



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

Theme 8: Traditional food technology

- Dairy and meat products -

Report of Hungary

Hungarian Open Air Museum

(Szabadtéri Néprajzi Múzeum)

H-2000 Szentendre

By Judit Szóke

November 2011

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.
This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. BENEFITS OF SHEEP HUSBANDRY: MILK

1.1 MILKING

1.2 DISTRIBUTION OF MILK BENEFITS AND THE TRANSPORTATION OF SHEEP MILK

1.3 PRODUCTION PROCESS OF SHEEP MILK

1.4 TRADE AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF PRODUCTS

1.5 CUSTOMS AND SUPERSTITIONS RELATED TO SHEEP MILK AND SHEEP MILKING

2. BENEFITS OF SHEEP HUSBANDRY: MEAT, FATTENING AND SLAUGHTER OF SHEEP; TRADE AND COMSUMING OF MEAT

INTRODUCTION

Since in most regions of the Great Hungarian Plain and the Transdanubia cattle breeding was more important than sheep breeding, basically the procession and consumption of cow milk was significant. Sheep milk was by no means as important as cow milk; the dairy products made from did not play a huge role in the alimentation and farming of local people. However I can't skip the significant sheep breeding regions of Greater and Lesser Cumania in this study, so I am going to mention examples from these regions, and review the local practices.

From north and east to the Great Hungarian Plain, in the middle mountain areas, near the sheep breeding areas of the Carpathians the procession and consumption of sheep milk was more important here. Among the eastern Palócs sheep breeding was quite typical, and the procession of milk was very similar to the processes in the Carpathian Mountains.¹

However it should be stated that sheep milk was never as important among the eastern Palócs and in the whole Hungarian speaking area, than its wool and earlier its meat. Before the introduction of merino the Hungarian sheep was bred primarily for its meat, even though it gave more milk than the merino. Later with the spread of merino sheep, the profit that could be made by its wool caused the neglect of milk benefits.²

Other important profit source of sheep breeding was the meat of sheep. In Hungary, the consumption of pork meat became significant only in the last 100-150 years. Earlier sheep- and cattle meat played a much more important role in the alimentation of Hungarian people. Sheep meat was willingly consumed by the town- and village-inhabitants. Sheep were slaughtered for engagements, weddings, harvest, baptisms, primarily in the autumn, before the pig slaughter in the winter. Lambs were slaughtered mostly in the springtime, before Easter.³

¹ Magyar Néprajz II. (Paládi – Kovács Attila szerk.) 2001. 738.
<http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02152/html/02/342.html#351>

² Paládi – Kovács 1965. 130.

³ Magyar Néprajz II. (Paládi – Kovács Attila szerk.) 2001. 732.
<http://mek.niif.hu/02100/02152/html/02/342.html#351>

1. BENEFITS OF SHEEP HUSBANDRY: MILK

1.1 Milking

Besides wool and meat, milk is the most important benefit of sheep breeding. With the milking of sheep and the procession of milk was done by the *milking shepherds*, who herded the milking flocks. Milking sheep farming was a well formed system from the 18th century in Greater and Lesser Cumania regions.⁴ Milking shepherds – just like herdsmen – were hired, usually at New Year by one or more farmers who grouped into associations. These milking shepherds were hired for a whole year or just for the milking season, and their wage and service period was determined accordingly. They were paid in money and in contribution in kind, beside the Sunday milk was their also, which they could process and then could sell the dairy products. The income of this counted into their wage. Moreover the shepherd himself could also be a member of the farmer and *esztrenga (milking-pen)* association and could breed 30 sheep. He only had to give milk of one day to the farmer, and in return the 30 sheep could be wintered by the *esztrenga* association.

Milking flocks were so important that they could graze on the best quality pastures, and often they were even allowed to graze on the plough-lands and forbidden pastures.⁵

Milking shepherds lived with their flocks out on the pastures from spring to autumn, where the “*esztrenga*” or “*isztronga*” (*milking-pen*)⁶ was set up and also their shelter with a hut, cellar, whey-boiler namely a “*tejes konyha*” (*milk kitchen*). Milk was processed in the milk kitchen, which was built next to the shepherd’s shelter and was made of reed-walls. While the “*tejes pince*” (*milk cellar*) was used to store the milk, which was a pit, covered with reed or weeds and grass, and which was sprinkled daily to keep it cool.

