

# The Cat in Egypt

A black cat is perched on a stone ledge in an ancient Egyptian temple. The cat is looking towards the camera with its ears pointed. In the background, there are stone columns and a doorway leading to a darker area. The lighting is warm and focused on the cat and the immediate surroundings.

**Elane Streets**  
**ORICL**  
**February 28, 2017**

Dedicated to  
Wallace Streets  
10-3-2003 to 1-9-2017



The McClung Museum of Natural History and Culture is hosting a travelling exhibition, scheduled from February 3 through April 27, 2017, on

*Divine Felines: Cats of Ancient Egypt*

This exhibit explores the role of cats, lions, and other feline creatures in Egyptian mythology, kingship, and everyday life through nearly thirty different representations of cats from the Brooklyn Museum's world-famous Egyptian collection.

This single session presentation is designed to provide background material for the **ORICL Trip 704 McClung Museum and Mighty Musical Monday**, which will include the exhibit, plus the Magical Musical Monday at the Tennessee Theatre, and lunch, on March 6, 2017.

Instead of discussing the specific items in the exhibition, in order to retain the element of surprise for visitors, we will instead attempt to prepare ORICL members to be able to appreciate the design and flow of the exhibition by exploring the history of the cat in Egypt. Those of you who are either not able to go on the ORICL tour, or who want to attend on their own, are welcome to attend this class.

# Brooklyn Museum's Collection of Ancient Egyptian Art

- One of the largest and finest in the United States, world-renowned
  - Wide variety of material from every period of ancient Egypt's history (~3500 BCE – 500 CE)
  - 50 Egyptian cat artifacts in web search of collection database
  - Exhibition has ~74 objects
- Acquisition began in early 20<sup>th</sup> century
  - Purchases from private collectors
    - ❖ Objects collected by Armand de Potter in the 1880s
    - ❖ Pioneer American Egyptologist Charles Edwin Wilbour (1833–1896)
    - ❖ Purchase of > 2000 Egyptian objects from New York Historical Society (1948)
  - Archaeological excavation
    - ❖ Very early sites in southern Egypt (1906 and 1908)
    - ❖ Supported Britain's Egypt Exploration Society, gained significant material from excavations in Egypt and Nubia
    - ❖ Temple Precinct of the goddess Mut at Karnak (since 1976)



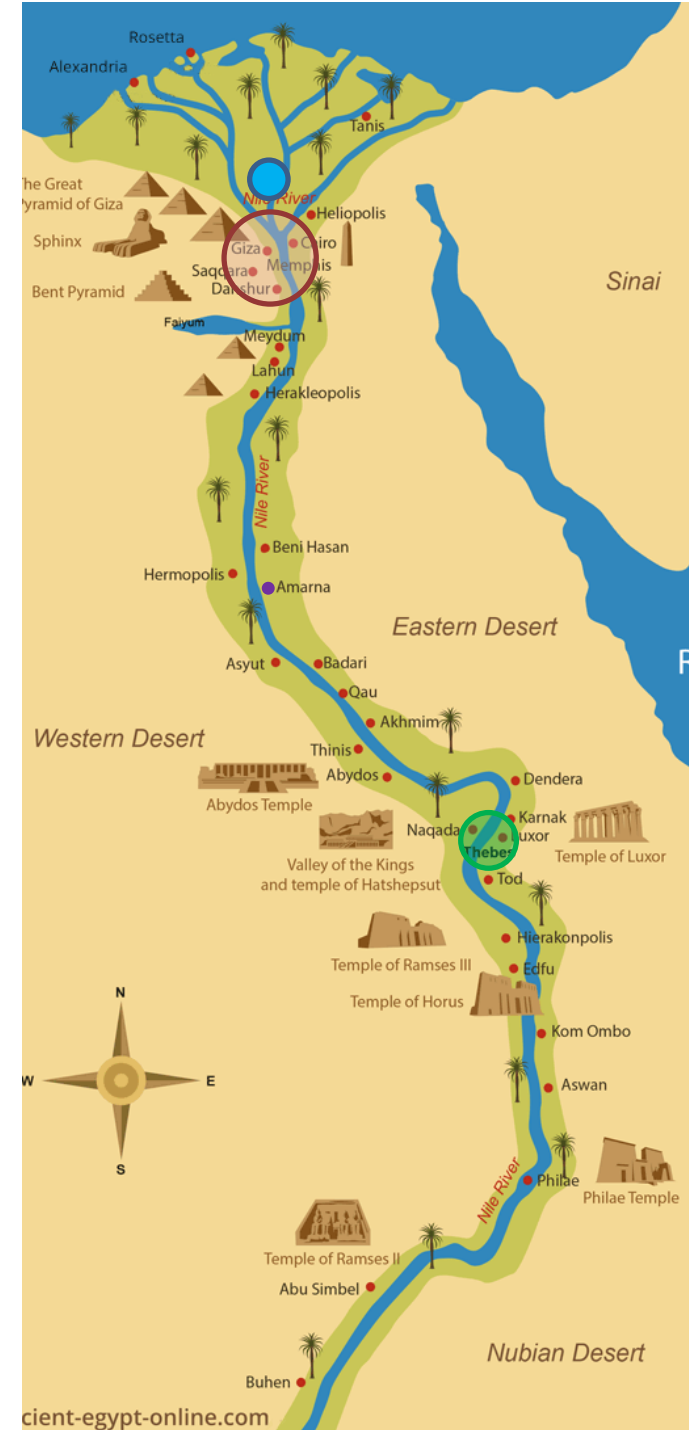
**Goddess Sakhmet**

# Notes on Exhibition Catalogue

- Contradictions within catalogue
  - Cats as pets
  - Did Egyptians worship cats?
- Inventory of artifacts in catalogue
  - Geographical: 63% of artifacts have no location data
    - Poor provenance: Poorly documented early artifacts, particularly from amateurs
      - ❖ de Potter: tourist agent, amateur antiques collector, poseur?
      - ❖ Wilbour: untrained, supported others in 5 excavation seasons, bought artifacts from locals, self-exiled from US because of involvement with Tammany Hall and the Tweed Ring
    - Poor editing or deliberate non-inclusion of data in catalogue
  - Temporal: Time frame of artifacts in catalogue  
2008 BCE-1630 BCE (Middle Kingdom) to 5th Century CE
  - Cat Deities in Exhibition
    - Goddesses: 4 + 10 unidentified out of a possible 13-20 in Egyptian pantheon
    - Gods: 3 out of a possible 6-10 in Egyptian pantheon

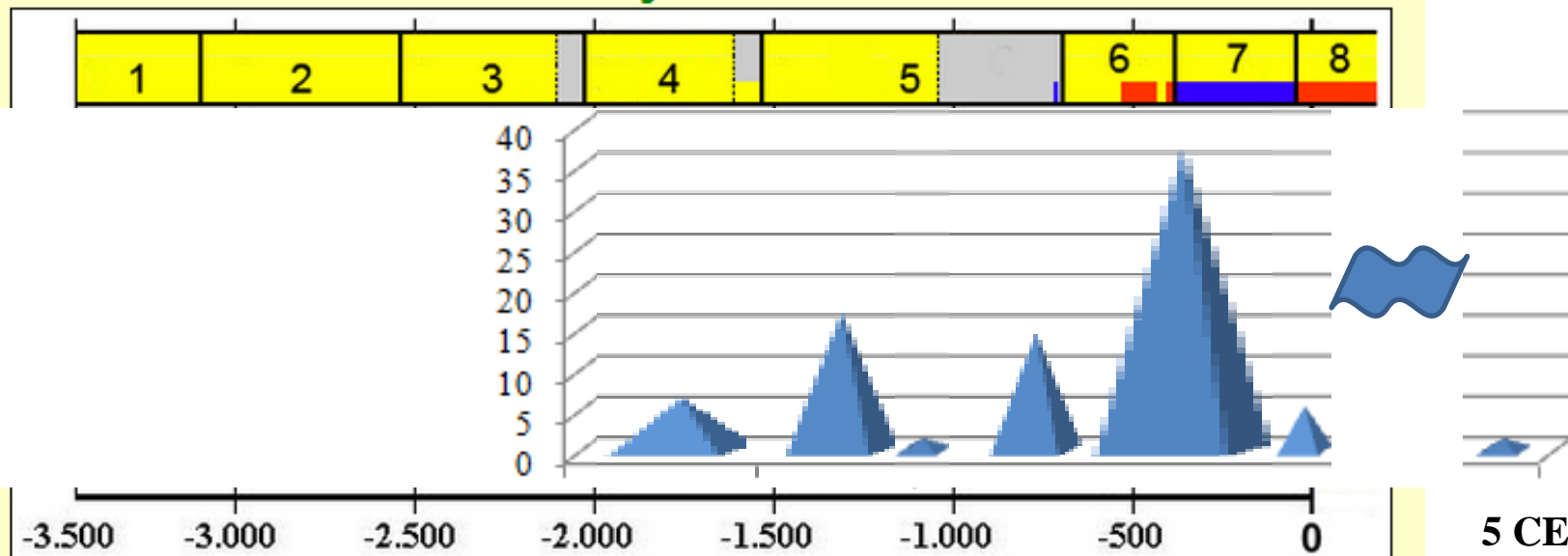
# Geographical Distribution of artifacts with location data

Location	# Artifacts
Antinoe	1
Bubastis	1
Leontopolis	2
Delta	1
Terenouthis	1
Giza	2
Memphis	1
Saqqara	10
Amarna	1
Thebes	6
Karnak	1
Deir-el-Medina	1



# Temporal Distribution of Artifacts

## History Timeline



Egyptian history (yellow bar at top in picture) is divided into 9 major including 3 periods of decline (in gray). This site deals with the first five. The colors blue and red show when, how long and by whom Egypt had foreign rulers. For the oldest times the figures are estimated.

- 0) Neolithic period 6000-3500 BC
- 1) Predynastic period 3500-3100 BC
- 2) Early Dynastic period 3100-2575 BC
- 3) Old Kingdom 2575-2040 BC
- 4) Middle Kingdom 2040-1550 BC
- 5) New Kingdom 1550-712 BC
- 6) Late period 712-332 BC
- 7) Greek period 332-30 BC
- 8) Roman period 30 BC-395 AD

Temporal Distribution of Exhibition	# Artifacts
2008 BCE-1630 BCE (Middle Kingdom)	5
1390-1292 BCE (New Kingdom)	15
1190-1075 BCE (D-20)	1
945-718 BCE (3 IP)	13
664 – 30 BCE (Late Period)	36
>30 BCE (Roman Period)	4
5th Century CE	1

# Critique of Cat Exhibition

- Not comprehensive in coverage of time or geography
- Questionable accuracy of information

So, should I go see this exhibition, with all its warts?

# Critique of Cat Exhibition

- Not comprehensive in coverage of time or geography
- Questionable accuracy of information

So, should I go see this exhibition, with all its warts?



***YES!!***

# Critique of Cat Exhibition

- Not comprehensive in coverage of time or geography
- Questionable accuracy of information

So, should I go see this exhibition, with all its warts?

YES!!



- These statements could be made of every collection of artifacts in the world.
- Even the (relatively) modern excavation of Tutankhamen's tomb has never been fully documented and published, although it was annotated to the standards of the 1920's
- Modern excavation practices are much more stringent than past practices
- New techniques are improving quality of data, even for poorly documented artifacts

# Critique of Cat Exhibition

- Not comprehensive in coverage of time or geography
- Questionable accuracy of information

So, should I go see this exhibition, with all its warts?

YES!!



- These statements could be made of every collection of artifacts in the world.
- Even the (relatively) modern excavation of Tutankhamen's tomb has never been fully documented and published, although it was annotated to the standards of the 1920's
- Modern excavation practices are much more stringent than past practices
- New techniques are improving quality of data, even for poorly documented artifacts



New radiocarbon dating finds that a dress discovered in Egypt in 1913 is at least 5,100 years old.  
(Courtesy Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology)

# British Museum Artifact

Partial Documentation of Artifact

Findspot : Excavated/Findspot: Saqqara (?)

