



## **Theme 9 : Pastoral life in Art**

### **Report of France**

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**AFMA, October 2011**



Education and Culture DG

Culture Programme





## **Iconography of sheep in French art**

### **CONTENTS :**

#### **Introduction**

- 1. Before domestication, goats, forces of nature**
- 2. The lower Middle Ages : sheep as a religious symbol**
- 3. The Renaissance : technical innovation and iconographic continuity**
- 4. The XVIIth century : religion and decoration**
- 5. The XVIIIth century : pastoral imagination and scientific realism**
- 6. The XIXth century : back to the land**
- 7. The XXth century : between realism and utopia**

#### **Conclusion**

#### **Bibliography**

#### **Photographs**



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### **INTRODUCTION**

France's territory has a great number of landscapes and climates which have since prehistoric times, influenced man's ways of life. Obligated to adapt to their environments, men have developed various agricultural systems to ensure their survival. Many animal species have been domesticated, amongst which are sheep and goats which form the basis of survival of some human groups, as was the case in the Landes until forestation radically transformed the countryside from the second half of the XIXth century. Men took advantage of all produce the animals could give: meat, milk, wool, skin, and also their droppings which enabled the enrichment of the land and cultivation of crops. The importance of animals, in France and elsewhere, in the relationship between man and nature is without doubt the starting point of numerous representations of animals, both mental and artistic, which can be traced back to the remotest origins.

#### **1. Before domestication, goats, forces of nature**

Sheep, ewes, goats and bucks as such, only appeared in the neolithic period, the physical changes due to the new domestication of these animals were indeed one of the indicators of this great change in culture. Notwithstanding this, wild species of goat, close to animals which were later domesticated, are not absent from Paleolithic art whether on walls or on objects.

Amongst the large herbivores of the Paleolithic period which were painted on the cave walls where men lived, amongst the bison or horses, it is not rare to come across ibexes with horns which are particularly well painted. We can find such animals in the black chamber of

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the Grotte de Niaux (Ariège). This chamber, an immense room situated 800 metres from the grotto's entrance, shows, among a hundred animal paintings, ibexes, represented either by simple lines, or by a full body, dating back 13 000 years (fig. 1). One can also see ibexes painted in Lascaux, in the Dordogne (-18 000 years approximately), or in relief as on the limestone blocks coming from the Roc-de-Serres site in the Charente (-18 000 years). One of these blocks shows two ibexes head to head as if in combat (fig. 2). This representation therefore illustrates the theme of an animal fight, a theme which is widespread around the prehistoric Mediterranean. These fight scenes show just as much the strength of the animals as the balance of nature to which these animals contribute. This possibly motivates the choice of the static representation of the fight, when animals are equal and not at the end of the fight when one animal dominates the other. These fights also evoke the rutting period since reproduction is also connected to the conservation of the immediate natural surroundings of man, to which he has adapted his way of life. The rut of the ibexes is indeed explicitly evoked in the Bourdois shelter in the Roc-aux-Sorciers (Vienne). One can see on the graven wall around 14 000 years ago, a painting showing five males, a female and two young animals (fig. 3). If some males have raised tails, one of them is putting this part of its anatomy on its buttocks, a sign of rutting. This position of the tail mirrors that of the female whose tail is placed horizontally in a sign of the same capacity for reproduction. This possibly explains why the vulva of the animal is clearly shown, a rare event in wall art. The presence of two young animals also evokes reproduction.

Ibexes are also present on object art from the Paleolithic period, not only on objects whose functions are known to us, such as the throwing device called "from the ibex" originating in the Mas-d'Azil (Ariège), dated between 17000 and 11000 years BC (fig. 4); but also on more mysterious objects, such as the fragment of rib coming from the Richard cave (Mayenne), which shows a finely engraved ornament with heads and backs of ibexes (fig. 5), probably created in the upper Magdalenian period, between 15 500 and 14 000 BC.

Even before domestication, goats occupied an important place in artistic and mental representation of the world by the first men present in the territory which would later become France. Animals represented by men participate in mythical stories which decorate grottoes, support the world's balance, denote the force of nature both physical strength in a fight and reproductive force.

In the course of the successive great historical periods, sheep and goats were curiously less often represented, as if their domestication reduced interest in representing them. In the Neolithic period, during the metal ages, in the Gaule and even in the upper Middle Ages, images of sheep became rare. This is all the more surprising as ancient Mediterranean art is full of evocations of pastoral life and work in the fields, both in literature and visual arts. Rams have indeed a ritual function, since they may be sacrificed.

