



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

**Theme 4: Transhumance  
Report of Hungary**

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## **1. General introduction**

**Hungary** is located in Central Europe, in the Carpathian Basin surrounded by the Carpathians, the Alps and the Dinaric Mountains. The territory of the country is 93,030 square kilometres, covering about 1 per cent of Europe. Hungary is a mixture of eastern and western cultural influences together with the traditions of a 1000-year-old state. Pagan tribes arrived in the Carpathian Basin around 896 and assimilated the smaller and greater local tribes. Later on, throughout their history, Hungarian rulers invited priests, artists and teachers to enrich Hungarian culture. Monuments of the Roman Empire as well as spas from the age of the 150-year-long Turkish rule, medieval castles and magnificent cathedrals all bear witness to a stirring history.

Administratively, Hungary is divided into 19 counties. In addition, the capital city, Budapest, is independent of any county government. The counties and the capital are the 20 NUTS third-level units of Hungary.

Hungary is a member of OECD, NATO, EU and a Schengen state. Despite its relatively small size, the country is home to numerous World Heritage Sites, UNESCO Biosphere reserves, the second largest thermal lake in the world (Lake Hévíz), the largest lake in Central Europe (Lake Balaton), and the largest natural grassland in Europe (Hortobágy).

Several million people of Hungarian nationality are living outside the current country borders, most of them in the surrounding countries (Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria). The most significant region – concerning sheep breeding – is Transylvania, which is a part of Romania. The review of Hungarian sheep breeding and herdsman's life is unimaginable without researching this geographical area.

### **Different species – diversity of local species**

Since sheep's domestication took place before the use of writing, there are no written reports to inform about the species of wild sheep, whose domestication contributed to the development of the domestic sheep. There are, however several theories to explain the process. Although we don't know when the domestication had started, we have knowledge about the keeping of sheep – besides other domestic animals - by Neolithic man. Numerous local, specific species of sheep had developed, many species cover different regions and cultures as common element. Sheep are present in Europe, Asia, Africa and America – in every continent. Their economic and cultural importance has changed a lot but they play again an important role in the bio/eco/organic agriculture and animal husbandry everywhere in Europe, this is especially true for traditional, local species.

*The species of racka, cigaja, curkan were the most important sheep in Hungary till the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the merino sheep started gradually to outnumber them. Cross breeding of different species as a consequence of co-existence of peoples, the interbreeding of different flocks contributed to the creation of a multicoloured sheep-culture in Europe.*

### **Different forms of the keeping**

In springtime, generally on the day of St. George (24th April), seldom on the day of St. Joseph, or on the 1st May, the sheep were driven to a certain part of the fields, normally of lesser quality, which was not suitable for other animals. In earlier times, when farmers applied rotation of crops, sheep were driven to fallow land.

There is a difference in the ways and grades between extensive and intensive breeding.

The feeding of animals in extensive breeding is based on grazing; it is connected to migration, simple buildings, little investment of labor and low efficiency. Extensive breeding was widely practiced during the feudalism, mainly the young and slaughter livestock were bred this way. Work-, milking-animals and those which were used for transportation were bred more

intensively; they were fed and kept better. The two types of breeding were present in Hungary simultaneously probably since the Conquest of Hungary. The intensive breeding grew slowly by degrees and because of this extensive decreased.

Differences can be made based on the constructions and on the owners of the flock (ownership by farms, manors, shepherds).

The forms of animal husbandry with and without permanent accommodation have developed.

In 1957, László Földes divided the sheep breeding in the Carpathian-basin to the following four regional and partly historical groups – mainly based on the type of buildings: 1. Alpine shepherding, 2. Kosarazó shepherding (*moving the sheep-pen from one place to another so the sheep could fertilize the land*), 3. Racka breeding on the Great Hungarian Plain, 4. Merino breeding.

The whole system of Hungarian sheep breeding changed with the introduction of the western merino breeds in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and their spread – because of the wool prosperity – in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Instead of the extensive breeding of racka, merino brought the change of breeding method and a new building type the sheep-cote appeared.

