

Sky Observation and Moon in Mythology: The Moon in Baltic-Finnic, Baltic, and Slavic Tradition

Mare Kõiva

Abstract: The article gives an overview of folklore and myths about the Moon (for example the origin of the Moon, the Moon as a living creature, the Moon as place of habitation) and the nature of Moon spots in Baltic-Finnic, Baltic and Slavic traditions. Moon creation myths have reached us mostly thanks to oral tradition and publications. The best-known myths about the origin of Moon spots people who have ended up there either as a result of their own actions or at the discretion of the Moon, or describe how human activity has caused the spots. In Baltic-Finnic tradition the main plots are connected with water carrier, Moon taring and Ursa Major; the Christian characters on the Moon is rare exception.

Keywords: Baltic-Finnic Moon lore, Baltic astral lore, Slavic Moon lore, astral names, Moon myths, Moon spots, Moon as a living creature

Based, first and foremost, on written texts about religion and myth, researchers have reconstructed a three-level model of the

world that is accompanied by a three-seven-nine-twelve-part heaven with inhabitants and constellations. The underworld and its structure have been reconstructed in the same manner. The living and communication quarters of the supernatural inhabitants of the middle world, as well as the overall topology of the worlds, are organised by means of complicated and partly polar relationships (see also Lefebvre, 1991). In reconstructions of the view of the world the methods of comparative mythology and archaeomythology have been productive, while data and methods from phraseology and folklore have been used to a lesser extent. This study examines data on the concept of the heavenly world, and specifically the Moon, in the corpora of linguistics, folklore and mythology. The study is limited to the Baltic-Finnic peoples and the relevant data about the Slavic and Baltic contact area.

The subject matter concerning the worldview of native Baltic-Finnic peoples who live around the Baltic Sea and north-western Russia, i.e. the Estonians, Finns, Karelians, Votes, Vepsians and Livonians, has been recorded over the course of two centuries. From a linguistic perspective the Baltic-Finnic people belong to Finno-Ugric and Uralic language groups, while neighbouring and contact people belong to various Indo-European language groups. Folklore and language corpora are the only valid way of observing the mentality of these people. Such observations are complemented by theoretical discussion and monographic studies (K. Vilkuna, U. Harva, K. Krohn, J. Hurt, P.-E. Prüller, A. Kuperjanov, M. J. Eisen, O. Loorits, I. Paulson, P. Ariste, E. Ernits, I. Vinokurova) that date back to roughly the same time as the start of sound recording. From one perspective two centuries is a short period, although from socio-economic, historical and ethnic vitality perspectives it can also be quite a long time.

This paper presents results of research into Moon spots, the Moon as a living creature and the Moon as a place of residence. For most of the traditions under discussion the Moon is a living

creature, a god or an old man. Other layers of myth relate to the life cycle and fate of the Moon.

The name of the Moon

It is a linguistic characteristic that the same word – *päva* (Livonian, cf. Loorits 1926), Votic *päivä* (Ernits & Ernits 2011: 89) and Estonian *päev* (EKSS 2009) – means both the sun and day. There is a saying in an Estonian dialect that “the day sets”, “the day turns to God”. Here day signifies the Sun and the setting of the Sun is its departure homeward or to God. A day is the period between sunrise and sunset and night is the period between sunset and sunrise (Õim 2012: 96). The word *ilm* in Estonian means world, but also means weather. Semiotically, *ilm* can also be used to define different worlds and realms (*inimeste ilm* (the realm of humans), *tontide ilm* (the realm of ghosts)). Today, we have come to use the compound word *maailm* = *maa* + *ilm* (the earth, day, sky), a word that shows the semiotic coexistence or integration of the earth and the sky. Other special names for the Sun include the suffix-induced *päval'ik(k)i* (Livonian), *päevlik* (Estonian) and *päivikko* (Votic, the latter also having been interpreted as light by Ernits & Ernits 2011, citing Öpik 1970). The common term used for the Moon in all Baltic-Finnic languages is *kuu*. The word *kuu* means, simultaneously, the celestial body, the closest planet, the Moon, the month (28–31 days), an astronomical companion, a satellite to a planet, as well as being used for the synodic month, i.e. the time it takes for the Moon to orbit the Earth (EKSS 2009). The words used for Moon and the unit of time differ only in Finnish and Vepsian: in Finnish *kuu* is the celestial body, rarely a unit of time, while *kuukausi* is month; in Vepsian *ku* is month while *kudmaine* is Moon, although both language use the same word stem. *Kuu* is a shared word in all Finno-Ugric languages and also

appears in the same form in Uralic languages. In other Baltic languages, the corresponding words in Lithuanian are *Mėnulis* and *mėnuo*, and in Latvian *mēness* (celestial body), *mēnesis* (time period) (LVET 2015). The word *mėnuo* means both the celestial body and the time period. These words directly derive from the Indo-European root **menes-*, **men(n)s-*, ‘Moon’ and ‘month’, and have a more general meaning of **me-* ‘measure’ (Vaiškunas 2006). In Russian these words are different: *луна* (*luna*) is Moon the celestial body, and the time period is *месяц* (*mesiats*). Linguistically speaking, the Moon is created or born again (VKS II: 325; III: 189, EKSS 2009). In the Baltic-Finnic area the phases of the Moon are called old and new moon, crescent moon, full moon, half-moon; in south Estonia there are also the hard and soft phases of the Moon (Sarv 2017; Kuperjanov 2003).

The Moon was used as a natural cosmic instrument for measuring time, something that became natural to people living in direct contact with nature who needed to know how to determine moonrise, the Moon’s movement across the sky and its brightness, size and colour. The Moon rises before the Sun sets and remains long after the Sun has risen, something that is important when calculating time. But working at night, i.e. in moonlight, was thought to be inauspicious: all work done after sunset was said to go to waste or to the devil. The lunar calendar and moonlight play important practical roles in folk belief (for example in folk medicine, cf. Kõiva 2011; Kõiva & Kuperjanov 2015; Kõiva & Kuperjanov 2016; Sõukand & Kalle 2011, and in plantation, veterinary medicine, forestry, house building, etc. For Votic and Vepsian parallels see Ernits & Ernits 2011; Vinokurova 2015). Moonlight was an important source of light before electricity. Phraseology includes the humorous expression The Moon is the Bachelor’s Sun (JUSTKUI 1998–2005), which refers to twilight meetings and village bachelors visiting girls. Lithuanians conclude that the Moon is “the Sun’s assistant”, shining instead of the Sun at

night, or that the Moon is a big fire burning in God's palace, and moonlight is the light shining through the windows of the palace (the stars, Vaiškunas 2006).

