



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

Theme 2: Oral tradition

Report of Hungary

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By Eszter Csonka – Takács and Viktória Havay

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1. Shepherds' lyrical poetry

Most of today's Hungarian children have no proper experiences about shepherd culture. Children's town environment lacks even animals. That is the reason why it was so surprising to hear from a 6 years old town-boy that he wanted to become shepherd. The surprised family asked what the reason was. The answer was very conscious: "Because the shepherd is well off." And how much he was right! This is what the Hungarian folk song suggests, which every child learns in the school: *The shepherd is well off / pasturing the flock / from one hill to another / he passes by, blowing his flute/he has a life free from care. When he is fed up with the flute, / he takes his bag-pipe. /he blows his sorrow in the sheepskin, /and lets it go with the wind. His food is milk and cottage cheese / with dried bread. / After, he drinks water and, lights his pipe, / and still, his cheeks are red.* Let us admit that this kind of happiness is very attractive for us too, in our world burdened with stress and information of all kinds.

The above story shows what role a folk song may play in the propagation of culture: it presents a bygone world, the world of shepherds for all those who cannot know any more anything about the breeding and keeping of animals, a basic food source of man. The problem has an extraordinary character because shepherding was an organic and basic part of the many thousand years old human history – except the last 50 years.

We know beautiful products of bucolic poetry from the time of antiquity. The Ancient-Greek Theocritus and his followers expressed in a masterly manner the desire for the creation of idyllic harmony between nature and love. Virgil's eclogues in the Latin culture are the most beautiful love-poems with shepherd subjects. This sort of poems had a revival during the Renaissance but the literary genre declined together with the Rococo style. Pastoral poetry had a great impact on the works of *Bálint Balassi, Miklós Zrínyi and Mihály Csokonai Vitéz* in Hungarian literature. *Sándor Petőfi* wrote pastoral folk songs in the 19th century (classical folklorism¹), which bore such a likeness to real folk songs that they became part of real folklore within the shortest time (example: the poem entitled *Bargain* with the first words: *Shepherd, poor shepherd boy*).

¹ Verebélyi K. 2002.

Imre Katona² assigned shepherds' songs to a separate group within his system of Hungarian folk lyrical poetry; they have close relationship with the poetry of "betyár" (outlaws) and the prison poetry and prisoners' songs. These songs are linked to special professions and lifestyles, which are different from those of peasants. The shepherds and outlaws represented idealised symbols of freedom for the peasants.

In his system, Béla Bartók³ assigned the shepherds' songs to an older, more archaic layer of folk songs. Their ornamental character is moderate and they attain a more reserved attitude, similar to the shepherds' art. The shepherd is always put in the centre of the text, together with the animals and tools of his small universe and with nature.

Characteristic contents of the songs are closeness with nature, anxiousness for the animals, competition with other shepherds and superciliousness towards peasants.

Imre

Katona is of the opinion that the ideal of the shepherds was the outlaw, who represented even more freedom than the shepherd. That is one of the reasons why it is not easy to separate certain "betyár" songs from shepherds' songs, especially, when we consider that shepherds preserved for the longest time the "betyár" songs and ballads.⁴ Folk songs suggest that the outlaws enjoyed the sympathy of - not only – the shepherds but also of the simple people in the 19th century.

Shepherds' life followed a strict order and was run in cyclic periods: animals were driven out to the pasture after St. George's day, the 24th April and they returned to shelter on St. Michael's (29th September) or on Demeter's day (26th October). The shepherds were exposed to harsh weather, to shortage of fodder and also to the moods of the sheep.

1. The weather is past Micheal's day,
The clouds are towering.
The time of snowing will soon set in,
Hills high and low will be covered by snow.

2. The lambs are crying-weeping,
The shepherds are entreating,
Imploring the master

² Katona J. 1998.: 386.

³ B. Bartók

⁴ idem

To give hay to the sheep.

3. There are many haughty masters,
Who say: Drive the flock to the rank-grass,
There is dry grass among the bushes,
The beasts have four legs, let them scrape it!

4. Wait, just wait, haughty master!
Your purse will stay empty.
Your sheep will throw away the fleece,
All the lambs are going to perish.

5. He who fails in winter his sheep
Will not milk them, to be sure.
In summer milk curd come well,
Stingy husbands would be glad to have them.⁵

The shepherds compensated and eased the tensions suffered in their everyday life by merrymaking, music, songs and dance on the occasions of festival days. The shepherd often functioned as musician.

1. The grey donkey is sad.
Its master drinks good wine
Don't be sad, grey donkey!
We shall soon go after the herd.

2. The wethers makes a large flock!
Three shepherds are driving them.
The ring-wether runs ahead,
He is no shepherd who does not steal.

3. My ring-wether, go ahead!
We go out to the pasture.
My ring-wether is the belled one.

⁵ Vargyas L. 1992.: 1272.

He is no shepherd who does not steal.

