

Herding and farming symbiosis: a dialogic exercise on the manifestation of a universal *topos* in Sumerian and Roman primary cultures*

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ABSTRACT

At a microeconomic level, the ancient inhabitants of southern Mesopotamia and regions of the Italic peninsula gained their sustenance from a combination of rain-fed cereal cultivation and herding. These already highly connected activities would inevitably, for many practical and cultural reasons, have profound repercussions on the construction of abstract thinking and on the conception of abstract vocabulary in a transversal cultural matrix. Such cultural compositions would come about by similar linguistic mechanisms, independently of the cultural context and time span, for the practical experience together with natural phenomena and rural life would be the source for these primary constructions.

In that sense, in this paper I speculate on the relationship between the signs of these two complementary activities and their imaged representation as a source for abstract meaning in the collective mind. By approaching a kind of archaeology of traditional thought, I intend to establish a dialogic analysis between the data from two unrelated sociolinguistic cultures, in order to identify a transversal mode of constructing meaning upon similar compounded images of daily life.

KEYWORDS

Semiotics, signs of meaning, Sumerian literature, Roman instructions, agriculture

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Approaching the daily life of Sumerian and Roman farmers and the way they thought about it is a highly theoretical exercise. Alster (1978) published samples of Sumerian proverbs, which seem to be inspired by daily life.¹ However, some scepticism is necessary as texts such as those are just a small sample of ancient textual corpus, so they should not be blindly considered sources for ancient wisdom or in some way being empirical references for the representation of life in southern Mesopotamia. Archaeological remains, administrative texts and certain literary texts², such as the FI³ or the 'Latin instructions on farming' can shed some light onto the practicalities of the farmer's life, although those texts do not provide sufficient evidence to gain an exact idea of the farmer's perspectives on his world and therefore, his behaviour. In this sense, seeking a prosopography on a farmer's life is a somewhat creative, speculative exercise. According to the mechanisms of semiotics, however,⁴ abstract language may give some impressions on the way ancient peasants could describe their lives by showing the landscape of meaning that surrounded them.

At a microeconomic level, the ancient inhabitants of Mesopotamia, as well as the ancient inhabitants of *Latium*, gained their sustenance from a combination of cultivation of cereals (rain-fed and irrigated), sheep and goat herding, and the cultivation of small orchards and vegetable gardens. In that context, farming and herding are highly connected, being the craft of ploughing a kind of a fusion between these activities; the man working the land with oxen⁵ is a kind of a

herder.⁶ Symbolically speaking, as a shepherd, he is the ruler, the protector and the source of sustenance for the animals, which he leads in order to produce crops, as a farmer.

1. Herding and Farming and a shared frame in the Mesopotamian landscape

Regarding the agricultural landscape, farming and herding usually come together. For example, in DI D₁⁷ (ll. 42-52, vide infra) there is an interaction between the two activities, as if the value of each was expressed through the other. And one could take the Dumuzi – Enkimdu *disputatio* (SF²)⁸ as a paradigm of that, for the qualities of both actors are described and compared, them representing farming and herding.⁹

The first 8 lines of the text are quite fragmented, but one can assume that there is an attempt at convincing Inana to marry Dumuzi, the shepherd god, and an answer that seems to show her unwillingness to marry him (ll. 7-9).¹⁰ Two values are being considered, that of the farmer and that of the shepherd. Apparently the god Utu tries to convince Inana to marry Dumuzi by presenting her with the attributes of the shepherd. Dumuzi can produce butter (*i₃*) and milk (*ga*), which are more than simple nourishment, these products are also an optimal base for various dishes and foodstuffs. So, as well as 'being the provider', the shepherd can also bring luxury. My interpretation is that Dumuzi is identified as the provider of a variety of exquisite foods, for those products can be fermented and salted, in order to be stored as surplus products that can be exchanged for other

ing world vide WATANABE 2002, pp. 99-102.

⁶ Regarding lexicon on farming used in economic and administrative texts vide MAEKAWA 1990.

⁷ Dumuzi-Inanna Song D₁; comp.t. ETCSL c.4.08.30; SEFATI 1998, pp. 301-12.

⁸ SF² – Dumuzid and Enkimdu (the Shepherd and the Farmer). Comp.t. ETCSL c.4.08.33; SEFATI 1998, pp. 324-43.

⁹ On Sumerian literary *disputatio* vide VANSTIPHOUT 2003. For a study in DI corpus vide SEFATI 1998.

¹⁰ For a reconstruction of the lines 1-6 vide SEFATI 1998, p. 336.

¹ Cf. Proverb collection VII, ll.11-13, ll. 51-53, ll. 96-100 (ALSTER 1978). On the subject vide VELDHUIS 2000.

² We will not approach aspects as the scribal tradition or the chronology of the texts here cited, despite its great value for understanding Sumerian literary, for the main objective of the paper is the semantics transmitted on the texts that are based on the signs of meaning, which are independent of literary context. On the historical background of Sumerian literature and scribal tradition vide VAN DE MIEROOP 2016 and RADNER, ROBSON (eds.) 2011.

³ CIVIL 1994.

⁴ On semiotics theory and on the approach of language construction based on signs of meaning vide COBLEY (ed.) 2010; concerning material culture, vide also PREUCCEL 2006, pp. 21-92. On the general theory ECO 2002 is being followed.