Curator's comments:

Acquisition of figure referred to in Gayer-Anderson's **unpublished autobiography**.

Acquisition date: 1939

Acquisition notes:

“...a gift to the Brit. Mus. from and in memory of Major J.G. Gayer Anderson Bey and Mrs Percy Stout‘.....



## The Gayer-Anderson Cat

*A late period bronze cat in the form of the goddess Bastet. Jewelry is ancient but not necessarily original to this piece.*

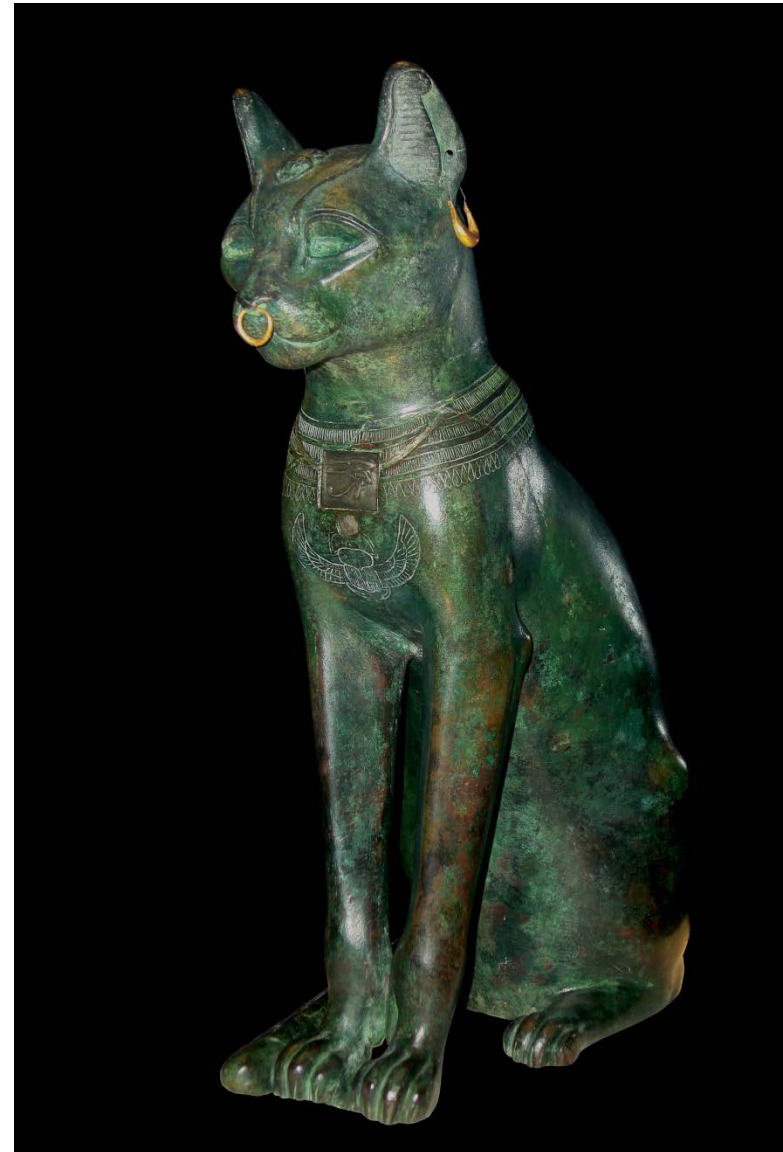
# The Irish Pasha



**RG ‘Pum’ Gayer-Anderson** was an Egyptologist, poet, surgeon, soldier, psychic, noted collector and tomb-robber. As a British Official in Cairo, Pum adopted Arab life and immersed himself in it as colonials seldom did; he saw ghosts and witches, sailed the Nile, wrestled Turks and crocodiles, fought at Gallipoli, smoked opium, performed surgery in the desert, gathered and cared for artifacts and boys in his Cairo home.

# The Gayer-Anderson Cat

- Not as well preserved as it appears
- X-rays reveal cracks almost completely around the centre of the cat's body
- Only an internal system of strengthening prevents the head from falling off.
- These repairs carried out by Major Gayer-Anderson who was a *keen restorer of antiquities* in the 1930s.
- When he bought it, the surface of the cat was "covered with a heavy coating of crystalline verdigris and flakes of red patina" *which he carefully chipped away.*
- The figure was probably tan-colored when made. Its current dark green bronze is a result of polishing in modern times.



# Curating an Exhibition: Art vs. Science

**August 16, 2010**

**Interview of Edward Bleiberg, Brooklyn Museum Curator of Egyptian, Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Art, by Melina Giakoumis**

**Was there a target audience? Did you have to keep in mind your viewers' attention span when putting everything together?**

- Always pay close attention to visitor attention spans, because we know that they are relatively short
- Target audience: everyone from the educated person with an interest in Egypt to the casual visitor or child who may have just stumbled on the Egyptian galleries
- Labels are relatively short, in an attempt to communicate the most important ideas to people who didn't come to read a lot. The objects themselves are very powerful if you allow yourself to be still enough to let them communicate with you.
- Trying to balance everything that we do in the galleries for this mythical typical visitor.

Let the Exhibition Tell its Story

# Cultural Property Wars: Collectors' Perspective

(National Association of Dealers in Ancient, Oriental and Primitive Art, Art Dealers Association of America, Christies, Inc. & other auction houses, as well as private collectors)

- More stringent antiquities restrictions disrupt free enterprise
- *Prevent people with the best ability to care for antiquities from doing so.*

Tokeley-Parry, a British restorer notable for smuggling more than 3000 pieces of Egyptian antiquities out of Egypt by disguising them as reproductions, at his trial:

*"Beautiful objects have always been moving around the world, following the new sources of power and wealth. It seems to me that as long as these objects are where the power is and where the wealth is, they will be cared for."*

***BUT THEY MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE FOR SCHOLARLY OR PUBLIC ACCESS!!***

- Trade is a beneficial cultural exchange.
- *In some cases, however, if an artifact had not been collected and preserved by private means, it would no longer even exist.*
  - 1812, Lord Elgin removed the Elgin Marbles from Greece with permission of the Ottomans, who occupied Greece from the mid-15th century until 1821.
  - The Marbles sustained significant damage during successive wars. An explosion ignited by Venetian gun and cannon-fire in 1687 sent the marble roof crashing to the ground and thus destroyed much of the artwork.
  - Marble pieces that fell were being burned to obtain lime for building.

# Cultural Property Wars: Protectors

(American Institute for Archaeology, the Society for American Archaeology, the Society of Historical Archaeology, the American Anthropological Association, and the United States Committee for the International Council on Monuments and Sites)

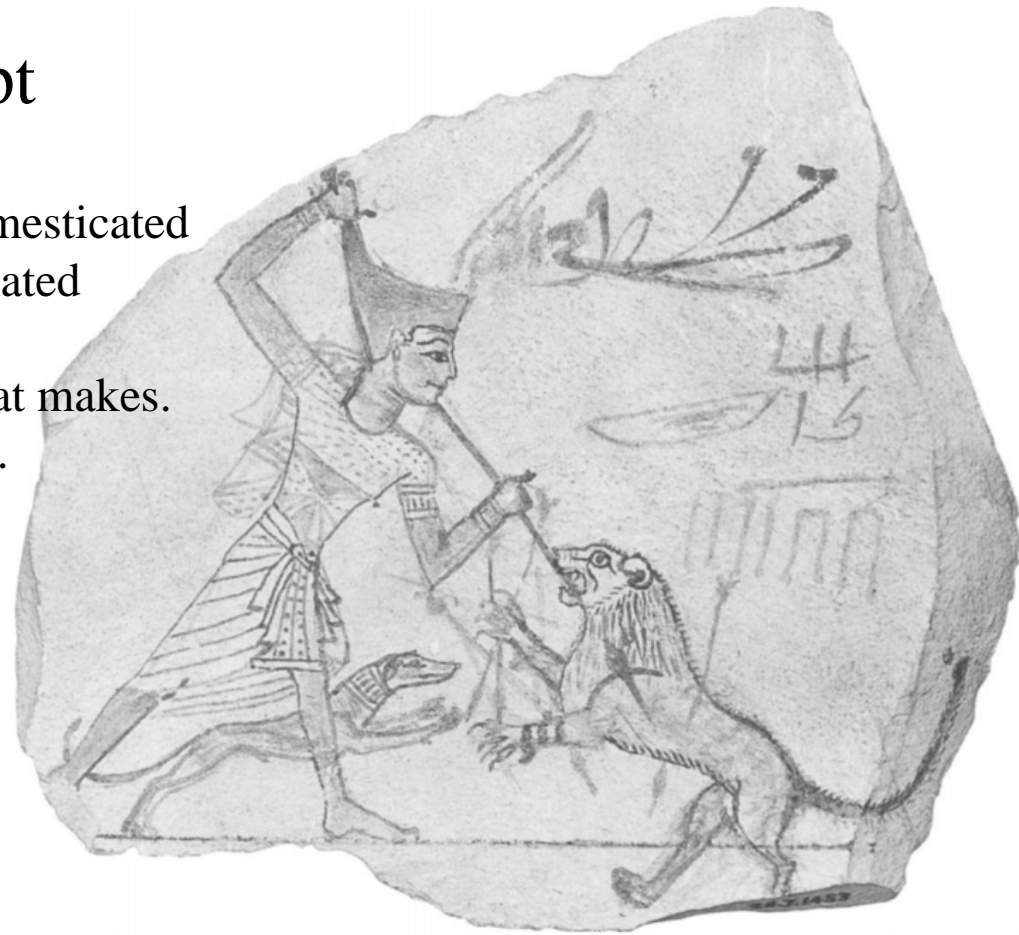
- Less stringent regulation of antiquities trade only further encourages looting. "For many years, concerned archaeologists have indicated how the attitudes of some antiquities dealers in the U.S. and indeed of a number of leading museums have created a climate in which *the traffic in illicit antiquities promotes the looting of archaeological sites worldwide*," says Lord Colin Renfrew, director of the McDonald Institute of Archaeology and the Illicit Antiquities Research Centre at the University of Cambridge.
- *Routine looting destroys the irreplaceable information that could be learned about cultures in situ.* The context of where something is found and in association with what, all of that information, is the primary and almost sole way to learn about many ancient cultures of the world.
- But we speak from our safe, wealthy perspective, but in mostly 3<sup>rd</sup> World countries for some looters, it is their livelihood.

# Cultural Property Wars: Compromise

- Allow museums and collectors to sell more of their "multiple" holdings to the market, such as some of the many statues of the cat-headed goddess Bastet. Some museums are already authorized to do this, and have done so in the past, using the funds to improve artifact protection systems, enlarge the size of galleries, or acquire new objects.
  - Contingent on preserving information about these artifacts in a permanent way to allow for scholars to study
  - Cairo Museum and others have many artifacts that have never been properly documented or displayed.
- Common or "multiple" objects are often less desirable to dealers and collectors, but archaeologists, anthropologists and historians consider each artifact potentially enlightening, especially in situ.
- Try to minimize looting of sites by locals
  - Encourage locals to become legitimate partners with scientists to find and study artifacts
  - Provide education on field work, giving them a trade.
  - Try to instill broader cultural pride and its concomitant benefit of increased tourist trade, with great positive economic benefits.

# The Cat in Ancient Egypt

- Did not distinguish between wild and domesticated cats; all cats known as “miu,” often translated as “he or she who meows,” perhaps an onomatopoeic reference to the sound a cat makes. Rare for a cat to be given a specific name.
- Early Egyptians probably saw many of the indigenous cats, but eventually hunting and territorial expansion by humans thinned populations to the point of extinction of the lion by the time of the New Kingdom.
- Early pictures in tomb paintings and friezes show what are clearly cats, but there is no evidence to prove these cats were domesticated.
- By the New Kingdom, cats are portrayed more closely in association with other tame domestic animals, being fed or tethered to chair legs.



