

MUMMIFIED CATS AS MANURE

The Birmingham Post 1 Feb 1890

London Correspondence:

An English firm, I hear from a good source, has secured a consignment of several thousand mummified cats, from Egyptian tombs, for the purpose of selling them for manure. These are to be delivered not in bulk, but in powder, it being stated that this, when mixed with certain chemicals, forms an even better fertiliser than the much-talked-of nitrate. As the Egyptians have previously been known to sell the mummies of their ancestors in order that they may be ground into brown paint, of which they are said to be an excellent basis, no wonder need be felt that the remains of the many sacred animals to be found in their tombs should similarly be put to commercial use.

The Belfast Newsletter 3rd Feb 1890

A NEW INDUSTRY.

LONDON. SATURDAY.—An English firm, it is reported, has secured a consignment of several thousand mummified cats from Egyptian tombs for the purpose of selling them for manure. These are to be delivered, not in bulk, but in powder, it being stated that this, when mixed with certain chemicals, forms an even better fertiliser than the much-talked-of nitrate.

Aberdeen Weekly Journal 4th Feb 1890

NOVEL IMPORTATION.—The steamer *Pharos*, belonging to the *Mose Line*, from Alexandria, has (says to-day's (Tuesday) "*Liverpool Journal of Commerce*") just landed in the Alexandria Dock an extraordinary consignment of 20 tons of mummified cats from Egyptian tombs. They have all been stripped of the necessary wrappings, but in every other respect are scented and embalmed. This is an instalment of a quantity to be imported for fertilizing.

A QUEER IMPORTATION.

180,000 MUMMIFIED CATS.

A Liverpool firm has just received a consignment of nineteen tons embalmed cats, which are to be used as manure. The cargo contains no less than 180,000 of the feline species, supposed to have been buried two thousand years before Christ in a subterranean cemetery about two hundred miles from Cairo, into which an Egyptian fellah was accidentally precipitated. The cats were found laid out in rows, one on the top of the other, and carefully embalmed as though Egyptian mummies. They were bought for consignment in Egypt at 73s 9d per ton.

The steamer *Pharos*, belonging to the Moss Line, from Alexandria has (says the *Liverpool Journal of Commerce*) just landed in the Alexandria Dock an extraordinary consignment of 20 tons of mummified cats from Egyptian tombs. They have all been stripped of the necessary wrappings, but in every other respect scented and embalmed. This is an instalment of a quantity to be imported for fertilising purposes.

About 180,000 mummified cats have been imported from Egypt to be used in this country as manure.

A CARGO OF MUMMIFIED CATS.

There has just arrived from Alexandria at Liverpool, by the steamer *Pharos*, a consignment of nearly twenty tons of cats, numbering some 180,000, taken out of an ancient subterranean cats' cemetery discovered about 100 miles from Cairo by an Egyptian fellah, who accidentally fell into this cats' cemetery, which he found completely filled with cats, every one of which had been separately embalmed and dressed in cloth after the manner of Egyptian mummies, and all laid out in rows. Specimens of these have been taken by Mr. Moore, curator of the Liverpool Museum, where they can be seen. In ancient times the Egyptian cat was buried with all honours, but those consigned to Messrs. Levington and Co., of Liverpool, after being purchased in Egypt at £3 13s 9d per ton, will be used in this country as manure.

A CONSIGNMENT OF MUMMIFIED CATS.—Messrs. Leventon and Co., of Liverpool, have just received a consignment of 19 tons of embalmed cats, which are to be used as manure. The cargo contains no less than 180,000 specimens of the feline species, supposed to have been buried 2,000 years B.C. in a subterranean cemetery about 100 miles from Cairo, into which an Egyptian fellah was accidentally precipitated. The cats were found laid out in rows one on top of the other, and carefully embalmed as though they were Egyptian mummies, and bought for consignment in Egypt at 73s. 9d. per ton.

(Longer article in the Daily Post on 16th about the role of the cat in Egypt etc...)