### **Benefits of keeping sheep**

Keeping sheep had several economic reasons; keeping sheep allowed to produce numerous products. As a consequence of milk processing several local types of cheese were being produced.

The historical and archeological sources confirm that the consumption of pork became significant only in the last 100-150 years. Earlier cattle-meat and lamb had greater role in the alimentation of Hungarians. In sheep breeding households the most important period of consumption was between the harvest in the autumn and pig slaughter.

The curd-cheese culture and yoghurt making methods of Hungarians in the Middle Ages – which did not include rennet – was completed with the cheese-culture using stomach- or vegetable rennet.

One of the most important yields of sheep breeding was the wool, which appeared in clothing culture, household textiles and fine arts.

Wool was one of the most important economic forces in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Wool processing promoted the development of the textile industry everywhere in Europe. Wool is used for clothing and for household textiles

A special type of fertilization in the Middle-Mountain regions was the *kosarazás*; the land was fertilized by the transportation of the dismountable and movable sheep-pen. The great historical background of heating with manure is proved by not only the origin of the word, but also its geographical incidence. Heating with animal manure was very well known and the word *tőzeg* (*turf*) has Turkish origins before the Conquest of Hungary.

### **Sheep breeding today**

Sheep breeding, like any other activity, is affected by several factors. The most important factor is the demand for sheep products, which is completed in Europe by the purposes of use of certain areas and landscape protection, furthermore by the necessity of providing jobs and preventing the migration of the population.

The importance and advantages of biodiversity and ecologic farming forms have to be highlighted. The economic geography of different regions can be studied from the view of sheep breeding and of tourism linked to sheep keeping: from environment point a sustainable

rural development, which takes into consideration the most important, locally specific ecologic values, the regional structure of agriculture, the cultural traditions of the built environment and the touristic sector.

## 2. Historical background

*In accordance with the terminology used in European research the Hungarian ethnographic literature calls transhumance the form of shepherding based on vertical movement of the herds between higher and lower pastures. This was practiced in Hungary only in a small area and only till the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a consequence of geographic circumstances and of historic development of animal husbandry, the movement between summer and winter pastures on the plains was more frequent and remained much longer, till the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The types of this latter are called horizontal transhumance<sup>1</sup> (movement between flood plains and higher grazing ground following the floods of rivers). First the classic transhumance as practiced in Transylvania will be presented, followed by other forms of transhumance.*

Transhumance is a form of shepherding practiced by permanently settled people, based on rhythmic change of summer (montane) and winter grasslands (on the plain). The distance between summer and winter pastures can be several hundred kilometres. Only the herd travels with the people necessary to tend them, the families stay at home. Mainly sheep flocks, in less extent goats practice transhumance. The practice is typical in the Mediterranean region but also known in the foothills of the Alps and Carpathians and in the Southern Transylvanian Alps.<sup>2</sup>

Originally, this form of transhumance was not practiced in Hungary. It was introduced by Vlach groups migrating to the Southern Transylvanian Alps from the Balkan. These groups appeared in the Southern Transylvanian Alps in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and in the Northern Carpathians in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Their arrival considerably affected the sheep-breeding practices of other peoples (Slovakians, Polish, Ruthenes, Moravians and Hungarians) living in the Carpathian Mountains and in the foothills. Their influence covered mainly the alpine and transhumance shepherding practices and the processing of sheep-milk.

Sheep-breeding villages with Vlach rights have been created between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in Transylvania, Galicia and Moravia. Their own leaders called “kenéz” ruled them and their taxation system was more advantageous than that of the serfs. Among the Vlach shepherds there were even Romanian, Ruthenian, Polish, Slovakian and Hungarian ethnic groups.<sup>3</sup>

Shepherding with movement between pastures in Transylvania and those in the Romanian flatlands - as we have observed - is a typical transhumance, identical in every important characteristic with the typical forms known in the Mediterranean region. Moreover, our area is geographically related to the Mediterranean region through the Balkan, and as such, it can be considered as the north-eastern extension of the South-European transhumance. It belongs to the subtype *transhumance inverse* because the owners of the herds are settled in the mountains.<sup>4</sup>

The main destination of the Transylvanian transhumance was Wallachia at the beginning, and even later. The wide flood plains of the Danube, called Balta offered the most important winter pastures. Alpine pastures were used in summer, and in autumn herds were shepherded

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<sup>1</sup> Example: Béres A. 1972-1974. 140., Frisnyák S. 1999. 592.

