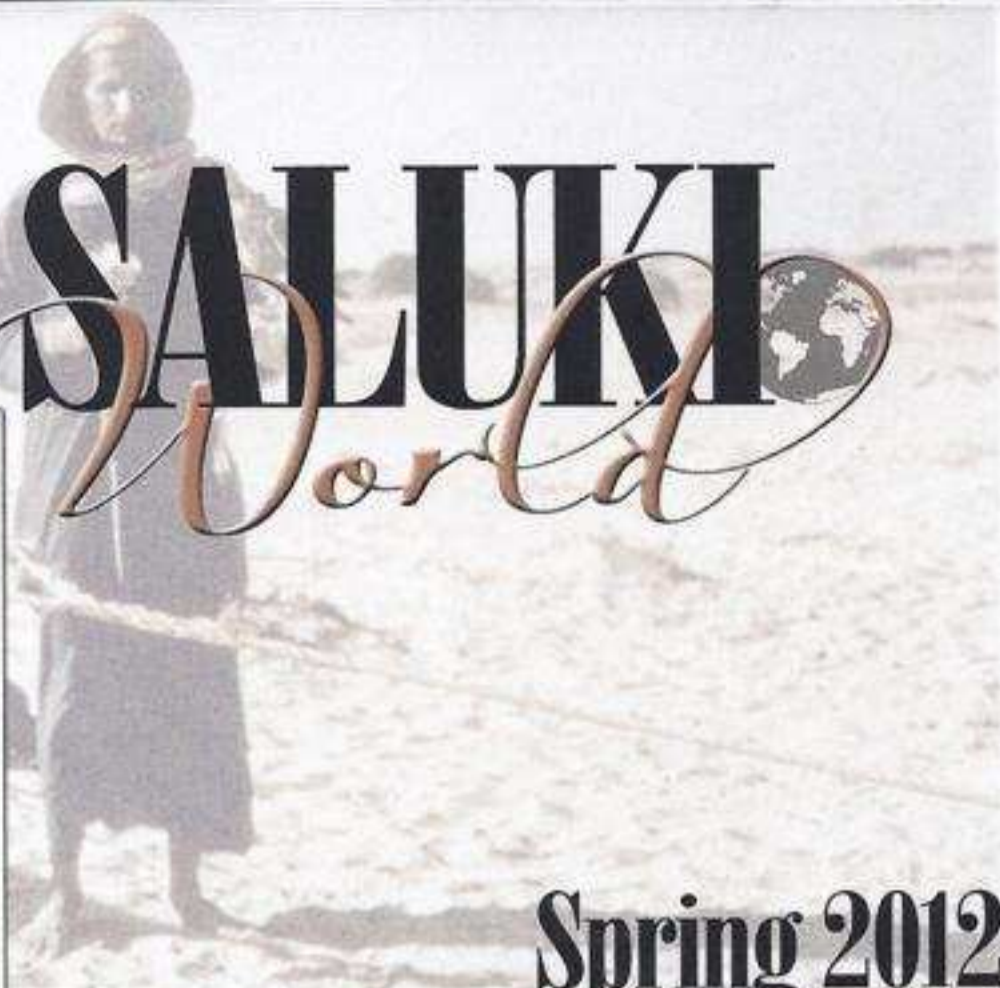


CLASSIC SALUKI

World



Spring 2012

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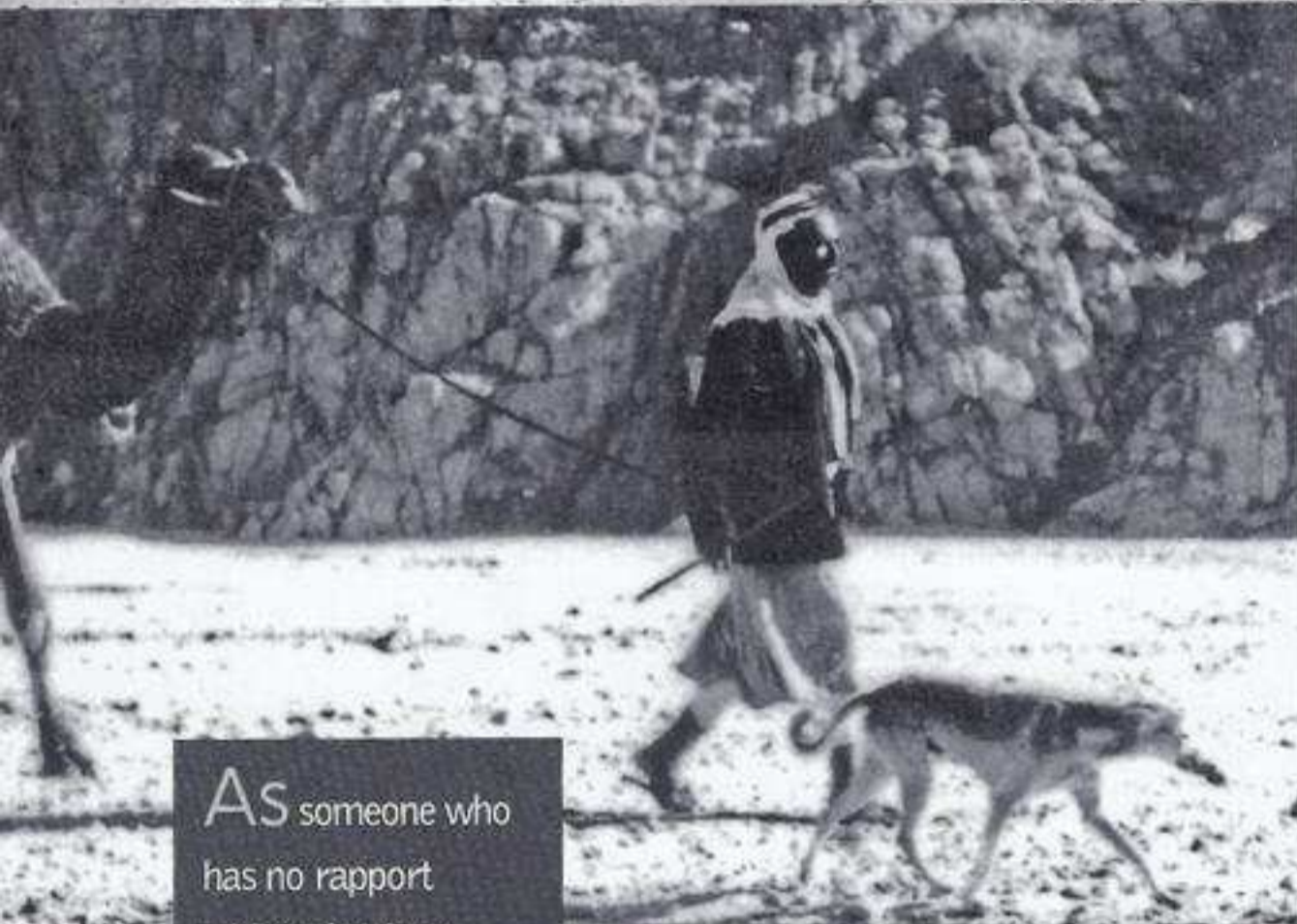
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Shifting desert sands changing desert breeds

The last caravan. Sinai, Tarabin Bedouin, 1970.
photos: E. Chen



AS someone who has no rapport with technology, compounded by old fashioned ideas about public and private domains of social interaction, I was slow to join the FaceBook (FB) world. I still don't do FB Friends, but I joined a few Saluki discussion groups.

