The Sphinx and Griffin as a Political-Religious Symbol in the Ancient Near East

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 Facts & Hypothesis

- Composite creatures (in this case sphinxes and griffins) are known in all regions of the Ancient Near East.
- In Egypt they seem to be mainly political, while they chiefly represent the Pharaoh.
- In Mesopotamia they often appear with gods so it seems they are generally used in a religious context.
- In Anatolia most sphinxes (bull- and lion-sphinxes) act as guards at doorways of temples, palaces, etc.
- In the Aegean the Theban sphinx is known best, so it seems the mythological context prevails.

Is it possible that, despite the differences, there are general similarities between the meaning and function of the sphinx in the different regions?

Findings

- The Lying Sphinx of Giza (ca. 2600 BC), an image of the pharaoh, was used in religious rituals and was known from the NK onwards as the God Harmachis (Horus on the Horizon).
- On the Investiture of Zimri-Lim (2000-1975 BC), the sphinx watches the goddess giving the tokens of power to the king.
- The Griffins Flanking the Throne (ca. 1450 BC) in Knossos Palace are not the only ones in the Throne Room, a second pair flanks a door to a shrine.
- The Gate-guards of Hattusha (14th C. BC) stood next to images of gods, goddesses and religious rituals and overlooked ritual proceedings (both religious and political).

The sphinx has gone through a dynamic process through different cultures but the motif seems to have common essential features, although there exists a great diversity of meanings, according to region and period.