

Les Lévrier (Sighthounds) by Xavier Przewdziecki

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Chapter III - The sloughi

Translated 2014 by Susan Bamford

Throughout this book, the term sloughi is most often used in the wider sense of Asian sighthound. In this chapter, "sloughi" concerns essentially the short-haired variety of Asian sighthound, or the sloughi as it is known. The long history of this sighthound will be evoked at a later point. This section concerns its individuality, its physical appearance, its psychology, its lifestyle, its potential.

Rootless and misunderstood

Forgotten in the West over the centuries, despite being already present in the first millennium B.C., the sloughi was "rediscovered" at the time of Algeria's conquest by France. At this time, the French had little knowledge of their Celtic ancestors and went to church to pray, not to examine stained glass windows. Otherwise, in 13th century writings, they might have read: "...African nomads possessed sighthounds similar to the ancient sighthound "Vertragus" shown in the stained glass of our cathedrals, which in their language they called sloughi..."

This previous existence of an old mediaeval term does not make it imperative to change its name, since it was no more the Arabs than the Celts who invented the sloughi. They both received from elsewhere "...this renowned predator with its black tongue and palate, with its skeletal structure visible through its fine skin, having reached a very noble pinnacle of pride, courage and elegance, accustomed to sleeping on beautiful carpets and drinking pure milk from a clean bowl...". Gabriele d'Annunzio also wrote of discerning in its eyes: "...a nostalgia for torrid and silent countries, for tents set up after a journey among illusory mirages, for fires lit for an evening meal under wide starry skies that seem to quiver with the wind whispering among the tops of palm trees..." By transposing the sloughi - a sighthound of wide open spaces - into today's compartmentalised and complex context of modern life, by disrupting its traditional pace of life, its likes and affinities, and in particular by preventing this hound from performing the activities for which Nature had created it, mankind has put the breed in danger. Attracted by this hound whose actions he so admired in the steppe, civilised man wanted to take possession of it. In order to keep it as it was, he thought to protect it by giving it a standard. He subjected it to dog shows, where beauty is conventional, where he won diplomas and prizes and concluded that such flattering rewards were sufficient proof for perpetuating lines of prize-winners.

By installing the sloughi comfortably in his home, by feeding it generously, by providing it with daily walks, civilised man appeases his conscience. Does he take any real interest in this sighthound's personality? Does he ever ask himself what were its needs or its desires?

Does the sloughi, while offering civilised man the joy of possessing it, share this same satisfaction? What becomes of its temperament of an athlete when any sport is forbidden? What becomes of its need of affection for the human family within which its current lifestyle so often side-lines it to a minor acting part? What becomes of its unused and suspended potential, of its stifled and ossified mechanism, of so many repressed affinities? What hope for the future can there be, based only on lines of prize-winners?

In the race towards show-ring championship titles, genitors are selected solely on appearance while intrinsic values are systematically neglected. It is often the case that unreasoned recourse to inbreeding (in the hope of seeing the emergence of some brilliant result) in fact ruins the temperaments of litters in which one finds animals that are anxious, nervous, timid, moody, depressed, unsuited to human company, to family life and to sport. These perturbations are all unknown to the sloughi's ancestral heritage and are in opposition to its true nature. Obviously, morphology must be taken into account, but this is not the only thing that makes a sloughi. Functional aptitudes and moral qualities are also contributory factors to this sighthound's personality and, in this domain, the standard is not pertinent. For as long as the world which has adopted the sloughi does not offer it any possibility of recognising its reason for existence, for as long as there is no requirement (primarily in genitors) for a context of activity allowing them to be seen at work, for their behaviour to be observed and their performances assessed, inevitably the breed will disintegrate. The physical deterioration that we are seeing at present is depressing, but still holds one advantage: it is visible. Moral deterioration, less apparent, is all the more to be feared.

In order to give a full picture of sighthound activities in this book, we have devoted a chapter to Celtic hunting. Indeed, it was mainly due to thinking about the sloughi and with a view to suggesting methods to be encouraged so as to get rid of the threat that weighs on this sighthound, that we came to write that particular chapter. The methods explained in it have made it possible over the centuries for Western countries to resolve the problem of conserving sighthounds once removed from the steppe. There are no others. Perhaps a study of genetics will make it possible to speed up the selection process, but it will never absolve us from the need to provide sporting activities for the sighthound.

