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Vanishing World, Vanishing Memory. Cultural Heritage of Shepherds in the Polish Carpathians (an Overview)

Znikający świat, znikająca pamięć. Dziedzictwo kulturowe pasterzy w polskich Karpatach (przegląd)

ABSTRACT

Transhumance shepherding and pastoralism is part of the tangible and non-tangible cultural heritage in the modern world. It has been known and practised for centuries throughout Europe, being one of the most traditional professions in the area.

The aim of the paper is to present the results of research on selected phenomena of the cultural heritage of shepherds in the Polish part of the Carpathians. Presented in the paper are the findings on the structure of the yearly and diurnal cycles manifested in the practice of shepherding, as well as the most important elements of the shepherds' worldview.

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In this paper, I used the results of qualitative research conducted at selected pastures in Spisz, Orawa, Podhale, the region of Żywiec and Silesian Beskids in Poland between 2015 and 2022. The research techniques applied include standardised and free-form interviews with master shepherds and their crews working in the pastures, as well as overt and covert participant observations carried out during selected shepherds' holidays and meetings in different spaces – in churches, during highlander and Wallachian festivals, thematic meetings and in the pastures. The above techniques were supplemented with an analysis of the visual sources encountered during the field research, as well as those provided by enthusiasts of the subject and found on the Internet.

The research showed that modern pastoralism oscillates between two contrasting tendencies – tradition, through which it has retained many elements from the past, and modernity, through which the shepherds introduce solutions drawn from contemporary culture to their pastures. The yearly cycle of the shepherds' life comprises two parts (seasons), during which they stay in different spaces and carry out work according to the rhythm of nature, influenced by the shepherds' vision of the world and accompanied by their rich rituals.

Key words: cultural heritage, the profession of shepherding, the Carpathians, local communities, traditional imagery, the sacred of shepherds, shepherds' time, customs and rituals

STRESZCZENIE

Pasterstwo stanowi część materialnego i niematerialnego dziedzictwa kulturowego współczesnego świata. Jest ono znane i praktykowane od wieków w całej Europie, stanowiąc jedną z najbardziej tradycyjnych profesji karpaccich i bałkańskich.

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie wyników badań wybranych zjawisk dziedzictwa kulturowego pasterzy w polskiej części Karpat. W artykule zaprezentowano życie codzienne pasterzy karpaccich istniejące na szałasach w sezonie pasterskim, jak również najważniejsze elementy wizji świata pasterzy.

W artykule wykorzystałam wyniki badań jakościowych przeprowadzonych na wybranych pastwiskach na Spiszu, Orawie, Podhalu, Ziemi Żywieckiej i Beskidzie Śląskim w Polsce w latach 2015–2022. Zastosowane techniki badawcze obejmują wywiady standardowe i swobodne z pasterzami oraz obserwacje uczestniczące prowadzone na szałasach, podczas wybranych świąt religijnych oraz dorocznych spotkań rodzin pasterskich. Powyższe techniki uzupełniono analizą źródeł wizualnych napotkanych podczas badań terenowych, a także dostarczonych przez pasjonatów tematu i znalezionych w Internecie.

Badania wykazały, że współczesne pasterstwo oscyluje pomiędzy dwiema przeciwstawnymi tendencjami – tradycją, dzięki której zachowało wiele elementów z przeszłości, oraz nowoczesnością, poprzez którą pasterze wprowadzają rozwiązania zaczerpnięte z kultury współczesnej. Roczny cykl życia pasterzy składa się z dwóch części (pór roku), podczas których przebywają oni w różnych miejscach i wykonują pracę zgodnie z rytmem natury, pod wpływem pasterskiej wizji świata, czemu towarzyszą bogate rytuały.

Słowa kluczowe: dziedzictwo kulturowe, zawód pasterza, Karpaty, społeczności lokalne, tradycyjne wyobrażenia, sacrum pasterzy, czas pasterzy, zwyczaje i rytuały

INTRODUCTION

Pastoralism and transhumance shepherding, in their tangible and intangible aspects, are part of the cultural heritage of the modern world. They have been known and practised for centuries in Europe and are among the most traditional professions in this area. We can still find them being carried out in the Balkans and in the Carpathian Mountains, where they are linked to ancient archaic imagery and ritual practices handed down from generation to generation among shepherds. At the same time, many of the customs and rituals associated with transhumance pastoralism in these regions, including the Polish Carpathians, have their origins in the traditional Vlach law, which was, from as early as the 14th century onwards, gradually spreading from the Balkans, Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania into other regions of the Carpathians, currently parts of Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Ukraine. Remnants of this „old world” have survived until the present day among the Carpathian highlanders, which manifests itself both in artifacts and in the specific thought structures, perceptions of reality or value hierarchies applied to the modern world. In embarking on this work, I set a number of research questions. My main objective was to examine the shape of contemporary shepherd culture in the Polish Carpathians, and – in particular – to find out how shepherds in this region live in the 21st century, how they practise their profession, what is their yearly rhythm of life, and what elements of their profession are perceived by them as part of their cultural heritage. I also wanted to look into the organisation of the modern shepherd’s hut (chalet), its temporal and spatial symbolism – the times when modern shepherds start and finish the grazing season, the world of their topographical imagery, what their daily life looks like, their daily schedule, what they eat and where they obtain their food.

In this section, I present the preliminary results of research on the everyday life of shepherds in the 21st century, conducted in chalets of Spisz/Spiš, Orawa/Orava, Podhale, Żywiec region and Silesian Beskids in Poland between 2015 and 2022. These are supplemented by the research I conducted during the Szczechowicz family’s spring *redyk* (walking with the sheep) which took place from 19th to 24th April 2018, and during which I, together with three shepherds, covered on foot a route of 110 kilometres from Ratułów in Podhale to Sobkówka in the Żywiec region, accompanying more than five hundred sheep to summer pasture. In all cases, I used qualitative research, mainly consisting of standardised and free interviews conducted with master shepherds and their crews working at the mountain pastures, as well as overt and covert participant observations made during selected festivals and gatherings of shepherds

in various locations – in churches, during highlander folk festivals, thematic meetings and at the pastures. I supplemented these techniques with an analysis of the visual sources observed during my field research, as well as of those lent to me by enthusiasts of the subject and found on the Internet.



Photo 1. Shepherd's hut of Lasak Family, Marysina Polna, Orawa, 2022, photo by E. Kocój

If we were to make a quick summary of modern shepherding, we could be justified in saying jokingly (but without malice) that its most conspicuous symbol is the modern *baca* (master shepherd) who owns... a swanky car, a leather jacket and a mobile phone [Translator's note: this is a reference to *fura, skóra i komóra* – a rhymed, albeit somewhat outdated, Polish expression listing the symbols of material success]; he also possesses a flock of sheep, a hut, and a folk costume, which he wears on holidays or whenever he feels like it. Apart from that, he has a year-round house and, „God willing”, a wife and a few children. His life is divided into two parts, according to the seasons: a spring/summer period, during which he grazes and milks his flocks, processes the milk and makes cheese, and an autumn/winter period, during which he lives at home, carries out other farm work and prepares for the following spring/summer grazing season. The boundary of these periods and the transition between them is marked even in the present day by rich shepherding rituals that highlight different functions of the seasons and their associated meanings. If one were to ask the shepherds which part of the year is more important, they would not hesitate to answer: the first one,

the spring/summer, associated with grazing. They usually wait for it all winter and would not even consider the possibility of not setting out for the pastures in spring; an absence of summer grazing would not only account to the end of their profession, but would also mean a more generalised „end of the world” in terms of the meaning of life, and would bring forth a distinct spiritual suffering. In some aspects, summer pasture could be seen as several-months-long festivities, although it obviously also involves hard physical work on which the year-round livelihood of most families depends. The necessity of leaving for the pasture, the long time away from home, as well as the specific rules governing the life in the pasture mean that this time is separated from the mundane time of autumn and winter by specific rites and rituals. To reiterate: for present day shepherds, grazing time is the sacred time, while autumn and winter are the time of the profane, when life on the pastures comes to a standstill and the shepherds move back into their family homes. On the other hand, the final stretch of the grazing season can be difficult for some shepherds, especially when the autumn weather starts to take its toll; they admit that they feel homesick and wish for an early end to the season and return to their families¹.

In order to have a good understanding of contemporary pastoralism, it is important to realise that the basic elements of the organisation of annual and daily cycles have a history that dates back centuries. Although the memory of contemporary shepherds concerning their profession usually spans to the generations of their fathers and grandfathers, or – rarely – to that of their great-grandfathers, and, due to the oral nature of shepherd culture, we have few relevant written ethnographic sources older than the 19th century, the researcher who stays in the pasture and conducts research among this community notices after a while that the specific forms of pastoral life must have developed in a very distant past and have retained their form for centuries, being passed on orally and through a kind of „initiation” into the secrets of the profession. This does not mean that pastoralism is an unchanging relic of the past – it has, and has probably always had, a dual character: it is both traditional and modern, preserving the essence of what is „old”, while at the same time readily introducing the „new”, based on usefulness from the perspective of modern life. As an example, the old wooden horse-drawn carts which were used by the shepherds to move their belongings to pasture at the start of the grazing season up to 1990s have now been replaced by cars or off-road vehicles. Also, the archaic method of record-keeping

¹ Field research – Ewa Kocój [hereinafter: FR-EK], in many places in Spisz, Orava, Tatra Mountains, Beskid Śląski and Żywiecki.

at *mirowanie* (i.e. measuring the quantity of milk given by sheep at the start of the grazing season), the so-called *karbiki* – slates or sticks on which the number of sheep and the amount of milk were carved using special symbols – used in the first half of the 20th century and even more recently (although only occasionally), have been replaced by pen and paper, and nowadays the results are often entered into a computer. Incantations and spells against viper bites, which were still used by shepherds at pasture in the second half of the 20th century, have been phased out by the medicines and injections that every shepherd's hut in the highlands is nowadays equipped with. The ban on women staying in shepherd's huts and mountain pastures in the Polish Carpathians before the feast of St. John the Baptist (24th June), which traces its origins to beliefs in demons appearing in the form of women and threatening the shepherds, while still familiar to many shepherds in Poland today, no longer applies to the realities of contemporary shepherding. Due to lack of junior shepherds (*juhas*) and at times unsatisfactory quality of their work, master shepherds increasingly hire women as helpers (this is especially true for so-called family pastures); women also occasionally assume the position of master shepherd (*baca*). This is the case, for example, with „Bacówka u Jancoka”, a pasture in Brzegi near Bukowina Tatrzańska, where the position of master shepherd has been held for more than 20 years by Janina Rzepka, who is described as „the first full-time female *baca* in Poland”². A similar situation takes place at the Lassak family's pasture at Marysina Polana in Lipnica Wielka on the Polish-Slovak border, where the position of *baca* is officially held by Andrzej Lassak, but the job is in a large part carried out by his wife Joanna, who supervises production of cheese and sells it, she also cooks, cleans, feeds the livestock, and advises tourists³. A number of women are involved in the production and selling of dairy products, especially cheese; a good example of this is Anna Wilczek from Kacwin, who during the grazing season helps her husband in making cheese and sells it at the markets in Jabłonka (every Wednesday from April to September) and in Nowy Targ (every Thursday from April to September)⁴. Maria Ptoś from Witów manages all the work at the pasture together with her husband Józef Zych. She makes the cheese, sells it, and – in order to preserve the memory of her family and the shepherding profession

² FR-EK, woman-*baca* Janina Rzepka, Brzegi, August 2021; *Śladami tradycyjnego wypasu owiec. Zrównoważone rolnictwo w polskiej części Karpat*. Przewodnik, red. B. Dąbek et al., Warszawa 2016, s. 54.

