

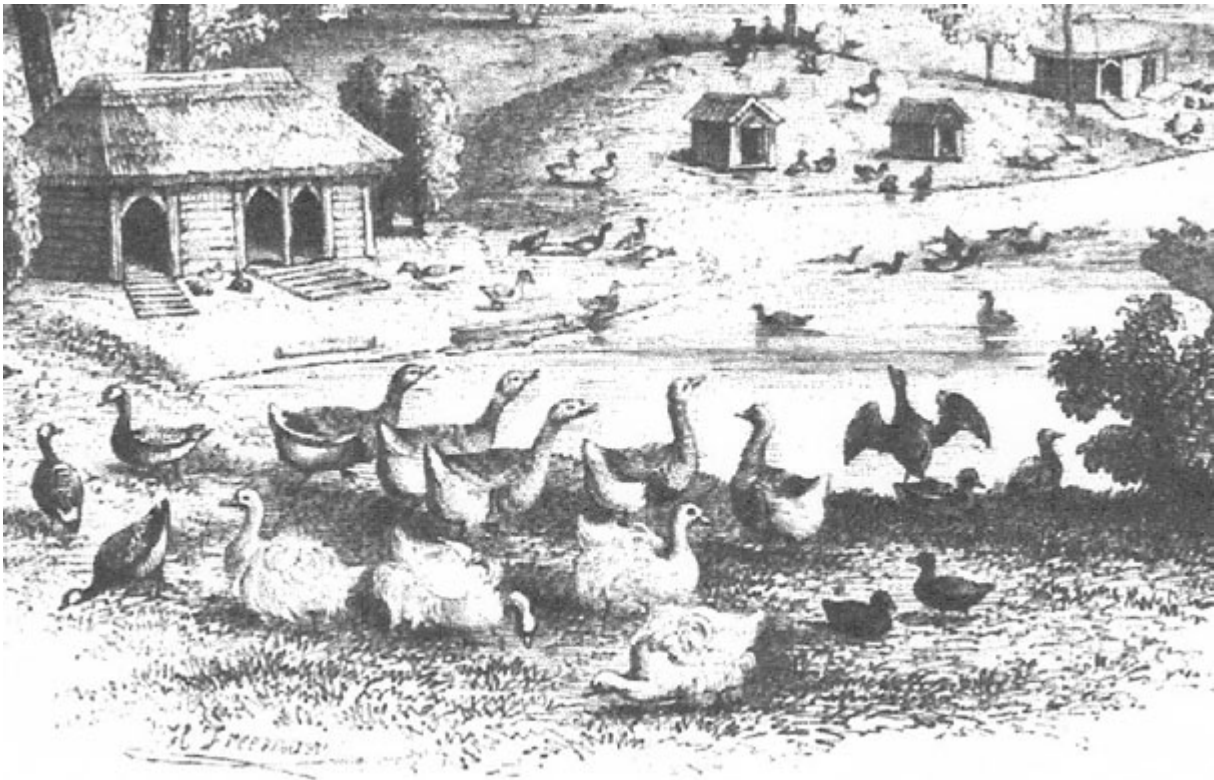
THE SEBASTOPOL GOOSE

~ an Anthology ~

Part 3

The Sebastopol Goose in Continental Europe.

By: Jonathan M. Thompson © January 2013



Les Oies au Jardin d'acclimatation. — Dessin de Freeman.

Fig. 1. (Detail, 1862)

The Sebastopol, or Danubian Goose (Oie frisée du Danube) in France.

At the same time as Harvey Bayly received his Sebastopol Geese from the Crimea in 1860, such geese were present in the Jardin d'acclimatation, Paris (Fig. 1).^{3 & 8.}

These geese found their way to the gardens through Dr. Delpech, having been donated by the Turkish Ambassador to Paris, Ahmet Vefik Efendi. The Ambassador had previously been involved in the repatriation of the Austrian and Hungarian prisoners of war. It is probably this association with the Ambassador that caused the breed to be also known by the name of *l'Oie de Turque* /*Turkish Goose*; a synonym first used in 1865.^{4 & 5.}

A report on the Jardin (1860–1861) states that two ganders and seven geese were present in the gardens; the geese started producing eggs in February 1861, & had produced 35 eggs by March.^{3.}

Having described the other varieties of geese in the gardens at that time, a contemporary account includes an illustration (Fig. 2.) and states:

Finally, we come to *l'oie du Danube* (which occupies the foreground in our engraving) [Fig. 2.] in colour the plumage is snow-white, the beak and feet of a clear yellow. Its neck is thicker and shorter, more horizontal in attitude, closer the duck. A unique feature, which first attracts the attention of the viewer, is the consistency of its feathers. They are light, so flexible, that they move in the slightest breeze. The bird appears to be buried beneath a mass of feathers that are not adhered to its body. This beautiful species breeds in a domesticated form in the Jardin des Plantes and the Jardin d'Acclimatation du Bois de Boulogne.⁸
(Trans. JMT)

