

Concept of the Representation of Palm Branches in Alexandrian Tombs

مفهوم تصوير سعف النخيل في مقابر الأسكندرية من العصر اليوناني الروماني

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عرف المصري القديم ثلاثة أنواع رئيسية من النخيل: نخيل البلح (*Phoenix dactylifera*)، نخيل الدوم (*Hyphaene thebaica*) و النوع الثالث المعروف بالأرجون (*Medemia Argun*). و من المعروف عن النخيل أن جميع أجزائه (الثمار، النوى ، الأوراق، السعف، الألياف و الخشب المستخرج من الجذوع أو السيقان) كانت تستخدم و لها وظيفة في مصر القديمة. فخشب النخيل كان يستخدم كمادة بناء في المباني الدنيوية و كذلك المرتبطة بالعالم الآخر، بينما الثمار بجانب أنها تؤكل كانت تستخدم في صنع الخمر و مادة لحرق البخور. و بوجه عام قدس النخيل باختلاف أنواعه في مصر القديمة، حيث ارتبط بعبادة بعض الآلهة المصرية المعروفة مثل تحوت، حتحور، نفثيس و أوزوريس. أما عن سعفة النخيل، فقد عرفت في اللغة المصرية باسم "رنب" *rnp* و تكتب بالعلامة

الهيروغليفية **أ** و التي أصبحت تستخدم بمعنى "عام" و أصبحت لذلك ترتبط بالإله حح **HH** إله ملايين السنين و إله الخلود. و لذلك أصبحت علامة سعفة النخيل رمزا تقدمه الآلهة للملوك ليمنحهم حكما خالدا لملايين السنين. و بجانب ذلك ارتبطت سعفة النخيل برمزية جنائزية في المقابر المصرية منذ فترة مبكرة من التاريخ.

يمثل سعف النخيل بشكل واضح على العديد من عملات الأسكندرية التي ترجع للعصر اليوناني الروماني، و يظهر السعف عليها مرتبطا بأحد الحكام أو الأباطرة أو آلهة الأسكندرية مثل سرابيس و إيزيس و حريوقراط و هرمانوبيس. و بجانب ذلك يلاحظ تصوير سعف النخيل على جدران مقابر الأسكندرية التي تحمل تصويرا مصرية، خاصة مقبرة تيجران و كاتاكومب كوم الشقافة. و يظهر سعف النخيل في هذه المقابر كعنصر أساسي بالمناظر الجنائزية حيث يصور المتوفى وهو يمسك أو يقدم سعف النخيل لأحد الآلهة، أو يصور أحد

الآلهة المصرية و وهو يمسكها في شكلها المصري و هي علامة **أ** *rnp* أمام المتوفى. و بالتالي فإن تصوير سعف النخيل بهذا الشكل على جدران مقابر الأسكندرية يحمل في طياته وجود مدلول ديني قبل أن يكون جنائزي مرتبط به و قد يكون هذا المدلول في جذوره مصرية خالصة، و قد يحمل معه معان مرتبطة بالمعتقدات اليونانية الرومانية أو خليطا منهما معا.

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Despite the diversity of types and species of palms, they all share a number of general features¹. For instance, palm trees have multiple roots that spread horizontally and vertically in the soil. Concerning the palm leaves or fronds; they are either pinnate known as feather-veined, in which the leaves flank a central principal vein or palmate, or fan-veined, in which the veining starts from a central point and ramify in the form of a fan (fig.1). The length, breadth, and curvature of the leaves, vary from one type to another².

The ancient Egyptians knew three main species of palm trees: *Phoenix dactylifera* L. or date palm (fig.2), *Hyphaene thebaica*, or dom palm (fig.3) and the one known as *Medemia Argun*³. The three species were used for various purposes to which every part of the palm was applied. Bodies in pre-dynastic and early dynastic periods were wrapped in mats woven of palm branches⁴. Palm tree trunks were used in making houses and covering graves in the first dynasty. Later, they were manifested in stones⁵ (well represented in the complex of Zoser of the third dynasty). Palmiform columns also

¹ I would like to show my gratitude to Dr. Ahmed Amer, professor of Forstery and Wood Technology, Faculty of Agriculture, Alexandria University for his great help in the field of palm trees and their characteristics.

² مصطفى بدر، النخيل وأشباه النخيل، منشأة المعارف، الإسكندرية، ١٩٩٥، ص ١٠.

³ Keimer, L., "Interprétation d'un passage du Papyrus Sallier I^{er}: une prière au dieu Thot", *Bulletin de l'Institut Égyptien* 29, 1948, p.286-287; Gamer-Wallert, I., "Palme, Palmblätter, Palmrispe, Palmfaser", *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* IV, edited by W. Helck & E. Otto, Wiesbaden, 1982, col.658. For places of vegetal remains of the three species of palms from ancient Egypt, see Vartavan, Ch. and Amorós, V. A., *Codex of Ancient Egyptian Plant Remains*, London, 1997, pp.134-199. The Nubians call the male tree of this species "argun", a name that was noted by voyagers and naturalists, thus the scientific name of this palm tree became "*Medemia argun*", Keimer, L., "Notes prises chez les Bišārīn et les nubiens d'Assouan", *Bulletin de l'Institut Égyptien* 32, 1951, p.57.

⁴ Wallert, I., *Die Palmen im Alten Ägypten, Eine Untersuchung ihrer praktischen, symbolischen und religiösen Bedeutung*, Münchner Ägyptische Studien 1, Berlin, 1962, p. 26; These can be seen in royal and private graves from pre-dynastic and archaic period, see Reisner, G. A., *The Development of the Egyptian Tomb down to the Accession of Cheops*, Oxfors University Press, London, 1936, p.20-21.

⁵ Petrie, F., *Wisdom of the Egyptians*, London, 1940, p.81; Gamer-Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, col.659.

appeared in temples as early as the fifth dynasty⁶. The fibers of palm branches were used in making sacks, carpets, baskets, brooms and ropes⁷. Moreover, palm wine was known since the Old Kingdom particularly that of date palm. Sweetening also was honey extractions from palm dates⁸. In addition, palm trees were represented among other trees in scenes of gardens in private tombs, especially those from the New Kingdom⁹. Moreover, they were also cultivated in royal gardens and groves of the temples¹⁰.

⁶ Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, p.23. Palmiform columns were regarded then as a symbol of Upper Egypt, cf. *ibid.*, pp.74-77.






⁷ Hohlwein, N., "Palmiers et palmeraies", *Études de papyrologie* 5, Cairo, 1939, p.29; Gamer-Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, col.658. Forms of fans were inspired from the palmiform shape with ostrich feathers or leaves, Fischer, H. G., "Fächer und Wedel", *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* II, edited by W. Helck & E. Otto, Wiesbaden, 1977, col.81. For more cf. Carter, H., *Tomb of Tut-ankh-Amen II*, London, 1927, pls.61-63.

⁸ Engelbach, R., "Mechanical and Technical Processes Materials", in *The Legacy of Egypt*, edited by S. R. K. Glanville, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1940, p.158.

