

# The Significance of Predynastic Canid Burials in Ancient Egypt

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*Dog burials have been found in Egypt dating as far back as the Badarian culture. During the Predynastic period they were found buried individually or in groups of two or more, associated with individual human burials, or within human cemeteries or settlements. The dogs have frequently been reported as pets, which appears to be a modern interpretation. By studying the early excavation reports and considering the positioning and the location of the dog burials, a pattern emerges suggesting that these burials were deliberate. They were located on the extremities of cemeteries, and when found directly associated with a human, the dog was placed at the foot of the grave. While the dogs may have been 'pets' in life, their function in the funerary context was that of a protector.*

*Les plus anciennes sépultures de chiens connues en Égypte datent de l'époque badarienne. Au cours de la période prédynastique des chiens ont été enterrés individuellement ou en groupes, associés à des sépultures humaines individuelles, au sein de cimetières ou encore sur des zones d'habitat. Dans ces contextes les chiens sont généralement identifiés à des animaux de compagnie, ce qui semble être une interprétation moderne.*

*L'emplacement et la disposition des sépultures de chiens d'après les fouilles anciennes suggèrent en effet que ces inhumations ne sont pas placées n'importe où. Elles sont situées aux extrémités des cimetières, et lorsque les animaux sont directement associés à des êtres humains, les chiens étaient placés au pied de la tombe. Bien que les chiens puissent avoir été considérés comme des « animaux de compagnie » de leur vivant, ils avaient en contexte funéraire une fonction protectrice.*

## Introduction

Evidence for the burial of dogs in Ancient Egypt can be found from the Predynastic to the Graeco-Roman period. It has often been assumed that the existence of dog burials in the Predynastic relates to the burial of a pet or companion. This paper will argue that a closer analysis of the primary evidence indicates that the location of the graves, the careful placement and positioning of the remains, and the lack of accompanying grave goods associated with many of these dog burials, indicates a more significant role of the dog, that of protector.

When reference is made to a dog burial it should be understood as the deliberate interment of an articulated body of a single dog, or a substantial part of a dog, found with no evidence of butchering marks (Grant 1984: 533-4).

As practically all the recorded Predynastic canid burials have been classified as 'dogs' (Petrie 1901; Reisner 1908; 1910a; Ayrton & Loat 1911; Engelbach 1923; Lythgoe 1965; Debono & Mortensen 1988; Rizkana & Seeher 1990; Dreyer et al. 2000; Midant-Reynes & Buchez 2002; Friedman et al. 2011), and dogs are commonly seen as pets, it has often been assumed that these animals were buried because they were 'pets'.

This assumption is most likely influenced by the current concept of a pet. A pet is considered to be a domesticated or tamed creature, kept as a companion and cared for affectionately,<sup>1</sup> leading to the establishment of a bond or relationship between the human and the animal. Russell considers the term 'pet' to mean a tame animal kept for companionship and in terms of both morphology and control of breeding, pets can be either wild or domestic (Russell 2012: 260). In the Predynastic dog burials, it was assumed that the pet dog was buried with the human so that the relationship could continue in the afterlife (Friedman et al. 2011: 120; Ikram 2013: 301).

This conclusion is too simplistic to be the only explanation, as dog remains recovered from excavations around the world have been interpreted as totemic (Insoll 2011),<sup>2</sup> as connected with the Underworld, as purifying agents, as healing agents, as connected with agricultural rituals, and as foundation offerings to provide protection (De Grossi Mazzorin & Minniti 2002: 62-65). Egyptian dogs in particular have been interpreted as a pet, as sacred, as votive, as a food offering (Ikram & Dodson 1998: 131), or as providing an amuletic function as argued in Late period dog burials (Hartley, Buck & Binder 2011).

Understanding the role of the living dog within the Predynastic communities comes fundamentally from images found on early rock art (Winkler 1938a, 1938b; Hendrickx et al. 2009; Morrow et al. 2010; Darnell 2011) and Naqada I-II White Cross-lined pottery (Graff 2009; Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2012), where the dog is repeatedly depicted in scenes representing the desert hunt. By Naqada II the hunt was no longer considered to be a matter of subsistence, but a prerogative of the elite (Linseele et al. 2009: 120; Hendrickx 2010: 128),<sup>3</sup> whose privileged positions were maintained by their participation in the hunt and ensuing capture of wild animals which were kept in captivity

1. Definition of a pet from online dictionary [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) (accessed November 9, 2014).

2. Insoll defines totemism as 'the use of plants and animals by social groups as guardians or emblems that are ritually celebrated' (Insoll 2011: 1007).

3. For a discussion on the privileged position of the hunter and the value of the hunting dog in Pre-modern Europe, see Menache (2000: 47-53).

for future ritual use (Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2012: 58-9). The position of the dog and its part in the hunt is an established early icon which continued to be found on later Old Kingdom tomb walls, confirming that the dog, the hunt and the elite were closely affiliated (Zahradnik 2009; Listemann 2010). As Predynastic dogs are not portrayed in other contexts, their role as guardian of flocks and herds, protector of communities, pets and companions are all assumed. However it is predominantly these daily life functions that have influenced the interpretation of the dog burials.

The existing theories for the relevance of dog burials in Egypt can be classified into four separate categories: pet/companion, hunting aid, protector or food offering. It is possible these theories are largely underexplored due to our continued acceptance of the dog's role as a pet. The argument in favour of the pet/companion theory is typically found as small commentary in larger bodies of work, with the primary purpose of the reports relating to the broader topic of all animal burials. The existing body of literature will be considered prior to a more specific analysis of tomb and burial reports.

The pet theory is supported by Reisner (1910a: 116) who interpreted the Early A-Group culture dog burials at Shellal and Khor Bahan, based on the fact that a number of the dogs were found with remains of what could have been collars and leashes. This pet perspective is shared by Brunton (1948: 22) who interpreted a dog burial at Matmar, where the dog was placed in its own wooden coffin, buried at the foot of the human grave, as being the deceased's pet.<sup>4</sup>

The broader topic of animal mummies has been dealt with at length by Ikram and Dodson (Ikram & Dodson 1998; Ikram 2005) and dogs are documented in these works. These mummies have been categorised as pet, sacred, votive and food offering (Ikram & Dodson 1998: 131). In a recent work Ikram (2013) differentiates between dogs buried with humans as opposed to dogs buried independently. She argues that dogs buried directly with humans are typically examples of the pet category based on the reasoning that 'the animal and its master could spend eternity together' (Ikram 2013: 301). Ikram acknowledges that a number of Late Period human/dog burials interpreted as amuletic by Hartley, Buck & Binder (2011) could well have had a protective function,<sup>5</sup> but sees the primary purpose of Predynastic dog burials as pets or companions.

