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Volume Speciale 2 (2025)

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CATS - PAST AND PRESENT
An interdisciplinary perspective
Rome, 19th-21st November, 2025

Abstract Book

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Francesca Lugli
Ivana Fiore

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CATS past & present
1st International Conference

CATS - PAST & PRESENT
An interdisciplinary perspective

Rome, 19th -21st November 2025

Associazione Italiana di Etnoarcheologia Roma

National Research Council (CNR)
Sala Convegni, via dei Marrucini (no street number)
19th-20th November

Sapienza Università di Roma
Dipartimento Istituto Italiano di Studi Orientali ISO
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Program

Wednesday, 19th November 2025
National Research Council (CNR)

09:00 Registration and Welcome
09:30 Opening Remarks

INTRODUCTION

10:00 Simone Pollo (Lectio Magistralis) - *Cats, the City and Not-Just-Human Democracy*
10:30 Eugenia Natoli - *Solitary in the Past, Social in the Present: Behavioural Plasticity of the Domestic Cat*
10:45 Astrid D'Eredità, Barbara Nazzaro - *The Cats of Rome and the Colosseum: Between Collective Imagination and Daily Management of the Cat Colony*

Coffee Break

GENETICS & ISOTOPES

11:30 Claudio Ottoni (Lectio Magistralis) - *The Dispersal of Domestic Cats to Europe Over the Last 2,000 Years*
12:00 Jeanne Mattei, Thierry Grange, Eva-Maria Geigl - *What Can Ancient Genomes Teach Us About the Evolution of the Cat-Human Relationship?*
12:15 Betty Mouraud, Patrizia Serventi, Bea De Cupere, Marco De Martino, Valentina Rovelli, Sébastien Lepetz, Gaëtan Jouanin, Sean Doherty, Naomi Sykes, Laurent Frantz, Greger Larson, Joris Peters, Wim Van Neer, Claudio Ottoni - *Paleogenomic Insights into the Dispersal of Domestic Cats to Europe and Selection Patterns Across Time*
12:30 Gene T. Shev, Bea De Cupere, Anastasia Brozou, Benjamin T. Fuller, Marcello A. Mannino, Wim Van Neer, Steven Bouillon, Claudio Ottoni - *Cat-Human Interactions Reconstructed with Stable Isotope Analysis at the Late Roman – Early Byzantine Site of Sagalassos, Turkey (ca. 300-650 CE)*

Discussion

13:00 *Lunch Break*

PALAEONTOLOGY & ZOOLOGY

14:00 Raffaele Sardella (Lectio Magistralis) - *Felids – 35 Million Years of Evolution*
14:30 Dawid Adam Iurino, Alessio Iannucci, Alessandro Tasso, Fabio Mongiovì, Fabio Bona, Marco Voltolini, Raffaele Sardella - *A Glimpse into the Enigmatic Evolutionary History of* Felis silvestris*: New Insights from a Late Pleistocene Cranium from Ingarano (Puglia, Italy)*
14:45 Jordi Serangeli - *The Importance of Felines in Both Human and Environmental Evolution*
15:00 Ibra Edoardo Monti, Roberta Lecis, Andrea Sforzi, Massimo Scandura - *A Wildcat from the Heart of the Mediterranean: Insights from One Year of Non-Invasive Monitoring of the Sardinian Wildcat* (Felis silvestris lybica)

Coffee Break

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16:15 Ursula Thun Hohenstein, Francesca Alhaique, Ivana Fiore, Antonio Tagliacozzo - *Wild cat exploitation in Italy during the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic*
16:30 Claudia Minniti, Chiara Assunta Corbino - *From Luxury to Companion Animal: The History of Cat in Italy from the Iron Age to the Middle Ages*
16:45 Ilaria Lonegro, Fabio Fiori, Antonio Curci - *Cats of the Elite: Case Study of the Cesspit of the Frederician Fortified Tower in Monselice (Padua)*

17:00 Eduards Plankājs - *Archaeological Evidence of the Earliest Domestic Cats in the Territory of Latvia*

Discussion

Thursday, 20th November 2025
National Research Council (CNR)

ARCHAEOLOGY

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09:30 Magorzata Grebska-Kulow - *Leopards and Other Wild Cats in the East Mediterranean Region During the Prehistory*
09:45 Giuseppe Minunno - *Bastet in Phoenician Religion*
10:00 Marina Maria Serena Nuovo, Marta Osypińska, Piotr Osypiński, Iwona Zych - *The Cats of Berenike - Remarks on Some Companion Animals from an Early Roman Red Sea Port in Egypt*

Coffee Break

10:45 Valentina Cosentino - *The Cat between Ancient Greece and Rome: The Time of Resistance*
11:00 Andrei V. Varenov - *Cats and Feline Predators in Sanxingdui Ritual Bronzes*
11:15 Maria Kudinova - *Cats as Pet Animals in Medieval China (Tang - Song Period)*
11:30 Leonardo Fioretti, Lidja Mcnight, Paolo Schirolli, Chantal Milani, Francesca Motta, Jonathan Elias, Sabina Malgora - *Miw, the Cat in Ancient Egypt: History, Sources, Relationship with People and Radiological Analysis*
11:45 Andrei V. Novikov, Aleksandr V. Kenig - *Cat in the Culture of Ob-Ugrians*
12:00 Olga V. Maltseva - *Domestication Pathway of Amur Cats: From Practical Hunters to Venerated Symbols*

Discussion

13:00 *Lunch Break*

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14:00 Margherita Mussi, Manuel Bea, Gianpiero Di Maida - *Big Cats in Palaeolithic Art*
14:15 Daniela Zampetti - *Cats and Their Relatives: The Felids in the Central Sahara Rock Art*
14:30 Dmitriy V. Cheremisin - *Snow Leopard in the Rock Art of Altai*
14:45 Vladimir V. Bobrov - *Large Cats in the Art of Early Nomads of the Eurasian Steppe*
15:00 Arina Bodrova - *A Scene of a Feline Predator Tormenting a Hoofed Animal in a Pazyryk Tattoo*
15:15 Frédéric Devienne - *Cats and Humans in Chinese Pictorial Arts from the Origins to the Present Day: What Feline Imagery Reveals About Domesticated Cats in China*
15:30 Donatella Failla - *Cats and Women in Japan: Socio-Cultural Contexts, Representations, and Symbolic Meanings*
15:45 Franziska Kabelitz - *Cats in the Cabinet: Tracing Feline Presence in Berlin's Museum for Islamic Art*

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Friday, 21st November 2025
Dipartimento Istituto Italiano di Studi Orientali ISO

PERFORMING & VISUAL ARTS

9:00 Irina Sopova - *Cat's Role in European Musical Theatre*
9:15 Alessandra Lazzari - *Character Analysis of Feline Breeds as They Appear in the Periodic Graphic Series*
9:30 Galina Sychenko - *Matroskin the Cat – an Archetypal Fairy Tale Character, Iconic Cartoon Hero and the Face of the "Prostokvashino" Dairy Brand*

Discussion

ETHNOGRAPHY, ANTHROPOLOGY & FOLKLORE

10:00 Simona Bealcovschi (Lectio Magistralis) - *The Fabulous Journey of the Western Feline: From Demonization in the Middle Ages to the Enchantment of Contemporary Cyberspace*
10:15 Ferran Pons-Raga - *Beyond a Three-Letter Acronym (TNR): Ethnography of the Socio-Technical Life of Trap-Neuter-Return in the Canary Islands, Spain*
10:30 Antonio Affuso, Ada Preite, Marta Golin, Vito Antonio Baglivo - *Cats in Ionian Basilicata: Archaeological and Cultural Evidence*

Coffee Break

11:15 Suzana Marjanić - *The Balkan Cat*
11:30 Valeria Kolosova - *"Cat" Plants in Slavonic Folk Botany*
11:45 Mariya P. Chernaya - *The Cat's Paw Is Soft, but Its Claw Is Sharp: Cats in Russian Folk Culture*
12:00 Francesca Lugli, Graziano Capitini - *Nomads and Cats*
12:15 Maria V. Stanyukovich - *Domestic Cat, Civet and Visayan Leopard Cat in the Philippines*

Discussion

13:00 *Lunch Break*

14:00 Aglaia Iankovskaia - *Cats That Walk by Themselves: Approaching Human-Cat Relationships in Indonesia*
14:15 Claudio Giardino, Jing Tai, Li Man - *Secular and Spiritual: Comparative Anthropological Perception of Cat between Eastern and Western Cultures*
14:30 Vienna Eleuteri - *From Desert Companions to Urban Symbols: The Evolving Role of Cats in Bedouin and Contemporary Saudi Society*
14:45 Guy Lanoue - *Cat Tales Among Northwestern Native North Americans*
15:00 Yaroslav Vassilkov - *Cats and Humans in India: From Harappa up to the Present*

Guy Lanoue - *Final Discussion and Closing Remarks*

Final toast

POSTER SESSION

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Francesca Corradini - *Domestication and Beyond*

Dario Daffara, Marina Lo Blundo, Paola Francesca Rossi - *Follow the Footprints ... the Neverending Story of Cats in Ostia*

Marco Fatucci, Valentina Asta - *The Case of the Isolated* Felis catus *Cranium from the Castle of Santa Severa (Italy)*

Ivana Fiore - *Gnawing on Bird Bones: Fractures and Traces*

Ivana Fiore, Luisa Migliorati - *A Cat in the Well at Peltuinum (Aquila, Italy)*

Ivana Fiore, Antonio Tagliacozzo - *The Felids of Grotta della Madonna in Praia a Mare (Italy)*

Laura Eloisa Gorello, Ursula Thun Hohenstein - *The Lion and the Hero: A Feline Remain from the Sanctuary of Hercules at Campochiaro (CB)*

Francesca Lugli, Ivana Fiore - *The Cat at the Museum*

Beniamino Mecozzi, Dušan Borić, Francesca Alhaique - *The European Wildcat from the Fucino Basin (Italy): Paleontological and Archeozoological Considerations*

Maria Chiara Pizza, Giulia Patrizi, Lucio Fiorini, Claudia Minniti - *The Role of Cat in the Cult of Adonis: The Evidence from the Etruscan Southern Sanctuary of Gravisca (Tarquinia, Italy)*

Ana Rois, Beatriz Mendonça, Susana Dias, Gonçalo Jesus - *Public Perceptions and Ecological Realities: The Contested Role of Cats*

Leonardo Salari - *Zoomorphic Figures of Felids in the Nile Mosaic of Palestrina (Latium, Italy; 2nd Century BC)*

Patrizia Serventi, Betty Mouraud, Gene Shev, Bea De Cupere, Valentina Rovelli, Marco De Martino, Marica Baldoni, Ulrich Schmölcke, Steven Bouillon, Wim Van Neer, Claudio Ottoni - *Bioarchaeology of Cats in Motion: Ancient DNA and Isotopic Traces from Medieval Urban Trade Hubs*

Preface

Cats are among the most popular pets in the world

- When, where, how and why were cats domesticated?
- What is their history?
- What is their role in traditional and non-traditional societies?
- What is their relationship with Human beings?
- What is their relationships to domesticated and non-domesticated animals?

The cat has been present in human communities for thousands of years but its history is so for poorly known.

In the last few years, data and hypotheses about cats have progressively increased, sometimes controversially, in various fields of research. However, the lack of exchange between scholars of different backgrounds has hampered a real advance in the study of the relationship between humans and cats.

This conference (which follows on from our previous conference on humans and dogs) aims at creating a platform for the exchange of practical and theoretical approaches for scholars from different fields of research (e.g. genetics, zoology, archaeology, archaeozoology, ethnoarchaeology, anthropology, ethnography, folklore, history of art, sociology, veterinary, psychology, ethnomusicology, literature, philosophy, comics) in order to achieve a real interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspective on the history of cats which will be pivotal for the future of research on this topic.

Francesca Lugli & Ivana Fiore

Acknowledgments

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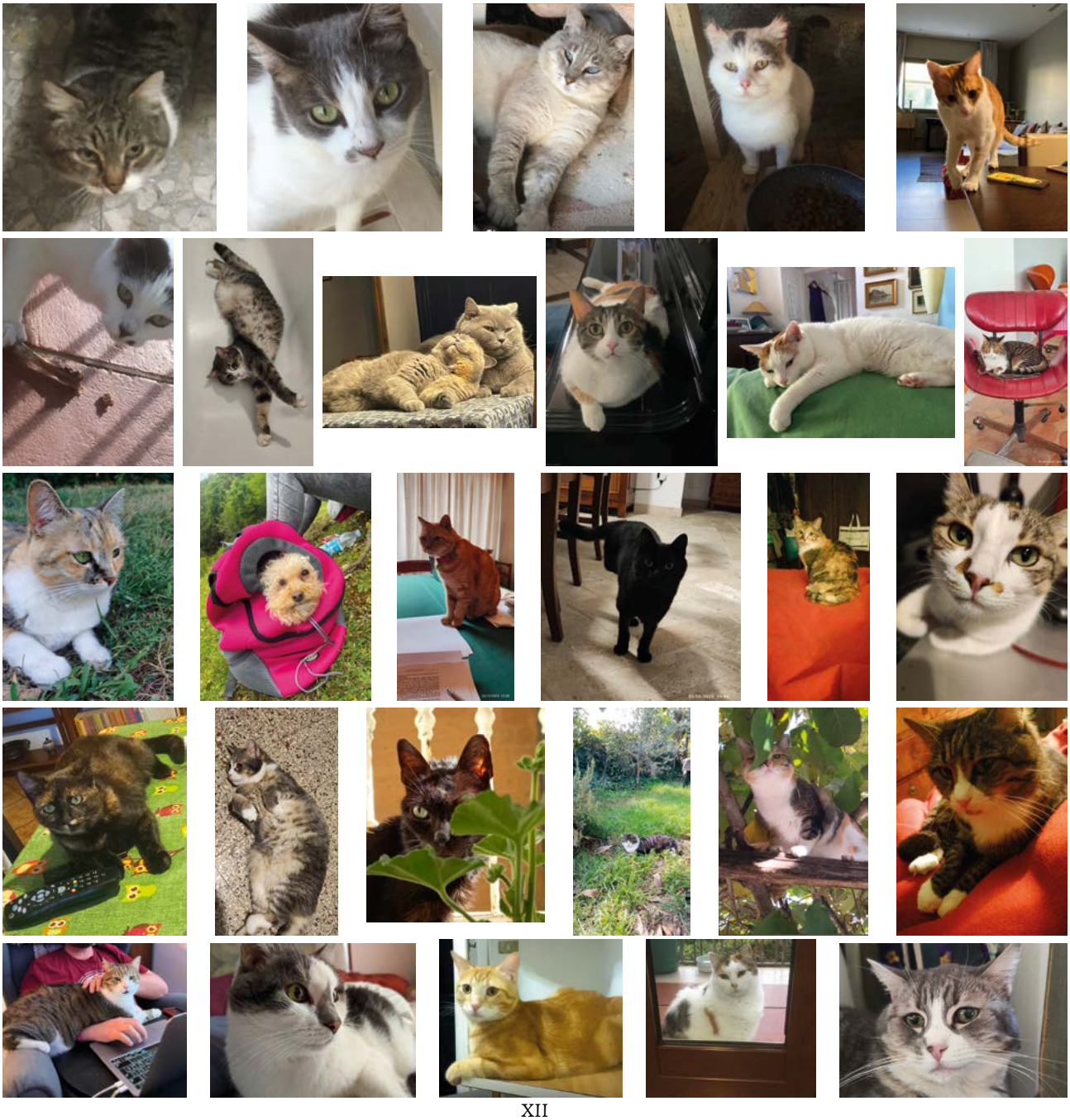
Elisa Barboni - *Oliver and Dolphine*, Enzo Barillà and Antonella Bizzarro - *Ernesto*, Stefano Biagetti, Ania - *Bambolina*, Paolo Burci, Giusy Calandra - *Punto e virgola*, Graziano Capitini - *Teodolinda and Mustafá*, Dario Daffara and Paola Francesca Rossi - *Giorgio*, Franco D'Agostino - *Panuzio*, *Sofia and Isotta*, Vienna Eleuteri - *Helwa*, Luciano Fattore - *Mais*, Fiore Family - *Micetta Family*, Adele Fiore - *OcchiBlu*, Fiorini Family - *Alien*, Jan Gadeyne, Patrizia Gioia, Simona Guerra - *Micio*, Marta Lugli - *Clappy and Sissy*, Luisa Migliorati - *Otto*, *Saké and Momoji*, Filippo and Anna Livia Perriccioli, Mario Federico Rolfo - *Minou*, Elisa and Gianluca Rollo - *Biro*, Andrea Romagnoli - *XFile*, Angela Rossi - *Strogatto*, Fernanda Rossi - *Gigio*, Antonio Tagliacozzo - *Pepe*, Umberto - *Kyria and Sirio*, Roberto Vannata.

Our heartfelt thanks to *Cu.Cu. Cucina&Cultura Catering*, Rome's first fully organic, sustainable, and fair-trade catering service, for accompanying our conference with a philosophy so naturally aligned with our own - honoring the planet, nurturing genuine connection, and embracing a mindful vision of the future we choose to shape together.



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Cats, the City and Not-Just-Human Democracy

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Fig. 1. The Sultan's throne, at Topkapı Palace in Istanbul. (Photo by S. Pollo)

Urban environments hold a distinctive significance in the history and practice of democracy. The polis was the cradle of democracy. Cities are the contexts in which democracies flourish, undergo transformation, or fall into crisis.

Today, moreover, approximately 50% of human beings resides in urban settings (about 70% in Europe). Cities are also the primary sites both of impact on climate change and of exposure to its consequences.

For all these reasons, urban life must be conceived as crucial to sustaining democracy and to rethinking it within a renewed ecological dimension.

Fig. 2. Escalator in Istanbul. (Photo by S. Pollo)

The presence of cats in cities, and the forms of relationships that human beings establish with them, may serve as a starting point for reflecting on the features of urban contexts whose democratic life is capable of extending inclusion to the non-human world.

Keywords: *Cats, City, Democracy, Ecology, Climate Change*

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Solitary in the Past, Social in the Present: Behavioural Plasticity of the Domestic Cat

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Fig. 1. Behavioural plasticity in domestic cats is invariably reported in the literature in terms of food opportunism. Indeed, in urban environments, unowned free-ranging cats readily exploit new food resources, as illustrated here with pasta.

The unowned free-ranging domestic cat (*Felis s. catus* L.) is now present on all continents, with the exception of the poles and certain islands. It inhabits a wide variety of environments, where the spatial and temporal distribution of resources varies greatly, resulting in individuals with very different lifestyles – from solitary to social organization (Vitale 2022). This ubiquity is often seen as a sign of high behavioural adaptability. Therefore, welfare and management decisions regarding unowned free-ranging cats should no longer rely solely on our understanding of the behavioural ecology of solitary cats living and breeding in more natural, "wild" environments.

Over approximately 40 years of research, our working groups have provided evidence that urban free-ranging domestic cats in the Anthropocene have responded to rapidly changing conditions – such as increased food availability and higher densities of conspecifics – by adapting their behaviour and social structures to form complex social groups. These urban cats display more social behaviours, including different breeding patterns, reduced infanticide, more frequent affiliative interactions, and different spatial groupings (Say *et al*. 2001). However, are we truly certain that domestic cats are as behaviourally plastic as they are nutritionally flexible (Natoli *et al*. 2022) (Fig. 1). If this were the case, the efficiency of male reproductive strategies would remain unchanged in the new environments colonised by domestic cats (e.g. urban environments); however, scientific research shows that no males, not even the most competitive ones, are able to achieve high reproductive success (Fig. 2).

Despite being found on every continent, domestic cats can only be considered native to certain regions. All domestic cats trace their origin to Southwest Asia and Egypt and are, in theory, alien species elsewhere (Krajcarz *et al.* 2022; Ottoni *et al.* 2017) (Fig. 1). The spread of cats throughout the Old World began during the Neolithic period and likely ended about a thousand years ago – possibly enough time for predator-prey relationships to develop. This contrasts with countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and those in the New World, where domestic cats were introduced between the early 1600s and 1800s. In these regions, domestic cats have caused significantly more ecological damage, contributing to the decline – and in some cases, extinction – of vulnerable native species, particularly on islands. But how do we define "damage"? Biologically, there is no objective definition – "damage" is a human moral category. Thus, decisions about the management of so-called "harmful" animal populations fall entirely within the domain of human judgement and serve the interests of the human species, which vary from place to place. From a bioethical perspective, domestic cats deserve humane control methods because they are sentient beings capable of suffering and therefore possess intrinsic moral value. Yet prey animals are also sentient and deserving of moral consideration.

Fig. 2. Litters generated by at least two males (multiple paternity). In the urban environment: 80% (42 litters; 192 kittens); in the rural environment: 22% (31 litters; 120 kittens); in the sub-Antarctic island environment: 0% (11 litters; 35 kittens) (Say *et al.* 2001).

The dilemma of safeguarding both domestic cats and wildlife remains unresolved. Multiple, often conflicting, perspectives exist on the issue. There may be no definitive solution, except to humanise methods for controlling feral and owned domestic cats – and other super- and meso-predators– as much as possible, in order to protect prey species. To this end, it is urgent to increase scientific research into humane methods such as genetic biocontrols and contraceptive baits to reduce cat fertility – approaches that are already under study but not yet widely available (Natoli 2024).

Ultimately, it is time to abandon further hypocrisy: this is a problem created by human beings through poor decisions and behaviour. Humans are the most invasive vertebrate species, and our management of other species – including the domestic cat – is just one example of how our invasiveness manifests itself.

Keywords: *Feral cats*, *Behaviour*, *Adaptation*, *Ecology*, *Ethics*

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The Cats of Rome and the Colosseum: Between Collective Imagination and Daily Management of the Cat Colony

Astrid D'Eredità, Barbara Nazzaro

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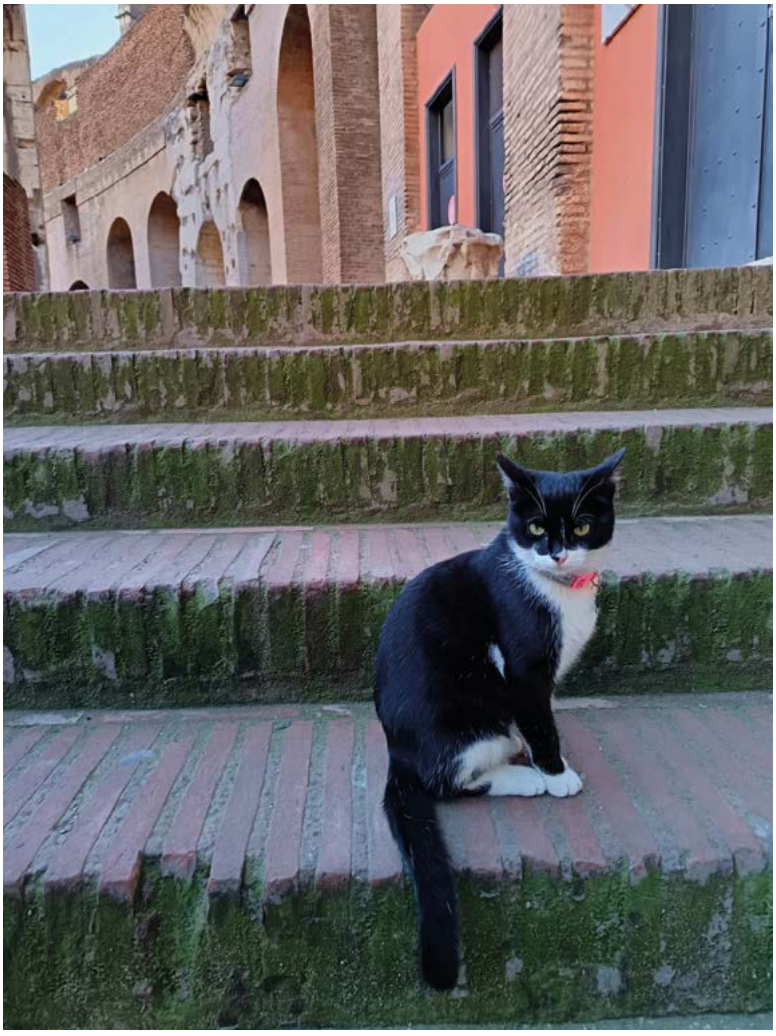


Fig. 1. Cesarina, Colosseum. (Photo by authors)

This contribution aims to analyse the case of the Parco archeologico del Colosseo as a privileged observatory for studying the interactions between animals, cultural heritage and society. Through the reconstruction of historical, media and management dynamics, it aims to highlight how cat colonies contribute to redefining the ways in which archaeological heritage is enjoyed and perceived, with implications that go beyond the local dimension to take on relevance in a broader context of socio-cultural attitudes, policies and practices of interspecies coexistence.

The presence of cat colonies at the Parco archeologico del Colosseo is a phenomenon of interest for interdisciplinary research, combining historical, cultural, managerial and social aspects. The stable presence of cats among the arches of the Flavian Amphitheatre and in the surrounding areas (Roman Forum, Palatine Hill, Domus Aurea) has been documented since the 20th century, but it is part of a broader imagery that associates

felines with a symbolic and functional role in the city of Rome. These animals have played a practical role in controlling rodents and, at the same time, have been the subject of popular and literary representations that have reinforced their perception as "natural guardians" of the ruins.

The evolution of this relationship has accelerated significantly in recent times: the cats of the Colosseum, from paper postcards to calendars, cartoons and reels, have become part of a global communication ecosystem which, through content and narratives disseminated online, has helped to redefine the public image of the monument. In this context, the archaeological heritage, a cultural asset of global importance, takes on the additional role of an environment inhabited daily by an animal community. The presence of felines therefore acts as a symbolic mediator between visitors and the archaeological site.

Fig. 2. Simba, Domus Aurea. (Photo by authors)

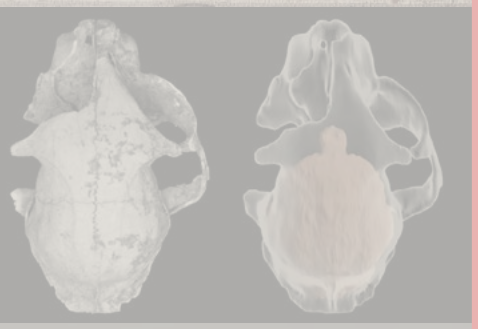
The coexistence of around 30,000 visitors per day and several feline groups also allows us to reflect on the complexity of relational dynamics. The cats receive attention and direct interaction from tourists, but also maintain an autonomous dimension, rooted in territoriality. The distribution of the felines is not uniform: distinct groups can be identified, permanently settled in the areas of the Colosseum, the Roman Forum, the Palatine Hill and the Domus Aurea. Each group has specific characteristics in terms of numbers, spatial distribution and behaviour.

From a management perspective, the experience of the Parco archeologico del Colosseo has become a model for other Italian archaeological sites and parks. The cat colony has been officially registered since 2021, and plans are in place for sterilisation, veterinary care and controlled feeding.

Keywords: *Colosseum, Rome, Archaeology, Cat Colony, Media*







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The Dispersal of Domestic Cats to Europe Over the Last 2,000 Years

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Fig. 1. Ancient cat from Hierakonpolis (credits: Hierakonpolis expedition).

From wild animals to pest controllers and finally to pets, the evolutionary success of domestic cats is indisputable. However, cats are understudied, especially if compared with other domesticates and their wild relatives. Zooarchaeological and genetic evidence demonstrated that domestic cats originated from the North African and Near Eastern wildcat, *Felis lybica lybica*. The interaction between humans and cats most likely started 11 thousand years ago in the Neolithic Levant. More recently, ancient mitochondrial DNA evidence suggested that domestic cats spread to southeast Europe as early as 4,400 BCE, however their dispersal to the rest of Europe is controversial due to the paucity of data.

To address that, we conducted genetic analyses on 225 cat remains from archaeological sites in Europe and Anatolia, resulting in 70 low-coverage genomes spanning a period of more than ten millennia from the 9th millennium BCE to the 19th century CE. We also generated 17 low- to high-coverage (~0.7- to 18-fold) genomes of present-day and museum wildcats from Italy, Bulgaria and North Africa, regions previously unexplored in terms of wildcat genetic diversity at the genome level.

This comprehensive genomic time transect enabled us to demonstrate that domestic cats were introduced to Europe around 2,000 years ago, much later than previously suggested, most likely from North Africa. In addition, a separate earlier introduction of wildcats from Northwest Africa, probably in the 1st millennium BCE, was responsible for the present-day wild population in Sardinia.

Fig. 2. Ancient cat mandibles (credits: Bea De Cupere).

Keywords: Felis catus, *Domestication*, *Europe*, *Roman era*, *Sardinia*

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What Can Ancient Genomes Teach Us About the Evolution of the Cat-Human Relationship?

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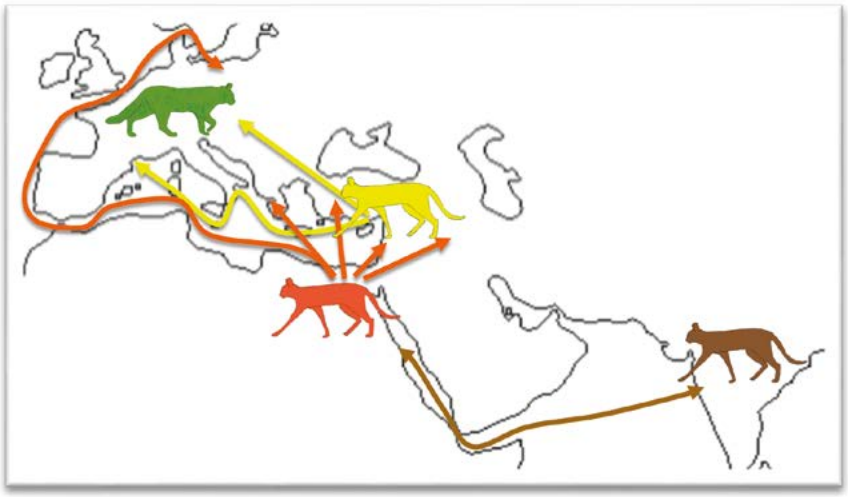

Fig. 1. Cat dispersal. (Map by authors)

The domestication process and the spread of the domestic cat have been approached by various scientific fields including history, archaeozoology and genetics, but many questions remain. The reasons for this lack of knowledge are numerous, from scarcity of archaeological cat remains, poor DNA preservation in the presumed domestication centers (Near East and Egypt) as well as propensity to hybridization between cats belonging to different populations/subspecies. In addition, proper domestication is not a prerequisite for cats to be a useful member of ancient human societies. These factors have rendered the domestication process of the cat complex. The first major paleogenetic study of the spread of cats as companions of humans since the Neolithic shed light on the dispersal of the cat in the company of humans was limited to the analysis of the maternal lineages, which only tell parts of the story. Subsequent studies of genomes suffer from limits in geographical and temporal extent and/or genomic coverage and therefore did not reveal the essentials of the domestication process.

We undertook a large genomic study of archaeological cats covering the entire Holocene and a large geographic region from the southern Mediterranean to the North Atlantic. Our results complete and partially contradict previous studies. They allow us to establish hypotheses accounting for the complexity and specificities of the domestication process of the cat.

Keywords: *Cat, Domestication, Paleogenomics, Hybridization, Dispersal*

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Paleogenomic Insights into the Dispersal of Domestic Cats to Europe and Selection Patterns Across Time

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Fig. 1. Picture of a cat skull (sample VLA05) from the Netherlands dated to the Bronze age. (Photo by authors)

Zooarchaeological and genetic evidence from the last two decades demonstrated that domestic cats originated from the North African and Near Eastern wildcat, *Felis lybica lybica*. The commensal relationship between humans and cats most likely started about 11 thousand years ago in the early farming communities of the Neolithic Levant (Vigne 2004). Yet, recent paleogenomic evidence showed that cats were introduced to Europe several millennia later, during the Roman era, from North Africa. Furthermore, an earlier human-mediated dispersal of North African wildcats may have originated the present-day wildcat population in Sardinia.

Recently, archaeozoological and ancient mitochondrial DNA evidence from northwest Europe suggested the presence of domestic cats in sites pre-dating the Roman era (Doherty *et al.*, preprint). However, until now, only five cat samples from the Bronze and Iron Age in Europe have been analysed at the nuclear level. One Sardinian sample was taxonomically identified as a *F. l. lybica* wildcat, and four European wildcats (*Felis silvestris silvestris*) were found in Greece and Italy (De Martino *et al.* 2025). This leaves a major gap of knowledge on the chronology of the domestic cat introduction into Europe. To address that, we analysed the DNA of more than 60 cat remains dated from the Bronze Age to the Middle Ages from northern and western Europe. Using state of art protocols, we extracted the DNA from cat skeletal remains (Fig. 1) and built double-stranded genomic libraries to generate low-coverage genome-wide data via shotgun sequencing (Meyer & Kircher 2010). The temporal

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transects of genomic variation made it possible to refine the timing of the introduction of the domestic cat to Europe using various population genetic analyses to infer the taxonomy of these samples.

