

# JOHN G. SMITHSON

# an Historical Portrait of Dieu d'Aralkam

# **SEAL POINT BIRMAN**

Preamble & Article adapted from authors text for 'The History Project'

### PREAMBLE - AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BIRMAN

The Sacred Cat of Burma or 'Chat de Birmanie' remains one of the most alluring of all the semilonghair breeds. With their sapphire-blue eyes, pointed coat pattern and distinctly unique white gloves and spearheaded gauntlets; they assume a mystical, almost transcendental air; which has won them the admiration of millions of cat lovers worldwide.

# THE TEMPLE OF LAO-TSUN

In his early writings about the breed, Dr Jumaud, a French Veterinarian and Birman fancier reports that the first recorded observation of these sacred temple cats, was by British Army Major, Russell Gordon, who had been charged with protecting the priests of the Khmer (known as Kittahs) in 1898.

Major Gordon's account of the Temple was that it was situated to the east of Lake Incaougji, between Magaoug and Sembo, in what was basically a desert region, surrounded by barriers and almost insurmountable walls. It was here, where he was permitted to observe the last of the Kittahs with their sacred animals.

#### THE LEGEND

The Legend of the Birman Cat 'Sinh', who sat on the bowed head of his deceased holy master 'Mun-Ha' before the Goddess Tsun Kyan-Kse, and was duly transformed from a yellow eyed white cat to the golden hued, dark pointed, blue-eyed beauty with white feet, (where the feet came into contact with the body of his dead master); was related to Major Gordon by the Kittah-Lama, Yotag Rooh-Oughi and later published in 'Minerva' by Dr. Fernand Mery. The story relates that on the seventh day 'Sinh' died, carrying to Tsun Kyan-Kse, the transmigrated soul of his holy master, 'Mun-Ha'.

In an article published in 'La Vie A la Compagne' in 1927, Dr Jumaud describes the Birman cat in the following terms:

"...the sacred Birman is very sociable, intelligent, happy to be stroked, obedient to commands, following his master in the same manner as a dog. He plays with composure, without the presence of his master he becomes nostalgic. He is a quiet animal and lacks the quickness and fire of the Siamese. He seems to be aware of his sacred origin."

# **ARRIVAL IN FRANCE**

As to sequence of events leading to the arrival of the first Birman cats in the West, although not a legend, is still shrouded in a degree of mystery, mostly due to a lack of documentary records, confusion over the names of the actual importers, and confusion over the possible outcrosses.

Writing in 1926, Jumaud advises that the American millionaire, Vanderbilt, whilst cruising his yacht in the Far East, obtained two cats, a male and a female, from an unfaithful servant who came from the temple of Lao-Tsun. It is assumed that the cats had been stolen.

Mr Vanderbilt is then reputed to have given the cats to a Mme Thadde Hadisch (Vienna). What is not clear, is whether this woman was behind the original purchase, or perhaps a guest of the Vanderbilts. But she soon disappears without a trace from the story. The two cats appear to have been a male named 'MADALPOUR' and a female named 'SITA'.

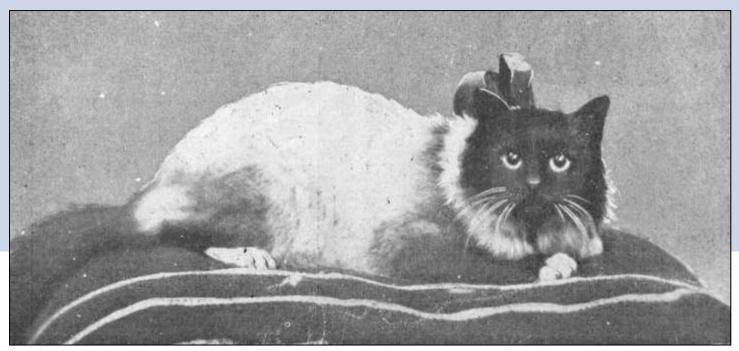
The male apparently died accidentally while at sea, although no details of his demise appear to be recorded, but it was subsequently discovered that the female, who did survive the journey, was already in kitten to him. The boat returned to France, and the female kittened her original litter in Nice, in 1920.

# SEAL-POINT BIRMAN - DIEU D'ARAKAN - AS A KITTEN IN 1930

**Bred and owned by Marcel Baudoin Crevoisier** 

Photo: Wild World. 'Nos Amis Les Chats' (1947) by Marcel Reney.