⁵ For a pre-historical symbolism of the bull of the farm-

commodities. There is, then, an image constructed upon a kind of potential abundance. This value of a certain luxury and richness may be materialized by the šuba stones Dumuzi is said to bring.

(l. 17) In other words, it is possible to find a relationship between the gifts promised to Inana and the goods from grazing and farming, for Dumuzi brings richness.

10. šeš-a-ni ur-saĝ šul^dutu
11. kug^dinana-^lra^l gu³ mu-un-na-de₂-e
12. nin₉-ĝu₁₀ ħe₂-tuku-tuku su₈-ba-de₃
13. ki-sikil^dinana za-e a-na-aš nu-ub-še-ge-en
14. i₃-ni dug₃-ga-am₃ ga-ni dug₃-ga-am₃
15. lu₂su₈-ba niĝ₂ šu dug₄-ga-ni dadag-ga-am₃
16. ^dinana ħe₂-tuku-tuku ^ddu₅-mu-zid-[de₃]
17. ^lunu₂^l la₂ šuba la₂ za-e a-na-[aš] nu-ub-še-ge-en
- 17A. [i₃]-ni dug₃-ga-am₃ ga-^lni^l [dug₃-ga-am₃]
- 17B. ^{lu2}su₈-ba niĝ₂ šu dug₄-ga-ni dadag-[ga-am₃]
18. i₃-ni dug₃-ga mu-un-da-gu₇-e
19. an-dul₃-e lugal-la za-e a-na-aš nu-ub-še-ge-en¹¹

10. Her brother, the vigorous warrior, Utu,
11. Directs his words to holy Inana:
12. “My sister, may the shepherd marry you!
13. Maiden Inana, why are you unwilling?
14. His butter is good, his milk is good,
15. The product of the shepherd’s hands is bright.
16. Inana, let Dumuzi marry you.
17. You, who wear jewellery, who wear šuba stones, [why] are you unwilling?
- 17a. His [butter] is good, [his^l milk [is good],
- 17b. The product of the [shepherd]’s hands [is] bright.
18. He will eat his good butter with you.
19. you, patron of the king, why are you unwilling?”

Dumuzi (ll. 35-64) answers Inana’s refusal¹² comparing himself to the farmer and generating a dispute about the qualities of both gods. Dumuzi lists the qualities of the farmer, albeit stating that for the goods Enkimdu presents, the shepherd can offer better and more – at least that is what Dumuzi claims by boasting about what he can provide. Despite this, the text clearly suggests that both are good candidates as they are both providers.

The semantic value of the signs of meaning that compound the image of the shepherd are crys-

talized in traditional thought as are the products provided by him and which give him a symbolic meaning once the particularities of his activity are considered. The same is true to the signs of meaning that constitute the symbolic construction of the farmer.¹³ In the previous example, the signs of meaning are a representation of each product that can be provided. Once conjugated those signs compound a symbol: abundance.

¹¹ Comp.T. Ni 2431 (SRT 3) + CBS 8320 (SEM 92).

¹² SEFATI 1998, p. 335.

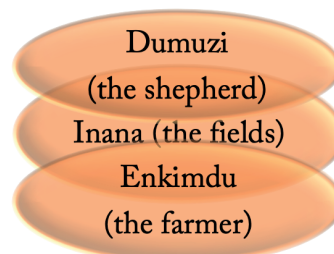
¹³ Vide ECO’s 2002, pp.29-43, and AGUIAR E SILVA 2002, pp.76-79, for a general definition of signs of meaning vide also LORUSSO 2015, pp.117-158.

40. [engar-e] ġa₂-a-ra engar-e ġa₂-a-ra engar-e a-na mu-un-dirig-ga-am₃
 41. ^den-ki-im-du lu₂ eg₂ pa₅-ra-ke₄
 42. ġa₂-a-ra engar-e a-na mu-un-dirig-ga-am₃
 43. tug₂ gig₂-ga-ni ħa-ma-ab-šum₂-mu
 44. engar-ra u₈ gig₂-ġu₁₀ ġe₂₆-e ga-mu-na-ši-ib-šum₂
 45. tug₂ babbar₂-ra-ni ħa-ma-ab-šum₂-mu
 46. engar-ra u₈ babbar₂-ra-ġu₁₀ ga-mu-na-ši-ib-šum₂
 47. e-ne kaš saġ-ġa₂-ni ħa-ma-an-de₂-e
 48. engar-ra ga sig₇-a-ġu₁₀ ga-mu-na-ši-in-de₂
 49. e-ne kaš sig₅-ni ħa-ma-an-de₂-e
 50. engar-ra ga-ki-si-im-[^{ma}]-[...]₂ ga-mu-na-ši-in-[^{de}]-(...)
40. “The farmer to me, the farmer to me, in what is the [farmer] superior to me?
 41. Enkimdu, the man of the dykes and canals –
 42. In what is that farmer superior to me?
 43. Let him give me his black garment,
 44. I will give the farmer my black ewe for it.
 45. Let him give me his white garment,
 46. I will give the farmer my white ewe for it.
 47. Let him pour me his finest beer,
 48. I, the farmer, will pour yellow milk for it.
 49. Let him pour me his fine beer,
 50. I will pour him, the farmer [my] kisim-milk for it. (...)

