

SEA: ZONE OF PROSCRIPTION AND CONFINEMENT OF EVILS

Carlos Augusto Ribeiro

IELT / NOVA FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

ABSTRACT: The sea is present in the collection of Popular Medicine collected by Michel Giacometti and published in *Artes de Cura e Espanta-Males* (2009). In many of the recipes and incantations belonging to various medical specialties, the sea – like the mountain or the high pine forest – is an area where evils are thrown / exorcised.

From a close reading of the most explicit part of the collection regarding the relationship between the therapeutic ritual and the sea, we find that there is a clear border between humanized spaces – symptomatically, where roosters and chickens are singing and, by extension, other domesticated animals – and the so-called outlawed, non-humanized zones. Necessarily, a boundary to be veiled and maintained for the benefit of (fragile) human and non-human bodies. The person who throws the material remains of a therapeutic ritual into the sea often does so with his back to the sea. The evils are sent to the curdled, salty, sacred sea, or to the very bottom of the sea. Precisely, where they are believed to be no longer harmful and can never return.

It is well known that in terms of a landscape history, the sea – as well as the mountain and the desert – was / is, because it is an area of incalculable risk and danger, a hostile landscape. And, only in modern times, the sea (as well as the seaside and the beach) is a landscape and a place of leisure. The aforementioned collection of folk medicine is a testament to this premodern mentality.

KEY-WORDS: Sea; exorcism; folk medicine.

Introduction

For the purposes of this article¹, we report ourselves to the archives of Popular Medicine collected by Michel Giacommetti and his team in the period between 1959 and 1990 (when he died). This collection was posthumously edited in *Artes de Cura e Espanta-Males*². These vast archives of ancestral healing formulas concern empirical, popular and traditional medicine, partly rescued by so-called 'alternative medicines', in accordance with the analyses of Álvaro Carvalho (2009, p. 21) and João Lobo Antunes (2009, p. 17). This medicine is still “present in rural areas, especially in the elderly with low schooling” according to Manuel Valente Alves (2009, p. 370). The rural aspect of this people's medicine justifies us calling for another designation: 'rustic medicine' (ARAÚJO 2004)³.

For the elaboration of this article, we carried out a preliminary inventory of all the references to the sea in all the medical specialties present in the said work, as well as a subsequent reading based on the relationship of the therapeutic ritual with the sea. To that extent, with this article we intend to deepen and expand our previous study (RIBEIRO 2013, pp. 85-96) about the therapeutic ritual and its performative aspect (SCHECHNER 2003, p. 22), then exclusively focused on a single medical specialty, Dermatology.

In a substantial part of the corpus of rustic medicine – composed of about 5500 recipes collected in Mainland and Insular Portugal and relating to the 19th and 20th centuries – the sea appears as a hostile, non-humanized space (together with the mountain or the high pine forest); and – consequently – as a privileged destination for most of the exorcised evils during the magical-therapeutic ritual. There is a clear borderline between

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²ALMEIDA, Ana *et al* (ed). *Artes de Cura e Espanta-Males– Espólio de Medicina Popular recolhido por Michel Giacommetti*. Henceforth, when we refer to a specific recipe from the aforementioned corpus of Popular Medicine, the respective number of the recipe will appear in square brackets. For example: (ALMEIDA *et al* 2009 [23], p. 67).

³The anthropologist Alceu Maynard Araújo thus explains the choice of the term that gives title to his work, *Medicina Rústica* – about the survival of popular, rural medicine practices in popular classes in Northeast Brazil – which we adopted in our text: «The chosen word is Rustic – Rustic medicine. It brings that Latin *rusticus* flavor: relative or typical of the countryside. Rustic medicine in its broadest sense, with no color restrictions or miscegenation, [...]. Exempt from prejudice will be the term adjectively rustic, meaning relative to the rural environment, typical of an eminently rural country like our Brazil. Rustic medicine is the result of a series of acculturations of popular medicine in Portugal, indigenous and black.» (ARAÚJO 2004, pp. 54-55)

humanized spaces – symptomatically, where the mother calls for the child or the boy cries; where roosters and chicken sing and, also, by extension, other domestic animals – and the so-called outlawed, non-humanized and infertile areas, which generate alarm and fear⁴. Necessarily, a frontier to be veiled and maintained for the sake of (fragile) human and non-human bodies.

