

The Power of Cats

Keep reading to learn more about the relationship of ancient Egyptians with their cats.

¹ Why do people keep cats as pets? Cat owners know that cats make excellent companions. They are playful, intelligent, loving animals. Cats let their owners know they are happy by rewarding them with a loud, rumbling purr or a lick on the arm. They also have the ability to be alone for several days at a time. All these aspects of cat ownership make it easy to see why millions of people today choose to share their homes with cats.

² The ancient Egyptians, who began keeping cats as pets more than 4,000 years ago, probably appreciated the same things about cats that we do today. But the reason they first formed relationships with cats was because the wild cats were keeping animals like mice and rats away from their supplies of grain. They probably began leaving food for the wild cats to encourage them to stay nearby and control the number of rodents. Once this happened, the cats became accustomed to living among people. It's likely that they were brought into homes, tamed, and bred by the Egyptians.

³ There is also evidence that the ancient Egyptians brought cats with them on hunting trips. They would have trained the cats the way that other civilizations have used dogs—to retrieve animals, like fish or birds, for their owners.

⁴ Archaeologists have been able to learn much about cats in ancient Egypt because of clues that have been found in the tombs of Egyptians and in Egyptian artwork. Pictures that were painted on the insides of tombs often show cats as part of everyday life in Egypt. Archaeologists have even found thousands of mummified cats. In Egyptian culture, this means that cats were highly respected. Some mummified cats have even been found with mice, rats, and saucers of milk buried in their tombs!

⁵ There have also been many statues and other sculptures found depicting cats. In fact, one of the Egyptian goddesses, known as *Bast* or *Bastet*, is often shown to have the body of a woman and the head of a cat. She was one of the best-loved goddesses in ancient Egypt, and she was thought to be the protector of women, children, and cats.

⁶ The next time you pet a cat on the head or scratch it under the chin, remember the history of cats in ancient Egypt. And if a cat expects you to treat it a bit like royalty, maybe now you'll understand why!



Write **F** before the sentences that are facts. Write **O** before the sentences that are opinions.

1. ____ Cats are excellent companions.
2. ____ Ancient Egyptians appreciated that cats kept the number of rodents under control.
3. ____ The artwork on the inside of Egyptian tombs is beautiful.
4. ____ Archaeologists have found mummified cats in Egyptian tombs.
5. ____ The Egyptian goddess Bast is often shown to have the body of a woman and the head of a cat.

6. Why did the ancient Egyptians first form relationships with cats?

7. How have archaeologists learned so much about cats and the ancient Egyptians?

8. How do you think the author feels about cats? Use specific examples from the text to support your answer.

9. The ancient Egyptians began keeping cats as pets more than _____ years ago.