

THE WORLD VIEW OF THE CULTURE OF THE GODDESS

by Marija Gimbutas

From *The Language of the Goddess*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989. Copyright © 1989 by Marija Gimbutas. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.



Celebration of life is the leading motif in Old European ideology and art. There is no stagnation; life energy is constantly moving as a serpent, spiral, or whirl. Recall the richly painted vases of the Cucuteni, Dimini, Butmir, and Minoan cultures, and sense the moving, turning, rising, splitting, and growing energy they portray, the splendid combination of colors with ochre red, the color of life, predominating. Life columns, upward winding snakes, leafy trees, bees, and butterflies rising from tombs, caves, crevices, or the Goddess's powerful uterus. One form dissolves into another. The transformation of human to animal, snake to tree, uterus to fish, frog, hedgehog, and bucranium, bucranium to butterfly, was a perception of the emergence of life energy in another form.

This is not to say that death was neglected. In art it is impressively manifested in the nakedness of bone, howling hounds, screeching owls, swooping vultures, and dangerous boars. The question of mortality was of profound concern but the deep perception of the periodicity of nature based on the cycles of the moon and the female body led to the creation of a strong belief in the immediate regeneration of life at the crisis of death. There was no simple death, only death *and* regeneration. And this was the key to the hymn of life reflected in this art.

Sacred images and symbols, goddesses and gods, their birds and animals, mysterious snakes, batrachians, and insects, were more real than actual daily events. They reveal to us the ultimate context in which Old Europeans lived. These symbols remain the only real access to this invigorating, earth-centered, life-reverencing worldview, since

we are now far removed from the society that created this imagery. Freud would have denigrated such imagery as "primitive fantasies." Jung would probably have valued it as "the fruits of the inner life flowing out from the unconscious."

The Goddess in all her manifestations was a symbol of the unity of all life in Nature. Her power was in water and stone, in tomb and cave, in animals and birds, snakes and fish, hills, trees, and flowers. Hence the holistic and mythopoeic perception of the sacredness and mystery of all there is on Earth.

This culture took keen delight in the natural wonders of *this* world. Its people did not produce lethal weapons or build forts in inaccessible places, as their successors did, even when they were acquainted with metallurgy. Instead, they built magnificent tomb-shrines and temples, comfortable houses in moderately-sized villages, and created superb pottery and sculptures. This was a long lasting period of remarkable creativity and stability, an age free of strife. Their culture was a culture of art.

The images and symbols in this volume assert that the parthenogenetic Goddess has been the most persistent feature in the archeological record of the ancient world. In Europe she ruled throughout the Paleolithic and Neolithic, and in Mediterranean Europe throughout most of the Bronze Age. The next stage, that of the pastoral and patriarchal warrior gods, who either supplanted or assimilated the matristic pantheon of goddesses and gods, represents an intermediary stage before Christianity and the spread of the philosophical rejection of this world. A prejudice against this worldliness developed and with it the rejection of the Goddess and all she stood for.

The Goddess gradually retreated into the depths of forests or onto mountain tops, where she remains to this day in beliefs and fairy stories. Human alienation from the vital roots of earthly life ensued, the results of which are clear in our contemporary society. But the cycles never stop turning, and now we find the Goddess reemerging from the forests and mountains, bringing us hope for the future, returning us to our most ancient human roots.

