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Birds: Metaphor of the Soul

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Both in Mediterranean and northern European cultures, birds are the messengers of gods; at a symbolic level, this gives them the capacity to predict, with their very presence, beneficial or harmful future events. Since antiquity, migrating birds have been seen as souls and, therefore, metamorphosis is one of the long-lasting cosmological paradigms in Mediterranean culture. Augural birds prevail both in the popular imaginary and in their condition as a source of inspiration for poets and writers from diverse cultural fields. Thus, both Christian and Muslim literary traditions are full of stories, legends and beliefs about birds as a metaphor of the human soul.

Speaking of nature also means establishing moral or religious rules. It is in this context that birds enter the cosmological system, especially those with determined characteristics whether because they are migratory and, therefore, appear and disappear at a given moment, or because of their colours, daytime or nocturnal habits, the places where they perch or the sounds they make. In stories, there is a tendency to seek signs of curse in animals with an abnormality, for instance a nocturnal bird, or signs of blessing in those which awaken empathy. It is difficult to find an understanding of nature free from the influence of culture and, in this respect, animals have served as a metaphor for humans. Aesop's fables or the Libyan fables mentioned by Aristotle and which perhaps also influenced the stories of Apuleius, from North Africa, are a good example of this.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* contains a world of transformation where a large number of birds appear which over time will preserve their metaphorical connotation. In the Middle Ages, the work was widely disseminated, as were the oriental fables in Arabic. All these stories go through a moral adaptation under the influence of Mediterranean religions.

We should recall, for instance, the medieval bestiaries, first popularised, like the fables, by the exempla of ancient preachers and, later, through the imaginary and popular literature. Undoubtedly, this is why we find, among the accounts of European origin, aetiologies of the lion, the unicorn, the ostrich, the elephant, the monkey and the dragon; all the fantastic or exotic animals which are represented in the texts. Moreover, these are Christianised and anointed with the moralising view of the bestiaries. We can say the same about Islam, whose mysticism encompasses animal symbols, especially of birds as representatives of the soul.

Today, the works of classical psychoanalysts stress some interpretations. However, as Durand (1981) states, their theses are too limited, as the theriomorphic symbolism is very old and embraces many more meanings than the libido. For Durand it is more related to the scheme of the animated: "All wild animals, birds, fish, insects, are more sensitive to movement than to formal or material presence." Feelings and perceptions are basic elements of the imaginary: life and death as copulative elements, nature, divinity, the eternal return... everything comes together.

For Bachelard (1986), the ascension, the desire for verticality is the profound reason that provokes the ease with which the flying dream is accepted in our psyche, and so the wing emerges as a symbol of rational purification. For this author, this explains why the bird is almost never considered an animal but a simple accessory of the wing: “We do not fly because we have wings, but the wings grow because we have flown.” Thus, the bird loses its animal form to the benefit of the function.

Auguries

Moreover, birds are recognised for having a creative role. Close to the sky, capable of speaking and, therefore, of teaching, they are mediators designated by their wisdom, of which we only see the meteorological aspect although it has had wider functions, later relegated to superstition.

It is not too surprising that the techniques of weather forecasting have so much importance in societies where agriculture has occupied a central place. These interpretation rules allow predictions in the short term: we know it will rain when we see swallows flying at ground level, when we hear the woodpecker or the frogs sing. However, we try to predict in the long term, to find out above all when the season changes will occur and, in this respect, migratory birds are good messengers.

Marlène Albert-Llorca (1991) recalls a story related to the prediction of the Chernobyl disaster: “Swallows have always built their nest under the eaves and in the hangar. In the Chernobyl year they did not come... If the swallows don't return, it is because men have played with fire too much. Absence of birds, weather disruptions: isn't the end close?” Predictive power has a long tradition linked to ancient civilisations, which were more related to nature than ours. The flight of birds predisposes them to serve as

symbols of the relations between the sky and the earth. In Greek, the same word could be a synonym of portent and of a message from heaven. In the Celtic world the bird is, in general, the messenger or the assistant of gods and of the Other World, whether it is the swan in Ireland, the crane or heron in Gaul, the goose in Great Britain, the raven for the Germans, the kinglet or the hen. Harry Potter uses an owl as a messenger in his imaginative cultural pastiche.

