

Many of today's breeds originated in Europe. They were principally developed in Great Britain, Germany and France, but it would be hard to find any European country without a national dog breed. Meet the Europeans will explore the history of breeds on an old continent full of fanciers.

Meet The Europeans...

Part 2 – Italy

Cirneco Dell'Etna – Cane Corso – Maltese

text and illustrations by RIA HÖRTER

With thanks to Eva-Maria Krämer for some of her beautiful photos

CIRNECO DELL'ETNA – SICILIAN HOUND

A DOG OF PRIDE AND DIGNITY

Mount Etna – 10,922 feet (3,323 metres) high and with a circumference of about 93 miles (150 kilometres) – is known for its violent eruptions. More than once in history, the inhabitants of surrounding villages in northeastern Sicily have had to run for their lives when the volcano smoked and rained ash or hot lava. One of the greatest eruptions destroyed a large part of the city of Catania in 1669. In 1971, the village of Fornazzo was struck, the lava stopping at 600 meters. Other major 20th-century eruptions occurred in 1949, 1971, 1981, 1983 and 1991-93. Recent eruptions took place in 1996 and November 2002. From January 2011 to February 2012, the summit craters of Etna were the site of intense activity when frequent eruptions and ash columns forced the authorities to shut down the Catania airport on several occasions. Apart from being an important tourist attraction, Mount Etna is a place for scientific research. Oranges,

lemons, figs, grapes and olives grow in the fertile volcanic soil on Mount Etna's slopes.

ROMAN VILLA AND EGYPTIAN TOMB

Images and written proof of early dog breeds are rarely found. However, visitors to the fourth-century BC Roman villa Romana del Casale near Piazza Armerina (Sicily) can admire mosaic floors showing realistic hunting scenes. The sighthounds are depicted with long tails, pointed muzzles and big, triangular, erect ears. The same type of dog can be seen on Sicilian coins dating from the Greek occupation, about 600 BC.

There is no doubt that *cirnechi* were bred in Sicily before the start of our era. While there is no solid evidence to support the assumption that this type of dog was taken by Phoenicians from the Nile Valley in Egypt to Sicily during their colonization of the island, Egyptian



The Cirneco is a sighthound that uses sight, scent and hearing to hunt.

tombs show dogs with the same pointed muzzle and big erect ears as can be seen on dogs in the Roman villa and today's Cirneco. The breed's present name appeared for the

When guarding cattle, or hunting bears or boars, the Cane Corso wore an iron collar (vracciale) with sharp protuberances to protect its neck and throat from bites.



Most characteristic are the large, triangular, erect, very-high-set and mobile ears.

first time in 1533, in a Sicilian law. People using *cirnechi* for hunting were punished because the dogs caused too much damage to wildlife. More than 400 years later, in 1973, Fiorenzo Fiorone, the Italian author of *Cani da Caccia* (Gun Dogs) wrote that several thousand Cirnechi still existed in the area surrounding Mount Etna.

CERNERE OR KYRENAIKOS

It is assumed that the Pharaoh Hound and the various types of Podenco have the same ancestry as the Cirneco dell'Etna. The Pharaoh Hound and the Podenco developed on the Island of Malta and the Balears, but the resemblance among these three is still striking. In 1934, Dr. A. Dominedo stated in *Rassegna Cinofilia* that in the past, Cirnechi were much bigger, up to 25.5 inches (65 centimeters). (Now the limit is 20 inches [50 centimeters].) The breed is smaller now, probably because it lived under plain circumstances. It is said that "miniature *cirnechi*" still existed in the 1950s. Until some years after the Second World War, the Cirneco developed in relative isolation, which is one of the reasons the breed hardly changed. The addition of 'dell'Etna' to its name can be easily explained because this breed was mainly used on the slopes of Etna for hunting rabbits and hare.

Probably the name "Cirneco" is derived from the Latin word *cernere*, which means "searching with attention," or from the Greek word *Kyrenaikos*, "dog from Cyrene." Cyrene was located where we now find Libya, neighboring Egypt. This explanation supports the theory that the oldest history of the Cirneco can be found in this part of North Africa.

SIGHTHOUND

The Cirneco developed by rigorous, natural selection. The result is a hardened, "heat-resistant" dog that is capable of doing his work for hours, without food or water. In today's Sicily, the Cirneco is still a working dog. He can be kept as a pet providing his owner gives him a lot of exercise, but the Cirneco usually lives in kennels, and his enormous passion for hunting makes training difficult. The Cirneco is a sighthound that uses sight, scent and hearing to track down, outrun, catch and retrieve.

