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CHAPTER 25

ANIMALS IN EGYPT

ANGELA MCDONALD

Under your protection let him learn
whence comes the fruitful freedom of the marshy Nile,
why common animals are on a par with the great gods.

Statius, Invocation to Isis in *Silvae*, 3.2.107–8, 113

(Donaldson, 1999: 1)

Introduction

The faunal ecology of the Nile Valley was not immune to change. In early predynastic Egypt (*c.*5000–3000 BC), large game animals such as the rhinoceros and the giraffe were supported by a wetter and more verdant environment north of the First Cataract (Germond, 2001: 24). However, by the end of that period, they had already begun to retreat ever further south (Houlihan, 1995: 41; Brewer, 2002: 427–8) and from that point were imports. At the opposite end of the historical spectrum, by Graeco-Roman times, the ibis was sacrificed in large enough numbers to bring it to brink of extinction despite extensive breeding programmes (Ray, 1976: 136; Brewer, 2002: 454; Ikram, 2005: 11; see Houlihan (1986: 30) for a different opinion), and numbers of hippopotami were dwindling according to Ammianus Marcellinus in his catalogue of Egyptian fauna in the fourth century AD, presumably because of extensive hunting.

Certain imported animals, such as the leopard and the horse, were part of the native fabric of life in New Kingdom Egypt: the former through the wearing of its pelt during religious rituals, the latter as a status symbol within military-elite circles. Later, the fortunes of the two animals parted company. While the panther's metaphorical significance in texts and art gradually slipped into obsolescence (McDonald, 2009: 365–72), uses for the horse increased in Egypt under the Greeks and Romans. For the Egyptians, horses were typically draught animals for chariots and were not usually ridden directly (Brewer, 2002: 448, but see Fig. 25.1b). It is, therefore, startling to see from the Ptolemaic Period images of kings on horseback (Fig. 25.1a).

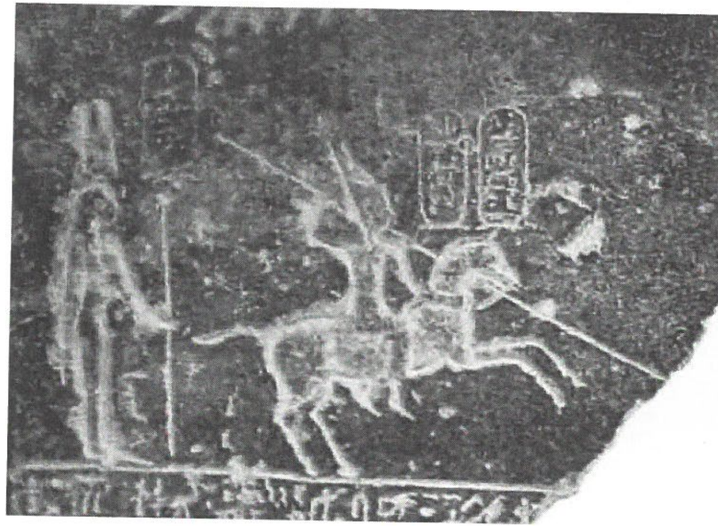

FIGURE 25.1a Ptolemy IV mounted on horseback on the Raphia Decree from Cairo Museum (CG 31088).

From Kamal (1905) vol. 2, pl. 74.

FIGURE 25.1b An Egyptian archer during the Battle of Qadesh. Non-elites were occasionally shown mounted on horseback in the New Kingdom.

After Rommelaere (1996) fig. 96.

Although animals' participation in many areas of life remained constant diachronically, significant synchronic changes took place, for example, with the explosion of sacred animal cults and the intensive breeding of votive animals in the Late Period (Taylor, 2001: 254–60). Graeco-Roman Egypt in particular saw several important developments in the animal world, both in the shape of newly arrived animals and in the innovative use of more familiar creatures. Taking this late period of innovation in Egyptian history as its focal point, this chapter discusses the changing contexts in which

animals feature from Ptolemaic to Roman times, and explores in turn the three major parts they played as divine avatars, as commodities, and as symbols.

Animals and the Divine

Theriomorphic and 'Mixed-Form' Deities

Greek and Roman deities were often accompanied in art by a strong animal element (Bevan, 1986: 11, 13). Representations of Dionysus in particular habitually involved animal presences. Five statues on the Ptolemaic dromos leading to the Serapeum at Saqqara depict him riding typically Dionysian wild animals: a lion, a panther, two peacocks, and a Cerberus figure (Myśliwiec, 2000: 186; Lauer and Picard, 1955: 15–16, 173ff, and pls. 19, 20, 23, 24). These early Ptolemaic statues possibly date to the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (Thompson, 1988: 116), whose interest in both the animal-loving Dionysus and animals in general manifested itself grandly in his Great Procession of 278 BC (Rice, 1983: 59, 86). However, only the Egyptians gave their deities animal faces.