For thousands of years, nomadic and hunting populations have selected their genitors in accordance with hunting abilities, removing from reproduction any that seemed mediocre or unsuitable to the tribal group. The result of maintaining such traditional selection is the sloughi -- physically beautiful, morally sociable, loyal, gentle and (at least among the peoples of the steppe who have their own secrets on training) obedient. It is these same principles that the West has followed in different countries for open field coursing. Let us hope that activities of this type, providing a true test of overall working ability, will one day become established in France.

For individual hounds that are capable of satisfying such tests, the speculative test in accordance with the standard would be replaced by an examination of performances and, as an indirect consequence from a psychological point of view, there should be a re-emergence of those moral qualities that have built the sloughi's reputation since times immemorial ... *mens sana in corpore sano*.

In this respect, it is pleasing to see that, in Germany where sloughi numbers are lower than in France, people interested in this sighthound have, over the past few years, organised purely sporting activity tests -- racetrack as well as lure-coursing -- which have already made it possible to significantly improve the quality of their breeding.

Psychology. Education

Man has domesticated many animal species. He has fashioned them to his taste, by acting on their living and working conditions, by selecting, by mixing blood lines, for the purpose of obtaining the animal that best suited his needs at the time. Dogs in particular are a product of this domestication, with remarkably spectacular effects, since this species now numbers two to three hundred breeds... And yet, among the domestic animals and under the heading of canines, one animal is listed which is perhaps the only one to have escaped this process of domestication -- the sloughi.

As we see it today, so it was thousands of years ago in those times when, as jackals and hyenas still do, the sloughi too came and prowled at night through the encampments of our ancestors. Less timid than others, the sloughi did not flee at the slightest movement of a sleeping man. It would draw away and observe the man woken from his sleep and, if no hostility was shown, would wait cautiously, discreetly, for a morsel of food to be thrown to him and in this way, gradually, it would become accustomed to remaining in the vicinity of people.

Like the crow accompanying the camel from pasture to pasture, like the African wild dog creeping through the rocks to steal game from the hunter who has just killed it, the sloughi followed man in his travels. When it saw man taking assegais and going away into the steppe, it sensed that he was going to hunt or visit his traps and if some game or other succeeded in escaping, the sloughi was there, ready to leap in and seize it. Imperceptibly, day by day, the sloughi was to become man's hunting companion and soon his friend.

This retrospective account, obviously imaginary, aims to highlight what the animal's behaviour might be as it progressed from life in the wild to life with humans. Whatever the process may have been that led to the sloughi entering the human family, it remains split between its true nature and the attitude it needed to observe in its new environment. Essentially distrustful and yet driven to place its trust, its situation close to man could only be considered an alliance, a pact of companionship but not subservience. It has always been man's companion -- if it had become a domesticated animal, it would no longer have been a sloughi.

Sloughis, brought back not so long ago from nomad tents by Europeans, were still more less at that stage. Until then, indeed, the thousand year pact had always been respected: man accepted from the sloughi the rewards of their good days and the sloughi found with man a guarantee of survival during difficult times. Bringing its collaboration as a provider of meat, the sloughi simply asked to enjoy an extensive independence. Respecting its nature, man never tied it up and never forced it to take part in guarding his tent or his flocks: this was the role of ordinary dogs. The sloughi was treated with respect by all family members. It slept on the chief's carpet, an honour which it has always appreciated since it is able to recognise who commands

and who obeys in the world of men.

Among the peoples of the steppes and deserts, the sloughi has never been numbered among ordinary dogs; it is a different kind of canine. For example, the Arab nomads say that it is "hor", which means "noble". Some consider that "hor" means "free", which would hardly change the meaning since, by definition, the noble is a free man. There must, in fact, also be added to "hor" a notion of purity of lineage, a feature that the nomads delight in emphasising by using this expression.

This privileged and independent life led by the sloughi, while sparing it the conformism of servitude, has allowed it to conserve its original intelligence. If in times past, it has modified its condition of wild beast, it has done so voluntarily and it is by its own free will that it has remained since then in the company of humans. When the sloughi first encountered man, its instinct must have incited it to move away. It overcame its natural instinct and, making contact with man, it understood that it could make a deal with him.

All in all, without relinquishing its instinct as a wild animal, the sloughi has come to participate in human destiny and gain from the experience of a new lifestyle. The result of this combination has been an incredible subtlety, that we express by saying that the sloughi is intelligent, although conventional psychology reserves the exclusivity of this faculty to man. Dhers and Rufer¹ attribute this intelligence essentially to the sloughi's long contact with man: "... of all the greyhound types, this is certainly the most intelligent and the manner in which it is raised, cherished, the contact with its master, with whom it lives and who is constantly looking after it, are undoubtedly the reason..." Whatever the elements that constitute this intelligence, the essential point is that the sloughi does possess it.

