



Contents lists available at [EKB](#)

Minia Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research

Journal homepage: <https://mjthr.journals.ekb.eg/>



## The symbolism of the crocodile under the tree in ancient Egypt

Mohamed Ahmed Fahmy <sup>a</sup>

Ahmad Mohamed Abo El Magd <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> PhD Researcher, Tourist Guidance Department, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Minia University

<sup>b</sup> Professor, Tourist Guidance Department, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Minia University

### Keywords

Crocodile God  
Ancient Egyptian  
Religion  
Tree  
Pyramid Texts

### Abstract

The crocodile god is one of the oldest known Egyptian deities. It enjoyed a cult in numerous places, including the Nile Valley, Delta, and Fayum. The Egyptians feared the crocodile as a hostile, harmful reptile on the one hand and worshiped the crocodile as a deity on the other. Egyptian theology did not resolve the inevitable conflict as a predator on the one hand and as a divine being on the other until the end of the Sobek cults. This paper will discuss the benevolent side of the crocodile god as a creator and his connection to trees and water; he was associated with positive aspects as a generator and guaranteeing the prosperity and fertility of the country and his role as a protector of the dead, son of Neith and new birth and regeneration associated with the trees in ancient Egypt. This paper uses a descriptive-analytical methodology to conclude the significance of the benevolent side of the crocodile god in scenes from tombs, temples, and religious texts until the late periods of Ancient Egypt.

Printed ISSN 2357-0652

Online ISSN 2735-4741

## Introduction

The theme of the god under a tree has been well known since the Old Kingdom; it is already a title of the priests of Ptah, "the prophet. Of the one under his tree," This title comes from an ancient Memphite local god, originated in a tree cult of *hry b3k.f* "he who rests in his tree."<sup>1</sup>

The individual old trees on the edge of the desert that probably shaded the last wells in the old days were natural to address it as the seat of the deities and the dead who lay in the desolate desert seeking its protection and shade.<sup>2</sup>

In ancient Egypt, acacia, the sycamore fig, the tamarisk, and date palm represented the image of the heavenly afterlife: a "high sycamore on the east Horizon" on which the gods sit, the name of the most common fruit tree, the "sycamore" *Nh.t* means "shelter" a national tree that was associated with the sun god.<sup>3</sup> According to Book of the Dead, chapter 141<sup>4</sup>. "Two sycamores of turquoise" at the eastern gate of heaven, from which Ra emerges daily in the morning. The ceiling inscription of the Wabet chapel at Dendera on the two heights of the horizon depicts an *isd* tree, the sacred tree of the sun god at Heliopolis, and the tree evokes both a royal and a funerary context. Since the New Kingdom, it was depicted on the walls of the temples as the tree on whose leaves a god inscribes the Cartouche of the king.<sup>5</sup> The ritual is closely connected with the sed-festival and promises a long and legitimate rule over the land.

The connection with the sky goddess Nut is given through the connection with the sky horizon. Both goddess Nut and the sacred trees served as benevolent dispensers of cool water for the souls of the dead; the old trees thus represent the position of the gardens with ponds and groves by the tombs and mortuary temples as a place of abode for the *B3* soul of the deceased. Such sacred trees were found everywhere.<sup>6</sup>

Tree plantations on the edge of religious buildings were common in ancient Egypt, and the sycamore had its place. Holes or wells filled with earth and plant debris

---

<sup>1</sup> D. Inconnu-Bocquillon, Thot de Pnoub (la ville) ou Thot du n b s (l'arbre). *Revue D' gyptologie*, 39, (1988), 47–62.

<sup>2</sup> H. Kees, *Der G tterglaube im alten Agypten*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG. , 2022, 77.

<sup>3</sup> H. Kees, A., Grohmann, and A., G tze, *Kulturgeschichte des alten orientis: Abschnitt. Kleinasien*. Beck, 1933, 297

<sup>4</sup> I., Muller, V., Bengtson, H., and W., Gustav, *Handbuch Der Altertumswissenschaft*. Wentworth Press, 1963, 117.