THE latest remedy for distressed agriculture consists of embalmed cats. We have heard some disputation lately about the loss of fertility in the earth. In order to do something in a small way to restore that lost fertility, a Liverpool firm has just imported from Egypt nineteen tons of embalmed cats to be used as manure. These cats, being regarded by their Egyptian owners as holy creatures, were buried in a vast subterranean chamber lately discovered. The price was 73s. 9d. a ton, which seems cheap, for it must take several hundreds of embalmed cats to go to a ton. In fact, there were 180,000 cats in the nineteen tons, so that the problem can easily be worked out. The present market price of mummified cats is only one-tenth of a penny each. In the Colchester Museum there is one sacred mummified Egyptian cat exhibited as a treasure of remarkable value and interest. Yet here there are 180,000 of these holy beasts brought over to this country, after many centuries of solemn repose, to be cast upon the ground as manure. After all they have been idle long enough, and we can only hope that they will be more useful in this country than they ever were in their own.

SALE OF FELINE MUMMIES.

AMUSING SCENE.

At noon yesterday Messrs James Gordon and Co. sold by auction, at Liverpool, eight and a half tons of mummified cats from Egypt. The mummified cats, which came from Beni Hassan, about 100 miles from Cairo, were consigned to Messrs Kleinworth, Sons, and Co., Liverpool. They were brought to Liverpool in 100 bags by the steamer Thebes, from Egypt. The sale attracted a very large number of Liverpool merchants. Mr J. C. Gordon, who conducted the sale of the cats, said that Professor Conway had written an article about them, and had expressed his belief that they were from

3000 TO 4000 YEARS OLD.

They had in the room that day a basket of the mummified bones as a specimen of what the remaining bones were like. The bones would be sold at so much a ton. He would like an offer. The bidding commenced at £3 per ton, and gradually advanced to £5 17s 6d, at which sum they were knocked down to Messrs Leventon and Co. Messrs Leventon and Co. were the purchasers of the other consignment of mummified cats, which were disposed of a short time ago. The price per ton then realised was £3 13s 9d. A large number of single cats' heads were next sold at prices varying from 1s 9d to 4s 6d each. The reason the cats heads were sold singly was because the brokers had been deluged with letters asking if they would sell specimens as samples. The mummies are broken into fragments, few perfect specimens remaining. They were packed very tightly into bags for the purpose of saving freights. The first cat's head which was disposed of brought an offer of 1s 3d. Mr Gordon said the head belonged to

A BEAUTIFUL TOM,

and was worth more (laughter). The bidding for the head slowly advanced in price, and was knocked down to a Mr Gorst for 8s 3d. The head of another cat, which Mr Gordon assured his audience was that of a *bona fide* Tom cat, brought 3s. A fine specimen of a cat's head and neck, with a portion of the mummy cloth on, realised 4s. Mr Gordon displayed a cat's head with all the teeth intact, and this brought an offer of 2s 6d. The auctioneer, who remarked that the teeth were worth more, succeeded in obtaining 4s for the head. Another cat's head, which Mr Gordon said was

LIKE THAT OF A HUMAN BEING,

realised 2s 6d. Many of the specimens were purchased by Mr Gorst, and it was remarked by the auctioneer that Mr Gorst was obtaining valuable specimens (laughter), and that he would sell them again to museums at £4 and £5 each (loud laughter). Another mummified cat's head, with the jaws open, excited some ridicule among the buyers. One gentleman asked were its eyes open, and Mr Gordon responded by saying—The cat is

ASLEEP WITH ONE EYE OPEN.

The head is a perfect study for a sweet face (laughter). The head was knocked down for 3s 3d. The auctioneer next displayed what he termed a very fine specimen of a cat's face, though not a handsome one, and this was sold for 2s. Some amusement was evoked over the sale of the hindquarters of a cat, to which were attached its two hind feet. Mr Gordon displayed the feet in question to his audience, and giving both feet a pull for the purpose of showing the claws, remarked that they would come off. Some old gentlemen—evidently scientists—who were in the room urged the auctioneer not to break the feet, and a voice cried,

"HANDLE THAT TOM CAT GENTLY."

The specimen in question was sold for 5s 6d. The hind leg of a cat realised 1s 9d, and a cat's paw with the nails intact 1s 3d. The sale from first to last evoked great merriment, and it was quite a study to watch the interest which a few men of science looked upon the affair as compared to the banter indulged in by men of business. Messrs Leventon and Co., who bought the mummified cats by the ton, intend to grind them up into manure. It is stated on good authority that the remains of Egyptian mummified human beings have before now been ground in English mills for manure.

