

# The Moon in Baltic-Finnic Religious Practices



Andres Kuperjanov, Estonian Literary Museum FO, Estonia, ESF 6824

## About Moon

Moon borns from the egg of bird (Estonian song of creation)

Moon is a son of God (Sun)

Sex is not specified in Estonian language. Moon is mostly (old) man, but also is mentioned that Moon is Sun's sister

Moon is Hell's window

Moon's life is short, only four weeks. Old moons are behind the worlds border, Chinese woman bring them for using as the fireplace poker

There is 13 moons, one of them is stolen

Moon is like earthglobe, people living there, the darker spots are their cabbage fields

## About Moon



Moon and other celestial bodies are living creatures (taevalised) – Heavenly Beeings.

They are holy. You don't abuse or point to them. It will be punished

## **Moon Spots**

Baltic and Estonian/Finnic astrononyms are very different, Moon and Milky way are great exceptions.

Baltic people (Latvians and Lithuanians) have same Moon spot explanations and very similar belief connected with Moon phases as Estonians

Common stereotypes (vanishing-old, growing-new, full-stabile, empty- dangerous) are used for work organizing, predictions, healing and charming

## **Moon Spots**

There are some explanations for the spots on the Moon. People believe the spots form a face with a nose, eyes and a mouth. In full moon a woman or a girl carrying water buckets with yokes can be seen. It is narrated that the Moon took an orphan girl, which asked his help. Sometimes it has been said that the Moon punished a proud girl and took her to himself. It is also believed that in the Moon we can see the legendary Lithuanian wizard Tvardauskas, whom the devil took to hell but lost on the Moon, also one may see the scene of the first fratricide on the moon: Cain holding his slain brother Abel on a pitchfork.

(Balys 1951: 9-11).

## Moon Spots

Figures on the Moon is seen as a boy, man, woman, girl or two men, young man and maiden.

1. Most popular motives orphan on the Moon - Moon feels sorry for her.

The most popular myth tells of an orphan or woman exhausted from the hard life and work, carrying water from the spring or brook, asks the Moon to take her up to him.

Moon, dearest,  
Take me to be your back-whisker  
And head-washer  
H, Wiedemann 3, 134



## **Moon Spots**

The Moon take pity on the girl or woman and takes her up to the sky where we can see her on moonlit nights. An early printed version of the story (1843) was spread through school textbooks and tells of an innocent maiden from Vaskjala who gets to the Moon.

## **water-carrier on the Moon**

Western limits in Europe coincide approximately with the border between Balts and Slavs is the "girl with pails in the Moon". Lithuanians (Kerbelite, Laurinkene, Vaiškūnas), Letts (Pogodin), Estonians (Kuperjanov), and Votians (Ariste 1974, Ernits, Ernits).

## **Moon Spots**

### **water-carrier on the Moon II**

There are two main versions of the water-carrier on the moon, one of them was orphan or poor women.

Second one is a women who carries water buckets and asks Moon to help. When Moon does not help, she abused Moon and Moon takes her

Both versions are known in Baltic-Finnic region and by Yuri Berezkin, they have wider parallels



## **Moon Spots**

Saami - the Sun takes the girl to give her in marriage to his son and throws her into the Moon with her pails (Charnoluski).

Other eastern parallels: Komi-Zyrians, Komi-Permiaks, Udmurts, Chuvash, Mari , Bashkirs, Volga Tatars, samoyeds, Selkups., Khanti.

Russian, Ukrainian, etc - after Alexander Gura - only some versions from Archangelsk, etc close to ethnic groups of Finnic Ugric Peoples.

After Y. Berezkin : Kazakh, Kirgiz, Kets in North, Khakas, Evenki, Nanai, Lamut, Nihv, Buryat, Mongolia. Japanese, Ainu, China. Paeoasiatic Peoples: Chukchi, Koryak, Kamchadal (pails and bush). Most of American tribes strating from Tlingit,etc.

## **Moon Spots**

2. Moon tarer. To hide the crime, punishment.

The crime is either theft,

wife-killing (South Estonia),

act of love (West and North Estonia),

offending the Moon

affronting or accusing the Moon for not coming to help  
(connected with the II version of water carrier on moon)

## **Moon Spots**

### 2. Moon tarer

One man had killed his wife. The moon was watching and laughing – I see you!

The man got angry, took a pot of tar and a brush. He climbed up on to 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.

ERA II 115, 644 (3) < Urvaste

## Moon Spots

3. Being in the sauna late on Saturday evening or generally late.

4. The spots could be result of a quarrel or argument between two brothers – also Cain and Abel.

5. A human face

6. The wolf and the bull.

The latter story is probably influenced by myths about Ursa Major.



## Moon Spots



7. A man on the moon cutting trees

Known in our area, but not very wellknown

## Moon Spots



Woman on the Moon. Chang'e

## **Moon Charms**

Early records - 17th century, 100+ texts.  
Some charms used even today.

The moon is addressed in short charms warding against disease and disease is transferred to the moon.

The great majority of moon charms are short formulae.  
The accompanying rites are not complicated either.

## **Moon Charms**

*Kuu teretamine* - Greeting the Moon.

The incantation had to be chanted when you saw the new moon in the sky and the purpose was to guarantee

youthfulness,

health and recuperation,

asking for money

food.



## **Moon Charms**

*Tsiale uni,  
lambale laiskus,  
saksale tõbi,  
a mulle tävvest tervisest.*

Sleep to the swine,  
Laziness to the sheep,  
Illness to the rich [Germans]  
But to me good health.

KKI, WS < Setu

## **Moon Charms**

*Tere, tere, kuukene!  
Sina rauaraskune,  
ja mina kullakergune.*

Hello, hello, dear moon!  
You heavy as iron,  
And me light as gold.

RKM II 368, 417 (10) < Maarja-Magdaleena

## **Moon Charms**

*Sinu silm tõntsiks-minu silm selgeks*

“Your eye to grow dim, my eye to be clear”

*Mulle tervis, sulle tõbi*

“Health to me, disease to you.”

## **Moon Charms**

### **Healing words & healing with Moonlight**

Small growths could be reattributed to the moon - warts, boils, bone deformities – as well as skin ailments.

Such incantations are common in Scandinavian (Norway, Denmark, Sweden), the British Isles (Irish, Scottish, English), central European tradition (German, Austrian, French, Hungarian), among Western and Southern Slavs (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovakia, Czech, Poland), eastern Slavs (Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia).

## **Moon Charms**

*Näe mis minul on ja sinul ei ole. Võta endale!*  
See what I have and you don't have. Take it!

If you see someone riding in moonlight, you have to say:  
And the wart makes three!

## **Moon Charms**

To make an illness recede, the old or full moon was addressed. The final formula *Kao kui vanakuu taevast!* “Go like the old moon disappears from the sky!” is found in many healing words.

To perform magic symbolic rites washing off the disease.

To whisk the disease off in moonlight.

## Moon Charms

Bugs and parasites could be transferred to the moon.

If there were roaches in the house, one person had to go out on the new moon Thursday and say: *Noorkuu, võta mu saksad endale!* “New moon, take my bosses [bloodsuckers?] for yourself!”

The phase of the moon is a very common time anchor in incantations.

Influence of confessions

## **Moon Charms**

*Jaunas Mėnuli,  
Dangaus karaliau,  
Apšieti žemę apvalai,  
Apvalyk ir mano griešną kūną.  
(Masalskienė 1990)*

Young Moon,  
King of the sky,  
You light the Earth and clean it,  
Clean my sinful body too.





Thanks!