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STRAIPSNIAI / ARTICLES

MARIJA GIMBUTAS (GIMBUTIENĖ): THE BALTIC GODDESS

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Marija Gimbutas (Gimbutienė) is a renowned archaeologist who specialised in European prehistory. This paper explores her life and work, including her personal biography, showing how her upbringing in Lithuania shaped her academic interests and orientations. This paper also reviews her professional achievements and contributions via the lenses of seven aspects of her academic life, namely her time in higher education, her work on Lithuanian folklore and symbolism, her explorations of Old Europe during the Neolithic, her Kurgan Hypothesis and engagement with Baltic studies, her excavations in southeast Europe, her work on the Goddess, and her symbolism work. It also examines academic and popular reactions to her writing and her influence on scholars and public discourse.

Keywords: Gimbutas, Neolithic, history of archaeology, Goddess, figurines.

Šiame straipsnyje aptariamas Marijos Gimbutienės gyvenimas ir darbas tiriant Europos priešistorę, o asmeninė žymios archeologės biografija atskleidžia, kaip jos vaikystė augant Lietuvoje suformavo akademinių tyrimų linkmę ir interesus. Profesinis mokslininkės indėlis bei pasiekimai pristatomi pateikiant septynis jos akademinio gyvenimo aspektus, t. y. jos laiką įgyjant aukštąjį išsilavinimą, darbą gilinantis į Lietuvos folklorą ir simbolizmą, Senosios Europos neolito laikotarpio tyrimus, kurganų hipotezės iškėlimą bei įsitraukimą į baltų tyrimus, kasinėjimus pietryčių Europoje, taip pat jos darbus deivės ir simbolizmo temomis. Šiame straipsnyje taip pat apžvelgiami akademinės ir plačiosios visuomenės požiūriai į M. Gimbutienės darbus.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Gimbutas (Gimbutienė), neolito laikotarpis, archeologijos istorija, deivė, figūrėlės.

INTRODUCTION

Marija Gimbutas and her expansive body of research have been consistent features in academic and popular discourses since the dawn of her prolific career. Chapman (1998, 296) praised her as 'one of the most productive and wide-raging scholars of European prehistory of this century.' Renfrew (1994), in his obituary of Gimbutas in the London Independent, described her as a 'figure of extraordinary energy and talent' whose work greatly enriched the study and wider understanding of European prehistory. Marler (1997) noted that 'Gimbutas' research was supported by an encyclopaedic background in European prehistory and a lifetime study of linguistics and mythology [and h]er theories have generated an enormous range of both positive and negative responses within the academic world and beyond.' Even in death she remains one of the best-known archaeologists. She conducted numerous excavations and possessed reading proficiency in many European languages; she made us much more aware of religion, warfare, and gender in prehistory. Her ideas simply cannot be dismissed as outdated.

Fig. 1. Marija Gimbutas during her childhood in Vilnius, Lithuania (Milišauskas 2000, Fig. 1).
1 pav. Marija Gimbutienė vaikystėje Vilniuje (Milišauskas 2000, 1 pav.).

BIOGRAPHY

Marija Gimbutas (nee Marija Birutė Alseikaitė) was born in Vilnius, Lithuania, on January 23, 1921 (Fig. 1). At that time Vilnius (Wilno in Polish, Vilna in Russian, and Vilne in Yiddish) was part of Poland. Both of her parents, mother Veronika Janulaitytė-Alseikienė (1884–1972) and father Danielius Alseika (1881–1936), were medical doctors. As a teenager, her mother was already a patriotic Lithuanian. Tsarist Russia forbade publications in Lithuanian from 1864 until 1904. She was expelled from high school (gymnasium) in Šiauliai, Lithuania for spreading Lithuanian publications but received a high school diploma from Jelgava (Mintauja, Mitau) in Latvia in 1902. Gimbutas' mother began her medical studies in Bern, Switzerland, in 1903 and finished in 1908 in Berlin, Germany. She started to study English at age eighty-two in order to read her daughter's publications. Gimbutas father received his medical degree from the Tartu (Dorpat) University in Estonia in 1910.

The family, including Gimbutas' older brother Vytautas, lived a relatively comfortable and intellectual life in a nine-room apartment that included two rooms for her parents' medical offices (Milisauskas 2000). There was also a country property located approximately seven kilometres north of Vilnius and shared with another family; the family frequently made weekend trips to the property in their personal car, an impressive luxury at the time. Following her parents' separation in 1931, Gimbutas moved to Kaunas with her mother and brother. She was unhappy in this new location and missed both Vilnius and her father; Marler (1997) described this home sickness as 'the first great sadness of her life.'

Gimbutas attended a Lithuanian grammar school named after Jonas Basanavičius, a major figure in the Lithuanian national revival of the nineteenth century, and it was during these early school years that her strong ethnic identity as a Lithuanian woman was formed (Milisauskas 2000). The school was Lithuanian speaking and taught an interpretation of history that was skewed towards the interests of Lithuanians (Miłosz 1968). Gimbutas was, by all accounts, a bright and talented student, although she became more serious about her studies following her father's death in 1936. Her parents initially encouraged her to pursue medicine, as they had done, but eventually supported her interests in the humanities after recognising her aptitudes and talents (Milisauskas 2000). These foci were unsurprisingly conditioned by her parents, including her father's writings about historical topics (e.g. his 1924 publication *Lietuvių tautinė idėja istorijos šviesoje*, (*The Concept of Lithuanian Nationality in the Light of History*)) (Milisauskas 2000). Gimbutas participated in ethnographic research and collected

Lithuanian folk songs and stories by the time she was seventeen, work that continued, directly and indirectly, throughout much of her career. She also enjoyed skating, kayaking, and playing the piano, one of her favorite pastimes (ibid.).

The family maintained strong interests in Lithuanian history, identity, and affairs. After Poland gained control of Vilnius in 1920 (Marler 1996), her father became a Lithuanian activist. He also served as chairman of the Lithuanian Committee of Vilnius from 1923–1928 as well as editing a local newspaper and various Lithuanian journals that focused on culture and history (Milisauskas 2000). In 1927, her mother was a founder of *Kultūra*, the Lithuanian Educational Society (ibid; see also Juškevičius, Maceika 1991).

Gimbutas' father remained in Vilnius despite the efforts of Polish authorities to expel her father for his work as a Lithuanian activist. Only the intervention of the General Secretary of the League of Nations prevented Polish authorities from expelling her father, Danielius Alseika, from Vilnius in 1924 (Marler 1997, 24). On occasion, the Polish authorities ordered all the pharmacies in Vilnius to not fill prescriptions of Gimbutas parents' patients for five or six weeks at a time (personal communication of Vytautas Alseika, July 2000).

Although Gimbutas' parents' professional networks included a considerable number of people belonging to other social groups, the family's personal and social circles were inhabited primarily by other Lithuanians. There was little social interaction among children of different ethnic and religious groups in Vilnius at that time; all of Gimbutas' close playmates were Lithuanian. This was in opposition to the family's business and professional relationships and services, approximately 80% of Gimbutas mother's patients being Jewish (personal communication of Vytautas Alseika, July 2000).

Gimbutas began attending the University of Kaunas in 1938. Her focus of her studies was quadripartite: archaeology, ethnology, folklore, and linguistics simultaneously – and inherently interdisciplinary (Milisauskas 2000). Her interest, even then, was in synthesising multiple lines of evidence in pursuit of a broader research agenda. It quickly became clear to her professors and mentors that she had 'a gift for imaginative interpretation of archaeological data' (Milisauskas 2000, 803). She often received praise for her work and once wrote in her personal correspondence about how 'Dr Puzinas remarked that the paper was a good one, original, with so much new material and so colourfully presented and well written in such a short time. I turned red with joy' (Butrimas 1997). At that time Puzinas was the leading Lithuanian archaeologist and trained the leading post-World War II figures in Lithuanian archaeology (Remeikis 1983). In addition to Gimbutas, his students included Regina Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė, Pranas Kulikauskas, and Rimutė Rimantienė (ibid.). Gimbutas began publishing in the late 1930s on topics pertinent to Lithuanian history and folk culture. Several of her early papers, including *Krivė* (1943), which focused on the high priest of the pre-Christian people, and *Naujoji Vilniaus krašto lietuvių tautosaka* (*The New Lithuanian Folklore of the Vilnius Region*, 1940) – were foundational to her subsequent academic endeavours (ibid.; see also Marler 1997).

Gimbutas first met Jurgis Gimbutas, her eventual husband, in 1937 when he was a student of civil engineering. They began dating in 1938 and were married in 1941, at which point Marija Alseikaitė became Marija Gimbutienė. This name change, and its modification in the United States following the couple's eventual emigration, is summarised by Milisauskas (2000, 802–803):

> In Lithuanian, the ending of the woman's last name indicates her marital status. As a daughter of her father, Alseika, she was Alseikaitė, while her mother was Alseikienė. In the United States all family members adopted one surname, Gimbutas.

Gimbutas' courtship and early marriage was shaped by the political turmoil that accompanied the beginning of World War II. Nazi Germany attacked Poland on September 1, 1939; the Soviet Union invaded from the east two weeks later and occupied the city of Vilnius until 1941. The brutality of this occupation, particularly the indiscriminate killing and deportation of local residents, shocked many of the region's inhabitants.

As the Soviet Army was on the brink of reoccupying Lithuania in 1944, Gimbutas' family left for the west and tried to reach Austria and Germany. They were some of the lucky ones. In the summer of 1944, thousands of Lithuanians in East Prussia (Ostpreussen) were hoping to reach Western Europe. The Germans were taking Lithuanian men to dig anti-tank trenches, thus keeping families in East Prussia. Those who were able to flee faced an often dangerous journey, especially if they travelled by water, since Russian submarines were regularly sinking ships.

How did the World War II period affect the archaeology of Lithuania after the country's forceful incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1940? A question arises why such a talented young woman archaeologist would leave Lithuania. Some Lithuanian archaeologists (e.g. Jonas Puzinas, Vladas Nagevičius and Marija Gimbutas) chose to emigrate to the USA to avoid the Soviet terror rather and brutal punishments for fabricated crimes against the new political system. The first Soviet occupation lasted one year until in 1941 when Germans attacked the Soviet Union. Before Germany attacked the Soviet Union (in June), the Soviets transported 18,000 Lithuanians to Siberia in freight wagons (Kasekamp 2010). As a member of the 'bourgeois' class and a strong supporter of an independent Lithuania, Gimbutas had no place in the future utopian society. Had she stayed in Lithuania, she would have been a good candidate for deportation to Siberia (Kastner *et al*. 1998).

A sad example is what happened to Latvian archaeologists who stayed in Latvia after Soviet occupation can be found in the experiences of Latvian archaeologist Ernests Brastiņš (1892–1941), who was deported to the Lower Volga region in Russia and subsequently killed. Ādolfs Karnups (1904–1973) was arrested and condemned to death; his sentence was later commuted to deportation to Siberia. Rauls Šnore (1901–1962) was arrested in 1946 and deported to the Republic of Mordovia in Russia. He was permitted to return to Latvia as an invalid in 1955 (Loze 2001, 795–796).

YEARS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Gimbutas and her family emigrated to the American city of Boston, Massachusetts, in 1949. This transition was not easy; Marler (1996, 41) notes that '[a]t first, Marija worked as a maid and took other menial jobs while Jurgis [her husband] worked as an engineer.' Gimbutas came to the United States with a German doctorate (*Die Bestattung in Litauen in der vorgeschichtlichen Zeit*; *Burials in Lithuania in Prehistoric Times*) in 1949, but it was not easy to get a job in archaeology. Since most American archaeologists did not know German and many scholars at the Peabody Museum would likely have had difficulty locating Lithuania on the map, Gimbutas was not a strong candidate for an academic job. However, she managed to obtain an unpaid position as a Research Fellow for three years at Harvard University's Peabody Museum. John Chapman (1998, 300) describes her as a mythical super woman, since 'the Harvard period was hard: the combination of raising three children under the age of 10, working at low-paid part-time jobs to support the family and keeping up academic research in the Peabody Museum put Gimbutas under great strain.' We should give credit to Gimbutas' family, who made it possible for her to spend long hours

on her archaeological research. Gimbutas was supported and helped by her engineer husband, Jurgis Gimbutas, who had good salaried job, and by her mother-in-law, Elena Gimbutas, who took care of the children.