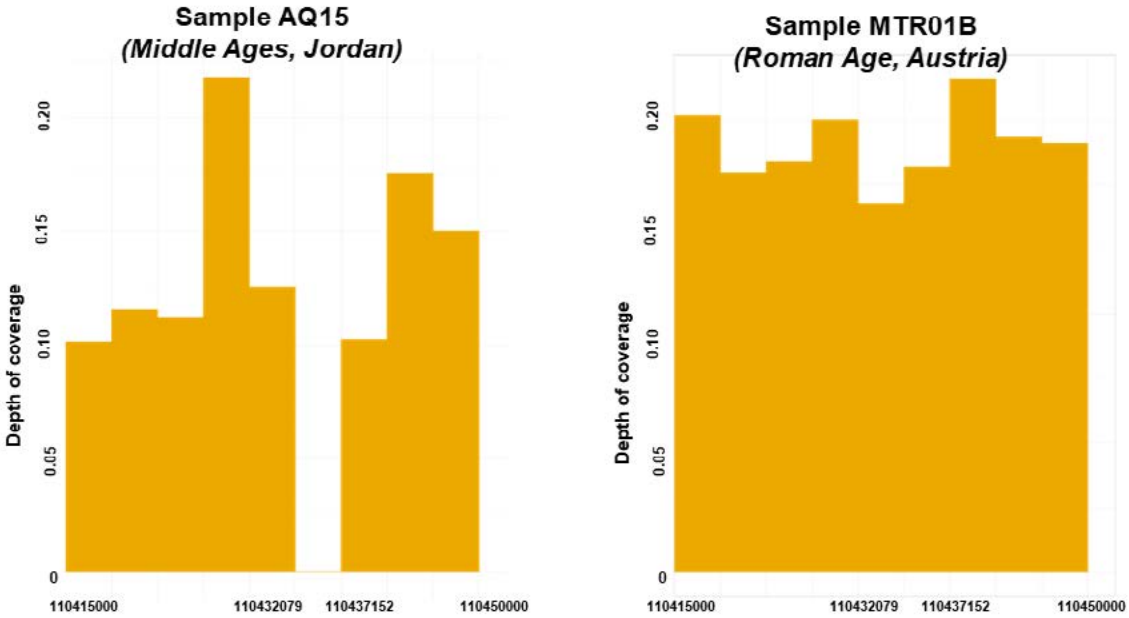

Fig. 2. Depth of coverage over 45 kb (coordinates as in the horizontal axis) in the X-chromosome in two ancient cats. The deletion spans from the positions 110,432,079 to 110,437, 152.

In addition, in the frame of this study, patterns of selection in the history of cat domestication are being investigated with a special focus on the variation of different traits across time. The domestic cat physical appearance is very close to its wild counterpart, for this reason traits associated with behaviour may have been selected during the early stages of domestication, whereas selection of aesthetic traits may have occurred later. Three types of traits will be investigated: behaviour, aesthetic and disease. Here, we show the results of the preliminary analysis conducted on the orange coat colour, caused by a 5kb deletion on the X chromosome (Kaelin *et al.* 2025). We compared the coverage of this region with the adjacent ones using 5kb windows in a custom python script. In total, more than 50 samples were screened for the presence of this deletion (Fig. 2). The results showed that only one cat from Jordan dated to the Ottoman era possessed the orange phenotype. In line with previous evidence, this suggest that coat variation appeared late in the history of cat domestication.

Keywords: *Domestication*, *Ancient DNA*, *Dispersal*, *Selection*

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Cat-Human Interactions Reconstructed with Stable Isotope Analysis at the Late Roman - Early Byzantine Site of Sagalassos, Turkey (ca. 300-650 CE)

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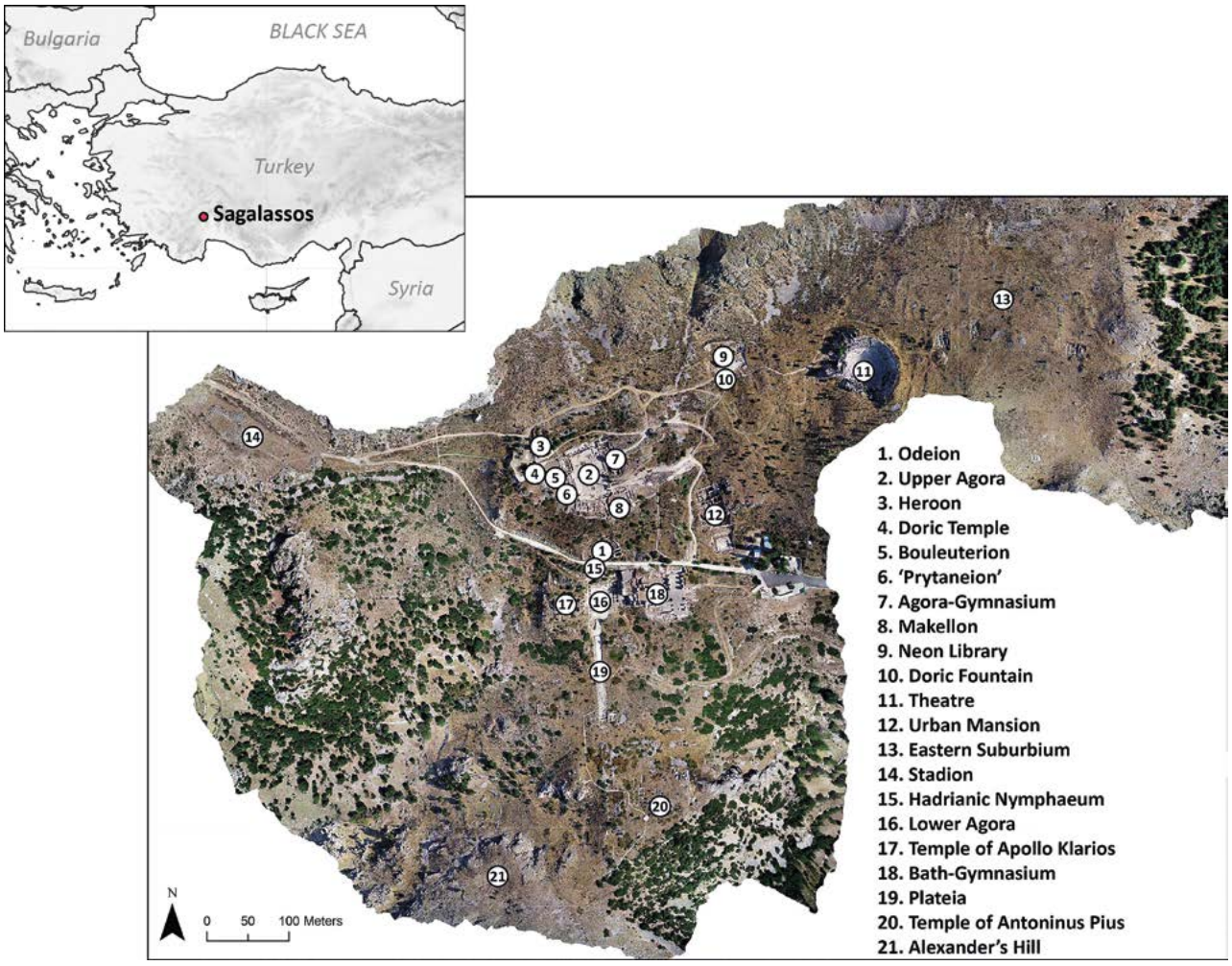

Fig. 1. Location and site map of Sagalassos, Turkey (C) Sagalassos Archaeological Research Proj.

Archaeological and genetic evidence suggests the ancient Romans were responsible for introducing domestic cats (*Felis catus*) to much of Europe north of the Alps (De Martino *et al.* 2025). Despite the apparent value placed on cats, they are not commonly featured in Roman literature or art in ways that indicate a role beyond that of utilitarian pest control (Nuovo and Zych 2023). Stable isotope ratio analysis of bone collagen permits the investigation of cat-human interactions through the sharing of diets during the early phase of their introduction across the Roman Empire. We analysed new bone collagen samples to complement previously published data (Fuller *et al.* 2012; Van Neer *et al.* 2024) from the Late Roman to Early Byzantine (ca. 300 – 650 CE) periods at Sagalassos, Turkey (Fig. 1). These include the carbon (δ13C), nitrogen (δ15N) and non-exchangeable hydro-

gen (δ2H) values of cats (n=24), humans (n=16), dogs (n=17), domestic livestock (n=113), wild terrestrial fauna (n=85), and freshwater fish (n=36). By constructing an isotopic food web using these species, it was possible to determine the dietary composition of the cats, including the relative contributions of domestic animals, fish, and small mammals likely obtained through hunting. The isotopic results suggest that humans shared a more similar dietary niche with cats rather than with dogs. Nevertheless, the cat isotopic niche size is broader, suggesting that cats had more diverse diets and were not completely reliant on human-sourced foods. A Bayesian dietary mixing model (FRUITS) using all three stable isotope ratio proxies was applied to 16 individual cats to estimate the relative contributions of domestic animals, fish, and hunted wild prey (Fig. 2).

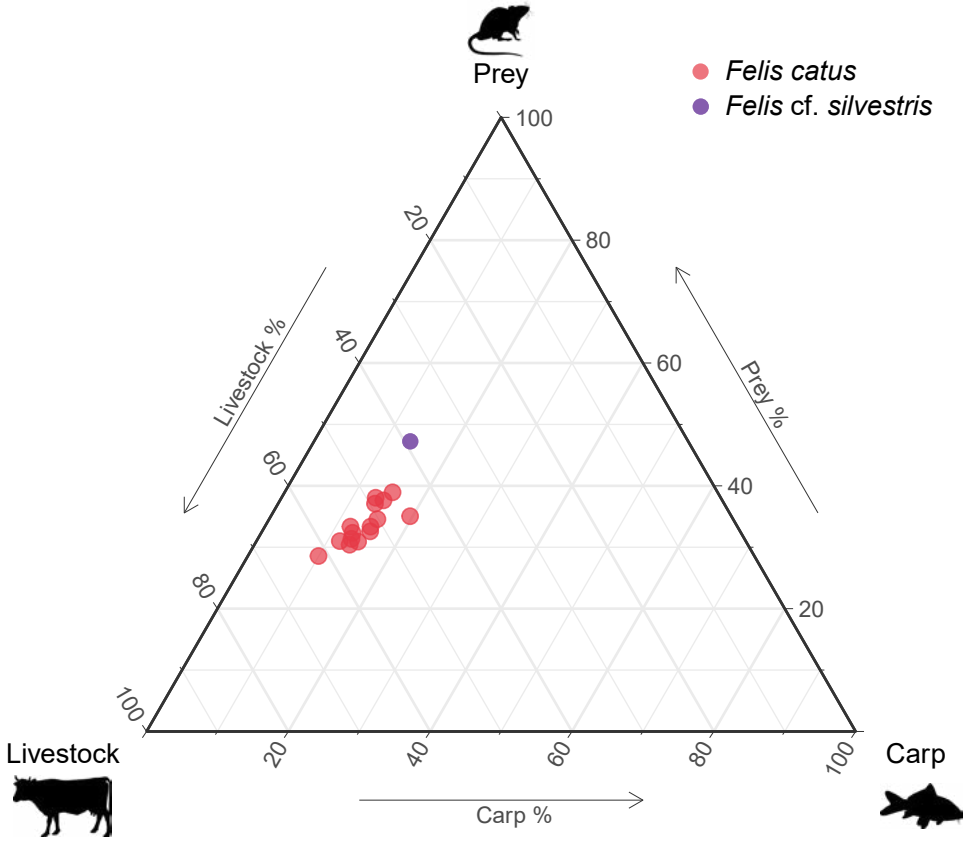

Fig. 2. Mean value Bayesian estimations of food source contributions for cats.

Results suggest that over half of the cat dietary protein came from domestic animals (μ = 52.3 ± 24.9%), but that small prey were also hunted to a large extent (μ = 33.7 ± 24.0%), while fish consumption was negligible (μ = 13.6 ± 12.1%). One cat had larger bone dimensions than the other specimens from the site and may belong to the European wildcat (*F. cf. silvestris*). This distinction is also evident isotopically, as it had a much higher δ^2H value outside the range of the domestic cats from Sagalassos. The statistically similar isotopic results observed between the cats and humans at Sagalassos raise questions about the closeness of their relationship. While some cats may have been cared for as companions, their free-roaming nature means that this isotopic overlap does not necessarily imply a closer bond than, say, between dogs and humans. Instead, it likely reflects a parallel dietary niche shaped by the opportunistic feeding behaviour of cats in scavenging or receiving provisioned food from humans, while they also supplemented their diet by hunting small prey (Germain, Ruette, and Poulle 2009). In tracing what Roman cats consumed, we begin to uncover a dietary relationship shaped by proximity and the shared ecology of urban life.

Keywords: *Stable isotope ratio analysis, Roman Empire, Dietary reconstruction, Synanthropy, Cat-human interactions*

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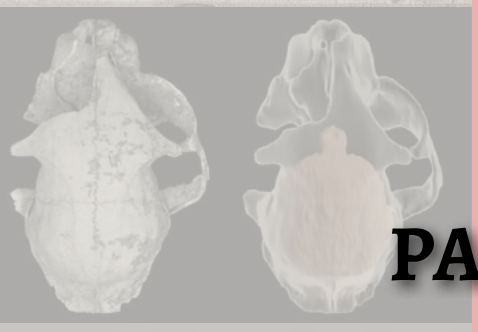

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Felids - 35 Million Years of Evolution

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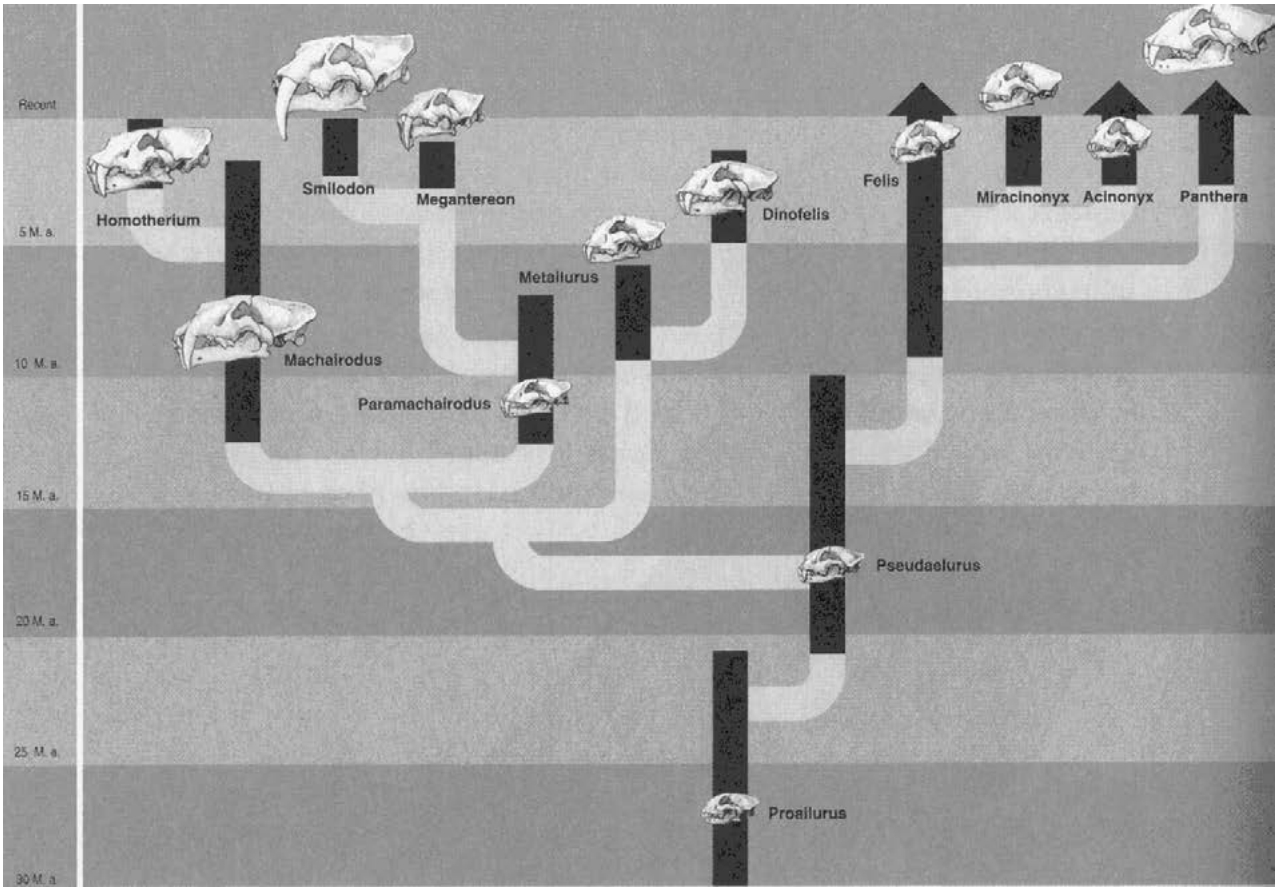

Fig. 1. "Phylogenetic relationships in felids". (M. Anton in Turner 1997)

The felid family – Felidae – holds a remarkable tale of evolutionary success that unfolds over tens of millions of years. Felids, commonly known as cats, encompass both the large iconic predators like lions and tigers and the familiar small domestic cats that share our homes. Their evolutionary story blends ancient origins, adaptive radiation, global migrations, and the ongoing influence of humans. Felids belong to the mammalian order Carnivora, and more specifically, the suborder Feliformia. The earliest ancestors of modern carnivorans were miacoids, small, tree-dwelling creatures living in the Paleogene (66 to 33 Ma). These gave rise to a number of carnivorous families, including the line that would become the true cats.

The first true felids appeared during the Oligocene epoch (33 to 25 Ma). The earliest well-known cat, *Proailurus*, lived in Eurasia and is regarded as "the dawn cat." *Proailurus* possessed features resembling both modern cats and their more primitive relatives – such as retractable claws, a flexible spine, and teeth specialized for shearing meat. In the early Miocene (approx. 20 Ma), *Pseudaelurus* emerged. This genus is thought to be ancestral to all living cats, and its members eventually gave rise to several evolutionary branches.

During the Miocene, felids diversified markedly. Two principal radiations can be distinguished: one leading to the extinct sabretoothed cats (the subfamily Machairodontinae) and the other leading to the extant lineages of "big cats" (Pantherinae) and "small/medium cats" (Felinae).

Machairodontinae, including genera like *Smilodon* and *Homotherium*, developed enormously elongated upper canines and were adapted to hunting large prey. Sabertooths occupied ecosystems worldwide until their extinction about 11,000 years ago.

Genetic studies reveal that today's cats are divided into eight main evolutionary lineages – each containing one or more genera and species. These lineages include the big cats (genus *Panthera*), the small wildcats and domestic cats (genus *Felis*), the lynxes (genus *Lynx*), and others.

Molecular studies calibrated with fossil data indicate that the Felinae, the subfamily including small and medium-sized cats, originated in Eurasia (approximately 10–11 Ma). The earliest representatives - *Pristifelis attica* from the late Miocene of Greece and Turkey (~9 Ma) - display cranial and dental features typical of modern small cats. During the late Miocene and Pliocene, these early felines spread across the Old World. The earliest known pantherine fossil skull from the Tibetan Plateau (*Panthera blytheae*) dated to the Late Miocene/Early Pliocene supports an Asian origin for the big-cat lineage followed by dispersal into Africa and the Americas.

Early hominins frequently shared ecosystems with formidable carnivores, including large felids (big cats and saber-toothed cats). These predators hunted large ungulates and often left behind partial carcasses – either because they abandoned leftovers or were themselves displaced.

Large felids thus functioned as "top carnivores" in the predatory ecosystem, and the dynamics of their kills and leftovers created a niche for hominins: not only hunting but also scavenging became part of early human subsistence. The interplay between felids, other carnivores and hominins likely influenced the evolution of meat-eating behaviours, tool-use, social cooperation, and ultimately the ecological expansion of *Homo* into new environments.

The genus *Felis* emerged in Africa and southwestern Asia during the early Pliocene, later diversifying into species adapted to arid, forested, or steppe habitats. Fossil remains of *Felis lunensis* from the early Pleistocene of Italy are thought to represent one of the earliest members of the modern wildcat lineage. From these forms, domestic cats ultimately descended.

Key words: *Evolution*, *Dispersal*, *Ecology*, *Carnivorans*, *Neogene-Quaternary*

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A Glimpse into the Enigmatic Evolutionary History of *Felis silvestris*: New Insights from a Late Pleistocene Cranium from Ingarano (Puglia, Italy)

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Fig. 1. Cranium of *Felis silvestris* from Ingarano (left) and 3D model obtained from CT-scan with brain endocast (right). (Photo by authors)

While cats are now among the most popular and widespread companion animals, and exert considerable influence in mass culture, the origins of the wildcat (*Felis silvestris* Schreber, 1777) are poorly known. Even though the species is generally considered to derive from a primarily Early Pleistocene form known as *Felis lunensis* Martelli, 1906 (Martelli, 1906; Ficcarelli and Torre, 1975) several aspects of its evolutionary history are also still unclear. This lacuna in our knowledge is primarily due to the paucity of diagnostic fossil remains of the Middle and Late Pleistocene wildcats, which are predominantly fragmented and consist of isolated mandibles, teeth, and postcranial elements.

This contribution presents preliminary data deriving from an ongoing investigation on a remarkably well-preserved *Felis* cranium, which was recovered from the Late Pleistocene palaeontological site of Ingarano (Puglia, Italy). This specimen, alongside a comparable cranium from the Spanish locality of Forat de la Ruda (MIS 3) (Madurell-Malapeira 2025), represents one of the only two relatively complete *Felis* crania known from the Late Pleistocene of Europe. Our investigation employs a multi-faceted approach, integrating biometric, morphological, and palaeoneurological analyses. These include a large comparative dataset of extant species, allowing for robust comparisons. The insights gained from the study of the rare *Felis* cranium from Ingarano will contribute significantly to shed new light on the evolution of the wildcat.

Keywords: *Quaternary*, *Wildcat*, *Fossil*, *Osteology*, *Neuroanatomy*

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The Importance of Felines in Both Human and Environmental Evolution

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Fig. 1. A right 3rd incisor of a sabre-toothed cat *Homotherium latidens* from Schöningen (ID 26229). The root is open, showing it belongs to a subadult individual. (Photo by Volker Minkus)

The limited number of Palaeolithic sites, coupled with the limited information available about them, often forces archaeologists to compare sites that are far apart geographically or in time. In this context, the 300,000-year-old Lower Palaeolithic site complex of Schöningen is an exception and plays a key role. By analyzing different types of data, it is possible to study how humans adapted to their environment over several millennia, for example by hunting, gathering, scavenging and using spears, on the shoreline of the same lake. As archaeologists, we have the opportunity "to explore" a mosaic landscape populated by lions, saber-toothed cats, elephants and rhinoceroses, a landscape that some today may find exotic or unbelievable. However, this was natural in Europe in the past. Consequently, it is now possible to make scientific suppositions and formulate new questions that are relevant to our understanding of the environment today.

Leaving Schöningen aside and taking a broader horizon, we can ascertain that the relationship between humans and big cats has always been intense and characterized by mutual respect. Both could be competitors, hunters or prey. Reflecting on this relationship helps us understand the past, the evolution of the environment, and the evolution of humans over thousand and millions of years up to the present day.

Over millions of years, big cats have exerted pressure on humans according to the classical Darwinian rules. They selected imprudent, slow, old, weak, and injured individuals as prey. Surviving in an environment with these animals forced us to communicate with other humans, to cooperate as a group to defend ourselves, to

trust each other, to create rules and taboos, to create weapons for defense and hunting, to help others that injured by big cats and so on.

Big cats, given their abilities that make them apex hunters, have certainly influenced human beings in a special way in the field of interspecies communication too. A spear, a hearth light at night, an animal skin carried to defend against the elements are not simply "tools" to meet human needs, they are also a direct message to big carnivores "beware I am not an easy prey."

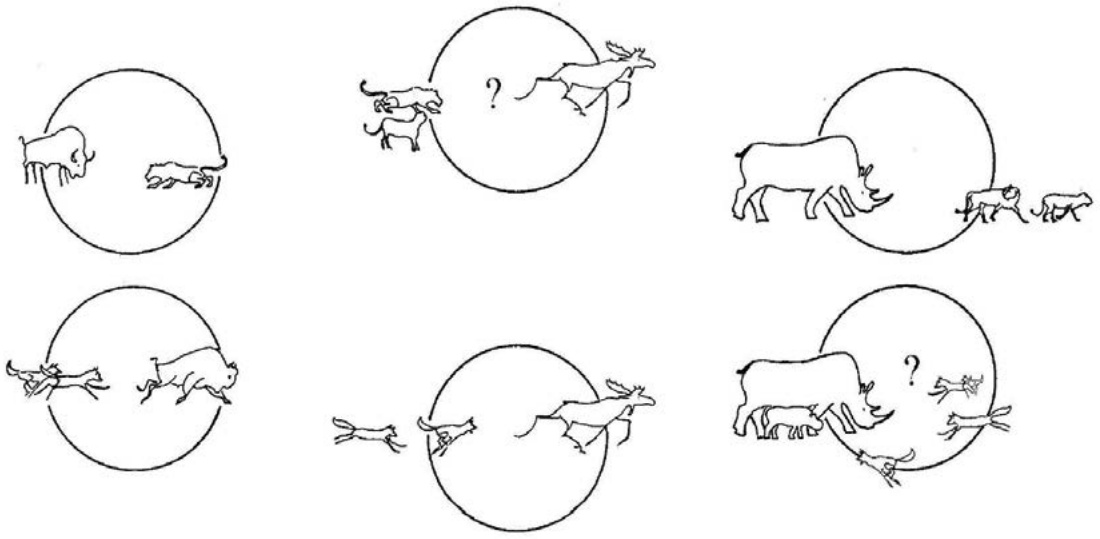

Fig. 2. Behavior of various prey animals when attacked by lions (top) or by a pack of wolves (bottom) (modified after Guthrie 1990, 288, Fig. 10.12). Some behaviors can only be hypotheses, as these animals no longer live in the same regions today. Left: lion and steppe bison (hypothetical), wolf and steppe bison. Centre: lion and elk (hypothetical), wolf and elk. Right: lion and rhinoceros, wolf and rhinoceros with offspring (hypothetical).

While research has focused particularly on humans as hunters, big cats force us to consider other, far more important aspects of social life. If the hunt goes wrong once, so be it. However, if defending one against e.g. an attack by a saber-toothed cat goes wrong, it is game over. This person would no longer be able to contribute their genes to the evolution of the human species.

In a "paradise" only with sweet sheep and squirrels, we never would be who we are today. Big cats influenced us to evolve in cooperative people, to conscientious and thoughtful individuals with empathy and sensitivity.

Big cats physically overpower us by far. They have 100 to 200kg of bones, muscles, claws and teeth, a highly developed brain, hearing and sense of smell, the ability to run fast in open spaces but also to climb trees. During the Paleolithic, but even nowadays in those few regions where big cats as lions, tigers or pumas still survive, no one went out for romantic walks to look at the stars on dark nights.

Lastly, by understanding the influence of big cats on human evolution, we can better understand how they have also shaped other animals and, thereby, the environment. Their complete or near-complete extinction would have serious consequences for the natural environment.

Keywords: *Saber-toothed cat, Cave lion, Extinction, Palaeolithic, Human evolution*

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A Wildcat from the Heart of the Mediterranean: Insights from One Year of Non-Invasive Monitoring of the Sardinian Wildcat (*Felis silvestris lybica*)

Ibra Edoardo Monti[1], Roberta Lecis[1], Andrea Sforzi[2], Massimo Scandura[1]

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Fig. 1. Hair trap on the left, and a wildcat captured by our camera trap on the right. (Photos by the author)

The Sardinian wildcat (*Felis silvestris lybica*) is a unique and understudied species, believed to have been introduced to Sardinia during the Iron Age, likely by Phoenician or Punic colonizers. As a distinct component of Mediterranean biodiversity, different from the European wildcat (*F. s. silvestris*), understanding its status is crucial for effective conservation. This study presents the results of one-year monitoring, project aimed at improving knowledge of the distribution of the species integrating camera trapping, genetic sampling, and citizen science approaches.

Preliminary activities included the distribution of over 50 questionnaires to local residents, hunters, and forest rangers, collecting valuable information on potential wildcat presence, including roadkills, private camera trap data, and direct sightings (Agnello *et al.* 2018). These insights guided the deployment of more than 30 camera traps across 11 study areas in the provinces of Cagliari, Oristano, Nuoro, and Sassari, resulting in over 4,000 trap-nights and nearly 100 independent detections of wildcats. The use of hair traps lured with catnip (*Nepeta cataria*) successfully elicited behaviours such as rubbing, urination, and scratching, enabling the non-invasive collection of hair samples (Fig. 1) (Steyer *et al.* 2012). These, along with tissue samples from roadkill specimens, were preserved and sent to ISPRA for genetic analysis, aiming to confirm species designation and assess potential hybridization with domestic cats (Mattucci *et al.* 2013).

Data analysis using GIS platforms allowed us to produce preliminary distribution maps based on 100 km^2 grid cells (Fig. 2) with standards from the Atlas of Mammals in Italy (Loy *et al.* 2025).

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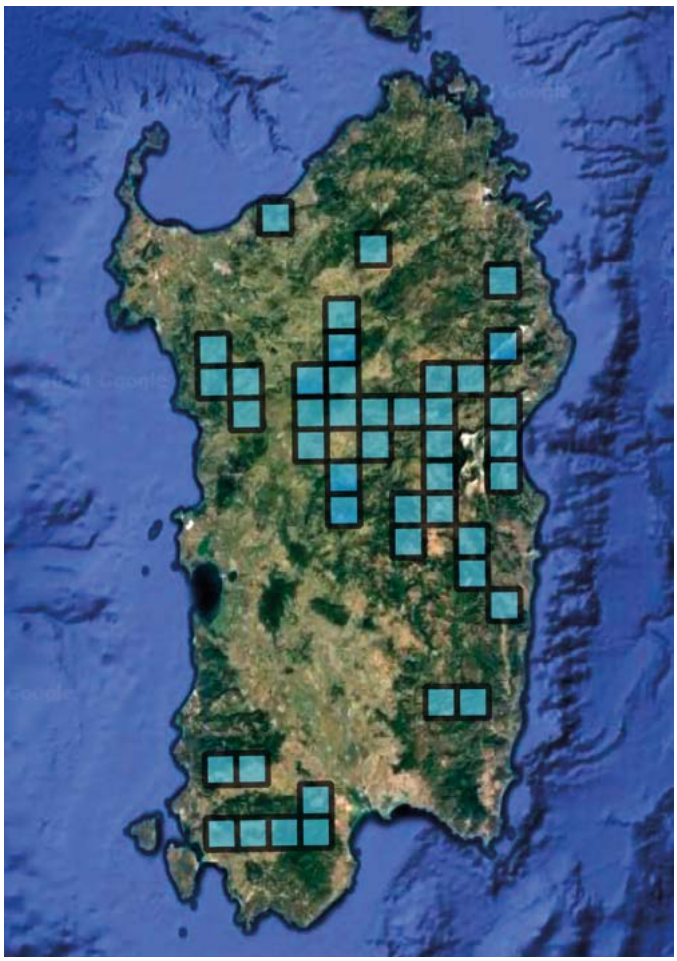

Fig. 2. Preliminary distribution map of Sardinan wildcat. (Generated using QGIS)

This project demonstrates the effectiveness of combining camera trapping with non-invasive genetic sampling for studying cryptic carnivore species such as the Sardinian wildcat (Wening *et al.* 2019). Due to the absence of large carnivores, the Sardinian wildcat represents an emblematic species of the island's biodiversity and its protection contributes to the preservation of the unique ecological balance of Sardinia's natural habitats. Long-term monitoring, alongside genetic studies, will be essential to assess the taxonomic identity of Sardinian wildcats, the risk of hybridization, and inform management practices tailored to its preservation.

Ultimately, this project lays the groundwork for sustainable, science-based conservation strategies that can also serve as a model for similar efforts in other Mediterranean islands. It highlights the need for continued research, community engagement, and the development of effective tools to protect Sardinia's natural heritage and promote coexistence between humans and wildlife in fragile ecosystems.