Pharaoh Spears a Lion Thebes, Valley of the Kings, late  
Dynasty 20- Third Intermediate Period, ca. 1100- 700 B.C.  
Painted limestone; h. (of stone) 5/2 in

So, When & Where were Cats first Domesticated?



*If Ever!*



**House cats  
share 95.6 %  
of their DNA  
with tigers.**

# A Serious Question

***ARE CATS DOMESTICATED?***

# Six Criteria of Domestication

Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*

- Must be easy to feed
- Must grow and mature at a rate that makes economic sense
- Must breed well in captivity to keep the population going
- Have to be generally nice animals
- Can't be prone to freak outs
- Social structure of the species has to be strong

# ***DOGS have masters.....***

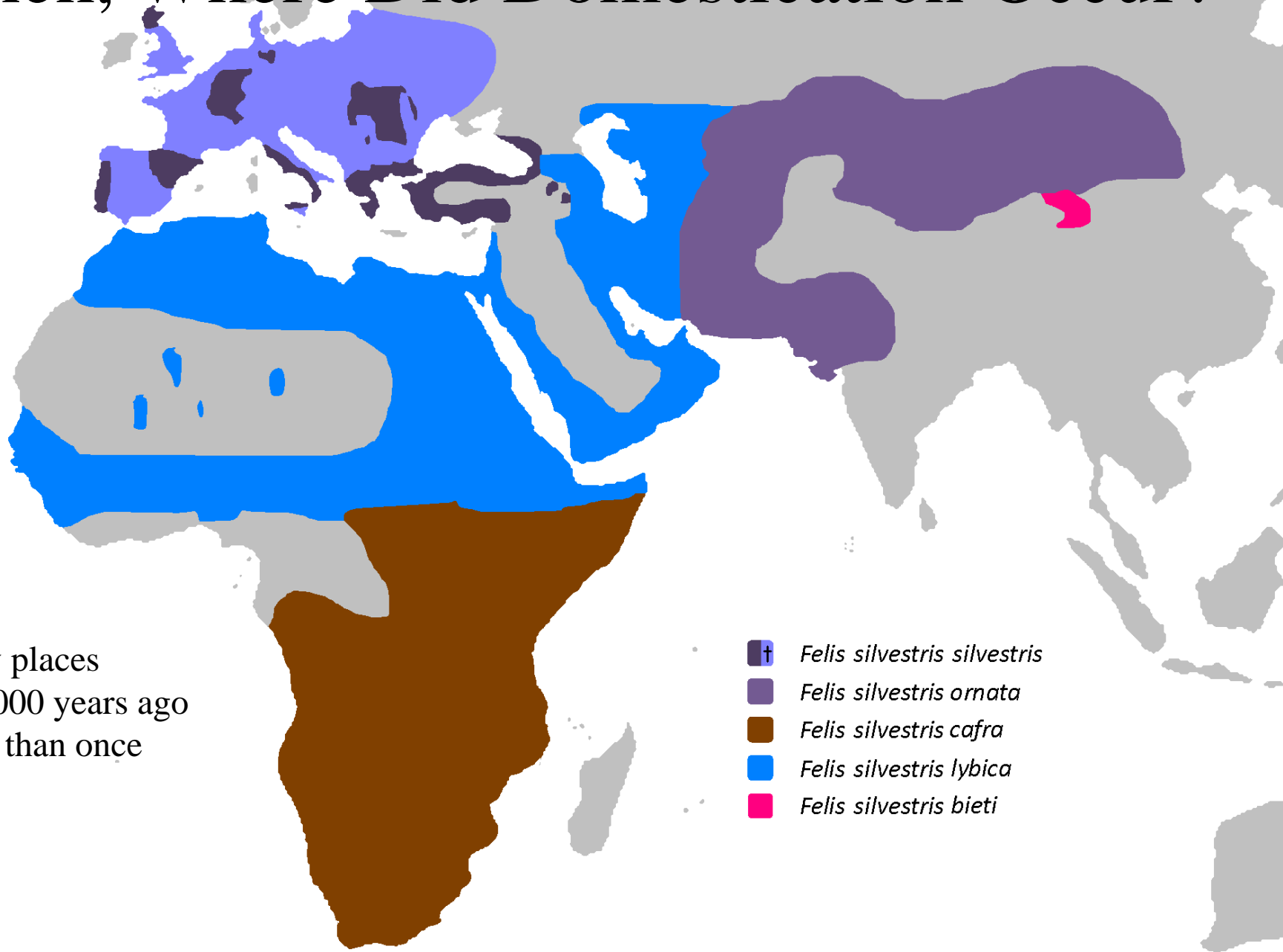
**GARFIELD**

Jim Davis



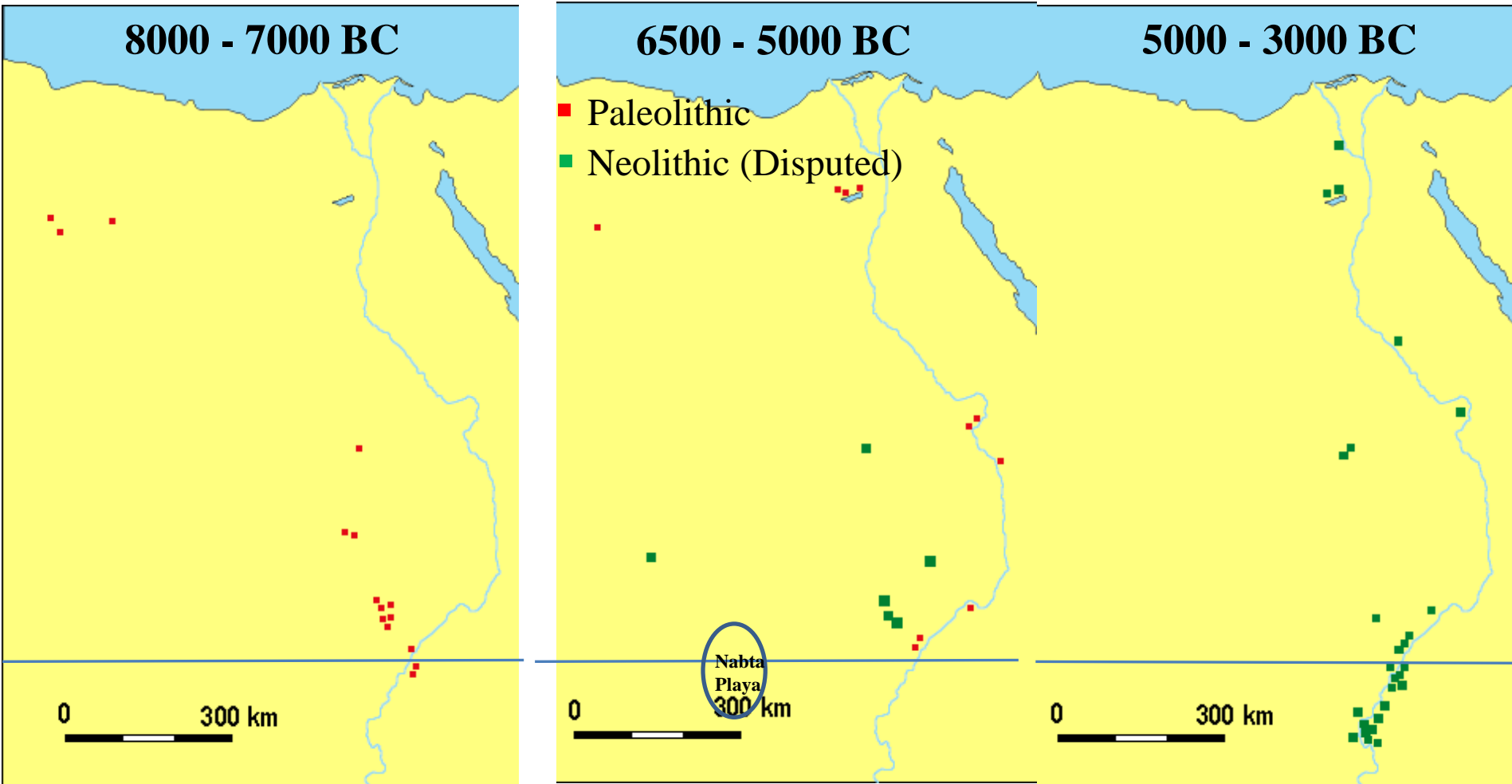
*.....CATS have staff.*

# When, Where Did Domestication Occur?



- Many places
- ~ 15,000 years ago
- More than once

# Transition: Paleolithic to Neolithic



Hunter-gathering → Grain-grinding culture → Bovine domestication

Continued desiccation of Sahara forced more permanent settlement around the Nile and adoption of a more sedentary lifestyle.

# *Ancient DNA from cats - a paleogenetics perspective into past distributions and patterns of dispersal of *Felis silvestris*,*

Eva-Maria Geigl, The Institut Jacques Monod, Paris, France, et al,  
7<sup>th</sup>International Symposium on Biomolecular Archaeology, Oxford, UK, 15 Sept. 2016

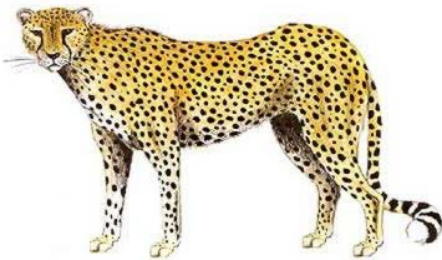
## **Study Structure:**

- Analysed mitochondrial DNA from 209 cats from > 30 archaeological sites across Europe, the Middle East and Africa.
- Samples dated from ~ 8000 BCE — the period just before the advent of agriculture, when humans lived as hunter–gatherers — up to the 1700s CE.

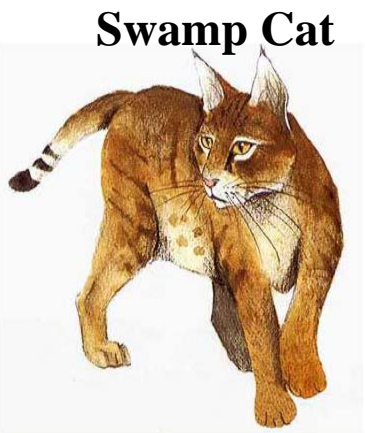
## **Results: Cat populations grew in two waves**

- Middle Eastern wild cats with a particular mitochondrial lineage expanded with early farming communities to the eastern Mediterranean. Grain stockpiles in early farming communities attracted rodents, which in turn drew wild cats. Mutual benefit to cats and humans might have resulted in a symbiotic relationship between the two, leading to semi-domestication.
- Thousands of years later, cats descended from those in Egypt spread rapidly around Eurasia and Africa. A mitochondrial lineage common in Egyptian cat mummies from the end of 500 BCE to 500 CE was also carried by cats in Bulgaria, Turkey and sub-Saharan Africa from around the same time.
- Sea-faring people probably kept cats to control rodents, based on cat remains found with this Egyptian DNA lineage at a Viking site dating to 800-1100 CE in northern Germany.

