

Seth's Unique Head Inspiration

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استلهام حول رأس ست الفريدة

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المخلص

هناك الكثير من الجدل على مر السنين حول الطبيعة الحقيقية لحيوان الإله "ست" المقدس و الذي رمز إليه، وسبب الجدل هو أن رأس هذا الحيوان لا تنتمي لحيوان محدد، و تقدم الباحثة في هذه الورقة تفسير لهذه الرأس الفريدة، هذا التفسير يعطي رؤية مختلفة "لست" عن التي يتم رؤيته من خلالها ، وتعتمد هذه الرؤية على أحداث الأسطورة الأوزيرية وارتباطها بالدورة الزراعية في مصر القديمة، حاولت من خلالها الباحثة إثبات أن رأس "ست" مستوحاة من أدوات زراعية مستخدمة في مصر القديمة؛ وهما أداتي المحراث والمجرفة، وهذا التشابه لم يتضح فقط في الشكل، وإنما في الوظيفة أيضاً.

الكلمات الدالة: ست ، حيوان ست، أوزير، أسطورة، الزراعة، المحراث، الجروف

Abstract

There has been much debate over the years about the true nature of the animal god Seth the sacred that he enigmatic personality, and the reason for the controversy is the animal's head that does not belong to a specific animal. In this paper, the researcher presents an explanation of this unique head that gives a different view than the one with which it is usually depicted, and this interpretation is through the Osiris legend and its connection to the agricultural cycle in ancient Egypt, where the researcher tried to prove that Seth's head was inspired by agricultural tools used in ancient Egypt; namely the plow and the hoe, and the similarity is not only evident in the figure but also in the function.

Keywords: Seth, Seth-animal, Osiris, myth, farming, hoe, hack, plow

Abbreviations

BD: Budge, W., Book Of The Dead, The Chapters Of Coming Forth By Day, London, 1898.

JEA: Journal of Egyptian Archeology, London, 1914FF.

Pyr: : Sethe, K., Die Altägyptischen Pyramiden texte, Leipzig 1908-1922.

Wb: Erman, : A., & Grapow, H., Wörterbuch der Ägyptischen Sprach, 6 vols, Leipzig 1926-1950.

ZÄS: Zeitschrift fur Agyptische und Altertumskunde, Leipzig 1893-1943, Berlin 1954FF.

1. Introduction

Seth is one of the controversial gods in ancient Egypt mythology , he was known as a violent and destructive god of ancient Egypt¹, one of his main documentation as a murderer of Osiris and the enemy of Horus in the standard references.

The Seth-animal played a vital role in his enigmatic personality especially it is used as ideogram of god Seth . The Seth-animal -as is clear- from Egyptian depictions and hieroglyphic writing, represented a mythical animal so many scholars have attempted to determine its zoological identity, and a survey of various hypotheses with a list of the relevant literature was given by Newberry² resulted that animal of Seth belongs to many animals but it is impossible to determine the type of one animal. The main reason of the assumption was the stranger head which is the subject of the research to interpret according to the ancient Egyptian religious beliefs.

2. The God Seth



Seth was ancient Egypt god of desert and represents confusion, and storms since the Predynastic at Ombos³.

He was an undefined God whose features have defied identification, unlike the other deities, Seth always remains something of a enigma to the ancient Egyptians, he exists on the boundary between the transitory and the everlasting, the same boundary, he had the most important role of myth of Osiris , he represented evil as a murderer of his brother Osiris, but he was not always associated with negative feelings⁴ especially his necessary role to keep the world going in its "Re's realm" by getting rid of the serpent,

¹Hornung, E., *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt, The One and The Many* Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press,1971,p.103.

²Newberry, P.E., *Beni Hasan II*,London 1894, pl.4(13).

³Belbirg,E.,*Arts &Humanities Through the Eras: Ancient Egypt*,Thomson Gale,2005,p.219.

⁴ he stand out in the incipient Egyptian State Pantheon on the contrary Seth was seen as an essential part of family of god in the first half of the Old Kingdom at the same time Rovensky,J., *Seth the guardian of Ra*,Praha, 2019, pp. 12-13.

