

Primitive and Aboriginal Dog Society

Dear members of the Russian Branch of Primitive Aboriginal Dogs Society!

We continue the publication of presentations made at the first international cynological conference “Aboriginal Breeds of Dogs as Elements of Biodiversity and the Cultural Heritage of Mankind”. In this issue is the presentation by Sir Terence Clark about the origin and present situation of the Saluki in the countries of origin and an article by Tatyana Desyatova about variation of coat color in East Siberian Laikas. An article by Don Messerschmidt about big guard dogs of Tibet contains a very interesting discussion of frequently cited passages from Marco Polo. Finally, Sergey Bogatov analyzes in his article differences between sport hunting and industrial hunting with Laikas, which causes certain differences between Laikas used by urban sportsmen hunters and Siberian industrial hunters.

Sincerely yours,
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THE ORIGINS OF THE EASTERN SALUQI AND ITS SITUATION TODAY

Sir Terence Clark

Abstract: The Saluqi is possibly the oldest breed of hunting hound with a continuous history in Mesopotamia going back at least 6,000 years. The origin of the name is obscure, possibly deriving from the Seleucid Empire in the 3rd century BC, but it first appeared in Arabic in the 7th century AD. The Saluqi seems to have enjoyed a special status in Islam, distinguishing it from other dogs. Its popularity across the region has gone into decline in more recent years largely as a result of pressures on the habitat of its main prey – gazelle and hare – but there are still significant populations in several countries, which should ensure the viability of the breed.

Until such time as medical science has arrived at a means for determining the genetic make-up of the different breeds of dogs, we cannot be certain of the Saluqi's antecedents. In this context I look forward to hearing at this conference what Dr Peter Savolainen has to say about this based on his recent research, to which a number of people here have contributed in the form of canine DNA and mtDNA samples. For the present it is believed that the Saluqi derives like all other breeds from the wolf - in its case probably from the smaller Asian wolf (*Canis lupus pallipes* or *arabs*) than the larger animal (*Canis lupus*) of Europe or North America.¹



However there is somewhat more certainty about the Saluqi's geographical origins. Archaeological evidence from the 5th millennium suggests the existence of a Saluqi-like hunting hound in Mesopotamia. At Tell Arpachiya in what is now a suburb of Mosul in northern Iraq British archaeologists discovered in 1933 seal impressions in sun-dried clay of, as they described it, "some kind of coursing dog, perhaps a greyhound".² Greyhound is how the British often called the Saluqi in the Middle East in those days. At about the same time in 1932-38 the Joint Expedition of the Baghdad School and the Pennsylvania University Museum of Mesopotamia made some important discoveries during a series of excavations at Tepe Gawra about 15 miles NE of Mosul. In digging out the debris from a well they found the skull of a Saluqi at a level suggesting the pre-Sumerian period c 4400-3800 BC. (In parenthesis, I can't tell you what a thrill it was for me to stand on that mound and look down in that well, while not a kilometre away in a small village I found hunters with their beautiful Saluqis still continuing an ancient tradition of hunting with hounds.) The Pennsylvania Expedition also found about 300 seal impressions of animal figurines and noted: "The animals depicted are rarely of any domesticated variety except for the commonly represented Saluki".³ These hounds are often represented together with what appear to be ibex. I deduce from this that at that time in the 4th millennium Saluqi-type hounds were in common use for hunting in this area. In a more stylised form they are also shown on this beaker of c 4000 from the Royal City of Susa in Iran now in the Louvre, Paris. Even at that time it is clear that the Saluqi was regarded as something special. For example excavators at Eridu in southern Iraq in 1947 found a skeleton of, as they said, "probably a Saluki-type dog" in the grave of a small boy of the Sumerian period c 3600 BC. The dog had been provided with a small meat bone near its mouth as sustenance for the after-world.⁴

Of course artistic representations are not conclusive proof of the existence of Saluqis, but the resemblance to contemporary hounds cannot be purely coincidental, unless the artists possessed amazing

¹ Clutton-Brock, J, *A Natural History of Domesticated Mammals*, British Museum (Natural History), London, 1987, p.42

² Mallowan, M, *Iraq*, Vol. II, Part I, British School of Archaeology, London, 1935. p.99, plate XI, third row.

³ Tobler, AJ, *Excavations at Tepe Gawra*, Vol.II, Pennsylvania University Museum, 1950.

⁴ Lloyd, S & Safar, F, *Eridu*, Sumer 4, Plate IV & p.118.

foresight. More convincing skeletal evidence emerged in 1987, when archaeologists from the British Museum reported that they had excavated at Tell Brak in northeastern Syria a Saluqi-like skeleton of the Akkadian period (c 2500 BC). Dr Juliet Clutton Brock of the British Natural History Museum later made a detailed study of the skeleton and wrote: “ it is certainly of greyhound build”. She made a detailed comparison of the bones with those of a Saluqi imported into Britain from Egypt in 1897 and found that their dimensions were so close as to be almost identical, showing a remarkable consistency of type over more than 4500 years.⁵ While continuing their excavations at Tell Brak the archaeologists also found a small silver animal, which may be identified as a Saluqi. The skeleton and the figurine together suggest that there too the Saluki had a special significance. I was pleased when I visited the excavations at Tell Brak in 1992 to find nearby some hunters with Saluqis. This is not to say that their hounds were linear descendants but merely that the conditions obtaining in the area today have not changed so much in the interval and that the terrain is still suitable for coursing with Saluqis.



Although lop-eared hunting hounds appear occasionally in Predynastic Egyptian artefacts, Saluqis occur commonly only in the Middle (2686-1650 BCE) and New (1550-1069 BCE) Kingdoms, possibly imported from Nubia and Mesopotamia, and clearly enjoyed a special status as the companion of kings. Perhaps the most famous representation is from 1350 BCE on one of the side panels of Tutankhamun's beautifully painted box now in the Cairo Museum. This 12th Dynasty mural from the tomb of Amenemhet, which appears in the Osborns' book *The Mammals of Ancient Egypt*, is also interesting in that it shows

in front of the Saluqi the ancient prick eared hound known as the Tesem, indicating that the two breeds co-existed.⁶

After the Assyrians in Mesopotamia there is a gap in representations of the Saluqi until the arrival of the ancient Greeks and Romans in Asia. But herein lies a mystery. While for example Greek vases from the 5th century BC clearly depict Saluqi-type hounds in hunting scenes and the Greeks had been in contact with Egypt since Tutankhamun's day, none of the literature refers to them as such. On the contrary Xenophon's massive treatise *On hunting* describes all kinds of hunting dogs but not coursing hounds. It is not until nearly four centuries later that Flavius Arrianus or Arrian, as the great chronicler of Alexander the Great is known, wrote in c 40 AD his monumental work *On coursing*, in which he gave a detailed description of a hound that most Saluqi owners today would recognise as that of a Saluqi. The mystery is that although it is clear that he is talking about a Saluqi-type hound, which he must have come across in Asia Minor, he perversely calls them Celtic hounds. In one place he calls them “vertragi”, which is probably the origin of the Italian word *veltro* or the old French word *veltre* meaning greyhound.⁷

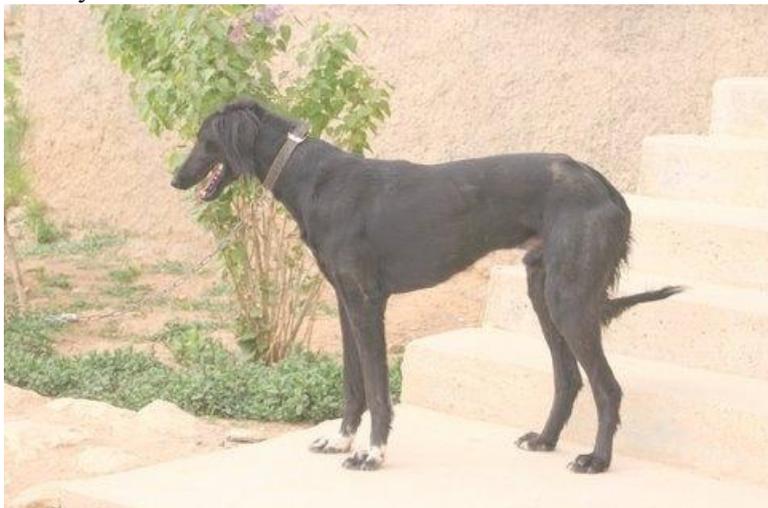
The Romans represented these hounds in numerous mosaics scattered across Asia Minor and North Africa but did not give them a name. At Bosra in Syria there is a huge amphitheatre of the 2nd century AD the massive black basalt walls of which are decorated here and there with mosaics lifted from other buildings in the vicinity and brought here for display and protection. One of these shows a huntsman with a pair of Saluqis pursuing a couple of hares. The guide took me to see in a house nearby a remarkably similar Saluqi used for hunting today. At Mount Nebo in Jordan a beautiful mosaic of 531 AD on the floor of the church at the place called Siyagha clearly shows a Saluqi accompanying a horseman on a boar hunt. Nearby at Makhayat there is a fine almost intact mosaic in the floor of the late 6th century church showing a smooth Saluqi coursing a hare. An almost identical pose is to be found in a Roman mosaic now in the Bardo Museum in Tunis. Indeed Tunisia is particularly rich in mosaics showing Saluqis hunting alone or interestingly in tandem with falcons. It has been claimed that the Romans were not falconers and that the art came to the

⁵ Clutton-Brock, J, *Iraq*, Vol.I, British School of Archaeology in Iraq, London, 1989, p.18.

⁶ Osborn, DJ & J, *The Mammals of Ancient Egypt*, Aris & Phillips, Warminster, 1988, p.62

⁷ Brewer, D, Clark, T & Phillips, A, *Dogs in Antiquity*, Aris & Phillips, Warminster, 2001, pp 87-90.

Arabs from China or Byzantium, but here we have irrefutable evidence from Roman Carthage in the 4th century AD.