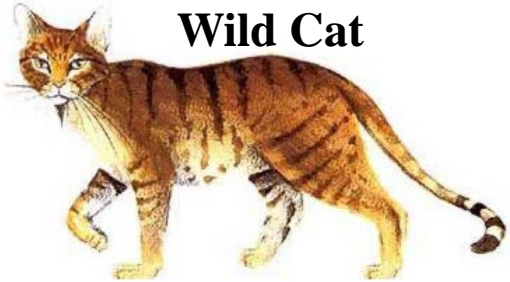
# Indigenous Egyptian Cats



Cheetah



Swamp Cat



Wild Cat



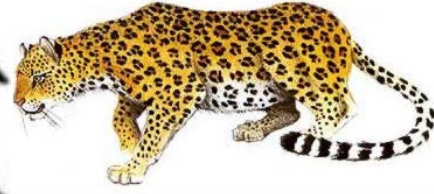
Sand Cat



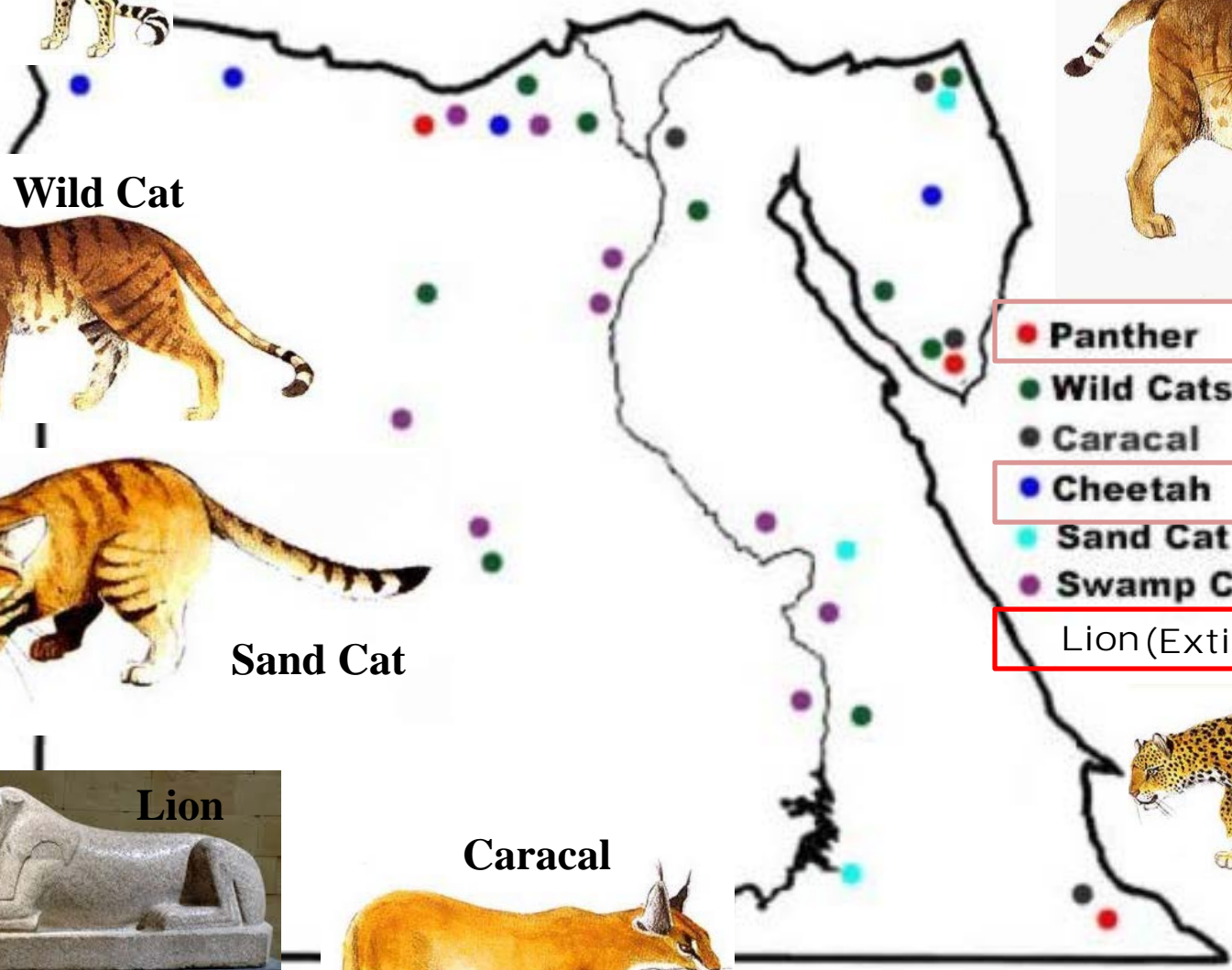
Lion



Caracal



Panthera



- Panther
- Wild Cats
- Caracal
- Cheetah
- Sand Cat
- Swamp Cat
- Lion (Extinct >NK)

# The Grandmother of Modern Cats

- Recent genetic studies show majority of the world's cats can trace their ancestry to an Egyptian cat
- Believed Wild Cat (*Felis silvestris lybica*) is the ancestor of the modern domestic cat



What might domestication look like in the archaeological record?

# What might domestication look like in the archaeological record?

- Burial?
  - With human?
  - Without human?
  - Mummified?
- Figures?
  - Totems?
  - Statues?
- Worship?
- Documentation showing specific activity
  - Tomb, temple, house painted depiction
  - Writing

# Early Taming of the Cat in Cyprus

J.-D. Vigne, *CNRS–Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, et al*  
*Science* 09 Apr 2004

- 1983 CE discovery of a cat skeleton in grave dating to 9,500 BCE, doubling date of *possible* early domestication
- Species *Felis silvestris*
- Remains lie 40 centimetres from human skeleton in grave with elite offerings (polished stones, seashells).
- Identical states of preservation, positioned symmetrically, with both heads pointing west.
- Cat ~ 8 months old when it died
- Cause of death unknown, no signs on bones that cat was butchered for food.
- Proximity of human skeleton suggests a strong bond with the cat, which might have been killed to go to the grave with its master.
- *Cats are not native to Cyprus, so their presence on the eastern Mediterranean island indicates they were brought there at some point – and that would have to have been by sea.*



# China's First Farmers Also Domesticated Cats (Maybe)

France's National Center of Scientific Research, the French Natural History Museum, the University of Aberdeen, the Chinese Academy of Social Science, and the Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology ,  
January 26, 2016

- Analysis of the mandibles of five cats unearthed in Shaanxi and Henan provinces suggests that cats were domesticated in China, as well as in the Near East and Egypt.
- The bones, dated to 3500 - 2900 BCE, belonged to the leopard cat, *Prionailurus bengalensis*, still living in Eastern Asia near human settlements. *Prionailurus bengalensis* was a distant relative of *Felis silvestris lybica*, the ancestor of all of today's domestic cats.
- *Felis silvestris lybica* is thought to have replaced the domesticated descendants of the leopard cat in China at the end of the Neolithic period (~ 4500 - 2000 BCE) with the opening of the Silk Road and trade with the West.



# The Mostagedda Tomb, Hierakonpolis, Egypt

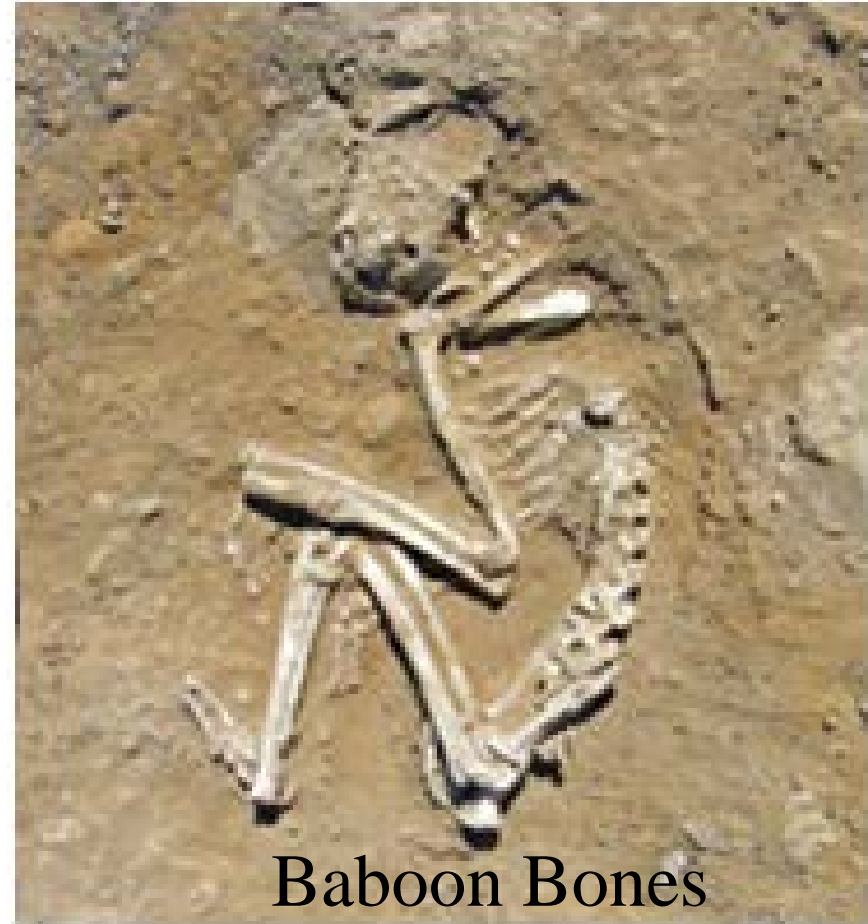
- 2012: Predynastic burial pit found, Hierakonpolis (capital, Upper Egypt, ~ 5000 - 3100 BCE, before unification of Egypt)
- Man interred with a cat & a gazelle
- Dated to around 4000 BCE
- Cat wrapped in cloth
  - Mummified?
  - 2014: textiles saturated with tree resin found in Mostagedda cemetery, suggesting active mummification, 1500 years earlier than previously thought
- *May not have been domesticated*, but was clearly important to the deceased.
- Why Important?
  - Pet? Killed when man died, as were human servants somewhat earlier?
  - Votive offering?
  - Totemic or cultic significance?
  - A hunting trophy?



# World's First Zoo, Hierakonpolis, Egypt

*Archaeology*, Vol. 63 #1, Jan/Feb 2010, Archaeological Institute of America, Mark Rose,  
Report from Hierakonpolis Expedition

- Large, exotic menagerie from ~ 3500 BCE (predynastic)
- 112 different animals found to date, including
  - Elephants
  - Hippos
  - Aurochs
  - Baboons
  - Wildcats
  - Dogs
- 4 kittens from at least 2 litters
- Baboons, a wild cat, and a hippo show signs of bone fractures that can only have healed in a protected environment.
- A 10-year-old elephant had eaten twigs from acacia trees as well as wild and cultivated plants from varied environments, suggesting it was being fed
- Burials are in city's elite cemetery, where rulers, family members, along with retainers (possibly sacrificed) were interred.



Baboon Bones

# D-18: Thutmose IV (~ 1400 BCE)

## 1<sup>st</sup> Archaeologist?

- A younger son of Amenhotep II and Tiaa, not crown prince
- While hunting in Western Desert, he stopped to rest under head of Sphinx, which was buried up to the neck in sand.
- Fell asleep, dreamed Sphinx told him that if he cleared away the sand and restored it he would become the next Pharaoh.
- After completing the restoration, he placed Dream Stele between the front paws of the Sphinx.
- Recently, a mud brick wall surrounding the Sphinx and Sphinx temples has been found with Thutmosis IV cartouche
- Restoration of the Sphinx his most celebrated accomplishment