Christianity and Islam, although opposed to prediction, have not hesitated to use birds as a metaphor. There is, however, a symbolic and functional equivalence between the messengers of the Celtic Other World, who often travel in the form of birds, and the angels of Christianity, who wear swan wings. Angels are also the intermediary between God and the world, although in the interpretation of the Church the wings are the symbol of spiritual order. The angel, as a messenger, always carries good news for the soul.

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The Spanish word *agüero* (from the Latin *augurio*) means prediction, although *agüero* and *agorero* (the person who reads the predictions) currently have an unlucky and superstitious meaning, undoubtedly because of how much the Church has fought against these practices, considered pagan. A similar term is the Catalan *averany* (prediction), although the philologist Joan Corominas derives it from the ancient *averar* in the sense of “launching an idea with a view to be checked,” “making an estimative calculation.” Pedro de Ciruelo, Canon at the cathedral of Salamanca, combats these beliefs in a work published in 1556: *Reprovação de las supersticiones y hechizerías*.

Libro muy vtil y necesario a todos los buenos christianos is very critical of these issues which the Canon must have found difficult to refute given the rooted character of these pagan practices. Among his reprovals he enumerates all kinds of omens extracted from aspects linked to nature, especially with birds.

In Roman times, omens are mainly caused by birds. The science of omens is not only visual: it presupposes solid knowledge of ornithology. There are species which transmit signs through their flight, others through their song and others, the most celebrated, through both at once. The augur does not try to predict the future. He consults the gods to know if the action projected is “permitted”: if it is fortunate. How much autonomy do those who look at the birds have towards these signs? Some authors have insisted on the Roman’s pragmatic treatment of omens: it seems that the augur is free to accept the meaning or not. It is, therefore, a religion based on the rite rather than on myth.

The Representation of the Soul

But, why do the birds want to warn us? What interest may they have in humans? Do they form part of our psyche, as psychoanalysts say? Are they fleeting transformations of the spirit, as some myths say? Do they put the living in contact with the dead?

One of the most widely-known symbolism of birds is the representation of the soul. The oldest testimony of the belief in the *bird-souls* is, undoubtedly, in the myth of the Phoenix, the purple bird of fire; that is, made of living strength. In the frescoes of ancient Egypt we see how a bird with the head of a man or woman symbolises the soul of the deceased or a god who visits the Earth. The conception of the bird-soul and, therefore, the identification of death with a bird are already attested to in the religions of the archaic Middle East. The *Book*

of the Dead describes death as a falcon ascending in flight and in Mesopotamia the deceased are represented in the form of birds (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1982). But also in the Christian system of symbols we see how at the moment of death the soul leaves in the form of a bird.

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According to the Koran, the “language of birds” is spiritual knowledge and is related to the souls. The Christian tradition of the dove, the angels or the Holy Spirit is maintained in Islam: the migrating birds – such as those of Attar and those of Avicenna’s *Recital of the Bird* – are souls launched on an initiation search.

In Plato’s *Dialogues*, the *Phaedo*, which deals with aspects of the immortality of the soul, presents Socrates stating: “The ancient doctrine of which I have been speaking affirms that they [the souls] go from this into the other world [the Hades, the place where souls go according to Greek religion], and return hither, and are born from the dead. Now if this is true, and the living come from the dead, then our souls must be in the other world [in the Hades], for if not, how could they be born again? And this would be conclusive, if there were any real evidence that the living are only born from the dead; but if there is no evidence of this, then other arguments will have to be adduced.” In the dialogue, this immortality is finally tested through the law of contraries: “If life comes from death, then death must come from life.” This Greek imaginary corresponds to the European imaginary which sees the stork as the bearer of the newborn’s soul but also with the representation of the spirit of the dead in Egyptian hieroglyphics. Thus, the birds, themselves

or as bearers, represent the life spirit, the spirit which sometimes wanders taking on a formal appearance while awaiting purification.