Dumuzi’s ability to generate value is identifiable on these lines, where he apparently manifests his willingness to exchange goods with Enkimdu.¹⁴ With such ‘commercial ability’, one can interpret that Dumuzi would be able to provide Inana with his products and with Enkimdu’s. The assumption I make is, of course, an extrapolation. It might also

¹⁴ SF² ll. 55-64: ħa-ħa-la sig₅-ni ħa-ma-ab-šum₂-mu / engar-ra ġe₂₆-e ga i₃-ti-ir-da-ġu₁₀ ga-mu-na-ši-ib-šum₂ / ninda sig₅-ni ħa-ma-ab-šum₂-mu / engar-ra ga [nunuz-te]-a-ġu₁₀ ga-mu-na-ši-ib-šum₂ / gu₂ di₄-di₄-la₂-ni ħa-ma-ab-šum₂-mu / engar-ra ga-ar₃ tur-tur-ġu₁₀ ga-mu-na-ši-ib-šum / u₃-mu-ni-gu₂ u₃-mu-ni-naġ-ġa₂-ta (i-zu-ba) / i₃ niġ₂ dirig-ga ga-mu-na-ra-ab-šub ([wa-at]-ri-im) / ga niġ₂ dirig-ga ga-mu-na-ra-ab-šub / ġa₂-a-ra engar-e a-na mu-un-dirig-[ga]-[am₃]. “Let him give me his fine ‘barley flour’, / I will give the farmer my *itirda*-milk for it. / Let him give me his good bread, / I will give the farmer my [nunuz-te]-milk for it. / Let him give me his small beans, / I will give the farmer my small cheeses for them. (...) / After letting him eat and letting him drink, (cf. SEFATI 1998, p. 341) / I will leave surplus butter for him, (cf. SEFATI 1998, p. 341) / I will leave surplus milk for him. / In what is the farmer superior to me?” Sefati translates ħa-ħa-la as something like pressed beer (l.55). Nonetheless, I prefer to let it open to ambiguity (cf. SEFATI 1998, p. 340; CAD H, p. 41).

be assumed that Dumuzi is only saying that for any product Enkimdu can offer, he can offer something better. There may in some way be an allegory that intentionally relates and, in some aspects, fuses the two activities. In fact, farming and herding are complimentary. And ll. 65-87, describing the meeting between the three gods and the resolution of the *disputatio*, may manifest the correlation of the two activities together with earth, the point of intersection, represented by Inana.¹⁵



¹⁵ On the interpretation of lines 65-87 vide SEFATI 1998.

Literature describes what is common sense in regard to a riverine landscape, that is, herding and farming are part of the same symbolic plan for

they belong to the same natural framework. In the following lines the symbolic symbiosis is clearly suggested:

73. su₈-ba^d dumu-zid-de₃ edin-a-na du₁₄ mu-un-di-ni-ib-mu₂-mu₂
 74. ĝa₂-a za-a-da su₈-ba ĝa₂-a za-a-da su₈-ba ĝa₂-a za-a-da
 75. a-na-aš mu-da-ab-sa₂-e-en
 76. udu-zu u₂ peš₁₀ ħe₂-em-mi-gu₇
 77. išin-ĝa₂ udu-zu ħe₂-em-mi-gu₇
 78. a-šag₄ šuba unug^{ki}-ga še ħa-ba-ni-gu₇
 79. maš₂ sila₄-zu^{id2} surungal-ĝa₂ a ħa-ba-ni-in-naĝ
 80. ^{lu2}sipad-me-en nam-nitalam-ĝu₁₀-še₃
 81. engar gu₃-li-ĝa₂ na-ba-ni-in-kur₉-ra
 82. engar^d en-ki-im-du gu₃-li-ĝa₂ engar gu₃-li-ĝa₂
 83. na-ba-ni-in-kur₉-ra-am₃
 84. gig ga-mu-ra-de₆ gu₂ ga-mu-ra-de₆
 85. gu₂-nida bir-un₄-na ga-mu-ra-de₆
 86. ^{lu2}ki-sikil niĝ₂ za-a-ra sig₉-ga
 87. ki-sikil^d inana še giĝ₄ gu₂ MUNUS ga-mu-ra-de₆ (...)

73. The shepherd, Dumuzi, from his plain provoked a quarrel with him.
 74. “I’m with you, shepherd, I’m with you, shepherd, I’m with you
 75. Why should I compete (with you)?
 76. Let your sheep eat the grass of the riverbank,
 77. Let your sheep graze on my stalks.
 78. Let them eat grain in the šuba (stones) fields of Unug,
 79. Let your goatlings and lambs drink water from my Surungal canal.”
 80. “I am a shepherd, at my wedding,
 81. Farmer, you are going to be my companion.
 82. Farmer, Enkimdu, as my friend, farmer, as my friend
 83. You are going to become indeed.”
 84. “I will carry wheat to you, and I will bring you beans;
 85. I will bring you two-row barley from the threshing-floor.
 86. Maiden, I will bring you everything you please,
 87. Maiden Inana, ... barley or ... beans, I will carry to you”

This frame apparently fuses two planes. The two activities generate complementary gifts and manifest how essential they are to human life. The scene, despite being constructed upon stylistic literary resources, mythology and perhaps religious or ritual beliefs, evokes an image that someone in touch with rural life could imagine. In that sense, the semantic value of this scene would be easy to under-

stand thanks to the previously acquired knowledge preserved by tradition and recreated over and over again by collective experience. In short, the two activities are complementary, and their traditional value can only be fully understood when they are related in a common frame.

Considering the *disputatio* SF², victory is not dependent on the superiority of the goods each god

can provide. From an economic perspective, both gods could exchange their surplus and provide different commodities and this is the way Dumuzi aims to convince Inana that he should win the contest. In that sense, no activity is seen as being more worthy than another.