In the 1930s, Dr. Dominedo described the Cirneco as "cowardly, shy and malignant." Italian veterinarian Dr. Maurizio Migneco, whose article about the Cirneco was published in *Il Cacciatore Italiana* (The Italian Hunter) in 1932, characterized



The fourth-century Egyptian dog sculpture in the Louvre Museum in Paris bears a striking resemblance to the Cirneco.

the breed as "very intelligent, alert and good-natured when they are young, but older dogs can be fierce and suspicious."

Since 1993, a working certificate has been a requirement for an Italian show championship. Field trials to test natural aptitude are held at the breed championship shows in Sicily and northern Italy.

DONNA AGATA

In his book *Die Rassen des Hundes* (Dog Breeds, 1894), German dog writer Ludwig Beckmann referred to sighthounds in Italy and Spain. His knowledge was, however, limited:

"According to Italian dog fanciers, there are two types of sighthounds on their islands, the Cirneca and the Ventredda; Ventredda meaning little sighthound. They are used as gun dogs and hounds and are fairly good scent dogs."

In his 1932 article, Dr. Migneco stated that the Cirneco, regarded as a very old breed, was nearly extinct. The eccentric Sicilian aristocrat Donna Agata Paterno-Castello dei Duchi Carcaci was also very interested in saving this breed and answered his call for help. In the 1930s, she collected as many dogs as she could find in the Etna area. At that time, most



Mosaic floor in the Roman villa Romana del Casale near Piazza Armerina (Sicily). The hunter's dogs have narrow heads, triangular erect ears, and long tails. (Photo: Marinus Nijhoff)

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Cirnechi were in the hands of farmers who required a good worker, and there was hardly any interest in appearance. Donna Agata kept looking for good specimens, travelling to Malta where the original type had been preserved. For more than 20 years she bred Cirnechi under the prefix Aetnensis. In 1952, the first Italian show champion came from her kennel. Dr. Scaldara (affix Taorminensis), another well-known Cirneco breeder from the '50s, got his stock from Donna Agata.

TYPICAL CIRNECHI

Convinced she was breeding the correct type, Donna Agata presented Guiseppe Solaro, a zoology professor, with 20 or so typical Cirnechi and asked him to write a breed standard (1939). Shortly thereafter, the Cirneco dell'Etna was officially recognized by the Italian Kennel Club (ENCI – enci.it/en). Recognition by the FCI followed in 1947. A breed club was founded in 1951 and recognized by the ENCI in 1956. Two of the founders of the *Società Amatori del Cirneco dell'Etna* were Donna Agata and Dr. Migneco.

About behavior and temperament, the present FCI standard says: "Hunting dog adapted to difficult terrain suitable especially to the hunting of wild rabbits; endowed with a lot of temperament, he is at the same time gentle and affectionate."

Italy is given as the country of origin and several hundred Cirnechi are registered annually in the Italian KC stud book. More purebred Cirnechi than that are born but, unfortunately, not everyone registers their dogs. In breeding, the correct size is important, as are triangular, erect, very-high-set and mobile ears.

SOME POINTS FROM THE FCI STANDARD

At first sight, the Cirneco dell'Etna looks like a small Pharaoh Hound. Medium-sized, the breed is elegant and slender, but at the same time a powerful sighthound. The length of the body is equal to the height at the withers (square outline). The oval head has a narrow skull and pointed muzzle; the stop is well pronounced. The oval eyes, which seem rather small, are amber, not too dark... never brown or dark hazel.

Most characteristic are the large, triangular, erect, very-high-set and mobile ears. Forequarters and hindquarters are straight and parallel. The feet are oval. The tail is set low, rather thick and of equal thickness its entire length, carried "sabre fashion" when in repose and "trumpet fashion" when alert.

The coat is smooth and comes in self-colored fawn that is more or less intense or diluted, such as Isabella or sable; or fawn with a white blaze, white mark on the chest, white feet, white tail tip, white belly (FCI). A white collar, self-colored white or white with orange patches are discouraged (AKC).

The working gait is a gallop with intermittent trotting phases. Some eliminating faults are: tail curved up over the back; walleye, a whitish iris or blue eye(s); total depigmentation; any

presence of black; an overshot or undershot mouth.

The FCI first classified the Cirneco in Group 10, Sighthounds, based on its appearance and qualities. Since 1995, the breed has been classified in FCI Group 5 (Spitz and primitive types).

THE BREED IN THE U.S.

