

Animals in Ancient Egypt

Animals were an important part of Egyptian culture and were present in all aspects of Egyptian life. Animals were mummified and some Gods were given animal shaped heads. Even the Egyptian writing system of hieroglyphics was largely centered on animals.

Animals played a much more complex role in Egyptian society. While some animals were worshipped, were others were hunted, killed, or sacrificed. Some were thought to have divine connections, while others had evil associations that needed to be controlled. Many animals were domesticated and kept as household pets.

Egyptians believed the gods were most likely to reveal themselves to humans through animal forms. Different animals were thought to have different connections with deities. The ibis and the baboon had connections to the god Thoth. Cats and lionesses were linked to many goddesses such as Sekhmet, Bastet, Mut, and Hathor. The falcon was affiliated with Horus. Animals were revered in Ancient Egypt, and killing an animal associated with a god was a serious offense, punishable by death.

Animal associations were made for a number of reasons. For example, Mut and Sekhmet were both connected to positive and negative powers of the sun. They were represented by the cat and the lioness. Both were seen as gentle and raging aspects of the feline family. Similarly, the falcon, which flies above the earth, demonstrates the power and the concept of “aboveness” that the god Horus represents.

Domesticated animals were often depicted in art with their owners. For instance, dogs were used for a variety of jobs: hunting, guarding, law enforcement, or as household pets. Cats were another animal with important symbolic significance. Domesticated cats were kept as pets and protectors against snakes and rodents. Sacred to the household goddess Bastet, cats and kittens were sacrificed to her, mummified, and sometimes placed in beautiful cat-shaped bronze coffins.

Images of monkeys are also very common in Egyptian art. Monkeys were often shown as pets and sometimes even as assistants to the police.