4. I have drunk away everything I had:
My fine three ring-wethers,
My bell, my donkey,
My double-ironed wooden flagon.⁶

The bagpipe of Uncle Kin,
How well I lived that time.
If he would pipe again,
I'd out a chair under him.⁷

1. Pesta Borgyász doesn't play his bagpipe,
For he said, the day is breaking,
Go fetch some wine girls,
I'll play the bagpipe so well then.

2. How fat is this girl?
Perhaps, she eats almonds?
Almonds, my fool,
She eats corn bread.⁸

Three lambs and six sheep,
Yet they don't give curd for them.
Three lambs and six sheep,

⁶ Vargyas L. 1992.: 1258.

⁷ Vargyas L.: 1992. 1346.

⁸ Vargyas L.: 1992. 1346.

Yet they don't give curd for them.⁹

As mentioned, shepherd traditions preserved the best the songs and ballads about outlaws. The “betyárs” Jóska Sobri (1810-1837), Sándor Rózsa (1813-1878), Imre Bogár (1842-1862) and Marci Vidrócki (1837-1878) were considered by the shepherds as heroes who revolted against social injustice and conventions.¹⁰ But the outlaws themselves did not have an easy life.

1. I am called a famous outlaw,
I stand up against twenty-four gendarmes.
Gendarmes are nearing, but I am not afraid of them,
I stand up and make quit with them.

2. Black soil yields good wheat,
The Bakony forest grows the outlaw.
Fair landlady, do take care of him!
You will get the reward for it!

3. A breeze is blowing from Sümeg,
Gendarmes are coming like wind from all direction,
But I, a lonely outlaw,
I alone am sturring-buzzing about my weapon.

4. Good-bye, town Sümeg!
I shan't be a dweller of yours any longer.
May the flatland grow green grass,
My little bay will no longer tread on it.¹¹

Many songs tell about the shepherd who became an outlaw, the gendarmes caught him and he was put in jail.

1. I drive out my ring-wether to grass,
It is sounding its bell sadly.
Nosing some strange smell on the plain,

⁹ Vargyas L.: 1992. 1311.

¹⁰ Küllös I. 1988.

¹¹ Vargyas L.: 1992. 1246.

It looks back, six gendarmes are walking after it.

2. Six gendarmes have no power enough
To drive me away from my flock!
Not until my head-shepherd comes out of the inn,
Shall I leave my flock.

3. Towards evening, my head-shepherd walks out [of the
inn],
He keeps asking: Where are you taking my good lad?
We are now driving him down to Zalaegerszeg,
To place him in the bottom of the jail.
Yellow clay will suck up my body!
My dear little angel, forget my name!¹²

It is important to mention the type of ballad about the murdered alpine shepherd, mainly known among Hungarians in Transylvania and Moldavia, and among Romanians.

1. Őrözgeti vala szegény csobán legény, [The poor shepherd lad was guarding]
Ezer báránkáját, néztelen sok juhát. [His thousand lambs and uncountable
sheep.]

Csak alátekinte, úgy jönnek, úgy jönnek, [As he was looking down the hill]
Úgy jönnek, úgy jönnek, három purkár legény. [He saw three swine-herds
coming.]

2. „Jó napat, jó napat, szegény csobán legény, [Good morning poor shepherd
lad,]

Tudod-e, hogy mét jöttünk, de mük azért jöttünk, [Do you know the reason we
came?]

Add ide te nekünk, ezer báránkádát!” [Give us your thousand lambs!]

„Nem adam, nem adam, ezer báránkámat!” [I am not giving you my thousand
lambs!]

¹² Vargyas L.: 1992. 1297.

3. „Ha nem adad nekünk, mük fejedet vesszük!”[If you are not giving us, we have to behead you.]

„Ha fejem veszitek, de tük ne mondjátok, [If you are beheading me, rather tell,]

De tük úgy mondjátok, hogy megházasodtam, [You should rather tell, that I was getting married,]

Fődnek e zsírjával, napnak e húgával. [With the fat of the earth, with the sister of the sun.]

4. De tük elémentek egy füstös házecskánál, [If you are passing by a little smoked house]

Ott vagyon es nekem egy öreg mámikám, [You will find there my old mother.]

Jól tudom megkérdi, hogy vagyok, mint vagyok? [I know that she will ask you how I am.]

De tük úgy mondjátok, hogy megházasodtam. [You should rather tell, that I was getting married.]

5. Fődnek e zsírjával, napnak e húgával. [With the fat of the earth, with the sister of the sun.]

De tük elémentek egy virágos kert mellyett, [If you are passing by a flower garden,]

Ott vagyan nekem es három kicsi húgom, [You will find there my three little sisters.]

Virágot gyomlálnak, ingem gyászolnak. [They are weeding the flowers and mourning me.]

6. Jól tudam megkérdik, hogy vagyok, mint vagyok? [I know that they will ask you how I am.]

De tük ne mondjátok, hogy fejem vettétek. [You shouldn't tell, that you were beheading me,]

Hanem úgy mondjátok, hogy megházasodtam. [You should rather tell, that I was getting married,]

Fődnek e zsírjával, napnak e húgával. [With the fat of the earth, with the sister of the sun.]

