

## Tibet and Tibetan dogs West Tibet 2002 by Primoz Peer

### Tibet and Tibetan dogs - West Tibet 2002



In June 2002 (Tibetan year of Water Horse) I have visited West Tibet with a group of friends that all have connections with Tibet for quite some time, some being Bhuddists, others active in the Tibet Society of Slovenia.

We mostly traveled at 4.500 m above sea, where roads are often only tracks made across the wast rocky plains and high passes, and the nature really is fantastic and still quite wild. Besides numerous birds we saw Chiru (Tibetan antilopes), Kiangs (wild donkeys), snow leopard (could not get a photo), lynx and even wolves only about 30- 40 metres from the main route.

Tibetans we met were mostly nomads, friendly, cheerful people, some of them being used to meet Europeans, but we even met some that were very unsure about our look and their children ran away in tears.

Our main destination was pilgrimage around the holy mountain of Bhuddist, Bompos, Hindus and Jainists – Kang Rinpoche (Jewel of Snow in Tibetan, also called Mt. Kailash). So we took the route from Himalayan passes between Nepal and Tibet and then through the southern part of West Tibet, mostly following the Yarlung Tsangpo river. Tibet being in size comparable to Europe, the Western part is the wildest and has most unfriendly climate, no trees, rocky almost desert plains and barren but at the same time colorful hills.

Most people here live as nomads roaming the wast land with their big herds of sheep, goats and yaks. There are no big settlements or monasteries, so it is understandable that in this part there are no "luxus" pet dogs, only big working dogs and stray, half feral stray dogs that are often found in gangs near the settlements or caravan routes.

And we met a lot of dogs.... for me of course they were an important part of my journey.

Almost all in our group complained a lot about the howling and all the noise dogs make during the night, but I did not hear them during the night, being maybe more used to dogs barking....

With the kind help of our Tibetan guide Tenzin, who spoke English fluently, I did quite a lot of interviews with Tibetans, mostly nomads, traders, inkeepers and some farmers, and learned some new details about Tibetans and their dogs..



Khyi

...Tibetans call any dog but normally it is used for a stray dog.

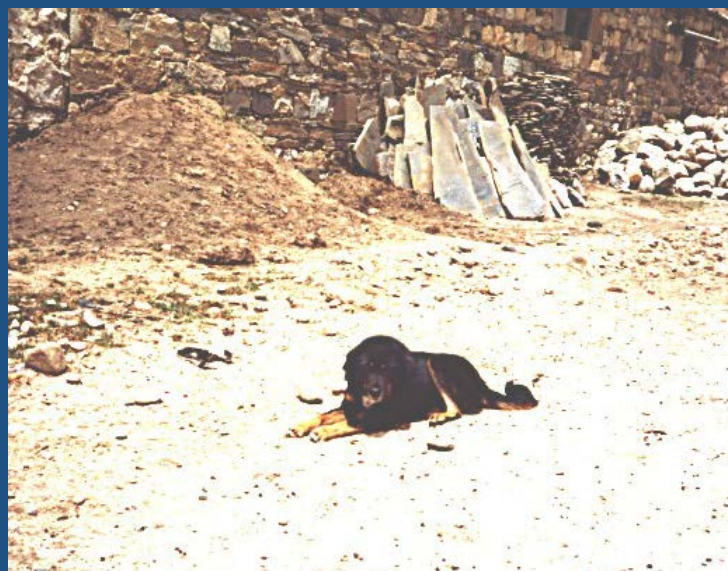
There are numerous packs of stray dogs roaming around. They are medium sized, short coated, mostly red colored (I met an odd gold brindle dog) with more or less curled tails, and quite leggy.

In comparison with feral dogs of other countries (for example Egyptian pariah dogs), these dogs are a bit bigger, leggier, with thicker but still short coats and a bit more Do-Khyi like in head expression.

They live in packs near main roads, crossroads, bigger settlements, pilgrim routes.

Tibetans do not care for them but also they do not harm them in any way, just let them live.

The purpose of these dogs is cleaning ...all digestable garbage is eaten by them.



Do-Khyi

...is the term Nomads of Western Tibet use to denote dogs that are of the type we in the West know as Do-Khyi – Tibetan Mastiff. The difference between stray dogs and Do-Khyis is clear, not only in type & size but also in the way both populations live.