The etymology of the word Saluqi is also puzzling. Dr Rex Smith has cogently argued⁸ that the traditional Arab derivation from Saluq, a town near Ta'iz in Yemen, is doubtful and that a more likely origin is from Saluqiyyah, the Arabic word for Seleucia. There were several such towns in Asia Minor named after Alexander's general Seleucus but the most likely one was that on the Tigris below Baghdad founded by Antiochus I in 274 BC. The difficulty with this attractive thesis is that the Seleucid Empire died out in Mesopotamia in the 2nd century BC and the Arabs are not known to have used the word Saluqi in writing - and even then

only sparingly - until about the beginning of Islam in the 7th century. It is only in the specialised hunting literature from the 10th century onwards that Saluqi is regularly used. It is sometimes linked in Arabic with the word al-Hurr, meaning "free" or "noble", or with 'Asil, meaning "pure" or "noble".

Before I leave the etymology, I should say a few words about the Tazi, because various claims are made about it being a separate breed because of its different name. In Turkish and the Turkic languages of Central Asia it is pronounced Tazuh, with a letter on the end for which we have no equivalent in English, and means fresh or pure. In Russian it is of course called Taza or Tazy, which is clearly borrowed from the Turkish root. In Iran and the Persian languages of Central Asia it is called Tazi, which may be derived from the verb tazidan= to run or possibly from the word tazi meaning Arabian. In Iraq where Turkish, Persian and Kurdish are spoken in addition to Arabic, I have personally heard Iraqis naturally calling the Saluqi Tazi when switching into one of the other languages, indicating that for them these two words have one and the same meaning. According to some Russian cynologists, such as Sabaneev, Sludsky and Shereshevsky, the Arabian Saluqi came to Central Asia with the Muslim conquests in the 7th and 8th centuries and was crossed with local breeds to produce the Central Asian Tazy.⁹ Sabaneev says that the admixture of blood from these local breeds brought about a change in the smooth-haired Saluqi's appearance to a longer coat, fringes, pendulous ears and a generally coarser build. He does not specify what these local breeds were but only that they were longhaired mountain dogs with pendulous ears.¹⁰ However according to Xavier Przewdziecki¹¹ representations of Saluqi-like hounds already existed in Scythian and Chinese art forms long before the Arab conquests, as these pictures show. Whether they were indigenous or whether they were conveyed eastwards by earlier invaders remains to be seen.

After the Arab conquests from the 7th century onwards the Saluqi appears with increasing frequency in hunting scenes, nowhere more graphically than in the colourful murals of packs of smooth Saluqis pursuing onager or wild ass which cover the vaulted entrance to the beautiful hunting lodge known as Qusayr 'Amra in Jordan, which was constructed between 705 and 715 by the Umayyad Caliph Walid I. Saluqis are also to be found in the stylised miniatures of hunting scenes from a wide range of sources: from 7th century China, where this tomb painting of the Tang dynasty shows a hunter with his hawk and his Saluqi or this 9th C painting from Dunhuang of a hunter and his hound; from Persia where King Khusrau is shown hunting with falcon, hound and cheetah; from Turkey where Sultan Bayazid is shown hunting with Saluqis; and from Mughal India where a pack of Saluqis is shown attacking wild boar. As some illustrations show the Saluqi was often used together with falcons with the bird being trained to attack the head of the gazelle to slow it down. Sometimes the role was reversed with the Saluqi being used to flush the Hubara bustard out of the bushes to allow the falcon to stoop on it. Both these hunting practices were practiced until recently but the lack of gazelles nowadays gives little opportunity.

⁸ Smith, GR, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies*, University of London, Vol.XLIII, Part 3.

⁹ Plahov, KN & Shelestina, AC, *Borzye Tazy I ohota s nimi*, awaiting publication in Almaty.

¹⁰ Sabaneev, LP, *Sobaki ohotnich'I*, Terra, Moscow, ed. of 1933, p.13.

¹¹ Przewdziecki, X, *Our Levriers*, English ed., Les Amis de Xavier Przewdziecki, La Colle sur Loup, 2001, pp. 97-101.



Under Islam the Saluqi appears to have enjoyed a favoured existence on a level with the Arabian horse. It was not unusual until comparatively recent times for a member of a tribe to be charged with memorising not only the pedigrees of the tribe's Saluqis but also their colour and hunting ability. While the Qur'an does not mention Saluqis specifically that is clearly what is meant in Sura V entitled Al-Maida or The Table. Here the Qur'an says in verse 4 that it is lawful for Muslims to eat what is caught by "beasts and birds of prey which you have trained as hounds are trained". The Hadith, the sayings and doings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, add the proviso that Bismillah (in the name of God) must be said before releasing them for the chase. So the prey of the Saluqi, the only hunting hound which would have been known at that time to the people of the Hijaz, and of the falcon was exempt from the general

rule that Muslims should not eat meat of animals unless ritually slaughtered, i.e. Hallal. With this kind of endorsement of an already existing practice in pre-Islamic Arabia, where we know from the poetry of the period that fast, long-legged, lop-eared, deep-chested hounds were used for hunting the oryx, it is no wonder that the Saluqi acquired a special status in Arabia in sharp contrast to the position of mere dogs, which are regarded as "najis" or unclean and, unlike Saluqis, cannot be handled without the Muslim going through a process of purification afterwards. It may be partly for this reason that the Arabs have always had an incentive to keep their esteemed Saluqis pure so that they would not lose their special status through becoming polluted by mere dogs. It is also true that until recent times, when foreign breeds have been introduced, there were no other breeds of dog in the Arab countries that might have been used to improve the hunting qualities of the Saluqi.

In recent years the populations of Saluqis in their countries of origin have been in decline and the breed has lost much of its former prestige. The economic and social pressures on the traditional way of life of the rapidly disappearing Bedouin and of the peasants, which were already having the effect in the 1960s and 70s of depriving them of the time and need for hunting and reducing the land available for those free-ranging animals forming the Saluqi's main prey, have been further compounded by revolutions and wars. Hunters' indiscriminate use of firearms and the pursuit of game in 4-wheel drive vehicles into the remotest areas have also been disastrous for the hare and gazelle. In some countries bans imposed to stop this slaughter with guns have also been extended to cover coursing with Saluqis with the result in Oman for example that the indigenous Saluqi, of which there was once a distinct type, has become extinct. In Morocco and Algeria draconian hunting laws introduced by the French colonialists in the 19th century initially to favour their settlers who used guns over the natives who used Saluqis are still in force and have led to the elimination of the pure-bred Saluqi from all but a few areas. The feathered Saluqi appears to have disappeared altogether. The smooth variety is however now making something of a comeback with official encouragement and the ban on coursing is largely ignored. Indeed on my visits there over the past few years I have found an increasing number of hounds being used in their traditional hunting role. However in the heartland of Arabia the employment of northern Arabs and Egyptians as teachers, skilled-workers and artisans has led to the spread of religious attitudes which were once unknown in the main Saluqi areas. Such town Arabs with little knowledge of or interest in the ways of the desert Bedouin tend to look on Saluqis as they would on other dogs as dirty creatures to be avoided and have passed on this attitude to the younger generation. (I speak only of Sunnis as in general the Shia do not hunt with hounds since they regard hare as unlawful meat.) Almost as harmful is the belief among wealthier Saluqi owners and breeders, particularly among the Saudi princes and Gulf shaikhs, that what is Western must be superior, even when it comes to Saluqis. The result is that they

import western-bred Salukis, often the flashier type bred for beauty in the show ring, which they are then surprised to find are no good for hunting in the rigours of the desert. Crossbreeding such hounds with local hounds also often gives disappointing results. Even worse is the practice, fortunately on a fairly small scale and limited to a few areas, of importing Greyhounds for the purpose of crossing them with local Saluqis under the mistaken impression that the dazzling speed of the Greyhound over short distances can somehow be transferred to the long-distance Saluqi. The end result is often a dog with neither the speed of the Greyhound nor the stamina of the Saluqi, as these crossbreds seen in Dubai may well have turned out. In the areas inhabited by Kurds, notably in southeastern Turkey, northern Syria and Iraq and northwestern Iran, the Saluqi or Tazi is still to be found in considerable numbers. There are still some among the Bedouin in Jordan and Israel. It was once found in Pakistan but has been heavily mixed with imported Greyhounds for the local sport of park coursing. I do not know how it is managing among the Tuareg after the terrible drought in the Sahel region of North Africa, though this lovely hound was photographed in Niger a couple of years ago, or how it has come through the upheavals in Afghanistan, though occasionally some are seen such as this one. The situation of the Tazi in Central Asia is different as I am sure other speakers will describe.

My general impression is however that wherever there is game, particularly the hare, in sufficient numbers to make hunting worthwhile, there will be breeders who will maintain Saluqis. In my experience of Saluqis from Morocco to Central Asia it is not in the kennels of the rich shaikhs but in the small villages on the margins between the desert and the cultivated land that the best Saluqis are to be found today. Here they have bred working hounds true to type over centuries and have followed the general principle of breeding best to best, leaving survival to the fittest. Their hounds may show small and unimportant variations often deriving from the local climatic conditions, the terrain or the type of game, but in essence they all share the same basic characteristics and are unmistakably Saluqis. They still enjoy a privileged position in some households, sharing the tent in the desert and occasionally the house in the villages or living in purpose-built quarters in the yard, eating what their owners eat, having names and oral pedigrees, wearing often beautifully decorated collars and in winter padded coats to keep them warm and being decorated with henna. On a recent trip to Jordan where I was staying in a Bedouin tent, a Saluqi puppy regularly curled up to sleep on the beds inside the tent and once crept inside the owner's coat while he was taking a nap on the sand. They also protect their bitches in season by various devices, including in Iraq and Turkey these cloaks to cover their hindquarters.

All those who sincerely wish to see the breed continue to flourish as a hunting hound must support local initiatives so that at least in some parts of its habitat today there will be breeders who will keep the old traditions going and maintain their valuable bloodstock for posterity. An encouraging development in this regard is the recent decision in Syria to include the Saluqi within the ambit of the Syrian Arab Horse Association in order to promote its preservation as a part of the Arabs' natural and cultural heritage. Unfortunately attempts to encourage projects in Saudi Arabia and Iran, which would have enabled controlled, coursing among a preserved hare population, have not so far been successful. Organisations such as the Society for the Perpetuation of Desert Bred Salukis based in the USA can also play a part in preserving some of the Eastern bloodstock in the West.