7. E küssebb sültümet¹³ lábamhoz tegyétek, [You should put my small flute to my feet,]

E nagyobb sültümet fejemhez tegyétek, [And my big flute to my head.]

Aluról fúj szél, fűjja, fűdagálja, [The wind is blowing from below, it would play.]

S eki azt meghallja, mindenik azt mondja: [If someone hears the sound of it, would say:]

Szegény csobán legény magát hubolygassa^{14,15} [Poor shepherd lad is comforting himself.]

2.1 The sheep in tales

Many motifs of fairy tales and underworld-journeys include the richly documented type of Angel-Lambs, belonging to the legend-tales in Hungary. Sheep is the protagonist in two types of legend-tales: *Christ multiplies the sheep of the poor shepherd* and *The liver of the lamb*.

The tale of “*The truthful shepherd*” has been related to king Matthias ever since it was written down the first time in 1848 by János Erdélyi: The much appreciated servant of the king kept his lamb with golden fleece. The neighbour king made a bet that the faithful servant would tell the king a lie, after he had seized the king’s much appreciated lamb. Since he had no success, he encouraged his daughter to cheat the shepherd out of the animal. She had got it for a night spent with the shepherd. The next day, on his way to the king, the shepherd held a rehearsal of telling a lie in front of his hat stuck on his staff. But facing the king, he told the truth: he had exchanged the golden-haired lamb for a black-haired one. The king rewarded him by giving him in marriage the king’s daughter and additionally, half of the cunning king’s country. The story’s few varieties are quite homogenous and they are probably based on several written stories.

Sheep in the cradle – the text is from an English pastoral play from the 15th century: a stolen animal (sheep or poached game) was dressed up as an infant and put in a cradle to prevent the thieves from being caught by the authorities. Varieties as anecdotes have been taken down in the second half of the 20th century in Maros-Torda County, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County and Nógrád County.

¹³ furulya

¹⁴ havalogatja: vígasztalja

¹⁵ Kallós Z. 1996.: 98.

One of the sermons of the French Cistercian monk, Odo de Ceritona tells about the peasant who became lawyer. He promised a goose to a lawyer if he would teach him how to defend himself successfully. In the story the peasant outwits the lawyer and catches him. The most successful adaptation of the subject is the French Farce of Master Pierre Pathelin from the end of the 15th century. One of the episodes is a court case:

Pathelin, the lawyer goes out to buy cloth for his wife. He cheats a merchant out of the goods promising him to settle the bill later at home. The merchant accepts the deal, since he cheated too; he offered the cloth for a much higher price. But in the lawyer's house he finds a dying man under the care of his wife. The cheated merchant goes to the court and he reports his shepherd also to the court because he had been stealing from him for years. Pathelin helps the shepherd and they win the case against the merchant. The clever shepherd rewards Pathelin in a proper manner: baa... baa... baa!

The subject is present in Hungarian literature from the 17th century in different variations published in calendars (in Lócse, in Győr, in Useful Pastimes, etc.)

Folkloric variations are found in the second half of the 20th century (in Háromszék County, Maros-Torda County, Nógrád County, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County): a man sells the same animal (rabbit, pig, etc.) to several buyers and he is brought to justice. Following a lawyer's advice, he pretends to be very simple-minded in front of the judge. But when the lawyer is asking for his reward, again he pretends to be half-witted. So, he got off scot-free.

"The uncountable amount of sheep" is a type of tale in the category of endless tales. There are several varieties known from the 19th and 20th century. A shepherd has to drive a huge flock over the river but the bridge is so narrow that the sheep can walk only one by one. When all the sheep reached the other bank, the tale will be told further...

2.2. The sheep in proverbs

In idioms a new-born lamb's innocence is related to pureness and guiltlessness, the meekness of older sheep is rather judged as stupidity.

The main characteristics of the lamb are placidity, patience and meekness in phraseology too, like in the idiom "meek as a lamb". Besides proverbial comparisons many other expressions in the Hungarian language refer to the submissiveness of the

lamb. When it is said “It is easy to tame a lamb” – the meaning is: it is easy to educate a gentle child.

Someone even with the patience of Job (in Hungarian: patient as a sheep) can lose his temper – as another Hungarian proverb says: The anger is even in the lamb. “Innocent as a newborn lamb” refers to someone who is as innocent as a newborn babe. However, the expression is often used ironically, to qualify hypocrite behaviour. Stupidity and foolishness are not far away from meekness and naivety. Proverbs conclude that a too kind person harms even himself with his patience: “He licks it like a lamb licks the knife”.

Sheep might suffer from blind staggers, the circling disease. Hence the comparison between foolish persons and the giddy goat (sheep in Hungarian), or in English: Fiona is very pretty but a bit giddy.

Sometimes the exceptional look of the lamb is the basis of idioms. The black sheep (in Hungarian black lamb) of the family is the scapegoat of the family, a person who doesn't respect the norms.