<sup>5</sup> W., Helck, Ramessidische Inschriften aus Karnak. *Zeitschrift F r  gyptische Sprache Und Altertumskunde*, 82(1-2), 1958, 98–140.


<sup>6</sup> M., Buhl, "The Goddesses of the Egyptian Tree Cult." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 6, no. 2, 1947, 98.




*šbk nb n3(h)w n<sup>c</sup>y=k r sht.wi=k hns(w)=k hns w ksb.wi=k*<sup>13</sup>

(and) to Sobek, Master of Ba(kh)u! May you travel to your fields (and) may you come between your kesbet trees.

According to Brovarski<sup>14</sup>, "Sobek of Irut trees"  "Sbk nb jr. wt" was worshiped as early as the Old and Middle kingdom and appeared on the

lintel of Thutmose I<sup>15</sup>  "Meri Sbk nb jr.wt" comes from the 18<sup>th</sup> upper Egyptian Nome el-Hibeh, on the right bank of the Nile, opposite Fashin. This is where the temple of Sobek, "master of the Irut trees," was located. This temple must have been near a sacred grove of trees.

The earliest examples of Sobek under the tree date back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> dynasties; a cylinder seal from the reign of Thutmose III represents four crocodiles and four trees with straight trunks and numerous branches (fig.1), the inscriptions

 "Mery Sbk-R<sup>c</sup> nb Sumnu" Thutmose beloved of Sobek-

Ra lord of Sumenu,<sup>16</sup> while under the text , four crocodiles on a pedestal and in front of them a tall tree with thick branches<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> C. Carrier. *Textes des pyramides de l'Égypte ancienne: Textes des pyramides d'Ounas et de Têti*. Cybele, 2009. 163-164

<sup>14</sup> E., Brovarski, Two Old Kingdom Writings Boards from Giza. *Annales Du Service Des Antiquités de L'Égypte*, 1978, 71, 40.

<sup>15</sup> C., Dolzani, (1961). *Il dio sobk*, Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1961, 199; H., Jacquet-Gordon, Karnak-nord VI: Le trésor de Thoutmosis Ier : la décoration, 1999, 41; E., Grebaut, *Le Musée Egyptien. Recueil de Monuments Et de Notices Sur Les Fouilles D'Égypte*. Tome I, 2017, 26, Pl. 29A

<sup>16</sup> C., Kuentz, "Quelques Monuments Du Culte de Sobk [Avec 2 Planches]." *Bulletin de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale* 28, 1929: 28, 157, fig. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Another example is a Lintel of the Sennedjem from Deir El-Madina in front of a crocodile with Atef crown on a pedestal and Willow-like plants leaning over the crocodile, B., Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh: (1930)/ par Bernard Bruyère*. l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1933, Plate 25, No.1

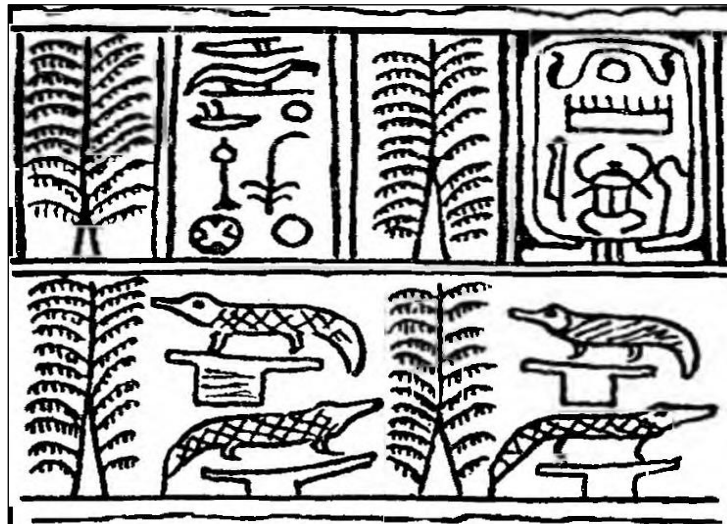


Fig.1, a cylinder seal from the reign of Thutmosis III, represents.  
Kuentz, C, (1929), "Quelques Monuments Du Culte de Sobk." *Bulletin de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale* 28 ,157


