

Description of some statuary reportedly found in Somalia. Robert Kluijver, Feb 2018



The prince, the merchant and the boy – heavy stone (limestone?) statues, about 40-55 cm tall. They seem to be broken off larger bodies, and two of them also have finished backsides: the prince and the boy, who seem to be made by the same hand. The merchant is stylistically different and has a rough back, not freshly hewn.



Three other statues (the Chinaman, the African and the Somali sphinx) are made in a different kind of stone, reddish. Sandstone? The hue of the stone is different among them, as if they came from different quarries, and also stylistically they are pretty different among each other, but they share an effort at abstraction. They are bigger and heavier than the three white statues. The backsides are rough; the sphinx has, on the back, an indent as if to be hung on a wall with a peg. On the top it has two similar indents, as if to carry the horns or maybe also for fixation.



From reportedly the same dig in the Golis mountains came also what seem to be some inscriptions in a script I do not recognize, something maybe proto-Arabic or Phoenician?

Note: I'm not sure whether the photo left is in the correct orientation

Stylistically the statuary does not look old, but it is eroded. To me it seems unlikely to be fake. If they were fakes they would have been very well made, and there is no market or local capacity or interest to do such a thing. Unless it's an elaborate hoax.

It is possible some of these pieces have been tampered with, like cleaned too roughly or re-chiseled, and I found traces of glue – a clumsy effort to make them 'look nicer'.

The story of the person who dug up these artifacts seems likely, as I heard it told through his friend. He's a simple person who expects to get some money for his find but is nervous to have problems with the authorities. I have been told that if I make his acquaintance, he may be convinced to show me the site where he found them. But later this offer was retracted.

If I were to put a date on these statues, I would say they may be about 1800 years old. But no other remains from that period that I have heard of have been found. In this country almost no archaeological excavation work has been undertaken, so it could be the first find of a period of forgotten Somali history.

What would the function of the statuary been? And why such different styles in one place? Were they part of a temple? I would have to see the site.



Above: traces of paint on the merchant. The white statues all have black pigmentation in and around the eyes and on the eyebrows. Only the merchant seems to have been painted in orange, red, light blue and black. The merchant is quite eroded.



The Prince seen from above and under – notice broken off ring beard, like a pharaoh. The dark colour is dirt and can be brushed off to reveal the same white surface. The hair lines continue on to the back of the head. On the 'crown' are little concavities apparently meant to contain stones. Whether the current stones belong there is another question. There were traces of what seemed like superglue in some of



the empty sockets. One of the stones studding the headdress appeared to be sculpted (see left).



The boy seen from behind, with his finely traced hair and anthropomorphic head.

The boy has Somali features: a long, narrow head with a big forehead, high cheekbones, a thin flat nose and full lips.



Specialists and researchers to investigate these statues and inscription, and to undertake fieldwork in Somaliland, are urgently needed.