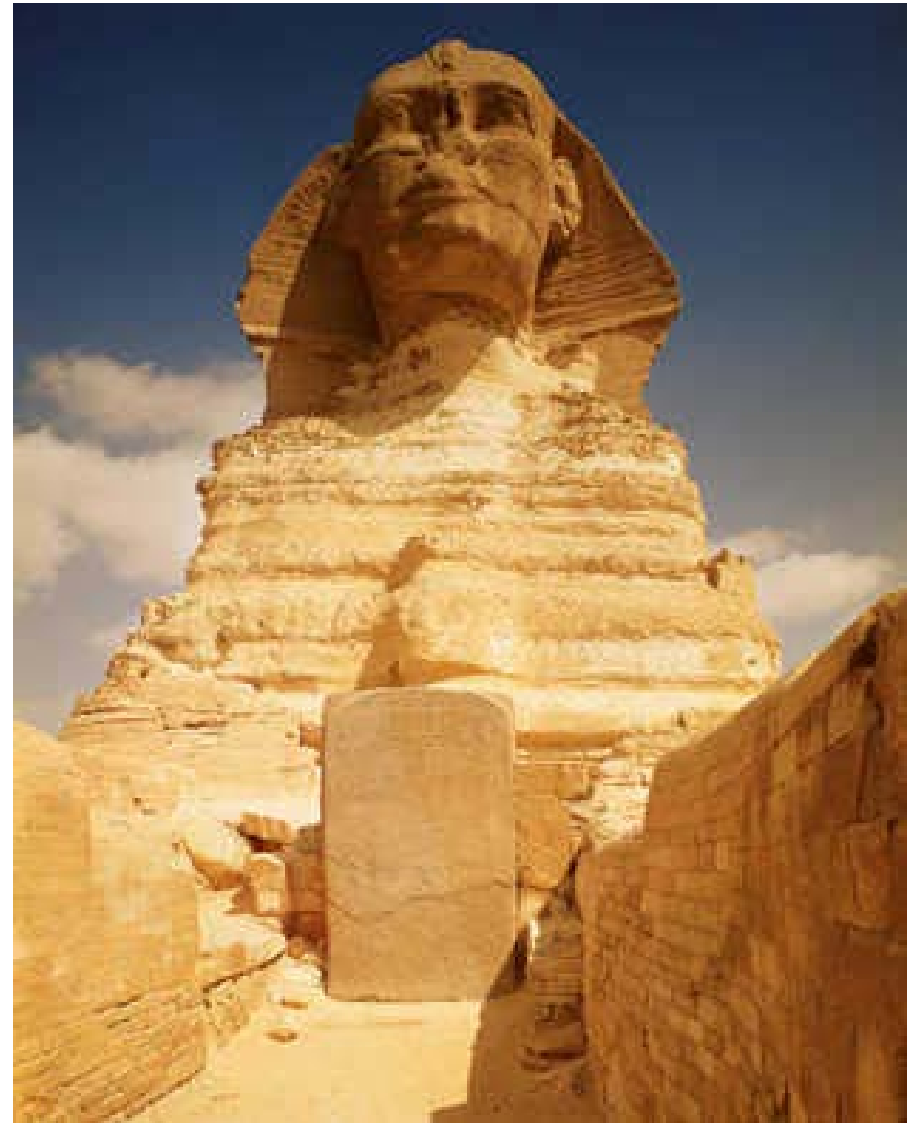


# D-18: Thutmose IV

## Cat Lover?

- A younger son of Amenhotep II and Tiaa, not crown prince
- Usurped power by ousting his older brother
- Commissioned the Dream Stele to legitimize his kingship
- Ruled ~ 10 years
  - Peaceful policy of diplomacy
  - Treaty with Mitanni, strengthened by marriage to Mitannian princess, mother of Amenhotep III

Buried with a royal cat



# D-18: Crown Prince Thutmose Cat Lover?



- Thutmose, eldest son of Amenhotep III, brother of Akhenaten
- Stone sarcophagus for pet cat in Thutmose's own tomb
- Seated before offering tables of food and flowers

*Sarcophagus of Prince Thutmose's cat Ta-Miewet (The Little Mewer),*

Carved stone, 18th Dynasty (1550-1292 BCE)

- Hieroglyphics same as on human coffins from this period, associate cat with the god of the underworld, Osiris and the funerary deities, Isis, Nephtys, and four sons of Horus
- Suggests Egyptians believed cats had a soul (ka) and would live on in the afterlife
- *Was cat sacrificed at time of Thutmose's death, or did it die naturally?*



# A Serious Question

## ***ARE CATS DOMESTICATED?***

"The cats just sort of domesticated themselves."

- *National Geographic News*, 2007

"Cats still carry some of the more aloof behaviors of their solitary wild progenitors. Sometimes they don't give a damn about you, but they are very much part of your niche. Cats have us do everything for them. We clean their litter, stroke them, admire them, but unlike dogs they do not have to constantly please and satisfy our needs. Makes you wonder—who's domesticating whom? "

- Smithsonian Institution archaeologist, Melinda Zeder, 2015

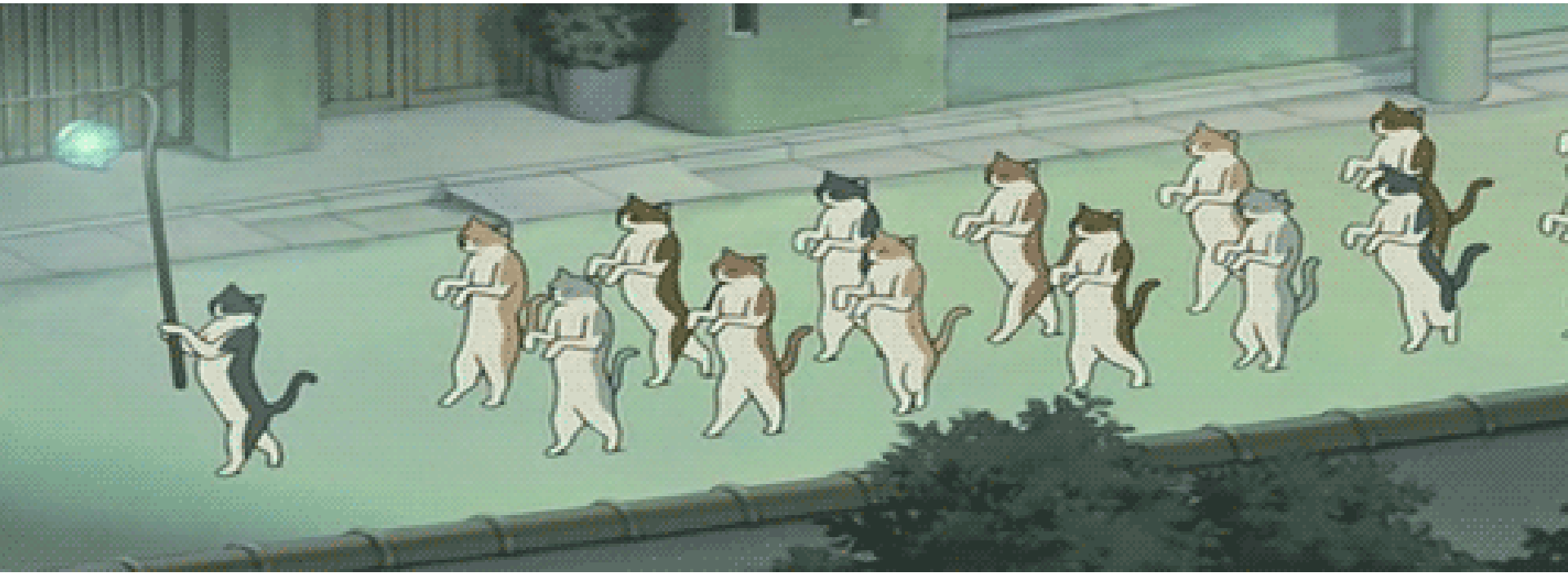
"Cat studies of all types are hindered by the many physical and behavioral similarities between domestic cats and their wild relatives. In fact, it is often difficult or impossible for even the trained eye to tell them apart, and interbreeding has created many hybrids of the two. Its behavior and anatomy are not clearly distinct from those of wild relatives."

- Ewen Callaway, *Nature*, 20 September 2016

"The latest answer, based on insights from recent archeological discoveries and genome-sequencing studies, is that ***cats are semi-domesticated.***"

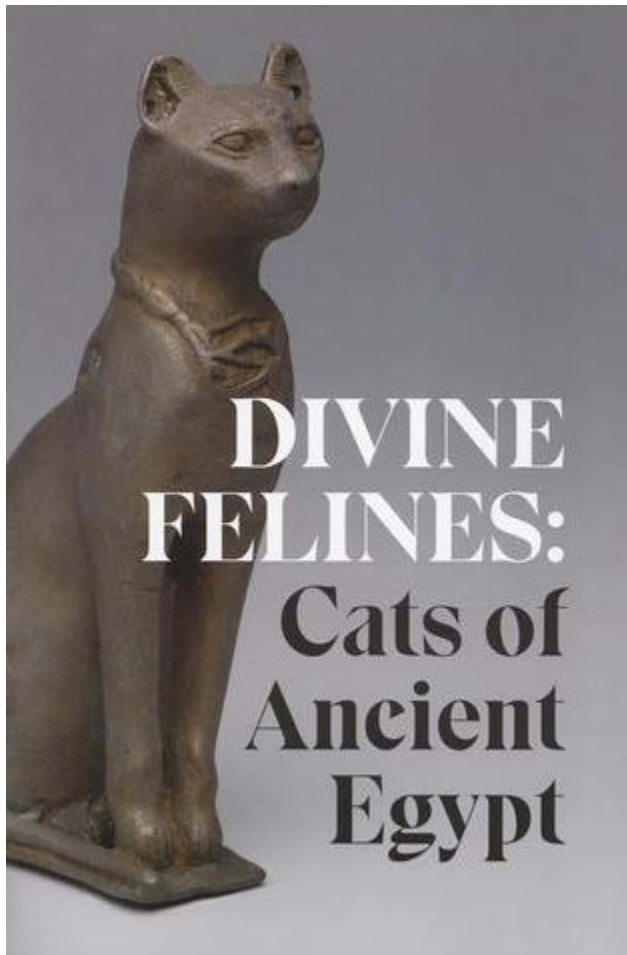
- Ferris Jabr, *The New Yorker*, October 23, 2015

**In summary, cats came to live with humans.....  
.....because we love them.**



- The cat-human bond holds no real survival perks for people. (??)
- It seems the cute and cuddly nature of cats, and their persistence amongst people, has given domestic kitties a big evolutionary edge.
- They're effectively insinuated themselves in human populations without sacrificing much of their wildness.

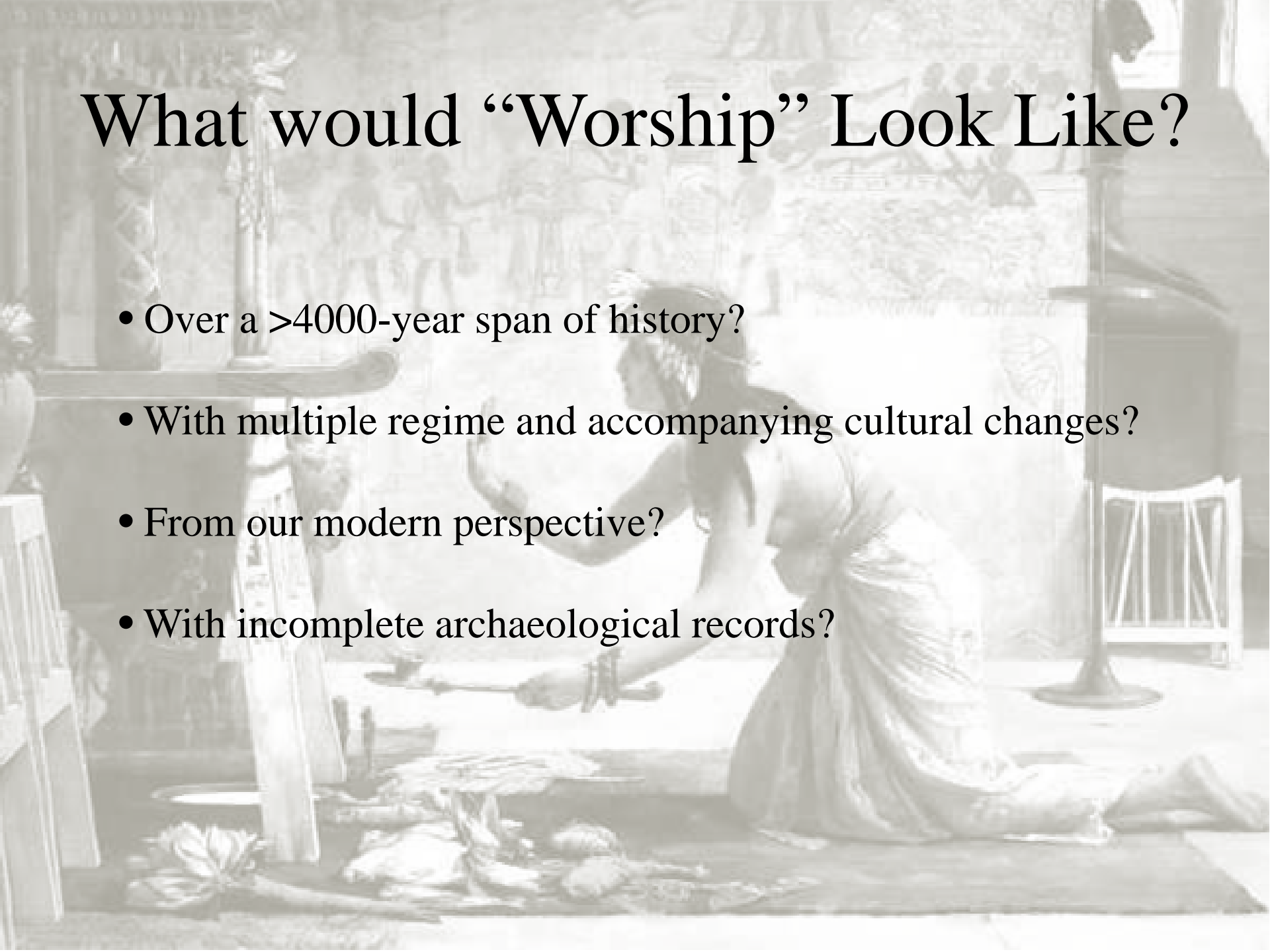
# Did Egyptians Worship Cats?



