

## 1. Historical background

Based on ditches and fortifications found in the villages of the Arpadian era, and the areas encircled by them, István Méri and József Laszlovszky assume that the fenced places were possibly in connection with the wintering of animals and generally with keeping them together. These ditches and fortifications are like we know from the ethnographical materials of the 18-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Shepherds withdrew from the inclemencies of weather to natural shelters, places fenced from the wind and forests; on woodless plains men had to prepare these shelters. The word “*akol*” (*sheep-fold*), which had Slavic origins, was used for a building that held the livestock together, and had no roof, appeared in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Probably it was made from wood and small twigs.<sup>2</sup> The word “*kosár*” (*sheep-pen*), had also Slavic origin, this means an enclosed place where mostly sheep spent the nights.<sup>3</sup> Sheep-pens were roofless buildings, with hedgerow- or reed-walls. On the Great Plain it was made from reed; highland, Slovakian and Transylvanian Romanian, Hungarian and Székely peasants mainly woven it from canes, so it looked like a *basket* (*its Hungarian name “kosár” means basket – the translator*).<sup>4</sup> The sheep-pen of the Middle Ages was a round building, and its role was to protect only smaller flocks.<sup>5</sup>

We know little about the early buildings of shepherds, only the early appearance of their names gives us reference, and based on ethnographical data we can assume that the archaic solutions were used earlier as well. In the middle ages the most current building for wintering, lambing and guarding the animals was the “*földöl*” (*earth sty*), which was used by the conquering Hungarians as well. The word “*ól*” (*sty*) signed a covered, closed building in the 10-15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> Besides the earth sties, there were walled animal keeping buildings above the ground even in the Arpadian era.

In the 16-18<sup>th</sup> centuries pastoral-buildings did not change a lot, but more detailed data are available. Two characteristic pastoral-buildings of the Great Plain the “*vasaló*” (*reed shelter where the shepherds could cook*) and the “*cserény*” (*it was protecting the shepherd and the sensitive stock from the wind*) appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MÉRI I 1963. 217, LASZLOVSZKY J 1982. 283-85, PALÁDI-KOVÁCS A. 1993.132.

<sup>2</sup> SZABADFALVI J. 1984. 91-93.

<sup>3</sup> TESZ II. 585-586

<sup>4</sup> GYÖRFFY I. 1942. 183-184.

<sup>5</sup> FÖLDES L 1960. 449-450.

<sup>6</sup> PALÁDI-KOVÁCS A: 1993.134-135.

<sup>7</sup> TESZ I. 508., III 1095.

**2. different type of buildings (sheep-pen; sheep-pen with one room; sheep-fold; type of shelter; wind-screen; milking-pen; barns, ect.)**  
**3. materials of buildings**

The most typical building for sheep breeding, in the Carpathian basin is the uncovered square shaped or multiangular removable “*juhkarám*” (sheep-pen) which has many different names in the region. Its most common form is about 3-5 meters long and 1-1.2 meters high. It is a fenced or enclosed place built from poles, laths or planks, earlier woven from wickers, but you can find types made from sticks, and types which are unmovable.



*Sheep-pen and shepherd's couch; Szászcsávás / Ceuaş (Romania) 2007. Photo: Miklós BUZÁS)*



*Fenced sheep-cote with rig timber structure; Debrecen 1938; MNÉGY F 004137*

In Hungary the square shaped sheep-pen with one room, was the most common. The rectangular shape with two or more rooms was general in the Partium and Transylvania. The round-shape type was common in South-Transylvania, among the Hungarians outside the Easter-Carpathians and on the fields alongside the Al-Duna. On the big plain pastures of the Tiszántúl it was built next to the reed “*szárnyék*” (*type of shelter*). In the highlands, for example on the pastures near the villages of the North Hungarian Mountains, it was attached to trees. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in the Kiskunság there was the “*magyar-isztonga*”, which probably was a reed-wall on the pasture, and there was the “*német-isztonga*”, which a transferable building. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the “*isztonga*” of the farmers were built in the garden of sheep-folds. On the Great Plain the dismountable sheep-pens probably appeared only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the intensive breeding of sheep.<sup>8</sup>

According to the available data, the “*kosár*” and “*juhkosár*” are two different buildings. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in Transylvania and in the Northern Hungarian Mountains, mostly but not solely the mobile, transferable summer “*juhkarám*” type is the most common; but the stable, unmovable type and also the wicker made type are also available. And on the Great Plain the unmovable, non-transferable version is the most general, which was made from reed or wicker, and which had sheep wintering functions as well. The more common from these two types was the woven, unmovable.

