

## On the treatment of animals in ancient Egypt

### Were the Egyptians cruel to animals?

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Most of what we know about the relationship between ancient Egyptians and animals comes from murals in tombs and buildings, from some wooden models made as grave goods in the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom, and from texts. I have searched for clues in the wall decoration of many ancient Egyptian elite tombs.<sup>1</sup> The scenes offer a wealth of information about the everyday life of the ancient Egyptian noble officials and their subordinates.<sup>2</sup> The way animals were treated is well documented. Very often, what herdsman and butchers did, said or shouted was recorded in a text above or next to the scene.

Ancient Egyptian depictions of animals are so naturalistic in form, color (where preserved), and behavior that zoologists can usually identify the biological species.<sup>3</sup> This precision in art suggests that the Egyptians admired the beauty and strength of animals. They were aware that animals are sentient beings. This is also evidenced by the caption of a scene showing a herdsman helping a cow to calve and another instructing: "Pull hard, herdsman, for she is in pain!"<sup>4</sup> The feelings of animals have also been pictorialized. A protruding tongue or open beak means that the animal is making species-specific sounds of agitation, fear, or pain (Plates 4–7, 9, 12–14).<sup>5</sup> The leaders of Egyptian society had a sense of wrongdoing with regard to the torture of animals, as they denied any suspicion of animal cruelty. Pyramid Spell #270 emphasizes that no one can lodge a complaint

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<sup>1</sup> Especially Ref 1 and Ref 2.

<sup>2</sup> The sequence of scenes from the entrance to the tomb through all the rooms to the burial chamber illustrates like a movie the journey of the deceased from this world to the next. Ref 3, pp 61–110.

<sup>3</sup> Ref 2 (vol 2), pls 27–33; Ref 2 (vol 3), pp 172–173, 213, 233–234, pls 83B, 92B, 95, 99, 102, 104, 105B, 105C; Ref 4, pp 40–43; Ref 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ref 6, p 37. In contrast, up until the 20th century, parts of society in Europe believed that animals were not capable of feeling pain. Ref 7, pp 117–118.

<sup>5</sup> Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 381, 382A; Ref 2 (vol 3), p 118, pls 52, 89, 92A; Ref 8, p 29 (3rd register from bottom).

against the deceased king – neither a living person nor a dead person, neither a pintail nor a longhorn cattle.<sup>6</sup> The so-called negative confessions of sins in chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead contain assertions that the small livestock were not deprived of their food and were not attacked while eating, and that no cattle were killed and no suffering was ever caused.<sup>7</sup> However, such assertions were purely rhetorical, since the care, presentation (for counting) and slaughter of animals was not the task of high-ranking persons anyway.<sup>8</sup>

## Hunting

Of course, the Egyptians should not be blamed for hunting, even though they hunted big cats, elephants (in the New Kingdom), and hippopotamuses not for their meat, but for their fur (as a status symbol and ritual garment),<sup>9</sup> for pleasure and to demonstrate strength.<sup>10</sup> The wild bovids (gazelles, antelopes, Barbary sheep, Nubian ibex)<sup>11</sup> and hyenas of the steppe zone were chased with hunting dogs and killed with bows and arrows if they had not already been killed by the dogs.<sup>12</sup> Game was also driven into a fence to make it easier to kill (Plate 1).<sup>13</sup> Fish were caught on a large scale with drag nets, bow nets, or fishing hooks<sup>14</sup> and, if necessary, killed with short clubs and gutted immediately<sup>15</sup>. Fishing with spears was also very popular, often with two fish impaled on one spearhead or with a double-headed spear.<sup>16</sup> Wild birds were killed individually with throwing sticks<sup>17</sup> or caught in large numbers in nets<sup>18</sup>. Wild animals for ritual or tribute purposes

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<sup>6</sup> Pyr 386 a, b (spell #270). Ref 9, p 201. Significantly, the word for longhorn bull, *ngʒw*, literally means “the one who is killed”. Ref 10 (vol 2), pp 348.17, 349.1–3.

<sup>7</sup> Book of the Dead, chapter 125. Ref 11.

<sup>8</sup> Men of exceptionally short stature (due to achondroplasia) were often employed to look after the dogs, see for example Plate 15 here and Ref 5, pl 94.

<sup>9</sup> Ref 1 (vol 5), pl 2d; Ref 1 (vol 6), pl 143c; Ref 1 (vol 8), pls 257a, 267a; Ref 1 (vol 10), pl 36.

<sup>10</sup> Ref 2 (vol 1), pl 77a; Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 104A, 105A, 108A. Killing these animals was very dangerous and therefore particularly prestigious. A nobleman would leave the harpooning of hippos to his subordinates. Ref 12, pp 83–84; Ref 13, p 15–16.

<sup>11</sup> The hunted species are confirmed by bone finds, but the percentages differ from the frequency of representation in the murals. Ref 12, p 82.

<sup>12</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pl 6; Ref 1 (vol 4), pls 131, 132; Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 215, 396; Ref 2 (vol 3), p 224 (fig. 101,1), pls 15, 16, 100, 101. Hunting with dogs has been practiced since prehistoric times. Ref 14, pl 25 (no 93 sts).

<sup>13</sup> Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 53a, 215; Ref 2 (vol 3), pl 100.

<sup>14</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pl 46; Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 54, 104, 106 (above), 213, 214, 412; Ref 2 (vol 3), pl 97A–C, 108A, 108D.

<sup>15</sup> Ref 2 (vol 1), pl 106; Ref 2 (vol 3), pl 97C.

