

Karanis Crocodiles:
The Egyptian Crocodile Cult at Roman Karanis

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Abstract

This thesis emerged in an effort to further investigate religion in Greco-Roman Egypt. I chose to explore religious practices in the Egyptian town of Karanis, located in the Fayum oasis of the western desert, as it is the site of ongoing excavations by the University of Michigan. Karanis was established in the middle of the third century BCE by Ptolemy II Philadelphus, who was the second Ptolemaic Greek ruler of Egypt. The town continued to be inhabited under the Romans. Religion in Karanis centered around the cult of the crocodile god Sobk, or Greek Souchos. The crocodile cult, therefore, developed as the focus of this thesis. I began by looking at the various aspects of animal cults in ancient Egypt and their nature under the Greeks and Romans. I then studied the role of the crocodile and its worship in Egypt as a whole, drawing evidence from both textual and archaeological sources. I finally examined the direct archaeological evidence at the site of Karanis available in the form of papyri, excavation reports and artifacts at the Kelsey museum of Archaeology.

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Introduction

From the earliest period of Egyptian history, there has been evidence of the worship of animals. Ancient Egyptians lived alongside some of the mighty African birds and beasts and this diverse fauna had a significant impact on their lifestyle. The Egyptians held most of these animals in both fear and respect, which led to their association with the divine. As a result, Egyptian gods and goddesses often took the form of local animals and the unique characteristics of these animals became incorporated in the personalities of the associated deities.

Egyptian deities were often seen as an embodiment of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic elements. This can most prominently be seen in the depiction of gods in ancient Egyptian art. The funerary god Anubis, for example, is almost always depicted as a jackal-headed human figure. In some cases he is also depicted entirely as an Egyptian jackal and in one rare depiction he can be seen in an entirely human form.¹ Anubis' role as the god of mummification and a protector of the dead is likely related to the natural behavior of the Egyptian jackal. According to Egyptologist George Hart (1995) –

*Anubis' power probably originated from the observation of desert dogs scavenging bodies in the shallow graves of the late Predynastic period. To prevent such dismemberment Anubis in his canine manifestation was taken as a protector.*²

¹ Hart, p 25

² Hart, p 25

Other animals may have similarly been associated with their corresponding deities as creators, protectors and destroyers. The ancient Egyptians worshiped animals not just as deities themselves, but also as earthly manifestations of gods. These divine animals were chosen, tamed and housed in temples where they were worshiped. Other animals were reared near temple sites as a way to please the gods. Unlike the immortal deities, these divine animals would eventually die, but they were revered even in death. Upon their death, these animals were often mummified and buried in *necropoleis* in elaborate funerary ceremonies.

Animal cults developed as an important feature of religion in Egypt and this practice sharply distinguished Egyptian religion from that of its neighbors, most notably Greece and Rome. Ancient Greek historians often expressed their surprise and contempt for the Egyptian practice of worshiping animals. The understanding of Egyptian religion, however, grew when the Greeks encountered Egypt a little more closely under Alexander of Macedon. When Alexander conquered Egypt in 332 BCE, he adopted the role of an Egyptian pharaoh and, as is required of a true pharaoh, indulged in the worship of animals. This practice continued and flourished with the successors of Alexander in the Ptolemaic kingdom.

In 30 BCE, the Romans conquered Egypt when Octavian, the first emperor of the Roman Imperial Empire, defeated the pharaoh, Cleopatra and the Roman General, Mark Antony at the battle of Actium. Octavian, thus, put an end to Ptolemaic rule in Egypt. Egypt was incorporated into the large Roman Empire and its civic, economic and religious façades were forever changed. Religion, especially, saw a merging of beliefs and practices across the Mediterranean in this period. The Romans added to an already established Greco-Egyptian religious identity by introducing their own gods into the pantheon. They in turn adopted some Egyptian deities into the imperial cult and spread this cult throughout the Roman

Empire. Smaller local cults, however, remained virtually untouched by Roman influence and animal cults continued to flourish at this time.

At the ancient site of Karanis in Egypt, one can observe the prevalence of the cult of the crocodile in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. Karanis was founded during the Ptolemaic period under the Greeks and the crocodile cult was established as the primary cult of the town. The cult developed from the worship of the Egyptian god Sobk who was associated with crocodiles. Karanis had a large Greek population and, as a result, the crocodile cult became a part of the local Greco-Egyptian religion. With the advent of the Romans, local and state religion was clearly distinguished. The Roman Empire did not directly incorporate Egyptian animal cults in the imperial cult, but it did acknowledge and respect the importance of these cults, as can be seen in the case of Karanis.

The studies of the site of Karanis in the 90 years since excavations began by the University of Michigan have left out a comprehensive discussion of the crocodile cult in this town. Through a study of the papyri, the temples and various other artifacts that serve as evidence of religion in Karanis, I hope to be able to establish the role of the crocodile cult and, thus, build an understanding of religion in Karanis.

Crocodile Cult in Egypt

The oldest, and perhaps most important, animal cult in Egypt was that of the sacred Apis bull at Memphis. The bull was an ancient symbol of virility and was, thus, associated with the all powerful pharaoh in Egypt.³ The Apis bull was believed to embody the Egyptian creator god Ptah, although Ptah did not take the form of a bull. The cult of the bull involved a careful examination and selection of a sacred bull, which was then marked on the forehead and kept in a special enclosure. Worshippers from all over Egypt visited Memphis to see the sacred bull considered to be the earthly manifestation of Ptah. The bull was cared for by priests and was the center of much ritual activity. Upon the death of the sacred bull, a funeral was celebrated in its honor as it was mummified and buried in a sarcophagus. This was followed by a mourning period that lasted for seventy days. The dead bull was no longer seen as a manifestation of Ptah, but began to be associated with Osiris, the god of the afterlife. At the culmination of funerary activities, the priests proceeded to select a new sacred bull, which became the new sacred manifestation at Memphis.⁴

Live animals housed in temples were often entrusted with carrying out divine duties. One of the ways in which these animals served the public was by delivering oracles. Oracles were an active part of religion both in the Greco-Roman and the Egyptian world as a means to directly communicate with a deity. In Egypt, most often only priests could access the innermost chambers and worshipers were not regularly permitted to participate in ritual activities. Oracles, thus, represented a unique opportunity for Egyptians to be able to directly participate in the ritual process, although participation in this activity was also often

³ Hart, p 30

⁴ Ikram, *Animals, Egyptian Sacred*, p 1

restricted.⁵ A worshiper seeking an oracle would address the animal that was standing in as the manifestation of a deity. A priest would then interpret the oracular response delivered by the manifestation. Alexander of Macedon is believed to have sought an oracle from a ram standing in as the god Amun at Siwa.⁶

Egyptians placed great importance on the afterlife. Proper burial and funerary practices were considered vital in ensuring a safe passage through the underworld into the afterlife. An important aspect of animal cults, therefore, was to observe appropriate funerary rites, such as in the case of the Apis bull. At Saqqara, a large number of ibises were reared in meadows. The greatest ritual activity associated with breeding these birds was their burial in large numbers in the animal necropolis in the region.⁷ The mummification of these animals was seen as a sign of devotion, and their mummies were also sold to individuals to be kept as a sign of piety. The ibis was associated with the god Thoth, who was depicted as an ibis-headed man in ancient Egyptian imagery. About 10,000 ibises were buried in individual pots annually at Saqqara.⁸ The necropolis at Saqqara was also used for the burial of other animals, including falcons, baboons and even lions.⁹

The divine nature of these animals meant that they were sheltered from any harm. The killing of several local animals was prohibited and punishable by law. In the 1st c. BCE, Greek historian Diodorus Siculus expressed his astonishment at the prevalence of animal cults in Egypt. He claimed to have witnessed the lynching of a Roman ambassador who had

⁵ Tallet, Gaëlle. Oracles. *The Oxford handbook of Roman Egypt*, p 398

⁶ Ikram, *Animals, Egyptian Sacred*, p 3

⁷ Bagnall, p 98

⁸ Bagnall, p 136

⁹ Bagnall, p 98

accidentally killed a cat in Egypt.¹⁰ Greek historian Herodotus wrote in the 5th c. BCE that the penalty of killing an ibis or a hawk in Egypt was death, even when the act was committed unintentionally.¹¹ He even described the care that was taken to suitably bury a dead animal –

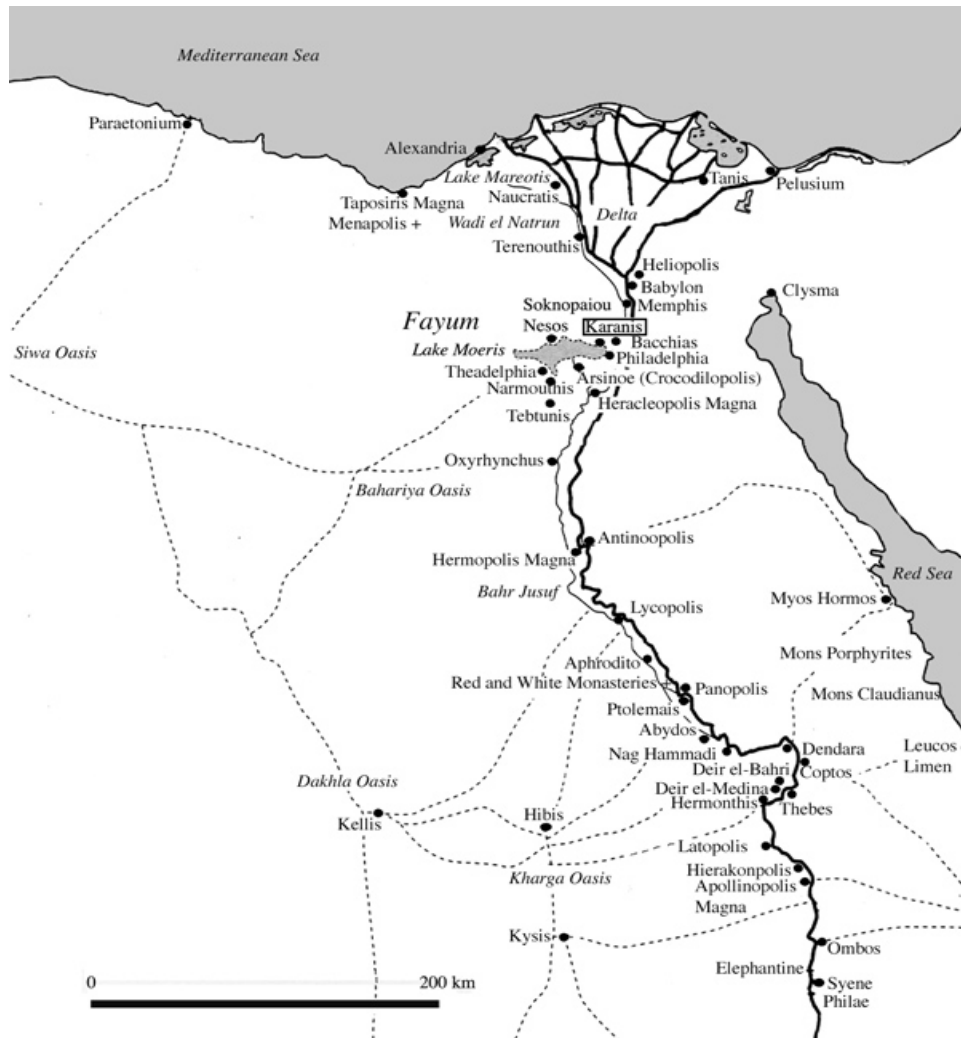


Fig. 1. Map of Egypt in Ptolemaic, Roman and Byzantine periods

Property of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan

¹⁰ Bagnall, p 31

¹¹ Herodotus, *Histories*, 2.65

*Dead cats are taken away to sacred buildings in the town of Bubastis, where they are embalmed and buried; female dogs are buried by the townsfolk in their own towns in sacred coffins; and the like is done with mongooses. Shrewmice and hawks are taken away to Buto, ibises to the city of Hermes. There are few bears, and the wolves are little bigger than foxes; both these are buried wherever they are found lying.*¹²

Another important cult in ancient Egypt was that of the Nile crocodile. The presence of the crocodile could not be ignored in the waters of Egypt and the ancient Egyptians held this beast in great fear and awe. This fierce predator was massive in size, weighing up to 1000lbs and growing to a length of 14ft on average.¹³ One of the ways in which we know of the worship of the crocodile is through written descriptions of the activity, especially by Greek historians who were both fascinated with as well as appalled at the practice when they visited Egypt. Another way we can attain direct evidence of the worship is through archaeological remains. These include depictions of ritual activity in wall paintings, signs of mummification and burial activities, references made in ancient papyri as well as the evidence of animal worship in temples.