Another example from the Nineteenth Dynasty is a schist plate from Gurob . It shows a crocodile wearing a crown on each side, and behind and above the animal is a plant whose stem is divided into three branches, covered with leaves (Fig 2). This motif was widely used on official and private monuments: the enthroned Sobek-Re under the tree can be found on various monuments.<sup>18</sup>



Fig 2. The tree behind the crocodile god represents "renewal" and "revival."  
Brunton, G., & Engelbach, R. (1927). *British School of Archaeology in Egypt: Gurob.* *British School of Archaeology in Egypt*, 41. 55

<sup>18</sup> H., Kockelmann, *Der Herr der Seen, Sümpfe und Flussläufe, Untersuchungen zum Gott Sobek und den ägyptischen Krokodilgötter-Kulten von den Anfängen bis zur Römerzeit* · Volume 1, 2017, 92.

Besides its religious significance, the image of the crocodile under his sacred tree is likely to have been inspired by relevant observations of nature: during the midday heat, the crocodiles interrupt their sunbathing and go into the protective shade of the vegetation at the water's edge; the female crocodile, in particular, lies under the protective bushes and trees when she is guarding her nest on the banks of the river.

Sunbathing on a riverbank or an island takes an extended period in a crocodile's life.<sup>19</sup> This condition is described by the term *ḥtp-rdwy*: "the one with dormant feet."<sup>20</sup>, which has also become the name of a separate crocodile god. Even more details in the later Greco-Roman temple of Kom Ombo temple KO 953<sup>21</sup> Where Sobek-Re is named *ḥtp-rdwy*, the one on four feet rests (*ḥtp hr 3fdt*). However, sunbathing does not extend over the whole day. The animals take shelter under shady trees during the midday heat."<sup>22</sup>

This behavior is also mentioned in Hymn KO 118: "who lay his body near the *št3-st* "hidden tree."<sup>23</sup>, an observation also provided the background for a vignette in a Third Intermediate Period Papyrus of Lady Heruben (fig 3).<sup>24</sup> Depicted, Geb, in the form of a crocodile, lies under a tree lies and is worshiped by the deceased.

---

<sup>19</sup> L., Trutnau, and R., Sommerlad, *Crocodilians, Their Natural History and Captive Husbandry*, 2006, 82 "Nile crocodiles move, following the daily rhythm and the course of temperature, and stay in the Sun, the shade, or the water and thus ensure an average body temperature of 25.5 °C with a fluctuation range of 3 °C. In the morning, they lie in the warm mid-morning Sun and thus resemble the heat loss from the cooler night. At hot midday, they retreat to the shade of the trees or into the water back".

<sup>20</sup> H., Knuf, H., H., Thissen, C., Leitz, and von Recklinghausen, *Honi soit qui mal y pense: Studien zum pharaonischen, griechisch-römischen und spätantiken Ägypten zu Ehren von Heinz-Josef Thissen*. Peeters. 2010, 353.

<sup>21</sup> A., Gutbub, *Textes fondamentaux de la théologie de Kom Ombo*. IFAO, 1973, 151.

<sup>22</sup> This behaviour is also mentioned in Hymn KO 953: "who lay his body near the *StA-st* "hidden tree.", Gutbub. "*Textes fondamentaux*" 15; an observation also provided the background for a vignette in a Third Intermediate Period Papyrus of Lady Heruben, depicted, with Geb in the form of a crocodile, lying under a tree lies and is worshiped by the deceased. A., Piankoff, *Mythological papyri* (v. 3, no. 1). Pantheon Books, 1957, Pl.1

<sup>23</sup> A., Gutbub. "*Textes fondamentaux*" 151

<sup>24</sup> A., Piankoff, and N., Rambova, *Mythological papyri*. Pantheon Books, 1957. Pl. 1

