

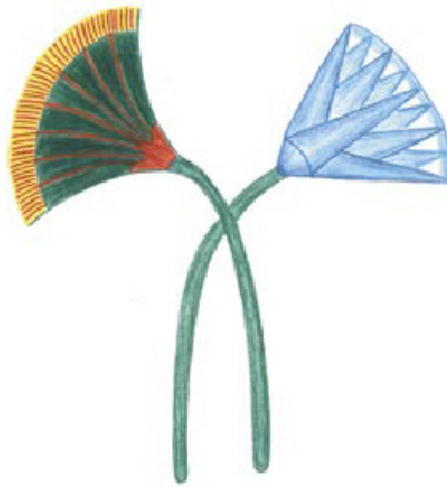
The Lotus in Ancient Egypt and the Bible

Joseph L. Thimes

In the era of Rameses II (about 1250 BC), the sacred plants of Egypt were the lotus and papyrus. This article will explain how the lotus influenced the lives of people in ancient Egypt and how it was used in the Bible.

Today's Taxonomy

According to today's plant taxonomy, the two sacred lotuses of the Rameses II era (about 1250 BC) were in fact water lilies. The **BLUE** lotus of ancient Egypt so often depicted in art is our *Nymphaea caerulea*. For the *Nymphaea caerulea*, the blossom usually ranges from 4 to 8 in across with a 6-in flower being typical. The **WHITE** lotus of ancient Egypt so often used at their sumptuous banquets is our *Nymphaea lotus*. For the *Nymphaea lotus*, the blossom often ranges between 7 and 12 in in diameter with a 9-in flower being usual.



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Typical ancient Egyptian representations of papyrus (left) and lotus (right) plants. Both papyrus and lotus were considered sacred by the ancient Egyptians and were Lotus in Ancient Egypt commonly depicted in their art. The lotus represented upper (southern) Egypt while the papyrus plant represented lower (northern) Egypt.



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Egyptian pink lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) of the Ptolemaic era (left) and the almost identical American yellow lotus (*Nelumbo lutea*) (right).

The true **PINK** lotus, *Nelumbo nucifera*, was **NOT** a sacred plant of ancient Egypt. The Persians probably introduced it into Egypt in about 500 BC. For the *Nelumbo nucifera*, the blossoms commonly are about 12 in in diameter; the pads (leaves) can measure almost 3 ft across. This pink lotus was portrayed often in Ptolemaic art of Egypt (ca. 300–30 BC).

Lotus in Ancient Egypt

The lotus that played a significant role in the everyday lives of the people was a symbol for southern (or upper) Egypt. In ancient Egyptian, the term for lotus was *seshen*. From very early times, the lotus was known in ancient Egypt. The earliest lotus depiction I personally viewed was a cut relief in a stone wall from the tomb chapel of Kapura, the overseer of the treasury (ca. 2400 BC), portraying several men carrying lotus blossoms and buds.

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Blue lotus blossoms (*Nymphaea caerulea*).

In ancient Egyptian religion, the lotus symbolized both eternity and resurrection, and served in rituals for the deceased. Lotus-tinted waters were ...

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