In the discussion of animal burials at HK6 (Friedman et al. 2011) it is suggested that the dogs buried with humans were placed there to 'meet the expected needs in the afterlife such as the continued companionship of a beloved animal' or they were buried with the deceased as a valued hunting aid (Friedman et al. 2011: 120).

Initially Friedman (2010: 72) suggested that specified graves, consisting of multiple animals without grave goods, could be considered as markers of the boundaries or corners of precincts or complexes, serving as spiritual guardians and protectors. However, she does not refer to dog burials alone, but rather considers the multiple burials of all domestic or wild animals in specific posi-

4. Brunton also suggests that bones of animals, but not necessarily complete skeletons, placed at the foot of a grave probably should be interpreted as a pet (Brunton 1948:22).

5. For a further analysis and interpretation of Late/Hellenistic human/dog burials, particularly child/dog burials from Qasr Allam see Colin, Adam & Pranjic, who have used a multidisciplinary approach to expand the amuletic protective role of the dog proposed by Hartley, Buck & Binder, linking a number of child/dog burials to Anubis' role in provoking vitality to infants at child birth and rejuvenating the deceased at death (Colin et al. 2014).

tions in the cemetery to hold this important significance. This paper specifically considers the placement of dogs, and will argue that the placement of the dog was symbolic of a protector function. The significance of other animals buried within human cemeteries is beyond the scope of this paper, however it is highly unlikely that sheep, goats, cattle, or any of the wild animals found in burials held a protective role in life that could be considered a protective role in the afterlife.<sup>6</sup>

Flores' research relates to all animal burials in the Predynastic period (Flores 2003), however only a portion of her work relates to specific dog burials. Her analysis presents two theories for the significance of the dog buried with a human as being either a pet, reflecting a personal relationship with the deceased, or a prized possession, reflecting the economic value of the dog in the community (Flores 2003: 57). Flores based this interpretation on the images of the dog as part of the desert hunt, found on early rock art and pottery.

Flores also briefly explores the possible significance of individual dog burials as an extension of their role as protector of the flocks, magically or symbolically transposed into the needs of the afterlife (Flores 2003: 65).<sup>7</sup> It is this alternative protector theory that needs to be examined in greater detail.

This guardian or spiritual protector theory was initially proposed by Moustafa (1955) who reported on the skeletal remains of a dog found in the Maadi cemetery. In his concluding remarks he briefly touched on the idea that the dog had been buried in connection with its function as a watch dog or guard. He believed the Predynastic dog was already worshipped and saw the burial of one dog among a multitude of humans in the cemetery as evidence for the dog's guardianship role (Moustafa 1955: 109).

Debono and Mortensen (1988) saw the possibility that the dogs in the nearby Heliopolis cemetery were buried as symbolic guardians at the edges of the cemetery, however they did not explore this theory further, and went on to suggest that the dogs may have been buried as hunting companions to accompany the deceased in the 'next life' (Debono & Mortensen 1988: 47).

The guardian or spiritual protector theory is only presented as a possibility for burials containing one or multiple dogs, without a human. This paper will extend the guardian/protector interpretation to include dogs buried in association with humans.

The final theory of the significance of dog burials in the Predynastic period was that the dogs served the function of a food offering for the deceased. Gransard-Desmond (2004) in his research into pre-pharaonic dogs in Egypt and the Sudan, explored this possible food offering theory, based on the practice of eating dogs, known to have occurred in contemporary regions of Africa (Gransard-Desmond 2004: 27-8).<sup>8</sup> However, he accepts that the lack of evi-

6. For a comprehensive interpretation of all animal burials in the Predynastic period see Flores (2003).

7. Dog burials have been documented from the cemeteries at Kerma in the Sudan (Chaix 1999), appearing during the Ancient Kerma (2500 – 2050 BC) sequence and increasing in number during the Middle Kerma (2050 – 1750 BC), placing them slightly later than the predynastic Egyptian dog burials included in this study. Single and multiple dog burials occurred with humans and also with complete sheep and goats (Chaix 1999: 110). Chaix considered the motivation behind the burial of a dog with a human to be that of a companion in the afterlife, or when buried with a number of sheep or goats, to be that of a shepherd dog for the small flock (Chaix 1999: 117).

8. Gransard-Desmond specifically notes that the burial of parts of dogs, especially the skull, could indicate the burial of a food offering, but accepts that more evidence is needed before this conclusion can be made (Gransard-Desmond 2004: 29).

dence consistent with butchering or burning on any Egyptian dog skeletal remains makes it unlikely that the dog was eaten.