'Chat de Birmanie'. The thesis of Philippe Jumaud (1925), was later published as 'Les Races de Chat', which included this grand photograph of a striking Birman cat in the 1930 edition, which means that this cat must have predated 1930.

Image courtesy of The Harrison Weir Collection.

From this litter one of the kittens (a female), was considered to be a perfect specimen and was named 'POUPEE'. This 'Poupee' was therefore the only recorded fully Birman offspring for which there is an oral record. Well we might wonder, happened to any of the other kittens that may have survived from this **very** precious litter!

# **FIRST OUTCROSSING**

In an article by Mr Baudoin-Crevoisier in 1933, we are informed that: -

"Poupee could not be bred by a male of that breed, but was bred to a Laotian Lynx cat belonging to a Doctor in Nice. This type of cat resembles the Siamese, with very blue eyes, and this breeding produced young mongrels of Birmans and Laotians. Through successive cross-breedings was born the perfect result – MANOU de MADALPOUR."

No further mention is made of the original queen, 'SITA' or any further progeny from her, nor of alternative breedings or progeny from her daughter the original 'POUPEE'.

By using the words 'successive cross-breedings' opens the statement to a much wider interpretation, as it could also mean both repeat breedings, OR alternative breedings, as well as over several more generations.

However, in 1933, the Swiss Abbot and breeder and author Marcel Chamonin (who wrote under the pseudonym of Marcel Reney), attempted to uncover

the truth about this initial outcrossing of 'POUPEE' by writing directly to the famous doctor in Nice; who replied saying: -

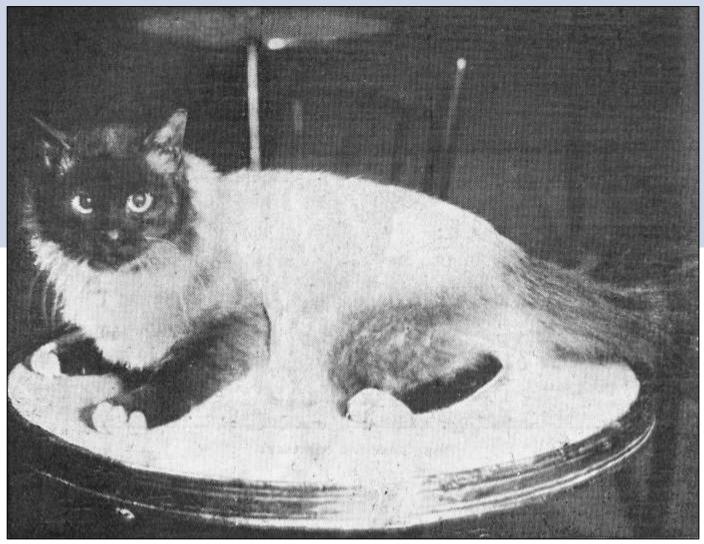
"We have had indeed several Siamese cats but know nothing of the origins. I know nothing of Mme Hadisch from Vienna." This would appear to affirm that the 'Laotian Lynx' was in fact a Siamese cat of "unknown pedigree".

If we assume that the outcross was in fact an unregistered Siamese of unknown origin, we must also assume that this litter would have been comprised of all shorthaired kittens, unless the Siamese was already carrying the gene for long hair!

It is in fact unclear as to whether 'MANOU de MADALPOUR' was from this breeding, or from a successive breeding but it is generally accepted that his dam was a 'POUPEE'. He is also listed in Birman databases today, as from the 'Laotian Siamese' and 'POUPEE'.

Madame Marcelle Adams, who owned MANOU de MADALPOUR, affirmed to Marcel Reney that a certain Madame Leotardi, had related the Birman story as Jumaud and Baudoin had recorded it.

It appears that she had obtained Manou from Madame Leotardi and photographs of this male and his mother 'Poupee' appeared in the October 1, 1926 issue of 'Vie A La Compagne' after they were successfully exhibited at a show in Paris in 1926 with the owners name recorded in the captions.



Another image of the 'Chat de Birmanie' from Jumaud's *'Les Races de Chat'* (1930) This cat's birth therefore must also predate 1930 and is captioned as owned by Madame Brassart.

Image courtesy of The Harrison Weir Collection.

From this litter one of the kittens (a female), was considered to be a perfect specimen and was named 'POUPEE'. This 'Poupee' was therefore the only recorded fully Birman offspring for which there is an oral record. Well we might wonder, happened to any of the other kittens that may have survived from this *very* precious litter!