## **2. The lower Middle Ages : sheep as a religious symbol**



The great art of the Middle Ages is, unquestionably, sculpture and in particular monumental sculpture, as Georges Duby stated. Medieval monumental sculpture, essentially dedicated to biblical or historical figures and allegories, leaves little room for sheep. There are, of course, as always, exceptions to the rule.

Thus, the musée des Augustins in Toulouse has a relief in marble from the XIIth century which came from the Saint-Sernin basilica traditionally called *Le Signe du lion et le signe du bélier* (fig. 6). One can see two veiled women, one carrying a lion, the other a ram, but the scale of the proportions is not respected (the animals are too small compared to the human figures). Obviously, in XIIth century art, naturalism is not in fashion and the semiotics of the work is primordial. The latin inscription may be translated as "Sign of the Lion. Sign of the Ram. This was made in the time of Julius Caesar" This work therefore alludes to the signs of the zodiac, recalling that the Middle Ages was not a dark age, that people continued to study astronomy and that Antiquity which was very recent, was still appreciated and partly taken as an example. It is this same astronomical context which is at the origin of representations of rams in the books of hours, each month being illustrated by its zodiac sign.

It is not however astronomy which permitted the development of sheep in French art, but, of course, the considerable development of religious images. Sheep appear in several biblical stories, from the Old and the New Testaments. The presence of the animal is therefore perfectly legitimate in representations of certain biblical scenes: *Annonce aux bergers*, *Job perdant son troupeau*, *sacrifice d'Abraham*, etc.

(News given to the shepherds, Job losing his flock, Abraham's sacrifice etc.)

If, in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, it is the eastern Magi who come to recognize the divine nature of Christ, in Luke's Gospel, it is the shepherds who first of all give homage to the Saviour. Just after the birth of Christ, an angel of the Lord appears to the shepherds who are watching over their flocks by night. He announces the birth of Christ to the shepherds and the herdsmen go to the manger before disseminating the good news. The choice of the figure of the shepherd by the authors of the Gospels is probably connected to nomadism imposed by transhumance, which facilitated exchanges between men of various origins and the spreading of the good news.

This story gives us some representations of the animal in monumental sculpture. In the XIIIth century, in the Chartres Cathedral, the lintel of the south door of the west face has a representation of the Nativity. On the righthand part of the lintel, three shepherds with their sheep are being led by an angel, unfortunately currently missing, towards the Nativity scene (fig. 7). The animals, hardly taller than the shin of the shepherds, are very small. Nevertheless, the hierarchy of the flock is alluded to: the dog is in front of the ram, a male reproductor, which in turn precedes four animals with no horns, ewes or sheep. The animals are grazing, heads down, indifferent to the event, incapable of understanding the divine. This relief is not an isolated case. In the Musée du Louvre, for example, there is a relief of



this biblical story, which came from the Notre-Dame-de-la-Couldre (Deux-Sèvres), and older than the Chartres relief (second half of the XIIth century).

The Annonce aux bergers is also shown in stained glass windows. It has its place for example in the representations of the life of Christ, as in the stained glass window in the church in Gercy (Aisnes) dating from circa 1230, and therefore contemporary with the reliefs cited above. Amongst the scenes represented, in a dense composition, two sheep, head to head, are accompanied by a dog looking at two shepherds sitting on green rocks, one of them is turning his head towards the angel who appears at the top of the composition (fig 8).

In illuminated manuscripts, three books, the Psautier d'Ingeburge du Danemark, queen of France (fig. 9), the Heures de François de Guise (fig. 10) and Les Heures de la Vierge in Les Très riches heures du duc de Berry (fig. 11) contain an illustration of the Annonce aux bergers. These works date respectively from the XIIIth century XIVth century and XVth century, and one can observe the evolution of painting during these three centuries, the arts of landscape and perspective developing remarkably from one image to another. Here, as in stone, the main concern of the sheep is food.

The Sacrifice d'Abraham is illustrated in several manuscripts amongst which in the XIVth century; Ci nous dit or Composition de la Sainte Ecriture (fig. 12). One inevitably finds in these works a ram which the angel shows to Abraham when he is getting ready to hit his son. The book quoted above contains also an illustration of the Buisson ardent. (burning bush). The righthand side of the work is taken up by Moses and the bush from which an angel's head emerges, as for the lefthand side, it presents sheep which are looking towards the left, as indifferent to the scene as their fellow animals in the news to the shepherds. The episode of the burning bush was not absent from contemporary churches (Laon or Chartres) where a link was made between this event and the New Testament. But the sheep were not represented in it.