In the Hungarian language area, the milking of the sheep was usually started in May, mostly around the 10-15th of May or maybe at Pentecost, after the end of shearing; while in Transylvania and in the Partium milking started in the second half

⁴ Fazekas 2009. 200.

⁵ Bellon 1996. 279.

⁶ Easily dismountable and assembled sheep-pen made from laths and twigs. It was easily transferable, and had a roof. Its purpose was to defend and keep the sheep together. The *esztrenga* can have one or more cells, and the milking is usually done in one corner of the *esztrenga*. There are many names for *esztrenga*, it is called *esztrenga* in the Hajdúság, Hortobágy and Transylvania. In Lesser Cumania and in the regions around Szeged it is called *isztronga*, while in Greater Cumania the word *fejőkarám* is used. In: MNL 1977 – 1982. <http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02115/html/1-2025.html>

of March. In Transylvania the milking season ended later – sometimes it was postponed even to the day of Dömötör (26th of October), while on the Great Plain, in the Transdanubia and in the northern regions milking was done until the St. Michael's day (29th of September).⁷

In the Palóc regions milking season ended on the 8th of September (*“Kisasszony nap”*) and the rams were turned loose on the flock, but in the manors even this was done later on St. Michael's day (29th of September).⁸

Among the market town's flocks in the Greater Cumania Region, three milking per day was in practice even in the 18th century. The town councils strictly prescribed for the shepherds, that the three milking per day can be reduced to two, only two weeks before the day of St. Michael (29th of September), and after this day they were told to milk the flock once a day. If someone did not comply with the regulations and reduced the daily milking to two – damaging the sheep owners – he was warned or sometimes even fined by the authorities.⁹

In the Palóc regions there were many different practices in use. The shepherds of the big families milked the flock once a day at noon, the flocks of little and large farmers were milked only in the morning until the 24th of June, and after this day in the evening also. In the manors flocks were milked three times a day until August. But after the First World War the three milking a day was not typical here. This practice remained longer among the *“árendás juhászok”* (*shepherds with contract*) mainly because they were allowed to dispose and trade with the remaining milk and dairy products freely after they turned in the predetermined quantities.¹⁰

It was typical to milk the flock once a day mainly in the Transdanubia; on the Great Plain and in the northern regions they were milked twice a day from the 19-20th century, while to east from the Great Plain and the Transylvanian flocks were milked three times a day.¹¹

Until the end of the 19th century, in the Greater Cumania Region, milking was done inside the village, in the milking-pens which were built in the stock-yard. This was beneficial because of several reasons. On the one hand if the milking was done in the

⁷ Magyar Néprajz II. (Paládi – Kovács Attila szerk.) 2001. 742.
<http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02152/html/02/342.html#351>

⁸ Paládi – Kovács 1965. 131.

⁹ Bellon 1996. 281.

¹⁰ Paládi – Kovács 1965. 131.

¹¹ Magyar Néprajz II. (Paládi – Kovács Attila szerk.) 2001. 742.
<http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02152/html/02/342.html#351>

yard of the farmer – so he could watch it – the milking shepherd could not manipulate the quantities. On the other hand the farmer's wife could start the procession of sheep milk immediately. On the turn of the 19th and the 20th century the decayed livestock got to the pastures, to the steppes, and the milking shepherd set his den there with the buildings mentioned earlier, he milked the sheep there and made the dairy products there as well.¹²

The flock was milked in the “*esztrenga*” (*milking pen*) on both the pastures and in the infields. A milking place (*milking hole*) was formed in one of its corners, where the shepherd sat on his characteristic “*fejőszék*” (*milking stool*) which had three or four legs, or on the skull of a horse. In the Hortobágy, in Greater and Lesser Cumania, the sheep was standing on a wetted plank, which was tilted towards the shepherd so the sheep could not escape. In the alpine regions and in Transylvania a small hole was dug into the earth for the same reason. The number of milking shepherds depended on the size of the flock, the number of sheep; one, two or sometimes even four shepherds did the milking at once. The herd boy or the child of the shepherd drove the sheep to the milking place using a stick or some other goad. If the shepherd was alone and had no help, his dog could drive the flock to the milking place.