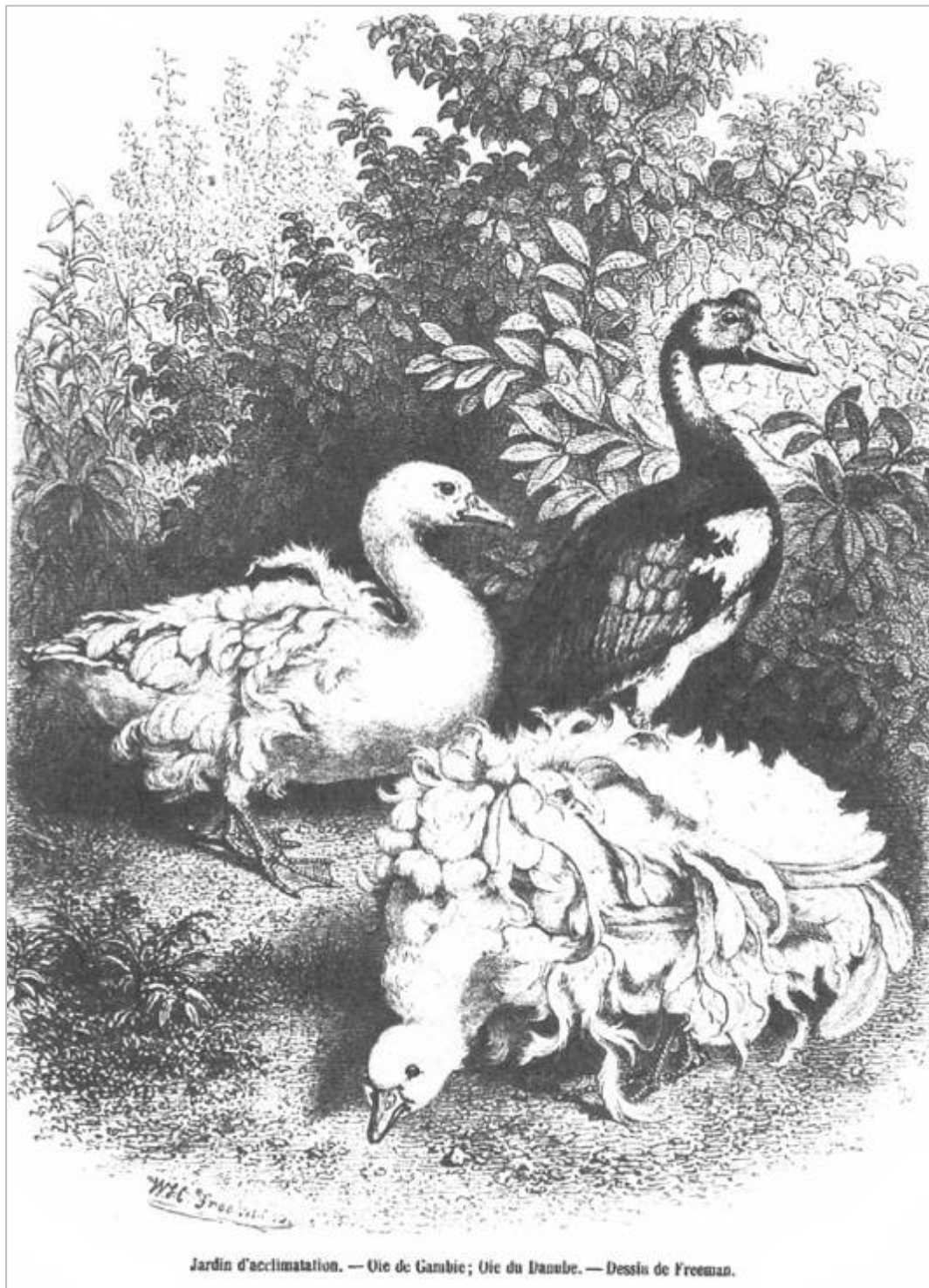


Fig. 2.

It is this engraving that is used by Lewis Wright in his books published from 1873.^{29 & 30.}

Jules Pelletan writes of the breed in 1862, describing them as:

Goose of the Danube.— A white variety which has the feathers going the wrong way, like certain curly hens. . . . Its feet are yellow; its legs are short and its carriage horizontal.^{24.} (Trans. JMT).

