

# The Role of Cats in Ancient Egypt



twinkl

# Cats in Ancient Egypt

Cats were considered to be very important creatures in ancient Egypt. They were believed to be magical; ancient Egyptians would often wear cat-shaped **amulets** to protect them from evil.

They were treated like royalty, dressed in jewels and given treats.

Cats helped to get rid of snakes and rats and gradually became household pets seen as divine that brought good luck to their owners.

## Did You Know...?

It is believed that anyone who killed a cat, even by accident, was sentenced to death.



# Bastet the Cat Goddess

The ancient Egyptians believed that gods and goddesses could turn themselves into animals.

Bastet was the daughter of Ra, the sun god. She was the only god or goddess with the ability to transform herself into a cat.

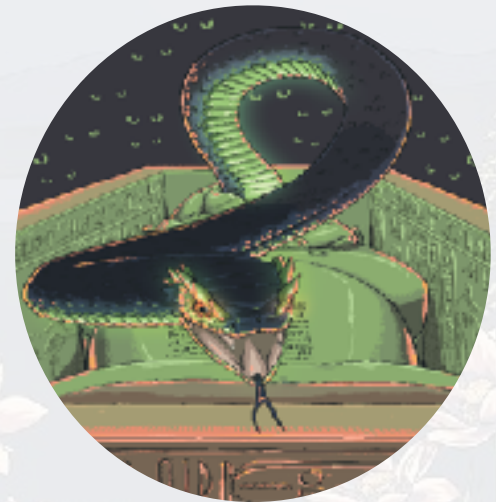
Bastet, or Bast, began as a fierce lion but later changed to a cat goddess. In many pictures and statues, she holds a **sistrum** and wears a necklace in the shape of the Eye of Ra.



# Bastet the Cat Goddess

She was thought to be the goddess of mothers, children and protection against diseases. She also helped to protect her father, Ra, against the snake god, Apep.

Ancient Egyptians believed that she was a good mother and images of her often show her surrounded by kittens.



# Bubastis, the City of Cats

The ancient Egyptian city of Bubastis was a city associated with the cat god Bastet. Bubastis, or Per-Bast, is located near the modern-day city of Zagazig, which is north of Cairo, Egypt's capital city.

During ancient Egyptian times, there was a festival each year to celebrate the cat goddess. People from all over the country would visit the temple of Bastet, built in her honour, and leave small cat statues as offerings to the goddess. Torches would be lit and people would dance, sing and offer **sacrifices**.

The remains of the temple of Bastet can still be seen today. A hoard of treasures was discovered in 1906, buried near the temple, including a golden cup and gold armlets.



# Mummifying Cats

Just like people, some cats were also **mummified** in ancient Egypt. They were sometimes used as offerings at the temple of Bastet and were also buried with their owners. The ancient Egyptians believed that this would mean they would be reunited in the **afterlife**.

When a person or animal was mummified, the body was coated in various oils and wrapped in bandages to preserve it.

In 2019, dozens of mummified animals, including cats, lions, cobras and crocodiles, were discovered in Saqqara, Egypt. It is thought that they were either worshipped or used as offerings to the gods.

## Did You Know...?

When they died, the cat's owners sometimes shaved off their own eyebrows and would **mourn** their pet until their eyebrows grew back.



# Glossary

- afterlife** – Life after death. Ancient Egyptians believed that, after a person died, their soul could pass through the **underworld** and enter a paradise known as The Field of Reeds, where they would live forever.
- amulet** – An object, often a small piece of jewellery in the shape of an animal or a god, used to protect the wearer against evil and danger.
- mourn** – Feeling sad over the death of a person or animal.
- mummification** – A technique used to preserve a body so that it could enter the **afterlife**.
- sacrifice** – An offering made to a god.
- sistrum** – A musical instrument which was believed to have magical properties. It had small rings or loops which rattled when it was shaken. .



twinkl