³ FR-EK, interview with Joanna Lassak, Lipnica Wielka, July 2022.

⁴ FR-EK, market in Jabłonka, observation, 2015–2022; interview with *baca* Jan Wilczek, Kacwin, May 2021.

– she created a „mini-museum” in her own home by collecting artifacts related to shepherding. This is also the case with Elżbieta Truhan, who comes from an old shepherd family and runs a shepherd’s hut (together with a dairy shop) and shepherd’s museum at Polana Potok in Witów⁵. This also applies to some of the shepherds entering into the profession: Jan Bzdyk from Maruszyna in Podhale, who manages a pasture at Złoty Groń in Silesian Beskids, is helped by his mother Helena Bzdyk who sells the cheese he makes and provides him with food on a daily basis⁶. The shepherds unanimously point out that the help of the women (wives, mothers, daughters) at the pasture is invaluable – without them they would not be able to keep the premises clean, keep up with deliveries or prepare daily meals. The presence of a woman – a wife or a mother – is also often important in itself, as it allows them a moment’s respite from the drudgery of work and brings a sense of community and acceptance arising from working for the benefit of the family.



Photo 2. Janina Rzepka on hut, Bukowina Tatrzańska, 2022, photo by E. Kocój

⁵ FR-EK, Polana Białą Potok, Witów, July 2021.

⁶ FR-EK, Złoty Groń, Istebna, May–August 2022.

SZAŁAS – A SEMIOSPHERE OF THE BUILDING AND THE RELATIONSHIPS

A valuable insight into the life of shepherds can be gained from studying the phenomenon of the shepherd's hut (*szalas*). For contemporary shepherds in the Polish Carpathians, it constitutes a specific semiosphere around which a diverse content has accumulated, revealing their vision of the world and symbolism; it is also a testimony to selected elements of Vlach law. It should be emphasised that contemporary shepherds in the Polish Carpathians make a clear distinction between two meanings of the term *szalas* – a narrower one, where it means a single building (shepherd's hut) erected at pasture, and a broader one, where the term is used to denote a specific kind of pastoral enterprise, a kind of shepherds' joint venture governed by special laws and relations between the persons staying there.

In the first (narrower) sense, the *szalas* is shepherds' seasonal residence in the Polish Carpathians and the most important point of space around which the daily life of those involved in this profession revolves. It is their home away from home, where they spend almost half the year – from April to October. It is usually a single building erected in various spaces (a meadow, clearing or forest) for accommodation of people, as well as for cheese-making (and formerly also for housing animals). A characteristic feature of the huts built today in the Polish Carpathians is their wooden construction; it was and still is predominant among local shepherds. This is mainly due to the fact that wood has traditionally been the basic building material in this region of Europe. Modern shepherds also emphasise that a wooden shepherd's hut is a matter of tradition – they would not seriously consider the possibility of huts being made of brick – the whole technology of cheese production and its quality requires wood, because together with the fire and the right ambient temperature it gives the cheese its distinct taste. Nowadays in Poland, structures named *szalas* are also being built using EU funds – they are located along the so-called Oscypek Trail [t/n: *oscypek* is the name in Góral dialect of the traditional pressed and smoked sheep cheese] or Vlach Trail and are used primarily for selling cheese and for education, i.e. occasional demonstrations of traditional cheese-making and activities for children and young people. Dairy products are usually brought there by car from traditional huts, where they had been made using time-tested methods⁷. A traditional Polish shepherd's hut, together with its furnishings and surroundings, constitutes a specific cultural landscape. The hut also functions as a special semiosphere for the shepherds, or even – using the terminology of Aleksei Lidov – a specific hierotopy. It is regarded by the shepherds as a place imbued with particular powers,

⁷ FR-EK, Spisz, Orawa, Podhale, Beskid Śląski, 2015–2022.

which determine its form and construction. The semiosphere of the shepherd's hut comprises a number of elements and features: architecture, light, imagery, colours, plants (flowers, herbs), singing, ceremonies and ritual practices particular to shepherds. It is divided into two parts: the external one, visible to everyone, and the internal one, accessible primarily to the shepherds. All these elements interact with each other and determine the symbolic value of the space. It can be pointed out that various spaces of the hut are divided into important and less important, or sacred and profane. The most significant space of the hut is the front wall, where the main entrance is located. Almost every master shepherd marks it in their own way, using both elements of natural origin – plants, sticks, roots, antlers of various animals – and diverse artifacts of their own choosing. The shepherds hang those on the front wall of the hut, usually above the entrance, or on the left side of the wall, level with the top of the entrance. These artifacts are called different names – more general: „shepherd's sign", „shepherd's logo"⁸, or more specific, depending on the object involved: „the root", „the shrine", „the holy image". All these elements form a system of signs which plays a significant role in the shepherds' time-space; they are also a message for other shepherds who can decode



Photo 3. Maria, mother of the shepherd Mateusz Micorek from Rycerka, 2021, photo by E. Kocój

⁸ FR-EK, Ochotnica Górna, August 2021.

it. When asked about the meaning of such objects, shepherds usually speak about them in general terms, reluctant to reveal their meaning to strangers: „it is what it is”, „these are some signs of ours”. As for the interior of a shepherd’s hut, it consists of two spaces – the front room and the back room (*kumornik*), the latter being an additional space behind the hut’s inner wall. In the past it was used as a storage space for cheese and as sleeping quarters for the shepherds, but nowadays sleeping in cheese-making areas is forbidden as per EU regulations. *Kumornik* is used for storing dripping cheese (*bundz*) and placing the troughs with brine in which the *oscypek* cheese is marinated.

The interior of the hut is filled with a number of artifacts, often handed down by shepherd families from generation to generation, which are used in daily living and preparation of food. They include, above all, a *watra*, or open fire, over which hangs a *jadwiga* – a wooden structure made from a barked and burned tree bough, on which a cauldron is hung for heating water, making *żętyca* (a drink from sheep milk whey) and cooking food. According to old customs, the fire in the pasture should not be extinguished for the entire season, and its extinguishing heralded misfortune. Starting the *watra* for the season is a ceremonial event and is always carried out by the master shepherd, who on this occasion recites a special prayer handed down to him by his elders. Fire was also believed to ward off evil forces from shepherds and flocks, and to work against evil spells cast on milk and cheese. A shepherd’s hut must also contain the following: cauldrons for heating water (usually made of copper and produced by Romani craftsmen), a *puciera* – wooden barrel for making cheese, a *felura* – the implement for stirring the curd, as well as wooden forms for pressing the cheeses and troughs for storing them. Contemporary shepherd’s huts are also decorated with religious symbols, such as small wooden shrines with an image of the Virgin Mary, as well as holy images of Jesus, the Virgin Mary or Saints. Among the images of the Virgin Mary, there is usually a figure of Our Lady of Ludźmierz – the patron saint of Podhale – particularly revered by the highlanders of the Polish Carpathians⁹. Occasionally, contemporary shepherds also decorate the huts with secular images referring to the cultural or natural landscape of their region. Many shepherds use elements of animal origin for decoration, usually deer or ram antlers, as well as heads of killed or found animals (wolves, wild boar, sheep and rams).

In the second – broader – sense, the *szataś* is made up of those who manage it (the *baca* or master shepherd), the managed personnel (the shepherds, organised into a hierarchy of positions such as *podbaca* or master

⁹ FR-EK, huts of Spisz, Orawa, Podhale, Beskid Śląski, 2015–2022.

shepherd's assistant, *juhas/walas* or junior shepherd, *honielnik* or shepherd's assistant), the owners of the land, the owners of the sheep (*gazda* or farmer), and the buyers of dairy products (local population, businesses and tourists). In my opinion, this hierarchical order dates back centuries and is a remnant of the ancient Vlach law, which had developed in southern Europe – probably among the shepherds of ancient Rome and pastoral peoples of the Balkans – and has spread to new territories through intercultural contact, migration and historical-political events. This law was called the Vlach Law (*Ius Valahicum*) or the Ancient Wallachian Law (*Lex antiqua valachorum*) and was of remote origin – many of its elements can already be found in the transhumance pastoral peoples of the Balkans and Romania, sometimes referred to as Wallachians or Vlachs in medieval historical documents. We are still not aware of all the elements of this law, but as late as the 19th century it was still applied in many regions of Central and South-Eastern Europe in the issues of land ownership, human settlement, grazing and use of land, the legal status of the nomadic or semi-nomadic populations (subordination to rulers, clergy and monasteries, personal and group freedoms), taxation, the rights and obligations of the population towards the rulers (including the duty to protect the borders) and dispute resolution. It probably also determined the beginning and end of grazing season and the associated obligations of shepherds. From as early as the 14th century, when the shepherd population gradually moved in small groups towards the north of Europe due to numerous wars in the Balkans and the arrival of the Ottoman Turks in Europe, as well as in the search for new grazing areas, Vlach law began to be applied in settling the shepherd population in the royal, princely and noble estates in the Carpathian Mountains, including the territories of today's Wallachia, Transylvania, Moldavia, Hungary, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland¹⁰. In some regions (Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvania), this law was also often referred to as „custom of the land“, „law of the land“ or „law of the ancestors“. Another important moment in the consolidation of Vlach law is the 17th century. After the conquest of the Balkans by the Ottoman Turks, ethnically mixed people from the region moved and settled on the borders of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. Sometimes transhumance shepherds (called Wallachians or Vlachs) penetrated from the southern Balkans into the Habsburg monarchy, causing confusion in the new regions and often