Keywords: *Camera trapping*, *Activity patterns*, *Non-invasive sampling*, *Citizen science*, *Conservation*

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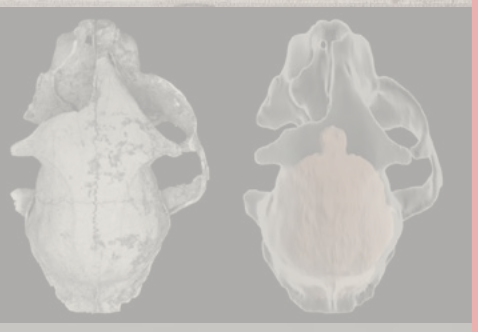
Wildcat in the Monti Simbruini Regional Park, November 2025, Filettino (FR), 1,230 m asl, 4,5 km from the nearest settlements. © Walter Fiore







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An Ancient Commensal of Man

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Fig. 1. *Felis silvestris lybica*. (Photo by Marco Masseti)

The cat is among the mammals that came under the cultural control of man the earliest. For the Western World, we have evidence for this from the pre-ceramic Neolithic period (9th millennium BC), while in the Far East, the cat's frequentation of the human environment is currently dated to between 5.500 and 4.900 years BP. In the West, the species involved in this process was one that still falls within the phenotypes of the present-day African wild cat, *Felis silvestris lybica* Forster, 1780. In prehistoric China, on the other hand, the ancestors of the domestic cat appear to have been derived from another species, the leopard cat, *Prionailurus bengalensis* (Kerr 1792), which is still widespread in much of south-east Asia. The incipient domestication of the cat would therefore be much older than that traditionally placed during the Egyptian New Kingdom (2nd millennium BC). Some authors believe that this animal, being a species with a strong sense of territory and which tends to keep its distance between conspecifics, is not a fully domesticated one. Unlike gregarious species, it does not need prolonged social bonds in time and space with other members of the same species, and needs shorter imprinting periods. Taming of the cat is only possible when a specimen, taken from its mother while still a kitten, specialises in commensality with man, who does not represent the figure of the hierarchically highest ranking exponent within the pack, precisely because the felid does not tend to aggregate in conspecific groups.

Keywords: *Domestication, Neolithic,* Felis silvestris lybica, *Prionailurus bengalensis, Commensality*

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Wildcat Exploitation in Italy during the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic

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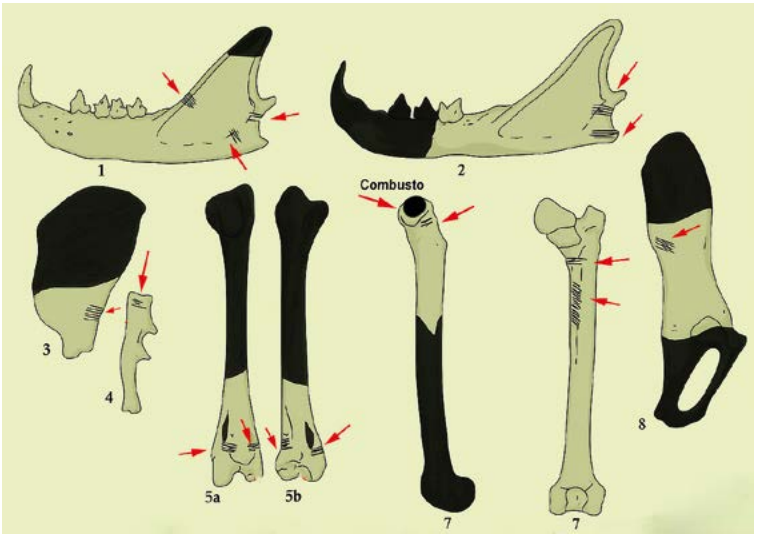

Fig. 1. *Felis silvestris*, localization of butchering marks on the remains from Grotta Romanelli. The missing part is in black (modified after Fiore 2003).

The study of wildcat (*Felis silvestris*) remains from Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic sites has become increasingly relevant for understanding the economic, technical, and symbolic value of this species for the last Italian hunter-gatherer communities. Although this *taxon* is generally rare in faunal assemblages, taphonomic analyses from several sites evidenced intentional human manipulation, including cut marks, fractures, and localized burning, indicating direct exploitation.

F. silvestris in Late Glacial Epigravettian deposits is either absent or extremely scarce in the Alpine and pre-Alpine regions (Fiore, Tagliacozzo 2009). In contrast, the species is more frequently attested in coastal peninsular and central Apennine contexts, such as Arene Candide, Riparo Mochi, Grotta Maritza, Grotta Polesini, Grotta della Madonna di Praia a Mare, and Grotta Romanelli (Alhaique 1995, 1996, 2005; Fiore 2003; Fiore *et al.* 2004, Tagliacozzo *et al.* 2012). With the onset of the Early Holocene (Mesolithic), *F. silvestris* remains also appear in the southern Alps, as documented at Galgenbühel / Dos de la Forca and at Riparo Gaban (Crezzini *et al.* 2014 Thun Hohenstein *et al.* 2016). This expanded distribution likely reflects environmental and climatic changes and, as a consequence, an adaptative response by Mesolithic populations with an increased diversification of the subsistence economy.

Taphonomic evidence indicates several forms of *F. silvestris* exploitation:

- Cut marks on long bones, mandibles, and astragali, indicating skinning and disarticulation; such traces are recorded at all the aforementioned sites.
- Localized burning, particularly on specimens from Grotta della Madonna di Praia a Mare, Grotta Polesini, and Grotta Romanelli suggesting the direct cooking of small disarticulated portions with exposed bone in contact with fire.
- Intentional fractures on long bones, especially in the assemblages from Grotta della Madonna di Praia a Mare and Grotta Romanelli, interpreted as evidence of butchering and marrow extraction.

Within the broader faunal assemblages, the wildcat belongs to the category of small-sized prey, together with hare (*Lepus europaeus*), badger (*Meles meles*), fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), and hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*), which complemented a subsistence economy still dominated by ungulates (red deer, chamois, ibex). Comparative taphonomic data from Mesolithic layers indicate that cut and burning marks on these small species share similar characteristics, pointing to a common strategy of small-mammal processing based on the direct roasting of whole individuals or of small body portions.

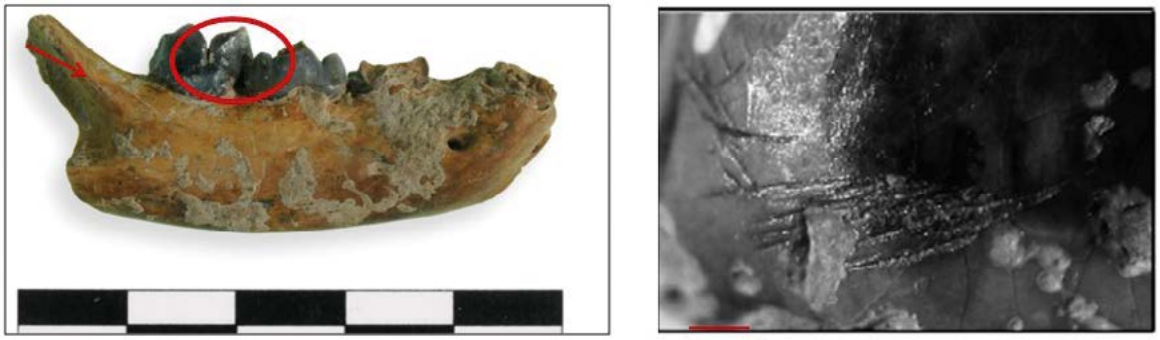

Fig. 2. *Felis silvestris*, localization of butchering marks on the mandible of Riparo Mochi (modified after Tagliacozzo 2012).

Keywords: Felis silvestris, *Taphonomy*, *Butchering*, *Roasting*, *Subsistence economy*

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From Luxury to Companion Animal: The History of Cat in Italy from the Iron Age to the Middle Ages

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Fig. 1. Cat maxilla from Acquafredda, Latium, 5th c. BCE (from De Grossi Mazzorin, Minniti 2022, Gli animali a Roma. Tre Millenni di interazione con l'uomo, All'Insegna del Giglio, p. 164).

The cat, alongside the dog, is one of humanity's most beloved pets. However, in ancient times, its role was significantly different. Human cat interactions has transformed considerably throughout history.

The introduction and diffusion of the cat is particularly intriguing. The domestic form was introduced in Europe likely from Egypt though the wild form (*Felis silvestris*) occurred locally.

In Italy, cat bones from archaeological contexts are quite rare; perhaps because it was not considered a primary source of food. Osteological evidence suggests a slow spread of the cat from the Iron Age onward. In Italy, the earliest cat considered domestic was discovered at Fidenae, near Rome, in a hut dated to the 9th century BC. Other very few remains from central Italy, ranging from the 8th to 6th centuries BC, indicate that it became more relevant from the Roman period onwards (Fig. 1).

In the Middle Ages cat remains are more frequent at urban contexts and inform about human management of this species and occasional slaughtering likely for meat and/or fur exploitation.

Written and iconographic sources also illustrate the cat transition from a rare and valued luxury animal to a precious mouse hunter, and eventually to a companion animal.

This paper aims to trace the history of the cat in Italy and to investigate the complex relationship between humans and cats from the Iron Age to the Middle Ages, to illuminate about cat evolving roles and significance in human society.

Keywords: *Zooarchaeology*, *Written and iconographic sources*, *Italy*

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Cats of the Elite: Case Study of the Cesspit of the Frederician Fortified Tower in Monselice (Padua)

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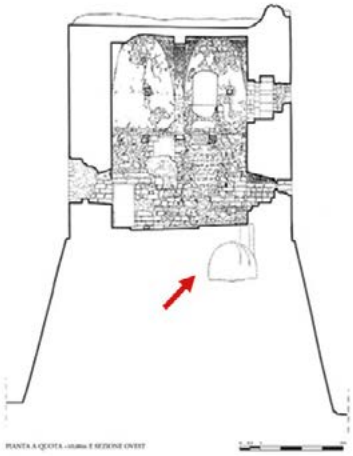
Picture 1



Picture 2

Figs. 1-2. 1: Section of the Frederician fortified tower showing the location of the cesspit (indicated by the red arrow). (Fonte picture 1: Romalli 2016, p. 131). 2: Selection of cat remains exhibiting evidence of burning and butchering marks. (Photo by Lonegro)

In 1239, by order of Emperor Frederick II, a fortified tower (mastio) was built on the Rocca of Monselice (Padua). This structure was used over the centuries by several aristocratic families (Ezzelini, da Carrara, Marcello e Duodo) until it was decommissioned by the Venetians at the beginning of the XVI century (Vedovetto 2023). In 1996, inside the keep (Picture 1), the cistern of the cesspit was discovered and excavated under the scientific supervision of Soprintendenza Beni Ambientali e Architettonici del Veneto orientale. This was a percolation pit without any outlet for emptying or maintenance, so its filling is in primary deposition. Therefore, it's a privileged source in the study of daily behaviours regarding nutrition and social practices of the stronghold's elite groups (D'Ambra 2001). During the excavation, numerous metallic and ceramic materials were recovered, allowing the earliest layers of the chamber to be dated to the mid XIII century.

The cistern fill was completely sieved, yielding a wide variety of animal taxa. Most remains belong to domestic mammals such as pigs, cattle, and sheep and goats, as well as a significant proportion of fish, including allochthonous species such as carp, alongside other freshwater resources like crayfish and molluscs. Furthermore, the assemblage includes a substantial number of both domestic and wild birds, whereas reptiles and amphibians are only minimally represented. The only wild mammal identified in the sample is a bear, which may represent one of the last occurrences of the species in the lowlands of Padua (Pastoreau 2008).

However, the preliminary archaeozoological analysis of this faunal sample has also revealed a significant number of cat remains, most likely all belonging to the domestic species (*Felis catus*). Individuals ranging from very young, approximately 4-5 months, to juveniles, 6-12 months, and adults, over one year of age, were identified in the assemblage. Moreover, several skeletal remains exhibit evidence of burning, while butchering marks were identified on only a few specimens (Picture 2).

The data collected during the preliminary analysis of this archaeological context and presented in this paper aim to highlight the role of the cat, spanning its practical domestic uses and negative connotations within an elite setting such as that of the Monselice stronghold. This particular issue has also been explored through comparative analysis with other case studies of similar chronological and contextual settings, such as an unpublished sample from the castle of Zagonara (RA) and the Rocca of Asolo (TV) (Bedini 1990). In conclusion, the aim of this archaeozoological study is to shed light on the nature of human-cat relationships between the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period.

Keywords: *Archaeozoology*, *Cesspit*, *Elite Context*, *Late Middle Ages*, *Nutrition*

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Archaeological Evidence of the Earliest Domestic Cats in Territory of Latvia

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Figs. 1-2. Maxilla of a cat (V 7671:8) from Skrīveru dzelzceļa ūdenspumpētava (Palata) Livonian flat burial site of Late Iron Age (10th-12th c. AD) excavated in 1931 by Hugo Riekstiņš, found next to disturbed male grave no. 6. From above and below. (Photo by Eduards Plankājs)

In the territory of Latvia bones of a wild cat (*Felis silvestris*) have been found sporadically since late Neolithic (1), but reliable evidence of domestic cats (*Felis catus*) appears in the archaeological layers starting from 12th-13th century AD, for example, in Tanīskalns (2), Aizkraukle, Tērvete and Daugmale hillforts, Rauši settlement, and Mārtiņsala (3), Lokstene (4), Turaida and Cēsis medieval castles. While the occurrence of cut marks detected are relatively low and various skeletal elements can be found (skulls, long bones), it is likely that in Livonia cats were treated primarily as mousers and pets, and were kept mainly in residences of higher status of society (hillforts, castles), at least for final period of Northern Crusades (12th-14th c. AD). In addition, it is arguable that those few bones with cut marks found in hillfort (Daugmale) and settlement (Rauši) context and associated with specimens treated as fur animals, actually are of wild cats.

The only individual found in a burial context so far is a cat co-burial from Grave 6 of cemetery at Aizkraukle next to Daugava River. Judging by type and typology of jewelry attached to a sub-adult man inhumation (bronze penannular brooch with poppy-head terminals, bronze belt fittings, bronze arm-rings and neck-ring made of twisted wires), the burial is dated to 11th-12th century AD. The 14C AMS analysis is in process yet. However, as cats' maxilla is the only element placed (or remained) next to the human feet and the leg area of human burial was disturbed, it is very arguable that remains of a human and a cat is archaeologically simultaneous. Human

burials with cat co-burials are quite typical for the Vendel and Viking age Scandinavia (5). The geographically nearest chronologically relatable domestic cat burial is found at Jõelähtme cemetery (Northern Estonia), dated by 14C AMS to 11th-12th c. AD (6). Both archaeological sites can be associated to eastern trade route Austrvegr and Nordic influence might be present in this boy burial from Aizkraukle.

Written sources from the 16th and 17th centuries AD mention peasants of Livonia who still fed snakes in their homesteads in honor of their ancient gods, to illustrate the popularity of practicing pagan rituals and the extremely low level of Christian customs at the same time. It is very likely that in rural areas the main role of cats (a mouser) was taken over by "domesticated" snakes, most likely the grass snake (*Natrix natrix*). This could explain why the cat became a common companion in the rural landscape relatively late – hypothetically in the 18th-19th centuries AD, when cats lastly gained victory over their natural competitors.

Keywords: *Cat*, *Snake*, *Austrvegr*, *Livonia*, *Latvia*

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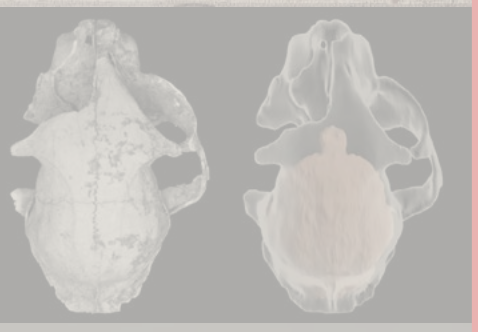

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Cats in Mesopotamia

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Unlike in Egypt, where cats held a strong religious and symbolic presence, Mesopotamian evidence for cats is remarkably sparse. The paper aims at re-examining textual, archaeological, and iconographic data to reassess the role and perception of the cat in Mesopotamian culture. Drawing on cuneiform sources – particularly Tablet 45 of the omen series Šumma ālu – and osteoarchaeological remains, it explores the distinction between domestic (šurānu) and wild species (murašû, zirqatu), as well as the symbolic meanings attached to their colors and behaviors. Through a systematic review of lexical lists, proverbs, and ritual texts, alongside a critical analysis of artistic representations such as kudurrus, seals, and figurines, the article proposes a new method for identifying feline depictions in Mesopotamian art. The findings suggest that while cats were known and even domesticated from early periods, they remained marginal in symbolic and visual culture –concealed behind the dominant presence of other animals. The cat's "hidden pet" status, as it has been aptly described, reflects both its practical value as a rodent hunter and the Mesopotamian tendency to view animals mainly in functional and omen-related terms rather than as sacred or aesthetic beings.

Keywords: *Mesopotamian culture*, *Cuneiform sources*, *Iconography*, *Cats symbolism*

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Leopards and Other Wild Cats in the East Mediterranean Region During the Prehistory

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Figs. 1-2. Prehistoric site of Damyanitsa, south-west Bulgaria. The clay head of wild felid (5th. millennium BC). (Photo by Krasimir Georgiev)

The timing of cats' domestication is still uncertain, related to the emergence of agriculture in the Near East in 8th/7th millennium BC, or much later during the Roman period. The latest investigations suggest that domestic cats were introduced in Europe earlier during the early first millennium BC (Doherty *et al.* 2025). However, this taxonomic group of animals is very present in humans' life and art quite early. A wild cat skeleton was unearthed in Cyprus in a human grave dated to 9.500 BC, which is one of the earliest manifestation of relations between this animal and man. Representations of this animal are documented at Göbekli Tepe, with approximately 22 images in total, one of which is leopard (Peters, Schmidt 2004). At Çatalhöyük leopard is very common felid portrayed in a variety of manifestations. The two leopards are within a throne upon which a woman is seated, interpreted as the great goddess. On limestone seal a woman is riding the leopard (Türkcan 2004), but also there is a man seated on a leopard. Representations of leopards in pairs and men attired in leopard skins and hats fashioned from the same material have been depicted on frescoes in Çatalhöyük shrines. In Hacilar, layer VI on several clay figurines feline is absolutely dominated by the "Mistress of Animals" (Mellaart 1970).

Subsequent depictions of this animal emerge in a slightly later period in the Balkans. A clay figurine of a felid, identified as a leopard or wild cat/lynx, has been unearthed from the Early Neolithic (beginning of 6th millennium BC) settlement of Eleshnitsa in south-western Bulgaria (Nikolov 1986, Fig. 1). Evidence of representations of wild cats in clay has been found at numerous sites across Bulgaria dating to the Chalcolithic period - 5th millennium BC (Radunceva 1994). However, the most intriguing images of this animal are from two prehistoric settlements of Balgarchevo and Damyanitsa in south-western Bulgaria. The head found in the destruction of House 1 in Balgarchevo dated 5510 ± 30 - 5460 ± 60 cal BC, suggests another feline – cheetah. Damyanitsa was established in the second half of the 6th millennium BC (Late Neolithic) and continued throughout the 5th millennium BC (Chalcolithic Period). The images represent mostly clay heads, sometimes quite stylized, and

sinister. They certainly represent wild cats, but whether they are of the puma family and depict leopards is difficult to say (Figs 1-2).

Several questions arise as to was the leopard the only favored animal of the cat family in Anatolia or the repertoire was much varied including wild cats, cheetahs and lynx? Were these felids presented in the Balkan praehistory as well?

Keywords: *Leopard*, *Wild cat*, *Damianitsa*, *South-western Bulgaria*, *Çatalhöyük*

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Bastet in Phoenician Religion

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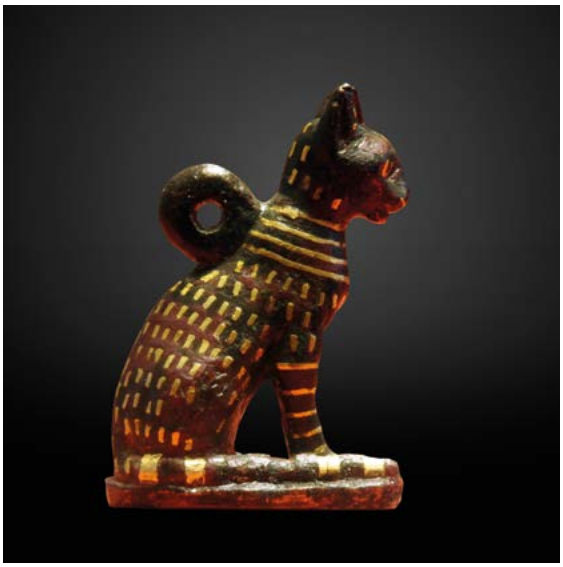

Figs. 1-2. 1. Egyptian amulet in copper alloy depicting Bastet in the form of a cat. Late Period (Louvre Museum, inv. E 10661). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cat_amulet-E_10661-IMG_9288-gradient.jpg. 2. Copper alloy figurine depicting Bastet in human form with a cat's head. Third Intermediate Period-Late Period (Louvre Museum, inv. E 3733). https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010006445

The Egyptian goddess Bastet is characterised by feline features, originally those of a lioness but, in the 1st millennium BC, developing more 'domestic' traits, as a cat or a cat-headed woman. Private devotion to the goddess in this period is also attested with certainty in the Phoenician sphere by some personal names. Although both the traces of the goddess and of the cat's presence in the Phoenician world appear rather limited, my aim is to try to examine Bastet's presence in Phoenician religion, also framing it in the broader context of how the cat might have been perceived in the cultural context of Phoenician settlements.

Keywords: *Bastet*, *Phoenician culture*, *Cat-goddess*

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The Cats of Berenike – Remarks on Some Companion Animals from an Early Roman Red Sea Port in Egypt

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Fig. 1. A cat from Berenike was wearing a bronze collar. (Photo by P. Osypiński)

Cats are only to be expected in a seaport, but the port of Berenike on the Red Sea is an unlikely place for a cemetery containing remains of these animals, who were evidently treated with care and compassion by their caretakers in life and in death, should read death, too. Over a period of around 100-150 years in the 1st and 2nd centuries CE, almost 700 animals were buried in a small burial ground surrounding a simple shrine on the approach to the port. A select few still wore metal collars and clasps, as well as the occasional string of beads and a small copper bell (Figs. 1-2). Even the ungifted bodies were often wrapped in textiles or basketry, but these practices had nothing to do with the Egyptian custom of animal mummification. This paper will focus on the elite few cats that were buried with accessories and grave goods. In this early stage of research, the authors will look for commonalities while providing a general background to this exceptional animal cemetery on the fringes of the early Roman world in Egypt. The archaeological evidence for cats living in the harsh conditions of this seaport community will be compared with contemporary iconographical sources from Egypt and the wider Mediterranean region, which offer visual insights into the kinds of cats and their role in human communities during this period.

Research on the animal cemetery in Berenike is supported by Polish National Science Centre grant UMO-2021/43/B/HS3/02749, led by Prof. Marta Osypińska.

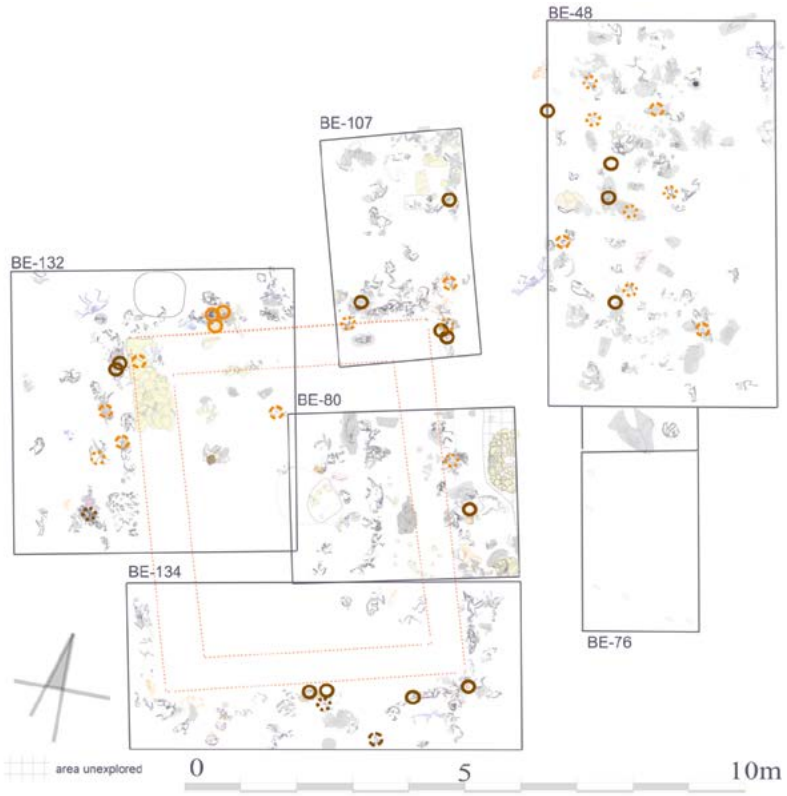

Fig. 2. Plan of the companion animal cemetery in Berenike marking the location of finds of collars and associated elements (location of Berenike in Egypt on the map in the inset). (by P. Osypiński)

Keywords: *Berenike*, *Roman Egypt*, *Companion animals*, *Cats*, *Animal burials*

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The Cat between Ancient Greece and Rome: The Time of Resistance

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Figs. 1-2. 1. MANN 8648, Pompei, Temple of Isis, VIII, 7, 28, kitchen 9. 2. MANN 9993, Pompei, House of the Faun, VI 12, 2, ala (30) floor, central section.

Several years have passed since D. Engels' synthesis on the cat in the classical world, and many studies have since allowed for new hypotheses regarding its role in Mediterranean civilizations (Fig. 1-2). Today it is possible to outline a more defined picture not only of how humans in these centuries interacted with cats, but also of how domestic felines gradually spread throughout Europe. Each civilization, after Egypt, related to the cat in a different way – at times even persecuting it.

This presentation therefore aims to reexamine both the known evidence and recent discoveries in order to define more precisely (and with some new insights) the stages of this vast historical phenomenon that led to the spread of the domestic cat in Europe, and to understand the reasons that favored this process. In fact, despite the apparent indifference shown by certain civilizations, the cat nonetheless managed to make its way among the various peoples and cultures that shaped the Mediterranean world from the end of the Minoan era to the Late Empire.

Keywords: *Cats*, *Archaeology*, *Classical Civilization*, *Ancient Greece*, *Rome*

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Cats and Feline Predators in Sanxingdui Ritual Bronzes

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Fig. 1. Bronze tigers from Sanxingdui. As per: 1 - Sanxingdui jisikeng 1999, p. 527, fig. 9; 2 - Chen Dean 2000, p. 88, fig. 80; 3 - Chen Dean 2000, p. 67, fig. 55.

Sanxingdui is a Bronze Age culture, spread in the last quarter of the II millennium BC on the plain in the vicinity of Chengdu, the administrative centre of the Sichuan province in China. Almost all Sanxingdui bronzes known before 2020 came from two sacrificial pits: JK1 and JK2, discovered on the territory of the eponymous settlement in 1986. Of all the finds in Sanxingdui sacrificial pits, numerous bronze anthropomorphic sculptures have always attracted the most attention, while zoomorphic figurines were usually neglected.

In the first sacrificial pit JK1, zoomorphic images are present in two forms: a high relief on the body of the *zun* bronze vessel and bronze figurines of one cat and two dragons. On the surface of the *zun*, tigers and dragons dominate over human figures (Sanxingdui, 1999, pp. 33, 35). Three dragons were cast on the shoulders of that vessel. They have snake-like bent bodies, big round eyes and bottle-shaped horns (Fig. 1, *1*). Below the dragons are three tigers attacking human figures, in a way that heads of men are inside the tigers' mouths (Fig. 1, *2*).

Two more bronze tigers were found at the Sanxingdui site outside of the sacrificial pits, one in 1984 and another in 1995. Both of them look the same. They were made like turquoise-incrusted flat bronze plaques and were originally attached to something. The tiger of 1995 has a long, slim body and a long tail with a slight curve at the end (Fig. 1, *3*). The profile tiger image shows two strong legs, a short neck and a big head with a small ear and four teeth inside the open mouth. Its length is 43.4 cm and height – 13.2 cm (Chen Dean 2000, p. 67).

Fig. 2. Bronze cats from Sanxingdui. As per: 1 - Xingyao Zhongguo 2024, p. 104, fig. 36; 2 - Xingyao Zhongguo 2024, p. 393, fig. 268; 3 - Sanxingdui jisikeng, 1999, p. 527, fig. 8; 4 - Chen Dean 2000, p. 71, fig. 58.

In sacrificial pit JK1, a cat-shaped support was also found. The cat's body when viewed from above forms a round circle (Fig. 2, 3, 4). It has four short legs and a long neck crowned by a heavy head with pointed ears, almond-shaped eyes and bare teeth. Its long tail stretches upright, while the end of the tail is broken off. The length of the cat's body is 11.4 cm, width – 7.8 cm, height – 10.8 cm (Sanxingdui, 1999, p. 33). The second sacrificial pit JK2 lacks any bronze cats or tigers. Its bestiary is represented by birds, dragons and snakes.

In 2020, excavations at Sanxingdui that had been previously put on hold in 1986, were resumed. Six more sacrificial pits were found. One of them, the JK8 sacrificial pit, has yielded two cat figurines looking much the same but differing from tigers and cats previously found at Sanxingdui. Both figurines show jumping cats landing on their fore legs. The cats have long, slim bodies and big heads with open mouths full of teeth and fangs. One cat has very long pointed ears and fantastic looking tail (Fig. 2, 1). Its height is 32 cm, length – 34.5 cm and width – 15.5 cm (Xingyao Zhongguo 2024, p. 105). Another cat also has large pointed ears and two horns between them. Its height is 75.5 cm, length – 58 cm and width – 38.5 cm (Xingyao Zhongguo 2024, p. 392). It is chasing a bird looking like a dove, so we can estimate the true size of the animal (Fig. 2, 2).

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Keywords: *China*, *Bronze Age*, *Sanxingdui culture*, *Sacrificial pits*, *Cat images*

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Cats as Pet Animals in Medieval China (Tang - Song Period)

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Fig. 1. Relief depicting a cat from a tomb near the Gaojiahe Village, Ningqiang County, Shaanxi Province (late Northern Song – Southern Song, 12th–13th centuries) (*Renmin ribao*. December 25, 2019. https://russian.people.com.cn/n3/2019/1225/c31516-9643615.html).

The earliest evidences of the use of cats in China date back to the 3rd century BCE and is recorded in written sources. In the encyclopaedic work *Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Lü-shi chunqiu*) by Lü Buwei it is said: "If a cat lives in the house, all the mice run away". And in the treatise *Han Fei-zi* by the legalist philosopher Han Fei it is said: "Assign the rooster to announce the end of the night, make the cat catch mice, use everyone according to their abilities, and then the ruler will not have to deal with the affairs of governance" (Xie Chengxia 1993: 302).

Archaeological finds of domestic cats are known from the Han period. Cat skeletal remains were discovered during excavations of tomb 1 in Dabaotai in Beijing and the ruins of the city wall of the Han capital, Chang'an (Xi'an, Shaanxi Province), both finds date back to the Western Han period. Cat bones unearthed from the city wall of Han Chang'an were found in a cluster of bones of other animals, both wild and domestic. In Dabaotai Han tomb (mid-1st century BCE), the bones of a domestic cat were found in two ceramic vessels together with the bones of other animals and may have been burial food (Wang Zijin 2010). These cats were descended from local Bengal cats (*Prionailurus bengalensis*), which since Neolithic period inhabited near the settlements. The earliest evidence of such a neighbourhood is the discovery of the skeletal remains of eight felines at the Quanhucun site (Yangshao culture) in Shaanxi Province, dated to 5560–5280 BP (Hua Yaowu *et al.* 2014).

Recent genetic research shows that modern domestic cats (*Felis catus* Linnaeus) arrived in China from the west via the Silk Road relatively late, only during the Tang Dynasty (Han Yu *et al.* 2025), and rapidly gained popularity first among the aristocracy and later among other strata. Apparently, from the end of the Tang Dynasty and during the Song Dynasty, along with a purely utilitarian attitude towards cats as a means of fighting rodents, the perception of them as pets (often exotic and very expensive) began to form. Similar transformations occurred around the same time with attitudes towards other domestic animals - dogs (Fig. 1).

