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**Ancient Egyptian animals**

**By Dr. Sherin Elkhawaga**

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The ancient Egyptians were very fond of animals. They had animals that were sacred, some were pets and other were used in farming.

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Sacred Animals.

Animals were thought to be sacred to the Egyptians because they believed that when one of their gods or goddesses came down to earth, they would represent themselves as a specific species. The Egyptians thought by honoring them, they would be pleasing the god. They also thought that animals shared an afterlife with their humans so it resulted in animals being buried within its family tomb.

The animals that were considered especially sacred:

- cat- The male cat had religious connections with Ra. Kittens were specifically reared for sacrificial/worship uses .
- cattle- Beef was often used as a sacrificial offering to various deities.
- scarab beetle- The emblem of a specific goddess, the scarab beetle was associated with the daily birth of the sun, and credited with spontaneous generation of its young. Because of its sacred status, it was widely represented in art.
- Jackel- it was considered a protector of royal tombs from robbers and helped in the afterlife journey.

Cats and Kittens.

One of the most common animal mummies in Egypt was the cat. Cats were believed to represent the goddess Bastet. Consequently, they were raised in and around temples devoted to Bastet. When they died, they were mummified and buried in huge cemeteries, often in large communal graves.

From about 332 B.C. to 30 B.C., animals began to be raised for the specific purpose of being turned into mummies. The mummies were sold to people on their way to worship a god and left at the temple as offerings. Scientists have uncovered a gruesome fact: many cats died quite premature and unnatural deaths. Two- to four-month-old kittens seemed to have been sacrificed in huge numbers. So many cat mummies were made that researchers can only guess that there were millions of them.

Bastet: Cats are very useful animals in a country that depends on grain. The cat's hunting instincts were honoured by the Ancient Egyptians, but so was the cat's gentler side as a warm and loving mother to her kittens. Bastet can be shown as a woman with a feline head. There are disagreements

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among zoologists as to when these animals first began to live with humans along the Nile, and about which feline became the Egyptian pet. Cats do not appear as household pets during the Age of the Pyramids, though they were very popular animal companions in later times.

Cattle were thought to be sacred and beef was often used for offerings to the gods or goddesses. A bull represented power, aggression, masculinity, fertility; these could be the attributes of kingship. . The cow's large eyes with long lashes, and her generally quiet demeanor suggested a gentle aspect of feminine beauty. Her gift of milk, which could sustain a human child, became of symbol of love and sustenance.

Hathor: Hathor as the royal goddess. Her name means 'House of Horus.'" Her image could take the form of a cow, a woman with a cow's head, or a woman wearing the horns of a cow. As a motherly cow, she gave the king her divine milk, and protected him as a cow protects her calf. She was the goddess of love, music, singing, and dance. She was one of the most important deities in the Age of

the Pyramids, and her popularity continued to the end of Egyptian civilization. In the early economy of Egypt, cows were wealth. A herd of cattle was a beautiful sight because it represented wealth in the form of food, milk, hides, and work, as oxen pulled the ploughs of farmers. Cattle dung was a valuable fertilizer and had many uses in building. The Egyptians admired many qualities in cows, besides their economic benefits. The cow's careful tending of her calf was a model for motherhood. In a time when many women died in childbirth, the ability of cow's milk to sustain a human baby was deeply appreciated. Cows, like people, love music and will happily listen to a human singing, thus it made sense for Hathor to be goddess of music. The big, gentle brown eyes of cows set a standard for beauty.

### The Hawk

A hawk, who soars high above the world of humans, seeming to expend no energy in his long hours aloft, and who – far seeing, –can swoop in an instant to capture his prey in sharp talons, became a symbol of kingship.

Anty: Anty was a hawk god of Upper Egypt. He is shown as a hawk sitting on a crescent moon, or in a boat. He became associated with other hawk–gods, such as Sokar

Horus: This god is shown as a falcon, or as a man with the head of a falcon. In Egyptian, his name is Her – the distant one. Like the good king who sees everything in his kingdom, the hawk is noted for his sharp vision. The sudden stoop of the hawk, as he leaves the distant sky to attack and capture his prey, is like the quick and decisive action of a king in defense of his country. Horus is one of the oldest gods of the Egyptians. In the days when powerful leaders were fighting to make one nation out of smaller settlements, the early rulers were called Followers of Horus. On the Narmer palette, the King is shown with a falcon whose one human arm holds a rope that passes through the nose of a defeated rival. The earliest way of distinguishing the name of a king from the names of others was the serekh, which was a rectangle representing the palace of the king, with a hawk on the top. Originally, there were at least two gods called Horus. One is the fifth child of Nut and Geb, Horus the Elder, and the other is the son of Isis and Osiris. Over time, their stories and attributes came together. An old story tells of how Osiris, king of Egypt, was murdered by his brother, Seth. Seth was very strong and powerful. He took over the country, and ruled well. Isis, the wife of Osiris, hid the child she had born, and raised him in secret. When Horus grew up, he claimed his father's throne. Seth and Horus struggled for the kingship, but in the end Horus' claim, as son of the previous king, was recognized by a court of all the gods, and Horus became king. In Ancient Egypt, each king was Horus. When a king died, Egyptians said that the falcon had flown to Heaven and united with the Sun Disk. The next king

