

DISCOVER ABKHAZIA

The Sickle of the Narts

Translated by Amjad Jaimoukha

(The original text is in Kabardian. Third cycle, tale no. 56, pp. 220-2, in *The Narts: Circassian Epos. Vol. 1. Asker Hedeghalh'e. Maikop: The Circassian Research and Science Institute, 1968*)

Millet used to be grown in abundance in the fields of the Narts. However, since they did not have an implement for reaping the crop with, they had to pick the ears one by one. This took them a very long time, which caused the millet plants to shed their grains. One day the Narts made a decision to go on harvesting the millet on moon-lit nights.

The Narts worked all day long. After sunset, they sat down to have their meal, and they saw the new moon in the night sky: it stood there like a drawn golden bow. The Narts were pleased, they finished their dinner and stood up to resume their work. As they were about to resume work, it seemed to them as if the moon was falling down from the sky. As they stood gazing, one end of the moon seemed as if it were being pulled down by a long black hand. The Narts were astonished and abashed by the sight. The long black hand pulled down the moon behind the mountains. It became so dark that you could not see the tip of your nose.

Next evening the new moon again hung up in the sky. As the Narts started to pick the ears, the long black hand came up from behind the mountain and started to pull down the moon by its cusp. This went on and on. Thus, the Narts were only able to harvest half the crop. The rest of the millet plants shed their grains.

When they ran out of millet, they were struck by famine. Feeding on meat and dairy products, they barely managed to survive till the next millet harvest. The Narts worked all day long, and then sat down for their evening meal. The half-moon was glittering in the sky. Yet again, the long black hand came up from behind the mountain, grabbed the end of the moon and started pulling it down.

The Narts became bewildered and worried. They went to Lady Satanay to seek her council and told her the whole story. Lady Satanay reflected and then gave them the following advice:

- Send Sosriqwe on horseback with some other horsemen to scout that area.

They sent Sosriqwe with a group of horsemen. After a long journey, the band of Nart scouts reached the mountain. Sosriqwe hit his Little Dun trice, and in no time he reached the top. The others helped one another to climb the mountain and they stood by Sosriqwe. Night fell and the new moon glittered in the sky. As it hung up there, on the banks of some river a tall black man rose up, stretched on his toes and grasped the end of the moon, pulling it down. Sosriqwe drew his bow and aimed it (at the black man). However, his companions stopped him from shooting the arrow, saying, "let us see what he does next." The darksome man lowered the moon and lit the fields, then holding one tip of the moon in his hand he swept the millet field once reaping a huge stack. The group of horsemen looked at one another in amazement saying, "how wonderful this is!"

Again Sosriqwe whipped his horse trice and jumped down the mountain:

- "Wait for me until I get back!" He said.

Sosriqwe flew at the black man at full tilt sword in hand. The black man threw back the moon up to the sky and fled. But Sosriqwe leapt and landed in front of him.

- "I will cut off your hand for stealing our moon," said Sosriqwe.

- "For God's sake, for the sake of Circassian ethics leave me be!" begged the black man. "If it were up to me, I wouldn't have pulled down the moon. It is the duty of my brother and me to feed the people in this land. My brother tends the cattle, and I cultivate and reap millet. If I do not pull down the moon, my millet plants would shed their grains, and our nation would starve.

- "No," said Sosriqwe, "this cannot be allowed to happen. If we do not work at night, our crop would also shed the grains, and we would go hungry. This moon belongs to both of our nations: let it shine for you as it shines for us. If you refuse, I shall have to pull you limb from limb."

The black old man wept and laid down again:

- "There is no escaping fate! I have to pick the ears one by one," he said.

The Narts returned home and recounted their adventure to Lady Satanay.

- "Why, then, have you come to see me? Go and tell Lhepsch what you have seen," said Satanay.

The Narts went to Lhepsch's smithy and recounted their story. Lhepsch stood up and made a moon from steel.

- "Oh, how could one reap with this?!" He said. He bent one end and stuck a stick into it.
- "To make it clench the crop," he said making dents along the blade. He named the implement sickle (ghwbzhe), and gave to the Narts saying, "go on, reap your harvest."

He manned his workplace once more and made a gigantic sickle, as big as the moon. This he had sent to the black man.

- From now on bid him not to tamper with our moon. Let him use this to reap millet for his children.