Another motif recurring in medieval illuminations is the Lamb of God. The animal represents Christ according to the words of John the Baptist written by Saint John in his Gospel (chapter I verse 29); "The next day John saw Jesus who was coming to him, and he says: This is the lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world." These verses come from the Jewish tradition since, in the Jewish faith, a sheep was often sacrificed to purify sins just as Christ sacrificed himself for the sins of man. It appears, for example, numerous times in illuminated manuscripts of the Histoire extraite de la Bible et Apocalypse, done in the XVth century by the Maître des Médaillons. In folio 43, l'Agneau de Dieu (the Lamb of God) is at the centre of a composition surrounded by symbols of evangelists and the twenty-four old men of the Apocalypse. (fig. 13). The image of the sheep here, is very far removed from the animal indifferent to the divine in the biblical scenes cited above.



Sheep are also part of numerous symbols which allow identification of saints, including Saint John the Baptist. A figure de dévotion (Musée national du Moyen-Âge- MNMA) (fig. 14) in pewter and moulded lead, dating from the first half of the XVth century, rather bare, 6cm high, represents Saint John the Baptist thanks to the sheepskin he is wearing and whose legs are hanging down both sides of the saint's body. This piece of clothing indeed became common at the end of the Middle Ages and replaced the former iconography of Saint John the Baptist dressed in a camel haircloth tunic as were the anchorites. The saint is often accompanied by the animal which is very much alive, for example on the sculpture from Burgundy in gold-plated walnut, kept in the same museum and also dating from the XVth century (fig. 15). A lamb is sitting on a book which the saint is carrying on his arm.

The lamb also accompanies female figures such as Saint Agnès. Although this is false from an etymological point of view, the saint and the animal were linked through the closeness of the sounds of their names. Consequently, the saint gains in importance, since she could be accompanied by the lamb of God himself, as in the Coupe de sainte Agnès (British Museum, London), a work of gold created in 1370-1380, where the life of the saint is represented in enamel on a gold background. After her successive martyrs, the saint is represented accompanied by a shrouded lamb, the symbol of Christ (fig.16).

Saint Marguerite, who derives her popularity from the fact that she helped women to give birth without pain, is often shown with a dragon by her side, an animal which ate her whilst she was praying and from which she escaped by transpiercing its belly with a crucifix she had on her. Nevertheless, some works illustrate the modest origins of the saint who was a shepherdess before her conversion. Thus, the very beautiful illuminated manuscript by Jean Fouquet (1415-1481), Sainte Marguerite et Olibrius in the Livre d'Heures d'Etienne Chevalier (Musée du Louvre) (fig. 17), shows the saint humbly spinning, in a field, accompanied by some sheep and other young girls. In a well-executed landscape which owes more to the Renaissance than the Middle Ages, a number of horseriders arrive among whom is Olibrius, the Roman governor who persecuted the young girl after she refused to marry him. The image is surprising, since Jean Fouquet's art transcends the mere creation of an image of devotion or an episode in life which is reduced to a few iconographic items established as one usually finds. Here, the work is more like a picture of courtly art, characteristic of the international gothic period from the beginning of the XVth century during which profane art developed in the service of the many courts which shared European territory between them. Sheep are not absent from such profane art.

The artists of the Middle Ages have also created several images of work in the fields, where caring for sheep, linked to the cycle of the seasons, naturally has its place. Thus, sheep can be represented on the pages of June or July as in Les Très riches heures du duc de Berry (Château de Chantilly – Oise) where the Limbourg brothers share the page of the month of July between wheat harvest and sheep shearing. A shepherd and shepherdess, shears in their hands, each hold a sheep between their knees to remove its wool (fig 18).



Wool working can be shown on other works than illuminations. Thus, the Louvre collections have a Flemish tapestry made in what is now France, with the heraldic arms of Thomas Bohier, former Chamberlain of Charles VIII and of his wife Catherine Briçonnet. This tapestry dated circa 1500 is entitled *Le Travail de la laine* (fig. 19). On a thousand flower background, the figure of a shepherd stands up, his trade being shown by his crook. On either side, two women are sitting and working, one shearing, the other weaving. Flanders had an economic boom at the end of the Middle Ages, due to the independence of the cities. The wool trade and tapestry making (of wool too) were fundamental factors in this economic prosperity which explains this surprising tapestry entirely given over to the first stages of this textile business.