This duality of instinct and experience make of the sloughi an animal of contrasts: spontaneous and suspicious, apparently indifferent and yet so curious, dominated by its sporting motivation and yet concerned for its comfort, affirming its true personality and sometimes also acting, anxious about anything that might impede its freedom but always seeking more affection, the sloughi is endowed with an unfathomable sensitivity and it is this delicacy which is both spiritual and sentimental together with that effort of elevation towards man that make its presence so captivating.

Many errors have been spoken or written on the subject of the sloughi by people who, no doubt, did not know it well. It is possible to excuse errors, but not malevolence. Probably there are sloughis that, like other dogs, may be quick to bite. This fault is certainly not specific to the breed and a record of bite incidents would confirm this assertion. We also consider that it is at the least discourteous for certain writers to be gratuitously detrimental towards the sloughi, by presenting it as a fierce animal, dangerous in the home. It is surprising, for example, that the *Grand Livre du chien*², the lavishness of which deserved high quality texts, could insert such simplistic opinions. This kick in the teeth for a breed under threat is as inelegant as it is unfortunate.

¹ Book "Chiens de garde, de berger, de luxe, lévriers et terriers", by J. DHERS & Fred RUFER (1956)

² Book, Le Grand Livre du Chien by Michel VILLEMONT (1970)

For thousands of years, sloughis have shared the joys and tribulations of their human family. For thousands of years, they have slept and played with the children, knowing that these are little ones. And when children torment and exasperate them, they have the intelligence to get out of the way. It is regrettable that man does not follow the sloughi's example and know how to refrain from unjustified biting.

It is interesting to note, in the sloughi that lives in a sedentary environment, the appearance of a characteristic remaining latent during its existence in the nomadic world - the notion of territory. Among the nomads, the sloughi takes no interest in strangers and does not prevent entry into the tent. In the West, it shows an exact knowledge of regular visitors to the home and also shows itself capable of being a watchful guardian of its family.

Why be surprised that this animal, still so close to nature, shows such docility? Why be surprised, if given the chance to stretch its legs in some place where space is not restricted, that it has no desire to hear you calling it?... After a few minutes of mad galloping, it will return not so much through obedience as through its need to come back to the companion who had given it the joy of once more becoming a little more like itself.

Since the sloughi is intelligent and sensitive, it is easy to obtain sufficient consent from it to obey essential commands, especially if, when it was young, it has benefited from a minimum of education. Just as much in its psychological life as in its physical life, the sloughi is closely conditioned by the care and attention received during its early life. Hardly are its eyes open, when it must find in man a friend knowing how to excuse all its silly behaviour. Such contacts during its first weeks of life will mark it indelibly. It will be direct and affectionate, or suspicious and disobedient, depending on the atmosphere around it at that time. Examples can be quoted of sloughis, three years of age, who have recognised and responded to the voice of the person who raised them and yet from whom they had been completely separated since they were six weeks old.

In fact, from a physical point of view, the baby sloughi must, from its first days, be subject to constant checking. Weaning is a crucial time, for which a breeder must prepare the pup, by getting it accustomed to taking a little additional food before the mother's milk dries up, generally around the age of 20 days. It is towards this pre-weaning period that a pup is most susceptible to cases of rickets, so it is therefore essential to supervise its food intake, check its weight and at the same time combat parasites with appropriate deworming treatments. Even after her milk has dried up, the mother's presence is still preferable, to educate as well as protect the pup from the cold. If it has to be separated from its mother, it is important to ensure that it has a clean and warm shelter. If it reaches the age of seven or eight weeks without a hitch, it will have successfully survived the main challenges.

From that point on, care becomes less demanding, although it does not mean relaxing one's guard. It is important to remain very attentive during the first few months in order to avert the possibility of rickets by means of a balanced diet, also intended to encourage and accelerate growth. A young sloughi should have access to a play area, enclosed, of around 10 metres by 15 for it to romp in, as far as possible with another youngster of the same age, without getting too tired. If there is no comrade, the

youngster's owner must play with it himself. This play area must be really flat, without any obstacle offering possibilities of jumping. At the age when they are forming, joints and ligaments are delicate and any efforts that might have adverse repercussions on shoulders and hindquarters should be avoided. In this respect, it is important to avoid allowing young sloughis to be handled by inexperienced people who run the risk, when carrying them, of forcing their forequarters apart since, in canines and more specifically sighthounds, the area where the shoulders are attached is a very delicate point. Towards the age of five or six months, a young sloughi can be allowed to play in freedom, although uneven ground should be avoided. No sport training before it is one year old, no jumping of obstacles before it is fully adult.

