

## History of The Dog

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### Evolution of the Dog

Fourteen thousand years ago, a group of Paleolithic hunters huddle together by a fire, listening to sounds of a forest that doesn't forgive mistakes or hand out sustenance willingly. Leaves and brush rustle; then a four-legged animal cautiously treads toward the fire, attracted by this unusual source of warmth.

Dalmatians  
are in cave  
paintings  
from 2,000  
years ago.  
Photo by  
Beth  
Bianculli



The animal, a wolf, has his head bowed and tail down, and then lays some distance away from the group but close enough to feel the fire. Members of the group had grabbed their crude spears, but the animal made no threatening moves. Gradually, the animal moves closer to the group and follows them as they depart for the hunt. The animal helps flush out game for the hunters, who reward their new partner with pieces from the kill.

There are no records of how early canines befriended humanity, but there is little doubt that the relationship was originally forged through mutual necessity. The above hypothesis provides a romanticized scenario, but researchers say there are other possibilities. For instance, man may have sought friendship after witnessing how dogs hunt in groups, or the wolf may have adapted to humans by scavenging off of human waste. There really is no one correct scenario we can be sure about.

However, new scientific findings have indicated that dog originated in East Asia instead of the Middle East, as was originally believed. Exactly when is still in dispute, but some theorize that the dog was domesticated between 12,000 and 15,000 years ago. One study put the date as far back as 40,000 years ago. The first major dog genetic paper (1997) reported a dog origin date of as much as 135,000ybp for the separation of dog and wolf, but this has been challenged as an artifact of the assumptions of the method they used for dating.

The wolf that joined early humans might have been an outcast from his pack. Perhaps he was too juvenile in his habits, not maturing enough to be of use to the pack. Those traits may have helped the wolf gain entry into human society. The wolf, over the years, gradually became the dog - more puppy-like and affectionate, and more eager to please.

At some point we began breeding dogs to serve specific functions - herding, hunting, guarding, working or simply as companions. The value of each breed is not limited to its original purpose, however. The relationship has blossomed from mutual need to mutual affection. They are family members and, in many cases, co-workers or even colleagues.

#### Origin of the Dog

We will probably never know the true origin of the modern dog. It was once believed that the dog was the result of a mixing of genes from the many different types of canids - which is the family of which the dog is a member. However, according to Janice Koler-Matznick, M.S., C.P.D.T., who has been investigating the origin of the dog for 20 years, genetic studies of the last 10 years confirm that dogs have no jackal or coyote gene sequences. There is still question of whether the dog is a direct recent descendant of *Canis lupus* (the mostly unquestioned

hypothesis of the vast majority) or, as Koler-Matznick believes, they have both descended from a recent common ancestor.

The earliest ancestor of the dogs is believed to have been a five-toed weasel-like animal called Miacis, which lived about 40 million years ago. A tree-climbing creature, the Miacis is believed to be the ancestor for many species that you wouldn't normally consider related. From the Miacis sprung the usual suspects in the canid world: wolf, jackal, hyena and the fox. But it is also believed to be the progenitor to the raccoon, bear and even the cat.

About 10 million years ago, a wolf-like creature emerged called the Tomarctus. This is the animal that probably developed the strong social instincts we see in dogs (and wolves) today. The wolf probably first appeared, in an early form, about a million years ago.

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### Early Breeding Programs

New research pinpoints East Asia as the region where the dog was first domesticated. "Domesticated" means an animal has been tamed and bred for specific traits.

Many dog clubs claim that their breed was the earliest recognizable dog type bred on purpose. As far as groups, hounds were among the first. The saluki and the basenji are documented in ancient Egypt 5,000 years ago. Dalmatians are in cave paintings 2,000 years ago. What makes an exact determination impossible is the nature of canids themselves—wolves, dogs, jackals, foxes can all interbreed. Undoubtedly, they were interbred all over the world, and at different times.

Each area developed its own type of dog that was adapted to the climate and to the nature of the work necessary to survive. For instance, dogs from northern Europe developed thick coats and a medium to large body to withstand cold weather and to have the strength to pull sleds.

The Scottish terrier is another good example. Dogs in the Scottish highlands were selectively bred to dig and chase small varmints. People did not need a large work horse-type of animal. Smaller dogs of the litters were chosen to be part of a continued breeding program. Eventually, the Scots had the terrier they wanted.

People took the breeding program a step further and developed specific breeds for specific tasks. This meant that when the mother and father were bred, all the offspring had the same characteristics, looks and abilities as the parents. Using the terrier of Scotland as an example again, offshoots developed: West Highland white terrier, the Scottish terrier, the Skye terrier, the Dandie Dinmont and the cairn terrier. These dogs can all trace their ancestry back to a generic terrier, but today they are considered separate breeds. This development of different breeds took decades to develop. It takes a vigilant group of people, accurate records and an intense love of the dog to develop and maintain a purebred.

### Prosperity and Dog Ownership

Prosperity advances a civilization. Once the basic needs have been taken care of, a population can devote time and energy to other pursuits. So it is with the dog. The status of the dog began to change with the early Greeks and the Romans. They appeared in art, sculpture and poems, their loyal traits lionized and admired. In other words, they began to become animals that were kept for enjoyment.

Of course, what passed for enjoyment back then was different. Dog fights were common events, a competition that has become discredited only within the last 100 years or so. In other parts of the world, such as the Far East, the fate of dogs depended on the breed. Pekingese were kept by royalty, the chow chow used in hunting and the shari pei used for fighting. Other breeds wound up on the dinner table.

In the Middle Ages, European nobility fell in love with purebred dogs and bred them for hunting, guarding and companionship. The English mastiff and the greyhound, for instance, became standardized breeds with a purpose. Smaller dogs were used as "comforters" by royal ladies.

## **Dogs Today**

Even today, breeds are changing. For example, the English cocker was brought to America, but Americans decided they wanted a smaller dog without a strong hunting instinct. Through manipulation and breeding, the American cocker was developed and is considered separate from the English cockers.

Kennel clubs around the world have their own breeds that they recognize. In the United States, the American Kennel Club recognizes over 150 breeds, belonging to one of eight groups: sporting group, hound group, toy group, working group, terrier group, herding group, non-sporting group and miscellaneous.

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