

To preserve through education...

JOURNAL

**of the International Society for
Preservation of Primitive Aboriginal Dogs**



№ 27 June 2011

From the Curator...

Dear members of PADS and readers of our *Journal*,

We are happy to offer you the 27th issue of our *Journal*, the first one in 2011. We ask your forgiveness for the delay, which was caused by the fact that our publishers were very busy at their work.

In this issue we publish three articles dedicated to Eastern Sighthounds in the countries of their origin. Unbiased and detailed descriptions of these dogs and the environment of their everyday life and work in countries of their origin will serve as a source of information for cynologists and will help them to better understand the breed they need to preserve.

Sincerely yours,

Vladimír Beregovoy
Curator of PADS, International

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All questions, suggestions and comments will be accepted with gratitude. Send them to:

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Submissions

Editors of the *Journal* invite submissions of materials for publication.

Categories:

- Article: more 12-14 thousands of characters plus 4-5 photographs formatted JPG or TIFF, resolution 300 dpi.
- Review: 8-12 thousands of characters plus 2-3 black and white photographs, JPG or TIFF, resolution 300 dpi.
- Note: 3-8 thousands of characters without picture.



Taigan: Myth and Reality

Tatiana Dubinina
Russia

During 15 years of living in my home country Kyrgyzstan, I was lucky to have the opportunity to observe and work with a unique indigenous breed of Eastern Sighthound – the Taigan. Being an ardent supporter of the rebirth and restoration of would-be lost breeds, I am always surprised by the opinions of old hunters (*axacals*) from Chuy and Talas provinces of Kyrgyzstan that we cynologists breed entirely incorrect Taigans. We, being experts, tried to convince the old men of the opposite, by excluding mixes with Tazy and rejecting the registration of most of the sighthounds of this region. My experience of work as a cynologist, together with my analysis of the qualities of Taigans from different parts of the country and participation in field trials and festivals forced me to change my view of the Taigan. The breed turned out not as uniform as it is presented and viewed today. Because of the commercialization of breeding dogs, using nowadays the popular term of “national heritage”, we cynologists are driven by the desire to have something rare and unusual and we have selected only one type out of the aboriginal diversity of dogs and marked all the rest of the aboriginal diversity of these dogs of the region, dogs traditionally bred in this land, as impure.



Half a century has passed since cynologists discovered the aboriginal type of Eastern Sighthound called Taigan which is distributed in today's Kyrgyzstan. The first researchers of the breed were P. T. Tsagaraev and I. M. Goncharov, who ran the first shows of Taigans in 1938-1953 in several provinces of the country. At a later time, in the early 60s, S. A. Minukhin showed Taigans and he became one of the authors of the first standard project on the Taigan. Thus, the breed became known not long ago, which was caused by the relative geographic isolation of the regions where Taigans were traditionally bred. Nevertheless, in the 1950s to 1970s, the population of Taigans was investigated and the breed standard was accepted. All the sources of that time emphasized that the most typical Taigans were discovered in high altitude regions of the Tian-Shan Mountains. The same opinion is maintained by the majority of modern cynologists. Analyzing publications which have appeared during recent years, the impression is that since the beginning of investigation of these sighthounds until modern times, the situation in their country of origin has catastrophically worsened. In the middle of the past century cynologists estimated the number of pure Taigans as not more than 1000 dogs; modern cynologists lowered the bar from 300 to about 10 dogs, which were similar to

“legendary Taigans” and the remaining Taigans were considered “Taigan-like dogs”. Is it really so? I would like to research and discuss it with other specialists. Next, I will describe the results of my own observations conducted during my work with these dogs.



The Taigan is an ancient sighthound used for hunting hoofed mammals as well as fox, wolf, marmot and badger. The formation of the Taigan began thousands of years ago, which is proven by Kyrgyz folklore, handicrafts in felt and embroideries by Kyrgyz women, rock paintings and records by travelers and old historians. How the Taigan was formed remains a mystery. The Kyrgyz themselves do not accept the idea of origin of the Taigan in any other breed of the Eastern Hound and are inclined to believe in its mythical origin. However, it is quite likely that similarly lop-eared, well-coated Eastern Sighthounds could have contributed to the formation of the sighthound breeds of the Middle East. Arab merchants traded with nomadic peoples of Central Asia and their travels would take several years. During their resting time, they hunted to obtain food for themselves. Traveling along the northern branch of the Silk Road, these merchants did not take their own dogs, because smooth coated sighthounds would not endure harsh weather of the northern regions. Therefore, these traveling Arabs obtained from local people sighthounds better adapted to high

elevation, which they took with them to their home countries in the west. The feathered hair on the ears and tail of Arabian and Persian sighthounds indicate that their ancestors might be well-coated dogs.



By tradition, the Taigan was a faithful dog of nomadic livestock owners, who required their dogs to have maximal functionality and minimal demand for care. The nomad carried out deliberate selection which was very rigorous because of the severity of the climate. One major requirement was the preservation of high speed in the chase, courage with wild animals and ability to catch game. The nomad was busy with his livestock and the other needs of animal husbandry and this made the Taigan undemanding and capable of obtaining its food. Parallel with this, through selection, nomads fixed in the Taigan the ability to protect herds from the attacks of predators and to warn the master about unfamiliar people. These qualities distinguish the Taigan from related breeds - the Bakmul and Afghan Hound. The nomadic way of life and periodic migrations of the Kyrgyz from the Altai Mountains through the taiga and the hardly accessible mountain forested regions of Mongolia to their modern regions in the Tian-Shan Mountains formed endurance and quick adaptability of the Taigan to life in different climatic conditions and a unique ability to work under conditions