It is difficult to say which offended Classical sensibilities more heinously—gods in full animal form such as the Apis Bull, or the 'Mischgestalt' typical of Egyptian deities, pairing animal heads with human bodies (Hornung, 1982: 109–25; Fig. 25.2). The

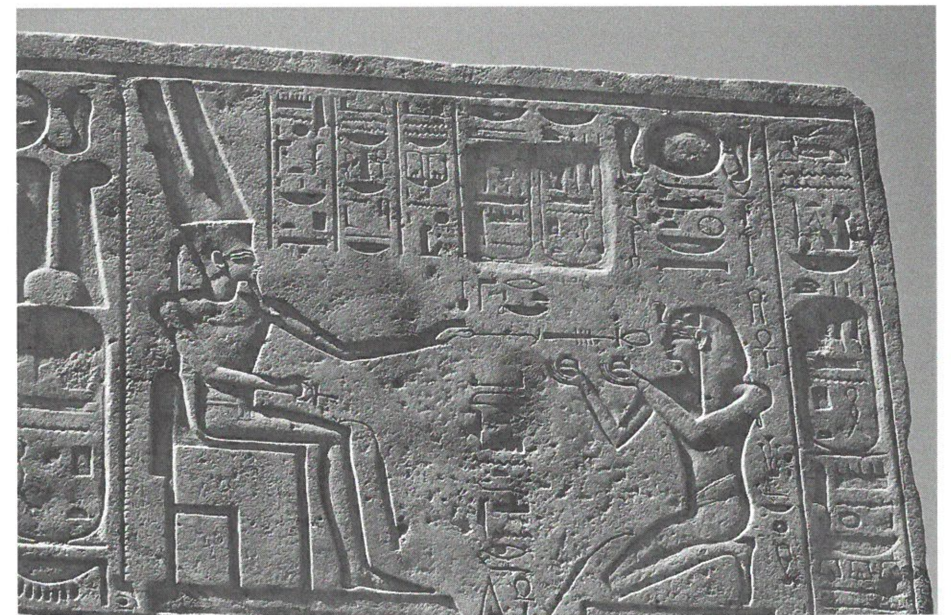

FIGURE 25.2 The varied faces of animal gods in ancient Egypt

a. Full anthropomorphic form: Amun at Karnak Temple, 19th Dynasty.

Photograph: A. McDonald.

FIGURE 25.2 (*Continued*)

b. Full theriomorphic form: Osiris the lion on a Ptolemaic Period stela from the Cairo Museum (CG 22177).

From Kamal (1905) vol. 2, pl. 51.

FIGURE 25.2 (*Continued*)

c. 'Mischgestalt': Falcon-headed Horus at the Temple of Seti I, Abydos, 19th Dynasty.

Photograph: M. Wilson.

introduction of the reassuringly anthropomorphic Sarapis was no doubt intended to put a more acceptable face on Egyptian religion (Bowman, 1986: 175). However, an animalistic appearance was not necessarily a hindrance to cultic worship: the demigod Bes was a human–animal hybrid of sorts with a leonine face, mane, and tail augmenting his essentially human body (Wilkinson, 2003: 102–4); his cult lasted beyond Roman times into early Christian Egypt (Frankfurter, 1998: 21).

Juvenal's sarcasm about 'the monsters demented Egypt worships' in the *Satires* (15.1–2) may typify the Romans' attitude (Versluys, 2002: 432), but it contrasts strongly with that of the Greeks, who even before the Ptolemaic colonization saw Egyptian animal worship in a more philosophical light, interpreting essentially alien practices allegorically and forging connections between Egyptian and Greek deities (Feder, 2006). The Ptolemies themselves embraced Egyptian religion; Ptolemy II and Queen Berenice were celebrated in the Canopus Decree for their generous patronage of animal cults (Bagnall and Derow, 2004: 265). By contrast, Octavian famously declined to visit the temple of the Apis since he said he was 'accustomed to worshipping gods, not cattle' (Thompson, 1988: 266). That he is depicted showing homage to the Apis on stelae (Bowman, 1986: 170) should perhaps be attributed to Egyptian convention.

However, such scorn did not hinder the cult of the Apis or any other sacred animal in Roman Egypt or indeed their spread through the Roman Empire in later times; the Apis cult flourished particularly under the benevolent patronage of Titus Germanicus and Hadrian (Thompson, 1988: 273–4) until the general suppression of pagan cults under Theodosius's edict in AD 391. Roman deities even shared sacred space with Egyptian animal gods: for example, a cult of Demeter was maintained within the temple of the Egyptian crocodile god Soknopaios in the northern Faiyum in the second century BC (Parca, 2007: 190).

Certain Egyptian deities even acquired new animal aspects in later Egypt; for example, a stela in the Cairo Museum depicts a Ptolemaic king offering to a recumbent lion captioned as 'Osiris the Lion' (Fig. 25.2b; cf. Leitz, 2002: II, 546). Lions became increasingly associated with the funerary realm, often appearing as guardians on Graeco-Roman sarcophagi, possibly through the connection with the similarly chthonic deity Dionysus, with whom the lion had a close association (de Wit, 1980; von Lieven, 2006).