¹⁰ D. Dulciu, *Ius Valahicum*, http://www.academia.edu/8031805/JUS_VALAHICUM, <http://portaro.eu/husav/documents/48902> [dostęp: 10.08.2022]; V. Rábik, *Development of Ruthenian and Wallachian Settlement in the Territory of Eastern Slovakia in the Middle Ages*, <http://www.paidagogos.net/issues/2008/1/5/article.php> [dostęp: 10.08.2022].

causing conflicts with local populations. Because of the migrating population, Emperor Ferdinand II Habsburg (1578–1637) enacted the so-called Vlach Statutes (*Statuta Valachorum*, *Vlaški statuti*) in 1630, which set out the basic principles of tenancy rights and taxation for Wallachian refugees on the military frontiers located between the rivers Sava and Drava; the migrants were granted land in return for military service¹¹. It is important to note that this statute defined the rules for the Wallachians not only in this area, but also for the pastoral population migrating from the Balkans to the Habsburg territories of Hungary, Bohemia, Slovakia and Poland. The statute mainly defined the system of governing the Wallachian community or others settling under Vlach law. It is worth remembering that in the Carpathian Mountains this law was called „Wallachian” and was often mistakenly associated only with this particular ethnos; in fact, it could apply to people of various ethnicities, regulating the conditions of land settlement, relations between rulers and subjects, taxes, rights and obligations of settlers, as well as customs within the communities¹². Many facts now suggest that the pastoral areas of the Balkans and the Carpathians must be considered jointly in terms of this law. The centuries-long influence of Vlach law on mountain communities has meant that certain customs became „natural” and have been handed down orally for generations, in particular through the organisation of life in the pasture. In spite of the changing political and historical situation, by the 19th century many elements of Vlach law had become so deeply rooted in the life of the Carpathian community that they became a kind of common law, still in part determining the rules of behaviour and social practices. They functioned alongside church and state laws, complementing them in certain aspects, but also creating different norms, contradicting those adopted in the general area.

We could therefore venture to state that, in the Polish Carpathians, the *szatás* in the latter sense encompasses both the material and spiritual sphere, and that the relations which link those spheres through the interdependence of all involved parties are highly significant. It should be added that the formation of a pastoral joint venture requires setting

¹¹ J.R. Lampe, M.R. Jackson, *Balkan Economic History, 1550–1950: From Imperial Borderlands to Developing*, https://books.google.pl/books?id=OtW2axOSn10C&pg=PA62&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false [dostęp: 2.07.2021]; L. Heka, *Vlaški statuti i njihova usporedba s povlasticama mađarskih hajduka*, „Podravina: časopis za društvena i kulturna istraživanja” 2019, 18, 35, s. 26–45; D.D. Mototolescu, „*Jus valachicum în Polonia*”, <http://www.laurlucus.ro/bibliotheca-lucus/reconstructe-istorice/dacoromania-sec-vii-xiii-dhr/vlahii-din-peninsula-balcanica> [dostęp: 23.05.2022].

¹² D.D. Mototolescu, *op. cit.*



Photo 4. Milking sheep in the Hyczyk family, Baligówka hut, 2020, photo by E. Kocój

up a number of arrangements between the master shepherd, the owners of the land on which the flocks graze, the owners of the sheep who entrust them to the shepherds for the duration of the grazing season, as well as for the distribution of profit (settlement in cash or dairy products). This is often a formidable task, as each master shepherd usually has to „come to an agreement” with up to dozens of people.

START OF THE GRAZING SEASON

The grazing season starts in spring and depends mainly on the weather. To many contemporary shepherds, the transitional stage between keeping the sheep in sheds during the winter and the time when they go out to summer pasture is known as *przepaski* – the gradual walking out the sheep from the sheds or stables to pasture for a few hours during the day and getting them used to walking and grazing:

„The sheep need to be grazed beforehand, because when they come out of the stable, they won’t walk far right away, they need to get used to it. This is done for a few days before they go out. If a farmer doesn’t graze the sheep, doesn’t let them outside, on the grass, then such a sheep may stop on the way, you have to drive it back to the farmer, it can’t walk”¹³.

¹³ FR-EK, interview with *baca* Tadeusz Szczechowicz senior and *baca* Tadeusz Szczechowicz junior, Ratułów, 2018–2021.

„The mixing of the sheep doesn't have a fixed date; the date is set depending on the year and the season and the weather. The way I used to do it, it could never be earlier than St. George's Day, it was always after St. George's Day in the mountains, and these were the spring *przepaski*, they did it early on, you know, so that the sheep would get used to it, so that the sheep wouldn't come out from the shed and immediately fall over. There were spring *przepaski*, these *gazdas* [t/n: farmers] used to do it, it's even good for the grass, also they would bathe the sheep, it all depended on the season. Where we live, historically, the mixing was no earlier than 15th, 20th May, in the old days, except they were already on their way, not far, but they were on their way into the mountains. But we did it in May, around May Day, because we're going to Ochodzita for those *przepaski*, it's not far away, and we're not going to Barania until June. And when they used to go to Hala Barania, they couldn't go earlier than in May, they went at the end of May, because earlier than that there wasn't enough grass. And that's why we did it that way, the *przepaski*, but the mixing only after St George, and we started using Ochodzita for grazing”¹⁴.

Nowadays the cut-off point, based on the old Vlach law, is the feast of St. Adalbert, celebrated on 23rd April according to the Catholic liturgical calendar, or St. George's Day, celebrated locally on 24th April, which, depending on the denomination of the shepherds, traditionally marked the beginning of the grazing season in Poland and Slovakia, as well as throughout the Carpathians. In practice, some dioceses in Poland combine the two feasts into one day and commemorate both saints on 23rd April. On the Sunday closest to this feast a solemn Mass is celebrated at the shrine of Our Lady in the village of Ludźmierz in the Podhale region. This event marks the start of the grazing season and is attended by shepherds and their families arriving from mountain villages in southern Poland and northern Slovakia, and above all – by the highlanders of the Podhale region. A small flock of sheep is also brought to this celebration every year – for many years this has been done by two brothers, Piotr and Stanisław, who come from Rogoźnik and run a pasture in Maruszyna¹⁵. Most of the shepherds wear festive highlander folk costumes for the occasion, and the Mass is accompanied by a rich repertoire of traditional songs played on shepherds' instruments (pipes, fipple flutes, bagpipes) by Polish or Slovak musicians. A white lamb is brought to the altar every year as part of the procession of gifts. During Mass selected shepherds serve at the altar, and the priest consecrates water for sprinkling on the animals and enclosures, as well as pieces of kindling from

¹⁴ FR-EK, interview with *baca* Piotr Kohut, Koniaków, December 2017.

¹⁵ FR-EK, interview with *baca* Piotr i Stanisław, Maruszyna, June 2021.

which the first *watra* is then lit at the pasture. The shepherds attending the Mass take these from under the altar; they also receive printed paper calendars showing the annual cycle of church holidays, which most of them then hang on their huts to keep track of time¹⁶. It is worth mentioning that the shepherds from the Żywiec region and Silesian Beskids also have their own shepherds' festival, a tradition started approximately ten years ago. They meet for a solemn Mass in the church of the Good Shepherd in Istebna on the eve of the feast of the Good Shepherd (a movable feast, the fourth Sunday after Easter). Shepherd families bring bread, wine and other sacrificial offerings, with prominent inclusion of cheese, which are brought to the altar in a procession during Mass. The originator and initiator of these meetings, which began in 2008, is unanimously considered by the shepherding community of the Żywiec region and Silesian Beskids to be Józef Michałek from Istebna – a highlander and the coordinator of many projects related to traditional shepherding in the Polish-Slovakian borderland.

Modern shepherds say that the start time of the grazing season is always determined by weather conditions. Each master shepherd must decide when to move out to pasture, considering the air temperature, the condition of grass (there must be enough fresh grass to feed the animals) and the wishes of the farmers who own the sheep (farmers often lack skills to milk the sheep, and have to feed the sheep using hay or special store-bought feed, so it is in their interests to put the sheep out to summer pasture as soon as possible)¹⁷. Some shepherds maintain that the old rules on the start of the grazing season no longer apply, but for many of them taking part in the traditional shepherds' festival in Ludźmierz, which marks the start the grazing season on St Adalbert's or St George's Day, or on the nearest Sunday, remains a significant point of reference. Many shepherds use that day as a marker of time for the grazing season, which can be seen from their statements regarding the start of summer grazing and setting off to the pastures with their flocks: „we set out before Ludźmierz”, „we set out before St. Adalbert's”, „we set out on Adalbert's, after Mass”, „we set out after Ludźmierz”. This reference to space (Ludźmierz) and time (the feast of the patron saint of shepherds) is in fact a manifestation of archaic thought structures, in which the Christian shrine in Podhale functions as a kind of *axis mundi*, necessary for renewal and sanctification of the time when the flocks are

¹⁶ FR-EK, interview with Jan Wilczek, Kacwin, May 2021.

¹⁷ FR-EK, interview with Jan Wilczek, Kacwin, May 2021; FR-EK, interview with *baca* Józef Wojtyczka, Polana Sosny-Niedzica, May 2021; FR-EK, interview with Piotr i Stanisław Guzy, Maruszyna, June 2021.

walked to pastures. The patron saints, in turn, form a pantheon of *mythical heroes* for the shepherds, without whom the world could not exist in its eternal order and could not cleanse itself after the deadness of winter. In shepherds' imagination, selected days of the liturgical calendar are also connected to changes in nature and the vegetative cycle, as well as to human activities resulting from these rhythms, such as grazing, and thus they create their own mapping of time, based on the ancient oppositions of cold/warmth or darkness/light, which have merged with the festivals, rites and rituals propagated by the Christian Church. At the same time, many modern shepherds show their attachment to the symbolism of the days of the week – they try to set out only on days that are considered lucky, avoiding those that have for centuries had negative connotations in traditional culture: „Fridays we avoid, it's a bad day, you shouldn't start on a Friday, you can start on any other day. Although when there were transports [to Bieszczady Mountains – E.K.], there were no exceptions, if it fell on a Friday, it unfortunately had to be. My favourite day to leave is when it's nice outside, green, and you can smell it's May, that's when you go, apart from Fridays, is all”¹⁸.

