

## Crocodile

<b>Latin name</b>	various	<b>Element</b>	Water
<b>Families</b>	Crocodyles, Alligators, Caimans		
<b>Order</b>	<i>Crocodylia</i>		
<b>Subclass</b>	<i>Archosauria</i>		
<b>Etymology</b>		<b>Deities</b>	Sebek, Ptah, Apep, Serapis, Sekhmet, Taueret, Set

### Varieties

The Nile Crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*) lives in the rivers of Northern and Central Africa and Madagascar. The Gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*) lives in the Ganges, Indus, and Brahmaputra rivers in India, and was once regarded as sacred by the Hindus. The Broad-fronted Crocodile (*Osteolaemus tetraspis*) lives in equatorial West Africa; it does not attack humans. Related species are the Caiman, found in South America, and the American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*), which lives in the Mississippi River in the south-eastern part of North America.

### Folklore

In ancient times, the crocodile was thought to have no tongue, and was therefore used as a symbol of silence.

Travellers' tales related that crocodiles moan and sigh like a person in distress to lure humans to the river bank, then devour them. They are even reputed to shed tears over the prey whilst eating it, hence the expression "crocodile tears", a symbol of hypocrisy.

### Mythology

In Egypt, the crocodile was sacred to a number of deities. It was an attribute of Set, depicting his brutality and evil. Sebek was crocodile-headed, and symbolised vicious passions, deceit, dissimulation, hypocrisy, and treachery. He was the god of the Fayoum, an ancient crocodile clan, and the son of the goddess Neith. He swallowed the Moon, then wept. Sebek was later identified with both Ra and Set, and was known to the Greeks as Souchos or Petesuchos, the Greek version of an Egyptian name meaning 'the one who belongs to Sebek'. Petesuchos was a sacred crocodile and the incarnation of Sebek. Sebek's most important shrines were at Crocodilopolis (called Arsinoe after the time of Ptolemy II). The sacred beast lived in a lake near the temple, and wore golden rings in his ears. Devotees riveted bracelets to his forelegs. Other sacred crocodiles were the family of Sebek. The crocodile was also sacred to Apep and Serapis, and was depicted at the feet of Ptah. Apep was the snake-god, lord of the powers of darkness, and a manifestation of Set. He was the serpent that threatened Osiris' Boat of Millions of Years as it sailed through the Underworld. Ptah was the creator,

smith, and potter god who made the Cosmic Egg on his potter's wheel. The goddess Sekhmet was occasionally depicted as crocodile-headed. She represented the fierce and destructive aspect of the Sun. Taueret, the hippopotamus goddess, who presided over pregnancy and childbirth, and rebirth, had the tail of a crocodile.

In central Africa, there is a venerable crocodile called Lutembi, who comes to the shore of Lake Victoria-Nyanza, where the fishermen give him fish.

In Australian Aborigine mythology the Rainbow Snake Women are the offspring of the Rainbow Serpent and crocodiles. They entice men to their deaths with sweet songs and honeyed words. Protection from them may be obtained from red ochre from caves, which represents the Earth Mother's menstrual blood.

## **Symbolism**

The crocodile symbolises the passage through the realms of death in order to be reborn. Being swallowed by a crocodile is likened to a descent into hell. With its mouth open, it represents going against the current, which portrays freedom from conformity. In some traditions, it is the guardian of the threshold. Like other amphibians, it represents spirit and matter, the dual nature of humanity. It also represents the fertility of the waters.

In psychoanalysis, the shadow is the first figure to emerge from the unconscious, and according to Jung, it often poses a *quaestio crocodilina*, because it is a guardian of the threshold. The story goes that a crocodile stole a child from its mother. The mother asked it to give the child back, but the crocodile replied that it would only do so if she could give a true answer to its question, "Shall I give the child back?" Whether she replies Yes or No, the answer is untrue, so in either case she doesn't get the child back.