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Apophis, Fig. 1, who menaces the course of the sun during its journey⁵, this double role is evident in texts of religious books⁶.

3. The Seth's head



The earliest representation of the Seth-animal according to Te Velde⁷ is the decoration of an ivory hair comb with the animal's figure reckoned to belong to Nagada I, but Baumgartel⁸ see that evidence is needed to make it certain, and Griffiths⁹ admits that they have little resemblance to the Seth-animal.

The earliest known image of Seth with a man's body with animal's head he is part of Pharaoh Peribsen's official seal, the Seth-animal standing over Peribsen's name has a truncated tail as opposed to that is known for the Seth-animal Fig. 3.

In the characteristic representation of the Seth-animal at the time of the Third dynasty¹⁰, the form of the body resembles that of a dog, large ears, square-topped, and his snout curves down to a point Fig.4.

Although Egyptians excelled at choosing symbols to their Gods and Goddesses in recognizable forms, but not Seth, his body is depicted as that of either a canine or a man, but his head is unlike any known animal. His large ears are square-topped, and his snout curves down to a point, so it often resembles a bird's beak.

Seth's head has been attributed to various animals: ass, dog, giraffe, tapir, greyhound, Oryx, jackal and others¹¹, but none of them is of a particularly good match, neither its shape nor its symbolism.

⁵ Te Velde, J., *Seth God of Confusion*, A Study of his Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion, Leiden 1967, p. 107.

⁶ Seth in the Pyramid Texts; the negative texts (69)) the positive texts (20) the neutral texts (44), in the Coffin Texts; the negative texts (72) the positive texts (27) the neutral texts (32), in the Book of the Dead; the negative spells (26) the positive spells (13) the neutral spells (12):

Turner, J., *Seth- A Misrepresented God in the Ancient Egyptian Pantheon?*, Ph.D. Thesis, the University of Manchester 2012, 42:44, 51:53, 103:106.

⁷ Te Velde, J., *Seth God of Confusion*, 13; Shaw, I. and Nicholson, P., *Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, London., 2003, p. 264.

⁸ Baumgartel, E. J., *The Cultures of Prehistoric Egypt I*, London. 1955, p.34.

⁹ Griffiths, J. G., *Review of Seth God of Confusion*. A Study of his Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion, JEA 55., 1969, pp. 226-227.

¹⁰ Murray, M., *Saqqara Mastabas I*, London, 1905, pl. XXXVIII; Te Velde, J., *Seth God of Confusion*, p.16.

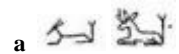
The greatest obstacles to a satisfactory identification are the ears and the tail which belong to none of the known animals ; the Seth-animal in all images had persistently erect ears, sharply cut off at top; this feature together with the long snouted part of face, ending in a narrow muzzle with protruding upper lip makes Seth easily recognizable.

So none of the animals has been suggested to have such ears or such a tail which identified as an arrow piercing the back of the animal¹² or a knife stuck on its back¹³.

Others described it as a mythical animal¹⁴ resulting from the combination of the bodies of several different species¹⁵ where the Seth animal is represented in company with an animal with a snake's head and with another with a falcon's head and wings from the M.K¹⁶ Fig.5, there are indications that the Egyptians themselves regarded the Seth-animal as a fabulous animal.

This does not mean that they did not believe in its reality where The Seth-animal is shown in hunting scenes in tombs at Beni Hassan¹⁷, from the M.K These scenes depict hunting dogs and various zoologically defined animals of the desert.

Also the hieroglyph of the Seth-animal^a is not possible to link it to any living creature and is not related to any animal which ever belonged to the fauna of Egypt.



4.The Inspiration of Seth's head

What did Egyptians have in mind when they designed Seth's head?

¹¹ Jensen, A.S, *The Sacred Animal of the God Set*, Det kgl Danske Videnskabernes Selskab. Biologisk Meddelelser XI,5, Copenhagen, 1934,p.7ff.