<sup>16</sup> Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 38, 70, 77a, 106, 117, 183; Ref 2 (vol 3), p 238 (fig. 105.4), pls 15, 105A, 108C.

<sup>17</sup> Ref 1 (vol 6), pl 113c; Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 40, 77a, 108, 117, 146, 174, 183.

<sup>18</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pls 12, 46; Ref 1 (vol 4), pl 132; Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 24, 33, 108, 146, 213, 214, 396a; Ref 2 (vol 3), pl 73.

were captured alive and fattened. The torturous conditions of their captivity had physical consequences.<sup>19</sup>

### Keeping livestock

Cattle had been bred in Egypt since the late 6th millennium B.C. (at Nabta Playa and Bir Kiseiba at least 1,000 years earlier).<sup>20</sup> A herd of cattle was a highly prized possession, and as such they were branded.<sup>21</sup> Oxen were either fattened or used as draught animals in agriculture. For example, they were made to trample the harvested grain for threshing,<sup>22</sup> and they pulled the plow with a yoke attached to their necks or horns<sup>23</sup>. The hooves of sacrificial bulls are conspicuously long, as is the case with hooved animals that are kept and fattened exclusively in barns.<sup>24</sup> Herds of cattle were regularly brought before overseers and scribes for counting, individually or in small groups.<sup>25</sup> If lead ropes are present in the image, they are attached in some way to the cow's mouth and chin; possibly it is a rope loop around the lower jaw (Plate 2).<sup>26</sup> There were also holsters that made it impossible for the cattle to stretch their heads forward.<sup>27</sup> When driving a herd, slow or reluctant cattle were beaten violently (with a large backswing) with sticks or whips.<sup>28</sup> Another typical gesture is the herdsman's flat hand on the back of a cattle, which looks like an encouraging pat.<sup>29</sup> However, it is more of a slap, because the herdsman often swings the stick at the same time (Plate 3).<sup>30</sup> A cow was immobilized during milking by tying her front and hind legs together,<sup>31</sup> or by tying her horns and tied hind legs together with a rope<sup>32</sup> (Plate 4). Calves were tethered to a ring anchored in the ground. The tether

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<sup>19</sup> Ref 12, p 83; Ref 15.

<sup>20</sup> Ref 16, pp 81–115.

<sup>21</sup> Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 187, 289.

<sup>22</sup> Ref 2 (vol 1), pl 72.

<sup>23</sup> Ref 1 (vol 5), pl 10a; Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 51a, 83a.

<sup>24</sup> Ref 12, p 88.

<sup>25</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pl 9; Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 37a, 67a, 187; Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 17, 87, 88; Ref 8, pp 26, 28, 29 (figs 1–3).

<sup>26</sup> It is probably a rope loop around the lower jaw. There were no nose rings. Ref 2 (vol 1), pl 67a; Ref 2 (vol 3), p 186 (fig. 89.2), pls 17, 37, 85, 88; Ref 8, pp 26, 28, 29 (figs 1–3).

<sup>27</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pl 45d; Ref 1 (vol 4), pls 105b, 152h; Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 194b, 219; Ref 17, p 316.

<sup>28</sup> However, it cannot be ruled out that the whip is simply swung around behind or over the animals. Ref 1 (vol 4), pl 106b; Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 97a, 187, 260b; Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 44, 45. There is often a "renitent" animal that has turned in the opposite direction. Ref 1 (vol 3), pls 71a, 73; Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 72, 187.

<sup>29</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pl 69; Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 67a, 219; Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 37, 45, 46, 54; Ref 4, pl 9C.

<sup>30</sup> Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 17, 44, 45, 54.

<sup>31</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pl 66.

<sup>32</sup> Ref 2 (vol 3), pl 92A (top left).

was short enough to prevent the animal from standing up completely (Plate 5).<sup>33</sup> Foot slings were used as an alternative.<sup>34</sup> When a herd of cattle had to cross a ford, a herdsman would lead or carry a calf in front of the herd. The calf's frightened lowing caused the lead cow and the rest of the herd to follow through the water (Plate 6).<sup>35</sup> Wild longhorn bulls were wrestled down by two or more men. It remains unclear whether such a scene shows the capture of a bull or some kind of bullfight.<sup>36</sup> But there are also peaceful or touching scenes: herdsman sitting beside lying young animals, feeding them by hand;<sup>37</sup> a herdsman letting a calf drink from a bowl while stroking its neck,<sup>38</sup> or helping a cow to calve (Plate 7)<sup>39</sup>.

The smaller bovids (sheep, goats, gazelles, antelopes, Nubian ibexes) and donkeys were also treated roughly (beating, slapping with a flat hand, too short tethers).<sup>40</sup> Donkeys were used as pack animals,<sup>41</sup> but they were not ridden, as in the Middle East.<sup>42</sup> A stubborn lead donkey was grabbed by one ear and one front leg and dragged forward (Plate 8).<sup>43</sup> Baby gazelles (as tributes or offerings) were tied in bundles or crammed into baskets that were hung from carrying poles.<sup>44</sup> Slightly larger juveniles were carried in the arms or on the shoulders.<sup>45</sup> Hares were carried by the ears<sup>46</sup> or in cages on carrying poles.<sup>47</sup>

Poultry meat was a staple food. Therefore, poultry was an important part of sacrifices and tributes. Live birds were carried by holding them by the wings and/or neck (Plates 9, 13), less often in the arms.<sup>48</sup> It must have been very painful for the birds to be carried on their wings, even though their shoulder joints are more flexible backwards than those of

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<sup>33</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pl 50b; Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 18, 57B.

