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## Introduction

The Rhodesian Ridgeback has been gaining popularity in recent years. Partly thanks to the characteristic ridge of hair running in the opposite direction along its back but, above all, thanks to the impression this majestic, proud and elegant animal conveys. The first Ridgeback we saw caught my husband's eye because it had the look of a Chinese kung-fu master with whom it had been training. Once called the "lion dog", today he is more a cookie dog, although it has until this day retained the qualities necessary for hunting. I have become an owner and breeder of Ridgebacks by accident. I dreamed about a dachshund, but my husband objected. I took him to a dog show so that he could participate in the selection and chose one from various types of dachshunds. Instead, he fell head over heels in love with a red-coated dog with a ridge and took a firm stand. Sometimes chance decides the rest of one's life, and that's exactly what happened to me.





## **A long, long time ago**

Books about breeds usually open with the breed history. It is the only way to understand the nature of the Ridgeback because it was formed at a specific time and under specific conditions. Besides, learning about the origins inspires respect for the ancestors of our dogs and for people who shared a difficult past with them. There are many sources and numerous stories told about it but what I always missed was a broader historical context, finding out about the background of events which we know only from school books. I hope that this chapter will present a broader context about the history of this breed or these dogs, alongside the history of man because the tale is fascinating.

### **The Egyptian roots**

A long, long time ago in Egypt, various animals lived with their owners under the same roof and, of course, dogs and cats were the most widespread. Cats purred in almost every home. People usually owned a few of those. It is said that they gained popularity thanks to the goddess Bastet, with whom they were identified, but the truth is probably more prosaic. They did not demand much care and more, and they seemed more useful because they hunted rodents. Dogs required better care, more food, so owning dogs was more popular among wealthier classes. In addition to dogs and cats, birds (especially falcons), monkeys (usually baboons), mongooses,

lions, gazelles or hippos were also kept as domestic animals. In contrast, crocodiles were kept in the temples.

Dogs appeared in Egypt as early as in the predynastic period (approx. 6000 BC–3150 BC), and probably originated from Mesopotamia, which is where the first collars and leashes were to be found. They became popular in Egypt, and it is where one of the oldest paintings was found (around 3500 BC), showing a man walking a dog kept on a leash. We know several ancient Egyptian dog names, as it was customary to inscribe them on collars. The dog in Egypt was used for hunting, as a guardian, a companion; there were police dogs, shepherd dogs, and military dogs. The relationship between a man and a dog has been discovered in the course of archaeological excavations, from temples and graves, and literature.

At the beginning of the dynastic period (approx. 3150–2613 BC), cattle had special significance for the Egyptians. Cattle were used as currency: to pay taxes and tribute. The paintings from this period depict shepherd dogs with collars, resembling the Basenji, the Greyhound, or the Saluki. Dogs were also used in hunting, those were called the Tesem. The name did not identify a race, it pointed at the dog's function. The Egyptians probably only distinguished between the Basenji and the Ibizian, the rest were not regarded as purebred dogs. In ancient Egypt, there were many dangerous wild dogs and wandering mongrels gathering in packs. They often dug up fresh graves and ate the flesh of the dead, as, in the earliest times, shallow graves were usually dug on the outskirts of villages. It seems that it was this phenomenon that prompted ancient Egyptians to bury bodies in proper graves.

You may wonder what Egypt has to do with the Ridgeback? The first proof of the existence of dogs with a ridge along their backs comes from around 3500 BC in the form of paintings in the pyramids, the tombs of the pharaohs. One of them shows dogs with pointed ears hunting for a gazelle. There is a bas-relief depicting a dog with a ridge and ears that hang down. It

is most likely that it was from Egypt that the Hottentots began their journey to South Africa, but they are the main characters of the next part of this tale.