It is during this period that educational action is most effective. Whether this involves a young or not so young hound, better results are always obtained through gentleness, caresses and rewards rather than by roughness or coercive methods that will quickly make it recalcitrant. Voice intonations are so much more meaningful than the lightest of whips. The sloughi is very quick to grasp the concept of what it is not allowed to do, which does not in any way prevent it from misbehaving, even when knowing that it will receive punishment. When this happens, and if it is well-deserved, the sloughi accepts it and, as soon as it is set free, feels ready to demonstrate that it does bear any grudge. However, injustices or preferences for one or other of its comrades, will affect it profoundly.

As in the old days when, still wild, it approached the encampment of humans in order to observe, so today the young sloughi remains, without this being obvious, extremely attentive to all actions and gestures by the person from it has accepted a certain suzerainty, but never slavery.

To the person who understand its nature and with whom it lives, the sloughi dispenses the treasures of an affection that one would never suspect when seeing it outdoors, distracted by outside events, anxious to be restrained, when it would be so good sometimes to take part freely in life.

The sloughi is endowed with keen eyesight. If he uses binoculars, man will see as far, maybe further. Where the sloughi may have spotted a gazelle taking a nap near a clump of grass, a man, with his binoculars, will be able to count the blades of grass in this clump, but maybe not notice the gazelle... In a more limited scenario, it has been noted that the sloughi is also capable of recognising another sloughi in a portrait, maybe not life size but fairly big, with this observation having been confirmed in several subjects. In most cases, it is eyesight that the sloughi calls on to discover its prey.

Contrary to widespread opinion, the sloughi does have a sense of smell. It hardly uses it in its hunting activity, since its traditional environment of steppes and deserts is little suited to detecting the track of its prey and even the best of scenthounds would be frustrated here. However, the sloughi is quite capable of using its sense of smell when there are no beaters present to put up the game. And even though such patient work is a long way from being exciting, it is perfectly capable of searching in the undergrowth and putting up a hare from where it lies. It has even been possible to show the fineness of its sense of smell by noting that, in a crowd, it was capable of

discerning the presence of someone from its family carefully masked by strangers. For as long as the practice of working trials does not make it possible to pick out the physical and psychological values of a prospective parent, whoever wants to extend their sloughi's lineage will be reduced to finding a partner for it, as close to the standard as possible. They should at least make every effort to find out about a possible partner's temperament. If the prospective pups are to be intelligent, lively without being too excitable, docile enough to be manageable in all of life's activities, including sport, such essential qualities need to be at least discernible in the envisaged prospective parent. Hounds that are vicious or systematically quarrelsome must be excluded from reproduction. Laziness, extreme nervousness, anxiety, lack of attention, are all mental defects that are just as serious as physical defects and it is important to remember that mental qualities or defects in breeding lines are equally as inheritable as physical qualities.

Portrait, standard and observations

Nature intended the sloughi for coursing the fastest of animals, often large in size, across steppe lands. The sloughi's traditional quarry consists of: hare, gazelle, various antelopes (addax, oryx, mohor, saiga), deer, wild ass and onager, ostrich. The sloughi has an aversion for other canines and will attack wolf, jackal and fox. It is said that, with the exception of the lion, it has no fear of large felines. It will not refuse any quarry designated to it by man, even if it does not really correspond to its hunting style.

In order to carry out its duty, it needed speed as well as strength. Intelligence was also necessary, but we will restrict ourselves here to a physical portrait of the sloughi.

In order to run fast and keep going over a long distance (several kilometres) nature has given the sloughi a streamlined and supple body, long limbs, lean flat muscling. There are faster carnivores than the sloughi, the cheetah for example, which can, they say, reach 100 km/h or more... But the latter is constrained to a very careful appraisal of the distance separating it from its intended quarry and will only launch itself to the chase when certain of a good result. Because despite the incredible speed of its attack, if it does not succeed in catching its quarry over a short distance, it will collapse, exhausted, incapable of reacting if anything wants to attack it. The sloughi always tries to approach its quarry by concealing its presence for as long as possible in order to economise its strength. However, since it hunts on ground that is generally open and often devoid of any cover, it is quickly exposed or perceived and a distance of 100 metres (or maybe more) represents approximately the handicap imposed on it by the quarry as it sprints away.

