

Chapter Two: The Earth

The Romanian peasants do not have the idea that the Earth is a sphere isolated in space. For them, the Earth is a plane, "like the face of a table"; at its edges, the Earth meets the sky, and it is supported by various things from below.

Some of them think the Earth is propped up by several pillars (usually three), made of iron, or wood, or wax. These pillars are gnawed at by an old *zgripturoaică*, and it is her activities which produce earthquakes. This *zgripturoaică* - who is a kind of supernatural monster-woman - eats only maize and water from the people of the Earth. When women sift maize, the part that remains around the edges of their sieves is thrown away for *zgripturoaică*. Similarly, when women go to the spring to fill their pails with water, the water they use to wash the pails with is thrown onto the ground to be drunk by *zgripturoaică*. Thus, says the peasant, economical thrift is good, because any kind of waste can give an enemy advantages.

Other peasants set Judas Iscariot in the place of *zgripturoaică*.

There are also peasants who say the Earth is a substance created by God, and set by Him into water on the back of a big fish. When the fish moves, the Earth shakes. As evidence for this, they affirm that wherever one goes on Earth, if one digs deeply enough, water will appear.

Some put the fish and the pillars together as supports for the Earth, but others have two fishes or two buffaloes, because they are also well-able to stay in the water.

Finally, other peasants explain earthquakes as being produced when God looks down, "because the Earth knows that on it, many sins and wrongdoings happen, and it cannot look at God without shaking from fear."

I shall conclude this chapter by telling some legends.

The first explains the creation of the mountains and valleys:

God created the Earth as a waste field, but He remarked that it was too large to fit under the sky. So, He sent the bee to ask the hedgehog for a solution. The hedgehog referred to his own rolled aspect.

"If the Earth cannot be fitted under the sky as it is too smooth everywhere, it must be tightened, rolled up, wrinkled with hills, mountains and valleys."

Then the bee told God of the hedgehog's opinion, and God finished the Earth off as we see it today, with hills, mountains and valleys.

The magazine "*Șezătoarea*", year I, page 232, offered another popular explanation:

Once upon a time, the fishes which support the Earth on their backs became angry and writhed about greatly, making the Earth shake terribly, and the water below became very stormy, which created the valleys, mountains and hills. At the same time, springs were opened in the Earth, which are the source of the rivers.

Also in the magazine "*Șezătoarea*", year III, page 25, is an explanation for the Earth's creation:

In the beginning, when the Earth was not yet created, and only the water was in place, God called the frog to Him, asking her to go to the ocean bottom to look for some earth. After a long time carrying out this order, the frog came back to God with a little earth in her mouth, telling Him that at the ocean bottom there was a lot of earth. So God commanded the waters to move back to the sides, and leave the Earth above. His order was executed, and from that time forth, the Earth has stayed above the waters. From then on too, God blessed the frog, and he who kills a frog commits a grave sin.

Another legend is this:

One day, God spat in his palm, and His spittle became the Earth. From that day onwards, the Earth stayed on God's palm.

And one last legend:

The Earth is supported by six wax pillars. Judas gnaws eternally at them, to sink the Earth down and destroy the world, but when he finishes one of them and runs to the next, the gnawed pillar springs up again. At Easter, when he sees the Christians with their red eggs, Judas becomes very nervous.