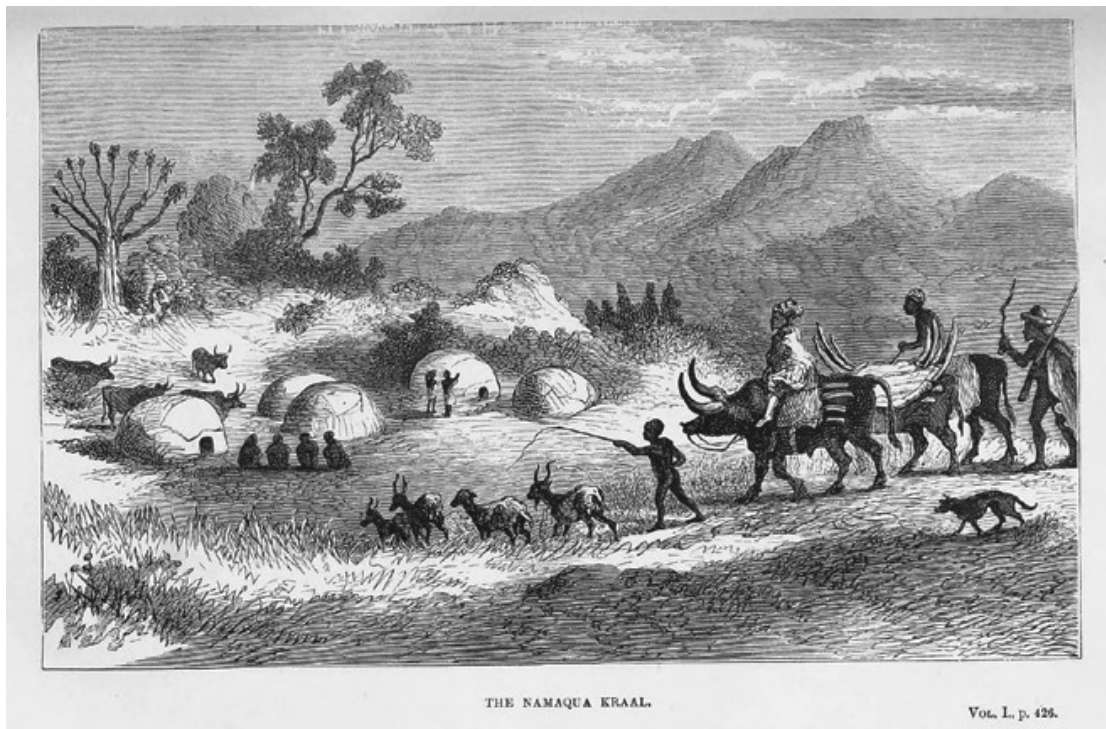
## **Hottentots and Bushmen**

The Khoikhoi or KhoeKhoe (“people-people”) is the original name of the tribe known today as the Hottentots. The Bushmen were already there when the Hottentots came from the north. While the Bushmen’s role in our “dog tale” is minor, its origin can be traced back to the Hottentots. They came in ancient times from Egypt or thereabouts. They brought along the zebu (a species of cattle) and sheep with thick tails, widespread in the north. They were called Hottentot, which in itself is not a very polite name, by the Dutch who, having heard “click sounds” in their speech, called them “stutterers”.

Hottentots were peaceful nomadic people. For millennia they roamed what is now the territory of Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, until they reached the southern tip of Africa, at the same time as the Dutch. They trekked across the Bushmen (San) land, accompanied on their journey by the dogs, used extensively thanks to their skills. The dogs helped in hunting, guarded the herds and the camps, endured the hardships of travel and were very devoted to the man.

In his book on the history of South Africa after 1505, George McCall Theal included a chapter about the Hottentots where it says: “The only other domestic animal was the dog. He was an ugly creature, his body being shaped like that of jackal, and the hair on his spine being turned forward; but he was a faithful, serviceable animal of his kind.”

Unlike Khoi-Khoi, the Bushmen were not engaged in animal husbandry or farming; they specialized in hunting, using a bow and poisoned arrows. Newcomers from the north could have aroused their curiosity because they immortalized them in paintings on the walls of their caves. The Khoi-Khoi also left behind quite a few rock paintings, and it is thanks to their art that we are able to recreate the trail of their journey across the continent. One



*Fig. A Hottentot settlement, from J. Chapman's book "Travels in the interior of South Africa".*

such painting discovered in Zimbabwe, known today as Diana's Vow, depicts a dog with a ridge.

The Bushmen did not recognize property, they considered everything they came across as their own, so they had no qualms and helped themselves to the Khoi-Khoi crops and cattle. Under these conditions, friendship was difficult, so this is most probably why the dogs with the ridge, often seen with the Bushmen, were appropriated or crossed with Hottentot dogs. From accounts provided by sailors and explorers, we know that they had such dogs.

## **Meanwhile in Europe**

In 1492, Christopher Columbus reached the shores of America. In Europe, the Middle Ages, with their specific order of things and view of civilization, were coming to an end. The age of knights, of courtly love and the troubadours singing about it was over. Medieval castles were falling into disrepair,