Sacred Versus Sacrificial Animals

Sacred bovine cults were arguably the most important in Egypt and the cults of the Apis and Buchis bulls in particular flourished in Egypt's late antiquity (Dodson, 2005). Such singular manifestations of deities lived full and pampered lives within temple precincts; some even became tourist attractions, such as the sacred crocodiles of the Faiyum that the distinguished Roman senator Lucius Memmius famously fed with titbits (Bagnall and Derow, 2004: 118, no. 69). This contrasts sharply with the brief lives of the sacred animals that were bred ultimately as votive offerings to the god with whom they had an affinity (Bowman, 1986: 173).

While we know a great deal about the administration of certain cults, especially that of ibis in Saqqara, which is detailed in the Archive of Hor (Ray, 1976: 136–46), no evidence illuminates the underlying rationale for the sacrifice of sacred animals. Manetho's treatise on animal worship is known but no longer extant (Stephens, 2003: 46). While the practice of sacrificing animals may go back to predynastic times (Flores, 2003), the intensification in the presentation of votive sacrifices is unique to the Late Period. A correlation with Egypt's steady decline as an empire seems logical (e.g., Nicholson, 2005: 49); perhaps increasing insecurity led to a greater need to feel a more tangible connection to a god. Bronze votive substitutes for living animals were also produced in large numbers in this period (Kozloff, 1981: 56).

In the Graeco-Roman world, sacrifice of animals such as bulls, heifers, sheep, pigs, and goats to the gods was common (Toynbee, 1973: 16), but there were many divergences from Egyptian practice. Herodotus (*Histories* 2.39) notes that Egyptians did not eat the heads of sacrificial animals, but would willingly sell them to local Greek traders (Stephens, 2003: 23). Pigs were also handled differently by the two cultures. They were sacrificed annually to Dionysus-Osiris and Selene-Isis as part of the Demetria (Parca, 2007: 202–3), and to Artemis-Demeter in the Thesmophoria (Bevan, 1986: 68), but were never included within the fold of sacred animals by the Egyptians.

The Cat

Grain ships supposedly introduced cats to Rome and Ostia from Egypt (Donaldson, 1999: 8), and cats start to appear in Roman art from the fifth and fourth centuries BC (Toynbee, 1973: 87). About this time in Egypt, their popularity soared. The cat (Malek, 2006) was associated with many leonine/feline deities but was especially sacred to the goddess Bastet. There is no evidence for a singular sacred cat occupying a place of honour within Bastet's temple at Bubastis; rather multiple sacred cats were kept there. Sacred cats were killed and presented as votive offerings in dizzying numbers (Malek, 2006: 126–9) and yet the Egyptians, according to Classical writers, were highly sensitive to any mistreatment of living cats.

Herodotus (*Histories* 2.66–7) recounts the frenzied attitudes Egyptians held about cats, from shaving their eyebrows when a family cat died to trying to prevent them from suicidally leaping into flames during house fires (Donaldson, 1999: 7). Diodorus (*Library*, 1.88.3) also gives an account of the bribing of sacred cats with bread soaked in milk and pieces of Nile-fish to curry their favour (Donaldson, 1999: 2–3). In addition to receiving the finest food, they also reputedly enjoyed warm baths, ointments, censing, dressing, and decking out with jewellery (Donaldson, 1999: 7: see Diodorus, *Library*, 1.84.5–6). It is also Diodorus (*Library*, 1.83.8–9) who tells the story about the Roman who accidentally killed a cat and was in turn killed by the Egyptians; Frankfurter (1998: 68) supplemented this story with another involving the killing of a dog in an area of Thebes that was sacred to Anubis that ends up sparking a rebellion against the Romans.

The Egyptians' attachment to cats was supposedly used against them by the Persian invader Cambyses, who supposedly shielded his advancing army with cats in order to thwart the Egyptians' attack (Donaldson, 1999: 11; Kalof, 2007: 5). Cambyses was also infamously accused of killing a sacred Apis bull (Brewer, 2002: 447), although there is considerable reason to doubt this tale (Depuydt, 1995) and probably the other as well.

Animals as Commodities

Animals in Use

Egyptian art attests to the importance of animals within agriculture (Houlihan, 2002). They were fundamental to the agricultural cycle, and facilitated the processes of growing and harvesting crops. Animals abound in scenes connected with the growing and harvesting of crops, from the draught-oxen that ploughed the land, to the sheep and goats that first trampled in seeds and finally separated the grain from the chaff with their hooves after harvest. Animals were also agricultural products themselves, providing meat and milk, as well as goods derived from their hides such as leather and pelts. Other animal-derived products are surprisingly absent from the early archaeological record. It took a long time, for example, for the Egyptians to make full use of wool; arguably, it was the Greeks and Romans who revolutionized the wool industry in Egypt (Strauss-Seeber, 1986: 1285).

