

"Studies on the Natural Environment and the Culture of Akita"
Special Issue, The Akita University Research Bulletin: 101-116 1987.

THE AKITA DOG AND ITS ORIGIN

By Keiichi Ogasawara, D.V.M.

1.Introduction

Dogs were probably the first domesticated animals. Archeological findings suggest a close relationship, developed between man and dog, has continued to this day.

Research on breeding and coat texture have raised many questions against the theory that dogs are improved domesticated wolves.

In ancient times, dogs were hunting dogs, guide dogs, and were even sources for food and fur. It is not known when Akita dog (originally called the regional dog) was domesticated.

The famous Kamikawa shell mound in Miyagi has yielded dog skeletons with height of 59 cm (23.2 inches).

Earthenwares of this period show dogs with erect ears and curled tail. Some of these dogs resemble Japanese dog of today. They are also seen on carved surface of hanging bronze temple bells.

Hunting scenes depicted that period also show what may be Japanese dogs of that era with erect ears, curled tail and occasional sickle tails.

White dogs are mentioned in Japanese literature such as the Kojiki (A Chronicle of Medieval Japan of A.D. 712) and the Nihon Shoki (The Chronicles of Japan). A dog named Okinamaro is mentioned in Makurazoshi (The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon) written around A.D.1016. A narrative of master and his lion dog is in the Taiheiki (A chronicle of Medieval Japan) written in 1338. The fighting dogs of Takatoki Hojo are mentioned in the Hojo Kudaiki (A History of the Nine Generations of Hojo) of the Kamakura period (1182-1332).

The fifth Tokugawa shogun, Tsunayoshi, during the Edo Period (1615-1867), was known as the **Dog Shogun Tsunayoshi** because of his compassion for living creatures.

Picture scrolls of the Middle Age from the late Heian Period (A.D. 898-1185) to the Kamakura Period (1182-1332) show dogs with erect ears, curled tails, and some with sickle tails. Dogs are colorfully illustrated with birds on scrolls drawn by a Buddhist monk, Sojo Toba (1053-1114), of the Osanji Temple of the late Fujiwara Period (1086-1185). There are also illustrations of dogs at the Kukaiji Temple, and a picture scroll of the Yada Buddhist guardian deity of children showing boar hunting techniques.

2.Illustrations From The Edo Period (1615-1867)

Two or three paintings from the Kano School by Tsunenobu, during the reign of the Dog Shogun Tunayoshi, also depicts dogs. Puppies on cedar door paintings by Okyo Maruyama (1750-1795) are at the Ueno Museum in Tokyo. Puppies also appear in a series of illustrations by Gyokusho Kawabata, the teacher of Hyakusui. The "Illustration of the Long-nosed Globins" by Kazan Watanabe also includes dogs. However, one cannot conclude from these illustrations that these were ancestors of the Akita dog. Dogs resembling the Akita dog are seen in the works of Shoju Kurata, a student of Hyakusui.

Although pintos appear most in these illustrations, it is not known whether pintos were a common sight at that time or were illustrated for convenience and coloring scheme.

Photographs of the early 1900s clearly show many black and white pintos, brindle and red pintos.

3. Biochemistry.

Biochemical data from the studies by Mr. Hamanaka (Biochemistry Department, Tokyo University), show that the glycolipid, N-acetyl noiramine (the Western type) is found in the Akita dog, Hokkaido dog and the chow, while the glycolipid, N-glycolyl noiramine (the Oriental type) is found in the Shiba dogs, Kai dogs, Shikoku dogs, Tosa dogs and Pekinese.

Research data on native domesticated animals seem to indicate that the Akita dog came to Akita from Europe via the U.S.S.R. and Hokkaido, while the Oriental type dog such as the Shiba dog is believed to have come from China to Korea to the Hiroshima area. However, there are still many unanswered questions.

For example, there is the question of the spotted tongue in the Akita dog. Although the Chow is considered a Western type, it originated in China, and spotted tongue is seen in almost all of the Chows. Spotted tongue among Japanese dogs is most common in the Kishu dog, and less common in the Hokkaido dog. Many questions along this line still remain unanswered.

