



Introduction: Tracing the Old European Heritage

Harald Haarmann and Joan Marler

In her germinal works, Marija Gimbutas maps out the multifaceted civilization that she addresses as ‘Old Europe,’ and she points to the persistence of Old European properties in subsequent cultures. This visionary path of her scholarship has been explored in recent years and a whole new domain of scholarly investigation into the beginnings of western civilization is gaining in profile. Ever more evidence for cultural continuity from Old Europe into classical antiquity and beyond has been presented and a fascinating kaleidoscope of longevity of cultural patterns is setting new standards for studying the history of early civilizations and their afterglow.

In this Spring 2018 issue of the *Journal of Archaeomythology*, scholars from Finland, Italy, Romania, and Albania, specialized in linguistics, archaeology, history of religion, law, and culture studies present new insights into processes of cultural continuity, revealing how the achievements of Old Europe have been reworked and transmitted through people’s cultural memory over millennia. In this way, present and future generations will continue to benefit from influences of the past that have proven their usefulness.

Patterns of Old European inheritance have left their imprints over a wide range of

cultural developments. In his article, Harald Haarmann discusses governance and gender equality in an egalitarian society (as the roots of democracy), then muses on the soundings of the Neolithic spirit in the abstract features of modern art; Marco Merlini traces the influential lineage of pre-Greek Artemis on the establishment of the Orthodox monastic site on Mount Athos; Adrian Poruciu explores the mythological figure of the Romanian “Wood Mother” as a complex female being whose attributes can be traced to the death-wielding and regenerative powers of primordial Nature honored in Old European symbolism.

Among these contributions is the outline of a project of scholarly fieldwork by Kathleen Imholz whose goal is to secure evidence of the survival of Old European traditions in the lifestyles of modern Albanians. Here, we are confronted with the pitfalls and quandaries of research when investigating continuity in contexts where neither archaeology, historiography, nor literary sources provide sufficient clues. Imholz’s project forms part of a joint venture with Harald Haarmann. The goal of their collaboration is to disentangle the twisted roots of Albanian origins and to secure evidence for the oldest layer, which is Old European.