To date, one cat is known to be buried in a tomb dating to the middle Northern Song period (11th century) in Gongcun Village, Hongqi District, Xinxiang City, Henan Province (Zhao Kunying *et al*. 2020). The cat was buried near the left shoulder of the tomb occupant and was presumably his pet during life.

Images of cats are presented in tomb murals and reliefs of the 9th–13th centuries (late Tang, Song, Liao, Jin), in total at least 30 tombs in Northtern and Central China. Various cat-shape porcelain figurines, porcelain pillows with images of cats were widely distributed (Geng Chao 2024). The image of a cat became popular in Song poetry and painting.

A striking example of the formation of perception of cats as pet animals (and at the same time prestige markers) is the story, recorded in several sources, about how the little granddaughter of Chancellor Qin Hui lost her beloved "lion cat" and, on the orders of her grandfather, hundreds of officials and military personnel in the capital region were raised to search for her; unfortunately, the cat was never found (Wang Zijin 2010: 96).

Thus, after domestic cats entered China from the West during the Tang Dynasty, the attitude towards these animals gradually transformed: they became not only protectors of the harvest from mice, but also pets and companions.

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Keywords: *China*, *Tang*, *Song*, *Burials*, *Tomb murals and reliefs*

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Miw, the Cat in the Ancient Egypt: History, Sources, Relationship with People and Radiological Analysis

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Fig. 1. 3D CT images of two cat mummies of the Natural Science Museum of Brescia (inv. n. 0001 e 0003) and the Italian Mummy Project team performing CT scan. © Mummy Project; research team: Michele Alquati and Daniela Bardelli.

Animal worship was an integral part of ancient Egyptian culture: many species of animals were respected and venerated, since they were considered earthly manifestations of the deities. Among all the animals which the inhabitants of the Nile Valley adored, a prominent role was occupied unequivocally by the cat, *Felis chaus nilotica* (miw in Ancient Egyptian, from an onomatopoeic word). Ancient Egyptians appreciated many qualities of the cat: the ability to see in the dark, nocturnal habits, a changeable and sometimes ambiguous nature. In addition, the cat was useful to people for its ability to hunt mice and kill snakes.

For these reasons, one of the main deities of the Egyptian pantheon has the appearance of a feline: Bastet, daughter of the god Re, the goddess protector of women and home, who can sometimes appear in the aspect of the lioness goddess Sekhmet.

Furthermore, the cat appears several times in Egyptian religion. For example as one of the 77 forms that the Sun can assume, described in the religious text *Litanies of Re*, and as a demon with a large knife that protects Re himself by killing the snake Apophis, incarnation of cosmic evil that every night tries to devour the Sun during its nocturnal journey.

The love and respect that the Egyptians accorded to the cat is proven by numerous cat mummies found in Egypt, often in animal necropolises such as in Saqqara and Bubastis, and now preserved in museums around the world. They were made as votive gifts and a rich trade for the mummies of these animals had developed. Modern technologies, such as X-rays and axial tomography, have allowed researchers to obtain important information about these mummies, such as their age and their mummification process, different from the one for human mummies (Figs. 1-2).

Fig. 2. IMP3: 3D CT images of the cat mummy of the Egyptian Collections of the Buonconsiglio Castle of Trento (inv. n. 985). © Mummy Project.

Keywords: *Cat*, *Mummy*, *Egypt*, *Science*, *Analysis*

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Cat in the Culture of Ob-Ugrians

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Representation of the cat and its relationship with humans throughout history are depicted differently in various nations of the world. At first glance, the cat is not an animal that has something in common with the lifestyle of Ob-Ugrians living in the North of West Siberia and being hunters, fishermen and reindeer herdsmen of the taiga. Nevertheless, the cat is a sacred animal for a group of Khanty living in the Kazym river basin. According to the beliefs of the North Khanty, Kaltas-imi (Vut-imi, Kassym-imi) is the supreme first mother and the wife of the supreme god Torum. This goddess plays a significant role in the existing world order; she is the protecting mother of Khanty and all Ob-Ugrians who gives a soul to a newborn baby and decides how long a person will live. Same as the other guardian spirits of Ob-Ugrian people, the Kazym river Khanty's goddess can take zoomorphic shapes, the most common associated with the goddess is the black cat with white breast. These beliefs have been captured in the name that the Kazym Khanty had given to their habitation area – the Land of the Cat's Elbow (Voldina, Moldanova 2022).

Based on the study of folk and ethnographic materials, verbal communications of informants, and linguistic data, different forms of mythological beliefs about the black cat – zoomorphic shape of the supreme goddess of the group of Khanty inhabiting the Kazym river basin – were reviewed. Linguistic materials and ethnographic parallels prove that these beliefs were adopted by Khanty from Komi and are relatively late.

Keywords: *Western Siberia*, *Khanty*, *Mythology*, *Black cat*

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Domestication Pathway of Amur Cats: from Practical Hunters to Venerated Symbols

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Fig. 1. Amur Forest Cat /Far Eastern Forest Cat (from the official website of the Russian Geographical Society: https://www.rgo.ru/, en. Photo by Konstantin Tuchin).

The Amur River fishermen have integrated cats into their daily practices since about the 17th century, the period when the Manchus came to power in China and extended their influence over the Amur area (1644 -1912). Local peoples established trade relations with them, exporting furs in exchange for handicrafts and agricultural products such as rice, gaoliang, millet, and legumes. These imported goods were stored in log barns on stilts, creating an urgent need for searching means of rodent control. As a result, cats were adopted as effective mousers and rat hunters (Shrenck 1899: 276-314).

Traveler A. Michi, who visited Eastern Siberia and the Amur region in the 1860s, noted that Manchu traders distributed these animals among the Gol'd (Nanai) people. To ensure stable distribution channels and revenue generation, the cats were spayed or neutered before being shipped (Michi 1868: 321). The Manchus highly valued domestic cats because of their practical role in controlling rodents. The animals sent to the Amur locals were not originally regarded as decorative; instead, they served a purely utilitarian purpose. Individuals with strong hunting instincts were chosen to be delivered. Breeding was carried out with adaptation to local climatic and economic conditions in mind.

Unfortunately, no documented breed descriptions of these cats have survived. It is reasonable to assume that the initial material for their formation was the population of Far Eastern (Amur) forest cats, which belong to the northern subtype of Bengal cats. In the 1929 studies, two species of Far Eastern cats were distinguished: the spotted Manchurian cat (*Felis viverrina mandjurica*) and the Amur wild cat (*Felis microtis*, M. Edv.). Their habitats overlapped and encompassed the northern provinces of China, Primorye, the southern part of the Amur region, and Korea. These species were common and had the following characteristics: a dense coat with spotted

reddish coloration; small, semicircular ears with white markings on the backside; stripes on the muzzle; and a body length of 70 to 85 cm (Baikov 1929).

There have been recorded cases not only of importing but also of taming wild forest cats by the indigenous peoples of the Amur region. These instances have been observed among the Nanai and Udegei communities, where small kittens were taken from the forest and raised in domestic settings. According to the available information, adult individuals were quite large and possessed an independent nature, capable of leaving human dwellings at any moment (Arcenyev, 1989: 45-46; FMA 2008).

Fig. 2. A domestic cat in Nanai homestead (The settl. Ulika- Natsional'noe, Khabarovsk territory, Russia. Photo by Aleksey Maltsev, 2014).

In addition to its practical purpose, the cat held symbolic significance in the daily life of the Nanai people. The Gorin Nanais had a tradition of venerating the red-striped cat, which was considered a relative of the sacred animal, the tiger. If the tiger was given the status of an ancestor and called Daka ("father-in-law"), then the cat was revered as Dadaka ("mother's elder sister"). The deceased animal was mourned and buried in a separate grave that was covered with a thin layer of sand or ash. Each participant in the ceremony left their mark on the grave, symbolizing the tiger's paw print that came to bid farewell to its kin (Samar 2003: 22-23; FMA 2001).

Since European settlers appeared on the banks of the Amur River in the second half of the 19th century, the local domestic cat population has been replenished by imported individuals. This process laid the foundation for the development of domestic cats that are characteristic of the Lower Amur area today.

Keywords: *Amur cats, Rodent control, Manchu trade, Taming, Veneration*

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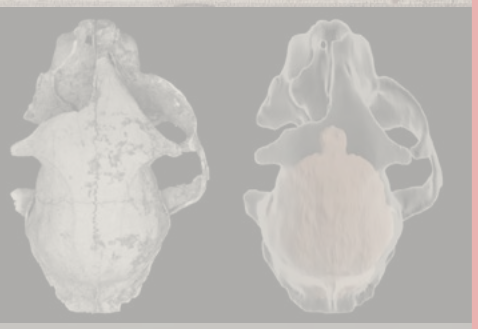

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Big Cats in Palaeolithic Art

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Fig. 1. The lion man from the Stadel cave in the Hohlenstein, Lonetal (Baden-Württemberg). (Dagmar Hollmann / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 4.0).

Big cats are rare in the Upper Palaeolithic faunal record, as it can be expected for top predators, and are not frequent in the artistic record either. We discuss here big cat representation in the European Pleistocene sites, also describing stylistic and other characteristics, including behavioural ones when such details are available. While the lion (i.e. Panthera spelaea, the cave lion) is vastly prevalent, a few leopards and lynxes also occur, but species determination is sometimes ambiguous. The geographical distribution is much unbalanced, with 90% of the known occurrences in France. Furthermore, frequencies also change through time. Overall, lions are found mostly in parietal art, starting with the Aurignacian. It is more frequent in the earliest record, not only in parietal art at Grotte Chauvet which alone provides half of the painted specimens found in France, but also as recorded by ivory figurines at Vogelherd and elsewhere in the Swabian Jura. Attention will be given to therianthropic representations, i.e. those of human bodies with an animal head, notably in the striking ivory statuette of Hohlenstein Stadel, also of Aurignacian age. The later artistic record is even less abundant, while on the opposite the number of archaeological sites increase with the Magdalenian in western and central Europe and the Epigravettian further south and east. During the Late Pleistocene, however, big cats are eventually also recorded in the Mediterranean artistic production. In the background of art distribution, the rarefaction and eventual extinction of the cave lion should be considered. It is generally assumed that this occurred around

14,500-15,000 years ago in Eurasia, but recent evidence points to the presence of the lion 10,000 years ago and possibly even later.

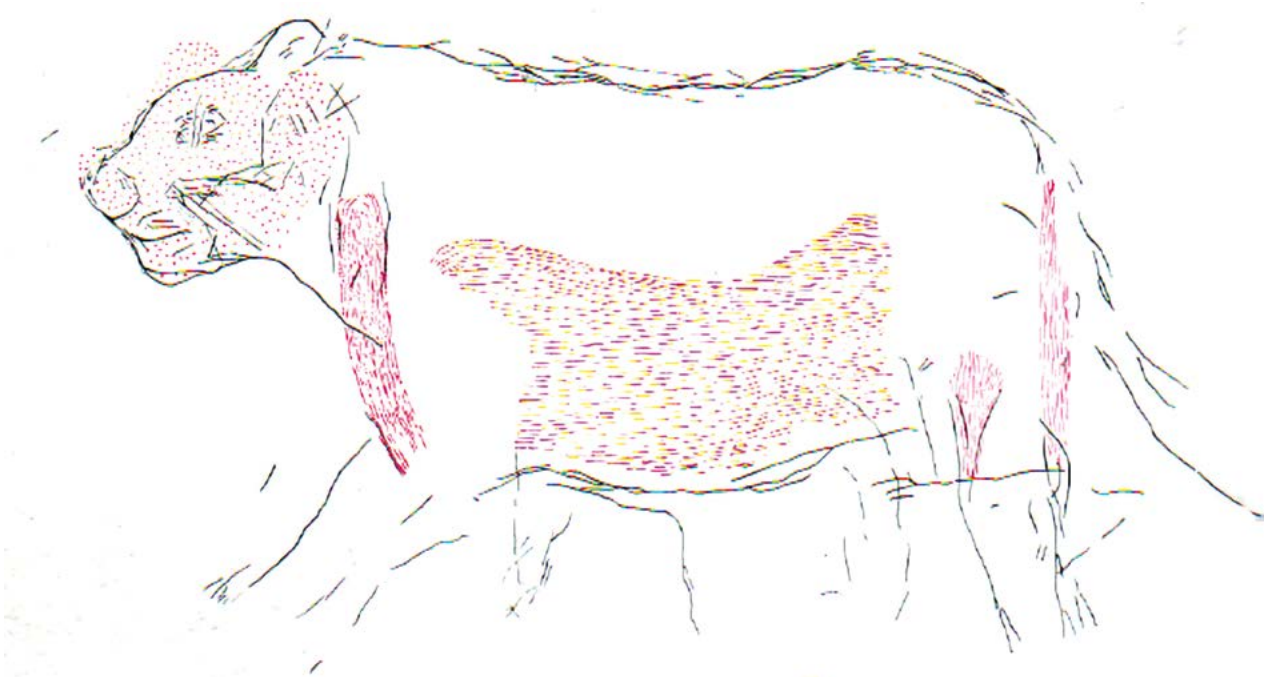

Fig. 2. The engraved lion of Riparo Tagliente (Veneto, Italy) (Aspes A. ed. 1984. *Il Veneto nell'Antichità*. Verona: Banca Popolare di Verona).

Keywords: *Palaeolithic art, Big cats representation, Lions*

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Cats and Their Relatives: the Felids in the Central Sahara Rock Art

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Fig. 1. Feline engraved on a stone plaquette (Moroc). (Photo by G. Donati)

The archaeological sites, attesting the presence of humans and fauna among which the carnivores, sometimes identified through the gnawing marks on mammal bones (e.g. Alhaique 2013: the Garamantian village of Fewet in the Libyan Fezzan, Gifford-Gonzalez Parham 2008: the Tenerian of Adrar Bous in Niger) constitute the background of this contribution. The settlements and the ritual contexts (funerary structures) are the main source of information about the faunal repertoire. Wild felids remains are reported in the syntheses concerning both the African continent (Jousse 2017) and more specific North Africa territories (Camps 1993, Gautier 1993). In North Africa a limited series of archaeological sites going back to the Holocene, contain felids remains: see the papers concerning Algeria (Amara, Serradj 2022), Libya (Masseti 2010), Niger (Sereno *et al.* 2008), Egypt (Kindermann *et al.* 2006, Linseele, Van Neer 2009, Polkowski 2018). Leopards, lions, caracal, "small cats" are the kinds of felids mentioned in the papers. More in particular in the Nile valley "small cats" are present since the Late Palaeolithic/Epipalaeolithic (Linseele, Van Neer 2009: 52) and a possible interaction of "cats" with humans has been hypothesized on the basis of the analysis of the Predynastic elite cemetry of Hierakonpolis (Upper Egypt c. 3700-3600 BC: Van Neer *et al.* 2014). Indeed the majority of the documents about felids imagery comes from Egypt but the Nile Valley and the desert areas of this country are not the core of this contribution. As to the central Sahara rock art, concentrated in the high plains of the Libyan Fezzan, the Algerian Tassili and Chad, painted and engraved felids are not very frequent even if in the Messak plateau (Libyan Fezzan) J.-L. Le Quellec (1998) discovered a good amount of engraved images both of lions and especially of wild cats. The important heritage, composed of thousands of naturalistic subjects, inscriptions and other kinds of symbols decorating the walls and the rockshelters of the high plains is associated to the activities of communities of herders, hunters and trading caravans inhabiting or crossing the central Sahara during the Holocene. The chronology of the rock art is always a debated topic, as we know, anyway in general the felids images are associated to the so-called "Pastoral art" and in particular to the Middle/Late Pastoral phases and later to the Garamantian kingdom (from c. 7000 BP onwards: Le Quellec 2021). Over this long period, characterized by a mobile lifestyle, the wild fauna and the domestic fauna are depicted according to different stylistic conventions that seem to draw

boundaries between one territory and another. The engraved or painted representations of the felids, include different kinds of dynamic scenes, single "portraits" showing typical attitudes (Fig. 1) or symbolic and metaphorical associations with other subjects. The relationships humans – felids in the prehistory and protohistory of the central Sahara (Fig. 2) is to a certain extent made explicit through the different use of their images and behaviours, certainly the result of direct observations and contacts.

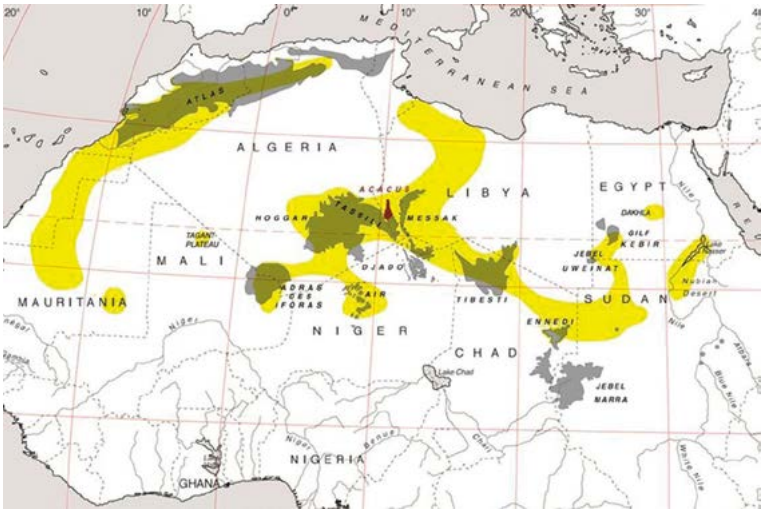

Fig. 2. Map of Northern Africa with the mountain systems hosting the rock art (grey areas). (Map by M. Gallinaro 2013)

Keywords: *North Africa*, *Felids*, *Holocene*, *Central Sahara*, *Rock art*

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Snow Leopard in the Rock Art of Altai

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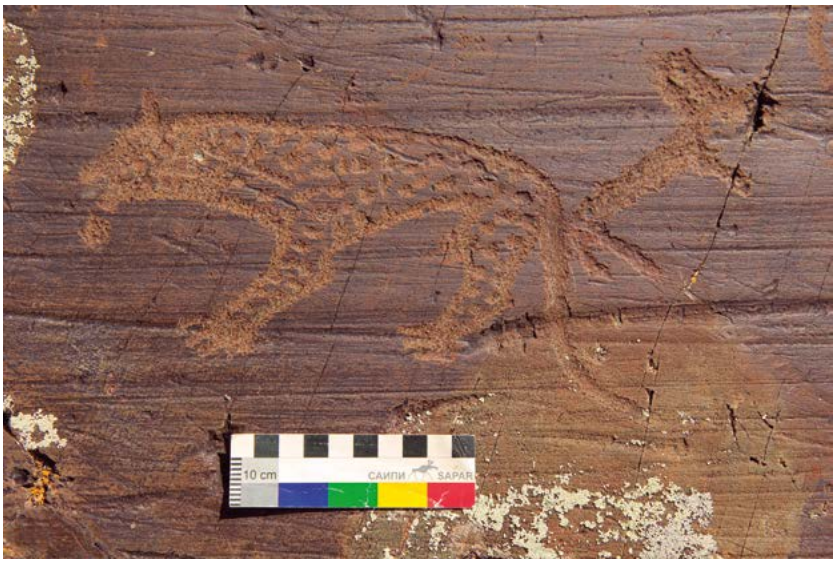

Fig. 1. Snow Leopard. Petroglyph, Shiveet Hairhan site, Mongolian Altai. (Photo by D.V. Cheremesin)

Large cats of the family Felidae had played a decisive role in the human evolvement at the territory of ancestral homeland – Africa. For several million years, various species of Australopithecus had been a common prey for large felines. Some species, such as the leopard (Panthera pardus) had specialized in hunting primates including our ancestors. The need to constantly watch for threatening and ready for attack large felines has defined "the fetishization culture" ingrained in genes of Homo Sapiens. This applies to association of headmen of both the Old and the New Worlds with feline predators, headpieces and hides of felines as attributes of power, deeds of mythical heroes and kings of the ancient world, "lion hunting themes" in the art of the Ancient East, etc.

It is the history of million years of coexistence that the ethology refers to when explaining the phenomenon of reverence of large felines in different ancient cultural traditions, as well as the appreciation of the modern society for them even though many large Felidae became extinct due to the fault of human and those remained are now red-listed (list of endangered species).

Ever since the Bronze Age (III-II millennium BC), the rock art of hunters and cattle herders of Altai had included images of feline predators and there are no doubts that the inspiration for them was the snow leopard – inhabitant of the Altai high mountains. Irbis or snow leopard (Panthera uncia, earlier – Uncia uncia) is a carnivore specie of the family Felidae, one of the five Panthera species belonging to the large cat subfamily.

Numerous petroglyphs carved and engraved on rocky surfaces across Russian and Mongolian Altai depict separate images and rare multifigured compositions with the snow leopard. Unlike other predators, such as wolves and dogs, the snow leopard's exterior was rendered via depicting a very long tail, often lying on the animal's back or curved. The other way of distinction of the snow leopard was depicting a spotted animal skin (Fig. 1). Most commonly, the snow leopard was depicted in hunting and attacking scenes with hoofed animals, wild goats, deer, wild boars. Other known scenes depict attacks of this animal on anthropomorphic figures (com-

position of location known as Kalbak Tash on the Chuya River) and their analogies can be also found in other places, such as the petroglyph site of Shiveet Hairhan in the Mongolian Altai interpreted as a depiction of an important mythologeme (Smirnov, Cheremisin 2021).

Numerous images of the snow leopard in petroglyphs and ornamental arts of the early Iron Age (VI-III century BC) are also known. The Scythian-Siberian animal style is full of feline images on ritualistic objects. Large number of feline predator figures is present on specific artifacts of Pazyryk culture, on horse harnesses as a decorative component and on torcs of Pazyryk people.

The Old Turkic runic inscriptions of the South Siberia indicate totemic names including "bars" (the snow leopard) zoonym which is evidence of a significant role of this animal in mythological ideas of the people of Sayano-Altai along with the rock art.

Keywords: *Fetishization culture, Altai rock art, Snow leopard*

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Large Cats in the Art of Early Nomads of the Eurasian Steppe

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Fig. 1. Numerous feline predators arranged in rows on the plane of a rectangular bar of golden hryvnia (our neck decoration) from the Arzhan-2 mound (Republic of Tyva, Western Sayan Moun-tains) (according to Chugunov, Parzinger, Nagler 2017, pp. 341, 373).

In the first millennium B.C. 8th – 3rd/2nd centuries B.C., the history of the steppe from the Balkan Peninsula to Manchuria China had been intertwined with many nations of various ancestries. Some of their names have been preserved in ancient written sources. They were Thracians, Scythians, Sakas, and further East over the Kazakh steppe the land was inhabited by nomads known presently by archeological names – Pazyryk culture, Aldy-Bel and Sagly cultures, Slab-grave culture Sayano-Altai mountains, steppes of Trans-Baikal and Mongolia. They were the creators of social, economic, historical and cultural world known in archeology as "Scythian-Siberian". In terms of archeology, it is characterized by so-called Scythian triad: arms, horse harnesses and the art of zoomorphic ornament. There had never been anything alike in Eurasian steppe in terms of geographical spread, contents, art forms and genres, neither in earlier ancient history nor in subsequent chronological ages.

A vast number of scientific researches, popular publications, catalogues of museums and exhibitions have been dedicated to the art of Scythian-Siberian world for a reason.

The key figures of the art of early nomads were animals of the cat family and hoofed mammals. Images of felines or more specifically of the large cat subfamily had become common in the art of people of prehistorical period. Central Asian cluster of the art of Scythian-Siberian nomads stands out the most in Eurasian steppe (Bogdanov 2006; Cheremisin 2008). Here the large cats were represented in bronze and gold, in wood-carving and hornwork, on rock surfaces and so-called deer stones, on human skin tattoos and felts. Feline predators were depicted in such art forms as sculpture, bas-relief, figure carvings on rock surfaces. All these things are indicative of keen interest to feline predators and its place in the belief system of early nomads of the Central Asia. This territory being a habitat of the snow leopard, the leopard and the tiger is a matter of no small consequence.

Feline predators in the art of early nomads of Scythian-Siberian world are depicted both in separate graphic themes and in compositions such as, for example, the scenes of tearing a hoofed mammal to pieces. Oftentimes, full images of a cat or its parts usually, its head were used as a decoration for horse harnesses, arms and ritualistic objects.

Fig. 2. Tattoo on a woman's arm (Fifth Pazyryk mound) By: Barkova and Pankova 2005.

The image of a curled-up panther where the predator bites its own tail is the most common theme in the art of early nomads. It is well-known in archeological sources from the North Ordos and Mongolia to the Black Sea Region, Caucasus and the Anterior Asia. The "tearing-to-pieces scene" was the most popular among multifigured compositions of the Central Asian nomads. It demonstrates triumph of the feline predator and doom of a hoofed mammal via original representative devices style and iconography. One composition that stands out among the kind is a tattoo on the hand of a mummified woman from the 5th burial mound of the Pazyryk valley the Altai Mountains that depicted two tigers and a snow leopard tearing two deer with big branching horns to pieces. Daintily outstretched dynamic bodies of the feline predators frame a picture making in almost rectangular in shape (Barkova, Pankova 2005, Fig. 14; Fig. 1). The image of tigers on a wall of a wooden sarcophagus of the Bashadar burial mound the Altai Mountains looks completely different. They walk one after another with

their heads low symbolizing grief at the death of the buried headman warrior. The last tiger has a defeated hoofed mammal in its chaps and paws (Rudenko 1960). It is possible that the same idea was planted in images of many feline predators depicted in rows on the surface of a rectangular bar of the golden torc neckpiece from the Arzhan-2 burial mound the Republic of Tyva, West Sayan Mountains (Chugunov, Partsinger, Nagler 2017). The figure of the large cat is invariant in multifigured compositions as opposed to a hoofed mammal which could be of various species such as the wild mountain goat or the wild sheep. The image of the feline predator was used as a decoration piece mostly on torcs.

Notwithstanding the similarities in the art of early nomads of the Scythian-Siberian world, people of different archeological cultures had their own characteristic representative devices. In Central Asia, the most distinctive is the art of the people from high-mountain valleys of Sayano-Altai with its applicative style. Its other distinctive feature is depiction of animals in moving fashion. It emphasized social significance and martial prowess of the owner of the image. The art was a part of the system of military hierarchical society of the early nomads. The image of the large cats took its place in their social characteristic symbology.

Keywords: *Scythian-Siberian world, Large cats, Animals in art context, Eurasian steppe, Nomads*

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A Scene of a Feline Predator Tormenting a Hoofed Animal in a Pazyryk Tattoo

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Fig. 1. Tattooed torture scene from the right forearm of a female mummy (After Azbelev 2017).

In the 8th-7th centuries BC, a unique cultural community, which received the scientific name "Scythian-Siberian world", emerged across the Eurasian steppe and forest-steppe zones from the Danube to Transbaikalia and Central Asia. It is distinguished not only by the extraordinary spatial scale of its distribution but also by the uniformity in material culture, represented in the so-called "Scythian triad" expressed in weapons, horse harnesses, and unique animal-style art. The phenomenon of the Scythian-Siberian world demonstrates the complex processes of cultural interaction and adaptation that became a characteristic feature of Eurasian history in the 1st millennium BC (Fig. 1).

One of the original archaeological cultures of the Scythian-Siberian world is the Pazyryk culture with its numerous monuments dating back to the period from the 5th to the 3rd centuries BC. The population of this culture inhabited the highest mountainous regions of Southern Siberia. A striking marker of the Pazyryk culture is the tattoos representing various motifs and images. One of the most interesting compositions, discovered on the right forearm of a woman from Pazyryk burial mound No. 5, is a scene of a feline predator torturing

a hoofed animal. Thus, the purpose of this work is to analyze the scene of torment in the Pazyryk tattoo and search for possible analogies of this motif in the material culture of the Scythian-Siberian world.

The motif under study is one of the central themes in the art of the Scythian-Siberian animal style. In the tattoo under consideration, the scene of torture is depicted dynamically, emphasizing the predator's aggression and the victim's suffering, which reflects the mythological idea of the struggle between life and death, and also of the cyclical rebirth and sacrifice (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Golden quiver cover. Ilyichyovo, barrow 1, burial 6 (After Dobrovolsky, Umitkaliev 2023).

Comparison of the tattoo motif and material culture objects shows stylistic unity. For instance, the examined scene appears on gold-plated sword scabbards or quivers from Scythian burial mounds in the Northern Black Sea region, where predation scenes similarly feature felines (lions, griffins) attacking hoofed animals (deer, bulls), indicating shared symbolic language. A hypothesis suggests that this motif was borrowed from Ancient Greek art (e.g., through Orphic myths of Dionysus-Zagreus) which is supported by analogous motifs in ancient sources. However, the Pazyryk interpretation could likely adapt the scene to align it with its own mythological ideas. It was also recorded that this tattoo diverges significantly from other Pazyryk tattoos, but finds parallels with various Chinese material culture artifacts from the 4th-3rd centuries BC.

Thus, the torture scene in Pazyryk tattoos, despite its local features, aligns with the broader tradition of the Scythian-Siberian animal style, reflecting the universal nomadic concepts of sacrifice and transformation. The motif may have been borrowed through direct contact with Scythians or indirectly via Central Asian cultures, highlighting the interconnectedness of ancient Eurasian civilizations.

Keywords: *The Scythian-Siberian world*, *Pazyryk tattoos*, *The scene of torment*

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Cats and Humans in Chinese Pictorial Arts from the Origins to the Present Day: The Domestication of the Cat(s) in China from the Point of View of Art History

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Fig. 1. Cats (?) as depicted on a lacquerware bowl for food from the 2nd century BCE Han period, with the inscription 'Jun Xin Shi' 君幸食 (invitation to eat) written in red. Unearthed from Tomb 1 of Xin Zhui 辛追 (c. 217 BC–169 or 168 BCE), Marquise of Dai, Mawangdui 馬王堆 site, Changsha, Hunan.
(Source: Hunan Museum Collection Database (https://www.hnmuseum.com), accessed on April 20, 2024 : https://www.hnmuseum.com/zh-hans/zuixintuijie/狸猫纹漆盘.)

Archaeozoological research in China suggests that the leopard cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*) lived alongside humans in Henan and Shaanxi during the Neolithic period, between 3,500 and 2,900 BCE. Motivated probably by utilitarian reasons, such as protecting grain harvests, this rapprochement between humans and felines does not seem to have persisted. It completely disappeared in the modern period, though it may have continued until the end of antiquity.

In contrast, the cats depicted in Chinese art from the seventh century CE are undoubtedly of Western stock (*Felis silvestris catus*), most likely imported from the Persian world via Central Asia, or possibly even earlier from India at the turn of the Common Era, when Buddhism was introduced to China. From the Tang dynasty (618–907) to the Song dynasty (960-1279), ladies of the court kept cats as pets in the gynaeceum. They could often be seen lounging at their mistresses' feet while they read or recited poetry. They were kept alongside parrots, parakeets and goldfish. In gardens, amidst rockeries and bamboo, these cats and their kittens played with children and other small animals, such as pugs.

While these cats of Western origin were initially the preserve of the high aristocracy, their popularity eventually spread to the working classes and the countryside, all during the Ming–Qing period (1368-1911). However, evidence of this phenomenon does not appear in art until the 20th century. The current craze for cats, accelerated by social media and cat videos, must be seen in China as resulting from multiple causes, such as the influ-

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ence of Japanese manga culture and Buddhism, alongside depictions in traditional and modern literature, in which the novel Cats Country by Lao She occupies a special place.

Fig. 2. 'Spring Play in a Tang Garden' (Tangyuan xichun tu juan 唐苑嬉春图卷) (detail). A copy by an anonymous Qing dynasty artist (18th century) based on an original by Zhu Zhanji 朱瞻基 (1399–1435), the Ming dynasty Emperor Xuanzong 明宣宗 (r. 1425–1435). Handscroll painting on silk (37.5 x 264.2 cm). From the collection of A. W. Bahr; purchased with the Fletcher Fund in 1947 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, ref. 47.18.9).

This paper aims to evaluate the contribution of iconographic sources to our understanding of the use and status of domestic cats in China, from origins to the present day. This brief cultural history of cats in China as depicted in art will attempt to answer the following questions. Is there any evidence of commensal or tamed leopard cats in early Chinese art? Did other small felines or animals fulfil the role of hunting rodents and pests until the end of the antiquity period in China? How can the steps in the evolution of the relationship between humans and cats be characterised, as depicted in Chinese art?