### **3. The Renaissance : technical innovation and iconographic continuity**

In French art, the iconographic role of sheep does not change throughout the Renaissance. It retains its iconographic function with some saints, the best known example is probably the misrepresented portrait of François Ier en saint Jean-Baptiste (François 1st as Saint John the Baptist) painted by François Clouet (1481-1541) in 1518 (Musée du Louvre) (fig.20). If the iconography changes little, the objects the art is on are not the same. The illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages give way to the new decorative art techniques of the Renaissance, amongst which including painted enamels are in the forefront. One thus finds sheep not only on rectangular plaques but also on enameled objects for instance water jugs or chandeliers. One can see, as in the Middle Ages, the Sacrifice of Abraham or the burning bush, as well as the lamb symbolizing the sacrifice of Christ, as on the plaque of *La Présentation au temple* (fig. 21) by the workshop of Pierre Reymond (active from 1537 to 1584). A discreet and peaceful lamb at the foot of the altar in the foreground and taking no part in the main action, evokes by its mere presence, the Child's destiny. Sheep taking part in the decors of enameled artifacts are often found in compositions which evoke art from the Antiquity, a really fundamental reference during this time of renewal. A water jug from the same workshop, showing Joseph receiving the stewardship of Egypt, presents a line of children on its top, one of whom is sitting astride a ram, which recalls the processions in decors of art from Antiquity both in sculptures and ceramics (fig. 22).

### **4. The XVIIth century : religion and decoration**

The Renaissance, through its taste for technical innovations, was a golden age for decorative arts. In the following century, great painting experienced a considerable development in France. It is the new favoured medium of images, but in similar iconographic frames to those of the Renaissance. One can for instance find sheep in the foreground of the *Présentation au temple* (1644, fig. 23) by Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). Another evocation of the future sacrifice of the Child. The images of the adoration of the shepherds show henceforth a sheep tied up, probably a gift to the Holy Family made by those





shepherds and this, not only in the very classical composition which calls on the heavenly works of Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674) but also in the more naturalistic approach of Jean Michelin (circa 1616-1670) (fig. 24 et 25). Even though the works of the artist are full of exotic elements recalling the Holy Land, the peasants are represented in clothes of contemporary peasants, some of which are badly torn, even those of the Child who is wearing a jacket which is completely comparable to those worn in the French countryside. Sheep also accompany the Holy Family in numerous paintings.

Even though religious art mainly developed in paintings, in fact sheep did not disappear from decorative art, quite the contrary. Sheep are included in decorative compositions using fanciful motifs from Antiquity, as on the glass panel from the middle of the XVIth century, Mars et la terre (musée national de la Renaissance, château d'Ecouen) (fig. 27). The heads of rams become a recurrent theme in decorative elements. They can decorate small objects as can be seen on the shoulders of the Gourde in multi-coloured enamel with a richness typical of the nièvre (musée du Louvre) (fig. 26). The two rams' heads here surround the jug's neck where hybrid figures, similar to grotesque ones from the Renaissance, are developed. The use of rams' heads in decorative sculpture in stone is another custom borrowed from Mediterranean antiquity. One can find them on many large stone vases which were used to decorate French gardens. Thus, rams integrate, even though they are only a detail, a fundamental element of French culture. In the château de Versailles, rams can often be found on these vases, set out as handles on the sides of the object, handles which cannot be used to carry such heavy objects. This can be found for instance on Le Vase du soleil, a work by Jean Drouilly (1641-1698), present in the Létone garden (fig. 28).

## **5. The XVIIIth century : pastoral imagination and scientific realism**

In the XVIIIth century, the religious and decorative roles of the image of sheep do not decline. However, the century is also marked by two phenomena: the development of pastoral images and a greater scientific approach to sheep farming.

The pastoral genre is a literary theme which goes back to Antiquity and evokes the harmony between man and nature. This theme gives rise to many literary works in the XVIth and XVIIth centuries, the culminating point of which was undoubtedly the *Astrée* by Honoré d'Urfé, a particularly long literary work which was very successful. The world of shepherds is mentioned without realism, animals requiring little care and leaving the shepherds plenty of time for their love lives. The pastoral novel is not unconnected to certain literary works of the late Antiquity, in particular the Greek novel *Daphnis et Chloé* by Longus, the heroes of which are young shepherds ignorant of their high birth status and whose love will be put through various trials.