In the Palócland the sheep of the big families was milked in the gate of the summer sheep-fold – which was in the woods – or in the sheep-pen. The shepherd went from sheep to sheep with a milking-pot in his hand. In these regions the flocks of the villages were driven home daily, where everyone milked their own sheep; while on the sheep farms of large farmers and manors sheep were milked in the sheep-cotes. Here a “*fejőnyílás*” (*milking gap*) was formed from the enclosures and the sheep were milked here, or in the entrance of the sheep-cote. Sometimes a milking pen was set up in the sheep-cote or outdoor. Here three or four shepherds milked the flock together, and the herd boys drove the sheep to them.¹³

Sheep were always milked from the back with hands, on a special milking stool. The shepherd grabbed the sheep on their wool; he pulled it to himself and held its udder with his left hand, and used his right hand to squeeze the milk out of it.¹⁴ He had to take care that all milk was squeezed from the udder, so that there will be no problem with milking of the animal later.¹⁵ The shepherd smeared his fingers with the

¹² Bellon 1996. 284.

¹³ Paládi – Kovács Attila 1965. 131 – 132.

¹⁴ Tálasi 1936. 216 – 217.

¹⁵ Paládi – Kovács Attila 1965. 135.

first drop of milk to make it more slippery, it was easier to milk by this way; and he repeated this several times by dipping his fingers into the milked milk. The shepherd also had to take care that the sheep does not mess into the milk.¹⁶ Shepherds wore rough, linen trousers during this work. They used a wooden milk-pail, which had narrowing neck¹⁷ on which a loose-woven linen, fine wirework or a so-called milking-mug was applied into which the milk was directly milked so it did not foam.¹⁸

Milking was a quite hard, exhausting men's work; although the shepherd's wife could also milk, she had to do it only in special cases for example during a war or the shepherd was sick. In the milking season the fingers and arms of the milking shepherds swollen because of the hard overwork. The quantity of milk depended on the quality of pastures and on the animals as well. The most milk could be milked at the beginning of the milking season: 2-4 dl from each sheep.¹⁹

From the turn of the 19th and 20th century, when milking and procession of milk was done on the pastures, the wife of the shepherd spent her time out on the pastures with her husband from the early spring to late autumn. Milking was the task of the shepherd, but the procession of milk was done by the wife. They made the "*gomolya*" (*ewe-cheese*), the curd or cottage cheese and the "*zsendice*" (*boiled sweet whey*), and they also cooked, cleaned the shepherd's hut, bred poultry and took care of their husbands.²⁰

From the second half of the 20th century, with the spread of intensive breeding sheep were milked with no hands but with machines, mostly in milking-folds specially built for this purpose. The sheep were driven in there once or twice a day and were attached one by one to the milking-machines while their heads were fixed. After the milking they were driven back to the pasture or to the sheep-fold. This process made milking a lot more quick and efficient.

The procession of milk also became partially mechanized, but the production of *ewe-cheese* and cheese did not change basically. The pasteurization of milk receives

¹⁶ Tálasi 1936. 216 – 217.

¹⁷ Később terjedtek el a gyári készítésű, zománcozott, bádoggal fejtőedények, melyek azonban szintén megőrizték ezt a hagyományos, felfelé szűkülő formát. In: MNL 1977 – 1982. <http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02115/html/2-171.html>

¹⁸ MNL 1977- 1982. <http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02115/html/2-171.html>

¹⁹ Paládi – Kovács Attila 1965. 134 – 135.

