

POPULAR COSMOGONY AND BELIEFS ABOUT CELESTIAL BODIES IN THE CULTURE OF THE HUNGARIANS FROM ROMANIA

Győző ZSIGMOND

University of Bucharest, Chair of Hungarology, Romania

Abstract: The paper is an analysis and synthesis of the beliefs and knowledge of the Hungarians from Romania concerning the genesis of the world and the celestial bodies (sky, Earth, Sun, Moon, stars, rainbow); furnishing new details about the whole popular cosmogony of the Hungarians living in the Eastern part of the Carpathian basin. The author tries to present a comprehensive aspect of this domain based on fieldwork and the literature. He also refers to most recent beliefs such as ideas connected to landing on the Moon.

Keywords: popular cosmogony, beliefs on sky, Earth, Sun, Moon, stars, rainbow

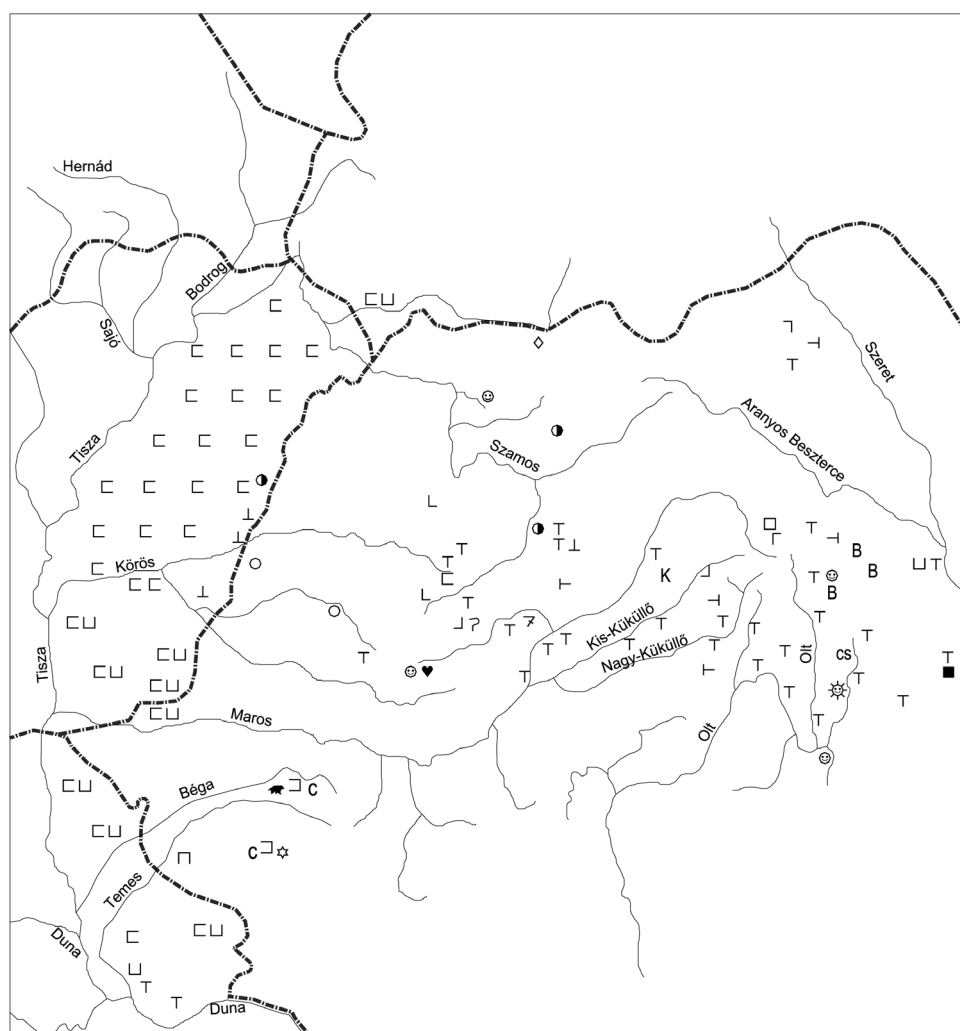
AREA AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

Between 1980 and 1994 I did research in 34 Romanian localities in 13 counties, in that way analysing most of the territory inhabited by Hungarians in Transylvania. Out of the 200 persons interviewed, more than 90 answered a set of questions using the expanded form of the “CS. PÓCS–HOPPÁL questionnaire” (1970). The persons interviewed were chosen from different age groups (classes) and belonged to different religions and denominations.

First of all the descriptive and comparative methods were used and in special cases the semantic approach. For the explanation of the names of stars and constellations my analysis was based on onomastics. In the case of the Moon accounts, of the spots on the Moon, I used the cartographic procedure.

POPULAR COSMOGONY

Here I would like to present some of the world creation-concepts, more exactly the folk concepts of Hungarians, especially of the Hungarian people from Romania (existing since 1918 as an ethnic minority in that state, living in particular in three geographical areas, the former Hungarian Partium provinces, Transylvania and the Moldavian Principality) with a short historical survey and a comparison with other cosmogonies – the Romanian for example. Finally I will try to (briefly) summarise all the concepts and data mentioned above.