<sup>2</sup> Paládi - Kovács A. 1993. 72.

<sup>3</sup> Szabadfalvi J. 2001. 708.

<sup>4</sup> Földes L. 1982b. 358.

to Wallachia, to the Danube and further to Dobruđja.<sup>5</sup> The importance of Wallachia is illustrated by the fact that the reduction of the pastures in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century caused the fall of the transhumance practice in Transylvania.<sup>6</sup>

A smaller part of the animal stock used to be sent to Moldavia at the end of the Middle-Ages. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a considerable quantity of herds migrated from Transylvania to the Southern Bessarabia but agricultural development limited the pasturing opportunities here too. New pastures were looked for on the Crimean Peninsula in the 1880s and in the Caucasus in the 1900s. The shepherds remained in contact with their native village in Transylvania and occasionally returned home. They gave up shepherding in these remote places in the 1930s and all had come home for good.<sup>7</sup>

The bigger part of the flocks grazing on the Romanian side of the Southern Transylvanian Alps was property of Transylvanians. From the 14<sup>th</sup> century on, and to a greater extent in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, some Transylvanian moving shepherds settled down here permanently and they are called up to now *ungurean*, *ungureni*.<sup>8</sup>

Transhumance concerned mainly sheep and goats which were kept together with them in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but relocation of horses, pigs and cattle was not excluded. Owners of the herds were feudal aristocrats, Transylvanian Saxon bourgeois, free Székelys, Csángó-Hungarian serfs, Romanian 'kenéz' (leaders) and shepherds. The majority of the shepherds might have had Romanian mother tongue.<sup>9</sup>

The regions Tiszántúl and Bánság of Temeschwar were also destinations of winter grazing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but they were less important with regard to the regularity and their size. Only a few dozen herds passed winter on the Great Hungarian Plain, and 100 000 sheep travelled from Transylvania to the region of Bánság for winter pastures.<sup>10</sup>

The number of Transylvania's transhumant sheep stock reached its peak in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, estimated between 1 and 1,5 million animals. Around 1870 only a third of that figure is considered as realistic.<sup>11</sup>

The first written evidence referring to the transhumance of Transylvanian sheep flocks to winter pastures is from 1363 and data are continuously available during six centuries. Transylvanian Romanian shepherds practiced transhumance to the Great Hungarian Plain till the first-second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the summer alpine grazing in Transylvania, the herds travelled in autumn to the different regions of the Great Plain, like Nagysárrét, Hortobágy and Nyírség, where grassland was rented for them in winter.

### **3. Overview of animal husbandry**

Transhumant sheep husbandry in Transylvania was dealt with in detail by László Földes. I sum up its most important characteristics based on his study.<sup>12</sup>

Sheep flocks used to graze in mountain regions from spring till autumn. During summer sheep were milked and dairy products were prepared. The head shepherd "bács" - responsible for

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<sup>5</sup> Paládi - Kovács A. 2001. 600-601.

<sup>6</sup> Földes L. 1982b. 372.

<sup>7</sup> Földes L. 1982b. 372.

<sup>8</sup> Paládi - Kovács A. 1993. 76.

<sup>9</sup> Paládi-Kovács A. 1993. 158.

<sup>10</sup> Paládi-Kovács A. 1993. 257., Földes L. 1982b. 373.

<sup>11</sup> Földes L. 1982b. 374.

<sup>12</sup> Földes L. 1982b.

the flock - was helped by the shepherd boy “kisbojtár” in the milking. However, these two types of functions were not present during winter.

The most important building in the summer pasture was the “esztenaház”, where dairy products were produced and stored.

A milking hut was built to carry out this activity. In the region of Barcaság these two huts were built together and their common name was *birszán esztana*.

The flocks were divided into milking and barren flock, depending on the milk exploitation.

