

## HISTORY

**S**ituated in the heart of Europe, Hungary (Magyar Köztársaság) is the country of pusztas (prairies) and the Danube, but also of Turkish occupation, Habsburg emperors, communist regimes and the 1956 uprising against the Russians. Until 1989, Hungary was a Socialist People's Republic, but today it is an independent democratic republic.

For many ages, Hungary was a melting pot of Huns, Teutons, Slavs and Turks, among others. Between the fourth and sixth century – known in Europe as the Great Migration – several local sheepdogs that would later become the national Hungarian breeds, had already been developed: the Puli, Pumi, Mudi (small sheepdogs) and the Komondor and Kuvasz (large sheepdogs). Today the pusztas are agricultural areas and the sheepdogs are all that's left to remind us of the large flocks and their shepherds. Those shepherds didn't know about genes or chromosomes, but they selected their dogs for working ability, strength, stamina and willingness to please. A good hunting dog or sheepdog had the same value as a cow or a sheep; an excellent sheepdog could be worth the annual income of a shepherd.

# Large Hungarian Sheepdogs

## Part 2 – Komondor and Kuvasz

text and illustrations by RIA HÖRTER

### KOMONDOR

#### Komondor versus Kuvasz

The Komondor and Kuvasz are two separate breeds now, but in the 18th and 19th centuries their names were interchangeable. In some parts of Hungary where neither was known, people were unaware of the differences. Both were large, white, strong and courageous sheepdogs.

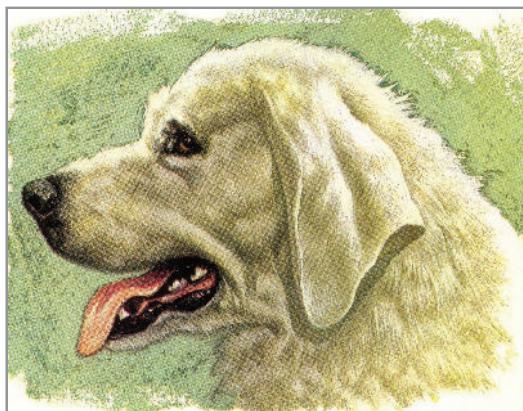
At that time, the Komondor was found mainly in the drier climate of Transylvania and present-day Slovakia; a wet climate does not suit the breed's matted coat.

Once breeders and fanciers got involved with these dogs and official descriptions were published, the names Komondor and Kuvasz could no longer be used interchangeably.

In *Die Deutschen Hunde (German Dogs, 1904/05)*, Richard Streb (1861-1940), described the Komondor and included an illustration. However, the depiction shows two Kuvasz. There is no description of the Kuvasz and the coat of the Komondor is described as, "very dense and solid, slightly wavy," which has nothing to do with the matted coat of the Komondor. Here's a



If a dog breed could be called "majestic," the Komondor would qualify.  
(Photo: Wikipedia)



Kuvasz head study by Piero Cozzaglio, ca. 1973

clear example of how these two breeds were being mixed up, even by a reputable dog writer.

In 1895, German dog writer Ludwig Beckmann included an illustration entitled *Ungarische Wachthunde oder Bundasch (Hungarian Watchdogs or Bundasch)* in his book *Die Rassen des Hundes (Dog Breeds, 1895)*. Beckman mentioned neither the Komondor nor the Kuvasz, but referred to Hungarian Count Esterházy, who – in 1883 – exhibited a so-called Bundasch. The description of the Bundasch did not refer to the Komondor or Kuvasz and therefore it is assumed that the Bundasch could be a forerunner of both breeds.

#### Dog of the Cumans

If a dog breed could be called "majestic," the Komondor would qualify. The breed is "upper class." Hungarians call him "the King of Dogs" with qualities of nobility, strength, courage and superiority.

There are various assumptions about the breed's origin and history. The first one is that they were taken by the Magyars, coming from Turkey and Mongolia, to the Carpathian Basin during the Great Migration, between the 4th and

*In their early history, the types were separate, but we don't know exactly why and when two different breeds developed.*

# HISTORY

continued from page 278

6th centuries AD.