Metamorphosis

Metamorphosis is wrongly distinguished from the transmigration of the soul or metempsychosis, but they are two different things. The latter has an effect on death and reincarnation in another body, while metamorphosis only affects the appearance rather than the profound self. Christianity and Islam have been firm in their condemnation of transmigration; however, metamorphosis, perhaps because of its allegorical nature, has been better accepted, at least in its popular version.

In metamorphoses there is a certain belief in the fundamental unity of the being; sensitive appearances have only an illusory or fleeting value. There are theories which see metamorphoses as expression of desire, censorship, ideal or sanction, emerged from the depths of unconsciousness and which take shape in the creative imagination. In fact, many mythologies are full of metamorphoses. In Irish and Welsh texts it is frequent to find that a wizard, druid, poet or prophetess, for one reason or another, turns a hero or heroine into a pig, bird or fish. Gods can metamorphose, as can witches. Novels, and especially love poetry, are rich in these types of desires.

In his great mythological work *Metamorphoses* the poet Publius Ovidius Naso, through two hundred and fifty fables linked by beautiful hexameters, shows popular religion, which contains metaphorical elements, as well as imaginative religion, naturally inclined to mystery. Although Ovid was undoubtedly a sceptic, legends are approached with a degree of irony, which confers on the religion, and this is the important aspect of his work, an aesthetic character. His work owes a lot to the tradition of Hellenistic sources. In this tradition it is espe-

cially important to mention Boeas, Priestess of Delphi, to whom a Hellenistic poet attributed an ornithogony, a set of stories of heroes transformed into birds, in which other Greek-Latin authors found their inspiration.

In the Middle Ages, Ovid's works were widely disseminated. Out of their contexts, the stories of the *Metamorphoses* are mixed with Indian and Arabic materials, adapted to popular forms or serve as an allegorical commentary for theology. From the Latin poems recovered in the 13th century we move to Ancient French, German, Dutch, and we can find traces of them in Chaucer, Boccaccio, Tasso, Montemayor, Corella and in the multiple adaptations of the characters of Cephalos and Procris, Orpheus, Scylla, Pasiphae, Procne and Philomela. We also find the subjects of transformation, punishment or purging of sins on the other shore of the Mediterranean, where the Ulema, the judge or the Koranic master are punished for their lack of pity, as we will see later.

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Many accounts which link a geography to a holy space are the object of transformation, such as Demnate, in southern Morocco. There we find the Imi-n-Ifri Bridge, an enormous natural arch perforated by the river Mahser, whose name means "the door of the precipice" in Berber. A rocky path allows people to descend to the foot of the bridge and cross a gigantic vault sprinkled with stalactites and small grottoes. Early in the morning, when the weather is fine, women come to take a bath among the rocks: it brings them good luck, helps them to be fertile. In the surroundings many squirrels and, above all, flocks of herons and black crows can be spotted. A legend tells of the presence



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of these birds: in the depths of the precipice lived an evil seven-headed genie who, so that the spring did not dry, demanded that every year the people of Demnate offer him the most beautiful maiden in the country. It happened then that the daughter of the *cadi* was chosen. Fortunately, a courageous young man managed to defeat the monster before the sacrificed maiden fell into his hands. The corpse of the hideous genie then decomposed into thousands of worms which transformed themselves into as many crows.

The Stork: Symbol of Life

Cultural contextualisation practices a diverse symbology in perceptions, but these can have a rooting which goes beyond certain religious canons. Although the Bible (*Leviticus* 11:18-19) includes the long-legged birds among the “impure animals”, and the stork is considered filthy, it has usually been seen as a good omen. In European countries, its regular return in spring corresponds to the festival of the resurrection of nature. Its role as a bearer of babies, that is of

life, is probably linked to this subject, although there are also other interpretations related to the notion of the “bird of the soul” in contact with “the waters of Creation,” the source of all fertility. Because of its ancient name in Germanic languages, *adebar*, which comes from the verb *bern*, *bero* (take, bring) and *od* (property) or *atem* (breath), the stork is considered in these countries the bird which brings fortune, gifts and the breath of life to children. Psychoanalytical symbolism sees in the stork’s beak the image of the phallus, “the spring of babies” symbolised by the mother’s womb (Rank, 1983). Moreover, in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics one of the common representations of the *bâ* (soul) is a human headed stork.