²⁰ Fazekas 2009. 206.

more attention; the purification of milk from micro-organisms became an important part of milk procession, to provide sterility and longer expiry.²¹

1.2 Distribution of milk benefit and the transportation of sheep milk

To distribute the milk benefits – the sheep milk and dairy products made from it – diverse and sometimes quite complicated systems were used. In case of farming associations and common village sheep flocks in the Hungarian language area the distribution was based on the number of sheep. For example in the 1870s in Kisújszállás the farmer received the milk of one day for 30 sheep in a flock of 180 sheep, and received the milk of a half day for 15 sheep. Here the custom of “*próbafejés*” (*proof milking*) or “*bemires*” (*calibration*) – which was spread in Transylvania – was not typical. This was used to determine the quantity of milk a farmer received from the milk and dairy products.²²

While the milking took place in the yard of the sheep farmer, it was not necessary to transport the milk, its procession could be started immediately there by the farmer’s wife. If the flock was milked on the near lands – or in the sheep-pen in the woody pastures, which was usual in the Palóc land – the milk was carried to the village for procession by the son or the wife of the sheep farmer, a young member of the big family. Sheep milk was poured into a “*csobolyó*” (*a small wooden vessel*) which was fastened to the back of the carrier by linen-sheet. The tin milk-can spread in the first half of the 20th century, which was carried on the back as well.²³

But after the flocks were “forced” to the outer pastures, the sheep milk was processed on the shepherd’s shelter by the shepherd and his wife; and the milk benefits were calculated for the sheep farmer of this processed milk. The dairy products were mostly transported into the village or town by the shepherd’s wife, who used a donkey- or horse-wagon.²⁴

1.3 Production process of sheep milk

After the milking, the milk was filtered through silk or linen cloth into a pottery – in the eastern Palóc regions into a wooden pot – and was left to rest for a while. After

²¹ Research of Anikó Gyenizse – Sheep farm of Harkakötöny

²² Bellon 1996. 281 – 282.

²³ Paládi – Kovács Attila 1965. 135.

²⁴ Fazekas 2009. 207.

skimming, the milk was poured into a cauldron and was heated to *udder-warm*, and then it was curdled.²⁵

To process the milk, to create cheese a rennet was necessary²⁶, which made from the stomach of goatling, lamb or calf. The stomach of the young animal was cleaned, salted and then dried in a blew up state. At the beginning of milking a piece was cut down from it; it was put into water or milk, and next day after adding whey to it, it could be used as a rennet.²⁷ If there was not enough material sometimes it occurred that the shepherds used the juice of sour fruits to make rennet. Where there was more milk, for example in the manors and estates or in the flocks of the Great Plain cheese was made several times a day, after each milking. But the small peasants and shepherds made cheese only once a day, because of the less quantity of milk.²⁸

The curd milk was left to rest, then the shepherds broke it up using a special wooden “*tejtörő*” (*milk-breaker*) and the peasant’s wife using her hands. Then the broken up milk was rested for another half an hour, then the cheese was sorted out from the liquid. This was done with a “*gomolyaruha*” (*a loose woven cloth which kept the ewe-cheese in but let the whey leak*). The corners of this cloth were held together and the remaining whey was squeezed out in a “*gomolyateknő*” (*a tub for the ewe-cheese*) or on the “*gomolyanyomó asztal*” (*a table for squeezing the ewe-cheese*).²⁹ After this, the tied cloth was hung up on a lumber, and a pot was placed under it where the remaining whey could drop into. Then the ewe-cheese was pressed to form a disk. After this the completely squeezed ewe-cheese was placed on cheese- or ewe-cheese driers and it was left to dry up. In Lesser Cumania before the ewe-cheese was washed in warm whey and put on the shelves to dry only after it was put into salted water for four or five days.³⁰ Cheeses were seasoned for 5 – 6 days on the cheese dryer, while their surface became yellow. The made cheeses were stored in chambers. In olden

²⁵ Tálasi 1936. 217.

²⁶ The curd-cheese culture and youghurt making methods of Hungarians in the Middle Ages – which did not include rennet – was completed with the cheese-culture using stomach- or vegetable rennet. In: Magyar Néprajz II. (Paládi – Kovács Attila szerk.) 2001. 738.
<http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02152/html/02/342.html#351>

²⁷ The Israelites used kosher rennet, which was made of curd – taken out from the sucking calf’s stomach – blended with water. In: Paládi – Kovács 1965. 137.

