

The early tracks of the Barbet

In the last decades, publications such as books and articles in magazines, all seem to be rooted to only a few works. There is an, in text-length rather extended, breed description in the multi-volumed encyclopaedia of Éditions Atlas (*Mon chien - Mon ami*), also published in Dutch under the title *Mijn hond - Mijn vriend* (1988/89), by Lekturama.

Then there is the “Thèse”, the independency pretending veterinary thesis by O.Chapusot of 1991, under the title of *Contribution à l'étude de la race Barbet en France*. Chapusot in here speaks about the contrasting points of view of the two breed clubs in France. He tries to make an independent honest historical survey, but already quite soon blocks himself with details. Any thorough analysis of the concerned matters he does not bring, not even an attempt of an analysis of the different loads carried by the term “barbet”.

Concerning the 19th century – this was a somehow confusing period with the entry of cynology, which seems to intend merely to supply a fixation of aspects of confusion, instead of bringing clarity and order. To say it in different words: these confusions had a strong artificial nature, because some persons *created* some situations and enhanced confusion, instead of explaining things properly to the public. From this period, Chapusot chooses only some poor quotations from the 19th century, walking by fast along all the rest. Apparently, he is only a veterinary and not a historian, and in addition his vision of all kinds of cynological developments is rather surficial. His bibliography is unbelievable poor.

In 2014 *Het Barbetboek* (Barbet book) was published in the Netherlands by B. Waller-Rengelink and E. Roest Kempemo, and also in an English edition. This work is meant to be a nice practical guide for owners in the first place and spends only a few words (less than 0,02% space) on the history and development.

A good breed description of the history and development of the Barbet: how should that be? The best would be to start from the well-known article of Le Houelleur in *L'Éleveur*, N° 2539, 7-10-1934. Of course not everything should be copied without proper digestion, but considered as material *to check* all points of argumentation, evidence and possible indications in original sources, compare and analyse them, correct them if necessary and in particular *complete* them.

The above mentioned encyclopaedia of Atlas/Lekturama (1988/89) says about the Barbet that the breed was absent at the time France was named “Gaul”, and the ancient Celts only had hounds and mastiffs for hunting and only had some poor agriculture and no shepherd dogs. This latter sounds like a contradiction to the fact that the Celts were already very involved in keeping herds of sheep and their wool weaving techniques were already highly developed ages before the first Celt ever set a foot in France. Then, how could they keep and breed herds of sheep without dogs to protect them? I only mention this as example of how unreliable some general available documentation on the Barbet is.

After no research was done, some more recent source states the opposite:

“The geographic origins of the Barbet are unknown, but it appears to be that he lived in our country when it was named Gaul”

(<http://www.chiens-online.com/race-barbet-fiche-100.html>).

If this is interpreted strictly, it would make someone sitting on the edge of the chair for all the surprising information, which could help to give this line some sense. After checking antique sources, both written and iconographic, it seems however there's not even any theory about it, nor any indication. France was called Gaul by Julius Caesar's time. Since then Celtic dog breeds are being described by various authors from Antiquity, but not any bearded. So, this statement from chiens-online seems to be only an expression of some kind of feeling.

On the same level is the first line on page 4 of the introduction of Chapusot's "Thèse" (1991):

“The barbet is a very old French dog breed, which has given birth to quite a number of other breeds, of which the most current in fact is the poodle”.

The author however spends only some pages on assumptions and gives some kind of inventory of points of view, without making any difference between fanciful hypotheses and serious opinions, based on facts. It lacks checking of data, and does not bring any real argument other than an external similarity of various dog breeds. So, this is not of any help either.

Concerning breeds, created with the aid of the Barbet, the best known are rough-coated scent hounds, at first at the court of Brussels, and then the rough-coated pointing breeds in several countries are known to descend from Barbet-like dogs in their own countries, and in France the Barbet was used to create the Griffon Boulet. But Chapusot puts the Poodle at number one to descent from the Barbet, in spite of that the Poodle can be traced back as a separate breed at least as long as the Barbet itself, and not even specific to France alone with different lines of development.

With its first line, the “Thèse” expresses merely a belief-system, an error caused by the lack of proper analysis and research more than the apparently confusing fact that both breeds were known under the same name of “barbet”. Some 16th and 18th century sources already described them as separate breeds (Gesner, Gmelin).

Before being able to chisel out the connections of Barbets, water, company and shepherd dogs, it is necessary to achieve a proper vision as wide as possible on the early tracks of the hunting Barbet.