Nature, which does not permit wastage and maintains a judicious balance between the capabilities of pursuer and pursued, has endowed the sloughi with a slightly greater speed than that of its quarry and a slightly lower endurance, because it is important that the quarry should also have its chances.

In the chase, the sloughi does not choose its ground. As this may be sandy, dotted with thorny bushes, stony, freezing cold or burning hot, nature has given it feet that are lean, tight, with supple and hardwearing pads; nature has also provided it with joints that can stand up to all conditions, such as the fast and sudden twists and turns that it must often follow in the wake of its quarry.

Keeping pace with its quarry's speed is a means, but attacking it and bringing it down is an end result. And for this, nature has also endowed the sloughi with the strength that is so essential to it. This consists of a powerful neck and strong jaw with formidable teeth, requiring a skull that is wide enough to contain it.

By harmonising the capabilities required for fulfilling its function, nature therefore created the sloughi, while man no doubt called on nature. However it was nature that designed the sloughi, and consolidated its design. The proof of this animal's perfect adaptation to its assigned function has been provided for thousands of years: the sloughi is therefore both beautiful and a masterpiece as created by nature. It is man's duty to conserve this masterpiece and to preserve it from any adulteration that might be inspired by false criteria of elegance.

In order to conserve the sloughi just as nature has entrusted it to us, we must first understand it, define it carefully; we must then maintain it in its traditional morphology through an appropriate methodology of work. Since this last condition has now been evoked, all that remains is to paint its portrait. There have been many descriptions given of the sloughi and it would be tempting to simply choose some extracts from the best texts. However, it is important here to be completely objective. Only one portrait therefore is relevant: the one given in the official standard which is in the appendix to this book.

This standard, held by the Moroccan kennel club, mostly conserves the text adopted in 1935 by the French kennel club. Alterations made since then have not changed the substance of the 1935 text, which took the place of an earlier standard, drawn up at a time when there was only a partial view of the sloughi, focused more on the model seen in Algeria and Tunisia. Meanwhile, Morocco had revealed different bloodlines and above all the mandate entrusted to France for organising the new Levant States (Syria and Lebanon) after the Great War had provided an opportunity for a better understanding of the sloughi in the Near and Middle East.

In a wider context, while remaining open-minded with regard to the model, the writers of the 1935 standard, all very knowledgeable, had the wisdom and merit of identifying those essential and permanent elements that guarantee uniqueness of type. The current standard, the form of which could do with improving, still remains a valuable document, the substance of which must be respected.

At the time when it was written, the 1935 standard was intended for judges and specialists and was adequate for well-informed experts in cynology, in particular those with experience on sighthounds. It would have been preferable if this standard could also have served as a guide for fanciers and breeders. This would have involved the addition of explanatory texts, which the circumstances at the time no doubt made it impossible to draw up. In order to truly become a guide, such texts would require a development that cannot be envisaged in this book. However, bearing in mind the lack of detail in this standard and in order to make it easier to read, here are a few brief observations, in the same order as the original headings, intended to cast some light on the very concise writing style of this document.

General appearance

The 1935 text said: "that of a very racy sighthound, with pronounced boniness due to its muscular leanness and fine skin". The words "pronounced boniness", since they could be interpreted as a requirement for thinness, have been deleted. Nonetheless, it is certain that in a fit sloughi, the bony structure must show through, particularly on the haunches. A sloughi without apparent pin bones would be considered fat.

Most current standards endeavour to complete the "general appearance" section by defining the subject's harmony which is a prerequisite for its organic mechanism. Here, numbers seem preferable to any description. Below, therefore, is a template for the sloughi. In order to establish this template, three measurements are necessary: height at withers, length of body (top of scapulo-humeral angle / point of buttock), and height of elbow above the ground.

The "stacked" sloughi must be contained within a rectangle clearly higher than it is wide. "Stacking" is the subject's natural position at a halt, holding itself in balance in order to remain immobile. The owner's intervention in moving its limbs or head in order to obtain effects deemed to be elegant or other manipulations, unfortunately accepted in dog showing, are to be avoided.