According to the regulations of the kosher kitchen the mixing of meat and milky foods is strictly forbidden. So the stomach of calf can not be used to make kosher cheese (notice of the author)

²⁸ Paládi – Kovács 1965. 137.

²⁹ MNL 1977 – 1982. <http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02115/html/2-1734.html>

³⁰ Tálasi 1936. 217.

times the cheese was smoked in the smoky attics of the Palóc houses, but after the appearance of chimneys a special smoking house was built for this purpose.³¹

The whey which was left could be used in the peasantry and manorial households. The wealthy farmers gave it to the pigs, but it was mostly boiled so the precipitated curd could be eaten with bread or with the liquid of the whey. The so-called lean or stale whey – which was left after another boiling – was given to lung-sick people or was consumed instead of water.

Peasant women made curd-cheese from the end of July, but the shepherds made it from the beginning of the milking season. The curd-cheese was made of rasped off ewe-cheese flavored with salt, *paprika* and *pálinka*. It was put into a cup or a “*stander*” (*wooden-pot, which could be pressed with a screw*), and it was covered with a peanut leaf and was left pressed for seasoning. If the liquids flew out of it, the curd-cheese was covered with a linen-cloth and it was stored in a chamber or in the attic.³²

In the Palóc regions, sheep breeding peasants did not make butter from the sheep clotted cream, but the manors and often the shepherds as well – even if the farmer did not know it – made butter. The skimming of the sheep milk was taken off with a wooden spoon with round head and ornate end; and after the proper quantity was collected it was churned. After about 15 minutes it thickened and the shepherds stored it lump form without shaping. Lately it was consumed freshly, it was not typical that they ran the butter. The sheep breeding peasants and shepherds consumed sheep milk and dairy products made from it regularly in various forms, for example: freshly, with bread, cooked into soups or with paste.

The equipments of milking and milk procession were usually made from wood and staves tied with iron-bound. Until the middle of the 19th century Palóc and Barkó peasants usually made their wood equipments, wood-pots, barrels and tubs by themselves. From the turn of the 19th and 20th century it was more common that they bought the well known *gömöri* wood-pots and wood equipments in the fairs of Debrecen from Slovakian traders.

³¹ Paládi – Kovács 1965. 138 – 141.

³² Paládi – Kovács 1965. 141 – 143.

The manors had the necessary equipments and pots made by their own cartwrights and cutters. Women cleaned the pots with sand, the cauldrons with wood-ash. The milking-pot was boiled out, and washed with thyme to make it absolutely clear.³³

1.4 Trade and commercialization of products

Sheep milk and the dairy products made from it did not mean significant commerce in trade in the 18th and 19th century, however on the Great Hungarian Plain it occurred that cheese was used as money.³⁴

Among the eastern Palócs the big family mostly produced ewe-cheese and other dairy products for own use, and had no surplus that they could sell. The sheepmasters and shepherds of the manors traveled to the near towns with their donkey-cart where sold the cheese and curd-cheese made of sheep milk, while the large farmers and other shepherds sold their dairy products in the near villages.³⁵

The milk benefits of a milking flock meant a significant income for the shepherd – who received the Sunday milk, and could sell the dairy products made of it – for the livestock owner farmers, manors and also for the families who bred sheep as a complementary farming activity.³⁶

1.5 Customs and superstitions related to sheep milking and sheep milk

In the Hungarian popular belief there were significantly less superstitions related to sheep milk than to cow milk. But one belief was even known in the 20th century in Greater Cumania, this was called “*kásaszórás*”. According to this belief the flock has to be scattered around with millet-pap the night before the day of St. George (24th of April). This has to be done very properly so on this evil night the witches could not take the milk of the sheep, because if they do not do so the livestock will not give enough milk through the summer. According to this belief the witch can't get through millet-pap until she picks them up one-by-one, which is impossible.³⁷

³³ Paládi – Kovács 1965. 143 – 145.