of limited visibility, which also distinguishes it from other sighthounds. When hunting, the Taigan uses scent, hearing and vision. The Taigan took on its modern appearance after the Kyrgyz had settled down, over 1000 years ago. Since that time and until the present, the value of keeping the Taigan is determined by its practical usefulness. Today, as it was thousands years ago in Kyrgyzstan, the Taigan is kept either for obtaining animals for meat and protection of herds or for the fun of hunting with birds of prey. Considerable changes in the life of the Kyrgyz in the early 20th century, the partial mixing with imported dogs of other breeds, the condemnation of the sighthounds as damaging animals and epidemics of rabies had a strong impact on the life of the Taigan, which had remained unchanged for centuries. The number of Taigans was considerably reduced. When the USSR collapsed, collective and Soviet farms were dissolved and the Kyrgyz returned to their natural work of keeping livestock. The development of tourism in Kyrgyzstan has helped to revive many national traditions. The importance of good working sighthounds became obvious. Descendants of Taigans preserved by enthusiasts in inaccessible parts of the country became widely distributed in Kyrgyzstan. Based on the fact that the Kyrgyz keep their Taigans for a practical purpose, it becomes clear that they value the most unique qualities of these dogs. Unlike breeders of show dogs, the farmer would never keep a worthless dog. Although occasional cases of mixing of Taigans in Kyrgyzstan cannot be excluded, there was no mass interbreeding, as happened with the interbreeding of the Chortaya with the Greyhound in Russia. Hunters are not interested in this. Kyrgyzstan is rich in the diversity of its natural zones: on its relatively not large territory there are deserts, canyons, cliffs, valleys and relic forests. Even in the regions bordering with Kazakhstan there are foothill, mountain,

shrub-steppe and shrub-forest zones. This is a terrain of intermingling slopes and valleys. This is exactly that kind of country in which the Kyrgyz Sighthound, the Taigan, is adapted to work and this is why it is valued by local hunters.



There is a common belief that most of the Taigans of Kyrgyzstan carry an admixture of Tazy. It does not make sense to speak of the possibility of mixing with other dog breeds because other dogs either do not exist in the country or they are present as sporadic individuals of show breeding and their ways simply could not cross with the sighthounds of livestock owners. Historically Kazakhs and Kyrgyz lived next to each other. It is a well known fact that people used to give each other outstanding sighthounds as a gift, a payment for a bride or a ransom for captives. Therefore, debating the possibility of genetic exchange between Tazy and Taigan is meaningless. When could such an exchange take place? It happened when there were no political borders, customs and the idea of "national heritage". According to modern debates on the purity of the Taigan, everything is quite the opposite: for hundreds of years Taigans were bred pure and only during recent decades were they massively mixed with the Tazy. Even now, the question remains: why would hunters

need to crossbreed on such a vast scale? Every native people needed a dog well adapted for work in certain conditions.



According to A. A. Sludsky (1939), in Kazakhstan the Tazy does not exist in regions of mountains and forests. This is the home country of the Taigan. By the way, according to the data of an official census done by the Union of Hunters and Fishermen of Kyrgyzstan, the pure Tazy belonged only to city hunters, who disappeared from Kyrgyzstan with the emigration of the Russian population in the early 1990s. The steppe breed has never been popular among Kyrgyz hunters. Nevertheless, modern cynologists concluded that Kyrgyzstan is teeming with "tazoids" (mixes of Tazy with Taigans) and their use in breeding programs is unacceptable. To corroborate this opinion the testimonies of old hunters (*axakals*) about the ideal Taigan are repeated.

Unfortunately, a thorough investigation of the narratives of old hunters indicated a pre-existing range of diversity. The ideal Taigan of different hunters was different and often particular. For example, one of them was speaking of shaggy dark colored sighthounds, but another one pointed that the Taigan has never had a profuse coat, which modern experts are promoting, and that true Taigans were big and had a predominately light coat color. The general picture described by old hunters perfectly fits the situation of the Taigan known today. Kyrgyz sighthounds in their home country are diverse phenotypically. Depending on the landscape and climate, hunters of different regions of Kyrgyzstan traditionally prefer a certain type of Taigan. This conclusion is confirmed by historical facts. The Kyrgyz were subdivided into different tribes. Each tribe lived on its own territory and its environment dictated what kind of Taigan was preferable. Tribes which lived in a harsh climate kept sturdier, well coated Taigans with a predominately dark coat color. The main game included hoofed mammals, such as *Ovis ammon* and *Capra sibirica*. A dark coat color, thick and long hair and sturdy body structure were beneficial for the survival of sighthounds under harsh conditions. A shorter, compact body structure along with more pronounced angles at the joints made sighthound more skillful when running on steep mountain slopes. People of the tribes living in mountain valleys hunted animals inhabiting the mountain foothills: saiga antelope, *Gazella gutturosa*, roe deer, fox and badger. Their Taigans were leaner, taller and with less angled leg joints; they had a thinner coat and were of predominately light colors. The coat of the valley Taigan remains and they have the most developed feathering, up to 7 cm long and have some soft undercoat. Also, there are types of Taigan, which develop feathering only after the hunting season. However, the Kyrgyz never had Taigans

without a well developed coat in winter, because its permanent life outside required the dog to have its own "bedding" of a well developed coat. A poor coat is a kind of adaptation of certain Taigans to life in a certain environment. There is much weedy and thorny vegetation in the valleys, which gets stuck in the dog's coat and make hunting impossible. Besides, at high elevation the mountain snow is dry and is loose like sand. In the valleys with temperatures ranging from below freezing to above freezing, during work on the snow until night, the dog's "pants" and feet become covered with a crust of ice and dogs can even die of hypothermia during their sleep. This is why in agrarian regions people prefer less coated Taigans and, if some of their dogs have a heavy coat, they shave them naked by using the sheep-shearing tool. Since very old times the Kyrgyz distinguished the *Tulku-Taigan* (fox hunting Taigan) and the *Teke-Taigan* (mountain goat hunting Taigan). This indicates that Taigans of different types existed with the Kyrgyz since very times. Besides, according to the old traditions of the Kyrgyz people, a good dog cannot be purchased; it could be received as a gift or stolen and the gene pool of Taigans from different provinces was thus renewed periodically. Outstanding *Tulku-Taigans* from the valleys were stolen and hidden in the mountains; and stolen Taigans of the high mountain regions were hidden in the valleys as well. Therefore, besides the different types of Taigans, the population also contains a great diversity of intermediate types. This is exactly how the diversity of the breed has survived for hundreds and possibly thousands of years until the present. It became really threatened since recent attempts to reshape it to fit into the straightjacket of the European model of breed standard and to deny existing types. It became threatened not virtually but rather as a unique population discovered by cynologists.



