History of the Breed updated March 2024

Almost nothing is known for sure about the history of the Chodský pes because the breed was developed many centuries prior to the keeping of written records of dog breeding and, in any case, was primarily kept by illiterate farmers. What is known for sure is that the breed developed in the heavily forested southwestern portion of the Kingdom of Bohemia (now part of Czech Rep.) and appeared no later than the 1300s. Although it is unclear if they developed the breed themselves or acquired it from others, the breed first enters the written record as the companions of the Chodove, a unique subset of the Czech people who have lived in the region since the 14th Century. The Chodský pes is very similar in appearance to a number of other Continental sheep herding breeds, especially the German Shepherd, Belgian Sheepdog, and Dutch Shepherd. Although these breeds are much better known around the world, all are significantly younger than the Chodský pes and may be descended from it. (We know that it was used to develop the Czech bloodlines)

The homeland of the Chodský pes has had one of the most turbulent histories of anywhere in Europe. Since the fall of the Roman Empire, the region known as Bohemia has seen countless battles, invasions, and waves of immigration. Located in almost the dead center of Europe, Bohemia sits right between several different cultures, languages, religions, and nations, most of which have involved themselves in the region. The region's longest-standing and most intense struggles have been between the Germanic and Slavic peoples, both of which have inhabited and attempted to dominate Bohemia since at least the 1st Century A.D. Eventually, most of Bohemia (and the neighboring region of Moravia) came to be inhabited and controlled by Czech speakers, although German speakers remained dominant in certain areas such as the Sudetenland, and all of Bohemia was a member state of the German-dominated Holy Roman Empire.

The Kings of Bohemia constantly needed to protect their lands, especially the border regions. In order to do so, they recruited the Chodove, which translates in English to "Rangers," "Patrollers," or "Walkers." The exact origin of the Chodove is disputed, with different experts claiming that they were originally Silesians, Poles, or Czechs and were either driven from or voluntarily left their homes in either Silesia or Poland. The Chodove were invited to settle the Bohemian Forest, provided that they swore loyalty to the King of Bohemia and defended the territory from rival Germanic powers. One of the major factors in the success of the Chodove was their dogs, which proved to be of great assistance to them in their national defense efforts. Their dogs became known in Czech as the Chodský Pes and in German as the Chodenhund, both meaning "Chodove Dog." The relationship between the Chodove and the Bohemian nobility was formally codified

in 1325, when the Bohemian King John of Luxembourg granted significant unique rights and freedoms to the Chodove in exchange for their continuing service. Included in these unique rights was special permission to keep medium-large guard dogs, which were otherwise illegal for commoners to own. These special ownership rights were one of the first formal historical mentions of the Chodský pes.
It is unclear where the Chodove first acquired their dogs. Some have suggested that they brought them with them from Silesia or Poland (In Poland although not recognized by the FCI there is a similar strike/race/breed), others that they were native to the Bohemian Forest, and still others that the Chodove acquired them after they arrived in the area.

The Chodove served as border guardians for almost 400 years, continuing to serve even after Bohemia fell under the rule of Germanic Austria. Some evidence suggests that the Chodský pes was being professionally bred and trained by the Chodove as early as the 1400's. If so, this would be one of the earliest records of such practices and also of a purebred dog in the modern sense. Over the centuries, the Chodove began to use the Chodský pes for other purposes besides border patrol and war. Because the breed proved equally effective in guarding against wolves as it did against people, it began to protect and herd the sheep kept by the Chodove and neighboring peoples, becoming a very highly regarded sheepdog in the process. After a day working along the border or in the fields, the Chodský pes guarded its family's home at night. Because the breed was in close contact with its family, only those dogs that were most trustworthy with children were allowed to breed, and the Chodský pes transformed into a beloved family companion as well as a feared guard dog and respected herder. Because of their long history of border defense and royal service, the Chodove were one of the most nationalist segments of the Czech population and played a significant role in almost every major Czech uprising and revolt until the 20th Century. Partially as a result, the last of their special privileges and rights were stripped away in the late 1600s by the local German aristocracy. Despite losing their special status, the Chodove remained in the area and kept their identity as a unique group. They also kept their beloved Chodský pes, although they were now primarily used as herding and farm guard dogs rather than for military patrol. The Chodský pes served as the region's primary working dog until the early 20th Century. During the final years of the 19th Century, German breeders developed the standardized German Shepherd from the Old German Shepherd Dog. This breed proved immensely successful as a police, military, and farm-working dog and quickly spread to the Czech lands, which were at that time a part of the Germanic-dominated Austro-Hungarian Empire. The German Shepherd became the primary working dog across most of Bohemia but was never able to completely oust the Chodský pes in its native land. A significant number of southwestern Bohemians continued to keep their native breed, especially those in the

vicinity of the cities of Domazlice, Tachov, and Primda. In the aftermath of World War I, as the Austro-Hungarian Empire crumbled, the Czechs of Bohemia and Moravia established an independent, new republic of Czechoslovakia in union with the closely related Slovak peoples.

