

Primitive and Aboriginal Dog Society

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

In this issue we publish the next four articles intended for the Proceedings of the first international cynological conference “Aboriginal Breeds of Dogs as Elements of Biodiversity and the Cultural Heritage of Mankind”. Myrna Shibolet writes about the ongoing project of many years on the Canaan Dog in Israel. Atila and Sider Sedefchev write about their work with the Karakachan in Bulgaria. Jan Scotland has allowed to republish his article about the history and present situation of the aboriginal population of Kelb tal-Fenek (Rabbit Hunting Dog), erroneously renamed and known as the Pharaoh Hound by show dog fanciers. Almaz Kurmankulov writes about the little known aboriginal sighthound of Kyrgyzstan – the Taigan. The Taigan has become the recognized national breed of Kyrgyzstan.

Sincerely yours,
Curator of PADS, Vladimir Beregovoy

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THE CANAAN DOG – BIBLICAL DOG IN MODERN TIMES

Myrna Shibolet

Israel

Abstract: The Israel Canaan Dog is one of the few existing breeds of primitive dog, known for thousands of years, whose natural habitat is the present day state of Israel. These dogs have not changed since biblical times, and their biological characteristics are evidence of adaptation to semi-arid zones. The breed still exists in the wild and with the Bedouins of the area. Breeders in Israel continue to bring in new bloodlines from the wild, and are attempting to preserve the natural characteristics of these dogs, despite them now being a recognized breed that are being bred in many countries abroad. One of the major factors in the successful preservation of the breed is its growing popularity as a pure bred, registered pet.

There are as many as forty references to dogs in the Bible and we learn that the dog was common and well-known thousands of years ago (4). Dogs of those times were used as shepherds and guardians of the flocks and home. References make it clear that the dog was of great importance in alerting the community to the presence of strangers. Although many citations were derogatory, it is clear that the dog was an accepted and valued part of life in those times (7).

There is good reason to believe that the dog of Biblical times was the Canaan dog, the only breed truly native to the land of Canaan, the modern State of Israel. Evidence includes rock carvings, such as those found in Wadi Celouqa in Central Sinai, depicting Canaan-type dogs chasing an antelope (1st-3rd century AD) (G. Ilani,

personal communication), and in the tomb drawings of Bene Hassan (2200-2000 BC) (1,8). A clear bas-relief of a Canaan dog has been found on a 2nd century AD sarcophagus dug up in Ashkelon, and presently in the local archaeological museum (9).

A fairly recent discovery that presents evidence of the importance of the dog and its uniformity in ancient times is the find of a huge dog cemetery in archaeological digs at ancient Ashkelon. This dates back to the fifth century BC with over 700 dog skeletons found, including numerous puppies, adults and juveniles. Each dog was buried individually and with great care, reflecting a strong bond between dogs and humans. The description of the dogs by the archaeological team is as follows: "The mature Ashkelon dogs were a little over 20 inches high



and weighed a little more than 30 pounds." (9). Wapnish and Hesse have found a modern counterpart in today's "Bedouin shepdogs", known as Palestinian pariah dogs. Or, as we would call them, Canaan dogs. (3)

The Canaan Dog is one of the small group of rare and disappearing breeds that are considered to be primitive dogs, and are often referred to as "pariah dogs" or "native breeds". The pariahs, that include ancient indigenous breeds found mostly in Asia and Africa, are of great interest for a number of reasons. They are in type the closest to the original dog, the dog that was the ancestor of all the modern breeds, and that may date back as much as 100,000 to 150,000 years. These are the breeds that have survived on their own, the only criteria for the breed's continuance being its ability to survive in very difficult conditions. On the other hand, pariahs, in their life style and relation to man, are very similar to the first dogs ever domesticated, willing to develop a partnership with man but able to live on their own if necessary.

To scientists and others with interest in the development of the dog, these breeds are described as a naturally occurring type of dog "breed" in which the dogs are similar in appearance and usually also in behavior. They were created by natural selection as suited for their local environments (size, coat type, color) and through only a small amount of direct artificial selection, which is nearly always post-breeding (culling of excess pups and elimination of undesirable individuals – those that, for instance, can not learn to stop bothering livestock/poultry). These are not "pure" breeds in the modern sense of having a narrow gene pool selected for some purpose, with no other breeds allowed to be crossed in. There is always the possibility of some minor mixing with other breeds that were brought to the living area of the primitive dogs, but only characteristics that would be favorable to survival



would have persisted, and overall any "foreign" influence would quickly be diluted in the strong gene pool of the pariahs.

The Canaan Dog holds a special and unique position in today's cynological world. On the one hand, this breed is fully recognized by all of the world's kennel clubs and is gaining more and more popularity as a pet and family dog in various parts of the world. On the other hand, in its land of origin, Israel, this breed also still exists as a wild or semi wild dog that must fight for its survival.

The Canaan dog is a member of what is considered to be the oldest family of dogs, the Spitzes. This extensive family, with members in all parts of the world, is perhaps the closest to the "original" dog. Throughout this canine family,

the basic characteristics of the wild dog remain – prick ears, moderate size and build build in most breeds, thick and weather resistant coat, functional skull shape, well developed senses, natural trotting gait, and great strength and stamina. The family further evolved to adapt to specific environments – the Nordic breeds, such as the huskies, laikas, elk and bearhounds, adapting to the cold and harsh conditions of the north, whereas the Basenji of Africa developed a very short, flat coat without undercoat suited to the Congo rainforests (3,6,7). However, most members of the family retained certain basic characteristics – body build tending to the square or nearly square, tail carried high and curled over the back, erect ears, a short quick trot, and personality traits of caution and suspiciousness, high reactivity, aggressiveness in particular to other dogs in their territory, independence, and strong loyalty to their own "pack". The Canaan dog is one of the few breeds known to be successfully adapted to a desert environment. Studies done at Tel Aviv University and Ben Gurion University of the Negev, as well as a personal study done by the author, indicate its astonishing ability to survive the great range of temperatures and lack of water of a desert habitat. (2,7). Physiological adaptations developed, no doubt, through the thousands of years in the demanding conditions of its home. Throughout the upheavals of history it survived, at times a valued working dog, at times a scavenger no better than a wild animal. And like the other wild residents of the area, only the strongest and fittest survived to breed and pass on their characteristics.



In 1934, Professor Rudolphina Menzel, a noted cynologist, emigrated to Palestine. In her native Austria she had gained a reputation as an animal behaviorist and expert on dogs. On arrival, she was requested by the Haganah (the Israel pre-state military organization), to build up a network of service dogs for guarding, tracking, mine detection and similar tasks. She quickly discovered that the breeds commonly used for such tasks in Europe, such as German Shepherds, Boxers, and Dobermans, were not suitable for use in Palestine – they suffered greatly from the heat and the hard, rocky ground. While attempting to find a solution to the problem, Prof. Menzel began to study the local pariah dogs, mostly ownerless, that lived on the outskirts of settlements, Bedouin encampments, and in the desert and wilderness. Her scientific eye saw that these dogs might well be a breed that had adapted to the conditions so difficult for other dogs. (3).

She began a program of "redomestication", collecting puppies and adults from the pariah groups, and found them to be highly receptive to change and quick to adjust to domestication. She also found them readily trainable, and, as she had expected, able to function efficiently in the difficult local environment. She set up breeding units from the Bedouin and Druse dog populations, and was able to provide useful working dogs for defense and guard purposes.



"Canaan dogs", as she named them, after the Biblical Land of Canaan, were very effective in patrol work, perimeter guard, and nose work, including their use as messenger dogs, and were the first to be trained to solve the difficult problem of mine detection. She even trained a few as guide dogs for the blind (3), though the natural suspiciousness and reactivity makes most Canaans unsuitable for this sort of task.

Prof. Menzel was instrumental in gaining international recognition for the breed; the breed standard prepared by her was accepted by the Federation Cynologique Internationale in 1966. (The last revision was accepted in 1987). The first specimens of the breed to be sent abroad

were sent to the US in 1965 and to Germany shortly after. In 1970, Shaar Hagai Kennels near Jerusalem joined in the development and breeding of these dogs, carrying on after her death in 1973. The breeding, training and exhibiting of the dogs is carried out according to her guidelines, as well as the inclusion of new desert and Bedouin bloodlines whenever possible, so as to retain the natural characteristics of the breed.



Today it is becoming more and more difficult to find wild-born Canaans. One of the reasons is the strict rabies control program in Israel, which includes the destruction of feral dog packs. There are many such packs on the outskirts of towns and villages that are composed of a variety of dogs, mostly mixed breeds, that have been abandoned by owners. These dogs live primarily from scavenging, and packs are often quite large, composed of ten dogs or more. These packs can be aggressive and dangerous to livestock and even to children. Wardens charged with the task of destroying these packs do not differentiate between them and packs of Canaans (rarely numbering more than three or four) which are rarely aggressive to livestock and not known

to be aggressive to humans.

Another reason is the spread of civilization and the settling of many Bedouins in towns and villages. This change in lifestyle results in the introduction of other breeds that mix with the natural population. There are still Canaans in the more remote areas and living with Bedouin tribes that still live a traditional lifestyle in areas distant from "civilization", but they are becoming fewer and harder to locate.

The Canaan is well established today in Israel and abroad. It is officially the Israel national breed, accepted as such by the Israel Kennel Club. Canaans are in demand in Israel as pets – they are extremely alert watchdogs that are very territorial but not highly aggressive, good family dogs, very reliable with children, and easy to care for. They have few health problems. A series of examinations over the years of numbers of dogs, from the ages of one year to over twelve years, seems to indicate that hip dysplasia is nearly non-existent in the breed. There are few indications of other health or genetic problems. The Canaans as puppies were very susceptible to parvovirus when the disease first appeared in Israel, but over the last years they seem to have built up a natural resistance on a level with that of other breeds.