Before FB there was no easy way to see photos and interact with Saluki people in regions far from my home and cultures very different from my own, so I was delighted at the prospect of broadening my knowledge of Saluki communities worldwide. Since I knew little about northern region Salukis, I thought joining a Persian group would be a treasure trove of new material. What did I find? A small group of western people promoting the athletic prowess of imports to the west or the descendents of broker acquired northern origin hounds, variously referred to as tazis, Persians, Turkish,

Iranian, or Kurdish, that compete mostly in German racing or American lure chasing or open field coursing events. Those presenting the hounds gave the impression that this particular northern breeding, emanating from Germany, dominated all athletic venues world-wide.

Since not only have I competed in American open field coursing events, continue to free course, and have bred Salukis that still compete and that have themselves produced outstanding, competitive offspring in both the field and show ring, I promptly attempted to broaden this propaganda of excellence. For this I received a "warning" from the American group moderator: "This group is for Persian Salukis, not all Salukis."

The Iranian group moderators put up some photos of hounds bred by the iconic Tazi Club of Iran founder and registrar, Mrs. Tamp, a German living in Iran for decades, and a few photos of their own hounds, and some hounds referred to as Kurdish and "the best hunters." A few pictures were taken in what appeared to be an exhibition, others were out walking, apparently free coursing in Iran. The comments, predominantly by western group members were always: Oh, gorgeous; oh, fabulous type; oh, what a fine strong Saluki; oh, please, send that one to me. I stopped

trying to share photos of my own desert-descent, athletic Salukis, but I did want to know more about the pictures. So I asked where the photos were taken, when were they taken, why were there different types, was this an exhibition where the man seemed to be explaining something to an audience. What was he explaining? Do you have photos of the parents of some of these dogs? No response to any question. For whatever the reason, possibly because when I share photos, I always credit the Sinai Bedouin and Israeli breeder of my own eastern imports,

Iranians had been of varied types, some appeared to me greyhound crosses, some seemed primitive types, and some were what western fanciers recognize as Salukis. There was rarely any history accompanying the photo or the hound. For me, history would remain the few photos I had collected, and the well-illustrated chapter on the Persian Greyhound in the 1904 volume by Comte Henri De Bylandt, *Les Races de Chiens, Volume I: Chiens de Chasse*.

On to the Arabian Saluki group; after all, this region I know something about and I have a good collection of

"old friends," more little Amherstia type hounds and Tarabins and Ruallas and Al Murras and an array of Bedouin-type survivors from decades past. After all, our earliest English imports came from this southern range of the breed. In western Saluki history, "Arab" was a synonym for "Bedouin" not a particular country but nomadism itself.

I was greeted by fabulous photographs of stunning Salukis bred to race, bred to show, bred to run mile after mile, four and five minute flat out chases after a gazelle, either tame or wild, flanked by four wheel drive vehicles, horns

effort to escape. As I watched the numerous linked videos my memory replayed the gripping description by Carl Raswan in *Black Tents of Arabia* (1947) of the bedlam and intensity of a Rualla Bedouin hunting party and an indomitable gazelle buck.

When I go into the field with my Salukis, as I have been doing for decades, as we begin our walk, I always feel as though time stands still and that we are joining all those legions of hunters who have walked the fields, searched the deserts, in the ageless pursuit of quarry . . . hound and hunter as one. I knew, from Raswan, that



Carl Raswan, 1940s, Rualla Bedouin Salukis.



Bedouin Saluki ca 1937. C. Raswan. Courtesy of the Raswan Library.

I was informed that there was no response to my questions because the Iranian group members did not want to answer me, and finally, that I was not "qualified" to participate in this group.

