

On The Trail Of Lost Breeds...

Although many breeds in the history of dogs no longer exist, their blood still runs in the veins of some of today's breeds. We follow the trail of...

Old Mastiff Types

Rascal, Scoundrel, Scamp and Mongrel

text and illustrations by RIA HÖRTER

Although the history of old mastiff types cannot be told in detail, there is no doubt that they existed. Old miniatures, engravings, paintings and other depictions testify to their appearance, and indicate whether a type has become extinct, as well as if or how they contributed to present-day breeds.

The meaning of the word "mastiff" kept many dog writers busy. Most of them translated it as "large mixed-breed dog," often followed by less-flattering names such as "rascal," "scoundrel," "scamp."

Swiss dog writer Dr. Hans Räber stated that "mastiff" might come from the Latin word *mansuetus*, meaning "tame" but also "domesticated." Another explanation might be the old German word *masteve*, meaning "heavy dog."

Putting it all together we have a large, heavy, tame dog of indeterminate breed.

Forerunners, Not Forefathers

Most dog writers begin the history of the mastiff with the beautiful bas-reliefs, some depicting the royal hunt, at the palace of Ashurbanipal, King of Assyria (668-627 BC), in Nineveh. It is tempting to connect the general appearance of these dogs with today's mastiffs. In

his book *Dogs of the Greeks and Romans*, dog writer Robert van der Molen stated: "In any case, we have to determine that the forerunners of our present mastiff types existed in Assyria. Let us be more careful: old depictions of heavy dogs remind us of heavy mastiff breeds today. Attention, please! Forerunners, not forefathers."

ALPINE MASTIFF

The term "Alpine Mastiff" referred to a livestock guardian breed in the Swiss and Italian Alps. The breed contributed to the development of the St. Bernard and is seen as a forerunner and/or contemporary, and it is said to have contributed to the modern Mastiff as well.

Dog writer M.B. Wynn stated in his book *History of*

the Mastiff (1886), "In 1829 a vast light brindle dog of the old Alpine mastiff breed, named L'Ami, was brought from the convent of Great St. Bernard, and exhibited in London and Liverpool as the largest dog in England." Dog writers do not always agree; in his *The Dog Book* (1906), James Watson accused Wynn of "selective investigation" and "coloured arguments."

It is said that the English aristocrat William Cavendish, 5th Duke of Devonshire (1748-1811), bred Alpine Mastiffs

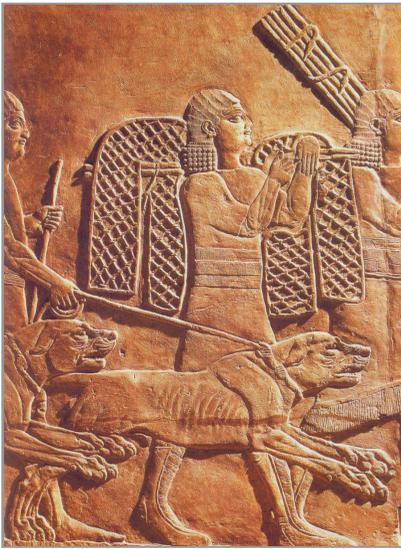


Portrait of Mrs. Boode's Alpine Mastiff 'Lion,' painted in 1815 by 13-year-old Edwin Landseer. Acquired from the St. Bernard hospice in 1814, Lion was said to be the largest dog of his kind in England. (Engraved by Thomas Landseer after a painting by Edwin Landseer)

... all the Alpine Mastiffs at St. Bernard, except one, had been destroyed by disease. The monks had no alternative but to cross the lone survivor with the "Spanish Pyrenean Wolf-dog" (Great Pyrenees). "Hence arose the race of dogs ordinarily known as St. Bernards."

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Bas-relief depicting the royal hunt, on the wall of the palace of Ashurbanipal, in Nineveh.

Fine-Coated Animal

Another painting by Landseer – *Alpine Mastiffs Reanimating a Distressed Traveller*, exhibited at the British Institution in 1820 when the artist was 18 – includes Lion wearing a red blanket with the initials “St. B” (St. Bernard). The other dog is Lion’s son ‘Caesar.’

In *Dogs. Their Origin and Varieties* (1874), H.D. Richardson wrote that all the Alpine Mastiffs at St. Bernard, except one, had been destroyed by disease. The monks had no alternative but to cross the lone survivor with the “Spanish Pyrenean Wolf-dog” (Great Pyrenees). “Hence arose the race of dogs ordinarily known as St. Bernards.” He described an Alpine Mastiff owned by Mr. W. Flood as “... a very fine-coated animal, the stern being fine, tapering, and free from any rough hair, the ears are rather large and heavy, the forehead is full and broad.”

