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# Cats in Ancient Egypt

Cats (Felis silvestris catus), known in Ancient Egypt as the mau, were important in ancient Egyptian society. Beginning as a wild, untamed species, cats were useful for limiting vermin in Egyptian crops and harvests; through exposure, cats became domesticated and learned to coexist with humans. The people in what would later be Upper and Lower Egypt had a religion centering around the worship of animals, including cats.

Praised for controlling vermin and its ability to kill snakes such as cobras, the domesticated cat became a symbol of grace and poise. The goddess Mafdet, the deification of justice and execution, was a lion-headed goddess. The cat goddess Bast (also known as Bastet) eventually replaced the cult of Mafdet, and Bast's image softened over time and she became the deity representing protection, fertility, and motherhood.

As a revered animal and one important to Egyptian society and religion, some cats received the same mummification after death as humans. Mummified cats were given in offering to Bast. In 1888, an Egyptian farmer uncovered a large tomb with mummified cats and kittens. This discovery outside the town of Beni Hasan had eighty thousand cat mummies, dating to 1000-2000 BCE.