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| ☐ – (King) David making music | ☐ – shepherd drying foot-cloth | ☐ – sickle |
| ☐ – St. Peter plays the violin | ☐ – (King) David drying foot-cloth | ☐ – man with scythe |
| ☐ – Cicely playing the violin | ☐ – St. Peter drying foot-cloth | ☐ – two foot-clothes |
| ☐ – Cicely dancing | ☐ – hunter drying foot-cloth | ☐ – God |
| ☐ – man carrying hay, straw, twigs or vine shoot | ☐ – Romanian drying foot-cloth | ☐ – picture of King David |
| ☐ – man carrying wood | ☐ – Virgin Mary drying napkin | ☐ – dog |
| ☐ – head, face (of a man) | ☐ – herdsman grazing | ☐ – people from the village Csomafalva with a basket for berrying |
| ☐ – man and a bair | ☐ – herdsmen making fire | ☐ – Babba Mary |
| ☐ – Adam and Eve | ☐ – Gipsy (children) | ☐ – people from the village Korond |
| | ☐ – Kain and Abel | |

Fig. 1. Explanation of moonspots in the eastern part of the Carpathian basin

With a short historical survey I have presented here the world creation-myths, more exactly the Earth creation-myths of the Hungarians and specifically the Hungarian minority from Romania (living in Moldavia, Transylvania, the Partium¹), in comparison with other peoples' cosmogonical notions.

Cosmogony is a peripheral dimension of the popular concepts as I discovered from speaking with my sources of information and the situation is the same in the case of the whole Hungarian population (MNL III: 291, VAJKAI 1948). In my numerous travels for research I have never heard about a creation-legend or myth; most people were surprised by the question: How was the Earth created? The only answer was: Go and see the Bible (Gen. 1–31).

Only a few researchers had the possibility to write down cosmogonical concepts, beliefs, and myths from Hungarian sources in the second part of the 20th century. Some of them were working on the same field (BOSNYÁK 1969, RÁDULY-FARAGÓ 1990). The most complete Hungarian version of a world creation-myth was found in Moldavia (BOSNYÁK 1969). I will quote Ilona Nagy's words, in connection with that myth (legend) found in MNL (see Selective bibliography) under the subtitle: The legend about the creation of the world:

God had been creating the world with the help of the Devil. At the beginning water was everywhere. God sent the Devil down to the bottom of the sea, to bring Him some sand up. The Devil carried out his duty, but only at the third time, because the sand was washed out of his hands by the water.

They had been kneading the sand, putting their feet on it and taking a rest. The Devil tried to push God into the sea, but without luck because in the direction God was pushed the land became bigger and bigger...

From the eight recorded versions one was collected from Palócföld², five from Moldavia and Bukovina, two from Marosszék³.

The Hungarian texts have a higher grade of similarity with the texts (world creation-myth) collected from the Ural-Altaic region (TOPOROV 1988), Bulgaria and Romania (MNL V: 560, RÁDULY-FARAGÓ 1990, BRILL 1994).

We may think of overtaking, parallel preservation of myths as well as bequeathed beliefs of neighbouring nations in the Middle Ages. In the Hungarian mythology we can find the Biblical Genesis and an ancient dualistic cosmogony in which God and the Devil were working together when the world was created. This could be a Finno-Ugrian inheritance or a Balkan one. The dualistic cosmogony mentioned above is known throughout the world with the exception of Western Europe, accord-

¹ Partium = partes Regni Hungariae is a traditional Hungarian name of counties which temporary belonged to the Ducey Transylvania in the 16th–17th century. Today these territories give the Western part of Romania.

² Ethnographical area in the North of Hungary and Southeast of Slovakia.

³ Central region of Transylvania.

ing to Ilona NAGY's study (1979). That is true in the case of the legends mentioning the world creation from the sand brought from the bottom of the sea. Regarding the other types of cosmogonical legends, there exist similarities in Western Europe, for example in the case of the Spanish and French cultures (SÉBILLOT 1991, AMADES 1994, JUNG 1992).

We can also affirm that the presence of the dual cosmogony – in most cases – is undeniable in Hungarian world creation-myths; naturally not including the story of Genesis from the Bible (BOSNYÁK 1969: 462–64, NAGY 1979, RÁDULY-FARAGÓ 1990). God and the Devil were “associates” in the process of creation. This concept might be a Finno-Ugrian one but also a Balkan borrowing. The idea of the Balkan origin is based on Károly JUNG's (1992: 157–185) competent, well-documented study (first edition in 1989) which confirms the existence of similar myths (to the Hungarian) in Bulgarian, Romanian, Slovenian, Ruthenian and Gypsy cosmogonies. Jung was the first to publish the only Serbian world creation-myth (the only version of it) which is justly considered by him to be a borrowing.

Jung refers to ZOLOTARJOV's (1980) important study in which the author suggests the Siberian origin of that (Serbian) myth, verifying his presumptions. These presumptions do not prove the origin of the Hungarian dual world creation-myths. Jung has two theories. The first is a theory about the connection of the Hungarian texts – presumably landmarks of late Hungarian Bogumil heresy – with Bogumilism, because of the lack of reference to an ornithomorphic demiurgos (Gr., the creator spirit); the second is a theory about the existence of these myths in Bukovina and in Moldavia with the help of foreign – perhaps Romanian – mediation.