<sup>34</sup> Ref 2 (vol 1), p 105. Animals were kept in foot traps since predynastic times, as evidenced by finds in the necropolis HK 6 at Hierakonpolis. Ref 18, p 88 (fig 19); Ref 19.

<sup>35</sup> The crossing of a ford was dangerous for herders and cattle because of the crocodiles. Therefore, a crocodile is usually included in the picture. Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 44, 52, 59, 89, 92; Ref 4, pl 7.

<sup>36</sup> Inscription in pl 14b in Ref 1 (vol 3): "Grabbing a bull that is defending itself violently". See also Ref 2 (vol 3), pl 59.

<sup>37</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pls 50b, 62; Ref 1 (vol 4), pl 102b; Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 37, 57b, 87, 89; Ref 5, pl 46.

<sup>38</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pl 62; Ref 1 (vol 4), pl 105b; Ref 2 (vol 3), pl 89.

<sup>39</sup> Ref 8, p 29 (fig 3); Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 85, 89; Ref 5, pl 113.

<sup>40</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pls 11 above, 43a, 46, 47, 50b, 51, 56a; Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 95a, 97a, 99, 100a, 101 (above); Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 18, 44–46, 50, 53, 56A, 57A, 91C; Ref 4, pls 10D, 20; Ref 8, pp 28, 29, 33 (figs 2, 3, 6).

<sup>41</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pls 43a, 56a, 80b; Ref 1 (vol 4), pl 106b; Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 79, 100a; Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 46, 49.

<sup>42</sup> Ref 12, p 89

<sup>43</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pls 47, 80a; Ref 2 (vol 1), pl 99 (bottom); Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 47, 49.

<sup>44</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pl 12; Ref 1 (vol 4), pl 91c; Ref 4, pl 10D; Ref 8, p 29 (fig 3).

<sup>45</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pls 4, 10, 21, 24, 28, 33b, 42a, 68; Ref 2 (vol 3), pl 88; Ref 4, pls 7, 10D.

<sup>46</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pl 70; Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 33, 67a (left upper corner); Ref 5, pl 48.

<sup>47</sup> Ref 1 (vol 4), pl 128.

<sup>48</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pl 24; Ref 1 (vol 4), pl 132; Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 198, 219, 391; Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 74, 79; Ref 4, pls 15, 17; Ref 8, p 26 (fig 1).

humans. Occasionally, several geese or pigeons were bundled together and hung by their legs.<sup>49</sup> Geese, ducks, and other wild birds such as herons and pigeons were grabbed by the neck with one hand and force-fed pieces of dough to fatten them.<sup>50</sup> (Hyenas were also fattened in this way.<sup>51</sup>) Chickens ("birds that give birth daily") did not gain economic importance until the Persian period.<sup>52</sup>

Horses and mules that were harnessed to chariots from the Second Intermediate Period onwards were bridled in a special way. The reins did not run in a straight line from the bit in the horse's mouth to the charioteer's hands, but were pulled through an eyelet on the chest harness (Plate 10).<sup>53</sup> This created a leverage effect so that even when the reins were pulled lightly, the metal bit exerted sharp and painful pressure on both sides of the horse's lower jaw (which is toothless in this area).<sup>54</sup> However, this type of bridling was not used for riding.<sup>55</sup> During the Ramesside period, some royal horses were so valued that they were given names (especially in battle scenes).<sup>56</sup>

### Slaughter and ritual mutilation

Before slaughter, a bull or cow was unbalanced with ropes tied to its legs, knocked over, and its front and hind legs were tied together.<sup>57</sup> In the case of cows, this was even done in the presence of their calves (Plate 11).<sup>58</sup> The method of killing depended on whether it was a slaughter for meat production or a ritual slaughter for sacrifice. The regular method, which is still traditionally practiced in the Orient today (arab. الذبح *dhabh*), was to sever the carotid arteries of the cattle with a targeted cut and let it bleed to death. However, representations of such a slaughter, with the blood flowing from the neck wound being collected in a bowl, have been found almost exclusively in Old Kingdom and First

<sup>49</sup> Ref 5, pl 166; Ref 2 (vol 1), pl 178; live geese can be distinguished from dead geese by the animated necks and legs (compare upper and lower register).

<sup>50</sup> Ref 2 (vol 1), pl 27; Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 77, 78A, 79, 81, 83A, 83C.

<sup>51</sup> Ref 2 (vol 3), pl 87, bottom register.

<sup>52</sup> Ref 12, p 93.

<sup>53</sup> Ref 1 (vol 4), pls 92, 93, 126a; Ref 1 (vol 5), pl 10a (bottom left); Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 191, 231, 234 (bottom), 240, 424A; Ref 2 (vol 2), pls 1, 53; Ref 5, pl 137.

<sup>54</sup> This kind of bridle is not an Egyptian invention. It can also be found, for example, in a depiction on a Mycenaean decorated vase. Ref 20, p 108 (fig 59). With a straight rein connection between the horse's bit and hands, the bit is cushioned by the horse's tongue.

<sup>55</sup> Ref 5, pls 134, 135.

<sup>56</sup> Ref 1 (vol 6), pls 153, 160, 165, 166; Ref 21, pp 177–178. The Ramessides (19th and 20th Dynasties) were closely associated with the military sector.

<sup>57</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pl 71b; Ref 2 (vol 1), pl 187; Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 86, 92A; Ref 4, pl 19. In scenes in the rock tomb of Amenemhet at Beni Hasan (tomb #2, early 12th Dynasty), the hind legs of the cow are simply held by an assistant. Ref 1 (vol 4), pls 128, 129. I doubt that this was possible with a strong bull.