Already in the XVIIth century, the jug in the Louvre Museum which we mentioned above, presents as its main setting, on one side a landscape of ruin and on the other side a scene showing three people, a woman and two men in a luxurious landscape. The stick carried by



one of the characters and the goat sitting at his side leave no room for doubt. It is definitely a shepherd and therefore a pastoral scene.

Pictures of shepherds' loves are so numerous and varied in the XVIIIth century that it would be almost impossible to try and record and classify them. All media are used. Shepherds' loves are illustrated in numerous paintings but also in prints such as *Les Deux confidentes* (fig. 29) by Jean Ouvrier (1725-1784) or small sculptures such as, in terracotta, *La Bergère des Alpes* (fig. 30) by Etienne Maurice Falconnet (1716-1791) who reduced the pastoral to the strict minimum : a young man on the ground, who is holding the hand of a young girl he is looking at and talking to, probably to declare his love, whereas close to her a sheep is sitting peacefully, looking away from the scene. Two characters and a sheep are sufficient to characterize the scene. One also finds pastoral scenes in tapestries or vases, in particular from the manufacture de Sèvres, such as vases called *Leriché*, works from 1786 by Charles-Eloi Asselin, head painter in the manufacture de Sèvres, and Decambos, a gilder and painter of flowers and birds, which have a gilt decor showing characters of both sexes accompanied by sheep and enjoying simple pleasures such as playing the flute, putting a ribbon on an animal or feeding grapes to his loved one (fig. 31).

The pastoral theme also developed greatly in paintings, whether decorative or easel paintings. Even though a number of artists have practiced the genre, such as Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) in 1716 in *Les Bergers* (fig. 32) or even Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755), in the panel devoted to *L'Ouïe* (hearing) (1749) in his series about the five senses for Versailles, it is François Boucher (1703-1770) who remains the master of the genre. He multiplied pictures and situations. He went back to source in a painting on the subject from Antiquity *Daphnis et Chloé* (fig. 34). *Daphnis* accompanied by his dog watching for the arrival of another person, observes the beautiful *Chloé* with bare breasts in her languorous sleep, her sheep staying quietly close by, the subject taken from Antiquity allowing nudity which would be immodest in a contemporary subject. Various scenes evoke amorous conquests in many different ways. This could involve exchanging gifts, as in *Les Présents du berger* also called *Le Nid* circa 1740 (fig. 35), in which the shepherd humbly offers a nest which he has just picked from a tree, thereby showing his talent as a predator. The sending of a love letter can also be seen in *L'Envoi d'un messenger* in 1765 (fig. 36), where a very well-dressed young shepherd attaches a message to a white bird's foot. Finally, in *Le Pasteur galant* (fig. 37), a work which still today decorates the *hôtel de Soubise* (Paris), a young man talks sweet nothings to a young woman with rosy cheeks in the centre of frilly materials and flowers, close to a well-designed fountain progressively invaded by vegetation. This fountain lets itself be once again invaded by nature, just as the young men and women who, even though they are shepherds, are wearing clothes of the social elite, as if they were young people fleeing social conventions to go back to nature, a primitive world without the constraints of corrupt society and where feelings could be fully expressed.



This is not unconnected to a special and well-known pastoral work which is neither a painting nor a sculpture but is architecture and artificial landscape : the hamlet of queen Marie-Antoinette, in the Trianon (Versailles), where the queen used to retire to escape from the constraints of court life and where thatched cottages, cows for milking and eggs to gather give the illusion of a return to the innocence of a rural life which innocence was, in that century, very often represented by a delicate young girl holding a lamb in her arms as does in 1790 Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1805) with his work *L'Innocence* (fig. 38).

The XVIIIth century is also the century of Enlightenment, where numerous actors of history attempt to demonstrate the amount of knowledge acquired by man. The scientific mind is at work. Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707-1788) is, from 1739 to 1788, steward of the King's garden which later became the Museum national d'histoire naturelle. He participates, with the Swede Carl von Linné (1707-1778), in the classification of species and wrote *L'Histoire naturelle*, a monumental work of thirty-six volumes published over forty years from 1749 to 1789. He was greatly assisted by Louis Jean-Marie Daubenton (1716-1799), a doctor and childhood friend, whom he had appointed as keeper and demonstrator in 1745, as Buffon had little talent for dissection. These scientific studies gave rise to a series of drawings and etchings whose esthetics are very far removed from the representations of shepherds' love and whose purpose is quite different. The *L'Histoire naturelle* panels are colourless but show a fine work of engraving. These panels have artists, numerous engravers or drawers which is hardly surprising in the context of such a large-scale work, amongst who are the illustrators Jacques de Sève, active from 1742 to 1788 or Pierre-François Tardieu (1711-1771) or the engraver Jean-Charles Baquoy (1721-1777).