2.3 Symbols

Sheep have different names according to their age and gender. The young sheep are called lamb; the male animal is the ram.

The sheep and lamb are a symbol of submissiveness, meekness and innocence but sometimes even of simplicity and stupidity

Furthermore, sheep was a symbol of wealth and richness in ancient cultures. Being a fertility symbol, the sacrificed lamb had to secure the fertility of the flock. Therefore, the sacrificial lamb is mentioned in several passages of the Bible: “the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but he did not have regard for Cain and his offering.”

The Jews escaped the tenth plague of the Lord and the slaughter of the Egyptian first-borns by marking the doorposts of their homes with the blood of a sacrificed lamb. For a commemoration, Jews eat the meat of the sacrificial lamb with unleavened bread during Passover. The Christian lamb symbolic evolved from this function of substitute for sacrifice: the lamb can function as Christ symbol because He saved the sinful humankind by sacrificing His own blood. Jesus was often depicted as the Lamb of God – who takes away sins of the world - in the Roman catacombs. Holding the banner of victory over death, the Easter Lamb is the symbol of Resurrection in Western Christianity. Jesus is often depicted as the Good Shepherd,

leading the flock of his people and looking for the lost sheep. That is why the long shepherd's crook has become one of the symbols of the Vicar of God on earth, the Pope of Rome, and of his local representatives, the bishops: the shepherds hook the hind leg of the sheep with the hook of the staff to drive them back to the flock.

Lamb is represented in the symbolism as an innocent and often as a stupid animal, but the ram is the symbol of strength, martiality and unimpressionable determination. Sheep and ram symbolize opposite values.¹⁶

2.4 Beliefs related to sheep, flock and shepherd

Similar to the breeding of any domestic animal, sheep breeding practice contains many other elements further to rational knowledge and knowledge about nature and healing. Practices based on beliefs about ensuring fertility and health of the animal and the yield of meat and milk play an important role. The shepherds are well aware of this traditional knowledge.

The timing of driving out the animals was often linked to special days but strongly depended on the weather. Some time between St. Gregory day (12th March) and St. George day (24th April), as soon as the frozen earth was thawed and the snow melted, herds were driven out to the pastures. Protection of the flock was striven for by different magic practices during the drive out in spring, and the purpose was to prevent bewitching and taking of cow's milk.

For example it was custom in Hortobágy to 'pour on the dung some milk fresh from the cow and to make the sign of the cross' when the herd was driven out.¹⁷

The Palots in North-Eastern Hungary used to place an axe or a chain (sometimes a closed padlock) or a briar branch or a boiled egg on the threshold of the sheepfold with the purpose to save the animals from the evil eye, or to ensure that the flock holds together. Several predictions are known related to the egg: when a sheep stepped on the egg and broke it, while leaving for the pasture, this sheep should die in the same year.¹⁸

One of the most important objectives was to hold the flock together and for this purpose different magic practices were applied during the driving out. The Palots strew the ground of the forest sheepfold with salt when they drove the animals the first time in the fold. A method for prevention from bewitching was the smoking of

¹⁶ Forgács 2005: 95-96.

¹⁷ Barna 1979: 197.

¹⁸ Paládi 2010: 168-169.

the animals. The first day after sun-set and before the night, the shepherds drove the animals through smoke. This way the flock was driven in a group and the animals held together afterwards. The shepherd did not have to get up in the night, to stop the flock from scattering in all directions.

St. George day is the feast-day of animals, besides being very dangerous for them because numerous witch-beliefs are related to this day. There were several methods to keep away witches. For example, garlic was put in the doors and windows. The custom of mush strewing (*kásaszórás*) was known in the region of Hortobágy on St. George day: in the evening of this day, before midnight, when the sheep rested, the shepherds walked around the flock nine times and strew mush on the floor. It was believed that when witches milked a sheep during St. George night, the flock would produce little milk in that year. But the mush protected the flock because witches could pass through the mush only, when they picked it up first.¹⁹

Gathering certain things on St. George day has magic power. It was well known how helpful it was to give to the sheep dew gathered early morning (only by naked women before sun-rise), mixed with salt. A beneficial result had the different herbs (dried and mixed with salt) gathered during St. George night. The purpose of all these practices was to achieve a high milk yield and a high fat-content in the cheese. A snake and lizard caught before St. George day had a healing effect: for example to cure the ewe's udder, when three times wrapped around it.

But it was possible to deprive the shepherd of his profit with a frog caught before St. George day.²⁰

Like humans, animals also could be bewitched in different ways: with the evil eye (when a person considered to be a witch looked at him), by words (praising the sheep), but evil could be done intentionally too, when someone dug an object with evil power on the road where the flock moved on.²¹

The shepherds themselves knew how to chase away other people's animals but they protected their own flock from all kinds of danger.

The belief related to the figure of *shepherd with knowledge* "is similar to the healer: the excellent knowledge of the shepherd about nature and how to heal animals is believed to have a supernatural origin [...] It was believed that he used to hand over to his follower his knowledge by giving him his crooked staff before his death

¹⁹ Barna 1979: 197.