MUMMIFIED CATS AS MANURE. — Yesterday Messrs. James Gordon and Co., produce brokers, of Liverpool, sold at their offices, 9, Rumbold-street, 8½ tons of mummified cats' bones. The animals had come from Egypt, and were said to be somewhere about 2,000 years old. The cats had been buried by the ancient Egyptians with all the reverence due to the feline race, according to the Egyptian doctrine. Few of the cats auctioned were perfect, but amongst the bones were numerous heads in an excellent state of preservation, the hair being perfect in colour and flexibility. Owing to the publicity given to a former consignment, there was a crowded attendance of people. Some 30 heads of the animals were offered for auction, and were most eagerly purchased at prices varying from 1s. 6d. to 5s. There were plenty of buyers at the latter rate, but Messrs. Gordon and Co. would not offer any further ones, and eventually all of the bones were knocked down to Messrs. Leventon and Co., of Hackins Hey, Liverpool, at £5 17s. per ton. These gentlemen are importers of bones from the different Mediterranean ports, and of guano, and the mummified cats are now being ground up by Messrs. Leventon for fertilising purposes.

These mummified Egyptian cats sold so well yesterday in Liverpool that further search in the cemeteries of Pharaoh-land is certain, as a response to an active commercial demand. Four shillings and sixpence was the sum paid for single heads, and one complete body without head fetched one shilling additional. The curiosity-monger has no doubt ulterior intentions with these specimens. Taken by the ton, the cats raised £5 17s. 6d., and considered purely as fertilisers for the agriculturist, this may not be a cheap speculation on the part of buyers.

(A summary report also in 15th Feb edition)

For "relics" of all kinds and descriptions to come under the auctioneer's hammer is by no means an uncommon circumstance. Family heirlooms and tokens and remains of bygone civilisations, objects of curiosity and antiquarian interest pass from one owner to another as the "lots" are knocked down to the highest bidder. It must, nevertheless, be admitted that very seldom has a stranger duty been entrusted to one of the profession than that discharged yesterday by Mr. J. C. Gordon when he displayed the samples of mummified cats that have recently been dug from an Egyptian cemetery near Cairo. Millenniums have run their course since the cat was held so sacred on the banks of the Nile that it was customary for the inhabitants of a house in which one of the animals died to shave their eyebrows as a token of mourning, and when they were worshipped while alive and embalmed when dead. The grotesque specimens that were handled so unceremoniously and excited such mirth in Rumford-street yesterday were no doubt interred with all the pomp and circumstance of Egyptian ritual. Few ideas could have been further from the imaginations of the ecclesiastical dignitaries who officiated than that a few thousand years afterwards the sacred remains, embalmed with so much care, would be dug up by sacrilegious hands, rudely stuffed into bags, and transported to unknown northern lands, there to be bought and sold, and finally ground up and used for manuring the fields. There was not, however, an entire absence of reverence in the mixed multitude gathered to take part in or watch the unusual sale of departed greatness. Grave men of science were there, anxious to secure relics of the worship of past ages, and accordingly portions of the ill-looking mummies were sold for sums which, though small in themselves, were rather more respectful in character than the few pounds per ton that the bulk went for. It is hardly probable that the singular deposits in what is now the Egyptian desert will long supply the insatiable demands of our agriculturists for fertilisers; it is rather likely that a purchase of ground mummy cats for manure by a farmer will remain as a memory and a tale to be told in days to come.

The Birmingham Post 11 Feb 1890

Nine tons of mummified cats from Egypt were sold by auction in Liverpool yesterday, this being the second consignment. There was a keen competition, the room being crowded. Heads brought as much as 4s. 6d. each, a complete body without head 5s. 6d., some bones 3s., while the bulk was disposed of at £5. 17s. 6d. per ton. The consignment was pronounced inferior to the first batch.

The Huddersfield Daily Chronicle 11 Feb 1890

On Monday a consignment of nine tons of embalmed mummified cats from Egypt were offered for sale by auction in Liverpool. The saleroom was crowded. Extraordinary prices were paid.

The Standard (London) 11 Feb 1890

A consignment of nine tons of fragments of embalmed mummified cats from Egypt was offered for sale yesterday by auction in Liverpool. The sale-room was crowded. Heads were separately offered, and the competition was keen, as much as 4s. 6d. being paid for a head. A complete body without head brought 5s. 6d. Some bones fetched 3s. each, while the bulk fetched 5l. 17s. 6d. per ton.

