

I found this three-part article in "Pumitar." It is an excerpt from the dissertation of MIKLOS LETAY, who graduated from the Department of Ethnography of ELTE (EOTVOS LORANT Science University) in Budapest, Hungary. His dissertation advisor was Professor ISTVAN TALASI

The articles, were originally published in the Hungarian dog magazine, "A Kutya" in 1970.

It is a good read to learn about the history and development of the Pumi and other Hungarian pastoral breeds. Plan to post the three parts over three weeks. Here is part 1.

"The Working Dog"

By Miklos Letay

PART 1

By the 18th century, livestock herding has become an integral part of animal husbandry in Hungary. Herding dogs were used most frequently on sheep. By the 19th century, Pulis and Pumis were also used on cattle and swine because of their rough and fearless disposition. There were no herding dogs used on horses.

A single dog could manage to herd approximately 1000 sheep. In the same time, they used two dogs for herding cattle due to their larger size.

Grazing livestock usually spread out on the pasture land while moving slowly. The Shepherd's job was to ensure that the animals didn't cross over to croplands, or fields belong to others. They also had to watch for animals separated from the herd. The dog was supposed to stay with the shepherd quietly and act only when the shepherd gave commands. The communication was short, using regional herding terminology such as "go out," "come by," "fetch" etc. If barking was not enough moving the stock, the dog might nipped the delinquent animals. They usually aimed the swine's hind legs, grab the wool of sheep or ears and noses. Shepherds didn't like dogs that broke skin because in case of fly strikes, wounds could get infected. When Herding cattle, dogs usually went for the tail, hind legs or the nose.

At break time, the dog gathered the animals in one spot where he tended them (moving along the invisible perimeter to keep the herd at bay.)

When they started moving again, the Shepherd could either signal to the dog with his crook, gave voice command, or by whistling. Sometimes, he just looked at the direction where the herd needed to move. It depended on how the dog had been trained.

When on hilly terrain, the shepherd lifted up the dog, helping him to see the position of the herd. When droving the stock, (moving them in a straight line by closely collaborating with the handler). It was important for the dog to keep the point of balance in order to keep the stock in the desired position. The dog moved left to right in the back and ran up on either side of the herd to keep them in line on the road or the path if necessary.

When the herd needed to change direction, the shepherd simply sent out the dog to the side, opposite to the direction they must turned, to put pressure on the animals making the necessary directional correction. In order to stop the flock, the shepherd sent the dog around one of the sides to the front. To avoid the dog getting exhausted, some of the signals are to trigger barking from the dog that makes the stock to start moving to the predicted direction (repetition developed a learned collaboration overtime between the flock, dog and the Shepherd)

There was no established glossary of Herding instruction words in the past. The way of handling the dogs may differed from region to region and from shepherd to shepherd. Some handlers loved a quiet dog while others preferred the ones that are vocal.

While out on the pastures at the grazing camps, away from the farm, in addition to herding, dogs also helped handling lactating animals to get milked. The task was to put just enough pressure on the animals to enter and stay calm in the milking bay or on the milking bench.

Naturally, shepherds were proud of their dogs. Periodically, for entertainment and for betting, they entered their dogs in specialized herding competitions. Ultimately, the most precise dog that also could cover the largest area, won the trials.

For a herding dog, the main priority was obedience. In addition to herding, for instance, when they encountered skilled livestock thieves, who made every effort to divert the attention of the dog with high probability enticing food, while their accomplices had tried to remove a couple of animals from the stock, obedience and listening to the shepherd was key to protect the flock and avoid potential loss due to theft.

As an ironic twist of fate, sometimes, thieves also used highly skilled silent herding style Pulis to assist in stealing live stock.

(to be continued...)