The Zenon Papyri (reign of Ptolemy II) discuss the breeding and transport of animals, which fall into four groups sorted by purpose: draught animals, beasts of burden, sacrificial and alimentary animals, and animals kept specifically for wool-production (Rostovtzeff, 1922: 107–17). New breeds of sheep were introduced in early Ptolemaic times to improve the poor quality of native Egyptian wool (Rostovtzeff, 1922: 115; Thompson, 1988: 44); this was done at both royal and non-royal levels. Special care was taken of sheep for the sake of high-quality wool production. The official Apollonius reportedly owned flocks of imported Milesian sheep whose fleeces were protected by leather jackets while they grazed; their wool was so precious it was not sheared but plucked by hand (Thompson, 1988: 52).

Differences again emerge between Egyptian and Classical priorities in terms of animal husbandry. While the sheep was the herd animal par excellence in Greece, for the Egyptians cattle occupied this position. One of the Zenon Papyri (*PSI* 380.4–7) records a clash between local peasants who wanted grazing land for their cattle that was being occupied by Apollonius's sheep (Rostovtzeff, 1922: 113; Thompson, 1988: 43, n. 50). Goats, which could graze alongside sheep, had a wider range of purposes, providing milk, hair, and hides for secular use as well as having a sacred purpose as sacrificial animals in Greek festivals (Thompson, 1988: 43).

Changes are evident in the types of draught animals employed. Traditionally, the Egyptians relied on donkeys for long journeys, oxen for agricultural tasks, and horses

for the drawing of chariots in battle and in elite display. The black Bactrian two-humped camel was a newcomer in Ptolemaic times, introduced according to Lucian by Ptolemy I (Toynbee, 1973: 137). In art, the camel is known securely only from the Graeco-Roman Period (Houlihan, 2002: 107). Camels featured in Ptolemy II's Great Procession and this king has been credited with realizing the camel's value for facilitating commerce (Rice, 1983: 92) because in his reign camels and elephants were used to transport spices along the trading route between Coptos and the Red Sea coast (Thiers, 2001: 9). Ptolemy's interest extended also to new breeds of more familiar animals, such as sheep, again evidenced by the huge numbers included in his Great Procession. A letter from the Palestinian ruler Tubias suggests that Ptolemy was also interested in creating new species: using animals supplied by Tubias, he was intending to cross-breed horses and asses (Rostovtzeff, 1922: 114).

Further uses were also found for more familiar animals such as the elephant, which experienced a new lease of life in Ptolemaic times. Herodotus (erroneously) lists elephants as inhabitants of the Egyptian western desert, although he never actually saw one (Scullard, 1974: 32). They were imported into the country from Nubia and Syria, mainly as a curiosity, although their ivory was also prized (Osborn and Osbornova, 1998: 125–30). Perhaps it was from his famous tutor Aristotle, who gives an impressive account of elephants, that Alexander the Great first learned of the animals' usefulness (Scullard, 1974: 49). Alexander was the first to incorporate elephants into the Egyptian arsenal. He reportedly relied on war-elephants to defeat King Porus in 326 BC, which is possibly why the wearing of an elephant skin seems to originate with him on coins (Cheshire, 2009: 22).

Alexander's elephants were procured from India, although by the time of Ptolemy II, it had become necessary to exploit Nubia as an alternative source. This marked the beginning of elephant-hunting in Nubia, attested to by graffiti at sites such as Abu Simbel (Thiers, 2001: 6). There has been some debate about whether Meroitic peoples passed on their techniques for domesticating elephants to the Ptolemies or vice versa (Rice, 1983: 92, n. 165; Thiers, 2001: 9). Whatever the case may be, importing elephants brought about technological advances: specially constructed ships were made to transport the animals (Thiers, 2001: 9). Ptolemy II and his successor Ptolemy III continued to use elephants in battle, despite their dubious efficacy. Possibly their capability to transport men and the wow-factor of their initial appearance had a greater advantage than actually trying to ride them against the enemy (Cheshire, 2009: 23–4, n. 145). Their unimpressive performance in the battle of Raphia and against the revolt led by Ptolemy V ended their military service in Egypt (Thiers, 2001: 11).

Hunting and Displaying Animals in Egypt

Outside the agricultural and martial spheres, animals were often depicted accompanying humans in hunts, particularly dogs in desert hunts, and also more unusually domesticated cats in fishing and fowling scenes and even lions in royal contexts (Houlihan, 1995: 40–73; Fig. 25.3).

FIGURE 25.3 A so-called battle-lion at a Ptolemaic king's feet, breathing fire on his enemies. Temple of Kom Ombo, Graeco-Roman Period.

Photograph: A. McDonald.

As quarry, fierce and exotic animals were favoured, particularly among kings. Ramses III chose to mirror his battle scenes on the north walls of his mortuary temple at Medinet Habu with wild bull hunts on the south walls; both acted as apotropaic representations of the king's ability to impose order over chaos. Non-royals were allowed modified versions of such ritualistic statements, primarily in the form of fishing and fowling scenes in which they were shown as calm, controlled figures taming a chaos of birds or river creatures. Symbolism aside, the Egyptians obviously enjoyed hunting for its own sake. Amenhotep III was particularly proud of his prowess in hunting lions and wild bulls, which he recorded on monumental scarabs in the 18th Dynasty (Clayton, 1996).