If the spring is sunny and the grass is growing fast, shepherds in the Polish-Slovak border region usually set off for pasture with their sheep as early as mid-April. When the spring is cold or even frosty, the moment of setting out for may be postponed until early May. In the weather conditions of Poland, the weather can also change abruptly – after a sunny spring and setting out in mid-April there may be such a sudden chill, or even frost and snow, that the shepherds have to suffer difficult conditions and feed the sheep in the pastures artificially: „We set out for pasture, it should be after St. Adalbert's, but even before St. Adalbert's we go sometimes. Because of course there must be grass, grass and nice weather, so sometimes we go earlier, because people call us, because lambs are being born on Easter, and when Easter is earlier, people have to milk the sheep, and they cannot milk very well, the farmers call, it's hard work for them, they want to give them out as soon as possible, so we go, because it's all the same to us whether we milk there or here. The sheep give birth in the spring, before they go out, and then they only go out when the grass is grown. This year on St. Adalbert's there was snow, everything was delayed, we went out later, but that is rare”¹⁹.

„We graze almost from snow to snow. One time we went out on the 14th of April, it depends on the grass, on the weather, you know. Back then it was different, we used to load sheep on the train, well, you had

¹⁸ FR-EK, interview with Andrzej Zubko, Dursztyn, August 2017.

¹⁹ FR-EK, interview with Jan Hyrczyk, Baligówka, August 2017.



Photo 5. Liturgy at the beginning of the shepherd season with the blessing of food, Ludźmierz, 2020, photo by E. Kocój

to keep the date, rain or shine, heck darn, this one time it snowed like heck, but we still had to go, for grazing in Silesia, so we were loading them on the train and it was snowing like heck, when was then, in the '70s they went by train, and in '83, '84, '85 it was already quite all right. In the '70s we used to go by train to Bieszczady Mountains, nobody walked, for it was terribly far away, so the trip was by train"²⁰.

The time of setting out for the pasture is nowadays referred by various names: some shepherds call this moment „redyk”, „spring redyk”, others „setting off for the mountain pasture”, „going out to the *szalas*”, still others „mixing of the sheep”. Strictly speaking, these names signify two different moments and two different activities: mixing of the sheep and setting out for the pasture. Sheep mixing refers to the time when the master shepherd gathers a flock of sheep from different owners and decides to set off. The *baca* sets the day for the gathering of the flock and informs his venture partners, the *gazdas*, who entrust their sheep to him for summer grazing. This moment is usually (although not always) ceremonial: around the day of the departure, the farmers bring the sheep to the master shepherd's cottage, where they are placed in a special enclosure, called *koszar*, or in dialectal pronunciation *koszor* or *kosor*. Some

²⁰ BT, interview with Stanisław Hyrczyk, Baligówka, August 2017.

owners bring in their sheep on the day before setting off for the *redyk* or add them to the flock during the walk to the pasture. Nowadays some master shepherds also agree to receiving the sheep directly in the pasture, in which case the *gazda*, his family or their employees drive the sheep on foot (if the pasture is not far from where the farmer lives) or by car.

Depending on the arrangements made between the master shepherd and the sheep owners during autumn and winter, the flock for summer grazing may be assembled from sheep from up to a dozen different farms. Master shepherds are reluctant to talk about the number of farmers with whom they enter partnerships; this is their secret – they try not to disclose it to outsiders in order to protect their interests and avoid losing customers. The number of sheep entrusted to the shepherds by the farmers also varies – this may be a few sheep or several hundred. Depending on the custom, the sheep are counted or – as the shepherds often call it – „read” by the shepherds at different times, usually when the *gazda* brings his flock to the starting place of the *redyk* and after the whole grazing flock has been assembled. The master shepherd counts the sheep using various counting methods, depending on the region and on the customs handed down to him by his elders. *Baca* Andrzej Zubek, who manages a pasture near Dursztyn in the Spisz region, emphasises that the sheep are not counted, but „read” (Góral dialect: *cytać*), a name which, according to him, comes from the Slovak custom of repeated counting of sheep up to fifty and over again, which resembles tedious reading: „Reading of sheep comes from the Slovak, although, as I’ve heard, that read by twenties, while I read by fifties. You read sheep, you don’t count them, it’s just like reading, because it’s the same over and over again, up to fifty and again, from one to fifty and one to fifty again. And if there’s a thousand or more of them, a thousand and a half, well, there’s quite a few of those fifties, you know. Then you make *karbiki*, on a stick or on the fence of the *koszor* [t/n: the sheep pen], and you count the fifties, how many of them there are. And this is done in the spring, when you’ve come [to the pasture], find out how many of those fifties, because after then, through the summer, you know how many there are”²¹.

Stanisław Hyrczyk, a *baca* who grazes flocks with his sons in the Orawa region, also refers to counting sheep as „reading”, using archaic expressions he learned had from shepherds of the Podhale region in Bieszczady Mountains in the post-war years, at a time when „the Tatras were taken away from the highlanders” and grazing had been moved to areas deserted after the expulsion of Ukrainians from south-eastern Poland following the so called Operation Vistula in 1947: „I’ve been taught like this since the

²¹ FR-EK, interview with Andrzej Zubko, Dursztyn, August 2017.

beginning, so I read every single one of them: one by God, two by God, all by God, foursome, fivesome, sixsome, up to fifty [t/n: throughout, either direct quotes or English approximations of non-standard forms of Polish numerals will be given]. Ten is tensome, then eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, *dwadcat* [t/n: cf. standard Polish *dwadzieścia* vs. Slovak *dvadsať* for „twenty“]. One and *dwadcat*, two and *dwadcat*, three and *dwadcat*, four and *dwadcat*, five and *dwadcat*, six and *dwadcat*, seven and *dwadcat*, eight and *dwadcat*, nine and *dwadcat*, *tridcat* [t/n: cf. Slovak *tridsať*], *tridcat* one, two and *tridcat*, three and *tridcat*, four and *tridcat*, five and *tridcat*, six and *tridcat*, seven and *tridcat*, eight and *tridcat*, nine and *tridcat*, *miru* [t/n: the origin of the numeral for „forty“ is unclear, maybe even related to Proto-Slavic **mirъ*, „world“], one *miru*, two and *miru*, three and *miru*, four and *miru*, five and *miru*, six and *miru*, seven and *miru*, eight and *miru*, nine and *miru*, *piatdiesiat* [t/n: cf. Slovak *päťdesiat*], and then start over from the beginning. Junior shepherds, when there was a big flock of sheep, would mark it on a stick, carvings, fifties, also on a *koszor*, or on a stick, I have my own stick, so only we would know, nobody else can know”²².

Piotr Kohut from Koniaków in Silesian Beskids also calls counting sheep „reading”. He calls his method of counting sheep „modern”, which he distinguishes from the „old dialect” still used by some master shepherds, and points out that it is dependent on the situation: one kind when the *baca* receives sheep from the *gazda*, a different one when he suspects that some sheep have been lost or attacked by predators, and still a different one during returning sheep to their owners in the autumn: „We count in tens, ten, twenty, thirty, forty. When it seems that a sheep is missing, that it’s been lost or a wolf has snatched it, then we take out a small counting board and count in twos: twosome, foursome, sixsome, eightsome, ten”²³.

The number of sheep is carved on a special stick or on the fence of the sheep pen. According to a centuries-old tradition, the total number of sheep in the grazing flock is known only to the master shepherd and remains his secret:

„How many sheep are grazing – only the *baca* knows”²⁴.

„The master shepherd marks the number of sheep he brings in on the *koszor*, no one can see it, then he rubs it out and he alone knows how many sheep there are”²⁵.

²² FR-EK, interview with Stanisław Hyrczyk, Baligówka, July 2018.

²³ FR-EK, interview with Piotr Kohut, Koniaków, 2017–2019.

²⁴ FR-EK, interview with Piotr Kohut, Koniaków, 2017–2019.

²⁵ FR-EK, interview with Magdalena Chrzęszcz, Jeleśnia, April 2018.

„We put a mark on the *koszor*, everyone in his own way, every *baca* has a way”²⁶.

The day selected by the master shepherd for setting off for the *redyk* is still a special day for shepherd families – it is accompanied by a rich set of ritual behaviours and gestures. On this day the shepherds, their families and the help hired for the season (*juhas* or *honielnik*) usually get up early (3 or 4 a.m.), as will be the case from now on in the pasture. After milking their own and their hosts’ sheep, a quick morning meal is eaten after which families gather at home and pray together for a good journey to the pasture, for health, happiness, prosperity and a successful grazing season; those who stay behind at home and on the farms (usually the wives) bless those setting off for the season. After everybody says their goodbyes, the master shepherd walks three times around the sheep pen, recites prayers, blows smoke on the sheep and blesses them for the journey. If the departure for the grazing season takes place after St. Adalbert’s Day, the master shepherd performs the ceremony using pieces of kindling and holy water blessed during Mass in Ludźmierz. If the start of the *redyk* takes place earlier, the shepherds use the Ludźmierz paraphernalia from the previous year, sometimes provided by family or neighbours, who obtain extra quantities from the shrine on the feast day. In addition to the kindling and water from Ludźmierz, herbs and flowers are also used, which had been blessed the previous year during the feast of the Assumption of Mary, celebrated on 15th August according to the Catholic liturgical calendar. Some master shepherds also make use of other artifacts that have been handed down in their families for generations. These include shepherd’s axes (*ciupaga*) or stoles (liturgical vestments), which are spread out on the ground and symbolically wrapped around the passing animals:

„We set out from Szaflary, also Gronków [...], this year we went early, on 4th April, it was cold, but we got by, on 4th April we were already here, in the spring we just carried the sheep by car. But when we set out, there’s a blessing, there has to be, you know, that’s the master shepherd’s job and everybody’s, we come forward, without God there’s nothing. You’d have to see for yourself, it’s different, some people have this tradition, others have that, the *baca* does it, we have holy water and a stole, like in church, I’ve had mine for a long time, the *baca* had to figure out where to get one, the *koszor* is fenced off, then we open it and the sheep run through over the stole and there they are, some people use a chain as well, they run through, you let them through, you say what’s needed,

²⁶ FR-EK, interview with Piotr Guzy, Maruszyna, July 2021.



Photo 6. Blessing of sheep by a priest in the Szczechowicz family, Soblówka, 2021, photo by E. Kocój

there's the prayer of the *juhas*, but I won't say it out loud, a *honielnik* must learn it slowly and step by step"²⁷.

„We step out of the house, we mix sheep, we blow smoke, the sheep walk over the chain, so that they stick together, and then we walk through the fields with the sheep, for half a day we walk from the farm to the pasture”²⁸.