¹²Borchardt, L., *Das Sethtier mit dem Pfiel*, ZÄS46.1909, p. 91.

¹³Te Velde, J., *Seth God of Confusion*, p. 16.

¹⁴ Newberry, P. E., *The pig and the cult animal of Set*, JEA 14, 19822,p.33; Lepsius, K., R., *Deukmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien IV*,Berlin 1849,778; Borchardt, L., *Das Sethtier mit dem Pfiel*,9; Brugsch, H., *Religion und Mythologie der alten Äegypter*, Leipzig.1890,pp. 703,786.

¹⁵ It seems unlikely the only major the soul-devouring monster.

Quiske, S., *Exploring religion in Ancient Egypt*, Chichester. 2015, p. 130.

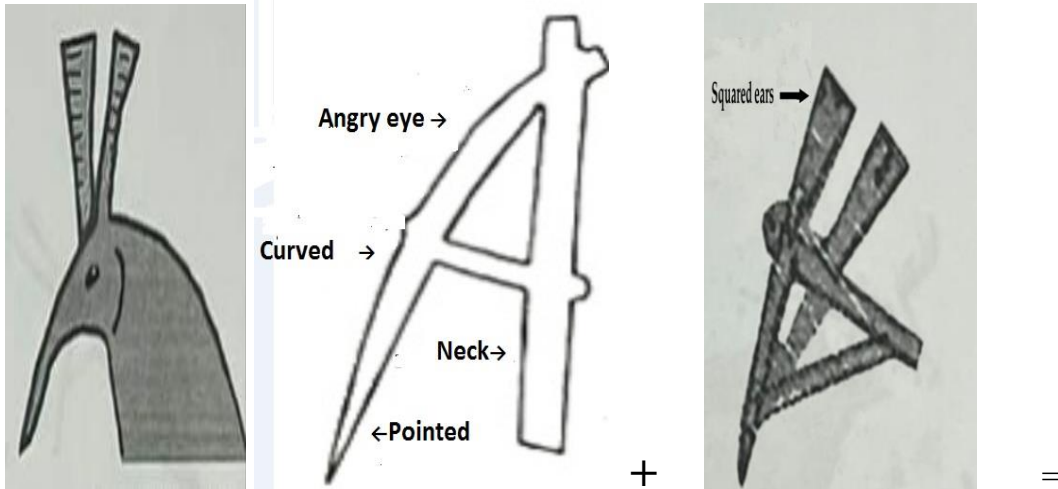
¹⁶Kamal, S. and Kilany, E., *Fantastic Animals Scenes at Beni Hassan*, Journal of Arab Universities for Tourism and Houspitality, Vol.8, 2011,.3.

¹⁷Newberry, P. E., *The pig and the cult animal of Set*, pl.4,13.

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My hypothesis regarding Seth's head is that it may have been inspired by the plow and the hoe used in agriculture, the similarity is not only in the morphology of the head of Seth and the outlines of the hoe and plow, but also the function.

The hoe and plow hack and cut the earth! Do they resemble Seth Fig.6.



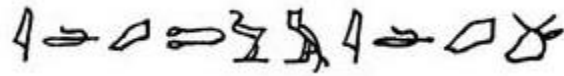
Hoe + Plow = Seth's head



this depiction of a plow resembles this Seth glyph from the same time O.K. (from <https://www.google.com/search?sxsrf=ALiCzsZJUarq1-dLQKSDOv3KuqLOsH3Bpw:1663096183338&source=univ&tbn=isch&q>)

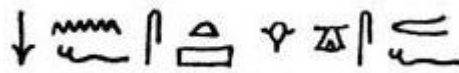
Seth/plow killed Osiris /soil

The Egyptian religious texts do not contain details and coherent narrative on the murder of Osiris by Seth, but it came abridgement sometimes direct and sometimes indirect; direct texts,¹⁸



id .tw id k3

Hours said to Osiris **"I killed for you who killed you"**
indirect texts,¹⁹



sn .f st hr gs.f

" ----- when his brother Seth threw him on his side²⁰--"

What significance did a plow have for Osiris/soil?

