

No. XX.—*On the Crocodile of Egypt, by H. G. POTTER, Esq., F.L.S., F.G.S., Lon.; Associé Correspon. de l'Academie Royale des Sciences, Turin; and Member of this Society.—Communicated to the Antiquarian Society, Newcastle, January 3, 1843; with Mummies of the young Crocodile.*

THE word Crocodile is derived from the Greeks, who gave the name of ΚΡΟΚΟΔΕΙΛΟΣ to a lizard, in their own country, on account of its timidity.* On their arrival in Egypt, they found a huge aquatic animal of a similar shape, to which they applied the same name. The ancient Egyptians termed it *Savak, Sovk, or Souchus*; and the present inhabitants of Egypt call it *Temsah*. In the Old Testament we find it mentioned (Job chap. xli. v. i.) under the name of Leviathan, derived from lavah *coupled*, and ten, *a dragon, i. e., a large serpent, or fish*. The compound leviathan, the coupled dragon, denotes an animal partaking of the nature both of land serpents and fishes, and in this place signifies the Crocodile, which lives as well under water as on shore.—*Coke's Comment on the Bible.*

The Portuguese term the lizard *el lagarto*, and hence is derived our word alligator. The Crocodile (*Lacerta Crocodilus*. LIN.) of the Nile varies in length from 40 feet, or more, to a few inches when young. Those on the table are about 12 inches in length.

This animal was worshipped by the ancient Egyptians, or rather, I should say, in certain parts of Egypt; for, while some of the inhabitants worshipped it, others made fierce war upon them for so doing. Such was the cause of quarrel between the Ombites and Tentyrites described by Juvenal, who tells us, that to such a pitch did religious hatred go, that even the prisoners taken in battle were eaten.†

* ΚΡΟΚΟΣ Saffron, and ΔΕΙΛΟΣ timorous.

† Mæotis first did impious rites devise,
Of treating Gods with human sacrifice,

The Crocodile was worshipped at Coptos, Ombos, and at Arsinoe, or, as it was previously called, the City of Crocodiles (Crocodilopolis). At Thebes also this animal was worshipped. The people of Ombos dug tanks for them, and taught them to come when called. At Memphis, the priests kept one, which was perfectly tame. It was adorned with jewels, and led about in ceremonial processions; and at Crocodilopolis, they were so tame, that they would take the food from the hands of the feeders. Strabo speaks of one which his host at Crocodilopolis took him to see. He was a man of consideration, and in showing Strabo and his party the sacred curiosities of the place, conducted them to the brink of the lake, having taken with him from the supper table a cake, some roast meat, and a cup of wine. They found the animal on the shore of the lake; and while some of the priests opened its mouth, one put in the cake, and then the meat, after which the wine was poured in. The Crocodile then took to the water, and passed over to the other side, to receive the offerings made to it by other parties.*

Various reasons have been assigned for the worship of this animal.

1. Because it afforded protection from Lybian and Arabian robbers, as none would venture to cross a river or canal where so fierce an animal existed. Thus the Dutch filled the ditches of Batavia with Crocodiles to prevent desertion, as most of their soldiers were enlisted by force. Certain it is, that the Crocodile of the Nile is the most ferocious of its kind; and we

But savage Egypt's cruelty exceeds
The Scythian shrine, where, though the captive bleeds,
Secure of burial when his life is fled.

* * * * *
Can men, or more resenting Gods invent,
Or hell inflict, proportionate punishment
On varlets, who could treat revenge and spite,
With such a feast, as famine's self would fright?

Juvenal, Sat. xv.

* Hospes itaque noster, unus ex honoratis viris, qui nobis sacra commonstrabat, ad lacum unà accedens, placentulam et carnem assam, et quoddam mulsi vasculum è coena attulit. Bestiam in ripa lacus invenimus, ex sacerdotibus alii ejus os aperuerunt, alius placentam ingressit, postea carnem, deinde mulsum infudit: ille in lacum desiliens, in ulteriorem partem trajecit: cumque alius hospes advenisset, et similiter primitias attulisset, cursu lacum circumeuntes itidem invento Crocodilo obtulerunt."

