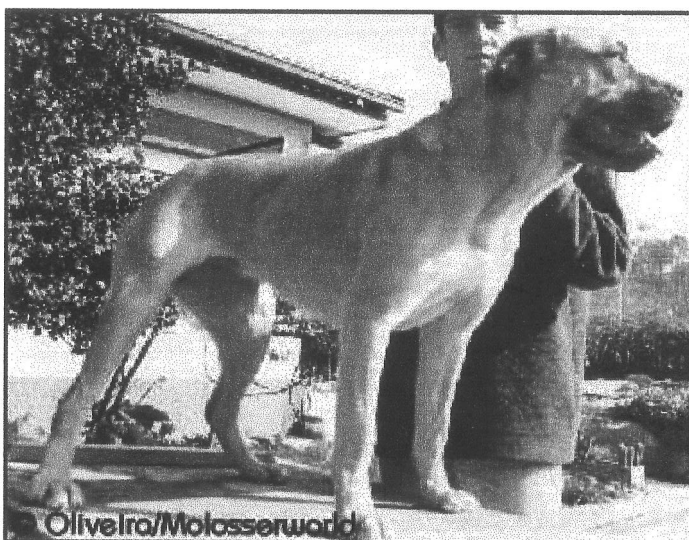


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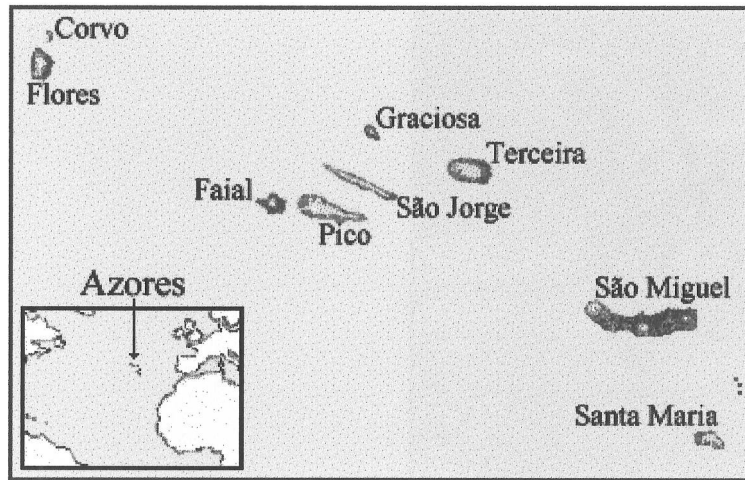
Cão de Fila da Terceira

Fila da Terceira - Mastiff of Terceira - Rabo Torto



Vicky at 12 months of age. Picture taken in 1999.
One of the few remaining Fila da Terceira females.

Many have heard about the Fila da Terceira, but there is not much information to find about the breed. In a few dog books there are superficial references, or small fragments of information, but never enough to learn you something about this legendary dog of the Terceira Island. This page will tell you about the long forgotten breed of the Azores, and its present life at the brink of extinction.



The Azores Islands.

The Azores islands was discovered in 1427 by Diego de Senill (Sevilha). The settlement on the islands began some years later, on the island Santa Maria in 1432. São Miguel was settled in 1444, and the island that is interesting for this page, the Terceira Island, was settled some years later.

The name Terceira means *The Third*, because the island was the third island of the Azores to be discovered by the Portuguese.

The Azores, as the point of Europe that is placed farthest from the mainland, and closest to the new colonies in America, became a rendezvous for the Spanish treasure fleet on their voyages home from the West Indies.

Under the British ruler, Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603), the Azores became a center in the maritime warfare between England on one side and Spain and Portugal on the other side.

From 1580 to 1640 the Azores, and of course the rest of Portugal, were a subject to Spain.



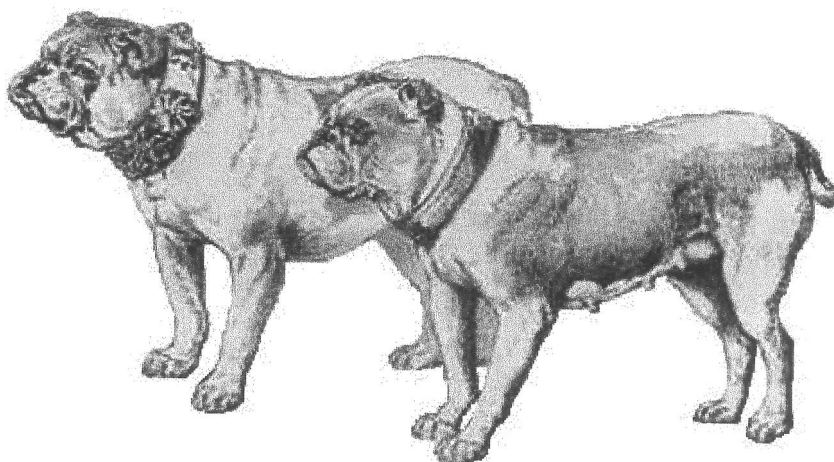


The male at left and the female with her puppies at right.
The famous Fila da Terceira photos by José Bettencourt Silva.