As I had arrived, I left the FB Persian Saluqi world having learned next to nothing new from it. The photos shared by the

photos of Saudi descent, Sinai-Negev, Israeli Bedouin descent Salukis. Maybe I'd be more welcome in that group despite the Israel connection. These are the desert bred Saluqis I have seen most of in the flesh, but it would be interesting to look into the Arab world beyond my own photos and memories. I hoped to visit with my

honking, men hanging out of windows cheering the hounds on and on and on . . . a marathon of endurance and a rush of excitement for these modern hunters . . . as these modern endurance runners close on the tiring gazelle that has been forced to run a straight line, no chance of jinking, turning, even fighting off the hounds in a desperate or courageous

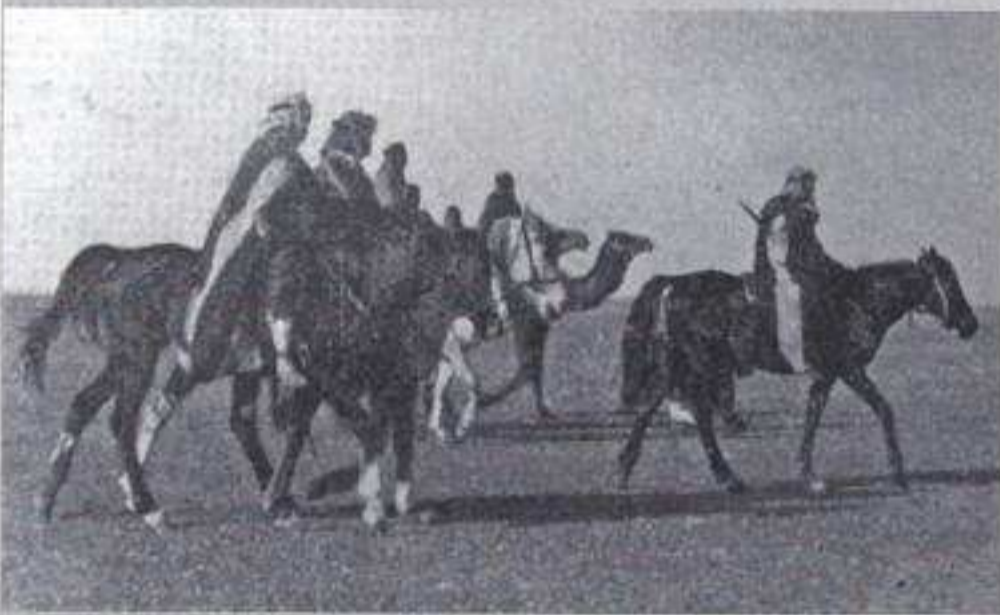
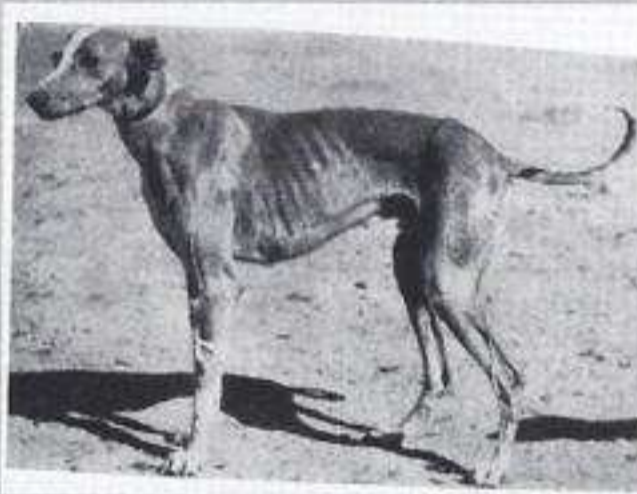
desert hunting parties could be large and raucous; the modern Saudi hunters were not so different from their Bedouin forbearers in their excitement.

Raswan described the hunting party as composed of a beater corps of over three hundred camel-riders and about two hundred horsemen who drove the game towards the centre



1923, Rualla bedouin raiding party with led mares. WR Brown.

1923, Rualla Bedouin Saluki. WR Brown.



from *The Horse of the Desert*, 1924. WR Brown.



Palestine, ca. 1937. Tinker, Saluki of Major Jarvis, Governor of Sinai.

of the line of Bedouin - relatives of the prince and other Ruala nobles and their attendant slaves. The Salukis and falcons had been fasted for two days prior to the hunt. Raswan comments, as he pulled up his mare to let the train of hunting comrades ride past.

