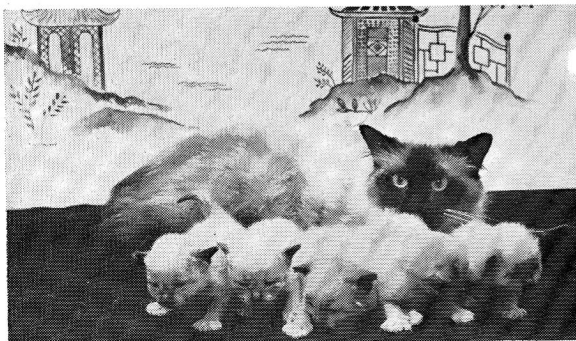


THE SACRED CAT OF BURMA
(Birman in U.S.A., Birmanie in France)
Verner E. Clum



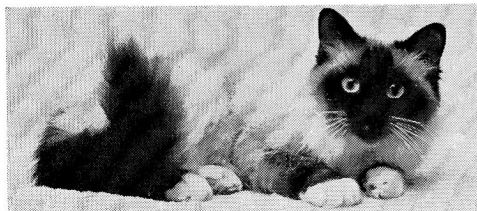
Kittens sired by: International, Ch. Neko De Lao Tsun of Gaylands & dam, Opom De Lao Tsun of Gaylands

When I was over in England, I visited all the famous Catteries, and his was one I enjoyed greatly. I was interested in the unusual cats, as he called them, but when I became aware of what he was using to produce the color point, I realized at my age to become involved in the uncertainty of true breeding was not prudent.

When I came back from the Mayo Clinic, I visited with the Frankenbergers' at Downers Grove, Illinois. They took me to the "Short Hair Show", where I had the good fortune to meet Col. and Mrs. Rau, who had recently returned from a long stretch in Paris, and were stationed at Fort Sheridan at that time. They showed the pictures of these cats, and all the material of interest. They told of how rare they were, and how lovable they were. At the time my health was such that I knew I could not take on this breed and do it justice. I hesitated to go by and see them for fear I would be tempted.

The following year I went out on a trip, and decided to go by and see the Raus and the cats, even though I knew I shouldn't.

I fell in love with them the minute I saw them, and had to have a pair or a breeding female. As you know, I didn't rest until I had my dear little Opom. Then came Misty and Pia, who later became the First International Champion, along with Neko, in America.



Ronde Laot of Gaylands

I have been in the cat fancy for nearly fifty years. I have always had Persian cats, my first one came in 1918 from "The Lavander" Cattery of our beloved Elsie Hydon.

I decided I would like to have another breed, and chose a colorpoint, from "Sterling Webb" in England. I corresponded with him, and as he hadn't a show specimen at the time, I decided to wait.

I worked very hard to have them recognized in the United States. In 1967 they had their first competition and their own "Sacred Cat of Burma Show". This was held at the Madison Square Garden in New York City. Rita Swen-

son was the first judge to handle them. They were up in the ninth ring under Mr. Gebhardt, who made remarks to the audience about them. He had judged the breed in Paris. The cats were honored by Eastern Airlines, having photographers cover the arrival of these rare cats, and the picture appeared in the hometown paper of the Hostess holding Pia, and I, Neko, while planes soared above. The following appeared in the New York Mirror:

"Cat Show Gets Feline Royalty"

Two top cats in the Buddhist feline hierarchy were given special priestly treatment on their arrival yesterday at Kennedy Airport.

The cats, with fluffy gray fur, white paws, and blue eyes, are Neko De Leo-tsun and Pia De Leo-tsun, male and female relations of the sacred temple cats of Burma, believed by Buddhists to be reincarnations of temple priests.

Insured for \$10,000 each, the cats were flown here from Sarasota, Fla., to lend an air to the National Cat Show being held today and tomorrow at Madison Square Garden."

I am greatly concerned about these rare and handsome cats and their fate for there is a great amount of controversy in Europe, especially in France. If you are a member of one society, you cannot use the studs of the people belonging to the other society and visa versa, or register them. It has curtailed good breeding greatly. Hence, the breeding of a Birman to a colorpoint and one of the offspring was sent to the United States. This is the reason the Birman is an established breed, instead of a natural breed, which it is in the United States standard.

At my request the A.C.A. and the Canadian Cat Fanciers admitted them to their standards.

I have a magazine dated 1927 "Le Monde Felin", in which there is a picture of Mme. Marcelle Adam first importer of this breed in France in 1925. Her cattery name was "Madalpour". This proves, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the authenticity of the breed.

It was in 1916 that Major Gordon Russell helped to get some of the priests out of Tibet. In 1919 he went to live in France, and the priests sent him two Birman cats in gratitude for his kindness.

There has been much said about the relation of the Birman to the Siamese, both in origin and breeding.

There are detailed accounts of these cats in "The Cat", by Fernand Mery and "The Complete Cat", by Joseph R. Spies.

THE LEGEND

The Sacred Cats of Burma are, or at least were, raised in the temples of Burma. About the middle 1920's, a pair of these cats was smuggled out of a temple and brought to France. Another pair may have followed shortly thereafter, but this is not certain. In any event, for about 40 years now, these cats have been raised in western Europe — all descending from the original pair or perhaps two pair. The fact that this species has continued to exist for so long a time, being so closely re-bred, is evidence that the original cats must have been

very pure genetic specimens. Since all of the beautiful characteristics of this animal have continued to breed true, it is inconceivable that any new blood lines could have been introduced by the crossing with other breeds.

During World War II, the Sacred Cat of Burma almost died out (it was difficult enough in Europe to keep families together and alive). A few pair of these unusual cats remained however in France and Italy; and, after the war, the species slowly increased again. The breed is rare even now. In fact, it is amazing that any of the cats still exist.