Depending on the habits of the family, different people take part in the smudging (blowing smoke) of the flock. Master shepherd Henryk Kukuczka (who passed away in 2018) mixed the sheep near his house in Stecówka, part of the village of Istebna. On the selected day, *baca* Kukuczka, dressed in his best suit, would bring the sheep out to the meadows and gather them in a small enclosure fenced off from the large one; family, sheep owners, musicians and friends would look on. The master shepherd accompanied by the musicians would go to the fence between the small and big enclosures, let the sheep through, bless them and recite prayers while smudging them with smoke from burning herbs. In the middle

²⁷ FR-EK, interview with Bronisław Leśnicki, Przełęcz Snózka, August 2017.

²⁸ FR-EK, interview with Jan Wilczek, Kacwin, May 2021.

of the large enclosure, he would place a *mojka* or a fir tree decorated with colourful ribbons, around which he or a person designated by him would mix the sheep, so that they would henceforth form a single flock:

„Heniek Kukuczka used to bring the sheep to the *koszor* before the mixing. A few years ago, some farmers even brought their sheep on the very day of mixing. Usually, however, the grazing flock was assembled gradually, sometimes even after the mixing. Heniek would greet everyone, go to the *koliba* [t/n: another dialectal name for a shepherd's hut] to start the fire, then he walked around the *koszor* and smudged the sheep – he would make himself a bundle of herbs maybe half a metre long for this purpose – then he would throw this „censer” of his next to the entrance to the *koszor*, so that the sheep would leave it, at least symbolically, „through the smoke”. He sprinkled the sheep and the shepherds with holy water. Then prayers would be said. A few times in the past there was also a priest who blessed the *szalas* and led the prayers. In recent years, we would stick two shepherd's axes into the ground in a cross next to the *koszor*. Then the sheep were let out of the *koszor* and the mixing itself took place around the decorated *mojka*. After the mixing, Heniek would serve cheese and small buns, and the bands would play. Usually [the folk bands] *Jetelinka* and *Walasi*”²⁹.

The mixing of the sheep looks similar when performed by the master shepherd Piotr Kohut from Koniaków, who prepares for this moment during the winter and changes yearly the paraphernalia used during starting the fire in the hut. On the selected day, the sheep that had already been gathered for several days in the pasture at Ochodzita descend with the shepherds from the mountains into the village of Koniaków (the distance of about two kilometres), where near the house and the hut of *baca* Kohut at Szańce, the mixing of the sheep takes place in an enclosure specially built for the occasion: „Each year I approach this very individually, emotionally, every year is different, every year I start with a different general idea, with a different experience. As we travelled through the Balkans, in Romania, I collected different elements there, some plants, something, somewhere, by all those shrines, I have collected it, and during winter, I go to different places. I never forget to take a small piece of kindling from Ludźmierz as well, because it is more than just kindling, I make sure I get some of my own”³⁰.

In the Szczechowicz family from Ratułów in Podhale, it is mostly men who participate in the blessing of the sheep. After prayers and goodbyes to the family at home, the master shepherd Tadeusz Szczechowicz Sr.

²⁹ FR-EK, on-line interview with Michał Milerski from Nydek, Czech Republic, 2018.

³⁰ FR-EK, interview with Piotr Kohut, Koniaków, December 2017.

lights the herbs, takes an aspergillum and, together with his son Tadeusz and grandson Michał, enters the sheep pen and walks around it three times, blowing smoke on the sheep and reciting – as he puts it – „little prayers”. The rest of the household, as well as the *gazdas* and neighbours, witness the ceremony from the outside of the enclosure. After the prayers and blessing of the flock, the enclosure is opened and the sheep walk over a *ciupaga* (shepherd's axe) laying on the ground: „You have to bless the sheep, consecrate the sheep, go around, so that they stick together, so that you don't fall asleep at the sheep, so that they all come home, so that good God watches over and helps watch over these sheep. Dad takes a plate, holy water, an aspergillum, just like a priest sprinkles holy water, he just sprinkles away. Dad opens the *koszor*, lays down the *ciupaga*, and the sheep walk over it, it's an old one, from back when, so that they stay strong and sharp like the *ciupaga*”³¹.

In the Miętus family from Miętustwo in Podhale, the whole family participates in the blessing: „When the sheep leave for pasture, there is no mixing of the sheep, because we only graze our own, we always smudge the sheep with blessed herbs, also those who go with the sheep, holy water, holy herbs, blessed on the day of Our Lady of the Herbs [t/n: a folk name for the feast of Assumption of Mary], we keep those for the next year, then you light them, over the sheep, you walk in a circle. We say a Hail Mary and then we sprinkle holy water on the sheep and on those who go with them. We get this water from Ludźmierz, and the kindling, from the shepherd's holiday in the end of April, that's when we get them. The wife says goodbye to her husband, gives him a kiss, they will see each other anyway, it used to be different, when the wife wouldn't see her husband for half a year, she had to say a proper goodbye to him. When daddy comes, he takes this holy kindling from Ludźmierz, starts the fire, and you also have to sprinkle the *koszor* with holy water, in the pasture, he's saying something or another, like „run away from the evil one, all of you” and so on... And he knows this from his grandparents, nowadays people often forget to pass it on”³².

Research shows that few shepherd families in contemporary Poland practise grazing in the traditional manner, setting off on foot „for a long journey”. Today's shepherds have significantly reduced the length of their walking routes – the distance from home is usually limited to one- or two-days' walk, they also use modern means of transport – sheep are increasingly being transported to more distant locations by car. The longest route is currently taken by the Szczechowicz family, who walk to pasture for

³¹ FR-EK, interview with Stanisław Szczechowicz, spring *redyk*, April 2018.

³² FR-EK, interview with Teresa Miętus, Zubrzyca Górna, August 2017.



Photo 7. Logo of shepherd Jarek Buczek on a hut in Ochotnica-Jamne, 2019, photo by E. Kocój

six days, covering more than 110 kilometres from Ratułów to Sobkówka. The same route takes them five days in autumn on return (as the sheep are no longer milked, there is more time for walking during the day)³³. On the other hand, *baca* Józef Klimowski sets off on the spring *redyk* from Nowy Targ in Podhale to Czarne in the Lower Beskids, carrying the sheep on special-purpose livestock trucks. In autumn however, the master shepherd undertakes the so called „great autumn *redyk*” – he returns with the sheep on foot, covering the distance of approximately 150 kilometres. The route first follows the Polish-Slovak border, and after that it passes through Jaworzyna Krynicka, Rytro, Prehyba and Jaworki, where the master shepherd and his flock are joined by his brother Władysław Klimowski, a master shepherd himself, who manages pastures in two locations – in Biała Woda near Jaworki (Pieniny Mountains) and above the hospital in Nowy Targ (Gorce Mountains). The trek is also joined by *baca* Wojciech Gromada, who grazes his flock in a pasture above Jaworki near

³³ E. Kocój, *Śladami ostatnich wędrujących pasterzy karpaccich. Raport z wiosennego redyku rodziny Szczechowiczów (kwiecień 2018)*, „Almanach Podhalański” 2018.

Szczawnica. The shepherds call this „the great autumn *redyk*”, as up to several thousand sheep led by several master shepherds join in along the way. It makes for an extraordinary spectacle and is a testament to the one-time scale of shepherding in the Carpathians.

It is worth noting that, in most cases, when shepherds set off on their spring *redyk* and return with the autumn *redyk*, they follow routes they have known for generations, recorded in their memories and spatial imagination. It could be said that the shepherds keep mental maps of their routes in their heads – they are not marked on paper maps or in GPS devices – and they orient themselves primarily by elements of the landscape: forks in the road, single trees or groups of trees, rivers, streams and ponds, hills and valleys, as well as architectural features (churches and shrines, fire stations, shops, etc.): „We have the road in our heads, we have been walking this way for years, sometimes we change something, but we know where to go. We keep track by our surroundings, by trees, hills, ravines. Now we will walk through fields, reach Czarny Dunajec and walk through it, but on the outskirts, not through the centre. Then we will go through the fields, along the forest, until we reach Pająk’s cottage, Hyrczyk’s one, then to Baligówka. Then we will go another third of the way, through forest clearings, until we get to Piekienik, where we will overnight, at the cottage of one farmer, we slept there many times before. Tomorrow we will go through the fields to Orawka, pass by the church and walk up to Zubrzyca”³⁴.

„They know the road by heart, I don’t know if they would manage by night, what they’d do in the dark, but I know this route as well, because we used to drive cows, when we go this way with the cows, we also drive them on foot. It’s a kind of combination, a few dirt roads, you know, there’s even a bike trail, so you can just follow the signs, there are landmarks as well, they know what these are, for example there’s a meadow, or some tree stumps, or some old tree, or some peculiar one like that, well then, „okay, I’m already at this place”, or some roadside shrine has been put up somewhere, or a figure of a saint, so they can make sense of where they are, or maybe some brook too, well, a brook is quite distinct, you can tell by some places, okay, that’s where we are”³⁵.

It is worth pointing out that the shepherds do not lose their way when walking these routes, and that this knowledge is passed on in shepherd families between the generations – from grandfather to father and son. The shepherds also choose the best passage – by looking for stretches of new paths throughout the years they acquire experience that allows

³⁴ FR-EK, interview with Stanisław Szczechowicz, spring *redyk*, April 2018.

³⁵ FR-EK, interview with Marcela Pluta, Trypsianka/Nowiny, August 2017.

them to avoid the more arduous or dangerous places, even at the expense of a longer walk. As for the place names, the shepherds use official ones known to the general public and tourists, unofficial ones used by local communities, as well as their own, used to specifically mark their route.

DAILY LIFE – DAWN

One element of the cultural heritage of shepherds in the Polish Carpathians is the diurnal rhythm, which has been used consistently for centuries. It depends strictly on nature and the position of the sun in the sky. The shepherds' daily life during the grazing season almost always begins and ends in the dark. Observations of the shepherds' behaviour show that their activity increases and decreases at liminal moments – during the transition of night into day and day into night. The gestures and ritual practices that are performed at these times (crossing oneself, prayers, magic formulas, division of roles and utterances) are related to an archaic concept of time, characteristic of traditional communities, which divides the day and night into two parts: the auspicious one (dawn/day) and the inauspicious one (dusk/night).