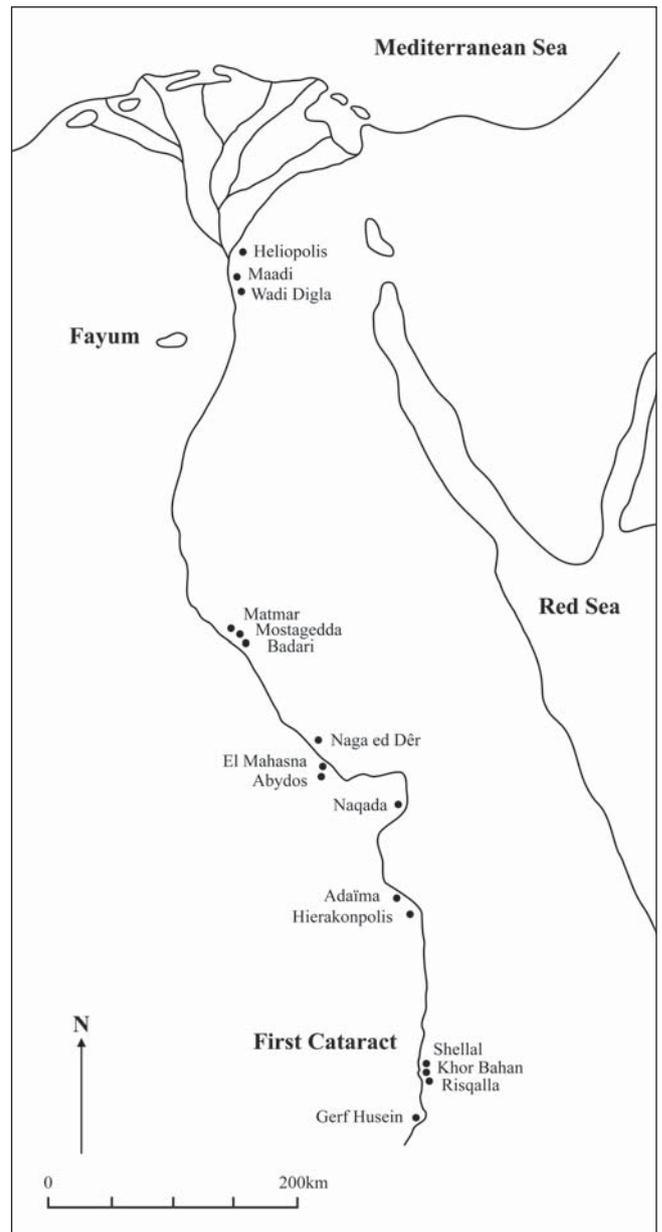
From the existing evidence there appears to be a strong predilection towards explaining the presence of the dogs as pets/companions, particularly if they are buried in association with a human. The purpose of dogs buried without humans, individually or in groups, is mentioned briefly however not thoroughly investigated, hence this paper will explore the theory that all Predynastic dog burials may have served the function of protector in the Predynastic funerary beliefs. It is therefore necessary to re-examine the existing excavation reports and papers in light of this possibility.

## Earliest Evidence

Within the Predynastic period dog burials have been found in four separate cultures. The Badarian (ca. 5000-4000 BC), the Lower Egyptian (Maadi-Buto) (ca. 3900-3000 BC), the Naqada (ca. 4000-3000 BC) and A-Group cultures (ca 3800-3400 BC),<sup>9</sup> located from the north to the south of Egypt (Fig. 1) are among the earliest Egyptian cultures to provide evidence for the careful placement of an articulated dog (s)<sup>10</sup> in the ground.

## Evidence from the Badarian culture

Possibly the earliest culture in Egypt to provide evidence for dog burials is the Badarian Culture (ca. 5000-4000 BC). Two separate cemeteries, one located at Badari (Brunton & Caton-Thompson 1928)<sup>11</sup> and another located at Mostagedda (Brunton 1937), record canid burials.<sup>12</sup>



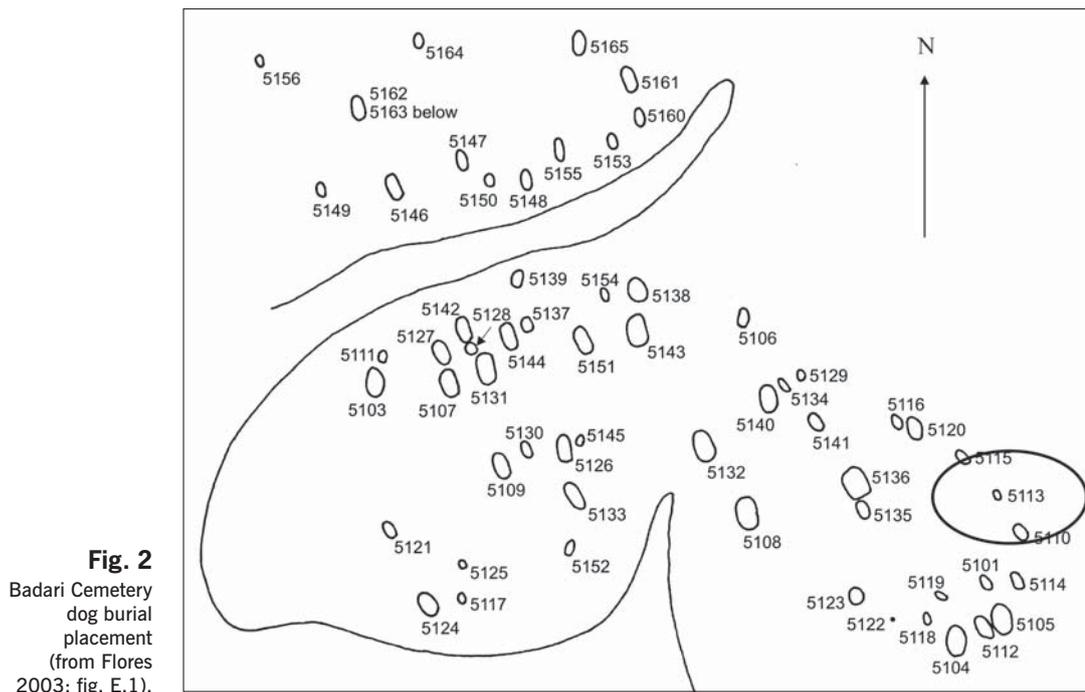
**Fig. 1**  
Map of the  
Predynastic sites  
cited in the text.

9. Unless stated otherwise, all dates are taken from Hendrickx "Predynastic-Early Dynastic Chronology" (Hendrickx 2006: 55-93). The dating for early A-Group culture is from Gatto (2000: 108).

10. Although many early excavation reports record canid burials as 'dogs', it is possible that other members of the Canidae family may have been included in this practice, as morphologically similar jackals (*Canis aureus lupaster*) and foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*), (*Vulpes rueppelli*), (*Fennecus zerdea*) were present at this time (Osborn & Helmy 1980; Gransard-Desmond 2004; Listemann 2010) and it is possible that the African wild dog (*Lycaon pictus*) was also present (Osborn & Osbornová 1998; Nowak 2005).

11. Seven cemeteries with about 262 human burials were found in the immediate vicinity of Badari. A single canid burial was found in cemetery 5100, and excavators believed this cemetery held the burials of the more important individuals (Brunton & Caton-Thompson 1928: 7).

12. Brunton & Caton-Thompson recorded the burial at Badari as 'dog or jackal' (Brunton & Caton-Thompson 1928: 7). Brunton questioned the burial at Mostagedda as "dog (?), the skeleton of an animal probable a dog" (Brunton 1937: 41).



