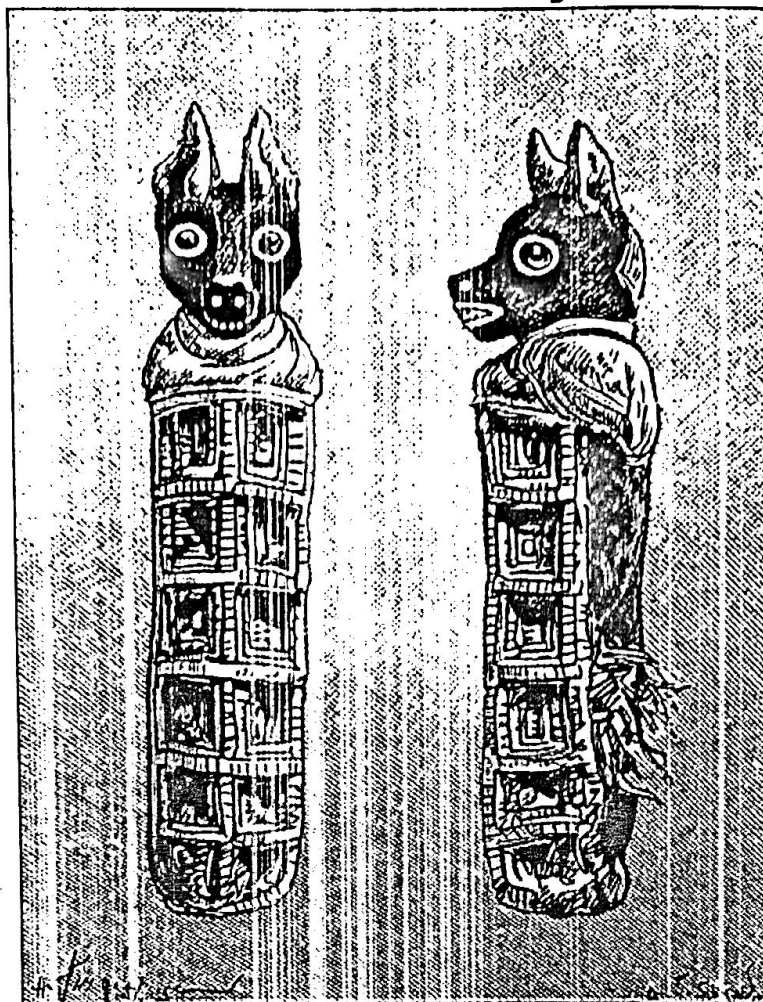


## Pet Cemetery



*Egyptian mummy of a dog*

Salima Ikram has a soft spot for the 3,000-year-old mummy in the display case at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

"I love that dog," she says.

This was no ordinary pooch, but a royal pet. When the dog died, the king's loyal followers mummified the animal and placed it in a crypt in the Valley of the Kings, home to the tombs of several ancient Egyptian rulers.

Ikram, an archaeologist at the American University in Cairo, has spent the past several years examining the museum's more than 200 animal mummies and preparing them to be displayed in a new exhibit.

"This morning I was cleaning one of these 18-foot-long mummified crocodiles and suddenly discovered that there was a baby crocodile in its mouth," Ikram recently told a writer for *Archaeology* magazine. "It was amazing!"

## Pet Friendly

The ancient Egyptians were some of history's best mummy makers. They preserved their dead rulers because they believed that the dead needed their bodies for the journey to the afterlife.

The ancient Egyptians didn't forget about Pharaoh's best friend, either. When a king's favorite pet died, the ancient Egyptians mummified the animal in much the same way as they mummified humans. They then buried the mummified pet in a separate casket alongside its owner.

"The Egyptians loved their pets," she told reporters. "Pet mummies are particularly nice, because you get an idea of ancient Egyptians' love for their animals."

## Gifts to the Gods

Beloved pets weren't the only animals the ancient Egyptians mummified. They mummified birds, fish, shrews, and even monkeys.

They mummified some animals as gifts to the gods. For example, worshipers of Thoth, a wise god whom the ancient Egyptians believed invented written and spoken language, often offered him a mummified ibis (a type of bird) or a baboon as a gift.

Those who worshiped the goddess Bastet, daughter of the sun god Ra, often mummified cats in her honor.

Many ancient Egyptians also mummified the remains of animals that they considered sacred, such as cats, cows, hawks, and falcons.

Others believed animals such as bulls and crocodiles were the living spirits of the gods. The ancient Egyptians pampered these animals, making sure they were superbly well cared for and fed.

"Animal mummies are very, very important, because we can learn not only about the ancient

environment--many of these animals are now extinct in Egypt--but also about ancient Egyptians' beliefs," Ikram said.

## Modern Mummies

For nearly 20 years, Ikram has been studying the dead of ancient Egypt, becoming an expert in animal mummification. She has tried to determine the ingredients ancient Egyptians used to preserve the animals.

One of the main ingredients in the process was natron, a native Egyptian salt often found at the edges of lakes. The salt drew water from a body, turning the skin thick and leathery.

In mummifying animals, the embalmers also used a type of oil called turpentine that kills bacteria. They applied other oils to soften the fur.

Ikram has tried many times to mummify modern-day animals using ancient techniques. She has been successful in many instances.

"Bunnies, ducks, catfish, and Nile perch--they're happy little mummies living forever in my office," she says. "It smells."