The two descriptions cited above appear to follow that given in the British periodical, *The Field* (1860), in stating the colour of the beak and feet to be yellow; and differ from Mrs Harvey's account of the birds having beaks and feet of a red colour.^{17.}

W. H. Freeman, the artist responsible for both of the afore-going engravings, produced another image (Fig. 3.) that appears in a work of 1864, naming the breed = the Curly Goose of Hungary, and remarks on its large size and beautiful white plumage.^{21.}

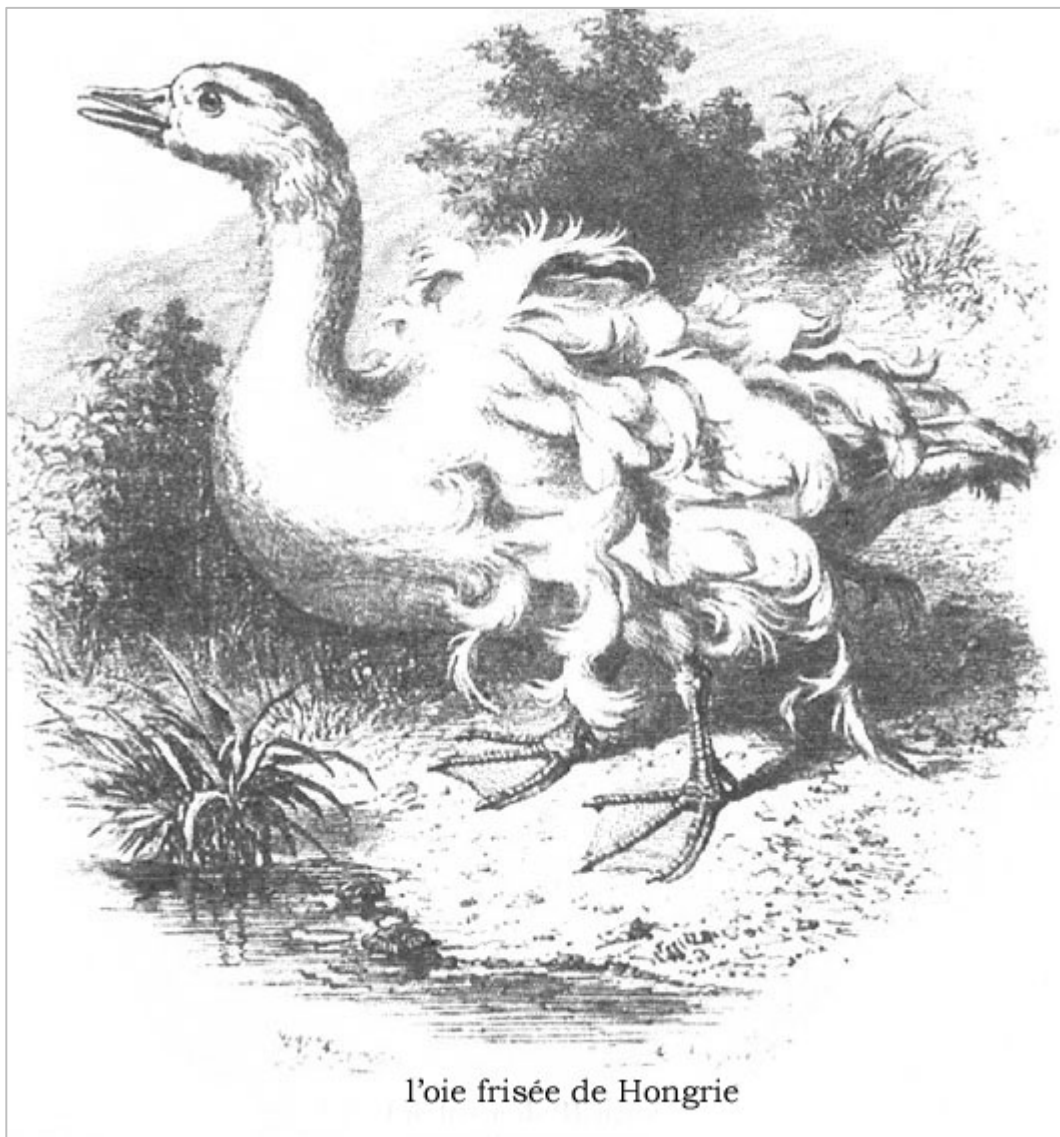


Fig. 3

The Jardin d'Acclimatation held stock of these geese in both the white and the grey forms by 1865.¹⁶ This is not surprising, as the species and varieties of geese were not kept in isolation, but together in a large group; and the feather-formation of the Sebastopol Goose has proved to be dominant, in varying degrees, when crossed with other varieties of geese. Surplus stock of the *Oie du Danube* had been distributed amongst amateur fanciers from 1862, and so it was also in a few hands outside of Paris.⁶

However, for those particular *Oie du Danube* in the Jardin d'Acclimatation, 'their days were numbered'.

Having thrived and proliferated in the gardens for a decade, they were to be served-up on the dinner-plate of any Parisian with the money to pay for them.