Herodotus described the Nile crocodile as a unique beast that was feared by all other animals and birds¹⁴. According to Diodorus Siculus, crocodiles were held in high regard in Egypt because, by guarding the waters of the region, they ensured the safety of the land from

¹² Herodotus, *Histories*, 2.67

¹³ Verhoogt, *Crocodile*, p 1

¹⁴ Herodotus, *Histories*. 2.68

robbers and invaders.¹⁵ The Greek historian Plutarch who lived in the 1st – 2nd c. CE described the nature of the crocodile as one associated with the divine –

The crocodile, certainly, has acquired honour which is not devoid of a plausible reason, but he is declared to be a living representation of God, since he is the only creature without a tongue; for the Divine Word has no need of a voice, and [p. 175]

through noiseless ways advancing, guides

By Justice all affairs of mortal men.

They say that the crocodile is the only animal living in the water, which has a thin and transparent membrane extending down from his forehead to cover up his eyes, so that he can see without being seen; and this prerogative belongs also unto the First God. In whatever part of the land the female crocodile lays her eggs, well, she knows that this is destined to mark the limit of the rise of the Nile.¹⁶

The crocodile's physical features, especially the nictitating membrane that gave its eyes a glassy appearance, and its stealth in the waters, made it unique. It had the ability to lie undetected and silently emerge from the water, thus catching its prey off guard. This led to an association of the crocodile with the Egyptian creation myth. According to this myth, all divine and mortal beings had first emerged from a primordial abyss or *Nun*¹⁷. This watery abyss was associated with the Nile and the crocodile was seen as one of the first beings to

¹⁵ Diodorus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, 1.89.1-3

¹⁶ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, section 75

¹⁷ Gazda, p 32

emerge from the abyss, as it does from the waters of the Nile. This view of the crocodile became another reason for its association with the divine.

The importance of the crocodile in Egypt is evident even in Roman coins. The crocodile was a popular image on Roman coins, especially during the reign of Trajan (98-117 CE) and Hadrian (117-138 CE). Coins carrying the image of the crocodile were usually minted in Alexandria and featured the bust of the emperor on the obverse and the crocodile on the reverse. A Denarius possibly minted in Rome in 28 BCE¹⁸, shortly after Egypt was annexed by the Roman imperial power, depicts Octavian on the front and a crocodile on the reverse. The crocodile is accompanied by the Latin word *Aegypto* above it and the word *Capta* underneath it. Therefore, the crocodile seems to have been used as a symbol of the newly conquered land of Egypt on this coin. Another coin, a Dichalkon of 126-127 CE that was minted in Alexandria depicts a crocodile with a faintly visible disk on its head.¹⁹ The disk attributes a divine nature to the crocodile and thus, seems to be a representation of the crocodile deity. The obverse of this coin depicts the bust of Hadrian.

The deity associated with the Nile crocodile was Sobk, or Greek Souchos. Sobk was an Egyptian god associated with water and was represented as a crocodile-headed man or simply as a crocodile, often wearing the *atef* crown. From the New Kingdom onwards, Sobk began to be associated with the creator god Ra and assumed the identity of Sobk-Ra.²⁰ In a spell belonging to the Egyptian Coffin Texts, Sobk “the rebel” was blamed for the mutilation of Osiris’ body. As a rebel, Sobk was most prominently associated with Seth, the god of

¹⁸ American Numismatic Society, 1944.100.39163

¹⁹ American Numismatic Society, 1988.59.1

²⁰ Pinch, Geraldine, p 200

chaos.²¹ Sobk is, however, also mentioned in the Coffin Texts as the one who retrieves Horus' hands from the water after Isis cuts them off in a rage. In this myth, he is seen as a savior of the gods.²²



Fig. 2. Sobk with the pharaoh Amenhotep III, Luxor, ca. 1391-1353 BCE

Archival architecture Images

This dual nature of Sobk and the Nile crocodile as viewed by the Egyptians is reflected in the treatment of the crocodile in different parts of Egypt. As a predator, the

²¹ Pinch, Geraldine, p201

²² Pinch, Geraldine, p 201

crocodile posed a danger to the lives of locals as well as to their livelihood. A papyrus from the Egyptian town of Tebtunis dating to 183 BCE mentions a cow that was killed by a crocodile after being driven into a canal.²³ As a consequence, there were parts of Egypt where the crocodile was considered a threat and was hunted and killed. Herodotus described this dual treatment of the crocodile in Egypt –

τοῖσι μὲν δὴ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἱροὶ εἰσὶ οἱ κροκόδειλοι, τοῖσι δὲ οὐ, ἀλλ' ἅτε πολεμίους περιέπουσι : οἱ δὲ περὶ τε Θήβας καὶ τὴν Μοίριος λίμνην οἰκέοντες καὶ κάρτα ἤγηνται αὐτοῦσεῖναι ἱρούς: ἐκ πάντων δὲ ἓνα ἑκάτεροι τρέφουσι κροκόδειλον δεδιδραγμένον εἶναι χειροῖθεα, ἀρτήματά τε λίθινα χυτὰ καὶ χρύσεια ἐς τὰ ὦτα ἐνθέντες καὶ ἀμφιδέας περὶ τοὺς ἐμπροσθίους πόδας, καὶ σιτία ἀποτακτὰ διδόντες καὶ ἱρήια, καὶ περιέποντες ὡς κάλλιστα ζῶντας: ἀποθανόντας δὲ θάπτουσι τὰ ἀριχεύσαντες ἐν ἱρήσι θήκησι.

οἱ δὲ περὶ Ἐλεφαντίνην πόλιν οἰκέοντες καὶ ἐσθίουσι αὐτοὺς οὐκ ἠγεόμενοι ἱρούς εἶναι. καλέουσι αὐτὰ δὲ οὐ κροκόδειλοι ἀλλὰ χάμψαι: κροκοδείλους δὲ Ἴωνες ὠνόμασαν, εἰκάζοντες αὐτῶν τὰ εἶδη εἶναι τοῖσι παρὰ σφίσι γινομένοισι κροκοδείλοισι τοῖσι ἐν τῆσι αἱμασιῆσι.

Some of the Egyptians consider crocodiles sacred; others do not, but treat them as enemies.

Those who live near Thebes and lake Moeris consider them very sacred.

Every household raises one crocodile, trained to be tame; they put ornaments of glass and gold on its ears and bracelets on its forefeet, provide special food and offerings for it, and give the creatures the best of treatment while they live; after death, the crocodiles are embalmed and buried in sacred coffins.

²³ Verhoogt, *Crocodile*, p 1

*But around Elephantine they are not held sacred, and are even eaten. The Egyptians do not call them crocodiles, but khampsae. The Ionians named them crocodiles, from their resemblance to the lizards, which they have in their wall.*²⁴

The area around lake Moeris that Herodotus mentions in this text is the Fayum basin. The cult of the crocodile was most prominent in this region of Egypt. Located about 80km southwest of Cairo, the Fayum was a natural depression in the desert. It was connected to the Nile by a natural water channel, Bahr Yusuf, which flowed through the Hawara Canal or the el-Lahun corridor to reach this depression. The region was a pseudo-oasis.²⁵ The water from Bahr Yusuf accumulated in the Fayum to form lake Moeris. The Fayum basin was extremely fertile and this led to the establishment of several towns in this region.

The oldest city in the Fayum is the ancient city of Shedyet, which was established on the Fayum delta. The delta was an area formed due to an accumulation of silt where Bahr Yusuf met lake Moeris.²⁶ Shedyet was the center of the crocodile cult and it was for this reason that the Greeks called it Crocodilopolis. Around 267 BCE, the town was renamed to Arsinoe after the sister of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, since Ptolemy II established several new cities in the Fayum. The population of these towns consisted mostly of Greek mercenaries and Egyptians resettled from other towns. The crocodile cult emerged as the primary cult in most of these towns, owing to their dependency on water.

According to Diodorus Siculus the origin of crocodile worship in the Fayum lies in

²⁴ Herodotus, *Histories*, 2.69.3

²⁵ Davoli, Paola. The Archaeology of the Fayum, *The Oxford handbook of Roman Egypt*, p 152-153

²⁶ Davoli, Paola. The Archaeology of the Fayum. *The Oxford handbook of Roman Egypt*, p152-153



Fig. 3. Detail of votive stela of Pia dedicated to Sobk, Luxor, ca. 1540-1075 BCE

Archival architecture Images

the story of King Menas, a mythical Macedonian king. In the story, King Menas is fleeing from his own dogs when he reaches the shore of lake Moeris. He is promptly rescued by a crocodile who carries him to safety on the opposite shore. The king was eternally grateful to the crocodile for saving his life and so he established the crocodile cult in a new city he founded in this region of the Fayum.²⁷

In the 1st century, the Greek geographer Strabo described the crocodile cult at Crocodilopolis in the 17th volume of his work *Geographia* –

²⁷ Diodorus, *Bibliotheca historica*, 1.89.1-3

μετὰ δὲ τὸν Ἀρσινοΐτην καὶ τὸν Ἡρακλεωτικὸν νομὸν Ἡρακλέους πόλις, ἐν ἧ' ὁ ἰχνεύμων ντιμᾶται ὑπεναντίως τοῖς Ἀρσινοΐταις: οἱ μὲν γὰρ τοὺς κροκοδείλους τιμᾶσι, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἦτε διῶρυξ αὐτῶν ἐστὶ μεστὴ τῶν κροκοδείλων καὶ ἡ τοῦ Μοίριδος λίμνη σέβονται γὰρ καὶ ἀπέχονται αὐτῶν: οἱ δὲ τοὺς ἰχνεύμονας τοὺς ὀλεθριωτάτους τοῖς κροκοδείλοις, καθάπερ καὶ ταῖς ἀσπίσι: καὶ γὰρ τὰ ὠὰ διαφθεύρουσιν αὐτῶν καὶ αὐτὰ τὰ θηρία, τῷ πληθῶθωρακισθέντες: κολισθέντες γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ ξηραίνονται πρὸς τὸν ἥλιον, εἶτα τὰς ἀσπίδας μὲν ἢ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἢ τῆς οὐρᾶς λαβόμενοι κατασπῶσιν εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν καὶ διαφθεύρουσι: τοὺς δὲ