My attempt can summarise the present results as shown above and those in JUNG's other study (1993: 10–13).

The basic dualistic world creation-myth reflects a logical thinking: the good comes necessarily from good; the Devil is evil, so all wrong, evil, bad things in the world issue from him. In the opinion of LÉVI-STRAUSS (1971) it is explained by the mythical way of thinking, so we have the acceptance of this universal opposition and the deduction of this opposition from ancient cosmogonies. In this way the current sporadic Hungarian popular cosmogony is a reflection of this ancient mythology.

STARS, CONSTELLATIONS

The knowledge of the persons interviewed about stars (constellations) is limited to an approximate location, a name and an observation of the date and the place. I present here the constellations and names in conformity with the popular beliefs and knowledge very briefly. I also analyse those data based on the science of names and descriptive-comparative account of stars.

The Transylvanian regions rich in names of stars are: Csík, Mezőség, Sóvidék, Udvarhelyszék, Bánság, Háromszék, Barcaság, Homoród Valley, Gyergyó region.

The Hungarians from Transylvania have given names to 34 stars and constellations; 118 names and 28 variations of form and pronunciation. Among these 19 are localised, identified, 4 partially identified and 11 unidentified. Special cases: 1, when the stars are mentioned without name; 2, when a name refers to several constellations (*Hétfejű sárkány* ‘the Dragon with seven heads’, *Hetevény*).

Most name types (way, cart, rod, brooder with chickens) and most variations of names are connected to the best-known stars and constellations. The variants of names (pairs of names) are given in brackets: Tejút (the Milky Way, 23 from the 118), Fiastyúk (the Pleiades, 18), Vacsoracsillag (‘the Supper-star’, 11), Göncölszekér (‘the Cart of Göncöl’ = the Great Bear, 9). The situation is similar regarding variants of form and pronunciation too: Göncölszekér (12), Fiastyúk (6), Tejút (5), Vacsoracsillag (4).

I try to give a comprehensive presentation (the semiotic approach, the inter-ethnic relations are included too). The persons interviewed knew about at most seven stars (constellations) or other heavenly bodies (meteors, comets) considered by them as stars:

1. the Great Bear (Ursa Maior)
2. the Milky Way (Via Lactea)
3. shooting stars (meteors)
4. comets
5. the “Daybreak-star” (Venus)
6. the “Supper-star” (Venus)
7. the Pleiades

In contrast with other regions, in Transylvania the names of the stars and the explanations connected to historical and religious facts are richer. Four functions are attributed especially to the constellations (stars): 1. to forecast the weather; 2. to be the scene of different events, things; 3. to predict important aspects of destiny; 4. to influence illness and recovery.

The most frequently asserted function of stars is the *location-function*, operating through their names and explanations. They are manifestations of events and things imagined there. I have already discussed this both implicitly and explicitly in my doctoral thesis, in the onomastic analysis and in presenting the explanations of star names. I shall not deal with these in detail here. It is, however, important to note that two fundamentally opposed locations occur. One is that of reward and the other of punishment. The opposite pairs good – evil, sacred – profane appear projected onto the sky in the star names mainly in the form of the opposite pair of *saint* (Saint Peter, Saint George, etc.) – *devil* (Satan). The stories and heroes on the positive side are linked mainly to the Milky Way, the Great Bear and Venus, and those on the negative side to comets, considered to be stars.

Aspects of history and religion appear most frequently in our world of stars. The informants linked a number of beings of belief with the stars, for example, in the

Bánság⁴ and Mezőség regions, the devil, in Alcsík region angels and in Felcsík region the dragon.

The *Fairies' Way* as the name of a constellation found in Moldavia is the only reference to another being of belief, the fairy (BOSNYÁK 1980: 28). In earlier times in the Székelyföld region a star named after a beautiful woman and the related legend were also known (KANDRA 1970: 413).

The role of stars in *predicting weather* is widely known. I can only give a few examples by way of illustration. From Bukovina to the Bánság region, a night sky full of stars is held to be a sign of good weather and the harbinger of a good harvest (BOSNYÁK 1977). In winter it is a sign of cold if the stars shine brightly, and in summer this means good weather. It is held to be a portent of rain if the stars *twinkle*, and if they are *like eyes*, that is, if they can be seen clearly and seem to be close. A very starry sky can also be a sign of a change of weather. In Havad, Marosszék region, it is held that there will be rain if there are many stars in the sky or if there are none (NAGY 1989: 68).

INFLUENCING, PREDICTING HUMAN FATE

One of the most alive and widespread beliefs is that a falling star causes or predicts death; it influences human fate or predicts its course.

Barcaság⁵ region:

If someone sees a falling star he must think of something and it will be fulfilled (Né).

Háromszék region:

There will be death in the part of the world where the falling star falls (Kő).

