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BRUTUS THE RAM. POETICS OF THE FLOCK LEADER BETWEEN INTERTEXTUALITY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

1. Tarquin's dream

In a scene from the tragedy entitled *Brutus*, the poet Accius has Tarquin narrate a premonitory dream he had shortly before being driven from the kingdom by his nephew, *Lucius Iunius*. This is how King Tarquin recounts the dream, which worried him, and not without reason:[1]

'Quoniam quieti corpus nocturno impetu
dedi sopore placans artus languidos,
visust in somnis pastor ad me appellere
pecus lanigerum eximia puchritudine;
duos consanguineos arietes inde eligi
praeclarioremque alterum immolare me;
deinde eius germanum cornibus conitier,

1 Cic. *De div.* I 22 (44-45) = Acc. pp. 283-5 frr. I-II Ribbeck (*Trag. Roman. Fragm.* Leipzig 1875[3] vol. I) [= fr. 212 Diehl (*Poet. Roman. vet. Reliquiae*, Berlin, 1967[6], pp. 87-88) = *Brutus* frr. I-II pp. 237-8 Dangel]. I am quoting from Jacqueline Dangel's edition, which differs from previous ones in details that are irrelevant to the topic discussed here. Translation by E.H. Warmington (in *Remains of Old Latin* 1936, pp. 561-3).

in me arietare eoque ictu me ad casum dari;
exin prostratum terra, graviter saucium,
resupinum in caelo contueri maximum ac
mirificum facinus: dextrorsum orbem flammeum
radiatum solis liquier cursu novo.'

"When now at night's onset I duly gave my body to rest, soothing weary limbs with sleep, I saw a vision in a dream—a shepherd drove towards me a woolly flock of surpassing beauty; two brother-rams were chosen from among them, and I sacrificed the nobler of the two. Then its own brother butted with its horns, and rammed at me, and with that blow I was brought to a fall, then thrown on the ground and sorely hurt; as I lay on my back I saw in the sky a thing most mighty and most wonderful—the sun's flame-beaming orb melted away to the right hand in a new course."

The interpreters (*coniectores*), who were consulted on this occasion, answered as follows:

'rex, quae in vita usurpant homines, cogitant, curant, vident,
quaeque agunt vigilantes agitantque, ea si cui in somno accidunt,
minus mirandum est; [sed] di rem tantam haud temere improviso offerunt.
Proin vide ne quem tu esse hebetem deputes aeque ac pecus,
is sapientia munitum pectus egregie gerat
teque regno expellat; nam id quod de sole ostentum est tibi,
populo commutationem rerum portendit fore
perpropinquam. Haec bene verruncent populo! Nam quod [ad] dexterum
cepit cursum ab laeva signum praepotens, pulcherrume
auguratum est rem Romanam publicam summam fore.'

"O king, it is no wonder that what men do and see, think, and worry over in their daily lives, their acts and plans of waking hours, happen again to any man in sleep. But in this miracle, there must be some reason why the gods offer you something new and strange. Take care then, lest the man who you think is as dull as any sheep, bears a heart notably fortified with wisdom; take care lest he thrust you out of your domains. For the prodigy of the sun that was revealed to you portends that for your people a change of their affairs is very near. May all this be rooted in good fortune for the people! For inasmuch as that Most Powerful Star took course from left towards the right, it was thus most favourably foretold that the Roman state would be supreme."

Those who witnessed the theatrical scene guessed without too much difficulty that the ram knocking Tarquin to the ground foreshadowed the imminent action of Lucius, who would organise the revolt against the tyrannical king and become the first consul of Rome's new political order, the *res publica*. After Tarquin had killed his brother (i.e. the sacrificed ram in the dream), Lucius had feigned dementia in order to avoid the same fate, earning the nickname Brutus ("the dim-witted", "the dullard"). According to the interpreters' explanation, the ram that headbutts the king

is therefore he whom Tarquin mistakes for a harmless idiot (*hebetem*),[2] but who in fact is anything but stupid – indeed, he is a cunning individual with remarkable skills.

In the dream's symbolism, the reason why, out of all the *bruta animalia* that could have represented Lucius Iunius, the choice fell on the ram is far from obvious. In their comments on the Accius fragments and *De divinatione*, respectively, Dangel (1995) and Wardle (2006) merely recall Wolfgang Fauth's (1976) argument, according to which the symbolism of Tarquin's dream in Accius combines elements of Greek, Etruscan, and Roman divination with elements borrowed from the East, including the connection between the sun and the ram in royal and religious symbolism.[3] The sheep would embody kingship, as in the myth of Atreus and Thyestes (where the two brothers vie for a lamb with a golden fleece)[4] and in the Greek onirocritical tradition (Artemid. 2.12, already recalled by Pease 1977 [1920], p. 170);[5] in addition, sheep would have been a positive omen in Etruscan religion.

In a study on the contiguity between the figure of the fool and that of the king in folktales, Maurizio Bettini (2000 [1987]) instead recalled the notion, widespread in both Greece and Rome, that sheep are the world's stupidest beings – *lanata quam stultissima*, to quote Plin. HN 8.199 (75); therefore, he considers the choice of the ram to represent Brutus ("the dullard") as an example of antonomasia.[6] Bettini actually notes that the ram is not exactly the typical specimen of his species and identifies

2 The key to the dream was perhaps even more complex, as it involved the protagonist's full name: in addition to *Brutus* ("fool"), who was depicted in ram form as *pecus hebes*, *Lucius*, a name connected to light, was associated with the sun, while *Iunius* (connected to the root **iun-*, conveying a sense of power–Schulze *apud* Wardle 2006: 221) alluded to the power of the ram and Brutus' coming rise to power (Wardle 2006: 221; Dangel 1995: 53 with note 109).

3 Fauth 1976: 458-503; Dangel 1995: 374 ("le thème du bélier est proche-oriental"); Wardle 2006: 218-9.

4 Concerning the influence of the myth of Atreus and Thyestes on Accius' representation of Tarquin's tale, see again Fauth 1976: 478-484 and Dangel 1995: 372-4. Likewise, by identifying Euripides' *Electra* as the tragic model for Accius' account of the Brutus tale, Mastrocinque (1983) seems to implicitly connect the presence of the ram in Tarquin's dream with the House of Atreus and the lamb with a golden fleece mentioned in the second stasimon of Euripides' play.

5 On Artemidorus' passage see below, p. 284. As for Roman folklore, in the myth of Genucius Cipus, the horns growing on his head herald a destiny of kingship according to the interpreters of the prodigy: Ov. *Met.* 15. 565 ff., Val Max. 5.3, Plin. 11.45. However, it is not specified what kind of horns they were (whether those of an ox, ram, goat or another species): if it is true that in Ovid's time the bronze horned head that was said to commemorate the episode was no longer visible at Porta Rauduscula (Hardie 2015: 571), one can easily understand the vagueness of the sources as to the form of these attributes. The mere presence of horns must, moreover, have evoked a male marker (Plin. 11.45) and must have referred to a generic function of 'head of the herd/flock' attested not only for rams but also for cattle and goats (*infra*, note 22).

6 See Bettini's apparatus of notes for all the legends concerning this character and for an overview of the interpretations proposed by previous scholars.

its peculiarity in its combativeness and dangerousness, traits that are undoubtedly characteristic of the male of the species. Bettini nevertheless does not doubt that *aries*, like *ovis*, meant "stupid" in the ancient Roman world. Yet, in Latin texts there is no evidence of the use of the term *aries* in this sense.

Analysed in such terms, the dream symbol presents inconsistencies that cannot be overlooked. First of all, a rigorous critical interpretation cannot equate the sheep in Tarquin's dream with that of Atreus and Thyestes. In all Greek sources from the Classical period, the non-human animal contended for by the two brothers is a lamb, most often a ewe lamb, and is characterised by a fleece of a valuable metal. Accius himself, in his tragedy *Atreus*, consistently refers to it as an *agnum ... aurea clarum coma* sent by Zeus-Iuppiter.[7] It is precisely the golden wool that marks it as a prodigious being, quite different from the two rams of the Etruscan king's dream, which have no such portentous characteristics. Imperial age authors such as Seneca and Lucian, who confuse Atreus' lamb with the astral Aries, cannot be used to retrospectively justify the overlap between the different non-human animals in an author such as Accius and to interpret both Brutus-the-ram and Atreus' lamb in the light of the same symbolism of oriental origin. The same applies to the theory of magical kingship.[8] In Greek myth the sheep is not in itself a talisman of royalty: as Carmine Pisano has recently demonstrated, in the House of Atreus it ensures possession of the throne not *qua* sheep, but because it is of divine origin and is the bearer of a golden fleece.[9] As for the reason why Artemidorus' *Interpretation of Dreams* has a ram (certainly not a sheep or a lamb) allude to "a master and a chief or sovereign",[10] this will hopefully become clear in the light of other arguments towards the end of the present contribution.