**Fig. 2**  
Badari Cemetery  
dog burial  
placement  
(from Flores  
2003: fig. E.1).

Burial 5113 from Badari, was an independent canid burial located on the eastern edge of the cemetery in an arc of human burials (**fig. 2**). No plan or sketch was made of cemetery 3500 at Mostagedda, therefore placement cannot be determined. However, these two burials display several interesting similarities. Both animals had been carefully placed in the ground, lying on their sides with heads in a southerly direction, both had been covered in matting, and neither animal was buried with any grave goods. Unfortunately neither age nor gender was specified for either animal.<sup>13</sup>

### Evidence from the Lower Egyptian (Maadi-Buto) culture

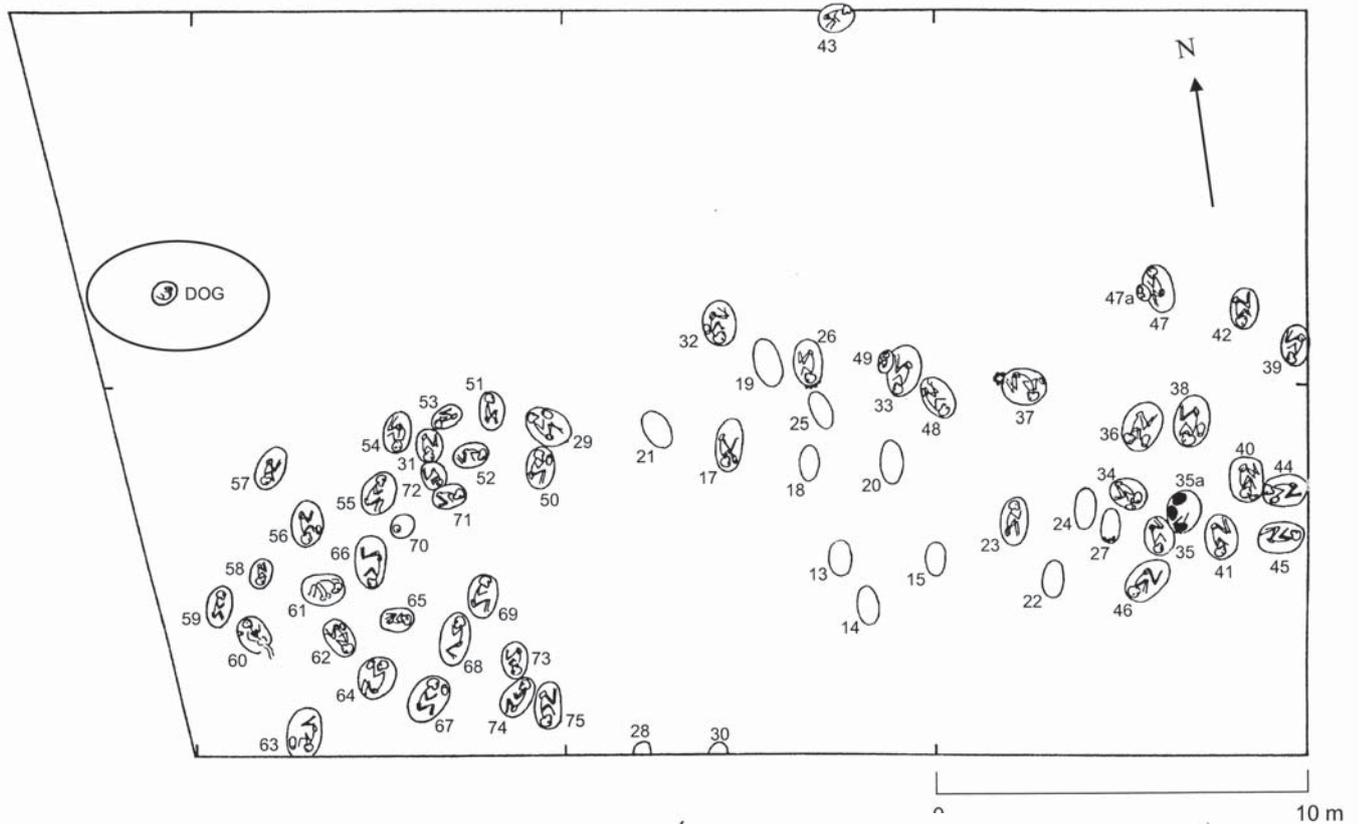
The Lower Egyptian (Maadi-Buto) Culture (ca. 3900-3000 BC) ran roughly contemporaneously with the Naqada culture (Hendrickx 1999: 19), and dog burials were found in three separate cemeteries, one at Maadi (Rizkana & Seeher 1990), one at Heliopolis (Debono & Mortensen 1988) and one at Wadi Digla (Rizkana & Seeher 1990).

A total of seven independent dog burials were identified at these three sites. All the animals were adult dogs, lying on their sides, without grave goods.<sup>14</sup> Remains of matting were found with only one dog.<sup>15</sup> These seven burials also display other interesting similarities, especially the location of the graves within each cemetery. The Maadi burial (**fig. 3**) was located on the north-western perimeter of the cemetery (Flores 2003: fig. E.4), the Heliopolis burials (**fig. 4**)

