



The Hounds of Heaven: Living and Hunting with an Ancient Breed

Stephen Bodio

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The Hounds of Heaven: Living and Hunting with an Ancient Breed Stephen Bodio **Tracing the History of the Oldest Breed of Dog**

In 1992, two Russian movie makers left a cryptic note for New Mexican writer Stephen Bodio at his local bar. It led him to Brighton Beach in Brooklyn, where he saw a film about the ancient breed of Central Asian sighthounds known as tazis. He would end up chasing these leads to Kazakhstan, where these beautiful dogs may have existed 6000 years ago. He found evidence in ancient rock paintings that these hounds, ancestors of such modern breeds as salukis and Afghans, were and still are used to hunt with birds of prey and horses in the Bronze Age, all along the old Silk Road.

He brought back several pups to his home in New Mexico, bred them, and placed them with friends, some of whom wanted to use them to increase the genetic diversity of the saluki. Soviets tried to wipe out the breed, valued by tribal people as a symbol of their independence. But the greatest threat to them today might be the show-dog breeder's closed stud books, though modern attacks on hunting with hounds might destroy their "work."

The Hounds of Heaven is a celebration of the Asian sighthound in all its names and glorious variety, a lament for disappearing ways, and an adventure. Its characters include scientists, hunters, and memorable dogs; Lashyn, the jealous girlfriend, who destroyed the bonsai; Ataika, the Kazakh princess who rules the world, who taught herself to hunt with hawk, falcon, and gun, entirely without commands; Kyran, who came speaking only Russian. Bodio blends science, history, and art to tell a tale that has not reached an end yet. As he says, "The hounds are still running."

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