After the Mongolian invasion (1237), many members of the Cuman people, including their military commander Köten Khan, sought asylum in Hungary from King Béla IV (1235-70). The name Komondor (plural Komondorok) could be derived from the Turkish language, the Syrian language, or the language of the Huns. The word *Koman-Dor*, which means “dog of the Cumans,” is the most plausible explanation. Komondor remains found in Cuman graves verify their connection with the Cuman people.

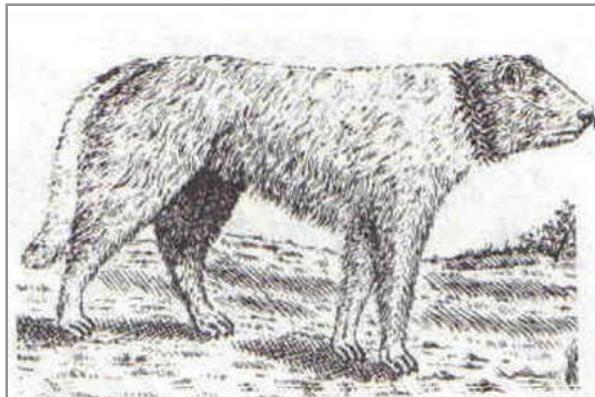
## Protection Against Wolves

Others believe that the name has something to do with the Hungarian expression *komondor kedvu*, meaning “dark mood” (*komor* is the Hungarian word for darkness.) The breed was scattered over the Hungarian *puszta* between the Danube, the Tisza – a river that flows into the Danube – and the Carpathian Mountains.

The first piece of writing in which the Komondor is mentioned as a “Hungarian sheepdog breed” dates from 1544.

In 1673, Czech humanist Jan Amos Komenský (or Comenius), 1592-1670, wrote: “*Komondoroc oerzic a csordat*” (“The Komondor guards the flock”).

In 1778, M. Klein wrote: “... rough, white dogs, known as Komondore, are mainly used as protection against wolves.”



*The first depiction of a Komondor is in Természetűről és mesterségtudomány (About Natural History and Science), 1815, by Ferenc Pethe (1763-1832)*



*A matted coat is excellent protection against the sharp teeth of wolves and bears.*

*(Photo: Komondor.ru.)*

*Természetűről és mesterségtudomány (About Natural History and Science)*, written by Ferenc Pethe (1763-1832) in 1815, has the first image of a Komondor. Using some imagination, one could recognize a Komondor, although without the characteristic coat, in the primitive 1815 illustration. Pethe was of the opinion that the name “Komondor” derived from the French word *commandeur*.

Photographs dating from around 1900 show Komondors that today – more than 100 years later – could enter the show ring as typical examples of the breed.

## Circumspect, Self-willed Flock Guardian

The typical matted coat, sometimes with long cords, is not just a coincidence. The climate and geography required a dog’s coat to insulate against both heat and cold. As well, a matted coat is an excellent protection against the sharp teeth of wolves and bears.

Apart from four-legged predators, there were also two-legged robbers. When guarding, the Komondor is circumspect, but at the same time quick to act with a well-developed understanding of right and wrong. The self-willed Komondor swings into action when he – not his owner – feels the need.

The Komondor is a typical flock guardian, not a drover. He does not chase intruders, but defends the flock on the spot. Because the coat resembles that of the Racka sheep, it’s easy for the dog to blend with the flock.

In early times, pale and yellowish spots in the coat were not a problem, but herdsmen preferred a white coat, so they could see the dogs at night. Today, the breed standard requires an ivory white coat; a colored or spotted coat is a disqualifying fault.

Old pictures show Komondors with erect ears – cropped, not naturally erect.

## Separate Development

In the spring, especially after the bitches gave birth, the Komondor’s coat was shorn and divided among the shepherds. During those periods, a short-coated Komondor could easily be mistaken for a Kuvasz.

