

Country report

**Legend of the four horned Racka
or whether in the sight of what did Eugene of SAVOY delight?**

by

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Eugene of SAVOY (1663-1736) took part even after the definite driving out of Ottomans from Buda Castle in many victorious battles. However, the commander-in-chief who remained a bachelor until his death spend his free time for arts and science, as well as he stayed much in the Belvedere in Vienna built a summer residence.

Salomon KLEINER (1731–40), the famous illustrator of the 18th century pictures also the Animal Garden (Menagerie) with its special habitants in his comprehensive work about the Belvedere in Vienna. Among others, a copperplate immortalizes the four horned ram kept in the paddock for sheep. According to the caption the individual presented is of Valaska breed (*Walachisches Schaf; Walachian Sheep*). A primitive white sheep with black face and black legs can be seen in the picture whose both primary and secondary horns describe three-quarter circular arc. The book just tells about the origin of the individual, that it is of a foreign land. The question is, however, that the individual really was a Valaska, and if the Valaska was ever really such a sheep?

BOHM (1878) published a picture with a caption of Walachian Zackel-Sheep (*Walachisches Zackelschaf*) 150 years after the completion of KLEINER's copperplate. Also here, a white sheep with black face and legs is discernable but whose horn is grown twisted along its straight axis. The Agricultural Institute of Leipzig got the ram presented in the picture from Ernest II, Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (1818–93), who sent the valuable breeding animal from the family estate in Káposztafalva (Kapsdorf, Grabasice) in Szepes county.

By approx. 50 years before the appearance of the four-horned sheep in Belvedere Daniel SPEER (1683) gave a true contemporary report about the Hungarian agriculture of the late 17th century based on his adventure. He wrote in his book the followings: „Ihre 2. 4. und 6. ho^ernichte Schaff oder Widder seynd noch einmal so groß, als die Schaff im Wu^ertemberger Land, sie tragen die lange Wolle, worvon man u^eber die Roß-Kutzen machet, manches Haar ist la^enger als eine halbe Elen...”. The beginning of the citation is really interesting: „Their sheep of two, four and six horn...”. The further parts of the citation allow us to conclude that

the questionable animal is the Hungarian Sheep (*magyar juh*; *racka*). The fleece of long staple, the body size, as well as the utilization is typical for Racka. One Hungarian ell (rőf, *Elen*/Ellen, sing, ulna) is equal to 62.2 cm, so half an ell will be near to 30 cm which is an acceptable value as the staple length of Racka.

Whether the place of description can give a clue to determine the breed? In the chapter XXIV Simplicissimus (alias SPEER) visited the upper region of river Tisza, the northern area of the Hungarian Great Plain between Eger and Kisvárd. This country part covers the traditional breeding district of Racka.

The animals seen by Simplicissimus carried horns in both sexes. The Hungarian Sheep is always horned in males and in females too.

According to these above documentations there have been lived multiple horned sheep also in the Carpathian-Basin. Their true onetime existence can be proven by archaeological finds. Thanks to the delicious excavation work and to the luck there are recent excavation materials (split horn, poll, and skull) from region of Hungary.

Through excavations of the Budapest History Museum three almost complete or partial skulls of multiple-horned sheep came to the surface. Two of them came from Buda Castle (Budapest, Szent György str. 4-10, excavation led by András Végh), the third was found on the Hajógyári Island (Budapest, excavation led by Anikó Tóth and Zoltán Havas). The fragments were dated to the 14-15th century (all the three findings are yet unpublished).

The identification of the breed could probably be carried out by use of anatomical or genetic comparative investigation.

Likely, the four-horned individuals of the twisted horned Racka had horns seen to follow an arch rather than a straight axis.

Regarding the breed history, we would like to call the attention to the *in libro* concept of conservation (GÁSPÁRDY et al., 2010). A longer version of our technical term is *in libro conservatio in causa emoriendi*, namely the conscious preservation of the characteristics entered of an already extinct domestic animal species. The meaning of the *entered* (in a book; *booked*) conservation in broader sense is the preservation of all the remaining knowledge, keepsake, documents and material inheritance of a still living rare breed. As a reason for the *in libro* conservation the same arguments can be presented as for the *in vivo* and *in vitro* ways of conservation. The keeping in life of an extinct breed does not crop up but the “keeping alive”, its one-time presence in the common knowledge is an important role. The cradle and the history of a breed should not be forgotten. Sometimes, very interesting facts (like multiple horns, swept horn angle, feral or polled variants) were documented in the history of the Racka breed group (GÁSPÁRDY, 2010a/b).

Also our past as well as our inherited professional knowledge should not be allowed to be wasted. This type of conservation needs financial and technical support. The maintenance of such collection can not be possible without governmental subsidise! The collected materials should be saved in original form (e.g. old documents), and according to the possibilities should be copied on data media (e.g. microfilm, digital medium). At the same time, these requirements call the attention to the conservation of the previous information (e.g. written history) about the still surviving rare breeds too.

The *in libro* conservation seriously demands the newest research methods in order to get more and more information about the breeds. Especially for the breeds extinct the modern research (e.g. DNA analysis) is almost the single one which would serve additional knowledge for us.

The Racka has provided our ancestors with feed stuff and with wool, and with many other products throughout many centuries, so it should be kept in our mind their preservation