The origins of the Moon

Diverse worldviews and the polarity of such views are also characteristic of data related to objects in the sky. Such objects form a topographical part of the sky while also representing the mythical and the sacred. These objects have been used in different practices and feature as components in explanatory models, necessitating the use of broader subject matter. The Moon is an important axis of temporal relations, bears significance as a temporal reference point and is an element in the sky that affects the day-to-day life of people both as a source of light and because of the powers ascribed to it.

There are records about the creation of the Moon in the older epic songs of certain Baltic-Finnic peoples. For example, in the mythical Estonian song "Loomine" ("Creation") the sky and earth are created from an laid by the world bird, with the yolk forming the Sun and the Moon and stars as well as animals and birds below. The same song is known among Votes and also in the Finnic-Karelian tradition, although with small variations (SKVR tiedekanta 2004–2007; Rüütel 1969). The myth of origination from an egg belongs among the creation myths, where it is the most common form (Eliade 1963) alongside the various versions of the earth-diver myth (see more in Napolskikh 2012). Older Estonian songs also include other fascinating motifs. In the epic song of the Star Bride (Est. *Tähemõrsja*), a girl chooses a star from various celestial suitors (the Sun, the Moon and the stars) as the most constant of companions. The Moon in his role of luckless suitor is faulted for his inconsistency, i.e. waning, waxing,

occasionally being totally out of sight. In other mythical songs the Moon is the son of a god (the Sun) and is usually depicted as an old man; in other myths it is the Sun's sister. Some songs too have been interpreted from a mythological point of view (Loorits 1949), although they are thought of as simple courting fantasies in which suitors are symbolically given the names of celestial bodies (Roos 1969). Astral myths in songs found among the Balts, neighbours to the Baltic Finns, have provided material for interpretation (e.g. Ivanov & Toporov 1974), revealing for example that they seem to be reflections of older Indo-European myths. At the same time other researchers have indicated that the texts used to create such theories have been personal creations and fantasies that attempt to create myths in the age of romantic recorded history, challenging their overall role in the mythological worldview (cf. Putelis 2017).

The lore of a number of nations includes a division of celestial bodies into specific genders (bearing in mind that Finno-Ugric languages lack gender). The Mordvins depict the Moon as a young man and the Sun as a young woman who live by the Volga River. The Mordvins start their prayers by turning to the god of thunder and then to the god of the Moon. The Moon mother (*Kovava-kov* 'mordvin, half-moon', *ava* 'woman, mother') is usually present in Mordvin folklore together with the Sun, with one of its functions being to observe time (Devjatkina 2008). A Komi myth tells the tale of how the god Jen first created the Sun and then its opposite, Omöl', the Moon, from an egg. Another version of this myth states that the Moon was created first and this caused everything to freeze. Nothing could be grown and this led to famine. Then, Jen created the Sun, which started to warm the world up and made plants grow, advancing life (Konakov 2003).

Among our neighbours, Lithuanians residing in Belarus associate the Moon with the deity *Dievaitis* (in dialect *Dievaicis*), 'young god, the son of God'. (Often the word is spoken in the diminutive form.) After *Vaiškunas*, the Moon is referred to as *jaunikaitis*,

‘young man’, *karalaitis*, ‘young king’, as well as *Dangaus Dievaitis*, ‘Heavenly God’, *Sūnus Dievo*, ‘God’s Son’ and *Dievas Sūnus*, ‘God Son’ (Vaiškūnas 2006: 373–374).

The appearance and disappearance of the Sun and the Moon have given rise to discussions and driven fantasies of their young age: according to Estonian folk belief, a Moon’s life is short, only four weeks, old Moons have gone beyond the edge of the world. Interim lunar phases during which the Moon is not visible in the sky have provided subject matter for vernacular narratives.

According to the beliefs of some Estonians, the Moon and the Sun move across the sky along an invisible rope. Once the Sun reaches the other side of the sky the Moon, in turn, starts its journey. When the Moon and the Sun are worn out from all this movement and grow old, they are piled up around the corner of the world where they grow mouldy. But a new Sun and Moon are then created to replace the old ones, as was recorded in Püha parish in 1893: “The Moon is also a moving thing and it is set thus that the Moon must illuminate the world during the night and sometimes it comes to an end and a new Moon is created.” (H, Mapp 135 (2) Püha)

Among narrative forms of expression, the most common explanation that Estonians have for the creation of the celestial bodies is that during prehistoric times the sky was so low that children could reach up and make holes in the sky, which they did out of boredom. Celestial light and life then shone down on the earth through those holes, creating the celestial bodies that we see. After this the sky was raised so that people could no longer reach it. This story spread through school textbooks from 1867 (see Jakobson 1867). For a long time it was the subject of popular discussions because not everyone understood or accepted this belief as taught. At the same time, the story inspired humour as well as being mixed with more factual content, especially during the modernisation period at the start of the 20th century.

Thirty-five years ago a herdsman in Epliku village said the following about the world, specifically about lost animals: “They won’t leave the world – the sky is above like an upside-down cauldron!” There was a humorous tale about a tailor and his family who poked holes in the sky in the old days when it was lower, cutting our Sun, the Moon and the stars. There was talk of going to the end of the world where the sky was said to touch the earth. (ERA II 261,186 (4) Ambla, 1939)

The image of an upside-down cauldron or arch over the earth was common (the same category, including the sky made of stone, was popular in Japan and Europe, see Metevelis 2000).