Becky Cooper (2020) describes a faculty at Harvard in the 1960s that was totally out of reach for Gimbutas. It was the time of gentlemen archaeologists, when '[m]any were known as dollar-a-year men; they came from such wealth that they only needed to be paid a token salary by the university' (Cooper 2020, 49). Several persons have written that Gimbutas was discriminated against during her time at the Peabody Museum as an immigrant and as a women. For example, Audrius Plioplys, a Canadian physician of Lithuanian heritage, writes 'I was stunned to learn of the discrimination that she suffered in order to pursue her career: blatant misogyny and anti-immigrant bigotry' (Plioplys 2017, 8–9). 'She was given a table in the basement of the Museum to work at … [s]he did not … receive royalty payments for her books which the university published … [s]everal research libraries that she needed to use barred women … [and a]s a fellow, she was not allowed to join the University's Faculty Club' (ibid.).

At the time, Harvard treated all women as second class citizens and did not target Gimbutas for special mistreatment. The famous Mayanist, Tatiana Proskouriakoff, who contributed to the decipherment of ancient Maya writing, never got an official position in the department or a proper office (Cooper 2020, 49). Despite these issues, Gimbutas stayed at Harvard until 1963, when she accepted a professorship at the University of California at Los Angeles. This move precipitated the end of her marriage and ultimate divorce, though she remained good friends with her husband (Milisauskas 2000).

Gimbutas remained at the University of California at Los Angeles until her retirement in 1989. She died on February 2, 1994, following a prolonged battle with cancer. Her ashes were returned to Lithuania in an owl-shaped urn and interred beside her mother in Petrašiunai Cemetery in Kaunas (Marler 1996). Memorial services and ceremonies accompanied her return, and it is estimated that approximately three thousand people, including the president of Lithuania, attended her burial (ibid.). Gintautas Česnys (in Marler 1997) memorialised the event by saying that 'now she has returned and belongs to us: a small sand grave on the bank of the Nemunas River, piles of books, and the powerful fluttering of Goddess's wings over the ancient land of the Balts.'

ACADEMIC LIFE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

It is impossible to overstate the breadth and depth of Gimbutas' academic contributions. Although a detailed summary of her many works would occupy considerably more space than is allotted here, a topical approach to her work based on seven key aspects of Gimbutas' career: her time in higher education, her work on Lithuanian folklore and symbolism, her explorations of Old Europe during the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, her Kurgan Hypothesis and engagement with Baltic studies, her excavations in southeast Europe, her work on the Goddess, and her symbolism work, allows for a robust engagement with the ideas, methodologies, and perspectives that defined her long academic career.

Higher Education: Gimbutas' 'Lithuanian Period'

Gimbutas had a strong commitment to multi- and inter-disciplinary work which was partly a response to the diversity of her interests. It was also likely a reaction to the heavily compartmentalised nature of many academic institutions and marks one of her earliest, and arguably her most significant, contribution to both of her chosen fields of study and to academia writ large. Gimbutas' insistence on interdisciplinary perspectives was an innovation,

as interdisciplinary projects had not yet emerged as a popular research strategy. Gimbutas' insistence on incorporating the perspectives of multiple fields in her approach to research problems reinvented linkages between fields like archaeology and historical linguistics and fostered untested combinations. Her multifaceted approach helped establish an interdisciplinary perspective as an essential dimension of historical research.

It is important to note that her early university training in archaeology was situated in the context of a culture history framework. This brought with it a strong emphasis on 'data, comparisons, proposed influences, the establishment and comparisons of chronologies, and essentialism' (Elster 2007, 87), emphases that conditioned Gimbutas' emerging perspectives and approaches to the study of culture and the past. A consuming interest in classification structured her focus on data, comparison and chronology, resulting in a strong inclination to essentialise. Archaeological categories were discrete and neatly bounded; variability and the social processes involved in creating the archaeological record were of little interest. Consequently, similarities in material remains between sites and regions were interpreted schematically, in terms of influence and migrations that did not require specific mechanisms or further documentation.

Gimbutas conducted small scale excavations in 1942 at the site of Reketė in Lithuania's Kretinga District (Kulikauskas, Zabiela 1999), where the human remains of four individuals were recovered and dated using artefacts to the 5th–6th centuries ad. Despite the significant social and political instabilities that dominated Lithuania during Gimbutas' early university years, including the German invasion of Poland in 1939, the Soviet and Nazi occupations, the deportation of thirty-five of her friends and relatives to Siberia, and the intensifying persecution of the local community, she completed her Master's thesis in 1942 after transferring to the University of Vilnius following its reorganisation (Marler 1996). This work, entitled *Laidosena Lietuvoje geležies amžiuje* (*Burial customs during the Iron Age in Lithuania*), was situated within archaeology and focused on Iron Age burials. However, Gimbutas also completed secondary studies in both folklore and comparative philology. Her thesis was partially published in the journal 'Gimtasis Kraštas' (ibid.; Marler 1998).

Following the completion of her Master's thesis, Gimbutas immediately transitioned to work on her doctoral dissertation at the University of Vilnius. This work focused on prehistoric burial rites in Lithuania; however, it was interrupted when the university was closed by the Germans in 1943. In September 1945 she enrolled in Germany's Tübingen University. Although World War II ended in Germany in May, 1945, most German cities were in ruins from the Allied bombing. 'Tübingen was one of the first universities to reopen after the war' and thus she took the opportunity to enrol (Elster 2007). Once admitted, Gimbutas worked steadily to complete her doctoral research under the supervision of Professor Peter Goessler (1872–1956); her dissertation, *Die Bestattung in Litauen in der vorgeschichtlichen Zeit* (*Burials in Lithuania in Prehistoric Times*), was successfully defended in March, 1946.

Lithuanian Folklore and Symbolism

Likely due, at least in part, to her parents' interests in Lithuanian folklore, history, and tradition, Gimbutas maintained a strong interest in the Lithuania's cultural patrimony throughout her long career. This is most clearly reflected in her ethnographic and ethnohistorical fieldwork during her years at the university and in her synthesis of symbolism in Lithuanian folk art, which was intended to capture 'the last echo of the symbolic art of prehistoric agriculturalists' in a way that is 'helpful to those seeking to solve the riddles of symbolism

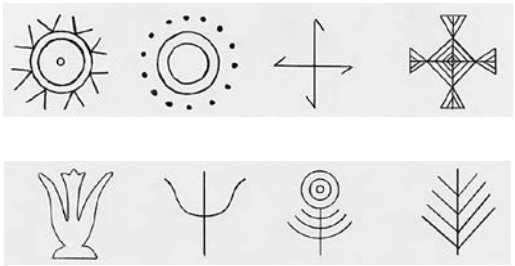


Fig. 2. A selection of (a) masculine-affiliated symbols and (b) feminine-associated symbols in the Lithuanian tradition. *Illustrations by Kathryn Hudson.*
2 pav. Lietuviški tradiciniai simboliai, susiję su vyriškąja (a) ir su moteriškąja (b) gimine. *Kathryn Hudson pieš.*

in [Lithuanian] peasant art' (Gimbutas 1958, 3). A considerable portion of this work related to what Gimbutas (1958, 5) calls the two poles: the masculine and the feminine. The complementary nature of this division can be succinctly summarised as follows:

> Some symbols represent the male element of nature and are linked with the sky: its movement, its phenomena, separate sky bodies, and the sky-deity. Other symbols pertain to the female element, the earth: its hillocks, rocks, plants, and the earth deity (ibid.).

Gimbutas (1958) identifies and describes several symbols connected to each pole (Fig. 2). Masculine-affiliated symbols, i.e. those connected with the sky and the sky deity, include the circle or wheel, the sun and moon, swastikas, crosses, spirals, male animals (e.g. elk, bulls, goats, rams, etc.), serpents, snakes, toads, reptiles, and the axe (ibid.).

Female-associated materials and symbols, i.e. those connected with the earth, include plants and plant pots, trees (including those embodied by wooden roof poles), buds, stones, and representations of natural features in the landscape.

Gimbutas' analyses of these symbols was undeniably innovative in its interdisciplinary and culturally contextualised approach that drew on fields such as archaeology, architecture, ethnography, folk art, history, literature, and music in addition to semiotics and incorporated the cultural knowledge of everyday people. For example, the use of folk songs to illustrate the linkage of the sun and wheel symbols offers an interesting perspective from which to consider not only the significance of graphic representations but also the conceptual and cosmological associations between the sun and the wheel in Lithuanian tradition (Fig. 3).

Kas tar teka per dvarelį?	(Who rises there upon the farm?
Saula ridolėla.	The sun, the rolling sun.
Saulala, saulala!	Sunlet, sunlet!
Saulala ridolėla!	The rolling sunlet!
Kų tar neša tekėdama?	What does its rising bring?
Saula ridolėla.	The sun, the rolling sun.
Saulala, saulala!	Sunlet, sunlet!
Saulala ridolėla![2]	The rolling sunlet!)

In the evening the sun sets
And adorns the green tops of the forest:
It gives the lime-tree a golden crown,
The oak-tree a silver wreath,
And for each small pasture
It gives a golden ring.

Fig. 3. The text and translation of two Lithuanian folksongs showing the connections between the sun and the wheel (from Gimbutas 1956, 10, 12).
3 pav. Originalus tekstas ir vertimas: dvi lietuvių liaudies dainos, rodančios Saulės ir rato ryšį (pagal Gimbutas 1956, p. 10, 12).

Fig. 4. Lithuanian Easter eggs decorated with (a) sun and (b) sun, snake, and moon symbols (from Gimbutas 1956, 17, 30).
4 pav. Velykinių kiaušinių dekoravimas naudojant saulės (a) ir saulės, gyvatės ir mėnulio (b) simbolius (iš Gimbutas 1956, 17, 30).

In these songs, the sun is referred to as *ridolėlė* (the rolling sun) and refrains are often based around *līgo* (from *līgot*, 'to sway') or *rotā* (from *rotāt*, meaning 'to roll' or 'to hop') (Gimbutas 1958). Decorations on Easter eggs are used to illustrate the forms and significances of various symbols (Fig. 4), as are those found on dower chests and house gables.

Historical and ethnohistorical accounts such as stories about the female-connected sacred oak tree in Paneriai where people left offerings and the fertility-granting stone in Narušėliai (ibid.) are similarly used to elucidate the functions and meanings of various symbols; roofed poles and crosses (Fig. 5) are also extensively referenced.

Gimbutas (1956, 100) also considered the role of evil and death in Lithuanian folk tradition, noting that '[o]ur ancestors knew that this fight for good and well-being could not be relaxed; otherwise, the evil lurking in the shadows would triumph. … [t]his fight for life, survival, and welfare claimed incessant attention.' In addition to her analyses of death-related customs, such as the belief that a field will not grow if a dead body is transported across it (Gimbutas 1956), Gimbutas (ibid.) also explored conceptualisations of (mostly masculine) demons such as the wolf and snake, the development of the *velnias* or devil concept, and the antics of the *laumės* (i.e. fairies that long for motherhood). Practices intended to resist evil are also considered, with particular attention given to the roles of movement, sound, water, fire, and those animal species associated with the sky-deity (who is still widely believed to fight evil and the devil). The interdisciplinary foundations of Gimbutas' approach are again foundational, and her serious treatment of hybridised beliefs is exemplary.

Old Europe: Studies of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Ages

As Elster (2007, 102) points out, '[t]he concept of "Old Europe" is one of Marija Gimbutas' most original contributions (Gimbutas 1973).' The term refers to the Neolithic and very early Copper Age societies of southeast Europe as they existed prior to the arrival of the Indo-Europeans and was developed on the basis of expansive studies of archaeological data. Gimbutas (in Marler 1996, 44) herself described the genesis of both the term and its associated concept as follows:

> I came to a point when I had to understand what was happening in Europe before the arrival of the Indo-Europeans. It was a very gradual process …. During my excavations I became aware that a culture existed that was the opposite of all that was known to be Indo-European. … This led me to coin the new term Old Europe in 1968.