Shepherds of the Hungarians on the bigger part of Transdanubia and on the Northern Hungarian Mountains area used closed buildings – with walls and with roof – also on the summer pastures. On the pastures near to the forests, there were “*akó*”-s - *made from sticks* – as well beside the sheep-pen. They were 6-12 m long and 4-4.5 m wide. The straw-roof was held by ramified prop-and-purlin roof-structure. The barn-like building’s sides were nailed horizontally or vertically with poles, and were maybe plaited with willow-twig.<sup>9</sup> Some peasant families wintered their sheep in sheep-sties shaped like summer akó, in one room of the barn, with wicker walls, and rarely in sheep-cotes. But the manors used sheep-cotes made of stones and cob. Similar buildings were known in the Bakony – called “*birkaakol*” (*sheep-fold*) – but this building type had a fence around it made of spiky sticks.<sup>10</sup> These buildings were almost like sheep-cotes. In the sheep breeding villages of Transylvania, animals were

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<sup>8</sup> TÁLASI I. 1936.

<sup>9</sup> PALÁDI-KOVÁCS A. 1965. 58-59.

<sup>10</sup> VAJKAI A. 1959. 57-60.

kept and fed in sheep-stables, barn-rooms, or possibly in open folded sheep-barns from autumn to spring.<sup>11</sup>

On the Great Plain and on the Transdanubia the most developed building of intensive sheep husbandry was the “*hodály*” (*sheep-cote*), which was a covered, rectangular or L shaped building with big capacity. This type of building was mainly called *hodály* in the east-northern parts of Hungary, in the Tiszántúl region and on the southern regions of Heves and Borsod counties. On the Transdanubia it was mostly used in the manors. There are two types of sheep-cotes: reed- or straw-covered sheep-cote sitting on its back-side (*seggenülő hodály*), and the sheep-cote with wall (*falás hodály*), which had low walls and pitched-roof. The first one was built rough-and-ready, this is why it could be the dismantable and mobile building of summer pastures. The second one mainly served as the winter shelter of the manors’ sheep. Accordingly to the geographical environment, the wall could be made of stone, brick, cob or mud-flake. In the sheep-cotes there were feeding-troughs and grids for the sheep. This building had one room, but for example at kindling time small parts could be separated by mobile “*lésza*” (*a light wall or fence part made from twigs, reeds etc.*). The sheep-cote had one, two or three wide doors. This typical building got to Hungary in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the merino sheep. It was not used for racka breeding. The word “*hodály*” is a migrant word, it is known in the Romanian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian Serbian-Croatian and Macedonian language, but its meaning is not always the same as in Hungarian language.<sup>12</sup> In the northern mountains we know many sheep-cotes which were picked into tuff, where the sheep of the village were usually kept together.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> SZE BENI G. 1962.

<sup>12</sup> TESZ

<sup>13</sup> REISCHL G.1998.



*„seggen ülő” hodály (sheep-cote sitting on its back-side); Botpalád, Hungary. 1969.  
Photo: Attila Bokor MNEA F 1985*



*Sheep-cote from the 2. half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hortobágy, Hungary*

## 4. buildings for the sheaperds

### Buildings for the herdsmen

Shepherds usually built huts by putting two plank-walls against each other to form a gable roof. These buildings were open from the front and easily transferable. The mobile, semi-cylinder shaped building made of bent-wood, mostly covered with straw was one of the most characteristic hut, for example the shacks in Bálványosváralja (Mezőség region) and Sztána (Kalotaszeg). Additional part of the shack could be the “lésza”, which is a kind of wicker wall. The mobile herdsmen’s shack can be found in the Bodroghöz region as well.<sup>14</sup>

Typical building of the shepherd’s shelter of the middle-sized mountains was the “szántalpas kunyhó” (*hut on sled runners*) which was commonly used on the Balkan Peninsula. This was used in the middle regions of the Transylvanian Basin. The role of hedge or plank hut standing on sled runners was to protect the food and clothes of the herdsman. Due to its size only the herdsman could fit inside. When the herdsmen changed their place, the hut was pulled by buffalos. The wheeled “bodé” and “kaliba” used in Bálványosváralja had similar roles; and their connections also were looking towards the Balkans.<sup>15</sup>



*Transferable shepherd's shelter. Transylvania, Szászcsovás / Ceaus (Romania 2007.  
Photo: Erika VASS*

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<sup>14</sup> KÓS K. 1947.

<sup>15</sup> K. KOVÁCS L. 1947.



*Shepherd's hut, Photo: László K. Kovács, 1943*

The most typical buildings of the shepherds' shelters in the highlands were the cheese-houses (*eszténa, komárnyik etc.*) in which the sheep-milk was processed, the cheese were ripen and stored. Here were the most important equipments of the shepherds: *sajtnyomó krinta* (table for pressing the cheese), *cseber* (bucket), *sajtprés* (chees-press), *sajtpolc* (cheese-shelf) etc. But a cooking-stove were also there to heat the whey and to produce the secondary dairy products. "Eszténa" was also made from timbers carpentered on the corners. In the Mezőség in Transylvania dismountable and transferable eszténa (cheese-house) were built from planks. Cheese-houses made of fir timber occurred in the manorial sheep-farms of the mountains as well, for example in the northern parts of Heves county, but it was totally unknown in the peasantry sheep-farming.<sup>16</sup> Similar cheese-houses are known from the Gömör and Barkó regions.