As you can see by the brief history of the Azores, the islands have been under influence by several powers.

Dogs of Mastiff and Bulldog types was brought to the islands, and the Fila da Terceira is believed to have been created by crossings of Iberian Bulldog types and English Mastiffs and Bulldogs. Piero Scanziani wrote an article about the Fila da Terceira in the Italian magazine "Il Nostri Cani" about 30 years ago. According to Mr. Scanziani the breed was created by intercrossing of the old time Bulldog, Mastiff, Dogue de Bordeaux and Perro de Presa Espanol, but he hold the possibility open that the Hound of St. Hubert also could have been used in the creation of the breed.

The different Molosser breeds were, according to history, brought to the Azores to protect the inhabitants from pirates that attacked the shores. But, I believe that it is also possibly that dogs who intentionally should have been brought to the West Indies and mainland America sometimes had to be left on the Azores islands, for some reason or another. Many different reasons for being "forced" to leave the dogs behind, after travelling 875 miles (1408 km.) in a wooden ship carried by the wind, comes easily to mind.



Old time Bulldogs, 1876.

Even if several Molosser breeds have contributed in the creation of the Fila da Terceira, we can ascertain that the breed have had much influence from the Bulldog, which can be observed in the twisted tail.

The twisted tail, called "rabo torto", have always been the most recognisable characteristic of the Fila da Terceira. The rabo torto was also described in the 1903 short "standard" of the breed. The twisted tail is so important in the Fila da Terceira that one of the alternative names for the breed is in fact Rabo Torto, a name based on the tail alone.

The Fila da Terceira have had some influence in the creation of the Fila Brasileiro. A massive emigration took place from the Azores to southern Brazil in the beginning of the 20 century, especially to the Rio Grande do Sul and S. Catarina regions. The emigrants did bring many of their dogs with them to Brazil, and even today there can be found Fila Brasileiros with twisted or crooked tail, a legacy of their Fila da Terceira forefather.

The Fila da Terceira have also had a important role in the creation of the Cão de Fila de São Miguel, which is a much younger breed than its fellow islander.



A young bitch from Terceira Island, 1998.
Notice the Rabo Torto - twisted tail.

In the late 1880's a gentleman called Dr. José Leite Pacheco travelled to Terceira Island, where he was to become the Municipal Veterinary. Dr. Pacheco did a very important work for the future; he wrote a description, or call it a short standard, of the Fila da Terceira. This description gives us a wonderful opportunity to learn how the breed looked like in the earlier days, and still should look like.

Below you will find the "standard" by Dr. Pacheco, in its native language, and scanned from the original publishing.

Dr. Pacheco writes that the breed should have a rectangular body, short neck, a very broad head - almost quadrangular. Further he writes about the tail, that it has an appearance of an "S", and he also writes that this gives the breed its common name, "Rabo Torto".

In the last part of this description Dr. Pacheco writes; "They are of extreme utility for the shepherds of the wild cattle, helping them in their work and defending them". This is very interesting to learn, and it tells us that the Fila da Terceira of the 1800's was used by the cattlemen as a Bulldog, which should not surprise us. Since we know that the breed contains much blood from the Bulldog of old we can assume that the Bulldog blood was infused with a purpose, and not a natural development out of the crossings of the different Molosser breeds brought to the islands as protection against the pirates.

A interesting question then hits the surface; was the Fila da Terceira of the 15 & 1600's much

different than the dog of the 17 & 1800's, used for Bulldog work? My guess is yes. When the time of the piracy ended the dogs used for protection by the islanders found a new work in assisting the cattlemen. The old protecting dog was probably larger and more *mastiffy* than the Fila da Terceira of the 1800's, and also probably with predominant Iberian genes. When the work of the dogs changed from protection dogs to cattedogs additional infusion of Bulldog blood was done, and this time the English Bulldog. The prove on this is the twisted tail. If Bulldog blood was infused at an earlier time the twisted tail would not have been the main characteristic of the Fila da Terceira. If you don't believe this, study the history of the Bulldog of England, and pay extra attention to the tail of the breed.

de cão de fila, cujos caracteres são: corpo rectangular, pescoço curto, cabeça volumosa, proxivamente quadrangular, ausencia de depressão no chanfro, bocca bem rasgada, guarnecida de fortissimos dentes, labio superior pendente aos lados da bocca, aboboda palatina de côr negra, focinho preto, pellugem fusca ou amarellada, em diferentes graduações, e (caracter constante) irregularidade na articulação dos primeiros coccigeos, o que produz o desvio na direcção da cauda, dando-lhe a apparencia de uma volta de S, de que provém a estes animaes o epitheto de *rabos tortos*.