Even regarding the ram of Tarquin's dream as an antonomasia for stupidity does

7 Acc. *Atreus* fr. V (v. 39) p. 116 Dangel. For the ewe lamb in the Greek versions, see Eur. *El*. 705-726 (χρυσέαν ἄρνα; χρυσέας ἀρνὸς; τὰν κερόεσσαν … χρυσεόμαλλον κατὰ δῶμα ποίμναν), *Or.* 812 (χρυσέας ... ἀρνὸς); Apollod. *Epit*. 2.10-11; Paus. 2.18.1 (τὴν ἄρνα). Cf. schol. ad Hom. *Il*. 2.104-6. In the scholia to Euripides' *Orestes* (807, 811, 990, 998) the lamb is alternately designated as masculine, feminine, and neuter (cf. Tzetzes *Chil*. 1.430 τι χρυσοῦν ἀρνίον).

8 Sen. *Thy*. 226 (*arcanus aries, ductor opulenti gregis*) is most likely conflating two lambs: that of Atreus and the celebrated χρυσόμαλλος of Phrixus and Helle, recalled by using precisely the same expression, *ductor gregis*, in other tragedies: Boyle 2017: 194. Likewise, Lucian (*De astrol.* 12) shows that in the Imperial age the two sheep were confused in the astrological field (ἔνθα δὴ Θυέστης μὲν τὸν κριὸν σφίσιν τὸν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ σημηνάμενος ἐπέδειξεν, ἀπὸ τέω δὴ ἄρνα χρύσεον Θυέστῃ γενέσθαι μυθολογέουσιν). This confusion was probably caused by the concomitant presence, in the myth of the House of Atreus, of the portent of the lamb with golden fleece and that of the sun changing its course. A similar process of assimilation led Pausanias (2.18.1) to state that Thyestes' tomb in Argos was crowned by *a ram* because "after committing adultery with his brother's wife, Thyestes had seized the golden *ewe lamb* (τὴν ἄρνα)": Pisano 2014: 137-8.

9 Pisano 2019: 147-155.

10 Artem. 2.12.1, p. 119 Pack.

not resolve all the problems. First of all, it is unclear why both of the Iunii brothers should be represented as *arietes*, since only Lucius pretended to be an idiot. But above all, Brutus-the-ram is not really a typical specimen of *hebes pecus*. On the contrary, he is remarkably intelligent: not only does he keep himself shielded from Tarquin's violence by pretending to be demented, but he achieves leadership in Rome by intuiting and realising the hidden meaning of a Delphic oracle – the response being "the kingdom of Rome will pass to the one who first kisses his own mother", and he, pretending to stumble, had kissed the Roman 'mother' earth. As the interpreters of the dream point out, the ram soon turns out to be a sheep that, far from being stupid, is remarkably clever: it is endowed with a mind of superior shrewdness, one "out of the flock" (*e-gregie*), as Accius says, using an apt pastoral metaphor. If we assume that all sheep were stupid *par excellence*, how could the ram of the dream coherently represent Brutus' *sapientia*?

Rather than taking the ram's symbolic equivalence with lambs and sheep for granted, it is necessary to examine whether, in the Graeco-Roman world, the *aries* had an independent profile, with its own characteristics. We must examine whether it merely represented a kind of *hebes pecus* or whether, on the contrary, there were sound reasons why it could stand for a character endowed with superior skills and intelligence. Through a survey of the possible literary models for Accius' Brutus and an inquiry into the functions and roles played by the ram in ancient pastoralism, this paper aims to delineate a far more coherent web of symbolic references in Tarquin's dream than the one hypothesised by commentators until now.

2. Appearances are deceiving

In the Iliadic scene of the *Teichoscopy*, Priam asks Helen to help him identify the Greek heroes he observes lined up on the plain below. Among them is one whose sight evokes a pastoral scene in the old king's mind:[11]

Δεύτερον αὖτ' Ὀδυσῆα ἰδὼν ἐρέειν' ὁ γεραιός·
'εἶπ' ἄγε μοι καὶ τόνδε, φίλον τέκον, ὅς τις ὅδ' ἐστί·
μείων μὲν κεφαλῇ Ἀγαμέμνονος Ἀτρεΐδαο,
εὐρύτερος δ' ὤμοισιν ἰδὲ στέρνοισιν ἰδέσθαι.
τεύχεα μέν οἱ κεῖται ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ,
αὐτὸς δὲ κτίλος ὣς ἐπιπωλεῖται στίχας ἀνδρῶν·
ἀρνειῷ μιν ἔγωγε ἐίσκω πηγεσιμάλλῳ,
ὅς τ' οἰῶν μέγα πῶυ διέρχεται ἀργεννάων.'

And next the old man saw Odysseus, and asked: "Come now, tell me also of that man there, dear child, who he is. Shorter is he in stature than Agamemnon, son of Atreus, but broader of shoulder and chest to look upon. His battle gear lies on the bounteous earth, but he himself ranges like the

11 Hom. *Il.* 3.191-202. Translation by A.T. Murray and W.F. Wyatt (1999², pp. 143-5).

bellwether of a herd through the ranks of warriors. To a ram I liken him, a ram of thick fleece, that paces through a great flock of white ewes."

Helen answers Priam's request by presenting Odysseus' personality in a few lines:

Τὸν δ᾽ ἠμείβετ᾽ ἔπειθ᾽ Ἑλένη Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα·
‘οὗτος δ᾽ αὖ Λαερτιάδης πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς,
ὃς τράφη ἐν δήμῳ Ἰθάκης κραναῆς περ ἐούσης
εἰδὼς παντοίους τε δόλους καὶ μήδεα πυκνά.’

To him answered Helen, sprung from Zeus: "That one is Laertes' son, Odysseus of many wiles, who was reared in the land of Ithaca, rugged though it is, and he knows all manner of tricks and cunning devices."

While Priam observes him, the Achaean hero is engaged in his role as a leader, walking among the warriors of the army to inspect their ranks, armour, and state of mind. His gestures and bearing remind the Trojan king of a ram laden with its woolly fleece and walking in the midst of a flock of sheep. But that 'ram'[12] is Odysseus, the most cunning of all Greek warriors, whose deadliest weapon is not a spear or a sword, but his ability to concoct ingenious plans and inescapable traps. This in itself would be enough to identify in the Homeric passage an illustrious antecedent to the image of Brutus, the cunning Roman, in the guise of a ram in Tarquin's dream.

However, the elements that make Odysseus-the-ram in the *Teichoscopy* passage a likely model for Brutus-the-ram in Accius do not end there. Antenor, who personally met the king of Ithaca during an embassy, speaks out to confirm Odysseus' identity, as affirmed by Helen. Recalling the episode of the embassy, he describes Odysseus' surprising demeanour on that occasion. When his turn came to speak, he kept his gaze fixed on the ground and his sceptre motionless in his hands, as if he were an idiot, incapable of delivering a speech; but as soon as his words took flight, they revealed his astonishing shrewdness:

Τὴν δ᾽ αὖτ᾽ Ἀντήνωρ πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ηὔδα·
‘ὤ γύναι, ἦ μάλα τοῦτο ἔπος νημερτὲς ἔειπες·
ἤδη γὰρ καὶ δεῦρό ποτ᾽ ἦλυθε δῖος Ὀδυσσεὺς
σεῦ ἕνεκ᾽ ἀγγελίης σὺν ἀρηιφίλῳ Μενελάῳ·
τοὺς δ᾽ ἐγὼ ἐξείνισσα καὶ ἐν μεγάροισι φίλησα.
ἀμφοτέρων δὲ φυὴν ἐδάην καὶ μήδεα πυκνά.
ἀλλ᾽ ὅτε δὴ Τρώεσσιν ἐν ἀγρομένοισιν ἔμιχθεν,
στάντων μὲν Μενέλαος ὑπείρεχεν εὐρέας ὤμους,

12 In Priam's question the ram is first referred to as κτίλος, a term to which we will return later in this contribution; the second time, the non-human animal is referred to as ἀρνειός, an alternative way of indicating a male sheep (Hom. *Od.* 10.572), which is otherwise called κριός (*e.g.* Hom. *Od.* 9.447).

