

Compendium of Cat Lore

From *The Mysterious, Magickal Cat*, by D. J. Conway:

The Sanskrit word for cat is *margaras*, hunter/investigator.

The Egyptian word for cat is *mau* or *myeo*, both derived from meow sound the cat makes.

One of the 75 praises of Ra, in Egyptian lore, calls Ra the Great Cat, the judge of words. But the goddess Bast was called "the eye of Ra," a clue that she was originally the great cat. The Egyptians did not worship any animal as an animal but honored it as an incarnation or representation of a divine presence or diety. Bast/Bastet/Ubastet was a goddess greatly loved. Her name may have come from the Egyptian word *bes*, meaning fire. Connected primarily with the moon and domesticated cats, so often called the "eye of the moon." Also called the Cat Mother and the Little Cat. She knew powerful words that would banish powers of darkness. If a person loved and befriended a cat, the animal would tell you those words.

The black cat, associated with both Bast and Pasht, was thought to be especially lucky and was the emblem used by physicians to advertise their services.

Even the poorest Egyptian willingly shared his meager meal with a cat. The Egyptian sacred temple cats, as well as those of Babylon, were believed to act as hosts for human souls. This same belief is found much later among Burmese and Siamese. Any human soul blessed by co-existing with a sacred cat would gain a high spiritual level when the cat finally died.

Ancient Egyptians were among the first cultures to believe cats had the ability to see spirits. Ancient Britons said that if you stared deep into a cat's eyes you would see into the world of spirits.

In the Gold Coast area of Africa, shamans wore cat skins around their necks to help them communicate with spirits.

Gotoku-Jim, the cat's temple in Tokyo, was built about 200 years ago and is still served by priests who wear sacred garments and chant for the cat souls buried there. Around the altar are graves of beloved cats, all covered with tablets on which are inscribed prayers to Buddha for their souls. On the altar are many portrayals of cats on paper and cloth, in porcelain and bronze. Each is shown with a paw upraised to height of its eyes. This peculiar position represents Maneki-Neki, the little female cat who is said to attract good luck and happiness. If her right paw is raised, good luck, or *fuku* is

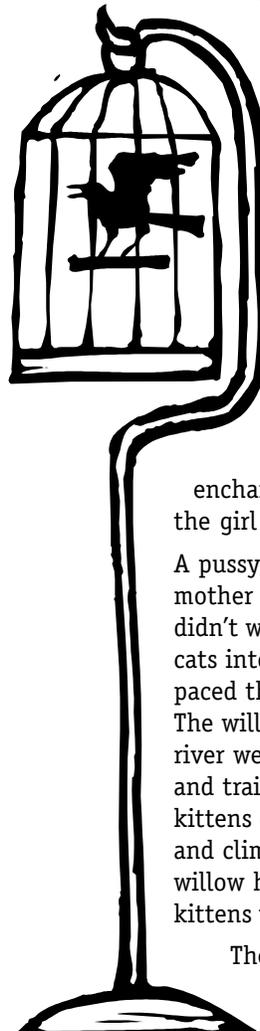


promised. If her left paw is raised, loss of money, or *senyuro*, is foretold.

In Scotland, the Goddess of the Witches was called Mither o' the Mawkins. *Mawkin* or *Malkin* meant either cat or a hare. *Grimalkin* meant gray cat and became a favorite name for pagan cats; gray malkins also meant the catkins on the pussy willow, whose blooming marks the Pagan rites in May.

A little known Greek story tells that the Sun and the Moon created all the animals at the beginning of the world. The Sun first created the lion; not to be outdone, the Moon created the cat, who is infinitely more useful to humans.

An old Irish tale tells of a mysterious island inhabited by people with cat heads. This probably refers to a clan of Irish people who considered the cat their totem and wore helmets shaped like cats' heads. The hero Finn was said to have fought against a tribe of "cat-heads." The warriors of the Irish king, known as Carbar of the Cat's Head, wore the skins of wild cats on their helmets.



A Danish folktale tells of a kind-hearted but mistreated girl who was thrashed for giving milk to hungry, stray cats. In spite of this, she fed the next poor cat to come to the door. After drinking the milk the cat grew very large and pushed off its skin, which it gave to the girl to use as a cloak. Later, the cat returned with beautiful dresses for the girl. Finally, through the girl's kindness, the cat was able to change into human shape; he was the enchanted brother of the king, and he and the girl married.