“They were a splendid knightly troop, on beautiful mares and camels. The falcons balanced with outstretched wings on the wrists of riders and the croups of the galloping horses. Cloaks, manes, tails, plaits and head-cloths, saddle trappings, fringes, and tassels flapped in the wind. The shout of men mingled with the thunder of hoofs, the neighing of mares, the screams of the hawks and the baying of the hounds.” p. 195

Raswan described how game was flushed, how the falcons flew and how the greyhounds were used in pairs to course the hares and how they sometimes took a somersault when the hare doubled suddenly changing direction. The second day of hunting was ended early due to the rising temperature, “for the heat of the sun is considered harmful to both greyhounds and falcons.” The thirsty mares were cooled down before drinking but “the panting and tired greyhounds had water splashed into their mouths immediately.” On the third day of hunting, Raswan describes in detail how the trained falcons flew above the gazelle then grasped onto their necks or heads between the horns or eye sockets, striking wildly with their beaks and wings to impede the progress of the gazelle or to blind it. Slowed or blinded, the gazelle was seized by the hocks by the greyhounds with the huntsman racing up and ending the animal’s suffering by ritually killing it. A total of 36 gazelle were taken during this three-day hunt. So, today’s YouTube videos of gazelle hunts are clearly conservative events.

But where I was going with this slide backwards into the “romance of the desert” was the final chase of the hunt, the gamest fight Raswan had ever seen put up by a young gazelle buck. I asked myself how do the Salukis of today compare to the Bedouin hounds of the past? Clearly these modern hounds have marvelous endurance and speed. Is that the essence of the Bedouin Saluqi?

Carl Raswan is a masterful story teller and this is a gripping tale from a time when the desert was home to legendary people, horses, camels, hounds, falcons, and their equally noble quarry. The buck “had succeeded in shaking off two falcons and goring a greyhound, and had reached temporary safety.” The Ruala decided to pursue the buck with falcons only, and sent beaters out

them him in, then they flew the strong falcons and started to follow the desperate contest. The buck runs, swerves, throws himself on the ground turning somersaults, speeding up, doubling right and left but despite the buck's resourcefulness, two falcons managed to attach themselves to his head and neck. With this, the buck leapt straight up into the air, and "with the same mighty swing he threw himself on the ground, tumbled over, and with a sidelong thrust of his head, drove his dirk-like horns into the ground, and executed a few more somersaults, having maimed one hawk, gored another to death, and crushed the third" Raswan imagines that every delicate bone of the buck is broken, but the desperate animal was up in seconds and off in full flight. At this point the huntsmen unleashed the greyhounds, but it was too late. "The hounds chased for some time after the little cloud of dust far ahead of them, but the hero of the day disappeared in the glassy distance."



The ride back to camp was described as one of exhausted men and mounts, injured falcons and greyhounds. This was the contest, the hunt, the quarry six decades or more ago. I simply lose myself in that desert with those Bedouin and their Saluqis. This was the era when the Ruala migrated, erecting a "great nomad city" when they stopped, with seven thousand tents assembled together and 350,000 camels in addition to horses and other livestock. From these Bedouin came many of our foundation hounds. The life, the hunt, the beliefs and practices, and droughts and famines and times of plenty, and gifts given and gifts received all created the process for natural selection to choose the survivors . . . the ancestors of our Salukis.

Fast forward, back to the present and Arabian Salukis on Facebook. Repeat the Persian group chorus of commentators: stunning, gorgeous, perfection, pure, I'd like one of those. The more the dog resembled a western show dog the more "likes" it got. Apparently many people were seeking eastern affirmation of their western preferences. And many of the photos themselves are simply terrific showing glistening coats and superbly conditioned hounds.

By any standard, these are handsome hounds. I am not criticizing them or their proud owners.

