



CULTURE AND NATURE: THE EUROPEAN HERITAGE OF
SHEEP FARMING AND PASTORAL LIFE

**RESEARCH THEME 3: PASTORAL LIFE
EVERYDAY LIFE**

RESEARCH REPORT FOR BULGARIA

**By Svetla Rakshieva, Assoc. prof. PhD
Simeon Milyov, Vanya Yordanova, Iglia Mishkova**

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INTRODUCTION

In this report, the center of interest is the daily life of the shepherd, as registered by the ethnology in the early twentieth century. For the traditional pastoralism there are still living informants. For example, the seventy years old Dimitar Tsvetkov from Belchin, Samokov municipality, recently created a small open air museum presenting pastoralism as he remembered it from his childhood. There is shown the old style of life that underwent changes during the twentieth century, especially in its second half at the time of socialism, when was created a new organization of the sheep-breeding: farmers were allowed to breed only a few animals to satisfy only the needs of the family while the market oriented large flocks of the past went entirely to the cooperative farms. Traditionally Bulgarian sheep breeding used to be profitable, though in places the social status of the shepherds greatly reduced. In the early 1990s the state cooperatives were closed, the animals were returned to owners, flocks drastically reduced. In the new century the image of the modern farmer takes his place as actor in the conservation of local gene pool, and in market-oriented production of meat and dairy products, including organic production and tourism.

What is the life of the shepherd - an image as an idealized bearer of national virtues in the first half of the twentieth century, his annual and daily rhythm of work? What qualities and skills should he have, how the organization of different types of sheep farms affects the life of the shepherd regarding his work (grazing, watering, feeding, milking, flock protection), his food and clothing, relations with the environment and the society ? What are the daily life of dairy and wintering sites, the games and entertainments, the weekdays and the holidays of the shepherd?

SHEPHERDS JOB IN THE ANNUAL CYCLE

The specific “pastoral” calendar was derived from the different processes and stages of breeding and raising sheep in the year. Accordingly – the shepherds activities and jobs were adjusted to that.

In Bulgarian traditional rural culture the annual cycle of economic activities, including pastoral was divided into two parts: “winter” and “summer”. The “winter” season started on St.

Demetrius Day [October 26] and went on up to St. George's Day [May 6]; "summer" season started on St. George's Day – till St. Demetrius' Day. On both dates masters and owners made contracts and agreements with shepherds to hire them for the next 6 months or for all the year round. The terms of employment, responsibilities, remuneration, etc. were stipulated and agreed upon. Old contracts and accounts were settled. Last year's staff and employed shepherds were released and free to make new contracts.

Mating - *óvcha svátba* ['sheep wedding'], *kóch katúm, púskane na kóch* [loosing tups with ewes] *mârlyane* [mating, tugging] took place in the autumn – usually on *Petkóvden* [St. Petka's Day October 14]. This day marked the start of the period of mating. In the old times some rituals were observed – the shepherds used to fire their guns into the ground – a magic wish for successful mating of all the sheep at the same time. Women at home observed on this day a taboo for spinning, knitting or sewing – to prevent deaths of new-born lambs.

Getting ready for this day started after St. Elijah Day [August 2] when the shepherds picked the best of the weaned male lambs together with older rams. They formed a special flock of these males – *kochóve, prázove* [tups, rams] and grazed them separately, apart from the ewes. Rams were taken special care of by a shepherd – *kochmardzhíya, prazár*. The shepherds knew that in the season of mating the sheep needed more cares and better feeding, so they took them in this period and about a month after that at drained pastures with nice grass and watered them well. In order to provide a good drive and successful insemination, the shepherds made sure that the ewes were no more milked at least 30 days before the mating. They often managed to stimulate more simultaneous drive among sheep by means of giving the rams salt. (About 8 – 9 days before loosing the rams with the ewes, the big salt-stones were removed from the pen and were put back just 1-2 days before the mating.) There were three methods of mating: random, loosing a ram with 35 – 40 ewes, and "letting the ram from hand". Usually tugging took longer time and resulted with a long lambing period in spring.

