

The birth of the modern Pumi

This article was written based on interviews with two living persons who played a very important role in this story. They both were very active participants in the story which took place forty years ago. One of them is Mrs. Viktor Katona., nee Zsuzsa Bene, the owner of Mocskos Kennel; the other is Dr. Zoltán Balássy, an international show judge, then president of the Hungarian Herding Dogs section.

The story starts in 1957, when Zoltán Balássy was asked to be the president of the Hungarian (i.e. Herding Dogs) Section of the MKOE (Hungarian Dog Breeders' National Association). "Since the then Section president, Dr. Lajos Abonyi couldn't work around the personal conflicts which occurred within the section" – says Professor Balássy – "in fact as a result of Dr. Kata Simon Répássy's suggestion, Aladár Puy, Dr. Lajos Abonyi and László Straskraba convinced me to accept the office – primarily in order to restore the normal, frictionless state of affairs at the Section. Only later it turned out to be that I had to participate in the breeding guidance of some breeds under the Section's jurisdiction – thus my role wasn't just an empty title. After a year or two, the Hungarian Herding Dogs Section – professionally justifiably – split into Puli-Pumi, Komondor and Kuvasz Sections; I became the president of the Kuvasz Section.

Thinking the task through, I found it important that in order to clean up the Section's work, the meetings should be an experience worth at least as much as a mediocre movie. If it is worth as much, enthusiasm about dogs will bring the membership to the Section's meeting; if it is not, the membership will rather go to the movies. To this end, primarily there was a need for presentations by experts which would satisfy professional interest and increase professional knowledge; also there was a need to prevent personal quibbling. The Kuvasz problem was a larger headache. In order to resolve it, I worked out a restructuring program, which I sketched out to Dr. Imre Ócsag during an informal conversation. He was of the opinion that a mechanical engineer is incapable of conducting such a program, because one has to be born with a sort of a sixth sense for animal breeding (he showed his fingers). To this I replied that the sense is not something that is given at birth, but the acquired knowledge and experience – that is, you simply have to learn the profession and practice it.

Consequently I studied animal anatomy, animal breeding and biology books and committed myself to the discovery of the history of the Kuvasz. Many helped me in this: Dr. Répássy, and Lajos Abonyi, Emil Raitsits's assistant who was very helpful. Ilona Orlay who was Emil Raitsits's secretary secured access for me to the contemporary documents. Then there was Dr. Iván Márki, veterinarian, Raitsits's colleague who later on moved to Debrecen, but I regularly conducted discussions with him at shows. I received perhaps the most important directions from Dr. Jenő Bajza, who brought to my attention that the reconstruction of all the Hungarian dog breeds shouldn't be ruled out. This also became clear during my research at the Széchenyi National Library. Nevertheless, I never claimed that I learned about breeding more than a breeder, however, I collected more material about the background of the Hungarian herding dogs and their history and certainly more contemporary data than others. Perhaps I should mention the zoologist Dr. Erna Mohr of Hamburg, who provided me with a lot of professional help and introduced me to breeders from the German Club for Hungarian

Herding Dogs (Klub für Ungarische Hirtenhunde), in front of whom I could express my opinion. Fiorone Fioroni from Italy asked me for professional data for their book *Breeds of Dogs (Le razze canine)*; I wrote several articles about the Hungarian dogs for American dog publications as well.”

“Professor, did you also write a standard for the Pumi?” – I asked. “Not only for the Pumi, but for all the Hungarian breeds” – he replied. “Originally I had to write a standard at the request of Aladár Puy, who was the MEOE president at the time. I naturally took into account the available written recollections and verbal input from cynologists while working on the Pumi standard in 1962. Following Kovásznay, Buzzi determined at the Szeged show in 1899 that there is a prick-ear Puli and a floppy ear Puli. Méhely edited the 1902 Hungarian edition of Brehm’s *Life of Animals* in which he mentioned the Pumi in a footnote: a dog slightly larger than the Puli that can be seen with shepherds and swineherds in the Transdanubian region. As far back as 1910 Raitsits attempted to separate the flop-eared Puli from the prick-ear or prick-ear with tilting tip



Fig. 1, The photo of a Pumi, closely approximating the ideal, which was taken by Zoltán Balássy during his 1960 travels across the country. Imre Ócsag published this picture before in his article entitled „Puli or Pumi”.