The Cirneco dell'Etna Club of America – cdeca.e2mweb.com – was founded in Houston, in 1997. Some who were involved in the breed's early American history are Lucia Prieto, Kay Durr, Joan Ayers-Cohen and Janis Butler. The first national specialty was organized under the presidency of Janis Butler. Kay Butler started the stud book, entering the first Cirneco in 1998. In the 1990s, the number of dogs and owners was limited. Until recently, only one litter a year was bred; luckily, the numbers have increased slowly.

In 2015, the Cirneco dell'Etna was fully recognized by the AKC and added to the Hound Group. (The breed is not recognized by The Canadian Kennel Club.) The AKC standard and other breed information can be found at cdeca.e2mweb.com.

CANE CORSO ITALIANO – ITALIAN MASTIFF



Kennel del Gelso Bianco is a well-known breeder in Sicily. The owners still work the breed.

A MEMBER OF THE LARGE MASTIFF FAMILY

The name of this Italian breed derives from the Italian word *cane* (dog) – which comes from *canis*, the Latin word for dog – and the Greek word *Kortos*, meaning fenced country estate. In the area of Puglia (southeast Italy), *corso* means coarse, sturdy and strong. The name has nothing to do with the French island Corsica, located in the Mediterranean Sea west of the Italian peninsula.

The Cane Corso existed as early as the fourth century in southern Italy and on the island of Sicily. It is a member of the large mastiff family, the "gripping" or "holding" breeds. Its relation with another Italian breed, the Mastino Napoletano, is obvious.

The Cane Corso is not a breed for everyone. Cane Corsos are not necessarily dangerous, but breeders must breed only from the best temperaments and owners need to employ proper training and socialization as puppies.

The Perro de Presa Canario, developed on the Canary Islands, is another breed related to the Cane Corso. Other relatives were developed in Portugal and Brazil – the Perro de Presa Mallorquin (Majorca) and the Fila Brasileiro (Brazil). The words *presa* and *fila* mean seizing and holding, the characteristics of another old dog type, the German *Bollenbeisser* (bull baiter) in northern Europe.

CANIS PUGNAX

The Cane Corso is a descendant of the Roman war dog, the *Canis pugnax*, a strong, muscular dog used for fighting bears, lions or men in the arena. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the type was so valuable to the local people that they trained it for

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other purposes – driving cattle, mostly bulls (*Cane di carritiere*), and controlling them in the butcher shops (*Cane di macellaio* – butcher's dog). Furthermore, the dog had to guard farmers, their families and possessions and, last but not least, protect the cattle from wolves and thieves.

Now an all-around working dog, the Cane Corso was also once used to hunt wolves, bears, boars, wildcats and porcupines. When guarding cattle, or hunting bears or boars, the Cane Corso wore an iron collar (*vracciale*) with sharp protuberances to protect its neck and throat from bites.

Policemen used the Cane Corso for arresting poachers and vagabonds. Its habit of gripping and holding fugitives made the breed a valuable asset. As well, the breed's impressive looks, especially those with black coats, were valued in the days when traveling in Italy could be hazardous.

ITALIAN DOG LOVERS

From the 1950s to the '80s, the breed was kept by herdsman, cattle farmers and hunters, mostly in Puglia and Calabria, the most isolated provinces in southern Italy. They had a long history of breeding dogs and selecting puppies; only the strong ones survived.

Then the Cane Corso was "rediscovered," and Dr. Paolo Breber started a breeding program in the 1970s to save the breed from extinction. In the 1950s two well-known Italian dog fanciers, Prof. Giovanni Bonatti and Prof. Balloti, had tried to do the same but were unable to find enough typical dogs for their program.

During the 1970s, only a few litters – 17 puppies – were born. In 1979, only six were recorded, and all six had a mastiff temperament, but they were not homogenous. There were long noses, short noses, some had a wrong bite, etc.

Dr. Stefano Gandolfi, the brothers Malavasi, Dr. Breber, Prof. Morsiani and Dr. Ventura combined forces and founded the Società Amatori Cane Corso (SACC) in 1983, choosing Dr. Gandolfi as its first chairman.

AKC and FCI STANDARDS

It is a pity that, because of differences of opinion, it took more years than necessary to agree about some points in the standard, for example the dentition.

The restored Cane Corso was presented at a dog show in Verona in 1990. The Italian Kennel Club (ENCI) recognized the breed in 1994, and two years later the Cane Corso was provisionally recognized by the FCI, then fully recognized in

2007, richly rewarding the efforts of many people. In 2010, AKC added the breed to its Working Group. The CKC has had the breed Listed, awaiting recognition, since 2006.

