

A ROOSTER FOR GOING BEYOND MYTHS

By Guilherme d'Oliveira Martins

Talking about a rooster in Portugal is not evoking an insignificant symbol, it is recalling deep cultural roots that came from the past and are projected in future time and overseas. There are no doubts that this is a strong symbol – and it is not enough to remind that, in Greek mythology, symbol (*simbolo*) is exactly what brings together, in opposition to *diabolo*, which is what divides.... Some would say, wrongly, that the rooster is a relative recent invention. That it comes from a legend, perhaps from the 16th or 17th century, about a rooster that saved someone who was unfairly convicted or even that it was a late discovery at the fairs in the Portuguese region of Entre Douro e Minho. “Our” Rooster of Barcelos, that Joana Vasconcelos stylized and enriched with decoration, making it even more symbolic of ourselves, comes unequivocally from our Celtic heritage – an heritage that António Pedro felt so deeply that made him enjoy bagpipes and the garish colours transmitted so well by Amadeo de Souza Cardoso in his unforgettable and unrepeatable paintings. No doubts about the rooster of Portugal. It is the Indo-European element that connects us to the Galatians, from Middle East to Turkey, to Polish Galicia, to Wales, to Gauls and to Galiza – all of them brothers.

It is true that Leitão de Barros, António Manuel Couto Viana and Artur Maciel went in search of a popular symbol – they found it and enriched it with strong colours and hearts illustrating one thousand affections. However, already in the 19th century, Rocha Peixoto talks us about the ‘whistle rooster’ [‘galo de apito’], which one can still find at fairs and is related to the strong symbology of who announces, at the aurora, the new day and the new times. Our distinct rooster is present in the tradition of the druids, but also in the Christian symbology of Saint Pedro. The rooster is the herald of the sun, but also a sign of truth and fidelity. Rediscovered at the fairs in the region of Entre Douro e Minho and painted with bright colours, the rooster reveals a loving heart, a discontent contentment love as in camonian poetry, but it also recalls longing as memory and desire, magnificent agapes and banquets of love and friendship. Culturally, the rooster means the melting pot that characterizes us in this place where the land ends and the sea begins, Finisterra.

The multiple paths the Portuguese explored took our symbols to the Indias, Africa, Brasil.... This is the reason why referring to traditional, historic and popular ancient roots constitute an intense link that allows us to perceive that a cultural or linguistic identity only exists if it interacts with others realities and influences.

The topic of cultural identity requires the recognition that only openness and dialogue, the fertile relation between heritage and memory and the dynamic understanding of patrimony can allow a culture of peace and mutual respect to develop. The Identity that crystallizes will die. The memory that focus exclusively in the mythical past becomes poor, narrow and resentful. The heritage that doesn't get stronger with contemporary creation and with permanent critical reinvention will vanish.

The reference to the utopia of Tomas Morus is brought to us by a Portuguese sailorman. The idea of travelling in India or of going beyond Taprobana corresponds to an appeal for an adventure that creates and critically reconstructs myths.

How can we understand the Candomblé and the syncretic religiosity – bringing together animism and Christian tradition – that connects the Lord of Bonfim to the court of orixás, so present since Saint João Baptista de Ajudá to Salvador da Baia? Oxalá, the great Lord of All, and Iemanjá, the Goddess of the Sea, rule that Olimpo.

The rooster is the battle bird, the good fortune teller.

This is the reason why the Rooster is not a regionalist brand or a recent symbol. It is ancient and universal. After all, it is a symbol for going, through critique, beyond myths.