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TO THE
Amateurs, Fanciers, and Breeders
of
POULTRY,
THE SUCCESSFUL AND UNFORTUNATE DEALERS,
THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES;
AND
THE VICTIMS OF MISPLACED CONFIDENCE IN
THE HEN TRADE, GENERALLY,
I DEDICATE
This Volume.

From: The hen fever, Geo. P. Burnham
TO THE READER OF THIS BOOK

It was 2011, while working on Genetics of Chicken Extremes, I found myself doing historical research to find when genetic traits first were documented in various breeds. This ad hoc research was the start of ‘Cold Case’ an investigation on the history of the Shanghai, Brahma and Cochin. The material found and e-book (Dutch) written was way too interesting to let it sink away back into its dusty tomes without being used for the many interested Brahma and Cochin fanciers abroad.

The body of work was the basis for the Dutch Brahma book. It was extended and the same was done again for this English edition. The history of the Brahma is the foundation of this breed. Understanding it, makes you understand your birds. With the help of many breeders the Brahma history is once again documented including the history of today. I hope you enjoy this book just as much as I did making it. Thank you all who helped and taught me!

Hans Ringnalda, April 2015

Cold Case: Shanghai, Cochin and Brahma (2011)

FOREWORD TO THE DUTCH EDITION

Brahma and Cochins have near identical histories dating back to about 1875, both rich and intertwined with world politics, these breeds descend from the same successive imports from the harbour of Shanghai China. In the past there were hardly any breed books published on one specific breed. Descriptions from history about the development of poultry breeds, both actual reports and ‘stories’ or anecdotes can be found scattered around the world in antique books in libraries and within universities and often within closed private collections. With help from the hundreds of illustrations from the English artists as Harrison Weir and Ludlow and to Sewell along with Wippell, Megargee, Graham and Schilling in North-America, we can see the development of the Brahma and Brahma bantam from approximately 1850 to 1950 in both England and N.America. Plus the many unsung painters and illustrators who were also charmed by the ‘Shanghais’ during the second part of the 19th century. Their works may be nearly forgotten and unknown but due to the willing cooperation of i.a. the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, I have identified a few. Mr. Awe Palthe (Netherlands) provided a few special historical illustrations from his private archive. The history contained in this book was completed with the aid of almost unknown information on imports in Europe from the archives of the French Société Impériale Zoologique d’Acclimatation, unique cartoons from the archive of Yale university N.America and by Stuart Kay from Australia who provided photos of English birds between approximately 1925 and 1935 from the historical archive from the English photographer Arthur Rice. Also Juul Lauwers from Belgium, the Delin-expert, contributed by providing unique illustrations from his archive of René Delin a Belgian painter of rural life and its animals (1877-1961). Willem Voskamp (Netherlands) added photos from app. 1960 to 1990 from the photo archive of Coen Aalbers. Thanks to these photos the Dutch history was described past and present of the development of the Brahmans we see displayed today. Diane Jacky, famous contemporary illustrator from N.America and Chris Jones, from England both gifted artists who paint our poultry breeds, willingly cooperated on this book. Composing this book was ‘a hell of a job’ mainly with the choices which had to be made. My library and photo archive contains so much material that on the history of Brahma, more books could have been made!

I am sure you will agree the pain of choosing, selecting and securing historical information on the Brahma as a biological cultural inheritance in both pictures and stories for future generations is a noble and worthy endeavour...

This is for the Dutch edition done by the Dutch Brahma Club with the cooperation of a lot of passionate Brahma people.

Hans Ringnalda, April 2015

The Dutch book, a hard cover with dust jacket, full colour print 160 pages, 2015.

To the reader of this book

It was 2011, while working on Genetics of Chicken Extremes, I found myself doing historical research to find when genetic traits first were documented in various breeds. This ad hoc research was the start of ‘Cold Case’ an investigation on the history of the Shanghai, Brahma and Cochin. The material found and e-book (Dutch) written was way too interesting to let it sink away back into its dusty tomes without being used for the many interested Brahma and Cochin fanciers abroad.

