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BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SAMOYED

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Dogs that came from the expeditions of Fritiof Nansen are considered the progenitors of the Samoyed. It remains an enigma to many, where the dogs used for Nansen's expeditions were purchased. Greenland, Chukotka and even the Amur River basin are mentioned as possible sources...

I offer quotations from some documents, which may shed light on the origin of these dogs.

"In the late fall-early winter of 1892, Baron Toll was in Tyumen. At the request of Nansen, he was searching for a suitable man, who could buy and deliver by a certain time a sled dog team to Yugor Shar. Former Governor of Tobol recommended Mr. Trontheim as a man with experience and knowledge of the north. In line with this, Mr. Trontheim signed a contract with Baron Toll, according to which he should buy from the Sosva River region 30 best choice dogs suitable for work in harness. The dogs should be shipped across Ural Mountain Ridge in Yugor Shar not later than early July and wait at Khabarovo for arrival of Nansen's ship.

After signing the contract, Trontheim was in Berezovo on January 16 (the lower Sosva River), where at this time there were great gathering of Ostyaks and Samoyeds. Using this opportunity, Trontheim bought 33 selected dogs that were trained for pulling sleds. For testing their endurance, they were harnessed to three sleds loaded with 160 kg plus one passenger each.

Trontheim successfully traveled from Berezovo to Muzhi riding in sleds pulled by these dogs. Here, he started getting ready for further travel. By the day the expedition started, Trontheim prepared 12,800 kg of food for the dogs, which consisted mainly of dry fish. He also hired a Zyryan with a herd of 450 head of reindeer, to deliver the traveler together with his dogs and belongings to Yugor Shar. Some of his reindeer would be used to feed the dogs.

They started from Muzhi on April 4. Four dogs were harnessed to each sled. The expedition moved rather fast. During the day, they made two stops, one for lunch and one to camp at night. The Zyryan reindeer breeders were on their routine seasonal travel with their families, including wives and children.

Therefore, in the evening, they set up their chums, started bonfires and cooked food for people and dogs. Then, the entire camp fell asleep leaving the guarding duty to small, reindeer herding dogs. In early morning, when it was still possible to distinguish between end of night and beginning of the day, with help of the same dogs, the Zyryan gathered their reindeer, packed their chums and took off again.

Upon the arrival to Khabarovo, it appeared that Nansen and his ship, the "Fram" still had not arrived and it was necessary to wait for their arrival.

Trontheim chose his camp site with the dogs between the sea and the village. A Samoyede was hired

to take care of the dogs. Trontheim bought 30 puds (480 kg) of meat and 15 puds (240 kg) of fish, which began to spoil, several puds of seal meat and flour, for which he paid 2 rubles 50 kopeks per pud (16 kg), from local Samoyede people and fishermen. While waiting for the "Fram", they spent time hunting and taking care of the dogs, which were in excellent condition.

The long awaited "Fram" arrived on July 18. Trontheim left to meet the ship in a small Samoyede's boat. Approaching the ship, he shouted in Russian so he would be taken on the deck. Here, an energetic man, not tall in stature met him. He wore an oily working jacket. Trontheim took him as an oil man or ship's mate. It turned out he was the leader of the expedition, Nansen himself. He generously met Trontheim, asked about his trip and immediately headed to the shore to check the dogs.

Nansen with other members of his team tried the dogs on the shore harnessing eight dogs per sled with three passengers per sled. Nansen was very happy with the dogs and thanked Trontheim for the good choice of dogs and their excellent condition. This is documented in the certificate given to Trontheim written in German.

"In January of this year, Baron E. von Toll ordered Alexander Ivanovich Trontheim to buy 30 selected sled dogs for my expedition to polar countries and deliver them here, in Khabarovo. He accomplished this task to my complete satisfaction. It was a pleasure to see that, while doing this job, he kept his accounts remarkably orderly and accurate, which is rarely seen. He left a very good impression and I can recommend him utmost well. Today, he received a Gold Medal awarded by his Highness Oscar II, King of Norway and Sweden for his service to our expedition. Khabarovo, August 3, 1893. F. Nansen."

Thus, "on the 29th, we arrived to Khabarovo; we took 33 dogs aboard. On August 2, we took water for engines and on August 3, we weighed anchor and took off" – a secretary of London newspaper Mr. Olly Christopherson wrote.

What was the further fate of these dogs? Nansen and Johansen took 28 dogs to the North Pole. However, these animals did not come back. The last of the dogs of the polar travelers were Kaifas and Sutgen (Giant).

On "Fram: drifting across polar sea, Otto Sverdrup was appointed as a Commander. In his account "About travel of "Fram" after March 14, 1895" there are some data about the remaining dogs.

"Nansen and Johansen left seven dogs: a bitch named Sussy and her six puppies, Kobben, Snadden, Bellya, Squint, Axel and Boris". Evidently, remaining dogs taken aboard of "Fram" at Khabarovo, except 28 dogs left with Nansen, died by some reasons during two years. "On April 25, Sussy gave birth to another litter of 12 puppies. All puppies were big and pretty and majority of them was white. They would probably grow up "belki" as Nenets usually call all white dogs". Three of these puppies died later on.

"On October 9, Squint gave birth to a litter. Squint was out of first litter of Sussy. Only one puppy was left with her. A week later Syssy gave birth to a litter of nine females and two males. Out of these puppies, both males and one female were left to live."

Thus, it follows from the account of Otto Sverdrup that by the end of travel, on "Fram", 20 closely related dogs remained. Their fate after the return to Norway is not mentioned in documents available to me.

According to fragmentary data from notes left by Nansen and Sverdrup, all these dogs were strong,

tough and excellent at pulling sleds; they worked very well in hunting Polar Bears. Descriptions of those hunts describe that good sled work does not exclude hunting capability, bear aggressiveness and intelligence. Unfortunately, there were no photographs in any of these accounts. However, in the drawings, big shaggy and predominately white dogs are shown.

All the information described above is pertinent to dogs that contributed to the modern breed of Samoyed dog. What kind of dogs can be found in their home country? In 1962, photographs taken by Vladimir Beregovoy show quite typical Samoyeds. Unfortunately, contemporary condition of aboriginal dogs of that area remains unknown.

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