About 60 years ago the men from Ansekūla believed that the Earth was a wide tin plate and that the sky was a cauldron that had been turned upside down and had holes in it and the Sun was a big ball of fire that could be seen through such a hole. God lives on top of the bottom of the cauldron and pulls down a screen either fully or half-way as he sees fit, resulting in a full moon or a half-moon. When God gets angry he bangs against the bottom of the cauldron with his fist, creating thunder. (ERA II 158,104 (40) Ansekūla)

The following excerpt on the formation of Lithuania was recorded from the period before World War II: “The Devil borrowed a sieve from Mary. He didn’t want to carry it to Heaven, so he threw the sieve up and the Moon appeared.” (Vaiškunas 2006, citing SBK). This is one of the narratives in which the characters are clearly Christian.

Christian beliefs from the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period have trouble assigning hell and paradise to specific points in space, often associating the gates of hell to the Sun, the Moon or

another star. The same applies to the gates of paradise. In Estonian belief accounts, the Moon is also mentioned as a window to hell (H II 9,107 (2) Viru-Nigula). One Estonian belief speaks of the afterlife of the soul in heaven, while the Votes mix the heavenly and Christian Heaven – a person's soul goes to Heaven after death: *Po1 ku inehmiin kuolõb, siz enči lentäüb taivasõõ*, 'when a person dies then their soul flies to Heaven' (Ernits & Ernits 2011, reference to VKS I: 206). According to Vaiškunas (2006) there is also a record in Lithuania saying that the Moon is the 'house of the Devil', because it is the place where the Devil resides.

The mythical motifs of songs and narratives represent a cosmological view of the world, as well as mythological events with their own spatial and temporal dimensions. At the same time, micro-records, behavioural norms and various narrative realisations provide an abundance of information that helps us decipher the meaning of celestial phenomena.

The Moon as an object in the sky: Adaptions of scientific explanations

Let us take a brief look at the scientific discourse and the expression of data in folklore-based knowledge. Although basic information on solar and lunar eclipses, the planets and stars are available in a calendar from 1739, including information on observation options and other information that was novel at the time, stories mixing different viewpoints continued to spread in folklore up to the mid-20th century alongside discussions of the nature and origin of cosmic phenomena. The size of celestial bodies is one of the more interesting issues. The complexity of assessing the size of celestial phenomena can be seen in a written record from the 19th century that expresses the belief that a single star is probably the size of an ox.

Varying sizes are proposed in the early 20th century, but these assessments are based on the size of the celestial bodies as seen by the human eye: *Päiv om just nii suur kui tuubri põhi, kuu nii suur kui pangi põhi*. ('The Sun is as big as the bottom of a tub; the Moon is as big as the bottom of a bucket') (H II 29, 822/3 (82) Kambja, 1880).

It would appear that, despite using the units of measurement employed on earth, these were serious attempts to give an accurate account of celestial sizes, although this shows that people did not know how to determine the size ratios of phenomena in the sky. The common measurements used simply express what would be a large territory to a peasant: "The stars are the size of a bushel of land and the Moon the size of a barrel of land, but only God's might knows the size of the Sun." (E 33896 (71) Narva)

A bushel of land is an archaic unit of surface area in the Baltics. According to Tallinn measurements, a bushel of land was approximately 0.18 ha (EKSS 2009), while a barrel of land was 0.55-0.63 ha. These units of measurement led to the following discussion, which brings together descriptions of the objects in the sky (as well as the holes in the sky) with their own limited fuel supply, which, when it runs out, will cause this cycle of the world to come to an end and the creation of a new Heaven and Earth.

Young cowherds believe the Sun to be the size of a couple of barrels of land. It is a hole in the sky the size of eight bushels of land where the fire is always blazing. The earth stands still and the Sun goes around the Earth. The Moon is said to be a hole in the sky that is as if filled with fire, but only the size of a bushel of land and full of coal. This hole is covered with a lid that moves back and forth on its own and where the Moon sometimes waxes and then wanes. And the Moon can sometimes be cut in half, so that it may look like a carriage wheel or the bottom of a tub or like a poker or a sickle. Just

like the day, the Moon is also a hole in the sky. The Moon used to be the only thing to cast light on the world, but then its fuel started to run out and the day was created, which was much bigger than the Moon. And when the day goes out then that is the end of days and a new Heaven and Earth will be created. (RKM II 34, 465/6 (1) Keila)

Writings from the Setu region in south-eastern Estonia also imply that certain scholarly explanations have been integrated into the folk explanatory model and changed, for example the Sun as a mountain of fire that has been adapted in the agrarian environment. Here we again encounter attempts to determine the size of both celestial bodies with objective units of measurement by imagining that the Moon is bigger (which it can optically seem to be) and the Sun is smaller. This micro-narrative also includes a description of the journey of the Sun behind the (world)mountain and back again and observations about different geographical areas and the visibility of the celestial bodies.

Päiv om määne tulõmägi. Tä om vakamaa suuru'. Kuu saistus om suurõmb. Kuu om kolmõ vakamaa. Päiv tsõõr' pääle ümbre. Vaos õdagult mäe taadõ, hommogult jal' tõõsõst veerest vällä. Üts miis siist Labõritsa külast ol'l Russaliinah. Tuu om rohkõmp päävä ala, mi' olõ kavvõmbah. Sääl paistus päiv maa pääle õkva nigu saiba mulku.

The day/Sun is a kind of mountain of fire. It is the size of one bushel of land. The Moon is bigger – the size of three bushels of land. The day/Sun moves in circles. It went down behind the hill in the evening and came back up from the other side. One man from Labõritsa village here was in the town of Russa. Russa is more under the Sun; we are further away from it. The day shone down on the land there like a pole into a hole. (ERA II 252, 202 (4) Setu)

Lithuanians have similar explanations, with generalisations such as the Moon being ‘a frozen ball’, ‘the frozen Sun’, ‘the night Sun’ and ‘the light of the night’, all the way to claiming that the Moon is ‘the night lamp of God’. The essence of most folk reports seems to indicate the re-textualisation of scientific information.

The Moon as a living being

The Moon and other celestial bodies are depicted as living creatures – heavenly beings (Est. *taevalised*) – as seen in several older beliefs. Beliefs that there are Moon people living on the Moon belong to the same category (“Moon people live on the Moon. When they start flailing about a lot then it is said to be a sign of war.” (ERA II 254,144 (45) Pühalepa).