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Hans Ringnalda, April 2015
Never has there been a better time for the modern Brahma breeder to claim a place in history amongst the pioneers, heroes & heroines past and present of our great hobby.

It is sincerely hoped you will find this book a useful guide on your journey no matter which path you take.

Paul Fox
Editor
HISTORY

Brahmas, politics and drugs

Early in the 19th century what England imported above all else from China was tea but as the years moved on trading opium from India to China became more lucrative.

Millions of Chinese became addicted. The Chinese paid for English opium in silver, resulting in massive economic problems. By bribing officials and civil servants the English prevented the Chinese Emperor stopping the flood of opium. In 1839 Lin Zexu was installed as Imperial inspector, soon after in Kanton he confiscated the whole English opium stock and was ordered to destroy everything. Compared to today's conversion rates the trade value translated as over 300 million euros worth.

The English were not particularly amused of course and in 1839 they sent battleships to China to 'secure' their trade interests. This was the onset of the first Opium War in which the Chinese triangle shaped 'dragon flag' warship was no match to the technologically much better equipped English fleet.

In 1842 China was forced to give access to five harbours for foreign vessels ...the uneasy arrangement didn't last long within a few short years came a second Opium War between 1856 and 1860 of which also France was part. A war with Japan (1894-1895) followed and one in 1900 with England, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, Austria, Italy and America because more than a few cocky politicians saw 'opportunities' to land grab from the Chinese. Ironically, if the first two opium wars hadn't have occurred, the first Shanghai would probably entered Europe and America until perhaps decades later!

Without the by 'cocky behaviour' caused imports of 'chinese chickens' the Fancy would never have been the way it is today and creative breeders in the past would never have made Brahmas, Cochins, Wyandottes, Orpingtons, Plymouth Rocks, Rhode Islands, Australorps, Faverolles, Marans, Welsumers, Barnevelders...

Cartoon from Keppler, 1895.
A Japanese surrounded by the 'cocks', which are the leaders of the European superpowers.
As early as 1340 the predecessors of the ‘Brahmas’ were described in a report from Ibn Batuta, after he visited the Chinese Emperor in Peking. Also Morga wrote about these giant fowls in which he saw in the Philippines in 1690 where they were called ‘Chinese’. In 1821 they are mentioned by Eversmann, who saw them in Bucharia (Uzbekistan, central Asia).

It’s assumed that sometime after 1842 that the first giant fowls (without leg feathers) were shipped to England from the harbour of Shanghai as a gift for Queen Victoria. In England they were known as Cochin Chinas by that time.

In French publications it is told a vice-admiral called Cécille sent some Shanghai to France. However, these imported clean legged birds from China soon disappeared.

Around 1847, Shanghai (as chickens from China were being called), with leg feathers arrived in America, also around 1850(?). The Zoological Garden in Berlin managed to lay hands on a few of these animals. The first ‘good’ illustration was made by Harrison Weir, from birds (with leg feathers) which were given by Burnham to Queen Victoria in 1852. The greys (dark) and lights with a peacomb finally became Brahmas. The other colours with single comb became Cochins.

There are quite a lot of illustrations to be found in historical literature, especially after 1860 the China fowl were popular with artists for earning extra income. The most representative ones are depicted in this book. Engravings and paintings depicting Shanghai and Brahma Pootra were massively popular and therefore wanted. German or French illustrations where particularly scarce and hard to find because there were not many of them created.

In England during 1875 and onwards a real craze for them developed, in America some time later, after 1900.

The development of the Brahma in the early years before photography, is visualized thanks to artists like: Weir, Ludlow, Sewell, Megargee, Wippell, Lydon, Graham and Schilling.

Lemon Shanghai by Harrison Weir in: The Poultry Book from Winfield & Johnson 1854. In later editions, of which Tegetmeier was one of the editors, this colour plate was not included.

Looking at the birds you see a few black feathers on the body of the birds. Black feather tips especially in the petticoat of the cock and a few on the breast of the hen and both in lower hackle, are signs of impure columbian (Co/co+). These so called ‘lemon’ birds are the predecessors of the buff columbians based on asiatic partridge (eb). These are not based on wheaten (eWh) like the buffs.