The symbol of provider can be constructed with signs of meaning from the traditional landscape where the shepherd is framed and also with those signs associated with the farmer (cf. DI D₁, ll. 42-59). In this sense, the *disputatio* between the gods Dumuzi and Enkimdu shows the natural space of the shepherd and the farmer, expressing a source for abstract agricultural images. The site is composed by the plain (*edin*) and by the riverbank.¹⁶ In fact, this could be considered to be the same framed landscape presented through the landscapes of

DumDr (ll. 1-13),¹⁷ where the shepherd god is the main character.

Naturally this is the shepherd's domain, for there is water and green grass for the herd. The terrain next to an irrigation canal is not good for farming, for seasonal changes in water level make it impossible to grow crops without the risk of losing them to floods. That makes the marshes of the river perfect for grazing, for there would always exist smaller green plants owing to the characteristics of damp, fertile soil.

Even when the symbol of the shepherd is being considered alone, it seems that, regarding the collective mind, the traditional shepherd is not always a symbol isolated from the agricultural cosmos. It tends to result from a symbiosis of herding with farming, as expressed allegorically in text DI D₁:

46. ki-en-gi ki-uri-a ešgiri₂ šibir šum₂-mu-na-ab (source: ta)
 47. saĝ gig₂ dur₂-ru-na-bi nam-sipad-bi ħe₂-ak-e
 48. e-ne engar-gin₇ gana₂ ħe₂-ġa₂-ġa₂
 49. sipad zid-gin₇ amaš ħe₂-em-mi-lu-lu

46. (Over all) Sumer and Akkad, grant him the staff and the sceptre!
 47. May he practice the shepherdship craft with the black-headed inhabitants.¹⁹
 48. May he, like a farmer, establish agricultural fields.
 49. May he like a loyal shepherd make many sheepfolds, (...)

¹⁶ SF² ll. 65-72: ul am₃-te ul am₃-te gaba peš₁₀-a ul am₃-te / peš₁₀-am₃ sipad-de₃ peš₁₀-am₃ / sipad-de₃ peš₁₀-am₃ udu na-an-ga-am₃-[mi¹-[ni-in-lu-lu] / sipad peš₁₀-a udu lu-a-ra / lu²sipad-ra engar mu-na-ni-[in-te] / engar d⁴en-ki-im-du [mu¹-[na-ni-in-te] / d⁴dumu-zid lugal eg₂ pa₅-re [...] / edin-a-na sipad-de₃ [edin]-a-na du₁₄ mu¹-un¹-[di-ni-ib-mu₂-mu₂]. "He was in joy, he was in joy, at the edge of the riverbank, he was in joy. / Is on the riverbank, the shepherd is on the riverbank, / Indeed the shepherd [was] pasturing too the sheep on the riverbank. / The shepherd pasturing the sheep on the bank; / The farmer [approached] the shepherd there, / The farmer Enkimdu [approached him]. / Dumuzi the king of dyke and canal [...]. / From his plain, the shepherd from his plain [provoked a quarrel with him]; (cf. ll. 73).

Of course, the signs that compound the symbols of the farmer and the shepherd are presented independently; however, they appear in the same plane, they interact within the same natural space and both work for the complementary sustenance of the community. By forming part of the same frame, their gifts are in some way mixed and interdepend-

¹⁷ DumDr – Dumuzi's Dream: ALSTER 1972; ETCSL 1.4.7.

¹⁸ Cf. COHEN 1988, p. 168, ll. a+110-a+111.

ent. Of course, this is an assumption based on common sense and on the practicalities of both activities in a riverine farming context. We should not forget that farming and herding were the main subsistence activities in antiquity. The literary representation may have a specific function and may alter the symbols, but the traditional signs of shepherd and farmer based on empirical practices are cristalized, so they do not change.

Considering the above, Westenholz (2004) says, “The farmer image was even more popular than the shepherd in the earliest personal names, as might be expected in an agrarian society. In fact, it is the pastoral image that seems out of place”. I defend that the shepherd image is not out of place, for herding was a very important economic factor in Sumerian society and not as dependent on season as farming, thus people would be in day-to-day contact with this activity, in the same way they would be with farming. That is, they would be in touch with the signs that potentiate the symbol and that gave place to ‘talking names’. In fact, farming and herding share some signs of meaning besides a common landscape.

- 60. engar maḥ-bi sipad zid kalam-ma
- 61. ud dug₃-ga zid-de₃-eš tu-ud-da-am₃
- 62. engar gana₂ daḡal-la ḫe₂-du₇-am₃
- 63. ši-im-da-ḡen nidba gal-gal-la-da

- 60. Its great farmer is the right shepherd of the Land,
- 61. Who was born loyal on a good day.
- 62. The farmer, suited for the wide fields,
- 63. Comes with great gifts;

In fact, this is not a reference to the symbiosis or complementarity of the two symbols. However, it is possible to find a kind of a crossover, as if they were two symbolic entities practiced individually, but manifested on the same plane in order to characterize the god as a leader and provider. The farmer is the great provider (the basis of society) and the shepherd the ruler of society, symbolically speaking.