Body, disease, and death

In the aforementioned collection of Popular Medicine, evil (disease, suffering and death) arises from a constitutive human fragility in the face of powerful forces that regulate and interweave the cosmos. First of all, with the most adverse environmental conditions: cold, snow and storms. The body (human and non-human) is, according to popular experience, an integral part of the cosmos, permeable to its visible and invisible forces and energies, as well as to countless dangers and threats. It is also prone to be a target of harms – voluntary or involuntary.

According to the conception of the so-called primitive and ancient peoples – although shared by many of our contemporaries – sickness and death are consequences of the supernatural: mystical forces, magic, divine punishment, evil airs, evil eyes, or foreign bodies. When it hits human organisms, animals, plants, and objects, it brings with it damage and disturbances that can lead them from wasting to total destruction. The body resembles a fragile fortress – to some extent, because of its openings to the outside. The body is seen as vulnerable and therefore in need of preventive and restorative measures at each step. In short: requiring ways of influencing the more or less impersonal cosmic forces through symbolic staging. Against the manifest evil that comes to inhabit the body, bones and (non-) human flesh, the rustic medicine (in its triple aspect: magical, religious, and empirical) believes there is a corresponding antidote. The supernatural virtue of

⁴The sea, the mountain and the high pine forest are hostile, non-humanized bordering territories. These uninhabited territories pose numerous and constant threats to the order, integrity and security of human communities. However, these territories become ideal destinations for an incessant retaliation unleashed by the humanized world, which, in this way, aims to achieve a temporary containment of the manifest influence of the forces of chaos (disease, dissolution and death). To that extent, the sea, the mountain and the high pine forest appear in this collection of popular medicine as related to the notion of 'landscapes of fear' (TUAN 1979, pp. 6-8). Indeed, through the magical-therapeutic ritual, people face the personalized evils (nature's anthropomorphizing trait) with a view to restoring and strengthening the boundaries necessary for the physical protection and magical defense of the integrity of the community, bodies and homes (TUAN 1979, p. 206).

amulets against dangers (*quebranto* or evil eye) or the miraculous efficacy of a prayer are enough for the patient to return to a state of health prior to the arrival of evil. Even to a state of health according to that which was given to him at birth – as evidenced, for example, in the benedictions of erysipelas or of the *quebranto*, respectively: «God make you your state as you were born and created» (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [13], pp. 80-81) or «If you have a *quebranto* or a branch of envy or bad air, stay safe and sound as God gave you in the world.» (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [1], p. 602). In this way, by sealing off the entrance to evil, the patient is given the desired protection.

Magical-therapeutic ritual

Although rudimentary, the resources available to the people – especially when access to the benefits of scientific medicine is scarce for socio-economic and geographical reasons – call for a diversity of therapies to repel, transfer, dominate and overcome the harassing evil invader. As a remedy to cure illnesses, affecting the health of the body and spirit, the help of God and Saints, *Bentas* and *Benzedeiras*, is asked more promptly than that of the doctor (a competitor only requested as a last resort). People pray, promises are fulfilled (for the protection of men and animals) and *ex-votos* are made (figures with the function of devoted gratitude for the healing operated by the saint; or, still, because they are substitutes of the real, with the function of capturing and channeling the miraculous power to the sick body or body part, in anticipation of the requested blessing).

The effectiveness of the cure is determined by a number of factors: adequate choice of specific means; observance of certain precautions and prescriptions (time interval or number of repetitions to which the same procedures apply until definitive cure is achieved); fulfillment of food prohibitions (fasting), as well as conditions relating to time and space according to specific therapeutic rituals. Healing rituals must occur at appropriate times: for example, some at sunrise or sunset; others, at midnight. Some involve the patient moving to sacred spaces or body contact with analogous attributes (the source of holy water); others, moving to a natural space marked culturally by any visual indication or oral testimony about the passage of a sacred entity.

The virtuous woman or man (derived from God), nicknamed *bentos* (VASCONCELLOS 1986, p. 326), knows how to recognize the various forms assumed by evil, the respective degrees depending on seriousness and their gender (which, in turn,

requires a corresponding kind of healer: a Mary or a John). In addition to the suggestive power of a formula or a ceremony⁵, the healer has a wealth of resources: direct and concrete agents – such as: substances (olive oil, holy water, salt, vinegar, urine, chicken, rat or sardon droppings, spit, ash from home, dust from the guide that is the land of the sieved road); instruments (knife, scabble stone, venom stone, holy candle lit in the hand of the sick and crucifix); recurrent gestures (praying the creed cross, arranging blessed palm and olive branches in a cross on Palm Sunday, distributing the words in a cross, drawing or painting the sign of the cross or making crosses in the air); the words and the names in addition to the gestures (the name of Jesus whose evocation causes any evil to disappear immediately) and the *ensalmos* (characteristic of popular medicine) in the form of prayer or ordering.