At the beginning of the 19th century, the names Alpine Mastiff and St. Bernard were being used interchangeably.

ALAUNT OR ALANO

The Sarmatians were a nomadic Indo-European people that flourished from about the fifth century BC to the fourth century AD. Classic historian Pliny the Elder wrote that they ranged from the Vistula River in Poland to the mouth of the Danube.

Their mightiest tribe, the Alans or Alani (also Halani and Alauni), required a good hunting dog that would also guard livestock. They were known for their horsemen accompanied by “enormous dogs,” and provided horses and horsemen to the Roman armies.

In 175, Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (AD 121-180) sent a large force of Sarmatian cavalry consisting of 5,500 men to Britain to defend Hadrian’s Wall against intruders from the north. The

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Over the years, old names such as **alaunt**, **alano** and **alaunt vautre** or **veantre** disappeared and were replaced by **mastiff** (English) or **dogue** (French).

Britons called the Alans’ dogs “hunting mastiffs.”

In 376, the Huns overwhelmed the Alans; many joined the conquerors moving west across the Roman Empire and by 409 had settled in parts of Spain. Their “enormous dogs” were named after the tribe: *alautes*, *alans* or *alanos*.

One of the first extensive descriptions of the *alaunt* can be found in the *Libro de la Monteria* (*The Hunting Book*) of King Alfonso XI of Castile (1311-50): “...hunting dogs called *alani*, a fierce hunting dog and war dog. They have the body of a greyhound, a solid head with square jaws. Narrow eyes and docked ears. The best ones are the ones with a white coat with black markings on the head and the tail. Grey, black and solid white are also common colours.”

This description could explain the many greyhound types with solid heads and square jaws on medieval miniatures depicting big game hunting.



Alpine Mastiffs Reanimating a Distressed Traveller, 1820, by Edwin Landseer. The dog on the right is ‘Lion’; the other dog is his son ‘Caesar.’

In his *Le Livre de Chasse*, Gaston III de Foix (‘Phoebus,’ 1330/31-91) stated that the best *alautes* came from Spain. Living in southern France, close to the Spanish border, ‘Phoebus’ was not only knowledgeable about Spanish dogs, but he owned hundreds of them. Many white *alautes* are depicted in *Le Livre de Chasse*.

A Great and Ougly Curre

French chronicler Jean Froissart wrote that ‘Phoebus’ owned 1,600 dogs for hunting large and small game, including a pack of dogs for the sole purpose of hunting bears, which lived in the Pyrenees Mountains on the border of France and Spain. Tenacious *alautes* were suitable for that job.

Le Livre de Chasse was translated into English by Edward, 2nd Duke of York, as *The Master of Game* (1406-13); three types of *alautes* were mentioned. In 1611, Randle Cotgrave described the three types as: “Allan (Alaunt) de Boucherie – like our Mastives, and serve butchers, to bring fierce oxen and to keepe their stall. Allan Gentile – like a Greyhound in all proportions and parts, his thicke and short head excepted. Allan Vautre – a great and ougly curre of that kind (having a big head, hanging lips and flowching ears) kept only to bait beare and wild boare.”

A good *alaunt* was faithful to its master, and fierce enough to grip and hold all varieties of game.

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Conquistadors

In the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, Spanish and Portuguese conquistadors accompanied by their *alautes* – war dogs – colonized Latin America. These campaigns were cruel; Spanish conquistador Vasco de Balboa (1475-1519), for example, used *alautes* to kill natives.

By the end of the 19th century, different methods of hunting required dogs with a softer temperament. In Spain, fights between dogs and bulls had been banned, the keeping and slaughter of livestock had been modernized, and *alautes* no longer had a purpose.

The Perro de Presa Canario, Cane Corso, Perro de Presa Mallorquin, Cao de Fila de São Miguel and Dogo Argentino are believed to be descended from the *alaunt*. Although a direct lineage can't be proven, pictures speak for themselves.

VIEJA PERRO DE PELEA CORDOBÉS

The Vieja Perro de Pelea Cordobés – Old Fighting Dog of Córdoba – was used by the Nores Martínez brothers of Argentina in their creation of the Dogo Argentino in the 1920s. Clearly, there was a strong blood relationship between the Cordobés (the name derived from the Argentine town) and the *alaunt vautre* – these old fighting dogs were so sharp they killed each other instead of the prey.

