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The History of Cats

Cats are such an integral part of our lives that it seems strange that for most of our history there were no domestic cats. While dogs have been our constant companions for at least 15,000 years (and by some estimates more than 50,000 years), the cat didn't deign to come and live with us until 10,000 years ago.

It's easy to understand why. The cat is a supreme predator, and quite capable of looking after itself.

You may wonder why cats allowed themselves to become domesticated at all, and as with most things to do with cats, it was because it suited them. With the invention of agriculture, large storage silos were erected to house grain crops. Rodents moved in to feast on this bounty, and cats moved in to feed them.

Archeological records suggest that the first domesticated cats were descendants of *Felis libyca*, the African wildcat. Domestication first occurred in the Middle East, where large scale agriculture originated.

But there are at least two other varieties of wildcat that may have contributed to the genetic make up of domestic cats. One is *Felis silvestris*, the European wildcat, while the other is *Felis manul*, the Pallas or Steppe cat, from Asia.

One of the earliest bits of evidence regarding domestic cats is a Turkish statue, dating back some 8,000 years. This shows women playing with cats and indicates that cats were already domesticated by this time.

The first written records regarding cats were found in Egypt, and date back to 4,000 BC. The Egyptians regarded cats as the embodiment of the goddess Bast, and killing a cat, even accidentally, carried the death penalty.

After the Roman conquest of Egypt, cats were taken back to Italy and from there they spread to the rest of Europe. In Britain, they became popular pets while in Scandinavia they were much-loved by the Vikings. The Norse goddess, Freya is depicted riding a chariot drawn by winged cats.

By the Middle Ages, however, the cat had fallen from favor in Europe. After the church had declared them 'servants of Satan', cats were routinely killed and tortured. As the number of cats declined so rodent numbers spiraled out of control. Europe's citizenry were made to pay a heavy price for their treatment of cats. The Black Plague, a disease spread by rats, cut a swathe across the continent, killing millions of people.

By the Renaissance cats were back in favor as pets. The great artist Leonardo da Vinci, referred to them as 'God's perfect creation'. It became commonplace to see holes cut into the bottom of doors to allow access to the resident cat.

In Asia, meanwhile, the cat had always been admired as a bringer of luck and a banisher of evil spirits. They were cherished and revered throughout the Far East, and featured in many art works.

The cat retains its popularity today as a human companion, even surpassing the dog in terms of popularity in some countries. This is a worthy tribute to this endearing, elegant animal.

If you've just adopted a cat or kitten, let me be the first to congratulate you. You'll probably be looking for [kitten names](#), and if so I recommend a visit to www.catnameshq.com. This site has a huge database of cat and kitten names, including an excellent collection of [female cat names](#).

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