During the Siege of Paris, 1870-71, due to the Franco-Prussian War, the inhabitants were forced to eat almost anything they could get hold of. Having exhausted stock of any cattle and horses, Parisians' attention was then focused on their pets, and even the rats of the sewers; but even that would not suffice.

Albert Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, then secretary/director of the gardens created by his father, Isidore, entered into a lucrative business-deal with local butcher, M. Deboos, of 173 Boulevard Haussmann; selling-off any of the Jardin's livestock considered to be edible.

It was not a singularly mercenary act; the animals were in the same situation as their human overlords ~ there was very little to feed them on and a general acquisition for food was in place.

The butchering began on 24th October, 1870, with the slaughter of asses, zebras and buffalos. Throughout the October, 1870 assorted ducks, geese and poultry were slaughtered; and in the November M. Deboos purchased a mixed consignment of mammals and birds which included ~ a couple of cassowary, 200 francs each; 5 pheasants, 110 francs; 2 Carolina Ducks, 30 francs; a Rouen Duck, 15 francs and an "*Oie du Danube*", 35 francs.

Later, even the much-loved elephants, Castor and Pollux, were not spared; and sold off ~ at 27,000 francs, the pair.¹⁸

Alphonse Gobin (1874) states the *L'Oie du Danube* was imported into England in 1859.¹⁵ It is probable that this statement, and some subsequent ones following the same text, caused Edward Brown (1906) to give the same erroneous date of its importation.²

The Jardin's collection of animals and birds was re-instated after the Franco-Prussian War and a pair of *L'Oie du Danube* donated to the gardens in 1885.⁷

However, the breed did not come to the notice of the French poultry writers again, until the Grand Exposition in Paris, 1889, when a pair was exhibited in the agricultural section of the French exhibit. ²².

It is not until 1895 that another illustration of the breed appears in a French publication (Fig. 4.). Charles Cornevin presents an image that bears a close resemblance to one which previously appeared in the American Press in 1876 (*vide post*), and states the beak and feet are yellow in colour and that the breed was imported into England at the time of the Crimean War, 1856. ⁹ Both of these assumptions would seem to be imprecise.

Remy Saint-Loup (1895) gives Gobin's account, thus furthering the inaccuracy, and includes the left-hand figure in the illustration given by Cornevin. ²⁵.

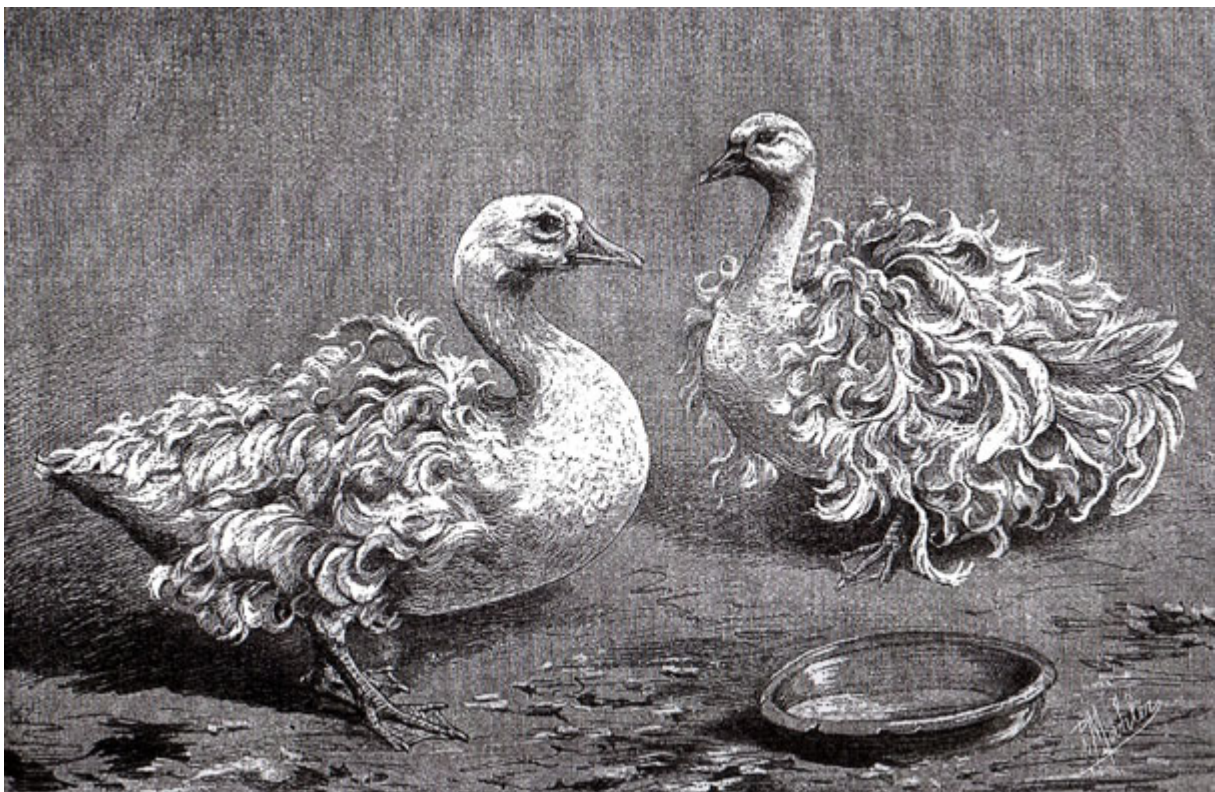


Fig. 4.