---



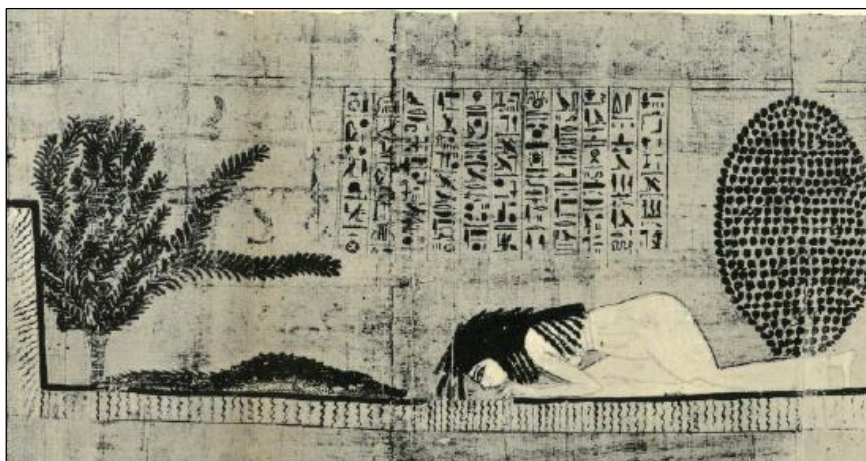


Fig. 3 Papyrus of lady Heruben

Piankoff, A. (1957). *Mythological papyri* (v. 3, no. 1). Pantheon Books, Plate 1

A tree is more than just the natural setting where the crocodile resides; it has a deeper symbolic meaning. In the "Book of Fayum," the sacred tree of the region is identified with Neith as the mother of Sobek; in this capacity, she protects the youthful God Sobek-Horus.<sup>25</sup> a theological conception built directly on the image of the crocodile under the tree seeking refuge from the Sun's heat. It also evokes associations with the young Horus, hidden for protection in the papyrus thicket of Chemmis.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, the "protection," the tree is associated with new birth and regeneration. The plants and trees in the crocodile's environment are an indication of the "primeval landscape" in which the sacred crocodiles appear as morning Ba forms of a reinitialization of creation; the tree and the branches above the crocodile represent the cosmogonic regeneration.<sup>27</sup>

The extended plant stalks, which surround the linen wrappings of late-period Roman crocodile mummies, are identified as papyrus; the stalks that lie between the damaged crocodile mummies in Tehne can at least be assumed to be papyrus stalks (fig. 4) or palm branches.<sup>28</sup> The papyrus sticks in the mummies served as stuffing and support material. The symbolism of regeneration and fertility are present here, which predestined them as a utensil for the burial of the mummified crocodiles; the mummies

<sup>25</sup> M., Zecchi, *Geografia religiosa del Fayum*. 2001. 33.

<sup>26</sup> H., Beinlich, *Egypt's Mysterious Book of the Faiyum*, Regine Schulz, Alfried Wiczorek, 2013, 90.

<sup>27</sup> D., Kessler, Die kultische bindung der ba-konzeption 2. Teil: Die ba-zitate auf den kultstelen und ostraka des neuen reiches. *Studien Zur Altägyptischen Kultur*, 29, 2001, 139–186.

<sup>28</sup> H., Kawanishi, S., Tsujimura, *Preliminary report sixth season of the excavations at the site of Akoris, Egypt: 1986*. Paleological Association of Japan, 1988, 7; H., Abou-Seif, "Rapport Sur Les Fouilles Faites à Tehneh En Janvier et Février 1926." *Annales du Service des antiquités de l'Égypte* 26, no. 1 (1926): 32–38. 35

wrapped in this way are perhaps just another version of the image of the “crocodile -god in the papyrus thicket as a cycle of regeneration”.<sup>29</sup>



Fig.4, crocodile mummies\_in Tehne

Kockelmann, H. (2017). *Der Herr der Seen, Sümpfe und Flussläufe*. Harrassowitz. Plate 58, b

The palm branch is associated with the embalmed crocodile as a particular plant motif, which is depicted in some late representations of crocodile mummies and is a well-known symbol of eternal life and victory over death,<sup>30</sup> scenes of the deceased worshipping the crocodile god have survived from the tomb of Sennedjem and Khonsou from Deir el medina in the attitude of worshipping the crocodile on a pedestal and palm tree leaves behind the god as an invocation of the rejuvenation and rebirth associated with the tree and Sobek-Ra (fig. 5).<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> H., Kockelmann, “Der herr Der Seen“. 92.