This excerpt probably likens the Moon people to the Northern Lights, which can often be seen in the sky around the Moon. This theory is supported by other beliefs that relate the Northern Lights to the Sami people and a mythical underground folk, with conflicts between heavenly beings seen by people on earth as celestial phenomena: “The flailing about and lunar eclipses are wars in the sky. Lunar eclipses are when Heaven must make half of the Moon white and the other half black. The Northern Lights are supposed to be the Sami people or the underground folk and they are said to cause the eclipses (ERA II 37, 339/40 (28) Jõhvi).

There is a difference between how older tradition and scholarly lore categorise animate and inanimate objects, with lore becoming fixed in the 19th century and reshaped in beliefs. Folklore knew animate beings such as plants, trees and rocks according to beliefs. The animate category also included the supernatural and the divine (living faith, living God).

However, since this constitutes a separate field, it can simply be said that heavenly beings included God (and divine beings

and gods), the angels and the saints and that demonic creatures also roamed Heaven. The Baltic-Finnic peoples have always given special attention, and shown respect, to celestial bodies and heavenly phenomena. All Baltic-Finnic, Baltic and Slavic people were forbidden from pointing at the Sun, the Moon, rainbows or stars. According to didactic belief, this would cause the finger to shrivel and die. The Sun and the Moon were not only sacred, Livonians also believed that they had their own “god” or fairy (Loorits 1926). Lithuanians believed that when the Moon and the Sun were both in the sky it was forbidden to make a child laugh because his or her navel would hurt (e.g. Vaiškunas 2006). Mocking or criticising the Moon would always be followed by an accident or punishment, and doing so was forbidden, just like being disrespectful to one’s elders. One was also not to perform impermissible acts in the sight of the Moon, i.e. in the moonlight, including stealing, having sex or hitting somebody.

The Moon as a place to live

Reports have been recorded from several ethnic groups of the Sun and the Moon being habitats similar to Earth, even with somewhat similar topology, enabling similar traditional daily tasks to be performed. For example, there are reports in the Estonian corpus of astral lore that, *Pääv olema mua, elanikud siden. Kuu piama üks mua olema, aga kessi juuren käenud on tal* - ‘The Sun is a kind of Earth with beings living inside. The Moon must be a kind of Earth, but who has been there?’ ERA II 266, 378 (7) Kodavere, 1937); *Kuu om ka maakerä. Kuu siheh om kah mõtsa’ ja oru’ ja kuu om tuulinõ*. - ‘The Moon is also a kind of Earth. There are also forests and valleys on the Moon and it is windy there.’ (ERA II 301, 222 (75) Setumaa)

The first text concludes with something that makes no assertions about plausibility, ‘but who has been there’. The storyteller is merely passing on what he or she has heard, allowing doubt to remain. In the next example, however, a man from a local village responds to a story told by a man from Hiiumaa by asking a devious question, which makes the text sound like a borderline joke targeting the neighbours. “There must be people on the Moon. The man from Hiiumaa said that there are meadows and fields on the Moon.” The man from Kiideva village then asked, “Would there be people from Hiiumaa there, too?” (ERA II 55, 66 (29) Ridala, 1928). There is a written record from Setumaa: *Kuu seeh üldäs olõvat lat’s vihaga*. – ‘It is said that there is a child with a whisk on the Moon’ (AES Setumaa). In some texts people live on the Moon, the darker spots are their cabbage patches (e.g. corpus of astral lore, ERA II 129, 382 (45) Rapla). There are trees growing on the Moon and the soil there is cultivated. However, there were discussions after World War II that might have been inspired by space travel and in which people believe the Moon to be ill-suited for living: “Moonspots – some folks calculated that there was supposedly also some kind of land there and that the air was so heavy that it would press blood out of your pores. (RKM II 147, 98 (27) Häädemeeste, 1962).

Since we have a number of opinions about the nature of the Moon recorded from Lithuanians, we can see some similar generalisations, for example ‘the Moon is the earth’, ‘an earth like ours with people living on it’, ‘some kind of a stone’ and ‘frozen stone’. (VAIŠKUNAS, 2006) These beliefs were probably also known among Baltic-Finnic and Slavic peoples, although this has never been recorded.

Moonspots

In the Northern Hemisphere, a common perception of the Moon's spots is a human face. In Lithuania, people believe the spots form a face with a nose, eyes and mouth, and there are similar reports from Estonia (e.g. digital corpus), as well as from the Votes (Ariste 1974: 175). The Belarusian tradition recognises the Moon as the head of John the Baptist (Boganeva & Avilin 2017). The same motif can also be found in the wider Slavic area (Gura 2010). Many believe the spots are connected with the Moon's ability to take people up on its own: we see people who for various reasons have ended up on the Moon. Explanations can predominantly be divided into:

- a) visible moonspots marking human activity, or the results thereof on the Moon, for example cabbage patches; the spots being a man on the moon cutting trees, a motif also known in the wider Finnic-Ugric area (Harva 1948: 159);
- b) the Moon taking a person up out of pity (mainly a person carrying water).

The major belief about Moon spots, and most common motif apart from a human face, says that we see the figure of a person fetching water, holding water pails in his or her hands. Yuri Berezkin (2010; 2015) has found parallels to this motif among a number of ethnic groups in northern Eurasia, for example in the Baltic-Finnic region, female water carriers predominate (cf. Kõiva & Kuperjanov 2015). The distribution of the 'water carrier on the moon' story in Europe coincides approximately with the distribution of Balts, Slavs and Baltic-Finnic nations. (Balts: Lithuanians (Kerbelite 2001: 70; Laurinkene 2002: 365; Vaiškunas 2006: 158), Latvians (Pogodin 1895: 440). Baltic-Finnic: Estonians (Kuper-

janov 2003: 72), Votians (Ariste 1974: 5; Ernits & Ernits 2011). Slavs: Belarusians (Boganeva & Avilin 2017), Bulgarians and Ukrainians (Gura 2010.) There is also a version of the story in which the main protagonist is male (adult or youth) or two children. This story is less widespread, or is absent, in southern Europe, but in Estonia there is a version featuring a girl in the Moon.