The effectiveness of the magical-therapeutical ritual derives, mostly, from the express submission of the mediator to a transcendent original power (saints, apostles, the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Trinity), from where the healing force is transmitted and also from the control of the most adjusted procedures to restore the lost health. After the healer (healer, *talhadora*, sorceress, etc.) assumes himself as the mediator (the executing hand), he identifies and, often, challenges and inveighs the evil located in the patient's body. Having declared himself at the beginning of the healing process as a mere intermediary of greater forces than himself (acting on their behalf or by the power and virtue of transcendent entities), the healer (mediating agent) does so, whilst also frequently questioning the patient during the therapeutic process. The patient is pulled out of passive inaction (for example: called by his name), as is any individual who is in the role of assisting the mediator. In effect, both are asked to provide their collaboration, if not in a sequence of questions and answers, certainly at least, in the final prayers (Our Father, Hail Mary, Hail Queen) in praise of the sanctified interveners, appointed during the benediction.

The magical-therapeutic process symbolizes and updates a definitive change of state: from a disease situation towards a health situation. And associated with this exchange, it decrees that the invading evil should change place. That is explicit, for example, in the formula for the cure of the *quebranto*: «All bad go outside / And health

⁵It is worth underlining that the constant collection in *Artes de Cura e Espanta-Males* often testifies to the existence of a diversity of *mezinhas* and applications (sometimes contradicting each other) and formulas (accompanied, in general, with information related to the context, procedures and prayers) to deal with each illness or defect.

come in» (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [58], p. 614). Or another variant for the same malady: «Get the evil out / And the good in» (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [76], p. 618). In addition to incarnating in substances and instruments manipulated by the healer during the therapeutic ritual, the evil can, on other occasions, be transferred to a predefined or fortuitous target: a poor neighbor (fellow countryman) or an animal. Through this process, assisted by transcendental entities, the value of the relationship between the invading evil and the (sick) host is transformed. Often, the formula recited by the mediator for the cure of a specific evil mentions the recurring sacred geography of a mythical encounter between Jesus Christ and the apostles (Peter, Paul), which occurred halfway to or from Rome, and which is associated with the mythical origin of the recipe. The origin of so many other recipes is associated with other mythical encounters: between Our Lady and *Santa Cecília* (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [114], p. 102); Our Lady and *Santa Elísia* (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [76], p. 92); The Virgin and *S. Sesnando*, coming from Rome (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [84], p. 96), God and Saint Mathews (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [67], p. 615) or between Eva and the Virgin Mary (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [136], p. 107; [69], pp. 616-617).

The final victory over the invading evil is celebrated by the formula recited during the magical-therapeutic ritual, in which the means and origin of the cure are announced. While it is being recited, the formula allows that the participants (the patient and the mediator) of the therapeutic process not only make things happen, but also show themselves and others (at least, before the divine audience) what they are in the process of operating. The healing process (performance and religious ritual) celebrates and makes healing happen. The therapeutic moment is, so to speak, an intermediate point between a mythical moment and the intended moment of definitive cure. Taking this mythical past as a model to be imitated, the healing process is its repetition or updating. What happened in Rome (center of the Christian world), in immemorial time, will be taken up elsewhere, with other actors who, as intermediaries between the divine and the human, as well as heirs of orally transmitted traditions and empirical knowledge, will not fail to remember and imitate the past therapeutic action. The liberation of powers in the present occurs with (and due to) this reproduction. Faith in the effectiveness of the ritual (shared by the participants of the therapeutic process) ensures that the success of the cure (achieved in the immemorial past) continues to be fixed and confirmed by repetition. Therefore, we can understand the therapeutic moment as an articulation of a spatial and temporal coincidence.

Understood as a performance, the healing process is a social event that integrates the most diverse dimensions of an integral ecology of society: the geography, the calendar, the social interaction, and the human propensity to transform nature into culture. The *mezinhas*, the magical cuisine (chemical or pharmacological, through which magical things are prepared and the ritual form is given to them), *ensalmos* and benedictions, are the expression of a close relationship between man and the natural environment, between the human community and the geographical space.

