

Cultural Aspects of an Ancient Feminine Deity: The Old Fairy

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Abstract

The Romanian ceremonial funeral chants contain advice given to the deceased in order to join their relatives in the afterworld. There are trails on their journey, but it can be successfully completed if they notice the old fairy - the mistress of the afterworld. She appears in the key moments of the odyssey: under a tree, where she writes their names on a list, at the fountain, where she offers them water or washes them, and at a cell or a rock to show them the way. Sometimes, the old fairy's prerogatives are transferred to the Virgin Mary, yet the character remains pre-Christian. No matter her name, the old fairy shares attributes with Virgin Mary's image from carols or incantations, with the Iele from folk beliefs and chants, as well as with the mistress of the Călușari (Herodias or Arada). It is probably owing to a common inheritance that the character is related to the mistress of the witches (Herodias) from the western Middle Ages, illustrating the specific way of representing death in archaic communities.