Most sources, even controversial, seem more or less unanimous that we find them in the end of the Late Middle Ages. Because of that, it appears to be a *key-period*, and in order to obtain a stable point of departure to reach all kinds of connections and understand later developments, it's good to make an inventory of some main analyses.

What do we really know about the historical sources on the Barbet as hunting dog for water game or different kinds of dogs with the same sort of exterior?

In France we find old, not necessarily the oldest, traces with *Gaston Fébus* and the, according some researchers even older, work of *Le Roy Modus et la Royne Racio*, both from the 14th century.

On one illustration with *Fébus* a Barbet-coated “spaniel” can be seen in the midst of a group “espainholz” (spaniels) or “Chiens d’oyssel” (bird dogs), which are smooth or long-coated. For the opportunity, I invented the term “Barbet-coated” to indicate it is long-coated with a potential beard, apparently, often with a “shaved face”, on feet and toes, back and front of the legs long, on the body even longer, well wavy and much thicker than with a long-coated spaniel.

Also, on the portrait of *Fébus*, sitting on his throne, surrounded by representatives of all, in that time, known hunting breeds, there stands a long-coated spaniel, and not a Barbet-coated.

In *Modus* dogs are depicted on the hunt in co-operation with hunting-birds (falcon, hawk, etc.) and in particular also to retrieve the down-fetched birds from the water. There exists a rather large number of versions or copies of *Modus*, and each time the illustrations are a little bit different, and in some cases it is interesting to have a closer look. This way *Lindner* (1940) seems wanting to make a link between a depiction in a (in Germany existing) copy of *Modus* and the water-dog of *Feyerabendt* (1582), more precise the woodcut by *Jost Amman* (see my translation of some pages by *Strebel*, some time ago).

Perhaps *Lindner*’s feeling, already a bit preceeded by *Strebel* (1905) can be correct. What is lacking however, is richer reference material and it should be deeper researched.

What exactly can we conceive from *Fébus* (1387)? Here follow some quotations from him, being an expertise of quality as a mix between love for a proper working dog and artistic beauty, taken over from *Castaing* (1960, pp. 45-47):

- “There exists another sort of dogs, called *Chiens d’oyssel* [bird dogs] or *espainholz* (spaniels), because they come from Spain, though other countries have them too....”.
- “The *Chiens d’oyssel* [bird dogs] are quarrellers and great barkers”.
- “The beautiful *Chien d’oyssel* [bird dog] must have a robust head and large body and a white and patched coat, because they are the most beautiful and of this coat we like them the best. And he should not be too hairy and must have a thick tail”.

Fébus covers two well-known illustrations with these *Chiens d’oyssel*: one with ten (on another version twelve) of them in a field subtitled “Cy apres devise du chien doysel et de toute la nature”, and another with three of them hunting rabbits. After careful investigation of these miniatures *Castaing* (1960) remarks:

“... on one of them are two *Chiens d’oyssel* out of ten, and on the other only three out the twelve are griffons or épagneuls in that sense what we understand nowadays under those terms, as well with most of them the tail is provided with short or brushy hair, just like a cow’s tail, like those long ago, the dogs were shorthaired. Without any doubt one has to park them in the same kennel, like it is being showed on another miniature, producing accidental mixes, because *Fébus* himself said so: but the long-coated were rather well a minority, and some of them were Barbets”.

The first two miniatures mentioned were two different versions of the same scene: one with the 12 drawn with ink, where, in my opinion, the type is worked out a bit

inferior, and the other better known with only 10 *Chiens d'oyse*, painted in colour, where much more attention was paid to depict the individual type of each dog.

Fébus however gives also another clear example of such *Chien d'oyse* or *espainhol*, and that is on his portrait, where he sits on the throne, surrounded by representatives of all the settled hunting dog breeds of his time, and among them a long-coated red *Chien d'oyse* or *espainhol*, which supplies him apparently some ideal, in spite he is reddish instead of white with patches.

It seems this way that the reddish or yellowish colour is connected to the long hair, and so most likely influenced by the Barbet-coated. The ideal would be to obtain a modern spaniel-like long coat with the colour of the smooth-coated, but that stage wasn't fixed yet on large scale. But perhaps we just have too few portraits to make a better inventory. Concerning the colour of the smooth *espainholz*, some seem to be greyish or greyish-brown with darker patches. This must have been a primitive way to depict the roan coat type.