Nocturnal birds are often linked to ghosts, the souls of the dead who at night come to moan close to their ancient dwelling

In contrast but equally meaningful, nocturnal birds are often linked to ghosts, the souls of the dead who at night come to moan close to their ancient dwelling. Owls are birds taken to the extreme whose dual curse is emphasised by stories: condemned to live at night, they are hated by other birds. Does this not mean that they are somehow excluded from the world of the living? The importance of the correlation between the opposition dead/living and night/day has an anthropological depth. However, we should point out that many of the accounts of the origin of the owls present their nocturnal existence as a fall from grace, according to Ovid’s version in his *Metamorphoses*.

Traditionally in Castile and in other parts of Europe babies are brought by the stork. The image of the long-legged bird flying at great altitude, carrying in its beak a small bundle through which the head of the newborn pokes out, has imposed itself as a symbol of birth. This is known even in those places where the tradition has been different and people “found” the

babies under a cabbage, at the foot of a rock or a spring, equivocal images which can presuppose abandonment, when the big bird flying horizontally creates an unequivocal feeling of protection of the messenger reaching its destination. The stork has accompanied many peoples from Europe and from Asia Minor in the spring. It arrives between February and March and has its babies in enormous nests built next to populated areas because, like man, it has always settled next to river banks, on open pieces of land with pastures and irrigation areas.

We find few studies on storks although since antiquity their symbolic, quasi-religious, role has been recognised. Saint Isidore of Seville regards the stork as “herald of spring.” This bird is also, with its long flamboyant beak, a knight who, ready for action, frees the fields of reptiles and other animals considered poisonous and malefic. Strabo, Plinius, Saint Isidore and Sebastián de Covarrubias speak of it as a symbol of filial piety: “Very notable is the love that they feel for their children; they warm their nests with so much zeal that they can lose their feathers after incubating for so long. However, they devote as much time raising their babies, as these, in their turn, devote to chicks” (Covarrubias, 1976).

The stork was dedicated to Juno, the goddess of marriage and married women. Sebastián de Covarrubias, in his *Tesoro de la lengua castellana* (17th century) is perhaps who most completely summarises the beliefs on and characteristics of storks, given that he collects material from the classics and introduces real observations. In the stork, therefore, we have a dyad which makes it worthy of respect and the taboo of killing it:

- It is the messenger and bearer of good weather, sun and heat; it brings or announces life.
- It eats bugs, filthy animals related to death, according to popular beliefs.

The Stork in Morocco

Ten years after a painstaking ethnographical work carried out in Castile, we have been able to determine the migratory cycle of the stork, and find what we could call its winter quarters, based on several lines of research developed in Morocco. The elderly in some villages in Castile and La Rioja used to tell us in the early 1990s that at the end of summer the stork moved to Africa or “God knows where,” but ecological concerns and technology have put an end to the secret garden of the storks. The sightings have multiplied not only in the Strait of Gibraltar but also in many other places. Let’s consider, for instance, the comments made at the Museum of Natural History in Fribourg (Switzerland) in relation to a stork it monitored: “Max is the best-known stork in the world, born in May 1999 in Avenches. It is the first Swiss animal to be monitored with satellites. Each year, by the end of summer, it heads to Morocco. After having spent two whole winters close to the town of Guerzif, in the north of the country, over the last few months Max has moved between Guerzif and Fez.”

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And the last news on Max dates from 10th January 2005: “The white stork Max remained until 20th December in Sidi Quacem, northern Morocco. It immediately returned to Fez, a town it visited in September 2004. Although the transmitter antenna was quite damaged, satellites have received signs again. With the help of the specialists of Argos, its journey from 23rd September could be reconstructed. We don’t know when Max left the nesting place but in late

September it was in Fez, where it had spent the 2003/2004 winter. In early October it went to visit the town of Meknès. Then it headed to the north-east, to the small town of Sidi Quacem. Every year, Max leaves the place of hibernation earlier: in 2000 and 2001, it started its return on 1st April; in 2002, on 27th March and in 2003, on 7th February. This last time it started its migration on 31st January.”