These dogs are living with people, lying (often chained) around the tents of nomads or in front of the houses of farmers.

I saw puppies inside nomad's tents, as it looks like they are of (quite) some value for Tibetans.

Do-Khyis are bred for certain purpose and type (which goes with it), although maybe not for specifications/standards as we understand them.

The way nomads, at least in West Tibet, use their Do-Khyis differ in some details from what I used to read....

As expected Do-Khyis are not used for herding, but they are also not (!!) used for protection of the herds of sheep and goat and yaks while out on pastures.

On my direct question I got the reply that a big herd could not be efficiently protected against packs of wolves by two or three Do-Khyis a family have (nomads could not afford to have more dogs) and more efficient is a man or woman shepherd or two.

Yaks do not need special protection so they are left alone while on pastures. Only horses are sometimes let on pastures with a Do-Khyi or two, mostly because nomads only have a few horses.

On one occasion I had a lovely experience looking at the young Do-Khyi and a horse playing on a pasture.

Whistling is often used by Tibetan nomads for communication with Do-Khyis, but never with slingshots which is a normal way of »communication« with sheep and goats.

The main purpose of Do-Khyis is the protection of the nomads' tents and herds who return to this place for the night. Quite some, especially male Do-Khyi's are chained around the tents for the most of the day.

Their deep often rough barking was the usual music of the evenings and nights.

Another interesting detail was meeting nomads on their seasonal move from one place to another with the whole »household«. While Do-Khyis are let loose and are following the whole small caravan within a short distance, Sha-Khyis were always tied, even the youngsters.

Do-Khyis are the usual dogs of nomads, most families have two or three of them, or some more if the family is a wealthy one and could afford feeding them. They are fed with leftovers, mostly old tsampa and with everything that people could not eat ...like bones etc.... So around the tents one sees lots of bones, some skulls and horns, thoroughly »cleaned« by the dogs.

Do-Khyis in West Tibet are big, but not huge, some of the males being similar in size to the small Tibetan donkeys.

After meeting quite some Do-Khyis I was able to tell the approximate age of most dogs, as they need time to mature.

For our taste most Do-Khyi there look to be starved almost to death and they would need to put on 10 to 20 kgs to get the impression we are used to see Do-Khys here in Europe.

With one exception all were long legged dogs, with strong bones, big paws of medium length and strong chests (with not much flesh on them due to starving)...and two of them that belonged to local innkeepers looked more like Do-Khyis we are used to, just because these two had ample food supply.

Majority of Do-Khys were of very good & sound structure, very balanced and with a very normal angulation of hind legs.

Except of some that were injured, others were excellent light-footed movers.

Tail carriage depended upon the mood of the dog, if alert or in a slow gait the tail is carried in a curl over the back.

These dogs are having strong, rather big heads, with a good stop and a blunt, quite deep muzzle, and a strong underjaw, accentuated with slightly pedulous upper lips.

The bites of the three dogs I managed to look at (with the help of their laughing owners) were all tight scissors, almost level.

Coats tend to differ a bit in length, mostly they are medium length and a few are having longer coats, and some had a nice mane.

Coats are cared for ...by the weather and nature ...

Meeting these dogs in June, they were all in various stages of molting, quite some of them already in the shorter summer coat already.

The amount of the dead hair on dogs clearly showed how thick their undercoat is during winter.

The common colors of Do-Khyis in this part of Tibet are black and tan (medium tan being usual), followed by black (often with a small white mark on the chest) and reddish gold sables, but the sabling in adult dogs is not showing much black tips.

Some of these golds had darker mask, mostly just a bit more than the dark muzzle, more common being the ones without a mask.

There was not a single Do-Khyi with more than a white marking on chest and/or minor white on paws. I haven't met any chocolate or blue (and tan) dogs.

When talking with Tibetans about Do-Khyis I was told repeatedly that bl & tan is the most »special« color, as these dogs have the second set of »eyes« that never sleep, other colors being »OK«.

Temperaments of the dogs I met were with few exceptions rather reserved. They would appear very fierce especially

when chained or when around the tents or houses of their owners. But as soon as the owner, even a child, would tell them to keep quiet, they calmed down.

On the other hand they appear very different when met alone out on the road or pastures. Quite a few times I was not able to get near to them as they simply went away from me, showing no aggressiveness.