*Transferable shepherd's shelter; (Transylvania, Szászcsávás / Ceuaș (Romania) 2007.  
Photo: Erika VASS*

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<sup>16</sup> PALADI-KOVÁCS A. 1964.



*Esztena (cheese-house), Photo: László K.Kovács, 1942*



*Esztena (cheese-house), Photo: László K.Kovács, 1942*

On the Great Plain and in the Northern Hungarian Mountains – for example in the in eastern palóc villages – shepherds built earth huts next to the sheep-folds on the summer pastures. The roof was held by props on the shorter sides; the side of the hut coped with dongs, weed, brushwood and straw and then covered with sod.<sup>17</sup> Similar hovels occurred on the summer example by the Rusyn upland people in the Northern Carpathians, and the nomadic people of Eurasian steppes).

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<sup>17</sup> SZABADFALVI J. 1970; PALÁDI-KOVÁCS A. 1965. 61.





*Shepherd's hut, Photo: László K. Kovács, 1943*

On the Great Plain, before the regulation of rivers and flood drainage, the primary building material was reed both for the herdsmen and for the livestock. Building with reed needed special implementation. The sheaves of reeds were flatted to achieve 5-10 cm thick pieces, then these were dug one foot into the ground, the excavated earth was rammed back beside the sheaves. After that, depending on the height of the wall, it was bound on both sides, over each other in two or three points parallelly. The sheaves of the thickness of an arm were tied with a “*korcolotű*” (a flat, wooden needle) using flexible twigs, which were collected in the spring.



*Open sheperd's hut (vasaló), Hortobágy. Museum's building*

[http://geocaching.hu/images.geo?id=7208&group=272&table=cache\\_images](http://geocaching.hu/images.geo?id=7208&group=272&table=cache_images)

The simplest type of mobile and angular reed-hut on the Great Plain is the “*enyhely*” or “*ekhó*”. It is a 2-3 m high bound reed-wall supported by two poles. Its purpose was to protect the equipments of the shepherd from the wind and from the sun. Its usage and function practicably were the same as of the *szárnyék*. On the Hortobágy this simple wall was functioning as a hut by leaning it to the *szárnyék*; later it was mostly used as a poultry-house. The *enyhely* appeared on the Felső-Tiszántúl and in Little Cumania also.

The most characteristic building of the Great Plain was the round shaped hut built from thick reed walls, it had a “*kontytető*” (*hipped roof with cone or spiky top*). In the Great Cumania, contrary to the above mentioned type the ground-plan of these huts were square shaped. The size of its sides were three or four steps, its height could be two or three meters. The reed wall was usually bound at two points. The upper part was tied strong with a rope made of straw or other weeds; this was called “*konty*”. On the front a relatively small hole was left as a door, and it was closed with planks or woven reeds. Sometimes a “*gádor*” (*mono pitch roof*) was built above the door. The shepherd kept his sheep shelters in the Bakony, on the Great Plain, in Little Cumania, in the countryside of Debrecen and in Bihar County. Earth mud was classified by the researchers of Great Plain herding, as a winter pastoral-building of old-age extensive animal breeding.<sup>18</sup> Shepherd’s huts dug into the ground, were used in other regions as well (for clothes, food and his most important equipments. They made a couch from straw on the floor, but it was used only when it was raining or cold. Alongside the Danube, in the Sárköz region, often 10-15 men were staying in the round reed-hut of the winter shelters.<sup>19</sup> Usually there was a fireplace also, but it was used only in bad weather. The huts with hipped roof were commonly used on the winter shelters of the Great Plain also. Beyond the great plain-pastures – primarily on the Hortobágy and Nagykovács – it could be found in Nagysárrét, in Little Cumania, in Komádi in Bihar County and in Dévaványa, but also on the pastures of Zemplén County along the Tisza – for example in Kesznyéten – and also to the north from Dráva in the Ormánság.

The most specific building of shepherding on the Hortobágy was the “*vasaló*” or “*főzőkarám*” (*cooking-pen*). It was a round hut, made of reed; its walls were leaning inward and had no roof. Usually it had a door and its purpose was to protect the fire and to provide a place where the shepherd could cook. Generally the fire was just a few meters from the door. The shepherd kept his box of food, his cooking equipments and cutlery in this building. Above the fire there was a pot-hanger, on which the stew-pot was hung. In the cooking-pen of

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<sup>18</sup> BÁTKY Zs. 1929.