Today's modern breeds are suffering more and more from degenerative, reproductive, and health problems, the result of a combination of a more and more limited gene pool in each specific breed, and selection for various

breed specific characteristics that can be considered anti-survival. In almost all of the modern breeds, there is no outside gene pool that could serve to improve the health and well being of the breed.

The pariahs in general and the Canaan in particular hold great value to the canine world in the continuing presence of unregistered wild and feral stock that can be added to the gene pool. In this way, the characteristics that have enabled these breeds to survive for thousands of years can be strengthened and preserved. In addition, there is a great deal of interest in studying the behavior of these breeds in their natural habitat and unchanged way of life. This provides us with a wealth of information on the natural behavior of the dog, from the time he first became associated with man, his capabilities and methods of survival in various conditions, and the way his relationship with man develops.

For these reasons, we find that the demand for Canaans abroad is growing rapidly; people seem to be interested in a natural healthy dog. There are multiple exports every year. There are active breed clubs in numerous countries – US, England, Germany, France, Italy, Finland – and more and more Canaans are being seen at dog shows, winning titles both in conformation and in performance. This Biblical dog has made a highly successful transition to the modern world where it is becoming more and more valued as a working dog and companion, as it was thousands of years ago.



Although the idea of breeding and registering the natural land races of dog with recognized kennel clubs has a lot of opposition among those involved with these breeds, we feel that this is what has given us the opportunity to preserve the Canaan Dog. In the early years, we found it very difficult to find homes for puppies or

to interest people in the breed. Only after a lot of publicity, emphasizing the uniqueness of these dogs, and the presentation of Canaans at shows and other events where the general public was able to see them, did people start developing an interest in having these dogs as pets and working dogs. Today, although very few people in Israel are interested in the Canaan as a show dog, there is a lot of demand for puppies as pets and family guard dogs, which makes more widespread breeding and selection possible.



Publicity of the breed abroad, in the form of articles, films, photos, and traveling with Canaans to shows abroad has also developed the interest in the breed overseas to the level it is at now.

We try as much as possible to monitor what is happening with the breed in other

countries. Our goal is to try and keep the breed as it is, without the changes and deterioration that has occurred in many other breeds. There is still a great deal of interest all over the world in continuing to bring in new bloodlines. Breeders abroad are aware of the unique possibilities we still have with the Canaan, of bringing in new lines from the desert, and are very interested in continuing with this. This is one method we have for influencing the direction of the breeding abroad.

There are several methods we have been using to bring in new bloodlines. The easiest method is to “capture” very small puppies and raise them in “civilization”. This means locating new litters and removing the puppies as soon as they are old enough to get along without their mother. A two to three month old puppy is already suspicious enough and fast and agile enough to evade being caught and to disappear into the wilderness areas where he will not be found. The puppies then have to be raised and examined when fully grown to determine if they really fit the breed type. We take puppies only when we can verify the parents. The mother is usually in the

vicinity and can be identified, as she will try to protect her litter. The father, in many cases, is also in the vicinity and can be identified – the Canaans tend to be very devoted to one another, and often the same pair remains together for life if nothing interferes. The Bedouin are of great help in this, as they are usually aware of where litters may be found, and can often identify the dogs and tell us who the sire and dam of a litter is.

Another method is to try to capture an adult. In most cases, the adults that are available are those that are attached to Bedouin camps. The Bedouin dogs are semi wild and can often not be approached by anyone but the children, who seem to build up a friendly relationship with the dogs. But the Bedouin are sometimes willing to try to capture such dogs, if they don't feel a need for them as camp guards, and let us take them. In the last few years, there have been three adults brought in from various areas, and all of them have adjusted extremely well to "domestic" life.



A final possibility is to bring a bitch in season to an area where there are excellent quality dogs, and to allow her to breed to a Bedouin or semi wild dog. This is also not easy, as the dogs are very suspicious, and it can take them a long time and a lot of hesitation to even approach a strange bitch in season. In some cases, despite our patience in waiting for something to happen, the suspicion was too strong and the dog was never willing to approach and breed the bitch, despite her games and seductive moves. But we have had one success in getting a litter this way, and it is a possible way of bringing in new lines in the future.

Over the last few years, about 15 dogs have been brought in from the wild or the Bedouin. The procedure for entering them in the stud book is to first examine the dog as an adult to see if it fits the breed requirements, and then to do a trial breeding with a fully pedigreed and proven mate. Several dogs have proven themselves as a valuable addition to the gene pool, and there is a generation of their descendents that are now approaching breeding age themselves. Some of the desert stock has been discarded as potential breeding stock due to lack of correct type (things that have been considered incorrect are ears that don't stand, incorrect bites, or structural faults that might interfere with effective survival, not "show points") or faults which may indicate mixed blood. Some of the desert dogs are still young and developing and will be judged as to their potential as breeding stock in the future.

We are continuing to look for and try to bring in more dogs from the desert. This program is helping to preserve the very unique characteristics of the Canaan Dog, one of the few "natural" dogs still left on earth.

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THE "DOG OF THE RABBIT" AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR THE RURAL CULTURE OF MALTA

Jan Scotland

The following text has been published in German language in edition Nr. XXXVIII (1998-1999) of the German Sighthound Stud Book (DWZB). The author is member of the breeding commission of the German Sighthound Breeding and Racing Organisation (DWZRV) with responsibility for the Mediterranean type hunting dogs (Kelb tal-Fenek, Cirneco dell' Etna, Podenco Canario, Podenco Ibicenco, Podenco Portugués).

1. Introduction

If the history of a breed of dogs can be dated further back than into the 19th century, it is very difficult to find scientifically evaluable facts about the roots of such a breed. Unfortunately, admirers of those breeds do often tend to compensate this lack of knowledge by various legends, stories and anecdotes, with shall prove a high age of the respective breed in an imaginative way.

This does also apply to the dog, which became known to us under the name "Pharaoh Hound" during the last two decades. The breed got this name only in the 1960'ties by English breeders, but if one asks Pharaoh Hound enthusiasts about the origins of their favourite breed today, many of them will immediately state that it was exactly this breed which already served as a hunting companion of the rulers of ancient Egypt and was brought to Malta in pre-Christian times by Phoenician traders, to survive unchanged in its new island home for more than two millennia. Apparently, the truth of this statement seems to be corroborated by the fact that even respectable canine governing organizations like the Kennel Club of England, the American Kennel Club and the FCI use the term "Pharaoh Hound" as the official breed name.

However, only one point in this whole story corresponds with the true facts: The Maltese origin of the breed. Exclusively Malta, including its neighbour island Gozo is the country of origin of the breed, which in Maltese is called "Kelb tal-Fenek", i.e. "Dog of the Rabbit", according to the main hunting prey of the breed. There is no proof for an actual connection of the dog existing today on the Maltese archipelago with the ancient culture of the Nile valley, and no reference to the existence of the Kelb tal-Fenek in Malta dates further back than to the 17th century.



However, the thesis of the Egyptian origin of the breed has meanwhile found entrance to the canine literature on a broad front, it appears in magazines, in show catalogues as well as in the internet, and many owners and breeders - whether with or without ulterior motives - do verbally spread it.

At latest on this critical point, when romancing ideas, wishful thinking and thoughtless assumption of unproven statements do not only replace serious historical research, but do also tend to wipe out any delivered historical knowledge, it is of utmost importance not to lose the view for the facts. Because the Pharaoh Hound or Kelb tal-Fenek is definitely not a relic of a lost age - just the opposite: It is a breed which still has a firm place in the culture of its homeland Malta. The following text draws a picture of the role of the Kelb tal-Fenek in the society of Malta and of its use for hunting purposes and tries also to integrate these facts into the historical development of Malta. I do refer both to literature as well as to my own experiences during several trips to Malta.

Let's start with a historical review:

2. First References to the Kelb tal-Fenek

2.1. Commendatore Abela's "Descrittione di Malta"

With the following words, the vice-chancellor of the Order of St. John and father of Maltese historiography, Commendatore Fra. G. Fran Abela, gave the first reference to the existence of a dog, which could have been identical to the modern Kelb tal-Fenek, or at least with some probability could have been its ancestor:

“Ma in vece di quella habbiamo i cani chiamati Cernechi molto ftimati per la caccia di conigli, che in fin dalla Francia fono richiefti ben fpeffo con molta infanza maffimamente per i luoghi faffofi alpeftri, e fcofcesi”

In English: “Instead of it, there are dogs called 'Cernechi' esteemed for the hunting of rabbits, and as far as France are in demand primarily for stony, mountainous and steep locations” (Fra. Abela, ‘Della Descrittione di Malta isola nel Mare Siciliano con le sue antichita ed altre notitie’, Malta, 1647.)

Abela wrote his very comprehensive work (573 pages) in Italian, at that time the official language of the Order of St. John, which ruled over Malta from 1530 to 1798. This may be an explanation for the fact that he uses the term "Cernechi" to describe a dog from Malta. Today, this word is found in the name “Cirneco dell’ Etna”, another breed of Mediterranean hounds, living in Sicily.

The origin of the word "Cirneco" (Plural "Cirnechi") is disputed among cynologists as well as among linguists – perhaps it is connected with the Italian term "crecare", i.e. "to search". Cecil S. Camilleri, a Maltese agricultural scientist, does therefore interpret the meaning of the term "Cernechi" used by Abela as "seeker, sifter - a characterisation, which describes the use of the Kelb tal-Fenek quite truly (Camilleri, p. 71).