In their early history, the types were separate, but we don’t know exactly why and when two different breeds developed. Maybe it happened because of the shepherds’ different methods of working. Was it due to geographic obstacles? We know that both breeds were depicted and their characteristics described separately in 1841.

A simple explanation given in *Pechenegs, Cumans, Iasians, Steppe peoples in Medieval Hungary* (1989) is that the Komondor was the dog of the Cumans, the Kuvasz of the Magyars.

The breeding of Komondors in an organized way began between 1910 and 1930. When fanciers became interested in the breed, more attention was paid to their appearance. Both breeders and owners preferred coats that were easier to maintain, so the rugged coats gradually disappeared. In the eyes of laymen, however, the coat was still troubling. Nevertheless, the coat is the breed’s most important characteristic.

## HISTORY

continued from page 280



*Because the coat of the Komondor resembles that of the Racka sheep, it's easy for the dog to blend into the flock.*

### *Canis familiaris pastoralis villus Hungaricus*

Little by little the real work of the Komondor – to guard and defend flocks – came to an end, resulting in the breed's decline. The remaining dogs ended up in farmhouses as guard dogs or pets.

During the Second World War, Komondors were used to guard military installations. Fanciers believe that although the breed's work changed, its qualities did not disappear.

In 1925, a group of Hungarian herding-breeders fanciers founded the Komondor Club and published various editions of the breed standard.

The first one, in 1920, was by Dr. Emil Raitsits (1822-1934). Raitsits, who was considered "the greatest personality in Hungarian dog breeding," recognized the confusion in the names and types of Hungarian herding dogs and set out to write clear breed definitions and standards. Raitsits named the Komondor *Canis familiaris pastoralis villosus Hungaricus* (Hungarian shaggy pastoral dog) (1924).

The 1935 description by Dr. Csaba Geyza Anghi (1901-82), who published a book about Hungarian herding dogs in 1938, is now considered the best one, and was the one sent to the FCI in 1935.

That same year, the *Pedigree Book of Hungarian Purebred Dogs* was published; 972 Komondors were entered, as well as 992 Pulis, 293 Pumis and 1,700 Kuvasz. The breed standard was accepted by the FCI in 1960; the present standard dates from September 2000. The Komondor is classified in FCI Group 1, Sheepdogs and Cattle Dogs (except Swiss Cattle Dogs).

Herding dogs of the nomadic Comans were scattered all over Europe – the Caucasian Ovcharki in southern Russia, the Tatra Shepherd Dog in Poland and the Bergamasco in Italy are exam-

ples. From their histories and appearance, we can speculate about their genetic relation to the Komondor. There is no written proof of this, but sometimes our eyes are the best proof.

### Something from the Breed Standard

The Komondor "The Komondor is a flock guardian, not a herder. Originally developed in Hungary to guard large herds of animals on the open plains, the Komondor was charged with protecting the herd by himself, with no assistance and no commands from his master. The mature, experienced dog tends to stay close to his charges, whether a flock or family; he is unlikely to be drawn away from them in chase, and typically doesn't wander far."

### The Komondor in the United States

"The Komondor Club of America (KCA) is a member club of the American Kennel Club and is the national club responsible for protecting and preserving the breed in the United States of America." The KCA was organized in 1967 and has approximately 250 members. Their website offers information about working, showing and buying a Komondor. Website: komondorclubofamerica.org



*The shaggy coat that tends to mat is a basic requirement of the breed.*

*(Photo: Postimees.ee)*

"The Komondor is characterized by imposing strength, dignity, courageous demeanor, and pleasing conformation. He is a large, muscular dog with plenty of bone and substance, covered with an unusual, heavy coat of white cords. While large size is important, type, character, symmetry, movement and ruggedness are of the greatest importance and are on no account to be sacrificed for size alone."

### Take a Look

The neck is "Muscular, of medium length, moderately arched, with no dewlap. The head erect."

Judging of the limbs is highly affected by the long corded coat. "Forelegs straight, well-boned, and muscular. Viewed from any side, the legs are like vertical columns. The upper arms are carried close to the body, without loose elbows."

