

**F**ourteenth-century engravers, 18th-century painters and yesterday's photographers all show us dogs as seen through their eyes. Their work is an enlightening way to follow the development of breeds and how they were seen in the eyes of the artist.

# In the Eyes of the Artist...

## Dalmatian – Dalmatinsky Pas

Text and illustrations by RIA HÖRTER

### *Dalmatica*

Looking at a dog breed in old and new depictions is more or less the same as skating. Just as you think it's going well, the ice is not yet thick enough and you end up in cold water. Then the handsome black-and-white-spotted dog is not a Dalmatian but a Great Dane. Just because the unusual coat has the uniquely recognizable spots, you were set on the wrong track. Harlequin Great Dane puppies bear an amazing resemblance to Dalmatian puppies.

A second problem is the artist. Is he or she a talented horse painter who added a spotted dog to fill a gap? Or is the painting a true-to-nature rendering of a famous Dalmatian? It is important to know what other paintings the artist has made. Is he or she a talented animal painter, or a dilettante? Sometimes more than one painter worked on a painting; an authority on dogs or horses, for example, might be invited to finish an animal's portrait.

Some knowledge of European history is required when writing about dog breeds. After every war the borders changed, especially after the First and Second World Wars. Before the Cold War, Yugoslavia was the Dalmatian's country of origin.

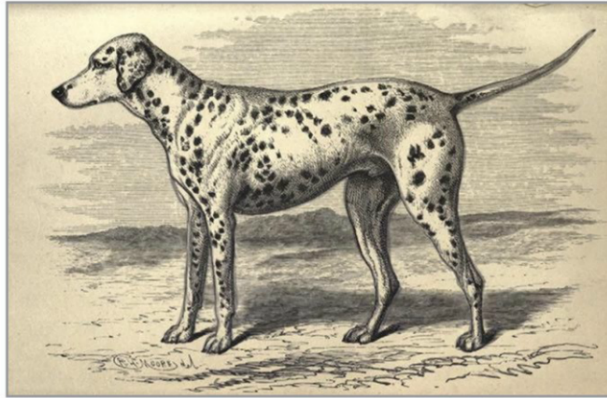
During the Balkan Wars (1991-95) Croatia became an independent republic (1991) and is now the country of origin. Turks, Romans, Italians, Austrians and Serbs left a mark on Croatia – as well as its dog world.

The name of the breed seems to be derived from the *dalmatica*, a liturgical tunic dating from antiquity. Dalmatia, once part of Yugoslavia, is now a region in Croatia. The FCI breed standard says: "Dalmatians can be found on the altar painting 'Madonna with Jesus and Angels' in the church 'Gospa od andjela' in the town Veli Losinj, island Losinj in Croatia dating back to 1600-1630 and also in a fresco in Zaostrog, Dalmatia, Croatia. It suggests that the Dalmatian originates from the eastern Mediterranean region, in particular the historic province Dalmatia." It is possible that

both explanations of the breed's name are correct. There is, after all, a connection between liturgical tunics and churches!

### *Breed Standard*

After the 18th century, the Dalmatian was developed mainly in England; the first breed standard was written in 1882. The Dalmatian's work was guarding stables and accompanying horse-drawn equipages, but the breed was



*The Dalmatian's work was guarding stables and accompanying horse-drawn equipages, but the breed was also used as a hunting dog.*

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also used as a hunting dog. Today it is mainly a companion dog.

Some artists painted exactly what they saw; others depicted their patron's dog not as it was, but as its owner wanted it to look. Some elaborated on older depictions or copied shamelessly. Not every painter knew the anatomy of dogs.

By the end of the 19th century, almost every dog breed had a standard; from then on, the development of a breed could negatively affect its welfare.



*Cavalcade with members of the House of Orange-Nassau (1621)*  
On the left, a black-and-white-spotted dog.  
This painting was based on an engraving by Adriaan van de Venne.  
(Collection The Loo Palace, Netherlands)

## The Orange-Nassau Cavalcade

An example of a historicized depiction is the cavalcade with members of the House of Orange-Nassau: from left to right, Philip William, Maurice, Frederick Henry and their nephews William Louis and Ernest Casimir. The painting was made from a 1621



*Prince Francesco di Cosimo II de' Medici (1614-34) ca. 1630*  
by Justus Sustermans (1597-1681)

engraving by Adriaen van de Venne, when a 1616-21 truce ended.