The origin of this interpretation came from the myth of Osiris where Seth killed his older brother twice; the first instance, where the flood (Seth) drowns soil (Osiris)²¹ , throughout Osiris symbolized the fertile land²² which was covered with the inundation flood ²³for 4 months of every year throughout Seth symbolized the inundation destructive and killing power which killed Osiris.

some of the texts of the pyramids confirmed this idea such²⁴



hw .s .tw m 3b n c n St

sacrifices protect Osiris from the flood of Seth's hand

¹⁸ Pyr II(1544 a,b,c,d);II(1339a);II(1337b).

¹⁹ Pyr II(1258c);II(1509a,b);II(972b).

²⁰ There are expressions that give the meaning of murder,such as threw on his side *rdi Hr gs* Faulkner,R.O.,*A Concise Dictionary Of Middle Egyptian*,Oxford,1964, p.291.

²¹Luker, M., *The Deities and Symbols of Ancient Egypt*, New York, 1980, 93.

²²Pinch, G., *Egyptian Myth*, Oxford ,2004,58.

²³Meader, J. & Demeter, B., *Ancient Egyptian Symbols*, Caleifornia,2016, 86.

²⁴ PyrI(20d).

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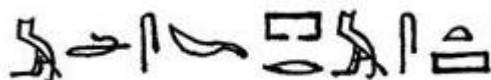
this meaning in another paragraph²⁵ that the flood was associated sometimes with evil act of Seth with his brother.

The flood here is the destructive flood that drowns the earth and destroys the crops, unlike the flood of goodness that revives the earth, and from here comes the duality of the flood.

After the flood receded, Osiris death and resurrection- were celebrated with a 10-days plowing and planting ceremony called the Osirian festival of Khoiak²⁶.

Osiris's death here does not seem natural to the Nile god, but it is a disorderly death caused by Set, which is manifested in storms and rains.

The second instance, was where Osiris was killed again by cutting²⁷, the tool's cut is a knife²⁸ (plow and hoe).



mds pri m St

" sharp knife that came from Seth"

It was also referred to revenge Hours that he was slaughter who slaughtered his father²⁹.

his organs which symbolized plowing the soil, so Osiris was called in the book of the dead³⁰ *tštš*" **he was cutting** " ³¹

It remains logical if we know that Osiris complained Seth to the gods because he attacks him and attacks the earth as well³².



ik(w) n.f w(i) hpr rn.f pw n ik-w-t3

He is the one who attacked me when he came into existence in his name This is the attacker of the earth.

²⁵ PyrII(1944a); Mercer,S.A.,*The Pyramid Texts*, Worcester Massachusetts,1952,p.413.

²⁶The Osiris festival of Khoiak came at the beginning of Peret and began with plowing and sowing ceremony which symbolic corresponded to the death:

Meader.J.&Demeter, *Ancient Egyptian Symbols*,87.

²⁷Assmann, J., *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, USA, 2005,68.

²⁸ PyrII(1999c).

²⁹PyrII(1977b).

³⁰ Allen, J. P., *Book of the Dead or Going by Day*,Chicago,1974,p. 5 .

³¹Wb IV,p.330.

³² PyrII(959a,b);Mercer,S.A.,*The Pyramid Texts* ,p.236.

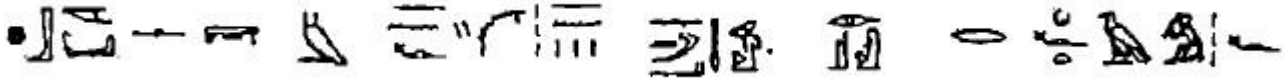
The Egyptian the considered the death of Osiris in the myth as important part of natural agricultural environment system³³ that in the pyramids texts³⁴Osiris the god of black land requests not to hoe the land!!



dd-mdw hbs-t3 hbs-t3 m nn hbs-t3 s3w .tw [h3.....]