The sea as a recipient of evil and as a source of healing

The strategies of exorcism, expulsion, dispersion or annihilation through the fragmentation of the evil entity, including its complete disappearance or, at least, the relocation of the entity in a proper, more convenient place, we said, the various strategies aim to put back the entities which are usurping the human territory and the sick person's body in their respective places. It is necessary to cut the evil out of the bed and the home and of every place. Localized and questioned, these evil entities or influences are exhorted to abandon the patient's body and be thrown to the ends of the humanized space.

For the cure of cutaneous diseases (erysipelas, *impigem*), psychiatric (*quebranto*) or the nervous system, ocular and many other evils (evil eye – the cause of *quebranto*; sciatica or nervous flatus), miracle formulas are mentioned where it is declared, with recurrence, that the evil is thrown in the waves of the sea – where it cannot revert or flourish – or thrown into an equally inhospitable place (like the desert). The sea – and sometimes the «sacred Jordan river» (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [13], p. 561) where Christ was baptized – the hill, the mountains, the pine forest, or its surroundings appear as places of deportation and definitive doom for the exorcised evil. In fact, in the corpus of recipes which is explicit about the correlation with the sea – the core of this article of ours – the sea is cited or evoked as the recipient of evil, in cases where the ritual occurs in its presence (in the seaside), but also in cases where the ritual takes place in another distant place (for example: at the crossroad of two paths). The healing of hernias and dislocations occur at a crossroad: there, the sick child (broken) is taken in arms by a boy (João) and passed to a girl (Maria) while the couple – both virgins – recite a prayer. More than the mere allusion to a past event – the passage of Our Lady through the salty sea – the recited prayer aims to operate the equivalence between the virtue of this immemorial occurrence

to the virtue of the transference of the sick from the hands of one to the other (and vice-versa), from which the child's inevitable cure will come (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [25], p. 52). Against the evil of envy, the healer wraps the remains of a fuming cure (ash and embers) to throw them at night, without anyone seeing at a crossroad (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [1], p. 573).

Convinced to abandon the body of the sick, a poor home and a weak sustenance, the evil is thus expelled or sent to the sea, crushed into the dreaded waves of the sea, as far as possible from the human community, from where it will be very difficult to return: the «middle of the sea», the «bottom of the sea», «the other side of the sea», «other parts of the sea waters» or, still, the «curdled sea», also called «glacial ocean» (VASCONCELLOS 1986, p. 119). One of the ingredients (or part of them) used to treat erysipelas (contagious skin infection, similar to measles and *coxó*, also called 'santo antão's fire' or 'evil of the rose') is thrown into the fire and the sea: a half of the lemon is put on the fire by a Maria, after the benediction, while the other half (rubbed in the affected area) will have to be thrown farther, with the back to the tide, and without the sufferer seeing (ALMEIDA et al 2009 [105], p. 101; [106], p. 101).

Saline baths or the use of sea water (in solutions) are advised in certain illnesses, but always taking into account the risks and dangers of being at the seaside. We must be attentive to the treacherous nature of the sea, because it is «treacherous as a wolf; he just wants to grab people» (VASCONCELLOS 1986, p. 118). The sea baths are indicated for angry children and with delayed walking (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [20], p. 175). Likewise, for broken children (with hernias), three successive tides should pass through them. Sometimes, saline baths, at midnight on the eve of *S. João*, are the guarantee against *sezões* (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [12], p. 295). After passing the sea water over the person's infected skin, suffering from *impigens*, one can then «write the *impigens*», painting them with ink (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [14], p. 142). Must wine baths (in mills) are a therapeutic alternative to saline baths recommended for underdeveloped children (with rickets) or walking difficulties (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [13], p. 173). The solution constituted by sea kisses dissolved in lemon juice burns the warts (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [32], p. 160) and removes the freckles from the face (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [3], p. 153). The salt (salt of the sea, appealing to «*mar salgado*») is an element, at the same time, which is purifying and protective, and which relieves and removes maladies – for example: sores, warts. Other metonymic uses of the sea: rubbing with warm seawater to cure rheumatism (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [10], p. 474); rubbing slime and seaweed from the wells of the

boulders to cure against the scrofula (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [8], p. 110) – that is: the tuberculosis of the lymph nodes on the side of the neck; screwing the head of a fish as a cure for children who do not stop drooling (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [3], p. 191).

