
Pastoralism in Bulgaria / Овчарството в България.
Vol. 1 ed. by Masahiro Hirata & Svetla Rakshieva, 148 p.
Vol. 2 ed. by Svetla Rakshieva & Elka Mincheva, 120 p.
Sofia: Gutenberg Publishing House, 2017

This set of two bilingual (English and Bulgarian) volumes is one of the products coming out of the Bulgarian-Japanese project “A study of traditional animal husbandry in the Southern Balkan Peninsula and creation of a digital archive related to pastoralism before the period of modernization”. It was carried out by five anthropologists from the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum in Sofia (Svetla Rakshieva, Maria Markova and Elka Mincheva), Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine (Masahiro Hirata) and Kwansei Gakuin University (Maria Yotova). It aimed at assessing, selecting and digitizing photographs related to pastoralism and milk processing technologies in traditional economies in Bulgaria. More than 2500 items kept in the archives of the Institute in Sofia have been examined and, after a selection, 1000 of them have been processed and made public in a searchable database “Pastoralism in Bulgaria” that is now available in English, Bulgarian and Japanese at <http://www.pastoralismbg.com>. In fact, it is a database of sheep husbandry with only a few photographs related to other animal husbandries. The photographs taken between 1905 and 1986 are valuable visual documents of everyday life of shepherds, material culture (shepherds’ housings and clothing, sheepfolds and barns, dairies, tools, vessels, etc.), pastures and pastoral landscapes, livestock management (grazing, feeding, shearing, milking, etc.), seasonal migrations of flocks, milk processing technologies, shepherds’ crafts and artistic expressions (especially woodcarving), feast and rituals related to sheep husbandry, and many others. Volume 2 of the published set is an album that presents 281 photographs which is more than quarter of the images in the database. It (as well as vol. 1) is printed on good paper and in large size (21x29 cm) and thus even picture details can be clearly seen.

Volume 1 is a quite unusual book in several regards. Though it bears the same title as the database, it is not linked with it. Only one (Rakshieva) of the four essays published in this volume features the most important aspect of pastoralism – that one of mobility. It can be viewed as a book on cultural aspects of food processing rather than on pastoralism, since the other three essays deal with milk processing technologies in traditional animal husbandry (Hirata/Yotova), food at feasts in the

context of sheep husbandry (Markova) and museal representations of Bulgarian yogurt (Yotova). The incoherence is due to the fact that at the beginning of the project no analytical publications had been planned, and the researchers came to the idea to publish an edited volume only at a later stage, so each of them wrote an essay on a topic which he or she had personal research preference to and which he or she had continuously addressed in previous studies. This makes each essay worth reading.

In their essay “The milk processing system in Bulgaria”, Masahiro Hirata and Maria Yotova provide detailed descriptions of pre-industrial technologies (fermentation, additive coagulation, cream separation, etc.) of milk processing and producing *kiselo mlyako* (yogurt), *kurtmach* or *katāk*, cheese, *kashkaval*, butter, and many other milk products – some of them being regionally or locally specific, as well as of methods of product preservation. The study is based on interviews with members of 20 households who keep or kept until recently sheep or cows and who process(ed) the milk. The comprehensive account of social and economic characteristics and developments of each household is meant to help understand the particular context of milk processing but in fact it does much more: it provides valuable information about recent and present-day social conditions and processes in the sector of the small-scale animal husbandry and dairy and also about local effects of post-socialist transformations and EU-ization. The authors give the same careful attention to topographic and climatic characteristics when describing and analyzing the technologies and the products. They elaborate on them in separate sections of the essay: technologies and products that are typical for Bulgaria in general, others that are specific to the Rhodope Mountains and still others that are specific to the Balkan Mountains. The study has also a historic dimension. It reveals technological changes over time. Some traditional technologies have been abandoned or are rarely used, while other technologies have been modernized: already in the 1970s, home-made rennet (*sirishite*) and yogurt were replaced with industrially produced rennet extract and citric acid as coagulants in the production of cheese and *kashkaval* respectively. Having studied milk processing in many other regions and countries (Central Asia, West Asia, West Europe), Hirata develops a hypothesis of cross-cultural diffusion of milk processing and particularly of cheese produce technologies in Eurasia. He argues that particular technologies (ex. those using rennet) emerged in the Balkans and were transferred to other parts of Europe and to West Asia, while other technologies originated in West Asia and were transferred to the Balkans, in each new region being adapted and further developed in regards to local/regional climate and cultural/taste preferences.