The Old Europeans collectively occupied a territory that stretched from the Aegean and Adriatic Seas in the south to former Czechoslovakia, southern Poland, and Ukraine in the East (Gimbutas 1982). They inhabited small settlements and townships and were successful agriculturalists capable of successfully exploiting and manipulating their environment; Gimbutas believed that the accumulation of their habitation debris over time created the *magoulas* (tells or mounds) described in archaeological literature

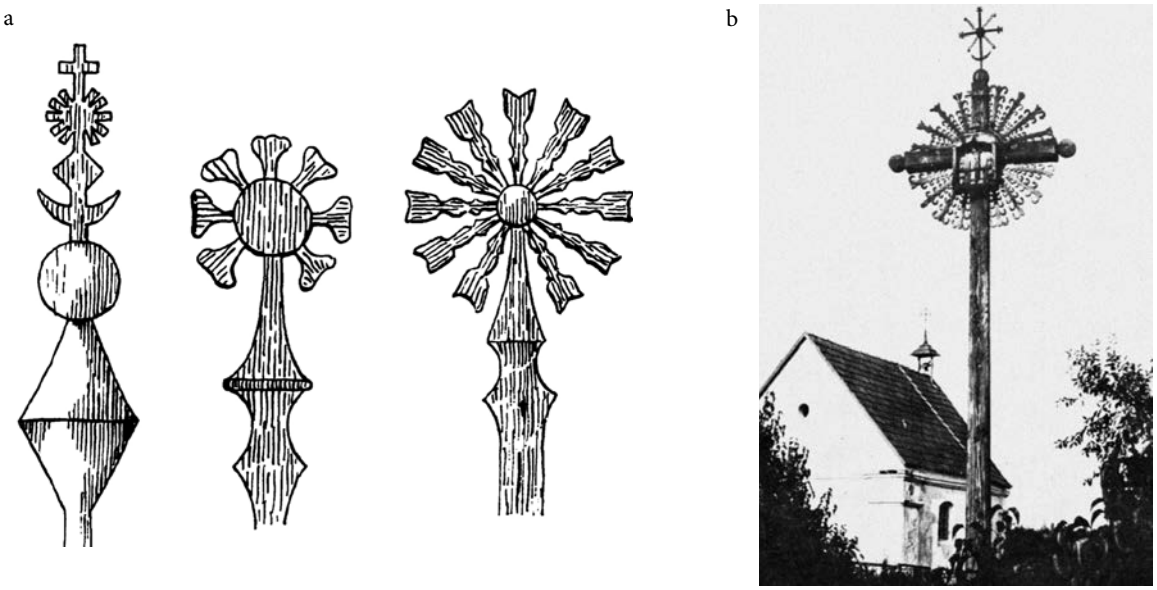


Fig. 5. Wooden tips on Lithuanian roofed poles with sky-related symbols (a), a wooden cross with a sun disk formed from plant motifs (b) (from Gimbutas 1956, 10, 55).
5 pav. Medinės stulpų viršūnės, puošusios namų stogus, dekoruotos dangaus simboliais (a). Taip pat medinis kryžius su augalinių motyvų saule (b) (pagal Gimbutas 1956, 10, 55).

(Elster 2007). Their crops included wheat, barley, peas, legumes, and vetch; they also domesticated all of the same animals as the area's contemporary inhabitants with the exception of horses (ibid.). They likewise produced elaborate material goods and developed a complex and semantically rich symbolic repertoire.

Although Old European culture can be divided into five distinct constituent traditions: the Aegean and central Balkans, the Adriatic, the middle Danube, the eastern Balkans, and the Moldovan-west Ukrainian, with unique ceramics, architectural practices, and religions, Gimbutas identified several overarching features of Old European societies. One of these was the general lack of warfare, which was posited due to the dearth of weapons at Old European sites, the absence of fortified settlements, and a lack of depictions of weapons and fighting (Gimbutas 1982; 1991; Elster 2007). Another was their matrifocal and matrilineal nature. This is supported by the religion of the Goddess that Gimbutas (1982; 1991) identified in Old European material culture and by the prominence of women within it; 'Old European society was organised around a theocratic, communal; temple community, guided by a queen-priestess, her brother or uncle, and a council of women as the governing body' (Gimbutas 1991, XI). Additionally, and despite the female-centrism of its religion, Old European society was markedly egalitarian. Burials and grave goods reflect 'a condition of mutual respect' between men and women (ibid.); they show no evidence of an imbalance between the sexes or the subservience of one sex to the other.

With her Old European framework, Gimbutas 'was one of the first scholars to 'describe an overview of Neolithic cultures on a pan-European scale and the first to articulate the differences between the matristic Old European and the patriarchal Indo-European systems' (Marler 1996, 46). This work marshals a substantial amount of data from numerous sites and illustrates an elaboration and development of material culture in the Old European territories

from the Neolithic through the Chalcolithic and early Bronze Age. She also published an article about Eastern European chronology (Gimbutas 1992). Gimbutas demonstrated that 'sites expand and are occupied for millennia, pottery is more sophisticated, domestication of plants and animals seems more purposeful' and that 'trading partners have been established … for honey-brown flint … *spondylus* and for obsidian … and the existence of specialised craft workers has been inferred' (Elster 2007, 103; see also Evans 1973; Nikolaidou 2003; Elster 2004). This work was not without controversy, however, much of it came from its close association with Gimbutas' analysis of Old European religious and symbolic repertoires. Marler (1996, 45) notes that

> [a]lthough Marija Gimbutas' writings on the Bronze Age were applauded by mainstream archaeology, her study of Neolithic religion was considered inappropriate by many. … [t]here was no archaeologist with whom she could discuss her ideas because the interpretation of prehistoric ideology was considered taboo.

However, bowing to orthodox convention and interpretation was admirably not a part of Gimbutas' methodology.

Indo-European, Kurgan, and Baltic Studies

Gimbutas' analyses of the Indo-Europeans, their arrival in the European continent, and the consequences of this coming are among her best known, and most thoroughly debated, claims. This is, in large part, because of her contradiction of Renfrew's (1987) Anatolian hypothesis, which claims that the Indo-Europeans were migrant farmers from Anatolia who arrived in Europe during the 7th millennium bce before spreading across the continent. This disagreement was intense by all accounts. For example, Gimbutas' review of Renfrew's (1987) book *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* questioned both its archaeological foundations and its interpretive validity, noting that '[r]epeatedly, throughout the book, the author either rejects or ignores everything which does not fit into his model' (Gimbutas 1988, 1). She described Renfrew's theory as 'a gross misinterpretation of Old Anatolian and Old European cultures and a disregard of interdisciplinary studies' (Gimbutas 1993, 205). Renfrew, for his part, was aware of her views. Elster (2007, 100) described how, when she visited Renfrew in Cambridge, he 'handed her proofs of the book with the comment "I hope Marija will not be angry."' However, her reviews showed that she was very unhappy (Gimbutas 1988). Despite this acrimony, Renfrew is positive and complimentary in his obituary of Gimbutas for the London *Independent*.

Unlike the Anatolian origins posited by Renfrew and others, Gimbutas believed that the Indo-Europeans came from the east, and, more precisely, from southern Russia, in the middle of the fifth millennium bce and initially settled in the Lower Dnieper region and west of the Black Sea (Gimbutas 1993). This marked the beginning of what Gimbutas (ibid., 205) described as '[a] continuous flow of influences and people into east central Europe … which lasted for two millennia, c. 4500–2500 BC.' and this triggered a 'collision of cultures' through which

> Old Europe was transformed, and later European prehistory and history became a 'marble cake' composed of non-IE and IE elements. The subsequent existence of a very strong non-IE linguistic and mythological substratum cannot be overlooked (ibid.).

This model combined archaeological and historical linguistic evidence, with the latter being used to illustrate that 'the original IE [Indo-European] homeland had to be located generally between the areas occupied by the Finno-Ugric,

Semitic, and Caucasian linguistic families' (Gimbutas 1993, 206) and more specifically in the steppe region between the Ural and Dnieper rivers of southern Russia (Elster 2007).

These views formed the foundation of Gimbutas' influential and broadly accepted Kurgan Hypothesis, which 'provided a significant point of departure for all continued research in both archaeology and linguistics' when it was first presented in an early form in 1953. In this view, the proto-Indo-European speakers that came from southern Russia were said to belong to the Kurgan culture that first appears clearly in the archaeological record when they conquered the steppe region north of the Black Sea around 4500 BCE (Gimbutas 1979; 1993). The Kurgan name comes from the Russian word *kurgan*, which was borrowed from Turkish and means 'barrow' or 'tumulus' (Gimbutas 1993); Gimbutas (1956) used of the term 'Kurgan tradition' is a blanket term for the culture of these semi-nomadic pastoralists, who built distinctive round funeral mounds (Gimbutas 1956). She subsequently clarified this nomenclature, noting that

> [t]he name *Kurgan Culture* (Barrow Culture) was introduced … as a broader term to replace the Srednij Stoĭg II and Pit-Grave (Russian *Yamna),* names used by Soviet scholars for the culture in the eastern Ukraine and South Russia, and Corded, Battle-Axe, Ochre-Grave, Single Grave, and other names given to complexes characterised by elements of Kurgan appearance that formed in various parts of Europe after the infiltration of Kurgan elements from north of the Black Sea … [it] is retained because it has appropriate connotations of eastern origins. (Gimbutas 1970, 155).

Kurgan culture thus encompasses 'the Early, Middle, and Late periods of cultural development between the lower Dnieper and southern Siberia and all its synchronous manifestations outside this area' (Gimbutas 1970, 156). There were three waves of Kurgan invasions into Copper Age Europe from 4,500–2,500 BCE, each of which 'worked a kurganising effect on the local population resulting in a considerable change of culture … synonymous with the concept of Indo-Europeanisation' (Gimbutas 1986, 5). This model is heavily reflective of the Culture History framework in which Gimbutas received her early archaeological training; she notes that it unquestionably reflects a constant development throughout the fourth and third millennia BCE (ibid.).

Kurgan culture was primarily chalcolithic, though in its late period it can be classified as belonging to the Early Bronze Age in places with metallurgical traditions (Gimbutas 1970). Elster (2007, 99) characterises it as having been 'patriarchal, pastoral, metal-using, horse-breeding … and war-like.' Settlements consisted of simple villages, usually on riverbanks, and hill-forts; graves and grave goods reflect stratified social differences. Kurgan economy was based on pastoralism, with a range of domesticated animals: cattle, horses, pigs, sheep, and goats, are known from throughout the Kurgan period (Gimbutas 1970). Among these, horses are given particular emphasis in Gimbutas' model. Horse bones comprised 70–80% of faunal remains at early Kurgan villages, likely because of their utility as sources of meat and milk, and flattened figurines shaped like horse heads suggest that magical or ritual attributes were also ascribed to the animal (ibid.). A range of tools were crafted from elk antler, cattle and sheep bones, boar tusks, wood, and stone. Agriculture was present but not well developed, though Gimbutas (1970, 161) notes that evidence of carts and steppe wagons, as well as ceramic models of them, are found in almost all of the areas inhabited by Kurgan people. Other kinds of ceramics were relatively plain and undecorated (ibid.).

One of the most significant and controversial aspects of the Kurgan Hypothesis is the strong contrast between the Kurgan people and the Old Europeans displaced by their arrival. Gimbutas (1993) characterised Old European society as generally peaceful, sedentary, matrifocal, matrilineal, and egalitarian, particularly in relation to gender roles and relations, while Kurgan society is described as warlike, patriarchal, and hierarchical in structure. The significance of these contrasts in Gimbutas' research cannot be overstated. At the most fundamental level, it divides her view of European prehistory into an earlier phase characterised by matrifocal and egalitarian Old Europeans, their symbolic repertoire, and their goddess-dominated pantheon and a later phase in which a hybridised culture emerged following the Kurgan arrival and concurrent influences of their warlike and patriarchal system. This transformation was not voluntary; Gimbutas, Dexter, and Jones-Bley (1997, 309) note that

> [t]he process of Indo-Europeanisation was a cultural, not a physical, transformation … [that] must be understood as a military victory in terms of successfully imposing a new administrative system, language, and religion upon the indigenous [Old European] groups.