Considering what Chinese art and visual sources attest to, cats have been useful to humans in many ways:

- Throughout the ages, cats have been valued for their practical role as hunters of mice and rats.
- The recreational and playful use of cats for entertainment, companionship and ornamentation was particularly prevalent among women and children from the Tang to the Qing dynasties, and continues to this day.
- The presence of cats in cosmography, as seen in bronze mirror decorations and the zodiac, dates back to the Tang Dynasty.
- In terms of beliefs, faith and religious considerations, cats have been used to depict shapeshifting demons in Buddhist art and fantasy literature since the Tang dynasty, and this has continued into contemporary times with a "shifted" sacralisation of cats.

- During the Ming-Qing dynasties, the zoological description of cats (including Chinese “breeds”, breeding, behaviour and relationships with humans, as well as their use in traditional medicine) was reinforced through general encyclopaedias, newly illustrated with woodblock prints, and numerous treatises dedicated to cats. The phenomenon of cat slaughter is mentioned in passing, despite being rarely depicted.
- Traces of village cats, as well as of stray and feral cats that have been returned to the wild, can be seen here and there.

Keywords: *Cats’ cultural history*, *Chinese art*

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Domestic Cats and Women in Japan: Sociocultural Milieus, Images, Metaphors, and Symbolic Meanings

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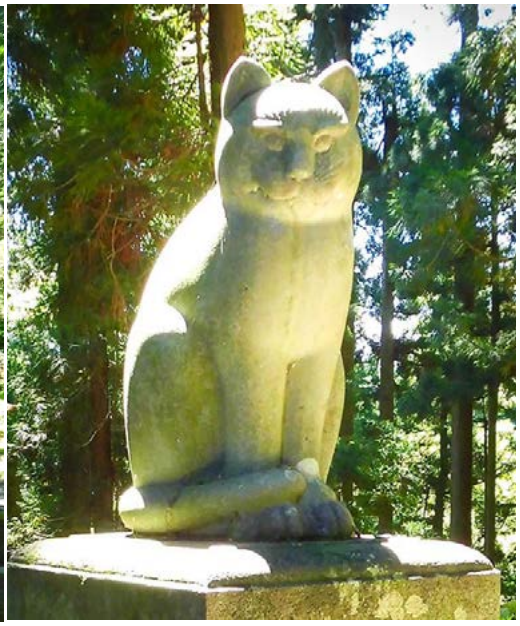

Fig. 1. Nanbu Jinja, Nagaoka, Niigata Prefecture (*Nippon.com*, 23/04/2021; accessed 24/12/2025).
Fig. 2. Cat statue at Nanbu Jinja, Nagaoka (*Nippon.com*, 23/04/2021; accessed 24/12/2025).

The southernmost islands of Japan are home to two critically endangered subspecies of the Bengal leopard cat: the Tsushima leopard cat (*Tsushima Bengaru yamaneko* 対馬ベンガル山猫, *Prionailurus bengalensis*), identified in the early 1960s on Tsushima Island; and the Iriomote wildcat (*Iriomote yamaneko* 西表山猫, *Prionailurus bengalensis iriomotensis*), similar in size to the domestic cat, discovered in 1965 on Iriomote Island in the Ryūkyū archipelago.

Until recently, it was widely believed that the domestic cat (*ieneko* 家猫) was introduced from continental Asia to Japan either alongside Buddhism around the mid-6th century, or between the Nara (710–794) and early Heian (794–1185) periods. The animal's principal role was to protect Buddhist documents, libraries, and sacred texts from mice and rats. However, in 2011, excavations at the protohistoric site of Karakami カラカミ on Iki Island 壱岐島 in Nagasaki Prefecture yielded the remains of a domestic cat dating back approximately two millennia.

Housecats remained relatively rare in Japan until the end of the 11th century. From the 12th century onwards, however, they began to spread across all social strata, maintaining a strong and consistent association with women. In contrast, medieval Japanese literature reveals that many men harboured phobias toward cats, influenced by persistent superstitions surrounding the feline's luminous eyes and its uncanny ability to see in the dark—a natural trait believed to endow the animal with the power to foresee and avert nocturnal incursions by malevolent spirits. Fortunately, there were exceptions among male artists in the early modern period: one notable example is the celebrated *ukiyo-e* painter and print designer Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳 (1798–1861),

a renowned cat enthusiast who, from 1841 onwards, produced numerous series of colour prints portraying cats in a wide array of disguises and expressions—works marked by both humour and evident affection.

This paper explores the empathetic bond between women and domestic cats in Japanese cultural history, focusing on three major sociocultural contexts that shaped this enduring relationship.

The Role of Domestic Cats in Rural Villages and Feline Worship in the Countryside

The domestic cat was introduced to southern Japan by Chinese and Korean immigrants during the Yayoi period (300 BCE–300 CE), alongside rice cultivation techniques and sericulture—two activities of strategic importance in Japan's rural economy and cultural history. Within farming communities, women were typically responsible for home-based silkworm breeding, as well as for the care, management, and protection of household food stores. The defence of these resources highly vulnerable to rodent infestations depended not only on women's vigilance but also on the predatory skills of domestic cats. Over the centuries, a durable woman-cat alliance emerged, fostering a deeply symbiotic relationship grounded in shared tasks and mutual empathy.

The protective role of domestic cats in rural areas – guardians of both labour and precious produce – is also evidenced by numerous Shintō shrines specifically devoted to feline worship. A recent nationwide survey indicates that the highest concentration of such shrines is located in Japan's leading rice-producing region, Niigata Prefecture (Iwazaki 2020). Here, Nanbu Jinja in Nagaoka City 長岡市の南部神社, commonly known as Nekomata Gongen 猫又権現 (Figs. 1–2), holds special cultural significance for cat veneration, feline talismans (Fig. 3), and traditional rites aimed at protecting rice farming and sericulture. More than one hundred similar shrines are found throughout the country (Iwazaki 2021).

A cat charm distributed by Bandai Shrine in Fukushima Prefecture during the heyday of silk farming (*Nippon.com*, 23/04/2021; accessed 24/12/2025).

Karaneko in the 9th–11th Centuries: Cats from China and Korea for Emperors and Noblewomen

Between the 9th and 11th centuries, elegant domestic cats from China and Korea were presented as diplomatic gifts to Japanese emperors and were warmly welcomed into the imperial gynaeceum and noblewomen's private quarters. In the late 9th century, a dignified, magnificent black cat from China (*karaneko* 唐猫) was gifted to Emperor Kōkō 光孝天皇 (830–887; r. 884–887). The same feline was subsequently inherited by Emperor Uda 宇多天皇 (867–931; r. 887–897), who affectionately described it in the *Imperial Diary of the Kanpyō era* (*Kanpyō Gyoki* 寛平御記), likening it to "a black dragon among the clouds" and praising its elegant form and luminous eyes.

About a century later, in *The Pillow Book* (*Makura no Sōshi* 枕草子, 1002), court lady Sei Shōnagon 清少納言 (c. 965 – c. 1025) wrote of a charming, graceful she-cat sent from Korea to Emperor Ichijō 一条天皇 (980–1011; r. 986–1011), recounting that the sovereign cherished the feline so deeply that he bestowed upon it a formal court rank and the title 'Lady Myōbu'.

In the 10th and 11th centuries, noblewomen and ladies-in-waiting recorded in their personal diaries the joy with which they welcomed kittens into their private quarters and cared for them as affectionate companions. *The Diary of Sarashina* (*Sarashina nikki* 更級日記, 11th century) recounts the episode of a graceful kitten that suddenly appeared near the author's residence and was soon recognised as the reincarnation of a recently deceased noble young lady. This moment of recognition, implying a metaphysical identification between the delicate, youthful woman and the feline, evokes Buddhist doctrines concerning the interconnectedness of all living beings through the Six Paths of Existence (*rokudō* 六道), governed by the universal law of *karman*.

In the early 11th century, Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部 (c. 973–1014 or 1025) in *The Tale of the Shining Prince* (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語, 1007) granted literary recognition to the cat as both an unwitting erotic mediator and a symbolic embodiment of female passion. In Chapter 34, "New Herbs, Part One" (*Wakana no Jō* 若菜上), a revealing episode unfolds: the Chinese pet kitten belonging to the Third Princess and Second Consort of Prince Genji, young Onna Sannomiya 女三の宮, is pursued by a larger cat and, in its frantic attempt to escape, dashes through the residence and collides with a bamboo blind, accidentally pulling it aside. As a result, the secluded princess is momentarily revealed to the courtier Kashiwagi 柏木, who happens to be in the garden at that moment. The brief, unintended exchange of glances between them kindles a forbidden, poignant, and ultimately tragic love affair.

Onna Sannomiya's ardent and fateful love story inspired classical painters of the Tosa 土佐派 and Kanō 狩野派 schools, leaving an indelible mark on early modern Japanese art as well. During the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), for example, prominent artists of the popular *ukiyo-e* school 浮世絵派 depicted fashionable courtesans holding cats on leashes in illustrated books, paintings, and woodblock prints. These images conveyed not only subtle allusions to Onna Sannomiya but also nuanced comparisons between the strict etiquette of Yoshiwara 吉原, the pleasure district of the shogunal capital Edo, and the emotional constraints of courtly love in earlier times. Additional visual references to the innocent princess appeared in printed portrayals of elegant Edo-city damsels interacting with kittens or cradling them in their arms (Fig. 4).

Domestic Cats' Roles and Meanings in Early-Modern Urban Milieus and Lifestyle

During the Tokugawa period, the rapid expansion of public restaurants, along with the growth of city-based silk and fashion industries in the three largest Japanese metropolises – Edo, Kyōto, and Ōsaka – highlighted the high value attributed to cats as indispensable hunters of mice and rats. Historical records indicate that a skilled mouser could command a price as high as five *ryō*, equivalent to five times the cost of a fine horse. Within the urban commercial context, the efficacy of domestic cats in controlling pests contributed significantly to their rising popularity as symbols of good fortune and prosperity. This cultural association likely inspired the creation of the *manekineko* 招き猫, or 'beckoning cat.' This talismanic figurine, typically crafted from *papier-mâché*, carved wood, or painted ceramic (Fig. 5), depicts a common white housecat with black spots, seated with one front paw raised in a welcoming gesture, and adorned with a red collar bearing a bell. Traditionally believed to have been invented at Edo's Gōtokuji temple, the *manekineko* remains widely displayed today at the entrances of commercial establishments, restaurants, and shops as a charm to attract customers and promote prosperity.

Within the licensed quarters of major cities, the graceful demeanour and supple movements of cats were regarded as animal analogues to the refined arts of seduction practised by courtesans. These women sought to charm, captivate, and entertain their clients through dance, song, and the playing of the *shamisen* 三味線, a three-stringed instrument introduced from China to the Kansai region in central Japan and then adapted to Japanese musical traditions. Ōmori Sōun 大森宗雲, an *ukiyo-e* artist active in mid-18th-century Ōsaka (Kansai), created the painting *Courtesan Amusing a Cat* (*Neko to tawamureru yūjo zu* 猫とたわむれる遊女図), a refined

work depicting a young pleasure woman in an elegant interior, seated among luxurious quilts and playfully teasing a kitten with a fluttering handkerchief (Failla 2014: 97, 208, cat. 31).

Fig. 4. Kikugawa Eizan 菊川英山 (1787–1867), *City damsel cradling a cat in her arms*, 1809-1810. Colour woodblock print (Kondō, Eiko, *Il mondo di Eizan*, De Luca Edizioni d'Arte, Roma 1989, cat. 22, pp. 110-112).

Fig. 5. Japan, Meiji era (1868–1912), *Manekineko*. White-glazed porcelain decorated with black, green, and red enamels, with touches of gold, height 9.3 cm. Author's Collection.

At first glance, the scene appears to represent a moment of innocent enjoyment between the girl and the cat. However, the artist deliberately embedded a subtle allusion to the shared melancholy fate of both courtesan and feline. In the background, a *shamisen* rests on the *tatami* behind a sliding door, with the sound box concealed from view and only the upper part of the neck visible. This compositional detail – a musical instrument present yet silent – implies an unspoken narrative woven into the scene: the hidden sound box subtly foreshadows the grim destiny awaiting the carefree kitten, whose skin would ultimately be used as the resonant membrane of the *shamisen*. This detail also alludes to the young courtesan as the *shamisen* player: like the cat, she is subject to a transient existence marked by fleeting pleasures and silent sorrow.

Keywords: *Woman-cat relations in Japan, Rice farming and sericulture in rural villages and feline veneration at Shintō shrines, Domestic cats imported from abroad for sovereigns and noblewomen, The cat as erotic mediator and symbol of feminine passion, Domestic cats in early modern Japanese cities as harbingers of prosperity and companions of pleasure women*

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Cats in the Cabinet: Tracing Feline Presence in Berlin's Museum for Islamic Art

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Fig. 1. I. 4590, f. 16 (collection of the Museum for Islamic Art, Berlin State Museums).
(Creditline: © Museum für Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Photo by Franziska Kabelitz)

The Museum for Islamic Art at the Pergamonmuseum forms part of the Berlin State Museums (Museum für Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin). Its significant collection of roughly 100,000 objects spans millennia and encompasses a vast geographical range from the Iberian Peninsula to Central and South Asia. Like many encyclopedic collections, the holdings are organized along established curatorial categories such as regional origin, dynasty, material, or function. However, this system of categorization emerged within the particularly European development of art history as an academic discipline. While such frameworks support scholarly interpretation as well as museological administration, they can obscure alternative narratives. One such subtle thread is the recurring representation of cats.

Based on the specific example of the Museum for Islamic Art, this study explores the insights that emerge when museum collections are reorganized not according to conventional taxonomies, but around a unifying motif. It proposes a thematic, experimental lens of inquiry – the figure of the cat – as a way to both reinterpret the collection and critically examine the curatorial practices that continue to shape it. This method holds particular relevance in 2025, as the museum is redesigning its permanent exhibition, to be opened in 2027.

While rarely foregrounded, feline presence surfaces in a multitude of visual and material forms, from illustrated historical Indian manuscripts and Iranian luster ceramic tiles to large-scale oil paintings and objects of everyday use, situated in domestic, literary, or allegorical contexts. Tracing feline representation, past and present, across the collection therefore provides an opportunity for examining changing human-animal relationships, social practices, and aesthetic conventions, as well as the role of visual culture in mediating those dynamics.

Beyond a catalog of feline depictions, this study positions the cat as a compelling methodological device to challenge conventional curatorial hierarchies and invite new lines of inquiry. As an organizing principle, the cat becomes a productive tool for rethinking museum collections. The study asks: Which objects feature cats, and what role do they play – decorative, narrative, allegorical, or scientific? What information regarding an object's biographical and material trajectories might be overlooked when searching by museological markers, and what alternative information may be discovered when following a single motif across a vast and layered collection? How might this shift in perspective complicate or enrich our understanding of Islamic art and related curatorial practice?

The study concludes by testing this method beyond the collection of Islamic art. It is demonstrated that within the ecosystem of the Berlin State Museums – where scale and diversity of holdings frequently overwhelm thematic coherence – the seemingly peripheral feline lens offers an unexpectedly coherent path through institutional complexity. Subsequently, this thematic approach reveals new networks of meaning, supports synergistic cross-collection research, and prompts reflection on how museums structure knowledge.

Finally, as digital tools increasingly enable thematic searching and collection mapping, moving from taxonomy to theme constitutes a valuable strategy for facilitating visitor access and engagement. This presentation offers a playful but serious reimagining of curatorial logic – and of what happens when the cat leads the way.

Keywords: *Cats*, *Museology*, *Collection*, *Islamic art*

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Cat's Role in European Musical Theatre: from Sound to Symbol

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Fig. 1. La Chatte. (Photo by Maria Stratonovich)

Cats have held a special place in human culture for centuries, revered for their independent nature together with cute furry appearance. This study delves into their musical portrayal, tracing their presence on the stage as prototypes of musical jokes and mystifications (such as "Duetto Buffo di Due Gatti" by Robert Lucas Pearsall attributed to G.Rossini) as well as personified personages of operas and ballets in 19th and 20th centuries ("Sleeping Beauty" by P. Tchaikovsky, "L'Enfant et les Sortilèges" by M.Ravel and others).

Furthermore, from a formal perspective, the author tries to study the ways musical language mimics feline behavior: from playful and graceful manners of movement to such anthropomorphic emotional features as wiseness and sympathy. Different composers use different musical techniques – ornamentation, syncopation, and rhythm – to evoke feline traits, creating a kind of musical animal symbolism that transcends mere representation. However, these technical methods show patterns of striking similarity in terms of tone depiction among different composers, for instance glissandos to imitate their meows.

The fact of occurrence of the terms "Pas de Chat" and "Saut de Chat" in official ballet terminology deserves special attention.

Ultimately, this piece of research underscores the enduring appeal of feline characters in European musical theatre, highlighting their capacity to symbolize complex human emotions and societal critiques, such as through the Cat personage of "Brundibar", opera by H.Krasa, which was written in Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia, at the time occupied by fascist Germany.

The integration of symbolism, performance techniques, and cultural narratives demonstrates how cats serve as versatile and compelling figures which continue to resonate within theatrical storytelling throughout the years. This exploration contributes to a broader understanding of animal symbolism in performance art and the ways in which musical theatre harnesses such symbols to evoke empathy, reflection, and cultural dialogue.

Keywords: *Musicology, Opera, Ballet*

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Ravel M., *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*
Sauget H., *La Chatte*
Stravinsky I., *Bayka*
Tchaikovsky P., *Sleeping Beauty*

The oral presentation is supposed to be supported by live music-making to illustrate the musicological immersion. "Musicology, opera, ballet, Grove Music Online imslp.org britannica.com rism.info rilm.org vam.ac.uk"

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Character Analysis of Feline Breeds as They Appear in the Periodic Graphic Series

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Fig. 1. From P. Cossi 2018, Il Gatto Alchimista, Segni d'Autore: Roma.

Among the animals present in the world of comics, the CAT enjoys a certain success, especially in the comic field. Its cousin TIGER moves better in the adventure genre.

We propose the main characteristics that qualify this presence in comics, with notable affinities with what happens in parallel in the field of cartoons. The scope of the research involved American and European publications (Italian, in particular).

The categories examined are for example:

- Antagonist = Victim
- Household: Amorphous, Tyrannical, Malicious. Spectator of human behavior
- Crazy Cats (by nature or by choice)
- In Animal Worlds
- Men in Cat Costume
- Real Women, Real Cats

Keywords: *Cat*, *Comics*, *Strip*, *Cartoon*

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Matroskin the Cat – an Archetypal Fairy Tale Character, Iconic Cartoon Hero and the Face of the "Prostokvashino" Dairy Brand

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Fig. 1. Uncle Fëdor, Sharik, and Matroskin – the main characters of the cartoon series "Three from Prostokvashino" (Captured by the author from "Troe iz Prostokvashino", dir. V. Popov, Soyuzmultfilm, 1978 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8qG-HJHIIM (accessed 27 January 2026).

Cats are frequent heroes of folklore, in particular, fairy tales (probably the most famous is the "Cat in Boots" by Charles Perrault), later – children's literature (Kondakov 2014; Rarenko 2024; Rzhavitina 2022). This is one of the most common zoomorphic characters in modern culture (Gordeeva 2016; Kiselëva 2017; Korolëv 2018). They are given a lot of space also in animation, enough to remember the world-famous cat from the animated series "Tom and Jerry". Cats can represent themselves, but more often they become the embodiment of human characters or their individual properties or qualities.

Soviet animation has created quite a few figures of cats and kittens, many of which have become iconic characters. However, sufficiently detailed studies of this stratum of contemporary culture have not yet been undertaken.

The report aims to examine several cat cartoon samples from different years and to delve more deeply into the animated series "Three from Prostokvashino" ("Three from Prostokvashino" 1978, "Vacations in Prostokvashino" 1980, "Winter in Prostokvashino" 1984). "Prostokvashino" is the name of the village where three friends go to escape. Derives from prostokvasha, a fermented milk product similar to yoghurt or kefir.

The animated film is based on the book by children's writer Eduard Uspensky «Дядя Фёдор, пёс и кот» ("Diadia (Uncle) Fëdor, dog and cat", 1974).

Created in the late Soviet era, it embodied the best qualities of Soviet intelligentsia culture – humanism, kindness and irony. Numerous quotes from the movie entered the lexicon of Soviet people, both children and adults, and remain there to this day. One of a trio of characters – a boy, a dog and a cat – Matroskin the cat became almost the most popular cat of Soviet animation. Thanks to what he took one of the main places in the hierarchy of cartoon cats? The thing is that Matroskin demonstrates a lot of life experience, sagacity, practicality,

common sense and folk wisdom – by these qualities he surpasses not only the simple-minded dog Sharik and his master Diadia Fëdor, a boy of 6 years old, but also the parents of the latter. Matroskin's practical mind plays a decisive role in organizing the comfort village life of the trio. When Diadia Fëdor's mother gets acquainted with him, she cannot help but recognize the fact that her son is behind Matroskin like a stone wall and change her opinion of the cat.

Based on an agreement between the dairy producer Unimilk and E. Uspensky in 2002, the "Prostokvashino" brand was created, which has become the most popular to this day. The cartoon itself contributed greatly to this, and at first, it was represented by many of its characters.

Fig. 2. Sharik the dog and Matroskin the cat advertise "Prostokvashino" dairy products (Captured by the author from Prostokvashino – Animated Advertising for TV. Chin Up Animation Studio, 2021 -https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lfnmd4WbAs (accessed 27 January 2026).

However, in 2008, a restyling was carried out, and Matroskin began representing the brand exclusively. The company's relationship with the writer Uspensky and the history of the use of his characters is described on the website https://top20brands.ru/ru/brand/brand_prostokvashino.html (accessed 27 January 2026). It also explains why Matroskin the cat ultimately became his face.

Of course, this issue requires more detailed coverage. It can be assumed that the advertising for the product skillfully used the archetypal properties of the cartoon character, beloved by both adults and children.

Keywords: *Soviet culture*, *Cartoon animation*, *Archetype*, *Cat*, *Publicity*

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The Fabulous Journey of the Western Feline; From Demonization in the Middle Ages to the Enchantment of Contemporary Cyberspace

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Fig. 1. My cat is watching her morning TV show. © 2025, Simona Bealcovschi.

This paper explores the evolution of diverse representations of cats in the Western imaginary, from the Middle Ages to the present, by examining various media products (books, photography, television, social media posts), which fuse the unfettered imagination and ideological currents. Cats in the Western iconography have followed a long road from the incarnation of evil to the glamour of modern branding.

Cats have been part of the Western imaginary since antiquity, though their symbolism has evolved over various epochs. For example, black cats are still a symbol of bad luck and are associated with spells in European superstitions and popular cultures. Even today, the French can describe a person who brings bad luck as a black cat ("être un chat noir"). Black cats are almost everywhere associated with evil. In 1233, Pope Gregory IX issued a Papal Bull (Vox in Rama) that stipulated that black cats, which were known to be witches' familiars, were instruments of the devil and were to be eradicated (Engels 1999). As a result, the legacy of cat killings passed into folk practice (Darnton 1984).

However, the rise of modernity saw the rehabilitation of the reputation of cats, including black cats. Italian and French folklore contain images of cats whose supernatural powers and extraordinary talents can enrich their masters. In the beginning, it is a partial renaissance, since these folkloric cats are usually not named – they are popularised by G. F. Straparola in Italy as *Il gatto maestro* or *Il gatto con gli stivali*; and by C. Perrault in France as *Le Maître chat ou le Chat botté*, though in English he would have to wait till the 20th century to emerge as *Puss in Boots*.

By the 19th century, the European bourgeoisie began bringing the cat indoors as a pet. Cats received names. Popular choices often reflected the owners' values and interests. For example, a cat might be named Poppy for

its delicate beauty, or Jasper for its unique fur design, or Snowball for its fluffy white coat, or Cleo for its perceived sophistication. Black cats in particular seem to have benefitted when avant-garde intellectuals adopted the image as a symbol of their iconoclast political positions. In Paris, Rodolphe Salis founded the Black Cat Cabaret in 1881, which became famous for bohemian artists and intellectuals.

Fig. 2. My Glamour Cat ©Simona Bealcovschi, 2025.

The technological inventions of the latter part of the 20th century aided the diffusion of progressive ideologies concerned with animal rights, such as the movement launched by philosophers Peter Singer and Tom Regan. New conversations and representations emerged, concerned with interspecies entanglements (Haraway 2008).

Starting in the 1940s, Hollywood launched a new iconography populated by anthropomorphic cats such as *Tom and Jerry* (1940, Hanna-Barbera), *The Aristocats* (1970), or *The Jungle Book* (1967), where a wise panther (Bagheera) saves and raises the human child Mowgli.

The internet and cyberspace have only reinforced the popularity of felines. No longer the scavenger of alleyways and backyard hunters, cats are now an asset. In 1990, the Japanese *Hello Kitty* burst onto the international scene, and *kawaii* ('cute') culture enjoyed great success, especially among teenage girls. This became a global marketing phenomenon worth about $8 billion in 2013. No one was shocked when iconic designer Karl Lagerfeld (Chanel) left $1.5 million to his cat Choupette.

Cats came to embody the culture of cuteness in cyberspace, where they found a home – about 2.504 billion active visitors a month on YouTube and 2 billion on Instagram and TikTok. Cats have thus made an extraordinary leap from anathema to being loved and even becoming a financial asset and a brand.

Keywords: *Cats symbolism*, *Western imaginary*, *Media*, *Modern branding*, *Cyberspace*

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Beyond a Three-Letter Acronym (TNR): Ethnography of the Socio-Technical Life of Trap-Neuter-Return in the Canary Islands, Spain

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Fig. 1. A recycled glass container for a feline colony in northern Tenerife. (Photo by author)

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) method has emerged in recent decades as a widely adopted strategy for managing cat populations living outdoors, positioning itself as a humane alternative to traditional lethal control (Wolf and Schaffner 2019). In a typical TNR program, free-roaming cats (*Felis catus*) are trapped in public spaces, surgically neutered and vaccinated at a vet clinic, and then returned to their original location. This method aims to control outdoor cat populations by reducing reproduction, while addressing ethical concerns around animal welfare.

Conservationists often denounce free-roaming cats as an insidious, though staggering threat to native wildlife (Loss *et al.* 2022), arguing that TNR enables continued predation by keeping cats outdoors. From this view, cats are devastating predators responsible for the 14% of global extinctions, representing a terrible menace to biodiversity (Loss, Will, and Marra 2013) – especially in island ecosystems, where they may act as invasive species (Nogales *et al.* 2013). In contrast, animal welfare advocates defend the cats as domestic, community animals deserving human care (Schaffner 2016), and frame TNR as a compassionate, science-informed approach to stabilizing colonies without resorting to killing (Luzardo *et al.* 2023).

Expert opposing narratives illustrate that TNR is not a neutral intervention; it is socially enacted through the practices and discourses of different actor groups, human and nonhuman. Rooted in a logic of effectiveness, the very identity of the method is contested, with debates centered on whether TNR achieves its stated goal of reducing free-roaming, community cat populations.

In 2023, the Spanish parliament passed a new Animal Welfare Law mandating that all *Felis catus* individuals be considered domestic animals and requiring municipalities to implement TNR for managing community cat populations. However, the new legal statute landed on rough land in the Canary Islands. Recognized as a biodiversity hotspot, the archipelago is home to protected, sometimes endemic species of lizards and birds preyed upon by cats. It is also a densely populated region, where urban, rural, and natural spaces intersect – and where traditional roles such as hunters and peasants remain significant. This has resulted in a polarized debate between conservationists and animal welfare advocates, often sidelining other uses and understandings of cats, such as their role as mousers.

Fig. 2. A peasant and the ethnographer's shadow staring at newborn kittens feeding from a female cat near a kitchen garden. (Photo by author)

Moving away from these binary, scientific expert-driven optics, this presentation explores the everyday practices of a handful of cat colony caregivers in northern Tenerife, examining TNR beyond its three-letter acronym. Drawing on fine-grained ethnographic research, the study reveals TNR as a flexible, multispecies, socio-technical assemblage whose social value exceeds the metrics of effectiveness. Instead, TNR emerges as an analytical entry point for understanding the tensions between conservation and animal welfare, while also

incorporating rural perspectives and the gendered dimensions of caregiving. These insights are especially relevant in the context of island ecosystems such as those of the Canary Islands.

Keywords: *Animal Welfare*, *Care Ethics*, *Multispecies Ethnography*, *Socio-Technical Assemblage*, *Wildlife Conservation*

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Cats in Ionian Basilicata: Archaeological and Cultural Evidence

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Fig. 1. Pelike from Metaponto (Bernalda, Matera): Female figure with cat on right arm. (From https://catalogo.beniculturali.it/detail/ArchaeologicalProperty/1700213351)

Archaeozoological evidence for cats in Ionian Basilicata is attested at the settlement at Termitito (Scanzano Jonico, Matera) during the LBA and at the sanctuary at Pantanello (Bernalda-Metaponto, Matera).

Iconographic evidence for human-feline relationships is found on figured pottery produced in the Metapontine area. A notable example is a red-figure pelike found in Tomb 798 at Metaponto on the SS 106 Ionica, former oil mill dated to the 5th century BCE; it depicts scenes of anakalypsis and dexiosis representing Aphrodite. On the Side B of the vase, a cat (αἴλουρος) appears alongside a female figure – who cradles it in her right arm while holding a bird (a dove) in her left hand – and a male figure, who grasps it with his right hand. Such scenes are well-documented across other regions of Magna Graecia (Campania, Apulia, Calabria, Sicily) and are typically associated with rituals involving gifts or offerings, coming-of-age ceremonies, and marriages under the patronage of Aphrodite and/or Artemis. In the Greek world, the cat was sacred to Artemis, the goddess of the hunt and wilderness.

Romans also valued cats, both as mousers and as companion animals. Cats were sacred to the goddess Diana; they were believed to possess magical powers linked to the goddess. In the medieval period, cats remained

part of domestic life and were considered valuable for controlling rodents and other pests in urban and rural settings.

During the Renaissance (16th century), cats are frequently depicted in conflict with other animals. They are shown battling mice in frescoes set in domestic environments showing the Nativity of the Virgin, as documented in the De Georgiis Chapel in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore (Tursi, Matera) and in the Church of Madonna delle Grazie (Miglionico, Matera). Scenes of cats fighting dogs appear in frescoes of the Last Supper in the former Franciscan convent in Grassano (Matera) and in the Convent of Sant'Antonio (Rivello, Potenza). At Matera, the coat of arms of the noble Gattini family features a cat positioned on three hills, gripping a viper in its teeth. In Christian iconography, cats depicted in conflict with other animals commonly symbolize the eternal struggle between good (the cat) and evil (represented by the mouse, dog, or viper).

Fig. 2. De Georgiis Chapel, Santa Maria Maggiore Church (Tursi, Matera): fresco of Virgin's Nativity with cat and mouse by the bed. (From: AA.VV. 2004, Tursi. La Rabatana. Fondazione Sassi - Matera. Bari 2004)

In the folk traditions of Ionian Basilicata, cats feature prominently in various tales, traditional songs, and nursery rhymes. Examples documented in the territory of Pisticci (Matera), such as *Musciamuscilla* and *La gatta del compare Peppe*, reference the figure of the cat and its domestic character.

Keywords: *Cat*, *Iconography*, *Symbolism*, *Magic*, *Song*

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The Balkan Cat

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Fig. 1. Traffic sign intervention – a cat with kittens in Vis, on the island of Vis. (Photo by Robert Franciszty)

In this cat-paper, I present folk beliefs about cats in South Slavic ethno-traditions. One of the first to write about the folkloric conceptualization of the cat in the South Slavic context was Natko Nodilo, working within Müller's nature mythology. In his study *The Old Faith of Serbs and Croats* (1885–1890), he refers to de Gubernatis's writings on the symbolism of the cat, emphasizing that the cat represents a zoomorphization of the night: "[…] with the sinister sharpness of its nocturnally widened pupils, it is like a zoomorphic embodiment of the night" (Nodilo 1981, 139). Thus, Natko Nodilo maintains a nictomorphic image of the cat, associating it with the night's zoomorphization and focusing on its gaze.

In Croatian folk beliefs about cats, typical international motifs appear: fear of a black cat crossing one's path; the similarity between cats and the night-mare/witch (Croatian – *mora, vještica*); the belief that encountering a black cat brings bad luck to hunters or fishermen; the nine lives of cats; and *custodia feralis*—the idea that if a cat crosses over a dead body, it may become a werewolf-like creature or gain supernatural qualities. There are also divinatory beliefs about cats predicting the arrival of guests or changes in the weather (Đorđević 1958).