It is Pierre Mégnin's (1896) mention of the *Oie du Danube* being first seen in France at the Grand Exposition in Paris, 1889, that has caused authors to claim 1889 to be the very first time Sebastopol Geese / *Oies du Danube* were present in France. Such statements are clearly inaccurate.

Mégnin delineates his *Oie du Danube* (Fig. 5.) as a much stockier bird than the preceding illustrations and describes it as having blue eyes, with the beak red-pink in colour and red legs; much more akin to Mrs Harvey's account. ^{22 & 17}. Most subsequent French authors follow Mégnin's description.

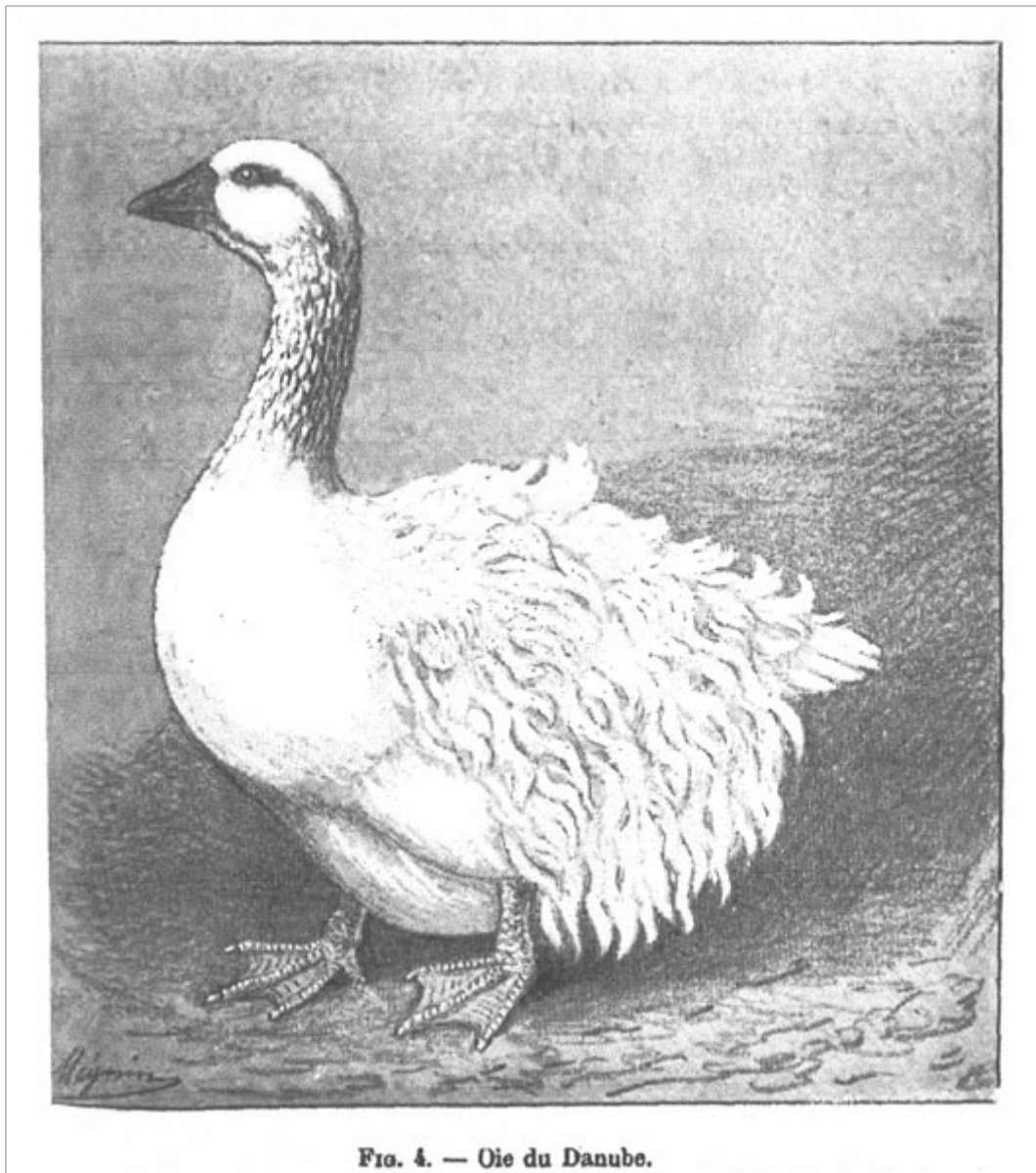


Fig. 5

Alphonse Blanchon (1896) retains the beak and leg colour of the *Oie du Danube - ou de Sébastopol* as given by Méglin; while Charles Voitelliere (1905) merely describes the plumage.^{1 & 28.}