The Vieja Perro de Pelea Cordobés was a typical mastiff; its coat was white or white with dark markings. Aside from the *alaunt*, the Cordobés was a descendant of the *fila* and *presa* breeds brought to Latin America by the Spaniards and Portuguese, and was regarded as a purebred dog. After crossing the Cordobés with, for example, the Pointer, Bull Terrier, German Mastiff (Great Dane) and Bordeaux Dog (Dogue de Bordeaux), the Nores Martínez brothers considered their creation a suitable dog for hunting big game. Despite the use of various breeds, the general appearance of the present Dogo Argentino still resembles that of the Cordobés.

BULLENBEISSER

Various mastiff types called bull-baiters, boar-baiters and bear-baiters could be found in Germany and the Netherlands in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. German dog writer Hans von

- **Boerboel** – a large mastiff breed bred for the purpose of guarding the homestead. Old South African farmers tell many tales of the strength, agility and courage of their Boerboels.
- **Conquistador** – Spanish word for “conqueror.” Soldiers, explorers and adventurers at the service of the Portuguese and Spanish empires. They colonized much of Latin America in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries.
- **Dogge (pl. Doggen)** – German word for “mastiff.” Englische Dogge (English mastiff); Deutsche Dogge (German mastiff); Dänische Dogge (Danish mastiff).
- **Epirus** – a region in northwestern Greece, bordered on the north by Albania.
- **Hadrian's Wall** – a defensive fortification in Roman Britain, begun in AD 122 during the rule of Emperor Hadrian.
- **Hund (pl. Hunde)** – German word for “dog.”
- **Molosser** – a term often incorrectly equated with “mastiff.” The word “molosser” derives from Molossia (Epirus), a region of ancient Greece. The huge Molossian dogs were flock guardians and hunting hounds.
- **Nineveh** – ancient Assyrian city on the eastern bank of the Tigris River; capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.
- **Par force** – par force hunting, in which the prey was run down and exhausted by the dogs before the kill was made, was considered the noblest form of hunting.
- **Solidus** – a gold coin issued by the Romans and in use until the 10th century.

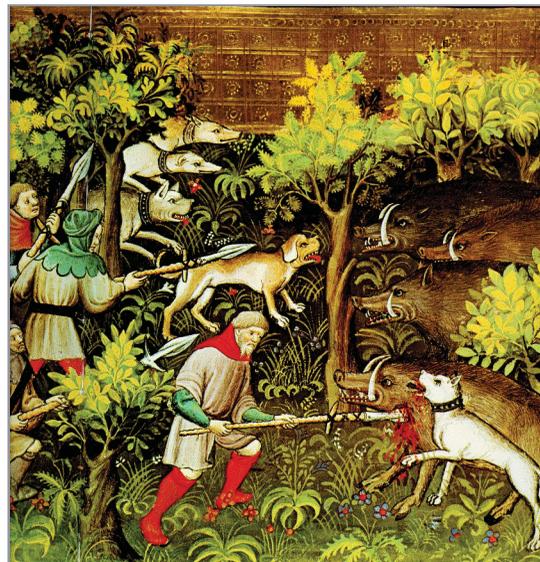
Flemming gave a detailed description in his book *Der vollkommene Teutsche Jager (The Complete German Huntsman)*, 1719: “... medium dogs, but heavily built. They have a broad chest, a short, thick head and a short sloping nose. Pricked, pointed and cropped ears and a double dentition. It's thus that they hold the prey. Their movement is ponderous, but they are strong, heavy and well-fleshed. Apart from the large Danziger Bullenbeisser [Danzig is a city in eastern Germany], another variety lives in Brabant [part of the historic Low Countries]. They are medium-sized and mostly smaller than the Danziger. But as far as limbs and construction, they are the same. Their name is Brabanter Bullenbeisser. In case there are not enough bears, they are trained

to pursue bulls or oxen, although this is a sport more suited to a butcher than to a hunter.”

The bull-baiters were used by livestock traders and butchers to drive or herd cattle. Three types were distinguished: large, heavy dogs of a mastiff type; a cross between a bull-baiter and an old type of hunting dog used for hunting stags and wild boar; and a smaller type, roughly the size of the present-day Boxer.