We will therefore focus on folk beliefs about cats among the South Slavs, examining how Tihomir R. Đorđević included them in his encyclopaedic work *Nature in the Beliefs and Traditions of Our People* (1958), as well as which beliefs were recorded in the *Collection for Folk Life and Customs of the South Slavs*. In the context of folk belief, we will also consider phraseological expressions related to certain beliefs, as discussed by Ivana Bašić. For example,

traces of ritual cat killing have been preserved in Croatian idioms such as *prvi se mačići u vodu bacaju* ("the first kittens are thrown into the water"), *prebiti kao mačku* ("beat like a cat"), *ubiti kao mačku* ("kill like a cat"), and *vući se kao prebijena mačka* ("drag oneself like a beaten cat"). Expressions that have survived in the Croatian language, such as *povući mačka za rep* ("pull a cat by the tail") and *objesiti mačku o rep* ("hang a cat by its tail"), are proof that the original ritual meaning has, through profanity, been degraded into humorous or erotic connotations denoting futility or harm (Kipre 2022).

Liminality, in addition to the waving of a cat's tail, is also represented by the mytheme of the cat's nine lives (souls), in which the sacred number nine symbolizes the Trinity of Trinities. This concept probably originates from the Egyptian pantheon, which was composed of three companies of nine deities (Oldfield Howey 1956, 235).

Finally, we will contextualize South Slavic beliefs about cats within the broader Slavic worldview. In Slavic oral stories, the cat is a domestic animal with dual symbolism and various demonic functions. It is often paired with the dog, another household animal, and is symbolically correlated with wild animals such as the bear, hare, and weasel (Gura 2022, 733). In Slavic beliefs, the cat is also connected with thunder. Russians believed that a cat and a black dog could protect the house from lightning strikes, although their presence during a thunderstorm was also considered dangerous (Gura 2022, 741). According to Slavic conceptions, cats are also believed to have a positive influence on dreams. This is why the cat, along with the hare, often appears as a character in lullabies.

Keywords: *Balkan cat, Folklore Belief, Phraseology, Symbolism*

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"Cats" Plants in Russian Folk Botany

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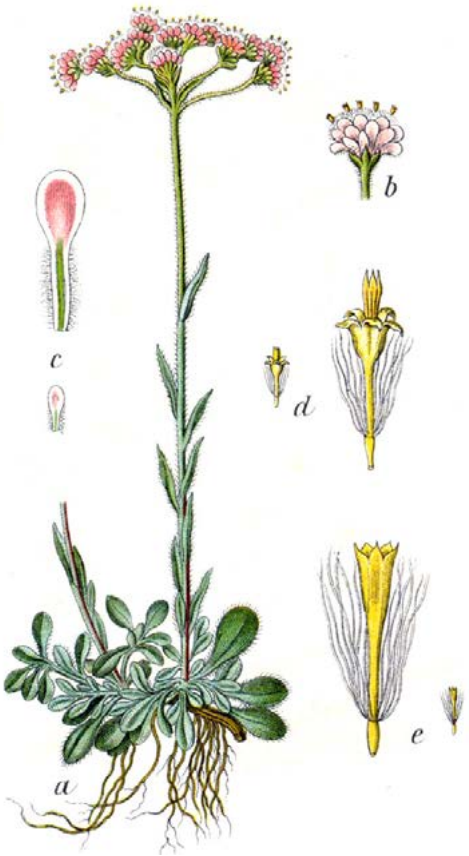

Fig. 1. *Antennaria dioica* (L.) Gaertn., commonly known as *mountain everlasting* or *cat's paw(s)*. Botanical illustration by Jacob Sturm from the book Deutschlands Flora in Abbildungen, 1796.

The paper analyses the Russian dialectal plant names formed from the words meaning 'cat'. In the paper, the author identifies the plant features used by speakers as the basis for their naming, to find out the reasons of creating cat-related names in Russian dialects.

The pool of plant names taken from regional and consolidated dictionaries of Russian dialects (mostly from SRNG) consists of about 100 phytonym use records, that is pairs consisting of a local name and its denotation. The most popular cat phytonym is *кошачья лапка/лапки* [lit. "cat's paw(s)"]; it was fixed 21 times and may mean various plants, mostly *Antennaria dioica* (L.) Gaertn., but also *Potentilla recta* L., *Achillea millefolium* L., and *Helichrysum arenarium* (L.) Moench. As for the plants associated with cats (45 in total), dialect speakers most often note *Trifolium arvense* L., *Nepeta cataria* L., *Antennaria dioica* (L.) Gaertn., *Astragalus* (various species), *Geum rivale* L., *Glechoma hederacea* L.

The names under analysis may be based on various plant features. The most numerous group of phytonyms is motivated by shape. So, dense fluffy inflorescences of *Antennaria, Achillea, Helichrysum,* and *Trifolium* look like paws of a cat (Rus. *котовы лапки, кошачьи лапочки*), while rounded flowers of *Geum rivale* covered with hairy bracts, or fruits of *Euonymus europaeus* are compared with tomcat balls (*кошачьи муди, котовы яйца*). Very sel-

dom inflorescences are compared with cat tail (*кошачьи хвосты* '*Dracocephalum thymiflorum* L.') or ears (*котовы уши* '*Trifolium arvense* L.').

The second important feature for cat-naming is smell. Some plants attract cats and influence their behavior, like *Nepeta cataria* L., *Valeriana officinalis* L., or *Valeriana wolgensis* Kazak., so they motivate such phytonyms as *кошачья трава* [lit. "cat's herb"], *ладан кошачий* [lit. "cat's incense"], *кошачий хмель* [lit. "cat's hop"]. Sometimes a 'cat' name points to the low status of a plant, like *кошачий клевер* [lit. "dog's clover"] 'burdock', *кошачья рожа* [lit. "cat's mallow"] '*Althaea officinalis* L.', showing that this clover, mallow, etc. are not real. Plants serving as surrogates may also receive cat-related names: *кошачье мыло* [lit. "cat's soap"] '*Viscaria vulgaris* Bernh.; *Saponaria officinalis* L.; *Cynoglossum officinale* L.; *Silene flos-cuculi* (L.) Greuter & Burdet' ("This is cat soap. We were kids, so we wet the grass, you wash your hands, and the foam starts to come out". Viatka region (SRNG 15: 140)). Unfortunately, not all phytonyms printed in dictionaries are identified; in these cases, it is difficult to judge their motivation.

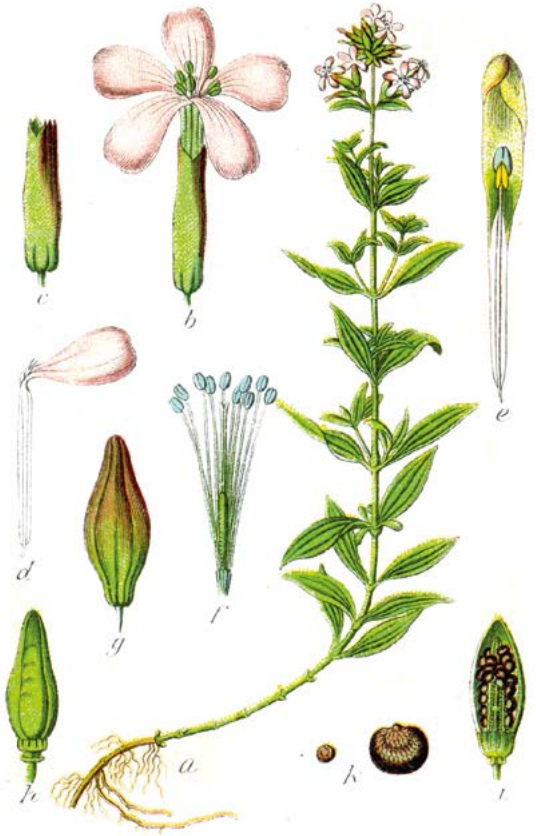

Fig. 2. *Saponaria officinalis* L. Botanical illustration by Jacob Sturm from the book Deutschlands Flora in Abbildungen, 1796. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Johann_Georg_Sturm,_(1796),_Deutschlands_Flora_in_Abbildungen)

Some Russian phytonyms have the same inner form as in Latin and some other European languages, for example, for *Antennaria dioica* Gaertn. and *Nepeta cataria* L. (Annenkov 1878: 37-38, 225), which poses a question about ways of borrowing plant names among languages.

In few cases, the cat-words mean not a specific plant but a part of it, e.g. *кошки* [lit. "cats"] 'seeds clinging to people's clothes and animal fur'; *котик, котики* [lit. "little cat(s)"] 'flowering male catkins of willow tree'.

It is interesting to compare the 'cat' group of phytonyms with 'dog' plant names (analyzed in Kolosova 2018). The 'cat' group is much less numerous than the 'dog' one; phytonyms are motivated with much less number of

plant features, and they do not include obscene words. The list of plants themselves is much shorter; among the plants, there are almost no poisonous ones, and no mushrooms at all. Perhaps this difference can be explained by the fact that the cat evokes fewer negative emotions than the dog, and is more associated with home space.

Keywords: *Ethnolinguistics*, *Ethnobotany*, *Plant Names*, *Russian dialects*, *Cat*

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"The Cat's Paw Is Soft, but Its Claw Is Sharp": Cats in Russian Folk Culture

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Fig. 1. Authentic Portrait of the Cat of the Grand Duke of Muscovy. (Hollar 1663, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Vray_Portrait_du_chat_du_grand-duc_de_Moscovie#)

Cats have long been a part of Russian life, culture, and folklore, and have acquired symbolism that reflects both the attitude towards the animal itself and a wide range of positive and negative meanings.

The cats use in the fight against rodents - mice, rats, which was extremely important for Russians (and more broadly - Slavs), an originally agricultural people. "The cat is an enemy to mice and loves goodness" (Belova 1999, p. 149).

In its domestic role, a cat performs a protective function, guarding its habitat, indicating to its owners a possible threat, since, according to beliefs, it can see an evil spirit, or is used in protective rituals: letting a cat into a new house before moving in, placing a cat in a cradle before putting a baby to bed so that the child sleeps (Gura 1997, pp. 79, 98, 108).

At the same time, a cat can serve as a threat tool: the well-known image of a shapeshifter cat; putting tangled cat hair to spoil a marital bed; the image of Bayun (one, who lulls to sleep) Cat, who puts a person to sleep and then devouring him. However, by performing certain actions, a person can resist the spells, neutralize evil, and even turn it to his advantage. For example, the fairy tale hero, Andrey the Shooter, who did not let be put sleep-

ing, beats Bayun the Cat first with an iron whip, then with a copper one, and finally with a tin one, which "bends, does not break, and twists around the spine". The cat begged: "Leave me, good man! Whatever is needed, I will do everything for you!"

The cat is also a favorite character in Russian popular prints, since the 17th century, such as the famous "Kazan cat of Astrakhan mind, Siberian reason and whiskers of Terek."

Cats could be kept in the house out of affection, for entertainment, or to create a cozy home. It is known that the favorite of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich was a cat depicted by an European artist in a drawing called "Authentic Portrait of the Cat of the Grand Duke of Muscovy."

The fact of keeping a cat as a pet is attested in written documents of the voivode's office of Verkhny Tagil in the Urals. True, this story had a tragic outcome: "The voivode Ryuma Yazykov was from Moscow. That voivode had brought with him a large Kazan cat. Ryuma kept him near him all the time. And that cat bit his throat while he was sleeping and bit him to death in that town" (Kniga Zapisnaya 1973, p. 7).

Perhaps the unfortunate voivode kept a wild cat as a pet, unknowingly, which revealed its nature in a tragic way. Representatives of the wild nature were called "wild (forest) cat: A wild cat is similar to a house cat, only motlier" (Belova 1999, pp. 149-150).

The cat presence in households is also confirmed by archaeological materials from excavations of Russian cities in Siberia. For example, cat bones were found in the Tomsk voivode's estate cultural layer (Chernaya 2015, p. 145), which is also typical for other Russian settlements in Siberia.

An interesting discovery was made in Mangazeya: in the space between dwellings, the skeleton of a cat was discovered, which, judging by the anatomical order of the bones and the absence of gnawing traces, was buried by the owners (Vizgalov, Parkhimovich 2008, p. 115).

In the European part of the country, an increase in cat remains is noted for late medieval layers as evidence that the cat is becoming a familiar attribute of the urban home.

Keywords: *Cats, Folk culture, Middle Ages, Russia, Siberia*

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Nomads and Cats

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Fig. 1. A cat sleeping on the bed in the yurta. (Photo by F. Lugli)

As is widely acknowledged, cats—unlike dogs—have not historically occupied a stable or clearly defined position within pastoral societies. Their strong attachment to specific places and human companions renders them poorly suited to the mobility that usually characterises classical nomadic lifeways, thereby limiting their integration into highly mobile pastoral systems.

Contemporary Mongolian pastoralism is undergoing rapid and far-reaching transformations that call into question the continuity of a cultural system whose origins extend deep into prehistory. These changes include not only a marked decline in intergenerational transmission, with fewer young people choosing to pursue pastoral livelihoods, but also a growing tendency towards partial essentialisation in certain regions, such as north-central Bulgan. This shift is materially expressed in the increasing adoption of prefabricated housing units, often installed in quasi-permanent locations, particularly within winter and autumn camps.

Within this context of socio-economic and spatial reconfiguration, the presence of cats in nomadic camps emerges as a phenomenon of particular ethnographic significance. During the research project *The Camps of the Nomads of Mongolia: An Ethnoarchaeological Perspective* – promoted by the Italian Association of Ethnoarchaeology and, since 2021, by ISMEO with the sponsorship of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – cats were documented in numerous pastoral camps across diverse regions of Mongolia. Ethnographic observations suggest that their presence has increased over recent years, a trend further corroborated by individuals who travel extensively throughout the country for professional purposes (personal communication, Alfredo Savino, Sain Sanaa Cooperative).

Field surveys conducted in 2023-2025 among pastoral households in Mogod (Bulgan), as well as among families residing approximately 100 kilometres from Ulaanbaatar, provide further insight into this development. The growing prevalence of cats within pastoral camps, together with the forms of relational engagement that

nomads establish with them, may be interpreted as an indicator of broader transformations in contemporary nomadic practice. While informants consistently recognised the instrumental role of cats in rodent control, the majority foregrounded their affective value within the domestic sphere, emphasising companionship, familiarity, and emotional attachment.

Fig. 2. A cat on the roof of the yurta. (Photo by F. Lugli)

The cat thus occupies a dual position, functioning both as a pragmatic agent within the pastoral economy and as a companion species embedded in everyday social life. Although the dog continues to hold a central and symbolically charged role within Mongolian pastoral cosmologies – often framed as the paradigmatic animal companion – the cat appears to be acquiring increasing visibility and relevance within herding households, particularly in contexts marked by reduced mobility and spatial stability.

Anthropological literature has long highlighted the ambivalent symbolic status of cats, which are frequently attributed both positive and negative qualities and positioned as liminal or ambiguous beings (Terbish 2023). At the same time, animals in Mongolian ontologies are widely understood as sentient actors capable of emotional experience and intersubjective engagement with humans (Fijn 2011). This study contributes to ongoing debates on human–animal relations by foregrounding the emerging role of cats in pastoral contexts and by underscoring the differentiated relational regimes through which nomads engage with dogs and cats, respectively.

Keywords: *Mongolia*, *Nomads*, *Cats*, *Dogs*, *Modifications*

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Domestic Cat, Civet and Visayan Leopard Cat in the Philippines

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Fig. 1. Domestic cat. Ifugao (2025), Nothern Luzon, Philippines. (Photo by M.V. Stanyukovih)

The Philippines has considerable cat population; the country is regarded as one of the most rapidly growing markets for pet industries, in which breed dogs leave cats as pets far behind. Most households, urban and rural, have cats, usually several ones; however, most of them are kept just to catch rats, mice, small snakes, cockroaches and other insects. As a rule, cats do not have names. There is a conspicuous lack of traditional beliefs related to domestic cat in the indigenous communities. Once being interviewed, the Ifugao, Yattuka and other highlanders of the Cordillera refer to lowland cultures as sources of cat-related omens and superstitions: according to them, Ilocanos believe that cat mewing is a sign of coming rain, and the Chinoy (Philippine Chinese) keep cats because they bring them luck in business. Lowland cat lore seems to be quite poor and largely imported: such are the beliefs about black cats bringing (mis)fortune, cats having nine lives, use of cat bones in sorcery, the belief that having killed a cat accidentally (e.g., by a car or motor) one should bury it to avoid bad luck. The aswang shapeshifters and multo/murto lost souls are said to take a cat shape sometimes, but mostly they turn into a dog or a pig (Stanyukovich 2018).

Most cat-related references derived from early Spanish records in W. H. Scott's *Barangay* (1994) treat about a civet cat: it was a competitor of domestic one ("if a civet cat could be caught young enough to tame, it made an even better mouser" (1994: 46)), and an object of international trade (live caged viverras were sold to Japan from Mindanao (1994: 76)); among the Tagalogs civet cats "were taken not so much for their flesh as for their perfume-fixing civet (*diris*)" (1994: 204).

As elsewhere in Asia, both domestic cats, wild felines (leopard cat) and their close relatives, including civets, were traditionally considered edible ("All animals whose flesh was considered fit for human consumption – for example, deer or civet cat – were referred to as babuy, pig", Scott 1994: 44); to a certain extent, it is still valid at present day (Podberscek 2007), especially for the wild species.

Fig. 2. Domestic cat. Ifugao (2011), Nothern Luzon, Philippines. (Photo by M.V. Stanyukovih)

Wild felines are very scarce in the archipelago, as opposed to neighbouring Indonesia and Malaysia, where we find both the tiger and extensive tiger lore, not to mention at least 4 species of wild cats (Adul *et al*. 2015). The term *harimao* (Indonesian for a tiger) is not unknown in the folklore of the South of the Philippines, but here it is mostly applied to dog-shaped creatures or more complicated dragon-like mythological beings combining the traits of a dog, a snake (python), etc. (Sellato 1992).

The Philippines is home to an endemic Visayan leopard cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis rabori*, aka Sunda leopard cat, *Prionailurus javanensis sumatranus*), *maral* or *tamaral* in Hiligaynon. Its habitat is limited to Visayas, primarily Negros and Panay, where it belongs to endangered species; it was reported to be extinct in Cebu and Masbate. This is a nocturnal animal that has adjusted to living in close proximity to humans, occupying now the sugarcane plantations. *Maral* feeds on exotic rodents (rats and mice that are of Philippine origin), lizards, skinks, gecko, birds. The *viverra* (civet cat), a distant relative, is *maral*'s competitor in subsistence; however, civet also consumes fruits and seeds, and is not nocturnal.

According to some sources, the leopard cat was the first cat species to be domesticated (at least 5000 years ago in Neolithic China), but later it was replaced with cats originating from the African wildcat of the Middle East (https://animalia.bio/leopard-cat).

Keywords: *Domestic cat, Visayan leopard cat, Philippines, Folk beliefs, Human-animal relationships*

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Cats That Walk by Themselves: Approaching Human-Cat Relationships in Indonesia

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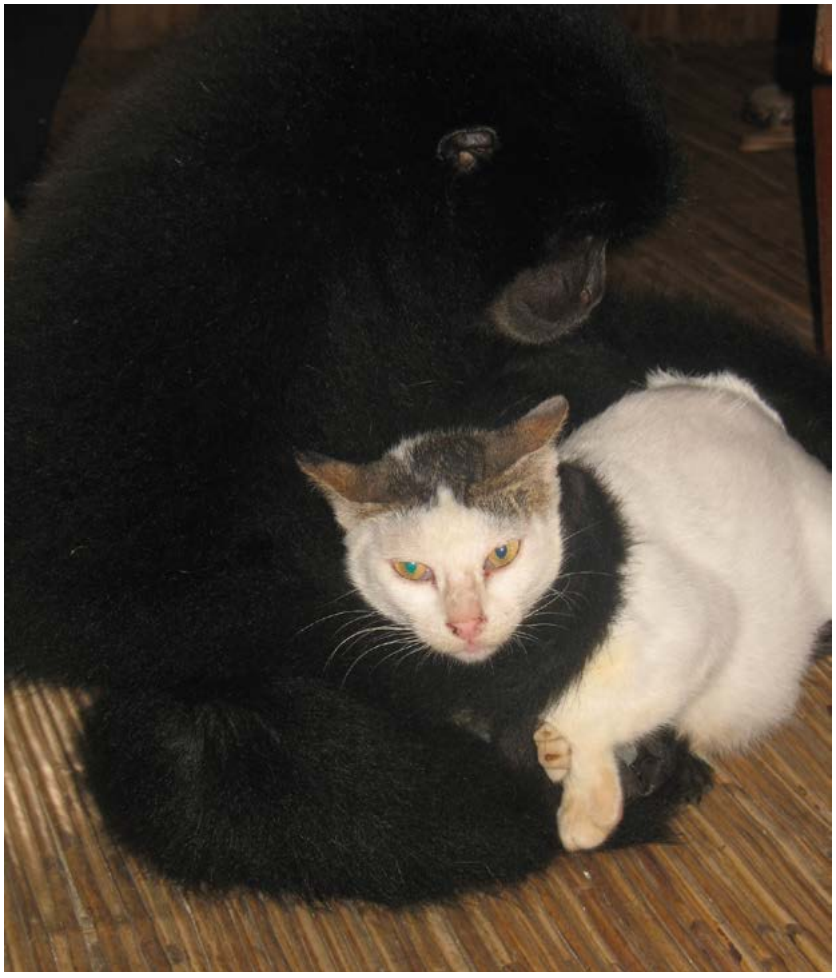

Fig. 1. Siamang petting a cat. West Sumatra, 2015. (Photo by Aglaia Iankovskaia)

The paper outlines prospective directions for discussing cultural aspects of human-cat relationships in Indonesia and the wider Indonesian-Malay world – a topic so far largely neglected by scholarship. Having arrived at the Malay Archipelago much later than dog, the faithful companion of Austronesian migrants, domestic cat appears to retain an ambiguous relationship with humans. While in urban environments Westernised pet culture keeps gaining popularity, in rural areas cats continue to live in association with people but often without direct contact with them.

They are occasionally allowed indoors and fed with rice, but less often petted and given names; at the same time, cats are sometimes eaten. Unlike dog meat consumption which is still practised in Indonesia to certain extent, cat meat consumption is much more limited and is mainly driven by a belief in medical properties of cat meat. While dog can be eaten for its taste, cat seems to be only consumed as a medicine. This medical perception apparently stems from a belief that cats possess a special spirit differing from other animals. Beliefs in supernatural powers of cats were observed in the late 19th century among the Malays of the Malay peninsula

(Skeat 1900: 191) and continue to exist nowadays among the peoples of Java, Sumatra, and beyond. Killing a cat is considered extremely unlucky: in case of such an accident, the person in fault wraps the cat's body in the shirt they have been wearing and buries it in order to ward off the bad luck. This practice is found in Central Java, North Sumatra, and possibly elsewhere in Indonesia and is not applied to dogs or any other animals.

There are also indications of intentional use of cats' magical powers in different rituals, such as those invoking rain. A Karo Batak myth describes a ritual performed by women who adorned a cat with jewellery and textiles and by this means evoked a storm that destroyed a village (Slaats, Portier 1994: 87-88). Focusing on the islands of Sumatra and Java, the paper discusses various beliefs and practices related to cats that were or still are found in the region. It draws both upon literary sources and the author's field observations in Indonesia in 2024-2025.

Fig. 2. A cat in Aceh, 2015. (Photo by Aglaia Iankovskaia)

Keywords: *Cat*, *Human-cat relationship*, *Java*, *Sumatra*, *Batak*

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Secular and Spiritual: Comparative Anthropological between Eastern and Western Cultures

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Fig. 1. Geometric figure and two cat-like images, from Nongbu rock art site (Guangxi, China).

The domestication path of cats differs significantly from that of typical farm animals: the domestication of livestock is based on captivity domestication, where humans breed individuals that meet their life and economic needs by long-term restriction of animal movement. In contrast, cats were domesticated through a commensal path. With the emergence of agricultural settlement lifestyles in the Neolithic period, large quantities of stored crops near human settlements led to the accumulation of small rodents, which in turn attracted small wild felids and mustelids as predators to live around human environments (Han Y., Zhao Y. Y., Luo S. J. 2025, p. 872).

The cat in the ancient Greek world is a shadowy and elusive creature, even in its name and identity. Weasels seem to have been much more commonly kept as pets in ancient Greece than cats, and the words for "cat" and "weasel" seem to have often been conflated. The Islamic world – where cats were highly regarded – played an important role in the spread of domestic cats to China from the Silk Road.

In ancient China, intellectuals started to regard cats as aesthetic objects as early as the Sui and Tang periods. The related artistic and literary creations reached their peak during the Song Dynasty, with many artworks focused on the theme of cats, including cat-themed paintings and poetry (Zhang Yujing 2022, p. 33). From the Yuan to the Qing dynasties, ancient texts such as 纳猫经, 猫乘, 衔蝉小录, 猫苑 systematically compiled a series of knowledge about cats (Zhang Jiali, Wei Luling 2019, p. 176), demonstrating the connection between cats as pets and the intellectual class in ancient China.

From the perspective of cultural symbolism, the metaphors surrounding cats throughout history are dualistic, which is related to the specific historical and cultural contexts in which cats existed.

In the West, one of the oldest representations of cats connects them with divinity, as in the Minoan statuette of the "Goddess of Snakes", where the cat's sacredness was connected with Egypt.

Fig. 2. Cat-like image, from Nongbu rock art site (Guangxi, China).

The finding of possible domestic cat bones inside an Early Iron Age hut from Fidenae (Rome), depictions of cats on vases and frescoes in Magna Graecia and Etruria indicates that in Central and Southern Italy this animal was considered a useful companion from the beginning. Cats as pets are widely attested in the Roman imperial age. See, in this regard, the Pompeian mosaic from the House of the Faun.

In the medieval West, the cat was considered to be at the border between the natural and domestic world; therefore, to some extent, ambiguous and "dangerous". Sometimes, the people's superstitions and the Church promoted the association of cats with the devil, considering them symbols of evil and witchcraft; they were therefore persecuted and killed because of this connection. This was also due to the cat's connection with ancient pagan deities, such as Isis, Diana and Freya, considered by Christians to be demons.

Western Medieval and Renaissance art offers us dual images: cats help the man against mice in some British medieval miniatures, but the cat flees at the angel's apparition in Lorenzo Lotto's Annunciation.

In the East, the situation was different. Based on the theme of cats hunting mice, they became objects of worship in agricultural civilizations and, subsequently, served as cultural symbols representing the spiritual world. For example, cat-shaped rock paintings (Figs. 1-2) and the Fire Cat ritual (舞火猫) in China (Li Man 2020, p.12), and the "hae nagn maew" rain-seeking ritual in Thailand, where cats are invoked to communicate with the heavens to pray for a bountiful harvest.

Keywords: *Cat*, *Cultural Symbolism*, *Comparative study*, *Religion*, *Art*

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From Desert Companions to Urban Symbols: The Evolving Role of Cats in Bedouin and Contemporary Saudi Society

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Fig. 1. Miniature from the Arabic manuscript of Kalila wa Dimna, Iraq or Syria, 13th century (Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. arabe 3465).

This presentation explores the evolving relationship between humans and cats in Saudi Arabia, tracing its roots in Bedouin nomadic culture and examining its transformation in contemporary society. Traditionally, cats have held a respected and multifaceted role within Bedouin communities – as protectors of food supplies, companions on desert journeys, and spiritual presences embedded in Islamic teachings and cultural practices. Their presence reflects the Bedouins' deep ecological and spiritual attunement to the desert environment and the values of care, reciprocity, and hospitality.

Today, however, this longstanding relationship is undergoing visible shifts. As urbanization expands and lifestyles change, cats are increasingly reframed not only as elements of cultural memory but also as actors in emerging narratives of sustainability, identity, and interspecies coexistence. The presentation examines how the symbolic and practical role of cats is being reinterpreted in urban contexts, animal welfare discourse, and conservation efforts – often positioned at the crossroads of tradition and transformation.

Through this lens, we argue that the cat becomes a cultural mediator, bridging inherited customs and contemporary values. Special attention will be given to the Islamic ethical framework that continues to inform attitudes toward animal care, and to how this moral foundation is being reactivated to support new forms of human-animal relations within Saudi society.

Fig. 2. Urban glimpse from historic Jeddah: the interplay of material elements - woven chairs, local textiles, carved window frames - and immaterial dimensions - stillness, belonging, and the rituality of everyday life - reveals the continuity between domestic and public space. The cat, a liminal and symbolic presence, occupies the threshold as an emblem of coexistence between nature, culture, and collective memory. (Photo by author)

Keywords: *Bedouin heritage*, *Human-animal relations*, *Cats*, *Cultural transformation*, *Ecological symbolism*

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Cat Tales Among Northwestern Native North Americans

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Fig. 1. Traps. Northern British Columbia, 1979. (Photo by G. Lanoue)

The domestic cat (*Felis catus*) was unknown in Native North American societies, since these small predators were reputedly introduced to North America as stowaways on Christopher Columbus's ships. Indigenous societies of the northwest, however, were familiar with the three native North American felids, bobcats, cougars and the Canada Lynx. The highly-adaptable bobcat is mostly found in southern Canada and throughout the United States, even in environments dominated by humans, whereas cougars (pumas, mountain lions), although widespread in the western parts of the continent, are shy and tend to live in remote mountainous zones. In Dene territory (northern British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, Yukon Territories, Northwest Territories and central Alaska), pumas were found only in the very southern fringe of the northwest. Of the three species, the lynx was the most widespread in the northwest but because of habitat loss is today largely confined to boreal forests. In this paper, I will explore the role played by wild cats in northwestern Native North American thought and in their collective imaginaries. I will concentrate on lynx, the most widespread of the northwestern felids and the only one to appear regularly in the mythology of the peoples of this zone.

Although appreciated by some people as a secondary source of food, lynx were never an important part of the diet of northwestern Amerindians since they are fast runners, excellent climbers and good swimmers. Unlike dogs and wolves who compete for the same resources as humans and whose pack nature in many ways mirrors human societies, cats do not actively interact with people, nor are they major competitors for human food resources. The solitary lifestyles and carnivorous nature of these predators kept their numbers relatively

low. Native demand for their meat and fur was relatively low. Lynx meat was a minor part of the Native diet, and clothing was largely made from processed caribou hides and only sometimes ornamented with cat fur.

Lynx became more important in northwestern Amerindian life as the European demand for furs increased as Eurasian lynx stocks became severely depleted by the 19th century. Most Native groups adapted to these new conditions and increased their hunting efforts. Almost all groups used various forms of snares to catch these naturally wary and intelligent animals. By the late 20th century, however, the demand for cat furs has fallen because of anti-fur sentiments, and so lynx are once again relegated to secondary status in the northwestern menagerie and numbers caught seem to have fallen to earlier levels.

Here, however, I am not concerned with lynx's role in the economy of northwestern Amerindians, though its limited role no doubt contributes in part to its secondary status in Northwestern mythologies. Lynx's position as a mythological protagonist is somewhat problematical, however. Given the cold climate of the region and especially the mountainous terrain that covers much of the northwestern quadrant of the continent, the mythological imaginaries of most northern Native populations divide the world into hunters and hunted. It is surprising, however, that lynx, a highly efficient hunter, does not occupy a higher niche in the mythological hierarchy. Although it possesses the same primordial power (*in'chon*, in several Dene languages) as some predatory animals (eg., eagle, wolf, spider) that in the mythology gave it some human-like appearance and traits (namely, speech and the capacity to interact with even sometimes marry humans), lynx is not usually a positive protagonist in myth. He sometimes appears as a magnificent hunter in human form, intelligent, resourceful and cunning but who is no friend of humans. Other times, however, he is presented as a mere animal who is good to eat. In other words, lynx is somewhat anomalous compared to other 'strong' animals in the menagerie who are also renowned for their hunting prowess and superior innate power, and as such are never eaten (with the exception of bear, who has only moderate primordial power despite its rather fearsome biological aspect; bears, however, are not classed as great hunters by northwest Native peoples). Finally, other power animals assumed their present biological forms but retained their innate primordial power after the intervention of a special mythical creature, the Transformer or Traveller, whereas most mythologies of the region are silent about the transformation of primordial lynx into normal, everyday lynx. In contemporary mythologies from the region, lynx does not appear to have retained any special primordial power, though this remains as a hypothesis to be explored.

This ambiguity is also mirrored in Athabaskan grammatical features, where obviation is marked in third person forms in most northern Dene languages. In other words, animacy, the capacity of sentient creatures to act, can be grammatically denoted as being proximate or obviative, classing subjects into main or as secondary protagonists. Lynx, in other words, can be either a primary or secondary actor, classed with sentient humans or with semi-sentient prey. Although no wide-ranging study of this grammatical phenomenon has been applied to lynx, it appears likely that lynx can be marked both ways, in keeping with his ambiguous nature. Although not examined here, this points to the need for further research.