³⁴ Fazekas 2009. 206 – 207.

³⁵ Paládi – Kovács 1965. 145.

³⁶ Fazekas 2009. 207.

³⁷ Fazekas 2009. 206.

2. BENEFITS OF SHEEP HUSBANDRY: MEAT, FATTENING AND SLAUGHTER OF SHEEP, TRADE AND CONSUMING

Besides milk and wool, another profitable benefit of sheep husbandry was the meat of sheep. Sheep meat or mutton was primarily consumed – and is consumed nowadays as well – in the sheep breeding regions. Mutton became more and more significant after the second half of the 18th century, with the flourishing of Hungarian wool export. In the next centuries the popularity of sheep meat decreased and today we can almost only find food made of mutton in the Great Plain and in parts of the Northern Highland regions. In the Great Hungarian Plain – and inside that region especially in the Greater Cumania Region – due to the significant sheep husbandry, sheep is the most popular meat type even today, and the dishes made of it are essential parts of a festive meal.³⁸

Mostly those sheep were slaughtered which were inappropriate for breeding, but still good consumption. The sheep were chosen for slaughter by eying them up, examining their hoof and teeth. Among the eastern Palócs the eying up of sheep was done on the 8th of September – the day of Kisasszony, the sheep were chosen for selling and slaughter on this day.³⁹

The shepherd was delegated for the selection by the farmer. The selection of sheep was always the task of the shepherd. They mostly slaughtered lamb or wether, but sometimes, after the coupling the ram was also chosen; for example in Lesser Cumania Christmas the time of ram slaughter. In Lesser and Greater Cumania sheep were fattened, especially wethers, which were grazed in a separate flock on the best quality pastures.⁴⁰

In Greater Cumania a large quantity of sheep livestock can be found up to this day; and sheep meat is an essential food and primal part of festive meals and dinners. In Karcag many aspects were taken into consideration for the selection of the sheep with appropriate age, size and sex:⁴¹

- an important aspect is the expedience, the sorting of animals which were inappropriate: *“If the breeder saw that if a sheep could no longer participate in the*

³⁸ Magyar Néprajz IV. (Balassa Iván szerk.) 1997. 474.

³⁹ Paládi – Kovács 1965. 147.

⁴⁰ Fazekas 2009. 189. és Tálasi 1936. 225 – 226.

⁴¹ By the interview with István Sinka, a member of Karcagi Birkafőzők Baráti Társaságának (Sheep Cooking Fellowship of Karcag)

breeding, he offered it for sale. This was the most typical material of cooking!”
- today, in most cases the demands of the customer are determinative in a slaughter:
“It is important how much guests they expect. An average sheep gives about 60kg of meat. Approximately the half of it (30kg) is appropriate for cooking, which is enough for 40-45 people.”

- of course the method of food making, and the choosing of the best type of meat has to be considered: *“If we want to make a roast the best is a sheep around 20-22 kg. If we want to make birkapörkölt or birkapaprikás (mutton stew) then we have to choose an animal older than 5 years, which is between 50 and 90 kg. The selection was done with the owner or the breeder!”*

The animal which was selected for slaughter was taken out from the flock by grabbing its back-feet or with the shepherd’s crook. In former times sheep were slaughtered on the pasture or in the yard of the farmer. Today, in case of public catering it is done in slaughterhouses, in case of family and other social events it is done on the spot. According to the regulations nowadays a veterinary examination is necessary.

“The slaughter of the animal can be done with ease. You have to lay the chosen animal to its left side, tie its two back-legs and the left fore-feet with a string. Then you have to cut the artery by sticking in a pointy, sharp knife under the chin, next to the cervical. You have to keep the knife in position and wait until the blood of the animal runs out, then after the last vital signs ceased with getting off from the cervical, you also have to cut the food-pipe and throat-pipe, and the skin. After this you have to cut the spinal cord by opening the joint between the skull and the cervical. You have to detach the food-pipe from the throat-pipe and band its end with a string – or by detaching the ring muscle from the food-pipe and knotting it – so the backflow of stomach content can be prevented.”⁴²

