

An established overland trading route of 'luxury' goods from the northern Adriatic (Aquileia) to Truso (now Elbing near Gdansk) on the S.E. Baltic coast was of more interest to the Greeks after the opening up of the salt mines in Halstatt in Austria (by 500BC) – it is felt this 1200 mile route via Halstatt may still have existed in Mediaeval times. The Greek love of amber dated from the Mycenaean era - later they traded bronze items, ivory (maybe wine) for amber, furs and salt from the north. [3]Pliny noted a small amber figurine cost more than a living man (days of slavery). It is tempting to wonder if 'luxury' dogs went back and forth at this time as they apparently did later on.

John Murray's travel guide of 1884 includes his visit to a museum in Athens, 'in recent times a variety of small Spitz dog was exported to S Germany from the E coast of the Adriatic, but has now become scarce'. He then compared this type of dog to the one on the Stele of Polyuectus (circa 250BC) – and noted, 'this little dog, as well as two others in this hall, seems to belong to the breed now known as the Pomeranian, or Spitz'. So it would seem over 2000 years later people from the same area in the Adriatic still bred Pomeranians/Spitz for export to other markets.



There was also a larger Spitz, evidence of this can be seen as of 2200 years ago – one is depicted on an Etruscan coin (Ref. Cato – Roman Farm Management) and another on an Italian plate - both dating from about 200BC. At the same time, in Wallertheim in the Württemberg region of Germany, a small glass model of a Spitz dog was buried in the tomb of a warrior so it is likely this represented a larger dog, perhaps a favourite dog of the deceased. The Württemberg area had a long association with Spitz dogs and both large and small specimens were eagerly acquired by international breed fanciers up until the early 1900s.

It should be stressed here that it is evident European Spitz dogs could be found throughout central Europe within the time frame covered in this article but we lack, with a few exceptions, ancient images of them conveniently provided by the early civilizations of Greece and Italy.

Archaeologists have found the skeletal remains of two or three types of Roman dogs, near the sites of Roman villas (circa 43-410AD), including small dogs - R. A. Harcourt's 'The Dog in Prehistoric and Early Britain.' Carson Ritchie

compared some remains to the modern Pomeranian. Once settlements had been established the families of the higher status soldiers, administrators and so forth arrived, and with them came their family's pet dogs. This suggests the possibility that throughout the vast Roman Empire a part of Roman domestic life would include dogs originating from their homeland.

Cane Volpino and 'fox-dogs'

By 1554 the Melitean Spitz type of the Greeks was called 'Can Volpini' in Italy. Tito Giovanni Scandianese theorised they could be descended from wolves - perhaps having a link with the wolf dogs referred to by Xenophon. [4] (Volpino means little fox from the Latin word for fox – Vulpes.)

The Germans also had a 'fox-dog' called the 'Fuchs-spitz' or 'Wißbader Spitz' in Bechstein's book of 1789, he noted that – it is said this type of dog originated from breeding the Pommer (Pomeranian) with the fox. [5] It was usually fox- red in colour. Red-coloured small Spitz dogs were also known in Italy until the late 1800s – of which more will be said later. In light of recent DNA studies it can be said that Scandianese was a few hundred years ahead of his time with his theory!

The 'Vocabolario Milanese – Italiano' a dictionary of 1856 cross-referenced 'Can Pomer' to 'Cane Volpino'. The Vocabolario Domestico by G Carena, 1859 described 'Cane Volpino' as 'detto in alcuni luoghi Cane Pomperano'. The British more often than not simply called all the varieties from Italy, France, Holland and Germany (regardless of size) -Pomeranians - although most were aware of the numerous regional European names and sometimes referred to them. [6] It is evident that many now believed Italy, rather than Greece, was where the Volpino originated. This is apparent in the writings of several writers in the C19th and here is Ouida's point of view.

Ouida (1839-1908) was the pen name of Maria Ramé of Bury St Edmunds. She spent most her adult life living in Italy and was a famous lover of dogs, an early and outspoken advocate of animal rights and she also kept several Pomeranians over the years. Her novel 'Ruffino' is about a little white Pomeranian Dog (Volpino) with a small black nose, and large black eyes, and a ruff as wide and imposing as Queen Elizabeth's. On page 86 of 'Ruffino' she also calls him a 'fox-dog' another early name used in Britain for a Pomeranian. Of him she said :-

'Rome was his birthplace, but he had never been able to comprehend how his race, with their double coat of long hair, and short hair underneath, ever became natives of a hot country like Italy. Yet it was quite certain that natives they had been for a vast number of centuries, and had been even cruelly honoured by being sacrificed to Flora in the remote days of the old Latin gods'.

Right: Lead figurine 200BC

