

MYTHOLOGY OF THE EARTH

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Abstract: *The paper in question has a basis in the idea that one of the first primordial element of creation (if not the first element) – earth, air, fire, water – that the ancient Greeks named Gea and Romanians called Mother Earth (Mama Pământ) etc. If we are to closer analyze, almost all of the world's mythologies have the primordial deity as representing the Earth. We will discuss some „facets” of this ancient deity, as well as the sum of the „mythological aspects” of the Earth, from the oldest known cultures up to christianity, where „dirt” represents the fundamental „creationist matter”. Some of these are quite imposing and they show not only that man had a different bond with nature, but also that, today, the individual has strayed from his cradle of origin. Mircea Eliade relates a story, according to which an elder native American was asked why he would not farm his land, so he can sell the harvest, to scythe the grass to thus exploit nature's bounty. To this, the old man replied that he could not scratch the skin of his Mother Earth, to cut her hair, just to obtain monetary advantages. The paper will also take into consideration the cultural „career” of the motive in question, distinctly the way in which the goddess Gea was integrated into the cultural, social and even economic value system. We will observe a transmutation from the notion of the „holiness of the earth”, as a sacred notion, the earth that gives birth to us and feeds us, to the term of holy land. We will certainly limit ourselves to simply enunciating the subjects mentioned, as the matter implies a more ample study sizing in the dimensions of an entire volume. In the current context, despite the advanced and modern technics of harvesting the land, hunger seems to be, yet again, a menacing threat, as in the Middle Ages. We believe that resuscitating an interest for Mother Earth is a welcomed idea. We will thus point out, through the course of this paper, the most interesting myths, legends and beliefs about the Earth.*

INTRODUCTION

We must state from the beginning that one of the oldest elements in mythology, if not the oldest and most important elements, is **the Earth**. This may, at first sight, seem somewhat odd, because, according to evolutionist and materialist theories, ancient man first gazed to the heavens, the star filled skies and its blue color, in order to give "irrational" answers "to such a simple" fact (to be fair, a logical explanation for **the miracle** of life has, still to this day, not been found). Historians of religion and most experts illustrate the precise fact that ancient beliefs point to the Earth as a womb of life. We can also state that, in these archaic beliefs, **the Earth** has a primacy, because it bears fruit. The moment man became conscious to the Earth's fertility, coincides with the precise moment of its divination:

A considerable number of beliefs, myths and rituals concerning the earth, the "Great-Mother" and its divinations, have been passed down to us through time. Representing, in a certain sense, the very foundations of the Cosmos, the earth is endowed with a sum of religious valences. It was praised because it "existed", because it showed itself and unveiled, because it gave, because it bore fruit, because it received. If we were to follow the history of only one religion, we could circumscribe, with enough precision, the functions and the evolutions of beliefs concerning telluric epiphanies.¹

The growing of **cereals** and **grasses** (the food required by man and animal) represent an important moment in **the history of religions**. The food that was once randomly found now becomes a regularity, and does not depend on the whims of the

forests, the waters, or the hunting grounds (we are referring here to the hunter and gatherers) anymore. We are also referring here to the **proteins** provided by the domesticated animals that make these "elements" (cereals and domesticated animals) occupy a primordial, central place in primitive man's pantheon:

*The Earth produces cereals and grasses. Formula that, we will see, could resume a big part of agricultural beliefs.*²

It is beyond any doubt that, for our primitive ancestors, **the earth** represented a steadfast presence; even more so, the soil was the very basis of every day to day life. We need to emphasize this, because at many times experts in human beliefs seem to forget the powerful roots, for a lack of a better term, buried deep in reality, in the pragmatic:

*Before any mythical procession of actions regarding the earth, it had already existed and its presence was religiously praised. For a "primitive" religious conscience, the earth presents an immediate fact of life: expanse, solidarity, a variety of relief and vegetation which sustains, amounts to a living, active cosmic unity.*³

It is worth to note that primitive man did not dispose of such a great "analytical power", as dispersed and as distributed as we have today. He perceived reality at a global level, and the earth was no exception. So **Terra ferma** was, in fact, just a fragment of the enormous and eternal universe, of divine origins, of course:

*The first given religious value of the Earth was "indistinct", meaning it was not located in the so called telluric layer, but it was rather merged in a single whole unity composed of all the sacred acts accomplished in the cosmic environment - earth, rocks, trees, waters, shadows etc. The prime intuition of the Earth as a religious "form" can be reduced to the basic formula of "Cosmos - receptacle of diffused sacred forms". If in the religious, magic or mythic meanings of the Waters we can find ideas of germs, of dormancy and of regeneration, then the prime intuition of the Earth projects itself as being **the foundation** for all manifestation. Everything on the face of the Earth is **together**, and amount to one large unity.*⁴

Certain is the fact that, from the very beginning, man has felt the earth to be the origin of life itself, even though if this fact was felt rather diffusely and somewhat intuitively:

*The Earth, with everything it sustains and encompasses, was, from the very beginning, a inexhaustible source of **existence**, which was revealed directly to man.*⁵

Even though "the morphology of genesis" is varied and diversified, it is bewildering and impressive that, at the same time, populations so far apart on the globe imagined the origin of man's life as being... in the ground. The biblical myth of Creation (from dust you are born and to dust you shall return) can, amazingly, be confirmed centuries or millennia earlier:

The Armenians believe that the earth is "the maternal womb from where man emerged". (...) Peruvians believe that they descended from the mountains and from the rocks. What is significant in these superstitions is the fact that the cosmic structure of the Earth can be identified in the whole surrounding environment, in the micro-cosmos, and not only in the so called telluric region. "The Earth", in this context, denotes all of man's surroundings, the whole "land" - with mountains, waters and its vegetation.

It is no wonder that man nourished, from the very beginnings, an acute "sense of propriety" towards the surrounding lands and towards which he manifested his activities, man being a veritable son of the land:

*"The Earth" was, in the first of religious experiences or mythical intuitions, "the whole land" that surrounded man. Etymologists have a sum of words that, regarding "the Earth", explain spacial impressions - "wide land", "province" (cf. **prthivi**, meaning "wide one"); or primal sensory impressions, "hard", "the one that stands", "black" etc. The religious development of the earth, from a strictly telluric point of view, could not develop until later: in the pastoral cycle and especially the agricultural one (...). Until that time, the so called "earth divinities" were rather **local divinities**, in the sense of the surrounding cosmic environment.*⁶

In many languages, **the earth** has a masculine gender. In spite of this, it is perceived and "developed" as a feminine agent, the furrow is assimilated with the female uterus, and the arm with which the crust was "perforated" (before the arrival of the shovel, the land was plowed in this way) with the male sexual organ. Because of the agricultural cycle, the earth was easily assimilated, as a semantic symbol, with the woman. Also mentioning the fact that the first agriculturists were, according to historians, in fact... women, and not men, as they spent most of their time fishing and hunting:

*Agriculture, it seems, was discovered by a woman. The man, between hunting the pray and herding the livestock, was, for most of the time, absent. On the other hand, the woman (...) had the privilege of observing the natural phenomena of seeding and germination, and to, in an artificial way, try to repeat the processes. Being in solidarity with the other centers of cosmic fecundity - the Earth, the Moon - the woman, herself, obtained the prestige of influencing fertility and distributing it.*⁷

Even more so, a sign of equality between female fertility and that of the fields, was placed. "Infertile" women were seen, by the traditional communities, as a mostly negative element, if not even malicious, meant to attract the worst possible evil: the infertility of the fields. In retrograde, the rituals of fertility of the fields interfered with the ones regarding future mothers, thus, creating a series of practices in that regard, where magic meets ritual meets "pragmatism":

*(...) The same beliefs can be found at the ewe populations in Africa. In South America, the jibaros tribes, for example, believe that "women have a certain influence, special, mysterious, over the growing of cultivated plants". This solidarity between women and the fruiting furrow was kept even after agriculture became manly technique and the plow replaced the primitive shovel. This solidarity, in turn, explains a large number of rituals and beliefs (...).*⁸

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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