Twenty-six years later (1922), the description remains the same as given by Méglin, and weights are included as being 3kgs for the goose and 4kgs for the gander.^{26 & 27.}

By 1887 Sebastopol Geese appear to have been widely distributed throughout Europe. An aquatint (Fig. 6.), from a collection of drawings of the East and Italy, circa 1887-1889, by Louis Morel-Retz, depicts a group of the long-feathered, smooth-breasted form disporting in the Aréthuse fountain at Syracuse, Sicily.

The Sebastopol geese have now long since vanished from the fountain, but the papyrus continues to flourish.

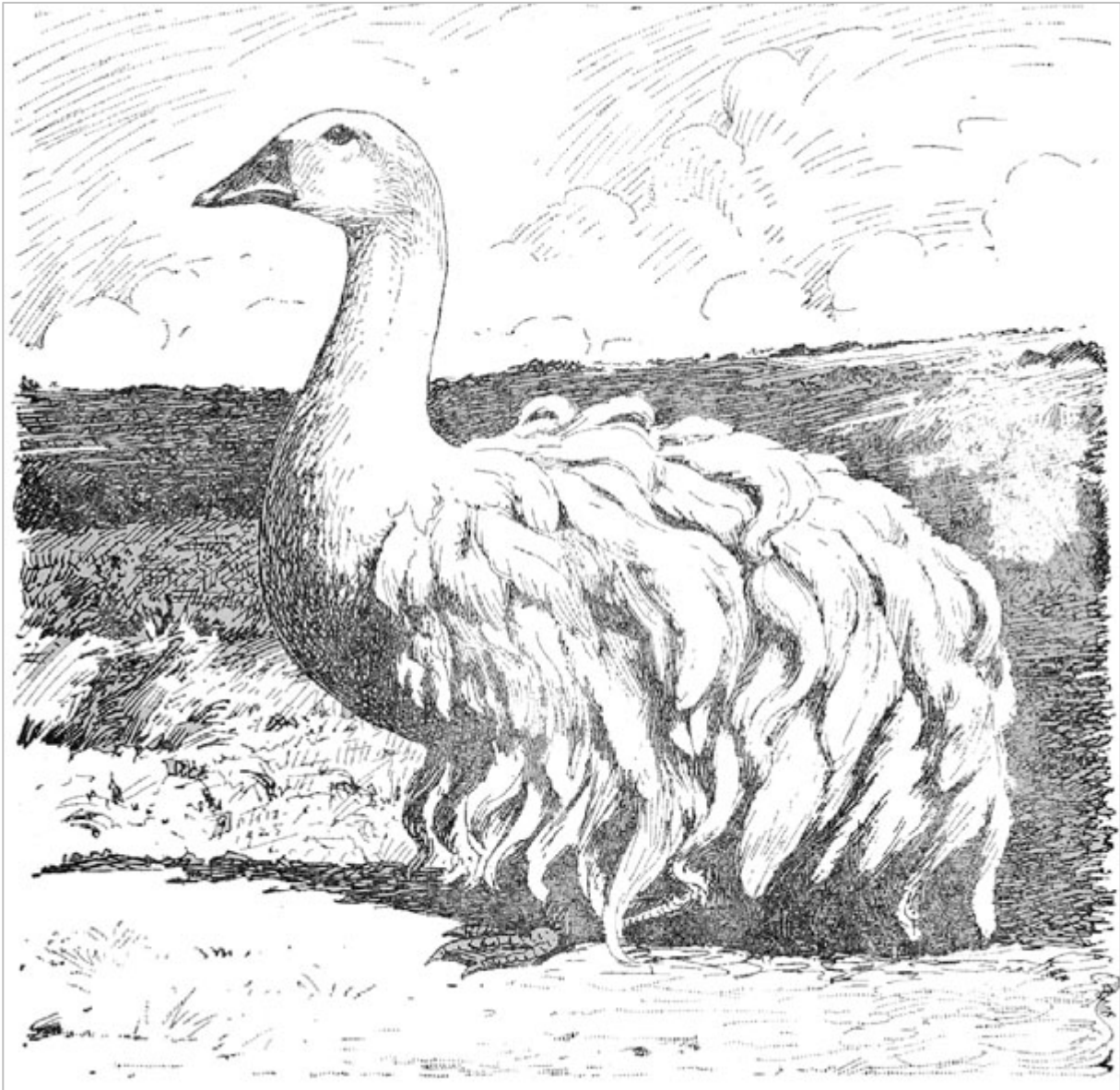


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(Detail taken from post-card.)

