

“THE SHEPHERD’S SKY”

NOTES ON THE DEFINITION OF A SHEPHERD COSMOVISION

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The Idanha-a-Nova region has an historical relation between its vast territory and the ancient shepherd activity and, thus, it is assumed as a land of shepherds. Within this context and due to permanent mobility and loneliness, the shepherd developed a millenary culture where the surrounding natural environment knowledge assumed a special relevance in the everyday’s life. He learned how to read and locate himself by the natural cycles, by the Sun, Moon and stars “trajectories”, and to make “magical” conjugations remitting to an archaic period, a time dominated by animism. This contribution leads towards the archaic shepherd cosmovision in 2009, declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Astronomy.

1. Introduction

The Idanha-a-Nova municipality is located in the far Southeast of the Centre region, belonging to the Castelo Branco district. It is inserted in a remote and heterogeneous region named Baixa Baixa (Beira Interior Sul), described by Orlando Ribeiro as “as a scraps blanket, some already *estremenhos* or *alentejanos*, a juxtaposition of units well delimited in the landscape and the daily life of the inhabitants” (Ribeiro, 1995, p. 431). Historically is a territory related with cattle breeding, which is confirmed by the oldest records as was shown by Orlando Ribeiro: “The Idanha plains breed more sheep than all Estrela Range (96849 sheep, 347 per 100 inhabitants, in the municipality of Idanha-a-Nova”; Ribeiro, 1941, p. 88). Concerning the most recent data on the General Agriculture Census from 1999, in the Idanha-a-Nova was registered 87 954 sheep and 7 679 goats. Thus, it is referenced as an intrinsically shepherd region.

The shepherd activity in the municipality of Idanha-a-Nova is intimately connected to traditional route shepherd and the cultivation of cereals. This strong symbiosis between cereals and cattle breeding is associated to the extensive exploitation of grasses, which defines the shepherd way of life. Thus, it involves movements of sheep flock followed by the shepherds. From this archaic mode of life rhythmicallized by the infinite movement of the sheep flock, sleeping and eating in the deepest loneliness, the shepherd created one of the most ancestral arts, the art of being shepherd.

2. “The Shepherd’s sky”: shepherd cosmovisions

The secluded and remote life of shepherds, away from the rhythms of the village’s bell and the common clock, made them excellent observers of their natural environment, leading to assimilate a recreate other time based fundamentally on the natural cycles, the Sun “movements” and the Moon stages. In this way, shepherds developed a whole deepened knowledge of the surrounding natural elements learning how to read the involved landscape taking from it, besides resources, know-how, purposes, omens, adages and, sometimes, even prays; they learn to read time using Sun, to orientate by the stars, to make weather forecasts through innumerous relations based on the daily experience with the involving environment and cattle management.

About the millenary shepherd knowledge, magical in a certain way, we may say that above all reveals archaic reminiscences close to “primeval people”, as it is described by the anthropologist Eliseo Cuesta:

"The shepherd thought has characteristics found in primitive people (...) defined by intuition and animism. Intuition is clearly observed in certain processes of knowledge, such as climatology, the prediction is made by previously experienced association of perceptions not logically connected. As an example 'sheep bring wind when jump, or bring rain when stay close to the pen wall'. It is a intuitive process connected to other feature of the primitive thought: the animism or, in a egocentric way, the projection of own behavioral trends to the animals and things, thus animated by the same purposes as Man" (Cuesta, 1983).

3. "Guessing weather": weather forecast

"When the Moon has a ring around after three days will rain, or if the Royal Owl fly Tejo River and starts to "sing" in the hills, after three days will rain, or when sheep wool is cut, if they lay down for a long time, the next day will rain. My father was who teach me this and he was also shepherd." (Rui Sanches, 26 years old, shepherd, Rosmaninhal).

"My father guided the weather already by the Moon. He said that when the Moon was turned would rain. Here, we have the experience when crows are there looking around and singing, quá, quá, quá and the clock from Soalheiras or Cegonhas sound, the weather changes quickly, or the wind will be stronger or clouds will appear or cold starts or rain will come. I already told many times to my daughter: she is Isabel and in former years the clock of the village of Soalheiras and the crows seemed only to guess water and this year they only guess wind and. But it is for sure!" (Maria Caldeira, 69 years old, shepherd lady, Rosmaninhal).

"When herons come from the river or bring water or cold. This year they came many times, but only brought cold. When Moon is turned to Tejo River it is sign of water." (Clementina Magro, 77 years old, shepherd lady, Soalheiras).