⁹ The most famous tomb in this concern is that of Inni the architect of Thuthmosis I and his successors (Thebes no.81), Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, p. 82. Inni in his tomb enumerates the palm trees he planted in his garden as: 170 date palms, 120 dom palms and only one *Medemia Argun*, Keimer, L., *op.cit.*, 1951, p.50.

¹⁰ Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, pp.91-93. They were planted close to the temples, in some cases as manifestations or emblems of the gods worshiped in them, *ibid.*, p.97.

Date palm trees or *Phoenix dactylifera* L.¹¹ are characterized by their columnar thick trunk and pinnate leaves with folded upwards leaflets¹² (fig.2). They can reach a height of 20-30 m with well-ingrained roots¹³. The fiber is used in making ropes and mats. The wood is fibrous of poor quality and the end of its trunk has the form of a tuft of about 4 m long. In Egypt, representations of date palms are to be found on rock and vessels paintings from pre-historical times¹⁴.

Date palms were known in ancient Egypt as  *bnrt*¹⁵ with variants , ,  and , known in Greek texts as φοῖνιξ¹⁷. It was the most important native tree in ancient Egypt. It provided food, building materials and fibers of which

¹¹ The origins of *Phoenix dactylifera* or date palm are not known, perhaps originated from the Persian Gulf, Germer, R., *Flora des pharaonischen Ägypten, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Abteilung, Sonderschrift 14, Mainz am Rhein, 1985, p.232*. It is not known either when exactly the cultivation of date palm was introduced into Egypt, Germer, R., "Flora", *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, edited by D.B. Redford, vol.I, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 2001, p.538. Cultivation of date palm might date in Egypt as early as pre-historic period, Germer, R., *op.cit.*, 1985, p.233. Date palm trees were used as a building material in tombs. Ex. tomb of Menna (Thebes no.69), cf. Mackay, E., "The Cutting and Preparation of Tomb-Chapels in the Theban Necropolis", *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 7, No.3/4, 1921, p.162.


¹² Täckholm, V., *Students' Flora of Egypt*, 2nd ed., Beirut, 1974, p.763.

¹³ Hohlwein, N., *op.cit.*, p.3; Germer, R., *op.cit.*, 1985, pp.232-233;


طارق القيعي، الأشجار والشجيرات والنخيل ودورهم في التوازن البيئي، الرياض، ١٩٩٣، ص ٢٢٥.

¹⁴ For the representations of date palm in pre-historical rock carvings, vessel paintings and offering artifacts, cf. Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, pp.63-73.

¹⁵ *Wb I*, p.462,1, already mentioned in the documents from the 1st and 2nd dynasties, Germer, R., *op.cit.*, 1985, p.233. In Coptic it is *bnne*, in modern Egyptian Arabic نخل البلح, Manniche, L., *An Ancient Egyptian Herbal*, University of Texas Press, Texas, 1999, p.133.

¹⁶ Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, p. 34. Fresh dates are known as  *bnr anx* "fresh dates", *Wb I*, p.196,5; Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, p.41. Dates are represented among grain and cereal offerings, and as an important element in the list of offerings in the tombs of the Old Kingdom, cf. *ibid*,

pp.38-40. Date palm wine is known as  *bnw* or  *bnrt*, *Wb: I*, 462, 4-6.

For the opinion identifying  *imA*-tree with male date palm trees, cf. Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, pp.54-60.

¹⁷ Hohlwein, N., *op.cit.*, p. 4.

basketry and ropes were made. Netting dates were also known in early periods judging from the various scenes of fishing and fowling¹⁸. All parts of date palms had functions; fruits, kernels, leaves, flowers, fibers and wood, and all were found in tombs throughout the ancient Egyptian history¹⁹. Dates (fresh or dried) and date beer were important elements in the ancient Egyptian peasant's daily diet²⁰.

Moreover, date palm groves are a traditional motif represented in private tombs of high officials since the end of the fifth dynasty, and more common in the New Kingdom²¹. In the Greco-roman time, date palms according to documents were mainly cultivated along with olive-trees, gardens and fields of vine and grain, but more important they were cultivated in areas of cemeteries and tombs²².

Dom palm trees or *Hyphaene thebaica* (fig.3) on the other hand, are indigenous to the Nile Valley²³. They are fan-leaves palms with forked stems that can reach a height of 20 m. The fibers of the leaves are strong; therefore they were used in harnesses and roofs of the houses, besides making mats, bags and baskets²⁴. The wood is hard and thus was used in making beams, boards, small furniture

¹⁸ Engelbach, R., *op.cit.*, p.132.

¹⁹ Greiss, E. A., "Anatomical Identification of Plant Material from Ancient Egypt", *Bulletin de l'Institut Égyptien* 31, 1949, p.354.

²⁰ Wilson, Hilary, *People of the Pharaohs from Peasant to Courtier*, London, 1999, p.8.











²¹ Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, pp.126-127. Cf. tomb of Inni (Thebes no.81), Boussac, H., *Tombeaux thébains: Le tombeau d'Anna*, Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission archéologique française du Caire, Cairo, 1896. The Tomb of Paheri at el-Kab, Tylor, J.J., *The Tomb of Paheri at el Kab*, The Egypt Exploration Society Excavation Memoirs, London, 1894. the tomb of Puymere (Thebes no.39), Davies, N. de G., *The Tomb of Puyemre at Thebes II*, New York, 1923. The tomb of Rekhmire (Thebes no. 100), Davies, N. de G., *The Tomb of Rekh-mi-re at Thebes II*, New York, 1943.








²² Hohlwein, N., *op.cit.*, pp.5-6.







²³ Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, p.18.

²⁴ Germer, R., *op.cit.*, 2001, p.538

pieces²⁵ and boats²⁶. They also provide fruits that were placed among offerings from pre-dynastic period on²⁷.

Dom palm trees were known in ancient Egyptian as  or     or      *mAmA*.²⁸ Dom palm trees were closely connected with the cult of Thoth. Therefore, the baboon, the important animal of Thoth is represented in many New Kingdom-figurines nibbling from a dom palm²⁹. In addition, in the Papyrus Sallier, he is identified with the *mAmA*-tree in which the

scribe addresses Thoth as        *pa mAmA* "O dom palm"³⁰. This is due to the fact that the sacred animal of Thoth, the baboon, used to live in dom palm trees, as its favorite nourishment element is the dom nuts, or in other words the fruits of dom palms³¹.

Ta-weret or Thoeris, the hippopotamus goddess, was also considered a goddess of dom palm as she took the title       *ta-wrt n mAmA* or "Ta-weret of dom palm"³². The dom palm was also connected with the cult of Min³³.

²⁵ Täckholm, V., *op.cit.*, p.763; Germer, R., *op.cit.*, 1985, p.234.

²⁶ Ex.Granite stela of Thutmosis III from Gabal Barkal, cf. Reisner, G.A. and Reisner, M.B., "Inscribed Monuments from Gebel Barkal", *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskund* 69, 1933, pp.34-35.

²⁷ Germer, R., *op.cit.*, 2001, p.538.