In sum, I propose to examine the reasons behind the indeterminacy of lynx's position in the pantheon.

Keywords: *Native North America*, *Northwest*, *Animals*, *Mythology*, *Lynx*

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Cats and Humans in India: From Harappa up to the Present

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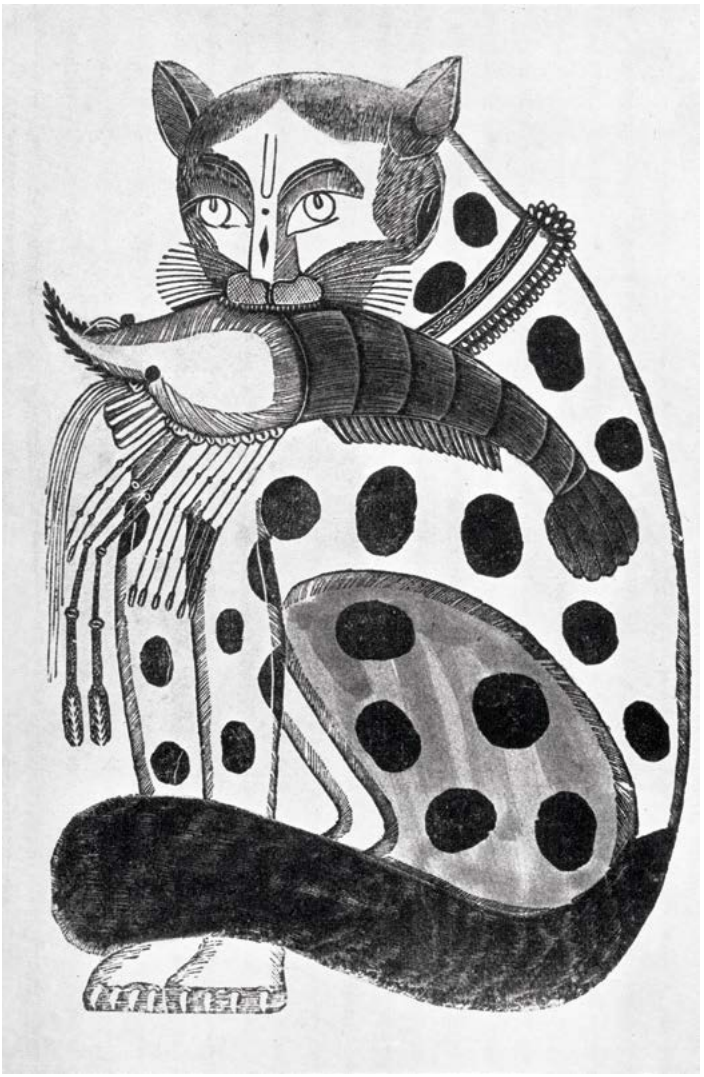

Fig. 1. Cat-"ascetic". Folk print. Calcutta, XIX century (after: Vasilkov 2014: 77).

The earliest information on cats in relation to humans in India is provided by the archaeological data of the Indus Valley civilization, where the cats were obviously domestic or feral, living close to human settlements. But in the subsequent Indo-Aryan culture mentions of the cats appear rather late, in such post-Vedic texts as Mahabharata, or Panchatantra, and in the focus of attention there is always a wild, forest male cat. The universally spread motif of the cat's ability to pretend to be dead or helpless with the aim to lure the mice, acquires in the Sanskrit literature a specific form: the wild male cat proclaims itself to be a repentant sinner, holy ascetic, preaching non-violence and vegetarianism; having blunted the vigilance of the mice, it devours them. Only once in ancient literature, in a Buddhist Jataka the cat (female wild cat) tries to make a cock (the wild one) go down from a tree branch, using a woman's tactics of seduction. In the "Laws of Manu", the text that obtained

its present form in the first centuries of the CE, we find a mention of a particular group of carnivora, distinct from the forest wild beasts: grāmya (domestic, or rather feral, admitted to enter a village, grāma) kravyād (carnivora). According to traditional commentaries, these are cats and mongooses, who were kept in the gardens and houses as hunters for mice and snakes. The reappearance of domestic cats in India was possibly connected with the spread of the house cats about 2000 years ago along newly established trade routes between Mediterranean and South Asia. But being necessarily accepted in the house or garden, cats were still perceived as bloodthirsty predators. In classical Sanskrit literature, they are often depicted in the act of stalking birds on the rooftop. The fear of cats was aggravated by their suspicious nocturnal habits. As early as the first centuries of the CE this fear found its mythological expression in the image of a particular goddess – Shashthi, "the Goddess of the Sixth Day", one (and the most important) of the "Mothers" – deities of the children's deceases, borrowed by Hinduism from some tribal cults. Modern medicine confirmed that in the conditions of old Indian villages the sixth day after birth was really most dangerous. Another specific feature of Shashthi is her relations with cats. Her vahana (animal, serving as a vehicle or mount) is cat; cats are her servants whom she sends to steal or kill children of a woman who does not worship Shashthi or mistreats a cat in her house. She has a feline nature herself, and was sometimes presented in art with the cat's head.

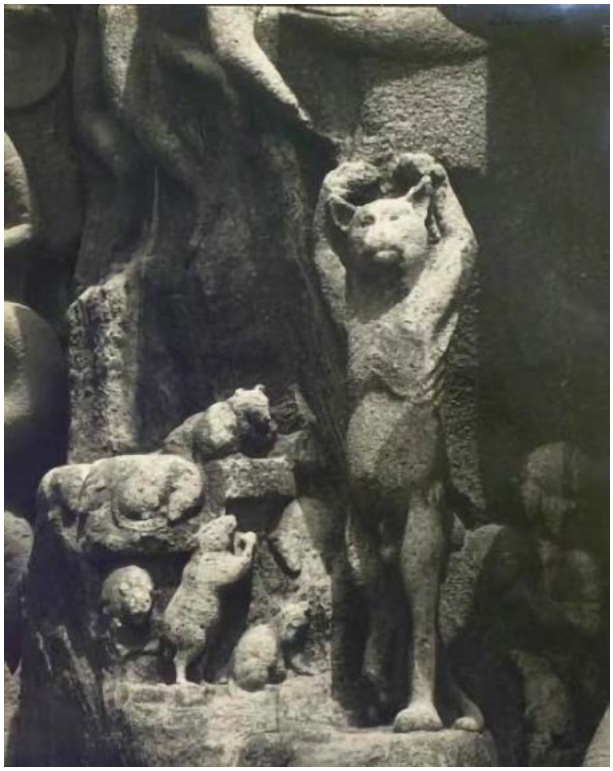

Fig. 2. Cat and Mice. Detail of the great bas-relief in Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu. VII cent. CE (after: Vasilkov 2014: 69).

In our time the image of a cat as a predator in the house is still alive in proverbs: "A cat is the aunt of a tiger", "If you want to know, what a tiger is, look at a cat", etc. In the Web we may find many discussions on such topics as: "Why are Indians scared of cats?". Some Indians admit that they consider cats to be dangerous, especially to small children, but they cannot explain it, or try to give a "scientific" explanation, e.g.: "Cat poop and hair can be fatal for children with weak immune systems". But the true reason is the presence in their consciousness of the half-forgotten mythological associations, connected with the image of Shashthi.

In the last decades the situation is changing quickly. The growth of the number of pet-owners is evidenced by the boom in the cat food trade. Most people keep cats of the imported breeds, but others adopt as pets stray cats.

Keywords: *"Ascetic" cats*, *Feral cats*, *"Laws of Manu"*, *Fear of cats*, *Shashthi*

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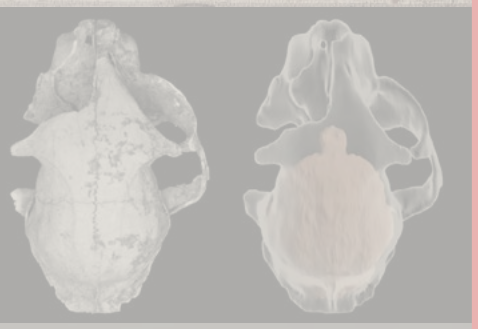

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Domestication and Beyond

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Fig. 1. Gattile Centro Felix (Trento). Elena Finatzer and her cats. (Photo by author)

My purpose in this poster is to explore the hegemonic narrative of domestication, highlighting the In Western scholarly traditions, domestication has long been conceptualized as a linear and human-driven process, grounded in control, ownership, and utility. This narrative frames non-human animals as passive objects shaped by human agency, obscuring alternative histories of interspecies coexistence, reciprocity, and mutualism. The concept of domestication has recently been revived within socio-cultural anthropology; nonhuman animals and plants, confined to the sphere of zoè, "have begun to appear alongside humans in the realm of bios" (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010: 545). Moreover, "the anthropocentric and male-centric model of 'human domestication of nature' has been strongly challenged" (Stépanoff, Vigne 2018:13) under the lens of ecofeminist approaches that push us toward notions of care and love and recognize "complex interwoven histories of co-evolution" (van Dooren 2014:293). In the last two decades, anthropologists influenced by new currents in archaeology have revisited the concept of domestication and its human anthropocentrism and exceptionalism, shifting their attention to "the mutualistic agencies of plants and animals in domesticating humans, entangling humans in relationships of mutual benefit" (Cassidy and Mullin 2007:24). In addition, they are engaged in research on "multispecies materialities of domestication" (Swanson *et al.* 2018:12) and long-term processes of co-becomings in which "biosocial relations" (Ingold and Palsson 2013) were involved. Tsing (2020:247) suggests replacing domestication with the concepts of "cospecies landscape" and "multispecies engagement", in which no species can be in charge. In this way, domestication becomes a complex landscape consisting of a "meshwork" of voices (Ingold 2013:132).

This study adopts a multidisciplinary approach combining theoretical anthropology, zooarchaeology, paleogenetics, and multispecies ethnography. Zooarchaeological and genetic research reveals that cats followed dispersal trajectories distinct from those of other domesticated animals. Ancient DNA evidence indicates multiple waves of expansion from the Near East and Egypt, occurring across different historical periods rather than through a single domestication event. Findings from sites such as Shillourokambos (Cyprus, ca. 7500 BCE) suggest early and intimate cat–human relationships predating Egyptian domestication narratives. These data support the hypothesis of multiple, regionally situated processes of co-domestication.

Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted at Centro Felix, a cat shelter in Trento (Italy), using participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The shelter functions as a multispecies social environment where cats retain autonomy while engaging in sustained relationships with human caregivers. Observations show that care practices prioritize relationality, communication, and respect for feline agency, challenging models based on confinement and discipline. Cats actively shape human routines, emotional attachments, and spatial organization, highlighting reciprocal influence.

In order to comprehend the dynamic interrelations of these coexisting forms of human-animal entanglements, it is imperative to decentre the prevailing approaches to domestication and instead, approach these entanglements as ongoing and mutual. This approach aligns with Swanson *et al.*'s (2018) observations, which contend that domestication is characterized by ongoing and mutualistic practices rather than by logical processes. The analysis of cats, employing methodologies from zooarchaeology and paleogenetics, offers a distinctive perspective on the dynamics of mutual exchange and influence between humans and cats. It can be posited that the cat has domesticated the human to a degree that rivals the human's self perceived domestication of the cat. Moreover, the disciplines of cultural and social anthropology, which are characterized by a propensity toward multispecies thinking, are imperative for the revaluation of the relationships between humans and non-humans in the past and the identification of methods to cultivate these relationships in our contemporary, troubled present.

Keywords: *Domestication, Narratives, Mutualism, Cat-human relationship, Multispecies ethnography*

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Follow the Footprints ... the Neverending Story of Cats in Ostia

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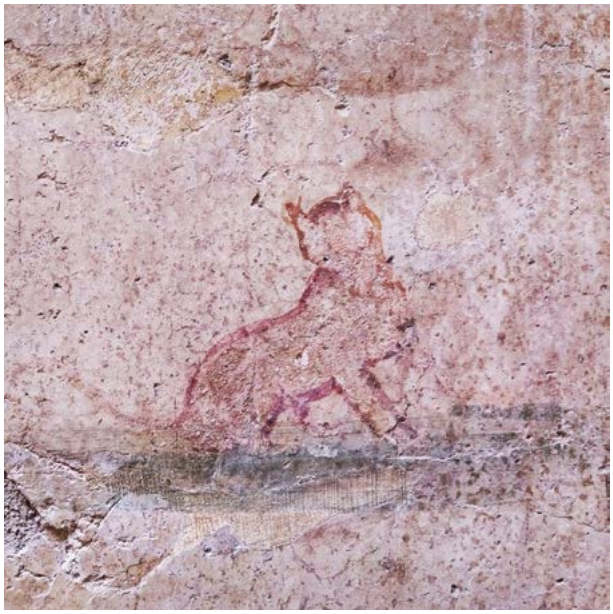

Fig. 1. Gatto, Insula delle Muse. Picture from Archivio Fotografico - Parco archeologico di Ostia antica.

The Parco archeologico di Ostia antica occupies a very peculiar geographical position: 30 km far from Rome, it is located close to the urban settlement of Ostia Lido, but above all it is situated between the coast and the mouth of the Tiber River, which gives the area its character as a river-sea transition habitat characterized by a rich biodiversity in terms of flora and fauna.

Within the archaeological area belonging to the Ostia Antica excavations, there is a large cat colony (35 members) that is regularly registered and protected in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Municipality of Rome (Regolamento Comunale Diritti Animali – Comune di Roma).

The archaeological area, with the natural features described above, is an ideal habitat for the domestic cat, *Felis catus* (Linnaeus, 1758), a small carnivore that, despite habitually sharing its space with humans, has a strong wild character; in this protected place, rich in spaces and hidden spots and at the same time bordering the riverbank, the wild nature of the feline almost predominates over its domestic nature. The shy presence of these animals, which roam freely among the ruins and archaeological finds, is evidence of a long and almost uninterrupted relationship with the city and its inhabitants, dating back to the city's period of great expansion and prosperity. Today, they have become an additional attraction for visitors, who are taught to respect the animals and promote peaceful coexistence.

Along the archaeological trail, evidence of the antiquity of this relationship can be seen in the remains of the city itself, in the form of paintings (unique in its kind, a feline depicted on the wall of a passageway in the Insula delle Muse – Fig. 1) or in the imprints left on the terracotta tiles used here in construction (but produced elsewhere) and still identifiable today.

Every year, the Park's Educational Services promote and monitor "PCTO" activities for high schools, with a particular focus on local schools, in order to strengthen the relationship between different institutions and create a positive and proactive link between young people and the area in which they live. It was during one of

the first projects carried out in this field that the students of the *Ugo Foscolo Art School* created the mascot of the Educational Services, named Cartilio the Cat (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Cartilio the Cat. Picture from Educational Services archives - Parco archeologico di Ostia antica.

Cartilio the Cat is not just a mascot, but a figure behind whom, for several years now, the Park's Educational Services have been organizing educational activities that combine the discovery of Ostia's archaeological heritage with a focus on biodiversity. It is no coincidence that the Park today is a partner in the European Green Heritage project, which aims to view archaeological and natural heritage in the same light.

The world of cats in Ostia is an integral part of life at the excavations. Every Saturday, the Park's social media channels share an image of a cat from the Ostia Antica cat colony with the hashtag 'caturday', to familiarize visitors who frequent the archaeological area of what was once Rome's first colony with this friendly population.

Keywords: *Feline colony*, *Education*, *Archaeology*, *Footprints*, *Ethology*

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The Case of the Isolated *Felis catus* cranium from the Castle of Santa Severa

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Fig. 1. Il Salterio Luttrell. Inghilterra, 1325.1340 British Library, Londra.

Fig. 2. *Felis catus* cranium, Castle of Santa Severa. (Photo by author)

Within the obliteration layers of the semi-hypogean Early Christian church (5th century CE) located in the settlement of Santa Severa, Santa Marinella (Rome), and dated to the late 13th century, a substantial quantity of faunal remains was recovered alongside a remarkably diverse assemblage of archaeological finds. Among the materials on display at the castle's museum, a complete domestic cat (*Felis catus*) cranium stands out.

Through the analysis of stratigraphic context, the morphological characteristics of the cranium, and the functional as well as symbolic-magical dimensions of human-feline interaction during the Late Middle Ages, an attempt has been made to interpret the isolated presence of the skull and the conspicuous absence of any associated postcranial elements.

Keywords: *Cat, Zooarchaeology, Late Middle Ages, Castle of Santa Severa, Cranium*

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Gnawing on Bird Bones: Fractures and Traces

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Fig. 1. Cat with a chicken bone. Chicken wing and leg long bones gnawed by cats (experiment). (Photo by I. Fiore)

The study of gnaw marks on archaeological bones is fundamental for understanding accumulation processes and the interactions between humans, animals, and faunal assemblages (Arilla *et al.* 2020; Bello & Parfitt 2023; Indra *et al.* 2022; Royer *et al.* 2021).

In recent years, neotaphonomy has adopted increasingly advanced analytical techniques – such as 3D modelling, geometric morphometrics, and artificial intelligence – to study carnivore tooth marks and bone surface modifications from Pleistocene sites. These methods have achieved accuracy rates between 88% and 98% in identifying the agents responsible for bone alterations (Courtenay *et al.* 2020, 2021). However, their application is not always feasible due to the limited availability of funding and specialized equipment, which often restricts their use in many archaeological contexts, particularly in more recent ones.

This study aims to provide diagnostic criteria for identifying feline gnawing activity, with particular attention to the domestic cat (*Felis catus*), a species frequently overlooked in taphonomic analyses despite its wide distribution in historical and modern contexts. The domestic cat represents a potential taphonomic agent capable of altering the faunal record through predatory and chewing behaviors, fragmentation and dispersal of the bones of small prey such as birds and rodents, and thereby influencing the composition and integrity of zooarchaeological assemblages.

Feline gnawing produces localized crushing, splintering, and irregular fractures, mainly on the epiphyseal ends of long bones, while the diaphyses are less damaged. These traces, often associated with the action of carnassial teeth, constitute diagnostic features useful for distinguishing feline activity from that of other carnivores and improve taphonomic interpretation.

To this end, experimental observations were conducted on a group of five domestic cats (two males and three females) under controlled conditions. The animals were provided with raw and cooked chicken bones to

simulate different scenarios potentially encountered in archaeological deposits. The resulting bone surfaces were analyzed both macroscopically and microscopically, documenting the morphology, frequency, and spatial distribution of the modifications.

The analysis showed that feline gnawing primarily affects the spongy and epiphyseal portions of the bones, producing localized crushing and irregular superficial fractures. The diaphyseal regions sometimes display fine fissures, but the central portions are less affected. The traces thus produced differ clearly from those made by canids, which cause a higher degree of fragmentation and tend to ingest the bones of small animals.

The results suggest that bone modifications attributed to cats may provide useful cluesfor identifying feline gnawing activity even in the absence of direct skeletal evidence. Such tracescould represent indirect yet consistent indicators of *Felis catus* presence and behavior, especially in late archaeological sites characterized by small vertebrate remains. Recognizing these patterns may therefore contribute to a more refined understanding of the accumulation processes and the potential taphonomic role of small carnivores in the formation of faunal assemblages.

In conclusion, this study refines diagnostic criteria for the identification of feline gnawing and proposes a practical approach for contexts where complex analytical methods cannot be applied. By highlighting the distinctive bone modifications produced by domestic cats, it improves our ability to evaluate their possible impact on the archaeological record and to reconstruct patterns of human–animal interaction over time.

Keywords: *Taphonomy*, *Bone Modification*, *Carnivores*, Felis catus, *Experimentation*, *Gnawing*

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A Cat in the Well at Peltuinum (L'Aquila, Italy)

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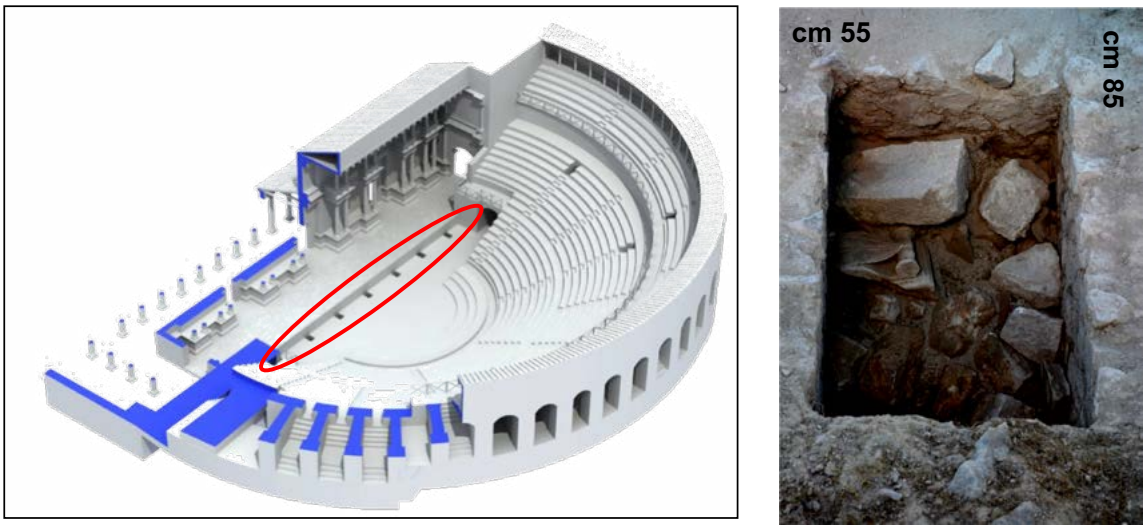

Fig.1. Reconstruction of the theatre of Peltuinum showing the location of the wells (in red) and a detail of one of them (left: D. Nepi; right: Archivio Peltuinum Migliorati).

The Roman town of Peltuinum, in the central Apennines, was founded in the mid-1st century BC to manage revenues from transhumance and was abandoned in the 5th century AD after a major earthquake. Excavations in the theatre area and its associated structures – including seven shafts and a sewer system – and in a defensive tower have revealed a complex sequence of reuse and secondary deposition dated between the late 4th and 14th centuries AD.

The presence of *Felis catus* is attested by a small but significant number of remains, recovered from shafts II and VI and from the tower fill. In total, 27 bone fragments were identified, belonging to at least three individuals (MNI = 3).

The assemblage from shaft VI is the most complete, including bones from nearly all anatomical regions – cranial and mandibular fragments, vertebrae, ribs, scapula, humerus, radius, ulna, femur, tibia, fibula, metapodials, and phalanges – indicating a whole or nearly complete individual, likely still in anatomical connection at the time of deposition. The long bones show unfused epiphyses, identifying a young cat aged about 8-10 months, close to skeletal maturity. The absence of cut marks, burning, or butchery traces, together with the good preservation, suggests an intentional primary deposition rather than accidental loss or disposal.

In shaft II, only a few isolated bones were recovered, belonging to a second, probably adult, individual. In the tower fill, *Felis catus* remains are sparse and fragmentary but confirm the species' presence in secondary or reworked contexts.

Possible interpretations for the remains in the shaft VI:

1. Intentional deposition (ritual use) – the cat was deliberately placed as part of an apotropaic or protective act.
2. Accidental death – the animal died naturally or accidentally near the site.
3. Fall and entrapment in the shaft – the cat fell into the shaft and was unable to climb out.

Fig. 2. Nearly complete skeleton of a juvenile cat recovered from the well. (Photo by I. Fiore)

The young cat from shaft VI may represent an intentional deposition, although the interpretation remains uncertain. It is plausible that the animal was associated with apotropaic or protective gestures, possibly linked to transition and regeneration, as seen in other Late Antique rituals where small domestic animals symbolically mediated between the human and spiritual realms. In this light, the Peltuinum cat – deposited alongside dogs, horses, and human infants – could reflect a probable act of ritual protection or closure, embedded within the broader symbolic framework of Late Antique religious practice.

Keywords: *Central Apennines*, Felis catus, *Late Antiquity*, *Ritual deposition*, *Secondary use of structures*, *Domestic fauna*, *Symbolic behaviour*

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The Felids of Grotta della Madona in Praia a Mare (Italy)

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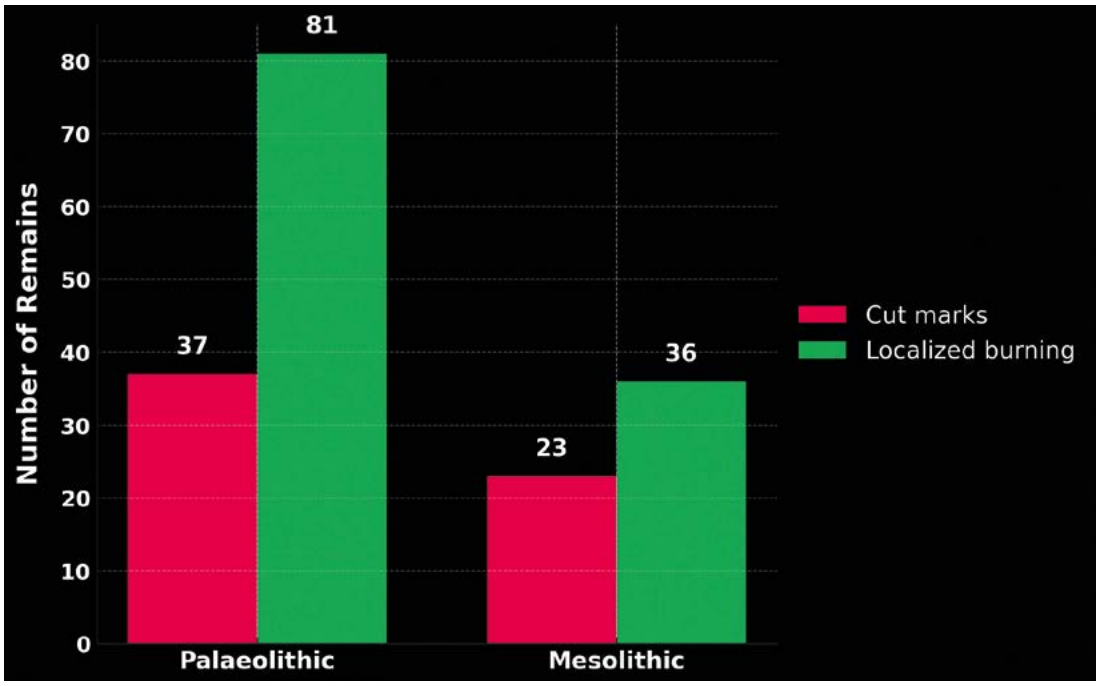

Fig. 1. Wildcat (*Felis silvestris*) bone remains from Paleolithic and Mesolithic levels, showing cut and localized burning. (by I. Fiore)

Grotta della Madonna at Praia a Mare (northern Calabria, Italy), located on a cliff about 500 m from the sea, preserves an over 8 m thick stratigraphic sequence documenting human occupation from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Middle Ages. Excavations by the Istituto Italiano di Paleontologia Umana (1957-1970) directed by Luigi Cardini identified Level L (10,850-9,020 BP, Upper Palaeolithic) and Level I (9,070-8,735 BP, Mesolithic). Since 2002, new investigations by the "L. Pigorini" National Prehistoric Ethnographic Museum refined the chronology and lithic industry analysis, contributing to the understanding of the Mesolithic in south-central Italy.

Throughout these occupations, mammals dominated the faunal assemblage. Ungulates – particularly wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), and roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) – were the main prey species. Fishing, although still practiced, declined during the Mesolithic and focused mainly on large trout (*Salmo trutta*). The exploitation of small vertebrates, such as the edible dormouse (*Glis glis*) and tortoises, increased, whereas hares and carnivores became slightly less frequent.

Among carnivores, small- and medium-sized species were the most common, but the assemblage also includes rare remains of lion (*Panthera leo*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), lynx (*Lynx sp.*), and bear (*Ursus sp.*). The lion stands out as the most remarkable large carnivore in the faunal record of this site.

Wildcat (*Felis silvestris*) remains provide further insight into human exploitation of felids. In the Paleolithic Level L, 389 remains were recovered, 9.5% bearing cut marks and 30.6% burning traces (68% of them localized), reflecting controlled fire exposure for pelt treatment and carcass processing. In the Mesolithic Level I, 78 remains were found, with higher modification rates – 29.5% with cut marks and 51.3% with combustion traces (90% of them localized) – indicating intensified exploitation mainly for furs and limited meat use.

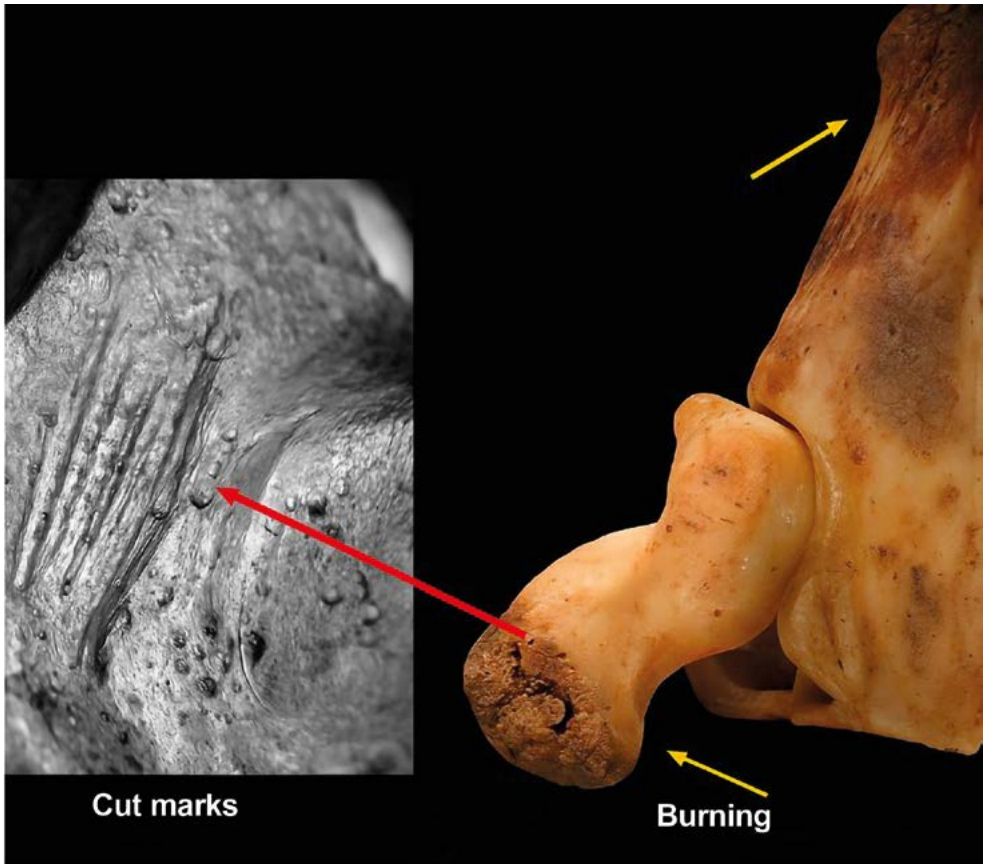

Fig. 2. Talus and calcaneus of a wildcat (*Felis silvestris*) in anatomical connection, showing cut marks (red arrow) and burning traces (yellow arrow). (Photo by I. Fiore)

The faunal assemblage from Grotta della Madonna suggests continuity through time in the exploitation of felids. Wildcats were likely hunted mainly for their pelts, whereas analyses of other species, including lion and lynx, are currently underway to verify potential evidence of human interaction or utilization.

Keywords: *Felid exploitation*, *Paleolithic-Mesolithic transition*, *Wildcat*, *Human-carnivore interaction*

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The Lion and the Hero: A Feline remain from the Sanctuary of Hercules at Campochiaro (CB)

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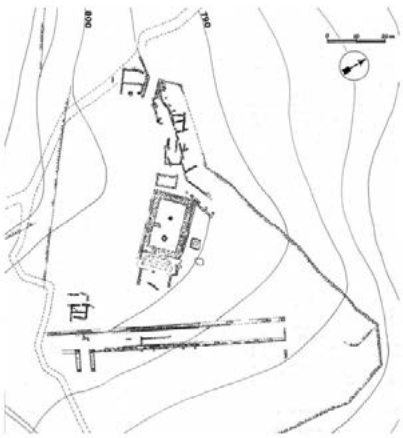

Figs. 1-2. 1) Map of the Sanctuary of Hercules at Campochiaro. (Photo from Capini, S., & La Regina, A., 2015). 2) Part of the decorative apparatus of the Italic temple. The fragment, belonging to the external frieze, depicts Hercules fighting the Nemean lion. (Photo from Capini, S., & La Regina, A., 2015)

The Samnite sanctuary of Campochiaro (CB), dedicated to Hercules, shows evidence of continuous use from the 4th century BCE to the 2nd century CE. Excavations, carried out intermittently from the 1970s to the early 2000s, have uncovered a rich assemblage of faunal remains, emphasising the central role of animal sacrifice in the cultic practices of the site. The study of the osteological material has made it possible to deepen our understanding of ritual practices associated with Hercules, the hero within Samnite communities.