Fig. 6.

The Sebastopol Goose (Fig. 7.) as depicted by René Delin, in Belgium in 1925, has a smooth breast and feathers trailing from the shoulders and back that are wide and undulating, reaching to the ground.²³



Courtesy of Denise Moss.

Fig. 7.

The Sebastopol Goose in Germany and Austria.

In the 1860's, European authorities were recognising this type of goose as a unique breed. Specimens arrived at the Munich Zoological Gardens in 1864 and Leopold Fitzinger gives a brief description under the name:

Gelockte oder Locken=Gans (*Anser Moldavius*). [Curled or Curly Goose]

Danube, Moldavia, Wallachia, Turkey. White, with long curled feathers on the back and wings; beak and feet orange-yellow. Known to us only in recent years, but found in most zoological gardens. Its origin is that of the common goose. ¹³.

(Trans. JMT)

In 1869 the breed was also present in the Hamburg Zoological Gardens; and by 1875 the breed received Imperial patronage and specimens were to be found in the menagerie at Schönbrunn, Vienna. ^{19 & 14}.

Bruno Dürigen (1906) describes under the various names of "Die Locken=, Strupp=, Seiden=, Zottel= türkische, Astrachan=, Sebastopol= oder Donau Gans - Anser dom. crispus;" ~ The Curly=, Un-kempt=, Silken=, Shaggy=, Turkish, Astrakhan=, Sebastopol= or Danube Goose, as an peculiar form of the domestic goose; and speculates that the traffic of vast numbers of geese into Germany from the adjacent countries of Poland & Russia probably included specimens of geese of the Sebastopol type. ^{12.}

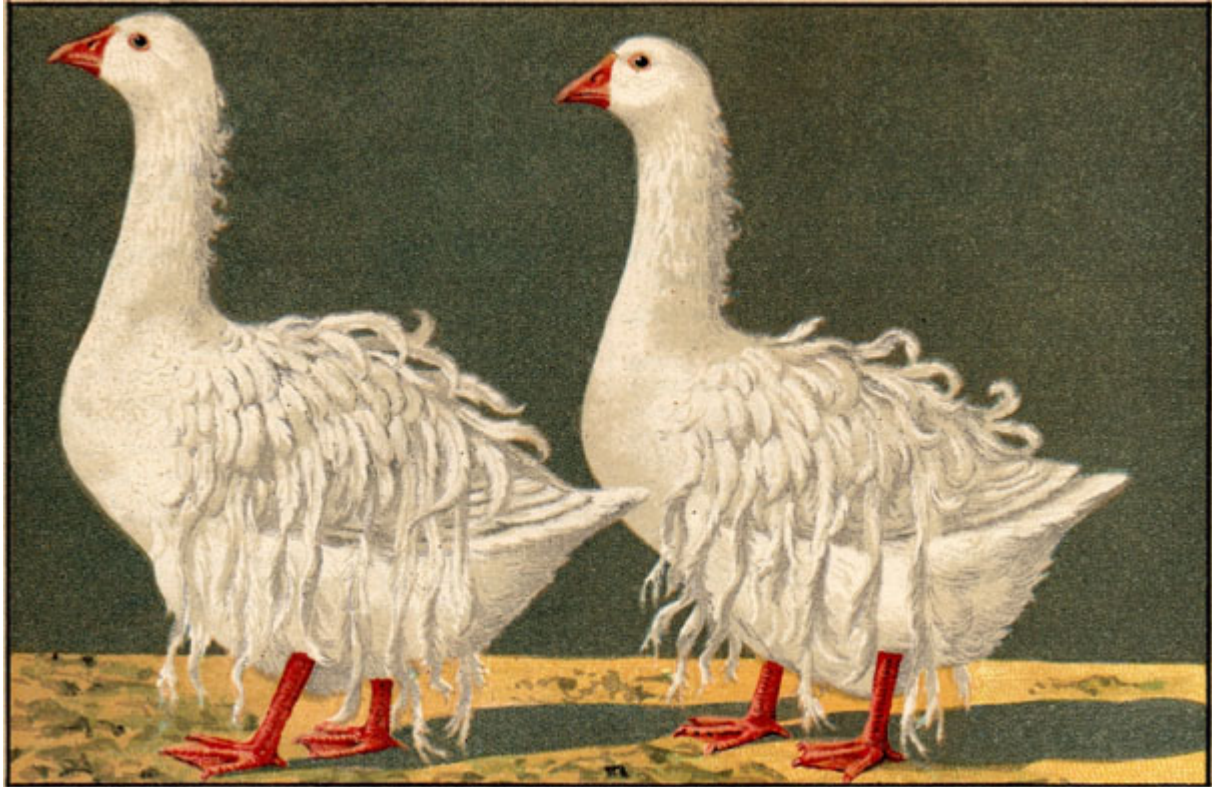


Fig. 8.