One of our first observations is the degree of sympathy and respect that people have for the stork in the Maghreb, an aspect previously verified by travellers and anthropologists during the 19th and 20th centuries. The stork in Berber is called *aswu*; in Moroccan Arabic, *belarej*. It is a bird of good omen in Morocco, as Mohammad Ibn Azzuz states (1958): “The stork is a bird of good omen as it is the synonym of happiness and good luck.” In the early 20th century, the colonial anthropologist Edmond Doutté (1914) stated that “storks only come to Marrakech in winter and spring, and then they head to the south... we are told to Massa. Massa, the mysterious Souss town.” Nothing remains of the town of Massa and its port, which were so important throughout history, only the memory, as it seems sunken beneath the dunes. At present, it is the location of the natural reserve of the river Massa, about fifty kilometres from Tiznit. The river estuary is a place where thousands of birds meet, especially ibis. Is this therefore one of the places where the storks, which in summer live in the bell towers of Burgos and Soria, go? Perhaps they die here when they are old, as the Castilian peasants told us that the old storks did not come and that, in wartime, they only died in accidents, although the people took care of them.

In March 1998 I was in Rabat, in the necropolis of Chellah. This large necropolis, built in the 14th century by the Marinids, stands outside the walls of the town, around two kilometres from the centre of Rabat, on the foundations of a prosperous Roman city, Sala Colonia, abandoned in the 10th century.

The necropolis of Chellah was destroyed by an earthquake in 1755. The spot is currently covered by an exuberant vegetation which makes it a leafy garden of palm trees, hibiscus, fig trees and very tall trees in which dozens of storks and ibis nest, thereby creating a telluric place, given the connotation of bearer of newborns that storks have in our culture, as well as the symbolism of the stork as a representation of the soul of the dead in ancient Egypt.

If in Marrakech a stork falls from its nest and breaks a leg, which sometimes happens, it is taken to the mâristân of the city, that is, a hospital

It is undoubtedly a holy place, not only because the vestiges of the Zauia and the domes of some of the tombs of Marabouts are patent, but particularly because of the miraculous spring found there, Ain Mdafa, which has the property of healing women's sterility. The spring is an almost square pond around ten metres long, where there are huge snake-like eels. Women with problems getting pregnant carry out rituals such as lighting candles or throwing boiled eggs, roasted meat or lamb lungs into the spring, which are quickly devoured by the eels which move at the bottom of the water or hide (Roque, 2007).

Edmond Doutté (1914) states: "The veneration for the stork is universal in Morocco; it is not pursued, nobody complains about the damage it causes, and people put up with the inconveniences of its presence; if in Marrakech a stork falls from its nest and breaks a leg, which sometimes happens, it is taken to the *mâristân* of the city, that is, a hospital. [...]. In both countries [Morocco and Algeria], the bird is reputed as holy," Doutté continues. "It is holy, it is Marabout,' they say when asked why they worship it so much. This is why the Algerians call it *merabta*. The Marabouts, who can also be women, are usually pious hermits, saints, and

their tombs are places of pilgrimage because of their skill in healing illnesses."

For his part, the Finnish anthropologist Edgard Westermarck (1926) writes: "Among the *ait warain* of the Middle Atlas there is the custom of burying the storks which are found dead and drawing a small *haws* (circle) on the tomb which is later visited by people suffering from fevers, as if it was a *siyid* (hermit representative of a brotherhood)." The symbolism of this bird, although of good omen, shares a contextualised polysemic vision with the cultivated and popular currents which have an effect on this cultural area, such as the aforementioned travelling birds and their link with the souls and initiation journeys.