More generally, the distinction between Old European and Kurgan societies was foundational in Gimbutas' identifications and interpretations of the symbolic and religious repertoires of pre-Kurgan European societies, since it presupposed a goddess-centred and matrifocal system and, by extension, the significances appropriate within it.

Gimbutas' views were, in many ways, an expansion of previous work conducted by V. Gordon Childe, itself a development of Otto Schrader's philological analysis of Indo-European origins and subsequent conclusion that the Indo-Europeans originated in the Pontic-Caspian steppes on the Caspian Sea and had domesticated horses, an animal indigenous to this proposed homeland. Childe (1926) also made extensive use of phonology in his considerations of Indo-European origins. His original analyses placed the Indo-European homeland in the Pontic-Caspian steppe (ibid.), a position that aligns generally with Gimbutas' conclusions, though subsequent work led him to revise this position and posit instead that Anatolia was the most likely point of origin (Childe 1950; see also Renfrew 1987).

Despite these debates and fluctuations, Gimbutas never wavered in her assertion that the Indo-Europeans came from the steppe. Support for her steadfastness comes from historical linguistics; proto-Indo-European and proto-Uralic seem to have been geographically adjacent, as evidenced by similar lexical repertoires that included pronouns and nouns such as *water* and *name* (Ringe 1997; Janhunen 2000; 2001; Kallio 2001; Koivulehto 2001; Salminen 2001; Witzel 2003; Parpola 2012; Anthony, Ringe 2015). Both possible explanations for this relationship, a shared common ancestor and extensive borrowing, require that proto-Indo-European be located near the proto-Uralic homeland, which Anthony and Ringe (2015) suggest was the forested region surrounding the Ural Mountains. Mallory (2001) posits that the spread of Uralic languages in the northern forest zone may have been partially triggered by interactions with proto-Indo-European speakers and their society at the boundary between the forest and the steppe, which requires proto-Indo-European to be in the steppe while proto-Uralic is positioned within the forest zone. Lexical borrowings in proto-Indo-European from Caucasian languages such as proto-Kartvelian also suggest a location adjacent to the Caucasus (Harris 1991; Gamkrelidze, Ivanov 1995; Nichols 1997).

In addition to her work on Indo-European, Gimbutas also made extensive contributions to the study of the Balts (more specifically Latvians, Lithuanians, and ancient Prussians) and Slavs

(Gimbutas 1963a; 1971; Gimbutienė 1985). Ethnicity played an important role in both her life and her archaeology, likely due to her parents' interests in folklore and history and the nation-building processes that characterised the socio-political climate of her childhood and young adult life; it is thus unsurprising that her interests included the history and traditions of her own ethnic group. Talalay (1999, 2) nicely summarises this interest, noting that

> Gimbutas considered the Balts 'the last pagans of Europe' whose wealth of songs, tales, riddles, charms, and rituals represented the world's greatest repository of Old European beliefs and traditions. Indeed, many of Gimbutas' ideas about ancient religion and the Goddess derive from extensive knowledge, accumulated since her childhood, of Lithuanian and Latvian folklore.

Like many Lithuanians, Gimbutas was proud of Lithuania's pre-Christian past and interested in its social and religious details. A pagan state was established in the region around 1240 ad and withstood more than a century of attacks by Christian crusaders, most of whom came from German territories; its cultural and spiritual traditions were of special interest. Gimbutas (1963 b) combined regional folklore, archaeological data, and historical documents in her efforts to reconstruct these intangible features; in particular, '[t]he role of Krivis or the chief priest, burial rites, vėlės, various deities, sacred woods, etc. are discussed' and the sanctuaries excavated in the Smolensk region of Russia during 1955–1957 are assigned to the Eastern Baltic people (Puzinas 1964, 3).

Gimbutas also considered the origins and historical development of the Baltic people. Following the Kurgan arrival in Europe, several distinct cultural groups developed as the newcomers intermingled with local populations in various parts of Europe. One of these gave rise to the proto-Balts. Gimbutas (1963) believed this group developed from Kurgan populations that moved from the lower Dnieper basin to the Baltic Sea and southwest Finland; a separate but related group moved from the middle Dnieper to the upper Volga and into Russia's Oka River region. More is known of the western group, which possessed a range of cultural features, including metallurgy, trade in amber, and burial rites that differentiated them from their eastern counterparts. Both groups began to divide into distinct subgroups (e.g. Curonians, Galindians, Lithuanians, and Sembian-Notangians) during the early Iron Age and expand their geographic territories (Gimbutas 1963). A so-called 'Golden Age' of Baltic history occurred during the second century ad, lasting approximately four centuries; this period saw additional territorial and economic expansions as well as developments in agriculture, metallurgy, and craft production (ibid.). Continued cultural development and differentiation among the Baltic societies continued through the middle Iron Age and into the centuries preceding the establishment of the pagan state. This period is particularly influential in Gimbutas' analyses since it is the period for which the most robust data are available. It is also the period most readily relatable to the ethnic and national identities salient during Gimbutas' lifetime, an ancient foundation for contemporary selves, and the clearest illustration of how '[h]er ideas connecting folk mythology, the ethnology of her people, comparative and historic linguistics; iconography, symbolism, and archaeology coalesced in her study of the Balts' (Elster 2007, 89).

Excavations in Greek Macedonia, Macedonia, Bosnia, Italy

Although she is better known for her work on Old European religion and symbolism, Gimbutas was an active field archaeologist and conducted several excavations in southeast Europe. From 1967 until

1968 she worked at the Obre site in Bosnia as part of a joint project with Alojz Benac and the Zemalski Museum in Sarajevo (Benac 1973; Gimbutas 1974a). The work was funded by counterpart funds from the Smithsonian Institution (Elster 2007). Excavations at the site were concentrated in two separate but equal areas. One of these was excavated by Gimbutas and her students from the University of California at Los Angeles, including field director Eugene Sterud and focused on recovering a quantitative sample; it concentrated on a smaller area and emphasised stratigraphy, the acquisition of samples for radiocarbon dates, and the development of a quantitative assemblage of pottery, lithics, bone tools, and both zoological and botanical samples (ibid.). The second excavation was led by Benac, who was unfamiliar with the methodologies used by the Americans and instead opened a wide area that revealed impressive architectural remains. Both sections produced considerable data and were thorough in their work, and together they produced a comprehensive picture of the site's history at both the macro and micro levels. Benac's team provided information about the overall village layout, while Gimbutas' excavations filled in quotidian details.

From 1969–1970, Gimbutas worked at Anza, an early Neolithic site in Yugoslavian Macedonia (Gimbutas 1976). Eugene Sterud worked as Gimbutas' field director during the first season; he was replaced by Geoffrey Sayres during the second season, although this change ultimately led to the discontinuation of the excavations due to Sayres' slow working pace and inability to reach the site's earliest layers (Elster 2007). Both seasons utilised the separate but equal model of fieldwork, with one excavation led by Gimbutas and another excavated by Milutin and Draga Garasanin (ibid.). The excavations revealed 'a subsistence pattern based on the domestication of plants and animals, with specialist crafters, trade or exchange of raw materials, and some hunting and gathering' (Elster 2007, 96). They also produced significant amounts of botanical, ceramic, geological, and zoological data. Gimbutas was particularly interested in the figurines and pottery from Anza's early Neolithic levels and in the symbolic data they provided, which helped lay the foundations of her Old Europe model.

Gimbutas likewise conducted excavations at two sites in Greece: Sitagroi (1968–1970) and Achilleion (1973–1974). Her work at Sitagroi was done jointly with Colin Renfrew, with support from the British School of Archaeology and funding from the National Science Foundation and British sources (Renfrew *et al.* 1986; see also Elster 2007). They were both interested in obtaining as many samples as possible for radiocarbon dating; the resulting twenty-nine determinations 'were many more than heretofore had been obtained from any other site in Europe and resulted in a re-evaluation of Greek and Balkan chronology vis-a-vis Troy and the ancient Near East and caused a mini-revolution of excitement, controversy, and reassessment (Elster 2007, 96; see also Renfrew 1973). Gimbutas was particularly fascinated by the site's large number of Neolithic and Chalcolithic figurines, which she published as part of the excavation report and which helped develop her views of Old European religion (Gimbutas 1986). Together with Renfrew she organised a seminar in which she presented her interpretations of these figurines, though her views were not well received by Renfrew. Despite his reservation and the questions from both the field crew and the visiting French team led by Jean Deshayes, Gimbutas 'was certain of her interpretations and elated by the richness and variability in the assemblage.'

At Achilleion, a low mound site in the eastern plain of Thessaly, Gimbutas worked with Dimitrios Theochares (Gimbutas *et al.* 1989). Theochares had previously conducted texting at the site and reported pre-ceramic levels, something of great interest to Gimbutas, but this suggestion was not borne out during excavation and Gimbutas (Gimbutas *et al.* 1989, 2) notes that the site's earliest levels belonged

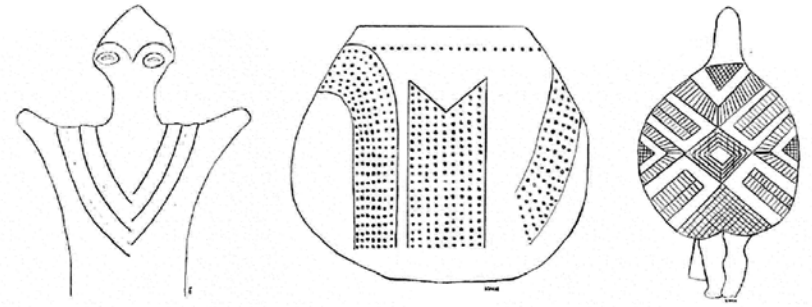


Fig. 6. Representations of the Goddess in Old European artistic and material productions. *Drawing by Kathryn Hudson.*
6 pav. Deivės vaizdavimas Senosios Europos mene. *Kathryn Hudson pieš.*

to a 'full-fledged Neolithic culture with proto-Sesklo pottery.' However, the project did uncover a considerable amount of data that included

> the rich Sesklo sequence of painted pottery from Early to Middle Neolithic … significant evidence for architecture and ubiquitous tools of bone and stone (many of Melian obsidian indicating trade or exchange with those who controlled this resource on the island of Melos) (Elster 2007, 97)

Hundreds of figurines were also excavated and subsequently published (Gimbutas *et al.* 1989). Gimbutas analyzed some of these as representing facial masks on stands, similar to those from Vinča contexts, and viewed them as evidence supporting her views of Old European religion (ibid.; see also Elster 2007). These contributions are particularly notable since both excavation seasons were cut short by political instability in Greece, including the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and the overthrowing of the colonels in 1974.

From 1978–1979, Gimbutas worked with Santo Tinė at the Grotta Scaloria Neolithic site in southeast Italy (Gimbutas 1981). The cave contains two separate chambers, both of which were explored during the course of the excavation. The upper chamber contained burials spanning 600 years and was in use during the mid-sixth millennium cal. BCE (Whitehouse 1987; Robb 1991; Elster 2007); the lower chamber was described as cultic and dated to the mid-fifth millennium cal. BCE (Tinė, Isetti 1980; Winn, Shimabuku 1980; 1988; Whitehouse 1992; Elster 2007). The excavated ceramic assemblage, when considered together with the calibrated dates, suggests that the site's occupation period may have been in use from approximately 6500 cal. BCE until c. 3500 cal. BCE (Elster 2007). Gimbutas directed the illustration, study, and photography of excavated materials in 1990 with a team of volunteers, although she was unable to fully publish the results before her death (ibid.).