ABOUT COAT COLORS OF EAST SIBERIAN LAIKA

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East Siberian Laika is the only hunting Laika breed with most wide range of variation of coat color allowed by the breed standard. This is explained by the fact that East Siberian Laika, as a purebred, exists only a few decades. In the past and until now, in its original breeding range, this dog is bred exclusively for hunting purposes. Naturally, in a utility dog developed by selective breeding run people, working qualities and adaptability remains always in focus, whereas coat color is considered the last, perhaps, only as a marking trait (Mychko, Sotskaya and Maklakova, 2002, in Russian). Thus in some regions people value white dogs, in other regions people value black and tan dogs, etc.

In breeding of pedigreed dogs, coat colors are given a great importance, which is determined mainly by desire of cynologists to better differentiate it from other hunting Laika breeds. In standard of East

Siberian Laika approved in 1981 and remaining active until present, there were preferred following coat colors: black and tan and agouti (so-called karamisty in Russian), which are not typical of other Russian hunting Laikas. During recent time, there are often heard suggestions to ban all other coat colors, except karamisty. We think that variation of coat color within the breed should be considered with caution, because we are dealing with a unique dog breed, which had been formed during several centuries mainly like natural working dog. Selection for minimal number of traits allows to achieve results quickly, but its success may be one sided and often at the expense of other important traits of the breed (Voilochnikov and Voilochnikov, 1992 in Russian).

In the process of investigation of East Siberian Laikas of Irkutsk Province, where density of dogs of this breed is high, we found very diverse coat colors among these dogs. Without discussion of genetic basis of coat colors, we will consider phenotypic differences.

General perception of coat color of dog is caused by combination of color of hairs, mainly guard hairs and undercoat. A major color background is formed by color guard hairs, but color of the undercoat adds some shading. Color of each hair is determined by pigments.

Entire wide range of variation of coat color in dogs is determined by the presence of one pigment, melanin, which can be present in two forms, eumelanin and pheomelanin. Eumelanin causes black or dark brown coat color and pheomelanin causes yellow or reddish coat colors (Nastevich, 2006). Inside hair, pigment is present in form of granules of different shapes. The color depends on the retraction of light in pigment granules and, therefore, shape of granules causes different coat colors.

Pigments in hair can be distributed at different densities inside the core and in the outer layer (Sotskaya, 1992). When pigment is distributed evenly and at high density, the coat color is most intense. As a rule, guard hairs are darker colored than undercoat, because they have different structure. Recently grown hairs are stronger pigmented than hairs prior to shedding, because outer layer of hairs is worn out mechanically. In other cases, coat color may be less intense and not always even.

For example, if only core of hair is intensely pigmented and in the outer layer pigment is absent or only little of it, then, basic color appears diluted, because it is seen like through semitransparent paper. This is how blue gray coat color appears, a kind of weakened black.

Many coat colors change with age of dog. This can be caused by change in the structure of the hairs and with redistribution of pigment in each hair; appearance of gray hairs, abnormal synthesis of pigment or its normal penetration inside hair and other factors.

When eumelanin and pheomelanin are distributed inside hair in form of ring zones, it is causing agouti (so-called zonary) coat color. It is a common coat color of wild Canidae and related to them dog breeds, primarily among Laikas.

Concentration of pheomelanin in hairs on different parts of body varies, which causes different shades, darker on the back and lighter on the abdomen (Malcolm B. Willis, 2000).



East Siberian Laika, agouti gray color



East Siberian Laika, agouti red color

Sometimes yellow or poorly pigmented rings become very restricted and this produces almost black color. Sometimes it is hard to tell this kind of color from ly black color, when each hair is entirely black, and we have a reason to think that the latter is not typical of East Siberian Laika.



East Siberian Laika, black color

Similarly, sometimes it is hard to tell agouti red color from solid red and the latter one is also not characteristic of the East Siberian Laika.



East Siberian Laika, red.

Besides to basic coat color, dogs may have spots colored differently then the basic color (Sotskaya, 1992). There are two major groups of coat color: with white spots and with yellow spots. Both are typical among East Siberian Laikas.

White spots vary from small white specs on the chest, paws and abdomen to actually entirely white color. When basic color is dark and white spots are located in centers of depigmentation, the coat color is called piebald. If the basic background is white, the dog is spotty. We think that describing coat color of dog, it is right to distinguish piebald from solid color with white spots. When the dog is piebald, white spots tend to form white on the middle of muzzle (“canal”), white “collar”, white “socks” (Andrianova et al. 1992).



East Siberian Laika, black and white



East Siberian Laika, black and white



East Siberian Laika, piebald



East Siberian Laika, white with black spots



East Siberian Laika, white with red spots

In the East Siberian Laika, reddish spots form pattern of tan color of various intensity. Area covered by a lighter pattern varies broadly among individual dogs. Typical black and tan color dog is black, but with whitish or reddish pattern on legs, chest and cheeks, eyebrows. In East Siberian Laika, this type of coat color is called karamisty (Samusenko and Nemchenko, 1975). This term is known since later 60th, 20 Century (Geits, 1968). It is believed that its name originated from name of a community named Karam, Kazachinsk-Lena District, Irkutsk Province, where from black and tan hunting Laikas were brought to the Irkutsk Kennel. They became basic stock (Geits, 1968); Kruzhkov, 1985). Besides, similarity of word “karam” to Evenkian word “kara” (black) and “karame” (dog name) (Boldyrev, 1994) allows to think that this term has even older roots in Evenkian language. Anyway, this term became rooted in lexicon of lovers of East Siberian Laika and became wide spread and this coat color became a trade mark of the breed all over Russia and beyond. Correct use of this term tells about knowledge of history of the breed and respect to its creators. Unfortunately the existing breed standard interprets karamisty coat color as a synonym of agouti gray color, which is a gross mistake and it is confusing to inexperienced experts.



East Siberian Laika, karamisty with red pattern.



East Siberian Laika, karamisty with pale pattern

Sometimes, black and tan Laikas have so little of light color pattern so yellow spots above eyes, under tail and on paws is hard to discern.

In cases with black and tan coat color, areas covered by lighter pattern can be so large so only back remains black (“saddle”). We believe that really saddle pattern is not typical of East Siberian Laika and its appearance may be an indication of past mixing with German Shepherd Dog. However, sometimes, it may be hard to tell apart saddle and black and tan patterns. If in doubt, if East Siberian Laika is purebred, it is important to look at other breed traits, such as head, body complexion, behavior, etc. It is also important to bear in mind that saddle coat color is changing with age. Thus, at birth saddle colored puppies are very similar to black and tan dogs, but they become lighter colored with maturity and red areas on their body increase in size until they become truly saddle colored dogs. Black and tan Laikas are born black and tan and their coat color pattern does not change with age.



Puppy of East Siberian Laika, black and tan, 10 days old



The same puppy, one month old

Combination of black and white or piebald coat color with black and tan produces tricolored coat. If take a closer look, one can find out that red spots in tricolor Laikas are positioned always where tan pattern should be and never on the back or on the tail, which allows to distinguish them from red piebald dogs.



East Siberian Laika, black and tan with white



East Siberian Laika, black and white with tan pattern

Dogs with weakened red or with no pigment seem pale red or white, respectively.



East Siberian Laika, pale red



East Siberian Laika, white

When black pigment is less saturated, the coat color is bluish gray. At birth, blue puppies of East Siberian Laika look “gray” like asphalt. At a later time, they differ from their normally pigmented littermates in bluish shade of their coat and not quite black, but still dark colored, nose.



East Siberian Laika puppy, four days old, blue coat color



The same puppy at the age of one month

Blue coat color varies from slightly “blue” shade to dark “steel” color. Blue dogs have very light colored eyes. Their color may change with age. Eyes are blue at the puppy age, but turn to yellow or light brown when they grow up.

It is proven that white or other light coat color is not associated with any health problems in the dog (Nastevich, 2006). However, it is important to know that coat color and hair pigmentation is not necessarily the same. Weakened pigmentation is often linked with problems in psychic and character of the dog. During embryonic development of dog, nervous system and pigmentation develop simultaneously out of ectodermic layer of cells. Genetic information for pigmentation and nervous system are in the same segment of DNA and they are linked in the process of development. Many geneticists explain that many factors causing a weaker pigmentation are linked with some deviations in the central nervous system, because melanosomes develop out of nerve segments and embryonic cells are undergone the same kind of damage at the same phase of embryonic development. Therefore, weakened pigmentation often is an indicator of some deviations in the development of nervous system. There are some data showing that weakened pigmentation is linked with loss of energy, vigor and resistance to diseases. Therefore, using dogs with weakened pigmentation as breeders can damage the breed. Therefore, the breed standard should allow only black color of nose.

To find out how frequent in the breed the preferred black and tan (karamisty) coat color is, we analyzed reports of dog show experts of East Siberian Laika at major dog shows in Irkutsk Province.

At the First All-Russian show of East Siberian Laikas in Irkutsk, 2003, out of total number of 88 dogs, 57% were variable black, including solid black, piebald and spotty, 15% were black and tan (karamisty), 15% were agouti gray of different shades, 8% were red of various shades, , 4% white and 1% brown (disqualified).

At the First Regional show of East Siberian Laika of industrial hunting regions, Zhigalovo 2004, out of total number of 54 dogs, 52% black and piebald, 26% red, 11% agouti gray, and 5.5% black and tan and white.

At the Second Regional show of East Siberian Laikas, Zhigalovo, 2006, total number of dogs 64, 47% black and piebald, 25% agouti gray, 12% red, 11% black and tan and 5% white.

Obtained results allow us to tell that karamisty coat color of East Siberian Laika, which A. V. Geits (1968) characterized as “little typical among Laikas”, in Irkutsk Province did not become more popular and remains rare. Banning red, gray and white dogs in the breed standard would eliminate a considerable part of breeding stock dogs and result in impoverishment of gene pool. Besides, there are no published materials on genetic background of coat colors in Laikas and their linkage with other hereditary traits. Now, based on what we know about inheritance of this coat color pattern in other dogs, we can tell black and tan coat color is a recessive trait (Malcolm B. Willis, 2002). Accumulation of recessive traits in any breed is undesirable.