São de maxima utilidade para os pastores de gado bravio, ajudando-os e defendendo-os nos rudes serviços do seu labor.

The original 1903 standard written by Dr. José Leite Pacheco.

In the beginning of the 1900's the Fila da Terceira had a difficult time with a decreasing number of specimens, much because of all the dogs brought from Terceira Island by emigrants to Brazil. In the couple of decades before 1950, José Bettencourt Silva and António Melo Correia was involved in the Fila da Terceira, and tried to get the breed back on its feet. When these two persons retired from dog breeding, no systematic breeding of the Terceiran Mastiff was done in many years. A few cattlemen continued to breed and use the dogs as they had *always* done. The breed was not to be found in a great number, but since still useful for the cattlemen the Fila da Terceira was never down to a critical number of specimens.



Cão de Fila da Terceira, 1934.

In the late 1960's there were started a recovery project of the Fila da Terceira. This project was supported financially by the Government of the Azores. The project also included two Bulldogs and two Bloodhounds, one of each sex.

Sadly there were much disagreement among the persons involved in the recovery work, and the project was abanded because of political reasons. Many of the dogs involved in the project was sold for high prizes to people in the Portuguese mainland.

But of course, even if the recovery project stranded, the interest in the breed did not fade away among all breeders and owners at the Terceira Island. A few persons continued to breed the Fila da Terceira, just like they had done before the recovery project started.

The breed continued to live as a farmdog on Terceira Island, kept alive by the few devoted breeders, even if the breed was declared extinct in the 1970's by the Regional Agricultural Governement.



The same dog in all three pictures.
From left; 1967, 1973 & 1975.
From the late 1960's -early 1970's recovery project.

Since the 1970's there have not been any work done to save the breed, and naturally the number of specimens have decreased as the years have gone by. Many of the old devoted Fila da Terceira breeders and owners have retired, out of old age or other reasons, with very few new individuals interested in this old breed of the Azores.

The Fila da Terceira is now at the brink of extinction. Only a couple of breeders at Terceira are still active in the breeding of this noble dog, and very few pure specimens of the breed still exists. In the São Miguel Island there are some dogs that is part Fila da Terceira/part Fila de São Miguel. These dogs are simply referred to as *red dogs*, since they always have a reddish coat. As you know the Fila da São Miguel is always brindle in colour.

In Terceira Island, but also in Graciosa Island, there exists some dogs of mixed parentage who has Fila da Terceira blood. Most often these crossdogs has blood from the Fila da São Miguel.



At left; Valente, one of the *red dogs* from São Miguel Island.
At right a female from Graciosa Island, of beautiful type, but sadly deceased.

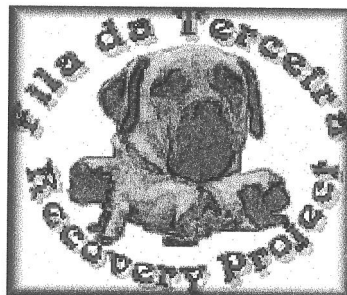
André Oliveira, a Zootechnical Engineerer with his diploma from the University of the Azorez, is the only *new* enthusiast and breeder that is devoted in his work to save the Fila da Terceira from extinction.

But the breed needs attention from more people if it should be any hope in saving this legendary dog from going extinct. To save a breed is a difficult task to do alone, and without any help from others.

I, Kaare Konradsen of the Molosserworld site, has personally involved myself in the rescue of the Fila da Terceira. Together with André Oliveira and a couple of other concerned individuals we hope to get the breed back on its feet again. To lose a breed is a tragic loss for the dog world, but luckily it is still possible to save the Fila da Terceira from extinction.

But it must be done NOW!!! And we need help from many other people, including you.

I will kindly ask you to push the button below, and visit the page of the *Fila da Terceira Recovery Project*.





Vicky, belonging to André Oliveira,
with one of her puppies in January 2000.

Cão de Fila da Terceira Fact Sheet.

Links



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