There are three main motifs relating to the female water-carrier on the moon in Estonia:

1. The moon takes someone up out of pity.

The most popular version tells of an orphan (or woman) exhausted from a hard life and endless work who, when carrying water from a spring or brook, asks the Moon to take her up to him. The Moon pities her and takes her up to the sky, where we can see her on moonlit nights (Kuperjanov 2003, see also Votian version: Ernits & Ernits 2011).

There is an adaptation of another well-known astral myth which greatly resembles this legend (e.g. the corpus of astral lore, ERA II 77, 572 (86) Nissi). This is the legend of a man, wolf and bull on the Moon, probably influenced by myths about Ursa Major: a poor farmer is on the road with his horse and cart when a wolf attacks the horse; all three of them are taken up to Heaven because the Moon feels sorry for them.

2. The Moon takes someone up for insolence.

A woman carries water buckets and asks the Moon for help. When the Moon does not help, she abuses it and the Moon snatches her away. This motif is less common.

In the old times once there was a woman who went to fetch water. She had shoulder poles with buckets on them. It was late evening and the Moon was shining. She looked up and was in a bad mood about having to fetch water so late: 'Why are you lazing about? Take the poles, you try carrying them, see if it's easy!' The Moon promptly snatched her right up

together with the buckets: ‘Now you’ll have it good and easy here!’ For this reason there is a human face in the Moon. (Corpus of astral lore, ERA II 77, 281/2 (74) Hageri)

3. A criminal act leads to the character ending up on the Moon, for example public sex in the moonlight, stealing, insulting the Moon or arrogant behaviour. Some texts are related to Christian protagonists. Well-known characters from the Bible and the Apostles end up on the Moon for their wrongdoings, stories that often revolve around fratricide.

Motifs of punishment for offending the Moon by breaking a law or taboo in the moonlight are widespread in Estonia. These transgressions can either be theft (a globally known motif), wife killing (in south Estonia), an act of love (in west and north Estonia) or insulting the Moon (in Lutsi, Estonia a woman said her bottom was whiter than the moon). There are no gender differences, both men and women can be taken up to the sky.

An intriguing taboo is found among belief motifs: anyone **in the sauna late on a Saturday evening (or generally late)** will be taken to the Moon. Many north Eurasian peoples share the obligation to leave the sauna for the spirits, specifically for Christ, Mary, God or nature spirits who either live there or arrive at dusk. ‘I’ve heard that Christ went to the sauna and was holding a whisk. (Corpus of astral lore, ERA II 163, 261 (39) Setumaa).

Another very widespread motif, in addition to the water carrier, is the story about **tarring the Moon**. Moonlight is too bright for those wanting to carry out sinful or nefarious acts so perpetrators tar the Moon. The evildoer gets stuck in the tar or is pulled (often with the tubs of tar) up to the Moon, where we can still see him.

The following two examples describe crime and moon-tarring motifs:

A man had killed his wife. The Moon was watching and laughing: 'I see you!' The man grew angry and took a pot of tar and a brush. He climbed up onto the Moon and started to tar it. His hand was shaking. In some places there was a lot of tar; in others very little. That's why the Moon is spotted. (Corpus of astral lore, ERA II 115, 644 (3) Urvaste)

A boy took buckets of tar and went to tar the Moon so that it would not throw its light on him when he went stealing. But he got stuck in the tar. Since then there has been a Moon boy on the Moon, his hands spread wide, holding buckets of tar. (Corpus of astral lore, RKM II 195, 688/9 (9) Iisaku)

Votian writing indicates that the shadows of three thieves can be seen on the surface of the Moon. The three men went to the Moon to cover it with tar because they wanted to go thieving, but there was moonlight. So they decided to tar the moon, but they got stuck there (Posti 1980: 203).

All three of the main Estonian motifs have widespread parallels in other groups. Among the Samis, the Sun takes a girl to give her in marriage to his son and throws her onto the Moon with her pails (Charnoluski 1930). Other eastern parallels are found among the Komi-Zyrian, Komi-Permiak, Udmurt, Chuvash, Mari, Bashkirs, Volga Tatar, Samoyed, Selkup, Khanti, Russians, Ukrainians, etc. A few versions are found in Archangelsk and other places close to Finno-Ugric areas (Gura 2010), although this list could certainly go on if we consider the subject matter of additional Finno-Ugric people and more recent Slavic sources. For example, in the Moksha version, Škai, the king of the gods, does not permit the Moon to be looked at for long. Whoever violates this prohibition would be beheaded by the king of the gods; to this day they stand by Škai's table on the Moon (Devjatkina 2008). The Komi people had other common motifs in addition to the

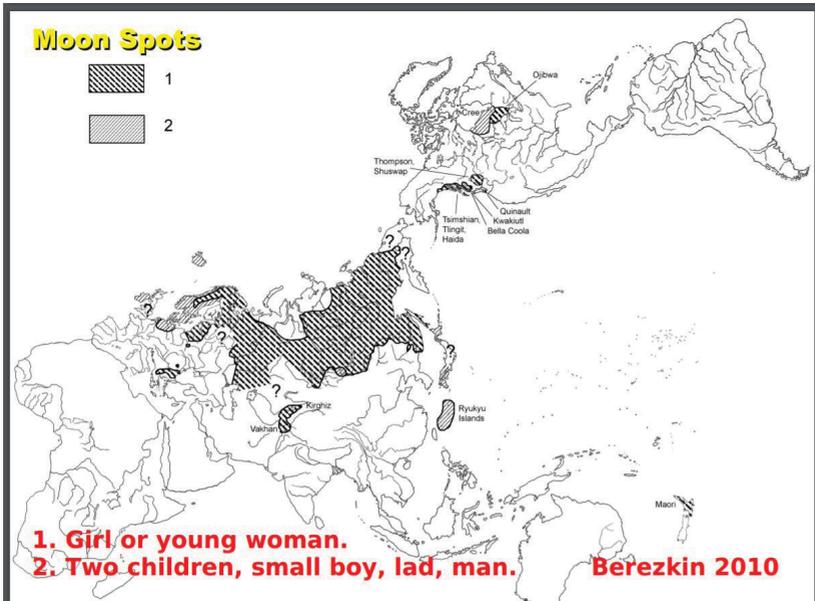
story of the orphan ending up on the moon. At the same time, the story of an orphan who was tortured by her evil stepmother and taken by the Moon at her request, together with her shoulder poles and buckets, is the most popular and is part of the corpus of origin and explanatory legends. The Moon answered the request of the orphan and the god Jen expressed gratitude by declaring the Moon his own creation (Konakov 2003). One Komi-Permiak fairy tale with a mythical background tells the tale of a man and a woman with three daughters. A black bear came to ask for the hand of the eldest daughter, a black raven came to ask for the hand of the middle daughter and the Moon came to ask for the hand of the youngest daughter. The suitors were turned down, but they waited until the girls left the house to work and then kidnapped them regardless. Later, they invited the parents of the girls to visit them. All three took human form when they appeared before the parents (Konakov 2003).