²⁰ Paládi 2010: 169-170.

²¹ Paládi 2010: 171-172.

because his knowledge was locked in the crook. It was also thought that the shepherd was the devil's disciple. The most popular belief about the *shepherd with knowledge* is that he holds the flock together by applying magic, for example by smoking around the flock or by sticking his staff into the earth. The flock tied this way holds together even in the absence of the shepherd. *Shepherds with knowledge* are able to send a rabid dog or wolf to the herds of other shepherds, with the purpose to protect their own flock. They are able to make scatter or to bewitch the flock of others. [...]

According to some sources, the *shepherd with knowledge* had power over the weather too: [...] he could cast a spell by incantation and drive away the bad weather, and when he went to sleep and rain approached, the storm avoided him: it was raining everywhere but the ground around him remained dry[...]

The shepherd probably had partly a similar social function as the healer. The *shepherd with knowledge* – as it was believed - was a person causing good and bad, due to his ambivalent supernatural power. According to belief, he is additionally able to increase and to protect the own community (the flock of the community entrusted to his care) to the detriment of the flock of the neighbour community. The shepherd was credited with the ability to turn into a wolf; in this capacity, he is related to the figure of the *werewolf*.²²

“The werewolf in recent Hungarian folk belief is mainly known in the form that certain individuals – first of all shepherds – have the ability to shapeshift into a wolf of their own free will. Such beliefs and stories were found in the 20th century mainly in Western Transdanubia and in the north-eastern regions but with locally different names: *küldöttfarkas* (*sent wolf*), in the region Gőcsej *farkaskoldus* (*wolf beggar*) (Hont county), *farkasember* (*man-wolf*) (Tiszántúl), *szakállas farkas* (*bearded wolf*), *küldött ördög* (*sent devil*). [...]

According to our data the ability of transformation could be obtained in infant age, when the mid-wife was not careful or when she had bad intentions. When she slips the infant through the hoop made of birch, he would become a wolf in the age of seven: he would leave his home and would start acting in the shape of wolf, visiting the village to prey on the cattle. From this time on, he takes the shape of wolf or man, as he likes. Other people acquire the ability in adult age: they pass three or seven

²² <http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02152/html/07/395.html>

times through a birch-hoop, with the help of „god-damn thorn” (the wild rose’s spine). Recovering the original shape happens the same way as the transformation. The child of a werewolf can be born with a wolf-tooth, hairy skin and a tail, having half human looks. Certain characteristics of his wolf shape make him different from the real wolf: his sense of smell is better, he is able to talk and his back and stomach changed places; shooting him is only possible with bead-tree bullets. Werewolf stories tell either about “unmasking” the werewolf preying on the flock in the shape of wolf, or about revealing him when appearing as human but showing signs of his wolf existence (the injuries suffered as a wolf are present also in his human shape; fluffs from his wife’s apron – bitten by him – are stuck between his teeth). According to certain myths his transformation into wolf can be prevented when the birch-hoop is burnt. Other myths report that the “*shepherd with knowledge*” or the witch are more powerful than the wolf: they are able to change the wolf into man, they get the better of the wolf attacking the flock with the help of magic.”

2.5 Knowledge about nature

Legends are told in the villages about the knowledge of animals and plants of those who lived in forests, marshes and on the pastures, such as herdsman and fishermen.

The fisherman, herdsman or peasants living in nature consider a multitude of signs when evaluating natural phenomena: they are aware of the main direction of wind and of the characteristics of the local climate. For example, a shepherd from Jászakisér could predict exactly when a storm was coming. He deduced it from several signs: he observed the behaviour of animals (his sheep, his dogs and the birds); he touched the fur of the sheep to feel whether they are completely dry; he knew the direction of the wind and the clouds and the earlier whether provided him information too. Several realistic factors supplied a better and safer base for conclusions – even if some not confirmable beliefs were mixed to these factors.

Herdsman and shepherds didn’t no more stars than the average population, but they knew more about stars which were important for other professions too, mainly about those stars which helped them in orientation in space and time, as shepherds were more concerned in that than peasants.

6. Festivals and rites

“The end of the farming year, the returning of the flocks from the pastures was

linked everywhere to settling the accounts and to the engagement of shepherds. People used to say that anybody could be shepherd when driving out the flock, but the real shepherd is the one who settles his accounts properly in autumn. Shepherds were engaged traditionally from Demeter till Demeter day (26th October), thus for a whole year. Eastern Christianity spread the veneration of Demeter in Hungary in the Middle-Ages and later the Church supported his cult. In many regions the shepherds' year ended on St. Michael day (29th September). The earlier return of the sheep was due to the breeding of Merino and the spread of stabling.

On the days of autumn accounting and shepherds' engaging as well as on the days of the shepherds' patron saints, shepherds participated in merrymaking everywhere in the country. The shepherds in Eastern Transdanubia were especially eager to celebrate St. Michael day in the 18th and 19th century, the so called *shepherds' patronal festival*.