Modern shepherds usually start their day around 4 a.m., which involves milking the sheep. There are some master shepherds who get up at 3 a.m. each day – this depends on the number of sheep they graze and the number of people milking them. Shepherds usually wake up by the sound of an alarm on their mobile phone or a traditional alarm clock; some wake up by themselves – this applies especially to the experienced master shepherds, whose bodies have adapted over the years to waking up early, so they do not need any technical aids to wake them up. Getting up in the dark is not easy, so the younger shepherds try to postpone this moment even by a few minutes. As soon as they get up, shepherds sleeping in the shepherd's hut add wood to the *watra* (open fire) in order for the fire to illuminate the space and to boil water in the cauldron, needed for making cheese and for other morning activities. When there is no electricity in the shepherd's hut, most of the activities are carried out in almost total darkness, illuminated only by the *watra* or a flashlight. The moment of waking up is also usually the time when the milking of the sheep begins – due to haste and the number of sheep, as most shepherds point out, very often there is no time for the morning meal. Some, however, remark that they cannot start milking without a cup of coffee; others joke that if the *juhas* (junior shepherd) is a clever lad, he always manages to squeeze in time for a warm drink. Most often however, as I mentioned, the day starts with milking the sheep without



Photo 8. Watra on a hut, 2019, photo by E. Kocój

a meal beforehand: „We get up at four o'clock, it's still dark at this time, it's the same in the spring, only sometime in October we'll wake later, but for now we still get up at four. We start by milking the sheep, two are milking, the third drives the sheep, we milk in the *koszor*, the *koszor* here is quite far away from the hut, we carry the milk by car, because the road is a bit long. We milk for over two hours, it's hard work, maybe not milking as such, but holding the sheep. After milking – coffee and breakfast”³⁶.

„We get up at quarter to three, it's not easy, you know, at quarter to three we already leave the house, at twenty past three we start milking, five are milking, the flock is over there by Chruśnica. It will take us till six o'clock, maybe quarter to six, it depends how obedient they are, if they're calm, it's easy going”³⁷.

Depending on the number of sheep and shepherd's helpers, milking usually takes two to three hours and is carried out in the pasture by the master shepherd (*baca*), master shepherd's assistants (*podbaca*) and junior shepherds (*juhas*). If the *baca* is older, younger shepherds take over while the master shepherd drives the sheep for milking, readies the

³⁶ FR-EK, interview with Jan Hyrczyk, Baligówka, August 2017.

³⁷ FR-EK, interview with Bronisław Leśnicki, Przełęcz Snózka, August 2017.

cheese-making equipment or prepares the meal to be had after the milking. The shepherds have to milk the sheep regardless of the weather, so their clothing varies depending on the conditions – on a warm morning they would do it in rubber boots, t-shirts or shirts and sweaters, and when it rains, they put on waterproof clothing: trousers and hooded jackets, which to an extent protect them from getting wet. During milking they sit on small wooden benches in a designated area (called *strunga*) at the entrance to the sheep pen, they are also equipped with plastic or galvanised metal buckets to milk into. The milkers or their helpers pour the contents of the buckets into a *puciera*, a wooden vessel (a kind of barrel) made of oak slats and holding several dozen litres of liquid. It is intended for milk and milk products, and is made of staves and two metal hoops; the milk will be curdled in it using rennet and turned into *bundz* (soft cheese). The milk is poured through a cotton cloth called *sata* [t/n: cf. Polish *szata* – „robe” or Slovak *šaty* – „garment”], used for straining the milk and hanging the cheese to drain. The cloth is covered with so-called *cetynka* or *jedlina*, i.e. cut branches of coniferous trees, so that the impurities (needles, insects, sand) collected during milking are caught and do not get into the milk used to make the cheese. In bad weather (rain, mud), the milk is poured several times with the cloth being washed each time. It is worth noting that some shepherds perform this stage with great diligence, ensuring that the milk used for making the cheeses is very clean.

As already mentioned, milking usually lasts between two and three hours and is carried out in relative silence in order not to upset the sheep, as stress in the animals can affect the amount of milk obtained. For this reason, many master shepherds make sure that there are no outsiders present, as that upsets the sheep. Often the distance between the milkers and onlookers is kept by shepherd dogs, which would prevent strangers from getting into the flock. The shepherds usually begin milking with a moment of concentration and silence, during which they say the common prayers or pray in their own words: „prayers are being said, whether it’s Hail Mary or Our Father, or you just pray as you can”³⁸.

At the end of milking, with the last sheep passing through the opening in the fence, the person doing the milking (usually a *honielnik*, but this activity can also be done by a *juhas* or even the *baca*) is obliged to utter the following words: *dość u Boga wiać* [t/n: this is difficult to parse in standard Polish, and even in the Góral dialect; cf. Polish *dość u Boga* – „enough by God”, Slovak *viac* – „more”], which the shepherds explain in various ways: „We say ‘*dość u Boga wiać*’, which means: there are enough sheep

³⁸ FR-EK, interview with Andrzej Zubko, Dusztyn, August 2017.



Photo 9. Making cheese on a hut, shepherd Bronisław Leśnicki, Polana Snozka, 2018, photo by E. Kocój

here, but there are more with God, you know, it's always been said like that, and then the *baca* prays too, in response. *Bojtar*, it's a kind of shepherd's helper, the one who drives the sheep, the one who goes among the sheep and drives them, when the last sheep comes through, he says '*dość uboga wiać*', and the master shepherd also says something, like a reply, but heck darn I don't remember what, because they mutter something under their breath and I can never understand. Then the *baca* crosses himself, both in the beginning and in the end, and that's it"³⁹.

Older master shepherds explain the meaning of these words by referring to the sacred nature of their work, which according to them depends entirely on God's will. Moreover, master shepherds participating in the milking silently utter „little prayers” in which they thank God for a successful milking. It is the responsibility of the *juhas* or the *baca* to say the traditional response: „Lord God bless, from misfortune keep us, even more drive to us” or „Lord God bless, from evil preserve us, more milk send to us” [t/n: these are approximate renditions of the non-standard Polish of the original]. Today's shepherds know these words very well and say them at least twice a day, but the explanation of their meaning is usually known only to the older ones, while younger shepherds find it hard to explain. They are aware of the sacredness and importance of these words, traditionally handed down to them by their elders, but they often repeat them without understanding, somewhat

³⁹ FR-EK, interview with Marcela Pluta, Trypsianka/Nowiny, August 2017.

like incantations, which is probably due to a partial loss of comprehension of their meaning.

After completion of the milking, the master shepherd or one of his assistants curdles the milk gathered in the *puciera*. The process is referred to as *klaganie* and is accomplished by adding rennet, originally extracted from the stomachs of animals, nowadays bought ready-to-use from shops. After it has been poured into the milk and the *puciera* has been covered, the milk begins to curdle after about half an hour. The cheese maker stirs the curdled milk thoroughly with a wooden *felura* – a kind of spoon with holes in it – which causes tiny and evenly distributed pieces of cheese to appear in the milk. At this time, the shepherds usually eat their morning meal, which most often consists of bread, a piece of sausage, bacon, and coffee or tea. Many of them eat only meat and sausage from own slaughter – they do not trust store-bought meat products. For this reason, they bring to the pasture foodstuffs prepared beforehand on their own farms. Most shepherds agree that time for meals is always in short supply: „Eating is more or less bottom of the list. First you have to do the milking, curdling, and start making cheese. If you cook it, you can eat it, whether it's some soup, some meat, nowadays you can buy anything in the shop, because there's everything, we buy bacon, one kind or another, sausage, otherwise you eat what you'd normally have at home, not long ago you'd only have fatback, lard and bread, in Bieszczady Mountains the dairy used to deliver, as the shops were a long way, so nobody went there, in case the dairy was delivering, you could order bread and other food when you brought in the milk, so they would send that over, otherwise there was pork fat and lard, no coffee, no sugar, nothing. And now! For dinner they grill sausages or make soup, when you make *oscypek* there is time to cook, for example today our people cooked mutton”⁴⁰.

„They eat breakfast when they can, when the milk is curdling or whenever, because you still have to bring wood for the fire, you have to wash the vats, to tend the pigs, to do all sorts of things, you know, all sorts, so when they can, they eat, and if they can't, then only do it after the work's done, around ten or eleven o'clock. What do they eat? Well, sometimes they fry up some scrambled eggs on bacon or cook or grill some sausages on the fire. They have to make sure it's quick, sometimes they grab a sandwich or some bread, bread and sausage in hand, and that's it, because they have to milk again at one o'clock”⁴¹.

After milking and breakfast comes the time for making cheese. The cheeses are usually made by the *baca*, and when there is a lot of milk,

⁴⁰ FR-EK, interview with Andrzej Zubko, Dursztyn, August 2017.

⁴¹ FR-EK, interview with Marcela Pluta, Trypsianka/Nowiny, August 2017.

he is often assisted by designated junior shepherds. Nowadays, almost every shepherd's hut produces large *oscypek* (pressed and smoked sheep cheese), *gołki* (pressed and smoked cow cheese), *syrki* (also sometimes called small *oscypek* or *baca* cheese), *bundz* (soft sheep cheese) and *bryndza* (salted spreadable sheep cheese), as well as sweet and sour *żętyca* (sheep whey drink). Two master shepherds – Piotr Kohut from Koniaków and Jarek Buczek from Ochotnica Górna – also make a cheese known locally as „Wallachian cheese”, i.e. a hard, ripened, round cheese (quite similar to the popular Romanian *cașcaval*). Each *baca* follows tradition when making the cheese, but also applies their own ways to make it taste good:

„We bring milk in; we strain it straight away. We eat breakfast once we've strained the milk, it stays there, and in that time, we eat breakfast, we eat different things, most often sausage with bread, but it varies, sometimes we cook. We pour the milk it into the *puciera* and make cheese, *bundz* or *oscypki* [t/n: *oscypki* is the plural of *oscypek*]. There's really not much to it, there must be rennet, fresh milk must curdle, and then we gather cheese by hand, we scoop *oscypki* with *cerpak* (a dipper). For soft cheese we do not heat the milk, but for *oscypki* you need to do it a little bit, we heat the milk so it's the same when it's leaving the sheep's body, we find out by feel, by touch. It's made in a cauldron over the fire, then you pour in the rennet, into the *puciera*, after half an hour it's curdled and then you break the cheese into small pieces, you stir and break it with the *felura*, so that there is no hard bits, then we gather it, squeeze and strain on a *sata*, not like grannies do it, we put it under and take out all at once. Then it drips, but we also knead it by hand, if the *puciera* is full, there is nowhere to strain it into, there's all of it, and that's how you make *bundz*. When we make *bryndza*, if we don't sell all the *bundz*, we make *bryndza* from what's left over, it has to age some, you cannot make *bryndza* from fresh *bundz*, we grind it, nowadays in an electric grinder at home, then we salt it, and it can go for sale right away”⁴².