4. The History of the Akita Dog

As previously stated, in the past, regional dogs were used to hunt bears and Japanese antelopes in the Kazuno area. These dogs were used in the Yasato section of Odate, as village guard dogs and hunting dogs (especially in the Ani area). A lord of the Odate Castle of a certain generations, who was devoted to dog fighting, used them as fighting dogs. Thus, fighting dogs became popular, and demand for these large powerful dogs increased during the 1890s. The crossbreeding of the Akita dog with Tosa fighting dog by some of the breeders soon spread to the Kazuno and Senboku areas. **Mr. Shigeie Izumi**, the mayor of Odate at that time, was against this trend of crossbreeding, and started a movement to preserve the Akita dog.

In 1900, two Akita dogs were presented to Emperor Taisho when he was still a crown at that time.

Two Akita dogs were shown at the Taisho Exposition of 1914.

Around 1915, public opinion strongly favored preservation, and in 1919, under the leadership of **Dr. Shozaburo Watase**, a legislation for the preservation of species was passed.

In 1920, Dr. Watase came to the Odate area to survey Akita dogs. However, since there were so many different types of Akita dogs, he was unable to designate any as natural monuments. These finding on the Akita dog were discussed in the paper, "The Origin of Japanese Dogs" presented at the 1922 Zoological Society Meeting. Around 1926, this subject was again discussed in "The History on Preservation of Japanese Dogs" by **Mr. Hiroshi (Hirokichi) Saito**.

The Akitainu Hozonkai (**Akiho**) was established in 1927.

Owing to a growing concern for the survival of Japanese dogs by the public, the **Nipponken Hozonkai** (an organization for the Akita dog, Hokkaido dog, Shiba dog, Kai dog, Kishu dog and the Shikoku dog) was also established in Tokyo on June 1928. In the spring of 1931, a group led by **Dr. Tokio Kaburagi** came to Odate for the second time to survey, and he became convinced of the importance of preserving these dogs. On this occasion of it's

designation as a natural monument on July 1931, the "Akita dog" was so named for the first time as a Japanese dog. The name was changed from the **Odate dog** to the **Akita dog**. Designated Akita dogs were **Kin-go** (male), **Matsukaze** (female) of **Mr. Shigeichi Izumi**, a female dog of **Mr. Ichinoseki**, a female dog of **Mr. Aoyagi**, male and female dogs of **Mr. Takahashi**, and, male and female dogs of **Mr. Tayama**.

The Akita dog gained sudden fame on October 4, 1932, when a news article on **Hachiko** entitled, "A Moving Story of an Old Dog" appeared in the Asahi Shinbun (Asahi Newspaper). This story was soon followed by many claims to Hachiko's place of birth, creating some skepticism on Hachiko's origin. Adequate proof was established once the letter of appreciation and other papers on this origin were found. However, occasional claims to Hachiko's origin still make news.

Soon, the Manchurian Incident proposed to the China Incident and on to the World War II on December 1941. Because of food shortage, this was a difficult period to raise large dogs such as Akita dog because of their enormous appetites.

Prior to this period, in July 1937, **Miss Helen Keller** requested an Akita dog, when she came to Akita. Therefore, in August of that year, Mr. Ichiro Ogasawara (who later became vice-chairman of Akiho) of Akita City sent Miss Keller **Kamikaze-go** (born at the home of Mr. Takichi Takahashi of Odate). However, Kamikaze-go soon succumbed to distemper. On July 1939, Mr. Ogasawara sent to Miss Keller another dog, **Kenzan-go** (an older brother of Kamikaze-go that was born at the home of Mr. Eijiro Kanazawa of Odate). While visiting Japan after the war in 1947, Miss Keller revisited Akiata to express her deep appreciation for the Akita dog's contribution toward peace.

The great food shortage during the war caused anyone seen feeding dogs to be often branded as traitors. Therefore, many Akita dogs were destroyed at that time since they were quite noticeable due to their huge appetites.