ἄμφω δ᾽ ἐζομένω γεραρώτερος ἦεν Ὀδυσσεύς.
ἀλλ᾽ ὅτε δὴ μύθους καὶ μήδεα πᾶσιν ὕφαινον,
ἦ τοι μὲν Μενέλαος ἐπιτροχάδην ἀγόρευε,
παῦρα μέν, ἀλλὰ μάλα λιγέως, ἐπεὶ οὐ πολύμυθος
οὐδ᾽ ἀφαμαρτοεπής, εἰ καὶ γένει ὕστερος ἦεν.
ἀλλ᾽ ὅτε δὴ πολύμητις ἀναΐξειεν Ὀδυσσεύς,
στάσκεν, ὑπαὶ δὲ ἴδεσκε κατὰ χθονὸς ὄμματα πήξας,
σκῆπτρον δ᾽ οὔτ᾽ ὀπίσω οὔτε προπρηνὲς ἐνώμα,
ἀλλ᾽ ἀστεμφὲς ἔχεσκεν, ἀίδρεϊ φωτὶ ἐοικώς·
φαίης κε ζάκοτόν τέ τιν᾽ ἔμμεναι ἄφρονά τ᾽ αὖτως.
ἀλλ᾽ ὅτε δὴ ὄπα τε μεγάλην ἐκ στήθεος εἵη
καὶ ἔπεα νιφάδεσσιν ἐοικότα χειμερίῃσιν,
οὐκ ἂν ἔπειτ᾽ Ὀδυσῆι γ᾽ ἐρίσσειε βροτὸς ἄλλος·
οὐ τότε γ᾽ ὧδ᾽ Ὀδυσῆος ἀγασσάμεθ᾽ εἶδος ἰδόντες.

Then to her in turn answered Antenor, the prudent: "Lady, that is a true word that you have spoken, for once before also noble Odysseus came here on an embassy concerning you, together with Menelaus, dear to Ares; and it was I who gave them hospitality and welcomed them in my halls, and came to know the form and stature of them both and their cunning devices. Now when they mingled with the Trojans in assembly, when they stood, Menelaus overtopped him with his broad shoulders; but when the two were seated, Odysseus was the more royal. But when they began to weave the web of words and of devices in the presence of all, Menelaus to be sure spoke fluently, with few words, but very clearly, since he was not a man of lengthy speech nor rambling, even though in years he was the younger. But whenever Odysseus of many wiles arose, he would stand and look down with eyes fixed on the ground, and his staff he would move neither backwards nor forwards, but would hold it stiff like a man of no understanding; you would have thought him some sort of a churl and nothing but a fool. But when he projected his great voice from his chest, and words like snowflakes on a winter's day, then could no other mortal man rival Odysseus; then we were not so astonished at Odysseus' appearance."

The Greek hero is characterised by a striking gap between his appearance and his intellectual capacity. In terms of his physical presence and gestures, the king of Ithaca appears inadequate. He does not know how to hold the stage, does not handle the sceptre with authority and ease, and does not use his eyes and gaze in an appropriate manner. He looks sullen or demented. But, surprisingly, his words testify to a mind that is far from inadequate or clueless.

It is evident that Antenor's description could also work well for Iunius Brutus, a man with the appearance of a fool who astonishes everyone when he takes the floor by displaying a remarkable degree of intelligence. Such is Brutus himself in Livius' description. He unexpectedly takes the floor after Lucretia's suicide, leaving everyone dumbfounded in the presence of a totally unexpected *in … pectore ingenium* (Liv. 1.59), an expression that is bound to recall the *pectus sapientia munitum* that the interpreters of Tarquin's dream attribute to the ram in Accius: Livy returns to the revelation of Brutus' intelligence and shrewdness in a passage a little later, summarising the speech he gave in the forum in Rome. Here, too, Livy emphasises the discrepancy between

the *pectus* and *ingenium* that Brutus had simulated until then and those that were instead emerging from his *oratio* to the Roman people (*ibi oratio habita nequaquam eius pectoris ingeniique quod simulatum ad eam diem fuerat, de vi ac libidine Sex. Tarquini, de stupro infando Lucretiae et miserabili caede, de orbitate Tricipitini, cui morte filiae causa mortis indignior ac miserabilior esset*).[13]

Certainly, in the *Teichoscopy* Homer does not say that Odysseus pretended to be stupid, but that he only seemed stupid. Yet, according to other sources dating back to the *Cypria*, the hero of Ithaca was no stranger to Brutus' ruses, for in his youth he had attempted to escape the Trojan War precisely by pretending to be suffering from dementia. In Hyginus' version, upon the ambassadors' arrival from the continent, the hero of Ithaca had pretended to be out of his mind (*insaniam simulans*) by harnessing a horse and ox and ploughing with a felt cap on his head. But Palamedes had sensed the deception and, by placing little Telemachus in front of the plough, had forced Odysseus to stop and confess his pretence.[14] Odysseus, in other words, was a good model for the portrayal of an ingenious hero who shows himself to others as a perfect idiot – sometimes deliberately, sometimes by his atypical gestures.

Moreover, Scobie and Borghini[15] hold that there was a widespread association between rams and rhetoricians in Greek and Roman imagery through the figure of Hermes/Mercurius, as the divine patron of communication was often represented with a ram. This would further reinforce the connection between the zoomorphic

13 A connection between Odysseus and Brutus was already suggested to some extent by Lanza 2020 [1997]: 178. According to Bettini (2000 [1987]: 73-5), the version of the oracle reported by Zonaras (7.11) also alluded to Brutus in non-human (canine) guise: according to the response given, Tarquin would lose his kingdom if a dog spoke with a human voice. Once again, the discrepancy between Brutus' appearance and his human *pectus* would be represented on the axis of eloquence (*mutus* vs. *loquens*) and the hero pretending to be *hebes* would reveal his true mind precisely by unexpectedly bursting into a perfectly congruous or even remarkably effective form of eloquence.

14 Hyg. *Fab*. 95. Other sources and versions of the myth are listed by Scarpi 1996: 331 in his apparatus to the edition of pseudo-Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca*; on Odysseus as the figure of a king feigning idiocy, see Bettini 2000 [1987]: 59 (who likens him to Brutus only because of this deliberate expedient and not because of the gestures and posture that made people mistake him for an inept orator). The *pileus* was a felt cap worn in Greece by people of humble status and travellers, and recommended for the sick. According to Plutarch, Solon wore one when he pretended to be suffering from a neurological disease and harangued the Athenians in elegiac verse to lead them to win back Salamis (Plut. *Sol*. 8). On this topic, see Lanza 2020 [1997]: 100-1 (with further bibliography).

15 Scobie on Apul. *Met*. 1.9; Borghini 1986. The orator-ram metaphor could also be played out in *malam partem*, by exploiting the element of the non-human animal's sound: *bla(t)terare* (Suet. *de naturis rerum* fr. 161 Reifferscheid; Anth. 730.56 Riese). Apuleius already used this verb in the modern sense of Italian *blaterare* "to talk in circles" (*blaterata* Apol. 3.7, *blateret* 34.2). Cf. Apul. *Met*. 10.33 (*forensia pecora*) with Zimmerman 2000 *ad loc*. and Apul. *Met*. 1.9 (*aries ille causas agit*) with Keulen 2007 and Graverini-Nicolini 2019 *ad loc*. I would instead tend to exclude that Brutus-the-ram in Accius' tragedy brings into play the metaphorical association between the ram and male sexuality (Bartalucci 1967).

metaphor and oratorical wisdom suggested by the model and taken up by Accius. The symbolic connection with the hermetic sheep would confirm for both Odysseus and Brutus the possession of extraordinary competence in the interpretation of signs and mastery of speech, all the more prodigious because unexpected.

3. The leading ram

We now need to investigate the figure of the ram in order to determine the ethnographic relevance of the pastoral simile chosen by Homer and Accius within the context of ancient pastoralism. Does the image of the ram reviewing the sheep of his flock refer to a real situation and, if so, does this reality contain aspects that make the simile more relevant? In what sense was a ram – belonging to the species of the sheep, which was considered to be among the stupidest beings – suitable to represent a shrewd and cunning man like Odysseus or Brutus?

Literary accounts of ancient pastoralism are very rare. This is probably due to the fact that the activity was mostly entrusted to slave labour – as was the general care of domestic non-humans – or to poor men of free status hired for the purpose. This fact is reflected in the tendency to ignore the technical aspects of livestock breeding and pastoralism in the representations produced by (and for) the elites. The latter, if anything, preferred to focus on agriculture, envisaged as a nobler form of activity and a more dignified topic for high-brow conversation,[16] or to savour – through the filter of poets' voices – rather idealised bucolic scenarios from which only little information can be drawn about the actual practices adopted by shepherds in dealing with their non-human animals. No ancient Greek treatises survive that illustrate how shepherding was done in detail. In the extensive treatises by Roman agronomists, the breeding of domestic non-humans is only discussed in relation to the reproduction and selection of breeds, feeding, and the treatment of diseases; no attention is paid to the management of pastures or the training of these creatures.