<sup>30</sup> H., Kockelmann, ”Der herr Der Seen“. 92 note 265

<sup>31</sup> Bruyère, “*Rapport.*” plate 25, No.1





fig. 5. Tomb of Sennedjem and Khonsou from Deir el-Medina

Bruyère, B, (1930) .... *Rapport sur les fouilles de deir el médineh*. Vol. 8 of *Fouilles de l'Institut Français d'archéologie Orientale Du Caire*. L'Inst. Français d'Archéol. Orientale, No. 1

The Lotus flowers above the crocodile mummy in Kom Ombo (fig. 5) are a clear symbol of solar rebirth; the appearance of the lotus after the water recedes is an indication that flowers with closed and open blossoms are usually combined above the mummy. The tree behind the crocodile god also represents “renewal” and “revival” (fig.6); it symbolizes this through its blossoming during the return of the Nile flood.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the willow as a tree of Sobek is a possible allusion to his identity as a sun god since, according to Heliopolitan.<sup>33</sup> Ideas: Ra was a phoenix during the creation of the world.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> P., Koemoth, Osiris et les arbres: Contribution à l'étude des arbres sacrés de l'Egypte ancienne. *Aegyptiaca Leodiensia* 3, Liège, 1994, 263.

<sup>33</sup> N., Baum, Arbres et arbustes de l'Egypte ancienne : la liste de la tombe thébaine d'Inéni (no 81), 1988, 170.

<sup>34</sup> P., Koemoth, Couronner Souchos pour fêter le retour de la crue, In: *Isis on the Nile. Egyptian Gods in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 263 [257–289]

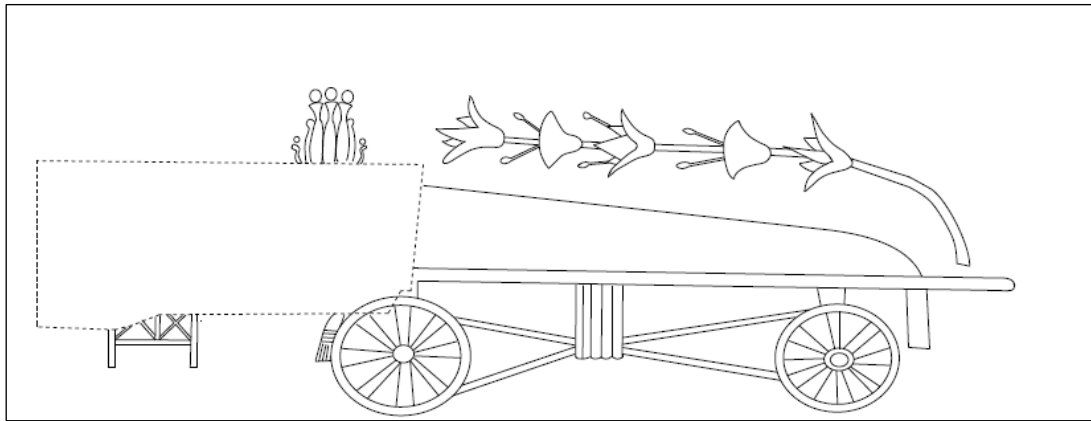


fig. 6, Mummified crocodile on a wheeled cart. Roman graffito on the exterior of the Temple of Kom Ombo

Kockelmann, H, *Der Herr Der Seen*, plate 73, figure 3

## Conclusion

The crocodile, one of the oldest known Egyptian deities, was worshipped as a predator and a divine being. The crocodile god was associated with positive aspects, such as a generator and guaranteeing prosperity and fertility and as negative aspects as dangerous and wild deity in ancient Egypt, the theme of the God under a tree has been well-known since the Old Kingdom. Old trees on the edge of the desert, such as acacia, sycamore fig, tamarisk, and date palm, represented the image of the heavenly afterlife. The sacred trees served as benevolent dispensers of cool water for the souls of the dead, representing the position of gardens with ponds and groves, tombs, and mortuary temples as abodes for the deceased's soul, The connection between the crocodile god and the sky goddess Nut was evident through the connection with the sky horizon. The crocodile animal and the trees have been depicted in various scenes, with the earliest examples dating back to the late Predynastic period. The crocodile god was worshipped as early as the Old and Middle kingdoms, and the earliest examples of Sobek under the tree date back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> dynasties.