The feet are "strong, rather large, and with close, well-arched toes. Pads are hard, elastic, and black or gray. Ideally, nails are black or gray."

"The steely, strong bone structure is covered with highly-developed muscles. The legs are straight as viewed from the rear. Stifles are well-bent. Rear dewclaws must be removed."

Gait is "Light, leisurely and balanced. The Komondor takes long strides, is very agile and light on his feet. The head is carried slightly forward when the dog trots."

## HISTORY

continued from page 282

### Shaggy Coat

The breed standard provides a lot of information about the coat. "Characteristic of the breed is the dense, protective coat. The puppy coat is relatively soft, but it shows a tendency to fall into cord-like curls. The young adult coat, or intermediate coat, consists of very short cords next to the skin which may be obscured by the sometimes lumpy looking fluff on the outer ends of the cords. The mature coat consists of a dense, soft, woolly undercoat much like the puppy coat, and a coarser outer coat that is wavy or curly. The coarser hairs of the outer coat trap the softer undercoat, forming permanent, strong cords that are felt-like to the touch. A grown dog is entirely covered with a heavy coat of these tassel-like cords, which form naturally. It must be remembered that the length of the Komondor's coat is a function of age, and a younger dog must never be penalized for having a shorter coat. Straight or silky coat is a fault. Failure of the coat to cord by two years of age is a disqualification. Short, smooth coat on both head and legs is a disqualification."

There are disqualifying faults, some of them similar to those for the Kuvasz: aggression or over-shyness; entropion, ectropion; a multi-colored coat or any color other than ivory; flabby construction, body lacking muscle; and prick ears.

The minimum height at the withers is 27.5 inches for males and 25.5 inches for females. The breed standard can be found at: <http://www.akc.org/dog-breeds/komondor/>

### KUVASZ

#### Kavasz – Chuvash – Kuvasz

The history of the Kuvasz runs parallel to the development of both the Komondor and other Hungarian sheepdogs. According to dog writer D.W. Mut (1925), the name derived from the Turkish words *kavasz* or *kawacz*, meaning "guard of armed noblemen." Another theory is that the name derived from the Chuvash people, who lived hundreds of years BC in the southern *pusztas* of Russia. A third authority states that *kavasz* became *kuvasz*, meaning "mongrel" (plural *kuvaszok*) when the breed came into the hands of "ordinary people." Finally, the name could have been derived from *ku assa*, "the dog of a horse."

How was it possible that two large white shepherd dogs developed both early and separately in a relatively small area? According to veterinary scientist Dr. András Kovács, both types, doing the same work, spread with the domesticated sheep herds that existed about 9000 BC. Following the route of the sheep, you follow the route of the dogs.

#### *Canis familiaris Pannonicus*

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the entan-



Hungarian herdsmen in traditional clothes, with two Kuvasz.

By Attila Karoly, 1855

glement of the names had nothing to do with cross breeding, but came about because both breeds did practically the same work. Seventeenth-century documents describe the Kuvasz as a breed of its own. The first depiction of a large Hungarian sheep-herding dog is in the 1815 book of zoologist Ferenc Peth (see above, under Komondor). The dog has erect ears and resembles a Pumi.

In *Der Ungarische steppige Schäferhund (The Hungarian Shepherd Dog from the Puszta)*, published in 1840 and written by Dr. Friedrich Treitschke (1776-1842), the author named the breed *Canis familiaris Pannonicus*. The name derived from Pannonia, an old Roman province now situated in the area of present-day Austria, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia.

Unlike the Komondor, the Kuvasz was also used as a working dog in shooting parties, during the reign of King Matthias I of Hungary (1458-90), for example. It is assumed that Kuvasz were bred at the Hungarian court and exchanged as gifts to the Italian and German courts in Naples and Munich, for example.