The animal was then hung up, its skin was flayed and its meat was processed. Before the slicing, the intestines and the tallow of the sheep had to be removed so they did not soil the meat. Only after this could the sheep be sliced. According to the traditional processing and preparation methods almost every part of the sheep was

⁴² Interview with István Sinka a member of Karcagi Birkafőzők Baráti Társaságának (Sheep Cooking Fellowship of Karcag)

used, why the Greater Cumania mutton stew contained not only the meat, but the chitterlings, the head, tail, liver as well. This gives the special taste of this food.⁴³

“Consumed parts of the sheep: besides its meat, the chitterlings (heart, liver, lung, spleen, kidney), the scorched head and hoofs, and the rumen and the honeycomb stomach. It is a curiosity but some cooks use so-called “gyöngyös bél” - filled with spiced and toasted bread - to make the sheep-sausage.”⁴⁴

Similarly to the milk benefits the shepherd had to account for the meat and skin of the slaughtered sheep. However most shepherds and sheep farmers knew how to prepare the sheep skin, they usually gave to a tanner or a furrier who made hats, *bekecs* (leather coat), *bőrpruszli* or bedspreads from the skin of the sheep.⁴⁵ The skin of sheep and often lambs were flayed in one part and then the skin was stretched with sticks to protect it from drying out. Then it was smeared with lime, and after that it was bathed in a liquid with alum for a while, then it was broken with hands and the remaining meat was removed with a scraper tool. From the scrotum of the slaughtered ram they mostly made tobacco-pouch.⁴⁶

After the First World War till the 1960s, the system of common-slaughter was in practice among the eastern Palócs. The main point of this system was that, about 10 sheep farmer formed a group and on every Sunday one of them slaughtered a sheep. On every Sunday another farmer slaughtered a sheep from his own flock and gave 2-2 kg of meat and chitterlings to the others. The farmers mostly knew how to slaughter and flay the animal, but if none of them could do it, they hired a professional to whom they gave 1 kg of meat and the hide for his work.⁴⁷

The slaughter of sheep - unlike the slaughter of poultry - was always a men's job, and it is still today.

“The slaughter - due to shepherd's traditions - was always done a man, because this process and the following flaying and slicing works also require strength. Irrespectively of this, we know of women who did not seclude her selves from this work.”⁴⁸

There were two widespread method of conserving the meat in the past. It was either smoked or fried and then stored in its own fat. Among the eastern Palócs and in the

⁴³ Tálasi 1936. 226.

⁴⁴ Interview with István Sinka

⁴⁵ Fazekas 2009. 191.

⁴⁶ MNL 1977 – 1982. <http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02152/html/02/342.html#351>

⁴⁷ Paládi – Kovács 1965. 147.

⁴⁸ Interview with István Sinka

Hungarian language area mutton was also usually fried and stored in a leather bottle or wooden cup. The leg was prepared as a ham and was smoked with the rack and the ribs. In the winter shepherds froze the meat by hanging it up on a branch. Properly mutton was usually consumed freshly cooked; it was conserved only if there were no other possibilities.

The sheep tallow was also utilized. Mostly it was stored cooked, so later it could be used for healing wounds, salved onto dried hands or it was burnt to light in the shepherd's shelter.⁴⁹

Nowadays mutton is stored in refrigerators for short periods and in freezers for longer periods in raw or processed condition.

On the sheep breeding areas, sheep or lambs were slaughtered for almost every festival or common work. On every Easter, harvest, vine-harvest, wedding or engagement it was essential to eat food from sheep meat.

“If I think about Karcag, there is no big family and social gathering in our region without mutton meal. On weddings, name-day evenings, baptizing and work festive it is an essential dish. On urban programs and festivals our cook-masters are more and more required. The three most typical sheep meals are the mutton-stew, the paprikás and the “juhászos bérka”. But if you just think: “For how long have I not eaten a good mutton-stew”, gives a good reason to cook.”⁵⁰

In Greater Cumania not only the slaughter, the preparation but also the serving of mutton has its own tradition and customs, which goes back to really old times.