The flocks left for Wallachia at the end of August or beginning of September. The travelling across borders followed a traditional, established order. A herd complex (tirla) was driven together and was divided into several groups (ciopor). In front of the herd went the wethers and the barren sheep, followed by one or more groups of milking sheep and at last came the ewes with the lambs. The front group was led by the oldest shepherd because he knew best the way. Each other group was also led by its shepherd (csobán). Donkeys carried the equipment; depending on the size of the whole herd, one or more donkeys were needed. Sometimes a horse-wagon was employed too. When there were several similar groups, for example several flocks of milch-ewes, one of their shepherds was responsible for all the groups. The head-shepherd called *vataf* was in charge of the whole complex (tirla), and he handled the money of the tirla.

It was a great event in the alpine pastures when they left for the plain. The preparation for the event lasted 8 days: the pasture household was broken up and a part of the utensils (milk pots and dairy necessities) was delivered home.

When describing the characteristics of the migration, László Földes refers to the study of De Martonne written in 1904, and reports that the travel from the Carpathians to the Lower Danube lasted generally 10-14 days.<sup>13</sup> They walked slowly and while they crossed Wallachia, they met other herds. Huge groups were led by 10-12 shepherds in the mountains, taking rests near small rivers. Once they reached the foothills, they were divided into smaller groups; a shepherd led 100-300 sheep. Some took a rest at the foothills of the Carpathians, others continued immediately. These herds covered the longest route compared to others in Europe. Several roads in Wallachia are called “sheep road” and passing-places in rivers are called “sheep-passing”. These roads were not specially constructed for the migration of herds, they were called sheep road because of their regular use. However, they were maintained by communal work.

The circumstances of the migration changed in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century because pastures and forests shrank due to the increase of arable land. In earlier times the flock moved freely between less arable land and on the meadows where grazing was free. László Földes describes the new circumstances following Mara N. Popp’s study, published in 1942.<sup>14</sup> One of the changes is the longer time of travelling, the migration became more difficult.

Coming down in autumn was faster than the return in spring. It could take more than a month because the herd was grazing in the nights and resting during daytime. Watchful shepherds had to prevent the flock from damaging the crops along the road.<sup>15</sup>

Travelling was continuous on the flat land, where not enough pasture was available for several days. The Boyars guarded their lands at the roadside and extorted money from the

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<sup>13</sup> In his study about the presentation of transhumance in Transylvania László Földes relies on the available summaries and retrospective ethnographic descriptions due to fieldwork carried out in 1920s and 1930s and which also referred to older data reaching back to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Földes L. 1982b. 375, 377.

<sup>14</sup> Földes L. 1982b. 375-378.

<sup>15</sup> Földes L. 1982b. 375-378.

shepherds. The head-shepherd went ahead during night to rent a resting and grazing place for the herds and he gave a few sheep in exchange.

The travelling was hard and expensive. In earlier times, when agriculture was less developed, the herds had more freedom in their movement. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the meadows were free between the days of St. Demeter and St. George, the passage of the herds was gratis.

Because the passage became more difficult, the herds were divided into small groups of 100-300 sheep on the foothills. In earlier times this division was practiced only in the flood-area of the Danube, just before leaving for the Balta, where it was easier to feed the animals with the willow-branches. Normally, a flock of sheep consisted of 800-1100 animals.

When the flocks reached the winter pasture by the end of September, more than half a million sheep had come together. The Balta is the flood-area, the lower course, the delta of the Danube. This area of 900 000 hectares extends up to the Black-Sea. The land alternates between huge reeds, marsh forests and meadows.

In autumn and mild winter days the herds grazed in the reeds, willow forests and thickets of the Danube region. They found their food even under a thin layer of snow. In very harsh weather the shepherds cut willow branches and fed them to the sheep.

They started feeding with hay and aftergrass, when big snow prevented the animals from going to the meadows. The head shepherd cared for this in early autumn. As soon as they arrived to the winter pasture, he let build sheepfolds. The sheep's food in winter consisted of budded branches with leaves. The remaining bare branches served as the shepherd's firewood. The settlement had to be cleaned from snow regularly during hard winters; otherwise the snow would have buried the whole settlement. This work exhausted the shepherds extremely. In such weather they used to feed the flock three times a day, and as spring approached, fodder was added too, especially for ewes with lamb.

