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**Comparison of different Tsigai sheep variants
according to the breeder countries**

by

András GÁSPÁRDY¹ and Alexandru NAGY²

- ¹, Szent István University, Faculty of Veterinary Science, Hungary, H-1078 Budapest, István u. 2., Tel./fax.: (36-1-)4784124, agaspard@univet.hu
², Research Station for Agriculture, Rumania, RO-3350 Turda, Judetul Cluj, Str. Agriculturii no. 27., tel.: (40-64-)311680, fax.: (40-64-)311134.

The Tsigai is an old, independent sheep of mountain origin. Many variants of the Tsigai have formed during its spreading in the South-Eastern part of Europe. According to this, we can distinguish the different variants based on the main purpose, conformation and colouration. However, a very important and practical kind of the grouping of the animals could be made by breeder country. Our comparison of the Tsigai variants could serve also the desired collaboration between the DAGENE members.

The whole Tsigai group can be divided into three sub-groups at least: the “Balkanian”, the “Carpathian” and the – let us call it – “Podolian”. Generally speaking about these sub-groups, the Balkanian one is more pigmented (blackish fleece, dark or spotted head and extremities), coarse wool producer, and kept for mutton production. The sheep of Carpathian sub-group has white fleece, crossbred wool, dark head, ears and legs, and is better in milk production. Animals belonging to the Podolian sub-group are totally white, relatively small and good in wool production.

The general description about the Tsigai variants is collected in the Table 1. The main sources of information were our own experiences and the EAAP databank.

Breeder countries of Balkanian sub-group.

Bulgaria. The famous representative of the Tsigai is the *Karbanat*. This name was given according to the breeding area called Karbanat-mountain. The animals are carrying long, coarse, mixed wool, which is often black, similarly to the colour of short hairs. Also the females are horned frequently. The tasty meat was the most important product in the history of this breed. (The *Pleven blackhead* contains Tsigai blood because it was created from this breed using Friesian and Hampshire mainly.)

Greece. The Greek breed of Tsigai is called *Thraki* after its breeding territory, Thrace. The often spotted animals are living in a relatively small, and from year to year decreasing population. The females are horned and good in milk production.

Turkey. The Turkish variant of the Tsigai is named *Kivircik*. The individuals of this small sized autochthon breed are living in different colour variety. The fleece contains hair. The main purpose is the mutton production.

Albania. The Albanian breed of Tsigai is also called *Ruda*, which is quite similar to the individuals of Podolian sub-group, because of the influence of the animals imported from the former Soviet Union. According to this effect the Albanian Tsigai is absolutely white and good in wool production.

Breeder countries of Carpathian sub-group.

Rumania. Rumania is a leader country of *Tigaie*-breeding from the size point of view. Four coat colour varieties can be found here, but the white and the reddish variant is the most popular. The finer wool production was the goal in the early history of the breed. However, the dairy purpose is set on the first place in some flock nowadays.

Hungary. The Tsigai is called often *Berke* according to the sandy-grey fleece colour of the newborn lamb. This colour will be lost by the age of about 4 months, and the fleece receives its white colour. Szentkirályi offered the “*black-and-white*” colour variant to be the Hungarian breed standard at the early years of 20th century. Because of the near connection with the Yugoslavian Tsigai, there is the danger, that the size of the animals increases and the horned character will be lost. (An other consequence of the use of some Yugoslavian rams that a *dairy Tsigai variant* has been developed. Today, this dairy variant is registered as an own sheep breed because of the absolutely different type of the animals and of the presence of other foreign genes.)

Slovakia. The Tsigai of this country is living in a large, stable population. The date of the Slovakian herd book establishment in the EAAP databank seems to be too old, older than the General Studbook of the Thoroughbred, which is questionable. The black-and-white population produces the wool and the milk at a good level. Here we have to call the attention to the very accurate registration of the production records and the conformation figures taken by the Slovakian breeders.

Czech Republic. The Tsigai is rather kept in the Moravian part of this country. The black-and-white animals bred in endangered size of population have coarser fibre than the medium but are also good in milk production.