Puli, which he named Pumi. Thus, Pumi as the breed name was introduced by Raitsits for a breed to be bred in the future from a mixed Puli population; he also started the program for breeding it. The attempts however always resulted in throwbacks to the Puli. For the time being the breeding of the envisioned intermediate Hungarian Terrier-type was not successful. It didn’t turn into a popular dog and there were very few who bred it, although MEOE (Hungarian Dog Breeders’ National Association) prepared the Puli and Pumi Standard in 1932 and submitted it to FCI (Federation Cynologique Internationale) in 1933; Raitsits’ successor MKTE (Hungarian Breeds Breeders’ Association) accepted the Pumi standard by Abonyi-Anghi-Müller in 1935 and submitted it to UCI (International

Canine Union) in 1936. Subsequently, UCI became weaker in Europe, while FCI gained strength. It turned out, that in 1961 our political situation made it possible to renew the ties with FCI which were severed in 1948. For this occasion I prepared the standards for ten Hungarian breeds (illustration No.3). Part of the reconstruction program included the definition of the tasks – to this end it was necessary to be familiar with the past and present of the stock to be included in the program. In turn, to achieve this, the knowledge of the necessary cynological - and in the case of herding dogs the ethnological background, that is, the acquisition of these was required as well. Assembling a standard with realistically achievable goals is only possible with the possession of these.



Fig. 2. Photo of Csillebérci Betyár (419/67) male Pumi, who carries the Puli characteristics (this picture was taken by Zoltán Balássy).

functioned well (Sára Nagy, Dr. Imre Bordács, etc.); there were good Pulik and the population was sufficiently large. The number of Komondorok in the hands of breeders was small, but there were competent (Zsigmond Katsányi, Orbán Deák, Árpád Boross) and enthusiastic (the Everses) breeders. On the other hand, there were serious problems with the Kuvasz population which seriously deteriorated, although there were a few breeders who fought against this (Antal Kovács, László Straskraba, etc.). There was no Mudi at all in sanctioned breeding and the experts' concept corresponded to the 1936 Fényes-Anghi undertaking. The Section didn't deal with the Pumi or the Mudi (as non-existent). Regarding the Pumi, the Kovásznay-Buzzi observation was still alive for all practical purposes; i.e. there is the floppy-eared Puli and there is the prick-eared Puli. Even the Pumi concept of Dr. Iván Márki corresponded to this and the experts spoke about the Pumi as an 'intermediate' breed. Personally I didn't even want to deal with the Pumi because I considered the breeding and setting up an intermediate breed from the Puli futile. I didn't see any 'capacity' for this, but I visualized endless breeder (and financial) failures. Of course I also kept in mind the Pumi and Mudi existing in their mixes, as Hungarian herding dog breeds belonging in the Section. My wanderings around the country were basically directed towards assessing the Kuvasz population, although I didn't pass blindly by mixes possibly resembling Pumik or Mudik. In this process I was getting the feeling that for the Pumi to appear we need the equivalent of winning the lottery and nobody is able to force this financially.

Imre Ócsag seemingly supported Zoltán Balássy's surprising and unequivocal opinion in one of his circulars as president of the Puli-Pumi Section which I'll partially quote here: 'Our Pumi breeding is still marked by the lack of breed maturity. In the case of this breed fixating it to be homogeneous hasn't happened yet like with the Puli between 1910 and 1960. At the same time we shouldn't hide the fact, that Pumik are found side-by-side with shepherds, by their flocks and herds, even today. We possess such Pumi selection possibilities which entitle us to high hopes. The breed is so quick to learn and lively, with modern appearance, that with planned breeding we could make it famous around the world.'

Puli characteristics always existed in the small Pumi population during 1950-1960" – continues Zoltán Balássy. "In writing the standard, I took into consideration the image of the dog seen with some shepherds that I remembered from my journeys across

the country, rather than the Puli with erect ears with the tips flopping down, regardless of to what breed mixes they tried to attribute the emergence of the Pumi. Success in establishing a foundation population necessary for setting the type within a foreseeable time was not expected due to the small number of breeders and minimal interest.

“I think that only Viktor Katona and his wife, Zsuzsa Bene had faith in the birth of the Pumi” – continued Zoltán Balássy. “They kept such mixed breed dogs they called Pumi that at first I expected some sort of Mudi to be born from them, rather than the long awaited Pumi. Nevertheless, their attempt was crowned with success. In 1971 the first Pumi litter burst forth from the likable, but ugly mixed breed dogs. When I saw the litter for the first time that fall in Budapest at the breeding inspection in Lövőház Street, I think I actually cried out: we finally have the Pumi – or something like that. We had the foundation for breeding the Pumi. The rest was the Pumi breeders’ and the Pumi Section’s job and primarily the Katonas accomplished the additional breeding work necessary for establishing the foundation population.