Camilleri does also point out that Abela’s use of the formulation "Ma in vece di quella" ("instead of it") might refer to the Maltese Terrier, a small dog, whose name seems also to point to a Maltese origin. But in fact, this breed originates from the Adriatic island of Mljet (Meleda, Melita) close to Dubrovnik (Croatia), which formerly was under the rule of Venice. Later, the word “Melita” obviously was mistaken for “Maltese”. (Räber, Bd. I / p. 644).

Consequently, the Kelb tal-Fenek must not necessarily have Sicilian roots. But in fact, there are a lot of arguments for a previous connection between the Mediterranean Hound populations in Malta and Sicily: Since times of antiquity, there have always been very active trade relations between Malta and Sicily, the latter only being situated 90 kilometres North of Malta. For example the Order of St. John used to purchase the majority of its grain imports from Sicily. Several times, settlers from Sicily came to Malta, especially after Gozo was nearly depopulated in 1551 by a pirate’s raid under the North African captain and governor of Tripolis Torghoud Raïs, who was on service of the Turkish Sultan (Bradford, P. 109).

On the other hand, it remains quite questionable whether the Kelb tal-Fenek was really exported “as far as France” in the 17th century, as Abela’s remark does suggest. It is a fact that particularly French aristocrats did always play an important role in the Order of St. John, and therefore the order had close relations to France, but it might also be possible that Abela had some knowledge about the existence of Podencos Ibicencos in Southern France. Up to the 19th century, they were particularly known in Provence, where they were named "Charnigue" in the local language – by the way, according to some linguists, this name could have the same roots as the word “Cirneco” (Daub, p. 93).

Finally, it is another possibility that “and as far as France are in demand” was only used as a metaphor by Abela to express the high value of this dogs, without meaning a real geographical spreading of the breed. With his vague description, Abela still leaves plenty of space for questions and assumptions, but however, it is very important to notice the following fact: Commendatore Abelas "Descrittione di Malta" is the oldest document, which points to the existence of a dog that is used for rabbit hunting in the Maltese Islands.

2.2. Modern References to the Kelb tal-Fenek

Definite references to the existence of the Kelb tal-Fenek, as we know it today, do only date from the 20th century: We find them in the photo albums of Maltese families, they are depicted in collections of old photographs from Malta and Gozo, and finally, we do also find them in canine literature: In the 1930’ties, a few specimens of the Kelb tal-Fenek were brought from Malta (at that time a British colony) to the United Kingdom. Apparently, they were never used for breeding activities, but they were thoroughly described in "Hutchinson's Dog Encyclopaedia", which is regarded as a canine standard work of the 1930’ties (Hutchinson, P. 1060).

This lack of historical facts may be disappointing for all those who would like to prove a long history of the breed. It is very likely that this lack of historical knowledge is due to the fact that the Kelb tal-Fenek always was a dog of the simple people, owned by farmers and hunters, who had no time, no leisure and (even up to the early years of the 20th century) often also no knowledge of writing, which would have allowed them to leave us documents about their life by the means of literature and art.

Actually, the possibility that the roots of the Kelb tal-Fenek do reach far down in history, cannot simply be denied – artefacts and drawings, showing the existence of slim, sighthound like dogs with large prick ears can be found in the relics of many ancient cultures in the Mediterranean, from Sicily over Greece, Crete up to Egypt, where this type of dogs used to be know as “Tesem”. But we must recognise the fact that there is a gap of more than two millennia between these ancient relics and Abela’s first mentioning of a dog used for rabbit hunting in Malta. During these two millennia, thorough changes and migratory movements took place in the Mediterranean

and particularly in Malta and Gozo. Therefore, the words written by the German cynologist Rüdiger Daub in an article about the history of the Cirneco dell' Etna, might also apply for the Kelb tal-Fenek:

"The often mentioned Egyptian origin must not be overemphasized, because prick eared sighthounds could be found in the entire Middle East. The "Tesem" was only one of these breeds, or one of its regional forms. Anyway, there is no reason to believe that all those ancient cultures who were in possession of prick eared sighthounds should have altered them from screw-tailed "Tesems" to breeds with whip-like tails" (Daub, p. 92).

We should also not forget that the word "breed", as it is used by modern canine organisations, has only been developed in the 19th century. Therefore, one must always be very careful when trying to regard modern breeds as being similar to types of dogs that existed many thousands of years ago.

A recent study on the dog genome, which was published in May 2004 by scientists from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle (USA), indicates that the Kelb tal-Fenek has been developed in more recent times: <http://www.kelb-tal-fenek.de/genetics.htm>

3. Civilian Resistance – the Importance of Rabbit Hunting in the Maltese Culture

In order to be able to understand the importance of rabbit hunting (thus being the main use of the Kelb tal-Fenek) in the Maltese culture, it is essential to take a short review on the eventful history of this small archipelago in the centre of the Mediterranean.

3.1. At the Mercy of the Regional Powers

The Maltese Islands, situated on the strategic hub between Orient and Occident, eastern and western Mediterranean, have been at the mercy of the regional powers in the Mediterranean since times of antiquity: Carthagians, Romans, Arabs, Normans and Stauffer ruled over the islands, before they came under the nominal rule of the Spanish princes of Aragón in 1283. In the 14th century, a government by the local Maltese aristocracy, the so-called "università" was established, which enjoyed a de-facto autonomy under the formal sovereignty of Spain. This phase of Malta's relative independence ended in 1530, when the Islands were handed to the Order of St. John by Karl V., after the Order had lost its former basis in Rhodes to the Turks seven years before.

A main point of attraction for foreign powers since ancient times were the large natural harbours of Malta, fjord-like cuts on both sides the Sciberras peninsula, where today Malta's capital Valletta is situated. They already served as a base for the Carthagian fleet, and as a result, the population of Malta became concentrated around the harbour area, whilst the forests, which in former times did exist in Malta, were destroyed for getting wood for shipbuilding and ship repairing.

As a result, large, rocky areas were left in the Maltese countryside, which were useless for agricultural purposes. Dr. Carmel Cassar, a scientist working at the Museum for Ethnography in Vittoriosa (Malta) and lecturer at the University of Malta in Msida points out that many of these areas used to be common property up to the beginning of the rule of the Order of St. John (Cassar, P. 6). Different from the situation in other regions of Europe, land ownership and hunting privileges were not reserved to the aristocracy.

3.2. The Order of St. John

This situation changed with the landing of the Order of St. John in 1530. The order, with full name "Order of St. John of Jerusalem", had originally been founded after the conquest of Jerusalem by the crusaders in the year 1099. In that time, it used to be a nurse order, which was dedicated to care for hurt and ill crusaders and Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land. After the re-conquest of Jerusalem by the Arabs in 1291, the Knights of the Order first escaped to Cyprus and later to Rhodes, where they remained until 1523, until they were finally expelled by the Turks. During the period in Rhodes, the main aim of the order had been changed from the care for ill people to military activities, and the galleys of the order operated in the entire Mediterranean, leading a continuous sea war against Islamic ships, which caused the Turkish naval and trade fleet serious damages.

Only aristocrats could become full members of the order (this has remained unchanged until today). The members organised themselves in so-called "Langues" (tongues).

According to the feudalistic tradition of their homelands, the knights of the order, which had got Malta as a new basis for their activities by Emperor Charles V., did immediately introduce hunting restrictions, which did heavily hit the Maltese people, since the wild rabbits were one of only very few sources for fresh meat that were available to the inhabitants of the Maltese countryside. On the other hand, a rising wild rabbit population could cause serious damages to the harvest (Cassar, p. 12).

The first law against rabbit hunting on the islands was already issued during the rule of Grandmaster Pierino de Ponte (1534 - 1535), and under the rule of Grandmaster Manoel Pinto de Fonseca (1741 - 1773), illegal rabbit hunting could be punished with galley slavery up to three years. The severity of the hunting restrictions

varied in connection with the density of the game population. Basically, they were meant to protect the hunting privileges of the knights. It was already the famous Grandmaster Jean Parisot de la Valette (1557 - 1568) who built a hunting seat and stables in the Boschetto, a forest area close to the city of Rabat, to be able to follow his favourite passion, the falconry (Cassar, S. 9 ff.).

In the year 1773, at the end of the rule of Grandmaster Manoel Pinto de Fonseca, the Maltese economy was in a deep crisis, caused by the long lasting mismanagement and prodigality of the order. Since there were no financial resources left for the import of food from neighbouring Sicily, the new Grandmaster Francisco Ximenes de Texada issued a temporally limited total ban on hunting in February 1773. His idea was that a growing rabbit stock should become a cheap food resource.

3.3. Rising of the Priests

The decree of the Grandmaster immediately caused protests among the local people. These protests were soon supported by a majority of Maltese priests. On September 8th, 1775 the current unrest escalated into open riots, and on the following day, a group of revolting Maltese priests occupied the order's fort St. Elmo in Valletta. The so-called "rising of the priests" was immediately crushed, and its leaders were either sent to prison for a long time or executed, but on 19 May 1776 Ximenes' successor in the office of the Grandmaster, the Frenchman Emmanuel de Rohan Polduc allowed "hunting for rabbits with any sort of arms and equipment, provided it was not carried out in private reserves" (Cassar, P. 14 ff.).