<sup>58</sup> Ref 2 (vol 3), pl 92A (upper register, middle); Ref 22, pp 5–30.

Intermediate Period tombs (Plate 12). The depiction of a cow being slaughtered was avoided entirely.<sup>59</sup>

During the sacrificial rites, on the other hand, a bull was mutilated while still alive.<sup>60</sup> The bull's front leg, which had a special ritual significance,<sup>61</sup> was cut off with a knife. In these scenes, which can be found in almost every decorated tomb, there is no sign of blood streaming from the throat or a bloody throat wound. In an attempt to rear up, the bull has hyperextended his neck, his eyes are wide open and his tongue is sticking out, i.e. he roars or has just done his last roar (Plate 13).<sup>62</sup> Even defecation was depicted.<sup>63</sup> There are also several funerary scenes from Theban tombs and papyri dating from the Ramesside period to the Late Period in which the right front leg of a living bull calf is cut off in the presence of its agitated mother (Plate 14).<sup>64</sup> It was evidently important that the sacrificial meat be brought to the sacrifice warm and full of blood.<sup>65</sup> However, the extremely gruesome mutilation of a live bull or bull calf is a matter of debate. Some scholars refused to accept that it actually happened. They argued that the cow-calf group was a "purely mythological scene".<sup>66</sup>

Smaller bovids were also immobilized by tying their front legs to their hind legs. They were then decapitated.<sup>67</sup> Birds had their necks twisted (the Egyptians had a verb for this<sup>68</sup>).

## Pets

The ancient Egyptians kept dogs, cats, and monkeys as pets. The first evidence of domesticated dogs in Egypt comes from Merimde Benisalame (late 6th millennium B.C.). They were trained for hunting and as guard dogs. In the course of pharaonic history, straight-eared and lop-eared dogs of the greyhound type (Tjesems, Salukis), Basenjis, and short-legged breeds (Dachshund, Mastiff) were kept.<sup>69</sup> Particularly valued dogs had

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<sup>59</sup> Ref 2 (vol 3), p 194 (g); Ref 22, pp 37–46, 58.

<sup>60</sup> See also Ref 2 (vol 3), p 194 (h).

<sup>61</sup> Ref 23, pp 41–60.

<sup>62</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pls 4, 21, 22c, 25, 35, 52; Ref 2 (vol 1), pl 107; Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 93A, 93B, 94 A-C; Ref 23, pp 45–47.

<sup>63</sup> Ref 24, pl 31.

<sup>64</sup> Ref 25, pp 10–12.

<sup>65</sup> See F. L. Griffith's comment in Ref 25, p 12.

<sup>66</sup> Ref 22, pp 54–60.

<sup>67</sup> Ref 2 (vol 1), pl 201; Ref 22, pp 47–52.

<sup>68</sup> Ref 10 (vol 1), p 374.6.

<sup>69</sup> Ref 5, pp 83–85, pls 90 a, b, 92–94; Ref 26, pp 31–34; Ref 27; Ref 28, pp 76, 77.

names, with about a third of dog names also being documented as personal names.<sup>70</sup> In the relief Berlin 14150 (New Kingdom), a dog travels on a boat and eats next to its master.<sup>71</sup> In a scene from the tomb of Kagemni (Saqqara, 6th Dynasty), a herdsman spits a sip of water or milk into the mouth of one of the dogs beside him.<sup>72</sup> The favorite dog often sits under the chair of its seated master, even in the key scene of the tomb decoration, the so-called dining table scene (Plate 15).<sup>73</sup> There are tombs from the Greco-Roman period where the skeleton was found together with the skeletons of one or more dogs.<sup>74</sup> An inscription on a reused stone block in tomb G2188 at Giza reports that a royal guard dog named “Abutju” was buried with full honors.<sup>75</sup> From all this it can be concluded that the relationship between an Egyptian dog owner and his dog could be very close.<sup>76</sup> Sometimes even a young gazelle is depicted under the chair of the seated tomb owner.<sup>77</sup>

A species of cat that lived wild in North Africa, Egypt and the Middle East (*Felix silvestris lybica*) was the ancestor of all domestic cats.<sup>78</sup> Cats entered into a symbiosis with sedentary humans (self-domestication) by hunting mice around houses and granaries for the benefit of both cats and humans. As with dogs, the Egyptians gradually developed an affection for cats. In the Old Kingdom, cats did not appear in murals; in Middle Kingdom tombs they are found almost exclusively in papyrus thicket scenes.<sup>79</sup> In the New Kingdom, a particularly beloved cat could also be depicted in the dining table scene (Plate 16).<sup>80</sup>

Beginning in the late Old Kingdom, monkeys (vervet monkeys, Barbary macaques) imported from other regions of Africa and the land of Punt<sup>81</sup> were kept as pets.<sup>82</sup> They

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<sup>70</sup> Ref 29, pp 176–182; Ref 21, pp 173–178, figs 1– 3. In some tomb inscriptions, the dog’s name has the addition “his [the owner’s] favorite”, e.g. in the tomb of User (TT 21), Sheikh Abd el Qurna, early 18th Dynasty. Ref 29, p 176.

<sup>71</sup> Ref 2 (vol 3), p 254 (fig 109.5).

<sup>72</sup> Ref 2 (vol 3), p 192, pl 92D.

<sup>73</sup> Ref 1 (vol 4), pl 134b; Ref 1 (vol 5), pl 9f; Ref 1 (vol 10), pls 35, 45b; Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 2, 35; Ref 21, pp 174, 175 (figs 1, 2); Ref 27, p 50 (fig 30); Ref 30, p 98; Ref 31.

