

10 Historic Dog Breeds That Have Served Nobility and More

These dogs all made their mark throughout history. And continue to do so today. Some served nobility or were popular with royalty. Others helped feed people via farming and hunting. How deep is the historical DNA of your favorite breed?

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Some of today's most popular dog breeds have rich histories dating back to ancient times
- Lhasa Apsos date back to 800 B.C. and were thought to house the souls of deceased owners

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There is ongoing debate about when and where dogs originated, as well as when, where, and by whom they were first domesticated. However, what we do know for certain is that ancestors of many of today's canine companions have been around since ancient times.

10 of the Oldest Dogs on Earth

1. **Chinese Shar-Pei** — Pictures on pottery suggest the Shar-Pei existed as far back as 206 B.C., and may have descended from the Chow Chow (both have blue-black tongues).

These dogs had many jobs on farms in China, including hunting, tracking, ratting, herding, protecting stock, and also human family members.

During the Communist Revolution, the Shar-Pei fell out of popularity. Fortunately, in the early 1970s a Hong Kong businessman set out to save the breed, and with just a few dogs was able to dramatically increase the Shar-Pei's numbers. The breed is now one of the most popular in the U.S.

2. **Samoyed** — The Samoyed gene pool is closely related to the primitive dog, with no wolf or fox mixed in. This dog was bred by the Siberian Samoyede people to pull sleds, herd reindeer, and hunt.

The Samoyed expanded beyond Siberia at the end of the 19th century and was used to pull sleds on polar expeditions. The expeditions were so difficult and dangerous that only the strongest, fittest dogs were able to survive.

The Samoyed was accepted as a breed in England in 1909, and in the U.S. in 1923.

3. **Saluki** — The Saluki is native to the area from eastern Turkestan to Turkey, and was named for the Arabian city Saluki. The breed is closely related to another ancient breed, the Afghan Hound, and is one of the oldest domesticated dogs known to man.

The bodies of Salukis have been found mummified alongside the bodies of the Pharaohs, and their likeness appears in Egyptian tombs dating from 2100 BC. These dogs are sight hunters and incredibly fast runners, and were used by the Arabs to hunt gazelle, fox, jackal, and hare.

4. **Pekingese** — DNA evidence confirms the Pekingese is one of the oldest dog breeds, having existed in China for as long as 2,000 years. The breed was named for the capital city of Peking, now Beijing, and the dogs were owned exclusively by Chinese royalty.

Around 1860, the first Pekingese arrived in England as trophies of the Opium War, but it wasn't until the 1890s that more of the dogs were smuggled out of China. The Pekingese was established as a breed in 1904 in England, and 1906 in the U.S.

5. **Lhasa Apso** — This very furry little dog is originally from Tibet and is named for the holy city of Lhasa. His thick coat is designed to protect him from extremes of cold and heat in his native climate. The first recorded history of the Lhasa dates back to 800 BC.

For thousands of years, the Lhasa Apso was the exclusive property of nobility and monks. The breed was considered sacred, and when an owner died, it was thought his soul entered the body of his Lhasa.

The first pair of dogs of this breed to come to the U.S. were given as gifts by the 13th Dalai Lama in 1933. The American Kennel Club accepted the Lhasa Apso as a breed in 1935.

6. **Chow Chow** — The exact origin of the Chow Chow remains a mystery, but we know it is a very old breed. In fact, the oldest recorded dog fossils dating back several million years ago look very similar in structure to the Chow Chow. Pictures on pottery that appear to be Chows date back to 206 BC.

The Chow is thought to be related to the Shar-Pei, and may also be an ancestor of the Keeshond, Samoyed, Norwegian Elkhound, and the Pomeranian. Chows were used by the Chinese as hunters, herders, cart and sled pullers, guards and protectors of the home.

Chow Chows first arrived in England in the late 1800s, and the breed name may be from the pidgin English word "chow-chow," which refers to miscellaneous items brought to England from the far East by merchants. The Chow was recognized by the American Kennel Club in 1903.

7. **Basenji** — The Basenji is thought to be one of the oldest domesticated dogs. His reputation as a non-barking dog may be because early people preferred a quiet dog as a hunting companion. Basenjies do bark, but usually only once, and then they are silent.

Another interesting aspect of this breed is that it may be only partially domesticated. The Basenji's metabolism is unlike that of any other domesticated dog, and females only cycle once a year, compared to twice a year for other domesticated dogs.

The Basenji was used by African tribes to flush game into nets, carry goods, and warn of approaching danger. The American Kennel Club recognized the breed in 1943, and to this day the Basenji remains a rare breed in the U.S.

8. **Alaskan Malamute** — The Alaskan Malamute is a Nordic sled dog, and is named after the Alaskan tribe that bred and raised the dogs, the Mahlemuit Eskimos.

The breed is descended from the Arctic wolf, and was used originally to pull sleds. Like the Samoyed, these dogs also participated in polar expeditions, including Admiral Byrd's journey to the South Pole. The Malamute is related to three other Arctic breeds, including the Siberian Husky, the Samoyed, and the American Eskimo dog.

9. **Akita Inu** — The Akita Inu is native to the Akita region in Japan, and is a national dog of Japan. The Akita is a very versatile breed, good as a police or military dog, guard dog, a hunter of bear and deer, and a sled dog.

The first Akita was brought to the U.S. in 1937 by Helen Keller, who received him as a gift. Sadly, the dog died of distemper shortly after he arrived. In 1938, a second Akita, the older brother of the first dog, was given to Keller. After WWII, many U.S. servicemen brought Akitas to the U.S.

There are now 2 types of Akitas, the original Japanese Akita Inu, and the American standard Akita. Unlike in Japan and many other countries, the U.S. and Canada recognize both types of Akita as a single breed.

10. **Afghan Hound** — This stunning dog originated in Afghanistan, and its original breed name was Tazi. The Afghan Hound is thought to date back to the pre-Christian era, and DNA evidence indicates it is one of the most ancient dog breeds.

The Afghan is a sighthound (he hunts by sight), and an extremely fast and agile runner. The dogs were originally used as shepherds and hunters of deer, wild goats, snow leopards, and wolves. Afghan Hounds were first transported to England in 1925, and then eventually to the U.S. The breed was recognized by the American Kennel Club in 1926.

Sources and References

[Dog Breed Info Center](#)

[Dogtime.com](#)