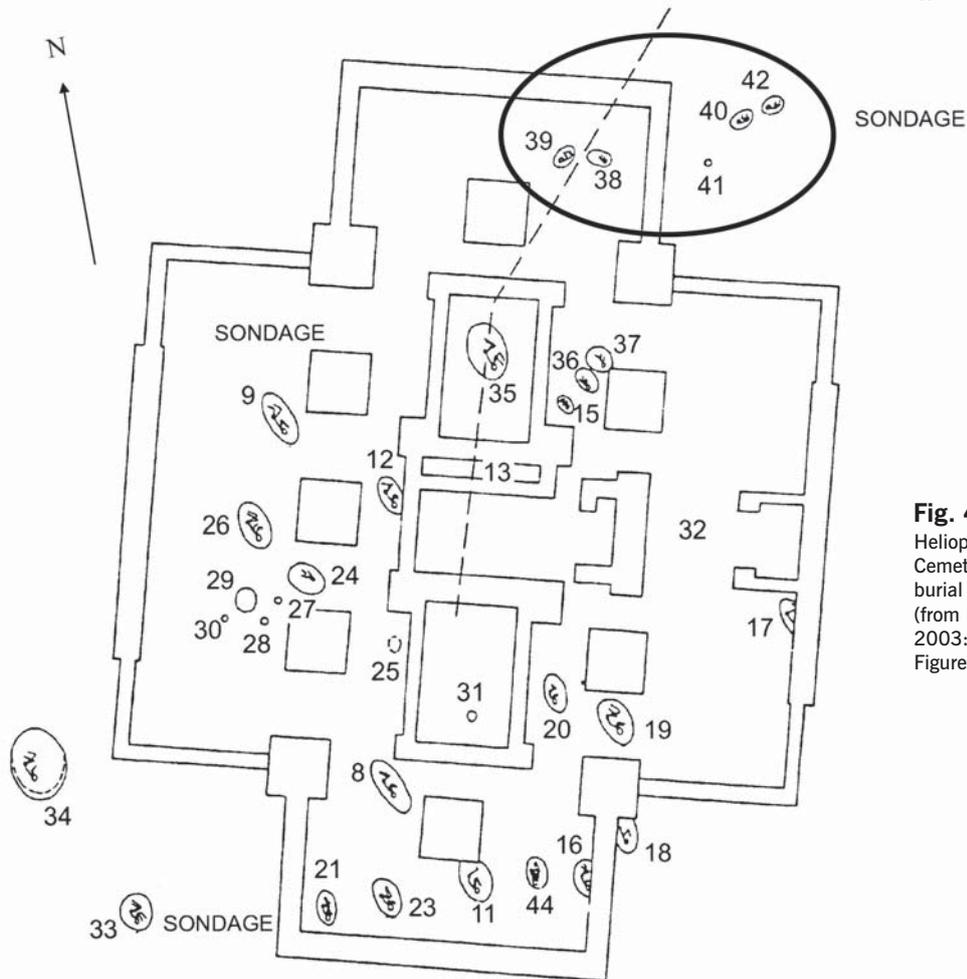
13. Age and gender of the animals in early excavation reports for Predynastic burials was not specified, however more recent reports have specified these details when they were available.

14. 'WD Animal 5' burial at Wadi Digla although not directly associated with grave goods, was surrounded by five independently buried ceramic vessels (Rizkana & Seeher 1990: 60, Plate XXV).

15. Grave I 40 from Heliopolis held the remains of matting (Debono & Mortensen 1988: 40).



**Fig. 3**  
Maadi Cemetery  
dog burial  
placement (from  
Flores 2003:  
fig. E.4).



**Fig. 4**  
Heliopolis  
Cemetery dog  
burial placement  
(from Flores  
2003: fig.  
Figure E.3).

were located on the northern perimeter of the cemetery (Flores 2003: fig. E.3) and the Wadi Digla burial was located in the northern section of human graves (Flores 2003: fig. E.7).

## Evidence from the Naqada I and II culture

Naqada I and II (ca. 4000-3200 BC) cover the Predynastic stages relevant to this paper, and during this time the core Naqada area extended from the Badari region in the north to Hierakonpolis in the south (Hendrickx & Huyge 2014: 248). Dog burials have been found in cemeteries at Matmar (Brunton 1948: 16, 17, 22), at Naga ed Dêr (Lythgoe 1965:252-4), at El Mahasna (Ayrton & Loat 1911: 7, 21, 32), at Naqada (Petrie & Quibell 1896: 26),<sup>16</sup> at the elite cemeteries of Hierakonpolis (van Neer et al. 2004; Friedman et al 2011), and Abydos (Dreyer et al. 2000) and at the settlement site of Adaïma (Midant-Reynes & Buchez 2002; Van Neer 2002).<sup>17</sup> During this period a number of developments become apparent. Dogs were found buried in direct association with humans, as well as independently buried. Dogs were buried within settlements as well as cemeteries, and these cemeteries were often closely associated with the elite. The most significant difference at this time is the burial of multiple dogs in one grave.

Within Grave N7418 at Naga ed Dêr and Grave 3128 at Matmar the humans had been placed in coffins, and a dog had been placed at the foot end of the burial, outside the coffin (fig. 5). The Matmar dog had been placed in a wooden

**Fig. 5**  
Naga ed Dêr cemetery showing the placement of dog burial N7418 at the foot end of the grave (from Lythgoe 1965: fig. 113a).

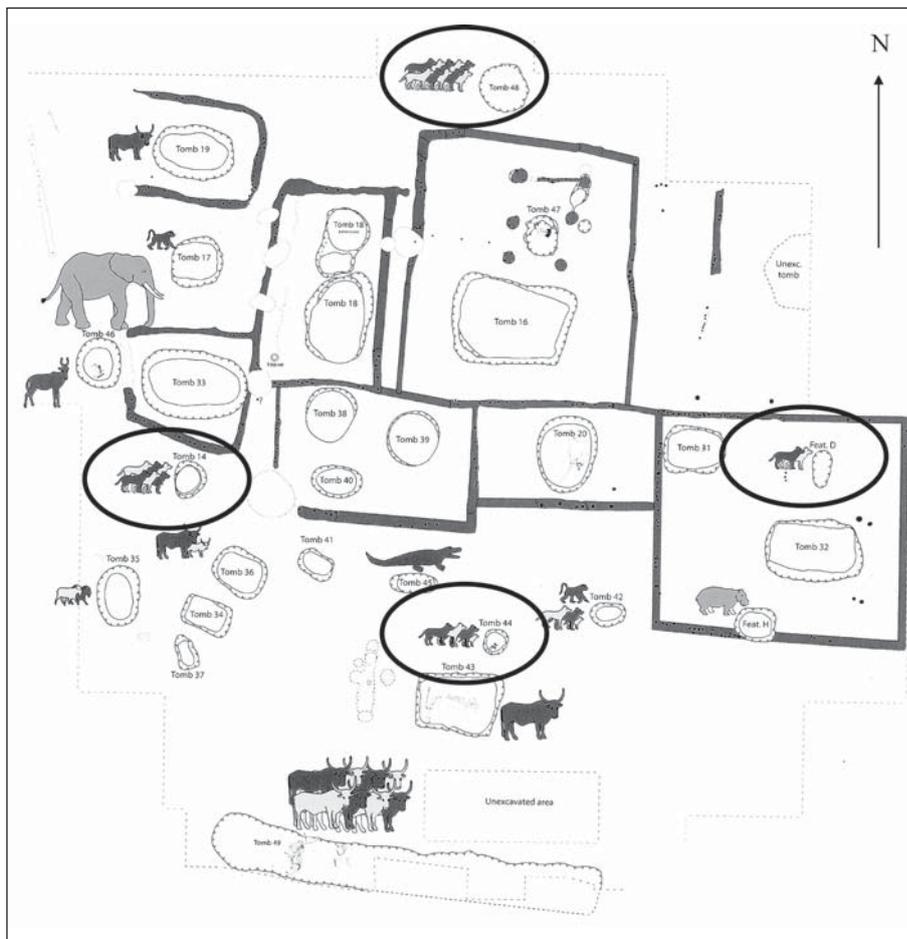


16. Grave 286 at Naqada was recorded as only the skull of a dog with human remains, however the grave had been severely disturbed and Petrie believed a complete dog may have initially been buried (Petrie & Quibell 1896: 26).