The sea is understood as powerful and sacred (in virtue of the passage of Our Lady)⁶, capable of supporting and retaining all exorcised evil. For this reason, it is evoked in the cure of psychiatric illnesses – in the benediction for the cure of *quebranto* (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [69], pp. 616-617); in the benediction of *possanto* (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [2], p. 648); in the benediction against the evil eye (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [15], p. 651) in people, animals and flowers; in the healing of the nervous flatus (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [12], p. 650); in the benediction for barb in the eye or eye diseases (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [13], p. 651); in the benediction of bad airs (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [23], p. 653); in the benediction of herpes (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [25], p. 653); in the benediction of *impigem negral* and *alvar* (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [24], p. 653); in the benediction of ‘crossroads’ children, with delayed locomotion and crossed legs (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [1], p. 428).

The inner rejection of the sea can be overcome, motivated by the need to heal a broken child (with some dislocation), invoking divine intervention and protection. Due to the fact that therapeutic attributes are recognized in the movement of the waves (three successive tides), combined with thermal shock, the child is taken to the sea, but always with great caution and distress so that no one is carried away by the waves.

Conclusion

We find, very often, in *Artes de Cura e Espanta-Males*, evidence of an ambivalent attitude of man with his surroundings. Although being a source and condition of life, air

⁶In one of the prayers against the evil eye and evil airs: «[...] With the Most Holy Name of Jesus whom I adore and truly believe who will come to judge us, the living and the dead, the good in heaven and the evil to eternal punishment. All these bad constipated airs that this body has, air of the sun, air of the moon, air of the cold, air of the mountains and air of the sea, air of snow and air of rain, air of doors and air of windows, air of beds, air of cradle, air of paths, air of churches, air of sinks, air of the wind or badly envied evil that entered this head, this brain, or this forehead, or these sources, or these eyes, this nose or this mouth, or this throat, these ears, this back, or these shoulders, these arms, these veins, or these hands, or this chest, this liver, this *bofe* or this heart, or this tripe or this chaff, or this belly, these bones or on these knees, or on these legs, or on these feet, or on these joints, in that sea, be thrown, for the sea is powerful and sacred, and it can deal with everything always. Amen. [...]» (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [24], p. 586)

is a vehicle for many diseases, when it emanates from beings, stars, crossroads, the sea and many other things that contaminate or infest it. In what regards neighbors: anybody can cast (intentionally or unintentionally) the evil eye on another person (namely, to things close to the person), whether he is an enemy or someone who desires the person well. In what regards the animal: the one that is pointed out as a direct or indirect cause of illness can, in turn, be the cause of cure (being part of the composition of folk remedies). Regarding the word (spoken and written): despite the incalculable power of the word in the form of benediction, exorcism, and prayer, as well as the name of Jesus (evoked in the cure of various illnesses), it is believed there is danger arising from certain words uttered, including names of animals endowed with polluting potential, or in the magical power associated with the names of certain diseases, more wrapped in fear and mystery, and thus, their utterance is prohibited. The same ambivalent attitude is verified in relation to the sea.

The collection of Popular Medicine (referred to here) is a testament of a pre-modern mentality. On the one hand, in the traditional models of disease and cure there is a semantic link (non-causal, non-deterministic) or a logic of similarities and comparisons between concepts and events. On the other hand, the pre-modern mentality is in line with a nature which is not very dominated materially – prior to the modern reality of a planet completely humanized or affected by human activity⁷.

To the body that becomes the target of the effectiveness of the therapeutic ritual is transmitted the necessary magical virtues and protection retained and preserved by consecrated materials, substances, acts, words, gestures, and signs. Through the magic ritual (determined by principles of sympathy / dislike, contiguity, similarity and contrast), the patient's body becomes a special stage of a complex performance, through which happen and are renewed the forms of intimate articulation between the individual and nature, the human community and the cosmos. Evil is transferred or exorcised away from the village – a deserted and difficult place to access where it cannot harm anyone or «nothing in the world» (ALMEIDA et al. 2009 [14], p. 605) and, above all, cannot return (CORRAL 2009, pp. 491-496).

⁷While for a pre-scientific mentality, the wild areas are the symbol of a demonic power (source of malefic intrusions) outside of human control, for technical-scientific modernity, they tend to be seen less as possessed by a harmful will to humanity and more like a fragile web of life that requires human protection and care (TUAN 1979, p. 212).