The presence of *Bos taurus* and *Sus scrofa* is particularly relevant among the identified species and is closely linked to the mythological cycle of the Labours of Heracles: a series of twelve superhuman feats undertaken by the hero to atone for a grave offence. Several of these labours feature extraordinary animals, such as the Cretan bull, the Erymanthian boar and the Nemean lion, each carrying a strong symbolic charge of strength, dominance and sacrifice.

In this context, the association between the identified species and mythological references supports the ritual nature of the archaeozoological evidence. Of particular note is the presence of *Panthera leo*, represented by a single element. This opens new perspectives regarding the nature of animal offerings within the sanctuary sacred to Hercules at Campochiaro.

Keywords: *Archaeozoology*, *Lion*, *Hercules sanctuary*, *Campochiaro*, *Samnites*

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The Cat at the Museum

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Fig. 1. Tombili in Istanbul (Johannes Nickel, CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons).

Cats have been part of human life since antiquity and have long been the subject of ambivalent and often contradictory attitudes, being alternately exalted or condemned as diabolical and malevolent creatures. From the twentieth century onwards, however, cats have increasingly been recognised for their emotional and cultural significance within different societies. Despite this growing appreciation, they continue to experience markedly divergent conditions, ranging from affection and care to mistreatment and cruelty. Nevertheless, cats are now more frequently regarded as companions and as members of the family. Unsurprisingly, a thriving industry dedicated to cat food and related products has developed alongside this shift in perception.

This undeniable and progressive change in attitude is further evidenced by the growing number of museums dedicated to cats and to their significance for human beings, established across several continents since the late twentieth century. Some of these museums focus on the physical characteristics and historical role of cats, while others examine their representation in the visual arts. Certain institutions are based on collections of cat-themed objects, whereas others host live cats with whom visitors may interact. Finally, some museums are explicitly committed to the protection and support of cats living in conditions of hardship. Although these institutions remain relatively niche, they nevertheless attest to the cat's expanding cultural presence and to the social status acquired in recent decades.

Historically, cats were often employed to protect stored objects from rodents, a function that in some cases made their presence a distinctive feature of museums. This tradition is particularly well established and widely

cherished in Russia, where the most famous example is the Hermitage Museum, which has housed cats since the eighteenth century. Today, these cats even have a dedicated press secretary and are celebrated annually in a festival held in their honour. In 2018, the resident cat of the Bulgakov Museum, Behemot – named after the character in *The Master and Margarita* – was kidnapped. The incident received extensive coverage in both the press and on social media, a factor that likely contributed to his recovery one week later.

Fig. 2. The Hermitage Museum - interior - Small Hermitage Pavilion (Gzen92, CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons. AI processing).

In such cases, the long-standing coexistence between cats and artworks has facilitated the transition of these animals from museum 'employees' or 'residents' to becoming the subjects of museums themselves. Beyond the museum context, cats have also been commemorated through monuments. Some of these honour individual animals, such as the statue of Dr Samuel Johnson's cat Hodge in London, the monument to Totti, the cat of the Finnish poet Edith Södergran, and the statue of the stray cat Tombili in Istanbul. Others celebrate cats more generally or emphasise particular traits associated with the species.

Keywords: *Cat*, *Museum*, *Culture*, *Art*, *Monuments*

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The European Wildcat from the Fucino Basin (Italy): Paleontological and Archezoological Considerations

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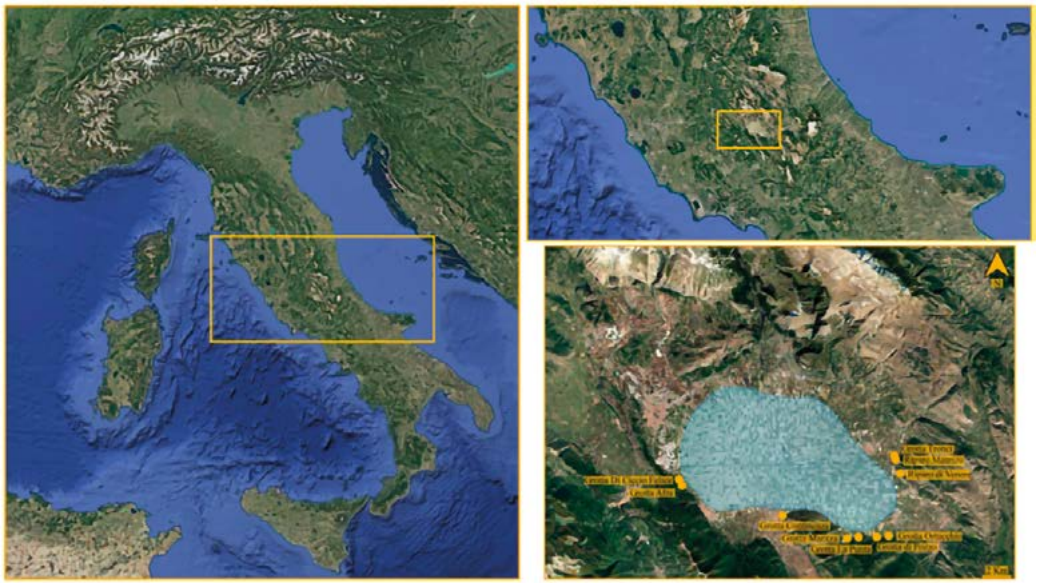

Fig. 1. Geographic position of the archaeological and paleontological localities from the Fucino Basin. (Maps by author)

The wildcat is one of the least widespread species in the wild, due to extensive hybridization with domestic cats or feral individuals. This process may affect the morphological and genetic characteristics of different wild populations, leading to the development of conservation programs aimed at preserving these important traits. Wildcats inhabit a variety of forested environments, showing a preference for structurally rich woodlands with a high density of tree hollows, ground-level deadwood, and regeneration patches; they may also occupy agricultural landscapes.

During the Pleistocene and Early Holocene, the European wildcat is scarcely documented across the continent, with a notable increase in findings over the past 15,000 years.

Around the Fucino Basin, there are several caves with evidence of human occupation have been excavated in the last century (Cremonesi 1968, Grifoni and Radmilli 1964, Radmilli 1956a, 1956b, 1959, 1963, 1997); these sites cover a chronological range from the Late Pleistocene to the Middle Holocene. Archaeological excavations at these sites evidenced continuous human presence, beginning in the late Upper Paleolithic and continuing through to the Bronze Age (Cremonesi 1968, Grifoni and Radmilli 1964, Radmilli 1956a, 1956b, 1959, 1963, 1997). The abundance of archaeological and paleontological in this area is mainly due to the presence of a large lake, the second largest in Italy, which was completely drained in historical times.

Within the large faunal assemblages recovered from these Fucino Basin sites, the European wildcat has been identified in some caves, mainly in archaeological levels referred to the late Epigravettian (Alhaique 2003 2005). In particular, European wildcat specimens, described in detail here for the first time, were collected from Grotta Maritza and Grotta Ortucchio. The infilling deposits of these caves have been dated with radiocarbon

method, and the measurements indicated an age of 12619 ± 410 BP for Grotta Ortucchio and 10420 ± 50 BP for Grotta Maritza.

Fig. 2. Hemimandibles of *Felis silvestris* from Fucino Basin in lateral view. 252, right hemimandible from Grotta La Punta (A); 251, left hemimandible from Grotta La Punta (B); 886, right hemimandible from Grotta Maritza (C); 873, left hemimandible from Grotta Maritza. (Photo by author)

These findings provide an opportunity to document morphological and dimensional features of wildcat populations at the end of the Pleistocene-beginning of the Holocene and, at the same time, investigate further human-wildcat interactions in the Fucino Basin. In addition, an overview of the coeval European wildcats of the Italian Peninsula will also be presented.

Keywords: Felis silvestris, *Fucino Basin, Late Epigravettian, Paleontology, Archaeozoology*

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The Role of Cat in the Cult of Adonis: The Evidence from the Etruscan Southern Sanctuary of Gravisca (Tarquinia, Italy)

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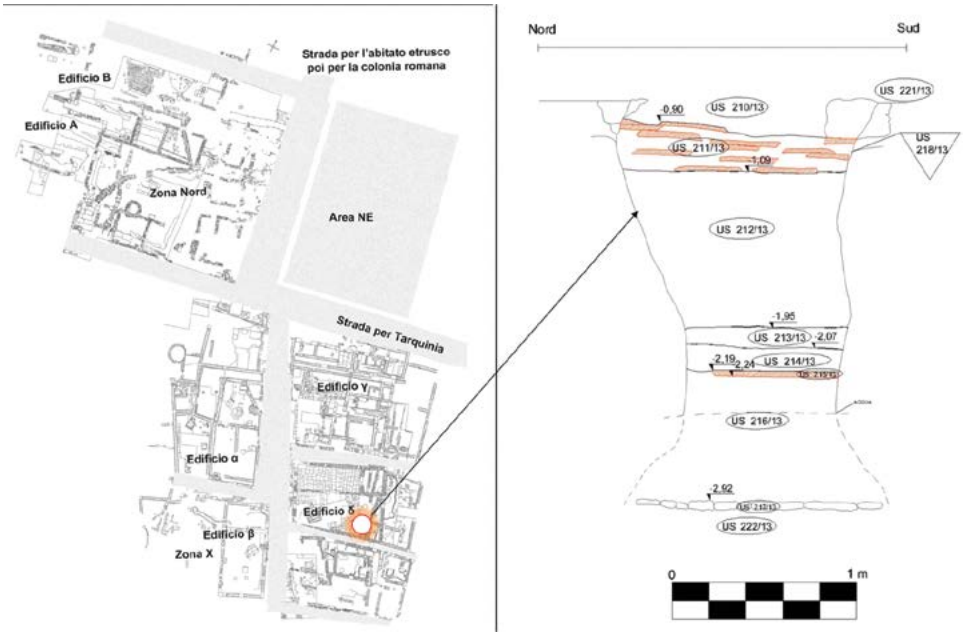

Fig. 1. Gravisca, Tarquinia, a) Plan of the site of Gravisca (from Di Miceli and Fiorini 2019), and b) cross-section of the well 23δ.

The results of the study of some cat remains found into the well 23δ, located in the building dedicated to Adonis at the Etruscan site of Gravisca (Tarquinia, Italy), are presented here. Gravisca was an important port and emporium sanctuary, used from 590 BCE, initially by Greek merchants and later by Etruscan merchants, until the Roman colonization of 281 BCE. The so-called Southern Sanctuary that was built in the 4th century BCE, hosted a building dedicated to Adonis characterized by a large open courtyard that housed the well 23δ, with a function closely linked to worship. The rite celebrated in several stages the birth of Adonis, his love encounter with Aphrodite and finally his death. Young women would bring small potted gardens to the temple in his honour. Lovingly cultivated, these gardens were later then sacrificed to the god. The well was used at the beginning of the festival to irrigate the vegetables planted in the gardens. Around the mid-3rd century BCE, the well was abandoned and ritually sealed. The remains of two very young cats, between 4 and 7 months old, were recovered together with few remains of chicken and pigs. Few evidence are available to understand the function that the small feline may have had in sacred areas. In Greek and Roman times, the cat was considered an excellent hunter of pest animals, along with the weasel, an animal associated with sexuality, female fertility, and possibly the cult of Aphrodite. Written and iconographical sources dated from the 6th to the 4th centuries BCE show that the domestic cat was often associated with figurative themes of courtship and gift exchange between lovers or nuptial scenes.

Fig. 2. Gravisca, Tarquinia, cats found in the fill of well 23δ. (Photo by authors)

Keywords: *Gravisca, Etruscan sanctuary, 3rd century BCE, Adonis, Cat remains*

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Public Perceptions and Ecological Realities: The Contested Role of Cats

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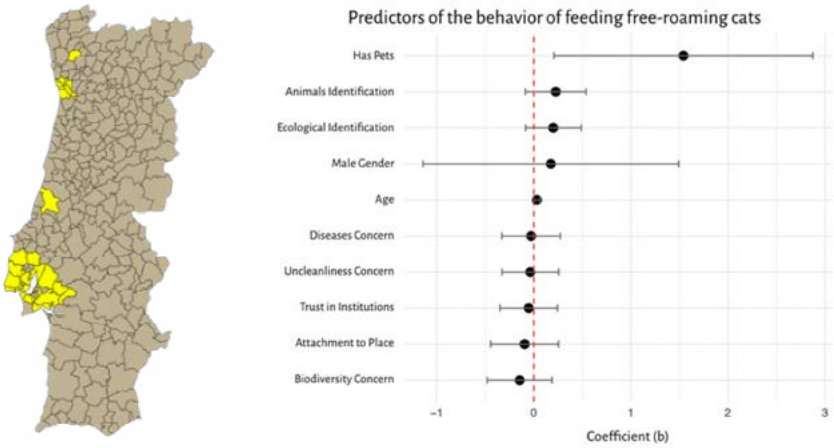

Figs. 1. Origin of participants' survey in mainland Portugal.
2. Regression Coefficient Plot: Effects of sociodemographic and attitudinal predictors on freeroaming feeding behavior.

Uncontrolled cat populations can lead to disease transmission, public nuisance, and wildlife predation, highlighting the need for informed, community-based action. Science-based programs such as Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) have been proven effective in managing free-roaming cat populations; however, their success depends on a deep understanding of the attitudes and motivations of caregivers. This study aimed to understand the determinants of caregiver behavior, focusing on psychological (ecological identity, empathy toward animals), sociodemographic, and attitudinal factors. In situ surveys were conducted with a sample of 96 participants from several regions in Portugal.

The dependent variable was the self-reported frequency of feeding free-roaming cats. A multiple linear regression model was used, with ecological identity and identification with animals as main predictors, and age, gender, pet ownership, institutional trust, environmental concerns, and sense of community as covariates. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(10, 80) = 2.19$, $p = 0.03$, explaining 12% of the variance in feeding behavior ($R^2 = 0.12$). Among covariates, pet ownership showed a significant effect ($b = 1.54$, $p = 0.02$), while ecological identity and identification with animals were not significant ($p \approx 0.16–0.17$). These results indicate that direct experience with animals may play a stronger role in shaping caregiving behavior than ecological or empathetic orientations alone. Effective communication about free-roaming cats should therefore balance empathy and ecological responsibility rather than rely on prohibition or blame. Campaigns that acknowledge the emotional bond between people and animals and promote ecological citizenship can better encourage sustainable behaviors and support for TNR programs. These findings underscore the complex interplay between empathy, environmental responsibility, and urban animal care, and highlight the need for further research using broader and mixed-method approaches to better inform humane and effective cat population management strategies.

Keywords: *Free-roaming cats, Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), Caregiver behavior, Ecological identity, Empathy toward animals, Community-based management*

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Zoomorphic Figures of Felids in the Nile Mosaic of Palestrina (Latium, Italy; 2nd century BC)

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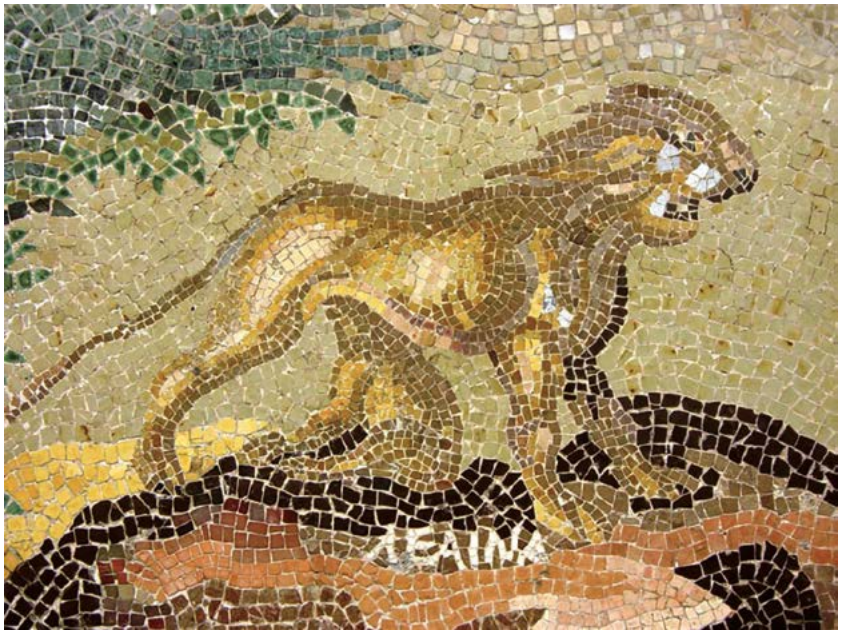

Fig. 1. Nile mosaic of Palestrina – Detail with ΛΕΑΙΝΑ (LEAINA). (Photo by L. Salari)

The Nile mosaic of Palestrina (NMP) was made towards the end of the 2nd century BC and would reproduce Alexandrian paintings from the previous century, perhaps to commemorate the participation of an illustrious citizen of *Praeneste* in the Roman embassy to Ptolemy VIII in Alexandria (140-139 BC). The NMP depicts a bird's eye view of the Nile landscape, from its mouth (down) to the upper Blue Nile and the mountains of Aethiopia (up). It appears to be a pictorial report of one or more expeditions organized in the 3rd century BC by the first Ptolemies beyond the first cataract of the Nile, for the purpose prestige and of exploring resources, especially elephants.

In the NMP there are various zoomorphic figures probably conceived in the erudite context of the Museum of Alexandria, perhaps at the time when Eratosthenes was its director (245-195 BC). The zoomorphic figures represent at least 28 species of Mammals, nine of Reptiles, 14 of Birds, two of Fish and one of Crustaceans. Several of these, particularly in the upper, rocky and wild part, are accompanied by inscriptions in Greek, real captions that allow for an immediate correspondence between the name and the image of the animal. Among these you can also observe representations of some felids: In the centre of the mosaic, flanked by the inscription ΛΕΑΙΝΑ (LEAINA), a female of lion, *Panthera leo*, is depicted with her cub (Fig. 1), on the right, a little higher up, indicated by the word ΤΙΓΥΙC (TIGYIS), two cheetahs, *Acinonyx jubatus*, one of which whit an anthropomorphic face, and further down probably a serval, *Leptailurus serval*, close to the inscription ΛΙΝΞ (LINX).

However, due to the various restorations, in particular the seventeenth-century restoration of Calandra, several zoomorphic figures are very altered or fanciful, as for example in the case of the ΤΙΓΥΙC (TIGYIS). In these cases, to identify the animal that is hidden in the images of the NMP, the drawings probably executed around 1630 by the Sabine painter Vincenzo Manenti on behalf of the Lyncean Cassiano Dal Pozzo are of funda-

mental importance. In fact, in drawing 19207 of the Dal Pozzo Collection the inscription is clearly TIГРIC (TIGRIS), the animals show the muzzle of felids (Fig. 2), and therefore they have been identified as cheetahs. This is also supported by the observation that in ancient times and still at the beginning of the 17th century cheetahs were also called "Ethiopian tigers".

Fig. 2. Detail of drawing 19207 from the Dal Pozzo Collection with TIГYIC (TIGRIS). (by Whitehouse 1976, redrawn B/W).

Keywords: *Hellenism*, *Panthera leo*, *Acinonyx jubatus*, *Leptailurus serval*, *Dal Pozzo Collection*

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Bioarchaeology of Cats in Motion: Ancient DNA and Isotopic Traces from Medieval Urban Trade Hubs

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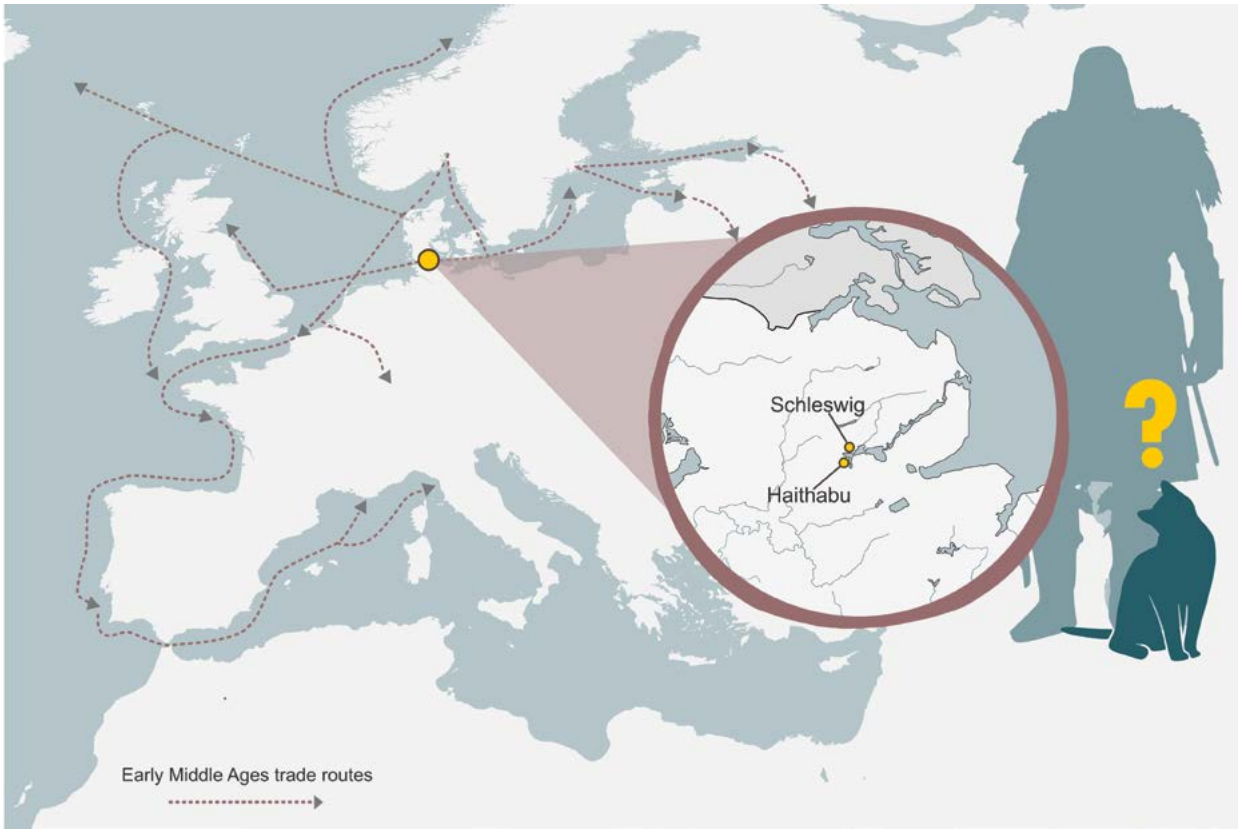

Fig. 1. Map showing the Viking site of Haithabu (8th-11th c. AD) and its medieval successor Schleswig (11th-13th c. AD) in northern Germany, along the Baltic Sea. Both were major trading centres connected through extensive maritime and riverine networks during the Early Middle Ages. (Map by authors)

From household companions to pest control agents, domestic cats (*Felis catus*) have occupied a complex and evolving role in human societies (Faure and Kitchener 2009). Far from being marginal, their presence in archaeological contexts can illuminate past networks of human connectivity, food provisioning, and intimate entanglements between humans and animals in the anthropogenic niche.

In this study, we explore biological and ecological trajectories of 92 archaeological cats from two key urban sites in northern Germany (Müller 2020): the Viking trading settlement of Haithabu (8th-11th centuries CE) and the medieval town of Schleswig (11th-13th centuries CE). Situated at the crossroads of North Sea and Baltic trade networks, these sites allow us to explore the origin, translocation, and adaptation of cats in changing human landscapes across centuries.

By combining ancient DNA and stable isotope analysis, we investigate feline genetic ancestry, population structure, and diet, thus complementing zooarchaeological evidence and offering novel insights on cats' multifaceted roles in medieval urban ecosystems (Toplak 2020). Mitochondrial DNA data reveal that all the individuals belong to clade IV (*Felis lybica lybica*), with a prevalence of haplogroups A, C, and D. This pattern suggests a long-established maternal gene pool in the region, likely shaped by earlier dispersal processes from the Mediterranean, perhaps as early as the Roman period (Skóra 2022). The observed genetic diversity aligns with the cosmopolitan nature of Haithabu and Schleswig, where sustained connectivity via trade routes may have facilitated movement of animals alongside goods and people (Schmölcke 2022).

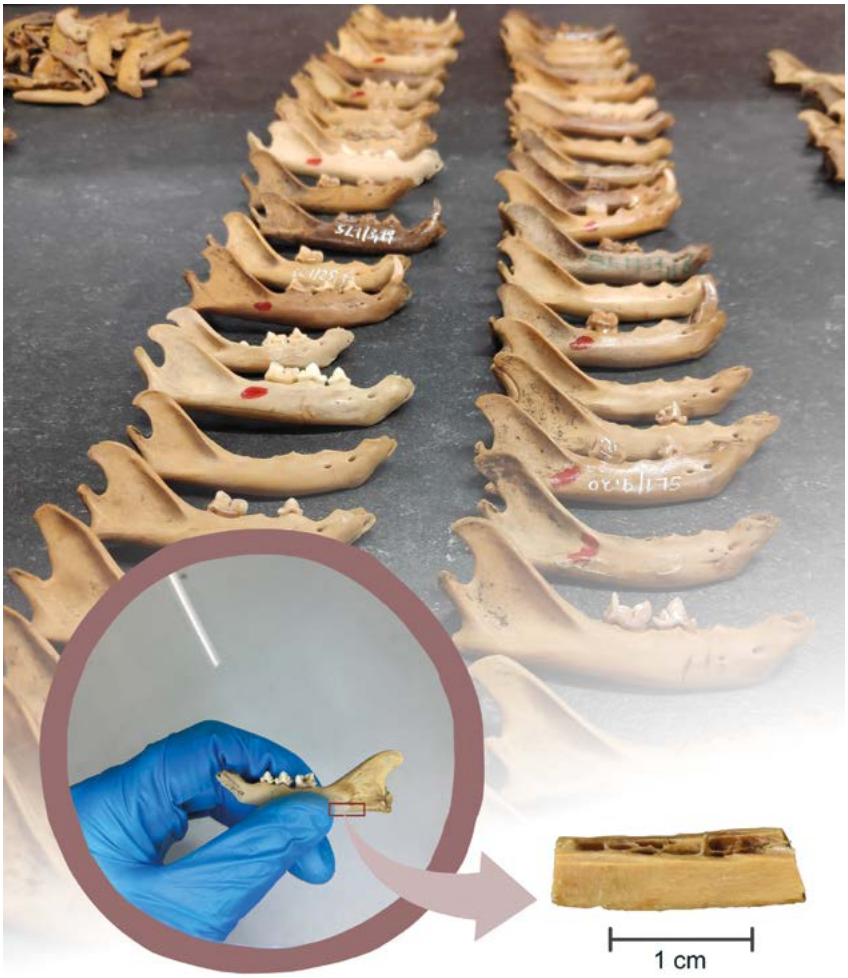

Fig. 2. Cat mandibles from Haithabu and Schleswig. Small cortical bone fragments were sampled through a minimally invasive procedure for ancient DNA and stable isotope analyses, and subsequently powdered under sterile laboratory conditions. (Photo by Bea De Cupere)

Nuclear genomic data confirm the dominance of domestic ancestry, with minimal evidence of admixture with European wildcats (*Felis silvestris*), reinforcing the biological distinction, and perhaps cultural selection, of cats within the anthropogenic spaces.

Isotopic analysis ($\delta^{13}C = -19.1 \pm 0.7‰$; $\delta^{15}N = 10.5 \pm 1.1‰$) reveals a broad dietary spectrum, consistent with opportunistic feeding behavior. Many individuals exhibit elevated nitrogen values indicative of access to marine-derived proteins, likely reflecting their integration into human food chains, whether through scavenging,

provisioning, or proximity to refuse-rich environments. This trophic flexibility echoes human subsistence and suggests a close ecological association between cats and their urban settings.

Despite chronological and socio-economic changes between Viking and medieval phases, the continuity in both genetic and isotopic signals points to a stable presence of domestic cats in Haithabu and Schleswig, where they were most likely well-integrated into daily life.

Combining genomic and isotopic data, this study highlights the role of domestic cats as bio-cultural indicators of mobility, economy, and human-animal ties, enriching our understanding of urban histories and shared lives across time.

Keywords: *Biomolecular archaeology*, *Cat-human relationship*, *Northern Europe*, *Ancient DNA*, *Stable isotope analysis*

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The Universal Fascination of the Cat in Children's Imagination

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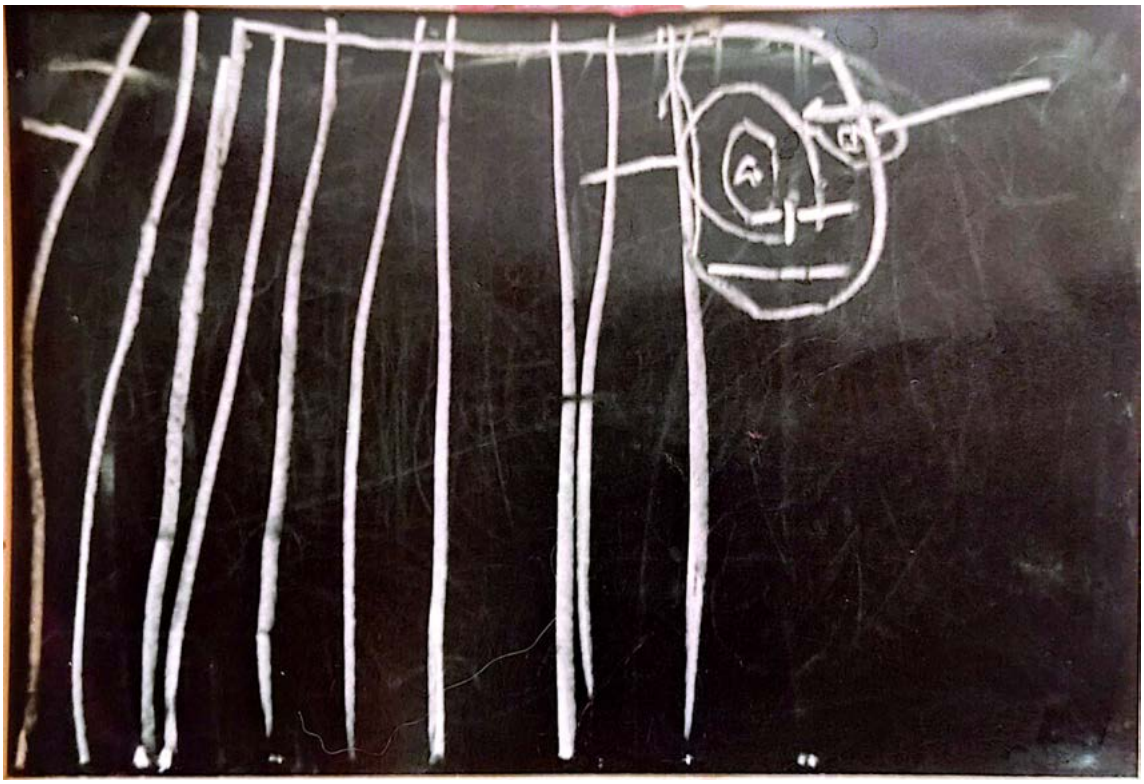

Fig. 1. Perception of the Cat in Children's Drawings. 4 years old child. The cat is represented in a way deeply linked to its appearance: fast and agile, with many paws, with no "gentle" connotation, but represented in its "wild/feral" aspect. (Photo by author)

This poster examines the significant cultural and symbolic presence of the cat in children's imagination.

Rooted in a coexistence that began 12,000 years ago, the human-cat relationship evolved from an utilitarian bond into a profound coevolutionary relationship. The figure of the cat has become a complex cultural archetype across many civilizations. Its omnipresence in fairy tales and media reflects this symbolic richness, making it a powerful vehicle of social values and beliefs that influences children's cognitive and emotional development. The cat provides a key to understanding the interaction between human needs and the formation of collective archetypes.

Fig. 2. Perception of the Cat in Children's Drawings. 10 years old child. The cat is perceived in its dimension as the dominating animal of the house, with human attributes: jacket, crown. There has been a radical shift from the perception of simple animal to that of the dominator of domestic spaces. (Photo by author)

Keywords: *Domestic cat* (Felis catus), *Children's Imagination*, *Human-Animal Coexistence*, *Cultural Evolution*, *Animal Symbolism*, *Cognitive/Emotional Development*