Shepherds came not only from the nearby Fejér, Tolna and Veszprém Counties, but even from the regions of Bácska and Inner-Somogy visited the festival of Michael's day escorted by their wives and daughters. Thus, the big coming together had a certain function as "girls market" (mate selection) beside engagement for the next year and merry-making.²³

The majority of the shepherds in the region of Hortobágy were employed from Michael day till Michael day in the next year. That is why St. Michael day was a very special day for them. Shepherds organised merry-making and shepherds' balls in their homes or in the inns and the owners of sheep were invited too. The shepherds cooked sheep-stew ('pörkölt') and their wives baked. The shepherds invited to the shepherds' ball in Karcag arrived on donkey-back carrying a banner of sheepskin in their hand.²⁴ The Demeter day merry-making of the shepherds on the Great Hungarian Plain was an important event. A few days earlier they drove the flocks to the towns and villages and began with the preparations. In many places a *sheep fair*, *shepherd fair* took place, and sales were followed by drinking a toast to "wet the bargain", enjoying a copious meal and attending the shepherds' ball. In catholic places shepherds offered lambs to the Church and attended mass to honour Demeter, the patron saint of the

²³ <http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02152/html/08/79.html>

²⁴ Barna 1979: 225-226

shepherds.²⁵

On St. Martin day the shepherds gave the peasants “St. Martin’s twigs” (in fact a branch) or rods as a gift expressing their good wishes and they got gifts from the peasants.²⁶

“The veneration of animal patrons and patron saints of shepherds originating from Western Europe spread in Hungary in the course of centuries through the Catholic Church. *Lenard’s* veneration stroke roots in the western fringes of Transdanubia in the 16th-17th century. Wendelin gained even more popularity in the 18th century (in Transdanubia, among the Palots and in the region of Jászság). The migration to Hungary of German and Moravian shepherds with guild traditions contributed to the propagation of mentioned saints.

Shepherds stuck together even in those places, where never existed an organised community based on guild traditions. It was noted in many regions that they addressed each other by kinship terms. It was thought that shepherds were all related to each other. And this belief was not completely unfounded.

The feeling of togetherness and solidarity between shepherds were strengthened by the customs of initiation. The following custom had its origin in the shepherd guilds: the *German shepherds* (the expression did not refer to a nationality in the 19th century in the region Tiszántúl) living at a distance from each other used to exchange their sons when they reached workable age. They helped in a fixed order and during a fixed period in different works: first they helped in milking and in work with the barren flock. When they were accepted as young shepherd, they tended to milking flocks during a few years, after which they were “initiated” as shepherds.

Most of herdsmen had a nickname already in the 17th-18th centuries on the Great Hungarian Plain. The shepherds had the biggest variety of nicknames. The reason of this is not only due to their big numbers and different behaviour compared to other herdsmen. The by-names referred normally to their ethnic group, their origin and mostly to their individual characteristics or to the humorous mood of their friends.

For example: Bujdosó János alias *Toppants Juhász*, *Tarhós* alias Vargha András, Czeplédi alias *Százeszű János*, *Kishasi Csehó Pista*. Names found in old archives in the town of Kecskemét: *Nagyorrú Matyi*, *Pörkölt Horváth Ferencz*, *Pinczékontekergő*

²⁵ <http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02152/html/08/79.html>

²⁶ http://www.tapiosagihagyományozok.eoldal.hu/cikkek/nepi-szokasok_-hiedelmek-napra_-honapra-felbontva/november.html

Istók

The *shepherd baptise* was a custom mainly known in the region of Middle-Tisza. [...]

The shepherd chose a “godfather”, a much respected shepherd older than 60 years, who could provide him with advice and help when needed. „Whoever was baptised, has got a name; he had to pay ransom: 5 or 10 litre of wine or a barrel of beer and so he could keep his old name. Otherwise the shepherds gave him a new name; this is how Szabó György became *Thurzó Hamuka*”²⁷

The shepherd’s wedding was an important event.[...] The last traditional shepherd wedding was held in Kunmadaras (Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County) in 1906. Best man was the head shepherd, groomsman was the shepherd boy. Not only shepherds were invited to the feast but cowherds, horse-herders and swineherds too. All the herdsmen of the region came together. In the 1870s the young couple travelled to the church on a donkey-drawn coach. They were followed by pairs of donkeys, ridden by shepherds. A sheepskin banner tied or nailed to a pole was carried in front of the procession.²⁸

The banner was the emblem of the shepherds in guilds. In the towns of the region of Kiskun, so in Kiskunhalas, they had real banners too. In the 1930s three of their banners were kept in the catholic church. Processions and funerals of shepherds were headed by carriers of banners. Originally, the shepherds of Kiskunság had no guilds but the German and Moravian shepherds coming from Transdanubia settled down here and they brought along their guild traditions.