The practice of linking *star-counting* (7 or 9 stars) and predicting the future was known in the Partium region and throughout Transylvania in the early 20th century. A similar practice was found in the region of Eger and in the Jászság region (Zs. SZENDREY-Á. SZENDREY 1922: 319). To give a few examples of the beliefs: in Szatmár county, if someone counts seven stars before going to bed, his dream will come true; in Bihar county, in Nagyszalonta, if a girl goes out on the street on the seventh morning after counting stars, she will meet her future husband; in the valley of the Fekete-Körös nine stars are counted backwards, in the Háromszék region, if someone counts nine stars every evening, the girl whose hand he holds on the ninth morning will be his wife (Zs. SZENDREY-Á. SZENDREY 1922: 319). According to a belief in the Csallóköz⁶ region, anyone who finds his star dies immediately (IPOLYI 1854).

⁴ Bánság, multiethnic region of former Hungary, after the Trianon Peace Treaty (1920) divided into three parts between Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia. Bánát, name of region of southwestern part of today Romania.

⁵ Barcaság, Burzenland, Țara Bîrsei = region in southeast Transylvania.

⁶ Csallóköz = Hungarian region in southwest Slovakia.

Stars are also present in folk *medicine*.

In the Bánság region it is said that warts can be made to disappear by counting stars.

The star can also be a cause of death if certain prohibitions are violated. Zoltán FEJŐS recorded in County Nógrád that pointing to a star means death (1985: 124). Thus in the Mezőség and Háromszék regions, for example, it is forbidden to count stars and anyone who violates this prohibition will have *freckles or warts*. The same belief is held, or rather was once held, in the Barcaság region, in Hunyad county, in the valley of the Fekete-Körös, in Csík (Zs. SZENDREY-Á. SZENDREY 1922: 319), in Bukovina and the Sóvidék⁷ regions (BOSNYÁK 1977, GUB 1994).

The stars that *show the time* for the most part no longer play this important role; with the appearance of various mechanical and electronic means of measuring and telling the time, even their names are falling into oblivion. Deducting the time from the stars is not a thing of the past according to reports throughout Romania. For the most part people gave approximate indications linked to work. Moreover, in the past it was not as important to know the exact time as it is now (cf. ERDŐDI 1977: 6).

STAR SYMBOLISM (THE STAR AS SYMBOL)

The additional meanings of elements and phenomena of astrology can be interpreted as symbolical, giving rise to symbols which are expressed through symbolical actions, such as beliefs.

A universal human characteristic: the star is above all a symbol of light; it is linked to the first element in such pairs of opposites as light – dark, up – down, sacred – profane, etc., it is of heavenly nature and this leads to what can be regarded as its universally positive evaluation. It is therefore understandable that the meaning of the star hieroglyph in Ancient Egypt is god and the meanings of the star-shaped sign in Mesopotamia are: sky, infinite, god (*Jelképtár* 1990: 47).

During my collecting work I heard a number of times that the stars indicate God's will and, since this is not always favourable for fallible humans, it may also appear as the vehicle of something negative. In this way stars are also linked to Satan (cf. TOPOROV 1988: 536), and not only to the angels (see also: CHEVALIER–GHEERBRANT 1990: 417).

In the Sóvidék region, reference was also made to the belief that it is only the Lord on High who really knows the names of the stars and because this is a matter that belongs rather to him, man should not seek to know it (cf. Bible, Isaiah 40, 26).

In the Szilágyság⁸ region there was even an informant who traced the names of a number of stars and constellations to Jesus Christ or above all to the message of divine origin that they symbolise.

⁷ Sóvidék ('Saltregion') = small Hungarian region in Szeklerland, East Transylvania.

⁸ Szilágyság = small region with mixed Hungarian and Romanian population in Western Transylvania.

For persons seeking consolation and hope, by its sacral nature alone the starry sky lends itself to interpretation as the sign of some kind of compensation or punishment, in cases applying only to certain elements, such as the *Star of the Poor*, *Star of Big Farmers*.

Regarding stars as a symbol of fate or a symbol of death was found everywhere: as such they indicate or even predict the course of the lives of human beings. It is quite common throughout Transylvania (too) to come across sayings referring to this (reflecting the influence of astrology), such as: *his star has risen*, *his star has set*, *he was born under a bad constellation*.

The star as the symbol of the Messiah (Christ) is commonly known in Romania too, and not only among the Hungarian-speaking population; in places this is also expressed in the name of the star (cf. CHEVALIER–GHEERBRANT 1990: 417).

The (five-pointed) star of Bethlehem is almost certainly a concession made by the church to astrological thinking: it signalled the birth of Jesus. But a star indicated this, for example, in the case of Buddha too (CHEVALIER–GHEERBRANT 1990: 420).

The word “star” is used with the implicit meaning of something having the power to make a curse, blessing or wish come true, for example when swearing an oath on the stars, or expressing the wish that the star will curse someone (BOSNYÁK 1980: 29).

It is not likely that people know that the five-pointed star is also a symbol of perfection (CHEVALIER–GHEERBRANT 1990: 416). However, this symbol lives in practice, even in urban folk culture, for example when stars are used as a commonly understood way of classifying hotels and restaurants.

The fact that “my star” is such a common form of address in Hungarian folk poetry may be related to the above. It is a value symbol having the meaning of my saint, my dear, my beloved. According to the common belief, the stars point towards heaven where they just live their eternal life. This is (could be) also related to their frequent interpretation as guiding signs.

Several stars, constellations: can be a symbol or sign of properties, historical events or in general of some element of the human world, as its heavenly counterpart.