Thus, barely a dozen Akita dogs survived the war, but much is owed to those whose great efforts have produced the Akita dogs of today. Some of well-known survivors were **Goromaru's** sire, **Tsubakigoma**, **Ichinosekitora**, **Futatsuigoma**, **Datenoryoku**, **Datamitsu** (Kongo's dam), **Mr. Okuro's Kinpu**, and **Sakurame**, **Mr. Yozaburo Ito's** male: **Taishu** of the **Dewa** line, **Arawashi** (Akita born ancestor of the **Tamaguro** line) of Tokyo. There was also **Peace-go** of the **Taihei** line of Odate, which was later sent to Southern Akita. Others were **Tachibana**, which appeared on a postwar postage stamp, **Jungoro** of the Ichinoseki line, **Shintora** of **Mr. Yugoro Izumi**, **Mr. Kaga's Kisaragi** 'or (**Jogetsu**), and **Hachiman**(or **Yahata**) of **Mr. Tokutaro Yamamoto** of Kazuno.

During the severe food and clothing shortages during the immediate postwar period, some dogs became sources for hides and meat.

The carnivorous dog was fed bracken paste, dog tooth violet starch, potato gruel, squash, daikon (Japanese radish) and other greens, so that the dog's reproductive power was often diminished, resulting in failure to reproduce, or failure of puppies to thrive due to malnutrition. Amazingly, some of these dogs still survived in spite of these difficulties. Owing to lack of heating in these days, whelping beds were often shaped out of rice straws. Many dogs whelped during the winter months in those days had bowed legs. At first, this was attributed to the warming of dogs near irori (a hearth sunk in the floor). However, it was later attributed to rickets caused by lack of vitamin D₃ absorption. Many mature dogs also died from distemper.

However, the news of Miss Helen Keller's and other American's interests in Akita dog led to a great popularity of Akita dog, so that, according to rumors, even the mongrel types of Akita dogs were sold at high prices. The timing was also perfect for **Kongo-go** which won top honors at the JKC's (an all breed dog organization) at this time. Also the same type of dog, **Kincho-go**, won the Meiyosho Award at the Akiho show, resulting in the rapid increase in that type of Akita dog from the late 1940s to the mid 1950s. However, some fanciers became quite alarmed at this trend and started a move to further improve the breed. This has resulted in Akita dogs of today.

Many dogs of that period were of postwar Kongo type. They were large, stout and majestic in accordance with the standard. However, the face, coat color and body were mostly of the German Shepherd type.

An Akiho Branch was established on the West Coast in the United States in 1969, and annual dog show has been held there since. As a result of guidance, some of the Akita dogs of today on the West Coast do not differ from those in Japan. However, the Akita dog on the East Coast seem to be similar to the Akita dogs of 30 to 40 years ago.

When I visited Los Angeles in 1969, I was asked by the Americans, "You Japanese revere old things from the past. Then why do you reject the old type of Akita dog as undesirable?" Thousands of Akita dogs have been produced in other countries. But, many of these overseas dogs do not resemble our Akita dogs. These people sincerely believe that they have great Akita dogs and raise them as if these dogs were members of their family. Whenever, I think of this, I realize my great responsibility to inform these people.

More recently, the Akitainu Hozonkai has gradually assumed an international role by getting more involved in international cultural exchanges. This may lead to a greater understanding by the public and the government so that they may eventually give greater support.

On May 3 1986, a prime time television coverage of the Akiho Headquarters Show occurred throughout the United States. Also a few days ago, we were contacted for the establishing of an Akiho Branch in New York and we are looking into that possibility.

The Akita dog has undergone a transition to become the magnificent Akita dog of today as a natural monument. However, this does not mean that the image of Akita dog has been completed. The Akita dog are rarely used today as hunting dogs, guard dogs or as working dogs. In order to produce sound show dogs, one must set the high goal of following standard and also considering the proper combination of genes.

I believe that these studies should be continuous.

From this stand point, the hereditary factors of the Akita dog will be discussed.

5.Hereditiy.

Coat Color. The basic colors of Akita dogs are: red, white and brindle.