In his *Historia animalium,* Aristotle also provides little information about pastoral techniques. However, he reports that shepherds used a leading ram to lead the flocks to pasture and bring them back into the fold in the evening:[17]

16 Hodkinson 1988: 36-7; Frayn 1984: 82. Until the Hellenistic age, livestock remained–on the Homeric model–the preferred form of wealth for Greek aristocrats, the only class that could afford grazing land, fodder, and labourers to look after their flocks and herds (Howe 2008: 31-41).

17 Arist. *HA* 573b25-574 a11 (translation by A.L. Peck in Aristotle, *History of Animals: Books 4-6*, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1970, p. 309). In *Geopon*. 18.17, a passage concerning πρόβατα, an individual ὁδαγός is mentioned, which was perhaps one of the names of this leading non-human animal. As we shall see, the authors are not always precise in their choice of words for the male, so it is often difficult to tell whether they are talking about an uncastrated ram or a wether (Ekroth 2014: 155).

ἐν ἑκάστῃ γὰρ ποίμνῃ κατασκευάζουσιν ἡγεμόνα <ἕνα> τῶν ἀρρένων, ὃς ὅταν ὀνόματι κληθῇ ὑπὸ τοῦ ποιμήνος προηγεῖται· συνεθίζουσι δὲ τοῦτο δρᾶν ἐκ νέων

In every flock they train one of the rams to be bell-wether. When the shepherd calls him by name, he takes the lead. Rams are trained to this from their earliest days.

Sheep are very timid beings and tend to freeze when faced with an obstacle or to scatter, splitting the flock. A shepherd alone could not easily bring the group together and lead it in the desired direction. On British pastures nowadays, certain specially-trained dogs do the herding by running around isolated individuals or small groups and driving them back into the main mass, or tracing trajectories around the flock to point it in the desired direction. This type of flock management was unknown in the ancient Graeco-Roman world,[18] where, in order to drive their sheep, shepherds instead resorted to certain individuals of the same species (males, according to Aristotle) who were selected and trained from a young age to take on the role of leaders. These individuals were given a personal name and underwent training to accustom them to responding to the shepherd's calls. They could thus lead the flock according to his will, obeying orders given by voice.

The practice of having a flock leader is confirmed by the ethnographic literature on a vast number of historical and contemporary pastoral cultures, from the Italian region of Abruzzo to the Greek mainland and islands, from the plains of south-western Eurasia to Afghanistan.[19] There are some variations in the methods used, and also in the types of individuals chosen: depending on local traditions, shepherds may prefer male individuals or particularly enterprising females for the purpose; often, but not always, the ram is castrated to make it more manageable even during the mating season;[20] and there are also cases of multiple flock leaders (two or more) being used, both males and females.[21] Finally, sometimes a billygoat (often a castrated one) or a she-goat is put in charge of the flock, as the goat is a very nimble and enterprising species that the sheep tend to follow.[22] Notwithstanding the variety of methods, which

18 See Frayn 1984: 100.

19 Particularly useful in this respect is Yutaka Tani's survey, to which I will refer for further details (Tani 1989). See also Thompson 1932.

20 In the English-speaking world, this is referred to as a bellwether: a bell was attached to the leading wether, alerting the shepherd to its movements (and thus to the flock's position).

21 Leadership is an important factor among sheep, because assembling in compact groups–that proceed in unison–constitutes a protective strategy against predators. Sheep that remain isolated from their group are helpless and easily preyed upon. Leadership, which serves precisely to prevent the dispersal of individuals, is also established in groups of females, where a ewe that is more resourceful than the others will take the lead: Fisher and Matthews 2001: 215.

22 Tibullus also seems to speak of an *hircus* at the head of a flock of sheep (2.1.57-

vary depending on the kind of relationship between the shepherds and their flocks (for example, the case of shepherds who manage their own flocks differs from that of hired professionals), the need to accustom the leader to responding to the shepherd's commands appears to be fairly constant. The individual leader must develop a close rapport and bond of familiarity with the shepherds. Selected at an early age and reared differently from the rest of the group, this non-human animal acquires a special position, mediating between the flock and the community of shepherds whose interests he serves and with whom he has a privileged relationship. It possesses an individual personality (it is given a personal name), receives a distinct dietary treatment, and experiences a degree of closeness with its human points of reference similar to that of a pet.

The fact that even in ancient pastoralism the formation and use of a leading ram was widespread appears to be confirmed by the frequency with which texts speak of a ram at the head of a flock. The testimonies are numerous for both Greece and Rome. We have already considered the Iliadic image of a ram reviewing its flock as a metaphor for Odysseus as an army leader beneath the Trojan walls; but the troops following Aeneas and the other Trojan leaders are also described as a flock standing behind the leading ram (Hom. *Il.* 13.492 λαοὶ ἕπονθ᾽ ὡς εἴ τε μετὰ κτίλον ἔσπετο μῆλα). What emerges here is the problem of understanding the meaning of the term used in the passage (κτίλος) and its relationship with the zoonym indicating the male of the species (κριός, ἀρνειός). The word κτίλος is consistently used for the leading ram in epic,[23] while in other ancient sources it is used as an adjective meaning "meek,

8 *huic datus a pleno memorabile munus ovili / dux pecoris curtas auxerat hircus opes*). An interesting testimony is provided by Isidorus, who speaks of goat-sheep hybrids called *tityri* and *musmones* (Isid. 12. 56 *in animantibus bigenera dicuntur quae ex diversis nascuntur, ut mulus ex equa et asino; burdo ex equo et asina; hybridae ex apris et porcis; tityrus ex ove et hirco; musmo ex capra et ariete*). It is surely an invention, as sheep and goats cannot interbreed. It may have originated from the practice of keeping sheep and goats together: mixed flocks (with goats leading the sheep) are attested in Sparta (Paus. 9.13.4, stating that shepherds call the leading goats κατοιάδες), as well as in biblical texts (Lewis and Llewellyn-Jones 2017: 58). Goats are indeed nimbler than sheep and advance fearlessly–if anything, they must be restrained: Colum. 7.6 (the goatherd must *precede* them and not follow them, as shepherds tending other kinds of non-human animals do); they have bolder souls because they are "hotter" (Plin. *NH* VIII 202-3 *ideo fortassis anima his quam ovibus ardentior calidioresque concubitus*). Goats, however, are less integrated into agricultural systems, where they tend to destroy crops and raze all vegetation, wandering here and there even in inaccessible places. They are therefore usually kept in smaller numbers than sheep, which can reach considerable numbers as they are more easily managed in agro-pastoral contexts. Being sedentary, sheep eat few types of plants and can also be used to bury seeds by trampling them. Oxen were also trained as leaders of cattle herds (τῶν βοῶν ἡγεμόνες). Arist. *HA* 575 b 1-4 argues that these specimens live longer as they lead less strenuous lives than plough oxen and enjoy untouched pastures. Not without irony, Ovid (*Ars amat.*1.326) refers to the bull that has just mounted Pasiphae and will become the Minotaur's father as *dux gregis*.

23 Hesych. s.v. κτίλος· ὁ προηγούμενος τῆς ποίμνης κριός; *schol. Hom. Il.* 3.196 p. 395 Erbse. In Quint. Smyrn. 1.173-6, it is Penthesilea who takes on the role of the leading ram by

tame".[24] We have seen that in many pastoral contexts the flock leader is a castrated male, and that this mutilation is inflicted on the future leading ram to make him more docile.[25] The fact that the flock leader is a castrated male, however, cannot be taken for granted. In some ethnographic contexts, shepherds prefer to use uncastrated rams, and we cannot exclude that this was also the case in ancient Greece. Aristotle speaks generically of males selected for this purpose from an early age, without mentioning castration. The term κτίλος would not appear to stand to κριός as "wether" stands to "uncastrated ram": the mention of a κριός ἐνόρχης (i.e. "with intact genitals") in at least three inscriptions actually seems to rule out the hypothesis.[26] Moreover, in Opp. *Cyn.* 1.388, the κτίλοι εἰλικόεντες are listed together with ταῦροι, κάπροι, and χίμαροι among those males that perceive the urge to mate in spring. It seems clear, then, that castration was not one of the κτίλος's markers – indeed, if it were, the choice of this image as a metaphor for Odysseus and Aeneas in the *Iliad* would be rather bizarre.[27]

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dragging the Trojans to battle against Achilles (… ἀμφὶ δὲ Τρῶες ἀνοστήτοισι πόδεσσι / πολλοὶ ἔποντ' ἐπὶ δῆριν ἀναιδέα τλήμονι κούρῃ / ἰλαδόν, ἠύτε μῆλα μετὰ κτίλον, ὅς θ' ἅμα πάντων/ νισομένων προθέῃσι δαημοσύνῃσι νομῆος). On the epic similes representing an indistinct mass pitted against a leading individual, see also Schnapp-Gourbeillon 1981: 28-37.