The height of the template rectangle is the height at the withers. The width of the rectangle must not exceed:

94 % of its height, for bitches

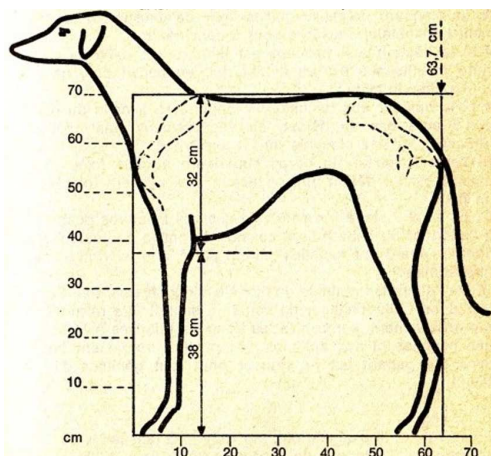
but may be less

91 % of its height for dogs

The body, excluding the head, neck and tail, must be contained inside this template, with the point of hock touching the edge of the rectangle, i.e. level with the point of buttock. The height of the elbow above the ground must be greater than half of the height at the withers (approximately 54% of the height).

As a practical example, measurements are shown in the following table (numbers in centimetres).

Template for a male of 70 cm



Point of buttock determines the placing of the right-hand side of the rectangle which can be placed within 63.7 cm but not outside.

For a height of	Maximum length of body is		For a height of	Maximum length of body is	
	males	females		males	Females
75	68.2		67	61	62.9
74	67.8		66	60	62
73	66.4		65		61.1
72	65.5		64		60.1
71	64.6		63		59.2
70	63.7	65.8	62		58.2
69	62.7	64.8	61		57.3
68	61.8	63.9	60		56.4

Observations and tolerances

A. With the standard specifying that the topline is essentially horizontal, two scenarios should be considered:

- if height at the hips is lower than at the withers, this deficiency is a fault which must never be accepted in the male;

- if height at the hips is higher than at the withers, this will not be considered a fault, such a difference in fact being relatively frequent in sloughis from the Middle East.

B. Any length of body greater than that set by the template is a fault which must never be tolerated in a male.

C. Any subject stacked in position but whose limbs do not remain within the template will be considered as dubious. However, with regard to bitches that have whelped, a tolerance may be allowed.

D. In view of the model's current deterioration, particularly in France, the body's height/length ratio can only be recuperated gradually. Nonetheless, data relating to height of hips and perpendicularity of hindquarters remain imperative. This template is essential for any imported breeding stock.

Head

Male and female sloughis have heads of equivalent length in relation to their height, i.e. around 35% of height. A very insignificant stop divides this length in two. The point on the stop to be taken into account, when checking the equivalent lengths of cranium and muzzle, is located on the straight line that joins the internal corners of the eyelids. A slightly longer cranium is acceptable.

Cranium

A flat skull should be understood as meaning a cranial cap that is not absolutely flat, but

with an extremely low vault. The standard says "fairly wide skull", the reason being that, in order to dominate its quarry, the sloughi must have a powerful jaw. A fairly wide skull offers a good capacity for housing the brain. Indeed, although volume alone would not be enough to give Intelligence, there are nonetheless limits to any reduction in volume that cannot be exceeded without compromising intellectual faculties. Ultimately, by "fairly wide" it is acceptable for this width to be at most 40 % of the head length in a male, significantly less in a female. While being wide, the skull must not show any conspicuous occipital protuberance. Where the skull joins the first cervical vertebrae, there should be a visible depression separating the profile of the head from the neck.

Muzzle

The standard does not mention lips. A purebred hound must have fine lips, fitting tightly over the gums, never hanging down. A brown nose is accepted, but a black nose is always preferable. The muzzle must be straight, a convex (Roman) muzzle is a fault. The standard "tolerates" a slight prognathism of the upper jaw. This liberality in the standard must be understood by breeders as a warning shot across their bows: even if there is no degeneration (temporary deficiency in a genitor, inbreeding) there is nonetheless a threat. The upper incisors must lie just in front of the lower incisors, a juxtaposition known as scissor bite. The standard does not talk of dentition. This must be in conformity with normal dentition for the canine species and in particular include four premolars. The absence of a premolar is not eliminatory, but must send a warning to the breeder.

Eyes

The expression "burnt topaz" is unfortunate. Topaz is yellow. Burnt topaz is a stone from Brazil which, after calcination, has become pinkish... Burnt topaz should be understood to mean a colour combining (but with the exclusion of pink) shades of hazel, brown amber and old gold. There is no strict synchronisation between coat colour and eye colour. A pale eye (yellow) is a sign of degeneration, and a serious if not eliminatory fault.

Ears

In the last century, most sloughis known to the French originated from Algeria or Tunisia. All texts, including the first breed standard, mention a small ear, thrown back onto the nape of the neck. One can accept that the sloughi coming from the East in the 11th century must have amalgamated with indigenous sighthounds, while, for reasons not yet really understood, the sloughis arriving in Morocco were preserved from any crossbreeding, since certain lines match in all points with sloughis from the East.