Manchester Times 15th Feb 1890

From "Fun":

A FORTUNATE CAT-ASTROPHE.—In the category of consignments surely that of twenty thousand mummified cats, recently arrived at Liverpool from Egypt, is the queerest. It impresses the imagination and appeals to the felines to consider that, after being buried decently for four thousand years, they have been exhumed to furnish manure for a distant land. They were discovered in a cats' cemetery—a famous cat-acomb in its day, about a hundred miles from Cairo—somewhere about the first cat-aract, isn't it?—by an Egyptian fellah—lucky fellah this!—who accidentally fell-ah into it and a good thing at the same time. From the locality of the discovery we presume that on this special occasion Cairo did neither kill the cats nor bury them.

The Chester Observer 15th Feb 1890

SELLING MUMMIFIED CATS BY AUCTION.—On Monday, Messrs James Gordon and Co., produce brokers, of Liverpool, sold at their offices, 9, Bamford-street, 8½ tons of mummified cats' bones. The animals had come from Egypt, and were said to be somewhere about 2,000 years old. Few of the cats put up to auction were perfect, but there were numerous heads in excellent state of preservation, the hair being perfect in colour and flexibility. Owing to the publicity given to a former consignment, there was a crowded attendance. Some 30 heads of the animals were offered, and were eagerly purchased at prices varying from 1s 6d to 5s. The bones were knocked down to Messrs Leventon and Co., of Haakins Hey, Liverpool, at £5 17s per ton.

Reynold's Newspaper 16th February 1890

THE TRADE IN MUMMIFIED CATS.—Nine tons of mummified cats from Egypt were sold by auction in Liverpool on Monday, this being the second consignment. There was a keen competition, the room being crowded. Heads brought as much as 4s. 6d. each; complete body without head, 5s. 6d.; some bones, 3s.; while the bulk was disposed of at £5 17s. 6d. per ton. The consignment was pronounced inferior to the first batch.

MUMMIFIED CATS' HEADS.—Recent arrival in Liverpool. A Specimen 6s. 3000 years B.C.—CROSS, Naturalist, Liverpool. 70,000 Bundles of PEACOCKS' FEATHERS. 8830

BANGOR MUSEUM.

SIR,—The Museum Committee of the Bangor Corporation should make an effort to secure some additional attractions at the institution which the late Captain Jones generously bequeathed to the city; and they might secure one or two specimens of "mummified cats," now on their way to Liverpool. The expense would not be great. A couple of complete cats could be obtained for 10s 6d. I understand that there are now on view at the University College museum some heads of these sacred but defunct animals; but I should prefer to view complete specimens. Could not Mr Lewis Jones, of Garth School, manage to obtain for Mr Peter Williams, the curator, another head of a Patagonian Indian?—Yours truly,

GRIMALKIN.

Louisa: "What very delicious grapes these are, dear. How I do enjoy them!" Julia: "Yes, they are nice. You know there were some big sales of Egyptian mummified cats in Liverpool back in the spring, and pa bought half a ton and had them used under the grapes and tomatoes." Tableau.

FOREIGN BIRDS AND ANIMALS.—500 Parrots, grey and green; 1000 Tortoises, 7000 bundles Peacocks' Feathers, small Foreign Birds, African Orioles, Nonpariels, 30,000 Gold Fish, Pet Monkeys, Pet Animals, Toy Dog, Antelopes, Deers, Buffaloes, Emus, Fancy Ducks, Kangaroos, over 20 Lions, Royal Tiger, Puma Lions, Hyenas, Wolves, Bears, Eagles, Vultures, Singing Canaries, 500 Cages; Black, White, and Black Neck Swans; 13 Macaws, Foxes, Pet Bear, 300 large Serpents, Crocodiles, Persian Cats, Wonderfully Carved Japanese Sword; Mummified Cats Heads, 1000 years (B.C.); 11 small Shetland Ponies; 2 Stallions, handsome, go in harness, a perfect show; 2 large American Mules, go together; Wonderful Talking Parrot, War Weapons, 500 Ostrich Eggs, and a host of Stock too numerous to mention. Stock purchased, shipped, or imported to order.—Cross, Liverpool, the greatest Emporium on Earth. 118a17

CARELESS COLLECTORS

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—With reference to Mr. Martin's letter in *The Times* of to-day, may I remark that it is not only the careless collector who has been responsible for enthusiasts of a later day enjoying the at least temporarily thrilling experience of a wonderful find?