# RECENT HISTORICAL RESEARCH

However, more recent research has been done on the origins of the Birman cat, the work of Professor Alain Lescart (France) who is currently in the process of publishing a new book, the French version of which is due out soon. Professor Lescart informs the writer, that his research shows that Madame Leotardi's reliability is seriously in doubt, in that she was taken to court in France over a number of scams. It would appear the 'Vanderbilt' story is part and parcel of that, and his research suggests that the first Birmans were likely 'created' by her, much earlier. He has published documentary evidence dating from 1922 linking her with the Birman cat, so

he believes it could date from as early as 1921. He also correctly qualifies the claim by observing: -

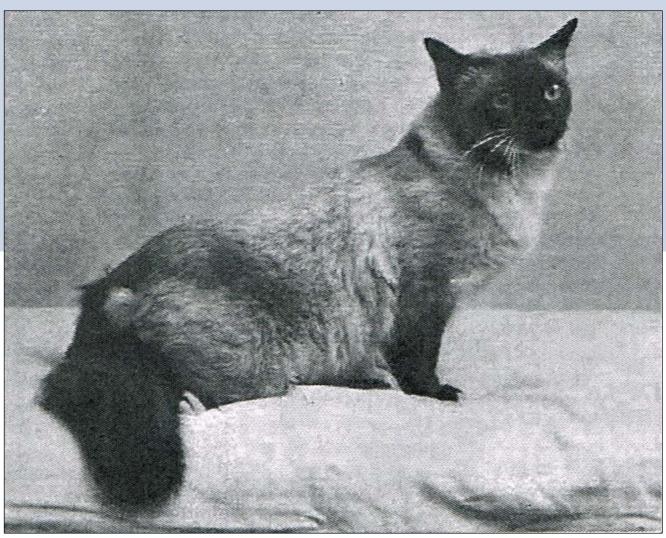
"This of course doesn't change anything about the creation of the Birman (a victim of history here) and all the efforts made to create this wonderful breed."

# **ESTABLISHMENT AS A RECOGNISED BREED**

Birman breeder, author, and former Chairman of the Birman Cat Club (GCCF), Vivienne Smith gives us what is probably the best overview of the breeds development from those early years in her book 'The Birman Cat'.

"It is now up to the reader to draw their own conclusions from the above information and thus decide which gentleman/gentlemen actually acquired the original pair of Birman cats.

"As can be seen, many articles and indeed, even a book by Marcel Reney — 'Los Amis Les Chats' have tried to investigate the true history of the Sacred Cat of Burma, but unfortunately much of the history is still shrouded with a seemingly impenetrable veil,



'MANOU DE MADALPOUR'

This photograph and others, were taken after his dam's notable win at the International Cat Show in Paris in May 1926.Both cats were exhibited, 'Poupee' owned by Mme Leotardi, and 'Manou' owned by Mme Marcelle Adams.

Photo: 'Vie A La Compagne' October 1, 1926. Image courtesy of The CFA Foundation.

particularly those years 1916-1935, and although undoubtedly, someone, somewhere in France knows the true story, we lesser mortals will have to use our imagination. All we can be certain of is that a considerable amount of inbreeding and the use of other breeds of cats must have occurred, as the Birmans as we know them today originated from this original pair of cats imported to France.

"The Breed known as 'Sacre de Birmanie' was first recognized in France in 1925 by the Federation Feline Francaise' (the equivalent of England's G.C.C.F.) and in 1935 Monsieur Baudoin-Crevoisier, who was recognized as a top Birman breeder and who owned the well-known male 'Dieu d'Arakan' and a female 'Poupee,' whose photographs still exist in France today, decided to sell Dieu d'Arakan with six males and females to Princess Ratibor Hohenhole for the huge sum of 30,000 French francs, and these were subsequently bequeathed to the Duke d'Aosta. After a time these cats were then taken over by the Countess Giriode Panissera and the ownership trans-

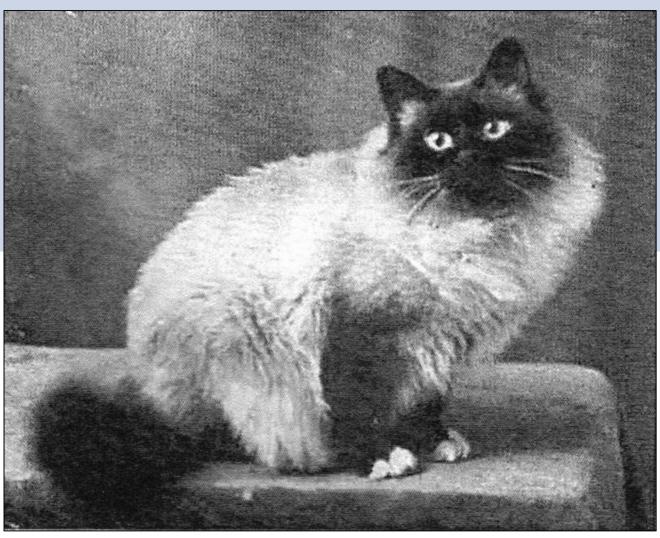
ferred to her.