- The catalogue intimates it in its title, but...
- The catalogue contradicts itself
  - Pg.5 :  
...Egyptians did not worship cats. Rather, felines were associated with specific gods.
  - Pg. 5:  
Fig. 6: Image of cat labeled “The Goddess Mafdet”
- Dispute among Egyptologists

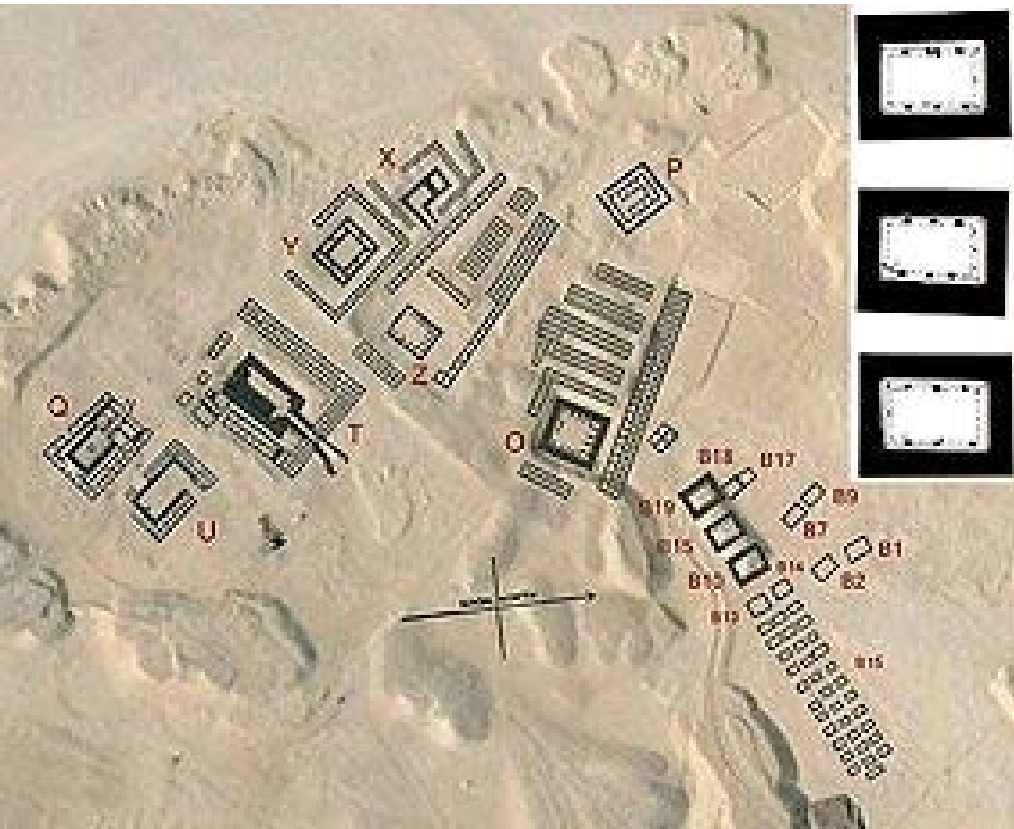
# What would “Worship” Look Like?

- Over a >4000-year span of history?
- With multiple regime and accompanying cultural changes?
- From our modern perspective?
- With incomplete archaeological records?



# Tomb of King Hor Aha

1st Dynasty (ca. 2960-2926 BCE), Abydos, Middle Egypt



- Earliest known retainer sacrifices in Egypt
  - Killed or committed suicide?
  - 36 subsidiary burials in 3 parallel rows NE of the main chambers
  - Included servants, dwarfs, women and even dogs
- Skeletal remains of adult as well as young lions discovered near tomb
  - Symbol of royalty?
  - Hunting Trophies?
  - Clear evidence that from the beginning Egyptians kept captive lions at the royal court?

• *Evidence of Worship?*

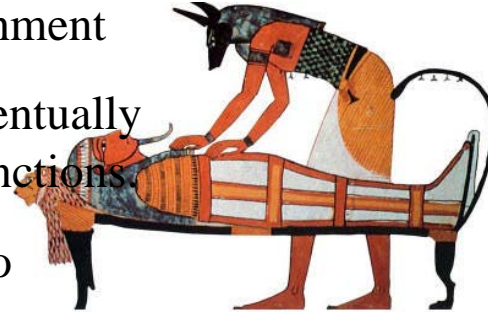
• *Certainly Reverence*

# Pantheon of Egyptian Felid Deities

Egyptian Cat Goddesses		Egyptian Cat Gods	
Mafdet	First of the cat goddesses, called the "Runner" Lynx, lion or cheetah shaped war goddess of early dynastic periods. Goddess of protection, spitting fire at cobras. Original cat deity who killed the enemy of Ra, the monstrous serpent Apep (Apophis) Later this job taken on by a cat-god called Mau "the one like a she-cat."	Mut	The great Mother Goddess was merged with Wadjet, Bastet, Menhit and Sekhmet, who were all warrior lioness goddesses.
Mau	Mau - the ancient Egyptian word for cat A personification of the sun god Ra, as a cat who killed Apep In this aspect she is shown holding a knife.	Wadjet	Wadjet was primarily a cobra goddess, similar in some respects to Meretseger, but she was also depicted in her aspect of a lion-headed goddess
Tefnut	Lioness-headed, or sometimes lioness-bodied Goddess of the air, hot winds and the sun Wife & twin sister of Shu (who also sometimes takes lion-form). They were worshipped as a pair of lions at Leontopolis.		Shu
Shut (Shuety)	"the One of Shu," a form of the lioness-headed Tefenet	Hetmet	(a.k.a. Hetmit) - "the Destroyer" lion-headed goddess
Sonet-nofret	"The Fine Sister" a goddess of Ombos, associated with Tefenet. Sometimes shown with a lioness-head or as Hathor. She was wife of Horus of Ombos and had a son, P-neb-taui, by him.	Mehet	Lioness-goddess of the city of This
Sekhmet	Warrior goddess, the "Powerful One" Lioness-headed goddess of Memphis (1st capital of unified Egypt), the Delta, and the thirteenth nome of Upper Egypt. member of the Memphis Triad (her husband Ptah & their son Nefertem) sun goddess of war and protector of Pharaohs who attacks the enemies of the gods. She often wears the solar disk on her head, and is seen as an eye of Re. Also protected against plague and pestilence	Men'et	"Nurse" a lioness-headed goddess who is associated with Hathor as the wife of Horus.
Menhit	(a.k.a. Menhet, Menehtet) "the slaughterer", "the one who sacrifices", or "she who massacres" War goddess of Nubian origin Very aggressive and warrior-like character, sometimes known as the goddess of lions Rode ahead of Egyptian armies shooting fiery arrows. In this aspect, she is the protector of kings, pharaohs and their armies. Woman with the head of lion. She often seen wearing a headdress with a solar disc and uraeus mounted on it When Upper and Lower Egypt united, she became an aspect of Sekhmet.	Urt-hekau	Lioness-headed goddess called "wife of the sun-god" Associated with goddesses who had sorceress functions - Isis, Neith, & Nephthys.
Bastet	(a.k.a. Bast, Ubastet, Pasht) Originally depicted as a fiercely protective and warlike lioness, like Sekhmet, but her image "softened" over time, she became more strongly associated with domestic cats Giver of blessings to the good and a deliverer of wrath to the evil Protector of domestic cats Goddess of Bubastos and Thebes Goddess of love and fertility in Bubastos Also a goddess of the hunt.	Matit	"The One Like a Lioness" Lioness-goddess associated with Hathor from 12th and 5th nomes of Upper Egypt. Funerary cat goddess with cult center at Thinis
Mekal	"Fierce Devourer," a goddess of pestilence adopted from Canaan		Neferten
Pakhet	"She Who Scratches" Lioness goddess of Middle Egypt Protected the living and the dead from evil The Greeks associated her with Artemis.		Hem-hor
			Re (Ra)
			Hu
			Merui
			Bes
			Tutu
			Sesmu
			Mihos
			Neferten
			Hem-hor

# Mafdet: The Runner

- Female deity who traces back as far as the 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty (3,400 -3000 BCE)
- Protector of king's chambers, other sacred places & against venomous bites, especially those of snakes and scorpions, and evildoers in general
- Goddess of legal justice & possibly of capital punishment
- The more well-known goddess Bastet may have eventually eclipsed Mafdet's popularity and assimilated her functions
- However, Mafdet's reverence persisted, especially to pharaohs. Her images are found on late pharaohs' personal items and on the beds where they were mummified.



Earliest evidence of felines as deities: a ~ 3100 BCE crystal cup decorated with an image of Mafdet as the goddess of execution, seen as a feline running up the side of the executioner's staff .



The Goddess Mafdet ,  
~ 300 BCE, Ptolemaic Period,  
Mendes, Nile Delta Region



# Mau: The One Like a She-cat



*Ra in the form of a feline slaying the snake Apophis, Tomb of Inherkha, 1160 BCE (late NK), Thebes*

Bastet and Mafdet both possibly originate from the legend of a divine jungle cat named Mau/Muit who defended one of the sacred Persea trees in Annu from the serpent Apophis.

The cat caught the snake in the act of attempting to strangle the tree, and cut off its head for its crimes. Bastet and Mafdet are often interchanged as the jungle cat heroine.

They were eventually displaced by Ra.

# Sekmet: The Powerful One



- Both creative & destructive force
  - Patron of Physicians, as a bringer of disease and as the provider of cures
  - Lioness sun goddess of war, protector of pharaohs, led them in warfare
- Protector of Ma'at (balance, justice)
- Annual Festival of Drunkenness celebrating myth of Ra using Sekhmet to destroy mankind. When he relented, He stopped her bloodlust by giving her red-colored beer till she passed out.
- Cult persisted into Ptolemaic times. Large temple dedicated to Sekhmet at Leontopolis in Delta region where tame lions were kept.