In the old traditional pastoral economy mating was correlated to the hibernating of sheep and seasonal migrations. The shepherds knew that sheep-pregnancy lasted about 150 days and took in consideration that lambing should take place in March when there would be enough fresh green grass in the pastures and the weather would get warmer. Generally mating should be accomplished later in the autumn to make sure lambing will also take place later in spring. Transhumant shepherds tried to complete the lambing at the winter pastures in the plains and to avoid cases of lambing in the course of their migration to the mountains.

In the **socialist period** – since the 60-ies of XX c. and up to the present day new methods of affected insemination were applied.

Taking care for pregnant ewes – *gebé, brémenni*, involved most of all their feeding – they received more and better quality fodder and foliage. Pregnant ewes were regularly fed with *popára, karmílo* [chaff or fine oats- and barley-straw mixed with feed and salty warm water]. Sheep were separated into those in lamb and those not. The shepherds regularly checked the ewes' udders to know how pregnancy is going on and when should be the lambing expected. Accordingly, the ewes were divided in three groups: *rânen sagmál* ['early ewes'] – the first to lamb, *sagmál* ['normal ewes'], *kyurpekíni* ['late ewes'] – the last to lamb.

Lambing – *ágnene* [Bul.] was considered the hardest task of the shepherd and his greatest responsibility. The lambing campaign lasted over a month due to the arbitrary mating. The shepherd was restless and could hardly sleep. He turned all around the pastures and back to the pen over and over again – to look after the sheep, to help them for the lambing – especially the hogs, to bring the baby-lambs with their mothers to the pen. He should not let deaths of lambs or ewes or anyway – at a very low rate. Usually in the lambing time the shepherd was helped by the sheep-owner or his apprentice. The ewes with their baby-lambs were separated in the pen and taken special care of. Ewes that lost their lambs because of abortion or in the course of lambing were called *changáli*. They were the first to be milked. Usually the shepherds attached to them lambs whose mothers died or lost their milk – to suckle from the *changáli*. The earliest lambs were called *raníche/ ráno yágne*, and the latest born - *kyurpé, sugaré*. In the past the shepherds used to tie around the neck of the first born lamb a small amulet – *mártenitsa* (made of a red and a white woolen threads twisted together) – to mark and recognize it as the first progeny, for good luck and health and to chase the Evil eye.

In the period of socialism and nowadays lambing was accomplished in totally different terms. As a rule mating was very early, so that lambing was provided for the end of December and the beginning of January. The ewes and lambs were kept in solid, warm, dry, clean buildings and well fed. In socialist cooperative farms as well as in contemporary pastoral cooperatives early lambing was a stage of raising lambs for meat –both for the interior market and export. However, lambing remains a hard task and restless time for individual private owners who take part in this process by themselves or helped by their families. Today owners can also rely to the professional help and care of veterinarians.

Weaning – *ótbiv, lâchene*, occurred soon – from the end of April – up to the end of May depending on the type of pastoral economy. In the areas with sedentary or mountain sheep-breeding weaning was correlated with the start of milking period and setting cooperative dairies – about *Gergyovden* [St. George's Day, May 6]. The lambs were separated from the ewes in a distinct flock and taken away to distant pastures. After the weaning they were already called *shileta* [weans, weaned lambs]. **Special shepherds** took care of them – *shiletári/ shilegári* until the end of July – to let them forget their mothers. At the same time a prohibition was set on grazing in the commons – to let the meadows, lawns and pastures to recover, to let the grass grow high and make hay. In some areas where lambing took longer time, weaning was done in two or three stages – to let the lambs suckle and grow enough, but it should happen before the end of May. In the system of transhumance weaning was accomplished after the spring migration to the mountains – when the flocks returned to the highland villages - at *Kostadínovden* [St. St. Constantine and Helena's Day, May 21].