After the return home of the herds of cows and horses and after sharing the flocks, the herdsmen organised copious meals everywhere in Hungary. But even during the year they had several opportunities to make their life happier and to visit the inns nearby. The swimming of horses and sheep, the marking of cows by branding, the shearing of sheep and of colts, the castrating of male lambs – all gave occasion for drinking a toast. In the region between the rivers Danube and Tisza as well as beyond the Tisza “sheep banquets”, were held yearly at 3-6 occasions by the sheep owners and the Shepherds of the communities.

Shepherds were essential participants in the big festive days of the year. At Christmas they used to sing in the church. They visited the houses of the village in

²⁷ Fazekas 1979: 216–217.

²⁸ Fazekas 1979: 215.

groups (cow-herders, swineherds, shepherds) and sang pious songs, expressed their best wishes for the inhabitants, for their being blessed with many piglets, lambs and calves. The peasants rewarded them with wine, brandy and sweet loaf. (In some places they took along a bunch of birch or willow rods and the peasants hit their backs with the rods. The herdsmen made big jumps to induce health and liveliness of the animals by this magic act.) Herdsmen usually received some gifts on New Year's Day, Eastern, Whitsuntide and the day of driving out the animals. Their cracking of whips on festive days, their sounding the horn on weekdays and their bagpipe, flute or cither music provided on weddings was pertaining parts of the life of local communities.²⁹

4. Shepherds' music

In the tradition of Hungarian folk music shepherds typically used to play aerophone instruments: varieties of flutes, long shepherd's pipe, reed, bagpipe, horn, hornet and pan-pipe and sometimes they handled shawm, clarinet or even cither and violin too.

The most archaic type of recorder is the reed: a fipple/ducted recorder without phonatory opening. This instrument was used in the 20th century only by the Csángós in Moldavia. Unlike all other shepherds' instrument, women and children also used to play this recorder.

According to the professional literature on musical instruments the Hungarian folk flute belongs to the end-blown recorders with six holes and fipple. Its scale is caused by the column of air leaving the holes drilled at the same distances depending on the size of the wood.³⁰ There is a characteristic (murmuring) technique in Hungarian folk flute playing: the flutist produces murmuring sounds in his throat while playing the instrument. This technique amplifies the sound and deepens its tonality.

"Flóta" is the name of the Hungarian folk transverse (side-blown) flute. It belongs to the family of wind instruments with labial pipe, corresponding to the side-blown flute as used in Hungarian folk music.³¹ The long shepherd's pipe is a typical 85-100 cm long instrument with five holes in Southern Transdanubia. The so called Transdanubien neutral third melodies (mode between major and minor key) are

²⁹ <http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02152/html/08/79.html>

³⁰ Sárosi B. 1998.: 80.

³¹ Sárosi B. 1998.: 80.

played on this instrument. A typical labial pipe of the Csángós in Moldavia is called “tilinkó”, blown even by women.

The classical shepherd’s instrument in Hungary is the bagpipe. It is so difficult to play the instrument made of goat or dog skin with its three chanters/drones that it was believed that pipers are the devil’s allies.³² The belief was also due to the fact that shepherds were somehow beyond the pale of society. These musicians had typically a very strong character and they couldn’t bear to comply with the playing of another bagpiper. A Hungarian proverb says: there is nor room for two bagpipers in one inn.

Aki dudás akar lenni, [Who wants to be a bagpiper]

Pokolba kell annak menni. [He has to go to hell.]

Ott vannak a jó nagy kutyák, [There are the large dogs,]

Abból lesznek a jó dudák.³³ [From them are the best bagpipes made.]

The good flutist shepherds mastered other wind-instruments too, like all kinds of horns, clarinet or the tárogató (shawm) – known from the 18th century. The horn was made of the bovine horns and was used for calling the herd together upon its sound. It is important to mention that music – flute, bagpipe, etc. - had a function in the driving and leading of animals. They got used to melodies played by the shepherd and he could urge them to go faster or slower according to the melodies.

The shepherds’ musical repertoire consisted of the traditional songs and ballads about local shepherds/outlaws, which were handed down among themselves on the one hand and the songs and dance songs of the peasants on the other hand. It happened that shepherd’s joined the music in church, especially at Christmas time, when bagpipe or flute replaced organ music.

There is a very special, dramatic melody type in their music: melodies linked definitely to certain texts. They were played either on flute or on violin and we know two topics: *The shepherd looking for his sheep* and *The miller’s dogs*.³⁴ The first is important for our study: the player tells the story by comments always pronounced before the music: the shepherd lost his sheep, he is looking for them for a long time but he finds stones instead of sheep. At the end he recovers his sheep and he begins to dance with joy. This melody type is known among others also in Romanian tradition.

Special attention was paid in Hungary to outstanding shepherd personalities already at the very beginning of ethnographic research. The first monograph with the

³² Juhász Z. 1998. 19.

³³ Idem 106.

³⁴ Olsvai I. 1998.: 508.

title *Music in the life of a Shepherd in Sály*³⁵ was written in 1984 by Ernő Barsi about the shepherd András Tarjáni, who was honoured with the state award Master of Folk Art (1965). The book tells within the history of a shepherd family the role of song-music-dance and merrymaking in the society of peasants and of shepherds, this latter constituting a separate social stratum.