²⁸ *Wb*:II, 29,7; only known from the New Kingdom, Germer, R., *op.cit.*, 1985, p.235. In Coptic it is *bnne kouk* and modern Egyptian Arabic it is *dôm* دوم , Manniche, L., *op.cit.*, p.108. The

fruit of the dom palm is known in ancient Egyptian as     *qwqw*, *Wb* V, p.21, 15; Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, p. 52.

²⁹ Germer, R., *op.cit.*, 1985, p.235.


³⁰ Keimer, L., *op.cit.*, 1948, p.278.

³¹ Keimer, L., *op.cit.*, 1948, p.288; Gamer- Wallert, I, *op.cit.*, col.659; Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, pp.97-98.

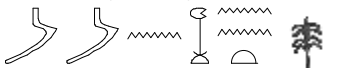

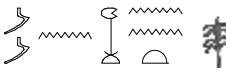
³² Walleret, I., *op.cit.*, p.106. Cf. funeral limestone stele in the Dorpart Museum, Wiedemann, A., "Egyptian Monuments at Dorpat", *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 16, 1894, p.152, n.2

³³ Walleret, I., *op.cit.*, p.108.

The chapter 124 of the Book of the Dead describes the life of the deceased in the vicinity of Osiris. The deceased plows the field and assures the following

 *i.w mAmA Min Hr.s* "My dom palm is Min on it (the field)"³⁴.

Medemia Argun Mart. is of another type of fan-leave palms that have the same aspect of that of *Hyphaene thebaica*, but with unbranched stem that might reach a height of 10 m, and the fruit is smaller than that of doms and tasteless. It is characterized by its short trunk, fan leaves, resembling those of the dom palm³⁵. It is rarely found today in Upper Egypt, only in the Nubian Desert³⁶. However, seeds and fruits of this palm were found in tombs from the fifth dynasty on as offerings³⁷. It was known in ancient Egyptian

as  *mAmA n xAnnt*³⁸ or as  with the variant  *xAnnt*³⁹.

It is possible that palm trees were introduced into the Greek lands by the Phoenicians⁴⁰. The palm of Apollo in Delos is particularly

³⁴ Naville, É, *Das Ägyptische Tottenbuch der XVIII. bis XX. Dynastie aus verschiedenen Urkunden*, vol II, Berlin, 1886, p.270; Walleret, I., *op.cit.*, p.108.

³⁵ Täckholm, V., *op.cit.*, p.763; Germer, R., *op.cit.*, 1985, p.235; Keimer, L., *op.cit.*, 1951, p. 54; Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, p.20.

³⁶ Zahran, M. A and Willis, A. J., *The Vegetation of Egypt*, Cambridge, 1997, p.108; Germer, R., *op.cit.*, 1985, p.235. It exists only in the Nubian Desert between Korsko and Abu Hamad, Keimer, L., *op.cit.*, 1951, p.50; Woenig, *Die Pflanzen im alten Ägypten: Ihre Heimat, Geschichte, Kultur und ihre mannigfache Verwendung im sozialen Leben in Kultus, Sitten, Gebräuchen, Medizin, Kunst*, Leipzig, 1886, p. 317; Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, p.21; Germer, R., *op.cit.*, 2001, p.538; Greiss, E.A.M., *op.cit.*, p.256.



³⁷ Täckholm, V., *op.cit.*, p.763; Germer, R., *op.cit.*, 1985, p.235; Keimer, L., *op.cit.*, 1951, p. 54; Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, p.20.

³⁸ Germer, R., *op.cit.*, 1985, p.235. Modern Egyptian Arabic *argûn* عرجون, Manniche, L., *op.cit.*, 119.

³⁹ *Wb* III, p.231, 17.

⁴⁰ Hohlwein, N., *op.cit.*, p.11.

mentioned in the *Odysseus* (vers 117) ⁴¹ clarifying that it was the tree at the foot of which Leto ⁴² (Roman Latone) gave birth to Apollo and his twin sister Artemis. Therefore, palm trees became a sacred emblem of Apollo. Besides this deity, other divinities received palm trees as attribute, like Artemis at Aulis where palms were cultivated around her sanctuary. Copper and gold palms therefore were frequently put in the temples of Apollo at Delphes and other Greek cities. In addition, they were minted on coins as symbol of victory or as attribute of Leto and Apollo. Palm trees were also cultivated in Italy at the time of Pline ⁴³, but only as unfruiting adorning trees ⁴⁴.

Palm branches, or the palm fronds *rnpt* ⁴⁵ in ancient Egyptian was simply expressed as a branch that is notched and stripped of leaves ⁴⁶. The sign of the palm branch was used in the Egyptian language to signify a "year" as  or  *rnpt*, the Coptic rompe or rampe ⁴⁷. The ancient Egyptian used a palm branch to signify "year" due to the fact that palms produce a branch every



⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.12. In addition, Ulysses, the messenger who was thrown at the beach of the Phoenicians where he saw the graceful figure of a young princess Nausicaa which he assimilated with the great palm tree near the sanctuary of Apollo at Delos, which grew up suddenly with high trunk, deep roots and always young and blooming, *Odysseys*, VI vers 162, Hohlwein, N., *op.cit.*, p.12.

⁴² Leto was the daughter of the Titan Coes, loved by Zeus who made her pregnant with the twin. When Hera discovered the infidelity of her husband ordered the lands to refuse the hospitality of Leto. The latter finally came in sight of a parcel of land floating on the water called Ortygia (later took the name of Delos). The arrival of the twin Apollo and Artemis on this island made it one of the most famous islands of the Cyclades, Schmidt, J., *Dictionnaire de la Mythologie grecque et romaine*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1998, p.126.

⁴³ Pline, *Nat. Hist.* XIII, 4, 6, Hohlwein, N., *op.cit.*, p.13.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁵ Germer, R., *op.cit.*, 1985, p.233.

⁴⁶ Gardner, A., *Egyptian Grammar; Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd ed., Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1982, p. 479, M4. The sign "represents a palm branch stripped of its leaves and with one notch", Newberry, P. E., "The Hieroglyphs  and " *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 34, 1948, p.119.

⁴⁷ Wb II, p.429; Gardner, A., *op.cit.*, p.479, M4; Faulkner, R. O., *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, Griffith Institute, Oxford, 1962, p.150.

new moon and thus twelve branches signified a year⁴⁸. Moreover, it is used as a determinative to refer to vigor or regeneration; like in the case of the adjective *rnpi* or *rnp* with the variant meaning "be young" or "vigorous"⁴⁹, "green" or "rejuvenated"⁵⁰. The Coptic word for the palm branch is *ba* or *bai* usually used specifically for the midrib of the frond, which is derived from the Egyptian *bai*⁵¹. It was used in this sense as sticks and rods⁵².

Thus, the palm branch signifies "long life" and hence it became strongly connected with funeral beliefs. Collars and garlands made of woven palm leaves were placed in tombs. Palm branch was used as offerings to wish the deceased a "rejuvenation in the other life" assuring him an eternal life provided by the power of the palm branch. In addition, palm branches were also found sometimes on the chest of mummies⁵³ and were held in funeral processions as well for the same significance⁵⁴.