In the time of weaning new **repartition of flocks** was made: **1) the flock of weaned lambs** – *shileta*, with 2 – 3 shepherds in charge – *shiletári*; sent at high alpine pastures; **2) the flock of barren sheep** – *yóz/ yálovi/ yálovina*, including geld sheep, rams, wethers, etc.; charged to 2 – 3 shepherds – *yalovári, yozchíi* and taken to the highest alpine pastures; **3) the flock of milky ewes** - *sagmál/ dóyni óvci/ mólznitsi/ mulzaré/ bachiárki* – sent to the best lower pastures close to the dairy and charged to 3 – 4 shepherds to graze them *and* to milk them – *sagmaldzhíi/ doyáchi/ duichéri/ molznichári*.

In some areas the task of shepherds of the weaned lambs was considered the hardest – because they had to take care and grow up young animals. Accordingly, the task of the shepherds of ewes was considered the lightest, because “their sheep were the most experienced”, i.e. they knew the life at the dairy and the process of milking. Though in other regions the opposite was valid – the task of ewes’ shepherds was thought the hardest, because they had to graze them and milk them 2 – 3 times a day, along with other activities. Both the shepherds of weaned lambs and those of barren flocks lived isolated on remote alpine pastures. They had random social contacts in summer and sent someone to the village to get some food supplies. They went back home for change once a week or in two weeks shifting each other. Usually these shepherds were given one or two goats – to use their milk as a special food supply – the so-called *manzári*. The *yalovári* shepherds and the *shilegári* shepherds cooked some ordinary meals themselves – such as hominy, porridge, yoghurt and drank fresh milk. They usually brought bread from the village.

Shearing is performed in three stages for different kinds of animals and their wool. Early in spring (in March - April), the shepherds carefully sheared a little spot under the belly and around the tail of the ewes and the *changali*. This shearing as well as the wool was called *podstrig/ postrek* and was considered of a low quality. That was done to prevent the wool getting dirty, to keep the udder clean for the sucklings and for milking, and to keep the skin cooler.

Generally the sheep were sheared for their fleece – *strížhba na runó/ na vâlna, karkóm* in the time about or after *Gergyovden* [St. George’s Day, May 6] – up to the end of May. The weather was carefully observed – if it was colder – sheep got sheared later not to catch cold, if it was warmer – they were sheared earlier. Ewes and barren sheep should be sheared at once, before taking them to the dairies or to the alpine pastures. In this way the owners tried to minimize the decrease of milk of the ewes as a result of shearing them. The proper “lucky” day for shearing was chosen – the first Monday after *Gergyovden* – “the day of Lord”. Usually before getting sheared, sheep were washed – they were pushed and dipped into a pool – *plavílo* [‘washing pool’].

The sheep were sheared by hand by the owners themselves with some help of their families, the shepherds or especially hired men – *strigáchi/ karkamdzhíi*. It was a common practice to gather a group for mutual aid and shear the sheep in common. Shearing took place on a dry place in shade under the trees or a shelter. It started from the belly and went to the back. Then the shepherd turned the sheep on the other side.

The traditional popular tools were several types of shears, generally called *nózhitsi*: 1) *karklazi/ karkmi/ karklatsi* – consisting of two separate blades connected with a short wooden axis; 2) *makazi* or *nóytsi s pruzhína* – the blades connected with a spring; 3) *terzíyski nózhitsi* – taylor’s scizors.

Transhumant shepherds from the Rhodopes organized the shearing of fleece at the winter pastures in the plains – two weeks before *Gergyovden*. Big groups of shear-men were hired – *karkâmdzhíi*, to help the shepherds. An experienced shearer could shear 90 – 100 sheep per day. Their remuneration was one fleece out of every 20. Shearing should be finished before their return to the mountains and setting the dairies. Fleeces were sold to merchants of wool in the plains and provided a good income for both shepherds and owners.