Boxer and Boerboel

Although both the Danziger and Brabanter Bullenbeisser are now extinct, the smaller type – the Brabanter – is considered the primitive form of today's Boxer. When the Boxer was being developed, breeders tried to keep the old Bullenbeisser type and not wander off to a terrier or bulldog type. In his book *Die Deutschen Hunde und Ihre Abstammung (German Dogs and their Origin)*, 1904/05, Richard Strelbel wrote that he found it most regrettable that the breed's original German name – Bärenbeisser or Bullenbeisser – was changed to an English name – Boxer. The South African Boerboel is also a descendent of the bull-baiters. When Dutch colonial administrator Jan van Riebeeck (1619-77) arrived in Cape Town, he was accompanied by a bull-baiter, not for hunting or fighting bulls, but for the protection of his family. His dog was described as “... a bull-baiting dog of the mastiff type.” The Boer-



“Allan Vautre – a great and ugly curre of that kind (having a big head, hanging lips and flowing ears) kept only to bait beare and wild boare.” (Randle Cotgrave, 1611). Without a doubt, the white dog in the front is an *alaunt*. (Illustration from *Le Livre de Chasse*, ca. 1387)

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Descendant of the alaut, the *Vieja Perro de Pelea Cordobés* or Old Fighting Dog of Córdoba, was used by the Norez Martínez brothers in their creation of the Dogo Argentino. (From M.M. Bèthencourt, *El Presa Canario*)

mask, lips and legs.

The breed's use for pursuing fugitive slaves, not only in Cuba but also in the U.S. South, was well-known. The breed was also used in dog fights.

Another name for the Dogo Cubano is Cuban Bloodhound, referring to the times of slavery. However, "bloodhound" is an incorrect term for this breed; a real Bloodhound does not attack, let alone molest people.

After the abolition of slavery in Cuba in 1886, the Dogo Cubano became almost worthless. The breed was too aggressive to keep as a pet and was extinct by the end of the 19th century.

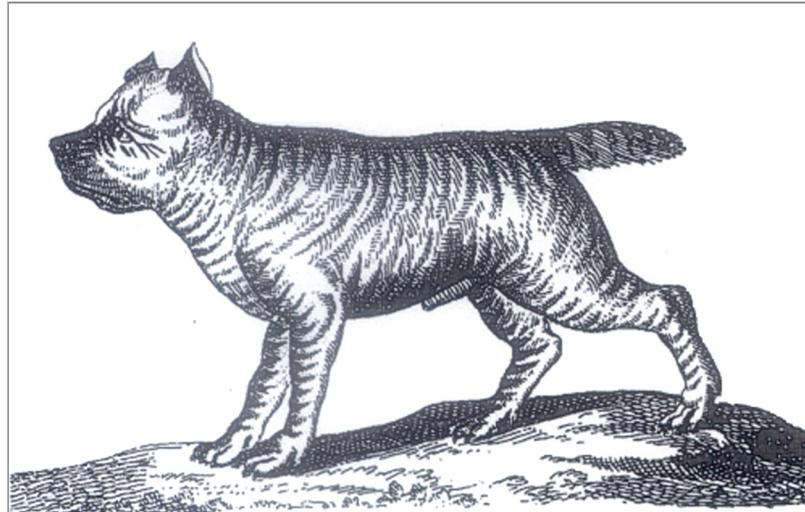
ULMER DOGGE

"Big, heavy dogs," mainly used for hunting big game, could be found in many regions of medieval Europe. They were mentioned in the seventh-century *Lex Alemannorum*, a code based on Alemannic customary law: "*Bonum Canem porcatorium, qui capit*

boel is still a popular guard dog in South Africa. The breed is recognized by the AKC in its Miscellaneous Class, but not by the FCI.

DOGO CUBANO

The Dogo Cubano or Cuban Mastiff is another extinct mastiff type. Developed from various bulldog types, mastiffs and drovers' dogs, the breed was between a Bulldog and a Mastiff in size. The muzzle was short, broad and abruptly truncated, the head broad and flat, and the lips deeply pendulous. The medium-sized ears were partly pendant, and the tail was rather short. The color was described as a rusty wolf color with a black



The Brabanter Bullenbeisser, a smaller type of bull-baiting dog, is considered the primitive form of the present-day Boxer. (From Hans von Flemming, *Der vollkommene Teutsche Jager*, 1719)

porcas, ursaritium, qui ursos capit, vel qui vaccam et taurum prendit, si occiderit aliquis, cum 3 solidis componat." This translates to, "If somebody kills a good pig dog that catches pigs, a bear dog that catches bears, or [a dog] that seizes a cow or a bull, then he will be fined three Solidis." The par force hunt was a popular pastime at the European royal courts, with sometimes 80 to 100 armored dogs participating.

In the 1600s, heavy dogs, rather high on leg, were exported from England to Central Europe; in Germany, these imports were known as Englische Doggen (English Mastiffs). A German type originated in the 17th century, and by the beginning of the 18th century, descendants of these *Doggen* had developed into regional types – for example, the Ulmer Dogge, a large, heavy dog with a black or black-and-white coat for the most part, named after the town of Ulm in southern Germany,

Another type, called the Dänische Dogge (Danish mastiff), had a fawn, Isabel or brindle coat, and was smaller and lighter than the Ulmer Dogge. In the 19th century, the term Englische Dogge was still in use, but changed gradually to Deutsche Dogge (German mastiff), then Great Dane.

