



CINTA SENESE, AN ANCIENT BREED

From the extinction risk to the DPO

How did this fantastic breed with the particular white belt come about? European-Mediterranean pigs have dark pigmentation and Asian and Far Eastern pigs have a lighter (white) pigmentation. If in the past centuries the Tuscan pig was represented with the white belt, it is evident that the "character had been genetically fixed". The hypothesis of a natural mutation is unlikely, therefore it is undoubtedly a crossbreed with various individuals from the Asian area. To establish such characteristics, scrupulous and meticulous work must have been required for several years. It is therefore conceivable that this occurred in the Roman or early Medieval-Lombard era. Most likely Barbarian invasions or contacts with people from the Asian area across the Black Sea area, Turkey and the Balkan peninsula, must have led to the cross-breeding. The Asian white pigs were taller and more "kind" in technical terms. This theory is supported by the observation that in Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and throughout the Caucasian area in general, there is interesting evidence of pig breeding in the pre-Roman and Roman times (see Hungarian National Museum Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts Budapest and Prof. S. Bokonyi's studies 1974).

In Siena's Town hall, on the wall of the Sala della Pace, the bright and picturesque representation of the Buon Governo (Good Government) triumphs in a marvelous fusion of colors, characters and landscape, in the sublime fresco which Ambrogio Lorenzetti painted in 1337-1339. He lived and worked with his brother Pietro in Siena, Florence and Pisa between the second half of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century. The beautiful fresco by Ambrogio Lorenzetti is certainly the first conscious and realistic expression of a poetic idealization of productive activities, including agriculture. It highlights a powerful inspiration, a wonderful harmony and bares a great documentary merit which, even today, tells us with almost throbbing effectiveness, what the industrial, agricultural and zootechnical activities of the distant and glorious Sieneese 14th century had been. The most important part of the fresco is that which refers to the beneficial effect of good governance in the countryside. Among the various episodes aimed at illustrating the activities of the Sieneese countryside, in addition to sowing, harvesting, threshing, fishing, hunting, etc., there's a peasant who leads a pig to town, holding him with a rope tied to the pastoral of the animal's right rear foot. This detail reveals the importance of pig farming in Siena's countryside. But it tells us that of all pigs the dominant breed was the Cinta. In fact the pig frescoed by Lorenzetti, in addition to all the characteristics of the Cinta (long snout, small and forward leaning ears, long limbs) also has the distinctive white belt on black coat. Lorenzetti, a verista of the landscape and the customs of his era, leaves no doubt that the Cinta populated the Sieneese hills even in the distant 13th century. This is also documented and proven in his fresco of the Last Judgment, made in collaboration with his brother Pietro,

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in Pisa's Camposanto. The pig in it, is modeled after the kind the Lorenzetti brothers were most accustomed to.

Evidently the Cinta Senese had been present for a long time before the great painter included it in his frescoes – certainly going back to the Roman era, if not beyond. From the few oral written and iconographic sources of the Middle Ages we learn that in Siena's square, the Campo, domesticated pigs ("troiam et quattuor porcellos" – latin for: a sow and four stags) were used to clean the piazza's pavement, eating the grains fallen from the market stalls. We also learn that the proud and rebellious character of the Cinta inspired some of Siena's noble families, namely the Parigini and Sergrifi, to use the Cinta pig in their family's coat of arms. We learn that the meat preserves from the Cinta were so good as to cause robberies and looting.

In 1282 Tacco di Ugolino della Fratta, father of Ghino di Tacco, who was an important Lord in Radicofani – mentioned by Dante in the Divine Comedy as well as by Boccaccio in the Decameron –, together with some relatives, were reported by the mayor of Torrita for the theft of two pigs and sentenced to the payment of fifty Lire. And: emblems with the Cinta can be found in numerous tombstones and vases. Mid 14th century the Cinta Senese was portrayed by Sano di Pietro in Santa Chiara's own breviary (Municipal Library of Intronati, Siena). The Cinta was used as an icon for Saint Antonio Abate, protector of the animals, for instance in a 1530 painting by Giovanni Antonio Bazzi called the Sodoma (Church of Santo Spirito, Siena).