Possibly such a catastrophe on a small scale has already taken place in the history of today's Kyrgyzstan; trying to achieve the "ideal dog", breeders used a restricted number of, in their view, "ideal" dogs. As a result, they got picture of perfect offspring, but with a completely destroyed working quality; actually all their dogs had a temperament problem, not typical of the Taigan (shyness combined with aggression, loss of flexibility of the nervous system, withdrawn gun shy dogs). The situation became even more complicated because Taigan fanciers beyond the borders of Kyrgyzstan obtained their knowledge from sources published in the 20th century plus an image of an *ideal Taigan* they received from the Kyrgyz Soviet Republic when it was a part of the former Soviet Union. We should remember that before the breed standard had been accepted, the very existence of the Taigan as a breed was in doubt and E. I. Shereshevsky (1963) suggested that the Taigan should be considered as a sub-breed of the then well known Tazy. This was exactly why Taigans brought to the show in Moscow were dogs deliberately selected to be most different from other Taigans of other regions of Kyrgyzstan. Periodical publications of articles in the press, repeating

that the number of *true Taigans* still remaining were less than 10 dogs and that they all belonged to a small number of supposedly best status owners, created a most fertile soil for such a view.



V. Vyrypaev (1992) studied Eastern Sighthounds and he was the first to write about several types of Taigans in Kyrgyzstan. When Kyrgyzstan became an independent country, centralized work on research of the breed was terminated and this study remained incomplete. In the entire cynological literature only the superfluous and likely erroneous views of cynologists of the mid-20th century about *mass interbreeding* of the Taigan and Tazy remained.

Investigation and even simple registration of Taigans in Kyrgyzstan is technically difficult and it has several peculiarities. One difficulty is in the geographic complexity of the landscapes of Kyrgyzstan; regions with traditional ways of keeping Taigans are hard to access even in a jeep, especially in the high mountains and mountain gorges. An officially conducted census could cover only a part of the population from communities closest to the capital city and a few dogs belonging to the most active enthusiasts living in remote regions. A few Taigans belong to individuals of the local elite or to Europeans living in the city. As a rule, these city dogs are shown in the national and

hunting show events. The organization of a survey and conducting a census of dogs in provincial towns has its own specifics. According to the tradition of the Kyrgyz, a good dog should not be shown to strangers. Therefore, in order to take a look at a dog in a remote village, it is necessary to secure the support of local *axakals* and the respect of the hunters, who on your behalf may ask the owner to show his Taigan. All these nuances together with the absence of government support and financing of travel show that all what has been done is just a drop in the bucket. Most of the population of Taigans remain hidden from the eyes of strangers until now and the number of Taigans in their home country remains unknown. A person unfamiliar with the breed can see only a few Taigans from shows and some mixes seen running loose in villages (*auls*). Thus, the myth about the disappearing breed receives a boost and this benefits the commercial interests of its creators. However strange it may be and despite the so-called *catastrophic situation with the breed*, puppies out of the *last purebred* Taigans will always be offered for sale. It is also interesting that despite the denial of the existence of several types of the Taigan, even the most ardent lovers of *purebred Taigans of the past* extensively use dogs of all existing phenotypic diversity for breeding. However, for registration and further breeding or selling they leave only dark colored shaggy puppies and the remaining puppies are given away to hunters in remote villages. Unfortunately, in such cases the real origin of each particular hound remains hidden; nevertheless, it is registered as *brought from hunting regions*. Another commercial ploy, which has become a new norm, is used. Initially the breeder is denied the registration of his Taigan litter, because its parents are *tazoids*. However, only a few years later, one or several typical dogs from the same litter are extensively used in breeding programs, but with a new label:

brought from hunting regions. At the same time, the parents of the *standard type* remain for life marked as mongrels, despite the fact that their puppy is sold as *one of the last representatives of the disappearing breed*.

Of course, it is desirable that the Taigan should be easily recognizable among other Eastern Sighthounds. However, it is a specific feature of the aboriginal breed that it is hard to fit it into a single standard type; even littermate puppies may be very different in appearance (K. N. Plakhov and A. S. Plakhova, 2007). The breeder has the right to fix the most desirable type by breeding his hounds in isolation. However, speaking of the preservation of the Taigan in the country of origin it is impossible to deny the existence of aboriginal forms of the population traditionally bred in different regions of Kyrgyzstan. Traits, distinguishing the *ideal Mountain Taigan*, do not provide a reason to throw out of the breed other Taigans, which do not match the *uniform type* and frequently are littermates or ancestors of the *ideal* hounds.

In the large picture on the ground, Taigan owners absolutely disregard the mental exercises of our cynologists. Today, the breed is alive, it remains in demand and popular in its home country. Yearly festivals, showing national methods of hunting, attract elderly and young Taigan owners (*taiganchi*) eager to test their dogs at competitions for speed, catching skills and aggressive attitude towards wolves. During these festivals, the best Taigans are found which subsequently are used to build up the breed. It is rather a matter of building the breed by thousand-year-old methods, then selective breeding by deliberately designed programs. This is how the nomadic people got their unique dog-assistant. Unfortunately, this work is going on separately from official cynology, which is busy searching for that *legendary purebred Taigan*.



