

## ***Le fiabe sono vere... Storia popolare italiana***

### ***Fairy Tales Are True... Italian Folk History***

In Depth (summaries)

## **6. THE ECHO OF PAN: PASTORAL LIFE**

### **The Art of Inter-Species Dialogue: Pastoral Communication**

Ethnographic studies of pastoral life reveal that communication between shepherds and animals—through sounds, murmurs, huffs, raspberries, kisses, tongue clicks, and whistles—is a true art form, rich in gestures and vocalizations that reflect deep communicative skill. The sonic repertoire of pastoral practices includes both inarticulate sounds that mimic animal calls and a structured spoken language, complete with names, titles, and meaningful phrases—a genuine shared vocabulary. Shepherds do not simply control their animals; they engage in a constant, meaningful dialogue with them, guiding, selecting, and caring for them through this intricate exchange. Animals are not seen as mute beings but as interlocutors with a comprehensible form of expressiveness.

### **The Patron Saint of Animals**

In 19th-century Sicily, farmers held their domesticated animals in such high regard that they placed them under the protection of saints. Each animal had its own patron: Saint George for horses, Saint Eligius for mules, Saint Erasmus for donkeys, Saint Paschal for sheep, Saint Martin for rams, Saint Anthony for pigs, Saint Vitus for dogs, Saint Martha for cats, and the Madonna for chickens, ducks, and geese. Animals were often even named after their saintly protectors. Religious devotion was deeply intertwined with daily life, as farmers saw their animals not merely as property but as an integral part of both their family and their faith.