Strabonis Geograph. Liber Decimus-septimus, p. 811.

are told that in places where they were worshipped, their numbers increased to such an extent, "that it was not safe for any one to wash his feet, or draw water, at the river; and no one could walk near the edge of the stream, either in the vicinity of Ombos, Coptos, or Arsinoe, without extreme caution."—*Ælian*, X. 24. *Wilkinson*, Vol. II. 230.

2. M. Pauw, and others, have supposed that as the Crocodile could only exist where water was to be found, there would of course, be a necessity for keeping the canals open, and that the worship of this animal would thus ensure a plentiful supply of pure water, where the towns were at some distance from the Nile.

I might notice other opinions on this subject, if time would allow. I shall, therefore, merely mention what has seemed to me the most probable reason. If we look at the habits of the animal, we find that he devours nothing but putrid animal matter. Thus, on seizing a man, or any other animal, he drags him under water to drown him; then placing the body under some ledge of rock or mud, does not devour it until putrefaction has taken place. Now, when we consider that the Nile is the *only* source from which water can be derived throughout the whole of Egypt, how wonderfully adapted does such an animal become to destroy the most disgusting matter which water can hold in solution, viz., putrid animal substances. It is in fact the great scavenger of the deep. Whenever the Egyptians wished to preserve any animal, they immediately made it sacred; and there can be no doubt that they were well acquainted with the habits of this animal, and understood its utility. But what in the first instance was merely intended to protect, soon constituted it an object of worship,—a God. And so infatuated did the worshippers of this animal become, that mothers rejoiced when their children were devoured by any of them, believing that great honour was conferred upon them by the god, who condescended to feed upon their offspring,

The Crocodile was not, however, venerated in every part of Egypt. I have already stated that it was the cause of war between the Ombites and Tentyrites. Old writers tell us, that the inhabitants of Tentyris, Appollinopolis, Heracleopolis, and the island of Elephantina, &c., held it in particular execration, looking upon it as the emblem of the Evil Being, or

Typhon. In some of these towns the Crocodile was eaten. The Crocodile is now only found in Upper Egypt, though in former times it was even common in the Delta. Manfaloot appears to be the most northern point at which these animals are now found.

The bodies of all sacred animals, as soon as life was extinct, were wrapped in linen, prepared with oils and aromatic substances, and then deposited in a sacred tomb. The linen used to envelop the mummies on the table, appears to have previously formed portions of garments, and most probably, priests' garments, as in some cases we find various devices embroidered upon it, such as hearts, rings, &c.

The most extensive Crocodile tombs at present known, are about five miles from Manfaloot, on the eastern bank of the Nile. From these apparently interminable caves, the present specimens were brought.

“The Grottoes of Maabdeh” (so called, from a village near them of that name), are entered by a perpendicular cleft in the limestone rock, of about 12 feet in depth. After which, you creep on your stomach, through a passage so small, that I nearly stuck fast, and almost fainted from the heat and exertion. As soon as we had crept through this narrow entrance, we found ourselves in a good-sized chamber, from which passages ran in various directions. Along several of these we proceeded, at one time crawling flat on the ground, at another merely stooping, and then scrambling over large masses of rock. The heat, dust, and the odour of mummies over which we frequently walked (and which, in many places, formed the floor of the gallery), were offensive in the extreme. Thousands of bats flew around us, coming every moment in contact with our faces, hands, and torches, thus threatening to involve us in perfect darkness. We had almost given up our search, when we found our further progress stopped, by thousands of Crocodile, and human mummies. From this immense collection, the present mummies were brought.

Each young Crocodile is wrapped in a piece of old linen cloth, and then formed into bundles, by fastening 5 or 6 together with thread. The large ones are single.

The human mummies frequently consist of merely parts of the body, thus we find the upper or lower half, separated from the rest, and forming

a distinct portion. These portions are wrapped in linen, and then bound round with palm leaves, which serve as an external covering. In no instance did I perceive any wooden case or coffin; many of the human mummies had the skin covered with gilding.

Whether these mummies were deposited at an early period of the Egyptian empire, or in later and more barbarous times, it is now impossible to say. It is evident from such extensive tombs, that where Manfaloot now stands, or near it, there must have been some ancient town, and as it has not been noticed by either Greek or Roman writers, we may conclude existed at a very early period. We may, therefore, reasonably suppose that these tombs are very ancient.