



HERDS AND FLOCKS

HERDS and FLOCKS. In the Iranian world, domestic herbivores have long been raised exclusively on natural grazing, as it is still true in many places, especially among the nomadic tribes. The herd or flock (*galla*) is the basis of all the techniques of this type of breeding (*Bonte*). It is the gregarious instinct that drives herbivorous animals to flock together under their leaders. The role of man consists of turning the natural rules of the gregarious instinct to his own profit by changing the size and composition of the flock and by imposing other leaders (shepherds or trained animals) on it. The aim is to breed, feed, and protect the livestock under the best possible conditions, taking into account such major constraints as variations in temperature, inadequate vegetation, predators, etc., which hamper this activity. In the present context of modernization, the ways of organizing herds and flocks are survivals of ancient forms of sharing implements of work and collectively managing natural resources, especially pastures.

With regard to its size, the herd or flock can be defined as “the largest group within which the animals may take the best benefit from grazing on natural pastures without getting in each other’s way” (Digard, p. 48). In application of this principle as well as the conditions of care-taking, a flock of sheep will rarely exceed 600 heads; but this number may considerably vary, depending on natural conditions or local social ones (see below).

A herd may consist of animals belonging to one and the same species—herds of dromedaries among the Arabs of *Kuzestān*, the *Qašqā’i* and *Bāšeri* tribes of *Fārs*, the *Torkmans*, the *Kurds* of *Khorasan*, around the villages bordering on



the central deserts, especially between Ṭabas and Yazd; herds of cows (*gāvāra*) in the Caspian forests—or animals belonging to several species. In the latter case, the species chosen must not differ too much in their walking aptitudes or in their eating habits. For instance, the Baḳtiāri often combine donkeys and cows on the one hand, and horses and mules on the other (*rama*; see Digard, p. 56). The most frequent combination of species is that of sheep and goats.

Changes can also be made in the make-up of the herd as far as gender and age are concerned, eliminating surplus males (and selecting the best), separating genders into two herds outside the reproduction periods, separating the young from their mothers so that they are not suckled too much during their milking periods, etc. This system of division acts at the same time as a prevention against overgrazing.

Most of the time, the herds are entrusted to more or less specialized people, shepherds or other keepers of livestock (see ČŪPĀN). The shepherd is assisted by several dogs. He may also bring leader animals, such as castrated and specially trained rams (*dobor*) or goats (*sehis*) into the herd (Digard, p. 56; Musawi-nežād and Karimi).

Several kinds of factors may influence the nature and the degree of technical interventions upon the herd, which can be divided into two general categories: “natural factors” and “social and cultural factors.”

Natural factors. They constitute the most important elements affecting the overall management of the herd. (1) The season: From December to February, the herds have to return to camp in the evening to shelter from the cold, so they travel shorter distances during the day and have to be divided into smaller herds to avoid overgrazing. From late February to early July (the milking period), the milked females are separated from the rest of the herd; from July to November, the large herds leave the camps for the entire period under the care of the shepherds alone. (2) The climate: Among mixed flocks, on the whole, sheep are better at standing the cold and are therefore more numerous than goats in the cold regions (Azarbaijan, northern Khorasan) and in the mountains (70 to 90 percent in the Zagros, Ṣafi-nežād, pp. 349-50; Moḥammadpur, p. 94), while goats are more numerous in warm regions (up to 64 percent sometimes in southern Khorasan, Baluchestan, and the Persian Gulf area). (3) The carrying capacity of pastures: Unlike sheep, goats can make do with poor and steep pastures on high mountains (Digard, p. 48) and with shrubby vegetation (Torkaman Ṣaḥrā); for the same reason, they are more



numerous among settled people than among nomads (Reżwāni Gilkalā'i, pp. 123-24). In periods of great drought (as in the Birjand area in Khorasan in 1378 Š./1998-99), each herd is split up. (4) Geomorphology: This exercises a major influence on the organization of herds. The herds are more homogeneous in their composition and of smaller size in the mountains than in the plains, because the risks, such as dispersion, loss, and attacks of predators, are more numerous in the mountains.

Social and cultural factors. Although more difficult to define, they are no less important than natural factors. (1) Mode of life: Nomads possess more riding animals (horses, mules), and settled people have more draft animals (oxen, *varzā*). Among villagers, owners of small herds (*galla čekāna*, with 10 to 15 heads of small livestock per family) are more numerous; therefore they have a greater tendency to form collective herds than the nomads do (170 to 190 heads of small cattle per family). (2) Forms of cooperation. Four main aspects may be found: a) *čupānkāra* (especially frequent in the Zagros), that is, the herds of each owner are kept separate; b) *sar-čupān* or *moḳtābāz* (the most widespread system), in which case the herds of several owners are grouped together on collective pastures under the care of a single shepherd; c) *sarkuhi* (characteristic for cattle breeding on the northern slopes of the Alborz), which means that the herds are only grouped together when summering on the heights during the lactation period to make it easier to milk them; d) a particular form of the *moḳtābāz* system (western Khorasan and eastern Semnān), which involves total cooperation during the transhumance, among about ten men sharing both the animals and their working implements, with each of them receiving from the community a salary plus his share of the dairy products on the basis of the quantity of milk yielded by his own animals; the *moḳtābāz* is the head and the accountant of this operation (Papoli Yazdi, 1998, p. 26). (3) The evolution of the owners' living standards: Goats generate lower income than sheep (the income from a goat is equivalent to 58.5 percent of that of a sheep), but they require a lower investment. Poor people possess more goats than the rich, but when their revenue increases, the number of goats tends to diminish with respect to that of the sheep. In the 1960s, when complementary food had to be supplied to the herbivores, the cost of goats caught up with that of the sheep, although their income remained lower. This led to a decrease in the number of goats. On the other hand, the traditional tendency (still present among older breeders) to prefer number to quality led them to prefer goats, although modernization was in favor of sheep, even among the nomads. For example, in the Sorḳi tribe of Fārs, which was entirely