Fig. 3. The color slide which was made of the famous siblings Mocskos Angyal and Mocskos Anca which is being published here for the first time (thanks to Prof. Zoltán Balássy).

In 1971, Imre Ócsag, in his letter titled ‘The state of our Pumi breeding’ wrote: ‘In our recent shows, however, some individuals exhibiting such perfect form showed up, who entitle us to hope that it is possible to make the Pumi’s looks uniform.’”

“Following this, what was your role in the formation of the modern Pumi?” – I asked Dr. Zoltán Balássy. “After this I haven’t directly intervened in breeding; I followed the breed’s formation at shows and happily determined that everything was going just fine. Professionally, Imre Ócsag followed the work at the

Katonas’ kennel and his advice was followed in their breeding work. So subsequently I didn’t participate in the formation of the Pumi, since that was the area of operation of the Pumi Section headed by Imre Ócsag. I always said or wrote down my deliberate opinion though, when I was asked for it. For a while Hungária Pumi Klub and the Långers maintained professional relationship with me. I can briefly say that the Pumi’s look changed later; instead of the leaner, rough coated looks resembling terriers, the teddy bearish, softer coated variety started to gain favor, which is also practical in the Scandinavian countries. The problem was generated when they started to accept all kinds of coat colors that happened to appear. I would only allow grey, because black can have a throwback to the Mudi and brown to anything.

The spotted ones could be especially risky, even if they look attractive.”

“Did you have a personal relationship with the Katonas?” “I have known the Katona couple – I can’t even say for how long. I have been to their place in Buda and Verőce as well and saw their dogs which didn’t look at all like Pumik, but rather some kind of lanky street mutts with tilted ear tips. Most likely that’s what they were, but only the Katonas saw them through rose-colored glasses as Pumik I tried to be courteous,

after all I was not commissioned to make judgments. Yet, the Pumi burst forth from these. It was a giant stroke of luck. Without it we could have waited for as long as fifty years, while sinking tremendous amounts of money in virtually random breedings.”



Fig. 4. Since we do not have photo of Kócos there are her parents here Móka (to the left) Bogáncs.

Mrs. Zsuzsa Katona recalls the events that transpired:

“Through our extensive social connections a politician friend of ours from Yugoslavia asked us in 1968 to obtain a Puli for him, since József Marjai, the Hungarian ambassador in Belgrade also had a Puli; the breed became quite fashionable around the world by then.

This request initiated the search.

We didn’t know about the MEOE (Hungarian Kennel Club), we didn’t know any Puli breeders, but my husband remembered that during his visits to school libraries there was a high school in Tiszalök in an old castle, where

the principal’s hobby was to get the children to like animals and dogs.

To this end the school had a collection of numerous animals in the castle park.

My husband went there for a puppy and brought home a small fur ball: Bogáncs.

We were happy that we fulfilled the request successfully, but the politician’s wife, journalist Rózsa Rehák – who knew about dogs more than we did – exclaimed: ‘This is not a Puli, but a Pumi!’ Pumi? What are we going to do with the Pumi now?

Later on we also brought home the other two dogs: Mocskos and Tücsök from the school’s zoo in Tiszalök. Subsequently we registered two of them in the ‘B’ registry – because they distinctly bore the characteristics of the Pumi breed – and we started the work as Pumi breeders. We can attribute our kennel name to the shepherd from Hortobágy, who bred the foundation bitch and named her Mocskos. We added the name

Móka, this is how the foundation bitch’s name became Mocskos Móka. Registering Móka was not a simple task, because at the time the judges didn’t want to accept her as a Pumi. On December 7, 1969 the litter was born from the two dogs from Tiszalök - Bogáncs and Mocskos Móka – from which two puppies later played an important role in the formation of the modern Pumi. They were the bitch Mocskos Kócos and the male, Mocskos Boxos. Kócos looked like



Fig. 5. The ever first international champion pumi Mocskos Angyal. (Courtesy of Zsuzsa Katona)

her sire, so it's not a coincidence that they didn't want to register her as a Pumi."