"In the autumn of 1936 in the Castle of Francanvilla Bisio, near Noir Ligure, the result of all the Contessa's hard work was rewarded. Dieu d'Arakan and another male Reine de Rangoon sired seventeen Birmans in fourteen litters, and they became known as the most beautiful cats in the world at that time."

# EU. CH. DIEU D'ARAKAN

In the history of the Birman as a breed, 'Dieu d'Arakan' (aka 'Dieu D'arakhan') stands as probably the most significant pre-war Birman cat of recognisable quality, especially when you consider that his foundation forebears were reported to have arrived in France only a few years before his birth, and the breed, by necessity had been subjected to outcrossing to Siamese, and possibly other breeds in order to ensure its survival.

'Dieu d'Arakan's' overall type was so demonstrably ahead of his time, that he was, almost by default, the



An impressive full body view of 'INTERNATIONAL CHAMPION DIEU D'ARAKAN', bred and owned by Marcel Baudoin-Crevoisier.

Photo: 'Vie A La Campagne', April 15, 1935 Image courtesy of The CFA Foundation

hallmark standard-bearer for the future of the breed. His appearance simply raised the bar for 'type' to new levels; and once seen, every Birman breeder of note wished to emulate his looks within their own breeding programs. He had the shape, the coat, the markings and the eye colour. In short, they didn't come any better than this. Here was a Birman cat, that could proudly stand beside all-comers in other breeds and be recognised as distinctly unique, with an air of quality that was unparalleled within the breed up until that point in time.

## **PARENTAGE & OWNERSHIP**

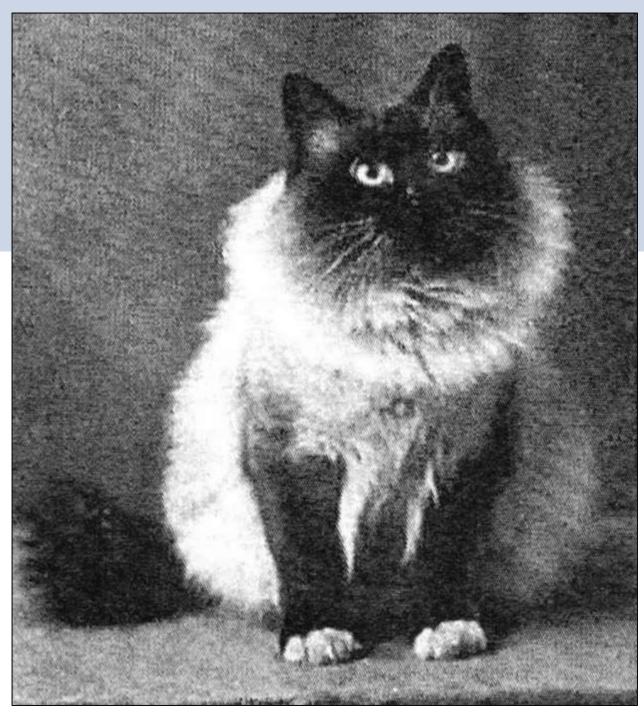
'Dieu d'Arakan' was born in 1930.¹ His breeder was Marcel Baudoin-Crevoisier, who had a short but meteoric rise to fame as one of the most prominent breeders of Birmans between 1929 and 1933. He had purchased two early high-fliers in 1929. Gisele Barnay refers: -

"If one continues the tour of the cat shows of the era, one sees the arrival of other stars. There were two more 'show' cats in 1929 in Paris: one at the Cat Club show on the  $8^{th}$ - $9^{th}$  February and the other at the Central Feline Society show on  $24^{th}$ - $26^{th}$  May.

"They were a couple of Birman cats unique in the world on account of their perfection. This referred to 'Ijadi Tsun', a female cat and the male 'Lon Saito', born in 1927, when Marcel Baudoin became their owner."

It should be noted that there are no firm records for the parentage of 'Dieu d'Arakan'. But given that Monsieur Baudoin-Crevoisier owned 'Lon Saito of Madalpour' and 'Ijadi Tsun' at the time, one cannot but wonder if these two were not involved in the production of such a fine specimen.