In addition to the usual chorus of accolades, the ubiquitous British tourist chants: time stands still, time stands still, time stands still. He asserts that these athletic eastern hounds of today are an unbroken chain, the direct descendants of those hounds that plied their trade from the tents of their original owners, padded along in the shadow of loaded camels, going out with young men to search for the swift desert hare and some hours of sport and possibly meat for a meal, or a gathering in the desert with hawks and hounds to catch gazelle for a feast. I even found a FB album of an Arab Saluqi owner using the same photos we use in the west of Sleughi and Sarona Kelb to illustrate ideal regional type.

Our intrepid British tourist and his western choir encourage us to believe that nothing, simply nothing of significance has changed during the past 100 years or more anywhere in the Middle East outside of the Gulf region and even there - well, look for yourselves - exquisite Saluqis. The shrinking world, the opening of the dog world via the internet to all eastern breeders, allowing them to import any breed they fancy to build their own modern strain of Saluqi - no, regardless of this known fact - the promoted perspective is that the eastern gene pool remains static and identical to that of the foundation western imports that all western Salukis descend from.

Okay. This was my FB experience. whenever I checked in, the same stuff: time stands still, look at these gorgeous hounds, we say they are Salukis so they are Salukis, and this is all you need to see and all you need to know. But wait a minute . . . **where is the history?** Where is the passed-down-for-generations knowledge: a poem, a saying, something that a grandfather told a young man with his first Saluqi, something associated with color, with behavior, anything that would broaden my knowledge of eastern values and preferences, anything that would invite me into the eastern Saluqi world of today and connect it to its ancient desert roots. Maybe the problem is in part language, but I have seen the "Dubai oracle" on YouTube too often to really believe that the vacuum is created by language. The Dubai oracle is



Sinai, Bedouin family with Saluki, 1960s.



Saluqi with her Tarabin Bedouin master. Sinai, 1970. E. Chen.



Tarabin Bedouin with his Saluki. Sinai, 1970. E. Chen

Sinai Tarabin Bedouin women and children watering goats. 1970. E. Chen.



a parody of the harsh Bedouin heritage of the region.

With each visit to FB, I found myself in a worse and worse mood. I would turn the computer on and start grinding my teeth! Why am I putting up pictures of old desert breeding, of foundation western breeding, of direct descent desert breeds? I know what I have in MY photo collection and memory, I want to see what other people have, I want to broaden my knowledge, see more, see beyond what I am familiar with. Then I realized: Bedouin didn't own cameras. And certainly up until 15 or so years ago, Muslims would not have taken pictures of DOGS. Even Muslims who might have owned Saluqis would not have taken pictures of their dogs. Even today there is reluctance among many Arabs to be photographed with a dog. Suddenly it dawned on me, the only Saluki history that there is is the history that western people have documented! My anger was replaced by disappointment. There would be no "old" pictures. The last camel caravan from Arabia has passed. Though I had read about the disappearance of the Bedouin, even seen some of it first-hand, somehow I had not considered how deeply this would affect everything Saluqi.

In the forward to Bedouin Poetry from Sinai and the Negev by Clinton Bailey, 1991, the great Arabia explorer Wilfred Thesiger wrote: "All that is best in the Arabs has come to them from the desert, and there, the harder the life the finer the type produced. Any Arab today, even a king, would be proud to claim Bedouin lineage." In his preface, Bailey reflects on Bedouin life when he began his research in 1967 when "most Bedouin lived in tents, migrated with their flocks in search of pasture and water, rode camels as their main means of transportation, wore traditional Bedouin dress, used traditional artifacts in their daily lives, and maintained a daily diet of grain-foods and the dairy products of their livestock." Though no longer able to raid and engage in warfare, "in many other respects ... the lives of the older people had changed little from those of their grandparents and even comprised elements from the lives of their nomadic antecedents in these deserts stretching back to biblical, and often pre-biblical, times." Bailey reflected upon his fascination with "the Bedouin's ability to survive in the inhospitable desert." He learned "that virtually every facet of Bedouin culture constitutes an adaptation to the arid environment ..."

