

## Chapter Eight: Atmospheric Phenomena

The Romanian peasant has a few ideas about atmospheric phenomena.

### a) *The Wind:*

This is formed from the breath of evil monsters who want to destroy all the things on the Earth, so that only they will remain. Of course, this belief refers just to strong winds, the ones which dry things up in summer, and freeze them in winter, because the lesser wind is considered useful in some cases. The following story illustrates this:

*One day, a beautiful and intelligent girl met three young men, who said to her, "Good morning, beautiful girl."*

*The girl, who recognised the three boys as Wind, Heat and Frost, answered, "Thank you to one of you three!"*

*The three boys were confused by this. Who was the one?*

*"Me", said Heat, "because she knows that, if I want, I can stifle her during the agricultural works of summer."*

*"Me", said Frost, "because she knows that, if I want, I can freeze her on the road in winter."*

*"I think it will be better if we ask her", said Wind.*

*All three agreed to this idea, and they ran after the girl to ask her which was the one she had meant. "Wind", answered the girl.*

*"I'll catch you in the summer", menaced Heat.*

*"I don't care", replied the girl, "if only there is Wind."*

*"I'll catch you in the winter", menaced Frost.*

*"I don't care", replied the girl, "if only there is no Wind."*

In the magazine Șezătoarea, second year, under the title "The Wind", are the following lines: *The Wind is a young, handsome man, whose house is in the air. He lives with his mother and is unmarried. He would like to marry, but he cannot, because he has not found a wife good enough for him. When he grows tired of racing round the world looking for a suitable wife, he stays in his house, and throughout the world there is silence. When his desire for a wife grows strong again, then the Wind reappears in the world once more.*

*The souls of men climb to Heaven and Hell on the wings of the wind, until they reach the limits of the air.*

*The zmei also travel on the wings of the wind.*

*When the wind blows powerfully for a long time, it is because he bewails the soul of one who has been hanged or drowned.*

*The wind does not blow in Heaven.*

For the ancient Greeks and Romans, there was a god of the wind, Hermes (Mercury), who was also the god Psychopompus or Psychogogus, the god who conducted the souls to their places after death.

Another belief the Romanian people hold concerns the dust-filled tornado formed by the wind, the whirlwind. The tornado is very dangerous, because it hides a devil in its midst. This devil can pull people up into the sky and then let them fall on the ground, to be crippled. He can also cause paralysis in anyone caught in these swirling winds. "He takes a hand or a foot, or twists the mouth", say the peasants. The same effect can also be made by the Iele, but the tornado is replaced by their Hora, the ring dance.

*Iele, Dânse, Soimane, Dobre, Sfinte*, or especially *Joimărițe* are names for a group of malignant goddesses, very beautiful, and attractively dressed, but who will not forgive anyone who sees them. They live in the air, but by night they come down to the Earth, singing and dancing. Where they touch the Earth, the plants grow pale and die beneath their feet, becoming like ash from under a fire, and that place becomes devastated. "God forbid that you should meet them!" There is a general belief that if they call you back to them, and you go, they will disfigure you. They also disfigure those who sleep outdoors in the night, dancing a Hora around such imprudent persons.

An interesting case is that where the *Joimărițe* punished a slothful girl who did not spin hemp until *Joia Mare* [*Joi* = Thursday, *Mare* = Great, so "Great Thursday", the Thursday before Easter]. The term *Joimărițe* proceeds from *Jove* (Jupiter) + *Marte* (Mars), but in time and with usage by the peasants, the name of the god *Marte* here became shortened, and its sense altered, to *Mare*. The real explanation of this belief stems from the fact that a Romanian peasant-woman contributes to the agricultural work alongside her

husband; so her winter work, which includes spinning, must be completed before the agricultural field work begins again, which is usually immediately after Easter. Only during the autumn do the peasant women have time for flax and hemp spinning.

These malignant goddesses must be reminiscences of the wind deities, the Harpies, the death goddesses, the Dryads, and the nymphs who protected the forests, and who punished those who cut into the great trees under their protection; such goddesses performed ring dances and sang songs around their protected trees too.

There are Romanian peasants who have been out walking in the night through forests or fields, and thought they heard the aerial song of the Iele, just as the ancients thought they heard the Dryads' song. Pipes placed in tree-hollows near where the Iele sing and play become magic pipes. If anyone plays them afterwards, those nearby are forced to dance, and if the pipes are played for a long time, the dancers must dance on until they die.

It is possible that the name Iele derives from Elo (Aello; Aellopus), the Harpy representing the breath of the hurricane.

### ***b) The Rain:***

This is given to the Earth when God wishes to do so. When He does not, God gives drought. Hailstones are made by the Solomonari who walk among the clouds, or they ride the balauri which carry the hailstones. The Solomonari throw hailstones wherever they want to. It is possible that the small, mobile clouds (which the Italians call *ascetisi*) that appear before the more stormy clouds arrive, especially before the hail-stone storm clouds, could have given the peasants the idea of the Solomonari who ride the balauri and choose the place where the hail will fall.

Concerning the name *Solomonari*, I think it comes from Solomon's wisdom. The peasants do not know exactly who Solomon was, but they think he was someone quite extraordinary. They also believe that Solomon was someone who knew how to dominate evil spirits. Some of these spirits were once trapped by Solomon in bottles, whose corks were sealed by him, and then the bottles were thrown into the sea. The evil spirits saw Solomon's seal on their bottles, and did not dare to emerge again. Other spirits were cast into the Earth's depths in a similar way by Solomon. Only a few spirits were not thus enclosed, and they remain free, causing a lot of trouble both on Earth and in the sky. The Mahomedans held these same beliefs about Solomon, but they expressed them in more elaborate, wonderful stories, although without any connections to natural phenomena, unlike the Romanian myths.

### ***c) The Lightning, Thunder-bolt and Thunder:***

These are the work of Saint Ilie.

In the peasants' beliefs, Saint Ilie follows the evil spirits and the Devil in the sky, walking across the clouds accompanied by his horses, treasure and a fire-whip. Thunder is the clatter of the horses' hooves and the rolling of the treasure-cart's wheels. It occurs when Saint Ilie's horses run too quickly through the clouds. When Saint Ilie whips his horses with the fire-whip, then lightning appears. This makes the horses dash along, which means the thunder follows immediately after the lightning. The thunder-bolt [lightning strike] happens when Saint Ilie shoots at the devil with an arrow. Being thus pursued, the Devil hides where he can, in men, cattle, houses, trees, etc., but Saint Ilie sees him wherever he is, and thunders after him. However, the thing in which the Devil hides is in danger too, so when lightning is seen, the people make a Christian hand-cross over themselves, in order to remain free from the Devil.

Some peasants think that when it thunders, the bulky dark clouds are fighting, butting at each other with their heads. From such a fight, a type of foam falls on the Earth which is good for wounds.