The Goddess Work (attracts attention of feminists and academics, most critical)

The Goddess, also called the Great Goddess, is a major part of Gimbutas' studies of Old Europe and is one of her most widely known ideas (Gimbutas 1982; 1989). She was the central figure of the Old European religion, a matrifocal system in which divinities were disproportionately female and women were responsible for many religious locations and rites, and worshipped as 'the Giver, Taker, and Renewer of Life' (Christ 1996, 53). In Gimbutas' analyses, this religious orientation motivated the artistic and material productions of Old European societies (Fig. 6) and enabled their egalitarian and peaceful existence (Gimbutas 1982; 1989).

In many ways these views, and the positing of a primary Goddess figure in the cosmology of Neolithic Europe, built on and refined earlier

conceptualisations of primitive matriarchy (see e.g. Briffault 1977 [1927]; Bachofen 1961 [1861]) and other studies of the prominence of ancient female divinities (see e.g. Levy 1948; James 1959; Harrison 1962). However, Gimbutas rejected the concept of matriarchy in favour of an egalitarian view in which both sexes were equal as well as the idea that Neolithic European societies were primitive. She instead marshalled considerable archaeological and ethnohistorical data to posit a socially rich society that was markedly advanced in both its sociocultural constructions and productions and in its peaceful approach to living, features that, in her view, were a result of Goddess worship.

It is important to note that, in Gimbutas' conceptualisation, the Goddess is conceived as a singular being with multiple forms or incarnations. Discussions of 'goddesses' in Old Europe are, in fact, examinations of the different manifestations of a single female entity, each of which represents one aspect of context of the Goddess construct. This is often confusing for contemporary researchers raised in the Western Judeo-Christian tradition, though it is not conceptually dissimilar from the Christian trinity except in its focus on a clearly female divinity. The Goddess was a single divinity, intimately connected to the natural world and manifested in multiple ways reflective of its many dimensions:

> the Goddess in all of 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 … the holistic and mythopoeic perception of the sacredness and mystery of all there is on Earth. (Gimbutas 1989, 321)

She was, in short, the embodiment of human understandings of the supernatural world when those understandings were conditioned by a close relationship to the natural world. There were also male divinities, co-existent and interactive with Goddess; 'the world of myth was not polarised into female and male … [b]oth principles were manifest side by side' (Gimbutas 1982, 237). However, 'the female goddess was the central creative principle' (Gimbutas 1982, 236); the fact that she was responsible for regeneration and the transformation from death to life made her the central figure in a pantheon of divinities and divinity aspects (ibid.).

Equally important is the Goddess' role in the contrasting of Old European and Indo-European (i.e. Kurgan) culture, which was, at its core, a clash between the matrifocal and patrifocal worldviews. The supplanting and assimilation of the Goddess by the male-centric religion of the encroaching Indo-Europeans marks one of the most significant changes in the process of Indo-Europeanisation. The ultimate outcome of this process was '[t]he dethronement of Old European goddesses, the disappearance of temples, cult paraphernalia, and sacred signs, and a drastic reduction in religious images in the visual arts' (Gimbutas 1989, 318). It was the belief in and worship of the Goddess that bound Old European civilisation together and generated its defining characteristics of equality and artistic production. Disconnecting from the Goddess, and the gradual process of cultural hybridisation that underlay it, meant that 'the core of the [Old European] civilisation was lost' (ibid.).

Gimbutas' analysis of the Goddess can also be seen as part of her interest in the study and reclamation of traditional Lithuania's folk life and cultural patrimony. Despite the absorption of the Goddess by the male-focused pantheon of the Indo-Europeans and the subsequent suppression of her vestiges by Christianity, Gimbutas (1989, 318) notes that 'the Old European sacred images and symbols were never totally uprooted … [they] were too deeply implanted in the psyche … [and] could have disappeared only with the total extermination of the female population.' Instead, much of the knowledge of and connections to the Goddess went

underground and became almost subconscious among the descendents of the Old Europeans. A few aspects of these beliefs continues more overtly and with less change; for example, traditions linked to birth, death, and fertility rituals have continued without significant degradation into modern times (Gimbutas 1989). Identifying and reconnecting with these practices was, in many ways, a means of reconnecting with a traditional cultural identity and, by extension, with an authentic Lithuanian self. Studying manifestations of these as well as knowledge and practices obscured through time was similarly a way to reclaim lost cultural wisdom. These benefits were particularly significant during and after the Soviet era, when interest in the reclamation of national identities was high, and make it clear that the role of the Goddesses extends into modern times.

Symbolism Work

No aspect of Gimbutas' research is better known, or more controversial, than her engagement with symbolic repertoires. Following her excavations in southeast Europe and explorations of the region's museums and cultural holdings, Gimbutas developed a strong interest in the religious beliefs and practices of the Neolithic and, by extension, an equally strong desire to understand their symbolism. Her research presented her with '[t]housands of exquisitely decorated ceramics, sculptures, and temples with ritual assemblies [that] spoke of a sophisticated human culture … impossible to understand without an investigation of Neolithic religion.' (Marler 1996, 44). Gimbutas (in Marler 1996, 44) was astonished by the fact that archaeologists had, as a whole, ignored the symbolic dimensions and meanings of these objects, noting that

> I found, myself, at least five hundred figurines. I have seen in the museums all over Europe thousands and thousands of them in storage rooms … lying there, not understood at all. In all the publications I knew, I never found any answer [to the question] What are these sculptures?

Her pursuit of these symbols and their associated semantics was unceasing and she once said of herself that 'I was always questioning myself: what are these symbols, what are these signs engraved or painted on sculptures … and hundreds of other items? [t] hey had to have a great meaning' (Gimbutas, in Marler 1996, 44). This questioning was undoubtedly a motivating and productive dimension of her research program and eventually led to three separate but related analyses intended to answer it: the religious symbolism of Neolithic Europe, the Old European script, and the elucidation of meanings associated with figurines excavated at Neolithic sites.

Gimbutas' studies of the religious symbolism of Neolithic Europe, particularly as it was associated with the Great Goddess and other Old European deities, is the best known facet of her semiotic and symbolic work. These analyses are summarised in *The Language of the Goddess* (Gimbutas 1989), a volume that was groundbreaking in its insistence on a complex symbolic repertoire in Old European society but widely rejected by her academic peers. This reception can be contrasted with the generally positive academic responses to her work on the European Bronze Age (Gimbutas 1965; Marler 1996, 45), which suggests that Gimbutas' studies of Neolithic religion and its symbolism were considered 'inappropriate' by many of her professional colleagues because 'the interpretation of prehistoric ideology was considered taboo.' It is likely that this reflected orthodox notions of linear development vis-à-vis complexity, of 'civilisation', an inherently problematic concept, and of which ancient civilisations are accepted as the sources of these things. Christ (1996, 57–58) suggests the same issues, noting 'proponents of the myth of progress like to think that cultures

proceed "onward" and "upward" by a kind of internal logic, with new and superior ideas replacing old and inferior ones', pointing out that

> we like to think that 'the Greeks,' whose culture we view as the basis of 'our' own, were the 'first rational men' to 'emerge' from the 'darkness' of 'primitive barbarism.' If in fact the Greeks came to power because their ancestors destroyed and pillaged other civilisations, then not only may they not have been the 'first rational men,' but also our culture's claim to be the 'highest' civilisation because we carry the 'light of reason' discovered by the Greeks is called into question.

Despite the lacklustre response to her work among academics (Spretnak 2011), Gimbutas persisted. The result was an expansive consideration of the symbolic world of Old Europe and the evidence of it.

Much of *The Language of the Goddess* is devoted to a discussion of symbols associated with various dimensions of the Goddess herself. The life-giving dimensions of the Goddess are represented by a wide range of symbols that includes chevrons and v's representing a bird goddess aspect, zigzagging lines, the letter M, water, streams, waterbirds, breasts, pairs of eyes, open mouths or beaks, and items relating to spinning and weaving (Gimbutas 1989). These Goddess manifestations were also represented by the ram, identified as the animal associated with the snake and bird goddess aspects, nets, triple lines, vulvas and other birth imagery, deer and bears, both connected with the birth-giving aspect of the Goddess, and the energy of the snake and associated snake Goddess aspect (ibid.). Renewing and 'eternal Earth' dimensions of the Goddess were represented as 'Earth Mothers' and with lozenges, dotted triangles, the sow, the sacred animal of the pregnant Goddess aspect, representations of bread and bread ovens, hills, stones, tombs (conceptualised as symbolic wombs), holed stones, and doubling (ibid.). Goddess aspects connected with death and regeneration were symbolically represented by animal forms depicting vultures, owls, cuckoos, hawks, doves, boars, howling dogs, frogs, hedgehogs, fish, bulls, bees, and butterflies (ibid.). Non-animal symbols, including stiff nude forms (e.g. the so-called 'Stiff White Lady'), eggs, vulvas stylised as triangles or hourglass shapes, bird claws, and stylised ships, were also associated with these aspects (ibid.). Goddess aspects connected to energy and unfolding processes utilised symbols in the form of spirals and opposed spirals, lunar phases, snake coils, hooks, axes, caterpillars, snake heads, hands, feet, whirls, combs and brushes, standing stones, and circles (ibid.) Symbolic representations of male divinities, including 'horned animal or bird-masked and ithyphallic men … creatures who are half-animal/half-man … enthroned vigorous men, and pensive or sorrowful men' (Gimbutas 1989, 175) – are also briefly considered.

Gimbutas' identification of an Old European script was equally groundbreaking and controversial. This symbolic system, which Gimbutas (1991, 309) believed to be 'consonant with their [the Old Europeans] stage of development', was widespread but most frequent in territories associated with the Vinča, Tisza, and Karanovo culture groups (ibid.; Winn 1981).

It emerged after the middle of the sixth millennium bce and contained 'symbols modified by lines, curves, and dots' (Fig. 7) that were 'clustered in groups or rows' (Gimbutas 1991, 311). Inscriptions could occur in horizontal or vertical rows, in circles, or in random groupings; their arrangement was dictated by the material features of the item on which they occurred.

Figurines, for example, typically have banded inscriptions on the front and back, most often on the torso, chest, or under the abdomen (Fig. 8a). Spindle whorls, however, typically have circular