Yuri Berezkin (2010) finds that some peoples in Asia and America have the same motif of the water carrier on the Moon: the Kazakh, Kirgiz, Kets, Khakas, Evenki, Nanai, Lamut, Nihyv, Buryat, Mongolians, Japanese, Ainus, Chinese and Tlingit, as well as some Palaeoasiatic peoples like the Chukchi, Koryak and Kamchadal.

It is interesting to note that predominantly Lutheran Estonians, Finns and Latvians have few astral myths with Christian or Biblical protagonists, especially when compared to Orthodox Slavic peoples (Gura 2010, or Boganeva & Avilin 2017). However, many Europeans do indeed see Biblical characters, saints and historical figures on the Moon. One of the few such beliefs held by Estonians is that the spots are the result of a quarrel or argument between the brothers Cain and Abel (cf. the corpus of astral lore, ERA II 206, 100 (22) Mustjala). The motif of fratricide (Cain and Abel) is widespread in Lithuania (Vaiškunas 2006, citing also Balys 1951: 9–11) and Belarus (Boganeva & Avilin 2017).

Belarusians also link fratricide to other Biblical characters who can be seen on the Moon for similar reasons, for example the sons of Noah, one of whom killed the other, Abraham and Isaac, and the Apostles Peter and Paul.

These beliefs are most widespread in European Slavic areas. Adam and Eve, the icon of Matthew the Evangelist, Saint George frightened by lightning or playing musical instruments, a chained Satan crucified by God, the witch Twardowski from Krakow, the Tsars Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great and the piebald head of King Marko's horse are just a few of the Biblical and historical persons, based on research by Gura.

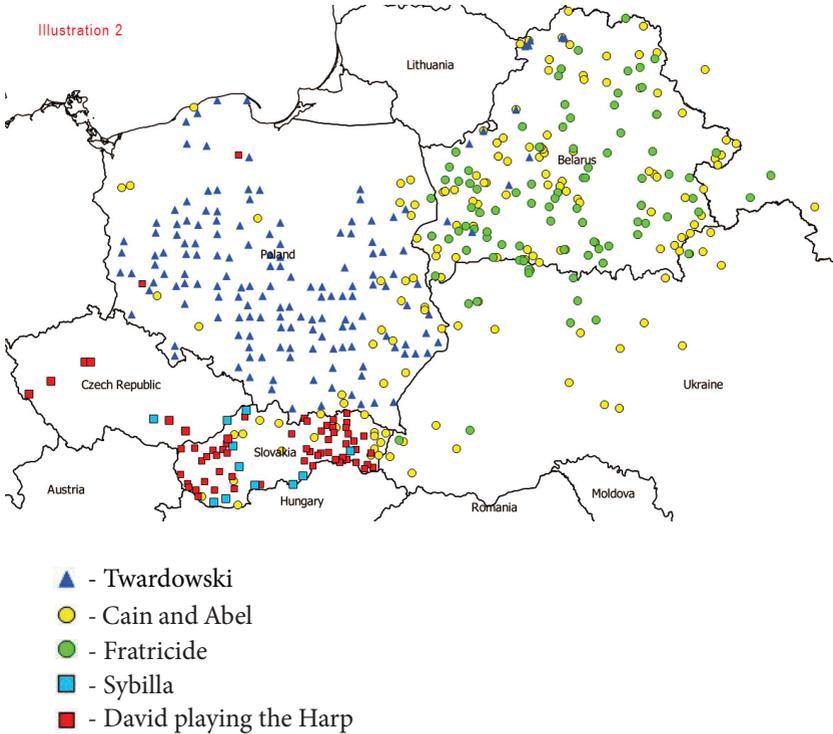


Ill. 1. The distribution maps prepared by Yuri Berezkin show that the motif of the water carrier is widespread among Eurasian and North American people.

This list also features a local Lithuanian–Polish–Belarusian motif – it is believed that in the Moon we can see the legendary Lithuanian–Polish wizard Tvardauskas or Twardowski, whom the Devil took to Hell but lost on the Moon (Vaiškunas 2006: 176, Balys 1951: 9–11); the motif of the wizard Twardowski, who owns the black book and sold his soul to the Devil, on the Moon is known in western parts of Belarus (Boganeva & Avilin 2017).

Summaries on the subject of Moon myths

Where many myths and religious beliefs are concerned the question of the potential for universal myths shared by people in different regions arises. (See the maps for the dominant local motifs.) The image of a living Moon and the Moon as a place to live were definitely universally known in the beliefs of a number of regions. The most popular Moon myths are very widely known indeed, the distribution areas stretching across the world at similar latitudes. Beliefs related to Moon spots are also universal: the image of a human head or a human is present in both hemispheres and various regions. At the same time, it is clear that in northern Europe the spots are rarely associated with animals, while animals provide a popular motif in the southern hemisphere and among many American nations. The water carrier motif popular among Baltic-Finnic people is widespread in northern Eurasia. However, the male version of the water carrier is more widely known in Asia and also in a more local area in North America. Given the widespread nature of ancient water carrying methods, the motif should be known much further away. The next question pertains to whether more concentrated collection efforts, for example in African and American communities, would demonstrate the existence of this motif. Migration and other aspects of transnationality have helped to spread motifs, meaning that this kind of development is not impossible.