We have data from the present from Udvarhelyszék, Bukovina (BOSNYÁK 1977) and the Palócföld region on the role of stars in *influencing crops*. The former probably originates from old almanacs containing predictions and interpretations of dreams and is related to the Evening Star (REGIOMONTANUS 1986: 47). According to the latter, when many stars can be seen in the sky the time is right to sow maize (FEJŐS 1985: 122).

In different places in the early 20th century predictions were still made for a good wheat crop or wine production from the starry sky on Christmas evening; elsewhere in Hungary conclusions were drawn from it regarding the future quantity of hay, plums, chickens or geese and also on how prolifically the hens will lay (Zs. SZENDREY–Á. SZENDREY 1922: 322). There were once people in Háromszék (Trei Scaun) who believed that if the stars all shone with equal brightness at midnight on the last day of the year, the coming year would be a fertile one (Zs. SZENDREY–Á. SZENDREY 1922: 322).

In the popular beliefs studied here we can find a mixture of magic, ancient mythology, religion, science and astrology. The explanations in connection with the stars today are fewer than in the past. The present oral tradition concerning stars and the Universe is poor in comparison with the older oral tradition (at the beginning of the 20th century – when A. Ipolyi published 258 star-names registered by J. Lugossy), and it can be found mainly in rural environments (ERDŐDI 1970).

The present-day Hungarian rural tradition tells us more about the universe, the stars than schools generally teach in towns: so one of its roles is to supplement, to fill in the gap. It is very significant that more than 30 Hungarian proverbs and idiomatic expressions concern stars (O. NAGY 1976: 126, 127, 164, 165, 213, 242, 283).

THE SUN

Shepherds and elder persons gave the most detailed answers. Elderly women gave another important part of answers about popular beliefs. As regards regional distribution, most of the data were collected in Moldavia, Mezőség (Câmpia Transilvaniei) and Csík (Ciuc) regions.

The sun is considered the most important celestial body giving light. According to the local popular terminology, it does not belong to the stars; its role is so significant. It is a general conception that the Sun is something else, not a star. Moldavian Hungarians from Lészped (Lespezi) said “The Sun is God’s eye” (BOSNYÁK 1978: 20–22).

The increase of the role of the Sun – the solar myths – can be placed in the later period of mythology (IVANOV 1988: 240–242).

During the time of the developed ancient civilisations, with the solar time reckoning its role became greater compared to the Moon’s (MN VII. 1990: 728). This cult did not live long in the European peasant societies, including in ours. But the ancient celebration of solstices became a tradition. Christianity, beginning with the 4th century, symbolically identifying Christ with the Sun, placed Christmas at the day of winter solstice. It is also connected to the solar year that the summer solstice was celebrated mostly with burning fires, and from the 5th century this became another Christian feast: the day of St. Ivan (MNL III: 693–4).

They do not worship the Sun as worshipping is due only to God, but its respect is present in today’s popular beliefs. The Sun is sacred, blessed; no one is allowed to curse it. In Moldavia it embodies the good. “The Sun is fighting with the devil” – they said in Bukovina (BOSNYÁK 1977: 29). The personifications of the Sun’s direction in the sky, its metaphorical expressions are widespread.

I only mention briefly how the Sun is present in our folk poetry and folk art. Gábor O. Nagy mentions 44 sayings connected to the Sun as a celestial body. I publish some of them in the data file, together with sayings (O. NAGY 1976). Being most frequently a king or a prince, in our popular tales the Sun lives in a golden palace.

Wooden houses decorated with rays of the Sun, the drawing of the world tree with the Sun and the Moon on the washing beetle, the Sun and the Moon on country gates etc. all show the significance of the Sun in Hungarian folk art.

Catholics in particular gave me accounts of the solar-ceremony including the act of looking into the sun and of the things seen during that act.

Information about this heavenly body was found in a smaller quantity than information about the Moon. In the case of the persons interviewed I can talk about a natural coexistence of experience, magic, popular and dogmatic religion as well as astrology.

THE MOON

I can add to the literature new and important data about the connection between the Moon and agriculture, the Moon and popular medicine, the Moon and the weather.

I modified the CS. PÓCS–HOPPÁL questionnaire (1970) taking into consideration the changes since the study was edited, adding new questions and I did research in schools too, based on this rewritten questionnaire. I also refer to the popular terminology and the different characteristic features of the Moon.

The Moon is regarded as a living thing, belonging to the sacral heavenly sphere. Signs of this are still present in some of the more conservative strata of our traditions. According to a communication from Moldavia, abuse must not be hurled at it because it is *sacred* (BOSNYÁK 1980: 23). In Gyímes region the moon is still sometimes called Babba Mary. “*Babba Mary knows everything. (...) When we were small children we did not even know that the Moon is called moon. It was Babba Mary*” (DACZÓ 1980: 231, 235).