Bailey also comments that the study of Bedouin culture "deepens our understanding of contemporary Arab life, many of the attitudes and customs of sedentary rural and urban Arabs today having been set by the experience of their desert-dwelling ancestors many generations before."

However, Bailey concludes: "The illiterate culture of Middle Eastern deserts, which has survived almost intact for nearly four thousand years with a tenacity known to no literate culture, is finally reaching its finale with the end of the 20th century. Modern times have broken into the sanctuary of the desert ... "

And so it is for the Saluqi, as well, because, as with the Bedouin themselves, every aspect of the Saluqi that formed our foundation breed stock was marked by the same adaptation to the arid environment of the desert and life-ways of the people. My guess is, there will be no answers to my questions, no discussion of traditional beliefs on FB. The enthusiastic young eastern breeders are creating their own body of belief and preference and breeding choices. The past is past, their gaze is forward, into their own future, which they have every right to create to meet their own needs and pleasure from their hounds. A new process is replacing the old process that created and maintained the breed Saluqi for millennium. They can't describe a past they don't know; they are building a future. So, that's it. Odd as it seemed to me at first, I now realize that it is the west - western Saluki fanciers - who are the keepers of the past, of the records, of the photos, of the history of the breed.

Not to be chauvinistic, there is a rich literature written in the east about the east. Some of it is translated and some of it deals with animals. In English, Cambridge University Press published a collection of *Abbasid Belles-Lettres* (1990) which includes beautiful translations of Hunting Poetry by Dr. G. Rex Smith. And there is an entire body of work by Arabists for any serious student of the east. My own edited volume, *The Saluqi: Coursing Hound of the East* (1995) is a treatise devoted to historical knowledge of the Saluki. But, ironically, when once the heart and soul of the Saluki was located in the east, in the desert and the air of the desert and the ways of the nomads, it appears to me that that ageless chain of continuity has been shattered, severed by modernity. The ageless process that created the Saluki has been permanently, possibly irreparably disrupted.

This said, what can a western fancier who is sentimentally attached to the mystique of the eastern Saluqi do? Where can one go to find a true, vigorous, "purebred" outcross for western lines, or foundation for an eastern-based breeding program? For young western fanciers, like young eastern breeders, I guess, the present, the Saluqis bred today, the

"stories" of their origins are all that you have. You choose to believe the breeder, believe the stories or you don't. The rapport is between the **young** and the time is **now**. Who needs the old and the traditional? And since "a breed" has always been a social construct and not a DNA profile, any dog is what its owner believes it is and what the fancy will accept it to be. So . . . realistically . . . who needs history?

Well, just like choosing an eastern Saluqi today, one can choose to study breed history to inform one's choices and evaluations of ALL Saluqis, eastern and western. As a matter of fact, that study of history seems more relevant to me today than ever before. There was a time, as recently as 25 years ago, that one could trust that most Saluqis acquired in the east had emerged from "the process" of natural and cultural selection, survival of the fittest, and were true representatives of "the originals." The FB Universe has revealed that this is no longer the case.



Sinai Tarabin Bedouin Saluki bound around the loin. 1970s. I. Sella.

Ironically, in a way, time has actually stood still in the west due to kennel club registry customs of closing stud books after establishing breed foundation stock. Some kennel clubs instituted procedures and secondary registries to allow continued importations of foreign bred dogs, but it was often difficult to get these imports accepted. So, Saluki breed history, whatever it is,

however sparse it is, appears to be what we in the west have accumulated in our books and magazines and memories and the pedigrees of our Salukis. Those absolutely precious pedigrees! Western pedigrees are probably more accurate than not and universally go back to foundation originals, the survivors of the process that created the breed Saluki.

It is critical that we study foundation lines, not just the lines we "like" . . . we must study all of the foundation lines. History is not just what we like, history is ALL imports, all of the types, all of the stories, all of the snippets and comments and criticism and praise. And again, ironically,

back to Sarona Kelb as a starting point. The beginning is the Amherstias, those fuzzy old photos from the 1800s, before the Saronas hit the dog world "showing."