17. Dog bones were recorded at Abadiyeh (Petrie 1901: 33), Ballas (Petrie & Quibell 1896: 13/16-17), Harageh (Engelbach 1923: pl LV), and multiple dogs were found in single pits at Nagada Cemetery T (Petrie 1901: 48) and Hememieh (Brunton & Caton-Thompson 1928: 94) however these burials are not used in this study as either their association with humans is unclear, or their association with a specific grave is unclear or the date of the grave is unclear.

coffin of its own, prompting Brunton to describe it as the man's pet (Brunton 1948: 22). The deceased male in Grave H23 at El Mahasna had been placed in a wooden coffin with numerous finely crafted grave goods (Ayrton & Loat 1911: 7 & 21), and to the west of the coffin, two dogs were buried, wrapped in a mat, lying on their backs, with bunches of imitation garlic at their heads.<sup>18</sup> Plans were not available for the areas of Matmar, Naga ed Dêr and El Mahasna cemeteries where the dogs had been buried, however the significance of these burials is the association of the dog with a human.

Hierakonpolis Elite cemetery HK6, presently undergoing re-excavation under the direction of Renee Friedman, was used throughout the entire Naqada period (Friedman et al. 2011).<sup>19</sup> To date nineteen separate burials incorporating dogs have been recorded, seventeen of which have been dated to the Naqada IC-IIA stages relevant to this paper (Van Neer 2004; Friedman et al. 2011). Apart from a small number of dogs found *in situ*, all the dog burials had been heavily disturbed, making association between the dogs and humans difficult to interpret. What particularly stands out at cemetery HK6 is the burial of multiple dogs, with or without human association, and the location of the burials (fig. 6).



**Fig. 6**  
HK6 cemetery  
Tomb 16 complex.  
Plan of Tomb 16  
and subsidiary  
tombs, showing  
dog burial  
placement (from  
Patch 2011:  
fig. 17).

18. For a photo of garlic models found in the same cemetery see (Ayrton & Loat 1911: Pl XVII).  
19. Tombs and features have been excavated yielding dogs buried with one or more adult humans, dogs buried with children, burials of multiple dogs, dogs buried with domestic animals, and dogs buried with or near various wild animals (van Neer 2004: Table 1).

Of the dogs buried without humans, ten dogs were found in Tomb 48 (Friedman et al. 2011: 181), seven dogs were found in Tomb 14 (Van Neer 2004: Tab. 1, 88-90; Friedman et al. 2011: 173, 181), and nine dogs were found in Feature C, a circular pit covered with sandstone slabs (Friedman et al. 2011: 182). When human/dog burials were found, the number of dogs in the grave was noteworthy. Twelve dogs were found in Tomb 71 accompanying a young child (Friedman 2013: 5), while the adult and child in Tomb 5 were accompanied by seven dogs (van Neer 2004: Table 1). Osteological studies undertaken on the skeletal remains showed that of the total 71 dogs found 51 were adults, two were specified as juvenile and one was considered a young adult. Five skeletons were found with a baculum and therefore identified as male (van Neer 2004).

Details of elite cemetery U at Abydos, recently re-excavated under the direction of Ulrich Hartung, are limited at present, as the site is still unpublished. However, a preliminary report has been made of the faunal remains among which are numerous dog bones (Dreyer et al. 2000: 88). Many of the tombs in cemetery U have been heavily disturbed by looters and previous excavations, making interpretation difficult. To date, dog bones have been found in ten tombs (Dreyer et al. 2000: Table 4) and excavators suggest that dog bones only occurred in the rather large and/or anciently well-equipped tombs (Ulrich Hartung personal communication June 16, 2014). Although many of the dogs are limited to a 'few bones', excavators believe the tombs initially held complete dogs. All the dogs were associated with human burials except one, U-292a, and although this was an individual burial it is thought to be subsidiary to U-292 the burial of a young male. All the dogs were classified adult, no gender was specified and no cemetery map is available to indicate placement.

Adaïma, located just north of Hierakonpolis, is a settlement site with two cemeteries, recently excavated under the direction of Béatrix Midant-Reynes (Midant-Reynes & Buchez, 2002). No dog burials were found in either cemetery, however five individual dog burials were found within the settlement area dated to Naqada II.<sup>20</sup> Each dog was identified as an adult and was carefully placed in the ground lying on its side. No gender was stated. Matting remains were found with three burials, and two of the dogs had been buried with ceramic vessels (Van Neer 2002: 533-5). Various features were found in the vicinity of each burial including pits, hearth or fire places, ash deposits, charcoal, ceramic fragments and flint, and what appears to be debris areas (Midant-Reynes & Buchez 2002: Plan 3 & 10).

The careful placement of these dogs within a settlement is similar to the placements of dogs in cemeteries, which indicates that the dogs had not been 'disposed of' or 'excluded', but had been included in the funerary practices. Van Neer suggests that the five dogs may have been buried as foundation deposits (Van Neer 2002: 543), which supports the protective role of the five settlement dogs.

Although no dogs were found in the two cemeteries associated with the settlement of Adaïma, pot burial S673 containing a young child dated to the later Naqada IIIA2, was found in the Eastern Cemetery, and on the left arm of the child was a bracelet (fig. 7) constructed

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**Fig. 7**

Bracelet with two sections of a canid mandible found on left arm of child (from Midant-Reynes 2007: 12).



<sup>20</sup>. Four child burials and the burial of a very young pig were also found in the settlement area (Midant-Reynes & Buchez 2002).

out of two pieces of canid mandible with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> molars still in place and other beads (Midant-Reynes 2007: 12).<sup>21</sup> Although Naqada IIIA2 is associated with the Early dynastic period, the presence of the pieces of canid mandible shows the deliberate selection of a canid bone, adding to the argument that dogs, or in this case parts of dogs, were used in a protective context.