Future of the breed is not in black and tan or karamisty (Yaroshenko, 2006), but in genetic heterozygosis, which secures its vigor and endurance. Cutting down genetic diversity within the breed to satisfy fashion or taste of poorly experienced specialists, who can tell East Siberian Laika apart from other Laika breeds only by its coat color is not permissible.

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BIG DOGS OF TIBET AND «THE MARKO POLO EFFECT»

Don Messerschmidt

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'I speak and speak,' Marco says, 'but...'

Forget Marco Polo! In this essay I'll tell you why.

Abandoning the first European to write about the big dogs of Tibet, including what his translators have subsequently called the Tibetan "mastiff", is not easy. Tibetan "mastiff" and other large breed dog fanciers have long looked to Marco Polo's Travels for insight and inspiration about the breed. Much of what he described, however, is probably not about "Tibetan mastiffs" per se. A great deal of what he wrote has been misunderstood and, in some instances, grossly distorted.

How much did Marco Polo actually write about the big dogs of Tibet? Very little.

Did he actually reach the high plateau of Tibet proper? No.

Did he observe Tibetan "mastiffs" serving their masters as a livestock guardians or monastery compound guards? No.

Were they the size of donkeys? No.

Did he really mean that the thousands of dogs he describes traveling with Kublai Khan's troops and hunting parties were "Tibetan mastiffs" as we know them? Most certainly not.

Does he deserve credit for being the first European to introduce us to the big dogs of Tibet? Yes, but... "Tibetan mastiffs"? Doubtful.

Introduction

When unraveling mysteries... it is wise to remember something Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes

once said: “When you have eliminated everything that cannot be, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, is what must be.”

– Pat Joseph, in ‘Did Mallory make it’ (2001)

For centuries the legendary big dogs of Tibet and the Himalayas have been described with awe and apprehension by explorers, mountaineers, diplomats, spies, missionaries, tourists and anthropologists in journals and travelogues, books and articles. The dogs that have come to be known as “Tibetan mastiffs” were known for their size, protective instincts and guardianship, faithfulness and ferocity.

The first informative account to reach the West about Tibet and Tibetan dogs was written by the Venetian trader and traveler, Marco Polo, following his epic 13th century sojourn in China and surrounding territories. The Polos—the boy Marco, his father Nicolo and uncle Maffeo—were not the first to have known about the big dogs, however. They are preceded in the literature by occasional and obscure references to several earlier encounters. The most well-known of these is the oft-cited Chinese chronicler’s account from 1121 BCE that tells of a large Tibetan dog “called the ‘Ngao’”, given as a gift from a western province to the Emperor Wuwang. Another even more speculative suggestion dates to the Han Dynasty (206 BCE to 221 CE) in the form of a glazed clay image, usually interpreted as a tomb guard with the likeness of a big dog that some think is a “Tibetan mastiff”.

Many writings from ancient and medieval sources are often fanciful or vague in the extreme, and (with the exception of Marco Polo’s) big dogs do not figure in them. Ancient geographers were more interested in exotic places and peoples. Traders concentrated their attentions on economic goods and markets. Missionaries wrote mostly about pagans and the spread of Christianity. Dogs were typically not in their sights nor on their itineraries, so went unmentioned. Thus it was left to Marco Polo to be ‘the first’ to tell the outside world about big dogs in Tibetan culture.

The Marco Polo Story

Now you must know that the Emperor sent the aforementioned said Messer Marco Polo, who is the author of this whole story, on business of his into the Western Provinces...

– Marco Polo, in *The Travels of Marco Polo, a Venetian*,
Thomas Wright edition (1948 [1880])

Every school child knows the story. The young Marco Polo traveled as a teenager from Venice to Cathay where he spent over two decades as an honored guest and sometimes personal emissary of the Great Khan, Kublai (grandson of Genghis Khan). Marco Polo ‘the Venetian’ was born in 1254 in Korčula, a town in Venetian Dalmatia (now Croatia) on the Mediterranean coast. In those days, Venice was “a kind of gateway to the world, you could say”, as one writer has put it (Kostova, 2005, p.26), a “gateway” that Polo threw wide open for his generation, with repercussions down to the present time. The Polos were fortunate in their timing, for trade between the Mediterranean and East Asia was flourishing as never before. It was a period that historians call the “Mongol Peace” (1245 to 1345 CE), a time of openness for overland travel and commerce by Europeans.

Marco Polo lived a long and venturesome life (7 decades), and died in 1324 at Venice. His adventures and discoveries along the Silk Road through Persia to Cathay, through countries now known as Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, China and Mongolia, are available to us in several versions and translations. The original account of his travels was published in 1298 as *Le divisament dou monde* (The Description of the World). It was written in Old French, the language of commerce in Polo’s day. Later, between 1310 and 1320, Polo reworked and reissued the book in Italian, as *Il Milione* (The Million), after the Polo family nickname¹².

It was a popular story, read by the educated classes, translated into several languages, printed and distributed widely—a significant achievement given that the printing press was not invented until 1440 CE, over a century after Polo’s death. The immense significance of the book inspired one translator and editor, Henry Yule (1903), to consider it as one of the greatest books of all time.

¹² Marco Polo’s *Travels* were first dictated to, hence ghost written by, Rustichello (Rustiglielo) Da Pisa, a man known in his day as a romance-writer. Thus, the book is “a product of an observant merchant and a professional romancer” (Latham 1958, p.1). The Italian name of the book, *Il Milione*, undoubtedly refers to the Polos’ wealth. Polo (and Rustichello) wrote for a relatively rational and scientific 13th century world that had maps, compasses and taxonomies. The writing strikes a cord of authenticity and reality in the modern geographical imagination. It is easy to ignore fabrications and exaggeration based on travelers’ tales and other hearsay (see Smethurst 2001).

In his short chapter “Of the Province of Thebeth” (Tibet), Polo mentions big Tibetan dogs (among several varieties) primarily in association with hunting¹³. He also describes some of Tibetan dress, habits and religion (though from this writer’s perspective his anthropology is quite inadequate). Along with his description of the dogs the size of donkeys, he associates them with the hunting of wild yak and musk deer. We do not know for sure, however, if any of the dogs were what we call today the “Tibetan mastiff”. Many Tibetan “mastiff” and molossus dog historians, breeders and fanciers cite references to the large dogs Polo describes without considering the source. Few have challenged the veracity of the translations or have thought them through critically.

One of Polo’s descriptions is of “a large breed of dogs” encountered in “Cuiju Province”, dogs “so fierce and bold that two of them together will attack a lion”. This observation is frequently cited by contemporary Tibetan “mastiff” fanciers in Asia, America and Europe to justify a modern quest to produce a breed of giant Tibetan super-dogs for show and for sale. From the description, however, it is impossible to tell the breed of dog he is referring to. It may well not be a “Tibetan mastiff”, if for no other reason than where he was talking about. Polo’s “Cuiju Province” is Guizhou (sometimes spelled Kwei-chau), situated east of Yunnan bordering Hunan. That’s a long way from Tibet and much hotter climate, a place where highland dogs would have difficulty thriving or surviving.

Problems of interpretation arise in cases like this when one assumes something other than the facts. In their otherwise excellent book *The Tibetan Mastiff* (1989), for example, Ann Rohrer and Cathy Flamholtz mistakenly identify Kwei-chau (Cuiju/Guizhou) as Szechuan, a mountainous province bordering southeastern Tibet. Then they rather wishfully assume that this was where “Polo first encountered Tibetan traders and their dogs” (1989, p.29).

This is not the only time that Polo is misquoted or misunderstood in the extensive literature on dogs. Such errors occur and are repeated frequently in books, articles and on the Internet. I call this phenomenon ‘The Marco Polo Effect’—the repetition, misrepresentation and misinterpretation of what Polo reputedly said or meant. The effect holds true any time someone quotes, misquotes or repeats any source from the past, or a translation of a source, or yet another translation of that, with or often without attribution, in order to establish the putative history of the dog breed (or, by extension, anything else¹⁴).

The Marco Polo Effect¹⁵

They have dogs of the size of asses, strong enough to hunt all sorts of wild beasts, particularly the wild oxen..., and are extremely large and fierce.

– Marco Polo in *The Travels of Marco Polo, a Venetian*,
Thomas Wright edition (1948 [1880])

The truth is, you see, that most people... are far too trusting... They believe what is told them. I never do. I’m afraid I always like to prove a thing for myself.

– Miss Marple, in Agatha Christie’s *The Body in the Library* (1970)

Anyone who has read modern accounts of the origins and history of the big dogs of Tibet, including what is recounted on Internet web pages put up by enthusiastic breeders, has encountered statements attributed to Marco Polo. We are led to believe that Marco Polo had a lot to say about Tibetan dogs, conveniently forgetting (or not checking to determine for sure) that he actually said very little about them and probably never got to Tibet proper to observe them in situ. Unfortunately, what he is said to have said about what he may (or may not) have seen is frequently misunderstood and misused. Referring to something ostensibly said by Marco Polo (or others) to shore

¹³ In another chapter, Polo also describes the “keepers of mastiff dogs” used in large hunting parties of 10,000 men and 5,000 dogs, in pursuit of various game animals. “It is indeed beautiful,” he says, “to see the speed of these dogs and the hunters, for when the prince goes out with his barons, boars and other animals are running on every side, and the dogs pursuing” (Marco Polo, Komroff translation, 1926, pp.130-131).

¹⁴ Rohrer and Flamholtz make a telling observation in their book, *The Tibetan Mastiff*, that “Marco Polo’s stories of the Tibetan dog, first set in print in the 1300’s, are remarkably similar to accounts penned in this century” (1989, p.28). And why not?, since much that has been penned about them in this century repeats the translations of Polo.

¹⁵ The following sources inform parts of the discussion of this effect: Thomas Wright, *The Travels of Marco Polo, a Venetian* (1880); Paul Smethurst, ‘Travel writing: Writing the East-Marco Polo and Sir John Mandeville’ (2001); Mary Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World* (1988); Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions* (1991); and Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (1974). Other sources are noted in the discussion.

up questionable claims about the origin, history, functions, size, sound and temperament of “Tibetan mastiffs” is commonplace. The practice has even jumped breeds and is found in the literature on other so-called “mastiff” type dogs, including Wolfhounds and Saint Bernards.