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The Hunting Hounds of China

by Sir Terence Clark

David and Hope Waters' book *The Saluki in History, Art and Sport* includes a beautiful painting of Salukis from the 10th century attributed to the Tartar artist Hu Huai, in which three hunters are depicted returning from the chase on horseback, two with their Salukis carried in front of them and one with his hound behind him. The Waters describe the artist as originally a Tartar tribesman who was familiar with nomadic life and with Salukis. They also opine that the Saluki reached China from Persia via the Kyrgyz nomads on the steppes of Central and Southern Siberia and Turkestan. But were the hounds depicted by Hu Huai really Salukis? The Waters clearly had no doubts, describing the hounds as 'of absolutely typical appearance', but this is a question that has troubled me for a long time, not least for its implications for the extent of the area, which we tend to refer to these days as the Saluki's Countries of Origin (COO). If they really were Salukis and they were sufficiently common in Asia for a China-based artist to paint them as an aspect of everyday life a thousand years ago, what were their origins, how did they relate to the other Sighthounds to the West in Central and Western Asia and did their descendants still exist today? In October 2010 I travelled to Xi'an in Shaanxi Province of Western China, to investigate the hunting hounds there, which from pictures on the Internet seemed to resemble the hounds in the Waters' illustration. The Chinese call these hounds *Xigou* (pronounced See-gow) which translates as 'Slender Dogs'.

XiAn was formerly known as Chang'an and was the terminal point on the Silk Road, along which from the first century BC until well into the 17th century AD traders, soldiers, missionaries, nomads and pastoralists of a variety of different nationalities and ethnicities moved with

greater or lesser ease, depending on who was in control over the land mass through which the routes passed. Trade along the Silk Road reached its peak in the 7th century under the Tang dynasty, with their capital in Chang'an, when China was the richest and most powerful country in the world and Persians, Arabs, Uighurs and Jews flocked in with their different languages, customs and religions to create a most cosmopolitan society. The first Arabs are recorded as having reached Chang'an in 651 AD but Islam made its major impact on the area a hundred years later, when Muslim Arabs defeated the Tang army at the Talas River (now in Kazakhstan). The Arabs at that time were prodigious hunters with both hawk and hound and it is probable that they brought their Salukis with them, most likely of the feathered variety from Khorasan in northern Iran which they had already conquered.



Mural from the tomb of Prince Zhanghuai (d. 684 AD)]

However there is evidence of earlier types of hunting hound in the region. As Xavier Przewdzicki records in *Nos Levriers* (1984) images of a graceful Sighthound appear on Chinese funerary bricks from the third

century BC. Of perhaps even greater relevance to the *Xigou* of today, a remarkably explicit painting of a foreigner holding a hawk on his wrist while a *Xigou* with a distinctive 'banana-shaped' nose looks up at him is to be found as a mural in the tomb of Prince Zhanghuai, who died in 684 AD and was buried near modern Xi'an. Later paintings, such as the one used as the masthead on the *Xigou* web site – www.xigou.cn - from the Ming dynasty dated to 1427, show a similar hound with what contemporary *Xigou* breeders refer to as a 'sheep's nose'.



Painting from the reign of Xuan De (Ming dynasty)

Xi'an today is a big, bustling modern city of some eight million people but traces of its glorious past are to be found at its centre in its massive old city walls 24 km long, its Grand Mosque founded in 742 with its beautiful Arabic calligraphy and several towering pagodas from the 14th century. However most impressive of all is the 'Eighth Wonder of the World', the terracotta warriors and horses of the Qin dynasty's first emperor – Shi Huangdi – from c. 204 AD, located at a site a short drive east of the city. Xi'an did not seem the place for seeing hunting hounds but I was wrong!



***Xigou* in Xi'an**

I was taken to an estate of towering tenement blocks and on the sixth floor of one of them I met probably the most Saluki-like *Xigou* I was to see throughout my visit! Her name was Xianni and she was a sleepy 15-year-old. I took her rough measurements and she proved much taller than long: 71cm at the shoulder by 64 cm in length. This made her a large hound by Saluki standards but, as I found out later, she was truly representative of the breed. She was accompanied by Ying Cai, a 3-year-old blue/grey bitch, measuring 70 x 66 cm. They were both kept as pets and were fully adapted to a life of ease in a flat, while their owners were out at work all day. This was not at all what I had expected to find but it was in one respect typical: it showed the close bond that the Chinese have with their *Xigou*. As one hunter told me, *Xigou* are counted as members of the family. Sometimes they live inside the house, though more often they live in kennels in the courtyard typical of Chinese houses outside the cities and protect the house. During the 1970s when keeping dogs was banned and many were destroyed, because of outbreaks of rabies, rather than lose their precious *Xigou*, owners would hide them in the house and even keep puppies out of sight inside their shirts!



Black Xigou



White Xigou



Black/chocolate male and dark brindle sibling

But I was keen to see these hounds in their more natural environment in the countryside, so my Chinese guide and mentor took me east from Xi'an on a circuitous journey to the Hua Mountains. On the way we called at the houses of two breeders and saw some hunting *Xigou*. These hounds did not at first sight appear particularly big but when I measured them they too were all in the range of 70-72 cm

tall by 64-66 cm long. I think that they did not appear leggy because they were well muscled and generally strongly built. Three of the first four hounds were basically black and one was white. As I was discovered later these are the two most common colours. The hounds had silky hair with long furnishings on the ears, like the *burki* on Kazakh Tazys, and only wispy feathering on the underside of the tail, also like Kazakh Tazys. When relaxed, the tail had a noticeable ring on the end, which was not fused as in some Taigans. Two of the hounds were two-year-old litter siblings and were unusually coloured. One had chocolate mixed in with the black of the *burki* while the other was a dark brindle with traces of red showing through here and there. While the white dog had a distinctly banana-shaped nose, the blacks were closer to standard. We saw a black puppy on the way which looked absolutely Saluki-like.