Art suggests that hunting grounds stocked with imported animals for recreational purposes existed in dynastic times (Houlihan, 2002: 127), although we learn this primarily through scenes of such exotic animals being imported rather than from depictions of the grounds themselves. In Graeco-Roman Egypt, hunting continued to be a prized activity, particularly in the Delta (Bowman, 1986: 14). However, hunting and fishing now required a special licence for which a fee was paid to the state (Rostovtzeff, 1922: 112). Dogs were bred for hunting (Rice, 1983: 93; Brewer, 2011), but inevitably continued to straddle the line between working animal and pet; a poignant example of this is provided by Zenon's lamented hunting dog Taurus, who died saving his master from a wild boar and was rewarded by a specially composed epitaph (Rostovtzeff, 1922: 112). Hunting dogs featured prominently in Ptolemy II's Great Procession (Rice, 1983: 93).

With the exception of deer and boar meat, which Roman soldiers ate after the hunt, all other animals that were caught were likely to be intended for the arena rather than the dining table (Epplett, 2001: 211). Ptolemy II offered hunters rewards for the discovery of 'unknown and extraordinary' species (Thiers, 2001: 10) and procured others through diplomatic channels (Rice, 1983: 86). The 45-foot-long snake captured in the marshes of the Delta was a particularly prized addition to the royal menagerie (Toynbee, 1973: 223; Thiers, 2001: 10). In the following century, a zoological exhibition was permanently housed at Alexandria (Hubbell, 1935).

The Egyptians may have indulged in zoological displays long before the famous exhibitions associated with Ptolemy II (Houlihan, 2002: 127; Brewer, 2002: 454; Müller-Wollermann, 2006). Certainly the rhinoceros depicted in the temple of Armant, dated either to the reign of Thutmosis III (Osborn and Osbornova, 1998: 140, fig. 12.25) or to Ramses II (Houlihan, 2002: 130), complete with notations of its impressive size, seems likely to have been displayed.

Export of Animals from Egypt

Many Egyptian animals were brought to Rome specifically for games or to take part in zoological spectacles (Donaldson, 1999: 8), presumably at great expense (Toynbee, 1973, 20), even if the Roman army was drafted into service to capture wild animals for this purpose (Epplett, 2001). Some animals did not survive their enforced travels, such as the crocodiles imported for the Roman official Symmachus. One set of crocodiles that he procured (he says in his letters that crocodiles are most in demand for spectacles) refused to eat for fifty days and so had to be killed (Toynbee, 1973: 219).

The first giraffe was seen in Rome in Julius Caesar's games of 46 BC (Toynbee, 1973: 141). Varro described a giraffe that had arrived in Rome from Alexandria (Rice, 1983: 98), to which it was probably imported via Red Sea trading routes to Africa. There are other allusions to giraffes in Classical authors, sometimes slightly confused (Toynbee, 1973: 142). From the second century AD they are mentioned only in relation to spectacles. Rice (1983: 97) suggested that since only one giraffe appears in Ptolemy II's Great Procession, the animal may have already been rare at that time. She took as corroboration the odd appearance of the giraffe in the early Ptolemaic period Painted Tomb at Marissa (Peters and Thiersch, 1905: pl. 8).

In Octavian's games in Rome of 29 BC, a hippopotamus and a rhinoceros were exhibited as a spectacle. A Greek epigram (*Greek Anthology* 7.626; Toynbee, 1973: 17–18) records that Octavian had caused the capture of a huge number of African animals for his show.

Before their induction into the arena, where they would fight each other or against men in staged hunts (*venationes*), exotic animals would be paraded through the streets. The earliest example of a dramatic hunt is recorded in Livy (39.22); it was staged by Marcus Fulvius Nobilior in 186 BC and included lions and leopards. Around twenty years later (169 BC), the curule aediles put on another show in the Circus Maximus, which included sixty-three large cats, forty bears, and some elephants. Pliny (*Natural History* 8.24, 40) described another show put on by the aedile Marcus Scaurus in 59 BC, which included 150 leopards as well as a hippopotamus and five crocodiles displayed in a large tank (Toynbee, 1973: 129). There were also more peaceful uses for exotic animals more akin to zoological displays: Elagabalus apparently exhibited his collection of Egyptian animals in this vein (Toynbee, 1973: 18–19).

Animals as Food

It is perhaps in their respective sensibilities about eating animals, governed by religious taboos, that the Classical world set itself most widely apart from the Egyptian. (For an overview of animals as food, compare Brewer, 2002 with Wilkins and Hill, 2006.) Whereas the Egyptians, particularly the priestly classes—although we are relying on non-Egyptian sources such as Herodotus and Plutarch for this (Thompson, 1988: 316)—were bound by many restrictions, the Greeks and the Romans observed practically none (Wilkins and Hill, 2006: 144), with the exception of distinct groups, some of which cultivated early forms of vegetarianism (e.g., Garnsey, 1999: 85–6).