3.4. Hunting as a Symbol of Resistance against Foreign Rule

Even the restrictions by the Order of St. John, which lasted for two and a half century, had finally not been able to suppress the hunting tradition of the Maltese country folk. This explains why rabbit meat traditionally has a high value on the Maltese Islands – it used to be a symbol for the civilian resistance against the foreign rule of the Order of St. John, which lasted for 268 years. Even today, the "Fenkata", a trip together with family members or colleagues connected with a traditional rabbit meal, is national tradition.

3.5. The British Rule over Malta

The British, whose colonial rule over Malta began in the year 1800 with the surrender of Napoleon's troops, that had occupied the islands two years before, left the liberal hunting practices of the Maltese people untouched. The British, who remained in Malta until 1964, tolerated the Maltese tradition, but at the same time, they met it with despise, because in the British Islands the rabbit traditionally is considered as the typical prey of poachers and poor people.

This cultural difference may have been one reason why the Kennel Club of England refused to recognise the name "Kelb tal-Fenek", when the dog was brought over to the United Kingdom by families of British Army officers, who left Malta at the end of the British colonial rule.

In an article published by the 1995 edition of the annual newsletter of the British "Pharaoh Hound Club", Monica Still, an English breeder and member of the board of the Pharaoh Hound Club for many years, points out that Kennel Club initially refused to recognise the breed, because "a foreign name translating to 'rabbit dog' was unacceptable" (M. Still in: "Pharaoh 1995", p. 14).

Following the example of the FCI that had summarized all Mediterranean Hounds under the name "Pharaonenhund" (Chien Pharaon) since 1963, now the British fanciers asked the Kennel Club to put the Kelb tal-Fenek under the name "Pharaoh Hound" on its breed list. This application was accepted, although this name neither corresponds with the origin nor with the original use of the dog.

When the FCI finally deleted its joint breed standard for all Mediterranean Hounds (which had been worked out at the end of the 1950'ties by Professor Eugen Seiferle, at that time lecturer for anatomy at the University of Zurich) the organisation maintained the name "Pharaoh Hound" but now exclusively attached this term to the Maltese Kelb tal-Fenek, and on the same time the organisation also recognised the breed standard that had been worked out in the United Kingdom.

4. Hunting methods

Normally the Maltese hunter keeps a whole flock of Klieb (plural of 'Kelb' = dog) tal-Fenek, to make good use of their ability of co-operation. The Maltese especially prefer well co-operating pairs of one dog and one bitch; in Maltese called 'Mizzewgin' (couple). The selection of the dogs is exclusively practised for hunting abilities. This is the reason why the breed could preserve its efficiency (and as the result its beauty) up to our days.

4.1. Terrain and Prey

The typical Maltese landscape consists of rocks, terrace fields, rubble stones and rubble walls. The Maltese wild rabbit moves in this difficult terrain with extraordinary nimbleness. It really jumps from one stone to the next and can change its direction of running at one point immediately. Because of the rocky underground, the Maltese wild rabbits do not dig burrows, but hide under rocks, rubble walls and inside the cracks and crevices which are found near the coast.



The main hunting areas are found in the rural south and west of the island of Malta and in most areas of the less intensely populated neighbour island of Gozo. The third and smallest island of the Maltese archipelago, Comino, is a natural reserve so all hunting activities are prohibited. There are no game tenants, but the Maltese generally obey the unwritten rules, and do not hunt in areas which are reserved for other hunters.

4.2. The Search

As soon as the hunter has reached an area, which is far enough from the main traffic roads, he lets the hounds off the lead. With their sense of smell, which is remarkably well developed for a

sighthound, they start sniffing for their prey. They are always moving away from the hunter and working against the wind, to get the smell of the rabbit early whilst the rabbit does not notice their approach. It is for that reason that the Kelb tal-Fenek likes to wallow in the excrement of rabbits or in any other, intensively smelling material to make his own smell unrecognisable for the keen nose of the rabbit.

It is typical for the anatomy of the Kelb tal-Fenek that this dog can reach a remarkable speed at the trot, although he always has his nose to the ground. The breed also has a high endurance which makes it capable of working throughout the whole night. One never gets the impression the dog is tired.

However, if hunting is practised during the daylight, the dog has almost no chance to surprise a rabbit outside its hiding place. When the dog locates a hidden rabbit, he announces this by loud barking and frantic scratching.



4.3. The Work with the Ferret

When the Kelb tal-Fenek announces a hidden rabbit, the hunter covers the shelter with a fine-meshed net (Xbiek). A ferret (malt. Nemes), carried by the hunter in a basket, is let into the hiding place of the rabbit. The ferret wears a little bell. This bell enables the dogs above ground to follow the sound of the ferret and its prey by using their large, flexible ears. When the rabbit bolts, the leading dog catches it, whilst the rest of the pack (or the partner in a Mizzewgin) is ready to snap if the rabbit should escape the first bite. The kill is practised in every case, whether the rabbit escapes the net through an undiscovered exit or

likewise, if it has been entangled in the net.

Since the dogs grow up together with ferrets, they do not consider them as a prey, and there is a natural respect that the dogs have for the little animals with sharp teeth.

4.4. The Chase

If the hunting takes place in the twilight or in the darkness of the summer nights, there is a good chance for the dogs to find a rabbit in the open field, because rabbits have to search for food in the dry landscape in larger distances from their hiding places. If the Kelb tal-Fenek has scared a rabbit, he chases it, whilst he barks in the certain sound the Maltese call "Kurriera". In that way the hunter is always oriented where dogs and prey are, although the scene is very difficult to survey because of the darkness and the many rubble walls.



The other reason for the "Kurriera" is also to inform the other dogs so that they assist in chasing the fleeing rabbit. During chase the Kelb tal-Fenek does not only orientate itself on the prey but also takes into consideration the behaviour of his partners as well as the contours and cracks of the rough terrain. Instinctively the slower dogs try to shorten the turns of the rabbit so as to get the chance for the kill. In a well co-operating Mizzewgin often the smaller, nimble bitch takes the part of chasing, whilst the stronger, slower dog cuts the way of the rabbit.

When searching, the Kelb tal-Fenek moves away from his owner and into the wind, but when chasing a prey, he normally drives it towards his master. This instinctive behaviour often makes it possible for the hunter to intervene before the pack lacerates the rabbit.

Because of the difficult Maltese landscape, speed is not the outstanding attribute of the Kelb tal-Fenek as a sighthound, but he shows an extraordinary power in jumping, nimbleness and attentiveness. A good Kelb tal-Fenek is always attentive of the terrain that he is hunting on, and gives due consideration to where he actually treads (although this is not often noticed due to the speed at which this is done). A Kelb tal-Fenek is likewise always aware that his prey will change its direction of running or will bolt into shelter. This is expressed in the breed's style of running on flat ground, which is, compared with a Whippet or Greyhound, a bit reserved. The ears, often laid back in gallop, are erect at every action of the prey as a sign of high attentiveness and strain. People who have seen the terrain on which the Kelb tal-Fenek hunts are quick to comment that other sighthounds would break their legs if they would travel at such speed on this type of ground.

4.5. Behaviour if Dog Loses Sight of Prey

If the Kelb tal-Fenek loses sight of the rabbit during the chase he searches through the area by widening circles, using his excellent sense of smell, until he finds his prey again. In difficult terrain the dog sometimes orientates itself by jumping.



4.6. The Kill

If the Kelb tal-Fenek catches a rabbit in chase, he grips it by a bite into the neck or back and shakes it until it is dead. Often he makes his prey tumble by hitting it with one front paw in advance.

If the rabbit bolts into a hiding place, the Kelb tal-Fenek announces this, as described previously, by loud barking. This sound is different from the typical "Kurriera", so that the dog's master knows when he can continue hunting with net and ferret.

If there are cracks in the hunting areas, which can be used as shelters by the rabbits, they are covered with nets before the hunting starts. So the rabbit entangles in the net if it tries to jump back into the crack.

4.7. Other Uses in Hunting

In the Maltese islands, the Kelb tal-Fenek is not exclusively used for hunting rabbits. Sometimes, although rarely today, he is also used in hunting quail and woodcock. The Kelb tal-Fenek searches and

flushes the birds so that the hunter can shoot them down. This is indicative of the breed's excellent sense of smell.

Although it is not common, a few hunters also train their dogs for retrieving the shot down birds or the killed rabbits.

A natural liking of the Kelb tal-Fenek is to hunt hidden mice or rats. If a number of dogs are working together, one can very well see the instinctive participation of tasks which makes a Mizzewgin. Whilst one dog intensely digs, the other dog(s) stand nearby, without looking away from the hiding place of the prey. The erect ears and fine wrinkles on the dog's head show the expression of strained attentiveness. If the prey tries to escape, in every case it will be caught by one of the waiting dogs, if it has not been killed by the digging dog before. This practice of hunting mice or rats is much disliked by the Maltese hunters since it distracts the Kelb tal-Fenek from its true prey - the rabbit. It is therefore very much discouraged.

4.8. Other Uses

The Kelb tal-Fenek is traditionally not popular as a pet in Malta. But in the agricultural scope, besides his use in hunting, he also tasks as a guard dog. With his keen sense of hearing he quickly locates the approach of strangers and announces them by loud barking.

4.9. Herding

Some farmers also use the Kelb tal-Fenek to accompany their flocks of sheep and goats when bringing them to their pasture grounds. But in this use, the Kelb tal-Fenek does not show any intensive work with the flock like a real shepherd dog.

5. The Role of the Kelb tal-Fenek in Rural Malta today

When asking "Pharaoh Hound" owners outside of Malta about the present situation of the breed in its country of origin, then one does easily come across romantic conceptions like this: "Even today, the breed serves as a valuable companion who helps the local farmers to solve their hard circumstances of life."