I am not saying that some of the quotations of Polo are not found in one or another translation of his book, but rather that they are too often misrepresented, contradictory, then repeated by contemporary armchair writers imperfectly, without checking, unquestioned, without proof, ad nauseam. (I prefer to follow Miss Marple’s example “...to prove a thing for myself”.) The problem in this case is compounded by the fact that there are a number of highly variable English and other European language translations of Polo’s travels to choose from.

Here are some instances that demonstrate how Polo has been misappropriated. Some examples are minor. Others change the whole meaning of what he said. Each describes an attribute of the big dogs of Tibet (but which big dogs?):

- on their size

When reading the many references to Marco Polo in print and on the Internet, he is either quoted or paraphrased as having encountered..., recorded..., described..., claimed to have seen..., told of seeing..., came across..., met with..., wrote of seeing..., was introduced to..., wrote about... “Tibetan mastiffs”.

Which is it?

What’s all the more interesting is that the term Tibetan mastiff (or its direct equivalent in Italian or Old French) was unknown to Polo. It was not invented until five centuries later, in the 1800s, when it was rather blithely inserted into the English language discourse by his translators¹⁶.

The typical Polo-based phraseology then goes on to describe dogs as tall as..., as large as..., as big as..., the size of... a donkey or donkeys, or an ass or asses... (depending on the translation)¹⁷.

It’s fine to use descriptive terms, but some of the words chosen to describe what Marco Polo wrote about are very different from the meaning that translators have gotten out of the early versions of his famous travel book. Nowhere does he actually say he saw the dogs in Tibet (or Tibetan donkeys/asses with which to compare them).

As early as 1880 Thomas Wright accused Polo of hyperbole over the donkey/ass size comparison, noting that while “a few other (more recent) travelers” mention large dogs, their accounts “do not convey an idea of the same magnitude” (Wright, 1880, p.287, note 12). “Surely, the breed was never quite that large”, writes an observer on the Internet (Anonymous, 2002).

Some breeders and Tibetan “mastiff” fanciers interpret Polo to be comparing the dogs with the small domestic ‘donkey’ (*Equus asinus*) of Tibet, while others feel certain he meant the large Tibetan wild ass (*E. hemionus kiang* or *E.h. onager*).

Which is it?

We do not know. He doesn’t say. But, probably neither, since there is no conclusive evidence that he ever saw either of the wild ass species with which to make a comparison. He was very familiar, however, with the relatively small domesticated burro or ass (*E. asinus*) so common in the Mediterranean countries. They were more likely his reference point. After all, he was writing for Europeans who knew nothing about Tibetan asses, domestic or wild, but a lot about those little donkey/ass critters closer to home¹⁸.

¹⁶ Rohrer and Flamholtz (1989:10) explain the derivation of the term “mastiff” for these dogs. They describe “mastiff” as a misnomer, similar to the erroneous classification of “Tibetan terriers” and “Tibetan spaniels”, neither of which is a true terrier nor a true spaniel: The Tibetan Mastiff has likewise suffered the same misclassification. By virtue of his size alone, the “mastiff” label was hung on the large dog of Tibet. We must remember, however, that in earlier days, the word “mastiff” was a much less specific appellation than it is today. Western explorers, catching their first glimpse of the powerful dogs of Tibet, doubtless, were anxious to explain the dogs in terms that their readers would understand. And so, they referred to the dogs as “mastiffs,” knowing that the reader would immediately envision a large, powerful dog... The name stuck and is with us still.

¹⁷ Note that the term ‘donkey’ only entered the English language relatively recently, in the late 18th century. In Marco Polo’s day what we call a *donkey* was an *ass* (*asino* in Italian). Thus, like the relatively new term Tibetan ‘mastiff’, the word ‘donkey’ first appeared in translations of Marco’s *Travels* many centuries post Polo.

¹⁸ One Internet writer has turned this notion on its head when he states that it is absurd “to believe the quantum leap of assuming that Marco Polo just happened upon [in Tibet] the smallest of miniature Mediterranean donkeys” (www.kesangcamp.com). It is highly unlikely that Polo met *any* donkeys (tame or wild) in Tibet. My point is that he

- on their loud voice

To the statement about a dog “as tall as a donkey” there is often appended the comment “with a voice like a lion” or “with a voice as powerful as a lion”.

Where did that lion voice come from?

It’s a puzzle, twice over. For one, while the Tibetan “mastiff” does have a uniquely loud voice or bark which some may think sounds lion-like; but note that the comparison to a “voice like a lion” does not appear in Polo’s account of Tibet. Furthermore, there are no lions (leone in Italian) in Tibet or China with which to make this voice comparison or (elsewhere in Polo) the statement that the big dogs are strong enough to hunt lions. By “lion” (leone in Italian) Polo undoubtedly meant tiger. As Wright tells us regarding the hunting of lions, “when our author [Polo] speaks of lions in China, as living animals, he undoubtedly means tigers” (Wright, 1880, pp. 268-269; see also Yule, 1903, v.2, p.126, and). (But, tigers do not roar as lions do, and are not exceptionally loud in any other way, either.) The most parsimonious explanation is that Polo used the term “lion” simply because it was more familiar to his European audience than the Asian tiger.

Note, however, that the lion motif is common in China and Tibet. Thomas Wright points out that the “imaginary and grotesque” representations of lion statuary in China are undoubtedly borrowed from the singha (‘lion’) of India’s Hindu mythology (1880, p.287).

Now, let’s examine differences in translating the passage that is most often borrowed (and distorted) from Polo, by comparing three of the most well known translations of Polo’s chapter on Tibet, according to Thomas Wright (1880), Henry Yule (1903) and Ronald Latham (1958)¹⁹.

was most likely comparing the dogs with the Mediterranean donkey because that’s an animal with which his readers were familiar. Comparing them to a large wild Tibetan ass—an animal totally unknown to his readers—seems far more bizarre.

¹⁹ There are many versions, editions and translations of Marco Polo’s *Travels*, most of them relying extensively on previous translations (a type of translator inbreeding). Here is a partial list (see also Smethurst 2005):

- 1559: The earliest translation in existence was published by Polo’s first Italian editor, John Baptist Ramusio, who claimed that “he worked from a Latin text of ‘great antiquity’” (Smethurst 2005). Ramusio wrote in medieval French, and incorporated a printed account of Polo’s book in Italian in his *Collection of Voyages and Travels*. Ramusio’s version is one of the basic works and a foundation to many later editions.
- 1818 (re-issued 1908): William Marsden translated and published his edition based on Ramusio’s 1559 Italian version.
- 1824: The French Geographical Society (FGS) published an edition based on a manuscript in Old French. Some scholars consider it the most nearly authentic of all versions.
- 1865: M. Pauthier published his French version, a revision of the 1824 FGS edition.
- 1880 (re-issued 1948): Thomas Wright published *The Travels of Marco Polo, a Venetian*. Wright’s version remains one of the best known English translations.
- 1903: Henry Yule’s 3rd edition of *The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian* was published after extensive editing and revision by Henri Cordier, based on Yule’s 1871 translation. The well known 3rd edition is often called the Yule-Cordier Edition. Of all the versions of Marco Polo’s work, scholars consider Yule-Cordier to be the most accurate, in part because of their tremendous combined scholarship. To prepare himself for the task, Yule personally examined many earlier Polo manuscripts.
- 1926: Manuel Komroff revised and edited Marsden’s 1818 translation. It includes a brief history of all translations and editions to that date.
- 1958: The translation by Ronald Latham is one of the most well known among the more recent versions.
- 2005: Barnes & Noble (Library of Essential Reading Series) republished Marsden’s 1908 (1818) version featuring an Introduction by Paul Smethurst and the addition of several chapters, including the Prologue and extensive notes by the editor Ernest Rhys.

“Here are found the animals that produce the musk, and such is the quantity, that the scent of it is diffused over the whole country... They are called *gudderi* in the language of the natives, and are taken with dogs...

They have dogs of the size of asses, strong enough to hunt all sorts of wild beasts, particularly the wild oxen, which are called *beyamini*, and are extremely large and fierce.”

– Wright (1880, p.285)

[Note: *gudderi* = musk deer; *beyamini* = yak]

“I should tell you also that in this country there are many of the animals that produce musk, which are called in the Tartar language *Gudderi*. Those rascals have great numbers of large and fine dogs, which are of great service in catching the musk-beasts, and so they procure great abundance of musk...

They have mastiff dogs as big as donkeys, which are capital at seizing wild beasts [and in particular the wild oxen which are called *Beyamini*, very great and fierce animals]. They have also sundry other kinds of sporting dogs...”

– Yule (1903, pp.45, 48)

“The country abounds with animals that produce musk, which in their language are called *gudderi*. They are so plentiful that you can smell musk everywhere... The rascally natives have many excellent dogs, who catch great numbers of these animals; so they have no lack of musk...

They have mastiffs as big as donkeys, very good at pulling down game, including wild cattle, which are plentiful there and of great size and ferocity. They also have a great variety of other hunting dogs...”

– Latham (1958, pp.173-4)

- on their primary function(s)

The canines in Marco Polo’s writing are described as “messenger dogs”, “sentry dogs” and “dogs of war” (in Kublai Khan’s army). If they were “Tibetan mastiffs”, it is remarkable that nowhere does Polo describe their primary role as guardian dogs tied in front of a Tibetan nomad’s tent to protect livestock or at a monastery gate to guard the compound. Furthermore, references to their specific functions as messenger, sentry or war dogs are derived from Polo’s sketchy discussion of the Khan’s army found elsewhere in his travelogue, quite separate from his description of Tibet. He undoubtedly exaggerated their roles with the army for effect. Much writing about armies, then and now, is intended more to impress than to inform. And did Kublai Khan’s army include a “contingent of 30,000 Tibetan Mastiffs”, as one recent author claims (Li Qian, 2006, p.21)? Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that dogs with the bulk of Tibetan “mastiffs” as we know them could function easily as “dogs of war”, since they could not have kept up with the Khan’s mounted soldiers. The most reasonable Tibetan “mastiff” function on the list is that of “sentry”. In retrospect Polo may have meant some other large but more lithe, fast dog, of which there are several varieties in the territories in and around the high regions of central and south central Asia and the Himalayas.