For example: Brindle A > Red B > White C.

In general, one think in terms of coat color.

In terms of eugenics (the science that deals with improvement of hereditary in terms of a breed):

1.AA x BB

F1 AB

F2 AA.AB.AB.BB. Brindle 3, Red 1

A similar situation exists between brindle and white.

Brindle 3, white 1.

However, in the case of brindle AB x brindle AC,

AA AB AC brindle

BC red or white (according to the foregoing factor, BC would be red)

Red B x White C should theoretically produce no brindles, but brindles do appear. This is not easily explainable, but a brief discussion, for the sake of improving the Akita dog, is in order.

Brindle. Should a red appear from brindle x brindle (AA or AB or AC), one may assume that BB or BC were involved. Reds from brindle parents (in this case, both parents may be from the same litter) have never produce brindles. Only reds or white are produced. However, if both parents are brindles or if one parent is a brindle, red x white will produce brindle(s). Their offsprings will probably be brindle, red and white. It has been reported also that a brindle stud dog of over one thousand offsprings has never produced a red offspring. This may be due to AA which may be very dominant.

Thus, dominant to recessive hereditary colors of the Akita dog are from brindle to white to red. Whether this is applicable to other breeds is not known and is being investigated.

Albino.

Although believed to be limited white only, it has occurred in the brindle and red also. It seems that this is not mentioned in other dog literature. This is not limited to coat color, but applies also to eye color and mucous membrane.

Coat quality: Long coat (moku) and short coat appears occasionally.

Inherited frame characteristics: Narrow chest, swayback, faulty tail curl, drop ears, cow hock.

Teeth: Undershot, overshot, missing teeth, etc.

Tongue: Spotted tongue.

Eyes: Eyes of different color, faulty eye shape, entropion, ectropion.

Testicles: Undescended testes.

Temperament: Shy, violent.

Dewclaw.

6. Management of the Akita dog.

a. Breeding.

The female comes into heat between the sixth and tenth months and the period usually lasts 17 to 18 days. Ovulation occurs around the 14th day, and copulation occurs during this time. The male normally matures beyond 10th month. The pedigree and characteristic of dog are considered before selecting the proper male for breeding. The gestation period is about 60 days and the standard weight varies between 350 to 500 grams. Weight gain after birth is about 50 grams per day, the upper limit being around 150 grams per day. At one month, the weight is about 2 to 3 kilograms, 6 to 7 kilograms at two month, and about 80% the weight of a mature dog at 6 month. If the litter is large and the puppies not up to expectations, one should cull to 4 or 5 puppies. Unless culled, no improvement is obtainable.

b. Care.

Two weeks after birth, the eyes open and they begin to walk. At three weeks, regular food is started with the first deworming.

In colder climates, temperature should be maintained around 20-25°C during the winter

months, and slightly softened dog food is fed.

At three weeks, progressive exposure to sunshine and exercise are introduced. In the past, rice with fish or dried small sardines or meat with green vegetables were used, but dog food is more commonly used today.

At our veterinary clinic, we see many pets with constipation which is often due to a heavy diet of dried small sardines. In a rice diet, one should omit bones, dried small sardines, cuttlefish and shark of the fish foods. Milk may cause diarrhea. Green vegetable and fruits are better avoid, since dogs as carnivores lack the necessary digestive enzymes.

The puppies are weaned at 45-50 days. At this time, one should keep only the promising puppies for the future, and dispose of the rest. This is the purpose of selective elimination. At 2-3 months, immunization for distemper is started. Combined vaccines are preferable. After immunization is completed, exercises which are very important for show dogs, are started gradually. However, heavy exercise for guard dogs is not necessary, and an adequate yard at home for light exercise is usually sufficient.

Feeding is usually adequate twice a day. For smaller dogs, once a day feeding may be adequate. One should increase the amount of food gradually until 6-7 months of age when the dog is considered fully grown. For a mature dog, about 500-700 grams per day of dog food is adequate.