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then became Horus. Like the Hawk, the king was a fighter, a warrior. This is why Horus, when shown as a hawk-headed man, wears an armored breast-plate.

**Anubis:** This jackal-headed god looked after the dead, and was in charge of the important task of mummification. Anubis can appear as either a black canine with long sharp ears, or as a man with a canine head. The black colour of Anubis is not natural to jackals or to the wild dogs of Egypt; it may refer to the discoloration of a body after death and during mummification. The black colour also refers to the rich dark soil of Egypt, from which new growth came every year; in similar manner, the dead would come to new life after burial. Dogs, as animal companions, were present in Egypt from the very beginning. Sometimes dogs were buried with their masters. It may have given the Egyptians comfort to think of such an animal as guarding the cemeteries, protecting the dead.

There are other minor animals that were held sacred by the Egyptians so because they were beneficial others because they were considered evil. Examples of these animals are:–

The mongoose was respected because of its skill and power of robbing nests and eating snakes.

The snakes were thought to be evil. Because the snake's poisonous bite, it killed many people.

The crocodile was known for its silent attacks on people near the Nile water.

The hippopotamus was considered evil and very dangerous. They were killed to protect the people. At

night the hippopotamus would trample the fields.

The locusts were considered evil because they would destroy and damage crops.

Frogs and toads were the sign of fertility. The number one hundred thousandths is a sign of a tadpole.

**Heket:** Frog-headed goddess of childbirth. Frogs, who produce vast numbers of tadpoles, were popular as amulets to ensure fertility.

**Babi** is a deity shown in Baboon form, and it's from his name that we get our word for these animals.

Babi is ferocious, even blood-thirsty, unlike the usually calm and reasonable Thoth who also appears as a baboon.

Other animals represented by a god/goddess or sacred were ibises, dogs, rams, baboons, shrews, fishes, gazelles, and lions.

### Farm Animals

Animals were one of the most important things about farming. Animals helped ancient Egyptians with jobs like trampling in the seeds, pulling the plow, eating unwanted grain or wheat and providing them with food and drink. But having these animals may have caused misfortune like if a donkey nibbled on someone else's crops the farmer could threaten to take its owner to court. Also if animals were sick the Egyptians had to do all the work that they did. If animals were not marked they may have been stolen. Some of the farm animals were goats, pigs, ducks, cows, and geese.

Egyptian radiologist, interested in egyptology.

## **A Look Into Egyptian Religion**

**By Kadence Buchanan**

By far, the ancient Egyptian culture represents one of the least understood and most interesting facets of beliefs throughout human history. In this article, we'll give you a basic idea of what modern day man

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knows about what the ancient Egyptians put their faith in.

Our understanding of Egyptian religion is far from complete. Many of the things that we know about their religion seem incomplete; we seem to have found alternate gods they've worshipped that served the same purposes, as well as conflicting stories about what they believed about how the world was formed. While our knowledge is somewhat lacking, we'll focus on what we do know.

Many researchers feel that one of the most basic forms of religious identity that the Egyptians performed was the worship of animals. The tribes of Egypt that existed pre-dynasty often worshipped different animals as gods that represented their feelings of which animal was in most relation to their way of life. Many of these gods were shown in pictures and writings to have an animal head on a human body, with an example being Ophois, the god of war, who had a wolf's head. Some gods were identified with multiple animals, as well, such as Thoth, who was associated with the ibis, the baboon, and the moon. The creationist beliefs of the Egyptians varied from tribe to tribe. Some felt that the god Khnum had built the world on a potter's wheel, while others felt that the existence of the universe was due to the spiritual thought of the god Ptah.

Organized religion found its way into Egypt at around 3200 BC, when Egypt became organized as a state. Many of the gods that the ruling class were in favor of received the most acclaim throughout the land, with the god Amon receiving much more acclaim than he had previously. The Egyptian religious experience was unique in that over time, the ruling class had the power to directly influence which gods received the most praise. As time changed, different gods came into the limelight. Any way you put it, we still don't have a concrete knowledge of the beliefs held by these ancient peoples. Hopefully, time and exploration can help us to clear up many of the difficult questions posed by Egyptian religion.

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