A pussywillow legend from Poland tells of a mother cat who had kittens her owners didn't want, so the humans threw the baby cats into the river to drown. The mother paced the bank, crying for her little ones. The willows growing along the banks of the river were touched by the mother cat's grief and trailed their branches in the water. The kittens caught the branches in their paws and climbed to safety. Now each spring the willow has little velvet buds, symbolic of the kittens they saved.

The Scottish Highlands are full of tales of elfin or fairy cats, known as the

Cait Sith (cait shee). They are said to be black cats as big as large dogs, with arched backs, erect hair and white spots on their chests. However, the Gaels of the Highlands believed that Cait Sith was a witch transformed into a cat, not a fairy.



Cats on the Isle of Man are said to have their own king. By day this king appears an ordinary cat, but at night he has terrible powers. If anyone mistreats him or his subject cats, the king will seek the person out at night and take horrible revenge.

Witch-hunters and their church supporters believed a cat's glow-in-the-dark eyes were a reflection of the fires in hell. But this night shine is really caused by light reflecting off the guanin on the back of a cat's eyes. Guanin are masses of tiny metallic-like particles coated on the linings at the back of the eye. When struck by light, the guanin particles amplify and brighten any picture focused on the retina. After a certain amount of time these particles retreat into their cells and the eye shine ceases.

A folktale explains how cats got their purr: Once a princess had to spin 10,000 skeins of linen thread in 30 days or her true love would die. She asked three cats to help her. By working day and night, the job was finished on time and the princess was united with her love. The reward to the cats was their purr, which imitates the spinning wheel's whirring sound. The purr doesn't come from the voice box and diaphragm but from the muscles around the voice box—from the mouth and nose, vibrating through the chest. Wild cats purr only on inhaled breath but domestic cats purr while inhaling and exhaling.

Tradition says a cat's meow has 63 notes.

From *Classical Cats*, by Don Engels:

In Muslim folklore cats foretell the future and sacrifice themselves to save humans from death. There is a cult of cats among a North African sect called the Heddawa in which the cats are treated as humans.

An old Welsh rhyme says,
*Wherever the cat of the house is black
The lasses o'lovers will have no lack.*

The black cat's coat color probably originated in the eastern Mediterranean in the fifth century B.C.E. and spread to western Europe shortly after. Black was sacred to the goddess Isis, who wore a black cloak.

In England, as in the eastern Mediterranean, black gives



good luck, and the white cat, because of its ghostly appearance, is unlucky. "It is good for a black cat to come to your house; on no account should it be driven away. When you flit or move to another house, it is unlucky to bring the cat with you. It is all right if the cat follows you of its own accord."

White hairs on necks and breasts of black cats saved them from the Inquisition. Called an "angel's mark" or "God's finger," they kept the cat from being killed as a witch's familiar. That's why completely black cats are, to this day, difficult to find.

From *The Secret Life of Cats*, by Robert de Laroche:

The Khmers believed the first tortie cat was created in a magic ritual performed by an old sage and sprang from the menstrual blood of a young goddess born of a lotus flower.

Cats are said to know the way back to the garden of Eden and to have led the third child of Adam and Eve—Jacob—there. So it is said, "There is always somewhere in the world a child and a cat who know the way back to the Garden of Eden."

Cats sleep 70 percent of the time and dream up to four hours a day. Thus, the Egyptians chose them as the guardians of sleep.

The Irish Celts believed the eye of the cat was a portal to the other world.

Cats, like magic snakes and dragons, were guardians of buried treasure.

The cat is a repository of secrets because the X shape of its whiskers represents the Greek letter chi, the initial letter of chaos (the alchemists' prima materia) and the Greek words for crucible, gold and time—the triple unknown of the Grand Design. The whisker-X was called "light formed by light."

From *Cats of Myth*, Gerald & Loretta Hausman:

In Asia, cats stored the souls of departing rulers in their breasts and carried them to the next world.

The famous Japanese temple cats are called benefactors—felines who look after human beings and help guide them through life.

Asian cat tales say that an ancestor cat is a cat that guards the body and soul of a human being. When that person dies, the cat draws in and holds the essence, or soul, of the individual. In time the cat releases the person's soul and takes it to heaven.