This painting is topnotch propaganda: the princes of Orange-Nassau drew a lucky number in the Dutch War of Independence – the war of liberation against Spain. However, this cavalcade never took place; in 1621, two of the persons portrayed were already dead! A black-and-white-spotted dog accompanying the cavalcade was good publicity for the breed; after all, this was its work.

## Patronage

Prince Francesco di Cosimo II de' Medici (1614-34) was a descendant of the mighty and influential de' Medici family of Florence. They had become rich in the wool trade and banking. Francesco died when he was 20 years old, a victim of the plague. Flemish painter Justus Sustermans (1597-1681) made Francesco's portrait, but of course we are interested in the dog. In 1621, Sustermans was invited to Florence, where he worked under the

patronage of the Medicis. This portrait was painted in 1630.

This early-17th-century painting is exceptional in that we don't have to guess at the breed. It is obviously a Dalmatian, although its totally black ears are notable; the FCI standard says: "It is very important that the ears are spotted, i.e. the ears must not be completely black or brown but black or brown spotted etc. with the spotting in accordance with the color variety on the white base."

How did a Florentine prince acquire a Dalmatian? Like the German painter, author and dog fancier Richard Strelbel (1861-1940), I am almost convinced that the Dalmatian was originally an Italian breed. The distance between Croatia and Italy is only an hour by boat. Croatia was annexed by the Roman Empire in 35 BC. The influence of Italy and Venice can still be seen in Croatia, especially in its architecture.

The prince loved his dog. There's a clear connection as he rests his hand on his dog's head.

## Baroque

In the mid-17th century, the Bible still had a lot of influence on themes in art. Subjects thousands of years old were painted in contemporary settings. The paintings of Giovanni



*Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, nicknamed Il Grechetto (the Greek), lived from 1609 (Genua) to 1664 (Mantua).*  
After his studies in Florence, Parma and Venice he became court artist for Duke Carlo II Gonzaga.  
The head of a Dalmatian can be seen at the lower right.

vanni Benedetto Castiglione (1609-64) are good examples. He was one of the most important animal painters of his time. Castiglione painted horses, dogs, sheep, cattle, etc. His brother, Salvador, and his son, Francesco, were also well-known painters and it is supposed that some paintings attributed to Giovanni were made by his brother or son.

This painting shows a Biblical subject – Rebecca from the city of Harem being taken to Isaac, whom she would marry. Abraham's servant Eliezer (in the middle of the painting) was responsible for making the arrangement.

The head of a Dalmatian is visible in the bottom right corner. There is no doubt about the breed. And again, the Dalmatian is escorting a group.

The dog's head is heavy. The AKC standard says: "The head is



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in balance with the overall dog. It is of fair length and is free of loose skin. The Dalmatian's expression is alert and intelligent, indicating a stable and outgoing temperament. The top of the skull is flat with a slight vertical furrow and is approximately as wide as it is long. The stop is moderately well defined. The cheeks blend smoothly into a powerful muzzle..."

### Falconry

Art historian Dr. Erica Billeter stated in her book *Hunde und ihre Maler (Dogs and their Painters, 2005)* that the painting *Falconry* made by Jan Fyt (1611-61), shows the first painting ever made of a Dalmatian. Fyt's painting dates from about 1650, so Billeter missed the works of Sustermans and Castiglione. Despite the age of this painting, there can be no speculation about the breed. In the midst of four red-and-white spaniels, two sighthounds and two hounds, the spotted dog catches the eye and dominates the painting. I am under the impression that it was added later to the painting, seemingly painted over three other dogs.



*Henrietta, Lady Jenkinson (1742), dressed in the height of fashion, immortalized by Philippe Mercier. (Leeds Museums and Galleries)*

The Dalmatian has good substance and is strong and sturdy in bone, but never coarse... The chest is deep, capacious and of moderate width, having good spring of rib without being barrel shaped." Lung capacity is important in this breed as depicted by this painting. It is obvious that dogs used in falconry must be in good condition.