Cammerhunde

The terms Saupacker or Saurüde (boar hound) or Hatzrüde (hunting hound) are used in 17- and 18-century literature about the hunt, probably to distinguish them from the Leibhunde (body dogs, catch dogs) and Cammerhunde (house dogs). The Leibhunde and Cammerhunde were held in high regard and sometimes adorned with silver and gold collars.

Gradually, the boarhounds became companion dogs under the name Deutsche Dogge (German mastiff); the names Ulmer Dogge and Ulmer Hund are still used in the Württem-



Dogo Argentino
(Photo: M. Lechat)

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Perros Conquista were mastiffs of the Spanish and Portuguese conquistadores. (From Miguel Gomez, La Conquista de Mexico)

berg region of southern Germany.

One of the first dog shows in Germany took place in Hamburg in 1863. Eight Dänische Doggen and seven Ulmer Doggen were entered. In 1869, 15 Danish and 12 Ulmer Doggen were entered at a show in Altona, until 1865 one of the most important harbours in Denmark, but now a suburb of Hamburg. The 15 Danish dogs were owned by Germans, not Danes.

Following a recommendation by show judges, it was decided, in 1880, to register the Ulmer Dogge, Hatzrüde, Saupacker and Dänische Dogge under one name – Deutsche Dogge (German Mastiff) – and judge them according to the same breed standard. England and France chose (for political decisions) the name Great Dane.

MALTESE MASTIFF

Another old and largely unknown mastiff breed is the Maltese Mastiff from the island of Malta. This type developed with the help of Sicilian and Calabrian dogs (southern Italy) of Cane Guzzo type. The Cane Guzzo was one of the old local versions of the Cane Corso in southern Italy. English bulldogs and “bull-and-terrier types” were also used when breeding the Cane Guzzo. In the same way that mastiffs were named in other parts of Europe, Italian mastiffs were given names according to their use: Cane di Maccellaio (butcher’s dog) and Cane di Carrettiere (drover’s dog).

The Maltese Mastiff was also related to the English Mastiff, not surprisingly – before 1964, Malta was a British Crown colony and after 1964, part of the British Empire. Malta became an independent republic only in 1974.

Maltese Mastiff coat colors were red, fawn and brown, with or without a black mask and small white markings. The ears were cropped. The breed was known for its bad temper and was used for dog fighting until that activity was banned. Not infrequently,

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Grouping together molossers and mastiffs in the present FCI Group 2 (Pinscher and Schnauzer – Molossoid Breeds – Swiss Mountain and Cattle Dogs) is incorrect and misleading, let alone can it be proven that our present molosser breeds are descendants of the old dogs from Epirus. A far better designation is the Working Group (AKC, CKC and The Kennel Club).

this mastiff type could be seen in the countryside, ending its days tied to a chain. A breed standard was never written and the breed was not recognized. The Maltese Mastiff is often considered a variety of the Maltese Bulldog.

It is said that a few Maltese Mastiffs survive on Malta, but most dog writers are convinced that this old mastiff type became extinct in the first quarter of the 20th century.

MOLOSSER

And what about the word “molosser”? In dog literature, the terms “molosser” and “mastiff” are often used interchangeably. Sometimes, “molosser” is simply translated as “mastiff.”

The word “molosser” derives from Molossia (Epirus), a region of ancient Greece. The nomadic people living in the region were called Molossians. In antiquity, their dogs had an excellent reputation, and were mentioned in writings. Greek writer Aristotle (384-322 BC) included these dogs in his *Historia Animalium*: “... among several other dog breeds, the dogs from Molossia distinguished themselves from all other dogs through their size and indomitable courage against wild animals.”

In ancient times, a molosser could be a fierce flock guardian or giant hunting hound – both types were large like a mastiff, but lacked the mastiff’s broad-mouthed, modified-brachycephalic head type.

Dog writers from the past wrongly linked any large, heavy dogs to the Molossian dogs and labeled them molossers. Breeds such as the Dogue de Bordeaux, Mastiff, Bullmastiff, Rottweiler, Fila Brasileiro, Broholmer, etc. – currently listed by the FCI under Molossoid Breeds – are not descendants of the Molossian dogs of antiquity. They were only labelled as such.

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

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 nominated twice in the annual Dog Writers Association of America writing competition for her articles in Dogs in Canada.



The Boerboel is still a popular guard dog in South Africa. The breed is recognized by the AKC in the Miscellaneous Class, but not by the FCI.