## Evidence from the Early A-Group culture

The fourth Predynastic culture with recorded dog burials was the Early A-group culture (ca 3800-3400 BC), known from a number of sites north of the 1<sup>st</sup> cataract at Aswan, to the Dakka-Sayala plain in Lower Nubia (Smith 1991; Gatto 2006). Although considerable debate has surrounded the dating of this culture, artefactual evidence points to it being contemporary with Naqada IB-IIC (Gatto 2000: 108). Dog burials found at three of the four Early A-Group cemeteries, Shellal (Reisner 1910a), Khor Bahan (Reisner 1910a) and Risqalla (Reisner 1910a) were independent dog burials while dog burials at Gerf Husien (Firth 1912) were associated with human burials. The published reports do not indicate the gender of any of the animals, however detailed photographs of the burials show the canids to be adult. What particularly stands out among these dog burials is the frequency with which they occur and the use of multiple dogs within a single burial.

Shellal Cemetery 7 (Reisner 1910a: 37-42) held nine dog burials (**fig. 8**) scattered among an isolated cluster of about fifty human graves (Smith 1966:74). Single, double and triple burials were recorded.<sup>22</sup> Pieces of 'three-strand twisted thong' were found with one burial which Reisner believed to be a leash (Reisner 1910a: 38).

Khor Bahan Cemetery 17 (Reisner 1910a 137-8) consisted of sixty-one human graves (Flores 2003: 74) and twelve circular or oval graves containing dogs (**fig. 9**), one of which contained five dogs. Remnants of leather thonging were also found in three graves, one dog still wearing the remains of a collar. From this discovery Reisner concluded that "in this cemetery there was also a very interesting series of the remains of pet dogs" (Reisner 1910a: 116). Two burials bore traces of matting, no grave goods were present and no burial was directly associated with a human.

The only dog burial at Risqalla (Reisner 1910a: 199) held two dogs and was found among eight human burials (Flores 2003: 75). Both dogs were carefully placed on their left sides, heads oriented to the east, and located towards the southern end of the cemetery.<sup>23</sup>

The two dog burials in Gerf Husein cemetery 79, which held around thirty-three graves (Smith 1991: Plan 4), were directly associated with humans. Grave 52 held the lower part of a human skeleton, and the bones of a dog and another human were found in the debris (Firth 1912: 133). Grave 144 held the

21. The entire bracelet was made up of a pierced Red Sea shell, four carnelian beads, four faience beads, four serpentine beads plus two pieces of canid mandible (Midant-Reynes 2007: 12).

22. Grave 255 contained a double burial of a dog and a goat, where the animals were lying on their sides facing each other, with the dog carefully positioned between the legs of the goat (Reisner 1910a: 37-42). The interpretation of the presence of the goat in this burial is beyond the scope of this paper.

23. Numerous objects were found with the burial in Grave 36 but excavators believed they probably belonged to a nearby plundered tomb (Reisner 1910a: 192).



remains of a male skeleton and “a small recess or later burial at the foot of the grave and 35 cm above the floor, contained a dog’s bones” (Firth 1912: 144). Although not within Egypt but within a comparative timeframe as the Early A-Group, two sites in the Sudan, Esh Shaheinab and El Kadada, have also yielded dog burials, providing evidence of the funerary customs of the local people between 5500 – 4500 BP (Bonnet et al. 1989: 26). The single, double and triple dog burials found in cemetery C at Kadada were all pit burials, with the dogs either accompanying a human, buried with sheep or goats or buried with a bovid bucrane. In eight cases the dogs had been placed directly at the bottom of the pit and the human had been placed above them, while in a number of other burials the dogs were located above the head of the deceased, pressed up against the wall of the pit, with legs facing outward (Bonnet et al. 1989: 27). Excavators were tentative in their interpretation of the role of the dogs in these burials, because of the lack of comparative documentation at the time of the publication, however the specific placement of the dog beneath a human, or at the extremities of the grave facing out, is consistent with the argument that it had been placed there in a protector capacity.

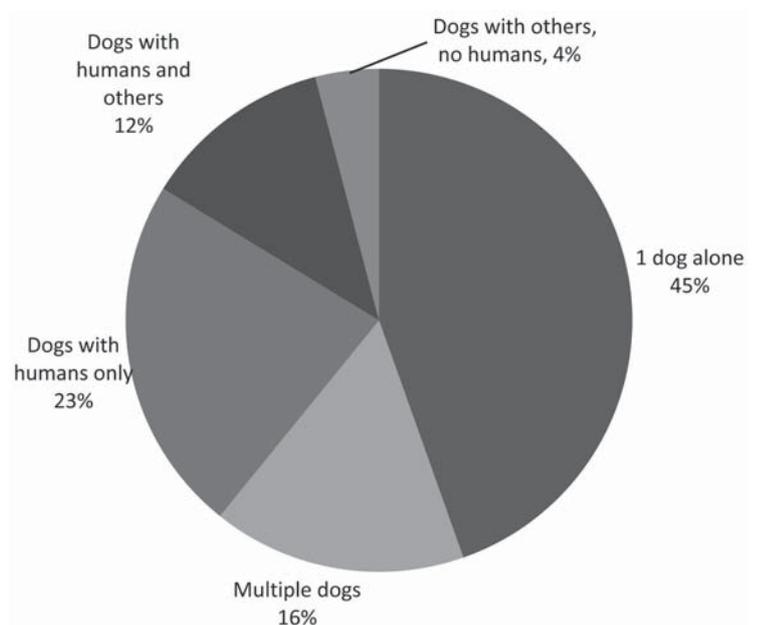
## Interpreting the evidence

Examination of the Predynastic burial data shows that dog burials predominantly occurred in human cemeteries with only a small number located in settlements. However this may be due to a lack of settlement archaeology compared with an abundance of cemetery archaeology. Both cemetery and settlement burials appear to be equally embedded in the ancient Egyptian funerary culture, as they show similar characteristics.

Geographically, Predynastic dog burials occurred along the Nile from the Delta in the north to Lower Nubia in the south, with a greater number located in Upper Egypt suggesting that the practice was more common in the south. However this bias may be due to the extensive, well published archaeological excavations undertaken in Upper Egypt compared with the difficulties of excavations undertaken in Lower Egypt, exacerbated by modern urbanisation.