László Földes informs about the buildings set up on winter pastures in Wallachia based on the work of Mara N. Popp.<sup>16</sup> These buildings and their names are not found in alpine shepherding.

The *saivan* (*winter stable*) is a big construction made of reed with a V-shaped end. The function of its edge is to divert the snowy wind into two directions. The two long sides in east-west direction are parallel, and the construction ends in wings turned outward on the western side. Its gable roof is covered by reed. (A similar construction on the Great Hungarian Plain is called "szárnyék".)

The *zavada* is a round construction made of reed for protecting the animals during winter. (Such construction was made also in the Hortobágy by Transylvanian shepherds). The side where it is most exposed to winds, is 6 m high, the other sides are 3 m high. A one meter deep ditch was dug around it and the earth was used to strengthen the walls. The ditch drained off the water and preserved warm air. The piled up snow protected from wind.

Another fence with a lower wall was also built; the sheep were led into this area when the soil inside the *zavada* had to dry.

At the gate of the *zavada* a higher reed wall was erected. Between this and the corner of the fence was the place of the shepherds. When a very strong wind blew, they settled on the other side of the reed wall, to the side of the sheep.

In bigger settlements, the shepherds had their separate huts, mainly for the shepherds practicing transhumance.

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<sup>16</sup> Földes L. 1982b. 380-



The *coliba* is a hut, half sunk in the soil. Its reed covered gable roof stood directly on the soil. One side, which was not in the direction of the winds, was open and steps led down to the interior. There was a fire-place in one corner for heating in very cold weather.

The *surla* was the most widespread construction in the Balta: it is a round, cone-shaped reed hut, which could accommodate 3-4 men.

The owners of the territories rent by transhumant shepherds used to build for them in recent times 50 m long *saivans* with gable roof and board walls on the side.

Lambs were born in the winter pastures; the shepherds got prepared to this event already by mid March. Within 3 weeks, before the day of St. George, all lambs were born. Around the day of St. George the herd – now completed with the lambs – started travelling to the mountains. The Balta became deserted; the region was too wet to be used as pasture.

Transhumant husbandry was profitable because the animals spent the whole year on the pasture, which was much cheaper than feeding them in winter, which, by the way, would have been impossible for a big stock. Summer pastures were in the mountains of the southern Carpathians, the winter pastures in the flood-plains of the Danube. This shepherding style existed as long as the two big regions of pastures, completing each other, were available.

In the economy of Transylvania a close relation is established between the transhumant wool production and the wool industry in the Saxon towns in Southern Transylvania. The suet processing used to be very important; thousands of sheep were slaughtered for obtaining tallow. Supply of dairy products to towns and villages was significant.

#### 4. Sheep breeds<sup>17</sup>

According to the actual stand of research, two sheep breeds were known in the Carpathian basin in the Middle Ages: the descendant of the European turbary sheep with short horns and another small breed with curved horns. Depictions found in Transylvania and Upper Hungary in the late Middle-Ages show the European **parlagi** and the racka sheep with long spiral shaped horns. In the late Middle Ages was introduced in Transylvania and Upper Hungary the Balkan breed of the Vlachs, a very resistant breed which took well long migrations.<sup>18</sup>

The racka breed, the Hungarian peasant sheep was the most popular in whole Hungary in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. To this breed belong the *Transylvanian white and the Transylvanian black-grey* sheep. The olah or valch sheep could be sheared twice a year. The sources mention Turkish sheep, Wallachian sheep and the flat-tailed sheep.<sup>19</sup>

Two new breed of sheep, called *purzsa* and *cigaja* came in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to Transylvania and the eastern part of the region Tiszántúl. Both are Romanian words taken over from Romanian shepherds practicing transhumance on the Great Hungarian Plain. (*Purzsa* is supposed to be an alteration of the word *birszán (curkán)*, meaning “vlach sheep”.)