Black puppy amid the drying corn grains

The next day we set off to meet two of the principal breeders of *Xigou* in Huayin. The first call started unpromisingly in what was a metal working yard, with men welding together sections of chain-link fencing! However as soon as I got out of the car I could hear a familiar howling in the background. Sure enough at the rear of the yard behind a mountain of steel pipes was a purpose-built kennels with about 30 *Xigou* and an assortment of other hunting and guard dogs. The *Xigou* were all two to a kennel, with an outside run and an inside

sleeping compartment on a raised wooden floor. The hounds are hardy as they sleep here without bedding or coat even in winter. I had clearly come to the right place to see a range of these hounds.



Black-masked red sable with a pronounced sheep's nose



Dark brindle with a Borzoi nose



Black dog with a standard nose



White dog with a standard nose

The first hound brought out for my inspection was really striking: a year-old male, he was big, measuring 80 cm at the shoulder, and he was a black-masked red sable with honey-coloured *burki*; but it was the shape of his head that was most remarkable – a most pronounced sheep's nose. He was followed by a series of hounds showing the range of head shapes and colours from brindle to white to black. The one I related to most as it was so Saluki-like was another red sable (#12). Some of the hounds were very broad in the chest when seen from the front, which made their front legs seem bandy (#13), and a few had a somewhat roached back (#14). Most of the hounds had purely descriptive names such as *Bailong*= White Dragon or *Xiezi*= Scorpion or *Heihu*= Black tiger.



Red sable dog



Broad-chested dog



Roached back

It was time to move on to another breeder and once again I was surprised to be shown into a large yard in the centre of which was a mountain of old shoes! However all around the yard were kennels with lots of *Xigou*, where the hounds at least had straw as bedding on the bare boards. One or two caught my eye immediately: a bouncy little 4-month-old puppy and a three-year-old bitch of the same smoky grey colour that I had seen at Nura in Kazakhstan a few years ago. A white dog in a kennel looked very Saluki-like. But the head of a striking red sable dog seemed to illustrate best the slight arch between the eyes which distorts the appearance of some of these hounds. Time flew by and reluctantly we had to call it a day to prepare ourselves for the forthcoming hunting expedition.



Grey puppy



Grey bitch



White dog in a kennel



Head of a red sable

We forgathered the next cold but sunny morning in the metalworking yard. About 15 *Xigou* with about 20 hunters piled into an assortment of vehicles and we set off in convoy. I had expected we would head into the deep countryside but we stopped after about 20 minutes still in sight of the massive smoke stacks of the town's power station. The land all around was flat and cultivated with alternate strips of cotton bushes and sprouting winter wheat. A river meandered through the fields and provided some rough cover along its banks. The hunters broke up into small groups to walk up the field, just as we would do with Salukis elsewhere, and began beating out one of the cotton strips. The hounds were held on simple rope slips, with one end tied to the wrist and the other

held in the hand, just as the hunters do in the northern parts of the Saluki's COO.



Walking up the field

Within minutes a hare got up, though far from me, and quickly evaded the 5 or 6 *Xigou* slipped on it by running into a tangle of undergrowth alongside a busy road. Sadly it was the only hare of the day! We walked up field after field and beat out the river banks: all to no avail. We were joined along the way by other hunters with a motley collection of hounds: Greyhounds, the import of which has been allowed from the USA and Australia since 1998, lurchers, a Borzoi from Russia, and more *Xigou*. Altogether there were about 30 hounds in the field, any or all of which would be slipped at the sight of a hare. Hunting here is not just a sport; it is all about giving your hound a run and catching the hare, which rarely escapes. I was shown a number of videos of previous hunts and they all followed the same pattern, with as many as a dozen hounds being slipped at the same time. One hunt at the last New Year consisted of around 150 hounds, so it is not so surprising that so many hounds are slipped together, as running them in pairs would mean that many would never have a run all day. In such circumstances it surprised me that the hare is not usually demolished by the pack but there always seemed to be someone on hand miraculously to grab the hare the moment it was caught. For this is China and even in the fields there is always someone about, ready to intercept

the pack if the hare is pulled down nearby. At the end of these hunts I saw how the hunters returned with the bag suspended from poles looking remarkably undamaged. The hare is similar to our European brown hare, though somewhat smaller, weighing typically up to 2 kg.



Hunter with Greyhound on a motor scooter



Mounted Tang hunter from 701 AD with Xigou

It was also clear from the videos taken over the last 15 years or so that, as elsewhere, times are changing. In the earlier years the hunters would pool their resources

and hire a bus to take them and their hounds to the hunt. Today, as a sign of China's growing affluence, many have their own cars. I saw one hunter arrive on a motor scooter with a Greyhound perched between his knees. What a contrast with this glazed terracotta figurine in the Xi'an Museum of the Tang period, dated to 701 AD, carrying his *Xigou* on the pommel of his saddle! The hounds earlier also looked smaller; and I was told that the hounds, like their owners, now eat more and better. The arrival of Greyhounds also represents a change, which is not necessarily a good one, as it will be a temptation for some hunters, with the game being scarce, to prefer a faster hound which may have only one chance of a kill in a day; or to crossbreed to *Xigou* for greater endurance. Although I saw a few lurchers, I was told that the serious *Xigou* breeders kept their hounds pure.