On the other side, some people seem to think that the Kelb tal-Fenek became nearly extinct in its homeland. This idea is even enforced by reports of tourists who have returned from Malta without having seen one single red-coated, prick-eared hound. Therefore, worried breed lovers tend to think that the Kelb tal-Fenek has only been saved by exporting the breed to England. A few might even think that the "Pharaoh Hound" as a pure breed was only developed after its export to the British Islands.

However, none of these ideas does correspond with the real facts, as a closer view on the present economic and social situation of Malta will show us:

5.1. The Economical Development of Malta after WW II

With the disintegration of the British Empire after WW II, Malta soon lost its importance as a British naval basis in the central Mediterranean and as a guardian of the sea route through the Suez Channel to India and East Asia. When the British government announced in 1959 that it was up to close down the Navy Shipyard (the largest employer of the islands) due to a radical shortening of the national defence budget, this immediately led to political unrests in Malta. This incidents caused the colonial administration to announce a plan, whose aim was to achieve political and economical independence of Malta as a sovereign state within five years (Aquilina Ross, p. 93 ff.).

Independence was finally declared on September 21st, 1964. The first, conservative government of Malta initially focused the nation's economical efforts on the development of mass tourism, mainly from the British Islands. When the Malta Labour Party won the elections in 1971, the new government under Prime Minister Dom Mintoff started to develop new industries in Malta, in order to achieve more independence from the British economy. With support of the People's Republic of China, the capacities of the shipbuilding industry were expanded, and in the same time, Malta got a well developed system of social basic safety for all its citizens.

During this time, the Labour Government actually succeeded in creating jobs and in raising the standard of living of the citizens, so that the emigration of working powers, in particular to Australia and Canada, could successfully be decreased (Aquilina Ross, p. 100 ff.).

The conservative Nationalist Party, which replaced the Labour Party in the year 1987 in government, did not touch the social system, but however it intensified the political and economical relations of Malta to Europe. The tourist authorities started to advertise Malta as a destination for tourists from the continent, and a Freeport was built in the Southeast of Malta, to make Malta an economical hub in the centre of the Mediterranean. A membership application was sent to the European Union, which finally admitted Malta as a new member in 2004. An introduction of the common Euro currency in Malta is expected in 2008.

It can be concluded that, at latest after the 1970'ties, the standard of living of the people in the Maltese countryside has risen to a degree which makes it no longer necessary to earn the daily living costs by using a Kelb tal-Fenek for hunting rabbits. Moreover, the majority of Maltese farms are meanwhile led as supplementary income enterprises, i.e. the owners have an additional occupation in the industry, in the administration or in the tourism business. The reason is the relatively small surfaces of the smallholdings, which do usually not permit to gain a full income by farming.

Actually, the author has never come across any case where rabbit hunting with the Kelb tal-Fenek had the character of a professional occupation.

There are also reports about a dramatic decrease of rabbit population in the Maltese Islands in the 1980'ties after Myxomatosis was imported to Malta. Only since the middle of the 1990'ties, the rabbit stock has slowly started to recover from this epidemic. But even now, any attempt to earn one's living by rabbit hunting would almost definitely be condemned to become a failure.

5.2. Is the Kelb tal-Fenek in Malta in Danger of Extinction?

Tourists who have been looking out for the Kelb tal-Fenek during their stay in Malta do usually agree in the statement that one does hardly see any Kelb tal-Fenek, if even one. Concerned breed lovers do therefore easily tend to think that the breed stock in the country of origin must have decreased dramatically or even might have come close to danger of extinction.

But in fact, the lack of presence of the Kelb tal-Fenek in the public has other reasons: Basically, it is the hunting method, which usually takes place in remote areas during the summer nights, which withholds the Kelb tal-Fenek from the views of a large public.

An additional reason is the high density of population in the islands (in 1996: 1180 people per km²) and the large number of motor vehicles, which limits hunting activities to areas which are far away from main roads. During the day, the dogs are usually kept inside of yards, dog houses and stables, which makes it impossible for strangers to get a view of the Kelb tal-Fenek.

This, however, does not only have its reason in the risk of traffic accidents, which might cost the life of dogs running freely: Additionally, most hunters show a marked restraint in showing their dogs to persons that do not belong to their family or to their closest circle of friends. The author had to experience this several times, when his Maltese friends tried to arrange visits at Kelb tal-Fenek owners in rural regions of Malta for him without success.

Baldacchino and Sultana explain this pronounced need of protection of the own privatesphaere with the special conditions of a spatially limited island society, whose members are bond together by a various network of different relations (Baldacchino/Sultana, p. 16 ff.).

Since dogs are not subject of an official registration system in Malta and since the vast majority of the local Kelb tal-Fenek population is also not shown at dog shows and not registered by the Malta Kennel Club for the reasons mentioned, it is not possible to evaluate exact dates about the number of specimens existing in Malta today. But however, the author was able to see more than 100 specimens in all parts of the Maltese Islands between 1994 and 1999, notwithstanding the difficulties that have been mentioned above. It was interesting to note that there is a large variety of types, which seems to be an indication for the existence of a broad genetic basis. Another remarkable fact was the large number of dogs owned by the hunters: It was unusual to meet an owner who had less than five dogs.

So the question about a possible risk of extinction can be answered with a simple "No". Malta does still shelter the largest number of specimens as well as the largest genetic pool of the Kelb tal-Fenek.

However, we remain with the question why the breed could survive in Malta up to our days, notwithstanding the dramatically changes in the circumstances of life.

5.3. The Role of the Kelb tal-Fenek in Malta today

To answer the question about the role of rabbit hunting with the Kelb tal-Fenek in Malta today, it is necessary to focus attention on the social environment, which forms the basis for the keeping of the breed in our days: Even today, the Kelb tal-Fenek is still a part of the common rural culture in Malta. Hunting, keeping and breeding with the Kelb tal-Fenek are almost exclusively carried out by people who are involved with agriculture and who live in rural regions.

Obviously, there are some practical reasons for this: The densely populated urban region around the harbours of Valletta does hardly offer any possibilities to give dogs a chance for free exercise. On the other hand, since the hunting grounds in the rural regions are divided by traditional agreements, only local persons are able to hunt with their dogs without getting involved in conflicts with other hunters.

Moreover, the Kelb tal-Fenek possesses an image which is strongly shaped by its use as a hunting dog: He is only rarely found as a pet, and, as been said, only very few specimens are shown at local dog shows. Both national canine organisations, the Malta Kennel Club (associate member of the FCI) and the Malta Canine Federation (affiliated with the Kennel Club of the UK) are largely oblivious of the Kelb tal-Fenek, since they are exclusively focused on dog shows. But a remarkable number of specimens can be seen at the annual agricultural fairs in the Boschetto on Malta (29th June) and in Rabat on Gozo (15th August), where the Kelb tal-Fenek is shown among many other products of the local agriculture such as cows, horses, poultry, goats, fruits and vegetables.

5.4. The hunt between hobby and tradition

If hunters in Malta are asked about their motivation, most of them will state that they regard hunting as a hobby and as a favourite leisure activity. But anyway, there must be some different reasons why a hunter takes upon the task of raising and training a dog for hunting rabbits, instead of choosing other, easier ways of hunting, such as hunting quails or trapping migratory birds.

Apart from an individual preference for the breed and its hunting method, also family traditions seem to be an important reason for choosing a Kelb tal-Fenek as a hunting companion: If a foreigner succeeds in getting closer contacts with persons who exercise hunting with the Kelb tal-Fenek, then it does often turn out that even father, grandfather and great-grandfather etc. have been involved with this hunting method. Now and then, this is proven by old family photos.

Puppies are usually only given to close relatives or friends, if the hunter does not use them to add his own pack of dogs. Therefore personal relations or a recommendation by close friends of the family are almost a “must”, if a stranger wants to get in possession of a Kelb tal-Fenek puppy.



5.5. A Part of National Identity

Even beyond the circle of its actual owners, the Kelb tal-Fenek is seen as a symbol for the rural roots of the Maltese culture. Camilleri describes this as a "living evidence of heritage, a link in a chain of historical and unrecorded events that unites people with a common background" (Camilleri, p. 67).

In order to underline the importance of the breed for the Maltese culture, the Maltese Government declared the Kelb tal-Fenek the National Hound of Malta in 1974. The Central Bank of Malta issued a silver proof coin by the nominal value of one Maltese Lira in 1977, showing a standing Kelb tal-Fenek on the reverse. Finally, a stamp with the image of a Kelb tal-Fenek was issued by Malta Post in 2001.

6. Conclusion

Today, the National Hound of Malta stands in the focus of a conflict between two different views, which hardly could be more different:

In the country of origin, the breed has maintained its image as a pure working dog, notwithstanding a changed meaning of hunting. As in olden days, the only aim of breeding activities is the efficiency of the breed as a rabbit hunter.

Outside Malta, the view on the breed is strongly affected by the artificial legend of the Egyptian origin, which has created a very romancing perception of the breed. Breeding activities outside Malta are very strongly influenced by the criteria of dog shows and – to a smaller degree – also by the requirements of lure coursing and track racing.

Compared with other breeds, the Kelb tal-Fenek (or “Pharaoh Hound”) has the great advantage of still being used for its original purpose in the country of origin. This means that the roots, which have formed and preserved the breed, have not yet been lost, as in many other breeds.