The weight of the fully grown female is 25-28 kgs. (55-61.6 lbs), while that of the male is about 28-30 kgs.(61.6-66 lbs.).

Protein in the diet is increased for pregnant and heavily exercised dogs. Dogs do not normally tired of the same daily menu, unless abnormal. Consult your veterinarian regarding your dog's health.

6.Faithful Hachiko.

The name of the faithful dog, Hachiko, become known worldwide, owing to an article, "Faithful Old Dog Awaits Return of Master Dead for Seven Years." in the October 4, 1933 issue of Aashi Shinbun (Asahi News).

Hachiko was born in Odate on November 1923. At the age of two months, he was sent to the home of Professor Ueno of the Agricultural Department of the Tokyo University. The professor's home was in the Shibuya district of Tokyo. Since he commuted to the agricultural department in Komaba and the agricultural experimental station in Nishihara, Hachiko accompanied his master daily to and from the Shibuya station. However, Professor Ueno died suddenly at work, when Hachiko was about eighteen months old in May of 1925.

Hachiko was sent to homes of relatives or friends, but he always continued to await his master, who was never to return, at the train station. On April 1934, a statue of Hachiko was unveiled at a ceremony near the entrance to the Shibuya station. Hachiko died the following year at the age of 11 years and 4 months on March 8, 1935.

In the autumn of 1934, a similar statue of Hachiko was placed near the entrance to the Odate station of his birthplace, Odate. During World War II, the statue were removed by the government and no longer exist. A new statue was placed in front of the Shibuya Station in 1948, and a group of Akita dogs statue were placed near the Odate Station in 1964.

(Note: A new Hachiko statue was erected at the Odate station in 1988).

References

(Available only in Japanese)

Igata, Sadasui, 1945, "Chronicle of Ancient Domesticated Animals", Kawade Shobo

Oura, Yutaka, 1934, "Research on Japanese Dogs", Sanseido

Ono, Susumi, 1931 "The Akita Dog as A Natural Monument", Saito Hoon Jiho No.58[Only in Japanese]

Ono, Susumi, 1934 "The Akita as One of The Okuwadakai Area"

Ogasawara, Ichiro, 1970, "My Memory of Miss Helen Keller", Akiho Monthly Bulletin, August Issue

Kaburaki, Tokio, 1967, "The Natural Monument and Japanese Dogs"

Kaburaki, Tokio, 1986, "The Natural Monument and Japanese Dogs"

Komatsu, Shinichi, 1936, "Names and Clasification of Japanese Dogs, Studies on Japanese Dogs of The Showa Period"

Saito, Hiroshi(Hirokichi), 1936, "Ancestors of Japanese Dogs"

Saito, Hiroshi(Hirokichi), 1936, "A History of The Japanese Dogs", Nihonken Hozonkai (Nippo Bulletin)

Saito, Hiroshi(Hirokichi), 1937, "A History of Dogs in Our Country" J.O.A.K. Radio Broadcast

Tanabe, Yuichi; Nakamura, Takao; Ota, Katsuaki; Imaizumi, Yoshinori; and Nozawa, Ken; 1980, "Native Domesticated Animal Research Bulletin", No.9

Nagakura, Yoshio, 1973, "Studies on Coat Colors of Dogs", Nihonken Hozonkai Kaiho (Nippo Bulletin)

Hasebe, Toku, 1952, "Dog Skeltons, Yoshigo Shellmounds", Bunkazai Hogoiinkai (Cultural Properties Protection Committe)

Tanba, Yuriko, 1986, "4th Issue of Studies on Ancient Japanese Dogs", Nippo Kaiho (Nippo Bulletin)

Hamanaka, Sumiko, 1980, "Japanese Dogs" Mainichi Shinbun (Daily Majnichi)

Hiraizumi, Ryonosuke, 1669, "A History of Akita Dog", Aiken no Tomo (Dog's Companion)

Hiraiwa, Yonekichi, 1942, "Dogs and Wolves", Nissin Shoin (Nissin Bookstore)

“nWatase, Shozaburo, 1922, "The Origin of Japanese Dogs", Rigakukai (Scientific World)