Had Polo, in fact, met or observed Tibetan nomads on the high plateau, first hand, if he had actually seen the big dogs in action, he would certainly have described them more correctly—as rather fierce and territorial livestock guardians. Landrace “Tibetan mastiffs” are bred primarily for this function.

- on their fearlessness

“Tibetan mastiffs” are often described as hunters of all sorts of “wild beasts” including “oxen” (yak), “animals that produce musk” (musk deer), and “lions”... (There are those mythical lions again!)

No doubt the Tibetan dogs Polo heard about were both fearsome and fearless. While there are big dogs in Tibet and elsewhere in China that are used for hunting, only rarely (I won’t say never) do Tibetan “mastiffs” serve this purpose, for they are neither light enough nor fast enough to chase down big game on the open plateau. The hunting and sporting dog types of Tibet are quite different. If he was talking about the latter—which he probably was—then this statement does not belong in a description of Tibetan “mastiffs”. Landrace Tibetan “mastiffs” are occasionally used for hunting, according to scattered accounts; but, usually to assist nomads only tangentially during a hunt. Robert Ekvall has described them as “accomplices in the subsidiary subsistence techniques of hunting” (Ekvall, 1963, p.166); i.e., only as “accomplices” (literally: ‘partner’, ‘helper’, ‘associate’).

In Henry Yule’s translation (1903) of the section in Polo’s book about the various wonders of Cuiju Province (modern Guizhou), he translates Polo as describing “a large breed of dogs, so fierce and bold that two of them together will attack a lion” (Yule, 1903, p.126). As already noted, these are not likely to have been “Tibetan

mastiffs”, for Guizhou is a long ways from the high plateau, far to the southeast of Tibet between Yunnan and Hunan.

- on their companionship

The companionship of Tibetan “mastiffs” is a common theme, and more than one breeder and aficionado believes that so taken was Polo with the breed that he had his own Tibetan Mastiff to accompany him on his travels.

This spurious assumption is based on an illustration printed in Henry Yule’s (1903) translation of Marco Polo. It shows the Polos approaching the gates of Venice after 26 years absence. On arrival, they were initially refused admittance to the family mansion because they were unrecognizable and had been presumed dead. In the illustration the Polos are shown dressed in Tartar clothing. In the foreground is a large black dog on a leash that looks remarkably like a “Tibetan mastiff”. Many people assume that this proves that Marco Polo brought one back to Venice with him.

But, does it? Check the facts.

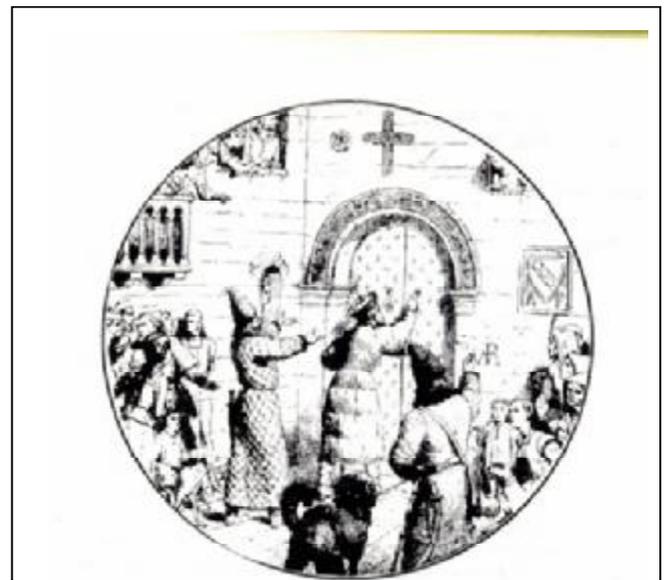
First, the full story of the Polos’ return to Venice was not recorded until the 16th century, by Giovanni Battista Ramusio. He based his account on a story handed down by family members. There is no dog in what he wrote.²⁰

Second, according to the caption on the illustration depicting “the Polos arriving at Venice”, the sketch was created by an Italian artist, Signor Quinto Cenni of Milan. It was commissioned for the 1903 Yule-Cordier Edition. At that time, “Tibetan mastiffs” were well known in Europe. Adding one to the illustration was Cordier’s idea²¹.

Unlike later adventurers in Tibet, such as Sven Hedin, Andrew Wilson, the members of various Himalayan expeditions and other 19th and early 20th century travelers who adopted local dogs, Marco Polo never mentions one as his traveling companion.

- and other stupendous features

One overstated account of the “Tibetan mastiff” ostensibly found “in the travel notes of Marco Polo” states that this big dog was “as sturdy as black bear, as agile as leopard and as clever as huntsman”...! (CTIC 2005). This is great descriptive language, but is it Marco Polo’s description? (I have been unable to document the original source of this description.)



“Illuminated Title, with Medallion representing the POLOS ARRIVING AT VENICE after 26 years’ absence, and being refused admittance to the Family Mansion; as related by Ramusio, p. 4 of Introductory Essay. Drawn by Signor QUINTO CENNI, No. 7 Via Solferino, Milan; from a Design by the Editor” -Yule, 1903, Explanatory list of illustrations to Vol. 1.

The ‘Marco Polo Effect’ is further compounded by the following:

- did marco polo get to tibet?

I have already indicated that he probably didn’t. Scholars generally agree that Polo may have gotten close to the Tibetan plateau during his travels in western China, but that it is highly unlikely that he ever visited Tibet proper. Thus, Polo’s descriptions of Tibet, its culture and its big dogs are based on hearsay, probably from

²⁰ Even the Tibetologist Robert Ekvall, in his otherwise authoritative article on the ‘Role of the dog in Tibetan nomadic society’, got it wrong when he states that the illustration showing “the Tibetan mastiff which Marco Polo brought to Italy with him” was taken from the original Italian edition (Ekvall, 1963, page 166, note 5).

²¹ The commission is described by Miss Amy Francis Yule, Henry’s daughter, in the 1903 Yule-Cordier edition. It was drawn, she says, from a design by the editor (Henri Cordier).

traders, pilgrims and/or other travelers he met elsewhere in the Khan's China.

Some scholars question if Polo even reached China! It has been pointed out, for example, that much of Polo's vocabulary is Persian, not Chinese. This has been taken to imply that he may not have gone beyond Persia. Other languages also come into his account but, if he had gone to Tibet, why doesn't he use Tibetan names for the animals he mentions in association with the big dogs? For example, Polo refers to yak as beyamini, an obvious corruption of the term brahmini or brahminy ('bull') from Sanskrit and Hindi. The Tibetan term is yak. And, he calls the musk deer gudder, interpreted by Yule (1903, v.2, p.49n.) to be derived from the Mongol term kuder. But it could just as well be a corruption of the Hindi/Nepali term kasturi ('musk deer'). The Tibetan term is lau or lawa.

Others have pointed out that Polo omits certain Chinese cultural items and practices that almost certainly would have intrigued him (and proven he had actually been there): e.g., chopsticks, tea, the custom of foot-binding, and the Great Wall. None of the claims against his traveling as far as China is conclusive, however, and for every argument against there are counter arguments for. Polo's staunch defenders point out that there are good reasons why he deigned not to describe some things and, on the other hand, that he mentions many other decidedly Chinese inventions and socio-cultural peculiarities that demonstrate his intimate knowledge of the culture.

Nor is Polo mentioned in any official Chinese accounts from Kublai Khan's court. It is known that the Chinese were typically quite thorough about keeping records of people with the reputed fame and stature of Marco Polo. Recent scholarship suggests, however, that during the 15th century official Chinese records of knowledge about or relations with outsiders were systematically destroyed by the xenophobic leaders of the time (Menzies, 2003).

In the end, the weight of opinion is that Polo did go to China, but not to Tibet²².

- did marco polo exaggerate?

Most likely yes. His descriptions of some places, cultural practices and strange things seen or heard about are often distorted by superlatives (even his own nickname: "Messer Marco Milione", 'millionaire'). Paul Smethurst (2005) reports that the Polo mansion in Venice was known as the "Corte del Milione", which suggests, he says, that Polo was prone to exaggeration—"to 'talking big'".

If so, why? Scholars have pointed out that books of his day were often "misleading and sentimental". The style of travel writing popular at the time pandered to the expectations of audiences who delighted in reading about far away places with strange and marvelous creatures and customs, wonders to behold. Marco Polo, too, followed the literary conventions of his time (though to a lesser degree than some others²³), enough so that Henry Yule refers to Polo's book as "a great book of puzzles²⁴".

- can we trust the available sources on marco polo?

Not comfortably. Contemporary references to Marco Polo are largely based on copies and translations, and sometimes translations of translations. These include some translators' own interpretations on various subjects, such as translating Polo as calling the big dogs "Tibetan mastiffs". There is no known copy of Marco Polo's original work in existence. Subsequent translations may be 'close', but they are not original.

The 'Marco Polo Effect' also holds true for many other translations from old accounts, and for quotations extracted and repeated from literary materials that are not, with absolute certainty, 'original'. Furthermore, some the interpretations by translators are often guided more by modern concepts, understandings and expectations than by those of the original (in this case medieval) audience for which they were intended. Thus,

²² After drawing my own conclusions about Polo in Tibet, or not, an even more authoritative discussion of the issue has been published. In his new book on *Marco Polo in China* (2006), Stephen G. Haw makes a definitive case for Polo going to China. He notes, however, that the Tibetan country that Polo claims to have penetrated to a distance of five days' walk was not Tibet at all, but parts of western China east of the high plateau (Haw 2006, p.99). Polo undoubtedly met Tibetan traders and saw what he took to be Tibetan dogs, but there is no conclusive evidence to support any claim that he actually attained the Tibetan plateau.

²³ Paul Smethurst (2001) considers Polo's writings far less exaggerated, for example, than those of his 14th century near contemporary Sir John Mandeville.