The transhumant Rumanian shepherds in Southern Transylvania kept seven kinds of breeds: *cigája, curkán, Tartarian fat-tailed sheep, stogu, soroka, parnaya, mistruganka*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The information on sheep breeds is based on the summary written by Paládi-Kovács Attila. Paládi-Kovács A. 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Paládi - Kovács A. 1993. 111.

<sup>19</sup> Paládi - Kovács A. 1993. 192.

<sup>20</sup> Paládi - Kovács A. 1993. 285-286.

## 5. Transhumance to the Great Hungarian Plain<sup>21</sup>

Although the main destination of transhumance from Transylvania was Wallachia, Dobruja in the Lower Danube region, some herds migrated to the Great Hungarian Plain too in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This destination was not as regularly and as important as the movement to the eastern direction.

Huge pastures existed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century along the river Tisza and westwards from Debrecen and Nyíregyháza. Those days very few villages existed there. Since a big part of these pastures could not be utilized due to lack of manpower, they were hired by neighbouring villages or very often by Greek and Armenian cattle merchants coming from Transylvania. The merchants used to buy cattle in Transylvania, Moldova and Wallachia and fattened and kept them during winter on these rented alkaline pastures producing nutritive, saline grass.

From the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century Romanian shepherds started to migrate sporadically to these rented winter pastures. The sources don't refer in a trustworthy way to their exact geographical origin, nor their ethnic group. These shepherds fed their animals with locally purchased food, they set up lambing places and they left the winter pastures with the new-born lambs around St. George day, the 24<sup>th</sup> April.

According to a list in the region Nyírség the following numbers of sheep spent winters there: 7000 in 1753, 3842 in 1754, 5518 in 1756 and 3317 in 1758.

The migration was thus not regular, and not the same herds returned every year to the same place, and the number of the transhumant animals was subject of strong variations probable depending on the available pastures too. There was definitely an absence of established yearly recurring seasonal movements unlike between the Carpathians and the regions southwards and eastwards. Transhumance for winter pastures was practiced till the 1840s.<sup>22</sup>

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanian shepherds travelled with their sheep regularly during one decade to the Hortobágy from the Bihar Mountain. They rented the puszta Ohat (60 km from Debrecen) from the town of Debrecen, and the town sold them its surplus hay too. The people of Debrecen called *mokány* these Romanian shepherds. By 1829 local people complained about the "purzsás" (Romanian shepherds) because they destroyed the pastures and left the dead animals unburied. The winter pasturing of the sheep created many other problems too. Grazing near rye-fields and vineyards caused considerable damage which often led to court-cases. The migrating "purzsás" frequently came across difficulties on the Hortobágy and anywhere in the region Hajdúság. Some had never arrived to their destination: they were stopped in Bihar or they faced other problems: local people attacked them due to damages caused in their fields. The town of Debrecen included in the contract with the shepherds about renting the pastures of Ohat that they had to leave the place before lambing, but they often stayed till St. George day. A part of the stock was sold on the fair in Debrecen. Therefore it is certain that local breed mixed with the Transylvanian breed. The Transylvanian breed spread in Hungary in the period when the Transylvanian shepherds started their migrations in Hungary. According to sources they came from Kolozs and Bihar Counties, which means that they covered a distance of 100-200 km. Since they travelled from Szatmár and Szabolcs to north-western direction, and from Bihar and Kolozs Counties in western direction, the Hortobágy was a meeting place of shepherds where they exchanged their professional skills.

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<sup>21</sup> The chapter is based on the studies of András Béres and István Balogh. Béres A. 1972-1974., Balog I. 1961.

<sup>22</sup> Balog I. 1961. 213-218. „The sheep called *purzsa*, which became very wide-spread in the breeding among peasants can be considered from Transylvanian origin. It is a breed-variety of the Transylvanian racka. His name was probably given after the shepherds around Brasso, who were called *birsan*. It is presumed that the breed spread in the region Tiszántúl through Rumanian migrating shepherds..” Balogh I. 196. 213., Paládi-Kovács A. 1993. 158.

