Entrance** area, which features abundant seating, two new elevators, an accessibility ramp, and accessible restroom facilities.



“We thought that moving a 12.5-ton Sphinx would be impossible. But at the Museum, we know well the power of human ingenuity,” says Julian Siggers, Williams Director of the Museum. “Relocating the Sphinx to his new home adjacent to the Main Entrance was a monumental undertaking—but now, sharing him with our visitors in this new space is perhaps even more monumental. The Sphinx is the first thing that many visitors will see as they are welcomed to our new Penn Museum.”

Other components of the **Sphinx Gallery** include a special display emphasizing the breadth and depth of the Penn Museum’s collections through 10 artifacts from across the world, such as a boundary stone from ancient Mesopotamia, an African mask, and an engraved wine jug from the Mediterranean. An adjoining intimate gallery space shines the spotlight on one magnificent artifact, which will change regularly. The first display in this gallery will be two pairs of moccasins: one, created by a Seminole maker, which bear silent witness to their wearer’s harsh encounters with warfare, starvation, disease, stolen lands, and desecration; the other, created by a highly skilled Huron-Wendat maker, share stories of adaptation and resilience, with meaningful symbols woven in to the intricate beading and quill work.

Also Opening November 16

Other reimagined areas opening as a part of the Penn Museum’s *Building Transformation* include a suite of **Africa Galleries**; the **Mexico and Central America Gallery**; and the historic restoration of **Harrison Auditorium**, a 614-seat performance venue first opened in 1915.

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About the Penn Museum

Since 1887, the Penn Museum has transformed understanding of the human experience. Dedicated to building connections between cultures, the Museum welcomes everyone to uncover the ancient past, gain an understanding of our shared humanity, and find one’s own place in the arc of human history. For more information, visit pennmuseum.org or call 215.898.4000.

Next Steps for the Building Transformation

The next major milestone in the *Building Transformation* project is the reimagined **Ancient Egypt and Nubia Galleries**, targeted to open in 2023 pending funding.

Paying special attention to the role of the Nile as an eternal river that makes life in Egypt possible, the Lower Level gallery will focus on “Life and the Afterlife” in Ancient Egypt, showcasing daily life and funerary practices, such as the science of mummification. It will feature a special section on hieroglyphic writing and an entire Old Kingdom tomb chapel that’s been completely reassembled—with visible carvings on its walls that offer detailed instructions for preparing for proper burials. Objects in this display will include a gilded mummy mask, canopic jars, and the Shabti of Lady Maya. Beyond the tomb chapel, the 5,000-year-span of ancient Egyptian history is told across the large central gallery and two side galleries through the Museum’s famed collection of Egyptian mummies and their related funerary artifacts.



In a more formal setting, the Upper Level gallery will focus on “Royalty and Religion,” kings, and pharaohs. With individual rooms that explore Early Nubia and Late Nubia, which offer an essential component to the overall story of the galleries, the Upper Level gallery will offer guests a chance to experience what it was like to walk through a pharaoh’s palace in Egypt. For nearly 100 years, Egyptian palace columns that were excavated by Penn archaeologists between 1914 and 1918 were displayed at only half of their original height. Thanks to advances in engineering, these massive 23-foot columns will be installed at their full height, along with a gateway from the 3,200-year-old Palace Complex of the Pharaoh Merenptah.

ABOUT THE SPHINX

Excavated by the famous archaeologist W. M. Flinders Petrie and his team, the red granite Sphinx of Ramses II (19th Dynasty, ca. 1293-1185 BCE) was a part of the division of finds between the Egyptian Antiquities Service, the Egypt Exploration Fund, and the British School of Archaeology. The School sent the monument to the Penn Museum as a result of the Museum's financial support of their excavation work in Egypt.



The sphinx, a lion with a human head, represents the power of the Egyptian king, both to protect his people and to conquer the enemies of Egypt. Buried up to its shoulders, only its exposed head was subject to erosion from the elements. The inscriptions on the chest and around the base give the five names of Ramses II. His son and successor, Merenptah, added his own cartouches to the shoulders after his father's death.

After traveling more than 6,000 miles from the Temple of the God Ptah at Memphis, Egypt, this Sphinx, the largest in the Western hemisphere, first docked in South Philadelphia on October 7, 1913, during the World Series. At almost 13 tons, the monument was so heavy that the German freighter on which it sailed had to move up the Delaware River to Port Richmond in order to unload the statue onto a rail car using a huge crane at the Philadelphia and Reading Railway Company cargo terminal.

Wrapped in burlap, it rode on a horse-drawn cart through the city. On October 19, 1913, the Sphinx finally reached the Penn Museum and caused quite a stir, distracting sports fans from the Penn-Brown football game underway across the street at Franklin Field.



For three years, the Sphinx was on view in the Museum's courtyard. Due to concerns regarding the long-term effects of harsh weather conditions, the Sphinx was moved inside in 1916. In 1926, it made its move into the Egypt (Sphinx) Gallery, which is currently being renovated through the Museum's *Building Transformation* project, part of the [Power of Penn](#) campaign. In the summer of 2019, the Sphinx floated across an interior courtyard of the Penn Museum with the "air dollies" (similar to hoverboards) that helped conservators to guide him approximately 250 feet and into his new home: the Sphinx Gallery, where he welcomes visitors using the Main Entrance.

MEET THE CURATORS

David Silverman, Ph.D., is Curator-in-Charge of the Egyptian Section, Penn Museum, and Eckley Brinton Coxe, Jr., Professor of Egyptology in Penn's Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. He received his B.A. in Art History from Rutgers University and Ph.D. in Egyptology from the University of Chicago. One of the leading authorities on the civilization of ancient Egypt, Dr. Silverman has directed several field expeditions at sites throughout Egypt, and his research ranges across Egyptian language, art, and religion. He was also the national curator, advisor, and academic content creator for the blockbuster exhibition *Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs*.

Josef Wegner, Ph.D., is Associate Curator of the Egyptian Section, Penn Museum, and Associate Professor of Egyptology in Penn's Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. He holds a B.A. in Egyptology and Anthropology and a Ph.D. in Egyptology from Penn. A specialist in the archaeology of Egypt's Middle Kingdom, Dr. Wegner has since 1994 been directing excavations at the mortuary complex and settlement site of pharaoh Senwosret III in South Abydos, which includes the largest royal tomb in Egypt. His research focuses on state organization, administration, and settlement during Egypt's Late Middle Kingdom (1850–1600 BCE).

Jennifer Houser Wegner, Ph.D., is Associate Curator of the Egyptian Section, Penn Museum, and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Egyptology in Penn's Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. She received her B.A. in Egyptology from Penn and her Ph.D. from Yale University. Dr. Wegner has served as an epigrapher and artist on expeditions to Bersheh, Saqqara, and Abydos in Egypt.



Photo captions for other objects in the Sphinx Gallery

Created in China during the Liao Dynasty (916-1125 CE), this gilded statuette of Guanyin, a bodhisattva figure in Mahayana Buddhism, holds a lotus bud and is adorned with a tiny figure of the Amida Buddha at the base of her headdress. Object: C400



Decorated with horses, this jar was made around 625 BCE and found in the tomb of a wealthy landowner in pre-Roman Italy. Object: MS935



A stone jaguar-shaped effigy vessel used by priests or shamans of the Chavín culture in Peru between 800 and 1 BCE. Object: SA4627



Rose Bean Simpson, a Tewa artist from Santa Clara Pueblo, N.M., depicts herself both as a man and as a woman, in her self-portrait, "American Gothic." Made of clay, the piece shares Pueblo concepts of gender. Object: 2015-25-1