As far as Zsuzsa Katona can remember, there were no active Pumi breeders then, except for the Váradis' Kutjavári Kennel. Her husband, Viktor was looking for a male for breeding at Kutjavári Kennel for Kócos. Finally, he picked a male, Kutjavári Emir Bitang he found suitable to mate with Kócos, based on his conformation. Although the Váradis tried to talk Viktor out of the dog, Viktor was intractable. It should be noted, that technically the Váradis were right, because the dog got "Good" classification in two shows, with which he could not be bred. The Váradis considered the mating so senseless, that they waived the stud fee (although they were not wealthy) and gave up the claim on a puppy born from the mating. In spite of this, the mating took place and the fortune changing litter was born on July 17, 1971: bitches Anca, Angyal, Apró and the two males Átok and Avar. The litter was developing and at the age of 7 weeks Imre Ócsag (Professor of Animal Reproduction at the University of Gödöllő and internationally renowned cynologist) went to inspect the litter, which was then customary. After inspecting the litter, Professor Ócsag spoke of the puppies in a complimentary manner and at the request of Viktor Katona he gave the sire Kutjavári Emir two provisional breeding permits retroactively. This shows that Imre Ócsag had high hopes for the litter back then, because that spring, as the president of the National Puli-Pumi Section he issued the following circular: "We're emphatically bringing to the Puli and Pumi breeders' attention that from January 1, 1971 within Greater Budapest only those puppies are eligible for pre-registration in the studbook whose sire and dam received such classification in shows or breeding inspections, which makes them eligible for breeding." Thus he gave dispensation to the litter's sire in spite of this restriction enacted a few months earlier.

The puppies, with their dam were brought to Marcibányi Square for breeding inspection when they were 3 months old. Zoltán Balássy, an international breed judge met the litter there for the first time and after scrutinizing it he cried out: "We have the real Pumi!" Zoltán Balássy finally found the apparently genetically stable appearance he was looking for, which most conformed to the picture he formed, based on his reading, contemporary descriptions, as well as his lengthy discussions with the famous cynologists of the era. At the time the puppies were not registered yet, but nothing could stop the victory march of the attractive looking, new type Pumi. Professor Ócsag sent József Hudecz, who was an internationally renowned animal photographer and previously earned a prize in Switzerland for his Puli series, to photograph the litter. They kept two puppies, Anca and Angyal whom they took to shows. Zoltán Balássy took their world-renowned photos after they earned their CACIB title. They became the first International Champion Pumik, first Angyal later Anca. Professor Ócsag referred to them in numerous articles and also based the writing of the Pumi standard on their measurements.



Fig. 6. Photo of Ancsa taken by the famous photographer József Hudecz

The repeated mating of Kutyavári Emír and Mocskos Kócos unfortunately didn't materialize, in spite of the provisional breeding permit, because in the meantime the dog went to bad owners and due to his weakened condition was not able to mate with Kócos. This is the reason that the Mocskos B litter was born from Kutyavári Emír's sire, Csillebérci Gazsi Roccó. This B litter was considered by Professor Ócsag better, because they gave a more homogeneous impression. According to the he Katonas, this litter brought a thicker coat type compared to the A litter. Kócos had a litter by Kutyavári Andris from the same Muki line, and also by Mocskos Brácsás, the son of Csillebérci Gazsi Roccó and Mocskos Móka. The line grew rapidly, so the Katonas moved from a third floor apartment to a larger place; they had to move another two times so they could secure the appropriate environment according to the requirements of the growing breeding operation. In 1974 they reached the H letter in the alphabet for their litter. The Katonas, encouraged by their successes, prepared for the 1976 World Dog Show in Innsbruck with a lot of energy. They entered four dogs: Fáni, Hebrencs, Kópé and Dugó-Dani. Tension was great because judging was drawn out and even with intervention by the organizers they just barely made it to the judging of the breeders' group. Tension, as we know, spreads to the dogs as well – in addition, two dogs weren't even owned by the couple; in spite of this they earned the very respectable second place in the breeders' group. This was such a significant achievement, that Imre Ócsag, then the president of the National Puli-Pumi Section, emphasized that as a result of this title the Pumi breed found itself so much in the center of international interest that it will be necessary to get ready for significant exportation. By then there were Pumik already in Finland and Germany. The ever first international champion German pumi was a male Mocskos Jakab (lived 1975-1985). Interestingly, the last German export from the Mocskos kennel is international champion too.

Finally, let's quote here part of Professor Ócsag's article titled "From the modern history of the Pumi", published in the *A Kutya* (The Dog) magazine in 1976. We can read his authentic first-hand eyewitness account of the work which was performed at the Mocskos Kennel – and not only about its glorious side:

"The Katona couple's Mocskos Kennel stands ahead of even the best breeders. I remember well the visit in 1970 I paid by invitation to the cradle of this kennel. The "large family" lived on the third floor of an apartment building. We had a lot of discussions and arguments with the owners: what is the desirable looks; what is not supposed to be done so the intelligence and the willingness to work of the Pumi are



Fig. 7. Three out of four Pumis won the 2nd prize in Breeding group at Innsbruck WordDog Show. Left to right: Dani, Hebrencs and Fanni. This photo has never been published before.

retained; how to breed that each maturing individual will have similar characteristics and will bear the Pumi standard.