DI D₁ apparently deals with the sacred marriage ceremony of an anonymous king, which seems to

Westenholz’s apparent differentiation of the two activities seems to ignore the potential relationship between activities and their practice. The two activities were certainly complementary economically and technically. Despite finding no exact proof within literature regarding the connection of the two activities in a physical and empirical plane, common sense leads me to believe with some certainty that both activities were undertaken in a complementary order. One activity benefitted the other, as for example, the use of a fallow system, or cattle to clean the fields of weeds. It may, therefore, be inaccurate to say that one of the activities was secondary to the other; one thing is economic value, another is social value.

In fact, Westenholz (2004) gives some weight to that by saying “In a later Sumerian literary composition, the Hymn to Enlil, the farmer is equated with the shepherd: engar-ma-bi sipa-zi kalam-ma ‘its august farmer is the country’s reliable shepherd’ (Hymn to Enlil [Enlil suraše], Line 60).” Although Westenholz is not arguing on the complementarity of both activities in practical and symbolic terms, they are associated semantically as it is also shown in Enlil A:¹⁹

personify the union between Dumuzi and the goddess Inana.²⁰ After the announcement of the arrangements for the marriage ceremony (ll. 1-32), there is what could be considered a prayer for happiness and prosperity. Dumuzi being the shepherd god as well as the future spouse of the fertility goddess, the blessings would reflect the two planes of action of both

¹⁹ Enlil A – Enlil in the E-kur (Enlil A), ETCSL c.4.05.1.

²⁰ SEFATI 1998, pp. 306-307.

gods and at the same time the material result of their symbolic union. The gifts of the shepherd come with Dumuzi, who is also presented as farmer and plough-

man, as the field is to be ploughed for Inana (DI P ll. 22-31); and the richness of the land will be improved, as Inana desires in the following lines:

42. ^dutu e₃-ta ^dutu šu₂-še₃
 43. ^{tum}ulu₃-ta^{tu-mu-ul-lu-ta tum} mir-ra-a-še₃^{tu-mu-dmi-ra} (vide cuneiform)
 44. a-ab-ba igi-nim-ta a-ab-ba sig-še₃
 45. ^{šis}ha-lu-ub₂'-ta ^{šis}erin-na-še₃ (source: ta)
 46. ki-en-gi ki-uri-a ešgiri₂ šibir šum₂-mu-na-ab (source: ta)
 47. saĝ gig₂ dur₂-ru-na-bi nam-sipad-bi he₂-ak-e
 48. e-ne engar-gin₇ gana₂ he₂-ĝa₂-ĝa₂
 49. sipad zid-gin₇ amaš he₂-em-mi-lu-lu
 50. gu he₂-en-da-ĝal₂ še he₂-en-da-ĝal₂
 51. id₂-da a-eštub he₂-en-da-ĝal₂
 52. a-šag₄-ga še gu-nu he₂-en-da-ĝal₂
 53. ambar-ra ku₆ mušen gu₃ hu-mu-da-ra-ra
 54. (^{šis}gi) mu-gi-e gi sumun gi henbur he₂-en-da-an-mu₂
 55. an-edin-na ^{mu}MAŠ-GURUM he₂-en-da-an-mu₂
 56. tir-tir-ra šeg₉ šeg₉-bar he₂-en-da-lu
 57. pu₂ ^{šis}kiri₆ lal₃ ĝeštin he₂-en-da-il₂
 58. mu₂-sar-ra hi-iz^{sar} za₃-hi-li^{sar} he₂-en-da-mu₂
 59. e₂-gal-la zi-su₃-ud-ĝal₂ he₂-en-da-an-ĝal₂

42. From the sunrise to the sunset
 43. From the south to the north,
 44. From the upper sea to the lower sea
 45. From where the *halub* tree is, to where there is the cedar tree,
 46. (Over all) Sumer and Akkad, grant him the staff and the sceptre!
 47. May he practice the shepherdship craft with the black-headed inhabitants,²¹
 48. May he, like a farmer, establish agricultural fields,
 49. May he like a loyal shepherd make many sheepfolds,
 50. May he be flax provider, may he be barley provider,
 51. May he be carp floods provider in the rivers,
 52. May he be the barley and flax provider in the fields,
 53. May fish and the birds 'make noise' in the marshes,
 54. May the old reeds and the young reeds sprout under him in the reed thicket,
 55. May the *mašgurum*²² plant sprout under him on the high plains,
 56. May the wild sheep³ (wild boar³) and wild rams be abundant under him in the forests,
 57. May the fruit gardens and orchards produce under him syrup and wine,²³
 58. May vegetables and plants (cress³) grow in the garden plots under him,
 59. May a long life in the palace be given by him.

²¹ Cf. ll.8-10, COHEN 1988, p. 176. For the shepherd as a leader of the black-headed (saĝ gig₂) vide also COHEN 1988, pp. 152-174, ll.93-94; COHEN 1988, pp.222-243, ll. a+57; COHEN 1988, pp. 222-243, ll. a+80.

²² Vide SEFATI 1998, p. 311.

²³ For examples of administration roles of gardens in Ur III (Ĝirsu) vide GRECO 2015.

All the qualities of a provider based on the agricultural landscape are brought together in the bridegroom that is: a shepherd and a farmer. The qualities presented cannot be related directly to the ploughman for the text does not do so, but it is perfectly clear that prosperity depends on the farmer and herder's skills, for Inana is the land to be ploughed. Concerning the scene expressed in this text, it is important to note that we are avoiding a religious and mythological approach, for we are looking for the semantics of the literary expression and not so much analysing the cultural context.