The palm branch in some occurrences was also held by Egyptian deities and divinities as a scepter. For instance, in the second hour of Amduat, six gods are depicted carrying the hieroglyphic palm

⁴⁸ de Walle, B. V. and Vergot, J., "Traduction des hieroglyphica d'Horapollon", *Chronique d'Égypte* 35, 1943, p.42.

⁴⁹ Gardner, A., *op.cit.*, p.479, M4, 480 M7; Faulkner, R. O., *op.cit.*, p.150; Wb II, p 432, 11.




⁵⁰ Wb II, p.434.

⁵¹ Wb I, p.446, 9.

⁵² Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, p.49. Therefore, palm branches are connected with the kingship, particularly in coronation scenes. Being crowned in two canopies as king of Upper and Lower Egypt, the pharaoh holds in the two cases a bundle of midribs of palm branches. It signifies here that he would be the king for countless years, *ibid.*, p.100.



⁵³ The deceased in chapter 124 of the Book of the Dead asks that the sarcophagus be covered with palm branches, Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, p.102; Winkler, H. A., *Ägyptische Volkskunde*, Stuttgart, 1936, p.226.

⁵⁴ Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, pp.101-102. This significance is indicated in the scenes. In the tomb of Amunmes (Thebes no.15), he offers his parents a palm branch in a carefully tied bundle as a gift, cf. Foucart, G., *Tombes thébaines, Nécropole de Dirâ Abâ n-Naga. [Tome 3-4]. Le tombeau d'Amonmos*, Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 57, Cairo, 1935, Pl.20, 22.

branch or  to signify "year" or more probably "time"⁵⁵. In addition, the gods of the ninth hour of the Amduat as well hold the sign of  *anx* or "life" in one hand and that of a palm branch  in the other to refer to the same meaning. The text that accompanies this scene refers to them as filed gods who cause the trees and plants to grow⁵⁶.

The god Thoth, as a "Lord of Time" and "Counter of Years", he is intimately connected with the palm branch⁵⁷. Thus, he presents it in the opet-festival to assure Osiris with millions of years⁵⁸. He defines the life and the reigning years of the king in his coronation ceremonies on a palm branch. Therefore, palm branch is his main attribute⁵⁹. In addition, Thoth in some occurrences is considered a funeral god. This is due to the role he played in the myth of Osiris as he taught Isis the spells by which she revived Osiris from death. Moreover, he stood in the judgment of Osiris to record the result of the trial on his ledger. Therefore, as a god of the dead, he wore Osirian attributes; a disk crown, *uraeus* and horns⁶⁰.

In PGM 1, 227 f. (a papyrus at Leiden, perhaps of the 2nd century AD) is an indication to a connection between Osiris himself, the god of the dead and the palm branch. He says "I am the plant with the name palm branch. I am the efflux of the blood of the palm branches from the tomb of the Great One (Osiris)"⁶¹.

⁵⁵ Wb V, 314. For  or simply the palm branch  *tr* also means "time", Gardener, A., *op. cit.*, p.479, M4.

⁵⁶ Griffiths, G. J., Apuleius of Madauros, *The Isis-Book (Metamorphoses, Book XI)*, (EPRO, vol.39), Leiden, 1975, p.203.

⁵⁷ Gamer-Wallert, I., *op. cit.*, p.659; Boylan, P., *Thoth, the Hermes of Egypt: A Study of Some Aspects of Theological Thought in Ancient Egypt*, Oxford University Press, London, 1922, p.83.

⁵⁸ Griffiths, G. J., *op. cit.*, p.203.

⁵⁹ Wallert, I., *op. cit.*, p.101.

⁶⁰ Ions, V., *Egyptian Mythology*, London, 1988, pp.85-86.

⁶¹ Griffiths, G. J., *op. cit.*, p.219.

In the concern of the Alexandrian tombs; they were influenced by Egyptian traditions and architecture⁶² that had become more and more common by the second century B.C. Full integration with the Egyptian elements was achieved by the first century A.D and onwards⁶³. Egyptian divinities and mythical symbols are to be found on the walls of these tombs. They reached their greatest adoption of the Egyptian symbols in the second and third centuries A.D⁶⁴. Thus, a mixture of Greek, Roman and Egyptian elements appear in the Alexandrian tombs in this period⁶⁵.

The most significant Alexandrian tomb to be represented with palm branches is that of Tigrane⁶⁶. It contains classical, Roman and Egyptian artistic elements⁶⁷. It is one of the Alexandrian triclinium-planned chamber-tombs that usually belong to Roman necropolises

⁶² For Egyptian influences on Alexandrian tombs, Cf. Abou El-Atta, Hussein, "The Relation between the Egyptian Tombs and the Alexandrian Hypogea", in *Études et Travaux* 16, 1992, pp.11-19.

⁶³ Venit, M. S., "The Tomb from Tigrane Pasha Street and the Iconography of Death in Roman Alexandria", *American Journal of Archaeology* 101, No.4, 1997, p.702.

⁶⁴ Breccia, E., "Tombe Greco-egiziane dell'età romana a Ramleh (Sporting Club)", *Bulletin de la Société Archéologique d'Alexandrie* 15, 1914, p.53.

⁶⁵ Schreiber, T., "Die ägyptischen Elemente der alexandrischen Totenpflege", *Bulletin de la Société Archéologique d'Alexandrie* No.15 vol.IV, 1914, p.5. Ex.The tomb of Anfushi II, on the wall of the lower part of the staircase is represented by an Egyptian paintings and figures of Egyptian gods, *ibid.*, p.5.

⁶⁶The tomb of Tigran was discovered by accident in 1952 during the digging for the foundation of a house in the district of Cleopatra les Bans. It was part of a necropolis that was destroyed in ancient inasmuch as in modern times. The surviving part (paintings were submitted by Adriani) was transported to a new location (where it can be seen now) where a room constructed to look exactly as the original tomb in the garden of Kom el-Shuqafa, Adriani, A., "Scavi e scoperte alessandrine", *Bulletin de la Société Archéologique d'Alexandrie* 41, 1956, p.63. The access staircase and the straight corridor were revealed at the time of discovery. At the end of the corridor, two chambers were found on both sides; a square chamber and a rectangular one with niches in its three walls. The square chamber, the staircase and the corridor had suffered greatly the underground water and could not be cleared. Only the chamber with the three niches was saved. The tomb in question has a simple plan regularly found in contemporary Alexandrian tombs with two chambers; one smaller and one larger with niches above sarcophagi. The one known as "Tigrane tomb" has three niches with three sarcophagi, *ibid.*, p.64. The tomb according to Adriani can be dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D., *ibid.*, p.84.

⁶⁷ Venit, M. S., *op.cit.*, pp.702-703.

and more common in the western necropolis of Alexandria like in the case of the main burial chamber of Kom el-Shoqafa⁶⁸.