Weaned lambs – *shíleta*, were sheared in summer in July - on *Petrovden* [St. Peter's Day, June 29] up to *Ilínden* [St. Elijah's Day, July 20]. Their fleece was called *yárina*. Shearing the weaned lambs was harder and their wool was more expensive. A good shearer could shear ca 70 – 80 weans per day. In the course of shearing as the fleece exposed the body it became obvious to everybody how exactly did the shepherd take care of the sheep, how did he graze them, what was their condition – well fattened and smooth or lean and hide boned. On this occasion the good shepherds of the better beasts got praised for their work and care.

During the socialism electric machines for clipping were introduced. Nowadays this method of shearing is still the most popular. However, today the owners of some “organic” flocks still prefer old iron traditional shears and old hand-shearing as bringing less stress for the sheep.

Marks of ownership

Sheep-owners were able to recognize and identify their sheep after their unique mark – *béleg*, *yén*. This mark was made by cutting out a bit of the skin of the ear in various patterns and combinations. The owners and shepherds especially observed that the marks were unique and did not occur twice in the village. The marks were inherited within the clan and were handed down from father to son. New-born lambs were marked at the end of March – on *Blágovets* [The Annunciation, March 25]. The cuttings of the lambs' ears were thrown into the river as a magic wish for growing, breeding and prosperity of flocks “as the river flows”. Or they were buried into an ant-hill – to let the flocks breed innumerable “as the ants”.

After the shearing, sheep were also marked with various signs stamped with tar upon their skin with special iron brands – *damgá*, *dangó*. The brands occurred also in various patterns, unique of each owner. In the past they were some odd combination of geometric symbols and elements of characters. Later on those strange signs were replaced by characters or initials of the owner. The image of the brand was represented in the Rhodopes upon the ritual breads on the occasion of pastoral holidays and celebrations – *Kostadinovden*, *Gergyovden*, *Petrovden*.

Both ear-marks and brands were considered some specific kind of pastoral “shepherds” script.

Marking the sheep was very important for their identification in the past when gathering cooperative flocks in summer and grazing the flocks in the commons was the usual practice. The shepherd should know very well all the marks in his flock – to be able to recognize lost or stolen beasts. More than that – there were especially skilled shepherds – the so-called *saráfi*, who were capable to identify a single sheep among lots of others according just to its appearance.

In the socialist period the brands were already put with paint instead of tar. Nowadays ear-marks were replaced by plastic marks put by vets.

Safeguarding

It was the shepherds' task to safeguard the flocks by robbery, getting lost, predators and disasters. In those cases they were helped by shepherds' dogs. In Bulgaria the most popular breed is *karákachanska ovchárka*. Shepherds carefully picked pedigree dogs of well known origins. They were especially trained to collect, drive and guard the sheep and were commanded by the shepherd with a system of whistles, orders and signals. Shepherds' dogs were fed solely with hominy, bread, porridge and whey and never with meat. It was a common practice for shepherds' dogs to wear a special iron ring with thorns around their neck against

predators – wolves, jackals and bears. In the summer the flocks at the dairies were guarded by more than 10 dogs. Dogs were the company and the friends of the shepherd at the distant pastures. Well trained faithful dogs never left the flocks and shepherds, shared their destiny and even died with them.

In his everyday activities and managing the flock, the shepherd was helped also by his donkey or mule. It was trained to drive the flock and usually carried the shepherds' luggage, cloak and food.

Another tool to guard the sheep were the **bells**. There were two types in Bulgaria: copper round bells – *tyumbelétsi* and conical bronze bells – *chánove*. There were bells of various sizes – the biggest weighing up to 5 kilograms. For that reason just billy-goats could wear them, because they were stronger and vigorous. *Chanove* were worn also by rams. There were about 12 of them set in one octave and a half. This was a special pastoral “orchestra”, the shepherds' music: *tyumbelets* representing the “drums” and *chanove* – the “melody”, the “vocals”. This was the pleasure, the fame and the pride of the shepherd. Many shepherds especially ordered casting of bells with the addition of silver to the alloy – to make them “sing as young girls”. The bells were “the voice” of the flock. They were recognizable and made the flock identifiable everywhere. The bells turned the subject of envy and were often stolen by other shepherds. They became one of the symbols of pastoralism and pastoral life in Bulgaria. Old shepherds could not leave their bells. If they could not hand them down to their heirs, they used to bury them under the route of the flocks – to keep on “singing” and narrating about sheep and shepherds. While the bells made a beautiful music, at the same time they helped the shepherd to find lost or strayed sheep and to feel the mood of the flock – fear or calmness. Rams and billy-goats wearing the big bells helped to lead and drive all the flock. Today both types of bells are still manufactured – for eager fans of traditions and folklore and for the needs of masquerade personages – *survakari*, *kúkeri*, *babúgeri* [mummers].