The Stork Men

Returning to the aforementioned relationship between the storks and the hospital, the Catalan Ali Bey's account of his journey to Morocco in the early 19th century is significant. Of his stay in Fez, and among other things that called his attention, he comments (1997): "Fez has a well-maintained hospital or hospice aimed solely at the care of the insane. What is notable is that a considerable part of the funds of the establishment has been donated by several charitable individuals with the only purpose of looking after, treating and burying in the same hospital the sick or dead cranes or storks. They believe that the storks are men from very distant islands who, at a certain time of the year, adopt the shape of the birds to go there and, when the time is right, return to their country, where they become men until the next year. For this reason anyone who killed one of these birds would be regarded as a criminal; on this question they string together thousands of stories, each one more absurd than the last. Undoubtedly, the useful nature of these birds, which pursue the reptiles so abundant in the warm

countries, attracted the respect of the peoples, who for this reason conserved them. However, the love for what is wonderful to which men have always been inclined has replaced, here as everywhere, absurd fables with real observation to reach the same end.”

In several articles, Juan Goytisolo has used the simile of the storks to speak of emigrants, and especially of himself, who lives between two cultures

Ali Bey was a 19th century positivist, while the myth is highly related to Sufi poetry. We must recall that Sufism, not considered very Orthodox by Islam, has been the current which has provided the most poetry and creative aspects to this religion, as mysticism did to Christianity. Ali Bey tells us about the psychiatric hospital of Fez, maintained through pious donations and which also heals and buries the storks which, in fact, according to the myth, are the metamorphoses of men from distant islands (Europe?), so that if someone killed one, he would be considered a criminal. There is no doubt that another interesting aspect of the belief is the temporal aspect provided by the annual migration; that is, the disappearance of these birds at a given moment. Ali Bey refuses to tell other stories which have nothing to do with distant men but with the transformation of Muslims into storks.

The writer Juan Goytisolo, who usually lives in Marrakech and knows well the care given in this city to the storks, has written a tale inspired by Ali Bey's story, as well as using metamorphosis as an invention of desire and its possible realisation – the writer calls the main character *transformer*. Goytisolo uses the myth of the stork men to tell us a story of migration in Europe. In fact, it is not the first time he does so, because in several articles he has used the simile of the storks to speak of emigrants, and especially of himself, who lives between two cultures.

Among the stories that Ali Bey heard and does not repeat was probably that of the stork which is a judge punished for having performed his ablutions with milk instead of water on his wedding night, as Doutté and Ibn Azzuz point out, or for having anointed with soap the stairs leading to his house to avoid listening to the litigants. Let's see how Doutté summarises the story (1914): “The stork was a judge who got bored with the trials. To amuse himself, he had put soap on the steps of the court, so that the litigants summoned in his court slipped and fell on their backs, which made the amusing magistrate burst out laughing. To punish him, God turned him into a stork and the clicking of the beak recalls the laughter of the former *cadi*.” And he continues: “A teacher from Aghmat tells us that the stork was a teacher in the Koranic school who performed his ablutions with *laban* (sour milk), a drink highly appreciated by the natives. For his sin he was transformed into a stork and his screams recall the clicking of the tablets that students move noisily and on which they write the Koran.”

Westermarck, for his part, cites other quotations: “Chénier suggests that his reluctance to kill storks can be due to the regularity with which these birds issue their screams and the movement they make with their bodies, which to a certain extent recalls that of Muslims during prayer.” One of the interpretations could be that, as in Ovid's stories where the gods punish the transgressors, Allah also performs the metamorphosis to punish them for their lack of charity and their impiety and, in this way, they expiate their sins. But we would be wrong to make only this reading, as there are other and more important ones. We said before that in Egyptian hieroglyphics the *bâ*, soul of the deceased, is usually represented by a stork. We saw at the beginning of the article that, in relation to the psyche, authors such as Bachelard see the wings as a symbol of rational purification and

therefore the bird, in dreams, is almost never considered as an animal.

In the Koran, as in Sufi poetry, the soul itself is a bird. A clear example of this is *The Language of the Birds*, a poetic work by the Persian mystic Farid al-Dîn Attar in the 12th century. In it, the birds, exhorted by the hoopoe (the messenger of love in the Koran), decide to set out in search of the king-bird Simorg, symbol of God in Persian mystical tradition. After a journey full of dangers and having gone through the valleys of desire, knowledge, love, unity and ecstasy, the thirty survivors discover the final revelation: Simorg is their own essence, until then concealed deep within them. The Sufi poet plays with the similitude of *sî morg* (thirty birds) and Simorg to find an eloquent image.