Following the narration of how Niniubur, steward of Eanna (ll. 33), takes Dumuzi, or the king, by his hand and brings him to Inana's lap (Ur₂), Inana manifests her expectations for prosperity, in terms of what Dumuzi can bring to the palace and the country. The fertile fields and the barns replete with products result from the symbiosis of the attributes of the two gods. The fields feed the herds and the animals fertilize the fields. Together, they both bring prosperity to the land, and the last lines of the text (65 ff.) materialize and personify their union by showing a scene of sexual intercourse. Their union states the symbolic prosperity of the land, because everything is in perfect harmony when Dumuzi is at Inana's side: 'fields' are established, even though he is the shepherd god, not the farmer god – such a god would be Enkimdu. In that sense, I hold this is not a merely mythological narrative, but the text expresses a construction of a semantic image that intends to show prosperity. And a real, factual prosperity could only be conceived through a perfect symbiosis of all the elements that constitute the rural landscape.

2. The plough and the animal

The image generated by the person leading the ox on the plough is a remarkable example of the symbiosis of herding and farming at a symbolic and empirical level. Considering the image of the bull in 'Latin instructions', Columella gives an example that suggests both the ploughman and the shepherd shared the capacity for leadership, expressed by the sign of meaning for 'leading'.

Si uero non pigeat iugum fabricare, quo tres iungantur, per hanc machinationem consequemur, ut etiam contumaces boues grauissima opera non recusent.
(Col. 6.2.10)

"If one really has no objection to constructing a yoke to which three animals can be fastened, we shall by this artifice achieve that even obstinate oxen do not refuse the heaviest tasks." (...)²⁴

The ploughman must be able to put the animals to work, even when it is hard. In that sense, Columella explains how to control or spur a bull by using the idea of a group to handle the herd. Two signs of the ploughman coincide with those of the herder (vide infra): the capacity of submitting the powerful animal and the quality of leading the animal into productive work. He may have to convert:

- 1) the strong, wild bull into a worker;
- 2) the lazy oxen into productive animals.²⁵

The instruction on the management of oxen suggests the potential of such image being a powerful analogy with the leader commanding the state. (cf. Col. 1.pr.13-14) Although this quotation is more technical advice than a literary expression of a symbol,²⁶ through it qualities of leadership are touched on, as well as seeing the actual image of the ox in an agricultural context. Thus signs of meaning based on visual landscape are being given: a sign representing the idea of 'leading', a sign representing 'work', a sign representing 'strength'.

Columella expands on the subject of herding with a metaphor: a military plan gives meaning to the discipline imposed on the cattle by a herder that intends to do farming work, that is, ploughing.

Hic enim recognosci grex poterit numerusque constare, si uelut ex militari disciplina intra stabularii castra manserint. Sed non eadem in tauros exercentur imperia, qui freti uiribus per nemora uagantur liberosque

²⁴ Columella notes some labouring characteristics and potentialities of bulls from different regions as Umbria, Etruria, Latium and Apennines. (Col. 6.1-2)

²⁵ cf. Col. 6.2.10.

²⁶ Vide THOMMEN 2012, p. 83.

egressus et reditus habent nec reuocantur nisi ad coetus feminarum. (Col. 6.23.3)

“Here it will be possible to inspect the herd and verify its numbers, and just like that if, through under military discipline, they occupy their quarters in the stalls. However, similar rules are not imposed upon the bulls, which, relying on their strength, wander about in the woods and are free to go out and return and are only recalled when they are required to cover the females.”

The factual control of the herder and the power of the bull are mentioned but the ploughman is not; however, the signs of his great tool, the bull’s power, are evident. Although the text does not use complex literary construction, i. e. there is no abstract language, the factual image can be identified through the scene presented; and its description is in fact a reference to an original natural image in which the traditional symbol is rooted.

The farmer can change the nature of things, and in order to reap benefits from the fields and he proceeds in a symbiosis with the animal, exercising control over the beast, literally or metaphorically:

Armentum enim id quod in agro natum non creat, sed tollit dentibus. Contra bos domitus causa fit ut commoedius nascatur frumentum in segete et pabulum in novali. (Var. R. 2. Pr. 4.7)

“Certainly, the herd do not produce what grows on the field, but tears it off with the teeth; as oppo-

sition, the domestic ox becomes the cause for the grain to grow easily in the ploughed land, and the fodder in the fallow land.” (Cf. Col. 5.4.2.5-6; Lucr. 5.206-5.217)

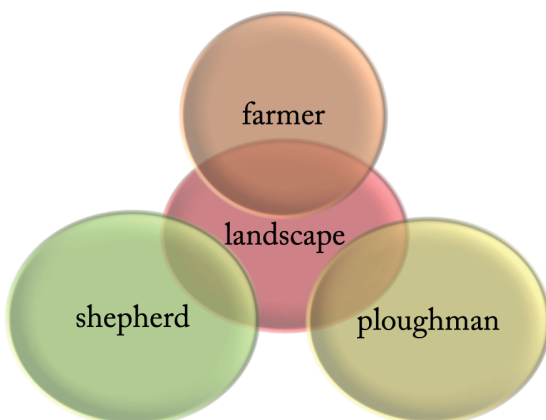
The farmer converts the herds (which normally eat and destroy crops) into productive cattle. He is like a shepherd, but at same time he is something more, for he interacts with nature in a way that modifies it and makes it productive. This farmer is a shepherd, and this shepherd is a ploughman, and the ploughman is a farmer.