The three walls of the chamber are provided with three niches, each embraces a sarcophagus. According to Adriani, the paintings decorating the walls above the sarcophagi can be categorized into three episodes: the one at the center (opposite the entrance) is that of the death, the one in the right side niche is the resurrection, and the last one on the left is the apotheosis. According to him, the three episodes belong to Osiris⁶⁹. Venit on the other hand, opposes this by clarifying that there is no evidence to prove this theory, besides; there is no sign to indicate that the male figure here is Osiris. He is not represented in the form of Osiris, nor does he wear the Atef-crown⁷⁰. Thus, it is more convenient that the figure represented in the three scenes is the deceased, the owner of the tomb rather than the god of the dead wishing to go through the same stages of Osiris or to be assimilated with the god of the underworld and reach the other life to live peacefully close to him.

Concerning the scenes represented in the niches above the sarcophagi⁷¹. The central one shows a scene of the deceased mummified lying on a funeral bed⁷², while Isis and Nephtys are standing; one to the left at the head of the bed holding two palm branches with her hands crossed on her chest, the other to the right

⁶⁸ However, the location of Tigrane tomb in the eastern necropolis is quite unique, Venit, M. S., *op.cit.*, p.703.

⁶⁹ Adriani, A., *op.cit.*, p.70.

⁷⁰ Venit, M. S., *op.cit.*, p.722.

⁷¹ All photos of Tomb of Tigrane were taken by the researcher.

⁷² A similar scene can be found on the wall above the sarcophagus of the central niche in the main burial chamber of Kom el-Shuqafa. This funeral Egyptian scene is one of the most common to have been traditionally represented on the walls of tombs in the Greco-roman period and particularly those of Alexandria, along with other Egyptian deities and symbols. Ex. Tombs of Ramleh (no longer exist, but well described by Breccia, cf. Breccia, E., *op.cit.*, pp.53-56.

at the bier winged with two palm branches stretching out above the funeral bed⁷³ (fig.4).

The central scene on right side niche above the sarcophagus represents the deceased in right profile kneeling on his left knee wearing a helmet in the form of the Egyptian *nemes*. He holds with his two hands two palm branches to be presented to the female figure standing on the right⁷⁴ (fig.5). The female figure might be Isis, who in return outstretches her two hands with two long vegetal objects to the kneeling resurrected male figure. According to Adriani, the two objects are two plumes⁷⁵, while to Venit they are two golden stalks, perhaps shafts of wheat, which was an important attribute of Isis⁷⁶. To the left of the deceased is a destroyed male figure with advanced left foot. He holds a large censer in his left hand and a shaft ending in snake-headed crook in the right⁷⁷.

The scene of the left side niche above the sarcophagus (fig.6) shows the deceased standing en face with the two legs joined, clasping his hands in front of his torso while holding two palm branches. He is flanked by two winged figures. On the right of the male figure stands a female goddess, and on his left is a male figure. Both have outstretched winged arms, perhaps representing Horus and Isis⁷⁸. The deceased's eyes look towards the male figure on his left, while sitting at his feet right and left are two figures of Anubis depicted as a jackal looking up at the deceased⁷⁹.

⁷³Adriani, A., *op.cit.*, 1956, p.71; Venit, M. S., *op.cit.*, p.712. Venit identifies the female figure at the bier with Isis as her head is fronted by a floral arrangement that might be a lotus if compared with Isis busts in the Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Egizio, who has a lotus in front of her headdress, Venit, M. S., *op.cit.*, p.712

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, pp.714-716.


⁷⁵ Adriani, A., *op.cit.*, p.72

⁷⁶ Venit, M. S., *op.cit.*, p.716, 727.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.716. According to Adriani, this figure might be Horus who advances towards Osiris holding a long sword in the right hand and a vase or an altar in the left, Adriani, A., *op.cit.*, p.72.

⁷⁸Adriani, A., *op.cit.*, p.74.

⁷⁹ Venit, M. S., *op.cit.*, pp.712-712.

The main burial chamber of the catacomb of Kom el-Shuqafa on the other hand, is designed as a square room with three niches above cut-in-the-rock Greek sarcophagi⁸⁰. On the central wall of the niche above the central sarcophagus, opposite the entrance is the traditional funeral scene. It shows the mummy of the deceased assimilated with Osiris lying on a lion-shaped funeral bed. Anubis the god of mummification is standing behind the bed, holding a two-handled ointment pot with the left hand, while placing the right on the body. Thoth is standing at the head of the bed, holding a *was*-scepter and the sign of life  *ankh* in his left hand, and a pot in the right. Horus is standing at the foot of the bed wearing a double crown and holding a *was*-scepter in his right hand, and a pot with a sprout in the left. Three canopic jars are to be seen under the bed⁸¹ (fig.7).

In the same catacomb of Kom el-Shuqafa there is an appended hall largely recognized as "Hall of Caracalla"⁸². It embraces niche-graves. Today only one still bears little traces of the scenes on the right hand of the entrance of the hall. The Back wall of the recess of this grave is divided into two registers; the lower is represented with an episode of the Greek myth of Persephone being kidnapped by Hades. The upper one shows the traditional funeral scene with the mummy lying on a lion-shaped bier. Anubis is standing behind the bier, while Isis and Nephthys are standing at the head and foot of the bed. Both goddesses outstretch their winged arms above the

⁸⁰ Schreiber, T., *op.cit*, p.6.

⁸¹ Rowe, A., "New Excavations at Kôm El-Shukafa during the Season 1941-1942", *Bulletin de la Société royale d'Archéologie d'Alexandrie* 35 vol.XI.2, 1942, p.20-21; Venit, M. S., *Monumental Tombs of Ancient Alexandria, The Theater of the Dead*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p.136.

⁸² Incorrectly called after the emperor Caracalla. It was thought that bones of men and horses found in this hall belonged to the youth who were killed with their horses in the gymnasium of Alexandria in the massacre of Caracalla in 215 A.D. It is possible however that the bones belonged actually to sport youth and their horses which they won in certain races and buried with them in this tomb under the protection of Nemesis, the sport goddess whose embalsms are to be seen in the catacomb, *ibid.*, p.31-32.

mummy of the deceased⁸³ (fig.8). Behind the two goddesses stands a figure of Horus, represented as a falcon-headed god holding a number of scepters in his right hand on the right side of the scene, while on the left side of the same scene is a standing figure of a man holding a number of scepters. It is notable that among the scepters which Horus holds is that of a palm branch represented in the form of the Egyptian sign *rnp*.

The southern end of the same hall opens into a square shaft. On the eastern side of the bottom of it is an adjoining hall. The latter embraces two painted tombs of the same type (niche-graves); one to the right and one to the left⁸⁴. The left was once covered with a colorful scene of which only little traces survived. The recess above the sarcophagus of the grave was centered by a representation of the deceased (now missing) flanked by the two goddesses, most probably Isis and Nephthys outstretching their winged arms on the two sides of the deceased. Behind the two goddesses stand two male figures holding a scepter⁸⁵ (fig.9).

This particular scene corresponds with that on the left side niche in the tomb of Tigrane (fig.6). Is it possible that the missing figure of the deceased when was complete, he was represented holding a palm branch along the lines of that of Tigrane Tomb.