In the philosophical-religious system of Islam, souls are pilgrims in a process of spiritual initiation; and this provides meaning to the ethnographical data of Westermarck, who clearly tells us that among the *ait warain* there is the custom of burying the storks found dead as if they were Morabites that people who suffer from fevers come to visit. Moreover, both Ali Bey and several later anthropologists and current informants tell us of the donated goods left in the *mâristâns* to heal and bury the storks.

The Pious Legacies for the Stork

In my research I have tried to understand more about the *mâristân* of Fez and Marrakech. *Mâristân* is the Moroccan abbreviated denomination of *bîmâristân*, the term which designates the hospital, especially psychiatric, in the Islamic world. It is a Persian word derived from *bîmar* (sick) and *stan* (place or stance). The first hospital for mentally ill people was constructed in Baghdad around the 8th century by Vizier Harun al-Rashid. From a scientific and architectural point of view, the idea is comparable to the

modern hospital; this model was followed in the Islamic world and, later, in the Christian world. The famous *mâristâns* of Sidi Frej, in Fez, and Sidi Isaac, in Marrakech, were built in the 12th and 13th centuries, managed with charity donations under the control of the state. In Europe, these hospitals were built from the 16th century following Muslim models (Ammar, 1987).

The mâristâns are similar to big palaces, with a cruciform plan, constructed around a rectangular patio with a fountain

Generally, the *mâristâns* are similar to big palaces, with a cruciform plan, constructed around a rectangular patio with a fountain. The trees, the perfumed flowers and the green plants associated with the burbling and freshness of the water of the fountains were considered to have healing properties and formed an integral part of the therapy of the mentally ill. Leo Africanus (1465-1550) was the secretary of Sidi Frej for several years. In his writings he mentions the personnel who took care of the patients, the pavilions devoted to different illnesses, even the place of surgery and especially where the mentally ill were and what they did with them (Gorini, Baggieri and Di Giacomo, 2004). The Muslim world has been very respectful of the insane and almost from the beginning there have been doctors who have used psychotherapy, such as the Persian Errazi, who left several writings on psychological disorders. Avicenna, in the 11th century, was also distinguished for the phenomenology applied to the therapy of the soul (Ammar, 1987). Before and after him, a distinguished group of wise men linked to the main Sufi mystic currents devoted themselves to exploring the depths of the human soul, such as the Neo-Platonic psychologist and musicologist al-Farabi and the great pedagogue al-Ghazali. In fact, the intensive spirituality which encouraged many doctors led them very soon to embrace the Sufi doctrine, the mysticism of the knowledge

of the self that, as we know, profoundly imbued the Muslim world. All this continues to serve today as therapy in psychological problems, although now it is related to the rituals of the brotherhoods and the Morabites carried out in the festivals.

Based on the foregoing, we can make a series of hypotheses linked to the imaginary and the piety of the people in relation to the storks and their apparent and strange link with the mentally ill. Perhaps the most ancient myth, although Islamised by Sufi contributions, states that the storks are men, distant or not, who have this appearance; however, their profound self, their soul, continues to reside within. The insane, in contrast, are people who have profound disorders in their psyche, which alienates their spirit.

Within mystic initiation, helping both of them allows a cosmic connection which returns the balance and redounds on the uniqueness of creation. In this respect, we see that the vision of the stork, despite being highly respected on both sides of the Mediterranean, does not have the same type of meaning, although it does maintain the metaphor of being the container of souls. Thus, the symbolism is enhanced through its relation with the beyond, with a psychopomp world, channelled by the migration of this bird at certain times of the year.

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Ἑρμῶσφαιρῶν ἰκτὰ 18 ῥάδια, ἄκμαζῶν τμῆσῶν

ἡμέρα Τετάρτη

ἡ

ἀνώγει τῆς ἡμέρας