The teaching value of the prints is primordial. They can be split into two categories. The first category is that of the internal organs of animals. The folio III of the volume V (fig. 39) shows a dissected ewe, lying on its back. The open belly shows its digestive organs. The subject is dealt with using relative neutrality and great precision which can be expected in this type of work. Pages showing isolated organs with a commentary can also be seen. Some pages also show the semen of the animal observed under the microscope. In volume II page VII presents spermatic animals, a term which was then employed to designate spermatozoids from various animal species, rams, dogs, rabbits, cocks (fig. 40). This page therefore shows in great detail, the principle of comparative anatomy, a science created in that century on Enlightenment, which enables the similarities and differences between different animals to be demonstrated to classify them.

The second series of pages looks at the external aspect of the animals and at different breeds (or species, the definition is still a little vague at the time) of sheep. Even though several draughtsmen and engravers were working, the composition of the prints showing animals (sheep or others) is always the same in *L'Histoire naturelle*, which enables an easy comparison between the species. These pages from volume XI show us in succession rams



and ewes from Iceland, Barbary, Asia (fig 41b) and France (fig 41a). These images have a charm which comes from the landscapes in which the animals are situated. The vegetation and architecture of each country are thus represented with a lack of precision which shows that exotic countries were not well known to the artists.

The pictures of *L'Histoire naturelle*, did not appear *ex nihilo*. There were other works which dealt with sheep from a scientific point of view before the work of Buffon, but the work of the century of Enlightenment is the first to show such a desire to be complete, based upon observation and knowledge. Scientific drawings also had a follow up in the XIXth century to illustrate the works of other naturalists in particular those of Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1772-1844), for example in his *Histoire des mammifères* (history of mammals) in 1819.

## 6. The XIXth century : back to the land

Some uses of images of sheep in art do not change over the centuries. The sheep remains a fundamental element of Christian iconography, both in biblical scenes such as *Le Sacrifice d'Abraham* painted by Hippolyte Flandrin (fig. 42) between 1856 and 1863 in the church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés (Paris), and in images of saints as is shown by, in 1886, *La Mort de saint Jean-Baptiste* (fig. 43) by Henri Lévy (1840-1904), in which the saint, about to be beheaded, is still clutching a lamb to his chest. As for Saint Agnes or Saint Marguerite in the Middle Ages, sheep are a sign of modesty (social and therefore mental) of certain figures such as Joan of Arc, whose image developed very naturally in the context of the awakening of nations where all peoples were searching for their heroes from the past. In 1892, *Vision* (fig. 44) by Alphonse Osbert (1857-1939), shows us a shepherdess in a field bathed in a blue morning light, raising her eyes to the sky. With her halo, the historical heroine is already shown as a saint whereas she was only beatified then canonized in the XXth century.

Furthermore, after the XVIIIth century the ram's head remains a common decorative motif, whatever the regime in power, in any case before the IIIrd Republic (1875-1940). These heads are not only able to support the handles of the vase called *Vase Cordelier* (fig. 45), a work of the manufacture de Sèvres for the apartments of the empress in Compiègne (Osie) in 1809-1810, but also to decorate in 1825 the *Carrosse du sacre de Charles X* (fig. 46) in the Restoration (1815-1830), which carriage was modified in 1855 in the Second Empire (1852-1870), for the baptism of the imperial prince (Musée national de la Voiture, palais de Compiègne).

But the XIXth century contributes many novelties. All society takes a new interest in the rural world. Realist painters look at the rural world by taking as a reference the Dutch masters of the golden Century and their taste for genre scenes and landscapes, genres which were previously considered minor by the Académie des Beaux-Arts. Thus, shepherds and shepherdesses are commonplace in the works of Jean-François Millet for instance *La Petite bergère* (Musée d'Orsay, fig. 47), a work whose date is not known but with a very different approach to that of the pastoral of the previous century, since the shepherds are wearing



humble clothes and have little time for love, as they are so busy looking after their flocks, accompanying the animals in their travel or weaving wool. The flocks of sheep in the work of Millet, as with many other artists, find their place in landscape art which in the XIXth century is no longer the storyboard landscape composed intellectually in a workshop, but reflects reality, using the observation of nature.