The shepherds were in charge to safeguard the flocks, but there was a stipulated rate of losses. In the Rhodopes and the other areas of transhumance the rate of 10 % losses was considered admissible – stolen, eaten by predators, disappeared and destroyed in disasters (floods, storms, thunder-struck). In case the losses exceeded 10 % the shepherds should present a proof showing the cause of death – some part of the skin or corpse, etc. In the rest of the country the shepherds should present a proof in every case of missing sheep. Otherwise they must repay the lost beasts.

Cure

It was the shepherd's task to take care of the health and good condition of the flock all the year round. The shepherd should know how to treat some diseases and cure the sheep, to prevent pestilence, and manage in case of broken legs, etc. Traditional folk culture in Bulgaria was distinguished with a full range of taboos, superstitions and magic actions to observe for the good health of flocks. Rational elements merged with irrational in the shepherds' practices of medical treatment of sheep. They should cope with broken bones, wounds by predators, bitten by serpents, distoma, scabies, measles, gid, poisoning, sunstroke, etc. The shepherds treated the sheep solely with the methods of folk medicine making use of herbs and minerals. Sometimes they accomplished operations and surgery – fixing a broken leg or even successful trepanation of the skull.

In the period of socialism medical treatment of the flocks in the cooperative farms (TKZS) was the duty of veterinarians. They also insured vaccinations, preventing pestilence and insured professional aid in the course of lambing. Although the old popular methods of folk medicine were still applied by many old shepherds in their private flocks.

In the summer shepherds took part in the **organization of cooperative dairies and milking the ewes.**

Great sheep-owners usually organized the milking, milk-processing and the work of dairies individually. They used to hire shepherds to manage the flocks and masters to make the milk production.

Much more interesting were the cooperative dairies organized by small sheep-owners – the so-called *mándra*, *bachíya*/ *bachílo*/ *bachó*. This was an old traditional form of organization between sheep-owners and shepherds for both tending and growing the sheep in summer and milk processing. They used to gather their sheep in common flocks and particularly – the ewes, because in this way they could get large quantities of milk and respectively – milk processing was more rational and efficient. As a result each of the members of the cooperative mandra or bachiya received more products of a good quality. It is interesting that the common flock of ewes in Western Bulgaria was also called *bachíya*, *bachiárki*, *sagmalítsi*, *mlâznitsi* and in other regions *sagmál*, *dóyni óvci*. The weans and barren sheep were also united in common flocks and sent to graze at distant pastures.

The cooperative bachiya or mandra was gathered in May – on *Yeremíya* [Prophet Jeremiah, May 1], *Gergyovden* [May 6], at *Kostadinovden* [May 21, especially in the Rhodopes] or at the beginning of June. This was a great celebration in local folk calendar – distinguished and performed very solemnly with ritual tables, consecration and many customs and rites for good luck, health and well-being of the flocks and shepherds, abundant yield of milk and products, and finally – for chasing Evil eye and preventing magic “stealing” the milk of ewes.