24 Hes. fr. 323 Merkelbach-West (χρὴ δέ σε πατρὶ < > κτίλον ἔμμεναι); Emp. fr. 130 Diels (in the Golden Age ἦσαν δὲ κτίλα πάντα καὶ ἀνθρώποισι προσηνῆ / θῆρές τ'οἰωνοί τε, φιλοφροσύνη τε δεδήει). The same meaning is attributed to μῆλα in Nic. *Ther.* 471 and to κύνες in Parth. *Amat. Narrat.* 10.2 (as opposed to ἠγριομέναι). What remains rather obscure, instead, is the meaning of the term in Nic. *Ther.* 452, where it refers to bird eggs preyed upon by the *drakōn*. In Opp. *Cyn.* 4.211 the Ethiopian hunters carry off a captured lion, now as helpless and harmless as a *ktílos* (αἰνὸν κεῖνο πέλωρον ἅτε κτίλον ἀείρουσιν). Cf. Eustath. on Hom. 403.31-7, 404.6-8, 404.13, 943.31; *schol. Hom. Il.* 3.196-7 p. 395 Erbse (πηγεσιμάλλῳ· … τῷ πραυτάτῳ δὲ εἴκασται διὰ τὸ ἀτάραχον); schol. Nic. *Ther.* 452; Etym. Magn. s.v. (ὁ προηγούμενος τῶν προβάτων καὶ προεξάρχων τῆς ποίμνης κριός … Οἱ δὲ νεώτεροι τάσσουσι τὴν λέξιν ἐπὶ τοῦ εἰθισμένου καὶ γεγονότος ἡμέρου ζῴου), Hesych. s.v. κτίλος (τιθασός. πρᾶος. ἡγεμών) and s.v. κτίλον (συνήθη). Hence too the two verbs κτιλεύω (Pind. fr. 238 Snell) and κτιλόω (Hdt. 4.113), both meaning "to tame", "to make docile/submissive".

25 Thompson 1932 reported the information–obtained from a friend–that in Sicily a wether called *c'rastu* was used to drive flocks. Thompson interpreted the Sicilian term as possibly deriving from the Greek κεράστης ("horned", said of the ram in Eur. *Cycl.* 52), but in all likelihood this is a contracted form of the adjective meaning "castrated".

26 *LS* 96, ll. 6 and 9 (Mykonos); *LSS* 98, l. 3 (Camiros); *SEG* 41, 1991 no. 744 (Eleutherna). See Georgoudi 1990: 280-1; Ekroth 2014: 155. It thus seems that κριός, in itself, simply indicated a "male sheep" regardless of whether it was an uncastrated ram or a wether. The etymology of the name is of little help: modern linguists trace it back to κτι- (as in κτίζω), "qui reste près de l'habitation, qui n'est plus sauvage" (Chantraine s.v.) or "belonging to the dwelling place" (Beekes s.v.). Casevitz 1985: 241 suggests that the term can be interpreted in an active sense: the *ktílos* would be "the one who tames" others and leads them. On the ram as a leader in Apollonian cults see Malkin 1994: 143-168 and Detienne 2002 [1998]: 115-118.

27 Castration might instead come into play in the case of Theocritus' Tityrus (see *infra*, n. 35). As Hunter (2021: 231-233) points out, while it is true that in the passage in question τίτυρος is not a personal name but the common noun for the leading billygoat, the fact that Tityrus is advised to beware of the "uncastrated male" (καὶ τὸν ἐνόρχαν ... φυλάσσεο) might be significant, as might the erotic–and possibly ironic–overtone of αὐτὰς ἐλαύνει. Virgil's choice

The term also appears in Pind. *Pyth.* 2.17, where it refers to Cinyras, the first priest of the cult of Aphrodite Paphia in Cyprus (κελαδέοντι μὲν ἀμφὶ Κινύραν πολλάκις φᾶμαι Κυπρίων … ἱερέα κτίλον ᾽Αφροδίτας). In an article devoted to the passage's interpretation, Anna Morpurgo (1960) recalled the two meanings of κτίλος (an epic noun and post-Homeric adjective). Finding it incongruous that a tame non-human animal may have been associated with the founder of Astarte-Aphrodite's mystery cult, and taking for granted the value of "fallisches Tier" attributed to the ram in Mediterranean cultures, Morpurgo leaned towards a generic meaning of the term and proposed a literal interpretation: "Aphrodite's ram" was precisely the priest of the goddess, who would wear a ram mask in this Cypriot cult of a theriomorphic nature. More recently, Ettore Cingano has taken stock of the various readings proposed, opting for the Homeric meaning of "leading ram", here used as a metaphor for the priest "leader of the 'flock' of worshippers" of Aphrodite Paphia.[28]

If we consider the practice of having a flock leader, however, it becomes clear that the two uses of the adjective and the noun are by no means irreconcilable. The leading ram is indeed a ram, but a tame one, raised by the shepherd himself: individualised, "sweet", and "obedient", and co-opted by the human group of shepherds as a mediator between them and the flock – which is instead deemed a collective entity that is largely undefined and cut off from the social sphere. This is precisely the κτίλος that Thompson had already likened to the *manso* of Abruzzo: the bellwether as the shepherd's loyal servant.[29] Cinyras was thus defined by Pindar as 'Aphrodite's *ktílos*', insofar as he was a priest devoted to the goddess and eager to serve her, like a ram called to lead the flock on the shepherd's orders, and thus her favourite 'specimen', entrusted with the role of mediator between the divine sphere and the human sphere of the acolytes.[30]

The flock leader's exceptional status with respect to the rest of the flock is clearly

(*Ecl.* 9.23-5) to translate the Theocritean passage as *et inter agendo / occursare capro ... caveto* would be intended precisely to avoid casting Tityrus as a 'eunuch', by flinging the marker of castration back at the aggressor (for, according to Varro, *caper* was the gelding, as opposed to *hircus*, the uncastrated male).

28 In Gentili *et al.* 1995: 371.

29 In Spain, however, it seems that *el manso* was preferably a goat (Thompson 1932: 53): see *supra*, n. 22. Malkin too (1994:154) establishes a semantic correlation between the noun and the adjective.

30 Similar explanation was already put forward by scholiasts (schol. Pind. *Pyth.* 2.31a Drachmann): κτίλον Ἀφροδίτας· ὅτι κτίλον τὸν συνήθη καὶ εἰθισμένον τῇ χειρὶ προσηγόρευσε. Evidently, in this case too, κτίλος does not evoke a wether at all: Cinyras was destined to become Adonis' father after having incestuous intercourse with his daughter Myrrha. The interpretation proposed here does not rule out the possibility that the ram was sacred to Aphrodite Paphia and that this was the case because of connotations related to fertility and sexual potency, as Morpurgo argues. In choosing the epithet κτίλος for the goddess' lead priest, Pindar may also have been alluding to these aspects of the cult.

illustrated in a very famous passage from the *Odyssey*. It seems clear that the ram to whom Polyphemus addresses such affectionate words – fawning upon him by using the nickname πέπον and anxiously questioning him as to why, uncharacteristically for him, he is not the first one rushing towards the exit – is none other than the leading ram of Iliadic similes.[31] In Odysseus' description Polyphemus' ram is characterised as the most beautiful specimen of the flock (μήλων ὄχ᾽ ἄριστος ἁπάντων), who strides forth like an epic hero (μακρὰ βιβάς): a simile that inverts in mirror-like fashion the Iliadic one in which Odysseus himself is the κτίλος who reviews his 'sheep'. The ram chosen by Odysseus to escape from the Cyclops' cave is therefore worthy of the hero.[32]

Polyphemus' words to his non-human companion betray apprehension at the strange behaviour it displays and attribute an empathetic attitude to the ovine:[33]

'κριὲ πέπον, τί μοι ὧδε διὰ σπέος ἔσσυο μήλων
ὕστατος; οὔ τι πάρος γε λελειμμένος ἔρχεαι οἰῶν,
ἀλλὰ πολὺ πρῶτος νέμεαι τέρεν᾽ ἄνθεα ποίης
μακρὰ βιβάς, πρῶτος δὲ ῥοὰς ποταμῶν ἀφικάνεις,
πρῶτος δὲ σταθμόνδε λιλαίεαι ἀπονέεσθαι
ἑσπέριος· νῦν αὖτε πανύστατος. ἦ σύ γ᾽ ἄνακτος
ὀφθαλμὸν ποθέεις, τὸν ἀνὴρ κακὸς ἐξαλάωσε
σὺν λυγροῖς ἑτάροισι δαμασσάμενος φρένας οἴνῳ,
Οὖτις, ὃν οὔ πώ φημι πεφυγμένον εἶναι ὄλεθρον.
εἰ δὴ ὁμοφρονέοις ποτιφωνήεις τε γένοιο
εἰπεῖν ὅππῃ κεῖνος ἐμὸν μένος ἠλασκάζει·
τῷ κέ οἱ ἐγκέφαλός γε διὰ σπέος ἄλλυδις ἄλλῃ
θεινομένου ῥαίοιτο πρὸς οὐδεϊ, κὰδ δέ κ᾽ ἐμὸν κῆρ
λωφήσειε κακῶν, τά μοι οὐτιδανὸς πόρεν Οὖτις.'