In fact, the same traditional funeral scene can be found on funeral stelae as well. A good example is the limestone stele found at Mitrahina and dates back to the Hellenistic period from the end of the fourth or beginning of the third century B.C. (fig.10). It shows the deceased mummified lying on a bed flanked by the two goddesses Isis and Nephthys as accustomed to in such scenes.

⁸³ Rowe, A., *op.cit.*, p.32-33; Venit, M. S., *op.cit.*, 2002, p.145.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.35.

⁸⁵ Venit, M. S., *op.cit.*, 2002, p.123; Rowe, A., *op.cit.*, Pl.XV. There is another example of this traditional Egyptian funeral scene also from the Roman period in tomb (A) at Qabbary, see Habachi, B., "Two Tombs of the Roman Epoch Recently Discovered at Gabbary", *Bulletin de la Société archéologique d'Alexandrie* 31, vol.IX-2, 1937, 270-285. pp.274-276.

Behind the two goddesses stand on the right a figure of the Ibis-headed god, Thoth, and on the left the falcon-headed god, Hours. Anubis is standing behind the bed performing the embalming rituals on the body, while a figure of Horus is represented as a falcon flying above the deceased grasping a palm branch.⁸⁶ The attitude of the falcon flying with the palm branch above the body gives the impression as if he has picked it out of the body of the deceased. The palm branch in this sense is most continently to be regarded as the soul of the deceased.

Concerning the concept of palm branch in the Greco-roman beliefs, it is obvious that it symbolized victory, particularly that it was a very important attribute of the goddess Nike, Roman Victoria, the goddess of victory⁸⁷.

For the Egyptians, palm branch was connected more or less with funeral concepts. This can be judged from the close connection between the palm branch, and the funeral concept and other life divinities. Thoth was the main god to be connected with the palm branch and at the same time had funeral functions related to the myth of Isis and Osiris, besides the role he played in the trial of Osiris. Moreover, as has been previously indicated, Osiris himself, the god of the underworld is described as a palm branch.


Hermanubis, the god who is formed of the Greek Hermes⁸⁸ and the Egyptian Anubis is usually represented with an attribute of a

⁸⁶F.W. von Bissing, "Osiris im Boot", in *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskund* 67, 1931, p. 19.

⁸⁷ Nike was the daughter of the Titan Pallas and Styx. She was the goddess of victory in wars and athletic competitions. She is frequently represented with two wings holding a victor wreath, Adkins, Lesley and Adkins, Roy A., *Handbook to Life in Ancient Greece*, New York, 1997, p.322.

⁸⁸ Hermes was the son of Zeus. As the herald of gods, he appears in many legends. He also had the function of leading the souls of the living to those of the dead. He therefore, often wears a winged helmet, coat, the staff of the herald (Caduceus), hat of messenger, and fins attached to his heels. The Greeks venerated him as the patron of speakers, and the inventor of the alphabet, music, astronomy, weights and measures. He was also the god of fertility, good fortune, roads and boundaries, Schmidt, J., *op.cit.*, p.104; Adkins, L. and Adkins, R. A., *op.cit.*, p.312.

palm branch. It is widely known that Anubis was the god of the mummification and the other life. In addition, in Greek texts $\beta\alpha\acute{\iota}\zeta$, $\beta\acute{\alpha}\acute{\iota}\zeta$ and $\beta\acute{\alpha}\acute{\iota}\nu\sigma$ ⁸⁹ are translated as "palm" or "Palm-branch"⁹⁰. At the same time according to Horappollo's etymology in Hierogl.1.7, the Egyptian *Bai* which is translated as "soul" is invoked as an attribute of the falcon Horus as a "soul", while $\beta\alpha\acute{\iota}\zeta$ or "Palm-branch"⁹¹ is invoked as an attribute of Anubis. This is another indication that the Egyptians connected the palm branch with Anubis, the god of the under world and at the same time hence explained the symbolism of the palm branch as "immortal soul"⁹² connected also with Horus.

Moreover, the Egyptian sign of palm branch *rnp*  as has been previously seen, was also connected with meanings of being "young" "vigorous", "green" or "rejuvenated" and hence also an indication of "long life". In other words, palm branch did not only bear a funeral concept, but it was itself a symbol of eternal life in the other world.

In Alexandria, palms or palm branches are frequently figured on coins to symbolize a certain era, a date or even an event⁹³. Considering tombs, it is obvious that the scenes in which palm branch appears are funeral ones more connected with niche-grave type from the Roman period. In these tombs, palm branches are represented in its natural form (simply a palm branch) like in the case of the tomb of Tigraue or in the form of the Egyptian sign *rnp*

⁸⁹ Liddell and Scott's Greek- English Lexicon, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, 7th ed., The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, p.144.

⁹⁰ Hohlwein, N., *op.cit.*, p.5. Derived from the Egyptian *bai*, *ibid.*, p.5.

⁹¹ de Walle, B. V. and Vergot, J., *op.cit.*, p.43.

⁹² Griffiths, G. J., *op.cit.*, p.202.

⁹³ Dutilh, E. D. J., "Signification des couronne et des palmes sur les monnaies alexandriens", *Bulletin de l'Institut Égyptien* 5, 1895, p.263. Ex. the Alexandrian bronze coin dated from the year 16 of the reign Hadrian. It is represented on the reverse side with (year 16) Isis with Horus seated on a throne on the right with a palm in front of her and a vase behind her. The year 16 of that emperor corresponds with the event of consecrating a village to the memory of his favorite valet Antinous, *ibid.*, p.264.

like the case in the Hall of Caracalla in the catacomb of Kom el-Shuqafa.

According to Venit, the tomb of Tigrane belonged to members of a certain guild or a committee of Isiac cult. These kinds of religious guilds were founded by individuals and members who practiced a special private worship centered on a specific divinity or a hero. In our case, it is the goddess Isis⁹⁴, who played a great role in the myth of Osiris, the god of the underworld and whom himself was described as a palm branch. In addition, the palm branch is connected with gods of the Osirian cycle and thus associated with the renewed life when shown in a funerary set⁹⁵. They are also connected with the Isiac cult, as her priests are also shown holding palm branches in their hands⁹⁶.

Moreover, the sprouting plant held by Horus in his left hand in the main scene of the main burial chamber of Kom el-Shuqafa is explained as indication of the image of Osiris with seeds that used to be set in graves to sprout to indicate resurrection in the other life⁹⁷. However, regarding the shape of the sprout, it is more convenient that it is a sprout of a palm tree which when growing has quite the same conformation (fig.11). In this case, being a sprout of a palm tree is more convenient considering the role it plays in the funeral concepts of the other life and underworld.


There is another question needs to be answered, which type of palm trees would the palm branches represented in the Alexandrian tombs would be? Taking into account the way the palm branches depicted in the scenes of Tigrane, it is obvious that the palm branches are of the feather-leaves type of *Phoenix dactylifera* L. or date palm. This particular tree was connected more with the other life beliefs in the Egyptian mind rather than the other palm trees. It


⁹⁴ Venit, M. S., *op.cit.*, 1997, p.729.

⁹⁵ Griffiths, G. J., *op.cit.*, p.203.