<sup>74</sup> Ref 32, pp 301, 304–305 (figs 5, 6).

<sup>75</sup> Ref 30, p 97. However, the dog grave was not found.

<sup>76</sup> Further reading: Ref 33, pp 23–41; Ref. 34.

<sup>77</sup> Tomb of Pabasa, El-Assasif (TT279), 26th Dynasty. Ref 5, pl 89.

<sup>78</sup> Ref 35.

<sup>79</sup> The canonical papyrus thicket scene shows the tomb owner boating or hunting birds and fishing in a swamp densely covered with papyrus plants. The thicket, with numerous birds, aquatic animals, at least one ichneumon and often a cat, symbolized a transition zone between this world and the next. Ref 13, pp 9, 12–13. The ancient Egyptian word for a tomcat was onomatopoeic “Miu”. Ref 10 (vol 2), p 42.1.

<sup>80</sup> Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 175B, 182; Tomb of Mery-mery, Saqqara (18th Dynasty), Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden, accession number AP 6-b, Ref 36; Tomb of Ipwy (Apy) and his wife (TT217, Deir el-Medina, 19th Dynasty), see Plate 16.

<sup>81</sup> Punt was probably at the Horn of Africa (in present-day Eritrea).

<sup>82</sup> Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 84a, 123B, 389; Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 2, 8, 9. A description of the veneration and cultic use of animals is beyond the scope of this work. An overview can be found in Ref 37.

appear in outdoor scenes and in the dining table scene.<sup>83</sup> Vervet monkeys apparently served as live toys and/or status symbols. They are often depicted with a lead rope tied around their neck or body (Plate 17). They were sometimes kept tethered and accompanied their owners on walks and journeys.<sup>84</sup> In the tomb of Khunes (Zawjet el-Maitin, tomb #2, 6th Dynasty) a vervet monkey wears a cloak.<sup>85</sup> Hamadryas baboons were considered to be embodiments of the god Thoth and were kept in temples for ritual purposes. A paleopathological study of the skeletons of baboon mummies revealed that they had suffered from malnutrition and lack of sunlight during their lives in captivity.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

The scenes on the tomb walls, most of which are canonical, depict the common practice of treating animals at that time. There is no doubt about this, as craft and agriculture activities were also realistically depicted. The Egyptians were fond of dogs and cats in their domestic environment, even if their primary purpose was to hunt, guard and catch mice. In contrast, the keeping and treatment of livestock and sacrificial animals was unsympathetic or even extremely cruel, although at least the elite saw the unnecessary torture of animals as an injustice.<sup>87</sup> However, they did not feel responsible and were happy to appear innocent before the Court of the Dead. The costly mummification of animals (not just dogs and cats) in much the same way as humans<sup>88</sup> stands in difficult-to-explain contrast to the general mistreatment of domestic and wild animals.

The initial question needs to be clarified: Were the ancient Egyptians cruel to livestock and sacrificial animals? The answer is yes. Humanity's ambivalence toward animals, beloved pets on the one hand and tortured livestock on the other, continues to this day, not only in Egypt,<sup>89</sup> but throughout the world.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ref 1 (vol 3), pl 36c; Ref 1 (vol 5), pl 12a; Tomb of Anen, Luxor [TT120], 18th Dynasty; under the chair is a jumping vervet monkey and a cat together with a goose! Ref 5, pl 88; Tomb of Ptahmose (Dra' Abu el-Naga, 19th Dynasty), Egyptian Museum Cairo TN 25.6.24.6; Tomb of Paatenemheb, Amarna, 18th Dynasty, Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden, accession number E 8b, Ref 38, see Plate 17 in the present article.

<sup>84</sup> Ref 2 (vol 3), pls 2, 9, 11, 94C.

<sup>85</sup> Ref 1 (vol 4), pl 107, left.

<sup>86</sup> Ref 15.

<sup>87</sup> It is worth mentioning that the beating of workers by overseers was also common practice. Ref 2 (vol 1), pls 105, 157, 261A; Ref 2 (vol 3), pl 68.

<sup>88</sup> Ref 12, pp 296–301; Ref 18, pp 85–88; Ref 39; Ref 40; Ref 41.

<sup>89</sup> Ref 42.

<sup>90</sup> Further reading: Ref 12, pp 247–380; Ref 43, pp 539–548; Ref 44.



## Plates



Plate 1: Hunting with dogs: The game was driven into a fence, which can be seen on the left and right sides of the image. Top left: Nine dogs tearing apart a Nubian ibex (drawing of this scene in Ref 2 [vol 3], p 224, fig 101.1). Tomb of Mereruka, Saqqara, 6th Dynasty, 2300-2150 B.C.



Plate 2: Attachment of a lead rope to the mouth of a bull. Tomb of Akhethetep, Saqqara, 5th Dynasty, 2400-2350 B.C.



Plate 3: Above: Plowing with cattle. Below: Sheep tread the seed into the soil. Tomb of Ti, Saqqara, 5th Dynasty, 2400–2350 B.C.