For the owners and breeders of the Kelb tal-Fenek, who live outside Malta, this means a great chance to learn from the experiences, which have been delivered since countless generations in the country of origin. They should learn about the roots of the breed, to be able to preserve the Kelb tal-Fenek’s characteristics true to the origin. On the other hand, this means also an obligation: The Kelb tal-Fenek is a symbol of the Maltese past as well as of the living present culture of a nation, which has to be preserved, and not to be changed through thoughtlessness or self-interest.

The many generations of Maltese hunters and farmers, who have bred and preserved this wonderful breed since many generations, deserve our respect and our acknowledgment. The Kelb tal-Fenek, Malta's National Hound, deserves to be loved as he is.

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THE KARAKACHAN DOG. PRESERVATION OF THE ABORIGINAL LIVESTOCK GUARDING DOG OF BULGARIA

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Karakachan dog kennel "KaraKitan"

Using large dogs for livestock protection has deep traditions on the territory of Bulgaria. On the basis of archeological finds scientists affirm that the first Indo-Europeans, who inhabited these lands – the Thracians, brought here livestock breeding practices such as transhumance. The horse and the dog are respected animals by the ancient Indo-European peoples. The Thracians are no exception. The dog and the horse are sacred animals for the Thracians. In Thracian tombs skeletons of favorite horses of a dead ruler are often found. The dog is present in the tomb as a soul leader in the world of the dead. The earliest find of a sacrificed dog is from the Neolithic tomb near Vinica (North-east Bulgaria).

We can also assess the type of dogs in Bulgaria from that age by Thracian art. The best example is a golden tile from a horse adornment from the Letnica treasure. Archeologists and historians have described the find as two fighting bears or as wrestling beasts. A comparison with bear images on other tiles from the same treasure shows that this view is unjustified. Actually, two wrestling dogs are seen on the tile. They have long hair and rolled up tails very similar to the Karakachan dog type.

It is an interesting fact that the present distribution range of the coarse wool “zackel” type of sheep in the Balkans coincides with the territories inhabited by Thracian tribes in the past. The distribution of Balkan breeds similar to the Karakachan dog is connected with the “zackel” type of sheep.

Autochthonic molossoid guarding dogs of the Thracians were influenced by the dogs of the Bulgarians and by dogs of other Asian ethnic groups who came to these lands in the middle ages.



In V-VIIth century Bulgarians come from Asia to the Balkans. Their route began in Central Asia – on the slopes of the Hindu Kush. They settled in the North Caucasus, where Khan Kubrat made his Great Bulgaria, of which the Alans and Hazars were neighbors. At the end of the VIIth century Bulgarians who crossed the Danube and fought with the Byzantine Empire founded today’s Bulgaria. Bulgarians also had had a cult of the horse and the dog. Dogs were used in sacrifices. For them the dog had been a symbolic animal. The most famous artifact of that age is the famous UNESCO site of the “Madara horsemen” near Shoumen (North–east Bulgaria). It is made in rocks 23 m high. The figure of a dog is sculpted on the left side of the horsemen.

The aboriginal breed of livestock guarding dog (LGD) in Bulgaria is known amongst the native people as the “Karakachansko kuche”(Karakachan dog in English). In different regions shepherds also call it “ovcharsko kuche” or “chobansko kuche” (both meaning shepherd dog) and “vlashko kuche”. The most widely distributed name of the breed comes from the nomadic ethnic group - the Karakachan people, who have been

developing transhumant livestock breeding for centuries. Anthropological studies prove that the Karakachans are direct descendants of the ancient Thracians. Their isolation in remote mountain areas and their specific way of life has contributed to that. The conservatism of Karakachan people is obvious also from the specific breeds they have selected. These are animals that are perfectly adapted to the natural conditions and transhumance. Each family owned from 500 to 4000 sheep and between 15 and 100 horses. The Karakachan sheep has been proved by the specialists to be the most primitive coarse-wool sheep in the Balkans, with craniological characteristics closest to the mouflon *Ovis musimon*. It is considered one of the oldest breeds in Europe. The Karakachan horse is the most consolidated old local breed of mountain horse. Comparatively small but solid, tough and with a calm character, it is a horse that carried all the belongings of the nomads. It was raised on free grazing. Nomads’ flocks were accompanied by guarding dogs, famous for their qualities. A number of folklore songs and stories speak with respect about those guard dogs.



The first specialized article on the Karakachan dog belongs to Dr. Hans Peters and was published in a German cynological magazine in 1938. In the 930s Dr. Peters was living and working in the King’s Zoological Garden in Sofia. There he raised a pair of Karakachan dogs, which he had got from Karakachan shepherds in the Rhodope Mts. In his publication he describes his ethnological observations and gives skull measurements. The article is illustrated with several photos. The author conclusions are that the Karakachan dog is a specific breed distributed in the Bulgarian Mountains, which is well distinguished from other similar ones. For this reason he suggests as the scientific name of the breed *Canis familiaris balkanicus*.

In the 1940s the vet Dr. Todor Gaitandzhiev first started to study local dog breeds in Bulgaria, including the Karakachan dog. As a result he wrote a breed standard in 1948, which was to be presented to the FCI, suggesting also the start of systematic selective work. At that time, there was still no organized cynological activity in Bulgaria. No attention was paid to his appeal.

In the meantime the breed suffered from hard moments, which came from political decisions. The closure of the borders between the Balkan countries after the First World War stopped the ancient seasonal movements of flocks. The nationalization of the land in Bulgaria, which was started after the Second World War, finished in 1956.

As a result nomads were forced to settle, and their big flocks were taken away. State cooperative farms were made. In those state flocks, the number of the dogs was reduced significantly.

The decree on combating rabies (of 1948) issued by the Government had an even more dramatic influence on the breed. The Government undertook the systematic eradication of dogs and the trade in dog skins. Shepherds were prohibited from having more than two dogs per flock. Each dog over this number was killed. In parallel, a war against wild canid populations (wolves, jackals, foxes) was undertaken.

At the end of the 1980s, in some regions local governments did not respect the rules so strictly and some shepherds owned more dogs to accompany their flocks. The political changes in this country in 1989 brought a new catastrophe for the dog. The state farms stopped functioning in 1991. A lot of the livestock was slaughtered. A lot of the dogs that had been guarding those flocks become homeless and were killed by hunters on the excuse of combating rabies.

In that period, some enthusiasts collected high-quality individual Karakachan dogs and started selective work. In the 1990s, the first attempts at organized club activities were made. The question of the standardization of the breed and its acceptance by the FCI came on the agenda.



In 1992 V.Dinchev proposed a standard based on his investigations on Karakachan dogs, made at the end of the 1980s. The standard was sent to the FCI for breed recognition. But dramatic changes in the Bulgarian Cynological Federation stopped the process. Until then the Karakachan dog was unwelcome in the Federation. New people in the Cynological Federation started to support the creation of a new breed of “Bulgarian shepherd dog” selected on the basis of aboriginal Karakachan dogs that were ‘improved’ chaotically by the St. Bernard, the Caucasian and the Central Asian Ovcharka.

In 1996, S.Sedefchev and A. Sedefchev proposed a standard based on their investigations and fieldwork. In 2000 V.Dinchev, S.Sedefchev

and A. Sedefchev decided to unite their efforts and made a joint text of the standard. It was accepted by the Karakachan Dog International Association (KDIA) as the breed standard of the Karakachan dog. The concept of the standard is to include the natural variation of the breed and to keep the shepherds’ traditional idea of this dog. That is why we do not describe one ideal dog as is usual in dog standards.

As a result of discrimination against the Karakachan dog by the Bulgarian Cynological Federation, the breeders of Karakachans decided to unite themselves in an independent Karakachan Dog International Association (KDIA) and to turn their efforts towards the official recognition of the breed by the legal state institutions. The KDIA put on its own specialized dog shows, independently from the Federation.

In 2005, the authors of the Karakachan dog standard defended it at a state commission for animal breeds in the Ministry of Agriculture of Bulgaria. After observation of the breed population, the state commission decided to recognize officially the Karakachan dog as a breed under the rules of the Animal Breeding Law. With this, the Karakachan dog was the very first aboriginal Bulgarian breed that was officially recognized by state officials.

In 2005, as a result of the breed’s recognition by the state commission and under the rules of the Bulgarian Animal Breeding Law, the KDIA obtained a patent for the Karakachan dog breed with all rights to it. The State Patent Bureau of Bulgaria has a duty to defend the exclusive rights of the KDIA and the proper use of genetic material from Karakachan dogs for selecting new breeds derived from it.



This success led to the award of the prize “Bulgarian Breed of the Year 2005”, which was given for the first time at the celebration of the European Agrobiodiversity Day (EAD). EAD is an initiative of the SAVE Foundation (Safeguard of Agricultural Varieties in Europe) and its national partner organizations.

With the foundation of the Bulgarian Biodiversity Preservation Society SEMPERVIVA in 1996, one of our main goals was to help in the conservation of the Karakachan dog. We decided that conservation of the Karakachan dog in its original type and working abilities was impossible without the conservation of the habitat where the breed is formed. This meant conservation of predators, livestock, pastures and pastoral traditions: conservation of the unique symbiosis between all these elements.

We started with projects for the prevention of harm to livestock by predators. We have been using Karakachan dogs as a conservation measure for the protection of large carnivore species.

For Bulgaria this was pioneering work. We unite the conservation of a guardian and a predator, because evolutionarily they developed together. Survival of the guardian depends on the survival of the predator and vice versa.

We have been working in collaboration with colleagues from “The Wolf Study and Conservation Program” of the Balcan Wildlife Society.