Simone Poirier and Gisele Barnay both allude to Baudoin possibly introducing Persians into the mix as they felt that the style had changed from what was a distinctly 'siamese' cross appearance with long hair, to a more rounded, heavier bult look, more consistent with outcrossing to longhairs.



The astonishing 'INTERNATIONAL CHAMPION DIEU D'ARAKAN' bred by Marcel Baudoin.

Photo: 'Vie A La Campagne', April 15, 1935. Image courtesy of The CFA Foundation

Gisele Barnay also noted that the coats had improved considerably. Poirier commented:-

"1929 was the year when Baudoin began to work seriously on the breed. He mever made any secrets of avoiding 'too many incestuous unions' he made 'lucky outcrosses with some Siamese females with white gloves and some stud-cats of Madalpour's line' but never admitted that he had called in some Persians."

to which Giselle Barnay then adds:-

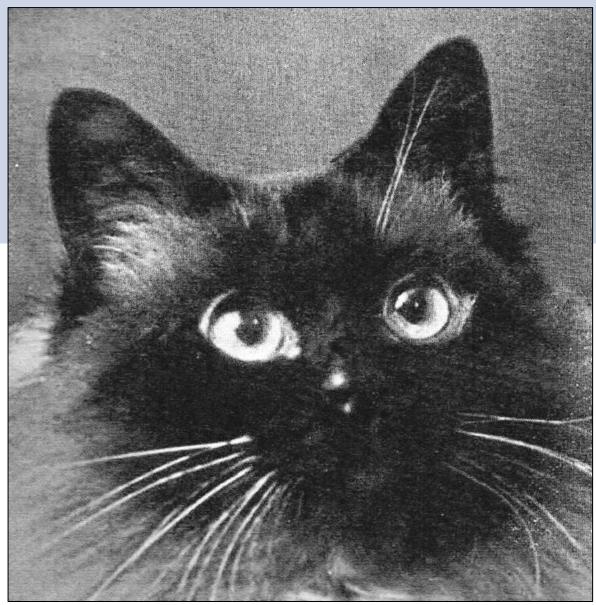
"Upon seeing the results in the following years, it is undeniable! In the photos, the cats of Marcel Baudoin-Crevoisier have a head distinctly more rounded and fur much longer than found with other breeders." She then asks Poirier: -

"have you never had the chance to meet him and ask that question?"

In her response she reveals: -

"When I asked him the question: 'What did you use use for your breeding?' he replied 'a Siamese, gloved and with long fur'. Then she added later: "..he responded to all my explicit questions in an evasive manner, clouding the trail. He was bizarre; he stuck to the history, always gliding over any doubts of their origin. I could not get any clear answers."

But regardless, Poirier did not question the value of the results of Baudoin's efforts. In fact, she concluded:-



Close-up head-shot of 'INTERNATIONAL CHAMPION DIEU D'ARAKAN' bred and owned by Marcel Baudoin-Crevoisier.

Photo: 'Vie A La Campagne', April 15, 1935. Image courtesy of The CFA Foundation

"There is no doubt that Baudoin had done a good job, with an intelligent breeding program that he continued to use. The original Madalpour line from which his stud 'Lon Saito' came was good. The descendants of 'Poupee' had been produced using regular blood relations with the intervention of Siamese cats, certainly gloved and probably with long coats. It was a prudent and controlled intervention, since the gloves were inherited by the new generations. Baudoin continued to 'frequently renew the blood of the breeding cats'. He wrote that, but he certainly did not tell how!"

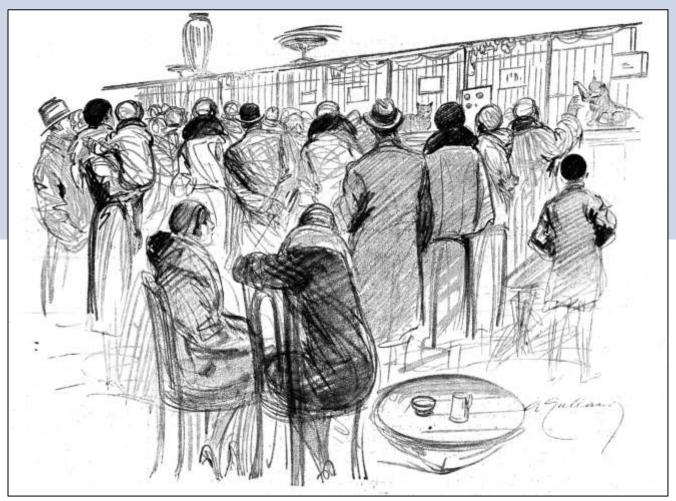
# Giselle Barnay added:-

"Baudoin also specified that the Siamese and the Birman cats share their origins and he added 'a crossed Birman and a gloved Siamese produced, in the second generation, a stong proportion of Birman characteristics. And these cats, from new crosses between themselves, produced kittens with at least 80-90% Birman characteristics.' Perhaps he was lucky."

