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Morphological traits of the "Pantesco" donkey

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ABSTRACT

The Pantelleria donkey is mentioned in prestigious zootechnical texts and treatises of the late 19th and early 20th century Authors such as Chiari, Mascheroni, Dechambre and others. In ancient times, when the Arab colonial extension in the Mediterranean reached its peak, a number of donkeys was transferred to the isle of Pantelleria southwest from Sicily. They served as draft animals and means of locomotion. In this environment - scarcely suitable for the breeding of farm animals, considering the geo-morphological conditions of the island - one of the most precious and valued donkey races of the Mediterranean basin has its origins: the Pantelleria donkey. Unfortunately, during World War II, Pantelleria was transferred in one of the most important theatres of war in the Mediterranean and the few remaining subjects of the race, once highly esteemed and frequently exported, were almost extirpated. Since then, various efforts have been made to recover the "Pantesco" donkey, but only in 1989 the Regional Forest Administration launched a project to reconstitute this particular population. Owing to comprehensive and accurate research, three males and six females with a percentage of 80 to 90% of "Pantesco" blood could be recovered. The aim of this recovery plan was to prevent the loss of a genotype of great historical and biological value - in Sicily no less than in other European and Asian regions. Currently the "Pantesco" donkey population - finally registered at the general index of equine races and populations - consists of 51 subjects.

The objective of our study was to determine the morphological type of this donkey population in order to provide useful data for its ethnic identification. The most significant morphometric traits of the thirty "Pantesco" donkeys examined (15 brood-mares, 13 stallions and 2 colts; those born after 2004 -15 subjects - were excluded from measurements) were measured in an erect position, using Lydtin's stick, calliper and flexible meter, and the most significant morphometric indices were calculated in order to provide for a reliable identification of the morphological type. The data obtained - mean values \pm sd - (withers height: 123.35 \pm 4.28cm; rump height: 129.43 \pm 4.43cm; chest height: 51.88 \pm 3.38cm; chest breadth: 28.61 \pm 6.66cm; body length: 124.82 \pm 8.86cm; lateral conformation body index :99.12 \pm 4.71; longitudinal thoracic section index: 41.65 \pm 2.42; body proportion index: 84.58 \pm 3.79; thorax height index: 42.05 \pm 2.07; pelvic index: 27.82 \pm 4.16; head length index: 42,28 \pm 1.53 and dactylo-thoracic index: 11.28 \pm 0.85), suggest that the "Pantesco" population can be assigned to the dolichomorphic type.