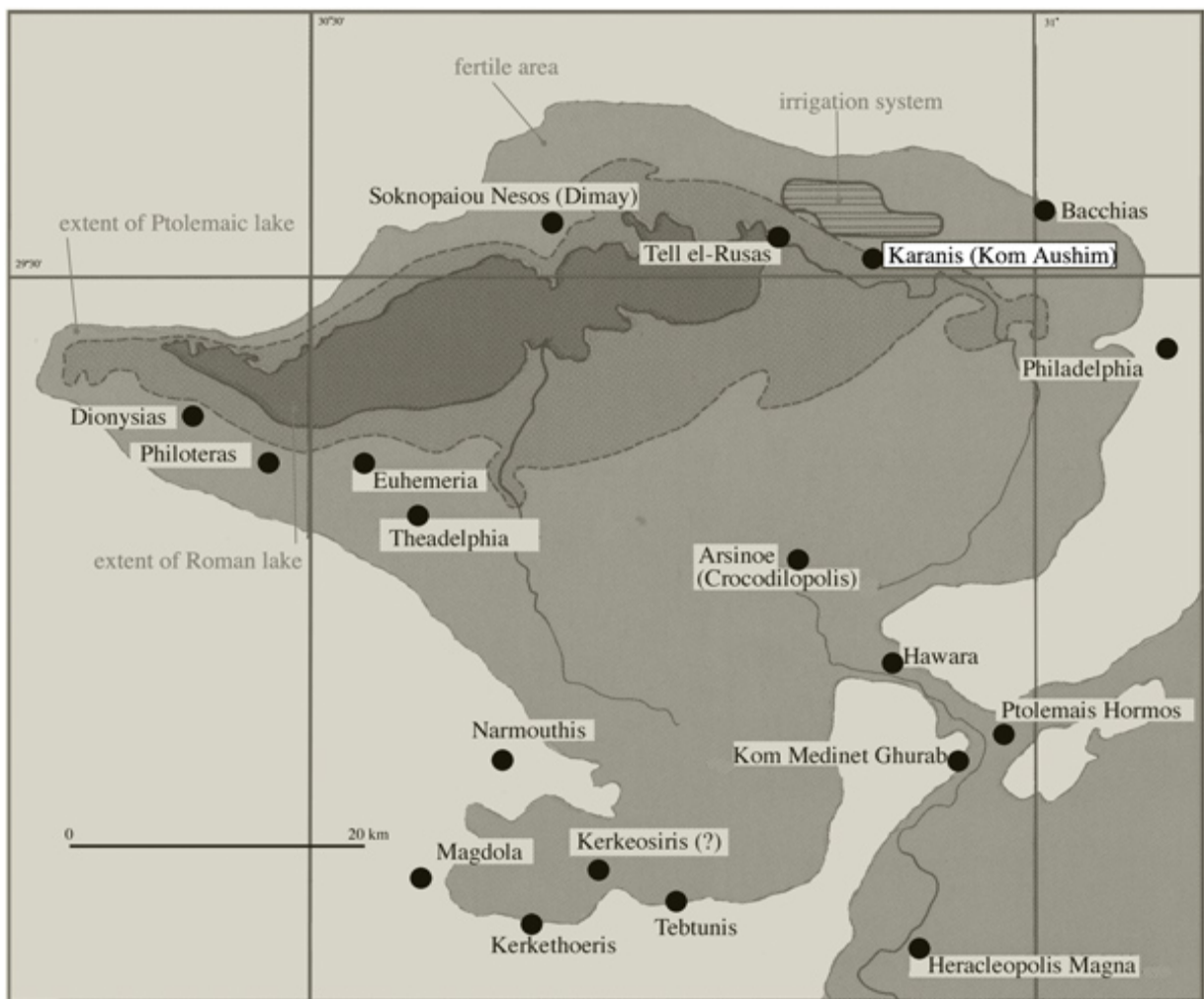


Fig 4. Map of the Fayum in Ptolemaic, Roman and Byzantine periods
Property of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan

κροκοδείλους ἐνεδρεύσαντες, ἡνίκ' ἂν ἠλιάζωνται κεχηνότες, ἐμπίπτουσιν εἰς τὰ χάσματα καὶ δι
αφαγόντες τὰ σπλάγχνα καὶ τὰς γαστέρας ἐκδύνουσιν ἐκ νεκρῶν τῶνσωμάτων.

Sailing along to the distance of 100 stadia, we come to the city Arsinoë, formerly called Crocodilopolis; for the inhabitants of this nome worship the crocodile. The animal is accounted sacred, and kept apart by himself in a lake; it is tame, and gentle to the priests, and is called Suchus. It is fed with bread, flesh, and wine, which strangers who come to see it always present. Our host, a distinguished person, who was our guide in examining what was curious, accompanied us to the lake, and brought from the supper table a small cake, dressed meat, and a small vessel containing a mixture of honey and milk. We found the animal lying on the edge of the lake. The priests went up to it; some of them opened its mouth, another put the cake into it, then the meat, and afterwards poured down the honey and milk. The animal then leaped into the lake, and crossed to the other side. When another stranger arrived with his offering, the priests took it, and running round the lake, caught the crocodile, and gave him what was brought, in the same manner as before.²⁸

The single divine crocodile described by Strabo was likely chosen to act as the earthly manifestation of Sobk and as in the case of the Apis bull at Memphis, there were rituals involved in the worship of this divine crocodile in the lake. It is possible that this worship too did not cease with the death of the crocodile, but continued for some time in the form of

²⁸ Strabo, *Geographia*, 17.1.39

funerary rituals as the dead animal was linked to Osiris. It is also likely that a new crocodile was then chosen as the restored manifestation in an ongoing process of worship.

The crocodile being worshiped would likely be selected as a divine manifestation early in its life, for it had to be tame so as not to prove a threat to the priests who interacted with the animal. A papyrus found at the site of Tebtunis in Egypt also mentions the ritual of feeding the crocodile –

Hermias to Horos, greeting. Appended is a copy of the letter to Asklepiades. Take care that its instructions are followed. Good-bye. The fifth year, Xandikos 17, Mecheir 17.

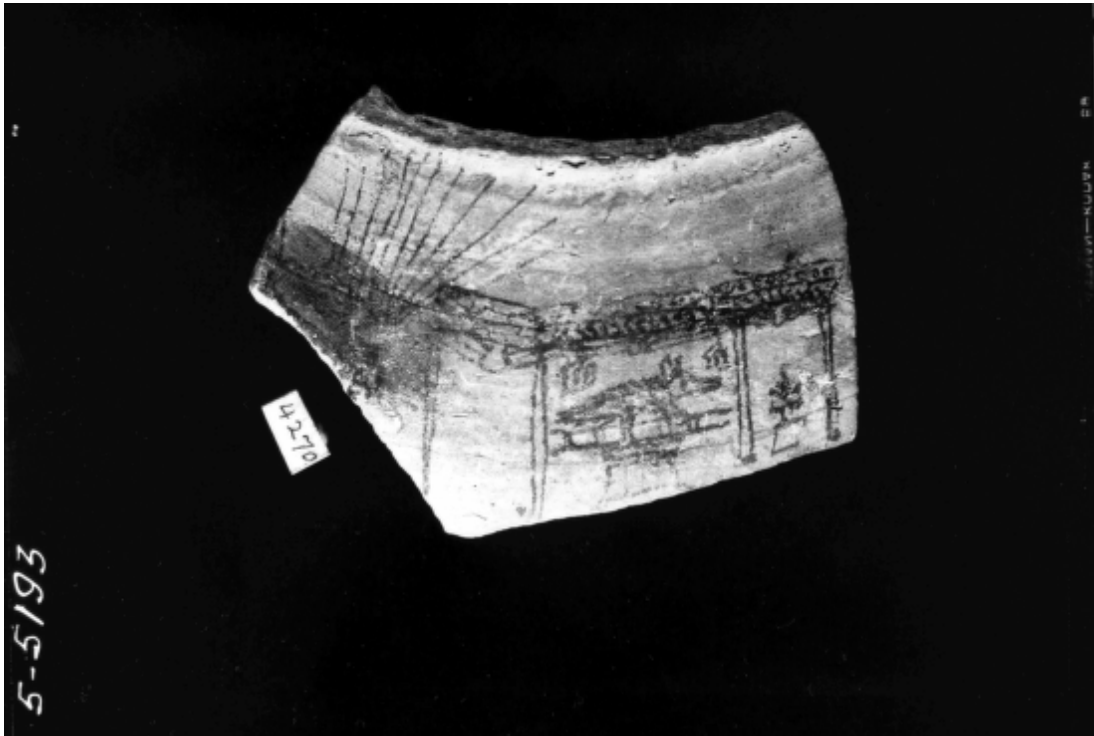


Fig 5. Drawing of Sobk is his shrine facing votive offerings.

Image digitally reproduced with the permission of the Papyrology Collection, Graduate Library, University of Michigan

To Asklepiades. Lucius Memmius, a Roman senator, who occupies a position of great dignity and honor, is making the voyage from Alexandria to the Arsinoite nome to see the sights. Let him be received with special magnificence, and take care that at the proper spots the chambers be prepared and the landing-places to them be got ready, and that the gifts of hospitality below written be presented to him at the landing-place, and that the furniture of the chamber, the customary tid-bits for Petesouchos and the crocodiles, the necessaries for the view of the Labyrinth, and the offerings and sacrifices be provided; in general take the greatest pains in everything that the visitor may be satisfied, and display the utmost zeal... (here the papyrus breaks off)²⁹

It is clear from this letter that the ritual of feeding the crocodile held some honor and prestige for it is seen as a means of pleasing a visiting Roman senator. The mention of the tidbits for the crocodile along with instructions to be hospitable also seems to suggest that it would be considered rude to not allow a prominent visitor to engage in this activity. Unlike the feeding of the lone crocodile in Crocodilopolis, the Roman senator in Tebtunis seems to have fed other crocodiles in addition to the manifestation of the god Petesouchos, a local form of Sobk. The divine animal would, therefore, not necessarily be housed in a separate lake.

Sobk was worshiped in many different local forms and a unique aspect of this cult was the worship of crocodiles in pairs. In many towns in the Fayum, temples were dedicated to two different forms of the crocodile god, each form embodying different characteristics of the god. At sites like Soknopaiou Nesos, Narmouthis and Karanis, for example, the temples

²⁹ Advanced Papyrological Information System, berkeley.apis.108

were dedicated to the worship of twin crocodiles. At Oxyrhynchus, a town located south of the Fayum in Upper Egypt, there was a temple called the temple of the 'Two Brothers' that was dedicated to a pair of crocodile gods called Senouy, or Greek Psoosnaus³⁰.

This practice of worshipping a pair of crocodiles has been associated with the worship of the Greek Dioscuri. The Dioscuri were a Greek mythological pair consisting of two brothers Castor and Pollux. Castor was the son of the Spartan King Tyndareus and his wife Leda. Pollux, or Polydeuces, was the son of the god Zeus and Leda. The two brothers were born as twins from the same egg, even though they had different fathers. Pollux was immortal as he was the son of Zeus, and with the help of his father he shared his immortality with his mortal brother, thus uniting their fates forever. The cult of the two brothers was widespread in ancient Greece and Rome. It is, therefore, possible that the Greeks associated the crocodile pairs with the familiar Dioscuri. This association could have established the practice of worshipping crocodile gods as twins in the Fayum. It could, however, just as easily have been the opposite case. It is possible that the already established practice of worshipping twin crocodiles made it easier for the Greeks to accept this cult as they associated it with the Dioscuri.