This new approach also allows a considerable development of animal art. In the XVIIIth century, studies of sheep from the hands of artists using the pastoral genre were numerous. In the XIXth century, animals became the subject of certain works in their own right. It is true, in many representations of fighting animals which are executed throughout the century, that sheep were never victorious, as illustrated by the sculpture by Barye (1795-1875) *Loup marchant, la gueule ouverte, à côté d'un mouton à demi dévoré* (wolf walking, mouth open next to a half eaten sheep) (fig. 48). Sheep are often also the subject-matter of paintings, finally free from any other animal or human presence (saints or amorous shepherds). The painting *Mouton paissant* (grazing sheep) by Rosa Bonheur (fig. 49), probably one of the greatest animal artists of the century, presents nothing other than what its title indicates. Sheep find an independent iconographic existence. The painting by Horace Vernet (1789-1863) *Etude pour une tête de bélier* (study for a ram's head) (fig. 50) completes the upgrading of the animal by approaching its head with a surprising realistic meticulousness, going as far as representing light effects and reflections in the eye of the observed specimen.

Moreover in the XIXth century, a new orientalism also developed in France, a far cry from the fantasy of the Turkish delights of the previous century. The Egypt campaign (1798-1801), the war to liberate Greece (from the 1820s) the conquest of Algeria in 1830 or the modernisation of the Ottoman Empire are opportunities to gain better knowledge of Islamic countries. If there still existed in the minds of western artists an imaginary Orient where women are lascivious beauties and men bloody fighters, some artists approach the Arab world from a more realistic angle. The view of Eugène Fromentin (1820-1876) on work on the southern shore of the Mediterranean is not far removed from that of Jean-François Millet in mainland France. In the picture *Jeune Kabyle à cheval* (fig. 51), the artist positions, in the middle of a mountainous landscape typical of this region, a horse rider surrounded by grazing sheep. It may represent a shepherd on horseback, painted during his daily tasks as a shepherd from mainland France would be. The musée d'Orsay has another work of a completely different nature, which depicts another figure of an Arab shepherd: it is a shadow theatre silhouette from the *Chat Noir* cabaret, *Bédouin gardant ses moutons* (fig. 52), executed in 1889 for a show relating the conquest of Algeria. This example demonstrated that the middle and lower classes, which this type of show was made for, had assimilated the figure of a north African shepherd who was not therefore restricted to the culture of the upper classes. This figure of the shepherd probably presents the political advantage of creating a cultural connection between the two shores of the Mediterranean, far-off Algeria could be compared and assimilated to nearby French landscapes.



The XIXth century witnessed the appearance of a new form of art: photography. Several photographs immortalized the image of sheep. Some of them, in a pictorialist vein, present rural life in a way which recalls realist paintings such as the *Bergère et ses deux moutons* (fig. 53), whose artist remains anonymous. In a small wood, two sheep accompany a humble shepherdess who is leaning back against a tree and resting on a stick taking a relatively relaxed pose which has already been observed in Millet's work. Other photographs seem to have been destined to be used as models for painters, a common practice, as shown by the series of anonymous photographs of sheep kept in the musée national Gustave Moreau (Paris) (fig. 54). The artist, who lived from 1826 to 1898, loved to multiply his sources of inspiration, looking successively for motifs in exotic arts, in masters of the past or in nature. The museum's collection contains a number of study drawings where animals are present as well as a plaster representing a head of a young ram whose horns have just begun to grow. One can find the motif of the ram in several paintings by the master, in particular on the prow of the ship of the *Argonautes* (fig. 55). Photography also enables rural life to be depicted in an ethnographic way although the use of this term for this period is a little anachronistic. The Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine (Paris) has a series of photographs taken by Amélie Gallup (1856-1943) in south-west France, in 1899. This judge's wife, an amateur photographer, did not only take an interest in middle-class social life. Perhaps against her own will, she also took an interest in peasants, travelling salesmen, disadvantaged people. Several of her photographs carefully explore the life of shepherds from the Albi (Tarn) area where she lived (fig. 56). These photographs, once again far removed from the images of pastoral shepherds, have value which is both documentary and as a witness.