In his book "Special animal husbandry. Pigs." (published by Utet Torino in 1927) Ettore Mascheroni illustrates pig breeding in Italy, defining the Cinta breed as the predominant kind in Tuscany, in particular in Siena and its province: "Tuscany, rich in certain areas of holm oak, oak, chestnut and Turkey oak woods, constitutes an ideal environment for pig breeding, composed for the most part of indigenous breeds among which the best known is the Cinta breed. Its cradle is the hilly area called Montagnola Senese, which includes part of the municipalities of Casole, Monteriggioni, Poggibonsi, Siena and Sovicille.

With the changing dietary habits of the population requiring less and less pig fat and with the simultaneous entry into our country of a lean meat such as the Large White, we witnessed a rapid decline up to the risk of extinction of the Cinta Senese. However, it should be noted that the Large White could not adapt to the semi-wild breeding typical for the Cinta in the province of Siena, based as it was on poor pastures and poorly practicable woodland. The spread of Cinta X Large White mongrels, however, led to the decline not only of the pure Cinta breed, but also of other indigenous breeds in Tuscany, such as the Cappuccia and the Maremmana. A survey carried out in 1980 in numerous farms in some municipalities in the Province of Siena had revealed a total of a hundred Cinta Senese pigs in 18 farms in Colle Val d'Elsa, Casole d'Elsa, Sovicille, Monticiano and Cetona. The results of this survey can be summarized as follows: Sows: 18 herds, 100 pigs. Boars: 2 herds, 2 pigs. Gilts: 2 herds, 8 pigs. Total: 22 herds, heads 110.



Thanks to the work of some passionate breeders in the area of origin and of the Sienese Breeders' Association, the Cinta Senese survived the dark years of 1970-1980. August 7, 1997 and March 6, 2001 are two important milestones in the recent history of the Cinta Senese population. The first marks the Decree with which the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry instituted a special section of the Herd book of the swine species for the protection of the breed. The second marks the institution of the Registry of the swine species by the same Ministry with Ministerial Decree 20871 of 6.3.2001 following the law of 3 August 1999 n. 280 – and it is managed by the National Pig Breeders Association.

Thanks to these interventions, the Cinta Senese population has lived through a committed demographic development. 38 Tuscan farms were registered in 1998: 16 of which in the province of Siena, which raised a total of 142 sows, 36 boars and 348 "pupils" of Cinta Senese. The commitment and enthusiasm of breeders, the sensitivity and support of public institutions (the Tuscan Region and Siena Province), the better organization of work ensured by the Registry, have facilitated a constant expansion of the breed. Such an achievement has its own monument: it stands to show the importance of this breed in the territory. The monument to the Cinta Senese was inaugurated in 2008 in a municipality located a few kilometers from Siena, near the foothills of the Montagnola – in Sovicille, by the then mayor Alessandro Masi. Thanks to the contribution of the Provincial Administration of Siena, it was made of Montagnola's yellow Siena marble by Sienese sculptor Piergiorgio Balocchi and it is kept in the courtyard of the Bell of the Sovicille Town Hall.

Thanks to the progressive increase of the specimens in 2003, the breeding farms, where at least one birth was recorded, were 188, of which 68 (36.1%) in the province of Siena. The number of herds over the years has gone up considerably to reach the peak in 2007 with 210 herds.

The Cinta Senese has therefore returned to grow and to be appreciated for its strength, rusticity and easy adaptability to breeding in the wild and semi-wild in the woods or in the expanses used for grazing from which it derives part of its sustenance by feeding on fruits of the forest, of grass and cereals. It lives well in Tuscany thanks to the type of pastures and woods available. It is from these territorial peculiarities combined with the type of diet, that its unique characteristics derive and the consequent particular taste of the meat. For these reasons in March 2012 the European Union recognized the name "Cinta Senese" as worthy of more protection. It was entered it in the Register of Protected Designations of Origin related to fresh meat of pigs born, bred and butchered in Tuscany according to tradition in compliance with a strict production specification and originated from the mating of pigs registered in the Registry and Genealogical Book of the "Cinta Senese" genetic type. Another important recognition came in March 2020 with the go-ahead by the European Commission to a significant change to the specification of the DPO, a change that allows to extend this Designation from the meat only, to all edible parts of the pig. The main advantage being that now also the lard is DPO, making it even more advantageous to breed Cinta Senese given its high percentage of such very distinctively healthy lard.

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Every year about 4000 animals are bred within the companies that adhere to the DPO. The consistency achieved and the high ratio between boars and sows are particularly positive aspects in order to preserve the breed. However, further expansion also appears necessary to cope with a continuous increase in product requests on the national and international market.