This connection of the Dioscuri and the crocodile gods is evident in some temple imagery. A wall painting at the temple of Pnepheros, another form of the god Sobk, at Theadelphia depicts a pair of crocodile mummies with the Greek deity Heron and the Dioscuri.³¹ One section contains the image of an anthropomorphic figure with a disk around his head mounted on a horse. Below this figure, which occupies the central space, is a

³⁰ Tallet, Gaëlle and Zivie-Coche, Christiane. Imported Cults. *The Oxford handbook of Roman Egypt*, p 446-447

³¹ Tallet, Gaëlle and Zivie-Coche, Christiane. Imported Cults. *The Oxford handbook of Roman Egypt*, p 447

crocodile mummy with an *atef* crown and a *wesekh* collar. On the top right corner of this section, above the central figure, is the image of a man holding a double axe. The two figures in the image are thought to be depicting the same deity. This twin imagery has been seen as a representation of the Greek Dioscuri.³² Another section of this fresco depicts Heron with a young crocodile mummy wearing a solar disk.

At the ancient town of Akoris, which lay east of the Nile, a relief depicts the Dioscuri with their sister Helen.³³ The crocodile cult was the most prominent cult in this city and Helen was associated with the crocodile gods who were worshiped as a pair. Seen as the twin brothers of Helen, there is no doubt of an overlap in the identities of the Dioscuri and the crocodile gods at Akoris. Furthermore, the prevalence of names like Castor, Polydeuces and Helena in Akoris in the Roman period³⁴ points to a prevalence of the cult of the Dioscuri there, possibly in conjunction with the crocodile cult.

The merging of identities of deities was not uncommon in this period. The advent of the Greeks and the Romans into Egypt saw religious syncretism, which resulted in the overlapping of deities and even in the creation of new ones. This exchange of ideas can be seen in a transformation of the depiction of a deity. As the crocodile god became a prominent part of the Greco-Roman religion, its representation too was Hellenized in some cases. At the temple of twin crocodiles at Tebtunis, for example, wooden panels depict a bearded man with solar rays crowning his head. This figure can be recognized as a Greek god. The god,

³² Tallet, Gaëlle and Zivie-Coche, Christiane. Imported Cults. *The Oxford handbook of Roman Egypt*, p 447

³³ Tallet, Gaëlle and Zivie-Coche, Christiane. Imported Cults. *The Oxford handbook of Roman Egypt*, p 447

³⁴ Tallet, Gaëlle and Zivie-Coche, Christiane. Imported Cults. *The Oxford handbook of Roman Egypt*, p 447

however, is holding a crocodile in his hands. Owing to its location in a temple of crocodile gods, the study of this imagery reveals this figure to be a Hellenized form of Sobk.³⁵

In addition to the cult of the living crocodile, like at Tebtunis and Crocodilopolis, an important part of the worship of Sobk was the rituals associated with the dead crocodile. Upon their death, crocodiles were mummified. They were sometimes housed in temples inside niches where they were presumably the recipients of sacrificial rituals. They were also carried on biers, most likely as part of a procession after which they were buried.

At the temple of Pnepheros at Theadelphia, a wall painting depicts a crocodile mummy being carried by priests in a procession.³⁶ Evidence implies that this processional activity was an important ritual of the cult. Papyri discovered in Tebtunis contain rules in Demotic that talk about a religious association of crocodile mummy bearers from the 2nd c BCE.³⁷ Seven Demotic association rules were found in the crocodile cemeteries at Tebtunis and four of these refer to an association whose members are described as ‘those of the association (and) the guild-master of the crocodile, who sit before Souchos (and) the gods of Souchos in the resting-place of the crocodile.’³⁸ A different set of rules describe the association as that of ‘the priests of Soknebtunis (and) the guild-master of the crocodile, who sits before Souchos (and) the gods of Souchos in the resting-place of the crocodile.’³⁹ The rules prescribe that the members must bring the gods of Suchos to the place of burial or they would be fined.⁴⁰ The various rules written in different periods imply a continuation of the

³⁵ Tallet, Gaëlle and Zivie-Coche, Christiane. Imported Cults. *The Oxford handbook of Roman Egypt*, p 451

³⁶ Gazda, p 37

³⁷ Muhs, p 3

³⁸ Muhs, p 6

³⁹ Muhs, p 7

⁴⁰ Muhs, p 7 & p 14

association over the years. This is evidence not only of private associations of members engaged in the cult, but also of a processional activity in Tebtunis. The members were obliged to ‘sit and drink’⁴¹ together on six specified days. There is, however, no mention of where this procession of the crocodile mummy began.

A crocodile mummy was found in the central niche of the temple at Theadelphia.⁴² The mummy lay on a bier, which suggests that it was either carried into or would be carried out of the temple, possibly in a procession. The rules of the mummy bearers found at Tebtunis imply that the mummies would probably have been led in processions after they were displayed in niches in temples, for they were to be led in procession to their place of burial by these members or priests. At Dionysias too, a crocodile mummy was found in the central niche of the shrine room.

Crocodile mummies have been found in vast numbers in *necropoleis* in the Fayum. At Tebtunis, archaeologists discovered over two thousand mummified crocodiles in a Ptolemaic *necropolis* that lay southwest of the temple of Soknebtunis, a form of the crocodile god. The find was described as –

“The pits were all quite shallow, rarely exceeding a meter in depth, and the crocodiles were sometimes buried singly, but often in groups of five or ten or even more, and with their heads pointing generally to the north. To the votaries of Sobk this mummification of his sacred animal must have been a labour of love, for besides quantities of the full grown specimens, tiny crocodile mummies were found, in addition to numerous sham ones, which

⁴¹ Muhs, p15

⁴² Bagnall and Rathbone, p141

*had the shape of a crocodile, but contained only a bone or some eggs, or sometimes merely a figure of a crocodile in stone or wood.”*⁴³

At the site of Soknopaiou Nesos too, crocodile mummies were buried in the Ptolemaic and Roman cemeteries, which were also the burial place of human mummies in cartonnage.⁴⁴

The cult of the crocodile was most prominent in the Fayum in Egypt because of the role this deity indirectly played in the livelihood of the people there. The agricultural lands of the Fayum greatly depended on the water supply by the Bahr Yusuf and consequently, Lake Moeris, for the irrigation of their lands. This dependency on the surrounding waters for livelihood transferred into a worship of the dominant animal that lurked in these waters. The crocodile cult was the center of religion at the town of Karanis too. In the following chapters, I will look closely at the archaeological evidence from the site of Karanis in an effort to determine the nature of the cult in this town.

⁴³ Bagnall and Rathbone, p 137

⁴⁴ Bagnall and Rathbone, p 137

Crocodile Cult in Karanis

(a) Imperial Prayer

Karanis was one of several towns established in the Fayum during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-247 BCE) as a means to settle Greek mercenaries in a region that could be exploited for its agricultural potential. It is located in the northern part of the Fayum, to the east of Lake Moeris. The town was named after Karanos, the king credited with the founding of Macedonia.⁴⁵ The settlement at Karanis began in the middle of the 3rd century BCE and continued till the end of the 5th century CE when it was abandoned due to a decline in the economy.⁴⁶

The ancient site of Karanis was an accidental discovery of the 19th century. During the 19th and 20th centuries, Egyptian farmers dug the land of the Fayum in search of decomposed organic material or *sebakh*. These locals, called *sebakhin*, dug the mounds of this region after obtaining government permits to uncover *sebakh*, which could be used as fertilizer as it was rich in nitrogen.⁴⁷ Along with the *sebakh*, these farmers began to uncover artifacts from the ancient settlements of the Fayum, especially an abundance of papyri. This sparked scholarly interest in the region, and in 1895 English papyrologists Bernard Pyne Grenfell and Arthur Surridge Hunt began excavating at different sites in the Fayum, including the Kom Aushim mound where they discovered the site of Karanis. Their excavations were hasty and they failed to systematically record the context of the papyri they

⁴⁵ Bagnall, p 131

⁴⁶ Gazda, p 1

⁴⁷ Gazda, p 2

found. It wasn't until early 1925, after Francis W. Kelsey's visit to Karanis that the University of Michigan began excavations that involved systematic recording and interpretation of the artifacts and the site.⁴⁸

In the excavation by the University of Michigan, the Kom Aushim mound was divided into seven large areas, which were further divided into grids of squares measuring thirty-five meters to a side. The different occupation levels were then determined, with the topmost level being Level A going down to the earliest layer, Level E. Plans and sections were drawn on the site and structures and artifacts were assigned individual numbers based on their position on the site⁴⁹.

A number of ancient documents were uncovered from Karanis during a University of Michigan expedition in 1928. Amongst these papyri was a unique ancient prayer found in room C123K/B. C123 has been identified as a granary and C123K was an open courtyard in building C123.⁵⁰ The large size of the granary has led to its classification as a semi-public building.

This papyrus was originally used as a tax document that recorded a list of the names of taxpayers and the amount of grain they had paid to the Roman state. It was later inscribed with the prayer on the verso. This prayer calls on Roman deified emperors, Greek Olympian gods as well as the crocodile gods of Karanis.

⁴⁸ Gazda, p 2-4

⁴⁹ Gazda, p 5

⁵⁰ Husselman, p 56

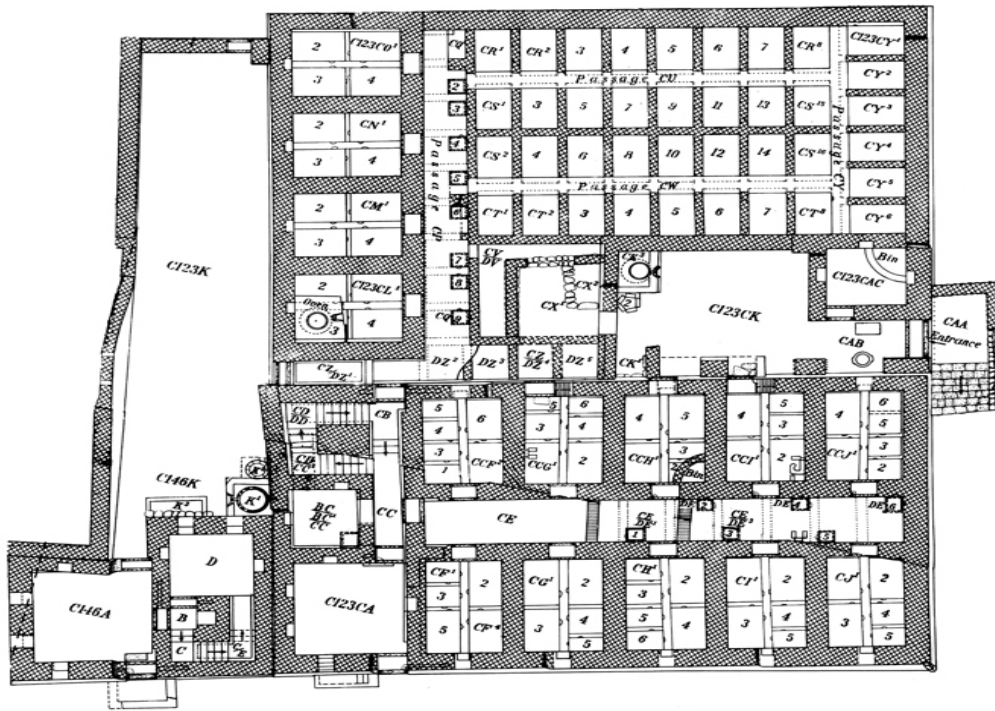


Fig 6. House C123 which was used as a granary. The papyrus was found in C123K/B.