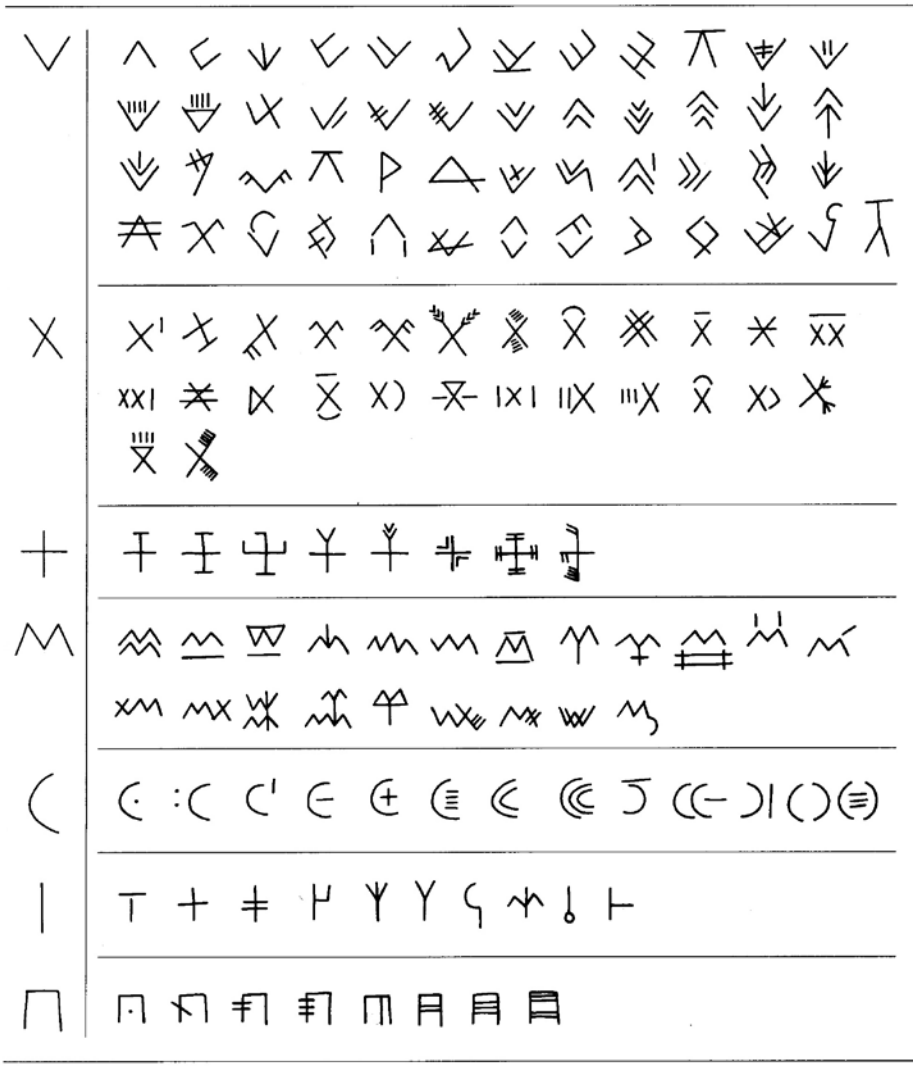
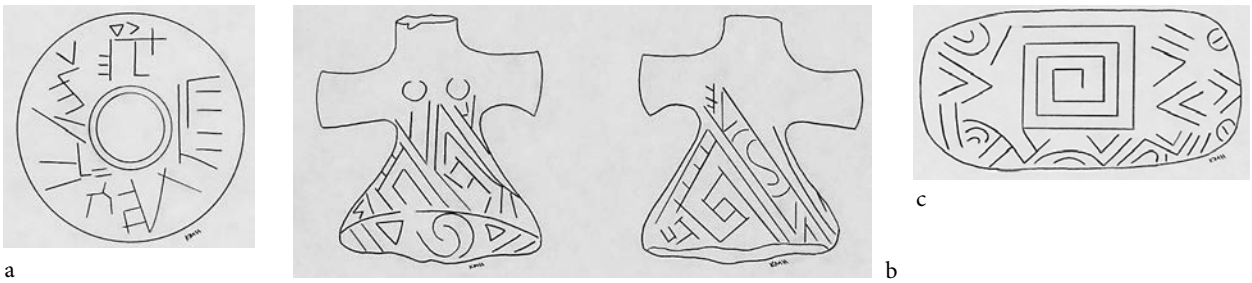


Fig. 7. Core signs and their derivatives in the Old European scripts (from Gimbutas 1991, 310).
7 pav. Pagrindiniai ženklai ir jų dariniai Senosios Europos raštuose (iš Gimbutas 1991, 310).



a b c

Fig. 8. Examples of Old European inscriptions on a spindle whorl from Fafos, Yugoslavia (a), a figurine from Tangiru, Romania (b), a ceramic miniature bread loaf from Banjica, Serbia (c) (from Gimbutas 1991).
8 pav. Senosios Europos užrašai ant verpstuko (a) iš Fafos (Jugoslavija), ant figūrėles (b) iš Tangiru (Rumunija) ir ant molinio mažyčio duonos kepaliuko (c) iš Banjicos (Serbija) (iš Gimbutas 1991).

inscriptions around the central hole (Fig. 8b) while ceramic models of miniature bread loaves are inscribed around the entire form (Fig. 8c) (Gimbutas 1991, 311).

The linguistic foundations of this system, and thus its status as writing in the traditional, narrow sense, remain unclear. Gimbutas (1991) posits that the script was non-Indo-European and suggests that this is a major reason for its undeciphered status, drawing analogy with the Cretan Hieroglyphic, Linear A, and Cypro-Minoan scripts. She also suggests that, in the absence of a 'happy discovery of a multilingual Rosetta Stone that will translate its message into an Indo-European language,' the script is likely to remain undecipherable (ibid.). This prediction has proven accurate, with several extensive studies of materials bearing Old European inscriptions failing to identify a likely linguistic substrate (see e.g. Winn 1973). This is a problematic state of affairs for linguistics and for many linguistically inclined archaeologists, though it does not necessarily mean that Gimbutas' analysis is incorrect. In fact, these studies, which draw on materials from throughout the Old European world, have made it clear that these symbols are structurally and graphically distinct in their form and presentation. Winn's (1973, XVII) observation that examples from Vinča territories 'are standardised and conventionalised, and … represent a corpus of signs recognised and used over a wide area throughout the duration of the Vinča culture' is likely generalisable and reflective of broader patterns within the Old European system. It is certain that Gimbutas' proposed script is a cohesive and distinct system that was semantically salient with the cultural and social contexts of Old European communities, and her identification of it was significant both in its recognition of an early meaning-bearing system of graphic notation and in its assertion that the kinds of sociocultural complexity entailed by such systems were extant in Europe during the Neolithic. However, its exact nature remains unclear.

Figurines represent another major dimension of Gimbutas' symbolic research. Bailey (2010, 117) suggests that this work was 'influential because … [it was] appealing and easy to understand.' Her analyses were rooted in archaeological data, but closely connected to her concurrent studies of Neolithic religious practice, which she viewed as embodied within the figurine corpus and predicated on an association of religion and statuary familiar in contemporary contexts:

> For Gimbutas the answers were clear: 'Figurines were representations of divinities or were objects used in special ceremonies of ritual significance, most likely focused on cults of reproduction and death (of plants, animals, and people). For example, flat white female figurines made of bone, with perforated ears perhaps for the attachment of copper rings, are frequently found in the remains of Gumelnița culture settlements in southern Romania'. Gimbutas designated these figurines as the White Goddess of Death, but there is no independent evidence suggesting that figurines were involved in death rituals.

Gimbutas' studies of figurines were also interconnected with her work on Lithuanian history and folklore – Bailey (2010, 117) notes that '[t]o support her identification of the white Goddess of Death, for example, she invoked analogies with death goddess from Lithuanian folklore' –with her broader studies of Old European symbolism and script. This insistence on an interdisciplinary and culturally contextualised perspective on figurines, which also included both comparative and historical linguistics as well as studies of iconography, was unquestionably innovative and has contributed to many subsequent analyses of figurines from the Neolithic and other time periods in a variety of ways (see e.g. Bailey 2005; Haarmann 2009).

The connections between Gimbutas' symbolic studies of figurines and her analyses of Old European religion are particularly clear. Since many Neolithic figurines represent women, it has often been supposed they represent goddesses. Hutton (1997) succinctly summarises how scholars have propagated this hypothesis. In Hawkes' (1951) analyses, Early Neolithic cultures were gynocentric and peaceful goddess worshippers. Childe (1958, 46) stated that the figurines were used in fertility rituals and 'represent the same Mother Goddess as among Oriental peasantries.' Forty-five years ago, Marija Gimbutas (1974b; 1991) resurrected and popularised Hawkes' hypothesis in her studies of the Great Goddess. As her work developed and she became known as a major authority on European archaeology in the United States, her interpretations became accepted as facts by some archaeologists (Hansen 2007). Among some constituencies in the general public, she herself became, symbolically, the Mother Goddess.

In her early publications, Gimbutas associated figurines with various feminine divinities, including the Bird Goddess and the Snake Goddesses (Gimbutas 1974b; 1984). Gimbutas assigned a specific name to these deities, and while it is impossible to evaluate their accuracy, we can probably safely assume there were women deities and spirits who played a significant role in Early Neolithic religion and ritual practice. By the late 1980s she was proclaiming that Early and Middle Neolithic peoples were worshipping a Great Goddess that had multiple distinct but related instantiations (Gimbutas 1989; 1991). This appealed especially to those women in western societies who were searching for a feminist alternative to male centred contemporary religions. This reaction was particularly salient among women interested in female-based spiritual practice; according to Allen (2001, 18), 'Wicca, sometimes known as the Goddess movement, Goddess spirituality, or the Craft, appears to be the fastest-growing religion in America' and was sympathetic to Gimbutas' ideas, showing that Neolithic figurines continue to have symbolic meaning in contemporary society.

Gimbutas, like J. Hawkes, idealised the Early and Middle Neolithic as a time of matrifocal cultures dominated by peace and harmony. This Old European period was contrasted with the Late Neolithic, during which warlike masculine values supposedly dominated cultures. The roles and statuses of women in the Early Neolithic are not clear. Gimbutas assigned them high status, but it is difficult to justify hypotheses about the position of women on the basis of figurines, some of which could be divinities and others of which could represent just about anything else. Ethnographic and historic data suggest that most societies honour both male and female supernaturals and, as Preston (1982, 326) pointed out, '[t]he presence of powerful goddesses in a religious pantheon rarely reflects anything about the role of females in that particular society.' In ancient Greece, the existence of powerful goddesses such as Athena, Artemis and Demeter did not prevent women from having a lower sociopolitical status than men. The difficulty of interpreting artistic symbolism is also well illustrated by the picture of a dove, which Christians know symbolises the Holy Spirit, but how would a woman from Early Neolithic Karanovo have interpreted such a picture?

Gimbutas' studies of symbolism and symbolic systems were an integral part of the development of what she termed archaeomythology. This approach expanded the scope of descriptive archaeology by incorporating linguistics, mythology, comparative religion, and the study of the historical record (Marler 1996). Its development was motivated by the difficulties of studying symbolic systems in the context of traditional archaeological frameworks, a process that Gimbutas (in Marler 1996, 43) described as follows:

> In the beginning I couldn't see anything. Luckily, I started deciphering, and from very

> tiny shards I began to piece it together. None of the literature could help me. I had to make my own way, little by little. Later on I became passionate to find more.

Gimbutas' interest in the folklore and history of Lithuania and other Baltic states was likely a conditioning factor in her pursuit of archaeomythological research. Jonkus (2011, 882) notes that '[d]espite stressing the importance of archaeology and using its sources to a greater extent than any other school in the Baltic countries, studies of archaeomythology are still based upon folklore and archaeology has only been used selectively.' He further commented on the constraints that often accompany such work, suggesting that – in archaeomythological analyses, '[t]he greater part of archaeological material which could not be reconciled with folklore has been left out and many phenomena of past religions have thus not been discussed as they cannot be compared with folklore' (ibid.). Despite these potential challenges, Gimbutas' development and application of this multi- and interdisciplinary framework marked a substantial contribution that has continued to affect archaeological interpretations and theoretical paradigms.

INTERPRETATIONS AND REACTIONS

Gimbutas' work has unsurprisingly been the focus on considerable debate and discussion, both among academics and within the general public. Marler notes that 'Gimbutas' … theories have generated an enormous range of both positive and negative responses within the academic world and beyond,' and it is not excessive to say that as much attention has been given to talking *about* her work as has been devoted to engaging with it.

Academic Responses

Gimbutas is undoubtedly a controversial figure in academic circles (Tringham 1993). This is due, in no small part, to the uniqueness of her ideas and methodologies and their countering of disciplinary orthodoxy, fuelled by an inherently competitive nature of intellectual production. Backstabbing and personal rivalries are common in archaeology. Archaeologists are not saints; they compete for power, positions, funds, sites, and publications. These tendencies are often particularly ferocious in hindsight, which facilitates the strategic positioning of oneself through the criticism and degradation of those who came before. Beard (2014, 24) notes that discussions of the history of archaeology and archaeological ideas are unfair to many archaeologists; she asks '[w]hy is it that, more almost than any other academic discipline, archaeology (and prehistoric archaeology in particular) invests its own past with such venom?'

In part, the answer is careerism. Throughout academia, challenging conventional perspectives is a favoured strategy for achieving prominence and advancement. It is particularly inviting in archaeology: the iron hand of orthodoxy identifies ideas and interpretations that must be challenged as well as those that should not be and approaches are generally highly subjective. At any given time, the theoretical landscape in archaeology tends to be highly eclectic and it is correspondingly difficult to predict which perspectives will come to be identified as 'cutting edge' so a pointed critique of contemporaries carries substantial risk. The archaeological past, in contrast, offers an irresistible array of targets: apart from a few figures with cult-like followings, even the giants among past practitioners may be criticised with impunity and the more virulent the attack the greater the rewards in terms of career boost.