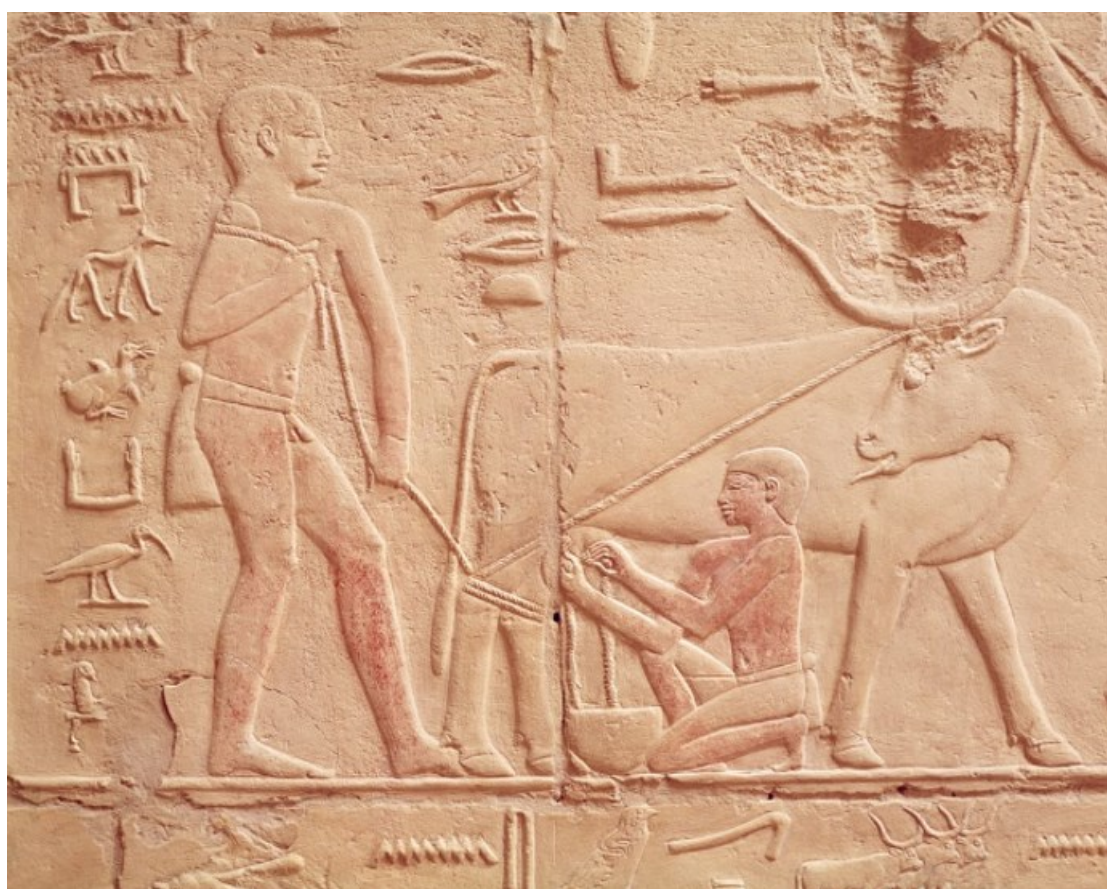


Plate 4: The immobilization of a cow during milking. Tomb of Kagemni, Saqqara, 6th Dynasty, 2300–2150 B.C. Inscription above the cow:  $\text{wr.t}$  “The size is huge”.

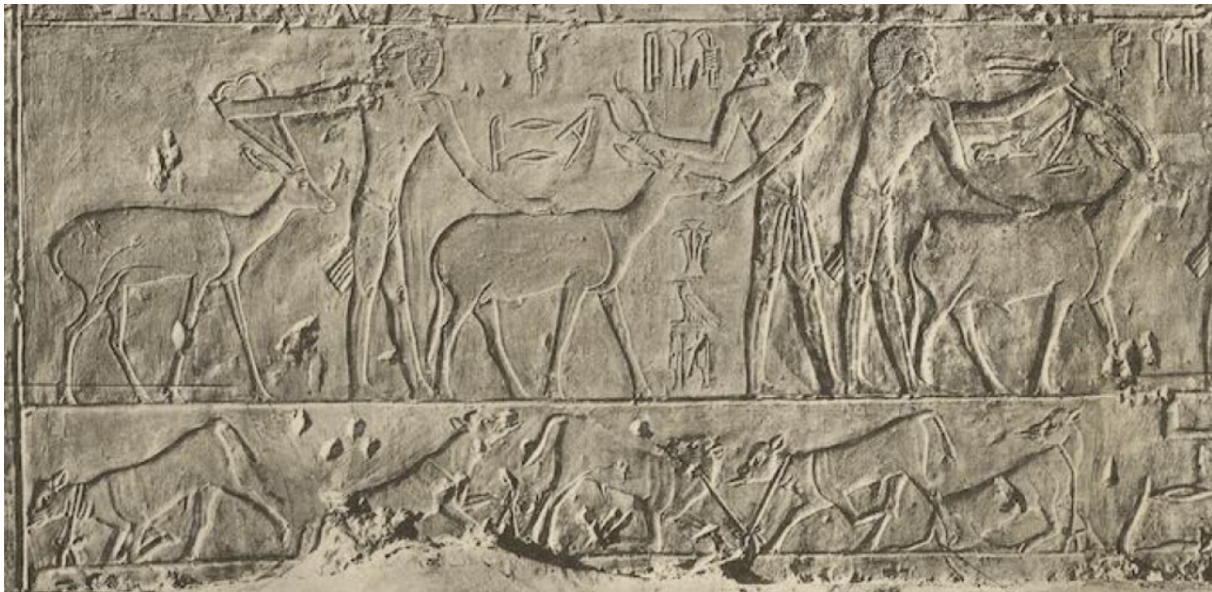


Plate 5: Above: Parade of antelopes. Below: Calves with much too short tethers. Tomb of Ptahhetep, Saqqara, 5th Dynasty, 2400–2350 B.C.