The most effective thing that the Katonas implemented, although uneasily, was expediting the new generations. Among the “heart” dogs were such which couldn’t have been used under any circumstances to produce offspring, because that would have corrupted the stock. On the other hand, they didn’t want to get rid of them, because they

turned into virtual members of the family. They carried them along for years, like a burden. Sure enough, there were also some who faded away from the stock under natural circumstances. Finally, the bitches that produced the best type offspring stood out. Subsequently they proceeded to experiment with males from their own and other kennels. They kept the new generation of those individuals from the litters that were the closest to the breed standard.

For the sake of the characteristics they dreamt of, the breeding went on for years and during those years there was neither moral, nor financial recognition – only hope. For sure there were also shows, where the exhibited specimens met with failure. They learned many ins and outs of breeding, showing, and the results slowly started to manifest themselves.

It’d be too long to document the road from the first “Excellent” to CACIB – this is not even our goal. The kennel also became “Breeders’ Group Winner” seven times. Presently two of their bitches and one of their males in their breeding program received the “International Champion” title in 1974 and 1975, respectively. The owner now is a “Silver Wreath Master Breeder”. The Katonas expedited the new generation with the best offspring. Thus their breeding stock improved from generation to generation. The best puppies served the domestic breeding and not the export (nowadays there are enough of them to go abroad as well). They could also maintain the nutrition for the dogs at such level, that the given genetic properties of the individuals could develop fully.”

What is in this success story that the contemporary breeders should pay heed to? Above all, that the breed which was born after all this hardship, countless attempts and failures, should be maintained and propagated with the greatest humility and expertise. There is absolutely no room here for fickle, inconsistent breeding concepts. It can be also

clearly seen in the example above, that in order to achieve such an exciting success, the existence of an ensemble of factors is necessary. Expertise is required – I’m thinking of the professional know-how of Professors Ócsag and Balássy; the very keen and refined sense with which Viktor Katona was blessed is also necessary – this is not something that can be learned, but the ability to judge our puppies strictly and unbiased can be – and something which we can’t control, is that luck should shine upon us. It’s likely that the lucky star shines upon us more often than we would think, but it’ll fade near the one who is not ready to deserve it.

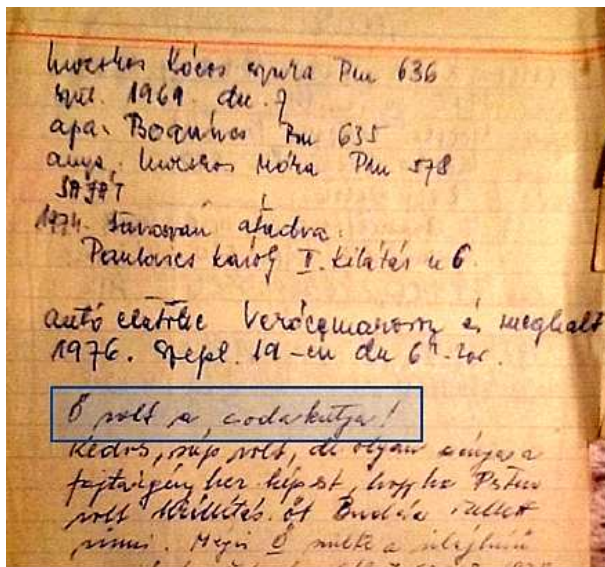


Fig. 8. „She was the wonder dog” The note of Viktor Katona.
 (The photo is Mrs. Katona’s property)

As she was flipping through the yellowing documents again, Zsuzsa Katona found an entry under Mocskos Kócos which was written by her husband, Viktor: “She was the wonder dog”. When Viktor recalled the story of Kócos for himself, must have had in mind Kincsem, the unbeaten racing wonder mare that was not bought as a yearling and in who, as a thoroughbred with stunted growth only Ernő Blaskovics had confidence. Viktor Katona also done well, that he put all his confidence in Mocskos Kócos and Kutjavári Emír who were not even looked at by anyone else, because this

way he was able to enter the Pumi, similar to Kincsem, into the success story of the Hungarian animal breeding.

This article is written by Csaba Dobó-Nagy and translated by Meir Ben-Dror.