Despite this reality, Gimbutas and her ideas have many academic admirers. Montagu (in Marler 1998,

114) asserts that 'Marija Gimbutas has given us a veritable Rosetta Stone of the greatest heuristic value for future work in the hermeneutics of archaeology and anthropology,' and Campbell (1989) compared her work with Champollion's decipherment of the Egyptian hieroglyphs. Puhvel (in Marler 1998, 122), one of Gimbutas' colleagues at the University of California at Los Angeles, said that her hiring 'meant the proximity and participation of the one person who was, even then, revolutionising the study of East European archaeology, and was laying the groundwork of a new synthesis of "the Indo-European question"'.' He also spoke highly of her immediate interest in developing collaborations, noting that from the beginning she was 'trying to conceptualise a unified field of Indo-European study, one that would bring together … archaeology, linguistics, philology, and the study of non-material cultural antiquities' (ibid.). Marler (1996, 37) is similarly effusive:

> Marija Gimbutas was a woman with the rare courage to trust her own perceptions and to maintain the trajectory of her scientific work within a male-dominated field. Her enormous professional output of over twenty books (translated into numerous languages) and more than three hundred articles expresses an original scholarship that enlarges the traditional lens through which European prehistory is viewed.

Elster (2007, 108) similarly described Gimbutas as 'an innovator and a pathfinder,' praising 'the number of major ideas she advanced [that] created the impulse and the agenda for the intense research of these ideas and publication of major volumes.'

Despite the effusiveness of this and other praise, it is not surprising that Gimbutas also has a group of opponents (see e.g. Steinfels 1990; Marler 1998). Some of this criticism was self-inflicted, as she could be a tough evaluator who took disagreements personally. Elster (2007, 106) notes that 'Marija was paradoxical in a sense when archaeologists disagreed with her early on, she not only believed them to be wrong, but regarded them also as guilty of personal jealousy.' For example, she, as previously mentioned, was sharply critical of Colin Renfrew, when reviewing his book *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* (1987). A brief excerpt from that review shows her masterly control of relevant literature and the vitriol with which she could criticise her colleagues:

> The overall impression is that this book was written by a scholar turned politician or an ill-informed journalist and was in any case, produced without a gestation period. The Moldavian, Ukrainian, and southern Russian Neolithic and Eneolithic are not void. The literature should be consulted: a convenient list of more than 500 bibliographical items is to be found in Dergachev's 1986 book. My own writings on Kurgan infiltrations and the transformation of European culture in the fourth millennium … seem perhaps to be deliberately neglected by Professor Renfrew (Gimbutas 1988, 1–2).

Other critiques stemmed from the fact that Gimbutas' work often contradicted archaeological orthodoxy. Christ (1996, 56–57) notes that Gimbutas might have received less criticism 'had she found in Old Europe what she 'should' have found: an inferior, primitive, barbarian prelude to civilisation' instead of a civilised culture and worldview. With this interpretation, 'Gimbutas threw down a gauntlet not only to her scholarly leagues but also to her whole civilisation … [and] challenged the "myth progress" that is deeply embedded in Western cultures' (ibid.). By arguing that the Indo-Europeans who invaded Europe were less civilised than the region's indigenous Old European inhabitants, if civilisation is defined in terms of artistic production and comfortable standards of living, Gimbutas

set the stage for a clash with a historical narrative that underlies many of academia's foundational understandings. It is unsurprising that this stance was met with retaliation.

In addition to general commentaries on her interpretations and methodologies, considerable attention, much of it critical, has also been given to the evaluations of the merits of individual aspects of Gimbutas' analyses. Many of these focus on the Goddess as the central figure in Old European religion, on the figures connected with her, and on the matrifocal orientation that these things imply (Meskell 1995). For example, Hayden (1986) described her matrifocal theory as 'discredited' and argues for the existence of balanced male and female forces in Neolithic religion. He posits that the water snake, which Gimbutas associates with the Goddess, is more accurately viewed as a masculine symbol and cited Freud and Eliade in support of his claim; he also objects to Gimbutas' identification of the pillar as a symbol of the Goddess, commenting that that 'all common sense and psychiatric wisdom would associate it instead with the phallus' (ibid.). Ucko (1968) cautioned against making inferences about the significances of figurines and their symbolism; as an example, he noted that female figurines from Egypt that are holding their breasts are symbols of grief rather than fertility or maternity, the most common interpretation associated with breasts in Gimbutas' eventual examination of Old European symbolism. Fleming (1969) similarly questioned the validity of Gimbutas' assertion that figurines are female unless they are specifically marked as male and other dimensions of her study of Neolithic material and ritual practice. Marshack (1981, 8–9) noted that 'Gimbutas … recognised the ancient Palaeolithic antecedents of much Neolithic imagery, particularly the image of the female "goddess", but the functional role that such symbols may have played in making possible the formal structuring of Neolithic society and culture remains to be clarified'.

The feminist dimensions of her work have also received criticism in academic circles despite their popularity among the general public (Conkey, Tringham 1995). At the core of these criticisms is the kind of essentialised femininity and womanhood that Gimbutas' analyses associate with egalitarian and female-centric society (see e.g. Tringham, Conkey 1998). Elster (2007, 106) summarises these critiques as follows:

> First, it is a unitary vision of women, which conflicts with much of third-wave feminist theorising, which emphasises the differences between women as much as their collective differences from men. Second, it is a vision of women that concentrates on biology (sexuality, reproduction, and motherhood), which historically the women's movement has been dedicated to rejecting. Admittedly, in the goddess version, biological aspects of womanhood are glorified and considered a source of power … Nonetheless, most feminists, including feminist archaeologists … would be reluctant to return to an understanding of women defined largely as wives and mothers, even if this allowed them to be goddesses.

The politicised nature of academia in the United States and Europe has also fuelled these critiques. It is striking that '[a]ll or nearly all of Gimbutas' American critics are associated with an academic establishment within which men whose values are those of the European patriarchy hold most of the significant power' and significant that their efforts reflect 'a counterattack against the challenges of feminism and multiculturalism to their definition of the cannon' (Christ 1996, 59). Daly's (1973) critique of feminist approaches in academia was less overtly political and more generalised but still reflective of these opinions of Gimbutas' work. Her assertion that feminist methodologies involve asking 'non

questions' about 'non-data' is certainly applicable to Gimbutas' work and has been used to suggest that it lacks intellectual footing.

Popular Engagement and Response

It is to Gimbutas' great credit that she captured the hearts of many non-archaeologists. Much of this appeal is based on the positive public reception of her work on the Goddess and her insistence that Old European society was egalitarian and matrifocal. Marler (1996, 46) notes that '[t]he flood of appreciation that Marija received after the publication of *The Language of the Goddess* took her by surprise … women, artists, mythologists, and others became enthusiastic … [and h]er work struck a chord that has resounded with cheers and controversy,' and Elster (2007, 83) similarly observes that 'her ideas have had an impact well beyond the borders of the academic world.' The reasons for this popularity are complex and multifaceted, but it seems likely that her illumination of an ancient world free from the kinds of problems that blight modern society – including sexism and war – was broadly appealing. Her surprise at the intensity of popular interest in and approval of her ideas demonstrates that her unconventional vision of the past was rooted in sincerely held beliefs rather than a self-conscious strategy of attracting attention by countering orthodox ideas. It also reflects a general disconnect between academic interests and those of the general public, a situation that Gimbutas, perhaps inadvertently, helped rectify.

The often female-centric nature of her analyses was undoubtedly another significant factor. Part of this appeal was that Gimbutas' ideas resonated with new perspectives emerging in academia and public intellectual, political, and social discourse. Feminism was a relatively new and increasingly influential perspective in many academic disciplines and an increasingly popular viewpoint in public discourse, especially in the United States. Gimbutas' insistence on the prominence of women in political and religious spheres in ancient societies resonated with popular and scholarly thought; the timing was perfect for the reception of her ideas. Her work remains popular among mainstream feminists, who 'found in her writing what they had sought, the "scientific" proof that once God was a woman and that women were in charge, or at least equal partners' (Elster 2007, 105). Eco-feminist groups, such as those adhering to the Gaia movement, also made use of Gimbutas' ideas. Despite this, Gimbutas herself never participated in feminist activism, seemingly preferring to allow her research and publications to speak on her behalf.

Building on Gimbutas' Legacy

Many of Gimbutas' ideas and perspectives continue to be explored and developed in the contexts of contemporary scholarship. One of these is her work on the Old European script, which has received steady attention in the years since she first proposed its existence. Most of this expansionary work has focused on examples from the Vinča culture. Winn's (1973, 275–279) comprehensive study is significant, particularly in its identification of seven things that the system is not: it is not sentence writing, it is not phonemic, it likely does not represent one-to-one sign-word relationships, it is not picture writing, it is not random or magical scratches, it is not purely representative of broad or general symbols, and it is not potmarks. These observations build on Gimbutas' analyses and offer clues concerning the system's functions in ancient contexts of use and engagement, which Winn (1973, 279) describes as

> [generally] fall[ing] into a writing system representing concepts, not implying the conception of signs as words and not so generalised as to be symbolic (in the sense of stimulating an indescribable feeling of some nature within the individual). In the

> mind of the perceiver they do not serve as pointers to single words of his verbal vocabulary but rather serve to recall concepts that are useful in his daily affairs … They do not merely stir up feelings that he cannot describe, although many of these concepts were probably of a religious nature. Isolated signs are removed from decoration, and many of the same signs occur in groups; this fact, reinforced by additional arguments for conceptualisation … harmonises with the notion that writing systems possess signs that become distinct concepts in order to avoid ambiguity.

Starović (2005, 259) similarly posits that 'the origin and invention of the signs and symbols were religious and ceremonial' but offers a more developmental view of the script's functionality, noting that

> in later phases pots became very convenient media for the transfer of practical information in everyday life. Many numbers, different sign groups, and even ligatures … and regional types of sign design, should mean that the Vinča people had started to write more precise messages, and to understand them.

Altschuler and Christenfeld (2003) offer an alternative view and suggest that the system did not encode religious information but instead was used for economic purposes.

Gimbutas' ideas about early European beliefs, particularly in relation to her hypothesised multi-dimensional Great Goddess figure, has been at least equally influential. This is especially true among certain subsets of non-archaeologists, who have often viewed Gimbutas' ideas and analyses as validation of their own beliefs and practices. Leslie (1989), writing in the *Los Angeles Times* from a non-academic perspective for a popular audience, notes that

> feminists with a spiritual orientation, who found wisdom and solace in goddess-oriented mythology, embraced her [Gimbutas] as a heroine … [her work] offered hope that their ideals – including harmony between the sexes, reverence for nature and existence without warfare – were not just theoretical possibilities but realities of past societies.

Leslie (ibid.) also describes how Gimbutas and her views of Old European beliefs had a 'dramatic effect on many artists.' Some artists found historical grounding and validation for their work in the similarities between their own images and the forms of goddess figurines. Others, such as Mary Beth Edelson, developed a deeper understanding of their own art through engagement with Gimbutas' ideas that motivated the creation of new and more engaged artistic creations rooted in ancient matriarchal religious practice (ibid.).

Gimbutas' reconstructions of a female-centred Old European religion also attracted attention in academia, though this typically took the form of critiques rather than engagement with or the incorporation of her ideas. At the core of much of this academic discomfort is the iteratively interpretive nature of Gimbutas' conclusions. She had a tendency to 'bring her imagination to [the ancient world] and not just act like a scientist' (McClintock, in Leslie 1989) in a way evocative of the imaginal, a mode of knowledge that Vest (2005, 239, 242; see also Hillman 1983) describes as not rooted in the sensory, empirical, conceptual, or ideational but is instead situated 'between senses and ideas' and capable of 'mediat[ing] both sensory and ideational experience.' The imaginal 'does not provide the same kind of validity that the empirical or scientific method provides … [but] because it has access to the arena of soul, imaginal hermeneutics often has greater depth and capacity to supply meaning than other interpretive methods' (Vest 2005, 242). Consequently,

the imaginal – and, by extension, the images and interpretations that arise from it – 'claim reality; that is, authority, objectivity, and certainty' (Hillman 1983, 15).