In the region along the Homoród River, the changing phases of the Moon are called *holdjárás* (moon movement, moon journey); it is a general belief that the Moon can have a court. In Csík it is jokingly added to this that consequently *it has something to talk about*. The Hungarians in Bukovina also address it as *new king*. An informant in Háromszék also mentioned that he was in the habit of greeting the Sun and the Moon when they rose. The personification of the Moon is more marked in the Hungarian tales cited by Ipolyi (IPOLYI 1854: 264). However, there can be no doubt that its esteem and knowledge about it are still remarkable in our regions. The aim of supplications addressed to the personified Moon is to ensure health charms and good luck, writes Vilmos Tánzos, who confirms his findings with Gyímes and Moldavian csángó texts (TÁNCZOS 1995: 55). The parallel existence in the supplications of magic charm texts and Christian formula of greetings and prayer indicates the syncretic presence of magic and Christian mysticism.

The most expressive personification of the Moon I found in my collecting work is the tale, now intended for children, explaining the changing shape of the Moon, recorded in the Homoród region.

You can see the half moon's nose too, its whole nose, its eyes and its mouth.

When we were children we believed that this was true. We saw the moon grow and shrink.

They said clothes had to be made for it, and it grew. When it was a half, they measured it. When it was full, they took its measurement again.

By the time the clothes were ready the moon disappeared: that's what they used to tell children.

A similar tale-type story is known in Moldavia, about the Moon paying court and being jilted by the Sun (BOSNYÁK 1980: 23).

Greeting the Moon is the most alive in the Easternmost Hungarian regions of Romania. In Bukovina at the new moon people prayed for health, peace and joy. They looked at the Moon and said: New Moon, new king, then their wishes, asking that they be fulfilled when they see the moon again (BOSNYÁK 1977). In Gyimes the new moon is greeted with a coin in the hand, with the sign of the cross and prayer (BOSNYÁK 1982). In Moldavia, when someone sees the new moon, he must make the sign of the cross and greet it: New Moon, new king, asking for good fortune, blessing and health, against snakes and dragons that bring sickness. It can be deduced from the prayers here that the Moon was a mediator to Jesus (BOSNYÁK 1980).

Reports of the practice of greeting the Moon can also be heard in the present time not only from the Csángó regions, but also from elsewhere, such as in Gyergyó and Háromszék regions.

The movement of the Moon and lunar cycles were the most ancient signs and help to measure the time for all peoples of the world (MNL II: 568).

The new moon is often called *új király* 'new king' in sayings, nursery rhymes, incantations. The new moon was usually considered more important than the stains (craters) of the Moon, the waning moon and the eclipse of the Moon. The names *újság* 'news' (the same word is used in Hungarian for 'newspaper') and *újhold* 'new moon' are used more frequently to designate the lunar cycle which is very rarely called waxing moon. Sometimes people consider the new moon only the beginning of the period when the Moon seems to grow. In the region of Udvarhely (Odorhei) the expression *hegyes újság* 'sharp new moon' is used for the Moon which has just begun to grow. The expression *hegyes újság* is a real technical term of popular astronomy.

In the explanations concerning the Moon the new moon is present almost like a determinant factor of the time of some activities, such as a factor which shows or predicts the weather.

Among the conceptions known by Hungarians from Romania concerning the stains (craters) of the Moon (they are many and quite varied) that which relates to the image of a shepherd drying his foot-cloths predominates.

The Bácság and Partium are borderlands concerning the interpretations of the Moon's craters too; they show similarities with the Alföld (Lowland) and Dunántúl (Transdanubia) regions (parts of Hungary). In Bácság and Partium Hungarians often mention David and Cecilia (*Cicelle*), but not quite like a little further west, here Cecilia or Saint Peter play the violin, and David and Cecilia are not seen together.

Basically two kinds of conceptions (visions) are found in the western and eastern part the Hungarian-speaking area: 1. David and Cecilia, 2. the shepherd who dries his foot-cloths. This duality is associated with a great variety, and the dividing lines of the bigger regions illustrate first of all the transition.

In Romania the presence of Gypsy children in the Moon was mentioned only in the Bánság region. We have similar data from the Alföld region. Near Szeged, at Klárafalva it is believed that some shaver Gypsy children can be seen in the Moon (RÓHEIM 1990: 146).

The regions of Dunántúl, Partium and Banat presumably show German influence (here some people see in the Moon a man carrying something).

Exceptionally in the region of the Eastern Carpathians Babba Mary is seen in the Moon, or the Moon is identified with Babba Mary.

A humorous saying based on the absurd, from Háromszék: “*When I was captain-general on the Moon*” implies the impossibility of man reaching the Moon (BALÁZS 1942: 126). This was regarded as something extraordinary by other peoples and cultures too. Among the Eskimos, for example, only the shaman “was able” to fly up to the Moon (ELIADE 1988: 233).

Did the fact of man’s landing on the Moon, an event shown on television, modify people’s notions of the Moon? It would appear to have had very little influence here. It slightly confused or only challenged thinking, but only until belief enabled them to incorporate the new element, as illustrated in the answers given below which can be regarded as typical (the only exceptions were my two youngest informants and two elder persons).

The great majority of my informants do not believe or doubt that man landed on the Moon. The opposite is true for persons under 40 who represented a small proportion of those interviewed. Nevertheless, there were a few exceptions.

The old and the new mingle in a communication from the Szilágyság region related to the landing on the Moon. The actors: Gagarin, his wife and God who punishes them as intruders.

Szilágyság Region:

Gagarin went up to the Moon, but God pushed him down and poured pitch over his wife because she wanted to throw the Lord down from heaven.