In 1935, an improved knowledge of the sloughi, based as much on Moroccan lines as on Eastern sloughis, persuaded those writing the standard to officialise the drop ear, hanging close to the head. The standard describes the ears, specifying "not too big". The result of this is that the ear hanging down naturally must not exceed the base of the cheek. This length can also be evaluated by pulling the ear forward: the bottom of the ear must only just hide the eye, without quite reaching the inter-orbital groove.

Neck

There needs to be a slight strengthening in the muscles of the first vertebrae. Muscular leanness shows itself laterally. Where the neck joins the shoulders, there should be a slight hollow.

Shoulders

"Moderately oblique", says the standard. The scapula is a flat, triangular bone, with its most acute angle where it joins the arm (humerus). The side opposite this angle, slightly curved, is joined to the spinal column by ligaments and muscle groups, forming the "withers". A nervure (the acromion) protrudes on the scapula and forms a noticeable axis. A keen eye will discern it but, in any case, the acromion can be identified by touch. We consider that a shoulder is moderately oblique when the acromion makes an angle of around 60° with the horizontal.

The humerus (arm) must be as close as possible to vertical. It seems to us that the angle made by the shoulder with the arm should always be greater than a right angle, around 105° to 110°. We are not talking about anatomical measurements which are different from measurements on the "outside". Here, we can only base ourselves on clearly visible points of reference. The angle calculated above corresponds to where the line top of withers/scapulo-humeral ridge intersects with the line scapulo-humeral ridge/elbow.

The Russian breed standard for the tazi, which also has a need for clarification, estimates that the angle which we have just defined needs to be of around 90° to 100°.

Chest

"Not too wide", according to the standard. The chest should be neither cylindrical, nor flat... It needs to be ogival (slightly vaulted) in shape: when looking at the sloughi from in front, the chest must be masked by the shoulders. In order to avoid frequent confusions with regard to chest dimensions, let us point out that its breadth is what we have just expressed. The chest is more or less dropped down, depending on how close it comes to the level of the elbow. Depth must be understood as horizontal length. Such depth is around 60% of the length of its trunk. The trunk's depth/length proportion varies with the gender, a female will have a longer trunk than a male since her mission in life is procreation. The standard draws attention to the final ribs: the more these ribs are long and sloping, the greater a hound's thoracic capacity.

Belly (underline)

The sternum does not reach the level of the elbow, the underline rises, without any abrupt angle, to the belly which is never exaggerated.

Top (back, loin, croup)

This is the sloughi's basic architecture and it is important to require high standards.

The standard asks for shoulders that are "moderately oblique" (point already discussed) and a croup that is "very oblique". Indeed, at the gallop, a supple loin allows the sloughi to bring its hind legs very far forward. A strongly sloping croup helps this movement. The croup must also be wide, breeders from the steppes placed their hand flat between the iliac crests (pin bones) to check their distance apart (normally 8 cm). The width of the croup gives the hind legs a spread that is greater than that of the forelegs: at the gallop, the hind legs can therefore extend outside and beyond the range of the forelegs (cf. ch. VII),

As the principal beam supported between two pillars (shoulders and croup/hips), the spinal column is slightly convex (this means the invisible line of the vertebral body, not the visible line of the vertebral processes making up the spinal column). According to professor Seiferle, the summit of this curve is situated where the dorsal and lumbar vertebrae join. This curve "is more accentuated in the Italian greyhound, whippet and borzoi, but much less so in the greyhound, although without in any way reducing its ability to run fast. Pharaoh hounds, salukis and afghans follow the rule of having a flat back. It is interesting to note that many greyhounds, remarkably successful at racing, have an amazingly straight back..."

Externally, the spinal column and muscle structure contribute to the rectilinear profile of the topline, which is horizontal or slightly sloping towards the front. This slope results from the fact that the height at hips can be greater than the height at withers, with this predominance also enabling good engagement of the hindquarters and bringing the centre of gravity further forward.

The Russian standard for the tazi notes the distance between the hind legs and the predominance of the hips.

Thighs. Limbs. Feet

The standard only mentions limb verticality with regard to hocks being close to the ground and bent without excessive angles. Even from the description "without excessive angles" one might deduce that hocks can be bent. We would however prefer the description "open hocks". Theoretically the metatarsus (hind cannon) should be vertical. In fact, it slopes slightly, as does the metacarpus (pastern). In the latter, verticality would be a fault affecting the foreleg's flexibility. The angle of the metacarpus to the vertical is around 8°. The "lean" feet, according to the standard, must be "tight"; toes that are spread would be a fault. The fine tough soles must not show any callosities.