Taboos concerning animal meat varied in Egypt regionally (Danby, 2003: 127). Plutarch described a fierce dispute between the inhabitants of Oxyrhynchus and Cynopolis over the former's capture of a dog, which was sacrificed and eaten in retaliation for the latter's eating of an oxyrhynchus fish (Frankfurter, 1998: 66–7). It seems that dog-meat was eaten in the Classical world (Wilkins and Hill, 2006: 142–4). Similarly, a first-century-AD papyrus records the oath of fourteen fishermen from the Faiyum who swear not to catch particular types of sacred fish, which they call 'images of the gods' (Bowman, 1986: 174). Despite the fact that many other fish were eaten in Egypt, they were never included in the funerary feast either in art or in texts. Similarly, fish were never offered up as sacrifices in the Graeco-Roman world (Wilkins and Hill, 2006: 142), although various types were imported from Egypt, particularly catfish (Bowman, 1986: 15).

There were other variations over time: predynastic Egyptians ate tortoise-meat, but it was taboo by the Old Kingdom and continued to be (Kozloff, 1981: 56). Galen, however, extolled the benefits of eating tortoises, stating that 'all Greeks eat tortoises every day, though they have hard flesh and are difficult to digest' and even goes on to list a few recipes (Garnsey, 1999: 83). Perhaps the animal's Sethian connections would have been enough for the Egyptians to consider eating its meat a sin even for outsiders, but, unfortunately, no sources survive to confirm whether Greeks and Romans ate tortoise meat in Egypt itself.

Even more so than the tortoise, the pig had Sethian associations from an early age (te Velde, 1992) and was never mentioned in texts or depicted in art as part of the diet in life or the afterlife in Egypt. Yet, like the Greeks and the Romans, who consumed pork plentifully (Wilkins and Hill, 2006: 144), the Egyptians must have eaten pork. Perhaps the taboo existed only for the elite classes or even just for priests; plentiful archaeological

evidence attests to the raising of pigs, most notably in the workmen's village at Amarna (Kemp, 1987: 36–41), and the eating of their meat (Brewer, 2002: 440-3).

Certain Classical writers revelled in promoting the superior eating habits that distinguished their civilized culture from barbarian practices. Galen, for example, dismissed the eating of 'wood-bugs' and snakes as a distinctly Egyptian, non-Greek practice (Wilkins and Hill, 2006: 145). Herodotus also used the Egyptians' peculiar appetites as another means of highlighting Egypt's strangeness (Wilkins and Hill, 2006: 23). However, Thompson's case study (1988: 324) of Greeks living alongside Egyptians within the temple precincts of the Serapeum in early Ptolemaic Memphis concluded that the two cultures did not differ greatly in what they ate, which serves as a useful reminder that the everyday diet in Egypt was mostly vegetarian, supplemented by fowl.

For the Egyptians, eating sometimes served an apotropaic purpose. Rituals directed against Seth, which intensified in late Egypt, included in Busiris and Letopolis the fashioning and eating of cakes stamped with his image in the form of a bound ass, while in Edfu, crocodiles were also considered Sethian creatures, and were hunted and eaten (Frankfurter, 1998: 54). The eating of crocodile meat outside Egypt is not attested in any source, even though creatures such as the camel do merit a (disparaging) mention in Galen (Wilkins and Hill, 2006: 144). It is uncertain whether Egypt was the source for Galen's stories about the unseemly eating of equids cited above, although a dream-interpretation papyrus from the New Kingdom does allude to the eating of donkey-flesh (Szpakowska, 2003: 82). Unfortunately, no recipes have survived from ancient Egypt, although medical texts imply that the Egyptians were prepared to ingest parts from all sorts of animals (Nunn, 1996: 148–51).

Animal Symbolism

Animals in the Script and in Art

Houlihan (2002: 132) systematically listed all the animals identified in Egyptian hieroglyphs and art of the dynastic period, but inevitably, animal symbolism changed in the wake of developments in the Graeco-Roman period. Possibly in response to their new foreign masters, the Egyptian priesthood instituted extensive changes in the hieroglyphic script, which progressed from comprising a few hundred regularly used signs to possessing several thousand, the majority of which functioned cryptographically (Wilson, 2003: 75–83). Animal hieroglyphs within this new system played a particularly prominent role, as is evidenced by two hymns from the Temple of Esna, one composed entirely with enigmatic crocodile signs, the other with rams (Sauneron, 1982; Parkinson, 1999: 82, fig. 36; Wilson, 2003: 79, fig. 13; and for a tentative translation, see Morenz, 2002).

While some newcomers such as the camel never featured in the script, an elephant with a rider appears in the repertory of newly minted signs in the Ptolemaic Period, reflecting one of its new uses (Grimal, Hallof, and van der Plas, 2000: A256).

Similarly, we see two variants of a horse being ridden (Grimal, Hallof, and van der Plas, 2000: A249, A427). Foreshadowing its symbolism in Roman mosaics, we also see in the script a hippopotamus sign with water pouring out of its mouth, which as well as signifying 'to spit out' also is used to symbolize 'inundation' (Vaelske, 2006: 123–4).