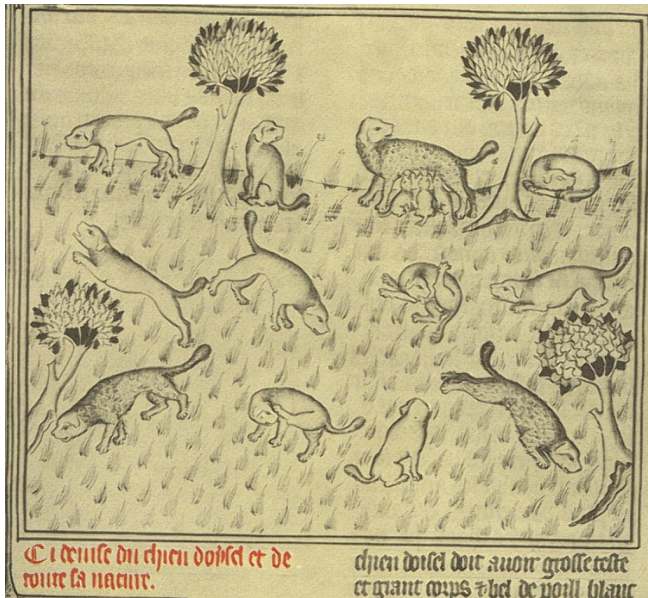
The question is: has the 14th century variation between the bird dogs, of which the *Barbet* seems to be part of, been the personal breeding art of *Fébus*, or did he just explain with this example how one should or could select, and was the whole art of breeding *Chiens d'oyse* (bird dogs) included the three coat types part of a wider spread, region or country bound blueprint?

Because *Modus* pays more attention to the bird dogs than *Fébus* (who only has them depicted hunting rabbits and not even birds), and may have been a little earlier work, the answer may be indeed that the *Chien d'oyse* (bird dog) certainly was a wider spread concept, and existed already before the 14th century.

In each case both the by *Fébus* described (on his pictures smooth-coated) white patched bird dogs and (on his picture reddish-yellowish) Barbet-coated bird dogs must have been stable breeds somehow, and likewise older than then the 14th century. And when *Fébus* calls them native to Spain, but also says that other countries have them too, judging from general dog breeds history, Italy may be been the (or one of the) other countries.



"Chiens d'oyse" or "espainholz" in the hunting book of Gaston Fébus (1386), showing old fashioned spaniels, of which the majority was smooth, but some were long-coated or Barbets.



Another copy of Fébus' hunting book, showing 12 "spaniels", of which 3 are long-coated or Barbets, although the type of the individual dogs is much less defined than in case of the coloured version. Remarkable however is that the bushy "cow-tails" are depicted with much emphasis.



Long-coated "espainhol" on the portrait of Fébus, sitting on his throne surrounded with examples of all the known hunting breeds of that time (1386). He indicated this as his favourite coat-type, apparently long-coated, but not too abundant. Still, if you study the front-side of all the 4 legs, it seems they are still more "hairy" than we consider typical for a modern spaniel. Therefor in this case it appears to be a not yet so well fixed mix between a smooth spaniel and a Barbet.



Smooth and long-coated "espainhol" of "Chiens d'oyse" (bird dogs) hunting rabbits in Fébus' hunting book (1486). Because they also catch rabbits, it's obvious they cannot be mistaken for some small breed of scent hounds, which in contrary hunt by nose on fresh scent track.

To the question: has *Chien d'oyse* (bird dog) been a term for the occasion, it looks most certain the answer is "no", because both Fébus and Modus used it and likewise did *Petrus de Crescentiis* from Italy (13th century, his work was published in print later in the 15th century, a.o. in German and Polish). Herein the *bird dog* was mentioned next to the *hawk dog*.

Rather often it is being suggested by a number of authors since the 19th century that the *hawk dog*, mentioned in various dated Frankish laws, has been the same as the *bird dog* (Chien d'oysel). This would assume that some primordial bird dog (pointer, spaniel or Barbet) has been in use in northwest Europe and Germany since the end of the Roman period, in spite of this is not really confirmed anywhere.

The differentiation of *bird dog* and *hawk dog* by Petrus de Crescentiis however should be a good reason for suspicion.

On his blog

http://caille-des-bles.blog.fr/2007/03/14/petite_histoire_du_chien_d_arret~3655934/ Jean Luc Bayrou gives a practical note about this question in his *Petite histoire du chien d'arrêt* (14-3-2007):

“Later it was believed to see the Chien d'oysel in the Capitulari of Dagobert (7th century) in the sentence “that who has killed a hunting dog which is named hapichunt, [a number of] three [gold coins] was applied”. The word *hapichunt* is often translated wrong as pointing dog [chien d'arrêt], although the word hapich means in reality falcon. This indicates thus the dog of the falconer, and not the lay-dog [chien couchant]”.