Plate 6: The canonical scene "Crossing a ford": A calf is used to lure the herd of cattle through the water. The leading cow (with sawed off horns?) follows the fearful lowing of the calf. Relief from the tomb of Idut, Saqqara, 6th Dynasty, c. 2300 B.C. Inscription (only the end is visible here): "O herdsman, be on your guard against the crocodile that is in the water and comes unexpectedly. Watch it carefully!"

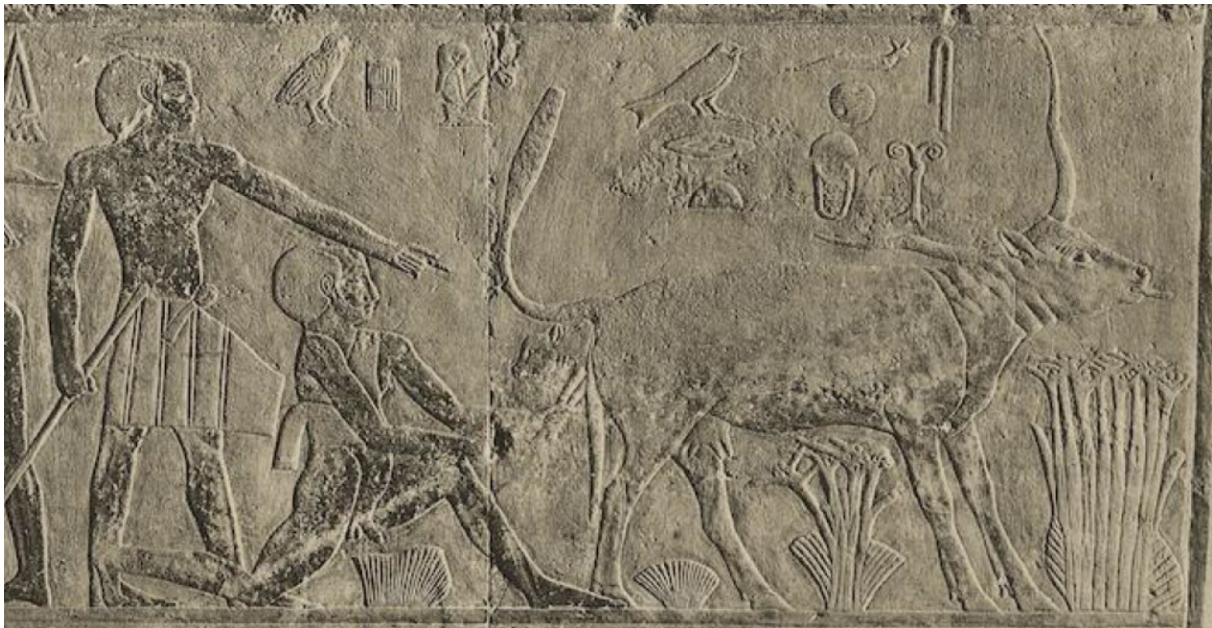


Plate 7: Birth of a calf (the cow's outstretched tongue means mooing). A herdsman helps calving and an overseer gives instructions. Inscription above the cow: *sfh.t wr.t* "Big [= strenuous] calving!" Relief from the tomb of Ti, Saqqara, 5th Dynasty, 2400–2350 B.C.



Plate 8: A stubborn lead donkey is disciplined. Relief from the tomb of Achethetepheri, Saqqara, 5th Dynasty, 2400–2350 B.C. Inscription: *j3t (j)r=k* „Go on!“ (lit. “Go on, you shall do!”)



Plate 9: Akhenaten offering a pintail duck to Aton. Painted limestone block, probably from Tell el-Amarna, 18th Dynasty, 1353–1336 B.C., MMA 1985.328.2.



Plate 10: Bridling of horses: The reins were pulled through an eyelet in the breast harness to provide leverage to the bridle. Fragment of a mural from the tomb of Nebamun, West Thebes, 18th Dynasty, c. 1350 B.C., British Museum EA37982.

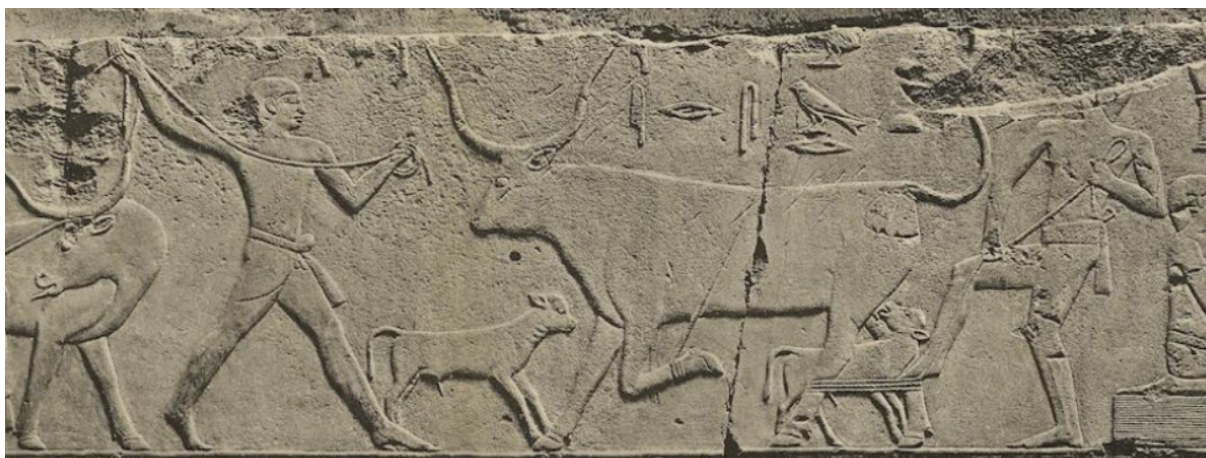


Plate 11: Overthrowing a cow before slaughter using ropes (while a calf is still suckling). Relief from the tomb of Kagemni, Saqqara, 6th Dynasty, 2300-2150 B.C. Inscription: *jrj=s wr.t* "She does [it] strongly!" [= She puts up a strong resistance].



