



To the Egyptians, the sphinx was above all a guardian and marked the borders of royal domains, especially the entrance to tombs, such as the Great Sphinx of Giza near the Pyramid of Khafre. The sphinx symbolized the union of wisdom and strength.



For the Greeks, the Sphinx was a winged lioness with a woman's head. She was the monster Oedipus confronted and from which he freed Thebes. Gustave Moreau's representation of Oedipus is a famous example of Sphinx iconography.

Vestige of Egyptian imagery, the sphinx has always held an important place in the iconography of the Western world. After the second half of the 17th century the sphinx became a must in French gardens and was often called the Lion of Egypt. Its iconography was fanciful until the end of the 18th century when new archeological interests changed the representations of sphinxes. Because of Napoleon's Egyptian expedition the Empire period was very fond of Egyptian symbols. From then on, Egyptomania and the sphinx, its most representative icon, continued to fascinate and influence the world of the arts. The Symbolist period marked another peak for the mysterious icons of Egypt.

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