nomadic until 1960, the proportion of goats in the herd amounted to 75 percent. But with the settling process and the rise of agriculture in the economy of this tribe (from 5 percent in 1959 to 28 percent in 1987), the proportion of goats dropped to 50 percent (Šahbāzi, pp. 97, 107, 112). (4) The functions and status of the shepherd: The role of shepherds in the organization and guarding of the flock varies. Their task is more complex in the mountains, where there are more dangers, and in cases of mixed herds, when walking habits and biological rhythms are different (the sheep cannot follow the goats everywhere, and they sleep during the hottest hours of the day, while the goats sleep at night, etc.). In such cases, a main shepherd and an assistant (*bāju* or *milāk*) are required, or else an assistance by the owners, who will work on a rota basis, each watching ten heads of small livestock for one night (*gomāri* or *nowbati* system). Both the work of the shepherds and their salaries have considerably increased since the 1960s, when pastures were nationalized. Before, the shepherd's function consisted merely of pasturage, and his salary was paid in kind (in terms of one-tenth of the growth of the herd). Starting with the 1960s, both the surface and the quality of the pastures declined, while the number of small livestock grew due to the liberation of the peasants, who wanted their own flock; and the rise in the consumption of meat in the cities made it necessary to provide additional food for domestic herbivores. Since the young were no longer interested in this kind of career, the salary of the shepherd rose in 1378/1999 to between 50,000 and 60,000 tomans, plus food, clothes, shoes, a donkey, and torches, which is altogether twice the salary of an employee with a master's degree. To make up for this raise, the owners keep adding to the size of the herd entrusted to the shepherd. (5) Popular beliefs: Certain beliefs according to which, for example, a flock must consist of fewer than 600 head of small livestock or include animals belonging to poor families, also influence the organization of herds.

The factors determining the concept of the herd are thus numerous and vary from one place to another. There is, nevertheless, a gradation which may be largely explained by natural conditions in the make-up of a herd: cows prevail in the north, dromedaries and goats in east and south, and sheep in the northwest and west. A comparable gradation, which is difficult to explain, can also be observed among the ways of organizing herds and using pasture. These are altogether more individualistic in the north and west, while assuming more community-oriented forms in the east and south, where they allow the poor to find their place in society. Actually, the lack of shepherds and the qualitative and quantitative decrease of pastures considerably challenge



the idea of the herd as a medium of pastoral management.

See also 'AŠĀYER; BOZ CATTLE; and GUSFAND.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jacob Black-Michaud, *Sheep and Land: The Economics of Power in a Tribal Society* [Lorestan], Cambridge and Paris, 1986.

Pierre Bonte, "La Formule technique du pastoralisme nomade," in Jacques Barrau, Pierre Bonte, and Jean-Pierre Digard, eds., *Études sur les sociétés de pasteurs nomades I: Sur l'organisation technique et économique*, Centre d'études et de recherches marxistes, Cahiers du CERM 109, Paris, 1973, pp. 6-32.

Jean-Pierre Digard, *Techniques des nomades Baxtyâri d'Iran*, Cambridge and Paris, 1981.

T. Moḥam-madpur, *Eskān-e 'ašāyar-e ostān-e Kuhgiluya wa Boir Aḥmad*, Tehran, 1376 Š./1997.

Ebrāhim Musawi-nežād and Ḍabiḥ-Allāh Karimi, "Dobor wa sehis, pišāhang-e galla-ye 'ašāyer," *Faṣl-nāma-ye 'ašāyeri*, no. 4, 1367 Š./1988, pp. 171-80.

Mohammad Hossein Papoli (Pā-poli) Yazdi, *Le nomadisme dans le nord du Khorassan*, Paris, 1991.

Idem, "Moḳtābāz," *Taḥqiqāt-e joḡrāfiā'i* (Mašhad), no. 51, winter 1377 Š./1998, pp. 21-40.

M. Reżwāni Gilkalā'i, *Puyeš-e ensān dar joqrāfiā*, Tehran, 1377 Š./1998, pp. 123-24.

Jawād Ṣafi-nežād, *'Ašāyer-e markazi-e Irān*, Tehran, 1368 Š./1989.



‘Abd-Allāh Šahbāzi, *Il-e nāšenāqta: pažuheš-i dar kuhnešinān-esorki-e Fārs*, Tehran, 1366 Š./1987.

Richard Tapper, *Pasture and Politics: Economics, Conflict, and Ritual Among the Shahsevan Nomads of Northwestern Iran*, London and New York, 1979, pp. 93-100.