



A MYTHOLOGICAL TYPOLOGY OF SHEEP AND GOATS. A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract: In this paper, the authors focus on the mythological typology of sheep and goats. First, they make it clear that a mythological typology of sheep and goats from Historical Banat can only be done by combining archetypal symbolism, pastoral folklore, and zoomorphic features with ritual, social and cosmological functions. Then, based on the references mentioned at the end of the paper, they investigate the mythological typology of sheep (black, rusty, with fairy eyes, and white sheep) and goats (white and wild goats) from Historical Banat. The conclusion of the study is that, despite the number of varieties compared (the number of sheep varieties is two times larger than that of the goat varieties) there are consistencies in all archetypes of both sheep and goats.

• Introduction

The construction of a mythological typology of sheep and goats from Historical Banat can only be done by combining pastoral folklore, archetypal symbolism, and zoomorphic features with ritual, social and cosmological functions – a typology that can be used in interdisciplinary research, ethnographic education or even in artistic projects. Therefore:

- Archetypal symbolism consists in universal images, motifs, and themes reflecting fundamental human emotions, experiences, and psychological patterns across cultures in time; it relies on two main foundations:

- Carl Jung's theory, according to which archetypes are innate, universal prototypes for ideas useful in interpreting observations and manifested as symbols in cultural narratives, dreams, and myths (e.g. the Hero, the Mother, the Wise Man);

- Collective unconscious, which is inherited, surfaces in similar forms in different cultures, and transcends individual experience;

- Pastoral folklore often idealizes nature spirits, seasonal rhythms, and shepherds and has for main elements the following:

- Customs and rituals involving symbolic objects such as bells, carved staffs, or wool – i.e. protective charms, rites of passage (e.g. first transhumance), and seasonal celebrations (Mărțișor, Sânziene) – and involving fertility, protection, and renewal;

- Folktales and legends blending realism and fantasy and reinforcing moral values and communal identity, and featuring lost flocks, magical flutes, shepherds who outwit spirits, and talking animals;

- Herder / shepherd archetypes, i.e. guardians of ancestral knowledge, romantic figures, or solitary wanderers embodying harmony with nature, simplicity, and wisdom;

- Nature spirits and sacred landscapes, i.e. groves, mountains (the Carpathian Mountains are often portrayed as mystical thresholds between worlds), and rivers imbued with spiritual presence (e.g. enchanted pastures, forest nymphs, and protective spirits);

- Oral poetry and songs, i.e. ballads, doinas, and laments expressing the hardships of rural life, longing, and love passed down orally, performed during communal gatherings or shepherding, and including coded language and metaphors of animal behaviour, weather, and wool;

- Seasonal cycles and transhumance mythologised through festivals, songs, and symbolic motifs like the blooming meadows or returning flocks, which reflect the rhythms of pastoral life (e.g. autumn harvest, spring migration, summer grazing, and winter sheltering).

• Material and method

The material used in this paper consists of articles and books on the comparative study of the mythological typology of sheep and goats. The research method used is the comparative method.

• Results and discussion

The mythological typology of sheep from Historical Banat concerns the following varieties of sheep breed.

- The Black Sheep – Archetype of the Marginal and the Visionary:

- Folklore: the "black sheep" as a sign of a special destiny, sometimes linked to fairies or spirits;

- Mythological function: symbol of otherness, of the shepherd-doctor or the lonely shepherd;

- Real correspondence: Țurcană Brează, Oacheșă;

- The Rusty Sheep – Archetype of the Past and Melancholy:

- Folklore: appears in stories about old shepherds and lost flocks;

- Mythological function: evokes ancestry, connection with ancestors and the winter solstice;

- Real correspondence: Țurcană Ruginie;

The mythological typology of goat from Historical Banat concerns the following varieties of goat breed :

- The White Goat – Archetype of Wisdom and Protection:

- Folklore: white goat as a totemic animal, sometimes a companion of fairies;

- Mythological function: guide between worlds, protector of the flock and the shepherd;

- Real correspondence: white goat of Banat, local varieties;

- Rituals: invoked in incantations and initiation stories;

- Zoomorphism: white fur, penetrating gaze, straight horns;

- The Wild Goat – Archetype of Chaos and Fertility:

- Folklore: present in the New Year goat game, as a being that dies and is reborn;

- Mythological function: symbol of fecundity, force of nature and sacred disorder;

- Real correspondence: Carpathian goat, black mountain goat;

- Rituals: goat dance, zoomorphic mask, fertility cries;

- Zoomorphism: agility, spiral horns, unpredictable movement.



Figure 2. Varieties of goat breed: a – White Goat; b – Wild Goat (after Klaus Benteș)

• Conclusions

The Mythological Typology of Sheep and Goats presented above captures the six main archetypes of sheep and goats: Black Sheep – Marginal and Visionary; Fairy-Eyed Sheep – Beauty and Magic; Rusty Sheep – Past and Melancholy; White Sheep – Purity and Sacrifice; White Goat – Wisdom and Protection; Wild Goat – Chaos and Fertility.

We need to emphasise that, despite the number of varieties compared (the number of sheep varieties is two times larger than that of the goat varieties) there are consistencies in all archetypes of both sheep and goats.