Some completing remarks may help to make the picture a bit more clear:

– In the Late Middle Ages (1250-1500) the dogs used by falconers were almost exclusively greyhounds and spaniels. The greyhound (lévrier) however was never ever indicated as hawk dog or bird dog, but without exception, always under a separate name. At least from the 13th on the term “bird dog” (Chien d'oysel, Vogelhund) can be traced, what certainly can be accepted in the same meaning as *Fébus* did with the “espainhol”, what includes the possibility the same coat variety went along with this term: smooth, long-coated or Barbet.

– The so-called Capitulari Triplex of Dagobert I (7th century) consist of large collections of Frankish laws from the 7th to the 15th century, of which only a small part could be from Dagobert, but it is not this, but the *Lex Baiuvariorum* (Bavarian law) of the 8th century with later additions, which contains the considered line, quoted above by Jean Luc Bayrou: “VI. De es cane, qui dicitur hapuhhunt, qui sententiae subiaceat”, which means that he who killed a hawk dog was punished the same way as he who did that with a greyhound, so had to replace it by a same kind of dog and also to pay 3 solidos (golden coins).

– Hapich (Old-German) does not mean “falcon”, but “hawk” (autour). There are but indications that the appellation *hapichunt* could have been a translation error, copied in the Early Middle Ages from other text models.

The big question now of course is the nature of the Barbet in the 14th century, at least in the case of *Fébus*, who apparently considered it as a coat-variety within the frame of the Chien d'oysel (bird dog) or espainhol (spaniel).

The author of the dog encyclopaedia of Atlas/Lekturama claims that the Barbet was the forefather of the 14th century espainhol, although Gaston *Fébus* reveals that this espainhol was in majority a smooth-coated breed. I think the author of

Atlas means that the Barbet-coated espainhol produced long-coated espainhols by crossing with the smooth-coated espainhol. This makes some sense.

All the nonsense of introduction of the Barbet in the shape of shepherd dogs by the Maures from northwest Africa, loyally copied in so many articles, is more or less impossible to check, because research is impossible if it is only an assumption, based on some old source, which mixed fairytales with facts.

Pure fantasy is the statement by the author of Atlas that there was no agriculture in the Merovingian empire, because agriculture and life-stock breeding were widespread on the territory of France already in the Celtic period before the Romans. The assumption they did not have had shepherd dogs is pure nonsense and only indicated that the person who wrote this had definitely no awareness at all of history, or read nothing better than the comics of Astérix by Uderzo. First of all, shepherd dogs were mentioned in the Merovingian laws and also long before the famous Celtic wool weaving techniques have been certified by samples from Hallstatt (Austria), dating from 1200-400 BC. This means sheep breeding has always been a very important factor in the Celtic culture, and how could that ever have been possible without shepherd dogs?

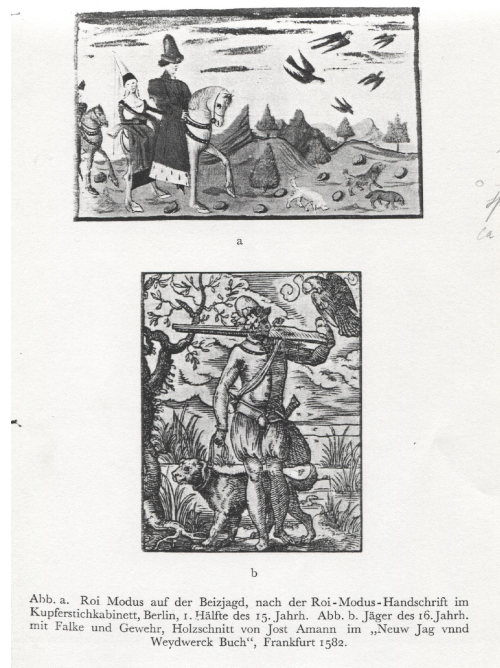


The same illustration in two different copies of "Le Roy Modus et la Roynne Racio", of which the original was from around 1350. Left the Chiens d'oysele are smooth and long-coated and at the right both are long-coated.

RIGHT: Another copy of "Modus" in a German collection (approximately 1400-1450), with (a) 3 not very fine-built looking bird dogs, reminding both Strebel (1905) and Lindner (1940) to (b) Jost Amman's woodcut of a water dog (according to Strebel – because of the stingy ridge on the back – a rough-coated type) in Feyerabendt's book (1582).



ABOVE: 19th century book illustration of a miniature illustration from Modus (14th century) with a not so well defined bird dog.





Codex Manesse (German, appr. 1250). King Chunrat with hawks and bird dogs.