„First you need to milk, then strain it, you put a bit of *cetynka* on the *sata*, and then we heat the milk over the *watra*, it's put into the *puciera*, it's heated a little, then you pour it into the *puciera* and add rennet, when it's cold it curdles slower, when it's warm it's quicker, everything depends on the weather in the pasture, even the mood, even the mood of the sheep and everybody working there. When it's curdled, this kind of curd is made, it's then cut, like so, you make a sign of cross to make it right, and then the curd is broken up, left alone for a while, not long,

⁴² FR-EK, interview with Jan Hyrczyk, Baligówka, 2017–2022.



Photo 10. Wallachian cheese at the shepherd Jarek Buczek's, 2019, photo by E. Kocój

for a while, it's collected into a *sata*, like a gauze, and that's *bundz*, you hang it on a stick and let drain"⁴³.

Once the cheesemaking is complete, all the utensils used are washed with warm water and then left to dry. Many shepherds also ensure that they are stored in a clean place so that they do not get dirty due to weather, animals or people and do not have to be washed again before the next use.

DAILY LIFE – DAYTIME

After the making of the cheese and the morning meal comes a moment of „relative rest” in the pasture. At this time, the *juhas* accompanied by the *honielniks* set off for grazing, heading for the surrounding mountain grasslands, where they will stay – depending on the number of milkings per day (two or three) – until lunchtime or into the evening: „The sheep set off early, as some of the guys stay in the hut and two of them go out to pasture, the ones that stay in the hut make the *oscypki* and prepare everything there, and the other two go out for grazing, every day. So, they leave the sheep in the *koszor* for an hour after milking, and then eat breakfast in that time, after that they go out with the sheep for grazing, they graze them maybe until one o'clock, and then they take the sheep back to the *koszor* at one o'clock, and the guys that stayed behind in the

⁴³ FR-EK, interview with Teresa Miętus, Zubrzyca Górna, August 2017.

hut, after they've eaten and cleaned everything, they go to milk the sheep at one o'clock. And then the whole drill's repeated, at this time we milk three times a day, so there's still one at eight o'clock, maybe at nine, it depends, if they collect cheese, they finish at eleven o'clock, and if they don't – maybe at ten or half past nine"⁴⁴.

Some shepherds take food with them – bread, a piece of sausage or cheese, as well as beer or water. Most shepherds grazing their flocks use a system of shepherd signals and calls with simple melodies that help them in keeping watch over their flocks. This includes whistling (of various lengths), signals given with the hands and body, short shouts, commands, curses. To reinforce those, shepherds also use wooden sticks or what they call a *pręc* or *chabina* – a switch or thin twig used to herd the sheep and control them⁴⁵. A *pręc* is usually made of a willow branch, often fresh – topped with green leaves. Shepherds are also assisted by dogs, which are trained for the job from an early age. Like the sheep, the dogs are taught to respond to whistles, hand and body signals and, in addition, commands such as „up”, „down”, „left”, „right”, „front”, „back”. Experienced and properly trained dogs remain in a fixed position relative to the sheep – at the front (leading the flock with the shepherds and looking out for danger in front), in the back (behind the flock or even at some distance from it, trailing the sheep and looking out for danger behind and to the side) and at the sides. When the flock breaks formation or the sheep unexpectedly turn the wrong way, dogs from the front or the back can run up and assist the shepherd in herding the sheep. Sheep and new dogs learn this type of communication quickly – practically by the second day of staying in the pasture with an experienced shepherd they know most of the signals and try to follow them; older dogs remember them from previous years.

Once the cheese has been made, the master shepherds and their assistants who remain in the hut usually receive customers for their products – during this time they are usually visited by local people who during the grazing season come from the surrounding area to buy fresh cheese and whey drink, as well as by tourists and passers-by. A large group among the customers are tourists who come to the pasture during the grazing season and buy cheese directly from the shepherds. These are mainly transient Polish tourists, but there are also regular customers, who like to stop shepherd's huts, especially if they are conveniently located, and make purchases. Visitors also include shepherds who had emigrated

⁴⁴ FR-EK, interview with Marcela Pluta, Trypsianka/Nowiny, August 2017.

⁴⁵ W. Herniczek-Morozowa, *Terminologia polskiego pasterstwa górskiego*, cz. 1, Warszawa–Wrocław–Kraków–Gdańsk 1975, s. 150.

to the United States and come periodically to Poland to visit their families. Some master shepherds sell regularly to local farmers, who purchase cheeses during the season in order to serve them to tourists vacationing at their farms as an accompaniment to the meals served there. Some shepherds also bring their cheeses to local outlets, either owned by themselves or to local shops that have contracted supplies from them. Increasingly, master shepherds deliver to two or more outlets of dairy products. It is worth mentioning that the cheeses are often sold by the shepherds' wives or members of their families (mothers, daughters or aunts), who on certain days of the week take the goods to markets or local shops.

Before noon, shepherds cook a hot meal for themselves and their helpers, which is eaten – depending on the day's schedule, the number of milkings and the grazing times – in the early afternoon or only in the evening, as supper. They also watch over the smoking of the cheeses and partition the sheep pens: „Then you have to move the cheeses around on the shelves, so they get smoked evenly, still others are going to the *koszor*, you need to partition the *koszor*, some of them have already gone, two have gone out with the sheep and others with the cows. When noon comes, we have to milk, at two o'clock we milk, before the milking we eat dinner [t/n: here used as the name for the midday meal], we make it ourselves, we cook for ourselves, because who else will cook for us? We've got a stove here, we cook whatever we like, I can cook anything, what do you think, if you go to Bieszczady Mountains or wherever, you have to have skills, and if you go to America, who's going to cook for you? Today we will cook the ram. We put some garlic in, some salt, then we cook it, it can also be roasted”⁴⁶.

In the pasture the food is simple, as there is no time to prepare anything complicated; in addition, master shepherds point out that the simple food to which they have got used over the years is what they like best. For lunch they often cook sour rye soup or beef broth, and eat, as already mentioned, sausage with bread and mutton (sometimes lamb, but that is less common). When the pasture is close to home, sometimes lunch is brought in by the shepherds' mothers or wives. On rare occasions, they buy meals in a pub or a restaurant and bring them to the pasture – this is usually the case when they are running errands in nearby villages or towns: „Afterwards we cook, a soup, broth or whatever, the *juhas* goes out with the sheep at seven o'clock, comes back maybe at one, the main meadow is over there, maybe two kilometres away, he grazes there and comes back, in the meantime we cook, we eat different things, sometimes we buy from a shop, like when we buy chicken legs, we have

⁴⁶ FR-EK, interview with Bronisław Leśnicki, August 2017.



Photo 11. Milking sheep in the shepherd Marduła's family, Maruszyna, 2021, photo by E. Kocój

our own mutton, lamb, we bring meat in from home, we cook over the fire, in the other hut, we cook there, we also cook soup, I learnt to cook at the *szalas*, I don't cook at home, sometimes they bring us dinner, now more often, because it is closer, in the past it was different, they cooked everything themselves in the *szalas*, for example in Orawa they didn't get stuff from outside. We use *żętyca* as base for soups, borscht or *żurek* [t/n: sour rye soup], *żętyca* with water half and half, potatoes, carrots, parsley, sausage, roux from pork fat so it's thicker, white sausage. We roast mutton over the fire, in pieces, not the whole ram, you have to add garlic, a lot of garlic, you have to smell the mutton, like you have to smell the fish, a woman also has her smell, not only from the perfume, you have to roast the lamb over the fire, very delicious food, potatoes with it, a salad, there's no better food"⁴⁷.

„A piece of sausage, if there's *żętyca*, you can even cook some borscht, we put potatoes in it, very good borscht from *żętyca*, and if there's none, there's just a piece of bread with sausage, it's different from time to time, there's no use being picky, but first of all there must be coffee, we cook coffee on the stove"⁴⁸.

Around 12–1 pm (this depends on the customs of the given pasture), the shepherds who milk their sheep three times a day return with the

⁴⁷ FR-EK, interview with Jan Hyrczyk, Baligówka, August 2017.

⁴⁸ FR-EK, interview with Teresa Miętus, Zubrzyca Górna, August 2017.

flocks to the hut. There the sheep are milked, the cheese is made, and the *juhas* and *honielniks* eat their lunch, then set off again with the flocks for grazing in the mountain grasslands, returning in the evening around 6–7 pm. Some master shepherds then milk the sheep for a third time – they finish the task around 9–10 pm.

DAILY LIFE - DUSK AND NIGHT

In the second half of the grazing season the sheep start giving less milk, so most shepherds switch to two milkings per day (this usually happens around mid-August). In August, some master shepherds also let rams into the flock of sheep, so that the young lambs are born in early spring and can be sold, if such an agreement had been made. The system of two daily milkings means that the flock spends more time during the day grazing – the shepherds usually bring it back to the sheep pen in the evening, when the shepherds also have a warm evening meal. Just before dark, the evening milking of the sheep begins, which lasts two to three hours and is followed by cheese-making. The shepherds eat supper, which is usually very similar in contents to their breakfast, or, in case of two milkings per day, they combine two meals into a warm late dinner, cooked during the day.

Between 9 pm and midnight the shepherds go to sleep – that depends on the number of sheep in the flock and the number of milkings per day. Modern shepherds sleep in various places, most often in huts, which nowadays include also additional rooms, among others the master shepherd's private quarters. The additional rooms are located at the back of the shepherd's hut and sometimes separated by a special wooden wall with a door, which divides the sleeping area from the one used for making and selling cheese. Some shepherds sleep in additional buildings, located next to the shepherd's hut. These are usually old houses (if the pasture is located on an old farm purchased or leased by the *baca*, e.g. the *szalas* at Marysina Polana in Winiarczykówka in Orawa or the *szalas* Pod Twarda Skalą near Dursztyn in Spisz). Some master shepherds nowadays have two shepherd's huts, one of which is usually used for processing milk and making cheese, while the other is used for sleeping (e.g. the pasture in Sobkówka in the Żywiec region).