Nails are black or dark brown. In view of their importance at fast paces, the absence of a single nail would reduce the hound's ability. No dewclaw on hind legs.

Tail

The tail has its part to play at fast paces, in particular it contributes to balance when

making turns. When "stacked" the tail drops down with a very slight curve, forming a half hook at the end, believed to be a sign of good breeding. A broad connection where it joins the body is a sign of coarseness.

Hair

To "short and fine" we would add "glossy". The skin must be dark or black.

Coat

The sloughi's coat is in a single colour. It can include various accessories, such as overlay, mantle, brindle.

The base colour ranges from pale sand to dark fawn. The tone may be slightly less intense under the body and on the legs. On top of this base colour symmetrical areas of shading may be seen. At the head, such areas of shading are on the muzzle and ears, when they surround the eyes one says that they form a mask. As well as a black mask, there is often a black line as well extending from the outside corner of the eyes. Areas of shading can extend to shoulders, back and even loin, thus forming a mantle. This mantle can become very extensive and cover the outer surfaces of limbs and tail, giving the appearance of a black coat. (This is sometimes described incorrectly as "black and tan coat" or similar words.) In fact, the base colour of this coat can be seen above the eyes and at the end of the limbs, on the inner surface. Sloughis coming from genitors that carry this extensive black mantle generally inherit the feature.

On top of the base colour brindle markings can also be added, sometimes faint, generally contrasting with the sand colour, sometimes more intense, reminding one of tiger stripes. This coat, also typical of the sloughi, is already seen on 3rd century Roman mosaics in Tunisia. The chances of having brindle pups are increased by using brindle genitors.

The standard still "tolerates" a white patch on the chest. Conscientious breeders should therefore concentrate on only producing animals free from any white hairs. For genetic reasons, too long to elucidate here, any white area, even tiny, will sooner or later become eliminatory.

Serious and eliminatory faults

The list given by the standard does not require any observations. It should just be specified that pinkness is a state of deficiency of the skin which is incapable, in certain parts of the body, to produce pigmentation. The skin therefore appears to be bare or sparsely covered with white hair, fine, fragile, pale and even reddish in colour. Pink skin resulting from depigmentation, pale eyes that show a lack of pigmentary cells at the time of growth, are all signs of degeneration. Pink on the eyelids is very serious and indicates a more advanced stage of degeneration.

Height

The 1935 standard accepted a height between 55 and 75 cm. The Moroccan kennel club has reduced this range but does not penalise a slight increase in height provided this does not affect overall harmony.

The new height scale (60 – 70 cm) eliminates the size difference that was formerly recognised between desert sloughi and mountain sloughi – a difference which is in fact only theoretical.

There would be a lot more to say. We have kept it brief and used simple language so that everybody can understand and above all so that it won't be too difficult for foreign readers who are interested in the sloughi.

Performances

At the beginning of 1955, when sloughis first entered the racing world, the racetrack in Algiers was equipped with an electric hare which could carry on round indefinitely and therefore made it possible to have circuits of 1200 and 1500 m, normal distances for the sloughi. The first sloughis that came onto the track were low in number and fairly disparate, sometimes old. In order to avoid finishes that were too spread out, it was necessary to limit distances to around 800 m for public races. However, at training sessions, it was noted that certain sloughis, Sahab in particular, over distances de 1,200 m, achieved times of 14 m/s (a little over 50 km/h). When generations of sloughis appeared on the scene, that were more similar and of better quality than the first batch, the racetrack had been moved to a place where it was impossible to install an electric hare. People had to make do with a mechanically pulled hare, limiting the distance to 450 m. Such a distance only just allowed a sloughi to warm up, it was never possible to succeed in measuring its speed over a distance matching its abilities.

The sloughi's performances at hunting have never been calculated. Its possibilities were often overestimated. Certain people following gazelles by car, and noticing that the speedometer showed 80 km/h, gave credit to the idea that the sloughi's speed was more than 80 km/h, since this hound was able to take the gazelle. Out of ten sloughis usually taking the hare, hunting alone and under their own efforts (i.e. not carried on the hunter's horse as is often done), two or three manage to take the gazelle. Capture is obviously easier when the sloughis are hunting in pairs, with one running a waiting race. For a hunting distance of 2 to 3 km, we estimate the speed of the chase to be 50 km/h with top speeds of 55 km/h, maybe slightly more.