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Negative number M8.0694

The following is the original prayer, accompanied by my translation drawn with the help of an unpublished study of the prayer by Traianos Gagos and Paul Heilporn of the University of Michigan's Papyrology Collection –

1st column –

1. [. . .] . . . [?]

2. Εὐφημία ἔστωι . [.] . . ε . [. .] . οντες

[ε]ϋχεσθε · ἐ[στία] Αὐτ[οκρ]άτορι Καίσαρ[ι]

Τ[ρ]αι[α]γῶι Ἀδ[ρι]α[ν]ῶι Σεβαστῶι τῶι

5. σ[ω]τῆρι καὶ [εὐε]ργ[έ]τηι τῆς οἰκουμένης ·

ἐστία θεῶι [Σεβ]α[στ]ῶι [Κ]αίσαρι · ἐστία

θεῶι Τ[ι]βερίωι [Κα]ίσα[ρι] · ἐστία θεῶι

Κλαυδίωι Κα[ίσα]ρ[ι] · ἐστία θεῶι [Ο]ύεσπασ[ια]νῶι

Καίσαρ[ι] · ἐστία [θεῶ]ι Τ[ίτ]ωι Κ[αί]σαρι · ἐστία

10. θεῶι Νέρωνα [Καίσαρι] · ἐστία θεῶ[ι] Τ[ρ]αιαν[ῶ]ι

11bis. 'ἐστία Ἀτερίωι [.] . [.] . ρ ἐστία'

11. [[Καίσαρι]] · ἐστία ω [. . . . ἐ]πάρχωι ·

Διὺ Σωτήρι · ἐστία Διὺ [Ο]λυμπ[ί]ωι · ἐστία

Διὺ Κασίωι · ἐστία [Διὺ Ξε]γίωι · ἐστία

Διὺ Καπετωλίωι · ἐστία Διὺ αν[. . .]ηι ·

15. ἐστία Διὺ Παγομφ[αίωι] · Ἡρα τελεία ·

Ἡ[ρ]α Γαμηλία · Ἀθη[νᾶ . . .] . . . [.] · Ἀθη[νᾶ]

. . [.] Ἄρηι (.) . ορ . . [. . .] . .

συμμάχοις · [- - -]

προ[. . .] . ορι μ . στα . δ[. . .] . . [. .] . ηι

20. α . . [. . .] Χάρισι [. . (.)] · Ποσιδῶνι

Ἀσφα[λείωι] · Ποσιδῶ[νι] Π[ο]ντίωι · Ποσιδῶνι

Γαιόχ[ω]ι · [.] . . λωι . [.] παντοτρόφοις ·

[.] . . . [.]θ[.] . . . μ . [. . .] . . · Ρέα θεο

Δ[ή]μητρι καὶ Κό[ρη] θεῶις καρποφόροις ·

25. Ἄδη[ι . .] . . η . . ωι · Φε[ρσεφό]νι καλλιτέκ[ν]ωι ·

Ἀπόλλ[ω]νι Μουσ[ηγέ]τηι · Ἀρτέμιδι

[.]ρωι · Ἑρμῆ[ι] Η . [. .]ι · Ἡρακλεῖ

Καλλιγίκοι · Διο[σ]κόρο[ις] ἐπιφανέσι

[θεοῖς ·] Μούσαις Ὀλ[υ]μπιάσ[ι] · Μούσαις Π[ι]ερίσι ·

30. Μ[ο]ύσαις [Ἐ]λικωνιάσ[ι] · [.] . . [.] · [Ἐ]λικωνιάσι

[. . . .] · [.] αἶδο . . . [. . . .] . . [.] . . α[ι]ς

[.] . . . [.] · ἀνα . . . [.] . . ο[.]οῖς · Ἀσκληπι[ῶ]τι

2nd column -

[.] Ἡφαιστῶι πολυτέχνῳι ·

[5/6?] . . ἰπλ[ο]υτοδότῃι · Διονύσῳι χορηγῶι ·

35. [Δ]ιῖ Ἐλευθερίῳι Σεβαστῶι · Ἀλεξανδρῳι

κτ[ί]στη[ι] · θεοῖς πᾶσι καὶ πάσαις . . [?]

. . . . [.] · [.]ι · ἐστ[ί]α πάντων Ῥωμα[ί]ων ·

ἐσ[τ]ία Ἀ[λε]ξανδρέων · ἐστία Π[τ]ολεμα[ι]έων

τῶν ἐν τῶ[ι] Ἀρσινοίτῃι νομῶι · ἐ[σ]τία . . .

40. [.] · [.] · φ[ί]λων καὶ συμμάχων · σωτηρία[ν]

[.] · [.] . . [εὐ]τεκνίαν, καλ<λ>ιτεκνίαν, εὐσέ-

β[ει]α[ν], [.] · [.] · [.] . . ιαν, εὐθυνίαν, πολυκαρπ[ί]α[ν],

[.] . . . ιαν, [.] . . . ν, ἰρήνην, ὁμόνοιαν,

[καὶ] τ[ὰ] ἄλλα πάντα καὶ νῦν καὶ ἰς τὸν αἰεὶ

45. [χρό]νον · επε[.] . .] . αἰ δὲ εὐχὰς τάσδε

. εἶναι [.] · τελε . . ι · ἐστία Πετεσορύ[χῳι]

[καὶ Π]νεφε[ρ]ῶτι [θ]εοῖς μεγάλοις ·

[ἐ]σ[τ]ία Σόξιτι [καὶ Π]νεφερῶτι θεοῖς

χρησμοδ[ό]ταις · [έστία] . . Τύχης

50. πόλεως · έστία Τύχης Καρα[ν]ίδος ·

έστ[ί]α πάντων τῶν κατοικού[τ]ω[ν]

[κ]αὶ γευχούντ[ω]ν · καὶ.ις ὄρας

καὶ.ις τ[ά]ς ἀτά[ς] . . . ς ἐπ' γαθῶι.

1st column –

1.....

2. Religious silence....(sacrificing)

Pray; Hearth for the emperor Caesar

Trajanus Hadrianus Augustus, the

5. Savior and Benefactor of the earth;

Hearth for the Augustus Caesar; Hearth

For the god Tiberius Caesar; Hearth for the god

Claudius Caesar; Hearth for the god Vespasian

Caesar; Hearth for the god Titus Caesar; Hearth

10. For the god Nerva Caesar; Hearth for the god Trajan

11bis Hearth for Haterius.....hearth

11. [~~For the Caesar~~]; Hearthcommander

For Zeus the savior; hearth for Olympian Zeus; Hearth

For Zeus Cassius; Hearth for Zeus Zenius; Hearth

For Capitoline Zeus; Hearth for Zeus...

15. Hearth for Zeus Panomphaian. Hera Teleia

Hera Gamêila. Athena....Athena

.... For Ares....

in alliance with.....

.....

20.for the Graces....for Poseidon

the securer. For Poseidon of the sea. For Poseidon

the earth-moving.....to feeders of all;

.....For goddess Rhea...

For the fruit-bearing goddesses Demeter and Kore;

25. For Hades.....Persephone the beautiful child;

For Apollo leader of the Muses; Artemis

.....; HermesHerakles

gloriously triumphant; for the Dioscuri appearing as

Gods; For the Olympian muses; for the muses Pirian;

30. for the muses HeliconianHeliconian

.....

.....Asclepius

2nd column –

.....for skilled Hephaestus

.....; for Dionysus the chorus leader;

35. for Zeus Eleutherios Sebastos; Alexander

The founder. For all the gods and all...

.....Hearth of all the Romans;

Hearth of the Alexandrians; Hearth of the Ptolemies

in the Arisnoite nome; Hearth...

40.friends and allies; Preservation

.....good and nice posterity,

piety.....prosperity, abundance of food,

.....peace, concord

and all the other (wishes) both now and for all

45. time;these prayers

..... hearth for Petesouchos

and for Pnepheros great gods;

hearth for Soxis and Pnepheros gods

oracle-givers; hearth...fortune

50. of the city; hearth for the fortune of Karanis;

hearth of all the settlers

and of the landowners; and ...

for seasons and for the same...for good.

The use of the participle “sacrificing” and the imperative “pray” in the first few lines of the text imply that it is a prayer.⁵¹ The prayer has been laid out in two columns, perhaps to

⁵¹ Lines 2-3

accommodate the text on the papyrus. Line 33, the first line of the second column simply continues the list of gods from the end of the first column of the prayer.

The prayer begins with an invocation to the Roman emperor Hadrian. He is referred to as the “Savior and Benefactor of the earth,” which makes it likely that he was the reigning emperor at the time the prayer was written.⁵² Hadrian was the emperor of Imperial Rome from 117 to 138 CE, and as the emperor, he would have been the object of cult throughout the Roman Empire, including Egypt. This prayer, thus, celebrates the imperial cult. Other Roman emperors mentioned in the prayer include Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, Vespasian, Titus, Nerva and Trajan.⁵³ These emperors were Hadrian’s predecessors and were worshiped in the imperial cult as deified emperors, just as they have been mentioned in the prayer. At the end of this list of Roman emperors is the name Haterius. According to Heilporn-Gagos this may be referring to Haterius Nepos, who served as the prefect of Egypt ca. 120-124 CE.⁵⁴ If it is indeed this prefect being alluded to, we can narrow the date of the prayer to within four years.⁵⁵

From line 1.11, the prayer lists the Greek Olympian Gods. The list begins with Zeus being alluded to in seven different epithets. Hera and Athena, both of whom are mentioned twice, follow Zeus. Together these three deities represent the Capitoline triad, thus placing this list of Greek gods in a Roman context. The list continues with Ares, Poseidon, Rhea, Demeter etc. and concludes with Zeus Eleutherios Sabastos, which was a deified form of Augustus, and Alexander the Great.⁵⁶ From lines 36 to 45, the prayer lists the different

⁵² Lines 4-5

⁵³ Lines 6-10

⁵⁴ Heilporn-Gagos, p 5

⁵⁵ Boak, p 50

⁵⁶ Lines 11-35

groups of worshippers, including the Romans, the Alexandrians, and the Ptolemies in the Arsinoite nome. This is followed by blessings for the state and its inhabitants “both now and for all time.”⁵⁷

Line 45 continues with the mention of “prayers” and leads into an invocation of the crocodile gods of Egypt. It lists the gods Petesouchos and Pnepheros as “the great gods” and Soxis and Pnepheros as “oracle-givers.”⁵⁸ This is followed by an allusion to the fortunes of a “city” and of “Karanis.” According to Heilporn-Gagos, this “city” could be Arsinoe, or Crocodilopolis, since it was the capital and the center of crocodile worship in the Fayum. The prayer concludes with a mention of the inhabitants and landowners, presumably of the “city” and Karanis, with no specific identification of ethnicity of worshippers as in lines 37-40.

The prayer has clearly been divided into two distinct parts, with each part following a similar pattern. Lines 2-45 focus on the imperial cult in not only listing the Roman emperors but also mentioning the Olympian gods in a Roman context. The blessings in the form of six pairs of accusatives act as a conclusion to the first part, especially since line 46 mirrors the opening of the prayer as it begins the second part with the invocation of local gods. The structure of lines 1-45 is thus repeated in lines 45-53, with a mention of the corresponding gods, followed by the worshippers and finally the blessings.