During the years of its implementation, the project has been supported by the European Natural Heritage Fund – EURONATUR, Gessellschaft zum Schutz der Wolfe e V., and the UK Wolf Conservation Trust.

We started work in two remote regions of Bulgaria, where wolf attacks were successful because the tradition of using Karakachan dogs was almost abandoned. In the following years we enlarged our activities in more and more territories inhabited by wolves where shepherding occurs.

We give to every chosen shepherd two unrelated puppies (male and female) with the purpose of having a fertile couple when they grow up. Then puppies from this couple are given to other shepherds in the region. With this we aim to achieve the continuation of these activities after the end of the project.

From 2002 until now we have been continuing the work, but now we are choosing regions with a good density of bear population. These are mainly the National Parks – “Pirin”, “Rila”, “Central Balkan” and Rhodope Mts. Wolves are common there too.

These activities are supported by the Alertis – Fund for bear and nature protection.

The results of our work are in many good words and stories from shepherds about the successful work of “our” Karakachan dogs in their natural habitats. Our monitoring shows a decrease of harm of 80 %.

In 2002, as a logical continuation of our efforts, we started a long-term project for the conservation of other elements of the puzzle. The project “Conservation of Karakachan sheep, Karakachan horse and Karakachan dogs – one of the oldest breeds in Europe” started with the support of the SAVE Foundation. Our goal was to bring together again the three breeds of the Karakachan nomads.

The sheep and the horse were nearly extinct and we explored and collected the remaining animals and created nucleus herds. At the beginning we received only opposition from the Bulgarian state institutions, because for them it was easier to say that these breeds could not be saved.



Establishing nucleus flocks was one of the most difficult tasks. Using our experience in this field since 1991 and through a precise search we found and collected the last typical representatives of the Karakachan sheep and horse. On this basis we are making a selection in the direction of the original type of these breeds. Another important aspect is to create and organize conditions for breeding the animals, which are closest to the traditional ones.

The present project is developed in the typically alpine mountain Pirin (South-west Bulgaria). Pirin is a National Park and a UNESCO site.

In parallel, a few years ago we began the sub-project for the revitalization of the practice of transhumance in Pirin National Park with the support of the Frankfurt Zoological Society. Transhumance is very important for the conservation of pasture habitats. Livestock mortality in high mountains is a potential food source for rare birds of prey, mainly vultures. Through transhumance we provide the Karakachan sheep flock and the

Karakchan horse herd with year-round grazing, as in the different seasons we bring them to a different altitude from 450 to 2800 m.

Karakachan dogs guard the project's flocks of sheep and goats all the year round in territory rich in wolves and bears. The transhumance is connected with work in very difficult conditions and is not profitable nowadays. Realizing this we started fruitful work with the Ministry of Agriculture for building a system of subsidies for shepherds who want to do transhumance.

This includes a subsidy for the use of purebred Karakachan dogs for guarding the livestock on the pastures. The subsidies for supporting transhumance shepherding will start in 2008 on the territory of the two national parks "Pirin" and "Central Balkan".

We deeply believe that for the real conservation of an aboriginal dog breed it is not enough to have a breed standard and to organize dog shows. The dogs must do their traditional work in their natural environment. This will keep them sound, smart and useful!

Appendix:

Karakachan Dog
(Karakachansko Kuche – in Bulgarian)

Breed Standard

Origin: Bulgaria

Synonyms: Ovcharsko kuche, Chobansko kuche, Vlashko kuche, Thracian Mollos, Karakachan Dog, Karakatschan Hund, Chien Karakatschan,

Authors of the standard: V. Dintchev, S. Sedefchev, A. Sedefchev, S. Stoev – 14. 01. 2000 (with amendments)

Date of publication of the first original valid standard: 26.06. 1991, Thracian University, Stara Zagora.

Utilization: used as a watch and a guard dog for livestock, houses and as a companion for people.

Classification FCI: Group 2 Pinscher and Schnauzer- Molossoid breeds- Swiss Mountain and Cattle Dogs and other breeds.

Section 2.2 Molossoid breeds, Mountain type.
Without working trial.

Brief historical survey: The Karakachan Dog is one of Europe's oldest breeds. A typical Mollosus, created for guarding its owner's flock and property, it does not hesitate to fight wolves or bears to defend its owner and his family in case of danger. Its ancestors started forming as early as the third millennium BC. The Karakachan Dog is a descendant of the dogs of the Thracians - the oldest inhabitants of the Balkan peninsula, renowned as stock-breeders, whom Herodotus describes as the most numerous people after the Indian one. The Proto-Bulgarians also played an essential part in the formation of the Karakachan Dog as they brought their dogs with them at the time of their migration from the Pamirs and Hindukush.



The dog is named after the Karakachans - nomadic shepherds of Thracian origin. Due to their conservative stock-breeding traditions, they managed to preserve some of the oldest breeds of domestic animals in Europe – the Karakachan sheep, the Karakachan horse, and, of course, the Karakachan Dog. It is with this name that the Karakachan Dog appears in the works of some of the classics of Bulgarian literature, namely Yordan Yovkov, Georgi Raitchev and Yordan Radichkov. In 1938 H.B. Peters wrote about it in a German cynological magazine. The first researcher of the breed was Dr. Todor Gajtandjiev, who proposed the standardization of the breed in the 1970s.

The Karakachan Dog's bravery and dignity, together with its incredible loyalty, make this dog an invaluable friend and helper.

General appearance: A massive dog. Harmoniously and proportionally built. It looks impressive and powerful. It is powerfully muscled, with bones that are massive but not coarse. Extremely undemanding and easy to keep.

Important proportions: The length of the body measures the same as the height at the withers + X%

in male dogs X = 4-10%

in bitches X=6 – 15 %

the height at the elbow = 52-55% of the height at withers

the length of the muzzle = 43-45% of the length of the head

Behaviour/ temperament: proud, domineering, wary of strangers, brave and intelligent dog of tough, steady and independent character. It has a typically deep solid bark.

Head:

Cranial region: The skull is broad and massive; the upper profile is slightly rounded with a shallow furrow on the forehead; the occipital bone is slightly pronounced. The superciliary arches are only slightly developed. The axes of the muzzle and the cranial region are parallel.

Stop: Visible but not emphasized.

Facial region:

Muzzle: Massive, widening at the base, shorter than the cranial part of the skull. Tapering very gradually from its set to the nose leather, ending flat.

Nose leather: Large and well-pigmented. Wide nostrils.

Lips: Thick and close-fitting. The upper lip covers the lower. Well-pigmented.

Jaws (teeth): Strong jaws. 42 teeth – 20 in the upper jaw and 22 in the lower jaw. Large and white teeth, well adapted to each other. Scissor bite or pincer bite.

Eyes: Small, deep and obliquely placed in the skull, with the lateral angles higher than the medial ones. Dark or hazel brown depending on the color of the coat. The rim of the eyelid is dark pigmented. Expression is grim, confident, intelligent and firm.

Ears: Rather small, low set, V-shaped, pendant, close-fitting to the skull.

Neck: Short and powerful. Well-connected with the body and head. Angled at approximately 30° to the upper line. No pendant folds apart from a slight dewlap along the ventral part of the neck.

Body:

Upper line: Horizontal, straight.

Withers: Well-pronounced, long and muscular.

Back: Straight, broad and well-muscled.

Loins: Of medium length, broad, well-muscled. Pronounced above the upper line.

Croup: Of medium length, broad and slightly sloping. Rounded and muscular.

Chest: Deep and broad but not barrel-shaped. Reaching deep at least to the points of elbow.

Under line and belly: The belly is muscular, taut and slightly tucked up.

Tail: Not very high set. It reaches to the hock joints but can also be short by birth. The coat on tail is long and rough. In repose it hangs low or the tip is curved. In movement or when the dog is alert, it is carried over the back in sabre form or curled.

Limbs:

Forequarters: Straight, parallel, massive.

Shoulders and upper arm: Long and



broad. Tightly joined to the body, well-muscled. Angle between shoulder blade and shoulder bone is approximately 105o.

Elbow: Close-fitting to chest.

Forearm: Long, with sturdy bone.

Carpus: Strong and broad.

Pastern: Slightly sloping. Broad and strong.

Front feet: Large, round, with taut, compact toes. Arched and well-haired. Elastic dark pads. Toenails are thick and strong, preferably dark-colored.

Hindquarters: Parallel, powerful, with moderate angulation.

Thigh: Of medium length, broad, well-muscled.

Lower thigh: Long, broad and muscular.

Hock: Broad and taut. The tibial-tarsus angle is about 140o.

Hind pastern: Of medium length, massive, slightly obliquely set.

Hind feet: Longer than the front feet, with taut, compact toes. Often with single or double dewclaws. Good feathering between the toes

Gait/movement: Long reaching. Preferred movement is the springy trot.

Skin: Thick, elastic and closely-fitting. No flaps apart from a slight dewlap along the lower (ventral) part of the neck. The nose leather and the visible mucus membranes should be black-pigmented and for red-white dogs should be brown.

Coat:

Quality of hair: In terms of hair length there are two types distinguished:

longhaired – length of coat on the body should measure over 12 cm.

shorthaired – length of coat on the body, neck and limbs measures up to 12 cm.

Over the neck, withers, croup, at the back of legs, and on the tail the hair is long and rough. The topcoat is straight and stiff. Over the head and the front part of the legs the hair is short and close-fitting. Heavy undercoat.

Color of hair: Two or tricolor, with spots. Most desired are clearly defined dark spots on white or big white spots on dark.

Size: Males: 63-75 cm.

Bitches: 60-69 cm.