## **7. The XXth century : between realism and utopia**

In the XXth century, with the development of ethnography, but also with the progressive disappearance of rural society, various other series of photographs show the lives of shepherds. Several lines of approach are possible. Charles Augustin Lhermitte (1881-1945), son of the naturalist painter Léon Lhermitte (1844-1925), proposes numerous photographs of flocks which are not dissimilar to animal art of the previous century. Many of them are kept in the musée d'Orsay such as the *Troupeau de moutons près d'une mare*, *Berger menant un troupeau sur un chemin* or *Moutons dans le lit d'une rivière* (fig. 57). Even though he draws on the previous century, Lhermitte despises blurring which was so appreciated by pictorialists, showing his subject with a documentary clarity, whilst retaining a taste for composition.

It is hardly surprising, in this context of the disappearance of traditional pastoralism, to see an art developing which could be called nostalgic where one is trying to project an image of mankind which is close to nature and in harmony with it, taking ancient times as a reference to speak about the future which is hoped will be better. Thus, Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), an



artist who was of course Spanish by birth but French by adoption, with the theme of the man with the sheep which he developed both in sculptures and drawings, whilst he used the classical image of the Good Shepherd, but also created, through nudity, a timeless image, emphasizing the relationship between man and animal (fig. 58). If, in Picasso's works, one imagines an image of the eternal Mediterranean through this figure, Maurice Denis (1870-1943), for his part, chooses to emphasize other origins. In 1905, in the *Déesse celte (Epona)* (fig. 59), the painter places the figure of the goddess on horseback in a harmonious context where man, horses and sheep live together and where the buildings (a fountain, small wall, modest road) blend into wooded nature without disfiguring it. In stark contrast to these visions of harmony, Picasso in the Second World War, used the motif of the sheep's skull in numerous still-life paintings, showing through this strong symbol, nature destroyed, death spreading through the world due to human conflicts (fig. 60).

The image of sheep in its domestic form appears in the Middle Ages, used in a religious context. This fundamental function remains throughout the centuries up to present times, when artists play upon the same sacred image of the animal, as in the duo *Art Orienté Objet* whose work *Le Tout-Autre* (fig. 61) presented in 2008 a stuffed sheep transpierced by gold-plated metal spikes inspired by the work *L'Agneau mystique* by Jan Van Eyck.

Sheep, and in particular the ram, also have a fundamental role in decorative arts where its iconography inspired from decors of Roman Antiquity, was used once again in the Renaissance and remained up to the beginning of the XXth century. During the Industrial Revolution, the refined techniques of the Renaissance are replaced by mass production of objects which considerably changed the situation.

## CONCLUSION

Moreover, sheep are also a symbol of Nature and the way they are treated evolves in different eras in accordance with the relationship man has with his environment. In the XVIIIth century, animals were a passive witness of the loves of shepherds, demonstrating a desire in intellectuals to go back to nature, without necessarily understanding it since the animals seem to be looking after themselves, with no need for any care by humans. At the same time, drawers and engravers immortalized scientists' experiments who attempted to approach nature in a rational fashion. This rigorous work on animals lasted throughout the following centuries. What should perhaps be seen here, more than in the pastoral, the beginnings of a more methodical study of human societies which enabled artists in the XIXth century to approach rural life with a desire to represent the tough reality of daily life. This approach lasted until the XXth century whereas in the Industrial Revolution, traditional



society and agriculture which characterize it, disappear. Some artists start to use images of sheep to evoke the phantom of an eternally harmonious relationship between man and nature.

Even today, animals are burdened with various connotations which are particularly noticeable in advertising which target town dwellers far removed from animals. Sheep can be a symbol of authenticity, of naturalness as currently depicted in an advertising campaign for a Basque cheese in the Paris metro, where we can see a humble flock behind a shepherd who is looking at the product. But sheep are also a symbol of stupidity as in the sheep of the Middle Ages which could not see the divine. An advertising film for television recently boasting about the original character of the Citroën DS4 by contrasting it with very short scenes evoking conformism. The first scene showed a flock of sheep. Elsewhere, people (or rather those who notice the advert) are currently told by a slogan "Stop being fleeced!" above an image of a sheep which enables the telephone operator Virgin Mobile to boast about the low prices for its services (fig. 62). This advertisement has variations using other species of animal and slogans: "Stop being milked" for cows and "Stop being plucked" for chickens. The consumer is encouraged in this way to recover his human dignity by showing his intelligence in the face of the telephone operators' market.

Sheep are therefore animals which have many interpretations and whose image can be used in various contexts. It is highly likely that the current phenomenon of mass culture will ensure it has a great future, especially in the context of reflections on saving the planet.

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