In this pattern of the prayer, one can observe a hierarchy established in favor of the imperial cult. The Roman leaders are mentioned at the top of the prayer, starting with the reigning emperor and concluding with the prefect of Egypt. The pantheon of Olympian gods follows the Roman leaders and the Capitoline triad, who were more dominant in the Roman pantheon. There is no mention, however, of any Egyptian deity in this first part of the prayer.

⁵⁷ Lines 44-45

⁵⁸ Heilporn-Gagos, p 6

The hierarchy in the prayer continues with the listing of the worshippers⁵⁹. The Romans, representing the ruling power, are mentioned before everyone else. The Alexandrians, who were the elite Greeks in the capital city, are mentioned next, followed by the Ptolemies of the Arsinoite nome, who were the Greeks based in the Fayum. The Egyptians are not mentioned as a separate ethnic group and may have possibly been absorbed into the Ptolemies, as these ethnic groups were sometimes merged in the eyes of the Romans. The native Egyptians could also have been included merely in the mention of the friends and allies of the state.⁶⁰ This same hierarchy is reflected in the second part of the prayer, with the placement of the crocodile gods before the Fortunes and the listing of Arsinoe before Karanis.

There is evidence of hierarchy not only within each part of the prayer, but in the prayer as a whole. The dedication of forty-four of the fifty-three lines of the prayer to the imperial cult establishes the use of the prayer primarily as a state rather than a local one. The structure of the prayer also mimics the structure of power in the Roman Empire by focusing on the religion of the Empire and narrowing this focus onto Karanis only in the last few lines.

The prayer, however, draws too clean a line between the state and local religion of Karanis. The absence of any Egyptian deity in the first part of the prayer is unusual. Isis, originally an Egyptian goddess, was adopted into the pantheon of the Roman Imperial Empire and worshipped throughout the Roman world. The deity Serapis, who was created by Ptolemy I of Egypt solely for the purpose of uniting the Greek and Egyptian religious identities, is not mentioned either. Similarly, the second part of the prayer focuses on the crocodile gods and the Fortunes of the cities, thus failing to acknowledge the wider pantheon

⁵⁹ As suggested by Heilporn-Gagos, p 32

⁶⁰ Line 40

of gods worshipped in Karanis, which included Isis and Harpocrates. The writer of the prayer, thus, seems to be focusing on the main cult of each region.

The origin and use of the prayer is a question that has been raised by Heilporn-Gagos, which I will briefly discuss here. Reference to the Roman imperial cult and the mention of Karanis in line 50 undoubtedly establishes the prayer as one used only in Karanis to celebrate the imperial cult. Owing to the limited evidence of the imperial cult in Karanis, it is difficult to determine how the prayer was used. The participle “sacrificing” in line 2 may give us a clue about the use of this prayer. Together with the repeated use of “hearth” or “altar,”⁶¹ this prayer could have been used in a sacrificial ritual in performance of the imperial cult. The participle in line 2 is, however, unclear and “sacrificing” is merely a possibility proposed by Heilporn-Gagos.

Turning to the question of the prayer’s origin, Heilporn-Gagos establish it as having been written by the Greeks in Alexandria as per the instructions of the Roman Empire.⁶² While the prayer commemorates the Roman imperial cult in Egypt, it does so with the use of Greek, and not Roman, names of the gods. Furthermore, the reference to Alexander as the “founder,”⁶³ which Heilporn-Gagos take to mean a reference to him as the founder of Alexandria, points to an Alexandrian hand in the fabrication of the prayer. This is also implied by the mention of Alexandrians immediately after the Romans in the list of worshipers, thus placing the Alexandrians in a prominent position.

Although the evidence points to the drafting of this prayer in Alexandria, it seems to me that the prayer was ultimately inscribed in Karanis, since it was written on the verso of a

⁶¹ ἑστία, translated in the prayer as ‘hearth.’

⁶² Heilporn-Gagos, p 14

⁶³ Line 36

Karanis tax document. It is possible that the scribes in Karanis added the second half of the prayer to a state-issued first half. This could also imply that the state may have distributed the imperial half of the prayer throughout Egypt and individual towns then took it upon themselves to combine the imperial prayer with their local cult.

For the purpose of this thesis, the prayer is especially important in establishing the crocodile cult as the primary cult in Karanis. Whether drafted by the state or the local priests, the importance of the crocodile cult is highlighted in the local prayer to the same degree as the Olympian gods in the imperial prayer. Furthermore, the mention of the different forms of the crocodile god worshiped in Karanis makes the prayer quite unique to the town.

The time of the production of this prayer falls into a period that saw an expansion of the settlement and an increase in building activity in Karanis.⁶⁴ This is also a period of increasing construction activity at the temples of Karanis. With growing prosperity, it is likely that the locals began to reinforce their religious identity and increase ritual activity. Gratefulness to the state for their prosperity may have also prompted the locals to celebrate the imperial cult as their own through the production of this prayer.

This prayer offers a unique glimpse into the celebration of the imperial cult in Egypt and is vital in the study of the influence of state religion in small towns of Egypt. The celebration of the important crocodile cult in the prayer can be most prominently seen in the temples of Karanis. In the next section, I will discuss the two temples of Karanis and the artifacts found within these temples that tell us more about the cult of Sobk.

⁶⁴ Husselman, p 68-69

(b) Temples of Karanis

Temples served as the center of religious life in Egypt. These buildings housed images of gods and were the site of rituals performed in the worship of these gods. Priests were generally the keepers of the temples and were actively involved in temple activities. The architecture and contents of a temple provide the richest source of direct evidence about religious practices in Egypt. This is also true in the case of Karanis, where a combination of textual evidence and a study of the temples provide a clearer picture of the cult practiced here, i.e. the crocodile cult.

The ancient Egyptians saw the temple space as a cosmic metaphor.⁶⁵ The layout of the temple mimicked the plan of the universe, with the colonnaded courtyard in the entranceway representing the primeval marsh of chaos from which everything is believed to have emerged. The successive courts and smaller chambers of the temple led to the innermost room with the high altar. This altar is believed to have represented the primeval mound, which was the first thing to emerge from the waters of chaos and from which the sun first appeared.

The temple space can thus be seen as a separate realm, where the universe and the gods were believed to come alive. Historian Henri Franfort (as cited in Gazda, 2004) explains –

...the temple, in Egypt, was a place of power. The gods were immanent in nature, and hence difficult to localize. The temple cast a spell, as it were, on a given spot where divinities might be approached.

⁶⁵ Gazda, p 34

Karanis had two temples roughly in the center of town, which were the centers of religious activity. The two monumental temples were built in the Ptolemaic period and continued to be used under the Romans. The rituals and practices inside the temple buildings can be seen in its architectural elements as well as the artifacts found inside the temple precinct. The South temple of Karanis was dedicated to Petesouchos and Pnepheros, two crocodile gods often worshiped as a pair. The North temple was dedicated to the worship of another pair of crocodile gods, Soxis and Soknopaious. Evidence of the worship of other Greco-Egyptian deities, including Isis, has been found in the North temple.

The University of Michigan has undertaken the excavations of both the temples in its time at the site. Both Professor A.E.R Boak and Professor E. E. Peterson of the University served as directors of the excavations at Karanis during different seasons and wrote detailed reports on the excavations of the temples. The sketches and descriptions of the temple plans in this thesis have been drawn primarily from these reports. Some more recent finds not covered in the reports have also been included, in which case the new source has been clearly distinguished. The discussion about objects found in the Kelsey museum of Archaeology and the conclusions drawn regarding these are original aspects of this thesis.

South Temple

The South temple of Karanis is the better preserved of the two temples. It was established towards the center of the early settlement area at Karanis,⁶⁶ which points to its integral role in even the earliest settlement. When Grenfell and Hunt arrived at Kom Aushim in search of papyri in 1895, the South temple had already been exposed by the *sebakhin*. Due to the destruction caused by the activities of the *sebakhin*, the later periods of the temple are not preserved. Furthermore, continuing destruction resulted in the loss of certain features of the temple that were visible in 1895. This includes the remains of a pylon on the southern side of the temple and an inscribed lintel from the northern pylon, which identified itself as the propylaeum of Commodus.⁶⁷

Around 1st c. BCE, houses belonging to the earliest settlement at Karanis occupied the area of the current temple. This area was soon taken over by the temple precinct and a mud brick temple was constructed here. There is evidence of the earlier houses having been cut away by the precinct.⁶⁸ At least four levels of occupation can be seen in the area of the South temple — Layer F corresponds to the 1st century BCE, the late F layer corresponds to the late 1st – early 2nd century, layer E corresponds to the late 2nd – early 3rd century and D corresponds to the late 3rd-early 4th century.⁶⁹

The current stone temple belongs to the late F level. This phase of construction falls within the period of economic prosperity in Karanis, judging from evidence of settlement and

⁶⁶ Husselman, p 9

⁶⁷ Boak, Peterson, p 19

⁶⁸ Boak, Peterson, p 30

⁶⁹ Boak, Peterson, p 20

construction. With the construction of this new temple, the temple precinct was also developed further as newer buildings began to emerge around the temple. Many of these new



Fig 7. Eastern Façade of the South temple as seen from the southeast

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Negative no: 0101

structures were directly related to the services of the temple. An example is a small building, called House T8 in the excavation reports, which was located to the north of the temple and belonged to the same phase of construction as the stone temple. This building contained a small vat-like structure, about 2m long and 85cm wide on the inside, with open tile drains. The end of the vat drained out into an adjoining room, room T8A. The vat was made of mud mixed with some lime, which suggests that it was used for an activity involving little water

since the walls were not impervious to water. The building also had benches or *mastaba* on either side of the room to permit seating.⁷⁰ From the evidence, it has been concluded that the building could have been used for lustral baths, most likely by the priests of the temple.⁷¹ Similarly House T9, another building located near the East gateway of the temple, seems to have been used for ceremonial bathing as a tile conduit system was found in the structure. This house was built in the E phase.⁷²

Most of the houses that were associated with the temple services were part of the E level and were thus, not built at the same time as the current temple. This suggests an expansion of the cult and the further development of the area as the need for more ritual buildings arose. Houses T12, 14 and 16, constructed during the height of temple activity in the 2nd c, were likely used as places of rest, as indicated by the *mastabas*.⁷³

The eastern gateway is the main entranceway to the temple. This gateway bears an inscription on the lintel, which identifies this temple as that of the crocodile gods Petesouchos and Pnepheros. The inscription was dedicated in honor of the Roman emperor Nero at the time when Julius Vestinus served as the prefect. The dedication was, thus, made between 59-60 CE. It was later altered when Nero's name was erased and the deified emperor Claudius became the new recipient of the dedication.⁷⁴

Approached through the eastern gateway, the temple opens into a large elongated room. Passages from the northern and southern walls of this room lead to

