



CATS & MORE CATS

1 Cats, felines, moggies — whatever you call them — are probably the most pampered of all domestic animals. Cat lovers (known as *ailurophiles*) dote on their pets. They like the fact that, unlike dogs, their cats are independent creatures that come and go as they please. Pet cats are ideal for snuggling up with while you are reading or watching television. Some take catnaps with you or lie on your lap and wind up their purring motors. They jump up on your desk while you are trying to cope with endless homework. They love

to play games and are the best of company when you are lonely or bored.

2 People love cats so much that nowadays there are moggy motels, kitty waterbeds, dating services for cats, even cat mouthwash! Some people have spent huge amounts of money pampering their pets, even leaving their entire belongings to them in their wills. Others have squabbled over cat ownership and squandered vast amounts in court battles.

3 Some cats have undertaken amazing adventures. What could be more amazing than a cat that lived up a pole for six years, during which time it mated and bred kittens? How about the cat that killed twenty dogs? Maybe you've heard about the cat born with four ears and another that fell from the 16th floor of an apartment building — and survived! There are so many stories to tell about cats.

4 The cat has been around (in one form or another) longer than humans. Ancestors of the modern-day kitty have been found in fossils dating back fifty millions years. Cats are classified in the order *carnivora* (meat eaters), which had its origin near the dawn of the *Cainozoic Era*. Probably the oldest representation of a “pet cat” is that of a clay figurine showing a woman cuddling a cat. This was found at Hacilar, a Neolithic site in Turkey. It is dated at more than 7,000 years ago. Cats were most certainly domesticated 3,500 to 4,500 years ago and may well have been domesticated as early as 8,000 years ago. A cat's jawbone, discovered in 1983 at an excavation site in southern Cyprus, was dated at 6,000 BC.

5 The ancestor of all domestic cats is the African wild cat, which still exists today. *Puss* seems a natural derivation of *Posht* or *Pasht*, which were names used for *Bast*, ancient Egypt's cat-headed goddess. The Romans called the cat *felis* from the root word *felix*, meaning “a good omen” which was linked to magic. Later, they began using *catta*, the same name as the weasel, as both cats and weasels were used as vermin catchers.

6 An early story told about cats concerns King Cambyses II of Persia who was at war in 525 BC. When he reached Memphis in Egypt, he tried to take the city. However, the wall was too high and too strong. Then he had a brilliant idea. He knew the Egyptians would never hurt a cat because they considered them sacred. In fact, if anyone was caught injuring a cat they could be put to death.

7 Cambyses got his soldiers to round up as many cats as they could find. Then he ordered that the poor little pussies be killed and tossed over the wall. When hundreds were thrown over, the Egyptians were so horrified at what was happening to their precious cats, they flung open the gates of Memphis and surrendered.

8 *Nedjem*, meaning “sweet” or “pleasant”, is said to be the first cat to be given a name. It dates from the reign of Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III (1479 BC - 1425 BC). Despite laws, said to have protected cats in Ancient Egypt, some cats were bred specifically to be sacrificed as offerings. The cat was the symbol of the sun god in those times, so many cats were sacrificed to Horus, the rising sun. When a cat died, its human owners shaved their eyebrows out of respect. X-rays of surviving mummies reveal that many cats died at less than 18 months old; half were under four months old. In many cases their necks had been deliberately broken.

9 Cats have been well-loved in countries all over the world. Japan revered cats, and in 600 AD felines were kept in *pagodas* to guard precious manuscripts. The Japanese believed that a cat crossing the path meant good luck. An old Italian legend says a cat gave birth in

the stable at the same moment as Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ.

10 Cats have also been scorned at some points through history. In the thirteenth century, the Catholic Church began persecuting people it believed to be practitioners of "witchcraft"; unfortunately the cat did not escape this atrocity. Cats were often accused of being witches' "familiars" and many a sad, old woman was killed because of her kindness to a cat. During the Renaissance, the Catholic Church, by order of Pope Innocent VIII, decreed that cats should be burnt alongside the "witches" who owned them. Thousands of cats were

burned each month in France until King Louis XIII, a cat-lover, stopped the practice in the 1630s.

11 Thankfully, cats managed to survive these dark times, living on into modern times. Perhaps it is their colourful history that gives cats that mysterious look in their eyes: the intelligent glint that marks you out as their faithful servant.

That, or are they just hungry and waiting for you to bring on the snacks?

Questions

- 1 What does carnivora mean?
a cat lover
b meat eater
c tree climber
- 2 When was the earliest that cats were possibly domesticated?
a 8,000 years ago
b 6,000 years ago
c 4,500 years ago
- 3 Cambyses II managed to conquer the city of Memphis by
a throwing cats over its walls.
b pampering the goddess Bast.
c using cats to round up its vermin.
- 4 When were Egyptians expected to shave their eyebrows?
a whenever a cat was born
b at sunrise
c when their cats died
- 5 Why were cats burnt during the Renaissance?
a They were burnt to honour the rising sun.
b They were believed to have been witches' familiars.
c King Louis XIII passed a law for it.
- 6 According to this text, what seems to be a common trait of cats throughout history?
a It has always been believed that cats need to be pampered.
b People have always believed that cats bring bad luck.
c Cats are regularly associated with superstitious or religious beliefs.

Vocabulary

Find words in the text that match the meanings below. The word is in the section shown in brackets.

- 7 Spoilt or indulged (1)
- 8 Wasted money away on useless things (2)
- 9 Asian buildings with curved roofs (9)
- 10 Holy and revered (6)
- 11 Made a law (10)

Grammar

Find a **noun** (person, place or thing) in these sentences from the text.

- 12 There are so many stories to tell.
- 13 The wall was too high.
- 14 Don't be caught injuring a cat.
- 15 The poor little kittens were killed.

Back To The Text...

- 16 In section 1, "Cats ... are probably the most pampered of all domestic animals" is
a fact. b opinion.
- 17 What would be a good sub-heading for section 3?
a Spoilt Moggies
b Amazing Cats
- 18 The purpose of this text is
a to recount. b to inform.

Sequencing

- 19 Chronologically, who came first?
a Cambyses II
b Thutmose III
c Louis XIII
- 20 Chronologically, what happened first?
a Cats guarded the pagodas.
b Cats were domesticated.

Think About This

- 21 Look at the illustration on the front of the card. The cat on the bottom left is probably
a waiting to become an Egyptian sacrifice.
b out hunting vermin.
c guarding a pagoda.
- 22 The word *scorned* in section 10 is best replaced by
a belittled.
b killed.
c revered.
- 23 Where did the word *cat* come from?
a the Egyptians
b the Romans
c the Persians

Challenge Option

Research: Find and list eight types of large, non-domestic cats.