The “purzsás” of Transylvania turned up seldom after the turn of the century. Although the Flood Prevention Company asked in 1878 for decreeing the renting of winter pastures in order to finance flood prevention in Hortobágy, they had to cancel it due to the farmers’ protest: the shepherds damaged the existing huts and sheep-folds and the sheep damaged the softened soil of the pastures. In 1910 a decree granted the grazing right in winter in Hortobágy only for those who used the pastures in summer too. With this, they excluded forever the Transylvanian or other shepherds, who wanted to spend only the winter here. The number of those who used the pastures only in winter decreased further between the two world wars, but shepherds, keeping their own sheep, rented summer pastures from cooperatives even in the 1970s.<sup>23</sup>

## 6. Other practices of migrating shepherding

Typology of the different shepherding practices in European countries is carried out on the basis of migrating phenomena, with regard to following characteristics: the distance of the pasture from the village (the permanent dwelling place); location of the pasture; annual period and rhythm of the migration; the way of driving; and whether family members follow the shepherds in their seasonal movements.

Following these criteria we differentiate nomadic pastoralism, transhumance and *Almwirtschaft*.

In the early period of Hungarian ethnographic research typology followed different aspects. The first monograph on the subject was written by *Otto Herman* at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He ordered the animal husbandry of Hungarians into development stages based on the technical differences in shepherding. He considered the extensive breeding methods as archaic types, and regarded the husbandry in buildings and fodder supply as a more developed form. Following his footsteps, István *Györffy* created another typology: *nomadic shepherding* (animal and shepherd spend the whole year outside), *half-nomadic shepherding* (the animals spend summer in the pasture, and winter in stables), and *stabling husbandry*.<sup>24</sup>

A researcher of later times, József Szabadfalvi preferred to use the term extensive farming.<sup>25</sup>

Attila Paládi-Kovács suggests treating separately the terms *nomadic*, *transhumance* and *alpine pastoralism*, and studying the phenomena of Hungarian shepherding within the big systems and regional types of animal husbandry, furthermore, placing the subject into the framework of international research. In his opinion it is not acceptable to merge into one another the three categories by the term *extensive*.<sup>26</sup>

József Szabadfalvi studied in several of his works the migration phenomena in the Hungarian shepherding, which is generally due to a short supply of pastures. The sources and researchers mention these phenomena from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The area of migration included mainly the region where the Great Hungarian Plain ends and the mountains begin, in valleys and banks of rivers and moors.

Hereafter I give a short presentation of the most important characteristics of migrating pastoralism in Hungary based on the recapitulation by József Szabadfalvi.<sup>27</sup>

1. In the period when two- and three-course rotation was practiced with the necessary crop rotation till the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a rhythmically repeating alternation of pastures was practiced in the fields of the villages. The animals were led during spring to the pastures around the village and to the growing plants on the uncultivated fields. From mid July they

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<sup>23</sup> Béres A. 1972-1974. 142-149.

<sup>24</sup> Szabadfalvi J. 1984. 7-21., 131-133.

<sup>25</sup> Szabadfalvi J. 1984. 21.

<sup>26</sup> Paládi-Kovács A. 1993. 71.

<sup>27</sup> Szabadfalvi J. 1984. 131-148.

fed on the harvested corn-fields. After the harvest of autumn plants they went to the fields where maize, cabbage, sugar-beet and fodder-plants had been harvested. During winter they could graze anywhere in the fields. The autumnal stubble-fields, especially the left-over plants of the cabbage-fields offered a rich grazing field to sheep. Sheep flocks coming from the neighbourhood but even from the Great Hungarian Plain were grazing in the cabbage producing villages in the valley of the river Sajó during autumn. Cabbage fields in the Rétköz and Hajdúhadháza played a similar role for the sheep of the Nyírség.