All serious researchers (Castaing 1960, De Marolles 1922) come out on the same point, that bird dogs, as the smooth-coated primordial lay-dogs (chien couchants) are typically South European, and all evidence for Barbet-coated dogs speaks for the same.

As such this does not really exclude long-coated shepherd dogs with beards or any other bearded dog, although they most likely have had their own ways of dispersion. An example with a Barbet-coated shepherd dog on a Flemish tapestry of the 15th century, half-shaved like a lion, and a spinning tool next to it, may sweep away any doubt that Barbet-coated dogs were spread over

Europe already in that time, and being used in different breed selections (hunting, sheep herding).



Barbet-coated dog, herding the sheep on a Flemish tapestry (15th century). Note that his coat is carefully clipped like a lion.

Concerning the coat type, most depictions show a thick wavy coat, and only in case of the *Très riches heures* of the duke of Berry by the brothers of Limbourg, in a falconry scene a brown dog with a long coat is depicted, but here the waves are smaller and numerous, so that the coat has a definite curly character. A rather similar dog by Lieven van Lathem doesn't expose real curls. In a Flemish version in French of the 13th century falconry-book of the king of Germany and Sicily, Frederic II, the "Master of Bruges of 1482" depicted a non-curly Barbet, white, clipped in lion model, beard and face cut short (all 15th century).



Details of the falconry scene on the August-page of the "Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry" by the brothers of Limbourg (1413-1416). Of course it's a very small detail of a rather stylish miniature painting, in spite of the high ear-set the total with long wavy curls speaks for itself.



A rather similar dog, although not really curly but almost tending to be, 2nd half 15th century by Lieven van Lathem.



Portrait of Maria of Burgundy with a merlin (steenvalk), a pigeon size falcon with the reputation of working excellent in combination with bird dogs.



Detail with a white Barbet in lion-clip in a 15th century Southern Dutch copy by the Master of Bruges of 1482 of the famous falconry book by Frederic II.

About the falconry (or oyselerie, or chasse au vol, volerie, vluchtbedrijf, because other birds than falcons were used as well) can be said there is a rather strong connection with bird dogs. On the other hand, it cannot be considered too essential, because falconry was known among the Romans as well the Merovingians and the Carolingians but without any evidence of Chiens d'oysel. According to one of the best falconry historians, *Swaen* (1937) the Germans picked up falconry from the east (may be from Scyths or Thracians) and brought it to Italy, from where the Romans brought it to Gaul. Greeks and Slavs must have got it from Central-Asian tribes.

So, I would tend to consider the connection of the Chiens d'oysel with falconry a later development and mainly of south and south-east European nature, spreading itself further north from around the 13th century, as far as can be traced. An example exists in the *Codex Manesse*, a manuscript from Heidelberg, Germany. Here the type seems to be long-coated and not bearded, but it is only one rare illustration.

In the Middle Ages, many falconers had Byzantine and oriental connections, like the author of *De arte venandi cum avibus*, Frederic II, king of Sicily and Germany (13th century). Robert d'Anjou, king of Naples and count of Provence (1277-1343) introduced in Provence hunting with birds on herons and bustards, mainly in the area of Crau near Arles. His greyhounds (lévriers) were trained on peafowl. Taken the tight connection between hunters and falconers it goes too much without saying to be a bold theory, that he had access to some kind of dogs to retrieve them from the water, because the work of Modus was almost from the same time and Fébus only some decades later. The canton he reserved for his pleasures near Arles still carried his name in the 17th century. The husband of his grand-daughter and heir gave his name to a brook, where he hunted herons (Louynes or Luynes). Also Jehan de Francières, knight of Rhodos, commander of Choisy and grand-prior of Aquitania, during the reign of Louis XI (15th century) wrote a treatise on falconry, after sources of falconry-masters from Cyprus, Antioch and Greece. So, even without evidence in detail a flood of connections can be observed between France, where water dogs apparently appeared at least in the 14th century, and the South and East Mediterranean, which is considered the region of origin of bearded dogs in Antiquity.

In the Southern Netherlands the water dogs seem to be settled since the 15th century at least. Maria of Burgundy most likely kept them. She even died from an accident during a heron hunt where she lived near Bruges and Ghent. On a well-known portrait she carries a very small falcon, not larger than a pigeon. This variety was the merlin (esmirillion, smelleken, steenvalk), which was according *Jacht-Bedryff* (Dutch manuscript of 1636, first published in 1948) specialised in staying high in the air above the lay-dog (chien couchant) or spillioen (spaniel), excellent for the hunt on partridge.



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