Outside Italy, there is now a rise in popularity; the breed is exported to Great Britain, the U.S. and some European countries.

In the past, the Cane Corso has been used for guarding, hunting and herding. These skills are still part of its behavior. The American standard and the FCI standard differ, but new owners should at least know this: "Intelligent, the Cane Corso is easily trained. As a large and athletic breed, they need a lot of exercise. For this breed to be a well-balanced member of society, he needs extensive socialization and training from an early age. He does not do well crated all day and should have a fenced-in yard for adequate exercise. They are affectionate to their owner and bond closely with children and family. The Corso requires substantial time invested and owners with an understanding of dog hierarchy." (akc.org/dog-breeds/cane-corso/detail/)

The FCI standard states: "Guardian of property, family and livestock; extremely agile and responsive. In the past, it has been used for herding cattle and hunting big game."

The American breed club, the Cane Corso Association of America – canecorso.org – publishes a magazine, the *Cane Corso Chronicle*. The club's website provides a lot of information, including about cropping and docking. Both are considered fundamental aspects of the breed; however, in Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, parts of South America, most European countries and some provinces in Canada, these practices

are now banned or restricted.

There are numerous websites found during a search of the internet with information about the correct coat, mask, and eye colors for the Cane Corso.

MALTESE

THE TYPE IS PRESENT IN ALMOST EVERY EUROPEAN COUNTRY

A group of small dogs – the so-called lap dogs or comforters – known in Greek and Roman times around the Mediterranean Sea, accompanied wealthy ladies on walks or visits. These small dogs



*An uncropped, undocked
example of the breed.
(Photo: Eva-Maria Krämer)*



*The Cane Corso type was known in the
17th century. Detail from Las Meninas
(Maids of Honour), 1656-7, by Velázquez,
depicting several figures from the Spanish court.*

*"The restored Cane Corso was presented
at a dog show in Verona in 1990."*

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shared the characteristics of a soft coat, sometimes curled, height at the shoulder of about 12 inches (30 centimeters), a black nose, defined stop, high-set ears, a scissor bite, and a high-set tail carried in a curl or over the back. The FCI classifies them in Group 9: Companion and Toy dogs, Section 1: Bichons and related breeds. These breeds are the Bichon Frisé, Maltese, Bolognese, Havanese, Coton de Tuléar and Lowchen. AKC classifies these breeds as Toy (Havanese, Maltese), Non-Sporting (Bichon Frisé, Coton de Tuléar, Lowchen), or in the Foundation Stock Service® (Bolognese).

MALITAEUS, MELEDA, MELITA, MLJET, MALAT

It is tempting to assume that the Maltese originated from the island of Malta, a republic in the Mediterranean Sea. The history of Malta starts with the Phoenicians, 2,700 years BCE. In about 200 BC, the Greek author Callimachos wrote about dwarf dogs on the island of Melitaeos, meaning Meleda (Italian) or Melita (Latin). Each name has a relation to the Semitic word *Malat*, meaning harbor or hiding place. In early times, the republic of Malta was called Melita.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) stated that the *Canis Melitensis* was a favorite companion dog. The Greek writer Strabo (ca. 50 BC) pointed to Melitaeos as the country of origin of these small dogs. Roman writer Pliny the Elder (AD 23/24-79) mentioned "the little dog from Melita" several times. He said that they possessed a source of energy; if one was placed on your belly, stomach complaints would disappear.

According to 20th-century Dutch dog writer Toepoel, these little dogs made themselves useful catching mice in ship holds and dock warehouses. Until the end of the 18th century, small dogs could be found in portraits of well-to-do ladies, although it's hard to tell which of the Bichon breeds is depicted.

MERCHANTS AND CRUSADERS

A theory is that these small white dogs became very popular thanks to Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish merchants who would take them home as gifts for their wives and children. In *The Maltese Dog*, Virginia Leach writes that the breed therefore came to be present in almost every European country. Another theory is that the breed was taken by the Romans to the rest of Europe, and England. The third theory is that Maltese were taken home by crusaders as gifts for the family.

Dr. Joannes Caius (1510-73), personal physician of Queen Elizabeth I, is always quoted when it comes to dogs. In his book *of Englishe Dogges*, he stated about the Maltese: "There is, besides those which we have already delivered [written about],



*Hugh, described as the best Maltese of his time (ca. 1880).
Illustration from Dalziel's British Dogs (ca. 1879).*

another sorte of gentle dogges in this our Englishe soil... the dogges of this kinde doth Callimachus call Melitaeos, of the Island Melita, in the sea of Sicily (what at this day is named Malta...) where this kind of dogge had their principal beginning. These dogges are little, pretty, proper, and fine, and sought to satisfie the delicatenesse of daintie dames...."