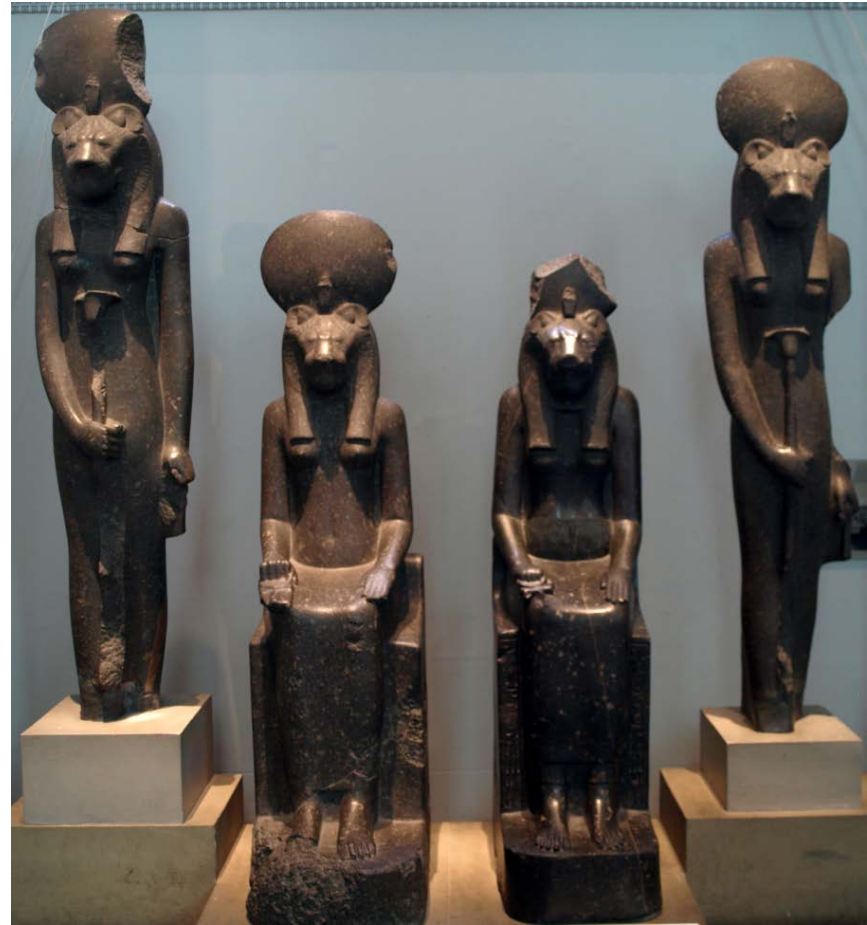
Sekhmet, shown with sun disk and cobra crown  
Relief at the Temple of Kom Ombo

- One of oldest Egyptian deities
- Possibly depicted on Narmer palette, along with her “mirror” deity, Hathor
- Triad of Memphis (1<sup>st</sup> capital of Egypt after unification) Sekhmet, Ptah, her consort, & their son Nefertem



# Precipitating Event: Plague & Pandemic

- Prior to and during the Amarna period serious outbreak of a pandemic throughout the Middle East
- Precise nature of plague remains unknown and Asia has also been suggested as a possible site of origin
  - Possibly plague, polio, perhaps the world's first recorded outbreak of influenza, or even the black death
  - Suppiluliuma I, the Hittite King died
- Amenhotep III had 730 statues of Sekhmet (one seated and one standing for each day of the year) erected in his mortuary temple in Western Thebes. Sekhmet, shown as a lion, is the Egyptian goddess of plague, among other attributes.



# Religious Ramifications



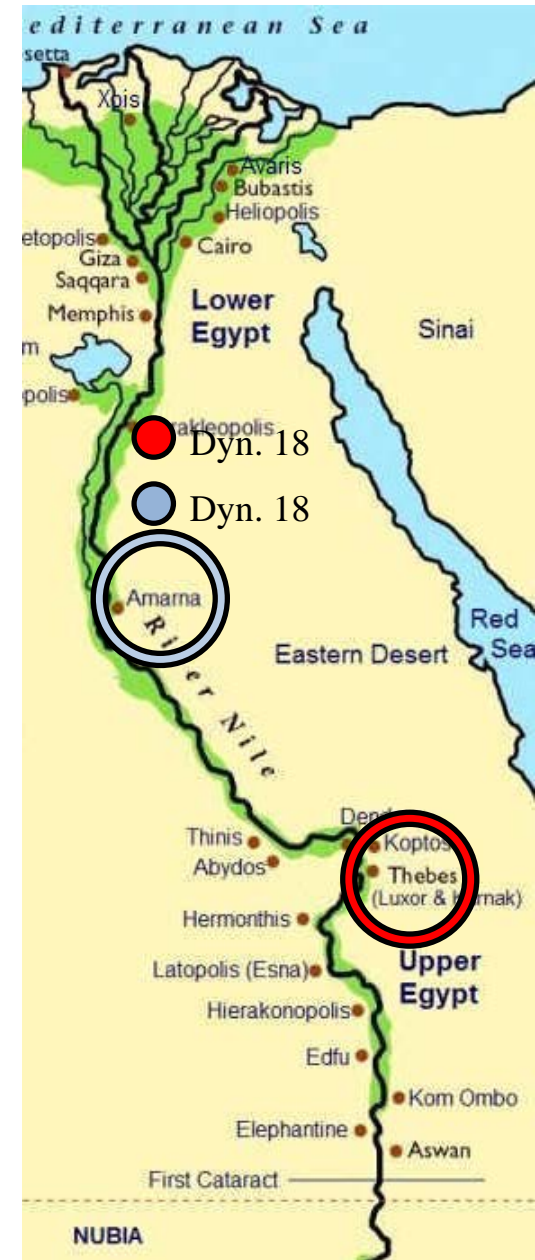
- Animosity between religious and secular powers had been an ongoing issue since foundation of Egyptian state
- Amun priesthood was particularly powerful during this period.
- Amenhotep III had already started trying to weaken this hold by favoring the Aten in his reign.



- *Amun could have been perceived as a failed god as the plague raged.*
- *Akhenaten may have used this to establish the Aten, a solar god, as the sole god in Egypt.*
- *Aten could have been presented as a protective, purifying entity, as well as a political maneuver.*

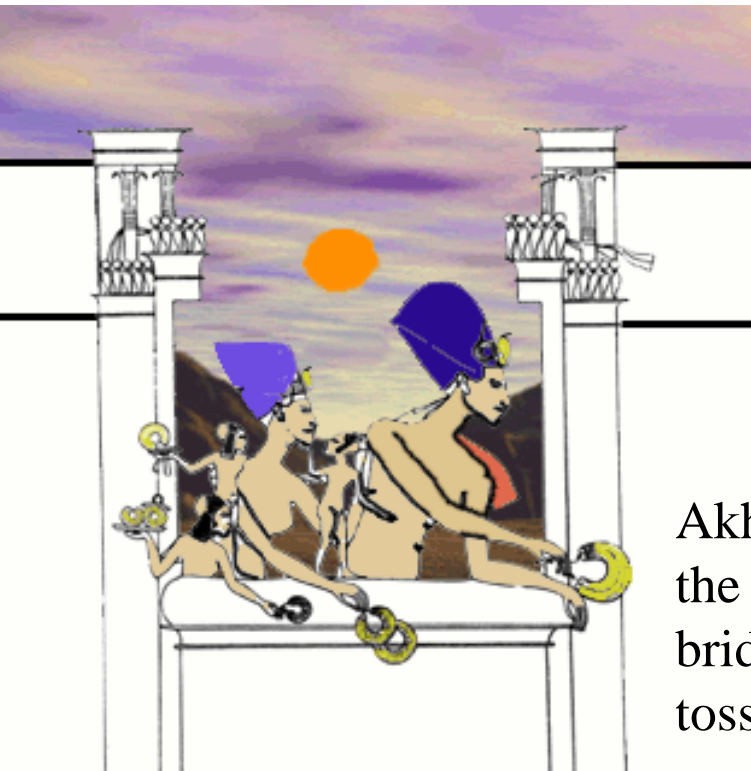
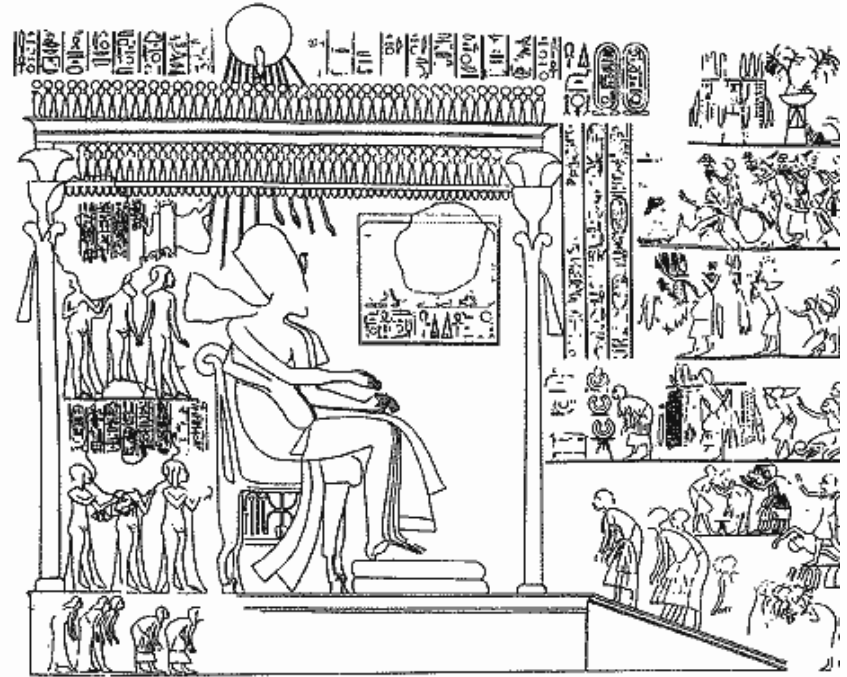
# Relocation to Akhetaten: The Horizon of the Aten

- In Year 5 of his reign (~1357 BCE) Amenhotep IV officially changed his name to Akhenaten (*Living Spirit of Aten*).
- He then sailed north from Thebes, directed by Aten, to find a virgin site for a new city.
- Emphasis on virgin site may have been to ensure no exposure to plague, i.e., quarantine.
- Desert location could have been perceived as a purifying site.
- Location of Akhetaten north of Thebes could have controlled access of Amun adherents to contact and assistance from lower Egypt and foreign powers.



# Quarantine in Akhetaten

At the Durbar in Y-12 depictions of foreign dignitaries presenting tribute to Akhenaten and Nefertiti as they are seated isolated in a kiosk.



Akhenaten and Nefertiti appeared before the people on the balcony known as the "window of appearances," a bridge which connected the palace with the temple area, tossing down gold ornaments and other gifts.

# Religious Policy

- Large number of amulets of household-and-childbirth gods and the Eye of Horus openly worn by Akhetaten inhabitants



- Cache of royal jewelry found buried near the Amarna royal tombs includes a finger ring referring to Mut, the wife of Amun.
- Such evidence suggests that Akhenaten's policies were fairly tolerant.



Taweret



- Within a decade of Akhenaten's death, comprehensive political, religious and artistic reformation began promoting a return of Egyptian life to the norms it had followed prior to the Amarna period.