#### Old Genetic Relations

It is supposed that during the Turkish domination (16th and 17th centuries), Turkish sheepdogs were interbred, but from the 17th century, the breed changed very little. There are, however, old genetic relations; from a certain distance it is hard to see the difference between the Great Pyrenees, the Polish Tatra Sheepdog, the Maremma and Abruzzi Sheepdogs and the Kuvasz.

When the nomadic flocks disappeared and the *pusztas* became agricultural land, the work of the Kuvasz changed from guarding sheep to guarding farm-



The cover image of a Kuvasz on Dr. Tibor Buzády's book 'Dogs of Hungary'.

## HISTORY

continued from page 284

### The Kuvasz in the United States

"The Kuvasz Club of America Inc., established in 1966, exists as a means to protect the breeding of purebred Kuvaszok and to bring their natural qualities to perfection. The K.C.A., Inc. is a member of the American Kennel Club and is this breed's official parent club."

The first Kuvasz registered in the U.S. appeared in the August 1931 stud book.

Website: [kuvaszclubofamerica.org/](http://kuvaszclubofamerica.org/)

houses. Unfortunately, many Kuvasz were killed during the Second World War for defending their owners and properties. Their numbers dropped dramatically. Political and social circumstances made breeding impossible, and they proved unsuitable for police work as they were more difficult to train than, for example, the German Shepherd Dog.

### Aboyni – Anghi – Márki

As far as I know, a Kuvasz entered at a dog show in Hamburg in 1863 was the first of the breed to appear in the show ring. In 1883, two "Kuvasz-like dogs" owned by Count Miksa Esterházy were exhibited in Vienna. Shortly afterward, in 1901, breeding started in Germany.

The first breed standard was written in 1905 (some sources say 1885). In 1914, it was rewritten by Béla Iovag Kerpely. In 1921, the aforementioned Dr. Emil Raitsits wrote a third edition. The next standard – written by Lajos Abonyi, Dr. Csaba Anghi and Geyza Márki – was the guideline for many years.

Lajos Abonyi (1833-98) was a veterinary surgeon, an authority on breeding and vice-president of the National Association of Hungarian Dog Breeders. Dr. Anghi, who was introduced above, was not only president of the national association but managing director of the Budapest Zoo. At that time, zoos were centers of science, especially when national dog breeds were involved. Iván Márki was a veterinary surgeon, an authority on dog breeding, and international

dog judge.

After 1935, only white and ivory coats were accepted; dogs with other colors – for example, reddish, wolf-grey and black – and dogs with matted coats, were not permitted and could not be entered in the stud book.

The Hungarian breed standard was accepted by the FCI in 1934 and published in 1937. Small additions were made in 1966. The present breed standard dates from September 2000; the Kuvasz is classified in FCI Group 1, Sheepdogs and Cattle Dogs (except Swiss Cattle Dogs). The current AKC standard was approved in 1999.

Without sheep to herd, the Kuvasz became a family pet, but still needs some work to do, such as agility. The breed needs room, both physically and mentally, and an owner with authority. This fearless breed will defend with his life the people and property entrusted to his care.

The Kuvasz is the most popular of the five Hungarian sheepdogs, both in Hungary and beyond.

### Something from the Breed Standard

The head is in harmony with the body. "Proportions are of great importance as the head is considered to be the most beautiful part of the Kuvasz. Eyes are almond-shaped, set well apart, somewhat slanted. Ears are V-shaped, tip is slightly rounded. Rather thick, they are well set back between the level of the eye and the top of the head. The skull is elongated but not pointed. The stop is defined, never abrupt... Cheeks are flat, bony arches above the eyes."

The neck is "muscular, without dewlap, medium length, arched at the crest."

The body, "When viewed from the side, the forechest protrudes slightly in front of the shoulders." The "Back is of medium length, straight, firm and quite broad" The croup is "well muscled, slightly sloping." The "Chest is deep with long, well-sprung ribs reaching almost to the elbows. The brisket is deep, well developed and runs parallel to the ground. The stomach is well tucked up."

The tail is "carried low, natural length reaching at least to the hocks.