The illustration in *Kramer's Taschenbuch* shows geese with curled feathering to the back of their necks (Fig.8.), which is stated to be present in well-bred specimens, and describes only the smooth-breasted type, giving the beak-colour as being pink and the legs and feet orange-red. ^{20.}

The German Standards for 1949 contains an entry for Sebastopol Geese (Lockengänse), describing it thus:

pure white and sometimes showing a small crest on the top of the small, round head. The bill is short; the neck medium-long, straight and appearing strong; the body being short and held horizontal, with a full round breast set somewhat high; the tail short, closed and carried horizontally. The curly feather formation is not uniform. In many birds the feathers flow only from the back, but in most the whole body, with the exception of the breast and neck, is curled. Weights for the gander are 5 - 6 kg, the goose 4½ - 5 kg.

General Impression: A comparatively small, deep-framed goose with a plentiful curl-formation to the plumage and also a tendency for a crest.

Characteristics: Body: comparatively short, carried fairly horizontal. Breast full and round, however somewhat high set. Head small and round. Bill short, neck medium length, straight and fairly strong. Tail short, closed and carried horizontally. (Trans. JMT.) ^{11.}

This Standard has remained basically the same throughout the years.

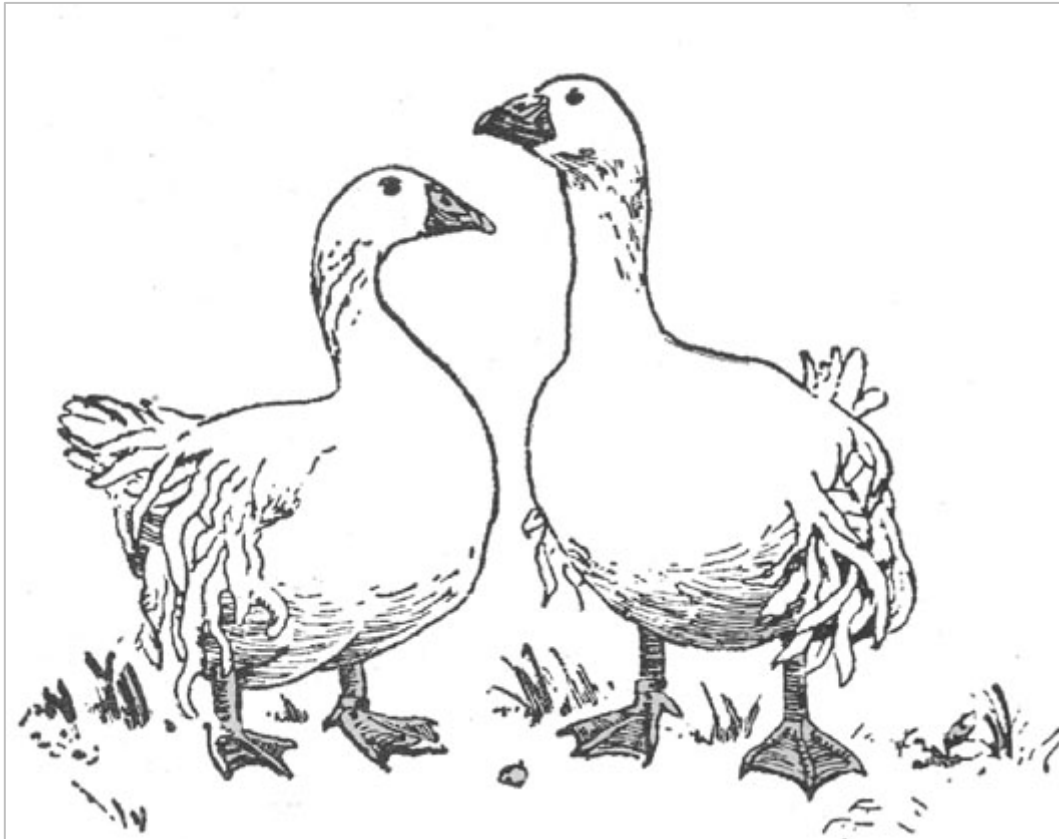


Fig. 9.

In 1974 the eye colour, blue, is added and in 1984 the bill colour is given as "orange-red with a lighter 'bean'", the legs and feet also "orange-red", along with the requirement that the paunch / belly should be only slightly prominent and be single-lobed; a double-lobe being a major failing.

Throughout all of these Standards the same figure of smooth-breasted, long-feathered birds (Fig. 9.), drawn by Heinz Ruthmann, is reproduced. In the German Standards, from 2006, the line-drawings are replaced by colour photographs of both sexes.^{9 & 10.}

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