

may have been similar to known examples of semi-feral dogs. However, skeletal remains comparable to the Torfspitz have been recovered from archaeological sites covering an extensive geographical area, for example, Württemberg and other areas of S. Germany, Slovenia, Sitagroi & Slesko in S.E. Greece and various locations throughout the Balkans.

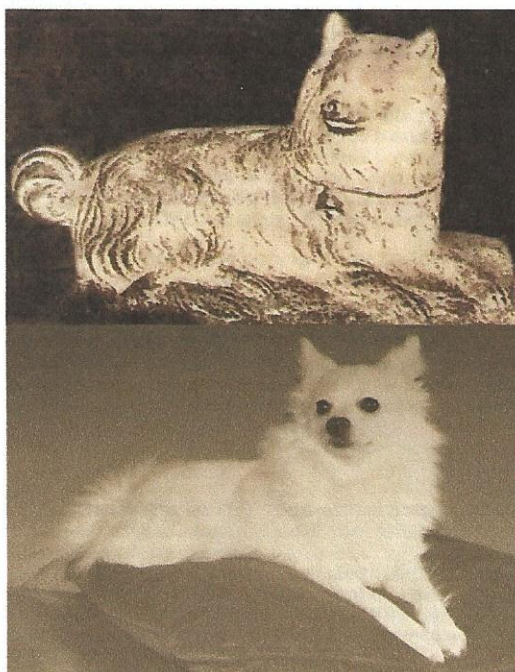
Recoveries from marl deposits in the central area of the river Po valley in Italy are of interest. Strobel named dog remains he found there as *Canis familiaris Spalletti* - they dated from the Terramare era (c1700-1150BC) and in 1886 Isadore Rosenthal noted *C. Spalletti* was nearest to the 'italienischen Fuchs- hundes (cane Volpino)' - the Italian Fox-Dog or Volpino Dog.

The 'Scion of Melita' did not originate in Malta

The Greeks would have classified Rosenthal's Volpino dog as a "Melitean" or to quote Theophrastus (c371-287BC) a "Scion of Melita". The Melita referred to here is NOT Malta, as some say, but the Illyrian island of Melita located in the Adriatic and it is now the lovely Croatian island of Mljet (pronounced Mleat). Another old name for the island was Meleda. Interestingly a small village on Mljet is called Pomena. Pliny, citing Callimachus (c310-240BC), said Melitean lap-dogs originated from Illyrian Melita. [1] This information suggests over 2200 years ago some tribes of Illyrians were consciously selecting and breeding for a small, refined dog of a relatively consistent type - perhaps to meet the demands of an increasingly affluent economy in Greece and its colonies. The remains of small pet dogs or lap-dogs are only found in archaeological excavations near higher status dwellings.

By examining artefacts dating between 600 - 300BC it becomes evident there were a couple of types of Melitean dogs, this fact was also noted by Lady Wentworth. The earliest and by far the most common type was a typical Spitz and strongly resembled today's Italian Volpino. The other one, less often depicted, appeared in later artefacts and is similar to the modern Maltese Dog apart from the fact that it had pricked ears as found in the Seidenspitz - suggesting it was developed from the earlier type. The second type was smaller and more heavily coated. Apparently some were further reduced in size, perhaps by 'in and in' breeding, and it was reported by Aristotle (384-322BC) that some were the size of ferrets or martens. Both types were usually white in colour although one small figurine from Egypt depicts a parti-coloured dog. Could this indicate yet another breed was incorporated in the process of developing the longer, thicker coat which included long hair on the head and muzzle.

Right: Comparison of a Volpino with the Terracotta Spitz statuette



Left: This little statuette is similar to the modern Maltese Dog in type but clearly has small pricked ears and is in this way similar to the prick eared Seidenspitz dog. Estimated to date from between 300 to 600 BC

Areas influenced by Greek and Roman civilization

Greek civilization had expanded rapidly in pursuit of strategic areas for the purpose of trading and power. By 275BC territory included Cyrene (in Benghazi area, Libya), Alexandria in Egypt, locations on the east coast of Spain and S France, areas of Turkey and the Levant, the Aegean Islands, Cyprus, Sicily, Southern Italy and Alexander the Great of Macedon (356-323BC) had advanced all the way to N India and the Himalayan region.

The affluent Greek town of Sybaris in S E Italy was so associated with Melitean dogs that in Tudor England a shaggy haired, bantamised variation - the Shock Dog - was referred to as a Sybaritical dog. [2] The Icelanders detecting a 'niche' market also exported a prick-eared variety to England, referred to by William Shakespeare.