Given this interpretive focus and her focus on challenging the patriarchal nature of historical analyses, Vest (2005, 246–247) suggests that Gimbutas 'may intentionally have chosen to exaggerate the perspective of the margin in order to dislodge the privileged position and open the conversation.' Edgar Polome, an Indo-European scholar at the University of Texas, was more explicit in his critique of Gimbutas' interpretive approach and described her work as 'a bit of a dream world;' Bolle, a religious history professor at the University of California at Los Angeles, said she had 'a peculiar romantic strand' and a tendency to 'overestimate' pre-Indo-European societies (Leslie 1989). More scathingly, Hodder (in Leslie 1989) characterises Gimbutas' symbolic interpretations as follows: 'She looks at a squiggle on a pot and says it's a primeval egg or a snake, or she looks at female figurines and says they're mother goddesses. I don't really think there's an awful lot of evidence to support that level of interpretation.' Trigham (ibid.) is similarly sceptical despite her support for the feminist objectives of Gimbutas' work, suggesting that

> What Gimbutas is trying to do is to make a generalised stage-of-evolution type of interpretation, in which all societies at one time are (dominated by women) and then they all change to another kind. But prehistory is much more complicated than that. Anthropologists left that behind a long time ago.

These and other criticisms are typical of the academic responses to Gimbutas' work, particularly as they relate to the interpretive nature and matriarchal focus of her analyses. While interpretations of archaeological data are inherently risky and often reflect the contexts of modern researchers more than those of their ancient subject, they are also useful windows into archaeological processes and orthodoxies that are often unconsidered. These insights, as they occur both within and around Gimbutas' views of Old Europe and its religious landscape, are an important aspect of her legacy that deserves more careful consideration.

Gimbutas' ideas about the movements of Indo-Europeans and the transformation of Old Europe, particularly as they occur in Kurgan hypothesis formulation, which locates the Indo-European homeland in the southern Russian steppe, have shaped investigations and interpretations of Indo-European migrations for decades. For example, Mallory (1989, 185) accepted the Kurgan hypothesis as the *de facto* standard theory of Indo-European origins but recognised that

> Almost all of the arguments for invasion and cultural transformations are far better explained without reference to Kurgan expansions, and most of the evidence so far presented is either totally contradicted by other evidence, or is the result of gross misinterpretation of the cultural history of Eastern, Central, and Northern Europe.

Cavalli-Sforza (2000) incorporated Gimbutas' insights into his discussion ancient genetics and the Anatolian Hypothesis, noting that genetic evidence clearly indicates that peoples of the Kurgan steppe descended at least partly from Middle Eastern Neolithic populations who immigrated from Turkey. Wells (2002) also identifies genetic evidence for migrations from the Middle East, though Anthony and Ringe (2015) do not believe it is compatible with historical linguistic data. Anthony's (2007) Revised Steppe Theory represents the best known revision of Gimbutas' Kurgan Hypothesis. It rejects the concept of a Kurgan culture as too broad and instead focuses on cultural interactions of the Yamnaya culture,

although a migration-based model involving the spread of new sociocultural patterns alongside the Indo-European languages is retained. Gimbutas' interpretation of the origins of the Baltic peoples from the blending of Old European and Kurgan societies had a comparable impact on the more circumscribed world of specialists in early Baltic history and is similarly influential, albeit on a more limited geographic scale.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Marija Gimbutas is unquestionably a major figure in the history of archaeology. Although many archaeologists may disagree with her interpretations of data and her methodologies, her work made European archaeology much richer and offered unique perspectives on the cultural richness of the human past. She was never impressed by orthodoxy, she challenged many of the accepted consensus explanations, and she was not afraid to fight for what she believed in. She scared some male archaeologists because she was not afraid to challenge them, but she inspired many others, particularly women, to pursue their ideas and beliefs in the contexts of archaeological research. Elster (2007, 90–91) notes that

> [t]he American School of Prehistoric Research at the Peabody Museum gave Marija the imprimatur of Harvard. Entering academia in the Ivy League, she met many scholars, observed the workings of academia and established a network of colleagues and friends – among them the distinguished linguist Roman Jakobson

Despite her status and influence, however, she remained a well-rounded individual with a deep commitment to intellectual processes and new ideas. Elster (2007, 1), a student of Gimbutas' who later became a close friend and participated in all of her excavations, notes that '[we] entertained each other, travelled together, broke bread and drank wine, worked like the devil, and did not at all always agree.'

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that a fitting tribute to Gimbutas' character and dedication can also be found in the writings of Elster (2007, 106–107), who notes that

> Various theoretical and methodological approaches and intellectual debate developed within the discipline during her years at UCLA and influenced the practice of archaeology – 'new' archaeology, processualism, postprocessualism, Marxism, structuralist, feminism – but only tangentially affected Marija Gimbutas' thinking. There were no alternative arguments powerful enough to convince her to replace her model. In a sense her intellectual development was shaped by her Lithuanian heritage and her European education and not much affected by the theoretical currents that ebbed and flowed over the last half of this century. She was a role model for and inspired many women whose lives touched hers, but she was never drawn to feminist activism. She negotiated her own independent life and couldn't imagine marching for anything less than independence for her beloved Lithuania.

This commitment, independence, and intellectualism set Gimbutas apart, both within and beyond academia, and secured her position as a true Baltic goddess.

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MARIJA GIMBUTAS (GIMBUTIENĖ): THE BALTIC GODDESS

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Summary

Marija Gimbutas and her research have been consistent features in both academic and popular discourses since the start of her prolific career. Her academic interests were shaped by her Lithuanian homeland and her parents' interests in history, folklore, and Lithuanian nationalism, which led to interdisciplinary university studies in archaeology, ethnology, folklore, and linguistics and – eventually – to a doctorate in archaeology. After Gimbutas immigrated to the United States with her family, she worked for three years as an unpaid research fellow at Harvard University's Peabody Museum before accepting a professorship at the University of California at Los Angeles, a position she kept until her retirement in 1989. During her long career she conducted excavations at Obre in Bosnia, Anza in Yugoslavian Macedonia, Sitagroi and Achilleion in Greece, and Grotta Scaloria in Italy. This work contributed significantly to her extensive analyses of Old European religion and symbolism. For Gimbutas, Old European religion was matrifocal and centred on a goddess – often referred to as the great Goddess – and her various incarnations. This female-centric religious perspective was, in Gimbutas' view, responsible for the egalitarian and peaceful nature of Old European society and a significant motivating factor in Old European material and artistic productions. Her studies of symbols and symbolism were closely related to her religious analyses and eventually led to three distinct but interrelated foci: the religious symbolism of Neolithic Europe, the Old European script, and the elucidation of meanings associated with figurines excavated at Neolithic sites.

Other dimensions of Gimbutas' academic pursuits and contributions can also be related to her archaeological work and interests in Old European religion and symbolism. For example, her Kurgan Hypothesis, which contrasts the generally peaceful, sedentary, matrifocal, matrilineal, and egalitarian Old Europeans with the warlike, patriarchal and hierarchical society of the Kurgan invaders, divides her view of European prehistory into an earlier Old European phase and a later, culturally hybridized Kurgan phase that marked the end of Old European society. Similarly, Gimbutas' interest in traditional Lithuanian folk life and cultural patrimony was rooted in a belief that the knowledge of and connections to the Goddess went underground following the Kurgan invasions and became almost subconscious among the descendants of the Old Europeans, although she believed a few aspects of these beliefs continued more overtly and with less change. These ideas have been the focus of

considerable debate and discussion among both academics and the general public. Although she remains controversial in many academic circles, her work also continues to have many supporters and to inspire innovative approaches to the study of ethnohistory and European prehistory. Popular responses to her ideas are generally more positive, likely due to the often female-centric nature of her analyses as well as her illumination of an ancient world free from the kinds of problems that blight modern society, the obvious sincerity of her beliefs and ideas, and a persistent disconnect between the interests of academia and those of the general public. She was, in all aspects, a true Baltic goddess.

MARIJA GIMBUTIENĖ: BALTŲ DEIVĖ

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Santrauka

Nuo pat vaisingos karjeros pradžios Marija Gimbutienė ir jos tyrimai buvo nuoseklūs tiek akademiniuose, tiek populiariuose diskursuose. Akademinius interesus formavo tėvynė Lietuva ir tėvų domėjimasis istorija, tautosaka ir lietuvių kultūra. Tai lėmė Gimbutienės pasirinkimą studijuoti tarpdisciplininius dalykus: archeologiją, etnologiją, tautosaką ir kalbotyrą. Po to, kai su šeima emigravo į JAV, Gimbutienė pirmus trejus metus neatlygintinai dirbo mokslo darbuotoja Harvardo universiteto Peabody muziejuje, prieš priimdama profesūrą Los Andželo Kalifornijos universitete. Šias pareigas išlaikė iki išėjimo į pensiją 1989 m. Per ilgą karjerą ji kasinėjo Obre Bosnijoje, Anzoje Jugoslavijos Makedonijoje, Sitagroi ir Achilejone Graikijoje bei Skalorijos oloje Italijoje. Šis darbas labai prisidėjo prie jos plačios senosios Europos religijos ir simbolikos analizės. Archeologei senoji Europos religija buvo matrifokalinė ir sutelkta į deivę – dažnai vadinamą didžiąja deive – ir įvairius jos įsikūnijimus. Ši, į moterį orientuota religinė perspektyva, mokslininkės nuomone, buvo atsakinga už lygiavertį ir taikų senosios Europos visuomenės pobūdį. Moteriškumas buvo reikšmingas, motyvuojantis senosios Europos materialinės ir meninės kūrybos veiksnys. Gimbutienės simbolių ir simbolikos studijos buvo glaudžiai susijusios su religine jos analize ir galiausiai paskatino tris skirtingus, bet tarpusavyje susijusius židinius: religinę neolito Europos simboliką, senosios Europos raštą ir prasmių, susijusių su neolito vietose iškastomis figūrėlėmis, išaiškinimą.

Kiti jos akademinių užsiėmimų ir indėlių aspektai taip pat gali būti susiję su archeologiniu darbu ir interesais senosios Europos religijoje ir simbolikoje. Pavyzdžiui, kurganų hipotezė, kuri prieštarauja paprastai taikiems, sėsliems, matrifokaliems ir lygiateisiškiems seniesiems europiečiams su karinga, patriarchine ir hierarchine kurganų įsibrovėlių visuomene, jos požiūrį padalija į Europos priešistorę ankstesniame senųjų europiečių etape. Kurganų fazė – senosios Europos visuomenės pabaiga.

Gimbutienės susidomėjimas tradiciniu Lietuvos tautos gyvenimu ir kultūriniu paveldu buvo pagrįstas tikėjimu, kad žinios apie deivę ir ryšiai su ja, įsiveržus kurganų žmonėms, išliko senųjų europiečių palikuonių pasąmonėje, nors ji tikėjo keliais aspektais. Šios idėjos sukėlė daug akademikų ir plačiosios visuomenės diskusijų. Nors mokslininkė tebėra prieštaringai vertinama

daugelyje akademinių sluoksnių, jos kūryba taip pat vis dar turi daug šalininkų ir įkvepia naujoviškus etnografijos ir Europos priešistorės tyrimo metodus. Populiarūs atsakymai į jos idėjas paprastai yra teigiami, greičiausiai dėl to, kad analizė dažnai yra orientuota į moteris, taip pat dėl to, kad ji apšviečia senovinį pasaulį, neturėjusį problemų, trukdančių šiuolaikinei visuomenei, ir akivaizdų įsitikinimų bei idėjų nuoširdumą. Visais atžvilgiais ji buvo tikra baltų Deivė.

Vertė Šarūnas Milišauskas

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