"The Maltese, Havanese, and Bolognese are ladies' dogs pre-eminently. Difficult to keep and to raise, especially the Maltese. They can hardly walk and must be carried most of the time."

– L. Seegers in the Dutch dog book *Hondenrassen* (Dog Breeds), 1914.

According to Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707-88), a French naturalist and co-writer of *Histoire Naturelle*, "the Maltese is... a wanted or coincidental mating between a small Barbet and a small Epagneul."

In 1841, Capt. Lukey of the East-India Trading Company returned to England with two Maltese from Manila (Philippines). Cupid and Psyche were intended for Queen Victoria, but were rejected for being dirty and matted. They went to a breeder instead and their offspring became the foundation of some early lines. Great Britain deserves the credit for modeling the breed into what it is today.

In France, Maltese were seen as toys for princesses and mistresses; hence, their nickname *Petit Chien Madame de Pompadour*.

VIRGINITY

In England, the breed has another name: Comforter. Edward Topsell (1572-1625) wrote in *The History of Four-footed Beasts* (1607): "These dogs are small, handsome and pleasant, and intended as peevish toys of handsome ladies; they do nothing else but playing and caressing,



Three-year-old Simonne Bucheron with a Maltese (1872). The portrait by Louis Gaillet (1810-87) hangs in the Royal Museum of Arts in Brussels.

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while wasting their time.”

Hutchinson's Popular and Illustrated Encyclopaedia (ca. 1935) states that in the 1840s, the breed was extremely rare. Imports in the 1850s were sold as Maltese Terriers in the dog market in London, as depicted in Richard Ansdell's painting, *Buy a Dog Ma'am?* (1860).

In 17th- and 18th-century paintings, small Bichon-like dogs symbolized purity or a second marriage. In the 19th century, many little girls were portrayed with Maltese or Maltese lookalikes.

IN VOGUE

According to Vero Shaw in *The Illustrated Book of the Dog*, between 1860 and 1870, the Maltese of Mr. R. Mandeville from London “practically swept the board” at the shows in Birmingham, Crystal Palace and Islington. Twenty Maltese were entered at the Holborn dog show in London in 1862. In 1883 and '84, several shows had classes for Maltese. Hugh, owned by Lady Giffard, is depicted in Dalziel's *British Dogs* (ca. 1879) and in Beckmann's *Die Rassen des Hundes*



Buy a dog, Ma'am? by Richard Ansdell, R.A. (1815-85), a social document dating from 1860. A vendor holds up a Maltese, a so-called “fancy pet” adorned with a red bow and already fashionable in the 19th century.

(1894). Dalziel wrote that on Malta, “furnished toy dogs” were bred for “dainty ladies and mincing mistresses.”

Around 1880, the breed was very much in vogue, but after the First World War, they were nearly extinct in England. When people tried to import again, they were offered “dogs nearly as big as Sheepdogs.” Then the British turned to the Netherlands and Germany; “Harlingen Dolly... a very fine and small bitch” was imported, then two others, Harlingen Snowman and Harlingen Emblem,



The Maltese has often been used in advertising. This is a vintage postcard for alcoholic beverages.

contributed to the English population.

THE MALTESE IN THE U.S.

The Maltese was recognized by the AKC in 1888; The Maltese Terrier Club of America was established in 1906. Later, the club changed its name to National Maltese Club. The first specialty

took place at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York, in 1917.

In 1961, two national breed clubs – the Maltese Dog Club of America (formerly the National Maltese Club), and the Maltese Dog Fanciers of America – merged to form the the American Maltese Association, the breed's AKC-recognized club.

A new standard for the Maltese was submitted by the association to the AKC in 1963 and approved the same year. The AKC standard, and good information for anyone considering a Maltese, can be found on the American Maltese Association website at americanmaltese.org.

The AKC describes the breed as “gentle, playful, affectionate, fearless in a charming Toy-dog way.” The breed is classified in the Toy Group.

Of course, the Maltese has changed over the centuries. The somewhat messy coat has become a smooth white coat, but the round black eyes look into the world as naughtily as they did thousands of years ago.

Next in the series is the Maremma Sheepdog, Neapolitan Mastiff, Segugio and Volpino.

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) if you think you are the owner of a copyright.

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For more information visit: riahorter.com



English artist Arthur Wardle (1860-1949) painted these charming Maltese around 1910.