



Original Contribution

**THE BULGARIAN PRIMITIVE HORSE IN THE AREA OF
STARA PLANINA MOUNTAIN**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper was to classify the herds of primitive horses found in the Central Balkan National Park, the Stara Planina Mountain, located between Karlovo and Kazanlak in Bulgaria. The average numbers of herds included in the study were the following: those in the Triglav Peak comprised 17 mares and 1 stallion, while those in the Sinanitsa Peak consisted of 14 mares and 1 stallion. Predator activities made it difficult for the foals in each group to survive. Fortunately, the herds are highly reproductive and hence serve as breeding animals. Our comparative studies led us to conclude that these herds belong to the Karakachan horse type. This was also confirmed by the rearing method which is typical of the Karakachan people. An additional fact was that the owners of the two herds are hereditary Karakachans who are usually averse to use of stallions from other breeds.

Key words: Local Mountain Horses, Exterior.

INTRODUCTION

Over time the primitive horses have developed and adapted themselves to local circumstances and to needs of humans. Harnessed in a pack they have served mainly for agricultural and forestry purposes or singly as general work horses.

Horse-breeding in Bulgaria dates back to centuries of history and is closely related to the historical development of the country. At the end of the 19th century there were local horse groups in Bulgaria. These horses were short and lacked the grace associated with today's survivors (1-5). After 1885 the newly formed Bulgarian army and agricultural enterprises caused the importation of horses of various breeds and created large farms for rearing and breeding them. Selection work with horses has enjoyed special care and interest by the state.

Nevertheless, primitive local horses continued to exist as separate herds in some regions of the country; some of them

absolutely isolated. According to Petrov et al. (3), typical representatives of that group of horses are the Deliorman, the Rila and the Stara Planina and Karakachan horses. It is quite easy to differentiate these breeds.

There is no published information of mountain horses in Bulgaria in recent years. In this connection, the present paper aims at determining the class to which these studied herds belong.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

We visited the Alpine pasture grounds at the foot of the Triglav Peak – 2275 m altitude and the Sinanitsa Peak – 1600 m altitude, the Central Balkan National Park, the Stara Planina Mountain, located between Karlovo and Kazanlak. The usual method for exterior description has been used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The average numbers of herds in the study are the following: those at the foot of the Triglav Peak consist of 17 mares and 1 stallion while those around the Sinanitsa Peak comprised 14 mares and 1 stallion (**Figures 1 and 2**). Predators made it difficult for the foals in each herd to survive. The herds are used mainly for

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breeding purposes, which is a good reason to take them as reproductive. Horses excluded from the herd and reared under completely different conditions are used for work.



Figure 1. Karakachan horses at the foot of the Triglav Peak



Figure 2. Karakachan horses at the foot of the Sinanitsa Peak

The rearing conditions are very harsh, especially in the winter. The all-year round pasture rearing is a rule for the two herds. In winter the herds go down to lower pasture grounds where they continue to feed on pasture grass only. The grass in these pastures almost never withers and it is a source of high-caloric food that is evident from the excellent body condition of the horses. The only additional nutrition is cooking salt that is provided twice or three times a year and horses take it with relish. Salt is spread directly on the grass or over larger stones (**Figure 3**).

Selected offspring of these animals are set apart for breeding purposes. The isolated rearing of the horses is a tradition for the Karakachan people till this day. As a result of the applied inbreeding, which according to Petrov, Al. (3) has no negative impact, the horses from those two breeds are equal as a type. The predominant colours are brown and grey. From information provided by the owners the change of stallions from other herds rarely occurs, and this accounts for the

segregated breeding of these animals.



Figure 3. Salt is spread directly on the grass

Mating of mares, pregnancy and foaling take place mostly on the pasture ground. The newly born foal is able to follow its mother immediately after foaling. In this regard the herd has a specific behaviour which does not allow for the mare and the foal to be separated while the stallion serves as a very good guard.



Figure 4. Karakachan horses are short in size

Stallions and mares from both herds are low in size, and this is due to their shorter limbs (**Figure 4**). The head carries a large forehead and a slightly elongated facial part. The neck is medium in length, wide and well connected to the body. The withers are average in height; the back and the loin area are long, wide and slightly jutting out. The croup is very well developed and the chest is wide, long, but not very deep. From the exterior this horse type has a proportionate body constitution which looks massive due to the larger width and the good muscle structure.

In conclusion, by comparing the horses from the two studied herds with the description provided by Petrov, Al. (3), it becomes evident that they belong to the Karakachan horse type. This is also confirmed by the rearing method, which is typical for the Karakachan people. An additional fact is that the owners of the two herds are hereditary

Karakachans who loathe using stallions from other breeds.



Figure 5. Karakachan horses are still used as pack animals

Over time the rearing method has changed tremendously. For example, the horses from both herds are on pasture grounds with no sheds all year round. It is quite probable that at present the use of the Karakachan horses has been changed. In timber industry they are still used as pack animals (**Figure 5**) but probably serve as good draught animals in the

field as well.

CONCLUSIONS

The horses from the two studied herds belong to the autochthonic Karakachan horse. The way of rearing and the economic usage have been completely changed. Both herds are reared on highland pastures all the year round and are used mainly as reproductive.

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