The image of the crocodile under a sacred tree holds religious and symbolic significance. During the midday heat, crocodiles interrupt their sunbathing and seek shelter under vegetation at the water's edge. The sacred tree is associated with Neith, the mother of Sobek, who protects the youthful God Sobek-Horus. The tree is also associated with new birth and regeneration, with plants and trees in the crocodile's environment representing the "primeval landscape." The extended plant stalks

surrounding late-period Roman crocodile mummies are identified as papyrus stalks or palm branches, symbolizing regeneration and fertility. The mummies wrapped in this way may be another version of the image of the "crocodile god in the papyrus thicket as a cycle of regeneration." Sobek, a god associated with rebirth, is symbolized by the palm branch and embalmed crocodile, symbolizing eternal life and victory over death. The tree behind the crocodile represents renewal and rebirth, resembling Ra's phoenix identity.

### Summary of Scenes

Figures	Description
1	A cylinder seal from the reign of Thutmosis III represents four crocodiles and four trees with straight trunks and numerous branches
2	A Nineteenth Dynasty schist plate from Gurob. shows a crocodile wearing a crown on each side, and behind and above the animal is a plant whose stem is divided into three branches, covered with leaves
3	A third Intermediate Period Papyrus of Lady Heruben, Depicts Geb, in the form of a crocodile, lies under a tree lies and is worshiped by the deceased
4	linen wrappings with papyrus stalks of late-period Roman from Tehne.
5	scene from the tomb of Sennedjem and Khonsou from Deir el medina, the deceased worshipping the crocodile god on a pedestal and palm tree leaves behind the god
6	Lotus flowers shown above the crocodile mummy in Kom Ombo as a clear symbol of solar rebirth

### References

Abou-Seif, Hakim. "Rapport Sur Les Fouilles Faites à Tehneh En Janvier et Février 1926." *Annales du Service des antiquités de l'Égypte* 26, no. 1 (1926), 32–38.

Allen, T. G., *The Book of the Dead: Or, going forth by day: Ideas of the ancient Egyptians concerning the hereafter as expressed in their own terms.* Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. 1974.

Baum, N., *Arbres et arbustes de l'Égypte ancienne: la liste de la tombe thébaine d'Ineni (no 81).* Département Oriëntalistiek, 1988.

Beinlich, H., *Egypt's Mysterious Book of the Faiyum.* J H Roll Verlag, 2013.

Bruyère, B., Rapport sur les fouilles de deir el médineh. Vol. 8 of Fouilles de l'Institut Français d'archéologie Orientale Du Caire. L'Inst. Français d'Archéol. Orientale, 1930.

Buhl, M., "The Goddesses of the Egyptian Tree Cult." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 6, no. 2, 1947, 80–97.

Gasse, A., "La Litanie Des Douze Noms de Rê-Horakhty [Avec 3 Planches]." *Bulletin de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale* 84 (1984), 189–277.

Gutbub, A., *Textes fondamentaux de la théologie de Kom Ombo*. IFAO, 1973.

Helck, W., "Ramessidische Inschriften Aus Karnak." *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 82, No. 1–2, (1958), 98–140.

Herbin, F., "Une Nouvelle Page Du Livre Des Respirations [Avec 9 Planches]." *BIFAO* 84 (1984): 249–249.

Inconnu-Bocquillon, D., "Thot de Pnoub (La Ville) Ou Thot Du Nébès (l'arbre)." *Revue d'Égyptologie* 39, (1988), 47–62.

Kawanishi, Hiroyuki, and Sumiyo Tsujimura. Preliminary report of the sixth season of the excavations at the site of Akoris, Egypt—the Paleological Association of Japan, 1988.