# **CHANGES IN OWNERSHIP**

Despite his considerable successes on the show bench before and during 1932, and whilst French cat breeding continued to improve, gained status; Baudoin appears to have become discouraged. Barnay tells us that in June 1932 he wrote that his financial affairs were difficult and that cat food was expensive etc.

In 1933, he decided to sell the whole of his breeding stock. Two cats were purchased by the Swiss Siamese breeder, Abbott Marcel Chamonin, who wrote passionately about the Birman cat under the pseudonym of 'Marcel Reney'. These were 'Rose de Mogock', the daughter of Bijou de Madalpour, and 'Poupee de Rangoon', the daughter of 'Rose de Magock'.



Spectators observing the cats at the Show run by the Cat Club de Paris, at the Salle Wagram, in December 1930.

This was the year in which 'Dieu d'Arakan' was born.

Drawing from 'L'Illustration', December 20, 1930. Image courtesy of The Harrison Weir Collection

This same Marcel Chamonin had organised the first cat shows in Switzerland at the beginning on 1933, with the permission of the Cat Club of Paris and the Cat Club of Champagne. At the time of the purchase, he was the general secretary of the Cat Club of Geneva, which considerably later in 1952, became independent. He was also a judge of the International Federation of Cats in Switzerland and loved his cats enormously.

Barnay informs us that two other Champions bred by Baudoin were sold in Belgium, to Mlle Rouselle, the general scretary of the Cat Club of Liege. These were 'Lon Saito de Madalpour' born in 1927, and 'Zaquelle de Mandalay' born in 1931.

According to Marcel Chamonin (Reney), Baudoin sold the remainder of the cats to the Italian Princess Ratibor Honenlohe in 1933 for the sum of 30,000 francs. At that time, she was living at Satirana castle, at Lomellina-Pavie. She in turn had given them to the Duke of Aoste. Finally they ended up at the Francecavilla-Bisio Castle, the home of a couisn of the Duke, the Countess Elisabetta Giriodi-Panissero, who appears to have loved the animals a great deal.

Barnay gives further illumination:-

"When she (the Countess) died in January 1985, she did not own a single cat, but always had about thirty dogs. Mme Norma Bagnasco, still responsible for the bursar's office at the Francavilla castle in 1987, was a little girl just before the Second World War. She did not remember 'Dieu d'Arakan', maybe he had died, because he had been very ill but she recalled perfectly Regina de Rangoon and she had seen the medals won at shows in times past, by the two champions of beauty. The servants and gardeners had been responsible for looking after the cats."

# **SIBLINGS & SHOWS**

Although it is likely that Monsieur Baudoin would have bred full and/or half siblings to 'Dieu d'Arakan', there are no records which can be tapped to confirm this. We do know that he bred from related lines, but to affirm that any of these were in fact siblings could only be based on conjecture.

'Dieu d'Arakan' appears to have first been shown in a class of young males on April 11 and 12, 1931 at the Second International Cat Show, in Rheims, where he



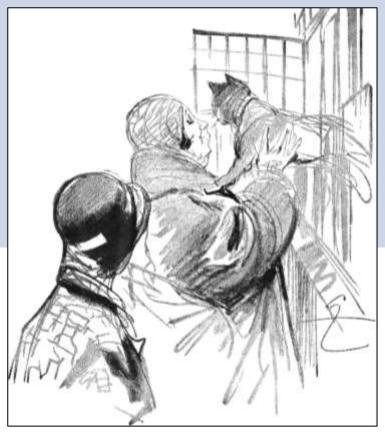
Bronze Medal of the CAT CLUB DE PARIS (1929) by Gallo Medal from the Harrison Weir Collection.

Carried off his first prize. This show was run by Cat Club of Champagne.