In the years between 1960 and 1980 shepherds from the Great Hungarian Plain migrated with their sheep to certain regions of Tolna and Baranya Counties: the animals not only survived winter on the stubble of high maize, but became even fat there. Shepherds from Bosnia migrated with their sheep to Bácska to graze on the stubble-fields, where high maize was harvested by machines.<sup>28</sup>

2. System of external and internal pastures on the Great Hungarian Plain (in the regions around Hortobágy, Kiskunság and Nagykunság): for example Debrecen had external pasture in Hortobágy where the animals (among them sheep, which were not milked) were kept from spring to autumn. The herds returned to the fields of the town in autumn, where they could graze on the stubble-fields and the grassy clearings of forests. In the villages in the mountains (Bükk and Bakony) forest grasslands had a similar function than the external pastures in the Great Hungarian Plain. The clearings in the forests were excellent pastures for sheep during summer but the birch and oak forests were used during winter too. Not only pigs were acorned during autumn and at the beginning of winter, but sheep found there also their fodder.

3. Grazing on roadside during spring and early summer from the springtime driving out till corn-harvest. Those sheep-owners who had no pastures and who did not rent pastures, asked for permit to graze their sheep on the way to a fair. The fair took place at a distance of 100-150 km but even 200 and more kilometres. They reached the destination in 2-3-4 weeks. Normally, they did not sell anything in the fair and then returned home on a different road, making a detour. Such shepherds trained up mute dogs which did not bark.

4. Half-and-half system: shepherds who did not own a pasture but had 150-200 ewes, made a contract for 2-3 years with a medium or big landowner who had pastures and fodder. The shepherd got pasture, winter fodder, stable, living quarter and some wages. When the contract terminated, they shared the complete stock, the lambs and other proceeds (cheese, wool) included. Shepherds often engaged themselves far away from home, even at a distance of 100-150 km.

5. Summer migration: only those persons having appropriate grazing-ground according to their land property had the right for grazing within the borders of the towns and villages. Those who had no grazing land, or not enough, hired a pasture somewhere else. This was the case of sheep-farmers. A classical destination of summer migration was the plain of Szabolcs-Szatmár, an important sheep breeding region even earlier. Between 1950 and 1960 60 villages had sheep-farmers regularly migrating to summer pastures at a distance of 50-150 km. They left home in April or at the beginning of May when the lambs were strong enough. The most important equipment was carried by the shepherd's donkey, later by a horse-wagon. The journey lasted sometimes several days; the herd walked on mud-roads preserved for herds. A simple hut was erected for the shepherd, and a sheepfold for the flock was made from laths. When mid-July the graze was consumed in the summer pasture, they returned homewards for

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<sup>28</sup> Szabadfalvi 2001. 747.

grazing on the stubble of the corn-fields in the village. In autumn the flock went back to the rented pasture, to return home again to the fields of the village in October and November. The private shepherds in the Nyírség used to hire pastures on the plains of Hortobágy, in the southern foothills of the Zemplén mountain, around Ungvár, on the mountain pastures of the Bükk mountain (in the western direction) on the grasslands of Bereg County (in the eastern direction) and on the alkali pastures of the Bihar County (in the southern direction).

6. Grazing in river basins, on the elevations of moors and marshes, mainly during winter: Till the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century it was a frequent practice in regions rich in meadows and marshes (Rétköz, Ecsedi-láp, Kis- and Nagy-Sárrét) on the Great Hungarian Plain, to drive animals from the summer pastures to the waters, instead of returning home. The rich, high vegetation of the marshes was not covered by snow and it suited as fodder. The reedy, shrubby areas offered natural protection for the animals. In some places sheep-folds were set up and even straw was collected for them.

These days rivers were not yet regulated and winter pasturing was usual in other regions too: in Csallóköz, Szigetköz, Sárköz, at the rivers Tisza, Körös and Drau.

## **7. Conclusion and present situation**

Above forms of migration are similar to transhumance since both result from the facts that pastures were in short supply and that owners of the flocks kept more animals than they could support in the village (qua fodder, stable or pasture). The production of fodder-plants became extensive in Hungary in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The relative availability of fodder, such as lucerne, clover, maize, and others, as well as the active feeding reduced the necessity of migration. Summer migration remained as tradition for the longest time. Since sheep are able to use well even the pastures with small return, the sheep is today the less fed animal in Hungary. Sheep grazing is recommended and it is considered biologically and economically to be the most advantageous. Its summer feeding is basically grazing, but today mainly on artificial grazing lands.

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