

## Witches in Modern Romania *February 2018*

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The communist regimes in East Europe promised modernization and the application of science to all of our problems. However, a quarter of a century after popular rejection of Marxism-Leninism and its “scientific governing principles”, ancient traditions are still embraced by a population that was largely educated in a communist environment.



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In Romania today, even in those urban areas seen as immune to old superstitions, there are lots of old traditions still practiced in the present time. Sick people are often treated by traditional homemade cures said to have curative powers as well as the capability of keeping the body healthy. Meanwhile, magic is sometimes used to heal not only the body but also the soul.

This is said to be accomplished by the utilization of spells. Such spells are usually performed by people who "sold their soul to the devil". Sometimes this black magic appears to work, but more often it is associated with instances in which those who perform ancient rituals are scamming vulnerable people in order to take their money.

There is a surprising degree of specialization among modern Romanian witches. There are those witches who specialize in problems involving breakups, fears, death, evil work or ominous predictions. People turn to them when their faith has been shaken and they are struggling with the routine issues of life and end up spending lots of money on the services of witches.

There's a witch who lives on my street who once claimed that she could not go to church because it makes her physically ill. She has long taken delight in hurting people around her, including her own children who now hate her. I once heard her claim that long ago she had a little girl whom she left at home because she had to do something outside that night. While walking by the street lights she claimed that human-like shadows could be seen apparently following her. Later that night, her little girl died because of the evil spirits who had followed her.

According to legend, these witches get their dark power from the devil and most of them only do evil work. Contrary to the popular perceptions, they do not wear black capes while preparing potions in big pots. However, they are said to send creatures to "hunt" and curse you. Creatures such as bugs, roaches, rats or frogs do their work for them. The woman on my street who is said to be a witch claims that she knows all kinds of spells that can inflict harm on individuals who offend her.

For example, one spell involves putting two lines of oil put in front of her victim's door. This arrangement has the effect of causing her victims to get separated as their relationship deteriorates. Another spell is implemented by throwing water or even mercury where a person will walk. If people step on it, they will be cursed. It is said in our neighborhood that a woman once stepped in it and gave birth to a baby whose intestines were crossed and the infant required surgery in order to survive.

Mercury is also used to discover a person's fears. When the mercury is cooled down in a glass of water, it reveals those fears which can then be exploited by the witch.

A neighbor claimed that our local witch threw lots of cursed objects in her yard. These objects were used to help her curse people simply because they are happy in their own lives or because they are not giving her attention she feels she deserves. The neighbor who told us this said she knew the objects had been used as a curse her and believed they were responsible for the death her husband not long afterwards. When she disassembled his bed to move it, she discovered roaches on the side that been his.

It is said that every time a witch performs spells on you, cracking noises can be heard in your closet. It is as if there is something in there waiting to get you. While you may be the target of a witch's curse, someone else can be the victim if that he encounters the objects intended to hurt someone else. Even in our modern era, most Romanian people believe dark magic to be a real thing. However, more often they realize that the only defense against this evil is faith in God.