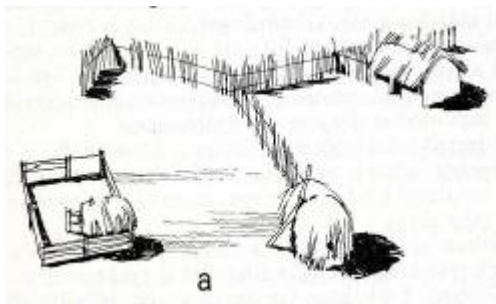
<sup>19</sup> KOVÁCH A. 1912.

the milking shepherds a mud-cauldron was also built. According to István Balogh simple forms of the *vasaló* could be found everywhere on the Hortobágy, where there wasn't enough space for a fireplace in the shepherd's hut. In the vicinity of Hortobágy there were semicircle pens, which were attached to the hut and they were protecting the fire.

Shepherds of the Great Plain used the so-called "*nyeregtetejű kunyó*" (*gable roof hut*) mostly on temporary pastures – for example during the grazing of stubble.<sup>20</sup> The unstrutted roof structure was on the ground, the roof was covered with brushwood, weed or straw. This type of hut was mostly used by field haywards and other wandering people.

A characteristic building of the steppe pastures of Little Cumania was the "*cserény*". It was only 120-150 cm high; its walls were woven of wickers and twigs. It had no roof and no door, and one of its sides was totally open. But there were a few which had full or partial roof. These buildings were mainly used by the herdsmen of big-bodied animals. In one part there were the plough-horses in the other, more closed part there were clothes and equipments of the herdsman. Shepherds did not use this type. The *cserény* was also used for the protection of fire.<sup>21</sup>

The most developed shepherd's hut – which can be found even today – was a house like building with one room and vertical walls. The shepherd stored all his clothes, food and tools there, but there was a "*dikó*" (*couch*) as well; and also the equipments to make dairy products. In front of the huts of milking shepherds usually there was a *csikótűzhely* (*cooking-range*) as well. The wall could be made from reed or more rarely from mud; in Little Cumania also from the walls of the *cserény* but these were smeared on both sides. But on the permanent shepherd's shelters there were huts with steady walls as well.



*Herdsmen's buildings on the Great Hungarian Plain. In: László TOMORY 1963 Mezőgazdasági építészet Budapest page 69, picture 60.*

<sup>20</sup> GYÖRFFY I. 1943. 116–118; SZABADFALVI J. 1970.

<sup>21</sup> BÁTKY Zs. 1941; MADARASSY L. 1912; TÁLASI I. 1936.

## 5. nowadays' architecture

### Nowadays

The number of sheep decreased in Hungary, and the extensive breeding was changed by the intensive, stabling sheep breeding. This process started at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it was finished in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The prepared and fulfilled plans of collective-farms' were following the traditions for some extent. They were built a roof structure – which was often covered with reed – built on 120-150 cm high brick walls.<sup>22</sup> To increase the size, the roof structure was laying on inter-propping. With the spread of mechanical littering the inner height grew everywhere to around 3m. There were sheep-cotes with tubular frame and concrete frame roof structures, but because of the precipitation of moisture these solutions did not work well. It is similar in case of the usage of lagged layer panels as roofing. Both of the above mentioned structures are working appropriately with intensive, usually mechanical ventilation. According to the practical experiences the maximum size of a building where natural ventilation is 12/60 m. In case of bigger building wideness artificial ventilation is necessary by all means. After the change of the political system the small family farmsteads started the extensive breeding and grazing again on smaller lands.

In Transylvania there is a tradition of alpine and extensive breeding and grazing up to this day; its equipments and buildings haven't changed much. As I observed during my researches in Transylvania, the shepherd's shelter is a closed boxed-like building made from planks, with a plank shed roof and with a door on its higher side, which can be opened upwards and can be trussed with a staff. The shepherd sleeps and keeps his goods in there. The building where the cheese is produced practically did not change. It occurs – especially in the near areas of the villages – that the herdsman builds a closed, roofed stable for their own sheep, where they can winter, or at least makes a covered place to store the straw. In this case he often attaches an additional building with one or two rooms for himself and sometimes also for his family. The innovations appeared very slowly. In these days the still wooden buildings are often covered with tar-paper or foil to protect against wind and rain. Near Kápolnásfalu, I saw electric lighting at a herdsman, and he generated the electricity with solar cells on the roof, which was stored in car batteries.

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<sup>22</sup> TOMORY L. 1960



*Solar cell on the wall of the winter sheep-cote built together with a house; Transylvania, Kápolnásfalu / Căpâlnița (România) 2011. Photo: Miklós BUZÁS)*



*Modern sheep-cote, Photo: Sándor Aranyos, 2011*