However, as in most of the Saluki's Countries of Origin, there is no official Chinese *Xigou* breed standard, though I was given a draft of one that is under discussion. The draft says that there is both a smooth and a feathered variety but I did not see any smooths and my companions did not know them either. There is also a smaller lighter variety on the plains and a larger variety in the hills. Interestingly the draft condemns the sheep's nose as 'a long way from normal development', but prefers a 'pliers' or square bite to a scissors bite, though it accepts that the latter is prevalent. Otherwise it contains many of the characteristics that would apply to the Saluki, such as a deep and moderately broad chest, a pronounced tuck, and prominent huckle bones. It does not list brindle among the common colours, but, as I saw, it is present in the breed. It is reckoned that there are around 600 *Xigou* in Shaanxi Province and around another 300 elsewhere in China, principally in Hebei and Shandong, which represents a small population for sustaining the breed.



The author taking a DNA sample

I took a lot of DNA samples for laboratories in Sweden and the USA and it will be interesting to see whether the analysis shows that there is indeed a relationship between these hounds and Salukis and other similar hounds in Western and Central Asia. On their purely physical appearance, this would seem perfectly possible as some *Xigou* looked identical to some COO Salukis, especially from the more northerly range, and on this evidence alone they certainly resembled the hounds in the picture in the Waters' book. In size and in colour, many of the *Xigou* reminded me of Kurdish Iranian hounds. Others shared some of the characteristics of the Kazakh Tazys, though their overall size was much bigger. The 'sheep's nose' of some of them is a puzzle. It may have developed through a mutation in this local population during the long periods of China's isolation from the outside world and was found attractive enough to perpetuate. I found some hunters positively preferred it, while others did not like it at all. All it is possible to say at present is that it is clear from the above-mentioned early art work, that it has been present in the breed for a long time and seems likely to continue. The hunters now take part in an annual dog show and the results there may influence the future of these hounds.

I saw no evidence of health problems; on the contrary the hounds looked well cared for and long-lived. However, as elsewhere, the *Xigou* is under pressure from modern development on its traditional hunting areas. The pressure on the hare population is also increasing, as greater affluence means that there are more people more able to indulge in hunting not only with *Xigou* but also with exotic breeds. Certainly the hunters I met were great enthusiasts of the breed and were justifiably proud of maintaining the long tradition of hunting with these hounds in this part of China.

The Tazy in the Almaty Province of Kazakhstan: Part 1

Raphael Balgin
Almaty, Kazakhstan

Contemporary human factors influencing the Tazy

At the present time not many people in Kazakhstan can afford to make a living by hunting. If someone is hunting, this is rather a hobby than an essential necessity. This is even truer of hunting with Eastern Hounds of the Kazakh type.



Tazy male of Kuansh

The very social structure of the Kazakhs had changed long ago. More precisely,

Kazakh society, as well as the rest of the world, as a result of objective causes, became a part of the so-called modern civilization, which is changing not only people, but also the specialization of the entire ethnic pyramid, including animals, belonging to it.

During the 20th century people of Kazakh nationality lost their entire nomadic culture which is thousands of years old. Now, Kazakhs no longer live in yurts; they use them only as one of a few still remaining traditional elements, as evidence of their ethnic attributes or only as a commercial-hedonistic one. The change of the Kazakhs' way of life has touched many aspects, the listing of which would exceed the scope of this investigation of the traditions and modern ways of keeping the Tazy.

Naturally, it is impossible to put the historical process in reverse and nobody is interested in doing so. Even the most traditionally oriented Kazakhs cannot imagine themselves outside the settled system of modern civilized principles. None of the "hard core" Kazakhs would pursue his political interests in favor of returning the Tazy to the natural or traditional way of life side by side with a human hunter with the transition back to the difficulties of natural husbandry, barter trading and hardships of nomadic life and dependence on the vagaries of nature. Nobody in Kazakhstan, even on the scale of a small population, would give up the comfortable accommodation of modern life for the sake of this breed, unless it is done in a format of shows and appropriate remuneration in the form of money.

The real attitude towards the breed has its impact on the culture of keeping of the Tazy as a breed, as described in Kazakhstan's government programs and in the media and also as glorified and trumpeted by ethnically oriented showmen. The breed irreversibly lost its original place. More precisely, it has been sacrificed by man

to the new way of life. This is no longer a tendency, but rather an accomplished fact.

Because collective ethnic wisdom accepts the superiority of "adequate civilization", the sacrifice of the Tazy does not evoke sympathy in response to a universal cry about it as a national catastrophe, because life dictates other priorities. In the future, the place of the breed in the context of the traditional criteria of its preservation will worsen as a result of the reduction of hunting grounds, population increase, regional and international development, expansion into new territories, railroads, pipe lines etc.



Tazy of choban Yasha on the village wasteland

The fact of the shrinking of the distribution range of the saiga antelope in the past 40 years indicates how the natural resources on which the Tazy depends have declined. In the 1970s, the antelope was still close to a satellite city called Boroldai (past Russian pronunciation was Burunbai), 10 km from Almaty. At present, to hunt saiga antelope one would need to travel to Jeskazgan steppes (straight distance to

Jeskazgan is 1000 km). Every year, in Almaty Province, a great number of hares, foxes, wolves and other animals are killed because many people have all-terrain vehicles and modern firearms, and night hunting using powerful lighting devices is popular. Evidently, the enforcement of nature conservation measures and beefing up the budget in this area cannot help. The point of no return at level of the civilization has been passed long ago. Possibly the consequent degradation of the breed will extend for the next tens of years. It is very likely that only show lines will remain as part of commercially oriented programs and some populations of hounds in wildlife management kennels with national parks and hunting refuges. The remaining Tazys will lose their special characteristics and will subsequently become absorbed by the colossal number of crossbred yard dogs.