Usually their members were 20 – 30 sheep-owners, their number determined by the number of the sheep. The common flock of ewes counted 150 – 200 – 250 or in case their number was greater – they were divided in two flocks. These cooperatives were based upon mutual interest and trust between the members – friends and relatives from the village or neighbourhood who knew each other very well. Sometimes in the same village 2 – 3 or more *mándras*/ *bachíyas* were organized. The initiative was taken by a bigger sheep-owner or shepherd with great experience and prestige – the so-called *bách* or *básh-mándradzhiya*. He became the leader and the head of the cooperative. The flocks were charged to shepherds' staff: *kehayá* [chief shepherd], *yán-kehayá*/ *podkeyník* [deputy], *sagmaldzhii*/ *molznichári*/ *doyáchi* [shepherds of ewes], *izkarvách*/ *pokarách*/ *pogoních*/ *karachér* [the person who drove the ewes in the milking-pen], *shilegári* [shepherds of weans] and *yalovári* [shepherds of barren flock]. Members of the cooperative were also the *odadzhíya* [housekeeper, manager], *syutchíya* (in the Rhodopes – in charge of milk distribution) and auxiliary staff.

The position of shepherds in these cooperatives was ambiguous – they were at the same time hired staff and members with their own sheep. Therefore they got paid and at the same time took part in the distribution of milk products. Contracting and agreement between sheep-owners and the shepherds – members of the cooperative was made orally based upon customary law. The milk production of these dairies (cheese, butter, curds) was commonly

called *maksúl, blagotá*. It was distributed between the members in a very democratic manner, along with the droppings from the flocks which was crucially important for manuring the crops in the mountains.

The chief of the cooperative – the *bach* was obliged to provide the great deal of the inventory and utensils, to hire the shepherds and masters of milk production, to lease the pastures and organize the work and management in the season. Usually he was in charge for the accounts and the control of distribution of products between the members. The sheep-owners also took part in providing utensils, erecting constructions and enclosures, ensuring salt supply for the sheep and bringing help from home for driving the ewes in the pen and transportation of the products. All their expenses were remunerated in milk products.

The cooperative *bachiyas* started with a common test milking the sheep of all their members – the so-called *prémlaz, prémuz, smláz* (Western Bulgaria), *prédoy* (the Rhodopes), *sdáya, izdáya, sdóy, predóyka* (Stara planina). The ewes were gathered and brought to the pen 2 – 3 days before the start. They were taken to good pastures and kept together to get the best options for milking and to equalize their yield. In the last twenty-four hours before the start the owners went to the dairy to milk their ewes and check their particular yield. On the date of the start all the members – owners and shepherds gathered at the dairy and made a test milking of their ewes. Each of them had to turn down the milking pails – to show there was no water inside – to enlarge the quantity of the milk, i.e. he was not cheating on his mates. Then the milk of each member was carefully measured with a special set of measures: *kútel, méra, dzhídzh*, which was also used in common and kept by the *bach*. For each liter of milk on this day the members should receive 3 – 5 kilograms of products in the season. That was the reason the yield of each owner was accurately registered by cutting it down with special runes on a stick – *rábush, chétula*, kept by the *bach* at the dairy. According to these marks he was able to control the fair distribution and receiving each member's share in the season. A chop of the rabush was kept by the owner – with his own share. In the time of milking season the owners took their milk in two or three stages – to prevent eventual decrease or loss of milk. The fair distribution of products presumed to balance the greater quantity of milk at the start of the season with its better quality at the end of season. That is why first came the owners with the biggest share and the last were those with little share.

The work and the duties of the shepherds of ewes at the *bachiyas* were very hard. At the beginning of the season the ewes were milked three times a day, later on – two times. This was time-consuming and hard work. The shepherds should take care to graze well the ewes and prevent any disaster (hail, storm, predators' attacks, dangers, etc.) that could frighten the flock and cause decrease or loss of their milk. That was a great responsibility. Accordingly, at the end of the season the shepherds of the ewes were granted a special "award" – the right to milk the ewes several days on their own, or additional quantity of milk products. This grant was called *rukoból* ['hands pain'] – suggestive of their hard work in the course of milking.

The cooperative *bachiyas* worked until *Golyáma Bogoróditsa* [Our Lady's Day, August 15] or *Krastóvden* [September 14]. Generally on this day the accounts of the cooperative were settled by the *bach*. The shepherds received their salaries and their share. Everyone took back his utensils and inventory. They broke and parted very solemnly with a celebration on this day. After that each member took his sheep and was free to milk his ewes individually and process the milk at home.

