



GUSFAND

GUSFAND (Mid. Pers. *gōspand*, sheep, ovine). In Persian a clear distinction is made between ewe (*miš*), ram (*quč*), and lamb (*barra*). In certain dialects tens of words are used to describe sheep according to age, sex, and physical characteristics, such as color, pattern of its fleece, shape of its ear, and so on (Digard, 1981, pp. 37, 65-66; Digard, Planhol, and Bazin, 1982; Rayfield, 1986; Rouholamini, 1967).

Domestication. The earliest signs of domestication of sheep have been found in Kurdistan and date back to 9,200 B.C.E. (Tetry, 1974, pp. 1158-59; Epstein, 1971, pp. 224, 263, 277). The main species is the Asian sheep (*Ovis Orientalis* Linné), which still exists in the world (*quč-e kuhi* in Persian, *pāzan* in Lori) from Turkey to India and Central Asia (Missonne, 1959, pp. 38-39). Traces of sheep husbandry have been found in archeological sites in Persia dating back to the 7th millenia. Gradually, as a result of domestication as well as natural selection, mouflon, or wild sheep, lost its characteristics and acquired those of sheep, and sheep husbandry gave birth to an ancient mode of agro-pastoral life based on the use of high-altitude summer pastures, which led, under the pressure of the Mongol invasion, from the 14th century onwards, to the present Turco-Persian pastoral nomadic life (Hesse, 1980; Zeder, 1985; Briant, 1982; Planhol, 1968).

Livestock and breed. Even today, despite its shortcomings and difficulties, sheep husbandry in Persia is among its most important in the Middle East and, no doubt, in Asia. Only a few years ago, the sheep population of Afghanistan reached about 21.5 million heads (Dupree, 1980, p. 48) and that of Tajikistan,



2.9 million heads (*Narodnoe*, pp. 254-56). In Persia the ovine livestock had risen from 31 million heads in 1341 Š./1962-63 and 28 million heads in 1355 Š./1976-77 (*Iran Almanac*, 1977, p. 216) to 35 million heads in 1361 Š./1982-83 (*A Statistical Reflexion*, p. 70). Although approximate, these figures clearly show the importance of sheep in everyday life in Persia. It surpasses all other cattle and its products are the most sought after (Ardelan; Jones).

There are, however, important regional disparities in sheep breeding in Persia. Khorasan is the most important province with more than 3 million heads, followed by Western Azarbaijan, the Central Province, and Eastern Azarbaijan, each with more than 2 million heads. Conversely, in some other provinces with more arid climates (Zanjān, Yazd, Kermān, Bušehr, Baluchistan, Ilām), the sheep are outnumbered by their more sturdy and more polyvalent eternal rivals, the goat (see [BOZ](#)).

The variety of natural constraints and human needs have contributed to the selection of various regional breeds of sheep. Only the Persian breeds of sheep have been subject to an overall zootechnical survey (Sattāri, 1349 Š./1970). Among the most noteworthy, for meat production, we can mention the *šāl* breed from the region of Qazvin, the *kordi* breed from Qučān and Bojnurd in Khorasan, the *mokān* breed from Azarbaijan, and the *sanjābi* breed from Kermānšāh; for milk: the *māzandarāni* breed, the *māku* breed from Azarbaijan, the *lori* breed from Lorestān and Baḳtiāri; for wool: *qal'-e-kuh* breed from the region of Varāmin, the *kermāni* breed, and the *balučī* breed; and for fur: the famous *qarakol* breed from the region of Saraḳs in Khorasan, also from Afghanistan and Central Asia (Balland, 1977; 1979), as well as the *zandi* breed from the region of Varamin. Common to all the breeds of sheep in Persia—except for those of the Caspian region, which once again mark its difference—is a mass of fat (*domba*) on its hip and tail, reaching up to 70 cm and weighing some 10 kg, so much that sometimes a small cart has to be harnessed to the animal to carry its mass (Dieulafoy, 1989, p. 197). This fat has a rather particular taste and is used in Persian cooking, especially for preparing the famous *āb-gušt* (q.v.) as well as pastries.

Sheep husbandry products. Despite the emphasis on meat, milk, or wool, brought about here and there by genetic improvement, the Persian breeds of sheep remain by and large rustic and, as a result, polyvalent. As a matter of fact, in traditional sheep husbandry the animal is bred for its wool, without which the carpet industry would not have existed in Persia, its milk, and its by-products (*māst*, *duḡ*, *rowḡan*, etc.), which on the eve of the Revolution of



1978-79 provided 51 percent of the animal protein consumed by the Persians, and its meat (18 percent of the protein consumed; Nyrop, p. 354), not to mention such other products as skin, fat, gut, horn, etc (Sattari, 1969). Since then, the growth of the population and the change in its dietary habits, coupled with the shortage in the supply of red meat at the time that the demand for it was on the increase, has moved Persia further away from the revolutionary goal of food self-sufficiency (Brun and Dumont; McLachlan; see [DĀM-DĀRĪ](#)).

Styles and techniques of sheep husbandry. The sturdiness of the sheep in Persia is much related to the conditions of its breeding. Sheep breeding style has continued to remain predominantly traditional and family-based, which is sometimes associated with small agricultural concerns — most of the time subsistence breeding, rarely exceeding several tons of sheep grazing on stubble or common pastures around the village, and sometimes with the nomadic lifestyle, which accounts for about half of the livestock population. Even where commercial-size sheep breeding is practiced, the technique adopted is of the extensive kind, using open air natural pastures. Sheep breeding in confined farm buildings is rare, except in very hot regions (e.g., *Ḳuzestān*, central desert), where underground sheepfolds have to be dug.

It is within these two frameworks that sheep breeding assumes its most importance. Some large nomadic breeders of the *Zāgros* (Digard; Black-Michaud) as well as some large sedentary breeders of *Khorasan* (Papoli-Yazdi), *Kermān* (Stöber; Bradburg) or Eastern *Azarbaijan* (Tapper) own flocks of over several thousand heads, which they send far away to *Ḳuzestān*, *Māzandarān*, *Kurdistan*, or the *Alborz* mountains to pasture, following a complicated itinerary, combining different forms of transhumance, the size and modality of which vary according to the economic context. The flocks are entrusted to shepherds accompanied by shepherd dogs (see [ĀUPĀN](#); [DOG](#)). Each proprietor identifies his sheep by a cut in their ears or a hot iron marking on their snouts.

These large breeders have increasingly specialized in fattening the stock and hand over the lamb fattened on summer pastures to the *čubdār*, who acts on behalf of urban slaughterhouses. Sheepbreeding agro-industrial units, such as *Marvdašt* complex, with a capacity of 350,000 sheep, remain the exception.

Recent evolutions. The return of the nomads to their status quo ante and the temporary disruption of meat imports that accompanied the Revolution of 1978-79, have reversed the trend. The new authorities in the new regime have



shown remarkable prudence and realism in this area. While the modern production sector has not been neglected, of which Āstān-e Qods-e Rażawi in Mašhad (Hourcade, 1989) is a good example, a policy of supporting agricultural prices has been adopted and steps have been taken to restore pastures. A great deal, however, remains to be done to bring Persian sheep breeding to its optimal level, such as raising technical standards and improving local breeds, and at the same time preserving the pastures that are gradually deteriorating almost everywhere. As for Afghanistan, as a result of the war, the situation of sheep breeding is in such a catastrophe that it would not be an exaggeration to say that it has to be rebuilt anew.

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