Success followed success. Poirier reported:

"In the cat shows of 1932, the cats of Marcel Baudoin-Crevoisier took away all the prizes." and Gisele Barnay added:- "I checked all this in the papers for that year! At the Cat Club of Paris show in January and the Cat Club of Champagne show at Reims in February, they were all ecstatic! 'The Birman cats were splendid, the international champions Dieu d'Arakan, Lon Saito de Madalpour and the amusing Reine de Rangoon, all from M. Baudoin.' The second prize went to Zaquelle de Mandalay, also from Baudoin's breeding and owned by Mlle Rouselle. For him 1932 was a glorious year. Birman cats were even celebrated in the columns of a specialist magazine, the 'Kathimerini' in Athens."

Among Baudoin's winners were the males 'Soleil d'Arakan', 'Bouli d'Arakan', 'Roult d'Arakan, 'Prince de Rangoon' and 'Dieu d'Arakan'. In the females were 'Rose de Magock', 'Poupee de Rangoon', her daughter 'Reine de Rangoon' and 'Zaquelle de Mandalay'. These notable wins and the beauty of the cats brought more breeders into the fold. Madame Chaumont-Doisy, a breeder of Siamese became interested in the Birman cat from around 1930 onwards. And Mademoiselle Boyer of the famous 'Kaabaa' cattery began her interest in Birmans around this time and did some excellent work with the breed.



Exhibitor and observer at the Salle Wagram Paris Show 1930.

Drawing from 'L'Illustration', December 20, 1930.

Image courtesy of The Harrison Weir Collection

## **BREEDING & PROGENY**

Madame Simone Poirier of the famous 'de Crespieres' cattery line had the following to say about 'Dieu d'Arakan' in a book co-authored with Gisel Barney, and later translated into English by Alwyn Hill.-

"Dieu d'Arakan was superb. He showed off some magnificent eyes, which the black and white photos do not even give an inkling of. The quality of his fur was perfect and quite close to the actual standard. He was more squat, and more rounded than the first Birman cats, as you have already remarked."

In a later conversation about the post-war cats of the 1950's she reiterated:

"Perhaps, although 'Dieu d'Arakan', in 1930, already had a very 'round' look. He was rather an exception for the period. 'Orloff' and 'Aria de Kaabaa' were like him. Their eyes were of a profound blue, magnificent and have become very rare today."

'Dieu d'Arakan' is likely to have sired successfully for Marcel Baudoin-Crevoisier, but again, there is no documentary evidence extant of his progeny.

It was not until the end of 1933, that the Central Feline Society of France and the reunited Cat Clubs of Paris and Champagne got together to form the French Feline Federation (FFF) which was presided over by M.

ble weather has also had a very bad less of colour in our blues. It is ead Mrs. Yeates' and Mr. House's blues of this last show season. Mr. unsoundness exhibited is due to the 12 for eye colour. Mrs. Yeates says few really good eyes in her classes. In type in blue Persians has improved though there are few with yes. The paler blue is nable colour now, and

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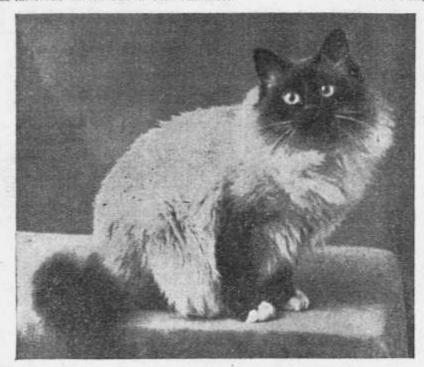
nany cases wonderfully ow we must strive to important of all points, urts) and coat and add our and brilliance of ady so beautiful Blue

#### Cats Abroad

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weather has also had a very bad of colour in our blues. It is of colour in our blues. It is Mrs. Yeates' and Mr. House's Nature's protection, and means that no food must describe the season. Mr. be taken until the throat enables it to eat. The oundness exhibited is due to the high temperature gradually drops, and then, when for eye colour. Mrs. Yeates says the throat is better recovery is quick. Lacteol is a lactic acid bacillus preparation, and disinfects the recovery and events resistance. month and creates resistance.



Sacred Burmese Cat, Dieu d'Arakan, the property of M. Marcel Baudoin, Cat Club de Paris. The photograph was sent to us by Mrs.

# THE FEEDING OF KITTENS

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After discussion at some length, Woodiwiss moved that: "Permissional Championship show in Harrogate be

Described as 'A Sacred Burmese Cat' this photo of 'Dieu d'Arakan' - was published in 'Fur and Feather' in 1932. Image: The Harrison Weir Collection.

Maurice Guingand. There was only one book of origins (stud-book) and this was the responsibility of the Cat Club de Paris. It was at this time that the registration of suffixes became more widespread.