The farmer must deal with different aspects of production and each of those aspects involves specific abilities and qualities, which can favour the construction of archetypes for moral values. When dealing with animals of remarkable brute force, such as oxen, the symbol for which contains the signs for strength and fertility, the ploughman must himself be remarkable. He has to read the animals and use that knowledge to put them to the particular work he wants them to do. And, in order to achieve that, the herder needs ‘natural intelligence’. Such intelligence is not so much that of pure knowledge and reason; the ploughman needs a sensorial comprehension of natural things. He must know how to drive power and must create a symbiosis between plough and beast, using the qualities of a herder.

Bubulco quamuis necessaria non tamen satis est indoles mentis, nisi eum uastitas uocis et habitus metuendum pecudibus efficit. (Col. 1.9.2)²⁷

“For the ploughman, however necessary, quality of mind is still not enough, unless powerful voice and condition makes him frightening to the cattle.”

The ploughman’s skill in exercising power is important for bringing earth and animal under control and making them productive; the ploughman then is somewhat similar to the shepherd. But like a farmer, he reaps his harvests thanks to his hard work and suffering.



²⁷ Cf. COHEN 1988, p. 176; ‘The song of the ploughing oxen: an ululumama to Ninurta’ ll. 1-3; Comp.t. CIVIL 1976, pp. 83-95; ETCSL c.5.5.5.

*Nec tamen, haec cum sint hominumque boumque
labores
uersando terram experti, nihil improbus anser
Strymoniaeque grues et amaris intiba fibris
officiunt aut umbra nocet. (...)
(Verg. G. 1.118-121)²⁸*

Albeit man and beast passed for efforts
– trying to goffer the earth, – the insistent geese and
the Strymon cranes and the bitter roots of chicory,
and the hurtful shadow cause damages.

Acting in accordance with the life cycle, and responding to difficulties by constant labouring, the farmer reaps his rewards through the plough that is pulled by cattle, so animal and man take part in the process of creation. The man is in the lead and shares the symbol with the cattle. In other words, the concept of cattle is in fact a compound element of the image of the ploughman:

*Agricola incuruo terram dimouit aratro:
hic anni labor, hinc patriam paruosque nepotes
sustinet, hinc armenta boum meritosque iuuenos.
Nec requies, quin aut pomis exuberet annus
aut fetu pecorum aut Cerealis mergite culmi,
prouentuque oneret sulcos atque horrea uincat.
(Ver. G. 2.513-518)*

The farmer has opened the soil with his curved plough:
The year's work (depends) of it; with this, supports
his fatherland and his little grandchildren;
And also the herds of cows and worthy steers,
Without rest, indeed the season abounds in fruits,
And new calves and lambs, or sheaves of Ceres' grain,
Packing the furrows with spring and filling the
granaries.

Together farmer and animals generate a landscape of life and abundance. The symbol of the ploughman would definitely be generated by an imaged symbiosis between man and cattle. Furthermore, the ploughman is hardened by his work, and his strength resides in the ability to use suggestion and power, rather than brute force:

²⁸ Cf. *Saepe ferus duos iaculatur Iuppiter imbres, / Grande dilapidans hominumque boumque labores (...)* (Col. 10.1-329-330). "Often the fierce Jupiter throws powerful rains, / man and ox are consumed by the heaviness of the work (...)"

Sed temperet uires clementia, quoniam terribilior debet esse quam saeuior, ut et obsequantur eius imperiis et diutius perennent boues. (Col. 1.9.2)²⁹

"Yet he should temper his strength with gentleness, since he should be more terrifying than cruel, so that the oxen may obey his commands and at same time last longer (...)"

As a herder, only by submitting – but not by crushing – can the ploughman prevail over the will of the beast. In this way, the shepherd-farmer avoids the animal rebelling, as a great king would do with his subjects. This latter statement is of course an extrapolation. I use a description of Columella's to evoke the symbol of the good king. I am now doing, what the ancients did, using a traditional image to create a symbolic classification (cf. Col. 1.pr.18.4-6). Such a symbol seems to be universal, as it is constructed upon invariable signs of meaning dependent on agricultural life experience. Columella's picture is the description of what would be a 'common sense' symbol paralleled the world of politics.

However, as mentioned above, cattle can also be harmful to agriculture, disturbing the harmonious agricultural landscape.³⁰ Nonetheless, through work³¹ and practical wisdom the farmer, together with cattle, overcomes barrenness and at same time protects his crops from the cattle (cf. Ver. G. 2.371-375). That man is the same farmer of the plough. In fact, due to the ox being so closely related to farming, and agriculture being so crucial for social life, there are references to oxen in foundational traditions and legends.³² In short, the Latin ox has a place in traditional rustic thought generated through its relationship with farming and the interaction with the landscape. Once the empirical practices of rustic life in antiquity are considered, the symbio-

²⁹ Cf. with the herder who makes the cattle bound (COHEN 1988, p. 181, ll. 11-12).

³⁰ *Apricis etiam et macris aut aridis locis prata iam purganda et a pecore sunt defendenda, ut faeni sit copia* (Col. 11.2.7-8) "and furthermore, in places exposed to the sun, poor and arid, the meadows must now be cleaned up and protected against cattle, so that production may be abundance of hay".

³¹ Cf. Lucr. 2.206-212.

³² Vide Col. 6.pr.7 and also the lines that follow this passage for the Greek myth relating Demeter (Ceres) with ox and the cultural consequences of it in Attica.

sis of herding and farming is clear, especially when draught animals were used.