The very best Do-Khyi I met lives near a bigger village named Paryang. A strong, lovely, young less than a year old male was friendly and playful even with Europeans, as he lives in a guesthouse beside the caravan route.

I wish I could take him with me.....



**Sha-Khyi**

Again a normal term Tibetans I met used for their hunting dogs, which all were decidedly of one – sighthound type I first met a pack of Sha-Khyis tied around some nomad tents near the ferry on Yarlung Tsangpo.

There were five or six adults and soon I learned they are not only good hunting dogs.

In type and size they are very much like Salukis with almost no fringes, but not very short coats either, maybe slightly stronger muzzles and skulls than we are used to in Salukis.

The usual color of Sha-Khyis I met was white with some markings, light gold, almost cream, some were white with black markings and I saw an odd bl & tan one.

From what I have been told they are mostly used for hunting marmots, hare and sometimes antilopes .....and pikas (kind of small rodent with big ears), but these are hunt for supplementing their own diet.

Also the way they hunt is very similar to Saluki way of hunting, browsing through the rocky terrain., being very independent in their hunting.

Sha-Khyis are much more scarce comparing to Do-Khyis, I met only two nomad families with a pack of these dog.

These two families did not have big livestock herds, so hunting might be their primary way of living.

I met some more Sha-Khyis, but only one or two with some nomad families.

Unexpectedly these Sha-Khyis proved to be excellent watch and even guard dogs.

When I saw a few of Tibetan hunting dogs lying around a nomad tent, I approached to make some photos. They began barking and suddenly quite some more of these dogs run out of the tent and in few moments I was surrounded by at least ten or twelve of them, few older ones quite determined to bite. At that point their owner came out of the tent

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### Khyi –Apso ?

The very special experience was meeting the »big Apso«...or if you like »Khyi-Apso«. (Tibetans simply call them »Apso«). I knew in advance the part we went to is the part dr. Daniel Taylor-Ide found some of these dogs and imported them to USA. I met only three of these dogs that indeed look like a cross between a long legged Apso and a Do-Khyi.

These three were swifter movers as Do-Khyi's, so I would expect they were lightly built under the coat...and interesting enough two of them were very fierce (and tried to bite our jeep) even when not near their owners or tents. Luckily I found and make photos of a nice old lazy one in the settlement under Chiu Gompa near lake Manasarovar. One more detail about dogs in west Tibet...I haven't met a single dog that looked at least a bit like something »else«, like an »import«.....no wonder as in these places even Chinese are quite rare.

### Collars....

Some Do-Khyis have them some do not. Collars that Do-Khyi's have are mostly red colored and have long fringes of yak hair.

Most Sha-Khyis I met were having collars of yak hair but with shorter fringes than the ones made for Do-Khiys, mostly of black color and often with a few sleigh bells.

From what I understood, the term »Kekhor« is not known in this part of Tibet.

### Dogs in Nepal

On our way to and from Tibet we stayed in Nepal, mostly in Kathmandu and villages along the route to Tibet ....and again I went to look for Tibetan dogs and dogs as such.

Tibetan dogs in Khatmandu are generations down from the dogs that came to this country mainly with refugees decades ago and very few if any new dogs coming from Tibet are added. So chances to get a nice Tibetan dog puppy in Nepal are getting slim every day.

The »pure« Tibetan dogs are considered very valuable and sold for prices up to USD 1.500,00, which is big money in Nepal.

On the other hand for Tibetan refugees Tibetan dogs are an important part of their heritage and they are very fond of them, keeping especially the small dogs, mostly Lhasa Apsos, and I saw a few longer –legged Apsos (the ones we call Tibetan Terriers).

When visiting the School for Tibetan refugee children near Bodhnath, Khatmandu I met the best specimen, a white **Lhasa Apso** with some black markings, lovely type and head expression, excellent coat texture, good natured, maybe because he lives in his masters inn.

For me the most magical experience was meeting a gold dog of Tibetan Terrier type walking around the big Stupa of Bodhnath with his mistress, an old Tibetan lady, following her on the usual evening prayer.

When in a taxi heading to the hotel one evening I saw a Do-Khyi of nice type being out on the evening walk with his master...of course, this one was on the lead.

I hope that my photos will tell you some more about these fascinating dogs and their country.