Burnham describes a similar colour in silvers (which he calls ‘whites’), which had black feathers distributed all over the body. These became later the light Shanghai or Brahma and without columbian they were the grey or dark (silver pencilleds).
ON THE ANCESTORS

Explorers told fantastic stories of what they had discovered about chickens in Asia, sometimes exaggerated and full of ‘facts’ to make it more interesting. The result was a mix of historical facts, fantasies and tasty anecdotes. Thus stories which were greatly enjoyed, included fantasy and exaggeration, a tall story is always more fun than reality and truth. How could we devide fact from fiction? Brahmas came from the region of the Brahma Pootra river in India? And Cochins come from Cochin China? English Major Croad discovered and then imported into Europe fowl and called them Croad Langshans? Therefore the names, sounds authoritative... don’t they?

Beautiful stories, partly true and partly fantasy which are still persistant in breed descriptions remain attractive to ‘everybody’ who wants to breed something special with a ‘history’. They may well assume their breeds were from the beginning a true breed as we are used to today, they may just be surprised?

Fact or Fiction? Only Japan had a long standing culture of pure poultry breeding, that had gone on for centuries. The Western world had been introduced to longtail fowl and Japanese bantams (Chabo) from this country. Throughout the rest of Asia chickens were usually kept to eat, eggs, cock fight or temple use. For these animals feather colours were not usually important. The explorers didn’t visit poultry shows in China looking for excellent birds, that’s too much honour for the mongrel chicken. Chickens were taken on trading ships as food, the fat ones were eaten and the poor quality, skinny rickety ones, too sick to taste good, were sold in the harbour towns.
Yet these scabby birds were supposed to be the ancestors of one or more chicken breeds? Reality was often way less attractive or interesting than the actuality. The remainder of the ragbag bunch which came ashore in the ports, was a gallimaufry of not particular uniform individuals. These birds were mixed into the barnyard fowls which already existed and this is how ‘poultry breeds’ arose. These ‘breeds’ were in Europe and America further developed to something with a ‘long history’, and thus branded as unique and special.

The today's Brahmas and Cochins all descend from the imports from China which were called the Shanghai which came to America and England around 1855 and bred till the gentle giants of the chicken world today.

The history of the Brahma and Cochin is connected to each other because the start is the same. Stories change over time and it is difficult to reconstruct the past without extensive research and analyzing trusted and partly trusted sources. The only primary evidence we have are actually the illustrations both in word and picture that where published in the West at the end of the 19th century. We must analyze all the sources to compare, destill and extract from this reference material the grains of salt that must be the truth. The following work is derived from the above and a working knowledge of the human mind (ref: Cold Case, history of the Shanghai, Brahma and Cochin as mentioned in the foreword). Reconstruction of events can only be attempted based on research, as the forfathers of poultry are no longer with us, so let us take a look how and what has happened based on what is published.

Then History of the Brahma in England can’t be indevisable from America, its actually one history. There is much more published about the Brahma in America compared to England. Even if the artists of the time had lots of imagination, the birds from the imports did not look at all like the Brahmas and Cochins of today.
First documented import from Shanghais which consisted of clean legged birds (no leg feathers), destined for Queen Victoria from England in 1843. These were called Cochin Chinas. Harrison Weir made the engraving in 1844. From ‘The Poultry Book’, Winfield 1856.

The Most famous engraving of the Shanghais which were given to Queen Victoria by Burnham in 1852. By Harrison Weir and published in The Illustrated London News.

With the wealth of literature on the ‘origin’ and development of the Brahma in American and English literature, research, archives and testament. I’ve tried to find out what really happened and hope it will help you decide yourself if the provided facts are enough to convince you that it is most likely the way it was.
The story begins in 1843, when the first chickens from China set foot on English ground. Rather quickly all sorts of origin stories were written by gentlemen who bestowed themselves the honour of giving these Chinese chickens all sorts of names to distinguish them as ‘their’ Birds after importing them.