“It is an honor to have that custom which we brought from the land of origin (this custom is still in use among the Kazahs). According to this custom an honorable member (oldest person, groomsman, special guest, or the couple on a wedding) of a group receives the head of the sheep, which was cooked in one part. It is not typical today to keep some bones or other parts of the animal as an amulet. Preparing the horn of a beautiful ram is possible.”⁵¹

The words of István Sinka can completely summarize the importance of mutton on the Great Hungarian Plain and especially in Greater Cumania:

“Like the fish for the people near the waters, the game for the highlanders, the sheep for the people on the Great Plain was an important component of their alimentation. The possibility which comes from the lifestyle enriches the festive cover,

⁴⁹ Paládi – Kovács 1965. 148.

⁵⁰ Interview with István Sinka

⁵¹ Interview with István Sinka

which can only be described with the attribute of naturality. As we wrote in the nominating material for the National Inventory, on festive events it is not even asked, what will be served.”⁵²

Mutton is still very popular among the eastern Palócs as well. In the period between October and the middle of December the bigger sheep breeding families slaughtered a sheep half-monthly, but mutton was necessary dish of festive meals. The wealthier sheep breeders slaughtered sheep even for Easter, but the slaughter and consuming of increased during the time of harvest. Among the Palócs the thrasher workers ate goulash made from mutton. The Saint’s day was eminent among the festivals, for which not only the wealthy farmers slaughtered 2-3 wethers, but the poorer families raised a sheep for this occasion. Neither engagement nor wedding was held without mutton and food made of it. Mutton was mainly eaten by sheep breeding farmers and shepherds, but for a long time it was a popular dish among the miners and industrial workers as well.⁵³

Sheep, just like other animals were sold on markets in the past. Every type had its own market place; there was sheep-market, horse-market and also cattle-market. For the markets and fairs of the summer and autumn, which lasted for more days; farmers of the nearby villages drove their most beautiful and fattened livestock. In Kunmadaras or Kunszentmiklós the sheep-markets of Demeter’s day (26th of October) were well known.⁵⁴

A bustling trade evolved between the Great Plain and the Northern Mountains, the vine-growers of the historical wine-regions bought many sheep in the springtime, and raised them in their vine-yards until the slaughter in grape-harvest season. On the markets of Eger, Rimaszombat, Putnok, Losonc and Nógrád mostly the Slovaks of Gömör bought the sheep of eastern Palóc sheep breeders, and herded them on feet to the villages of Alacsony-Tátra, Kis- and Nagy-Fátra.⁵⁵

The order of markets and fairs were secured by the so-called “*vásárbírák*” (???) their *tizedeseik*. Their contracts were written by the so-called *vicenótárius*. The customers could be farmers, butchers or *kupecek* (*dealers*), but to Hungary often came Czech and Austrian traders, contractors and other types of merchants as well.⁵⁶

⁵² Interview with István Sinka

⁵³ Paládi – Kovács 1965. 152.

⁵⁴ Tálasi 1936. 204 – 205. és Fazekas 2009. 192 – 197.

⁵⁵ Paládi – Kovács 1965. 146.

⁵⁶ Tálasi 1936. 204 – 205. és Fazekas 2009. 192 – 197.

Today the customer contacts the owner or the breeder and chooses the livestock there. Selling the sheep as meat is often done through wholesalers.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Iván BALASSA (main editor)

1997. Magyar Néprajz IV. Budapest

Tibor BELLON

1996 Beklen. A nagykunsági mezővárosok állattartó gazdálkodása a XVIII – XIX. században. Karcag

Mihály FAZEKAS

2009 Kunmadaras juhászata. Karcag

Gyula ORTUTAY (main editor)

1977 – 1982 Magyar Néprajzi Lexikon. Budapest

Attila PALÁDI – KOVÁCS

1965 A keleti palócok pásztorkodása. In: Műveltség és Hagyomány VII. Debrecen

Attila PALÁDI – KOVÁCS (main editor)

2001 Magyar Néprajz II. Budapest

István TÁLASI

1936 A Kiskunság népi állattartása. In: Néprajzi Füzetek 6.