An interesting legend is told about the Sacred Cat of Burma. To fully appreciate this story, you must transport yourself in thought to the ancient land of Burma — there the great Buddha idols and the beautiful temples illustrate the deep religious faith of the people. The belief of the Burmese people in reincarnation and their high respect and love for their priests provide the setting for our legend. The utmost in loving care and tender attention is given to the white-gloved temple cats because it is the Burmese belief that, after death, their priests return to the temples in the form of these sacred cats.

The origin of the legend you are about to hear dates back many centuries to the time when the Kmer people of Asia built magnificent temples of worship in order to pay homage to their gods. The Temple of Leo Tsun was such a temple. Set by a lovely lake in a valley surrounded by majestic towering mountains, this temple contained a beautiful golden goddess with shining sapphire blue eyes. Her name was Tsun-Kyan-Kse and it was her duty to watch the transmutation of souls. Mun-Ha, one of the most admired of the priests, often knelt in meditation before Tsun-Kyan-Kse. As the holy priest prayed and meditated, his beautiful and faithful white cat, Sinah, was always by his side.

One night as the moon rose, Mun-Ha was kneeling before the golden goddess, faithful Sinh at his side as usual, when raiders attacked the temple and the good priest was killed. At the moment of Mun-Ha's death, Sinh placed his paws upon his fallen master and faced the goddess. Immediately the white hairs of his body became golden as the light radiating from the beautiful goddess and her sapphire blue eyes became Sinh's very own. On his four legs, the light color shaded downward to a deep velvety brown except where the four paws rested gently on his adored master's body — and there the white color still remained as a sign of purity.

The next morning, the temple radiated a golden light — the other temple cats had been transformed like Sinh to reflect the golden hue of the sunset. Sinh never left his position of reverence after his master's death, but continued to gaze steadily into the eyes of the golden goddess. Seven days later, the faithful animal also died and carried with him into Paradise the soul of Mun-Ha.

Because of the above legend, the followers of Buddha in the ancient land of Burma guard carefully and treat very gently the sacred cats within whose bodies, they believe, live the souls of their departed, beloved priests. It is written: "Woe to anyone who, even

unwittingly, puts an end to one of these worshipped cats. The worst punishment will be in store for him and his guilty, tortured soul will find no rest for the whole of eternity." Only a few, and they must be proven worthy, are permitted to possess one of these beautiful creatures.

The Standard in America and Canada all call for Chocolate and Liliac points, but as Mrs. Rau states, they have never seen either in Europe. All of these cats are light in color when young, and darken later. In her opinion there should be only seal and blue points.

The gloves are most important (in Europe they count 40 pts. of the 100). They should be full at the wrist or ankle joint Symmetrical and **pure**, while if there are laces up the back hocks — so much the better, but lack of laces should not disqualify. Neither should one or several black toe pad be disqualifying. These cats are too rare to jeopardize for so small a defect, if it is a defect.

The body type is difficult to describe, but it should not be like the Himalayan or Colorpoint. Eye color should be dark blue, almost purple. Lighter blue in Blue point. No crossed eyes.

The diamond shaped mask over face, ears, and tail (which should be thick and bushy) all should be the same color. Dark seal, almost black in Seal point, and the Blue Point — beige-blue-grey. The ruff or collar should be full and thick, stand up and be light, almost white in color. Body color should be as light as possible, over the flanks and shoulders the coloration will be a little darker. Ears are medium sized.

Due to the scarcity of these animals, their wins have had to be with classes made up of my own cats. When the standards are perfected, and I am sure C.F.A. will iron them out, more of the breeders of this breed will be tempted to show. I am sure this breed will take its proper place in the Cat Fancy.

In all my breeding of cats, I have never had cats with the outstanding personalities and were more like a companion than the Birman. They are truly an exotic cat. All the cats I got from the Raus were the finest available in the world. They take little or no grooming and never knots, and are good eaters, never fussy.

My thanks to all who have made the recognition of this breed possible. I hope in the very near future I may see these cats up in finals when the judges have a more detailed description of necessary points.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Miss Clum is one of the most versatile people I have known. Not only has she bred, imported, raised and shown some of the finest Persian cats in the country, but she has that imagination, knowledge, exertion and determination to start a project and see it through to perfection. She has had truly fine collections of antiques, fans handkerchiefs, cups and saucers, laces, cat figurines, cat pins, jewelry, porcelains, and is currently collecting stamps. Her energy is boundless and I think she is only quiescent when asleep.

Twice, due to ill health, she was forced to give up her extensive breeding and showing of fine Persians, among whom were : Gr. Ch. Gayland's Dawn, Tr. Gr. Ch. Beamsley Sunshine of Gayland's, Imp., and Foxburrow Fantasia (litter sister of Foxburrow Frivolous). The above pair are the great-grandparents of Shawnee's Moonflight, many times Best Cat. Tr. Ch. Widdington Rosebud of Gaylands, another fine import, has won Hydon Goodwin Best Tabby and Tortie.

While on a trip after a stay at the Mayo Clinic, she first saw the Sacred Cats of Burma, and couldn't resist them. She fell completely in love with their beauty and uniqueness, and spent many hours at her desk and long distance phone compiling data and comparing and unifying standards so that they would have a chance for recognition and be eligible to compete in shows under the various associations. Her Sacred Cats (Burmans) were the first "All American", and the first International Champions in this country.

Her Gaylands cats have added much to many major catteries and their imprint can be seen in today's show rings. Although Miss Clum is now retired, she still maintains a lively interest in Persians and in the Fancy. She is at present living at 1243 Jungle Avenue North, St. Petersburg, Florida.

Augusta Clarendon