"Beloved ram, why is it that you go out through the cave like this, the last of the flock? Never before have you been left behind by the sheep, but are always far the first to graze on the tender bloom of the grass, stepping high, and the first to reach the streams of the river, and the first to show your longing to return to the fold at evening. But now you are last of all. Surely you are sorrowing for the eye of your master, which an evil man blinded along with his miserable fellows, when he had overpowered my wits with wine, Nobody, who, I tell you, has not yet escaped destruction. If only you could have the same thoughts as I have, and could get for yourself the power of speech to tell me where he skulks away from my wrath, then would his brains be dashed on the ground throughout the cave, some here,

31 This was already noted by Eustathius (1638.59 κτίλον τε εἶναι τὸν κριὸν ἐμφαίνει).

32 This passage constitutes an example of bucolic poetry *avant la lettre*, since the dialogue between a shepherd and his flock was to become a topos of this genre: Hunter 2021: 227-230 who points out that, in describing the episode, Odysseus' narrative mixes elements reminiscent of pastoral folk songs (the Cyclops' address to his ram) with Iliadic-epic (i.e. mock-epic) overtones. It is as though the narrator Odysseus were adopting a 'bucolic' technique here– the pastoral poet's patronising gaze on his creatures (and their ἀφέλεια "simplicity"), which will be typical of Theocritus and his imitators.

33 Hom. *Od*. 9.447-460 [translation by A.T. Murray and G.E. Dimock,1995^2, p. 349 slightly modified].

some there, once I had struck him, and my heart would be lightened of the woes which good-for-nothing Nobody has brought me."

In contrast to the sheep, which remain unidentified (just like Odysseus' companions, hiding under them[34]), the ram is clearly delineated and has a privileged relationship with its human point of reference.[35] Polyphemus believes that if only his ram could think and speak as a Cyclops, he would be an ally against the stranger.

The practice of having a flock leader was also known in Rome. Many Latin literary texts display a ram playing the role of *dux gregis*. In Propertius, in a scene of idyllic serenity that contrasts with contemporary Rome's turbulent life, a ram leads some sheep to the stables, returning from the pasture, without the shepherd having to attend to them (*corniger Idaei vacuam pastoris in aulam / dux aries saturas ipse reduxit oves*).[36] In Ovid, the figure of the ram as the flock leader occurs in more than one passage.[37] In Seneca's above-mentioned version of the rivalry between Atreus and Thyestes, the disputed ram with the golden fleece is an *arcanus aries, ductor opulenti gregis*.[38] Hyginus explains why Aries is the first zodiac sign: it does not symbolise–as some have claimed–the ram that brought Phrixus to safety; rather, on the authority of Hermippus of Smyrna, it stands for the ram that led the army of the god Liber (the founder of the oracle of Ammon) across the desert to the water, thus proving itself an *optimus ductor* and earning first place among the constellations out of the god's gratitude.[39]

34 On the characterisation of Odysseus' companions as a group of indistinct individuals in the Homeric poem, see Franco 2010: 156-172.

35 Was it because of this privileged bond established through cooperation that, according to Aristoxenos of Tarentum (Diog. Laert. 8.20 ὅ γε μὴν Ἀριστόξενος πάντα μὲν τἄλλα συγχωρεῖν αὐτὸν ἐσθίειν ἔμψυχα, μόνον δ' ἀπέχεσθαι βοὸς ἀροτῆρος καὶ κριοῦ), Pythagoras admonished his followers to abstain from the flesh of the ram? As is widely known, some commentators suspect that in Theocr. *Idyll*. 3.1-5 the mute character Τίτυρος, affectionately addressed (ἐμὶν τὸ καλὸν περιφιλημένε) by the goatherd who entrusts his non-human animals to him, is not a friendly shepherd but a leading billygoat, whom the goatherd puts in charge of the other goats while he is singing (Gow 1952[2]: 65 with the scholium to this passage, whose interpretation is also very doubtful). Cf. Photius τιτυρίδες καὶ τίτυροι· τράγου εἶδος and Theocr. *Idyll*. 8.49, where the shepherd calls upon the billygoat to convey a message to his beloved. As we have seen, however, the literary sources speak of billygoats leading sheep, while there is no evidence of billygoats leading herds of goats–indeed, Aristotle rules out the possibility (see *HA* 574a11-12). Servius reports that in the Laconic dialect the term τίτυρος was used not for the billygoat, but for the leading ram (Serv. ad Verg. *Ecl. Prooem*. pag. 4.7 Th. *Nam Laconum lingua tityrus dicitur aries maior qui gregem anteire consuevit*).

36 Prop. 3.13.39-40. *Idaei* is a conjecture for the transmitted *atque dei*. See the comment *ad loc.* in Heyworth and Morwood 2011: 241.

37 Ov. *Am*. 3.13.17, *Fast*. 4.715, *Met*. 5.327, 7.311.

38 Sen. *Thy*. 226.

39 Hyg. *Astr.* 2.20. The Egyptian god Ammon was represented with a ram's horns (Ov. *Met.* 5.327-8) and was adopted by the Greek colonisers of Cyrenaica in the syncretistic form

A scene from Plautus' *Captivi* shows that, even in the countryside of ancient Latium, these flock leaders were given a proper name that was used to call them back and give them instructions.[40] The sponger Ergasilus is in a hurry to bring good news to Hegio, and threatens all those who dare to stand in his way; in his barrage of warnings, he also takes it out on some tradesmen whom he considers dishonest. Among these are butchers:[41]

tum lanii autem, qui concinnant liberis orbas ouis,
qui locant caedundos agnos et dupla agninam danunt,
qui Petroni nomen indunt uerueci sectario,
eum ego si in uia Petronem publica conspexero,
et Petronem et dominum reddam mortalis miserrumos.

"Next point: the butchers who arrange for sheep to be bereft of their children, and for the lambs to be slaughtered and then sell the meat for double the price, who call 'Petro' the wether followed by the flock: if I set my eyes on this Petro in a public street, I'll make both Petro and its master the most wretched of mortals."

A *ueruex*, Varro informs us, is a castrated ram,[42] and we have seen from ethnographic parallels that a wether often serves as a flock leader. Thus, there is no reason to doubt Paulus Festus' gloss (Fest. p. 336 Müll *sectarius vervex, qui gregem agnorum praecedens ducit*) – invoked by Lindsay and more recently by Moore[43]– according to which *sectarius* is an adjective from the root of the verb *sectarier*, and more specifically from *secta* ("path", so *sectarius* would mean "who opens the path", "pathfinder"), and not, as some commentators suggest, from *secare*. Besides, it would be somewhat redundant to call a *ueruex* "castrated", since this is by definition a gelding. As for the proper name that shepherds used to give to this wether, according

of Zeus Ammon. The same Dorian colonisers worshipped another ram-god, their native deity Apollon Karneios: Malkin 1994: 153-164.

40 Shepherds apparently identified many of the non-human animals in their flock/herd and not only the flock leader. The shepherd of Theocr. *Idyll.* 5.102-3 addresses the sheep of his flock using the proper names Κώναρος, Κιναίθα, and Φάλαρος, while in *Idyll.* 1.151 it is a goat that is addressed as Κισσαίθα; in *Idyll.* 4.45-6 two calves are addressed by the names Λέπαργος and Κυμαίθα. In Longus' novel, Daphnis calls his goats by name (4.26 τὰς αἶγας προσεῖπε καὶ τοὺς τράγους ἐκάλεσεν ὀνομαστί), offers them food, and kisses them (4.38 ὁ δὲ Δάφνις καὶ ἐκάλεσέ τινας αὐτῶν ὀνομαστὶ καὶ φυλλάδα χλωρὰν ἔδωκε καὶ κρατήσας ἐκ τῶν κεράτων κατεφίλησε). In Alciphron, *Epist.* 2.18, one of the goats seized by the wolf bears the name of Χιόνη. For some comparative reflections (and further bibliography) on relations between humans and non-humans in pastoral societies, see Stammler 2010.

