

The cultural depiction of cats and their relationship to humans is old and stretches back over 9,500 years. Ancient Greece and Rome Ancient Roman mosaic of a cat killing a partridge from the House of the Faun in Pompeii Domestic cats were probably first introduced to Greece and southern Italy in the fifth century BC by the Phoenicians.[9] The earliest unmistakable evidence of the Greeks having domestic cats comes from two coins from Magna Graecia dating to the mid-fifth century BC showing Iokastos and Phalanthos, the legendary founders of Rhegion and Taras respectively, playing with their pet cats.[10]: 57–58 [11] Similar Greek coin from Rhegion, showing the city founder playing with a cat Housecats seem to have been extremely rare among the ancient Greeks and Romans;[11] the Greek historian Herodotus expressed astonishment at the domestic cats in Egypt, because he had only ever seen wildcats.[11] Even during later times, weasels were far more commonly kept as pets[11] and weasels, not cats, were seen as the ideal rodent-killers.[11] The usual ancient Greek word for "cat" was *ailouros*, meaning "thing with the waving tail", [10]: 57 [11] but this word could also be applied to any of the "various long-tailed carnivores kept for catching mice".[11] Cats are rarely mentioned in ancient Greek literature,[11] but Aristotle does remark in his *History of Animals* that "female cats are naturally lecherous." [10]: 74 [11] The Greek essayist Plutarch linked cats with cleanliness, noting that unnatural odours could make them mad.[12] Pliny linked them with lust,[13] and Aesop with deviousness and cunning.[7] The Greeks later syncretized their own goddess Artemis with the Egyptian goddess Bastet, adopting Bastet's associations with cats and ascribing them to Artemis.[10]: 77–79 In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, when the gods flee to Egypt and take animal forms, the goddess Diana (the Roman equivalent of Artemis) turns into a cat.[10]: 79 Cats eventually displaced ferrets as the pest control of choice because they were more pleasant to have around the house and were more enthusiastic hunters of mice.[14] Middle Ages Main article: Cat-burning During the Middle Ages, many of Artemis' associations with cats were grafted onto the Virgin Mary.[14] Cats are often shown in icons of Annunciation and of the Holy Family[14] and, according to Italian folklore, on the same night that Mary gave birth to Jesus, a cat in Bethlehem gave birth to a kitten.[14] Vikings used cats as rat catchers and companions. An old Irish poem about an author (a monk) and his cat, Pangur Ban, was found in a 9th century manuscript. Pangur Ban, 'White Pangur', is the cat's name, Pangur meaning 'a fuller'. In eight verses of four lines each, the author compares the cat's happy hunting with his own scholarly pursuits. I and Pangur Ban my cat, 'Tis a like task we are at: Hunting mice is his delight, Hunting words I sit all night. A medieval King of Wales, Hywel Dda (the Good) passed legislation making it illegal to kill or harm a cat.[15] In Medieval Ypres, cats were used in the winter months to control the vermin infesting the wool stored in the upper floors of the Cloth Hall (Lakenhall). At the start of the spring warm-up, after the wool had been sold, the cats were thrown out of the belfry tower to the town square below, which supposedly symbolised "the killing of evil academics". Farmers sought protection for their crops by leaving pans of milk in their fields for Freya's special feline companions, the two grey cats who fought with her and pulled her chariot.[6] Folklore dating back to as early as 1607 tells that a cat will suffocate a newborn infant by putting its nose to the child's mouth, sucking the breath out of the infant.[7] Black cats are generally held to be unlucky in the United States and Western Europe, and to portend good luck in the United Kingdom.[7] In the latter country, a black cat entering a house or ship is a good omen, and a

sailor's wife should have a black cat for her husband's safety on the sea.[7][8] Elsewhere, it is considered unlucky if a black cat crosses one's path; black cats have been associated with death and darkness.[4] White cats, bearing the colour of ghosts, are conversely held to be unlucky in the United Kingdom, while tortoiseshell cats are lucky.[7] It is common lore that cats have nine lives.[7] It is a tribute to their perceived durability, their occasional apparent lack of instinct for self-preservation, and their seeming ability to survive falls that would be fatal to other animals.

Cats in the Garden, by Mao Yi, 12th century Asia

China Cats that were favored pets during the Chinese Song Dynasty were long-haired cats for catching rats, and cats with yellow-and-white fur called 'lion-cats', who were valued simply as cute pets.[20][21] Cats could be pampered with items bought from the market such as "cat-nests", and were often fed fish that were advertised in the market specifically for cats.[20][21]

Japan Main article: Kaibyo This article may need to be rewritten to comply with Wikipedia's quality standards, as section. You can help. The talk page may contain suggestions. (July 2021)

A typical maneki-neko In Japanese folklore, cats are often depicted as supernatural entities, or kaibyo (?????, "strange cat").[22][23] The maneki-neko of Japan is a figurine often believed to bring good luck to the owner.

Renaissance and Victorian depictions Richard Whittington and his Cat (1808) In the Renaissance, cats were often thought[clarification needed] to be witches' familiars in England (for example, Greymalkin, the first witch's familiar in Macbeth's famous opening scene), and during festivities were sometimes[clarification needed] burnt alive or thrown off buildings.[citation needed] Cats became popular and sympathetic characters in folk tales such as Puss in Boots.[16] One English folk tale in which a cat is given a role of a friend who was betrayed is Dick Whittington and His Cat, which has been adapted for many stage works, including plays, musical comedies and pantomimes. They were associated with the goddesses Isis and Bastet.[4] Cats were sacred animals and the goddess Bastet was often depicted in cat form, sometimes taking on the war-like aspect of a lioness.[5]: 220 Killing a cat was absolutely forbidden[3] and the Greek historian Herodotus reports that, whenever a household cat died, the entire family would mourn and shave their eyebrows.[3] Families took their dead cats to the sacred city of Bubastis,[3] where they were embalmed and buried in sacred repositories. According to Russian law, a huge fine was imposed for killing a cat, the same as for a horse or ox. Many cats have guarded the Hermitage Museum/Winter Palace continually, since Empress Elizabeth's reign, when she was presented by the city of Kazan in Tatarstan five of their best mousers to control the palace's rodent problem.[19] They lived pampered lives and even had special servants until the October Revolution, after which they were cared for by volunteers. Cats are not native to Cyprus.