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# classroom TUTORIALS

## Thutmose's Cat

**T**he ancient Egyptians had pets, much as we do. They kept cats, dogs, and monkeys as part of the household; they even had pet geese and gazelles. These animals had names and wore collars, and at least one was given a splendid burial. The son of Amenhotep III, Prince Thutmose, had a pet cat named Ta-Mit that was buried in this stone sarcophagus featured in the exhibition. Ta-Mit means “the cat.” *Ta* is the Egyptian word for “the;” *mit* is the feminine form of the word “cat” (*miw*), which mimics the sound of the animal. A picture of this beloved pet was carved on the exterior of this coffin, seated before an offering table of food and flowers. Decorated in standard Egyptian fashion, the text on this coffin associates the dead pet with the god of the underworld, Osiris. The funerary deities—Isis, Nephthys, and the four sons of Horus—adorn the coffin. The hieroglyphic inscriptions on this sarcophagus are the same as the ones found on human coffins from this period. This suggests that the ancient Egyptians believed that, like human souls, the soul of Ta-Mit would live on in the afterlife. A complete translation of the inscription can be seen at <http://www.mafdet.org/Ta-miaut-trans.pdf>. (CLICK HERE)

Animals were often mummified in Egypt, but generally these animals were sacrifices, not pets. In the Late and Greco-Roman periods, votive animal mummies were given as offerings to the gods. They were made at cult centers and purchased by pilgrims who were traveling to a temple to honor a deity.

The coffin of  
Ta-Mit the cat





Ta-Mit the cat

For example, a cat mummy would be offered to the feline goddess Bastet at the city of Bubastis, which was sacred to the goddess.

Votive mummies were different than the more elaborate mummies of sacred animals. The most well known of these sacred animals was called the Apis bull. In life, one bull at a time would be considered the physical incarnation of the god Ptah or, later, the god Osiris. This lucky animal lived a rather luxurious life. As each Apis bull died it was wrapped in fine linen and at least partially gilded before burial.

Animals were also mummified as part of food offerings for the deceased. For instance, whole birds were mummified and placed in pottery dishes in the tomb for the deceased to eat in the afterlife. The Egyptian Museum in Cairo has a collection of hundreds of animal mummies, some of which can be viewed at <http://www.animalmummies.com>.

The coffin of Ta-Mit is an elaborate piece of burial equipment for an animal. In order to make it, the sculptor first shaped a box and a lid from a mass of limestone. Preliminary sketches were drawn on each side to provide guidelines for the sculptors. Sculptors used stone tools for the initial carving and finished with copper or bronze tools for the details. On the coffin of Ta-Mit, the individual chisel marks made during its manufacture are visible. Look for diagonal striations, or lines in the stone where the sculptor struck the limestone to create a level surface.

The hieroglyphs and figures on the sarcophagus were created by carving them deeper into the stone, a technique called *sunk relief*. If the background is carved away, leaving the hieroglyphs and figures higher than the surrounding surface, then the technique is called *raised relief*. The exterior was polished by rubbing stones and quartz sand on the surface.

The coffin of Ta-Mit the cat provides evidence that the ancient Egyptians believed that their pets could make the journey to the afterlife. The coffin itself is more than container for the dead body of an animal, it is an enduring document of the affection Thutmose had for his pet cat Ta-Mit.