"When we get up in the morning and the sky is open from clouds to the South and the clouds appear here on top of the hill, that day it rains; when it is to dark down to South and clear in the hill, it doesn't rain. When the Moon is small and has the two tips pointing up, water does not fall down, but when goes somewhat inclined brings water. When toads "sing" also guess water, the goats also guess water, when it is raining they move more arrumaçadinhas (closer to each others)" (Ti Domingos "Menoucho", 79 years old, goat shepherd, Penha Garcia).

"By the shack of the goat bells at night we know that is going to rain in the next day. This happens when they shack themselves a lot during the night. When cattle are moving too close to each other also guess rain. When the Moon is blurred and has a ring, the water is far away; when it is close we only can see a mist in its centre, which is sign of rain." (António Santos "Cacarne", 85 years old, retired shepherd, Idanha-a-Nova).

"The cattle predict water, when is about to rain they shack the bells more, we note by the sound of the bells. Also say when the Moon is turned upside down we get water. The piquençaro-bacorero bird also guesses water when it starts to sing a lot." (João Pires, 73 years old, shepherd, Idanha-a-Velha).

"We looked to that set of dark clouds that appears under the hill, if it appears suddenly under the hill, it rains. Some days ago I noticed, the dark set came, I said, today is raining and during the afternoon it rained! The Moon, they say when it is upside down gives water, when it turns right does not give water. The birds also guess water, when we pass in a stream and they are taking bath is because it will rain; the chicken when search a lot for bugs in their bodies and swell also will rain; when swallows fly flat in the middle of the cattle also guess water." (João Chambino, 67 years old, retired shepherd, Rosmaninhal).

"It is the Moon that commands all! It is cold due to the Moon, In ten days weather gets warm when the new Moon comes. It always makes a small revolution or much ice will come, much hot or much cold, much wind or much rain." (Joaquim dos Santos, 62 years old, shepherd, Salvaterra do Extremo).

"Guessing water through the Moon, my mother already told: Moon circle from far water from close. When the wind is low we look to the cock from the tower: when it is directed to Idanha will rain, if it is turned to Gata Range is even worse." (Ifisénia Maria, 85 years old, retired, Proença-a-Velha).

"When the Moon goes inclined sends water, when goes straight it rains. When the Royal Owl flies along the hills, it rains or if the Cotovia bird is in the Holm-oaks guesses water." (Ti Marcos, 74 years old, shepherd, Cegonhas).

4. Orienting by the stars

"Once there were no clocks, only by the stars in the sky we were guided. During the sowing we woke up to see how the "seven-star" were going to lead the cattle to food. We saw three stars in a queue, called cachero, and regulate by the shepherd's cachero."* (Clementina Magro, 77 years old, shepherd lady, Soalheiras).

* Reference to Pléiades. This term is also in the Bible, Book of Jó: 9-9 "[...] who made the bear, Orion, the **seven-star** and the rechambers of Sun."; 38-31 "Or could you tie the chains of the **seven-star**, or release the ties of Orion." José Leite Vasconcelos describes the term: "The people call **seven-star** or seven-stars [star is masculine] to Pleiades. To this constellation the following songs are dedicated: The seven-stars fo high/Miss, go to bed: That I'll do the same/That I have to wake up early; The seven-star fell down/On a rock, was limping: The lily was missing/soon dressed purple; The seven-star goes high/Even higher goes the Moon/Higher goes happiness/Which God has to give me; Stars from the sky come to Earth/I want to choose mine: From four I want the biggest/From three the smallest." (Vasconcelos, 1986, p.63).

"To know the Moon we need to sleep outside, many people know nothing because never slept out of doors. As soon as we could see the morning star we know what time was it." (José Lourenço, 90 years old, former transhumant shepherd, Manteigas).

"When at night I followed the stars, we called the seven-star, when they were about to appear, we said it is that time and never failed. To wake up in the morning, I looked first to the seven-star to know what time was it. During the day, I was oriented by the shadow of the Holm-oaks. I did like this: when I found someone with clock I would ask what time is it and then I looked to the shadows of the Holm-oaks and made there a mark. As soon as I passed by this place by the signalled hour I looked to the mark to know exactly the hour. Even today, already with clock, I use to do the same. It may be broken and thus I know! I mark the place, if by any chance the shadow is before the mark it is because is sooner, if passes is because it is later. I know the exact hour in the mark." (João Chambino, 67 years old, retired shepherd, Rosmaninhal).