Plate 12: Slaughter of a fattened ox by severing the carotid arteries. The blood is collected in a bowl. Wall painting from the tomb of Iti and Neferu, Gebelein, First Intermediate Period, 2118-1980 B.C.



Plate 13: Upper register: Presentation of live geese (recognizable by their kicking). Lower register: Sacrifice of a bull: A front leg of the tied bull is cut off. The hyperextended neck and the outstretched tongue (meaning roar) show clearly that the bull is still alive. Relief from the tomb of Idut, Saqqara, 6th Dynasty, c. 2300 B.C. Inscription (center): *jtj (j)r=k* "Do pull!" or "Pull towards yourself!".

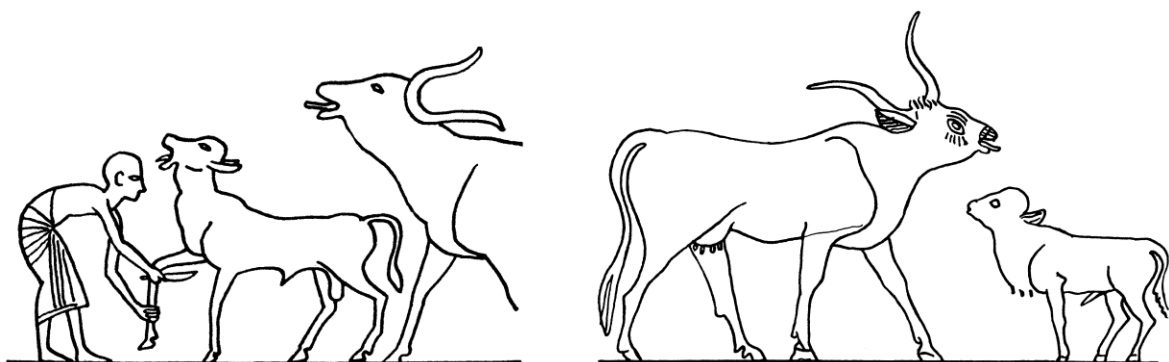


Plate 14: Left: Cutting off the right front leg of a live bull calf. Drawing of a scene from the tomb of Ptahmose, Saqqara, 19th Dynasty, c. 1290 B.C., Egyptian Museum Cairo 369. Right: A bull calf that survived the sacrificial mutilation. Drawing of a scene from the tomb of Amenmose (TT19), Dra' Abu el-Naga, 19th Dynasty, c. 1300 B.C., after Robert Hay (MSS 29851, 227).



Plate 15: A Tjesem-type dog named "*Jdm*" together with its guardian under the tomb lord's chair. Relief from the tomb of Inti (G 2338 B), Giza, 6th Dynasty, 2300-2150 B.C.



Plate 16: The artisan Ipuy and his wife accept the funeral offering. A cat (with collar) sits under the wife's chair, another cat plays on Ipuy's lap. Facsimile (tempera on paper) of a mural from the restored tomb of Ipuy (TT217), Deir el-Medina, 19th Dynasty, 1279-1213 B.C.





Plate 17: General Paatenemheb (possibly identical with the later King Horemheb) and his wife accept the funeral offering. A vervet monkey is tied to a chair leg under the chair of the wife. Relief from the tomb of Paatenemheb, Tell el-Amarna, 18th Dynasty, Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden E 8b.

## Abbreviations

B.C.: Before Christian era; CC: Creative Commons; ed/eds: Editor(s); lit.: literally; MMA: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; no: number; p/pp: Page(s); pl/pls: Plate(s); Pyr: Pyramid Text; Ref: Reference; TT: Theban tomb; Vol/vols: Volume(s).

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- Plate 2: Relief from the tomb of Akhethetep, Saqqara, 5th Dynasty. Photo: Ref 2 (vol 3), pl 88 (CC 0).
- Plate 3: Relief from the tomb of Ti, Saqqara, 5th Dynasty. Photo: Ref 2 (vol 3), pl 44 (CC 0).
- Pale 4: Relief from the tomb of Kagemni, Saqqara, 6th Dynasty. Photo: Meisterdrucke, Finkenstein, Austria, image ID: 422495, <https://www.meisterdrucke.fr> (accessed November 2, 2024; courtesy of Meisterdrucke).
- Plate 5: Relief from the tomb of Ptahhetep, Saqqara, 5th Dynasty. Photo: Ref 2 (vol 3), pl 18 (CC 0).
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- Plate 16: Facsimile of a scene from the tomb of Ipuw, Deir el-Medina, 19th Dynasty: Artist: Norman de Garis Davies, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession no 30.4.114, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/548567> (accessed November 12; CC 0).

Plate 17: Relief from the tomb of Paatenemheb, Tell el-Amarna, 18th Dynasty. Photo: Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden, Leiden, accession number E 8b. Ref 38 (photo detail; CC 0).