" O who plowing the earth do not plowing the earth be care of the [fullnen]³⁵ "

And the reason comes from the texts of the book of the dead(BD18)³⁶, -to removes the exclamation- which is that the night of the earth's hoeing is the night of Osiris's enemies getting from him.



hbs t3 m snfw .sn sm^c-hrw Wsir r hftyw.f

hacking up the earth with their blood and vindicating Osiris against his enemies.

It seems obvious that a plow killed a soil, but it also revived him to life (crops), then Osiris's death was not the bad thing because belief of the resurrection are based on a rule that " out of death life arises", it refers to this in the pyramid texts ³⁷ that Osiris urges to get up and remove the mud and shake the dirt.

Evidence supports that Explanation:

³³to more see: Jensen,A.E.,*Das religiose welibild einer frühen kultur*,Stuttgart,1948.

³⁴Pyr I(693a,b).

³⁵The word is incomplete in the text and the closest word to it is xFA meaning abundance or fullness

Budge,W., *Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary*,Vol.I, London,1920,p.545. according to the missing space

³⁶Allen, J. P., *Book of the Dead*,p.33;BD 18(8).

³⁷PyrI(747b).

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1. The researcher believes that this interpretation is supported by Opening of The Mouth Ceremony that in the funerary texts, the deceased's mouth is said to be cut open as a symbolic way of reviving him "The mouth of the earth is split open"³⁸and "New seed sprouted from the corpse of Osiris, as many scenes show"³⁹.
2. According to the new interpretation, we find Seth's long curved snout has a certain history, where Seth was forced to bow down deeply before Osiris, he hit his nose so hard with the earth that his nose bleeder, Re buried the blood resulting to symbolize the hacking the earth⁴⁰.

Osiris/earth +Seth's nose/ plow = hacking

3. The rite of hoeing the ground could specifically allude to the death of god Osiris, who was symbolically buried each year in the form of the planted grain⁴¹ Fig.7.
4. The agricultural cycle dominated the Egyptians' life so that Egypt was known *ḥbs t3* "The Land of the hoe"⁴².
5. The change of shape of Seth-animal's head synchronized with appearance of the role of Osiris in the myth in O.K.
6. The Egyptian saw their territory as being into the fertile "Black Land" associated with Osiris and the deserts "Red Land" associated with Seth, after the inundation had brought water and mud it was possible to grow different kinds of crops in the flood plain⁴³.

³⁸PyrII(1345a).

³⁹ Lurker, M., *The Deities and Symbols of Ancient Egypt*,13.

⁴⁰Te Velde, J., *Seth God of Confusion*,17 footnote 6.

⁴¹Wilkinson, R. H., *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art*, London, 1994,1:191

⁴²Allen, J. P., *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Atlanta social of Biblical Literature, 2005,pp.33;BD18(8).

⁴³Pinch, G., *Egyptian Myth*,2004, Oxford,58,59.

5.Conclusion

The Egyptian lived in very close contact with nature and they found in the recurring events of the farmer's year another perspectives other than the agriculture itself and linked between the seed and harvest seasons, and the famous myth of Osiris and Seth.

The ancient Egyptians knew their ability to imagine, but it was not a mythical imagination, but rather an imagination related to the surrounding environment.

The elements of the ancient Egyptian religion; gods, beliefs, and myths, were only inspired by nature, Osirain mythology is partially based on farming, which made the shape of the animal Seth different in the Old Kingdom than before, synchronizing with appearance of Osiris in mythology as the fertility of earth⁴⁴, Seth-animal type was un clear form affiliation compared with the rest of the deities that represented clear features, he was nothing but a representation of the tools used to equipment for agriculture.

So Seth- head not only resembled the plow and the hoe in shape only but in the function also "Seth/plow killed Osiris /soil".

Therefore, the old belief of Seth as an absolutely evil god should change for he is a mixture of negativity and positivity⁴⁵, as stated in the religious texts, It represents evil as well as it represents the influential force hence his title in the pyramids texts⁴⁶ is "great power" so Seth must be seen that its appearance is evil, but its interior is good and, he is the line between death and life.