The best and only references for progeny from 'Dieu d'Arakan' are those gleaned from details of his later years when he very fortunately came under the careful stewardship of the Countess Elisabetta Giriodi-Panissero.

In the book by Marcel Reney, 'Nos Amis Les Chats' (Our Cat Friends) published in 1947, Chamonin claims to have visited the Francecavilla-Bisio castle, near Novi-Ligure, in 1936. There he apparently saw 'Dieu d'Arakan' and 'Reine de Rangoon', surrounded by seventeen cats and their fourteen kittens! Poirier then sadly advises:

"Since then, no one has heard any more about them."

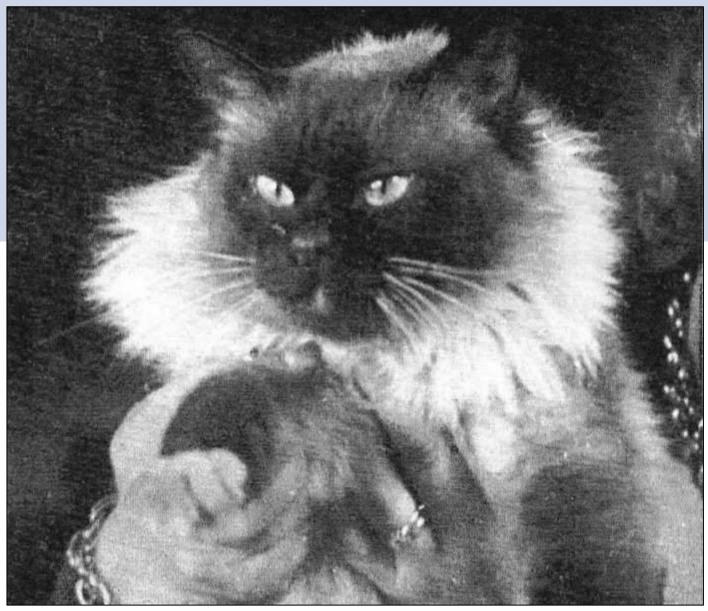
Even sadder, is that Marcel Chamonin's own cats were also eventually lost. These included those he had bought from Baudoin and 'Sinh de Saint-Hubert' whom he had purchased from Mlle Rouselle in Belgium. Those that remained were tragically lost in a fire at his home. So unless some of the kittens held by the Countess were used for breeding and or passed into new ownership, it seems likely that there

are no verifiable offspring of record for the magnifcent 'Dieu d'Arakan'.

#### **IN SUMMARY**

Over many decades, new colours of Birmans have been introduced. Firstly 'Blues', then later 'Chocolate and Lilac'. Later again, the 'Red' and 'Tortie' series, and then in the last 30 plus years or so, the 'Tabbypoints'.

Monsieur Baudoin-Crevoissier's reactions to all these



INTERNATIONAL CHAMPION DIEU D'ARAKAN, bred and owned by Marcel Baudoin-Crevoisier.

Photo: 'Vie A La Campagne', April 15, 1935. Image courtesy of The CFA Foundation

developments would have been immense and extremely negative. He was most apprehensive about what was the vogue of introducing even 'blue' into what were purely 'seal' bloodlines, when he spoke to Madame Poirier in 1967. She elaborates: -

"Without being reactionary, perhaps he was not completely wrong. He feared the worst! He thought that the sacred cat of Burma, the one the first breeders had shown, especially his 'Dieu d'Arakan', was the most beautiful cat in the world."

Then she quoted Marcel directly: -

"The harmony of his colours, the beauty of his coat and marvellous collar create an almost supernatural animal."

He said, "To want to change these characteristics is a crime of treason."

Perhaps Monsieur Baudoin was right for the times. In his view it was important to set the conformation and to be seen striving to breed consistently good seal-points before attempting to branch off on a new colour tangent. And he had proven to all-comers, that he knew what he was talking about.

His 'Dieu d'Arakan' **was** the new standard, and in him, the cat world got a surprising glimpse of what could be achieved. He was simply a cat that once seen, could never be forgotten.

# **References:**

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  (2006) by Alwyn Hill, translated from the French. Original
  Authors: Simone Poirier & Gisele Barnay.
- 'Vie A La Campagne', 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1935.
- 'Les Races De Chats' (1930) by Dr V. Phillipe Jumaud.
- 'L'Illustration' 30<sup>th</sup> December, 1930
- 'L'Extraordinaire Adventure du Chat sacre de Birmanie' by Prof. Alain Lescart (2020) and emails.