



## Introduction ~ Seeking the Source of Renewal

Joan Marler

In the first article of this collection, “Reconsidering the Roots of Western Philosophy,” the cultural historian Charlene Spretnak begins by declaring, “The Western mind is schooled in discontinuities. We are traditionally socialized to perceive a radical break between body and mind, humans and nature, and self and the world.”<sup>1</sup> But was this always the case?

In her in-depth investigations of the earliest agrarian (Neolithic/ Old European) societies of southeastern and central Europe—from the mid-seventh to the mid-fourth millennia BCE)—the Lithuanian-American archaeologist Marija Gimbutas focused not only on long-lived habitation patterns, economic practices, and myriad manifestations of material culture.<sup>2</sup> She paid particular attention to the rich outpouring of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic sculptures, finely crafted ceramics with elegantly engraved and painted patterns, and a wide range of ritual items found in specific contexts. In Gimbutas’ view, these creations are not simply curios with decorative designs; they contain meaningful patterns that reflect people’s worldview and their inseparable relationship with the living world. Spretnak quotes Gimbutas, who writes: “The multiple categories, functions, and symbols used by prehistoric peoples to express the Great Mystery are all aspects of the

unbroken unity of one deity, a Goddess who is ultimately Nature herself.”<sup>3</sup>

Spretnak emphasizes that long after the end of Old Europe, an afterglow of Old European wholistic orientation lingered as a substratum presence that was continued in various ways by the preSocratic philosophers (c. 600-400 BCE). She points out that during the Greek classical period, the history of Western philosophy made a radical shift away from perceptions of interconnected wholeness, toward basic beliefs in ontological discontinuities and the separation of mind and body. This philosophical trajectory eventually led to the development of a mechanistic worldview central to the Scientific Revolution that codified and enshrined the supposed necessity to conquer nature resulting in a further estrangement from the living world, and the progressive destruction of the web of life. For too long we have forgotten our most ancient inheritance that we are inseparably part of the great unity of all life, which, as Spretnak reminds us, we can no longer afford to deny.

The British author, artist, and prehistorian Michael Dames laments the effects of the long-term influence of the Greek philosopher Socrates, who downgraded the preSocratic *muthos* and replaced it with *logos* that emphasizes linear, rational, objective reasoning. By the seventeenth century, the cult of Reason had turned this preference into dogma leading to the tyranny of abstract theories. In his article,

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<sup>1</sup> Spretnak 2020: 5

<sup>2</sup> See Gimbutas 1991.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

“Some Archaeo-Mythic Rambles,” Dames discusses the effect of logos-derived *objectivity* within British archaeology, leading to a process of disenchantment concerning its perception of the ancient world. He remarks that researchers working within the modern philosophical mindset find it hard to acknowledge the *pre-modern*, mythically experienced life-world.

In Dames’ view, to rediscover the semi-hidden world of pre-Socratic *muthos* requires a capacity to marvel at, and show gratitude for, the infinitely complex and marvelous living world in which we live. He reminds us that we need to switch off the light to see the stars, and merge constricted selfhood into universality. As a useful contribution to this state of affairs, he offers a “Pocket Guide to Myth” to help us find respectful ways to appreciate and benefit from the compound wisdom of previous myth-based cultures.

Myth-based cultures are found in early societies throughout the world. The multiple megalithic temples created and used for ceremonial activities during the Neolithic period on the islands of Malta in the Mediterranean Sea have been the subject of great curiosity and conflicting explanations for several hundred years. The discovery of myriad full-bodied female sculptures within the context of the temples, have sparked ongoing debates about their significance.

In his article, “Was Malta a Place for the Veneration of a Mother Goddess?” Louis Laganà—who is an art historian, art critic, curator and practicing artist teaching at the university of Malta—examines the question of whether Malta was a place for the veneration of a Mother Goddess during Neolithic times. This controversial question was at the center of an historic conference held in 1985 at the University of Malta, titled “Malta Conference on Archaeology and Fertility Cult.” Laganà’s article presents descriptive analyses of various anthropomorphic sculptures used during the temple period. He includes interpretations by

archaeologists at the conference who disagree with the theory that the worship of a Mother Goddess existed. Other presenters, including Marija Gimbutas, maintained that a Great Goddess was venerated in Malta more than 5,000 years ago in temples and in hypogea (underground temple tombs) by the local population. The conflict between these contrasting views represent a snapshot of controversies continuing to this day. Laganà quotes the archaeologist David Trump who writes: “Whatever, or whoever, is being represented, stands, sits or lies at the very heart of the religion of the temples.”<sup>4</sup> On that point, at least, the presenters seem to have agreed.

The German linguist and cultural historian Harald Haarmann residing in Finland, and the American linguist, lawyer, and cultural historian Kathleen Imholz, living and working in Albania, discuss their collaboration in the article, “Old Europe and Albanian Civilisation.” As the title implies, their investigation explores evidence of Old Europe within the jumbled cultural layers that exist within the ancient cultural boundaries of Albania.

This area was inaccessible to the Western world during the communist period until 1991 when researchers could finally enter this previously forbidden region. The intention expressed by Haarmann and Imholz is to bring Albania (and the other parts of Southeast Europe where Albanians live) into the discussion of Old Europe using a multi-disciplinary approach.

Old Europe (as defined by Marija Gimbutas) refers to the non-Indo-European cultural and linguistic level that preceded the Indo-Europeanization of Europe. The Indo-European presence within Albania is recognized linguistically and in terms of its patriarchal social structure. But as the authors point out, language, social patterns, and mythic elements also indicate traces of earlier influences.