⁴⁴Bleiberg, E, *Arts & Humanities, through the Erase: Ancient Egypt*, Thomson Gate, USA, 2005,,217.

⁴⁵His followers did not see him as Osirian legend did with all its negative connotations but showed his beneficial original nature by names they chose for themselves such as "Seth is kind" "Seth is content" "Seth causes to live"

Redford. D., (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Vol.3, Oxford, 2001,,270.

⁴⁶PyrII (1145b,c).

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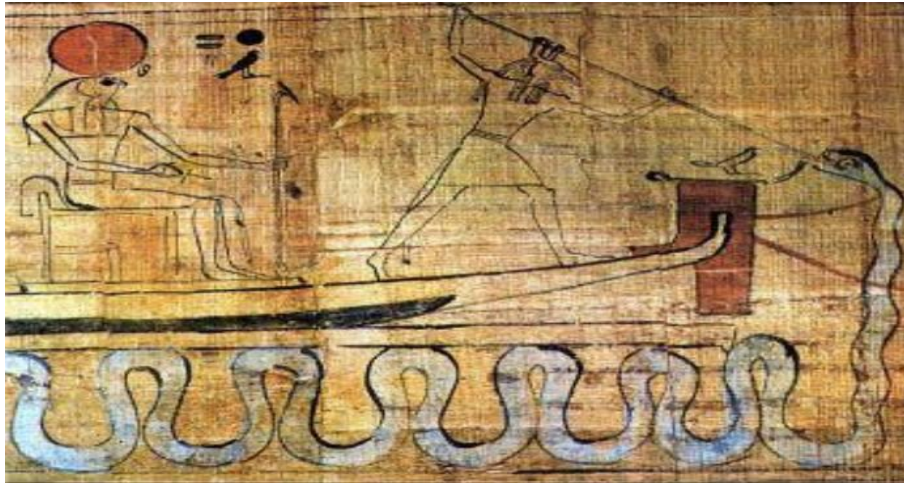
Websites

[//www.google.com/search?sxsrf=ALiCzsZJUarq1-](https://www.google.com/search?sxsrf=ALiCzsZJUarq1-dLQKSDOv3KuqLOsH3Bpw:1663096183338&source=univ&tbm=isch&q)

[dLQKSDOv3KuqLOsH3Bpw:1663096183338&source=univ&tbm=isch&q\).](https://www.google.com/search?sxsrf=ALiCzsZJUarq1-dLQKSDOv3KuqLOsH3Bpw:1663096183338&source=univ&tbm=isch&q)

file:///C:/Users/smc/Downloads/Tarikh-Masr-Egyptian-History_03-Al-3asr-Al-Zahaby0qw6747g-dehf.html).

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[Figure1] Seth defeating Apophis

Schweizer, *The Sun Gods Journey through the Netherworld* ,142.

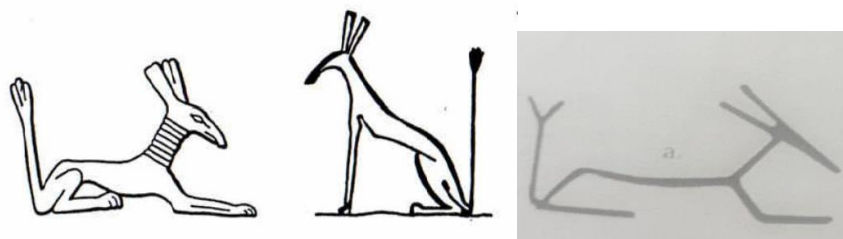


[Figure2] A: comb from Nagada with horned antelope (Nagada I), B :Ivory from El Mahasna (Nagada I), C. comb from El Mahasna (Nagada I):

Te Velde, *Seth God of Confusi*,8,pl.1.



[Figure3] Seth-as-man and Seth –animal are apart of Peribsens official seal:
Meader. & Demeter, *Ancient Egyptian Symbols*, 89.