These cooperatives were active up to the 30-ies – 40-ies of XX c. Consequently they were replaced by dairies organized by merchants and market oriented. White brine cheese, yellow cheese – *kashkavál* and butter was produced there by professional masters for the interior market and for export. The remnant *bachiyas* or the individual sheep-owners sold the raw milk to these “trade” dairies for money. In this period the shepherds of the ewes had to milk them and carry the yield to the dairy and sell it on behalf of the owners. In other cases the shepherds should process the milk into white cheese and give it to the owners.

In the period of socialism the old cooperative dairies were replaced by modern market oriented dairies at TKZS (cooperative labour farms in Bulgaria). Milk processing turned a profitable modern industry with big plants and famous trade marks.

REMUNERATION

The shepherds were hired and made contracts with the owners according to the dual division of the year – for the “winter season” (since Dimitrovden to Gergyovden) or for the “summer season” (since Gergyovden to Dimitrovden), just for 6 months or for all the year.

They were paid in money and in kind according to their activities and tasks. For instance the winter salary – *zímen hak* included a small amount per capita, winter clothing (cloak, shoes), food supply. The owner was obliged to insure a room or hut for the shepherd. When calculating the salary due allowances were made for the hardest activities – such as lambing campaign. The summer salary included also money, clothing and food. The amounts per capita varied in the salaries of different categories of shepherds according to the flocks and the tasks. Usually the shepherds were given one or two goats to milk them, and the salary of the shepherds of ewes was bigger because their work was considered the hardest. It was a common practice to include in the shepherds’ salary the right to use the manure from the flock. In the time of settling the accounts the shepherds received also some “awards” in kind from the owners – weans, wethers, milk products – for their good work and cares. Many young shepherds started their own flocks from such grants.

In the period of socialism the shepherds worked at the cooperative labour farms – TKZS. Up to the 70-ies of XX c. their salary was very low despite some improvement of living conditions and mechanization of some activities – shearing, feeding, milking. Accordingly, young people were not interested of this profession and moved to towns and big cities in the quest of higher education, good income and leisure.

Clothing and attributes

In the old times the shepherds were dressed in the typical local costume. One of their specific “professional” attributes was the **shepherds’ cloak** – *yamurlúk, opandzhák, gúnya, kabanítsa, képe*. There were various kinds of this dressing – with or without sleeves, hood, smooth or fluffy, etc. The cloaks were manufactured of coarse homespun cloth of wool and goats hair – to make them waterproof. This was the most typical shepherds’ outfit – symbolic of the profession. Shepherds wore the cloak all the year round and used them as a rug and blanket in the night and as a shelter in bad weather. In the Rhodopes there was one more typical attribute – the **shepherds’ shawl/stole** – *shel*. These stoles were red, long and wide, adorned with fringe. They were used in everyday life but at the same time performed a special festive part of the shepherds’ costume. Shepherds usually wore leather sandals with wide

white woolen puttees tightened with black straps. A special shepherds' attribute was the wide leather girdle – *silyáh*, with many folds to keep tinder, flints, various knives, tobacco-case, cigarette-box, etc. It was also adorned with metal applications. Shepherds were allowed to be armed, so they carried a long rifle, pistol and knives. The big heavy knives – *karakulak* were used for self-defense, cutting and chopping, as well as an axe. Smaller knives – *kostúra* and daggers – *kamá*, were used in case of surgery too. The shepherds were belted with various bags, cartridge-boxes and horns, so that they really looked rather as brigands than as quiet herdsmen. Of course the most typical shepherds' attribute – the symbol of pastoralism was the shepherds' crook – *géga*, and the shepherds' staff – *toyága*, *krivák*. The distinguishing feature of the gega was the wooden carved hook (occasionally metal hook – Sredna gora) – *géga*, *kúka* at its top, used to catch and drive the sheep. In the past the shepherds also carried their musical instruments – kaval [flute], duduk [wooden pipe] and bag-pipe (*gáyda*, *kabá-gáyda*) in a special adorned leather bag.