There is also a true story related to the landing on the Moon. This is a caricature from Csík of the forced collectivisation following the Soviet example.

Alcsík Region:

It happened at the time of collectivisation. Someone told Uncle Matyi Nagy that Gagarin had gone up to the Moon.

And he answered: – Then let them make the co-operative there and leave us in peace!

It is worth noting that the landing on the Moon is often mistakenly associated with the name of Gagarin and this is largely the consequence of the popularity of this astronaut, greatly assisted by propaganda.

It can be seen that the landing on the Moon influenced the opinion held on the

Moon. Where people – mainly the young – believed that this happened, the influence was greater than where they did not believe it. On the one hand it gave rise to doubt, questioning the sacred and unreachable nature of the Moon, making this heavenly body profane. As a result, a believer in Pusztina who believed in the landing on the Moon no longer had to confess cursing the Moon (cf. HEILIG 1994: 115). On the other hand, the event proved to be an unsuccessful little challenge which tried in vain to shake the belief and ideas of hundreds or thousands of years. A factor contributing to this result was the fact that people experienced the flood of information as a kind of failure, the truth of the information transmitted by the mass media was often questionable.

V. V. IVANOV (1988: 92–94) – in connection with the lunar myths – considers that the Moon had its symbolic importance only in predictions and magic.

In Hungarian mythology the Moon appears mostly in agricultural predictions (MNL II: 567–568). The act of resort to the Moon (and constellations) in case of illnesses is rare and practised exclusively by the popular healers (mostly women).

The Moon is frequently present in Hungarian popular poetry, in legends, prayers, idiomatic expressions and in the popular arts as a decorative element. Its importance is without question. The specific character of the beliefs and knowledge about the Moon in my research data derives from the inter-ethnic influences and from the fact that the regions examined were more archaic, with better-preserved traditions than the western regions, between the Carpathians.

THE RAINBOW

In popular mythology – as I could see from my research – the rainbow appears as a heavenly body and not as a natural phenomenon. Its functions are (besides the general characteristic features: bridge, way, passage):

1. fertility, 2. sign of weather, 3. sign of illness, 4. sign of a positive event.

The beliefs presented were lost in most of the cases, existing only as memories of the beliefs. Their functional parts are the religious ones. Their role is especially to predict floods, the end of the world and forecast the weather.

Sometimes the beliefs survive with other functions; they became amusing and instructive texts for children.

In addition to the known data I found some explanations about its origin not known in other sources than the Bible. For example a legend, collected in the Transylvanian Plain tells us how the rainbow was born from the hair of a fairy.

THE EARTH

As I have heard from my informants, the Earth is situated in the middle of the Universe, under the sky. Only recently has it been considered a round celestial body. In connection with the well-known myth of an Earth floating on the water, are the

Eurasian myths considering that animals hold the Earth. Here we can see the influence of religion. The ancient Earth-myths and concepts were transmitted to a newer generation influenced by the Bible.

THE HEAVEN (THE SKY)

In the popular terminology the firmament (sky, heaven) was a holy world, the place where there were the Sun, the Moon and the stars; this is the opposite side of the Earth.

The heaven is associated with different meanings as we can see in these expressions: “Heaven only knows! (Az ég tudja)”; “Heaven bless you! (Az ég áldjon!)” instead of “God bless you! (Isten áldjon!)”. The Heaven is associated with God in the language of some nations near the Urals, and of the Mongolian nation. In ELIADE’s view (1988) the separation of the seven layers of heavens is a shaman act, a belief that is present in my study too, with the concept of unique and unified Heavens.

In the whole region populated by Hungarians, there exists the belief that the real colour of the sky is not blue but red, and this colour can be seen when there is lightning. The name Fiastyúk (Pleiades) derives from the belief that stars were considered as holes or celestial windows. This belief is very similar to the newer belief that the satellites perforated the sky. The newest beliefs are connected with the UFO phenomena and with extraterrestrial beings. In these cases it is obvious that unknown things generate bizarre ideas, visions and fantasies.

CONCLUSIONS

The universal oppositions which are the characteristic features of a unified mechanism of the human imagination (DURAND 1977) are found in cosmogonical explanations and celestial body explanations too. They also determine the structure of time and space.

In popular beliefs the origins are very important. The appearance of different celestial bodies gave inspiration to new beliefs and imaginations (ORTUTAY 1989: 433). The universal binary oppositions (open – shut, up – down, good – bad, etc.) have an influence on the evaluation of time. Midnight for example is considered dangerous. Taboos and ill omens are associated with sunset, the solar eclipse, the eclipse of the Moon and the star shower.

Most of the agricultural predictions were based on the Sun, Moon and stars.

In the peasants’ everyday life cosmogony and the explanations of the celestial phenomena have become less important in our century. Their practical advantage decreased. Their practical knowledge and the beliefs related to different celestial bodies in some cases, are still associated with strange phenomena, as modern science and society sometimes fail to give proper answers.

In Eastern Europe a quantitative and functional decrease can be seen in the case of popular beliefs, not only because of modern science and of technical progress but also of the changing socio-political situation. In these regions access to astrological knowledge has decreased within the past fifty years due to the socio-political circumstances.

