

## Chapter Five: The Moon

Like the Sun, the Moon is a saint, a virtuous woman who lightens the night, and reposes during the day. The Romanian people imagine the Moon as a beautiful maiden, the twin, or younger, sister of the Sun. This familial link, and the fact that these two heavenly bodies do not meet for long in the sky, has given birth to many legends from the same source, namely that the Sun wanted to marry his sister the Moon, but that this wedding was stopped by something, and then the Moon fled from the Sun. The following two tales illustrate this.

**a)** *The Sun, the most handsome of young men, could not find a more suitable wife for himself than the Moon, the most beautiful of young girls. But at their wedding party, the hedgehog heaped up dust-piles in the Sun's court, saying that these were fodder for the guests' horses.*

*The wedding guests were amazed, and asked the hedgehog, "Why do you do this?"*

*"Because if a brother marries his sister, God will stop the rain and all the food for the horses will disappear", answered the hedgehog, "so the horses must learn to eat dust".*

*Then the guests told the Sun what the hedgehog had said. The Sun became scared, and called off the wedding.*

As we see, in the people's imagination, the hedgehog is a kind of philosopher, very modest and moral.

**b)** *The Moon is the Sun's sister, but, because the Sun wanted to take her as his wife, she always ran away, so as not to be caught up by the Sun.*

In Romanian popular beliefs, sometimes the Moon was said to be originally as luminous as the Sun, because they were twins. The Moon's light became less, because after the failure of their wedding, as God wanted the Moon to keep out of the Sun's view, she hid at the sea bottom. The sea water quenched her brightness.

For the ancient Greeks, Apollo, the solar god was also the twin brother of Artemis, the lunar goddess, the most beautiful and pure maiden, the goddess of clear light.

On the Isle of Crete, Artemis is mixed up with a local goddess called *Britomartis*, the sweet maiden, and as the Cretans' influence over the Mediterranean seacoasts was considerable, *Britomartis* became a second lunar goddess, of the seas, the Moon with the vaporous light, while Artemis remained the bright Moon of the land. Thus they became sisters.

Similarly, Minos, the principal Cretan god, was also mixed with Apollo, becoming his brother, and so also Zeus' son. This led to the generalization of the Cretan myth of Minos' love for *Britomartis*, as with the Romanians, but compounding Minos with Apollo and with the Sun, *Britomartis* with Artemis and the Moon. Here is that myth:

*Minos, attracted by Britomartis' beauty, fell in love with her, and wanted to abduct her, but she ran off. When Minos was close to catching her, Britomartis threw herself into the sea, landing in a fisherman's net. Then Artemis made her into a deity as a reward for her chastity. From that time forth, Britomartis oversaw the seas at night, appearing to the people of the shores and isles.*

Descharmes says, "Graceful personification of the Moon, directing the sailors in their travels, illuminating the activities of the fishermen by night, and, reflecting herself in the surface of the waves, playing among the nets. Or, in accordance with her legend, she is the image of the travelling Moon who walks over the forests and mountains, but who runs from the Sun who desires to catch up with her, and ends by plunging into the abysses of the seas. In a word, she is the lunar Artemis of the Sea-peoples."

Her cult circulated the shores of the Mediterranean, from Crete to Marseilles.

So this cult was also present in Italy, and the Roman legions brought it to Romania, where the legend survives to this day.

The Moon's phases impressed the Romanian peasants too, but they did not understand what they were, and so they found a simple Christian explanation: *Every month, God renews the Moon to demonstrate that He can make little things great, and great things small.*

When the new Moon first appears, the peasants look to see if they are carrying any money in their bag. If they are, it will be a good month. Some of them take an empty bag and make the sign of the cross while looking at the new Moon, asking her to help them.

The peasants also see the Moon's spots and think, without understanding that they are mountains and valleys, that the Moon is a man's round face, with his eyes and nose formed by the spots.

Most of the peasants, however, explain the Moon's spots as being in essence the shepherd called Abel (the first shepherd on Earth, according to the Bible), who was killed by Cain. Here are some other explanations:

**a)** The Moon's spots are a shepherd with his pipe and sheep. His name is Abel, and God set him on the Moon to show mankind how mild he was.

**b)** The Moon's spots are two brothers. The big brother killed the little one, and as a punishment, has to carry his dead brother's body, which drips blood.

**c)** The Moon's spots are two brothers, one of whom is punished by having to drink fuel oil because he killed the other.

**d)** The Moon's spots represent Cain, who drinks the blood of his brother Abel, whom he killed.

**e)** On the Moon can be seen a shepherd with his sheep, propped up by his crook; near him is a fountain and a woman, who came here to drink the water and speak with the shepherd.

This last image concerning the Moon's spots is the most widely-circulated. It may be a projection onto the Moon of the constellation of the Shepherd, who has beside him in the sky the Great Maiden with a Yoke and the Fountain of the Crossroads.