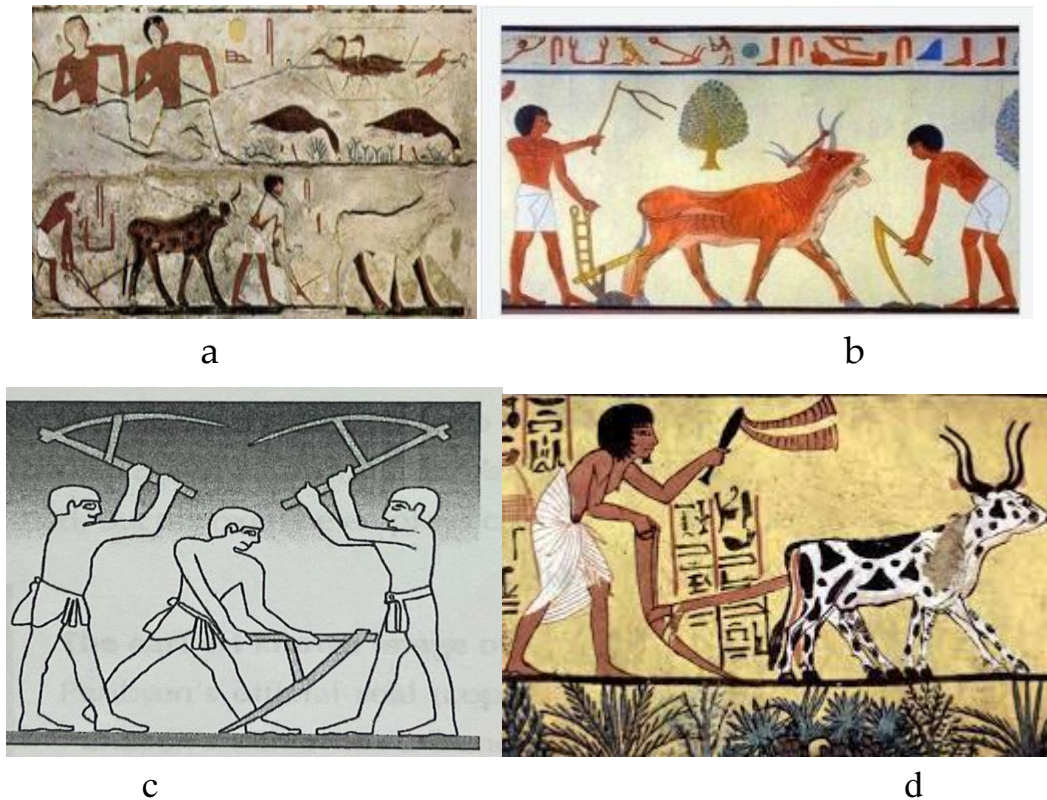


[Figure4]Seth-animal from O.K and M.K:
Te Velde, *Seth God of Confusi*,16,pl.6.



[Figure5]Animal from beni Hasan:
Newberry, *Beni Hasan II* pl.4,13.

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[Figure6] a,b,c,d) The hoe and plow in ancient Egypt

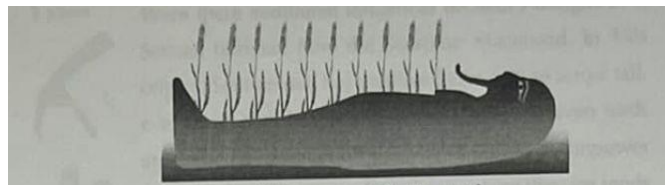
a ,c:

<https://www.google.com/search?sxsrf=ALiCzsZJUarq1-dLQKSDOv3KuqLOsH3Bpw:1663096183338&source=univ&tbn=isch&q>

b:

///C:/Users/smc/Downloads/Tarikh-Masr-Egyptian-History__03-Al-3asr-Al-Zahaby0qw6747g-dehf.html)

d:**Meader.&Demeter**, *Ancient Egyptian Symbols*,88.



[Figure7]Osiris represents fertile earth:

Meader&Demeter , *Ancient Egyptian Symbols*