

Kitty's Korner

The other evening while my brother Whiskey and I were just sitting at the window, looking out into the night sky, Whiskey leaned over to me and asked simply, "Socrates, Where do we come from?" I scratched behind my ear and shook myself and responded to him with contemplative, "I do not know brother".



Since our human owners were well into dreamland by now, I said to Whiskey, "Let's start up the computer and do a quick search before they wake up". Whiskey agreed and off we went from website to website seeking our true heritage.

I told Whiskey that I was going to do a fast check on our email first but it revealed no new messages from our readers. From there, Whiskey watched as I pawed my way through many Google searches, seeking where we came from.

Finally as the sun was starting to rise, we hit the mother load on the History of Cats and now wish to pass this along to all of our readers here of the Kitty's Korner. This was found at www.pets.ca in case we are breaking any kitty kopyright issues in copying this here for the magazine.

A history mixed with reverence and hate

The furry felines that inhabit our homes were not always a part of our families. It is believed that it was the Egyptians who first transformed the wild cat into a domesticated



creature. This occurred an estimated 4000 to 5000 years ago. Compare this to the domestication of the dog, around 20 000 years ago. Notice that the dog was domesticated much earlier than the cat. This may explain why cats are not often as eager to please humans, and why they retain many of their natural instincts such as hunting

mice. This independent nature and aloof quality is what led the Egyptians to admire these animals and bring them into their homes. What happened before this though? How did the wild cat evolve into the domesticated cat that we see today? We will focus on these questions and more as we strive to uncover the history of the cat.

Here's a shocking fact – the very earliest ancestors of cats evolved from reptiles. Reptiles appear to us to be in stark contrast to the cat, so this may sound strange, but indeed it's true. This development led to a group of small animals (approximately 30cm) that had sharp teeth for cutting. These creatures lived in the forest, either in the trees or on the ground. The miacids, as they were called, had long bodies and tails and were mostly carnivorous. These animals were to eventually adapt and evolve into the various carnivores of today (cat, dog, and many others). It is a myth that domestic cats evolved from the saber-toothed tiger as many people believe. The saber-toothed tiger was a gigantic cat, weighing up to 400kg that lived as early as 10 000 years ago. However, it failed to evolve and became extinct around that time.

Now that we have unsheathed the truth about the ancestry of the wild cat, we can move on back to the ancient

Egyptians and their relationship with the cat. Simply said, the Egyptians worshiped cats. They saw them as divine creatures, and worshipped their confident, independent personalities. Ancient Egyptians were so extreme in this manner that their law stated that a person guilty of murdering a cat was punishable by death! Understandably, if a person stumbled across a dead cat they would wail and moan in loud sorrow. This act ensured that everyone was aware of their grief, so they would not get blamed for the cat's death.



Although in modern times we mourn when our pet cats die, the Egyptians took this to a new level. The death of a household cat would cause such extreme sadness that the entire family would shave their eyebrows in remembrance. Additionally, those from wealthy families would mummify their cat and put it in a tomb with treasures and fine jewelry as its final resting place. The Egyptians' devotion to cats was not just to a single household pet, but to all cats!

Their reverence for these sacred creatures however, was used against them in a war with the Persians. How did this happen? Having a keen appreciation for the Egyptian culture, the Persians snuck into town, stealing as many cats as they could without being noticed. Then, on the battlefield as the two sides approached each other, the Persians released the cats. This plan worked flawlessly. The Egyptians would not attack the Persians for fear of killing the cats, and thus the Persians won the war with no casualties. The Egyptian devotion towards their cats was admirable, even though it resulted in their downfall.

Eventually, realizing the benefits the cats had in protecting crops from pests and giving Egypt economic benefits, some were stolen by the Greeks. Over time, more and more countries added the cat to their populations through trade. They did not worship the cat quite like the Egyptians did, however they did hold them in high regard and deeply appreciated their hunting skills. The cat spread throughout the world until one day everything went wrong.



During the Middle Ages, the public view of cats was flipped upside down when Pope Innocent VIII denounced the adoration of cats as pagan worship that was in defiance of God. The public now believed that all cats were evil, their sole purpose being to mislead and corrupt the faithful with their black magic. Something had to be done to stop this. The solution was that all cat owners were hunted down and put on trial as witches and heretics. When found guilty of "consorting with demonic forces", both the cats and their owners were burned to death. How could cats ever survive this slaughter?

Fortunately for cat lovers cats as a species did survive and the attitude towards cats became favorable again in Victorian times. This can mainly be attributed to certain

individuals who admired cats and wanted to raise their societal status. Harrison Weir was one of these people and he organized the first cat show in Britain in 1871. This cat show led to increased public interest in cats and in breeding them for their appearance. Another noteworthy name was Louis Wain, a cat artist, breeder, judge, and president of the National Cat Club in 1890. Both of these men deserve great mention for helping to rid the cat of its prior association with the devil.

The cat established its permanent place in the lives of humans by surviving though the brute viciousness practiced against them by many. They continue to live widespread around the world and bring with them a whimsical air of confidence, intelligence, and independence. The Ancient Egyptians would have been pleased to see these same qualities that modern cats have retained throughout the years.

I next leaned over to Whiskey while shutting off the computer and asked if he was now satisfied in knowing his heritage. Whiskey responded in typical fashion by giving me a high five with his paw and said, "Come Socrates, the window awaits us".



Your Furry Friend
Socrates

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