Yugoslavian. The largest individuals of Tsigai are kept in this country, which are entirely hornless. Because of the steady selection in dairy direction this variant gives the highest amount of milk in average.

Some other derivatives of the Carpathian sub-group can be found in Croatia and in Poland with the more or less same characters.

Breeder countries of the Podolian sub-group.

Animals belonging to the Podolian sub-group are existing in Moravia, Ukraine and in the Russian Federation, and also in some places belonged former to the ex Soviet Union. As common feature of the animals bred in this countries can be said that they are totally white, relatively small and good in wool production. Concerning to the purpose and conformation we could suppose a remarkable Merino effect appeared in the past but for a long period of time.

We think that this list of the Tsigai variants according to the breeder countries is not a whole one. On the other hand there is the possibility to find other purebred variants of Tsigai sheep. It should be mentioned that the Tsigai is existing in many crossbred and improved form.

Regarding of the rare knowledge of the Tsigai breed group partly and generally we call the attention to the more precise registration, to the maintenance of the current or perhaps the former type of the endangered Tsigai variant.

Besides the phenotype the most modern evaluation of the genotype is urgently to be needed in the description and in the comparison of the different Tsigai variants.

At the same time, we must not forget the continuous and elaborate research of the Tsigai' history, which would also serve the more correct breeding work in the future as well as confirm even more the independency and speciality of the Tsigai.

Table 1.:

General information and characteristics about the Tsigai variants

	Rumania	Hungary	Slovakia	Czech Rep.	Yugoslavia
Local name	Tigaie	Cigája, Berke	Cigaja	Cigaja	Cigaja
Breed society	research institute	institute for quality control	institute for breeding	association of sheep breeding	<i>miss</i>
Herd book established	<i>miss</i>	1974	1700 (1961)	<i>miss</i>	<i>miss</i>
No. of ewes	2,500,000	600	96,000	600	250,000
No. of rams	90,000	25	2,800	25	500
Trend of population	increasing	stable	stable	decreasing	decreasing
Coat colour	white fleece, face and legs can be <u>white</u> , <u>reddish</u> , dark brown or black	white fleece, face and legs are <u>black</u>	white fleece, face and legs are <u>black</u>	white fleece, face and legs are <u>black</u>	white or <u>black</u> fleece, face and legs are black
Presence of horn	males -	(males) -	males -	males -	- -
Wool classification	medium	medium	medium	coarse	medium
Wither height, cm	67/63	74/68	72/68	72/67	75/67
Live weight, kg	58/41	80/55	75/50	75/55	85/60
Main purpose	wool milk meat	milk meat genetic resource	wool milk meat	milk meat wool	milk meat wool
Conservation activity	-	Exists	-	-	-
Status of endangerment	-	potentially endangered	-	endangered	-

Table 1. continued

General information and characteristics about the Tsigai variants

	Bulgaria	Albania	Greece	Turkey
Local name	Karbanat	Cigaja, Ruda	Thraki	Kivircik
Breed society	<i>miss</i>	ministry of agriculture	university	research institute
Herd book established	<i>miss</i>	<i>miss</i>	<i>miss</i>	<i>miss</i>
No. of ewes	100,000	5,000	20,000	<i>miss</i>
No. of rams	3000	120	<i>miss</i>	<i>miss</i>
Trend of population	decreasing	decreasing	decreasing	decreasing
Coat colour	white, brown or <u>black</u> fleece, face and legs are black, skin pigmented	white fleece, face and legs are <u>white</u>	white fleece, black or brown <u>spots</u> on the face and legs	white, black or brown fleece, black or brown <u>spots</u> on the face and legs
Presence of horn	males (females)	males -	males females	males (females)
Wool classification	coarse	medium	<i>miss</i>	coarse
Wither height, cm	<i>miss</i> /50	67/55	63/55	<i>miss</i> /62
Live weight, kg	<i>miss</i> / <i>miss</i>	65/40	<i>miss</i> /38	50/42
Main purpose	meat milk wool	wool milk meat	milk meat wool	meat wool milk
Conservation activity	<i>miss</i>	-	-	-
Status of endangerment	<i>miss</i>	-	-	-