⁹⁶ Venit, M. S., *op.cit.*, 1997, p.727.

⁹⁷ Venit, M. S., *op.cit.*, 2002, p.137; Rowe, A., *op.cit.*, p.21.

is closely attached to Hathor. In Berlin Museum (No. 7322) there is a funeral relief from the New Kingdom showing a date palm inhabited by Hathor who is offering to a deceased a vase in one hand and a table of offerings in the other⁹⁸. Hathor at Kom el-Hisn (capital of the third nome of Lower Egypt) took the name of *nbt imAw* or "the mistress of the male date-palms"⁹⁹. The deceased wished to be buried in the shade of the date palm tree of Hathor and Nut or to be transformed into a manifestation of the divinity's palm¹⁰⁰. In the Book of the Dead, chapter 68 1.8 and 82 1.6, the date palm is described as "the date palm, in whose shadow the deceased sits at the feet of the goddess Hathor"¹⁰¹. In addition, among the various names given to her cult centers, Dendera was called  *pr bnrw nt tA nirt* "the Date palm Property of the Goddess"¹⁰². In addition, Hathor in the late period was also known as "protector of the dead in the other world", thus had funeral functions¹⁰³.

The date palm is thus the best option for the funeral beliefs. Moreover, the name of the palm tree *Phoenix dactylifera* L. is derived from (φοῖνιξ) Phoenix, the Egyptian *bnw* , the mythical Egyptian bird (identified as herons, *Ardea cinerea*, or *purpurea*)¹⁰⁴.

⁹⁸Keimer, M. L., "Sur un bas-relief en calcaire représentant la déesse dans le sycomore et la déesse dans le dattier", in *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 29, 1929, p.84. Also cf. Erman, A., *Ausführliches Verzeichnis der aegyptischen Alterthümer und Gipsabgüsse*, Berlin, 1899, p.150; Borchardt, *Die Aegyptische Pflanzensaule*, Berlin, 1897, p.45-46. A similar scene is found on a sarcophagus in the Egyptian Museum (Journal d'entrée no.29663, discovered in 1891 at deir el-Bahari) from the twenty-first dynasty, Keimer, M. L., *op.cit.*, 1929, p. 83.

⁹⁹ Buhl, M-L., *op.cit.*, p.86. *imAw* is the male palm, *ibid.*, p.86



¹⁰⁰ Gamer-Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, col.659.

¹⁰¹ Buhl, M-L., "The Goddesses of the Egyptian Tree Cult", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 6, No.2, 1947, p.92; Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, p. 62.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.104; Gauthier, H., *Dictionnaire des Noms géographiques contenus dans les textes hiéroglyphiques*, vol.II, Institut Français d'archéologie Orientale, Cairo, 1925, p.77.

¹⁰³ Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, p.105.

¹⁰⁴ Kákosy, L., "Phönix", *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* IV, edited by W. Helck & E. Otto, Wiesbaden, 1982, col.1030-1031.

In fact, Phoenix was considered as well a symbol of rejuvenation, resurrection, long time, and long periods. According to Herodot, this bird lived for 500 years¹⁰⁵. In addition, being represented as a man with *bnw*-bird's head, he is connected with the two personifications of eternity and immortality *HH*  and *Dt*  respectively. Thus, Phoenix was also connected with funeral beliefs and frequently found in Pyramid and Coffin Texts associated with the deceased in the other life, as he is assigned with the task of releasing the dead man's path¹⁰⁶.

All this indicates that the concept of representing palm branches in Alexandrian tombs bears was funeral indicating resurrection and more properly a symbol of eternal life in the other world of pure Egyptian origin with no Greco-roman influences. This can be proved by the fact that palm branches continued to be seen in Coptic art connected with same significance. They are represented accompanying martyrs¹⁰⁷. Moreover, Coptic monks used to celebrate the arrival of an important personality with a palm branch as to wish him a "long life". Using palm branches at the arrival of the Christ at Jerusalem indicates the same significance. Finally, Coptic funeral stelae frequently show the deceased accompanied by a palm branch¹⁰⁸ confirming the funeral concept of the palm branch as symbol of eternal life in the other world.

¹⁰⁵ Kákosy, L., *op.cit.*, col.1033.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, col.1034.

¹⁰⁷ Becker, U., *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols*, New York, 1994, p.225; Wallert, I., *op.cit.*, p.103.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.101-102.

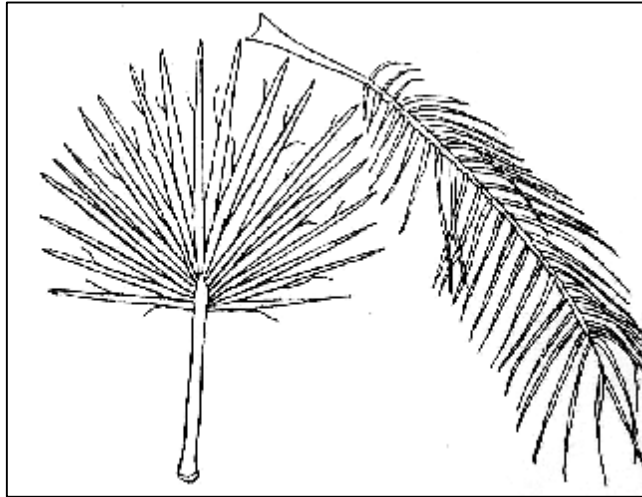


Fig.1 feather-veined and fan-veined palm branches
Petrides, G. A., *A Field Guide to Eastern Trees*, Boston, New York, 1998, fig.26



Fig.2 *Phoenix dactylifera* L. (date palm tree)
مصطفى بدر، النخيل وأشباه النخيل، منشأة المعارف، الإسكندرية، ١٩٩٥، ص ٢١١.

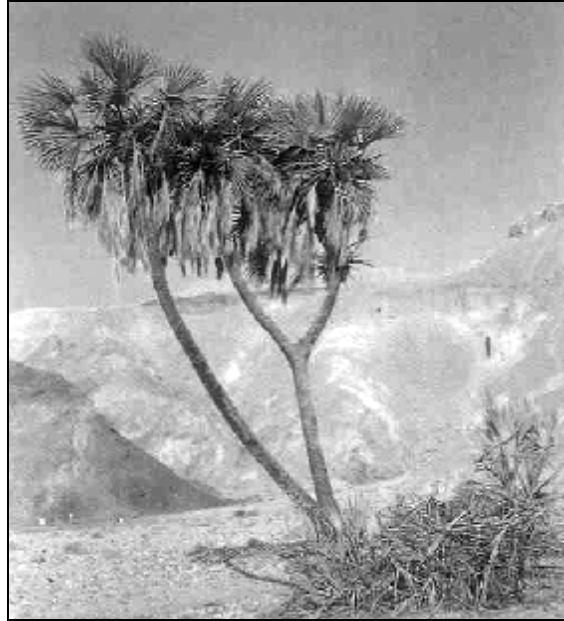


Fig.3 *Hyphaene thebaica* (dom palm tree)
مصطفى بدر، المرجع السابق، ص ١٩٣.