It has been said that we cannot preserve what we do not understand. We must cling to the 1923 British breed standard. It forces us to take seriously that the Saluki is, first and foremost, a swift, rough terrain, hunting hound. It forces us to study the conformation of running dogs and it encourages us to debate and reflect upon all of the nuances of our unique breed. It forces us to study history! The old photos show us a variety of imports and direct descendents. These Salukis define terms like moderate, broad, how

Post-foundation Middle Eastern imports are also important to study, as well as photographs taken by western travelers or researchers in eastern lands. It is only in the past 25 years or so that the changes to eastern hounds have been so drastic. Not all original types of eastern hounds have survived in the west due to biases against coat or conformation or eye color or pigment or tail carriage or some superficial quality that is simply not liked. Losing some of these imported individuals has diminished our gene pool. And again, ironically, the more a modern eastern Saluqi looks like a 21st-century western show Saluki, the less likely that hound is "an original."

Further complicating the assessment of modern recent imports are the stories that accompany them. Partial-pedigree-truths have been interwoven with fiction and this has become the fantastic new truth of today's "pure" desert breeds. And because those who

Sinai, the great and terrible wilderness, Tarabin Bedouin Salukis, Ayn Hodra, 1975. J. Sella



western Saluki breed history has become one of the main sources to evaluate modern eastern Saluqis. But again, the focus must not be on what we "like" but on what was . . . **all of what was.** What was at the earliest points of our foundation imports, the irregular, non-standard, squinty-eyed hounds of all sizes and types that were imported. The beginning is not 15 years of western breeding and 10 crosses

much bend of stifle, how much muscle, length and breadth of head, back, loin, even tails. Hunting made the Saluki and the 1923 standard attempted to describe the conformation, allowing for variation, of our perfectly adapted, arid lands rough terrain, coursing hound. Most modifications of the 1923 standard have harmed Salukis by reducing the diversity essential to continued breed health.

create this new desert bred truth are not the original illiterate Bedouin, but the wealthy and literate, in both the east and the west, we are inclined to accept the stories and the pedigrees as accurate. The titled and the wealthy, the educated and the esteemed don't lie, do they?

Let me summarize my main observations and suggest a direction for the future:

- The repository of the written and photographic history of the Saluki is in the west.
- History is the means, the tool to evaluate

the Saluqi of the east today and preserve the Saluki in the west.

- The original Saluqi of the nomadic Bedouin is no more. The process that created that hound has changed so drastically that the original Saluqi has vanished.
- Saluqi owners in the east and Saluki owners in the west do not define "purebred" the same way.

Since time does not stand still, since canine gene populations have always been fluid, since there is no such "DNA thing" as a purebred dog, and since closed gene pools inevitably deteriorate into poor health, how should we choose an eastern outcross? Is there some health benefit to recycling Saluki genes: export east, recycle west? What is clear is that, in the future, much more careful evaluation of eastern breeding choices will be required. I don't think that we should seal the door to the east shut. I don't think that is in our best interest as Saluki lovers. I do think that opening that door has become more difficult, less certain of benefit. So, be careful Saluki lovers . . . be careful.

Our descendants of "the originals" are possibly all that survive of the millennium old Bedouin Saluqi. Of course, the east is full of Saluqis, but are they that perfect hound immortalized by Abu Nawas in the 10th century? That is your decision to make. The future of the Saluki is in your hands.

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**I WILL SING THE PRAISES OF A HOUND WHOSE
OWNER'S GOOD FORTUNE IS ASSURED BY HIS
TREMENDOUS EFFORT.**

**ALL THE GOOD THINGS THEY HAVE COME FROM HIM;
WHAT A FINE HOUND YOU ARE, WITHOUT EQUAL!**

—translation G.R. Smith