*Falconry, ca. 1650 by Jan Fyt (1611-61), a well-known Flemish animal and landscape painter. (Private collection)*

And again, there is a connection with Italy; Jan Fyt worked for the prominent Italian Doge families Sagredo and Contarini.

The Dalmatian looks a bit timid with its tail tucked between the hind legs. The AKC standard says, "Temperament is stable and outgoing, yet dignified. Shyness is a major fault." It also says, "The Dalmatian is a distinctively spotted dog; poised and alert; strong, muscular and active; free of shyness; intelligent in expression; symmetrical in outline; and without exaggeration or coarseness. The Dalmatian is capable of great endurance, combined with fair amount of speed.

acquired training in classical landscape style. His animal paintings are in the collections of the Tate Gallery in London, Welbeck Abbey (Nottinghamshire), Longleat House (Wiltshire), the



*John Wootton painted A Grey Spotted Hound in 1738*

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, and the Yale Center for British Art, in Connecticut.

A *Grey Spotted Hound* is a beautiful painting of a Dalmatian that shows the breed in the 1730s. The dead bird refers to the breed's skill as a hunter.

### Court Painter

About two centuries after Sustermans and Fyt, Spanish painter Francisco Lacoma Y Fontanet made *Cuidador de los Perros de Aranjuez – The Dog Keeper of Aranjuez* (see painting on the next page). The dogs are wearing beautiful gold-colored, padlocked collars. The Dalmatian is turning its head in the direction of the dog keeper, who is holding a piece of bread.

Lacoma Y Fontanet was the court painter of King Fernando VII of Spain (1784-1833). In the background are the stone arches in the garden of the summer palace at Aranjuez. It is more than likely that these dogs belonged to the Spanish king.

The Dalmatian's ears are cropped, a practice in large parts of Europe at the time, to protect the ears when the dog was hunting. Otherwise, the Dalmatian does not show any sign of exaggeration. Isn't it amazing that a breed today looks exactly the same as it did in the early 1800s?

### Outline

Cassell's *The Illustrated Book of the Dog* by Vero Shaw was



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*Cuidado de los Perros de Aranjuez, ca. 1820  
by Francisco Lacoma y Fontanet (1778-1849)  
Most likely portrayed with King Fernando VII's dogs  
(Museo Nacional de Cazas)*

published with full-color plates in 1881. The chromolithograph of the Dalmatian also shows the Bull Terrier. Shaw was of the opinion that the Bull Terrier's outline took after that of the Dalmatian. The beautiful illustrations and the author's expertise made this book a standard work in canine literature.

The depiction of the Dalmatian in Shaw's book illustrates all the requirements in the breed standard he wrote. Experts may establish small differences in type, but the answer to the question of

whether this breed became prey to exaggeration is a straightforward No!

Many dog books with black-and-white illustrations were published during the 19th century. Some examples are *Dogs* (Col. Hamilton Smith, 1839-40), *The Dog in Health and Disease* (J.H. Walsh), *British Dogs* (Hugh Dalziel, 1879) and *The Dog* (William Youatt, 1886). The quality of the illustrations varies and sometimes they used the same illustrator. Dutch writer Count Henry de Bylandt, who published his *Dogs of All Nations* (1904) in four languages, used the illustrator R.H. Moore, who had illustrated the



*The Dalmatian running alongside coaches*

- **Breed:** Dalmatian (Dalmatinsky Pas)
- **Origin:** Croatia
- **Used for:** hunting, carriage dog, companion dog
- **First breed standard:** 1882
- **AKC breed standard:** [akc.org/dog-breeds/dalmatian/](http://akc.org/dog-breeds/dalmatian/)
- **FCI breed standard:** [fci.be/Nomenclature/Standards/153g06-en.pdf](http://fci.be/Nomenclature/Standards/153g06-en.pdf)
- **Breed group:** AKC Group 6 (Non-Sporting); FCI Group 6 (Scenthounds and related breeds)
- **Breed club:** Dalmatian Club of America – [thedca.org](http://thedca.org) – founded in 1905



*Chromolithograph from Cassell's  
The Illustrated Book of the Dog, 1881*

Dalmatian chapter in Hugh Dalziel's book *British Dogs* 25 years earlier. At the beginning of the 20th century, German dog fancier Richard Strebel wrote and illustrated *Die Deutschen Hunde* (*German Dogs*, 1905).

