



A Brighter Moon

Many traditions persist that at some time in the past the Moon was much brighter than it is now, and larger in appearance than the Sun. In many rabbinical sources it is stated that the Sun and the Moon were equally bright at first.⁽¹⁾ The same statement was made to de Sahagun by the aborigines of the New World: “the Sun and the moon had equal light in the past.”⁽²⁾ At the other end of the world the Japanese asserted the same: the Nihongi Chronicle says that in the past “the radiance of the moon was next to that of the sun in splendor.”⁽³⁾

Traditions of many peoples maintain that the Moon lost a large part of its light and became much dimmer than it had been in earlier ages.⁽⁴⁾

In order that the Sun and the Moon should give off comparable light, the Moon must have had an atmosphere with a high albedo (refracting power)⁽⁵⁾ or it must have been much closer to the earth. In the latter case the Moon would have appeared larger than the Sun. In fact, the Babylonian astronomers computed the visible diameter of the Sun as only two-thirds of the visible diameter of the Moon, which makes a relation of four to nine for the illuminating surfaces. This measure surprised modern scholars, who are aware of the exactness of the measurements made by the Babylonian astronomers and who reason that during the eclipses one can easily observe the approximate equality of the visible disks.⁽⁶⁾

References

1. Targum Yerushalmi, Genesis 1:16 and Numbers 28:15; Hullin 60b; Midrash Breishith Rabba. Other sources in Ginzberg, *Legends* V. 34ff.
2. [B. de Sahagun, *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva Espana* [Cf. the Peruvian tradition recorded by Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa in the sixteenth century, according to which Viracocha created the Moon brighter than the Sun: *Historia de los Incas*, ch. 7.]
3. Nihongi, *Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times*, transl. by W. G. Aston (1896), Book I, pt. 1.
4. Cf. S. Thompson, *Motif-index of Folk Literature* (1932); cf. Ginzberg, *Legends* VI. 35; *Handbook of South American Indians* (American Bureau of Ethnology [Washington, 1948], Vol. II, p. 515).
5. See above, section “The Earth Without the Moon,” n. 13.
6. E. F. Weidner, *Beitraege zur Assyriologie* VII, Heft 4 (1911), p. 99; cf. idem, *Handbuch der Babylonischer Astronomie* (1915), p. 131. Cf. “Gewichte” by Lehmann-Haupt in Pauly-Wissowa *Supplements*.