Weight: Males: 40-55 kg

Bitches: 30-45 kg

Faults: Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree.

head insufficiently massive and broad

pointed muzzle

stop insufficiently pronounced or too prominent

occipital bone too protruded

eyes protruded or round

ears set high or not close-fitting to the head

lack of pigmentation

neck long or too short

prominent dewlap on the neck

narrow or shallow chest

soft back

rounded back

tail low set

crooked legs, O-shaped or X-shaped

pasterns too sloping or straight

hock angles sharp or straight

brindle coloration

black mask

Eliminating faults

resemblance to other breeds: Caucasian Shepherd Dog, Central Asian Shepherd Dog, Sharplaninets, Landseer, etc.

overshot

undershot, with gap between the incisors of more than 3 mm.

phlegmatic temperament
timid temperament
unreasonable aggressiveness
missing teeth, apart from two of the first premolars (P1), two of the second premolars (P2), or the two of the third molars (M3)
one-colored coat
straight tail
soft and/or curly hair
no undercoat
N.B. Male dogs should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum.

THE TAIGAN KYRGYZ SIGHTHOUND BREED, ITS CONTEMPORARY STATE, ORIGIN AND WAYS TO ITS RESTORATION

Almaz Kurmankulov
Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

The Kyrgyz Taigan belongs to the ancient breeds of eastern hunting dogs. It was created by nomadic people under conditions of rigorous and consistent selection. I should emphasize that this breed was developed without mixing with any preexisting breeds.

The Taigan is a very fast and hardy breed that is undemanding on the conditions in which it is kept. Dogs of this breed are naturally attuned to people. The hunter does not need to teach the dog how to hunt. To start hunting with the Taigan, one does not need to interfere with the natural urges of the puppy from an early age and encourage it to hunt.

The Kyrgyz Sighthound, the Taigan, is used to hunt *Ovis ammon*, *Capra sibirica*, roe deer, fox, jackal, tolai hare and wolf. Hunting is done on horseback, by walking and rarely by lying in wait.

Hunting with the Taigan is very thrilling. In old times, hunting was important in the economy of family or clan and was not just a hobby. In years of hunger and wars Taigans helped to save many lives. The preservation and restoration of the authentic Kyrgyz Sighthound, the Taigan, has a great ethnographic and historical importance. The breed was formed in ancient times and was used by nomad livestock breeders.

When hunting weapons were inefficient, the assistance of a dog was necessary. Hunting served as a source of food and fur, which could be traded for goods, which nomads did not produce themselves, such as grains, cloth, etc. Therefore, hunting for fur bearing species was economically important. Taigans not only provided game meat, but also helped in controlling the wolf population that harmed livestock. Artificial selection was harsh and it was associated with harsh conditions of life. The mountain nomads needed a very hardy, very maneuverable and aggressive (to wild animals) breed. As a result, they developed a sighthound with the following unique qualities: high speed, endurance, maneuverability, low maintenance, aggressiveness towards wild animals and high adaptability to life at high altitude (low oxygen).

Contemporary conditions of the breed are difficult, because of a reduced population and a high percentage of mixes: the decline of the Taigan population began from the middle of the XIXth century. Starting from that time, Kyrgyz society was formed on a feudal capitalist structure. Close relationships with Russia eliminated intertribal wars. Contacts with the West were started. Highly efficient hunting weapons became available in Kyrgyzstan. Firearms were far superior to spears and bow and arrows. Taigans became less important. Despite this, the population of Taigans at that time did not decline too much. In early the XXth century, there was a war in Kyrgyzstan, which proved genocidal for the tribes and clans defined by Russia. There was mass exodus of Kyrgyz to China. This had a strongly negative impact on the number of Taigans in the possession of the local population. Then, under Soviet rule, persecution of the Kyrgyz people stopped. However, other troubles remained, such as hunger, poverty and confusion over land and pastures, belonging to different clans. The number of Taigans slightly increased, because for some time the majority of Kyrgyz lived by hunting until the number of livestock (a major commodity of nomads) slowly increased. During collectivization and afterwards, the population of Taigans remained stable. Then there was further trouble during WWII. Firearms were taken away from hunters and the majority of hunters were recruited to serve as snipers. As war veterans related, snipers and commanders died first. This reduced the number of hunters in Kyrgyzstan and the number of Taigans was reduced by half. However, this was still not the worst. The worst was still to come. During the evacuation, a great number of people from the western part of the Soviet Union were relocated to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. They brought a small number of

dogs of other breeds with themselves. Because of that, the mixing of Taigans with other dogs began. After WWII, the percentage of the Russian population increased and the number of imported dogs also included hunting dogs, which were also mixing with the aboriginal dogs of Kyrgyzstan. The population of Taigans and Kirghiz Ovcharkas was reduced under the rule of N. Khrushchev. According to witnesses, Taigans and Kirghiz Ovcharkas were shot. The reason was an instruction by the government to allow only a limited number of guard dogs with each sheep herd, because dogs, as well as horses, were allowed to be fed a certain amount of food. The number of Taigans declined to a critical level. Then, in L. Brezhnev's time, since 1975, hunting weapons were required to be registered and the attitude towards Taigans became even more hostile. Taigans were killed as poachers' dogs, because they have not been registered officially. Concurrently, homeless dogs were exterminated. Dogs were considered homeless if they had no collar and their owners did not have documents showing vaccination against rabies. To the credit of official epidemiologists, both before and during that time there were no rabies epidemics. Then, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the standard of living dropped and people migrated in masses to the cities. Some tried to sell Taigans to help the families. This was the last step to the complete extermination of Taigans and their population was reduced catastrophically. Only a few dozens of purebred Taigans remained. Some tried to sell even what was left for "big money" as they believed. Because there were no rich enough buyers in Kyrgyzstan, they sold them to other countries.

At present, the situation of the Kirghiz Sighthound, the Taigan, is difficult. The great number of mixes makes pedigree work difficult. There are several private clubs and funds, breeders and hunters, trying to increase the number of Taigans.

The origins of the Taigan lead back to the ancient past. It is impossible to tell where and how this breed originated. Its history is tied with the history of the people, who owned this breed. The history of the Kyrgyz people is complex. They live on the Enissei River, in the Altai, in China and until recent times they were in Afghanistan. Rock paintings found in central Siberia depict scenes of hunting with dogs. The dogs have prick ears and curled tails, which are clear characteristics of Laikas. They also depict other dogs with saber shaped tails and pendulous ears, hunting *Capra sibirica* and *Felis uncia*. These paintings are dated to at least two – three millennia ago. In Mongolia, there are geographical places named Kyrgyz Nur and Taigan-Debe. Supposedly ethnic Kyrgyz have always been nomads and lived in the forests, mountains and steppes. Dogs have always been major assistants to the nomads. In the beginning, the dog was generalized, similar to the Anatolian Akbash Dog. It was both a guarding and a hunting dog. The method of hunting with it was similar to rounding up towards center. At a later time, with the development of tribal relationships, hunting became not only a source of income but also an attribute of power. A need for special hunting dog emerged. In the possession of the nomads, dogs became divided into guarding dogs and hunting sighthound dogs. Life on the vast steppes demanded fast running dogs. When the nomads moved from the steppes into the Siberian forest-steppe and then into the deciduous forest, sighthounds gained skills in chasing in smaller open spaces, became maneuverable and able to search for animals by tracking. When the Siberian nomads moved to the mountain regions of the Altai and Tian-Shan, their sighthound gained the strength typical of all mountain animals. As a result, it became the Taigan, with which we are familiar today. The question arises, when was the Taigan completely formed? Rock drawings indicate that this took place about 2-3 thousands of years ago. Which breed was ancestral to the Taigan? One opinion is that the Taigan arrived from the east, from the Arabs. If so, how to explain the rock drawings of such antiquity? The Taigan and the Tazy are related breeds, but they are still different breeds. The Afghan sighthound is another aboriginal breed related to them.

Contemporary science allows the determination of the origin of species and breeds with a high degree of precision. However, the analysis should be performed by using samples from correctly selected dogs. It is no secret that mongrels carry genes of all breeds, which contributed to their genealogical tree. Thus a Taigan of mixed origin also has the genes of mongrels. Therefore, it is necessary to use samples from dogs of a pure line. At present, the problem of authentic origin is very important. It is possible to obtain a mix very similar to the Taigan, but in the offspring of such false Taigan characteristics will segregate and there will be dogs very different from the Taigan. The ultimate indicator of the breed would be a guarantee that the offspring would be similar to the parents, according to the standard of the breed, including all the characteristics and not just the appearance.

For the conservation of the unique breed, the Taigan, it is necessary to find purebred dogs and use them for obtaining as many puppies as possible. It will be necessary to establish several pedigree lines and run them separately for at least three –four generations, using moderate inbreeding but avoiding close inbreeding. There is no need to breed mixes, because of the lack of purebred Taigans. There are pure Taigans in Kyrgyzstan, but many dog breeders call them Afghans. There is great confusion in terminology among our dog breeders. They use working dogs as pedigree dogs and consider purebred dogs as unfit ones. In view of many breeders a purebred

Taigan is that dog of mixed origin, which he happened to see in the possession of his relative during his childhood. Insufficient knowledge of genetics and pedigree work are immediate obstacles in the way to correct breeding.

There is only one way to restoration of the Taigan: it is to unite all breeders, clubs and funds in one forum and to use rules of scientific pedigree work. Sectarianism and commercial interests cause problems. However, I think that this can be solved by education and incentives. I believe that we will not lose this breed, we will not breed mixes, but rather we will conserve and increase the number of dogs out of authentic pure lines.

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