Fig.4 the central niche of the tomb of Tigrae



Fig.5 the right hand niche of the tomb of Tigrane

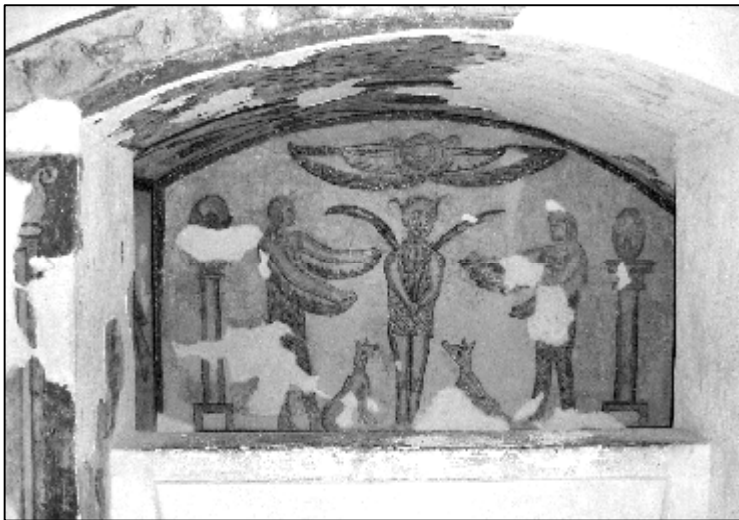


Fig.6 the left hand niche of the tomb of Tigrane

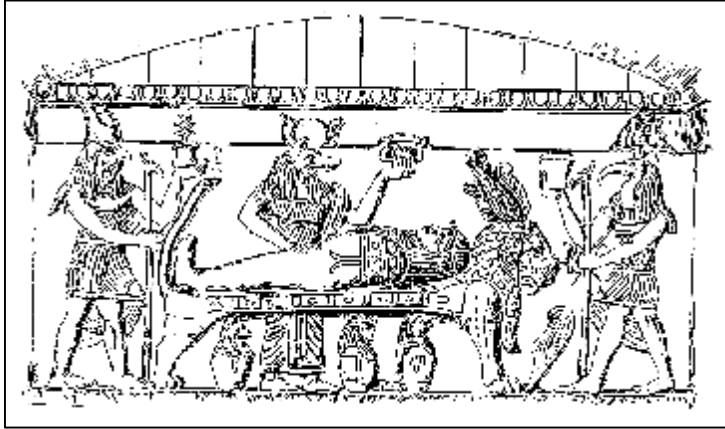


Fig.7 the scene on the central wall of the central niche in the main burial chamber of Kom el-Shuqafa

Rowe, A., "New Excavations at Kôm El-Shukafa during the Season 1941-1942", *Bulletin de la Société royale d'Archéologie d'Alexandrie* 35 vol.XI.2, 1942, Pl.VI, fig.1

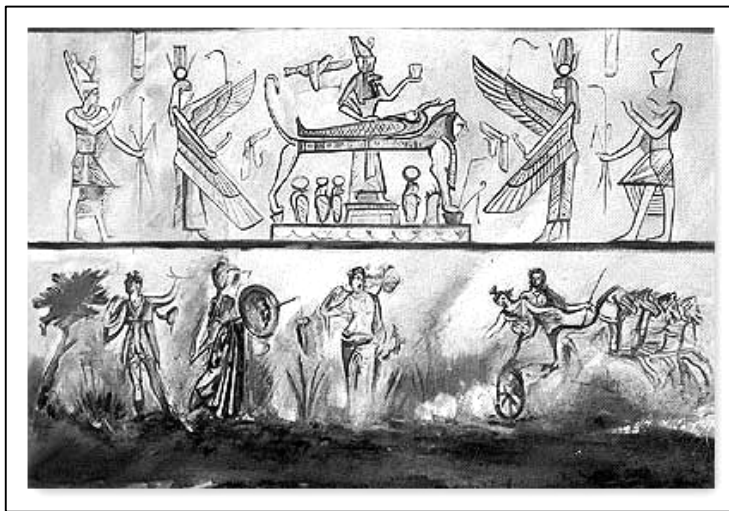


Fig.8 the scene on the right side niche in hall of Caracalla in Kom el-Shuqafa
Venit, M. S., *Monumental Tombs of Ancient Alexandria; the Theater of the Dead*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, fig.126, p.146

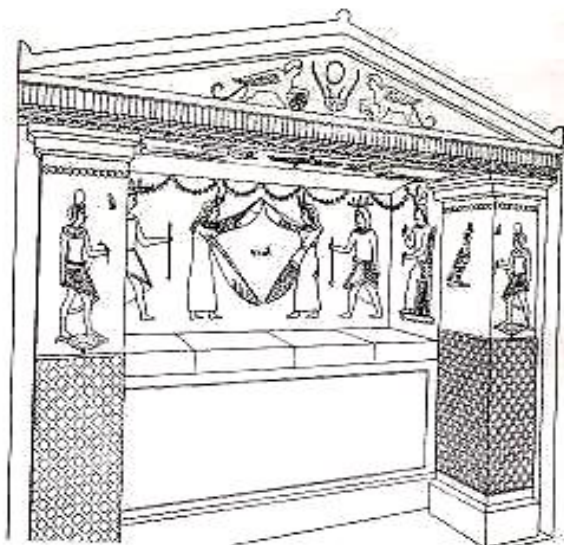


Fig.9 The back wall of the recess of the left tomb of the adjoining hall at bottom of the square shaft of the Hall of Caracalla
Rowe, A., *op.cit.*, Pl.XV.

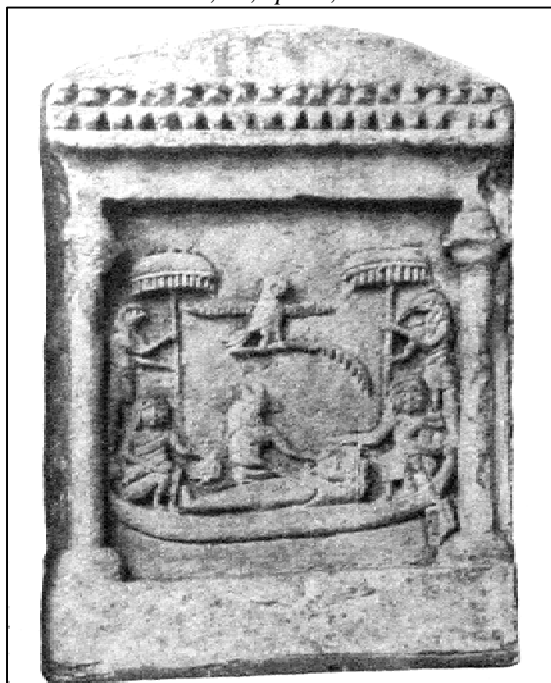


Fig.10 The limestone stela of Mitrahina showing the falcon god Horus flying and grasping a palm branch with his claws above the mummy
F.W. von Bissing. 1931: 15



Fig.11 A sprout of a palm tree
مصطفى بدر، المرجع السابق، ص ١٨٦.