²⁴ Yule wrote: "It is a great book of puzzles, whilst our confidence in the man's veracity is such that we feel certain every puzzle has a solution" (1903, v.1, p.1).

it is a bit dodgy to consider what we read (in English) ostensibly from Marco Polo or any of the early interpretations, as accurate and correct. Therefore, the veracity of much that we read as ‘authentic’ is open to serious question²⁵.

- do we sometimes seek what we want to hear?

Undoubtedly, yes. It is human nature to find what we want to see and hear in such accounts, then pass it along to impress others, pursuing fancy and ignoring obvious truths and facts to the contrary. Inflated egos and economics often seem to get in the way of caution. Italo Calvino says it well in his postmodernist novelistic account of Marco Polo’s interviews with Kublai Khan, where he writes the following truism as part of an imaginary conversation:

“I speak and speak,” Marco says, “but the listener retains only the words he is expecting... It is not the voice that commands the story: It is the ear.” (Calvino, 1974).

Misusing Polo to Prove the Tibetan “Mastiff”/Molosser Connection

There is another aspect to the Marco Polo Effect, one that has been very decisively put down by serious critics (such as the dog origin researcher and breeder Kåre Konradsen at www.molosserworld.com). Some of the same people who have misinterpreted Marco Polo as described above, seem also to consider that Polo’s observations somehow provide ‘proof’ that Tibetan “mastiffs” are the true Molosser. They often compare Polo’s descriptions of the big Tibetan breed with the famous Assyrian bas reliefs of molosses-type dogs. Konradsen calls this “The Tibetan Theory”. He writes (rather irreverently, as a dogged ‘cynic’²⁶):

Furthermore, the Tibetan theory advocates claim that the dog on the plate from Nineveh, dated about 580 B.C.[.] is a Tibetan Mastiff brought down from the mountains, just because it has a bushy tail carried like the modern Tibetan Mastiff. Yeah, and the moon is a cheese, because it looks like a cheese. What about the other bas reliefs? Perfectly Mastiff typed dogs without a bushy tail carried over the back? Tibetan Mastiff mutants?

Konradsen’s discussion goes on, briefly, in the same vein, to scotch the notion of Tibetan “mastiffs” on the Assyrian bas reliefs, at Nineveh, or with Alexander’s army across Persia to the Indus River. Simple logic should have put these notions to rest long ago—the regions noted are far too hot for “Tibetan mastiffs” to survive.

Conclusion

There you have it. A lot of what Marco Polo is frequently ‘quoted’ as having said, or thought to have said, about the big dogs of Tibet is hyperbole. I have belabored the misinterpretation and misquotation of Marco Polo somewhat, but the reader should be aware that Marco Polo is not the only author who has been so clearly rubbished in print. It happens often, especially on the Internet with its uncritically encapsulating (some call it amateur) effect on modern communications²⁷.

²⁵ The contemporary Marco Polo expert, Paul Smethurst, writes that “you will not find anything in the manuscripts that has not found its way into the modern editions which are usually a sum of existing manuscripts” (personal communication, December 2006). In Smethurst’s ‘Introduction’ to *The Travels of Marco Polo* (published in the Barnes & Noble Library of Essential Reading Series, 2005) he writes further that:

The original manuscript of *The Travels of Marco Polo* gave rise to numerous copies, translations and editions. There are about eight-five surviving manuscripts in different languages preserved in museums and libraries around the world. Most modern editions are based on either the medieval French edition (the Paris manuscript or F text) written in the early fourteenth century, or the much fuller Italian version by Ramusio (1559), which is generally regarded as the first printed edition. The F text is usually considered to be closest to the original, and it is generally accepted that it is written in the same language as the original, i.e. medieval French. Ramusio claims that his edition is based on a Latin text of great antiquity (it is certainly partly based on the Latin translation made in Polo’s lifetime by Francesco Pipino, a Dominican of Bologna, who claims to have worked from an Italian, not French, manuscript). This may contain original material omitted from F, or possibly contains additions made by Polo himself in later life. The origin of Ramusio’s “additions” is a matter of conjecture, but it is conceivable that some of these came from a fuller translation of the original manuscript...

²⁶ ‘Cynic’ is derived from the *kuon* (Greek for ‘dog’) > *kyn* > *cyn*, the root to both *cynology* (the study of dogs) and *cynic* (one who believes that people are motivated purely by self-interest).

²⁷ One contemporary observer of the Internet’s pervasive amateurism, its lack of intellectual engagement, calls “the entire Internet movement” a “cultural meltdown, an instance of barbarians at civilization’s gates” (Steven Levy, 25

A Reprieve

With all this copy-cat bashing of people who misuse Marco Polo and other old sources to stake out a questionable position or make a point or claim to understand the history of something (e.g., dogs), I must remind myself that even when we know better, we do not always act better.

What is it about the subject of dogs that causes even reputed scientists (respected historians, anthropologists, geneticists, animal behaviorists, etc.) to fall into the trap of self-deception?

The summary comment below from Gustavo Aguirre, a veterinary scientist, puts it well. Although he is speaking from a background in dog genome studies, what he says has a larger meaning, one that we can all relate to. It is clear that even the most scientific among us mess things up at times, when we neglect to pause and think critically (or skeptically) about what we know, or think we know, and especially about what we say or write and publish that is largely speculative. Aguirre says:

Most scientists who talk about dogs have their scientist hat and their dumb hat. And whenever they start talking about dogs, they put on their dumb hat. They say things that as scientists they have to know can't possibly be right. (Aguirre, as quoted in 'The truth about dogs' by Stephen Budiansky, 1999).

Perhaps (tongue in cheek) Mark Twain should be given the last word: "Get your facts first," he once said, "and then you can distort them as much as you please"²⁸.

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Newsweek, March 26, 2007, p. 16, after Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture*, (2007). (With a little common sense and critical thinking, it doesn't have to be that way.)

²⁸ This quote is attributed to Mark Twain by Rudyard Kipling in 1890 (according to Ralph Keyes, *The Quote Verifier*, 2006, p. 232).

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Box: 'Marco Polo on the Big Dogs of Tibet

* *Bhote kukur* = 'Tibetan dog' in Nepali.

Marco Polo on the Big Dogs of Tibet

“Here are found the animals that produce the musk, and such is the quantity, that the scent of it is diffused over the whole country... They are called gudderi in the language of the natives, and are taken with dogs. These people use no coined money, nor even the paper money of the grand khan, but for their currency employ coral. Their dress is homely, being of leather, undressed skins, or of canvas. They have a language peculiar to the province of Thebeth... a country of so much importance as to be divided into eight kingdoms, containing many cities and castles. Its rivers, lakes, and mountains are numerous. In the rivers gold-dust is found in very large quantities. Not only is the coral, before mentioned, used for money, but the women also wear it about their necks, and with it ornament their idols... These people are necromancers and by their infernal art perform the most extraordinary and delusive enchantments that were ever seen or heard of. They cause tempests to arise, accompanied with flashes of lightning and thunderbolts, and produce many other miraculous effects. They are altogether an ill-conditioned race. They have dogs of the size of asses, strong enough to hunt all sorts of wild beasts, particularly the wild oxen, which are called beyamini [yaks], and are extremely large and fierce. Some of the best laner falcons are bred here, and also sakers, very swift of flight, and the natives have good sport with them. This province of Thebeth is subject to the grand khan, as well as all the other kingdoms and provinces that have been mentioned...”

– The Travels of Marco Polo, a Venetian (Wright, 1948)

HUNTING FOR PROFIT VERSUS HUNTING FOR SPORT

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Hunting is among the oldest human professions and it was an important method of obtaining sustenance in the early period of human history. Over the millennia, humans came a long way from their primeval stage. People changed and their attitude towards hunting changed as well. Today hunting is a diversion, a sport and a hobby. However, at the same time, in some regions of Russia, hunting still survives as a way of life and a profession to make living. This kind of hunting we call “industrial hunting” (“promyslovaya okhota” in Russian).

Hunting for sport means primarily an emotional and esthetic pleasure and the product is of only secondary importance. During industrial hunting, one does not keep in mind its recreational activity; your goal is to get a certain amount of product, such as sable and squirrel pelts or meat of wild animals, etc.

Because of this difference, different methods of hunting were developed and employed. Hunting dogs, being an important mean of catching wild animals, could not remain unchanged and the same applies to sporting hunting and industrial hunting, because each of these two directions has certain special characteristics.

Legislation and regulations applied in the Russian Federation encompasses a significant range of species of mammals and birds that are hunted during the fall-winter seasons. Hunters, involved in sport hunting, can choose to hunt among hoofed animals, bear, and fur bearing animals, grouse and waterfowl. Therefore, having an all-rounder hunting dog is very desirable. I believe that Laikas are popular in our country exactly for this reason. Laikas are among the most all-round hunting dog breeds.

A hunter, especially if he is living in a big city, cannot afford many dogs. He keeps one dog and tries to hunt it on all kinds of birds and mammals allowed for shooting in season. Understandably, cynologists of major centers were guided to enhance and fix the all-rounder hunting qualities of dogs and gave additional points when rating them (bonitation, as Russians call it).

However, this trend, during recent times, took an ugly turn. Laikas are being tried on an excessively wide range of animals (“from hummingbirds to elephants”). In the past, when rating dogs at field trials, decoy animals were used only as an additional test but were not essential. Now, they have become basic.

In the industrial hunting with a dog, the situation is somewhat different and it is brought about by economic need. A hunter works on contract and he has to deliver hunting products in certain quantities. Under these

conditions, the all-rounder dog is more of a nuisance than a valuable asset. This is because hunting with dogs is limited by the period before heavy snowfall and the hunter must complete his harvest of wild animals according to his contract during this short period. As a rule, a Laika hunter has more than one dog, on average three dogs. In the early season, before snowfall, they hunt squirrel. When there is enough snow, they hunt sable. The work of the dog on squirrel and on sable is very different. The dog searches for squirrel, but it chases sable. Therefore, a good squirrel dog cannot be equally a good sable dog and vice versa. First, the hunter determines the talents of his dogs and then takes them to hunt those animals, which they are most prone to hunt. Of course, both sable Laika and big game Laika can hunt squirrel. However, as squirrel is not their favorite and most exciting game, squirrel hunting with such a dog is nothing more than “killing your legs”. The same is true with a good squirrel dog. If a squirrel dog were to find sable tracks, it would chase and tree it, but it would be only a sporadic game and the hunter would not be able to fulfill his contract.