During what Columella considers ‘remarkable times’, the leading man would come from the fields, probably because of the skills he had obtained there.

Enim temporibus, ut ante iam diximus, procures ciuitatis in agris morabantur et, cum consilium publicum desiderabatur, a uillis arcessiebantur in senatum. (Col. 1. pr.18.4-6)³³

“During those times, as we previously said, the persons leading of the state used to pass their time in the fields and when advice on public matters was wanted, they were summoned from their farms to the senate”.

One cannot ignore the idealization with and, at same time, the disconnection from the reality of the farmer’s economic activity; that is, what his work actually consisted of. For a great number of those working on farms were slaves and servants, dealing with their strife making profits for others. Nonetheless, the idealized image is there because it is constructed upon the elements that constitute the performance of the activity³⁴: ‘leading’, ‘work’, ‘growing’, ‘crops’, ‘strength’ and ‘soil’. Those elements give rise to the analogy with the abstract image and its resulting signs of meaning that may be sources for abstract language resources such as metaphors. And the descriptive relation between the visual sign of meaning based on an empirical reality and the constitution of the symbol can be resumed in the following way:

Sign ‘leading’:

good commander (symbol/metaphor)

Sign ‘strength’ (control over a bigger animal):

the power over subjects (symbol/metaphor)

Sign ‘labour’:

the strength and resilience of man (symbol/metaphor)

Sign ‘producing’ (The crops generated by a farmer’s work together with the animal):

the leader that leads to prosperity (symbol/metaphor)

3. Conclusion

As pointed out, the literary symbols of the shepherd and the farmer tend to be a selection of some of the signs that compound the traditional image; the symbolic character is composed after the selection of signs according to the objectives of the text or with the myth to which the symbol belongs. However, that symbol is not exactly the traditional one, it is only a selected part of the original signs of meaning that makes up the abstract image.

The literary characters of shepherds or farmers are often used as a metaphor that evokes a symbol that is at the same time transversal and almost universal, but when used by literature its complete semantic value is highly dependent on context. All the images presented in this study are a constructed selection made from the multiplicity of semantic signs that issue from reality. So, they may function as complex symbols in literary speech, but they will always maintain their profound, spontaneous and unchangeable value because they are a recall on a visual reality. If those activities are practised in the same way in a visual landscape, the potential signs of meaning generated by them will be seen and identified in the same way. It is the mechanism of linguistic expression that alters and creates different complex symbolic outcomes. Despite linguistic creativity, the signs of meaning are never ambiguous or variable in their value for they correspond to unique and crystalized images.

In agricultural cultures shepherding is highly connected with farming as there is an interaction between the two activities, despite the technicalities of these activities being different, as Varro stated:

alia, inquam, ratio ac scientia coloni, alia pastoris: coloni ea quae agri cultura factum ut nascerentur e terra, contra pastoris ea quae nata ex pecore. (Var. R. 2. Pre. 4.7)

“I say, the skill and knowledge of the farmer are one thing, (and those) of the herdsman (are) another: in

³³ Cf. with the returning of Quinctius Cincinnatus to the fields, after exercising his social role and ignoring power (Col. 1.pr.13-14).

³⁴ Cf. Col. 11.1.8.

the space of the husbandman are those things which are made to spring from earth by farming, contrary to those that born from the herd”.

They do, however, belong to the same natural frame. It is their workings that make both activities distinct, but they share a landscape and both are fundamental to subsistence. Recalling the example of the *disputatio* between Dumuzi and Enkimdu, Inana is the soil (DI P ll. 22-31), therefore the point of intersection of the images constructed upon a factual and empirical reality that generates traditional and transversal signs. Those signs are shared and unified by two activities that are crucial for the existence of complex societies. And images of earth, farmer and shepherd are compounded by the same basic signs independently of the culture of their expression.

In conclusion, I would like to bring to mind the image of the Virgil's Corycian gardener (Verg.

G. 4.127-33),³⁵ a character that perfectly fits an idealized image, regardless of the chronology of a given cultural context. The receiver of such a description would always recognize this farmer as a good man (cf. UrN G ll. 17-19, Šu-Suen C ll.18-22; Cato *Agr. pr.* 2-3). However, is that a compelling literary description or is it a symbolic frame that transcends the literary *topoi* and influences our cultural thinking? In other words, is it because of Virgil's compelling description that we see this man as great, or because of our preconceptions of the attitude toward life and morality? The answer is not so much a result of a philosophical inquiry, but a matter of intuition and, in this sense, it may be a question our own cultural background has already answered for us. In sum, the signs of meaning based on agriculture are universal and can give some clues as to the thought of the silent voices from the past.

³⁵ *Corycium vidisse senem, cui pauca relict/ iugera ruris erant, nec fertilis illa iuvenis/ nec pecori opportuna seges nec comoda Baccho./ bic rarum tamen in dumis olus albaque circum/ lilia verbenasque premens vescumque papaver/ regum aequabat opes animis, seraque revertens/ nocte domum dapibus mensas onerabat inemptis.* “I saw old a Corycian that just counted on a few/ acres of rural land, not fruitful for bullocks,/ no good for the herd, nor suitable for wine./ Still, here between brambles, he had in rows/ white lilies in a ring, vervain and a few poppies./ He equalled the wealth of kings in essence, when later at night,/ having returned home, he covered his tables with un-bought feasts”.

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