⁷⁰ Boak, Peterson, p 36

⁷¹ Boak, p 35

⁷² Boak, Peterson, p 38

⁷³ Boak, Peterson, p 25

⁷⁴ Boak, p 50

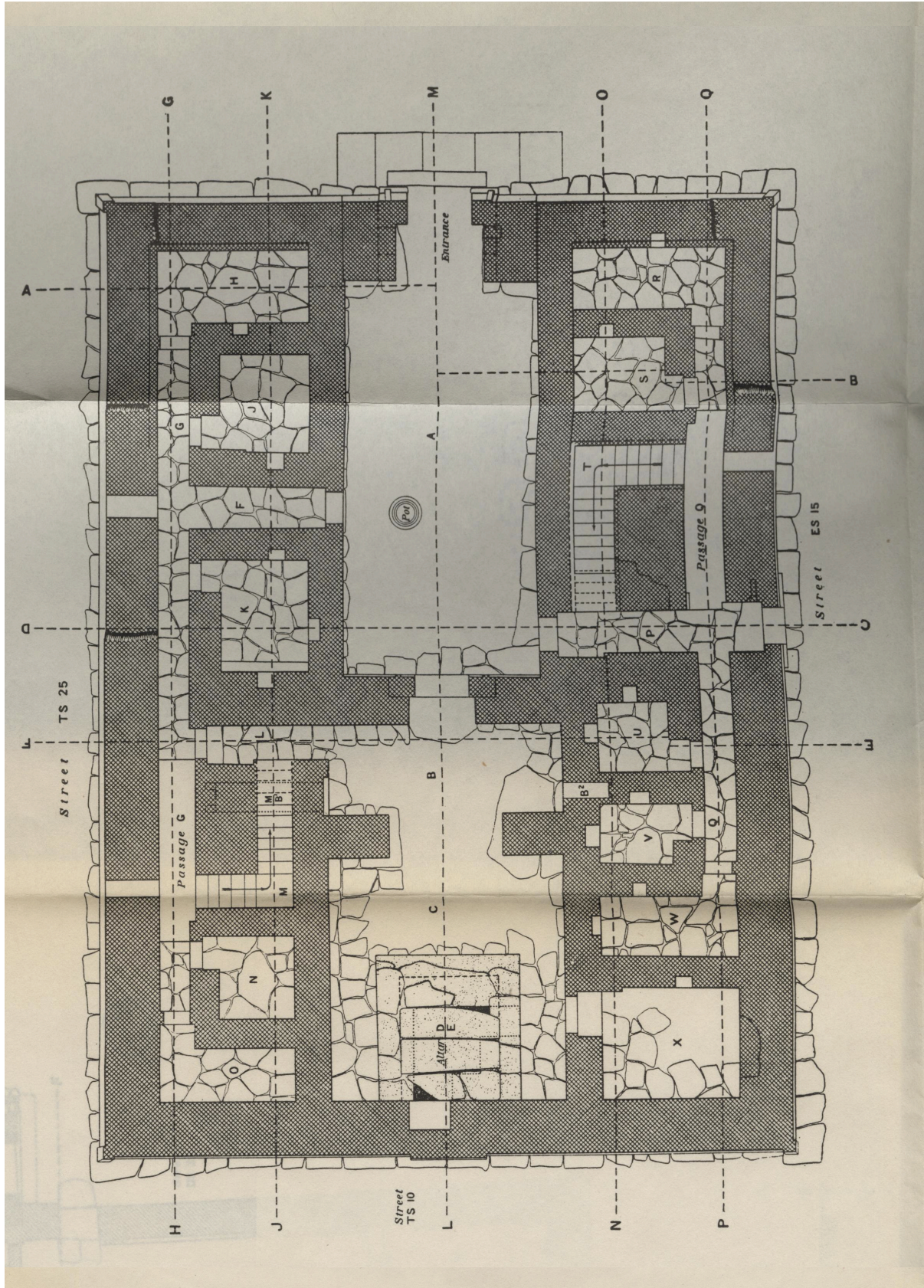


Fig 8. Plan of Temple of Petesouchos and Pnepheros as drawn by Enoch E. Peterson.



Fig 9. Top of Eastern doorway with inscribed dedication.

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smaller chambers on either side. These rooms each have a niche and open up into corridors running along the northern and southern stretch of the temple. The niches were most likely used to house figures of gods and served as shrine rooms. The passage on the south wall turns left towards a staircase leading up and continues to the south wall of the temple to a side entrance.

Moving westward through the elongated chamber, the temple continues onto a second inner room. In the northern wall of this room is a niche unlike any other in the temple. This niche is approximately 75cm high, 50cm wide and about 3m deep. There are two smaller niches at the bottom left and bottom right of the back wall of this niche.



Fig 10. Crocodile niche in north wall of inner room in South temple.

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Negative no: 0490

The unusually large size of this niche suggests that it was used to house something larger than the figure of a god. It was indeed most likely used to store a crocodile mummy. Wooden bars set in the niche are further indications that this space housed a crocodile mummy, as the mummy would have been carried on a wooden bier. The smaller niches on the back wall would have been used to fit the biers in the niche. The mummy would have been used in a procession and placed in the niche for ritual activity before burial. The one crocodile used in this ritual may have been selected specially as the manifestation of Sobk and worshiped in life as in death. It is, therefore, possible that the space was used just in a funerary procession, like the one of the Apis bull at Memphis, and remained empty the rest of the time.



Fig 11. South wall of the temple, with the side entrance visible.

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Negative no: 7.2301

The innermost chamber with the high altar lies in the western end of the temple. The altar is made of three walls about 1.5m high extending 3m on each side, with the fourth side made up by the western wall of the temple. Above the altar, on the western wall is a niche that may have housed the image of a god. It may also have been used for the ends of the bier in the case that the mummified crocodile was placed on the altar.

The altar has an unusual feature carved in the southern wall of its gray limestone surface. A low doorway is carved into this wall and it leads to a small chamber within the altar. This chamber is believed to have been used by priests to deliver oracles. A worshiper in the temple would be unaware of the inner chamber of the altar and oracles spoken from within the altar would have been considered direct words of the god.



Fig 12. View to the east, overlooking the south temple from the back.

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Negative no: 7.2302

The room in the southwest corner of the temple is the only room in the temple that opens into the innermost chamber. Its entrance faces the southern wall of the altar, which is the wall with the hidden doorway. This low doorway of the altar would have been easily accessible through the attached chamber. It would enable a priest to make his way inside the small chamber within the altar without being seen by a worshiper facing the front of the altar. It seems then that the primary purpose of this room may have been attached to oracular activity.

A doorway standing outside the temple building to the south of the main eastern entranceway of the temple forms a part of another smaller building in the temple precinct. The lintel on the doorway identifies this building as a *deipneterion* or a



Fig 13. Gateway leading to the banquet hall.

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Negative no: 5.3399

banquet hall built in the time of Vespasian (69-79 CE).⁷⁵ The location of the hall right next to the temple suggests that it may have been used for sacred feasts attached to the worship of the crocodile.

⁷⁵ Boak, Peterson, p41

The architecture of the South temple establishes it as an undoubted center of crocodile worship. It is objects found within the temple, however, that may provide evidence of ritual activities undertaken in this building. Objects found within the South



Fig 14. Uraeus amulet found in the Northern corridor of the South temple.
Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Accession Number 0000.00.8476

temple include an abundance of coins, beads and amulets found in various rooms of the temple. An example is an amulet in the form of a wooden uraeus found in the northern corridor of the temple. The uraeus measures about 9.5cm in length and 2.5cm in both width and height. Two round piercings on its surface establish its identity as an amulet, for it would be then worn as a necklace by the worhiper.

A mold made terracotta horse was found in the northern corridor of the temple. Traces of black and white paint are still visible on this 12mm long, 5mm wide and 11.5mm high object. This horse would have been used as a dedicatory artifact. Votive terracotta animals were commonly found in Karanis and included camels, cows, boars, birds and dogs in addition to horses.⁷⁶ The inclusion of animal figurines in religious cults is a testament to their prevalence and importance in the agricultural town of Karanis.



Fig 15. Wooden horse found in the Northern corridor of the South temple.
Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Accession Number 00.000.6891

⁷⁶ Gazda, p 15



Fig 16. Tethering Stake found in northwest room of Temple.
Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Accession Number 0000.02.6491

This importance is further attested by the discovery of a tethering stake in the room occupying the northwestern corner of the temple. Tethering stakes were commonly found in and around houses in Karanis⁷⁷ and it is possible that this stake, measuring 58x15x10cm was used to secure an animal within the temple. The northwestern room of the temple does not have any niches, so it could not have been used as a shrine room. It is possible that it was instead used as a place to hold a sacrificial animal before a ritual. In this case, the banquet hall of Vespasian may have been used for feasts involving the consumption of the sacrificial meat after the ritual.⁷⁸ It is, however, also possible that this stake was instead used to hold a crocodile within the temple. While there is evidence of crocodile mummies being held in the temple,

⁷⁷ Gazda, p 15

⁷⁸ Gazda, p 36

there has so far been no evidence of live crocodiles housed in a temple. In the absence of a pool of water to house the crocodile, it is possible that the crocodile manifestation was brought into the temple and secured to this stake before ritual activity. However, it is also possible that the stake was left in the temple with the abandonment of Karanis circa 5th century. This would mean that the tethering stake lost its original context with the heaping of random objects within the temple building.

The discovery of crocodile bones in the temple is perhaps the most relevant find. Bones, including part of the spine of a crocodile, were found in the inner shrine room as well as in the room south of the shrine room. The prevalence of these bones most prominently establishes the presence of crocodiles within the temple. It is possible that these bones are remnants of crocodile mummies that were housed in the crocodile niche or placed on the altar. It is also possible, however, that these bones serve as evidence of ritual activity within the temple. It is a reasonable assumption that the bones of the sacred crocodile would hold some importance in this cult. Since the chosen manifestation of Sobk would have been mummified, it is possible that the bones of other crocodiles were kept as talismans or used in temple activities. It would be difficult to draw a conclusion regarding the presence of these crocodile bones in the South Temple and would have to be the subject of further study.

North temple

The North temple had already been partially uncovered by the *sebakhin* when the University of Michigan began excavations in 1925.⁷⁹ The haphazard removal of *sebakh* from the area led to the poor preservation of this temple. The building is not as well preserved as that of the South temple, but owing to systematic excavations since 1925, it is still possible to understand some aspects of the temple. The remains of this temple include three pylons that lead to an inner sanctuary with the high altar, thus maintaining the cosmic metaphor of temple structures in Egypt.



Fig 17. Outer pylon of the North temple.

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Negative no: 5.1644

⁷⁹ Boak, p 3

The North temple runs for 33.31m and is 10.61m wide.⁸⁰ It is approached from the South through the outer pylon, which may have been part of a brick wall that enclosed the temple precinct, although there is no more any evidence of such a wall. Recesses on either side suggest the presence of a swinging set of doors that would permit entry into the temple. The roof of the pylon included a lintel block and a copestone, which have since collapsed. The copestone is decorated with two uraei surrounding a winged solar disk, which is an allusion to the solar goddess Re and a common symbol found at the entrance of Egyptian temples. The symbol marks the temple building as a sacred space that is a representation of the universe. No inscription was found on the outer pylon, thus prompting archaeologists to try to identify the primary deities worshiped in the temple by examining evidence found within the building.

Through the first pylon is a paved courtyard that leads to a second gateway. This second pylon has visible holes where the sockets of the pivots of doors would have turned. A wall extends eastward from the doorway and meets another wall, which runs north, perpendicular to this wall and encloses the eastern side of the temple precinct. This crudely built wall, consisting of sandstone blocks, is from a later date than the inner pylon and the temple itself. Another crudely built wall extends westward from the west pillar of the pylon. A paved courtyard leads from the inner pylon to the temple building.