As parts of the more limited folk view of the world, knowledge and beliefs served essentially the same goal. Together they gave an interpretation and meaning to the macrocosm as opposed to and made to correspond to the microcosm in a way that is determined by a particular religion, ideology, system of beliefs or set of knowledge. At the same time, together they constituted a model for action, showing the direction for adaptation and prosperity.

In the 20th century cosmogony, the explanation of the celestial bodies played an increasingly indirect and infrequent role in the everyday life of rural people. It was their direct usefulness and their value as a guide in practical things that diminished, not their importance from the viewpoint of religion, beliefs and science. It is of note that there has been a decline in interest in nature and an increase in the interest shown in the questions of history and society (BÉKÉS 1980).

Although they are able to play their role with the help of the celestial bodies, the modern instruments of orientation and measuring time have largely made it unnecessary to turn to the celestial bodies directly in rural communities preserving old traditions. Empirical knowledge and beliefs continue to be associated to the celestial bodies most commonly in those areas of popular life where today's society and knowledge have not been able to give a reassuring answer. Predicting weather and crops, phenomena that are still regarded as extraordinary, healing, diseases, predicting the fate of man and the world: these are the elements to which the most beliefs and empirical knowledge regarding the celestial bodies are associated, mostly knowledge in the nature of recognition; these are so intertwined that it is not possible to classify them in one or another category.

In Eastern Europe the functionality and quality of the knowledge and beliefs examined have been reduced not only by modern science and the achievements of technology, but also by the historical situation of the recent past.

As a result of the social and political conditions in our regions in the past fifty years, access to religion and especially to astrology has been reduced for village people. As regards religion, the hostility to religion practised for decades as a state policy proved largely without results as far as the world-view in the narrower sense is concerned. The old, essentially Christian folk religion also preserving archaic, non-Christian elements remains dominant.

Over the past period of close to half a century astrological information hardly reached village people who for centuries had demanded such information. Various publications spreading such knowledge have again become very popular, almost to the same degree as the old almanacs (SZELESTEI 1988, DUKKON 1988). In this field we can therefore expect new supplements to the folk explanations of celestial bodies, the addition of new notions, as can already be observed to a certain extent.

In cosmogony and in the celestial body explanations too the Moon explanations occupy a large place. Even nowadays, the Moon has a great importance in the field of agriculture and medical treatment. There are no major differences between the shepherds' and the farmers' (peasants') knowledge and beliefs in connection with celestial bodies, but in the case of the Sun and the stars, the shepherds are better and more thoroughly informed.

The "deep structure" of the vision of the world was well conserved and kept as an archaic value. Obviously the modifications that occurred changed the popular cosmogony and cosmography, influenced by religion and practical needs.

The popular cosmogony has its role even nowadays: that of the creation of a specific language, giving significance and sense to the cosmic phenomena. The Earth, the Sun, the Moon, the stars and the rainbow – each plays its role in the universal casting.

The research could establish the following functions of the Sun in the field studied: lighting; heating; forecasting weather and crops; foretelling misfortunes; emphasising woes, blessings, curses, prayers; division of time; indicating directions. In the process of predicting with the help of the Sun the most important elements are empirical knowledge and astrological forecasts. I managed to record a much smaller number of beliefs about the Sun than about the Moon, and a greater quantity of knowledge on the Sun than on the Moon.

Concerning the Moon – as it involves a particularly rich and many-sided explanation material – we come across a more detailed stock of functions and meanings. I present the survey of the Moon's system of beliefs as well as their functional classification. The Moon – with her many functions of time indicator, weather predictor, forbinder, punisher, fertiliser, influencer of agricultural and household activities, lighter, setting of imaginary events, healer, sometimes harm doer – takes the second position immediately after the Sun.

The most widely known stars and celestial bodies within the Hungarian population in Romania determine four important functions: 1. setting of imaginary events and things; 2. predicting the weather; 3. fortune-telling; 4. causing and healing illnesses.

The data registered about the rainbow – not long ago still living beliefs – can be grouped around the following functions and meanings: (a) transition (bridge, way, gate), (b) fortune-telling: 1. predicting crops; 2. predicting the weather; 3. foretelling evil, diseases, etc.; 4. marking positive events.

My informants were hardly interested in the Earth as a planet. They would rather take it as the surface of the Earth, the soil.

The predictions collected mostly involve the Moon, the Sun and the stars.

Orientation and division of time have their modern tools, so the celestial bodies have lost their direct role. Empirical knowledge and beliefs are being attached to them where modern society and science fail to give satisfactory explanations to certain phenomena. Predicting the weather and the crops, still exceptional phenomena, healing, diseases, foretelling people's and the world's destiny; these are the fields most frequently connected to beliefs concerning celestial bodies as well as empirical

knowledge, mostly knowledge of recognition. They all go hand in hand being entwined and cannot be classified in one particular category.

The above discussed beliefs and knowledge have been diminished in Eastern Europe lately not only by modern science and technical achievements but also by the historical background.⁹

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⁹ To the original Hungarian version of my doctoral thesis belongs an Appendix which comprises 661 representative popular texts, which are the basis of the analytical process. A questionnaire is also attached, containing the names of sources, the abbreviations and the bibliography.

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