Certain animal forms underwent a process of simplification in later times, particularly mythical entities such as the so-called Seth animal. Originally a composite creature jigsawed together to convey aggression, chaos, and dominance (McDonald, 2000), it increasingly gave way in the Graeco-Roman period to more recognizable animal forms such as the ass and even the falcon, the symbol of Seth's great divine rival Horus (te Velde, 1977: 68–72; Kaper, 1997). The appearance of other composite animals (Vernus and Yoyotte, 2005: 632–55) was similarly reimagined, for example the Devourer, Ammut (Seeber, 1976: 163–84). Early New Kingdom depictions show a tripartite form typically composed of the head of a crocodile, the body of a lion or panther, and the hindquarters of a hippopotamus. On a Roman period shroud (Seeber, 1976: 171, fig. 69), a more leonine Ammut is shown biting down on a damned soul. Similarly, in a Roman period tomb in Akhmim, Ammut stands before a cooking vessel, over which a little damned soul is suspended (Seeber, 1976: 186, fig. 79). Innovative forms unattested earlier are also known, for example, a lithe, wholly feline version of her from a first-century-AD tomb at the Bahriya Oasis (Riggs, 2005: 146, fig. 67). Other new composites were invented. Cairo Stela CG 27575 shows a creature with a hawk's head and crocodilian body whose tail terminates in a rearing cobra. The creature stands on a coiled serpent, which Edgar (1904: 59, pl. 28) suggested was a symbolic representation of the Labyrinth of the Faiyum.

The Romans, like the Greeks, incorporated Egyptian symbolism into their art, particularly Nilotic scenes featuring animals such as the crocodile, hippopotamus, and ibis, at first with a great deal of accuracy but then increasingly appearing as stereotypical versions of themselves (Versluys, 2002: 265–9). The ichneumon, cobra, and ostrich were also common in Roman mosaics (Mielsch, 2005: 66). Julius Caesar used an elephant to symbolize Africa (Cheshire, 2009: 26). A tethered crocodile was embossed on coins as a symbol of Augustus's capture of Egypt (Toynbee, 1973: 220; Bagnall and Rathbone, 2004: 16, fig. 1.1.4; Fig. 25.4).

On coins, Alexander is sometimes shown wearing an elephant skin with a ram's horn protruding from the side. Cheshire (2009: 23, 26) convincingly argued that the ram (sacred to Amun, whose oracle Alexander famously consulted in Siwa) symbolized the western limits of the empire, while the elephant skin symbolized victory over the eastern realms whence the animal came, with an underlying connotation of military prowess. This geographical symbolism is evident in female personifications of the city of Alexandria or the provinces of Africa or Egypt wearing the same elephant-hide headdress (Cheshire, 2009: 140 and n. 970).

Numerous examples of Egyptianizing symbolism executed on a more sophisticated level emanated from Alexandria in which motifs were not simply replicated, but were adapted meaningfully; for example, the clothing of the jackal-headed Anubis in a Roman centurion's armour (Venit, 2002: 271–2), or the particularly nuanced image of

FIGURE 25.4 Minted in Italy in 28 BC, this silver denarius commemorates Augustus's domination of Egypt, symbolized by the captured crocodile.

Courtesy of Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, GLAHM 18654.

the falcon-headed god Horus, dressed in a breastplate and cape, impaling a crocodile, shown mounted on an untypically Egyptian forward-facing horse (Frankfurter, 1998: 3).

A more subtle adaption is the addition of snakes wound around Isis's arms to Roman representations of the goddess (Toynbee, 1973: 223), perhaps to increase her 'Egyptianness'. The association takes hold, because Isaic snake bracelets become a common feature on Roman women's coffins (e.g., Riggs, 2005: 107). We might see the addition of an Egyptian-style beard to uraei in Greek art in the same light (Boardman, 1999: 151).

Frogs, symbolizing the fertility goddess Heket, were common on Roman terracotta lamps (Toynbee, 1973: 217). Numbers of jackals, traditionally associated with the funerary realm in Egypt, increase dramatically on Graeco-Roman monuments, in a variety of adapted forms, including seated and walking with tails raised (examples in Riggs, 2005: 192, fig. 92; 228, fig. 113), and adorned with keys around their necks (Morenz, 1975; Kaplan, 1999: 73; Fig. 25.5a). Additionally, from the Ptolemaic Period, recumbent or seated jackals representing Anubis are found on Greek funerary sculpture, facing forwards instead of being shown in profile according to Egyptian custom (Fig. 25.5b).

FIGURE 25.5a A seated Anubis jackal wearing keys on his collar; from a Roman Period shroud from the late second century AD, Turin Museum 2265. (after Grimm (1974), pl. 139.2)

Similarly, the 'prancing Apis bull' is a Roman aesthetic twist on the Egyptian prototype, which was always shown in a static standing pose. This more dynamic variant was found all over the Roman Empire with the notable exception of Egypt itself (Kozloff, 1981: 74). The furthest that native Egyptian representations went was in Hellenistic times, when the bull's head could be turned slightly. The key element is the 'lively touch' (Kozloff, 1976: 184), manifesting in the turning of an animal's head or a change in its orientation, imparting an air of dynamism from which the Egyptians shied away.