It is not surprising. In an alternative view to the thesis of an intrinsically maritime country, conveyed by historiography, erudite literature, the intellectual and political discourse of certain times, under which the Atlantic adventure appears hegemonically as the symbol of national identity, Joana de Freitas reminds us, in her study entitled *Landscapes of Fear: The Portuguese Coast*, that – in tune with historical documentation and oral tradition texts – the Portuguese coast remained for centuries, from the Middle Ages to the 19th century, an empty, wild, untamed and chaotic territory. The maritime domain was limited to a narrow coastline, except for small coastal communities and port cities. Citing Orlando Ribeiro, Joana de Freitas recalls that activities related to the sea have always been limited, fragmentary and intermittent. For centuries, fishermen only settled on open coasts during the summer, returning to the countryside during the winter, to dedicate themselves to rural activities. Because of the high level of exposure and openness of the Portuguese coast – between Porto and Nazaré and between the mouth of the river Sado and Cabo de S. Vicente -, the coastal area was perceived, for centuries, as an inhospitable and hostile place. Coastalization is a recent phenomenon, which started in the 19th century, according to the study by Joana de Freitas (2016, p. 29). Inseparable from changes in population patterns, technological and economic transformations in the fishing industry, rural exodus, the emergence of sea baths for medicinal purposes, coastalization has contributed to a progressive change in the perception of the coast as an exemplary landscape of fear. Only modernly, the sea (as well as the seaside and the beach) is an aesthetically valued landscape (henceforth perceived as grand, beautiful and sublime⁸) and a popular place of leisure (FREITAS 2016, p. 47). The same happened with the mountain (vertical extension) and the desert.

The weak occupation of the Portuguese coast had real and imaginary reasons, which intensified an ancestral fear of the sea and the ocean: frequent attacks by pirates and corsairs, of different nationalities, persisting until the beginning of the 19th century, whose memory is preserved in periodicals and newspapers of the time and is present in the popular imagination (FREITAS 2016, pp. 35-37); the frequent shipwrecks because of the coastline's morphology and weather conditions; the storms, which inhibit human

⁸The aesthetic appropriation of nature through a free enjoyment of contemplation came to imply a kind of detachment of nature (or better: the autonomization of an integral element of this whole) henceforth not strictly confined to the existence of work or to any practical purposes: «What was once used, or was considered useless as a desert land, and what has been ignored and despised over the centuries, or the hostile and unknown territory, has become great, sublime and beautiful: it has become aesthetically in the landscape» (RITTER 2011, p. 105)

presence along the coast (FREITAS 2016: p. 42); the risk of loss of life and misery are the constant threats to fishing families, as exemplified by oral tradition; the lack of resources – namely, the lack of arable land, the destruction of which is caused by sand carried by the wind; the lack of fresh water; the hostile climate with great thermal amplitude during the day; the impact of salt contamination on the flora; the almost non-existence of access routes to coastal villages (FREITAS 2006, p. 44). As for the imaginary reasons: the fear of coastal areas, considered as a privileged space of the unknown (FREITAS 2006, p. 29). Under the shape of an epic sea, linked to the imagery of the Discoveries – in turn, distinct from the sea associated with fishing, to a hard mode of life made of chance and luck – there is an anti-epic sea (*História Trágico-Marítima*), whose fury and bravery plunged into the depths of human suffering and misery all those who were pushed to him, sometimes by poverty, sometimes by greed. Witnessing much affection for the land and little for the sea, oral tradition reveals a sea of survival, quite different from the sea of richness in the East, according to the study [in press] by Guimarães and Freitas.

The coast is an area of incalculable risks and dangers. As an example of dry land – like the mountain, the desert, the sea and the pine forest – the coast was ignored and despised for its uselessness and considered a hostile and unknown territory (RITTER 2011, p.105). Recalling Luís Cancela da Fonseca's argument, the fear of maritime populations at sea is not only manifested in the belief that, after a certain limit, it becomes impossible to return from the sea / ocean, but also in the use of the horizon line as reference point and frontier between the known sea (navigable and source of sustenance) and the infinite sea as a space of wonder and perdition (FREITAS 2016, p. 31).

There is also a religious reason for the repulsion to the sea: the mountain and the sea are associated with the malediction, as they are the face and vestige of the Flood. In other words: instruments of punishment and relics of the catastrophe. Under this pre-modern mental framework, it is not surprising that the sea appears as a sink and abyss of all evils. Besides that, with an additional guarantee: evils are necessarily imprisoned far beyond the limits of the known sea.

(translation: Mariana Guimarães)

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