The shepherds used to wash and look after their clothing at the distant pastures. Those who were relatively closer to the villages went back for change in one or two weeks. Transhumant shepherds who lived far away all season long, took new clothing at the beginning of the migration and came back with worn out clothes.

In the period of socialism the woolen cloaks were replaced by rubber ones, and leather sandals – by rubber boots, but these proved not as durable and warm as the old attributes.

OTHER SHEPHERDS OCUPATIONS

The life of shepherds with the flocks on the pastures was quite solitary, so they used to make some things for entertainment while keeping an eye at the sheep.

One of their favorite occupations was woodcarving. They elaborated various wooden objects for the household, gifts for their beloved maidens and fiancées as well as for weddings, wooden objects and utensils for the pastoral life in the mountains. The shepherds made wooden spoons of different size and function for the household and the dairy, low stools with three legs, prosphora [wooden stamps for ritual bread], distaffs and spindles, candlesticks, measures for the test milking, specific “shepherds” cups, crooks, etc. In the time of their long rounds with the flocks in the field and the woods, the shepherds acquired a good knowledge of species and their qualities. They used oak, beech, maple, lime-tree, walnut-tree, pine-tree, juniper and cornel. They perfectly knew the flavour, colour and the solidity of each kind of wood. Their articles were decorated with carving – a specific flat incised geometrical style known as “shepherds’ carving”. Of course there were different techniques of carving and decoration – incised, high and low relief, piercing, cutting, engraving, etc. Several plain tools were implemented – shepherds knives – *kostura*, small saw, axe, special curved instrument for cutting and chiseling - *iznimalo*, various types and patterns of stamps (stars, rosettes, triangles, circles, etc.), awls and stilettos – *zamba*.

Geometrical ornaments are predominant – dots, circle with dot in the centre – the so-called “bird’s eye”, rosettes, diamonds, triangles, zig-zag, swastika.

The handles of spoons were decorated with zig-zag lines, serpent motifs, spirals. The distaffs were often made with a tiny piece of mirror in order to remind the fiancée of her beloved shepherd when she spinned and caught her image in the mirror. Some spoons were decorated with tangles and knots, “ropes”, etc. Sometimes they bore an image of a

shepherds' head at the edge, as well as the initials of the master. Especially interesting were shepherds' crooks, carved with a ram's head at the top which turned a serpent at the bottom. The images of the ram and the serpent were by no means accidental. The ram represented the flock and the serpent was the symbol of the health and well-being of sheep – it was supposed to protect the flock from diseases, disaster and Evil eye. "Shepherds" cups were the trade mark and specialty of the shepherds from Sredna gora. They were distinguished with their specific shape and decorated with grooves, geometric motifs and occasionally – with beads.

Another shepherds' occupation was knitting. Rhodopean shepherds used to spin white wool and knit themselves small flat caps – *terlik*, which they wore under their fur caps.

Another beloved occupation of shepherds was playing the flute or the bagpipe.

Shepherds in the past entertained themselves with special dressing rams or billy-goats – to make them extraordinary and "beautiful". They shaped their horns to make them straight or twisted, they sheared them in a specific fashion – *na alotsi* – leaving long fleece on the neck and back. Sometimes the shepherds prepared especially beautiful ram – *godesh* – with "golden" curved horns and red dyed fleece for weddings (in the Rhodopes). Their famous entertainment were the fights of dogs or the fights of rams.

Pastoral life far from home at the remote pastures was quite solitary. To make a good shepherd one should have a special attraction about growing sheep. This profession demanded devotion and love for the animals. It was a hard work day and night with no time for leisure and a few holidays. The society of the shepherd was the flock and his best friends and company – the mule and the dogs. At the same time the flock was his fame and glory. The perfect condition, good health, fertility, well-being and abundance of the flock represented the general sense and purpose of his life.

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