There is the case of the arrow-heads observed upon a farmhouse mantelpiece in Scotland by an antiquary who, recognizing the type as something never before found in Northern Europe, questioned his host. The farmer replied that when ploughing he frequently turned up these strange specimens, a statement verified when the antiquary himself went into the fields with a spade. The exciting news was communicated to a learned society in London, and a party travelled specially to Scotland to make further investigations; possibly an entire recasting of the archæology of the British Isles was averted when it came to light that a predecessor of the farmer had used as fertilizer several loads of broken mummy-cats, at one time exported from Egypt for this purpose. With the mummy fragments had come the arrow-heads.

It was in Scotland, too, that a New Zealand *mere* (greenstone axe) was once found; and one of the fine carved celts from the island of Santo Domingo was some years ago unearthed in the Ardennes.

Yours faithfully,

April 26.

T. A. J.

Mummified cats

The Daily Telegraph [London (UK)] 06 Aug 2005: 023.

SIR - Cats were indeed once worshipped by ancient Egyptians (Letters, August 5). They mummified them and buried them in sacred cemeteries in Beni Hassan, 100 miles from Cairo. Four thousand years later an Alexandrian merchant dug up 180,000 of them and sold them to a Liverpoolian guano and bone dealer. In 1890, two steamships, Phou and Thebes, shipped 19 tons of disintegrating cats to Liverpool for conversion into fertiliser.

Some of the more complete mummies were auctioned, and it was reported that the auctioneer used a "pussy's head as a hammer" to amuse his clients. One of these cats is in the Liverpool Museum.

As Mark Twain said: "If man could be crossed with a cat, it would improve man but would deteriorate the cat."

Val Lewis

Shepperton, Middx

MUMMIFIED CATS.

A Feline Cemetery in Central Egypt Labeled of Its Dead.

A cat four thousand years old is not altogether a familiar object to Englishmen, and can scarcely be regarded as an every-day visitor to these shores. The arrival, therefore, of 19½ tons of such cats in Liverpool is an incident that can not but lay a heavy strain upon the British capacity for experiencing amazement. Not the least astonishing feature of this unique event is that the consignment in question, described with commercial crispness as "a parcel of embalmed cats," consists exclusively of feline mummies, aptly, but accidentally, culled from a catacomb in Central Egypt. There are no fewer than 100,000 of these swathed and spiced remains in the "parcel" that reached this country a few days ago, and they have already been sold for fertilizing purposes to a Liverpool manure merchant, the auctioneer who disposed of them using one of the deceased cat's heads as a hammer wherewith to knock down the "lots."

According to a correspondent, it has long been believed in Egyptological circles that a huge cat cemetery was in existence "somewhere about" on the left bank of the Nile. One day last autumn a fellah husbandman, while engaged in the agricultural pursuit of digging at a place called Beni Hassan, discovered this ancient burial ground by a very simple process. The soil which he was turning into a pit which, on further examination, proved to be a spacious subterranean cave, tenanted by uncounted legions of dead cats. Every one of these corpses had been sedulously embalmed, and swaddled so to speak, in cloth cements, in the very best style of the undertaker's craft, as practised in the land

of the Pharaohs some twenty centuries before the commencement of the Christian era.

The news of this strange discovery spread swiftly through Beni Hassan and the adjoining districts, whence laborers soon flocked to the newly-opened cave, and set to work with might and main to disinter its venerable occupants. Why these cats had been mummified, and when they had come to be arranged so systematically in their subterranean quarters, were secondary considerations, naturally enough, to the bucolic Egyptian mind—in fact, "the sort of things no fellah could understand," but the peasants of the Nile are keenly alive to the commercial value of embalmed "cats and dogs, and each obscene beast, to which Egyptian dotards once did bow," either as high-class manure or as a peculiarly quick and fragrant combustible. With exemplary promptitude and dispatch, therefore, they dug up some hundreds of thousands of mummies, several "lots" of which were purchased on the spot by local farmers, while others found their way down river to the storehouses of an Alexandria merchant. This worthy, being of a speculative turn of mind, shipped them off to Liverpool "on sale or return," where they fetched a trifle less than £4 a ton. Thus, for a matter of three "ponies" or so, a British "bone-buyer" has become the sole possessor of nearly 200,000 fine old crusted Egyptian cats, each of which, at the time of its decease, had been deemed worthy of special embalment and honorable sepulture, according to the rites of Memphis, Bubastis and Thebes, "in that case made and provided."—London Telegraph.