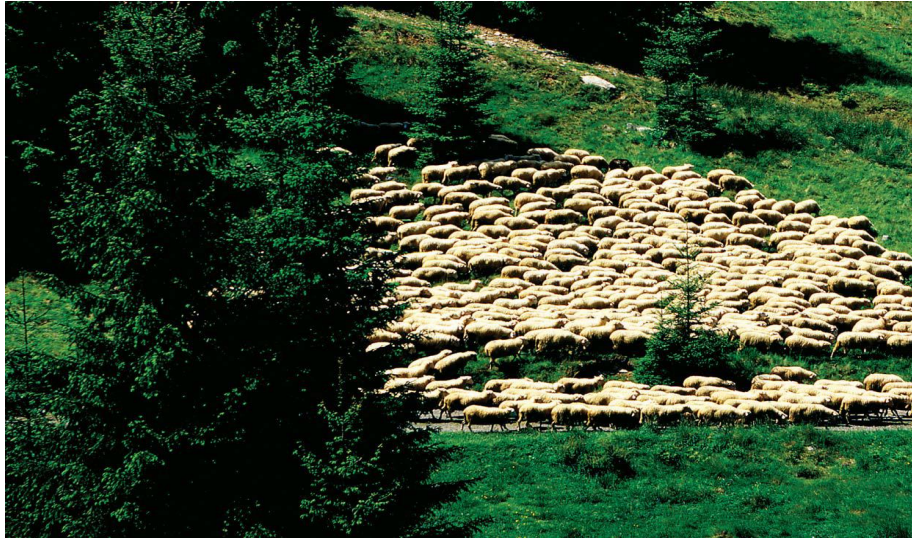


## Sheepfarming in Slovakia

(Dr. Katarína Grunwald)



Sheep my Sheep  
you have golden bells  
when they go underneath the grove  
the shimmer all

Who would not know sheep-cheese noodles, sheep cheese or sheep's whey in Slovakia? The sound of bells and flocks of white sheep on mountain meadows has been part of the colouring of the country lying under the Tatra for centuries. Sheep farming is among the oldest agricultural activities in Slovakia. Its origin goes back centuries before the time of Jesus Christ. Osteological material found give witness about growing sheep farming in the oldest populated areas of Slovakia. The method of keeping sheep was unsignificantly different from progressive breeding ways in other parts of Central and Western Europe. Ancient Slavic tribes kept sheep as most useful animals giving them many benefits - milk and meat for food, wool and fur for clothing all of which helped our ancestors in surviving and allowing them to settle down in areas not very suitable for agriculture. Sheep farming is a phenomenon of Slovak history which has a great perspective. Wallachia sheep farming brought centuries ago in our part of the world such specifics, which have permanently influenced our way of life, farming, clothing or eating. In 13th and 14 century, sheep farming largely allowed the birth of various guilds, such as: furrier, tanner, footwear and more. Significant was the "Period of the Golden Fleece" when at the end of the 18th century fine fleeced merino sheep was introduced and it lead to the development of industrialising wool making.

In the past, sheep keeping was considered to be one of the most important areas of livestock production and in all production fields of manufacture. Witnessing it are not only the names of settlements, villages and regional localities relating to sheep keeping and which survived to these days, but also historical paintings, gobblins, handcraft, dresses, paintings on ceramics, wood carvings and other items of utility as visual manifestations of known and unknown masters, which enriched our culture. Dress components and artefacts characteristic for shepherd's trade had unique features. They were multiple belts, richly decorated shepherd bags, folk jewellery - rings, buckles, clasps, metallic details as well as axes, sticks and other items needed for personal use. Sheep wool is one of the products of economic efficiency of sheep. Traditionally it was used to a variety of blankets, parts of dresses, especially trousers, jumper and hairy overcoats (*guby*). Wool was used to make large bags with belts for wearying everything needed to be delivered to sheep-folds. Skilfulness of shepherds is shown in how aesthetically ornamentation and artistic shaping of wood, mainly cooking utensils. They were mainly sheep's whey drinking cups, dippers, cheese and smoked cheese (*oštiepky*) storing boxes and wooden spoons.

A special, unthinkable part of traditional pastoral culture in Slovakia amounted to musical folklore. In between specifically Slovak belong several musical instruments. There are a variety of whistles, signal horns, archaic trough stringed instruments. Remarkable are the bagpipes (*gajdy* and *gajdice*). An unique musical instrument is shepherd's pipe (*fujara*) made by skilled producers in addition to audio perfection also remarkable decorated. Shepherd's pipe was in 2005 listed by the UNESCO World Heritage Sites.



Shepherds together with flocks of sheep spend life in high mountains - at the shed in the middle of fragrant meadows. They lived in wooden houses called *koliba* in close proximity to sheepfold called *košiar*. Wooden house with sheepfold was shed. Head of shed was chief shepherd called *bača*.

Bača was responsible for milk production, must have knowledge of the sheep rearing, but also the organizational capabilities needed to manage the mountain farming.

Special delicacies from sheep's milk to keep in Slovak cuisine till today. Sheep-cheese noodles have become a Slovak national dish. This cheese, called *Bryndza* - originally a salt-free cheese is changing over time, it is let to mature, after fermentation, salt is mixed in by hand and then formed into chunks. Later, instead of sheep skin and goat cheese stores are packed into barrels of cypress wood, which are the precursors to today's special packaging in timber pot, called - *geletka* . Thus prepared and packed into barrels sheep cheese called *šnajdka* was really hard and needed cutting, because today's production method of soft spreading sheep cheese not yet known. Experts know that bryndza made in May is the best. In 18th and 19 centuries bryndza from Liptov, packed in nice handsome wooden geletách produced in Lupča travelled on rafts down the river Váh to Sered' and hence to gourmand to Vienna. It is said the members of the Emperor's family loved eating bryndza. Today, smoked sheep cheese as well as man's sheep cheese and steamed cheese products are more and more liked by the consumers.



Bryndza is historically one of the few food products, which can be assigned without hesitation genuine Slovak origin. According to written records, Vagač John established the first sheep cheese trade, in Detva in 1787! Bryndza has not only its commercial and nutritional value, but also historical and cultural value. Microbial Slovak sheep cheese is a phenomenon, unique natural product, a natural preserve which retains all original components of sheep milk. Bryndza is white gold.



So you are welcome to enjoy our specialties with glass of wine, good music and pleasant atmosphere. Bon appetit.