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Special Discussion #1

During the extended period of 3100 BC to 332 BC, ancient Egyptian civilization prospered. They were able to start a civilization and empire during these times through the use of tools and advancements in science and mathematics. Another aspect that assisted the Empire in its prosper was their view and use of domesticated cats. Their view of cats and the idea of domesticating them is what led modern society to having cats as the last domesticated animal in the Western world.

Ancient Egyptians had a polytheistic religious system, or the belief of multiple gods. Cats during the ancient Egypt were viewed as demigods. On ancient Egyptian tombs and walls were pictures of cats. A goddess that was depicted as a Cat was the goddess Bastet. Bastet was a goddess of protection and fertility. Bastet was known as a protector of diseases and for healthy fertilities. Bastet was seen as this way because of the viewpoints, the Egyptians had on cats. Cats warded off rodents and pests from bringing diseases and from destroying crops; as well as cats were known to reproduce in large quantities. This observation would be the reason for their prosperous economy.

Egyptians main food supply came from crops. Despite the hot desert land, the flood from the Nile River made the most fertile areas to grow crops. They grew crops like wheat to make bread and barley to make beer. They ate this along with wine from grapes and fish from the river. However, the ancient Egyptians were only able to grow these crops between the months of June and September as that was the time of the flood. Besides from these times, they would have to survive from trading, or the fish from the river. Because of this small opening to grow crops, they relied on the growth of the crops for survival and trade. The Egyptians traded their crops for supplies like various metals and woods. The only resource that the Egyptians could trade with was their crops, like wheat and barley. Before there were pesticides to repel off pests from destroying crops, ancient Egyptians used cats to do so. The felines’ diet consisted of eating rodents, which led to protection of the crops. The cats were a natural pesticide to keep pests from destroying large farms. Without these cats, the small opening they used to grow crops would be all for nothing if destroyed by pests. In essence, they relied on the cats to maintain their survival and their economy.

Cats were seen as a different class than humans. In the same aspect as how society treats the upper class with more care and attention, the cats were seen as the same. The cats were treated with the utmost respect. In ancient Greece and Rome, the artists would make sculptures and drawings of their gods with human structures. In ancient Egypt, artists had paintings and sculptures of cats. In addition, cats were also invited into households, where they were fed and treated to the utmost priority. This would affect the social life of Egyptians, as their lives revolved around these felines.

The harming of a cat was punishable by the death penalty because the cats were seen as entities close to gods. Their entire lives were revolved around their religious views of worshipping their gods. Gods were treated with the utmost respect and importance, and to hurt a being close to that level would be punished to the highest degree. The Egyptians showed grief of the death of a cat by mummifying the cats with various jewels and displaying them at shrines across Egypt. In addition, if a cat died within someone’s household, the entire household would have to shave their eyebrows as a sign of deep mourning. The daughters of many of the household would be named after cats, such as “Mit” or “Muit”.

Bastet, the goddess of protection and fertility, was a religious entity that was founded through the ideas of cats. The Egyptians were using zoomorphism to give animal attributes to a different entity like a god or human. They used the cat-like attributes of protection and fertility to relate to a god or goddess. This is different from anthropomorphism, the idea of giving human attributes to different entities like gods or animals. Through zoomorphism, the Egyptians portrayed the goddess Bastet with cat-like attributes, but this is not to say, all cats were gods. The Egyptians worshipped this god with cat-like attributes but did not worship all cats.

All in all, cats were revered as important beings in ancient Egyptian culture. They were a huge part in the prosperity of the Egyptian economy, as well as a huge center piece in their religious beliefs and lifestyles. They played roles in all aspects of Egyptian life, including economically, socially, and religiously. The cats were such helpful animals in Egyptian life, that they made a god represented as a cat.

References

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