

As a tailpiece, Abu 'l-Barakat elsewhere reports hearing these verses:

How cruel it is, I think, that men will take the name of
'dog' in vain,
When of all creatures dogs will least forget good deeds.
Surely, if some person makes you cross enough to curse,
The proper insult is, 'You man, son of a man!'

*i.e., not "You dog, son of a dog,"
the conventional insult.*

Moving to 14th-century Morocco—but returning to feline vermin control—a scholar and raconteur of Miknas called Ibn Abi Jalla owned a remarkably clever cat:

One day, he went home and found that the cat had moistened one of her front paws and then dipped it in some flour, so that the flour stuck to it. She was holding this paw out in front of a mouse hole in the wall; the other paw she held up in the air, ready to grab the mouse when it emerged. Seeing this, Ibn Abi Jalla called her by name—whereupon she turned her head to him and put a claw to her mouth, exactly in the manner in which one gestures for silence.

*Take this with a pinch
of salt. It comes from a small
volume compiled by the scholar's
students entitled "Collected
Gems of Ibn Abi Jalla."
According to his biographer, the
students slipped in some of their
own apocryphal tales to poke
fun at their master.*

More conventional rattling methods of a cat called Wardaghan were commemorated in an elegy by her owner, the 18th-century Yemeni poet al-Khafanji:

*When I lived in
Bi'r al-'Azab, al-Khafanji's
quarter of Sana'a, it was still
frequented by prowling cats.
An elderly gentleman I used to
visit was so fond of his own cat
that he would feed her in his
lap at lunchtime, between
his own mouthfuls.*

Wardaghan has made my loneliness complete,
Wardaghan the white, the precious cat.
She's dead, the one who filled the room with life,
Who fussed around it, housemaid-like.
She guaranteed the peace of all who took a nap,
Was diligent in every task she undertook.
Her bravery made cowards of all the other cats,
And when she pounced, she terrified.
She'd spring into the air to catch a moth—
She could have caught a falcon, too!

*Other creatures have been
lamented in Arabic verse.
A 12th-century ruler of Hama,
in Syria, gave a much-
loved falcon a state funeral,
complete with Qur'an-reciters.*

To end on a different elegiac note, we return to goats—but better behaved than that one in the Granada china shop. It is sunset in the highlands of Yemen, on any day over the past millennium and more;

the hour has come to gather in the flocks from the mountainside. The blind poet and folklorist Abdallah al-Baradduni, who died in 1999, collected this *mahjal*, a traditional song chanted while at work:

It's time for home now—night is near,
Sunset's come and we're still here.
You've had your fill of food since dawn
So come, my wattled goat with curling horn!

*On mahjals, another
commentator notes that
"some are exceedingly powerful
and beautiful." I can confirm
that, having heard them
echoing through remote
mist-filled valleys.*



*Even the best efforts at translation often entail some loss. However, the pleasing sound of the original Arabic title of this series, *Tarjuman al-Kunuz*, makes up for some of the literary shortfall when it becomes the syntactically accurate but less euphonious English "Interpreter of Treasures." *Tarjuman* is the root of the English word "dragoman," which refers to an interpreter serving in an official capacity. The full title echoes Ibn al-'Arabi's early-13th-century collection of poems, *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* (Interpreter of Desires).*