Approaching natural or optimal conditions for raising the hunting Tazy today

Naturally, the Tazy is primarily a hunting dog. At present, in Almaty Province, the most suitable conditions for keeping this dog exist on the outskirts of villages at distances ranging from 50 to 100 and more kilometers from Almaty, the largest city of Kazakhstan. This allows the Tazy to have the freedom to get into the nearest steppes, river valleys and mountain foothills. This is the only way how these dogs at the present time can feel natural. Besides, this is the distance at which some game still exists and which allows the Tazy to exercise its capabilities. I should mention also that in winter time foxes can be found closer to the city.

Those few hunters, who can afford regular trips to hunt and keep their hounds in conditions most similar to natural surroundings, can expect that their Tazys will retain their essence and purpose which has been preprogrammed in them during past millennia.



Chiquita and Amigo on the yard, Uzynagash village

It is necessary to point that such a regime for keeping the dogs is not an easy one. At present, it is a difficult ideal not only for country people, but also for kennels, which most often are restricted to keeping their dogs in pens with sporadic sighthound hunts or coursing. A hunting trip in the conditions of such a hunting regime is a significant event involving adventure, drama and pursuit, as well as a kind of adrenaline therapy for hardcore hunters.

A dog breeder or owner concerned with maintaining the breed must have a budget sufficient for the weekly expenses and be completely specialized in keeping Tazys in order follow all traditional canons. For financing such a way of life, the hunter and breeder will need to do cynological pedigree work with all its subsequent commercialization. As a result, he will sell puppies to support financially such an expensive *hobby*.



Tazy male of choban Yasha, chained on the yard; Zhetygen village

At present, in Almaty Province, the type of a dog food determines the conditions for keeping Tazys. Three basic types can be distinguished: "free foods", "budgetary" and "meat-bone" feeding. Each of these types has its own benefits and disadvantages. It is possible to say that there are no strict rules to follow in these types of feeding regimes.

"Free foods" is a feeding regime which is characteristic of the Kazakh or rather of the livestock keeping way of life, because in the villages Tazys are no longer an exclusive element of Kazakh ethnic culture. Kazakhstan is a multinational country and you can say that now Tazys are kept by people of different ethnicities: Kazakhs, Russians, Turks, Greeks and others.

Despite the shift from nomadic to settled husbandry, the principles of feeding the "free food" type has not changed much. However, at the time of the nomadic way of life, Kazakhs prized Tobets above other dogs and the Tazy above all; at the present time, because of socio-economic factors, in many cases the Tazy has become like other dogs, except for the fact that they can be used for hunting as well as for shepherding and guarding the home, though they are poorly suited to the latter and are often stolen.

Owners of Tazys, who keep them on a "free foods" regime, live in rural places and feed their dogs irregularly; the dogs have freedom to run in the steppes, mountain hills and river valleys and to hunt to supplement the meager food given to them at home, which consist mainly of table scraps and the skins and entrails of butchered animals. Periodically the Tazy is given a broth made of bones with barley and bread soaked in it.



Tazy of choban Yasha heading to the village waste land to finish eating lamb entrails. Zhetygen village

Under these conditions, Tazys live free in their own societies. The dogs' owners, who use this method of keeping them, do not bother, with rare exceptions, about caring for their Tazys. In such free "Tazy communities" puppies are born and raised by the pack. People do not trouble the Tazys. Only one requirement is a must - respect: according to the ancient *covenant of the wild* between dog and man, the pack of dogs must follow the herds of sheep and the horse riding master.

The "budgetary" type of feeding is used by those Tazy owners who live mainly in cities. These are often beginner Tazy owners who are convinced by the authority of the recommendations found on packages of dry dog food or by the owners of hunting Tazys, who value this food, because it is easier to feed. It also includes food which owners of the Tazy eat. Sometimes this diet

is supplemented with vitamins, but more often not, because vitamins are listed in the dry dog food labels. Tazys kept by hunters, despite being fed with dry dog food and despite their smallish stature and their small numbers, catch foxes successfully.



Amigo inside yard surrounded with a solid fencing. Uzynagash village

A “meat-and-bone” diet assumes regular feeding with a broad range of meat scraps, such as parts of cow heads, entrails, legs and bones sold on markets and at slaughter houses. In Almaty, one kilogram of such food is sold for 100-200 tenge (from \$0.7 to \$1.3). On average, 5-7 kg of food is purchased for one dog, depending on its age. The raw meat which is fed twice per week includes different animal parts so the Tazy chews soft tissues as well as cartilage and bones. This is done to develop and train the jaws. An inspection of the remains of one feeding helps to adjust the next one. The uneaten meat products are cooked and fed to adult dogs by portions twice daily. “Meat-and-bone” diet needs to be supplemented with vitamins, cooked with the broth, grains and vegetables, such as radish, beets, cabbage, etc.

When feeding a “meat-and-bone” diet, it is considered necessary to take the Tazy to wide open places for a long exercising run after a horse or a car over 20-30 km distance.



Tazy of Unatbek hunting a rat. Yzynagash village

A “meat-and-bone” diet enables breeders and hunters to achieve excellent results, if they regularly take their dogs to the steppes for exercise. Tazys kept this way, if taken to joint hunts with other teams, have an advantage both in their appearance and their ability to chase over long distances across difficult terrain. However, special attention should be paid to maintaining regular contact between the hunter and his Tazy. This depends on the age when the Tazy was obtained and on subsequent training to interact with the master and other Tazys.

It is desirable to take puppies away from lactating mothers when they are still blind or soon after they open eyes. During the first month or month and a half such puppies live inside, because of need to secure correct feeding, sanitary care and the right conditions for development. It is important to point out that when grown up after a prolonged period of life from early age in the society of adult dogs under conditions of free space, such as house yard, sheep yard, or a fox hole in the mountains or hills, such dogs will keep their distance from man, being like simbiants, escorting man and his sheep. Participating in the hunting teams, such dogs

follow "the covenant of the wild" with humans and never forget to work well.

After the age of six months, it is considered important to take puppies to hunts together with dogs of other ages as well as dog teams. Thus, they will start acting not only as well socialized dogs, but also as sighthounds with correct hunting behavior and acute reaction to moving game.