Kessler, D., "Die Kultische Bindung Der Ba-Konzeption 2. Teil: Die Ba-Zitate Auf Den Kultstelen Und Ostraka Des Neuen Reiches", *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 29 (2001), 139–86.

Knuf, H., Thissen, H. J., Leitz, C., & Recklinghausen, von., *Honi soit qui mal y pense: Studien zum pharaonischen, griechisch-römischen und spätantiken Ägypten zu Ehren von Heinz-Josef Thissen*. Peeters, 2010.

Kockelmann, H., *Der Herr der Seen, Sümpfe und Flussläufe*. Harrassowitz, 2017.

Koemoth, P., *Osiris et les arbres: contribution à l'étude des arbres sacrés de l'Égypte ancienne*. C.I.P.L., 1994.

Koemoth, P., *Couronner Souchos pour fêter le retour de la crue*. In *Isis on the Nile. Egyptian Gods in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt Proceedings of the IVth International Conference of Isis Studies (257–289)*. Brill, 2011.

Kuentz, C., "Quelques Monuments Du Culte de Sobk [Avec 2 Planches]." BIFAO 28 (1929), 113–72.

Lieven, von. Das göttliche in der natur erkennen. Tiere, pflanzen und phänomene der unbelebten natur als manifestationen des göttlichen: Mit einer edition der baumliste p. Berlin 29027. ZÄS 131 (2004),156–172.

Muller, I. V., Bengtson, H., & Gustav, W., Handbuch Der Altertumswissenschaft. Wentworth Press, 1963.

Piankoff, A., Mythological papyri (v. 3, no. 1). Pantheon Books, 1957.

Sander-Hansen, C. E., Die texte der metternichstele. Von C.E. sander-hansen. [The text, with a german translation and commentary.], 1956.

Trutnau, L., and Sommerlad, R., Crocodilians, Their Natural History and Captive Husbandry, 2006.

Vandier, J., Iousâas et (Hathor)-Nébet-Hétépet. Revue D'égyptologie, 16 (1964), 68.

Williams, B., The A-group Royal Cemetery at qustul: Cemetery L. Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1986.

Williams, B., Decorated pottery and the art of Naqada III: A documentary essay. BRD, 1988.

Williams, B., Narmer and the coptos colossi. Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt, 1988, 25, 35–59.

Zecchi, M., Geografia religiosa del Fayyum. La Mandragora Editrice, 2001.

## رمزية التمساح أسفل الشجرة في الديانة المصرية القديمة

محمد احمد فهمي<sup>1</sup>  
أحمد محمد أبو المجد<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> باحث دكتوراه- قسم الإرشاد السياحي- كلية السياحة والفنادق- جامعة المنيا  
<sup>2</sup> أستاذ دكتور- قسم الإرشاد السياحي- كلية السياحة والفنادق- جامعة المنيا

الكلمات الدالة	
الاله التمساح	يعد الاله التمساح أحد أقدم الآلهة المصرية المعروفة. وكان يتمتع بشهرة واسعة في العديد من الأماكن، بما في ذلك وادي النيل والدلتا والفيوم. كان المصريون يخافون من التمساح باعتباره من الزواحف الخطرة والمؤذية من ناحية، ومن ناحية أخرى يعبدون التمساح كإله للخير. الطبيعة المزدوجة كحيوان مفترس من ناحية وككائن إلهي من ناحية أخرى لم تنتهي حتى نهاية العصور المصرية القديمة ونهاية عبادة التمساح. ستناقش هذه الورقة البحثية الجانب الخيري للإله التمساح كخالق وارتباطه بالأشجار والمياه؛ ارتباطه بالحيوانات الإيجابية كاله خالق وضامن لرخاء وخصوبة البلاد ودوره كحامي الموتى وابن نيث والولادة الجديدة والتجديد المرتبط بالأشجار في مصر القديمة. يعتمد هذا البحث على المنهج الوصفي التحليلي لاستنتاج أهمية الجانب الخيري للإله التمساح.
الديانة المصرية القديمة	
شجرة	
نصوص الاهرامات	