Czechoslovakia briefly prospered, but it soon came into direct conflict with Germany. The territory granted to the new republic contained a very sizable German-speaking minority that wanted to be a part of either Germany or Austria, not Czechoslovakia. Germany's (in particular Adolf Hitler's) desire to reclaim what they considered to be German lands in Czechoslovakia and Poland became one of the major causes of World War II. First, the Sudetenland, then all of Czechoslovakia, was occupied by Germany, and the Czech population suffered immeasurably as a result. Millions of Bohemians of all ethnicities perished in World War II, as did untold numbers of their dogs. Luckily for the Bohemian Shepherd, a relatively significant number of breed members managed to survive the war, and they continued to be bred in their homeland in its aftermath. The Bohemian Shepherd was one of the only native Czech breeds to survive the war, along with the diminutive Pražský Krysařík or Prague Rat-Hunter. Despite pleas to the Allies, Czechoslovakia, which mostly had been "liberated" by the Soviet Army, fell under communist domination. Communist thought at the time was generally against deliberate dog breeding for anything other than working ability, and any potentially nationalist symbols such as the Bohemian Shepherd were strongly discouraged. This made the breed's initial recovery very challenging.

By the 1980's the harshness of Communist rule had significantly lessened, especially in Czechoslovakia. There was a greatly renewed interest in dog breeding, especially of native Czech breeds. In 1982, Mr. Vilem Kurz sent several photographs of rare dog breeds that he thought could be revived to Mr. Jan Findejs. Mr. Findejs was especially interested in those which depicted the Chodský pes. In 1982, he wrote an article in a major canine journal about the breed and what he thought its ideal standard should be. Mr. Findejs quickly found Chodský pes owners very interested in reviving the breed which their ancestors had cherished for at least six and a half centuries. These original owners were all very insistent and aware that they possessed Chodský pes and not German Shepherd mixes. 3 individual dogs of unknown parentage that Findejs considered to be the best examples were initially chosen to revive the breed, and the first Chodský pes registry was founded. In 1985, the first registered litter of Chodský pes puppies was whelped, followed by a second the following year. The goals of Mr. Findejs and the other early breeders were always the same: to maintain the health, working ability, excellent appearance conformation, and family companion nature of the Chodský pes. Realizing that three individual dogs were not nearly enough to revive a healthy breed, other surviving examples of Chodský pes were sought out and added to

the gene pool. Each new dog was carefully examined to ensure it was an ideal and pure specimen. Throughout the revival of the Chodský pes, the litters produced even by dogs of unknown ancestry have bred true to the standard without exhibiting characteristics of other breeds, such as the German Shepherd. This has seemingly confirmed the belief that the pure Chodský pes had survived and that it is not actually a recreation of an older type by the use of mixes.

In November 1991, the Klub Pratel Chodkeho Psa http://www.kpchp.org/ was founded to promote and protect the breed. Five years later, the last Chodský pes of unknown parentage was entered into the breed's studbook. As time passed, more and more Czech citizens became interested in owning and reviving one of the country's oldest dogs. Although initially slow, recovery efforts have significantly picked up. From 1982 to 2005, more than 2100 breed members were registered by more than 100 individual breeders. An additional 1400 were registered between 2005 and 2009. The breed has quickly earned a reputation across the Czech Republic for being both an excellent family dog and a highly driven and capable worker. The Chodský pes has especially made an impression in the Schutzhund and general protection dog community. The breed's medium size and attractive appearance are greatly increasing its popularity as well. Although the breed still has a relatively small population, it is now well-established in its native country and it is generally agreed that it will continue to substantially increase in popularity there. The health of the breed has continued to remain a very important consideration among breeders, and mandatory screenings of parents (and acceptable scores on these tests) for several health conditions have been a condition of registration.

Throughout its long history, the Bohemian Shepherd has figured prominently in the culture and art of its homeland. The breed has made repeated appearances in Czech works since the 14th Century, the most prominent of which is the novel "Psohlavci" (Dogheads) by Alois Jirasek and the Mikolas Ales paintings that accompany it. The novel describes one of the many Czech uprisings against German rule in which the Chodove played a major part. Jirasek claimed that the breed was so popular a symbol among the Chodove that they included it on their revolutionary flag. Although that is not technically true, Ales included the Bohemian Shepherd flag in his paintings. Psohlavci and Ales's paintings have gone on to have a major impact on Czech nationalism and iconography in much the same way that Emmanuel Leutze's Washington Crossing Delaware has had in America. This iconography is best known to Czech youth because it has been extensively used by Czech scouting groups (much like the American Boy and Girl Scouts), and one of their badges still shows a version of Ales's Bohemian Shepherd. Jindrich Simon Baar, perhaps the most prominent Chodove author, also extensively described many aspects of the breed in his works.

In recent years, a growing number of Bohemian Shepherds have been exported to other countries, and the breed is now known outside of its homeland for the first time in centuries. Most breed members outside of the Czech Republic live in continental European countries, but a few individuals have made their way to the United States and Canada. Despite these more recent introductions, the breed has not yet become well-established outside of its native country, where it remains very rare. It is generally believed that the breed will slowly increase in popularity in the world at large as it has in the Czech Republic, although this is no guarantee. In 2019 the Bohemian shepherd was provisionally recognized by the Federation Cynologique Internationale (FCI). The Bohemian shepherd is granted full recognition with the Czech National Kennel Club, also known as the Cesko-Moravska Kynologica Unie (CMKU), the Swiss Kennel Club (SCS), and the kennel clubs in Scandinavian countries. The breed is gaining popularity in North America and is registered with the American Kennel Club (AKC) FSS. In the last 12 years, the population has grown from 4 dogs to about 100, mainly thanks to the efforts of the North American breed club, Bohemian Shepherd Club North America (BSNA) bscnainfo@gmail.com

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