The entrance of the temple opens up into a large court. Through this court, one can access two chambers with niches on the west and one chamber with a niche and

⁸⁰ Boak, p4



Fig 19. Copestone with winged solar disk with uraei.

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Negative no: 0777

one corridor on the east. As the corridor runs eastward, it first opens up into a chamber with no niche on the right, or south, then it leads to a staircase on the left, or north, and finally leads down to a side entrance of the temple through the east wall.

Moving northward through the entrance chamber, the temple opens through a doorway into a smaller court. On the west side of the court is a small staircase of six

steps leading up to a platform from which two staircases lead to the upper floor. On the east side is a deep recess, which runs underneath the staircase that began in the corridor leading from the entrance court.

Continuing northward, the inner court opens into the innermost chamber of the temple, which houses the great altar. The altar projects from the northern wall of the chamber and is made of the same limestone used to construct the temple building. It is surmounted by a cornice on three sides, and the front or the southern side, contains a sunken panel. Like the altar in the south temple, this altar too has a small door on its western side that leads into a small hidden chamber within the altar.



Fig 20. View of the innermost room with the high altar.

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Negative no: 5.1643

The inner sanctuary has two niches on the western side and a doorway on both the eastern and western sides, leading to two rooms with no windows. It is possible that these two rooms were used for priestly functions. The room on the western side is located at the far back and may have been used by priests to discreetly enter the altar chamber, as in the South temple. On the northern exterior, or the back wall, of the temple is a partly preserved niche.

Several notably artifacts were uncovered in the temple court. Perhaps the earliest one in linking this temple to the worship of crocodiles is a small sculpture surmounted on a rectangular base depicting a figure with a reptilian body but the head of a falcon. This object, made of soft white limestone, is 30cm long, 10cm wide and 16.5cm high from the base. It is a depiction of the crocodile god, Soknopaiou.



Fig 21. Figure of Soknopaiou found in the North Temple.

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology

Soknopaiou was the form of Sobk that incorporated the attributes of the Egyptian deity Horus⁸¹. Since Horus was a falcon headed god, it is fitting that a representation of Soknopaiou carried the physical appearance of both a falcon and a crocodile.

Another find in the same court of the temple was a figure depicting a female with draped clothing. Although the face of the figure was not preserved, excavation reports identified it as a representation of Isis. This identification may have been based on the



Fig 22. Wall painting of Isis and Harpocrates in House B50.

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Negative number: 4.2990

⁸¹ Gazda, p40

association of the goddess with Soknopaiouas. At the site of Soknopaiouas Nesos in the Fayum, Soknopaiouas and Isis were worshiped together, perhaps because of Soknopaiouas' association with Horus. There was a well-established cult of Isis in Karanis, as is known from both textual and archaeological evidence. Wall paintings and household shrines in Karanis often depict Isis and her son Harpocrates in Hellenized forms.⁸² It is, therefore, fitting that Isis was worshiped alongside Soknopaiouas in the North temple.



Fig 13. View of the North temple from the South.

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Negative no: 0134

Other finds at the temple include altars, a lion sculpture, jewelry, pottery and coins. A limestone fire altar was found outside the temple building, near the courtyard

⁸² Gazda, p39

between the inner and outer pylon. It depicts a bearded male head on the front side. The head is accompanied by horns depicted directly above heavyset eyebrows and is crowned with a solar disk between two uraei. This image has been identified as that of the deity Serapis-Zeus-Ammon-Helios because of the combination of unusual characteristics. Serapis-Zeus-Ammon-Helios was actively worshiped in Egypt at the time and is a testament to the syncretization of religious identities during this period. A different altar found inside the temple bears an inscription that establishes it as a dedication of a Sarapion, son of Papas.⁸³

A find that was not officially recorded in the excavation reports was that of a number of crocodile mummies found below the ground level of the temple.⁸⁴ The excavators supposedly found these mummies just outside the North temple. It is not clear why this is merely mentioned in passing in the University records and leads me to conclude that these mummies were perhaps a discovery predating the first University expedition. Another find not recorded in the report was the discovery of a partial crocodile mummy inside the temple. A photograph taken during the excavations, as identified by T.G. Wilfong of the University of Michigan,⁸⁵ is the only record of the partial crocodile mummy. It was found in the inner sanctuary of the temple, where it was probably kept on the altar for worship.

⁸³ Boak, p13

⁸⁴ Wilfong, T.G. The University of Michigan Excavation of Karanis (1924-1935): Images from the Kelsey Museum Photographic Archives. *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, p 229

⁸⁵ Wilfong, T.G. The University of Michigan Excavation of Karanis (1924-1935): Images from the Kelsey Museum Photographic Archives. *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, p 229

The discovery of crocodile mummies is the most significant find related to the North temple for the purpose of this thesis. While other objects found in the temple point to the worship of a large pantheon of gods, the presence of the crocodile mummies and the statue of Soknopaios attest to an active cult of the crocodile in this temple too. However, the lack of a dedication for this temple made it less significant in the excavation records of the university.



Fig 11. Part of a crocodile mummy found in the inner sanctuary, as identified by T.G.Wilfong.

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Negative no: 5.1692

Excavations at Karanis continued, however. And the identity of the North temple was discovered much after all knowledge of it was assumed. In 1975, a French team

excavating at the North temple discovered an inscription that was until then hidden on the inside of the first pylon⁸⁶. The pylon consisted of 2 rows of blocks and when the team dismantled this pylon, they discovered that the two rows were held together with brick and mortar and contained an inscription inside. The inscribed block was made of limestone similar to the material used to make the temple. It is, however, longer than the other blocks used, which suggests its use as a lintel of a doorway before it was stuck together with the other blocks. The block is about 116-118cm long, excluding a missing part on the right and the unregistered ends of the inscription. It is 24cm high and 33cm thick. The inscription, inscribed on yellow stucco, has been translated as –

To King Ptolemy the god, Philopator, Philadelphe, son of Petesouchos....and his wife and children (have dedicated?) the propylon of the temple to Soxis the great god, great.

The year 9, Mésorê, 20

The inscription has been dated to the late Ptolemaic period judging by the style of the script. The allusion to the king as Philopator and Philadelphe also helps determine the date of the inscription, as these titles were used in association with King Auletes of Egypt, who ruled in the mid 1st c. BCE. This date coincides with the date of the dedication to Pnepheros and Petesouchos on the South temple⁸⁷.

The discovery of this new inscription establishes the North temple as one dedicated to the crocodile gods as well, Soxis being the primary deity and Soknopaious worshiped in conjunction with Soxis. This would be in keeping with the practice of

⁸⁶ Wagner and El-Nassery, p 139

⁸⁷ Wagner and El-Nassery, p 141

worshiping crocodile gods in pairs. Other evidence found in Karanis, such as the mention of Soxis alongside Petesouchos and Pnepheros in line 48 of the prayer discussed in an earlier chapter, supports the prevalence of this cult in Karanis.

The inscription may have been hidden after the advent of Roman rule in an effort to reestablish the identity of the temple. This could have been so that other deities could be worshiped in the temple in addition to the named crocodile god, or perhaps in a simple effort to erase the name of King Auletes. The discovery of the inscription definitely determines that the temple was built to be a center of crocodile worship in addition to the South temple.

Conclusion

The crocodile cult was one of the prominent animal cults of ancient Egypt. It was concentrated in the Fayum due to a high dependency on water and irrigation channels in this region. Karanis established the crocodile cult with its earliest settlement in the Ptolemaic period and the cult continued to flourish here till the abandonment of the town in the 5th century. The Roman recognition of the crocodile as a symbol of Egypt and the imperial acknowledgement of the importance of the crocodile cult is a testament to its prominence in Egypt.

The temples of Karanis occupied a central location in the town. The inscriptions on the temples dedicating them to the worship of different crocodile gods reflects the devotion of the people of Karanis to the worship of Sobk. The crocodile god were worshiped in four different forms at Karanis, namely Petesouchos, Pnepheros, Soknopaiou and Soxis. These different epithets represent different personalities of Sobk that were each worshiped individually. These four forms are prominent also in the names of inhabitants at Karanis, as is evident from personal letters, official records and temple dedications.

Through a study of the temples, one can determine that the cult of Sobk involved the worship of a crocodile in life as in death. Crocodile manifestations were housed in a sacred pool where they were visited and fed. In death, these crocodiles were mummified and taken into the temple where they were housed in a niche or placed on an altar in a continuation of ritual activities. The ritual activities may include oracular activity, wherein the priest delivered verbal oracles to a worshiper from within a

hidden chamber in the altar. It may also include a sacrificial activity where an animal was sacrificed on the high altar and its meat consumed in a sacred feast. The mummies were then carried in a procession to the *necropolis* where they were buried.

Daily worship in the temple by the locals may have involved leaving dedicatory artifacts such as wooden horses and stone altars for the deities. The niches in the several rooms would have held idols. Other rooms would have been used for handicraft and commercial purposes, as is evident from the discovery of jewelry, pottery and coins. The walls of the North temple have evidence of graffiti on them, with a repetition of the word *topos*. This is believed to have marked the spaces of stalls used by merchants,⁸⁸ thus adding to the status of the temple as a center of the town.

An important aspect of religious cults in Roman Egypt is their presence in households. It was, therefore, natural to look for signs of a private cult of the crocodile at Karanis. The worship of deities like Isis, Harpocrates and Heron seem to have been especially active in household shrines at Karnis, but there is almost no evidence of the crocodile cult. Although signs of the cult can be found in scant remains of amulets in the shape of crocodiles, there is no sign of active worship within households. Houses excavated in Karanis have depictions of deities in wall paintings as well as niches in the walls that served as shrines. Some of these niches had painted figures while others may have held small idols. No sign of a crocodile painting or idol has been found yet.

The absence of the crocodile cult from private religion is intriguing and may be due to several reasons. The concentration of the cult in the temples may have discouraged the locals from worshipping Sobk in domestic spaces. They may instead

⁸⁸ Gazda, p 43

have taken the opportunity to worship other deities who were not as represented in the public temples. It is also possible, however, that evidence of crocodile worship was destroyed with the abandonment of the town. The migrating population may have taken away crocodile figurines used as personal items of devotion with other belongings when leaving town. This would, however, not explain the lack of depictions of the crocodile god in wall paintings.

The presence of the crocodile cult shaped the history of this town. The celebration of the cult at the time of a festival is imagined by Egyptologist Cyril Aldred –

His image, suitably veiled or hidden in the primeval shrine, was placed on a litter and carried on the shoulders of his priests in procession...As the cortege went on its circuit amid the shouts of the populace, the chanting of the temple choir, the blowing of trumpets, the beating of drums, the rattling of sistra and the burning of incense, emotions rose to a pitch of hysteria, and in such a frenzy the moment was ripe for the god to intervene in the affairs of man by giving oracular answers to suppliants by the spasmodic movements of the litter and the shoulders of its bearers. So the morale of true believers was sustained by the presence of the god in the midst, by the evidence of his divine power, and by his concern in their everyday affairs.⁸⁹

In ancient Egypt, religion was a part of every sphere of life. It was incorporated into daily activities and no economic transactions, social proceedings or political decisions would be untouched by religious beliefs and practices. It is important,

⁸⁹ Gazda, p 38

therefore, to understand the religion of the people in the effort to gain a complete understanding of the ancient community. As the small town of Karanis in the Fayum region of Egypt continues to be excavated and new information continues to be found, I hope to shed some light on the cult of the crocodile here with the existing evidence in an effort to contribute to the understanding of the ancient world.

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