Animals as Characters in Myths and Stories

Animals' presence in Egyptian texts seems to intensify in later periods (for surveys, see Brunner-Traut, 1968; Teeter, 2002). Teeter (2002: 252) identified animals' perceived purity of character as the basis for this pervasiveness in both literary and religious texts. Serving as allegories for human qualities and behaviours in moralistic texts, they both help and hinder human protagonists in tales. Humans may transform into them either literally or metaphorically (Grapow, 1924: 69–99).

Greek and Roman writers told slightly different stories about Egyptian animals, which we might call 'myths' to varying degrees. Hyginus's *Poetic Astronomy* included a story about the Greek gods fleeing from Typhon and taking animal form in Egypt.

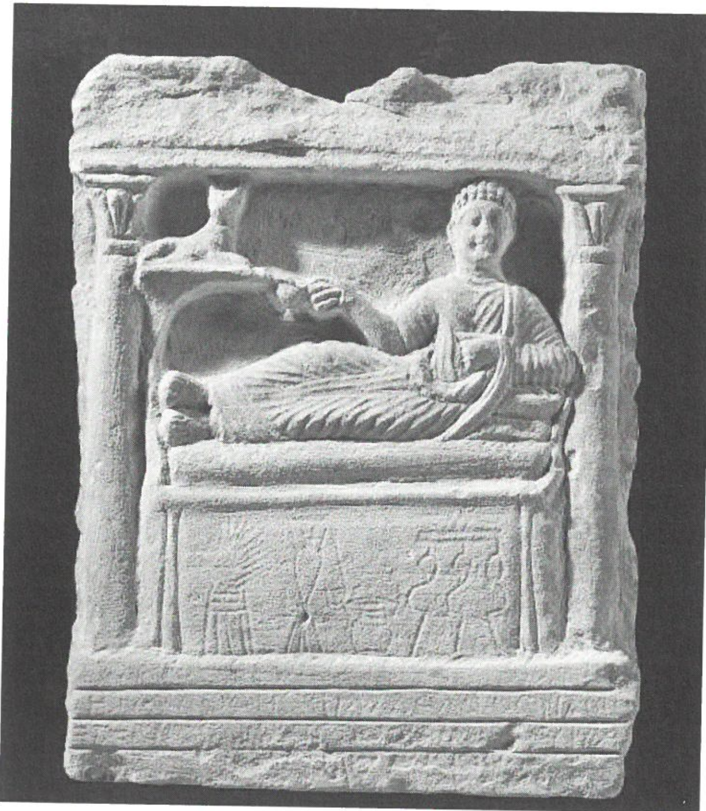

FIGURE 25.5b A forward-facing Anubis-jackal perches above Herakleides on his funerary stela. Roman Period, Kom Abu Billo (Terenuthis).

Photograph © 2014 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Artemis takes the form of a cat (echoing her connection with Bastet, known as early as Herodotus: Donaldson, 1999: 5–6, 22). In the Alexander Romance, animals are used to create an 'Egyptian' atmosphere. The tale casts Alexander as the son of the last native pharaoh of Egypt, Nectanebo, whose seduction of Olympias involves her visitation by a god in various forms, including a serpent and 'horned Ammon' (Stephens, 2003: 8, 64, 71). *The Dialogue of the Dogs* by Eudoxus of Cnidus, mentioned by Diogenes Laertius, is no longer extant, but possibly centred on Egyptian canine gods (Stephens, 2003: 31; although for a different reading of the title see Griffiths, 1965: 75–8).

More along the lines of an (apocryphal?) story is Pliny's account of the natives of Dendera who swam with crocodiles, even sitting on their backs (Mielsch, 2005: 70), which, however, finds some verification in other sources such as Strabo, who noted that men from this region accompanied crocodiles brought from Egypt for a spectacle since they showed expertise in handling the animals (Toynbee, 1973: 219). Similarly, Aelian's description of baboons who were taught to read, dance, and play instruments for payment, which they collected in little bags, sounds rather

fanciful (*Characteristics of Animals* 6.10; see Toynbee, 1973: 57), although baboons (and other animals) playing musical instruments is a common theme on ostraca (Brunner-Traut, 1968: 9–11).

Texts and art acknowledge that animals were the constant companions of humans, sometimes helping and providing, sometimes challenging or even threatening. Gods wore animal faces or manifested themselves in animal bodies. Metaphors were constructed around animals, as comparisons of human strengths and weaknesses were inevitably made with them. Animals permeated the spheres of ancient Egyptian experience and became not only an irrevocable part of the world view of pharaonic times but also a mirror reflecting the essence of Egypt to those who tried to tame her.

Suggested Reading

For surveys of the animals known to the Egyptians, Houlihan (1995) and Osborn and Osbornova (1998) are the best general, illustrated sources, in addition to Houlihan (1986) for birds. There are no dedicated studies of animals specifically in Graeco-Roman Egypt, but much information can be gleaned from general works such as Thompson (1988) and Brewer (2002) for animals in mundane life and Taylor (2001) for the treatment of animals after their death. For general discussions of Egypt under the Greeks and Romans, see especially Myśliwiec (2000) and Frankfurter (1998).

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