Maria Markova’s essay “About the ‘first’ and the ‘final’ meals related to the start and the end of the milking season in pastoral calendar” deals with the distinctive features of festive foods prepared from milk and meat products at feasts that marked the beginning and the end of the milking season of sheep in pre-industrial Bulgaria: St. George’s Day in the spring and the Dormition of the Mother of God (*Golyama Bogoroditsa*) in late summer or St. Petka’s Day (Petkovden) in early autumn. Yogurt and fresh cheese from the “first milk” and a stuffed lamb roasted in an oven (or a

lamb on stick roasted over a fire in some regions) belonged to the festive meals on St. George's Day, and the meals for the other two feasts included *kurtmach* from the "last milk" and boiled sheep meat. In the descriptive parts of her essay, Markova provides many details about milk processing methods, ex. the use of herbs in the fermentation in the spring and the produce of *kurtmach* from fermented sheep (or rarely goat) high-fat milk by boiling it for several hours and adding salt (or rarely cheese). Markova interprets the contrast between the cooking technologies (fermenting vs. boiling the milk and roasting a lamb vs. boiling sheep meat) at the beginning and at the end of the milking in symbolic terms and binary oppositions such as first vs. last, new vs. old and fresh vs. matured.

In her contribution "Between tradition, science and modernity. Yogurt representations in post-socialist Bulgaria", Maria Yotova examines the meanings and values ascribed to "Bulgarian yogurt" that – with special reference to *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* used for the fermentation – is popularly viewed as a product which is specific to the country and which qualities, taste and benefits are perceived as being unique, genuine and superior in comparison to fermented milks produced elsewhere. Yotova reveals several factors that shaped this image, among them: the central role of yogurt in the diet in Bulgaria, the promotion of yogurt made with *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* as a life-prolonging food by Nobel laureate and biologist Ilya Mechnikov in the early 20th century, the "evidences" of health benefits provided by further studies over the years, the advertisement and marketing of Bulgarian yogurt in Japan as an authentic and natural product that guarantees good health and helps alleviating stressful lifestyles. In the main part of her article, Yotova focuses the attention on the Yogurt Museum in the small village of Studen Izvor in the municipality of Trăn as an example of how the Bulgarian image of Bulgarian yogurt is being (re)produced. The museum is located in the birth place of Stamen Grigorov, the scientist who in 1905 identified the main actor in milk fermentation – the lactic acid bacterium that he later called *bulgaricus*. The museum was established in 2007 on the initiative of the Trăn municipality and a NGO lead by one of Grigorov's descendants and it became a quite popular destination. Yotova examines the exhibition in detail and identifies three central narratives that create the image of Bulgarian yogurt: a narrative about Bulgaria as the homeland of yogurt, a narrative focused both on Grigorov's discovery and on scientific research on yogurt that supports the notion of its positive health effects, and a narrative about the international valorization of Bulgarian yogurt. In an interplay, they highlight yogurt as a national, science-based, healthy and internationally recognized product. The way in which Bulgarian yogurt is represented in the museum is interpreted by Yotova as a strategy of creating a desired national self-image in times of post-socialist uncertainties and national pessimism.

Svetla Rakshieva is known for her numerous studies on traditional sheep husbandry, i.e. on practices before the socialist collectivization of agriculture in Bulgaria. Her present essay "Tradition and innovation. Current problems of sheep farmers in Bulgaria" is her first study that addresses current issues of sheep farming and questions of how old practices persist or change in the post-socialist political, eco-

conomic and social landscape. It is focused on extensive sheep farming using grazing but in order to show differences and modern trends, it includes also an example of intensive indoor farming in a high-tech facility. The extensive pastoral sheep husbandry is still practiced in two farming systems – stationary (with grazing in the settlements' surroundings) and alpine (with summer grazing in the mountains) – that were typical both for the more distant past of traditional economy and for the period of permitted smallest-scale “private” farming after the socialist collectivization. Rakshieva explains their persistence in post-socialist time with the coping strategies of farmers: they are focused on maximally using grass resources and minimizing expenses for other fodder. She describes the farming practices also in regard to the two organizational types of farming – in individual and cooperative farms – and notices that the cooperation of sheep farmers, a quite common economic pattern in the past, is used in only one farm; furthermore, it has been established within a Bulgarian-German project in 2003. In fact, cooperating is widely practiced among small sheep-farmers in Bulgaria but their cooperatives are informal, not officially registered. The author may not have come upon such cooperatives during her fieldwork. The single case of cooperation she thoroughly discusses shows that the cooperated farmers make use of customary practices that had been recorded by ethnographers in the late 19th and in the first half of the 20th century, ex. the division of labor and the investment of time and work according to the number of personal sheep kept in the cooperative farm. In the other parts of the study, Rakshieva presents social portraits of present-day sheep farmers: their age, education, professional skills, family, relationships within the family and between generations, labor division, professional and economic interests and preferences. Special stress is put on their motivation to continue, start or abandon sheep farming. In present time, their attitudes toward sheep farming, their cultural and economic orientations and their practices are largely shaped by the national implementation of EU's agricultural and environmental policies and regulations, by the access to subsidies, by conflicting economic and nature-conservational values.

The four essays are well illustrated. Though the volume lacks a conceptual frame, the individual essays address scientifically and socially relevant issues and might be of interest not only to readers concerned with social and cultural aspects of sheep farming or milk processing.

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