After examination of the canid burial data it becomes evident that dogs buried without human association far outnumber dogs buried with a human (**fig. 10**). Of the seventy-four dog burials discussed in this study, thirty-three (45%) were single dogs placed in a grave of their own, another twelve (16%) were of more than one dog in a single grave, and a further three (4%) were dogs with other faunal remains but no evidence of human remains. This makes a total of forty-eight (65%) dogs buried without direct human association. Of the remainder, nine (12%) were dogs and other faunal remains, associated with humans, and only seventeen of the seventy-four (23%) were burials of one or more dogs with humans only.

**Fig. 10**  
Pie chart showing percentage of Predynastic dog burials with humans and other fauna.



The elite cemeteries of Abydos and Hierakonpolis demonstrate a relationship between dog burials and the elite (Flores 2003: 57). It was also noted by the excavators of Badari cemetery 5100, where dog burials were excavated, that this cemetery held the burials of the more important individuals of the seven contemporary cemeteries (Brunton & Caton-Thompson 1928: 7). The quantity and quality of the grave goods associated with the human/dog burial at El Mahasna reflects the burial of a high status person (Ayrton & Loat 1911: 7, 21, 32), and the forty ceramic pots found with the Matmar human/dog burial also suggests the interment of a prominent person (Brunton 1948: 16 & 17 & 22, Plate X).

The careful placement of the dog within the burial context appears to be a significant, deliberate act, as is the location of the dog burial within the cemetery. The one dog buried in the Badari cemetery was placed on the eastern perimeter. The one dog buried in the Maadi cemetery was placed on the north-western perimeter. The five individual dogs buried in the cemetery at Heliopolis were placed on the northern perimeter. The triple dog burial at Shellal was placed on the north-eastern perimeter. The triple dog burial at Khor Bahan was placed on the southern perimeter.

The position of the dog burials at the perimeters of the cemeteries indicates specific placement consistent with the interpretation of their role in the funerary practice as being the protector of the boundaries of the cemetery. Many of the Predynastic cemeteries were heavily denuded, looted or destroyed in antiquity or by more modern urbanization, making excavation of the entire perimeters of some cemeteries impossible. Therefore it cannot be ascertained if other dog burials were placed on the undefined boundaries of those cemeteries.

The boundary protector concept is supported by a small complete cemetery found at the Late Neolithic site of Kadruka, located south of Egypt in the Sudan near the 3<sup>rd</sup> cataract of the Nile (Reinold 2005). Although this cemetery lies beyond the geographic bounds of Egypt, its timeframe is comparable with Predynastic Egypt. KDK21 is a cemetery with its borders still defined, and buried on the boundaries at cardinal points to the north, south, east and west were four double dog burials (Reinold 2005: 118). The discovery of the dogs at such specific locations is consistent with the theory that they had been deliberately placed there to function as protectors of the cemetery.

Unfortunately many early cemetery excavation reports lack cemetery plans, making it difficult to determine the location of the dog burials in respect to the borders of the cemetery. Nevertheless, a similar pattern in the location of a number of dog burials surrounding the important Tomb 16 complex in elite cemetery HK6 at Hierakonpolis can be recognized. Four multiple dog burials, each containing a different number of dogs, were located to the north (Tomb 48, ten dogs), to the south (Tomb 44, four dogs), to the east (Feature D, two dogs), and to the west (Tomb 14, seven dogs together with the remains of a young adult).<sup>24</sup> The position of each grave creates an impression of a protective barrier carefully placed around the inner important Tomb 16 and its subsidiary tombs (see **fig. 6**).

24. Tomb 14 is the only tomb of the four reported to contain the remains of a juvenile human. These remains were found deep within the tomb and excavators reported that the human may have originally been placed in Tomb 14, but was not necessarily beyond doubt (Friedman et al. 2011: 173).

The role of a single dog directly associated with a single human burial, could be that of a pet sacrificed to accompany its master in the afterlife. However, if dogs were being buried at the boundaries of cemeteries to protect the burials within, then it is feasible to interpret the role of the dog buried directly with a human as that of the protector of the person they were placed beside. The human/dog burials at Naga ed Dêr (Grave N7418), Matmar (Grave 3128) and Gerf Husien (Grave 144) all revealed dogs *in situ* specifically placed at the foot end of the human graves. The Naga ed Dêr dog lay outside facing the coffin at the foot end. The Matmar dog was buried in its own wooden coffin at the foot end and the Gerf Husien dog had its own small niche cut 35 cm above the floor at the foot end. The two dogs accompanying the El Mahasna human burial (Grave H 23) had been placed to the west of the coffin. The head of the human faced south east, therefore west of the coffin places the dogs towards the foot end of the grave.

In two human/dog burials found at Hierakonpolis the placement of the dogs has not been specified, but both Tomb 71 and Tomb 5 held a large number of dogs accompanying either a child or an adult and a child. It is feasible that all these humans had been sufficiently important during their lifetimes to warrant large numbers of their own protectors. Of the dog burials that appear to be randomly placed in cemeteries, it is possible that they were specifically placed to carry out the role of protector for the family or group clustered around them. The existence of multiple dogs in a burial without human association is not consistent with the argument that these dogs were buried as pets but supports the premise that large groups of dogs were buried in a protective capacity.

## Conclusion

From the above analysis of Predynastic dog burials in Ancient Egypt across the Badarian, the Lower Egyptian, the Naqada and the A-Group cultures, several consistent patterns have emerged which support the argument that the dogs were buried with a protective role.

The positioning and placement of the majority of dog burials appears to be deliberate. Many animals were wrapped in matting and carefully placed in the ground, usually without accompanying grave goods. Many individual dog burials were deliberately placed at the boundaries of the cemeteries. The majority of dog burials were not associated with humans. When dogs accompanied a human burial, the dog was regularly placed at the foot end of the grave. The burial of multiple dogs in one grave, with or without human association detracts from the theory that these were pets.

Although it is possible that some of these dogs had previously been pets during their lifetime, this paper has analysed the existing evidence to support the argument that their primary purpose in the mortuary context was that of a protector; protector of the important/wealthy individual human they was placed beside, protector of a group of graves clustered in close proximity, or protector of the boundaries of an entire cemetery keeping those buried within safe in the afterlife.

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