Ill. 2. The distribution of the Twardowski motif in Belarus and Poland, map by Boganeva and Avilin 2017.

The most common motifs in our Moon spot stories are related to the special power the Moon has to take people up, at its own discretion, for example pity, as a punishment for giving offence to the Moon, or for performing immoral or forbidden acts. People share the system of norms and prohibitions that result in some ending up on the Moon out of mercy or as a punishment, for example point a finger at, mocking or ridiculing sacred objects was banned, as were commit discountenanced acts in moonlight (theft, sex or slaughter). These prohibitions represent core values the violation of which is followed by symbolic punishment. The

norms are invariable, for example working during divine liturgy leads to a real or mythical punishment.

The tradition related to Moon spots also has regional traits, meaning that it is important to map the traditions of different nations, including small ethnic groups. Baltic-Finnic people have other astral myths related to Moon spots (for example the myth of the origin of Ursa Major). Some stories related to Moon spots serve as warnings, and can be found in the constellation names in sky atlas produced by a number of European nations. In the traditions of Baltic-Finnic Orthodox contact people fratricide is punished with banishment to the Moon. Such stories reflect the patterns, events and characters of Biblical myths – important Christian characters or the Devil serving his punishment can be seen on the Moon. In the myths of neighbouring and contact nations, historical persons appear together with saints and characters from the Bible. This is a reference to various rulers, but also to the semi-mythological witch Twardowski from Lithuanian-Polish-Belarus territory.

At the same time, it is noteworthy that the protagonists and main actors in Baltic-Finnic legends are ordinary people, usually poor peasants who farm the land. This determines the social framework and time of the stories as prior to the 19th century. Widespread orphan or slave-child motifs create interesting associations. The sad fate of the orphan (alongside the motif of baby killers) is part of the folklore and literary leitmotifs of the 18th and 19th centuries. The social and economic defencelessness and tragic fate of children raised without parents were expressed in hundreds of songs in the older song tradition of northern Estonia, giving cause to define orphan songs as a distinct sub-genre. The motif of the fate of the orphan is represented not only in legends, but also in fairy tales (to make use of the type terminology employed in folkloristics). It should also be noted that the orphan in Baltic-Finnic myths is a girl. But the question here is not whether the

popular legal system (which was based on verbal agreements) was enough to protect orphans, solitary or seriously ill people – no system can do so completely. Instead, the myths provide us with a powerful artistic and psychological generalisation.

The man on the Moon has spread in oral heritage as well as in literary fiction, and both strata – oral and literary – have influenced each other. In children's books, the Moon is often a kind of Moon-man. Although the Estonian language lacks gender and the Moon has none, contextual hints lead us to conclude that the Moon is male. We also see allusions to this in old epic songs (the daughter of Day marries the Moon and they sit together on the edge of the world). In the 19th century and more recently, visual media has played its part, for example postcards, book illustrations, etc., depict the Moon as male.

It is interesting how often Moon myths found their way into 19th-century primers and school textbooks, where they were chosen as one example of national mythology. The water carrier on the Moon obviously fitted in well because of its human(itarian) message: there is always hope in a difficult situation. The story also has key concepts of ethnic identity, i.e. pointing out the difficult situation and backbreaking workload of the poor (Estonians being lower-class labourers). The humour and didactic messages found in other stories, for example tarring the Moon, made it an indispensable school myth. To sum up, the most important Moon-related astral myths and narratives expressed the sort of messages that would fit with the rising national movement whilst retaining the importance of the stories in the mythological efforts of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Acknowledgements

Research was supported by the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies (European Regional Development Fund, TK 145), PRG 22-5, EKM 8-2/20-3.

Sources

CORPUS OF ASTRAL LORE – digitalized data from Estonian archives.

References

- Ariste, Paul 1974. *Vadja muinasjutte ja muistendeid* [Votian Fairy Tales and Legends]. Tallinn: Valgus.
- Balys, Jonas 1951. *Tautosaka apie dangų*. Sodus: Michigan.
- Berezkin, Yuri 2010 The Pleiades as Openings, The Milky Way as the Path of Birds, and The Girl On the Moon: cultural links across Northern Eurasia folklore. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 44: 7–32.
- Berezkin, Yuri 2015. *The Thematic Classification and Areal Distribution of Folklore-Mythological Methods. The Analytical Catalog*. <http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/berezkin>
- Boganeva, Elena & Avilin, Tsimafei 2017. Pljamy na mesjatsy: belaruskija interpretatsyi [The Moon's Spots: Belarusian Interpretations]. *Беларускі фальклор* [Belarus Folklore], 4: 112–149.
- Charnoluski, V. 1930. *Materialy po bytu loparei* (Materials on the Everyday Life of the Lapps). Leningrad : Izdatelstvo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obschestva.
- Devjatkina, Tatiana 2008. *Mordva mütolooogia*. [Mordvinian Mythology]. Tartu: EKM Teaduskirjastus.
- Eliade, Mircea 1963. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. Cleveland: Meridian Books.

