CHAPTER TWELVE

*CANIS FAMILIARIS*, THE DOMESTIC DOG

12.1 **The Living Animal**

12.1.1 **Zoology**

The domestic dog is basically like the other members of the dog family; actually, the name of the family is derived from that of the dog. This means that the domestic dog has a long pointed muzzle, large ears, a deep-chested muscular body, slender and sinewy limbs, short and blunt claws on their small and compact feet, soft pads below the feet. They walk on their toes.¹

As is generally the case in a domestic species, many breeds occur, varying in size, colour and other characteristics, partly according to the purpose for which they were bred. The major difference with its closest wild relatives, the golden jackal and the Indian wolf are its drooping ears; this is never seen in wild canids. The tail may be curled over the back, and is often not bushy at all. The shape of the muzzle varies. Very common in India are the medium-sized, slender dogs with drooping ears, either with a pointed muzzle (fig. 176) or a broader, more blunt muzzle. Other differences with wild members of the dog family are found mainly in behaviour: domestic dogs are less aggressive, more docile and humble than both wolves and jackals, dogs wag their tail when pleased—wolves don’t, jackals do—, dogs can make a smiling grimace—wolves don’t, jackals do—, dogs hide a bone—wolves don’t, jackals do—, dogs turn round before sitting down—jackals don’t, wolves do—, dogs bark—wolves do, though rarely, jackals don’t—. Wolves and jackals both interbreed regularly with domestic dogs in India, and both species appear to have left their stamp on some of the Indian domestic breeds.

¹ See further section 11.1.1.
Dogs occur everywhere where there are humans, and rely on them for food to varying degrees. Village dogs often have to find food in the forest and from scavenging at waste; they are hardly fed by humans. Trained domestic dogs generally do not hunt on their own, though they sometimes kill poultry and small animals.

12.1.2 **Role of Dogs in Society**

Domestic dogs typically occur in human settlements, but whether their ancestors were originally domesticated for some use or just came to roam the village border is still a matter of debate. Also the first onset of domestication or taming is unknown, and estimates range from well before 10,000 B.C.E. in Iraq \(^2\) to a more modest 5,000 B.C.E. in eastern Europe, \(^3\) but these claims are based on fragmented and incomplete skull parts or lower jaws. More recent studies, taking into account a wider range of comparative material and individual variation, shed doubts on the early claims. By the time of the Neolithic period, differences between remains of wolf and dog begin to be substantial. As far as South Asia is concerned, domestic dogs were certainly present at the time of the Indus Valley civilization. Bones and teeth were recovered from the ancient site Lothal in Gujarat (2,300–1,750 B.C.E.), \(^4\) Dog bones were also excavated at Mohenjo-daro, along with terra-cotta images of dogs (fig. 177). These figurines resemble modern Indian domestic dog very closely, and have nothing to do with jackals or wolves. One such terra-cotta figurine \(^5\) bears a prey in its mouth, which may indicate its use as a hunting dog. \(^6\) The small figurine of a ‘watchdog’, earlier labelled a mastiff, \(^7\) however represents a lion (fig. 409).

In the early stage of domestication and possibly earlier, dogs were likely kept for their meat as well. The eating of dogs today is limited to East Asia and to some tribal areas of India, but was certainly more wide-spread in prehistoric times. For example, the Vlasac site along

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\(^3\) Clutton-Brock, op. cit. (1981).


\(^5\) Harappa Museum, cat. no. 13.413.