Those days, many people suffered from the so called ‘hen fever’ and chickologists from both continents published and advertised until the epidemical spread. The most fantastic stories were told especially on the size of the Chinese chickens.

In The Hen Fever (Boston), a humourous little book Burnham published in 1855, the Shanghais were depicted as really giant chickens. After Burnham initiated a Polka composed about the Shanghai craze, he wrote in 1861 that the at that time famous songwriter Stephen Foster even made a song about the birds. The audience loved it.

A lot of stories are based on hearsay and it is difficult to find substantiated facts, a lot is still vague and there were only a few who kept accurate documentation. The importation of the Chinese chickens and what the gentlemen kept in their backyards is not particularly ‘world history’ although we might think it is. There were only very few who were really interested and who saw the implications of this happening from a broader perspective.

Of course with hindsight it is pretty logical since who, in that time period, had the contacts and networking to inform others about what was happening in the poultry scene? And what could the recipients do with the given information?

Therefore it took considerable time before Europe was aware of Burnhams’ publications. It was the Dutch painter and writer Van Gink who played an important role in the history of poultry of The Netherlands. Due to his knowledge of English he could read books and articles to inform himself while the majority of the Dutch only spoke local dialects.

The only data known on Brahma came from Van Gink. Considering the fact he had contacts in America, it is strange he focussed fully on the publications from Lewis Wright in London. Due to this fact, only the British interpretation about the origin of the Brahas (and Cochins) was considered the only correct one.
1.

De Shanghai chicken when you put him in de pit
He'll eat a loaf of bread up but he can't fight a bit
De Shanghai fiddle is a funny little thing
And evry time you tune him up he goes ching! ching!

*Chorus* — Oh! de Shanghai!

Don't bet your money on de Shanghai!
Take de little chicken in de middle of de ring
But don't bet your money on de Shanghai.

2.

I go to de fair for to see de funny fowls
De double headed pigeon and de one eyed owls
De old lame goose wid no web between his toes
He kills himself a laughing when de Shanghai crows.

*Chorus* — Oh! de Shanghai! &c.

3.

De Shanghai's tall but his appetite is small
He'll only swallow evry thing that he can overhaul
Four bags of wheat just as certain as your born
A bushel of potatoes and a tub full of corn.

*Chorus* — Oh! de Shanghai! &c.
A later Dutch poultry man with influence named Houwink wrote in 1924 the same as Van Gink the Brahmas came from the region of the Brahma Pootra river in India... (By the way, Van Gink reconsidered his opinion on the origin twice; in 1961 and 1963 in a publication in ‘Avicultura’. Which is now, after more than 50 years still not updated in the Dutch Standard).

Van Gink was, due to his contacts, within the Dutch fancy an expert with wider geographical knowledge of poultry than anyone else, and he painted and drew better than anyone else. Not withstanding his overwhelming status and the work he had done on poultry, there are some caveats. Several drawings and illustrations in this book are from his hand.

Illustrations can be considered doubtful of origin when based on date and breed name. Drawings from an artist were more than often copied by another, a bush added or the shadow a bit different, mirrored and published with another date, another signature and again a new illustration was ready. Sometimes illustrations were remade and provided from a much earlier date but incorporated with the findings from a later date which led to huge confusion. One illustration is dated 1855, and under the ‘updated’ one 1875, or the other way around. Shanghai pictures where copied at that time, no one gave it a second thought it was just one of those things to the ones involved in the hen craze... we see the same things happening today in popular breeds.

Because the first Shanghais came to England and America between 1843 and 1852 there are no illustrations by English or American artists which are made before 1843.

Buff Shanghai with leg feathers (Pti-Langshan type) from The Illustrated Book of Domestic Poultry written by Martin Doyle and published in London, 1854, but... years later Martin Doyle was the pseudonym of William Hicky...

Clean legged ‘Chochin China Fowls’ as published in The American Poultry Yard, 1850 by D. J. Brown. In the caption he calls them also Gallus giganteus or Ostrich Fowl.