- Ernits, Enn & Ernits, Tiiu 2011. Vajja rahva astronoomiaast 20. sajandil [Votian Folk Astronomy in the 20th Century]. M. Kõiva (ed.). *Paar sammukest* 35. Tartu, ELM Scholarly Press.
- Gura, Alexandr 2010. On the Methods of Constructing a Mythological Text: Slavic Folk Beliefs regarding the Spots of the Moon. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 44: 35–50.
- Harva, Uno 1948. *Suomalaisten muinaisusko* [Finnish Ancient Religion]. Helsinki, Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö.
- Jakobson, Carl Robert 1867. *Kooli Lugemise Raamat* [School Reading Book], I. Tartu: Laakmann.
- Ivanov, Vladimir & Toporov, Vladimir 1974. *Issledovania v oblasti slavjanskikh drevnostei* [Research on Slavic Antiquities]. Moscow: Nauka.
- JUSTKUI (1998–2005) = Baran, Anneli & Hussar, Anne & Õim, Asta & Õim, Katre 1998–2005. *Justkui. Eesti kõnekäändude ja fraseoloogismide andmebaas* (EKFKA) [The database of Estonian Sayings and Fraseology]. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi Folkloristika Osakond <http://www.folklore.ee/justkui/>
- Kerbelytè, Bronislava 2001. *Tipy narodnyh skazanii* [Types of Folk Narratives]. St. Petersburg: Evropeiski Dom.
- Kõiva, Mare 2011. Eesti loitsud [Estonian incantations]. Tallinn: Pegasus.
- Kõiva, Mare & Kuperjanov, Andres 2015. The Moon, Astronomic Objects and Symbolic Rites in Healing Strategies. Minniyakhmetova, Tatiana & Velkoborská, Kamila (eds.). *Magic in Rituals and Rituals in Magic. The Ritual Year* 10. Innsbruck & Tartu: EKM Teaduskirjastus. (The Yearbook of the SIEF (Société Internationale d’Ethnologie et de Folklore), WG on the Ritual Year), 10: 313–322.
- Kõiva, Mare & Kuperjanov, Andres 2016. Some Aspects of European Moon Mythology. Astronomy and Power: How Worlds Are Structured. Michael A. Rappenglück, Barbara Rappenglück, Nicholas Campion & Fabio Silva (eds.). *Proceedings of the SEAC 2010 Conference*. BAR International Series 2794, pp. 173–178.
- Konakov, Nikolai 2003. Moon. *Komi Mythology*. Encyclopaedia of Uralic Mythologies. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Kuperjanov, Andres 2003. *Eesti taevas. Uskumusi ja tõlgendusid* [Estonian Sky. Beliefs and Interpretations]. Tartu: Eesti Folkloori Instituut.

- Laurinkienė, Nijolė 2002. Predstavlenia o mesiatse i interpretatsia vidimyh na nem piaten v baltiiskoi mifologii. *Balto-slaviānskie issledovania* [Balto-Slavic Studies] 15: 360–385. Moscow, Indrik.
- Lefebvre, Henri 1991. The Production of Space (La production de l'espace). Translated by D. Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Loorits, Oskar 1926. *Liivi rahva usund* I. [Livonian Folk Belief]. Acta et Commentationes Universitas Tartuensis, B 11.1. Tartu: University of Tartu.
- Loorits, Oskar 1949–1957. *Grundzüge des estnischen Volksglaubens*. I—III. Skrifter Utgivna av Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akadcmien för Folklivsforskning 18, 1–3. Lund: Carl Blom.
- LVET 2015 = *Läti-eesti sõnaraamat* [Estonian-Latvian Vocabulary]. Compiled by M. Madisson, A. Mandel, T. Nõulik, A. Tannenberg. Tallinn: EKSA.
- Metevelis, Peter 2000. The Lapidary Sky over Japan. *Asian Folklore Studies*, 59(1): 79-88; DOI: 10.2307/1179028
- Õim, Asta 2012. Kuidas me mõistame ööpäeva. [How we understand day and night]. *Mäetagused*, 48: 95–110. DOI: 10.7592/MT2011.48.oim
- Õpik, Elina 1970. Vadjalastest ja isuritest XVIII sajandi lõpul [On Votians and Izhorians at the End of the 18th Century]. Ants Viires (ed.). *Etnograafilisi ja lingvistilisi materjale Fjodor Tumanski Peterburi kubermangu kirjelduses* [Ethnographic and Linguistic Materials in Fyodor Tumansky's Description of the Saint Petersburg Governorate]. Tallinn: Valgus.
- Pogodin, Alexander 1895. Kosmicheskie legendy baltiiskih narodov [Cosmic legends of Baltic peoples]. *Zhivaia starina*, 5(3–4): 428–448.
- Posti, Lauri 1980. *Vatjan kielen Kukkosin murteen sanakirja* [Dictionary of Kukkos dialect of Votic language]. Lexica Societatis Fenno-Ugricae 19. Helsinki: Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura.
- Prüller, Paul-Egon 1968. Eesti rahvaastronoomia [Estonian Folk Astronomy]. *Teaduse ajaloo lehekülgi Eestist*. Kogumik [Studies in the History of Science in Estonia], vol. 1. Tallinn: Valgus, pp. 9–68.

- Pütelis, Aldis 2017. *Variation in language, literature, folklore, and music. December 7–8, 2017. Estonian Literary Museum / University of Tartu. Tartu, Estonia.* Tartu: ELM Scholarly Press. Programme and abstracts.
- Roos, Eduard 1969. “Tähe mõrsja” Salme ja tema kosilased [‘The Star Bride’: Salme and Her Suitors]. *Keel ja Kirjandus*, 11: 658–670; 12: 727–736.
- Rüütel, Ingrid. 1969. Muistne “Loomislaul” eesti uuemas rahvatraditsioonis [Ancient “Song of Creation” in Contemporary Estonian Folk Tradition]. *Paar sammukest eesti kirjanduse uurimise teed. Uurimusi ja materjale* [A Few Small Steps. Research and data], 6. Tallinn: Eesti Raamat.
- Sarv, Mikk 2017. *Kuu* [Moon]. Tallinn: Cum laude.
- SBK – The *Synopsis of Beliefs* compiled by Jonas Balys from LTA (see above). Vilnius: Institute of History at the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences.
- SKVR tiedokanda 2004–2007 = SKVR-tietokanta – kalevalaisten runojen verkkopalvelu [Internet Data Base of Finnish Runo Songs]. <https://skvr.fi/>
- Sõukand, Renata & Kalle, Raivo 2011. Taevakehad Eesti taimepärimuses. [Astral bodies in Estonian plant folklore]. *Universumit uudistades. Paar sammukest XXVI. Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi aastaraamat* [Exploring the Universe. A Few Small Steps. XXVI, Yearbook of the Estonian Literary Museum]. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, pp. 153–174. DOI: 10.7592/PS/26.
- Vaiškūnas, Jonas 2006. The Moon in Lithuanian folk tradition. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 32: 157–184.
- Vinokurova, Irina 2015. *Mifologija vepsov* [Vepsian Mythology]. Petrozavodsk: Petrozavodskii Universitet.
- VKS = *Vadja keele sõnaraamat* [Dictionary of the Votic Language], II, III. Tallinn: Teaduste Akadeemia Kirjastus (II); Eesti Keele Instituut (III).