# Addendum

**Archaeology Magazine** Volume 57 Number 4, [July/August 2004](#)

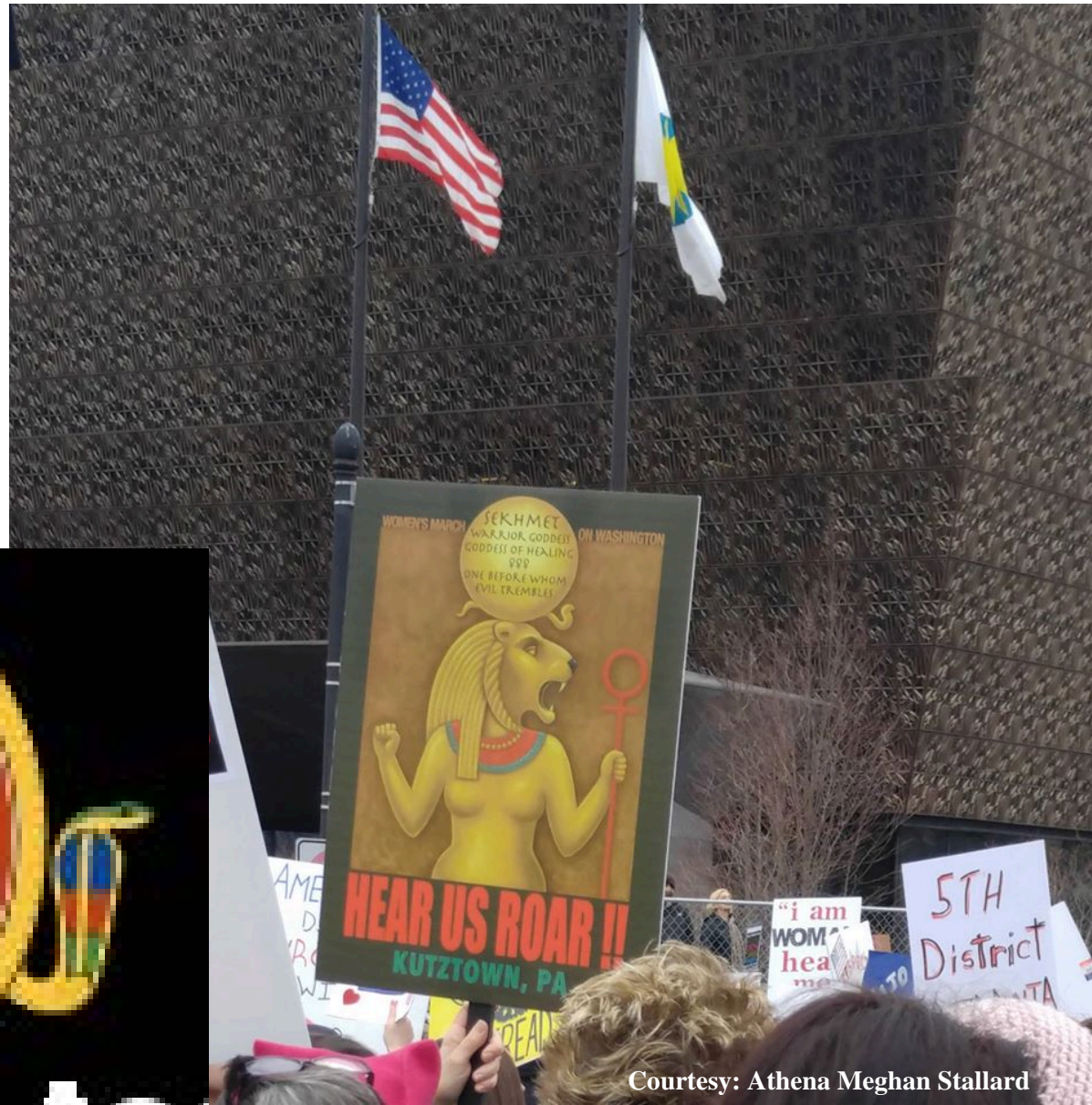
- A paleoentomologist researching the pests that infested the workman's village in Amarna (modern name of Ahketaten) has discovered black plague bacteria in the remains of fossilized fleas, the first evidence of a non-Asian origin for the deadly plague.
- It also may give clues to why Amarna was the capital city for only 20 years, from 1350-1330 BCE, before being abandoned. Fleas, bedbugs, and other insects and parasites were rife in the squalid living conditions of the laborers who worked on the tombs of Tutankhamun and Akhenaten, making the village a likely place for plague to arise.
- Contemporary medical papyri mention an epidemic with symptoms that sound similar to bubonic plague.

# Sekhmet

Remains a Force to be Reckoned With

## Women's March on Washington

January 21, 2017



# Bast (?She of the Ointment Jar?)



- As Bast, fiercely protective lioness goddess of warfare in Lower Egypt (Delta) before the unification of ancient Egypt, like Sekhmet
- Around 3200 BCE, Bubastis built as cult center for the goddess

- Bast's image and name morphed over time: **Bastet**
- Became more strongly associated with domestic cats
- Keeper of hearth and home
- Protector of women's secrets
- Guardian against evil spirits & disease
- Goddess of cats
- Greeks linked her to Artemis, a moon goddess
- Cult of Bastet officially banned by Roman imperial decree in 390 CE.



Alabaster cosmetic jar topped with lioness representing Bast, from the tomb of Tutankhamen (c. 1323 BCE—*Cairo Museum*)



# Bastet: Goddess of Domestic Cats

A cat was considered a physical representation of Bastet's spirit & therefore, sacred.

The Egyptians are also responsible for the very name 'cat' in that it derives from the North African word for the animal, "quattah", and, as the cat was so closely associated with Egypt:

European  
Derivatives:

French, *chat*

Swedish, *katt*

German, *katze*

Italian, *gatto*

Spanish, *gato*



Bronze Saite era art of an Egyptian cat. Gulbenkian Museum

The colloquial word for a cat – 'puss' or 'pussy' – is thought to derive from the word 'Pasht,' another name for Bastet.

## Annual Festival of Bastet (~ October 31)

- Hundreds of thousands of people making pilgrimages to Bubastis and other cities.
- Wine & Singing & wild behavior (Women?) 🐱
- As evening ended, there were also prayers to Bastet, accompanied by music and incense.

# Battle of Pelusium (525 BCE)

The greatest example of Egyptian devotion to the cat



- Cambyses II of Persia defeated the Egyptian forces of Psametik III to conquer Egypt.
- Knowing the Egyptian's love for cats, Cambyses roundup up various animals, chiefly cats and drove the animals before the invading forces toward the fortified city of Pelusium on the Nile.
- The Persian soldiers painted images of cats on their shields, and may have held cats in their arms, as they marched behind the wall of animals.
- The Egyptians, reluctant to defend themselves for fear of harming the cats (and perhaps incurring the death penalty should they kill one), and demoralized at seeing the image of Bastet on the enemy's shields, surrendered the city and let Egypt fall to the Persians.
- The historian Polyaeus (2nd century CE) writes that, after the surrender, Cambyses rode in triumph through the city and hurled cats into the faces of the defeated Egyptians in scorn.

# Don't Mess with the Cat!

## The Lost Army of Cambyses



According to Herodotus, Cambyses II, sent 50,000 men to destroy Oracle of Amun at Siwa Oasis after the priests there refused to legitimize his claim to Egypt.

The army was halfway across the desert when a massive sandstorm sprang up, burying them all.

People have searched for the remains of the soldiers for many years, in vain.

Professor Olaf Kaper, an archaeologist at Leiden University, Netherlands, believes the lost army of Cambyses II did not disappear, but was defeated at Dakhla Oasis – the location of the troops of the Egyptian rebel leader Petubastis III, who ultimately ambushed the army of Cambyses II, and reconquered a large part of Egypt, and was crowned Pharaoh in the capital, Memphis.

The fate of the army remained unclear because the Persian King Darius I, who ended the Egyptian revolt two years after Cambyses II's defeat, attributed the embarrassing defeat of Cambyses to a sandstorm in order to save face, and this became the accepted account .

Excavations in the Dakhla Oasis have revealed titles of Petubastis III carved on ancient temple blocks.. Hopefully further work will be undertaken to follow up this promising lead, which may solve one of archaeology's biggest outstanding mysteries.

# A Cat's Life in Ancient Egypt

- A sacred and respected animal
- Ancient Egyptians took their cats on hunting trips instead of dogs, especially in the marshes where cats may have been trained to retrieve fowl and fish.
- Statues of cats were placed outside house to protect inhabitants and to ward off evil spirits
- Greek historian Herodotus (*The Father of Lies*): men would guard fire outbreaks to ensure that no cats ran into the flames.
- Laws forbade exportation of cats, though many were smuggled to neighboring Mediterranean countries.
- Cats began to appear on objects of everyday life
  - Small golden cat pendants & other jewelry
  - Cat amulets made of soapstone for necklaces and rings, so even ordinary people could enjoy the protection of the cat goddess .
- Assume cats were still doing their job killing rats & snakes, although modern research has posited that they were not that great at pest control.



# A Cat's Death in Ancient Egypt

- Cats were protected by laws so extreme that if a human killed a feline, either intentionally or unintentionally, that human was sentenced to death.
- Herodotus observed that when a cat died, the household would mourn as if for a human relative, and would often shave their eyebrows to signify their loss. The period of mourning lasted until the brows grew back.
- From the New Kingdom, cats often appear in tomb paintings along with their human families. Some were mummified and buried with fine jewels, mice, milk, and whatever else they might need in the afterlife.
- Herodotus noted that cats that died anywhere in Egypt were often taken to Bubastis to be mummified and buried in the great cemetery, but this may or may not have been the case.
  - The mummification and preservation of the body was intended to make it possible for the deceased's ka to locate its host and subsequently be reborn into the afterlife.
  - At the burial site in Bubastis the Swiss Egyptologist Édouard Naville found more than 20 m<sup>3</sup> (720 cubic feet) of cat remains but also evidence of cremation: stacks of cat bones in many pits made of bricks and clay, and furnaces blackened from fire. Cremation would not preserve the body, necessary for the afterlife.
  - Many cats were afforded the full embalming ceremony and buried in other great cemeteries along the Nile.



# A Cat's Death in Ancient Egypt: Messengers to the Gods

## *Archaeology, March 11, 2014*

### **Why did the ancient Egyptians invest so much in the afterlife of creatures?**

- Vast animal cemeteries along the Nile hold millions of mummies, mainly from after the fall of the New Kingdom, around 1075 BCE
- During the following 3<sup>rd</sup> Intermediate Period (~ 400 years), population had more income, not having to pay taxes to chaotic central authority
- With loss of centralized religious practices, a turn to personal piety among general public
- Pilgrims visiting temples began to purchase animal mummies from priests to bury as votive offerings to carry their messages to the gods.
- X-rays and CT scans of the mummies show some entire skeletons inside the mummy bundles, as well as only partial remains.



# A Cat's Death in Ancient Egypt: The Dark Side

*Gnudi, et. al., Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery, April 2012.*

Between ~ 332 - 30 BCE in Egypt, cats were bred near temples specifically to be mummified and used as offerings.

Production of animal mummies was rife with corruption. Priests sold fraudulent mummies that either had no animal inside at all, or held multiple animals that each represented a separate purchase.

Cat mummies from this period are common, especially kittens. "Kittens, aged 2 to 4 months old, were sacrificed in huge numbers, because they were more suitable for mummification,"



To make the cat take up as little space as possible, the embalmers fractured some of the cat's bones, including a backbone at the base of the spine to position the tail as close to the body as possible, and ribs to make the front limbs sit closer to the body. A hole in the cat's skull may have been the cause of death, or it could have been created during the mummification process to drain the skull's contents.

# So, Did Egyptians Worship Cats?

Felid deities usually appear as cat-human hybrids, avatars of feline characteristics rather than cats

Cats sacred in the society for a long period of time, through changing regimes and cultures

Raised to be sacrificed and used as votive objects to petition felid deities

Probably kept as pets, at least in wealthier households



# So, Did Egyptians Worship Cats?

Felid deities usually appear as cat-human hybrids, avatars of feline characteristics rather than cats

Cats sacred in the society for a long period of time, through changing regimes and cultures

Raised to be sacrificed and used as votive objects to petition felid deities

Probably kept as pets, at least in wealthier households

So, maybe Yes,  
at least as much  
as we do.



# A Cat's Life in Egypt Today

Since the cult of Bastet was officially banned by imperial decree in 390 BCE, Egypt has experienced a decline in the respect once held for cats.

They are still kept as pets and tolerated elsewhere because they catch pests.

Even so, the cat has not lost all religious significance with modern Egypt's largely Islamic population, since cats are also revered to some extent in Muslim tradition.



But take a short walk in Cairo today, it is clear to see that the former demi-gods have indisputably fallen from grace.

Feral cats are everywhere — prey for cars, abuse, disease and starvation.

# Egyptian Mau Rescue Organization (EMRO)

Gloria Lauris, founder of the Egyptian Mau Rescue Organization is working to take Egyptian cats off the streets and put them into homes with people who appreciate their legendary heritage.

Her greater dream is to see these native animals revered for what many believe them to be: modern descendants of cats domesticated in Pharaonic times.

The Egyptian Mau distinguished by black spots on its body instead of Stripes, black ringed tails and legs and a black stripe down the back.

Intelligent and somewhat mischievous, they are also the fastest domestic cat, clocking 36 mph.