41 Plaut. *Capt.* 818-822 (translation by W. De Melo 2011: 589).

42 Varro *LL* 5 § 98 Müll. (*quoniam si cui ovi mari testiculi dempti et ideo vi natura versa, verbex declinatum*).

43 Lindsay 1900: 303; Moore 1991.

to Paul the Deacon *Petro* is a typical peasant name, deriving from *petra* ("stone").[44] Wolfgang De Melo instead considers it to be a name of Sabellian origin, connected to the root for "four" (as such, this name may have been given to the fourth son or a son born in the fourth month of the year). In Rome, this name would have become a derogatory term to indicate a country-dweller, a person who is unrefined.[45] Be that as it may, in the Plautus passage this name is given to the wether, which is ironically called "Yokel" by the *lanii*, who evidently used it to govern the movement of lambs coming into the city from the countryside and which were destined for sale.

4. The ram is (not) a sheep

To return to Tarquin's dream, another passage from Aristotle about sheep behaviour provides information that seems to have relevant implications for the present argument. It states that, when sheep scatter, shepherds bring in some males to herd them:[46]

τό τε γὰρ τῶν προβάτων ἦθος, ὥσπερ λέγεται, εὔηθες καὶ ἀνόητον· πάντων γὰρ τῶν τετραπόδων κάκιστόν ἐστι, καὶ ἔρπει εἰς τὰς ἐρημίας πρὸς οὐδέν, καὶ πολλάκις χειμῶνος ὄντος ἐξέρχεται ἔνδοθεν, καὶ ὅταν ὑπὸ τοῦ νιφετοῦ ληφθῶσιν, ἂν μὴ κινήσῃ ὁ ποιμήν, οὐκ ἐθέλουσιν ἀπιέναι, ἀλλ᾽ ἀπόλλυνται καταλειπόμενα ἐὰν μὴ ἄρρενας κομίσωσιν οἱ ποιμένες· τότε δ᾽ ἀκολουθοῦσιν.

For the character of the flocks, so it is said, is simple-minded and stupid: of all the quadrupeds it is the worst, and it wanders into deserted places towards nothing, and often in wintry weather it goes out from indoors, and when they are caught by the snow they are unwilling to go away unless the shepherd moves them, but are left behind and perish unless the shepherds bring males, and then they follow.

Aristotle holds that sheep cannot look after themselves and tend to get into trouble out of sheer stupidity.[47] They are dumb enough to leave their pens in winter and risk their lives in the snow; slow-witted enough to fail to understand that they should not lag behind when the shepherd tries to take them back into their folds; and imitative when it comes to following the male specimens, which shepherds use to get them

44 Paul. Diac. p. 227 Lindsay. On this point too see Lindsay 1900: 304.

45 De Melo 2011 *ad loc*. (note 3 p. 589).

46 Arist. *HA* 610b 23-9 [translation by D.M. Balme 1991: 235-237 slightly modified].

47 That the information specifically pertains to sheep, even though πρόβατα could theoretically also refer to goats, seems proven by the fact that Aristotle deals with the stupidity of goats separately, in a later section of his work: goats' stupidity manifests itself in the fact that when one grabs a goat by the beard, the others simply stand by, dumbfounded. There is conflicting evidence about goats' intelligence: contrary to Aristotle, some texts actually point to goats' shrewdness. It is said, for example, that they know how to heal themselves; as proof of this species' ingenuity, a story was told about two goats meeting on a narrow bridge: in order to get across, one of the two walked on the other's rump (Plin. *NH* 8.76 (201), *Geopon*. 18.18). Cf. Lewis and Llewelyn-Jones 2017: 57.

back into the pens.[48] It seems as though sheep, being stupid *par excellence*, do not grasp shepherds' commands, but–by a sort of automatic reflex–tend to follow the rams, which are used to move them. Thus, a distinction emerges within πρόβατα between the behaviour of the females and that of the males of the species, with rams once again acting as mediators between the flock and the human handler.

In dreams as well, the ram apparently carried different meanings from those typical of its species. In his manual *Interpretation of Dreams*, Artemidorus of Daldis assigns a very different value to the sheep compared to the ram by virtue of the fact that the latter plays the role of leader, and is Hermes' favourite mount:[49]

ἔοικε τὰ πρόβατα ἀνθρώποις διὰ τὸ πείθεσθαι τῷ ποιμένι καὶ συναγελάζεσθαι καὶ προβιβασμῷ καὶ τῇ ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιον προκοπῇ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὀνόματος. ἄριστον οὖν καὶ ἴδια ἔχειν πολλὰ πρόβατα καὶ ἀλλότρια ἰδεῖν καὶ ποιμαίνειν, μάλιστα τοῖς ὄχλου προίστασθαι βουλομένοις καὶ σοφισταῖς καὶ διδασκάλοις. ἔτι δὲ καὶ κριὸς πρὸς δεσπότην ἐστὶ ληπτέος καὶ πρὸς ἄρχοντα καὶ βασιλέα κρείειν γὰρ τὸ ἄρχειν ἔλεγον οἱ παλαιοί, καὶ τῆς ἀγέλης [δὲ] ἡγεῖται ὁ κριός. ἀγαθὸν δὲ καὶ ἐποχεῖσθαι δοκεῖν ἀσφαλῶς καὶ δι᾽ ὁμαλῶν χωρίων, μάλιστα φιλολόγοις καὶ τοῖς ἐπὶ τὸ πλουτεῖν ὁρμωμένοις· καὶ γὰρ ταχὺ τὸ ζῷον καὶ Ἑρμοῦ νενόμισται ὄχημα εἶναι.

Sheep are like human beings because they obey their shepherd and congregate together, and they represent advancement and progress for the better (scil. *probáinein*) by the implication of the word for 'sheep' (*probaton*). So it is most auspicious both to possess many sheep of one's own and also to see other people's sheep pastured on one's land–especially so for those who want to lead the crowd, those ambitious for positions of authority, and sophists and schoolmasters. Further, a ram should be understood as relating to the master of a house, a magistrate, or a king. The ancients used the verb *kréiein* in the sense of 'have command', and the ram (*kriós*) is the leader of his flock. And it is auspicious to dream of riding a ram safely and through level ground, especially for orators and those setting out to make money–the animal has a quick pace, and is thought to be the favoured mount of Hermes.

It must be said that, more generally, a marked distinction between males and females was drawn in the characterisation of all major domestic species. Animal husbandry dictates that only a few males be kept uncastrated and raised to adulthood;[50]

48 Likewise, according to Pliny 8.75 (199), the stupidity of the *pecus lanatum* is shown by its imitative nature (*stultissima animalium lanata: qua timuere ingredi, unum cornu raptum sequuntur*). As we have seen, though, sheep's staunchly gregarious spirit is far from being a sign of stupidity, since it constitutes their main defensive strategy: *supra*, n. 21.

49 Artemid. 2.12.1, p. 119 Pack [translation by M. Hammond in Hammond and Thonemann 2020: 83]. As in the Aristotle passage mentioned above, here too πρόβατα designates sheep (not goats). The symbolic value of αἴγες in dreams is dealt with separately by Artemidorus in a later section of his work: they are always unfavourable, whether they are white or black–whereas the very opposite is true of sheep.

50 For the *ratio* behind the slaughtering of male lambs, see Col. 7.3.13. On castration in ancient husbandry more generally, see Georgoudi 1990: 280; Ekroth 2014. Mutilation was also dictated by the desire to improve the taste of meat: as adult males developed an unpleasant odour, males intended for slaughter would either be killed before sexual maturation or castrated

most are slaughtered at a very young age, while the bulk of the herd/flock is made up of productive females with their young, and a number of geldings.[51] In Greek, sexual difference for these species is lexicalised: the male is assigned a distinct name, invariably of the masculine gender (ταῦρος, κριός, κάπρος, τράγος), whereas the name of the species (of common gender) designates the majority of the individuals of the flock/herd and often agrees with feminine articles, adjectives and pronouns, especially in the plural (αἱ βοῦς, αἱ ὄιες, αἱ ὗες, αἱ αἶγες). In other words, due to their configuration, flocks/herds of cattle, sheep, or pigs tended to be thought of as flocks/herds of "cows", "ewes", or "sows", regardless of the presence of any males in them. In terms of cognitive linguistics, the female of the species represented the prototype (i.e. the best example) of the category "flock/herd non-human animal", whereas rams, bulls, boars, and billy-goats belonged to it to a lesser degree. Castrated males were closer to females than to males.[52] Alternatively, flocks/herds were designated by a neuter noun (πρόβατα, μῆλα, βοσκήματα, ὑποζύγια), thus lacking gender markers.