Cat laughter was compared to the music of shells singing on the tide—the very sound that tickles the fancy of destiny, bringing good fortune to all who hear it.

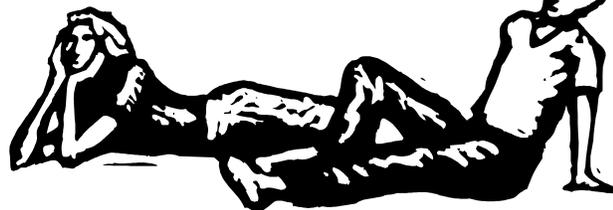
The Greek Galstheos commanded Pharaoh's army at the time of Israel's escape from Egypt and was married to Pharaoh's daughter, Scota. They eventually settled in Portugal. Centuries later, one of their descendants founded Scotland and named it for his progenitor, Scota. His mascot was a cat, and that became the Scottish coat of arms.

Single, standing stones of the Neolithic age in Scotland are known as cat stones. No one knows why.

Matagot is the French good luck cat. Every country on earth has a cat caretaker myth in which the cat comes to help, its spirit manifesting riches or rewards—spiritual, material or both. But the cat isn't really the benefactor. Instead, it is the human's trust of the cat that turns misfortune into personal gain.

It was once believed that because cats had such acute eyesight they could cure human blindness by putting their paw on the membrane of a blind person's eye. Sometimes the cat's tears were used in the same way.

Cats are skilled navigators that make use of a psychic tracking mechanism called psi-trailing. Dr. Michael W. Fox has said animals have a faculty that reduces the dissonance between solar and internal time, an ability to "read" sunlight, to regard the time of day, the season of the year, the elapse of a second, through a subtle internal mechanism. So, possibly using solar and lunar magnetism, the cat may follow its translocational mind as unerringly as



a map. As the cat moves from one place to another, drawing ever close to where it wants to be, it reduces the stress it feels, with regard to the area traversed. In effect, it's saying to itself: "This way feels wrong, change direction; this way feels right, stay on target." If an animal can perceive the time of day or the season, it should be able to find the square mile where it lives by "reading" the sun and the angle of its rays in relation to the expected value its internal clock anticipates. Incongruity is met with motivation to reduce the dissonance between solar and internal time. And the translocated animal is able to find his square mile on the globe.

In Scotland, cat skin and fur was used for burns, rheumatism, hives and sore throats.

Behaviorists also suggest whiskers are an echolocation device and may pick up magnetic impulses from solar bodies. This ties to occult lore, which suggests whiskers are things of great power. In voodoo, for example, they are said to be good for finding what's lost.

An old Japanese cure for stomach cramps was a warm cat laid on the stomach—also good for melancholy and epilepsy.

Cats bring their live catches indoors not to *please* humans but to get us to join in the fun of the hunt.

Cat fur is static-bearing and electrically charged most of the time. Feline behaviorists have proven cats need a certain number of solar hours each week—a large vitamin D infusion—to lead a normal life. A cat's back is a positive storehouse of some amount of electricity, measured by handstrokes from head to tail.

Legend has it that before the arrival of St. Patrick in Ireland, all animals were fluent speakers, but he muted all except the clever cats, who escaped into the Gap of the North (between Slieve Gullion and Carlingford Hills). Some of these cats were restless and went off to Egypt, where they became objects of worship. The cats who escaped into Ulster from the south did not have to go to Egypt to have a good time, for they were long worshipped in Ireland. The deity of Fir Bolg was called Cairbre cin cait (of the cat's head) and was the enemy of the Gaulish Danaan people. Pangur Ban, the first

puss mentioned by name, was friend to an ancient scribe living at Carinthia, who wrote the first documented cat poem.

The self, like a dancing cat, desires to spin, to radiate beyond the prison of the flesh. Truly,

when this energy is set free, it becomes a miracle cat who pirouettes on dancing feet beyond the confines of time and the dissolution of death.

Dilapidated cats come to us, *from us*, a gift to ourselves. And yet, we still haven't the courage to claim them as *us*.

The tortoiseshell cat is the icon of the medicine woman. Torties descended from the common European house cats brought to the United States in the 1600s.

Zen Buddhism says that once the mind is cleansed of itself, nature can take its course, and rightful action becomes clear. A master cat waits for the right time to pounce upon the rat, and so his technique consists of no technique at all.