*The Kuvasz gait is "Easy, free and elastic. Feet travel close to the ground." This is Amuruskon Halasiwy from Finland.*

*(Photo: Kolumbus)*



*It's hard to see the dogs in this flock on the Hungarian puszta. (Photo: Gallery site)*

## HISTORY

continued from page 286



Old photograph of a Hungarian herdsman and his Kuvasz.

In repose it hangs down resting on the body, the end but slightly lifted. In state of excitement, the tail may be elevated to the level of the loin, the tip slightly curved up. Ideally there should not be much difference in the carriage of the tail in state of excitement or in repose."

### Wide and Slow Steps

The forequarters have "Legs that are medium boned, straight and well muscled." "The scapula and humerus form a right angle, are long and of equal length." Elbows are "neither in nor out. The joints are dry, hard." Pasterns are "relatively short, lean, sloping slightly." The legs have "Dewclaws on the forelegs and should not be removed. Feet well padded. Pads resilient, black. Feet are closed tight, forming round "cat feet.""

As for the hindquarters, "The portion behind the hip joint is moderately long, producing wide, long and strong muscles of the upper thigh. The femur is long, creating well-bent stifles. Lower thigh is long, dry, well muscled. Metatarsus is short, broad and of great strength. Dewclaws, if any, are removed. Feet as in front, except the rear paws somewhat longer."

Gait is "Easy, free and elastic. Feet travel close to the ground. Hind legs reach far under, meeting or even passing the imprints of the front legs.... the front legs do not travel parallel to each other, but rather close together at the ground. When viewed from the rear, the hind legs (from the hip joint down) also move close to the ground."

The coat is "a double coat, formed by guard hair and fine undercoat. The texture of the coat is medium coarse. The coat ranges from quite wavy to straight. Distribution follows a definite pattern over the body regardless of coat type." The length of the coat varies depending on location on the body. The color is "white. The skin is heavily pigmented. The more slate gray or black pigmentation the better."

Height at the withers is 28 to 30 inches for males and 26 to 28 inches for females.

Disqualifying faults are: Overshot bite; undershot bite. Dogs smaller than 26 inches. Bitches smaller than 24 inches.

The Kuvasz is "A spirited dog of keen intelligence, determination, courage and curiosity. Very sensitive to praise and blame. Primarily a one-family dog."

The breed standard is at: <http://www.akc.org/dog-breeds/kuvasz/>

There are similarities between the Komondor and the Kuvasz – for example, the hind feet are longer than the forefeet. The body length of both breeds slightly exceeds the height at the withers. But the main difference is the coat. The Kuvasz's wavy coat does not tend to mat; a shaggy coat that tends to mat is a requirement for the Komondor.

*Ria Hörter is a dog writer from The Netherlands. She is the contributing editor of various Dutch dog magazines and works for the Dutch Kennel Club. She was a finalist twice in the annual Dog Writers Association of America writing competition for her articles in Dogs in Canada. On April 12, 2014, she was awarded the Dutch Cynology Gold Emblem of Honour presented by the Dutch Kennel Club. For more information visit: [riahorter.com](http://riahorter.com)*

We have tried to find the names of all photographers etc. Unfortunately, we did not always succeed. Please send a message to the author ([riahorter.com](http://riahorter.com)) if you think you are the owner of a copyright.

### LITERATURE

- K.V. Antal, *Kynologische Varia*. Asten, 1999
- Dr. Tibor Buzády, *Dogs of Hungary*, undated
- David Hancock, *Old Farm Dogs*, Princes Risborough, 1999
- András Kovács, *The Kuvasz. Seminar*, Cornell University, 1988
- Paul Sárkány and Imre Ócsag, *Hungarian Dog Breeds*, Corvina, Budapest, 1987
- Richard Strehel, *Die Deutschen Hunde (1904/05)*. Reprint Kynos Verlag, Mürlenbach, 1986
- Handboek Kynologie, *Herdershonden*, 1998
- *Toepoels Hondencyclopédie*. Becht, Haarlem, 12th ed., 2002
- Various Hungarian websites