Zoltán Juhász's monograph written in 1998 about István Pál is especially important.³⁶ István Pál is the last representative of those pipers, who inherited their knowledge and skills from their father in a traditional environment. The today 93 year old István Pál is not only an outstanding performer but at the same time a teaching master with huge music repertoire. Every piper active in today's revival movement has learned all skills of the trade from this person known as "shepherd with great knowledge". They have learned that the melody played on any instrument has to follow the text and has to play as many verses and syllables as the song requires and the piper plays the best for a dancer, when during the play, he also makes dance steps. Furthermore, István Pál is an excellent shepherd, a healer, singer and story-teller and beside several prizes, he received the state award Master of Folk Art as well.

5. Shepherds' dance

The Hungarian folk dance research includes the herdsmen's dances in the old type dances, and within this category, to the dances with accessories.³⁷ The first sources from the 16th and 17th centuries mention the haiduck-dance. The name refers first to the shepherd-soldiers haiducks' dance, secondly to the folkloric dance style of this period. According to historic descriptions, this dance was a free-structured mandance, in solo, in pairs or in groups performing acrobatic movements, while handling weapons. The herdsmen's dances with accessories are a direct continuation of the Haiduck dances with some transformation.³⁸ György Martin divided them into 3 groups³⁹:

1. Cudgel dances; 2. Swineherd's dances; 3. Broom-dance.

The cudgel (*botos*) dances are the oldest type of Easter European weaponed herdsmen's dances known from the north-eastern and eastern fringes of the Great Plain preserved by shepherds and gypsies. The cudgel dance was generally performed

³⁵ Barsi E. 1984.

³⁶ Juhász Z. 1998.

³⁷ Martin Gy. – Pesovár E. 1998.: 548.

³⁸ Martin Gy. – Pesovár E. 1998. 551.

³⁹ Martin Gy. 1974.: 22-29.

among the herdsmen in the Upper-Tisza region at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. The true masters of this dance were the cowherds and the swineherds. The best cudgel dancers were the gypsies employed as shepherds and the copper-worker/bell-caster and trough-maker gypsies. Only fragmented, simpler forms, consisting of just a few motifs of these dance types have survived among the herdsmen of other regions, and the cudgel dance is missing from the Gypsies' repertoire in other places. We find its traces less and less towards Upper-Hungary and Transylvania, and in western direction not farther than the regions of Jászság and Kiskunság.

Cudgel dances have different types based on their function: the duel-like type is danced by two men. The stick or other accessories (hatchet, axe, shepherd's crook, trough-making cleaver) are handled like weapons, every movement serves the practicability of fighting: twirling in one or both hands, hitting, cutting, stabbing, defending. The dance process consists of movements of approaching, striking, retreating, defending, slow steps, running in front and back, jumping, crouching, kneeling and sudden stops. The structure and the succession of the dance motifs depend on the momentary situations in the fight. Therefore, the motifs have a loose structure, an undefined duration and rhythm, thus they don't evoke the impression of strictly metric dance motifs. This type of cudgeller was the rough entertainment on markets and fairs, often ending up in brawls.⁴⁰

Duel-like, show-like and playful elements are mixed in the cudgeller danced by a couple. The man with weapon demonstrates his dexterity in front of the woman dancing without accessory; he playfully attacks her, twirls the stick above his head and around his body, or he tries to dodge away the woman's playful, attacking movements, who tries to hinder the twirling of the stick. The man's movements are not much more structured than in the type of paired men's dance, the woman's dance however is composed of metric motifs.

Dancers may dance alone, while trying to demonstrate their virtuosity at handling the accessories, and dance-like motifs get more across.

Another group of herdsmen's dances are swineherd's dances characteristic for Transdanubia; the music consists of the sound of bagpipe or long flute. In the dance when man faces women, the music is fast, they throw the sticks to each other with frightening speed. The cudgel is twirled in hand, put under the legs, or placed on the

⁴⁰ Pálffy Gy. 2001.: 22.

ground. A great dexterity is needed to keep the balance and the rhythm when sticks were placed crosswise. Cudgel was sometimes replaced by a broom, a hat or a scarf.

Both above mentioned types evolved to a third variety, the spectacular broom-dance, mainly popular in Transdanubia, but it was practiced even in Europe in many places.

Folk dance research in Hungary paid close attention to outstanding personalities of folk dance, to learning and researching their skills. These persons appropriated the knowledge of their community, kept it alive and handed down to others. György Martin's monograph about the dancer in Kalotaszeg, Mátyás István Mundrucz⁴¹ was published, and Zoltán Karácsony⁴² analysed the dance skills and knowledge of János Horpácsik, the shepherd from the region Upper-Tisza, who received the state award Master of Folk Art in 1978.

⁴¹ Marton Gy. 2004.

⁴² Karácsony Z. 2005,

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