Not all Tazys are ferocious with caught game. Among littermates, some are later maturing individuals than others. This is particularly true about young males. Such participation in group hunting with different dog teams of different owners is beneficial for the necessary socialization of the Tazy and accelerating the hunting development of a young dog.

On pedigree work, safety and the transformation of the principles of pricing of aboriginal sighthounds



Amigo; Meat and bona diet. Feeding with raw beef palate

Except for those Tazys which live in city apartments and kennels with their pens made of wire, this breed is incompatible with

limited space and leashes and even more so with chains. The best places to keep Tazys are on the outskirts of villages, situated conveniently to allow them to escape total degradation among other dogs in labyrinths of streets.

For keeping Tazys, it is true that in modern conditions caused by socio-economical factors it is sufficient to have a large securely fenced plot supplemented with regular exercise and hunting trips in habitats least modified by human activities.



Tazy female of Kuansh eating meat of butchered limping donkey

The need for having an "impenetrable" plot in most cases is determined by the frequent theft of Tazys in rural areas and their sale in other regions of Kazakhstan and adjacent countries. It is still not a well developed industry, but "*barymta*" on Tazy" is common among certain social groups. Among other things, it is considerably helped by the spread of information and the popularization efforts of this elite breed. This kind of thievery is lucrative, because of the complexity of investigation to find enough evidence and the limited punishment, if a thief is caught.

The use of the term *barymta*ⁱⁱ, speaking of such intensively promoted national breeds like the Tazy and Tobet, is a social neologism with a satirical streak.

The theft of dogs is radically different from stealing livestock. Thieves sell stolen

dogs to other salesmen or use them for breeding themselves. In practice, it is impossible to find the dog and punish the thief. There is no service for searching for lost animals or methods of finding them in the country. Many victims never report the theft to the police. Microchipping is also very expensive and there are no local programs supported by adequate electronic equipment necessary for the identification of microchipped animals.

By the way, the price of a Tazy still in the epoch of Han Tauke (one of the most outstanding state leaders of the Kazakhs) was equal to the price of a *kul* (slave), according to the law of Zheti Zhargyⁱⁱⁱ. To understand the principle of pricing a Tazy, it is necessary to explain the importance of a *kul*^{iv} (slave). In nomadic society this term had a somewhat different meaning than 'slave' in Ancient Rome. A *kul* is a man who does not belong to the system of tribal relationships but he is a dependent part of it. *Kuls* originated from captives. Slaves were used mainly for work on personal property and around the home of the hereditary steppe aristocracy. Slaveholding as a socio-economical system did not become established among the Kazakhs and did not spread beyond the limits of patriarchal housekeeping. Keeping *kuls* as a social institution was superficial and the borders between the social groups and strata were vague. Thus, a *kul* could become a *telengut* – mercenary. In the late 19th century, because of the way human rights were interpreted under the rule of the Russian Imperial authorities and the non-recruitment of Kazakhs for participation in military actions, anyone without a certain residence and property could be considered a *kul*.

A modern equivalent of *kuls* are migrant workers. They arrive in Kazakhstan from neighboring countries most of the time illegally. The average wage of illegal immigrant workers is about 25,000-60,000 tenge a month^v, which coincides with the

average price of a capable hunting Tazy found on the market and in advertisements. Interest in the breed, which is heated up by programs of trendy quasi-national movements, encourages advertisements for puppies at prices up to \$500-\$800 (\$1=T145). Naturally, such advertisements are targeting at breeders and traders from Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic countries and the countries of Eastern Europe and beyond. This is how Tazy trafficking is taking shape. This topic will be discussed in following articles.



Chiquita. Meat and bone diet, eating raw cow palate

Undoubtedly, in the culture of nomadic Kazakhs, a Tazy puppy served not only as a measure of wealth but also as an ethnic symbol. It is not just an item of wealth; a Tazy was always considered as a "pass ticket" or a "key" to establishing effective friendly relationships. Thus, puppies out of well known hounds would replace the payment for a bride and serve as a goodwill gift in inter tribal diplomacy. Understandably, puppies could be used for bribery too.

At the present time, the majority of Tazy owners have given up on the traditional code for breeding the best hounds. They consider those enthusiast breeders who stick with national traditional ethics regarding the Tazy

with the principle of “No selling of Tazy puppies!” as hopeless retrogrades.

In the following article, I will discuss behavioral images of the Tazy, traditional Kazakh methods of evaluating its appearance, as well as some peculiarities of methods of transporting Tazys in cars, veterinary service, care of maturing dogs and other topics.

ⁱ «Barymta on Tazy» – a satirical neologism.

ⁱⁱ Barymta – a form of settling tribal disputes concerning such matters as the unlawful taking of livestock, reimbursement for damage caused by herds of horses of a trespasser, when the offender did not obey the decision of the judge; at a later time, it became a form of plunder common between rival tribes. *Казахско-русский словарь под редакцией Сыздыковой Р.Г. и Хусаин К.Ш., Алматы: Дайк-Пресс, 2002, стр 542, ISBN 9965-441-62-6*

ⁱⁱⁱ «Zheti Zhargy (Seven Laws) is the only preserved document of Kazakh Law from the Khan period of the 15-19 centuries. Kazakh lore attributes Khan Turke as an author of the law. *История Казахстана и Центральной Азии. Абусейтова М.Х., Алматы: Дайк-Пресс, 2001, стр. 365, ISBN 9965-441-57-Х*

^{iv} Kul -1) slave 2) captive, 3) Slave of God, insignificant person. *Казахско-русский словарь под редакцией Сыздыковой Р.Г. и Хусаин К.Ш., Алматы: Дайк-Пресс, 2002, стр 542, ISBN 9965-441-62-6*

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