Something similar seems to occur with sheep in Latin: the flock could be referred to by the neuter *pecus* or by *oves*, the latter often used in the feminine form,[53] regardless of whether it included not only ewes, but also male lambs (*agni*) and wethers (*uerueces*). Uncastrated males–present in small numbers to avoid continuous fighting during the mating season–were instead given a masculine designation (*arietes*).[54] Even in Rome, the prototypical individual of the ovine species would therefore appear to have been the female sheep (and the wether, which was somehow associated with females),[55] whereas the ram was placed in a marginal position within this category.

We can assume, then, that even with respect to the species' stupidity, the ram had a less prominent position than the other components of the herd. In Latin, the term *ovis*, its diminutive *ovicula* (significantly, a feminine noun), and *ueruex* ("wether") were used to insult people by calling them stupid, while *aries* was never

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early on.

51 It should be noted that even in the natural world females outnumber males: the sexually mature adult males of many gregarious species tend not to live in flocks/herds, but to form small separate groups, from which they only break away in order to join flocks/herds of females during the mating season.

52 Georgoudi 1990: 233-235; Franco 2006, Franco 2020, Franco 2021. On Aristotle's description of castration as an action that triggers a process of feminisation in individuals, see Zucker 2005.

53 *E.g.* the already quoted Prop. 3.13.39-40 (*dux aries saturas ipse reduxit oves*). Particularly revealing is Ov. *Met*. 9.732 (*urit oves aries*). Cf. Physiogn. Lat. 115: effeminate men (*molles*) speak with a bleating voice (*glauciunt*), like *oves*.

54 See Plin. 8.72 (188) and Col. 7.3.4-6 for the methods that shepherds used to make rams less aggressive and easier to handle.

55 Wethers display a gregarious behaviour more similar to that of female sheep: Fisher and Matthews 2001: 232. On the castration of lambs in the ancient Roman world, see Varr. 2.2.18, Col. 7.4.3, Plin. 8.74 (198).

used in this sense.[56] This fact seems to agree with the reconstruction proposed so far according to which the *aries* differs from the rest of the flock on account of a series of characteristics that distance him from the typical 'flaws' attributed to sheep: he is not as meek as they are–if anything, he displays an excess of combativeness; he is neither so slavish nor so timid, but knows how to be enterprising and courageous; and he is not so stupid, since he can play the role not only of natural leader of the flock, but also of mediator between his fellow ovines and the shepherd, whose commands he understands and 'translates' into effective action with the sheep. Finally, this action is based on competence acquired through teaching, a kind of wisdom that other members of the flock do not have. In short, the ram knows how to express *virtus* and *sapientia* that other sheep seem to lack.[57]

In conclusion, the symbol chosen for Tarquin's dream in Accius' account now appears perfectly appropriate. Lucius Iunius and his brother are two rams that the arrogant king treats like ordinary sheep, without realising that they are actually exceptional individuals.[58] One of them does not have time to prove this because he is sacrificed; the other saves himself by temporarily concealing his virtues[59]–courage, resourcefulness, and shrewdness–only to reveal himself at the right moment for what he really is: a ram leader, capable of leading the Roman people to revolt against a dynasty of tyrants.[60] A leading ram knows how to be obedient and tame, but will also

56 Ovis: Plaut. *Bacch*. 1120-1139, *Persa* 173. Ovicula: Plaut. *Mercat*. 567, Petr. 57.2, Juv. 10.50, Sen. *De const. sap*. 17.1. Vervex: Plaut. *Mercat*. 567, Petr. 57.2, Juv. 10.50, Sen. *De const. sap*. 17.1. Among various other lexical traces of the notion that sheep are particularly stupid, Bettini (2000: 71) mentions the connection of *balatro* with *balare*. *Pecus* was also used as an insult, but since it could refer to different species of domesticated non-humans (much like our term "livestock"), its connection to sheep is less defined and therefore less significant for the present argument. What is interesting, instead, is a passage from Columella (7.3.16) stating that sheep give birth just like women, and that they suffer and must be cared for by skilled hands, even more so than women since sheep are "completely devoid of intelligence" (*Partus vero incientis pecoris non secus quam obstetricum more custodiri debet. Neque enim aliter hoc animal quam muliebris sexus enititur, saepiuque etiam, quando est omnis rationis ignarum, laborat in partu*).

57 Another possible expression of the *sapientia* of the leading ram is suggested by the metaphorical uses of verbs such as ἡγέομαι and *ducere* in the sense of "to calculate, to think", mentioned by Marcel Detienne in his pages devoted to the ram in the cult of Apollon Archegetes (Detienne 2002 [1998]: 116-118).

58 This ambiguity is rooted in the lexicon, where the generic terms *pecus*, *pecoris* (collectively) and *pecus*, *pecudis* (individually) are often used to refer specifically to sheep: *e.g.* Cato, *de re rust*. 5.7, Lucr. 2.369, Juv. 13.232-3, Plin. 24.53 (90). In Sen. *Med*. 983 the protagonist refers to the ram with a golden fleece as *pecus aurata*, while in Ov. *Fast*. 903 the same non-human (turned into a constellation) is called *pecudem … Helles*.

59 *Iam satis virtus dissimulata est*, states Brutus when revealing himself in Ovid. *Fast* 2. 844.

60 Liv. 1.59.2 *totique* (…) *Brutum iam inde ad expungnandum regnum vocantem sequuntur ducem*.

resolutely react against those who challenge him. So it becomes clear that the real fool is ultimately Tarquin himself, who is incapable of perceiving the dual nature of the dream sign (sheep/ram) and of distinguishing a ram endowed with special skills (*sapientia munitum*) from dim-witted flock 'beasts' (*quem tu esse hebetem deputes aeque ac pecus*). Tarquin will pay for his lack of intelligence with the loss of his kingdom.

5. Philology and ethnology

The argument developed so far shows that the cultural relevance of the dream symbol presented by Accius cannot be fully grasped without defining certain peculiar aspects of the relationship between humans and sheep that are peculiar to the Greek and Roman worlds, and without taking a detour into the ethnological field. In the study of non-human animals acting as characters in ancient narratives, comparative research–with its focus on the concrete realities of ethology and practices in pre-industrial rural or pastoral environments–proves invaluable: it allows us to appreciate the importance of these practices in tracing the paths of the mythical and literary imagination. It is not a matter of transposing elements from one culture in order to explain another, but of examining societies that are comparable to those of the past in terms of the contexts of production and resource management, yet–unlike ancient societies–can still be observed in their practical and concrete aspects. This move can lead the researcher to identify traces of forgotten customs, no longer existing relationships, and tools and techniques that have fallen into obsolescence.[61]

By reading about flock leaders in different pastoral societies and learning about the type of subjectivity and agency that characterise their position within the flock, we can take a fresh and more careful look at the figure of the *dux gregis* in Classical literature and seriously consider the information–including the more detailed and fragmentary information–that is usefully preserved by ancient texts on ethological knowledge and zootechnical practices. Relations between human and non-human animals can be regarded as long-term historical phenomena. When studying such relations in societies of the past, it is therefore worth trying to fill in the inevitable gaps by observing populations that are still alive and active today in comparable environments. A comparison with the customs and practices of contemporary traditional societies that still entertain relationships with livestock within a direct interpersonal dimension that is not alienated by industrial segregation and reification devices can prove most useful for the investigation of Classical texts: it allows us to set such texts in dialogue with the vast cultural background from which they once

61 Lonsdale too (1990: 22) stresses the usefulness of reviving the practice–adopted by many 20th-century classicists–of drawing comparisons with the pastoral contexts of traditional societies.

emerged, and which for us –urbanised individuals and consumers of animal products that are mass-produced and mechanically processed–has become opaque, if not invisible, insofar as it is shielded by the curtain of collective repression.

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Pl. 1 Ceremonial helmet with rams' heads, 525–500 BC; Greek, South Italian, Archaic period; bronze with ivory and bronze restoration; 19 3/8 x 12 3/4 x 6 3/4 inches; Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum Purchase 282:1949.1 (Courtesy of Saint Louis Art Museum).

Pl. 2 Youngster carrying a ram, maybe Hermes Criophorus (protector of herds). Terracotta from Boeotia, ca. 450 BC. Louvre, CA626 (Wikicommons).

Pl. 3 Attic red-figured cup in the form of a ram's head with handle, ca. 480-470 BC. Attributed to the Syriskos Painter. British Museum, n. 1873,0820.272 © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Pl. 4 Odysseus under the ram. Archaic small bronze, 540-530 BCE. Archaeological Museum of Delphi. (Wikicommons).

Pl. 5 Roman relief with a ram's head, 2nd century AD. Marble. Speed Art Museum, 1993.7. (Wikicommons).