5. Other influences from Moon

"All moons have four quarters, two from new Moon and two from the old Moon. I learned this with my father in the field, it was their rule. The elders knew better than us, now everyone knows to read, if they don't read they are incapable of see anything. Os antigos traziam aquilo mais que a gente, agora tudo sabe ler, se não lerem não A man that does not how to read, how does he know this? I know this by heart and don't know how to read. All the quarters have seven days, each seven days the Moon turns, now is only to count the quarters, every month have four

quarters, every quarter changes, one because is new Moon, other because is decreasing Moon and other because is full Moon. This was used for us to make the cattle. I was to cut the balls of lamb and couldn't be in the new Moon, it would have to be in the old Moon. The old Moon always get shorter, if you cut yourself in the arm, if it is new Moon, the infection is bigger than during the old Moon, everyday shorter. But in the new Moon is always growing to reach the full Moon. Doctors must know also those things! To give a male to a female is the same, the decreasing quarter in everything. If we go to sow some greens, if it is during the increasing quarter soon it will ear, the decreasing quarter is stronger. If a man goes to a women in a decreasing quarter it will be female, if in a decreasing quarter will be male, it never fails!" (Joaquim Folgado "Carrapato", 71 years old, retired shepherd, Rosmaninhal).

"Moon has many influence on the animals, when is full Moon they reproduce, become further on or late, if by any chance if they reproduce in the increasing quarter, they become later on, if it is during the decreasing quarter, they get late." (João Chambino, 67 years old, retired shepherd, Rosmaninhal)

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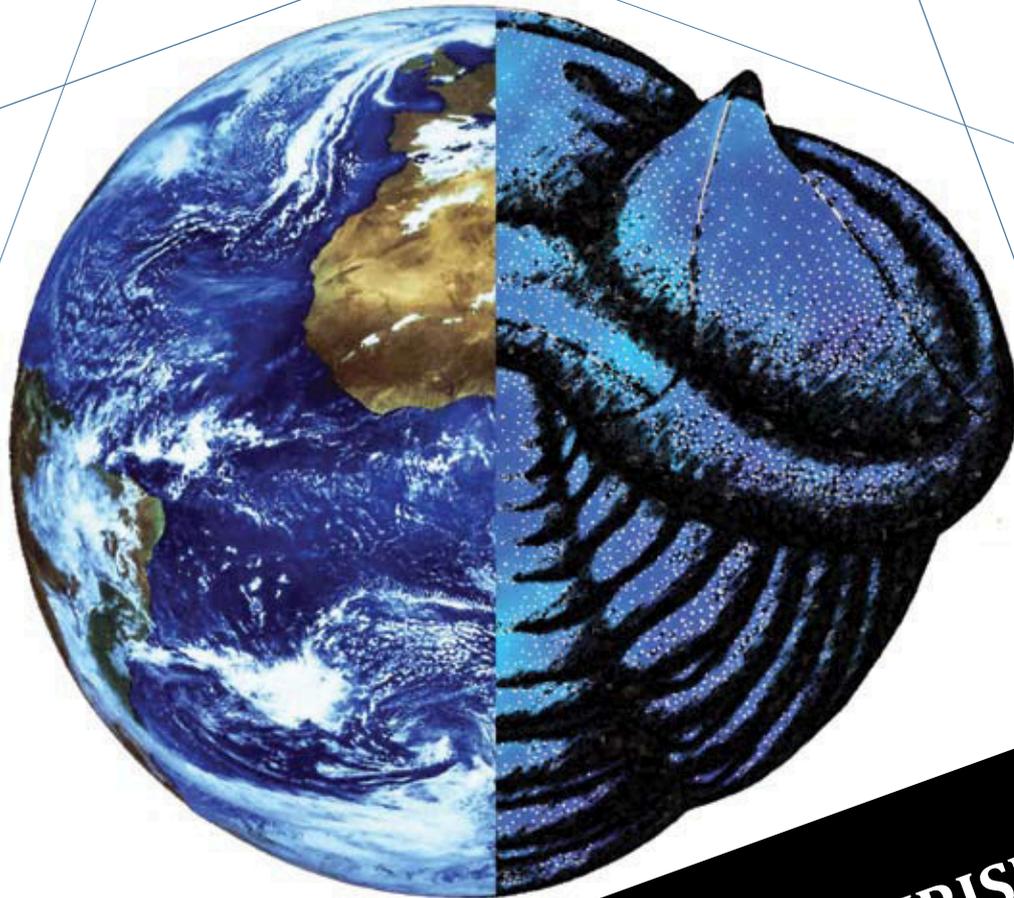
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