## Running alongside coaches

Dalmatians are believed to have traveled with bands of the nomadic Romany but little is known about the breed's origins. The FCI standard – [fci.be/en/nomenclature/DALMATIAN-153.html](http://fci.be/en/nomenclature/DALMATIAN-153.html) – contains a brief historical summary that goes back to the 16th century.

In the 17th century, they were exceptionally well-suited to road work. Noblemen and merchants felt safe when traveling with Dalmatians, which were known for their speed and endurance. Thomas Bewick, who published *A General History of Quadrupeds* in 1790 (reprinted in 2009, University of Chicago Press), mentioned the "Dalmatian or Coach Dog." Many painters and illustrators, such as American animal artist Walter Weber (1906-79), who worked for the National Geographic Society; Britishers Henry William Standing and Vic Granger, have depicted one or two Dalmatians running alongside a coach. During overnight stops, the Dalmatian would stay in the stable to protect the horses and coach.

## Six depictions from dog books

The photos on the next page are a collection of photos from dog books by R.H. Moore, T. Goetz, Col. Hamilton Smith, Richard Strebel, Hugh Dalziel and Count Henri van Bylandt.

## The Firehouse Dog

Apart from being a coach dog, Dalmatians were known as the "firehouse dog" because they ran ahead to clear the streets for the horse-drawn fire engine of that time. To this day, they remain a firehouse symbol.

A breed standard, written by Vero Shaw (1884-1905), was published in 1882. The first official Kennel Club (U.K.) standard dates from 1890. The FCI published its official standard in 1955 under the name Dalmatinsky Pas (Dalmatian Dog).

There are four breed clubs in the U.K. – the British Dalmatian



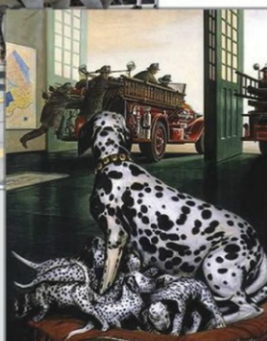
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Many dog books with black-and-white illustrations were published during the 19th century



Apart from being a coach dog, the Dalmatian was and is still known as the "firehouse dog."



21st century. (Wikipedia)

### About the Author

A retired bookseller and publisher, Ria Hörter is a dog writer from The Netherlands. She is the contributing editor of the leading Dutch National Dog Magazine *Onze Hond* (Our Dogs) and works for the Dutch Kennel Club and the Welsh Springer Spaniel Club of the Netherlands of which she was one of the founders. She was nominated twice and a finalist in the 2009 Annual Writing Competition of the Dog Writers Association of America, for her articles in Dogs in Canada.

On April 12, 2014, she was awarded the Dutch Cynology Gold Emblem of Honour. The award was presented by the Dutch Kennel Club. Ria is a member of the World Press Association.

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Club (originally the Southern Dalmatian Club; since 1925), North of England Dalmatian Club (1903), Northern Ireland Dalmatian Club (1981) and the Dalmatian Club of Scotland (1970).

### Something about the breed in America

One of the early pillars of the Dalmatian Club of America was Mrs. Flora MacDonald Bonney, who acquired her first Dalmatian, Windholme's Kip, in 1912, from Harry S. Peters' Windholme Kennel at Islip, Long Island.

The Dalmatian Club of America, founded in 1905, held its first national specialty show in New York on June 26, 1927. The DCA is the parent organization that oversees 30 or more regional clubs.

### Dalmatians and the Civil War

There is a beautiful photograph from the Antique Dog Photo Gallery, taken during the American Civil War. It shows a husband and wife in front their Dalmatian. The photo is a tintype. A tintype, also known as a melainotype or ferrotype, is a photograph made by creating a direct positive on a thin sheet of metal coated with a dark lacquer or enamel and used as the support for the photographic emulsion. Tintypes enjoyed their widest use during the 1860s and 1870s, but lesser use of the medium persisted into the early 20th century and it has been revived as a novelty in the

Attempts were made to find the names of the photographers.

Unfortunately, we did not always succeed. Please send a message to the author ([riahorter.com](mailto:riahorter.com)) if you think you are the owner of a copyright.



Dalmatian on a tintype photograph, probably taken between 1860 and 1870