The sheep are watched over by shepherds throughout the night. This is done by the *baca* or a *juhas* designated by him, who sleeps next to the sheep. The watchman sleeps in what is known as the shed (or, in dialect, *kolibka* or *kucia*), which is a portable structure usually made of wooden boards with a roof, serving as a night shelter for the shepherds. The inside

is furnished with hay or mattresses, on which quilts or blankets are placed for cover during the night: „Some sleep in the hut, and two guys sleep by the sheep, they have a kind of sheds, there is only a mattress inside, maybe some little shelves to keep things handy, and they sleep there, well, someone has to sleep by the sheep”⁴⁹. „We sleep in the *szatas*, and Dad sleeps by the sheep, he can’t do otherwise and won’t let anyone sleep by the sheep. That’s what he’s used to, he says he couldn’t get a good night’s sleep in the hut. The sheep need to be watched, from the wolf, from the bear, they could also frighten from something and break loose”⁵⁰.

The shed has a rectangular opening used as an entrance, which also enables the shepherds to watch the animals. The shed is placed outside the sheep pen, but close to the it, so that the shepherd is both close to the sheep and able to confront wild animals. The biggest challenge for shepherds comes from wolves and bears, which attack flocks of sheep in the Polish-Slovak borderland every year. These predators are found practically all over the border region, in the Bieszczady Mountains, Lower Beskids, around Nowy Sącz, in Spisz, Gorce Mountains, Podhale, as well as in Żywiec and Silesian Beskids. Modern shepherds also point out that sleep is often interrupted due to various behaviours of the animals – they can leave their enclosures and scatter in different directions, or panic in the event of danger from wild animals or strong wind: „The guys don’t sleep that much, you sleep while you can, because when they start to stir, when a sheep or a cow wakes up, because sometimes they come out of the fold, then you have to chase them, so that’s it for the sleeping, you know, or the sheep would come out of the *koszor*, the sheep are like that, they catch fright from one another, one would skip and then all start skipping, and they run like mad, then you have chase them. There was no problem with wolves yet this year, knock on wood, one time, two years ago, we were just milking at midday, when it was running by, not far at all, a bear was running by, we thought it was a deer, the dogs yelped a lot, but they stayed put, one set off, but turned back halfway, as if something scared it, only later we could tell by the tree bark, there were broken tree roots and all sorts of things, so we figured out it was a bear after all, but it was a young one, just passing by like that, it didn’t stay on for the night, didn’t do any damage”⁵¹.

Many years of grazing sheep in the mountain pastures have taught the shepherds a variety of ways to deal with the dangers of the night. For many of them, especially in the case of approaching wolves or bears, the

⁴⁹ FR-EK, interview with Marcela Pluta, Trypsianka/Nowiny, August 2017.

⁵⁰ FR-EK, interview with Stanisław Szczechowicz, spring *redyk*, April 2018.

⁵¹ FR-EK, interview with Marcela Pluta, Trypsianka/Nowiny, August 2017.



Photo 12. Evening rest of the Wojtyczek family, hut in Niedzica, 2021, photo by E. Kocój

main recourse are well-trained and sharp dogs – some shepherds keep as many as a dozen of them – to guard their flocks: „At nine o’clock the sheep get driven back, we eat something and go to sleep, a *juhas* sleeps with the sheep, the one who grazes them during the day. We watch out, three or four days ago there were so many wolves that it was hard to believe, wolves are coming up, fewer this year, some years ago they were here, a whole pack was here, I didn’t see them myself, but hunters said they saw nine wolves, and we had to keep watch, because they attacked several times a night, at night they come up, they pull sheep out, if the dogs or the shepherds don’t see it, they would pull some sheep out, the wolf is stupid that way, it kills more than it can eat, it’s not like it takes one, if it has time, if no one bothers it, it kills plenty of sheep, eats one, leaves the rest, comes back later, if it’s there, it comes back for the food, there are big losses, but usually the shepherds are looking out. There was a time when we had to keep a fire going to ward off the wolves, a fire was burning, but the most important thing is the dogs, if the dogs don’t see, the *juhas* won’t see either, dogs are good”⁵².

At times of danger, shepherds also recite „little prayers”, or specific prayers against the evil, they shout and curse; other ones prefer to use more modern means. such as firecrackers or a radio: „Well, firecrackers

⁵² FR-EK, interview with Jan Hyrczyk, Baligówka, 2017–2022.

is all, you're not allowed to shoot them, because they're protected species, firecrackers and radio, a radio, when it's so bad that they come up every night and you can't sleep, they're coming up and the dogs are making noise, then we hang the radio in a bag, not too loud, so the sheep won't get upset, and after that it never happened that they'd come up when the radio was on"⁵³.

END OF THE SEASON

Modern shepherds usually end the grazing season in the beginning of October or in its second half. Preparation for leaving the pasture begins around the end of September or early October, when shepherds switch to one milking of the sheep per day, which goes on for about two to three weeks. This is followed by a gradual phasing out of milking, taking into account the welfare of the animals (milking switch to every other day, then once in four or more days). However, these changes depend on the weather and the thickness of the milk (when it gets more condensed, there is less milking). Most of the shepherds are familiar with an old saying, handed down in their families through the generations, which refers to St. Michael's Day as the traditional time to end sheep grazing in the mountains: „after St. Michael's Day it's risky in the mountains to stay”, but not all of the master shepherds adhere to it. Depending on the weather, many extend their stay in the pasture, trying to take advantage of favourable grazing conditions. Shepherds try to stay with their flocks in the mountain grasslands for as long as possible, due to the abundance of natural food. However, the sudden cold and rains that autumn brings in Poland mean that each *baca* decides for himself when it is the time to end the grazing season and to return from the summer pasture. Shepherds use various names to describe it: *rozchód*, *rozsad*, *rozhod*, *rosad*, *rozhod*, *rozsod*, *osad*, *osod*, *ozesod*, *łosod*, *łozesod* [t/n: All of these seem to be related either to Polish *rozchodzić się* – „to part ways”, or to Slovak *rozhodnúť* – „to settle”], *redyk*, *jesienny redyk* [t/n: „the autumn *redyk*”]; all these terms often refer collectively to two separate, albeit related activities: separating the flock, counting the sheep and returning them to their owners (the *gazdas*), and the autumn *redyk*, i.e. the walk from the pasture back home. The actual *rozhod*, i.e. the counting of sheep and handing them over to the owners, usually takes place from mid- to late September. Some master shepherds, such as Piotr Kohut, ensure that the *rozhod*, according to the centuries-old tradition, takes place on St. Michael's Day (29th September), the day that

⁵³ FR-EK, interview with Teresa Miętus, Zubrzyca Górna, August 2017.

used to mark the end of the grazing season and was associated with the settlement of shepherd contracts drawn in spring on St. Adalbert's Day (23rd April) or St. George's Day (24th April), as customary for the Polish Carpathians. On the day assigned by the *baca* for the *rozhod*, the sheep owners arrive to the designated location where, together with the shepherd's team, they count and mark the animals. The sheep of each *gazda* are being marked on their heads or necks with special markers in a colour chosen by the owner – usually red, green, yellow, blue or purple. The *gazdas* either take their sheep back to their farms on the same day, or, if the weather is good and they want them to graze in the lower grasslands for several more days, they leave the marked animals with the *baca* who delivers them to the owner after the grazing is over, or the owner collects them himself.

The case is different when the master shepherd brings the entire grazing flock from pasture to his own farm, on foot or by car. Then the so-called autumn *redyk* takes place – the shepherds return from the *szalas* dressed in festive folk outfits (they wear them on the last day of the walk), singing loudly and in good cheer, and are often welcomed and offered alcohol by the villagers along their route. The walk is often accompanied by musicians, singing and playing instruments: „In the autumn we walk back for one day, it's not far, maybe twenty kilometres. We're out until 27th October or so. Back in the day, we would sometimes stay until the snow, but nowadays the veterinary office and the agricultural agency make us leave. So afterwards we stay on the farm, at home, and keep the sheep there. We walk with the sheep to Szaflary, they collect them there, it's called *redyk*, we go after the grazing's over”⁵⁴. „We usually stay at the *szalas* until mid-October, it depends on what the weather's like. We walk back together; we dress in highland style. As for reception in the villages, it's not so common any more, these sheep, when they get on the road, you know, the sheep bother some people, most drivers are bothered. I try to walk on a Sunday, there are no big trucks, no tractors, no construction vehicles, no lorries carrying all the supplies, only people, those who drive there are able to wait a little on a Sunday, they're not in a hurry, because they're going to church, or from church, and it's different like that”⁵⁵.

In recent years, festive sheep *rozhods* have been organised by several mountain resorts at nearby summer pastures – these are attended by the family of the *baca* and other shepherds, as well as tourists. At the end of the grazing season, the shepherds roast a ram, which is then served to the visitors. They also offer samples of the cheeses produced on the

⁵⁴ FR-EK, interview with BT Bronisław Leśnicki, Przełęcz Snózka, August 2017.

⁵⁵ FR-EK, interview with Andrzej Zubko, Dursztyn, August 2018.



Photo 13. End of the shepherding season in the Franos family, 2017, photo by E. Kocój

same day. Music bands are invited to perform highland repertoire. These events are often combined with organic food fairs.

During the autumn/winter period, after the grazing season has ended, the shepherds spend their time mainly... preparing for the next season – they deal with various matters related to grazing: they contact the farmers who raise sheep to be grazed during the next season, prepare shepherding equipment, breed new lambs and make agreements with landowners for grazing on their land. During that period, they also seek foreign workers to be hired as help for the next season. For example, master shepherds Adam Gruszka from Hala Boracza in Beskid Żywiecki, Jarosław Buczek from Ochotnica Górna in the Gorce Mountains and Tadeusz Szczechowicz Jr. from Ratułów in Podhale travelled to the Hutsul region in Ukraine to visit their workers whom they had employed for the 2017 grazing season and hire them or other workers for the following year 2018⁵⁶. Modern *bacas* are also increasingly involved in a range of community events – they teach children to play traditional instruments, organise lectures, attend scientific conferences, support crafts, further their education and even tour Europe in search of their roots and learn about the lives of shepherds in other countries.

⁵⁶ FR-EK, January 2018, participant observation and interviews during the trip with shepherds from Poland to Ukraine.

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NOTA O AUTORZE

Ewa Kocój – doktor habilitowany, etnografka, antropolożka kulturowa, absolwentka Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego; obecnie pracuje na stanowisku profesora nadzwyczajnego w Instytucie Kultury Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w Krakowie. Jej zainteresowania naukowe obejmują materialne i niematerialne dziedzictwo kulturowe mniejszości narodowych, etnicznych, religijnych i bezpieczeństwa Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej i Europy Południowej. Ważną część jej badań zajmuje także problematyka doświadczanej religijności (ikony, relikwie, rytuały i obrzędy), komunikacji międzykulturowej, stereotypów oraz antropologii wizualnej muzeów i lokalnych zbiorów.