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<sup>4</sup> Trump 2002: 94-95.

The fine-grained, work-in-process of the authors' investigations of submerged Old European influences within Albanian culture requires deep searching in a multiplicity of disciplines in relevant fields. For instance, they are making good use of the extraordinary discoveries being made in the field of genetics that are constantly modifying and enriching their views about the movements of prehistoric populations in the area. Their concerted efforts are leading to a range of fascinating discoveries making it possible to work on an increasingly solid footing in order to continue to discover the "mostly hidden, mosaic that is Albanian culture today."<sup>5</sup>

Their collaborative article is followed by "A Special Note on Dodona," by Kathleen Imholz, who begins by acknowledging that beliefs in oracles have been widespread in human history. In Greek antiquity, the two best-known oracular centers were at Delphi and Dodona, although there were also many others. According to Herodotus, Dodona was "the most ancient place of divination in Hellas."<sup>6</sup> Although Dodona is mentioned both in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*, its location has been lost to history. Imholz lifts the curtain on her complex search for the location of this sacred center, with fascinating tales to tell.

Françoise Storey and Jeff Storey, both professors at the Université Côte d'Azur in Nice, have penned a unique article, "The Goddess, the Serpent and Video Games at the Origins of the Monomyth." Their academic research discusses the appearance of ancient mythic motifs within the secular world of video games that has captured the imagination of gamers throughout the world.

The concept of the Monomyth, coined by James Joyce in the 1930s, was developed by Joseph Campbell a decade later in his bestselling book, *The Hero With a Thousand*

*Faces*. During the 1970s George Lucas incorporated the motif of the Monomyth, as the hero's journey, into his *Star Wars* Trilogy, catapulting this mythical tale to international fame while sparking the imagination of contemporary audiences in ways that purely academic inquiries never could. This mythic motif has become the standard narrative template for video game designers throughout the world, and entire communities of gamers are enthralled by the Monomyth. Given this remarkable reality, the authors declare the necessity to examine the validity of this model to understand what is actually taking place here.

During the course of their article, Storey and Storey examine the structure of the myth, its various elements and stages of the hero's journey, and the symbolic quest of the elixir, which represents the entire purpose of the adventure. They examine the essential role of the serpent, and especially the woman in Campbell's Monomyth, as a "primal element," "mother of the world," "world-bounding frame," "shell of the cosmic egg," and "universal Goddess."<sup>7</sup> In this way, Campbell recognizes that she represents "the totality of what can be known."<sup>8</sup> After all, this universal Goddess who initiates the hero by means of the *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage), is at once the womb of new life, the tomb of death, and the elixir that regenerates the hero within the cycle of life. This, as the authors point out, is the ancient understanding of the reality at the regenerative center of all being.

Nevertheless, Campbell's telling of the story reduces the actual significance of the universal Goddess to only one stage of the journey, straightening its cyclic nature into a linear path of male achievement. Woman is relegated to being simply a stage of his journey but is no longer recognized as the primal essence of the journey itself.

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<sup>5</sup> Haarmann and Imholz 2020: 47.

<sup>6</sup> Herodotus (Htd) 2.252.

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<sup>7</sup> Campbell 1949: 255, 259.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

As the authors clearly state, the Monomyth of today is a denatured version of the spiritual tool recognized by the ancients. They specify that the hero's journey of the Monomyth, enacted by gamers throughout the world, represents "*the vestige of our ancient experience of the Eternal Return, the pathway of initiation, magic invocation, the ritual and eternal cycle of renewal in the world.*"<sup>9</sup>

This volume concludes with an article by the German philosopher of science, Heide Goettner-Abendroth, who is the founder/director of the International Academy Hagia. Her article, "The New Ideology of 'Eternal War' in Archaeology: Critical Reflections on Early History," challenges prevailing interpretations within archaeology that warfare has always been endemic to human societies. In her view, the assumption that Paleolithic, Neolithic, and indigenous societies worldwide have always been warlike is an unfounded projection of modern beliefs in eternal war.

There is no evidence of organized warfare or the use of weapons specifically crafted for war among the Neolithic inhabitants of Old Europe (6400-3500 BCE) or on the islands of Malta (5200-2500 BCE) as typically found during the Bronze Age. The agrarian people who built the megalithic temples on Malta and the ample sculptures of the Maltese Goddess, as discussed by Laganà in this volume, were peaceful farmers who cultivated the shallow soil of these limestone islands for millennia. After a long and peaceful period, the end of Old Europe (c. 3500 BCE) and the end of the Temple Period on Malta (c. 2500 BCE) coincided with the arrival of Bronze Age newcomers who introduced a warlike social structure with weapons of war.

Goettner-Abendroth's rejection of the belief in the inevitability of eternal war, Haarmann's and Imholz's search for evidence of Old Europe in Albania, and the impulse of Storey and Storey to call for the recognition of the mythic significance of the cycles of renewal as exemplified in the living world have not lost their relevance. The collective disassociation with the cyclic realities of Nature, typical of the modern world, as discussed by Spretnak and Dames, has led to a wholesale disenchantment and shredding of the web of life. Perhaps we will eventually find the hidden source of the lost oracular center of Dodona and the eternal cycles of renewal within ourselves once again for the benefit of all.

## References

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**Joan Marler** is the Executive Director of the Institute of Archaeomythology and the editor of the *Journal of Archaeomythology*.

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<sup>9</sup> Storey and Storey 2020: 67.