Generally, Laikas of East Siberia are prone to hunt “red game” (sable and big game) with maturity (Voilochnikov and Voilochnikov, 1992). Pure squirrel dogs are rare. The best squirrel dogs are usually young ones, one – two years old. Squirrel is a mass species and, if the sable population is low, dogs seek out squirrels enthusiastically until such time as they mature and become interested in more valuable game. In the first fall hunt the puppy is very agile and tirelessly searches in all habitats and stays very well squirrel it has found. Mature, experienced dogs save their energy for sable and hoofed game. By the end of the first hunting season – the early period of next fall’s traits of hunting specialization begin to show. The dog tends to go after a certain kind of game and by the age of 5-6 years, the dog will not pay attention to squirrels and focuses, for example, on sable only.

An industrial hunter, specializing in fur bearing animals, would not walk by a squirrel treed by his dog. However, if the dog “turned away” from the sable tack (dropped the sable and switched to squirrel), it would be reprimanded severely and the squirrel would never be shot. When harvesting the meat of wild animals, there is a different pattern. The hunter would never shoot a squirrel even if his dogs were not tracking big game at the time. He would rather call off his dogs or punish them, if they tree squirrel, because big game might be not too far away and be frightened by the dog’s barking. I know some big game hunters who do not even carry any shotgun cartridges

The determination and subsequent enhancement of specialized hunting talents in dogs, finally results in attempts to preserve them by selective breeding. This is how strains of sable Laika, squirrel Laika, big game Laika, etc. are developed.

Besides the versatility and narrow specialization of Laikas, differences in certain elements of the dog’s work are also important either for sporting hunting or for industrial hunting. Above all this is the style of searching. During hunting, besides the shooting, hunters get a lot of satisfaction from just watching the dog’s work. Hunters have worked out several requirements, which are included in the rules for field trials, which are often described in different publications. As a result, it is believed that the correct searching style is gallop, alternating with trot, during which the dog is running in circles on both sides of the hunter’s path. This is correct, but it is true only in the sporting hunting. Because this kind of hunting does not take long, usually only a weekend, and this kind of work allows the dog to find most of the game in the visited habitats. A hunter, seeing this style of work, enjoys it the most.

Alas, I have to disappoint Laika lovers. Industrial Laikas, as a rule, do not work this way. The hunting period lasts from a period of two weeks to a month and even longer. The dog must work with a great output of energy in deep snow and during frosty weather, because the entire hunting period is limited. The dog trots and visits only the habitats suitable for game. During the search, the dog often runs in a straight line, which is particularly typical of sable and big game hunting Laikas. This is because dogs are searching for tracks; once the track is found, the dogs work “until exhaustion”.

Only young and inexperienced dogs, as I mentioned above, being curious are actively “flying” in the woods and this continues during the early hunting period, until deep snowfall. Some hunters try to restrict the dog’s searching range in order to save their energy. For this purpose, they keep the dog on the leash behind reindeer or horse until they hit game tracks. However, I must repeat, this makes sense only when hunting sable or big hoofed game. The reason is the same. For an industrial hunter, it is the beauty or correct style of the dog’s work as it is accepted by the conventional rules. Their goal is productivity without wasting much time and energy.

The second element is the dog’s persistence. Industrial hunting dogs have a powerful hunting instinct. They can work on sable or hoofed game away from their master for several hours. This kind of persistence is among the major conditions of successful hunting. For the sporting hunting, this persistence is not necessary. Moreover, if you hunt in an overcrowded region and the dog chases for several hours, he will cross the borders of the property and get into a variety of difficulties: he might be shot, killed by a car or stolen. I suppose, such dogs are eliminated naturally. Nobody wants them for hunting, because it does not make sense to chase game over

several kilometers instead of switching to another animal that is easier to get. Many amateur hunters with Laikas confirmed my conclusions.

Yet one more peculiarity of industrial hunting Laikas is their good work during extremely cold weather. When it is very frosty, working conditions for the dog are especially difficult. The scent of tracks disappears quickly and the animal easily hears the chasing dog far away and becomes either frightened or it hides. Extremely frosty weather in the hunting regions of East Siberia is very common. In early November, the daytime temperature drops to minus 30-35° C. A morning temperature of minus 20-25° C is considered normal. Therefore, the industrial hunter's productivity depends on the ability of his dogs to hunt in these conditions.

Laikas, which work well in warm weather, but sharply lose efficiency during frosty weather, are of low value or are even killed. The ability to work well at low temperatures is a must and it is among the major merits of a hunting Laika. This trait was developed and preserved by selective breeding for centuries.

For a sporting hunter, this is not so important, because he can postpone his hunting trip, if the weather is too cold. Besides, particularly cold weather is not typical in the major regions of breeding pedigree Laikas. Even trials of Laikas on squirrel, marten and other game are not conducted, if the temperature drops below minus 20° C. Therefore, official cynologists never subtract points for the inability of dogs to work at low temperatures at organized field trials. All Laikas are used for breeding regardless if they can or cannot work in frosty weather. Such dogs are not suitable for industrial hunting. Here, I have my own bitter experience. When I arrived to work in Irkutsk Province, I took a West Siberian Laika from Sverdlovsk. This dog worked beautifully and productively during the early period of the hunting season, but when the weather turned frosty, the dog made frequent mistakes, barked under empty trees and was poor at tracking. Its hunting productivity sharply declined. Only at midday, when the air temperature rose, could I take two –three squirrels with him.

The differences between industrial hunting dogs and pedigree dogs are not in the working traits. Industrial hunting is hard work in harsh conditions. A dog used for industrial hunting should be undemanding and hardy. These traits were also developed by human selection. Weak and sick dogs were killed. A Laika for industrial hunting must have a thick coat, with very stiff guard hairs on the legs, because the icy crust on the snow in the fall is very common and without good protection of legs, the dog would lose the ability to run during the first days of hunting.

Industrial hunting dogs have plenty of endurance and have a strong nervous system, because they have to work not for a couple of days, but for two weeks, a month and longer using all its energy. There are several dogs at each winter log cabin. This is a dog team and each dog must fight for its social status in the team. A dog with weak nerves cannot do it. Unfortunately, after life in cities, many of these qualities have been either lost or weakened.

Based on all the above, I can conclude that pedigree Laikas from major cynological centers will never be able to replace local industrial hunting dogs. Industrial hunters often talk and write about this and often in connection with the worthlessness of some pedigree Laikas. I disagree with this. Pedigree dogs are not bad at all. They are simply designed for sporting hunting and they have qualities developed exactly for this purpose.

It is quite possible that industrial hunting dogs would be rather unsuitable for amateur hunting, especially, if they had been obtained as adults.

The goal of this article is not only to show the differences between dogs that arise from the different requirements of industrial versus sporting hunting, but also to show the uniqueness of the industrial hunting dogs and the need to preserve them in the industrial hunting regions of the country. Official cynology should finally pay them serious attention and admit that besides the cynological centers with pedigree dogs, there are regions with absolutely unique populations of industrial hunting dogs, which need assistance for their preservation. The state of the industrial hunting dogs in our country is not favorable. It would be safe to say that it is worsening. This is caused not only by the importation of dogs of other breeds, keeping dogs permanently on the loose and poor feeding because of economic hardship in Siberian villages, but also by the tendency to breed only those dogs, which hunt well on the most profitable kind of game at the given moment (Bogatov, Bogatova, 2004).

Thus, in Zhigalovo District, Irkutsk Province, in early 1960s all squirrel dogs were actually killed. During this time, the majority of hunters worked on collective farms. They were allowed to leave for hunting for 15-20 days and the money from the sold furs was the only money for the family to live on. Sables were plentiful and the average number taken by one hunter was 40 sables per season. Squirrel hunting was considerably less profitable and squirrel dogs were killed, because they were not needed.

During the 1980s, the population of hoofed animal hunting Laikas in Zhigalovo District also suffered losses for the same reason (Bogatov and Bogatova, 2004). In 1999-2001, the prices for squirrel pelts rose sharply and hunters hurriedly began breeding squirrel dogs. In the remote community of Magdan, Kachug District, Irkutsk Province the dogs were famous for their typical conformation and high hunting qualities on moose and northern

lynx. Hunters began importing squirrel Laikas with very different conformation from the local dogs.

Some of them were used for breeding. Now, prices for squirrel pelts have fallen again and the demand for squirrel dogs has also declined, but the local dogs have become “contaminated” genetically by untypical dogs. I can continue listing examples. This allows me to say that local dogs are greatly endangered.

Now, to solve the problems of breeding professional quality hunting dogs, running pedigree work in one or another region of the Russian Federation is not enough. The development of a unified program is necessary. We need to work out a single unified program “Laikas of Russia” supported and funded by the Government and recognizing the Laika as part of the national heritage of Russia (Mikhailov, 2004).

To start with, we need to run a cynological survey in Siberia and the Far East for the following purposes:

1. To evaluate the quality and quantity of authentic local dogs with the prospect of using them for breeding.

2. To describe and systematize the breed characteristics of aboriginal Laika strains so that this information could be useful for the standards of aboriginal dog breeds.

3. To determine the territories where local dogs most fit the descriptions in the standards of existing Laika breeds and where they do not exist or are present in such small quantities as to make it impossible to use them for pure breeding. To resume Laika breeding in those territories, pedigree Laikas can be used selectively with preference given to those most similar to the aboriginal type of dogs.

To accomplish these tasks, it is necessary to attract local specialists in hunting and wildlife biology, who know the local hunting dogs and have experience of working with them.

To continue this work for solving problems with industrial dog breeding, it is necessary to use the entire knowledge accumulated by Russian cynology in Laika breeding in the last 70 years. It is absolutely impermissible to delay this work with the dogs of the industrial hunting regions, because procrastination is deadly dangerous. If we lose the breeding stock of aboriginal Laikas, we lose not only the cultural heritage accumulated by generations of native peoples of Siberia but also a unique and irreplaceable hunting tool. We simply have no right to kill by negligence our best assistant in hunting – the industrial hunting Laika.

LITERATURE

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R-PADS, 2004

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