

## **Glenda Cloughley**

### **New Mythos Grant — Preliminary Research Report**

#### SUMMARY

The opportunity for intensive study in the Marija Gimbutas Collection at OPUS Archives and Research Center during April 2010 has deepened my understanding of formative patterns in European psyches and cultures, and expanded my knowledge of this major scholar's life and works.

My research affirmed the archetypal psychodynamic movements of plot and symbolism I have been developing for my project, *The Ethos Epic*. This confidence in the deep structure of a new mythic work is a wellspring of vitality for the creative process.

The research yielded some material that I will use directly in the narrative and poetic content of the work, and it also inspired my movement in some new scholarly directions.

My interest of some 15 years in the work of Gimbutas has primarily been about its relevance to the contemporary psychology of European-derived urban culture and its revelation of laws governing the enduring possibilities for ecological balance between people and nature. I have found deep-structure, archetypal bases of 'whitefella' equivalents to the Indigenous lawsongs and dreaming stories of Aboriginal Australia in her dynamic, systemic, symbolically coherent social ecology of prehistoric Europe.

I do not know of a better teacher in the indigenous 'dreaming' of Europe than Gimbutas. Collection materials strengthened my view that knowledge of this understorey in the building of Western civilization is a most useful foundation for contemporary art-making that seeks to activate the spirit of a healing, healthy mythos.

Insight into the fascinating nexus between Gimbutas' life experience and the theses she generated was an unexpected valuable outcome of the research. As both Jungian analyst and artist, I gained much from the phenomenological perspectives the Collection affords into the workings of her synthesising symbolic intelligence. I particularly appreciate access to personal reflections and iterative drafts and formulations in the Collection that reveal links between the cultural environment of her early years, the associative movements of her extraordinarily creative mind and the interdisciplinary method of archaeomythology she devised. These connections are a key to understanding how she discerned consistent patterns of meaning through the 30,000-year span of European cultural systems that her lifework encompasses. They could also open a door to reevaluation of her contributions.

Like Gimbutas, I hold the view that the seeds of future wellbeing are alive, though politically dormant in the cultural substrate. I also agree with her opinion that these need urgently to be germinated and cultivated, and that the arts and depth psychology have vital parts to play in the regenerative process.

As I use my research in composing *The Ethos Epic* and some scholarly writings, I will draw on my deepened understanding about the symbolisation of healthy and hegemonic social patterns — especially in representing people’s relations with the natural world and attitudes to the laws of nature.

## BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

I came to the Collection with considerable prior knowledge of Professor Gimbutas’ work and fairly well-formed views about its significances for mythic art-making and cultural psychology.

My Research Masters and doctoral dissertations presented original hypotheses about the psychodynamic history of healthy and pathological social layers. These writings<sup>1</sup> and my composition of related mythic poetic and musical works are congruent with the observations and theories of Marija Gimbutas.

Although the main formation of my work occurred during immersions in ancient Greek dramas, other mythic texts and contemporary psycho-political research rather than archaeology, the treasury of generative prehistoric symbolism Gimbutas opened has informed and substantially extended my work as a Jungian analyst and artist.

Professor Gloria Orenstein has said that it is because of Gimbutas that “we are beginning to speak the language of regeneration”<sup>2</sup>. I agree with her, and am also convinced that fluency in this mother tongue of humanity depends upon our capacity for *symbolic* – not literal – understandings about the animating powers of nature and the maintenance of healthy social and environmental relations that are represented in forms which Gimbutas and others refer to as the “Great Goddess”.

I emphasise this here because one cannot write about the enormous contributions of Gimbutas without referring to the critical view and erasure of her work in some academic contexts. This seems, at least in part, to be an intellectual reaction to some of Gimbutas’ fervent ‘followers’ who apparently find it hard to listen to the symbolism of Neolithic art on its “own plane of reference”<sup>3</sup> — probably because it seems to offer resonances with personal beliefs about goddesses and political philosophies like feminism. But the language of regeneration is a language of law, so it cannot be learned at depth through ideological filters, or while being placed in the service of dogmatic commitments. Gimbutas knew this, and her archive speaks eloquently for the disciplined basis of her scholarship.

Reading in the Collection, I was impressed again and again by the thought that the large potential contemporary significance of the symbolic art of Old Europe for

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<sup>1</sup> Core elements of my dissertations are synthesised in ‘Lament and Renewal in Temenos Australia’, the public lecture I gave in Australia’s three most important public art galleries for the Barbara Blackman Temenos Foundation. This can be read at [http://www.chorusofwomen.org/Temenos\\_website\\_compressed.pdf](http://www.chorusofwomen.org/Temenos_website_compressed.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> This statement was made in Orenstein’s speech at the 1991 launch of *The Civilization of the Goddess*, which I transcribed from an audiotape in the archive

<sup>3</sup> See the quotation on page 9 of my report, where Gimbutas states that this is the best way to understand images and symbols

current relations between people, other life forms and the Earth itself will not be realised at large in the world until it is reassociated with the laws for harmony it encodes. I do not know how the necessary attitude for this wholistic kind of perception would develop within academic archaeology, and Gimbutas was certainly sceptical about the possibility of this as she intimated to Joan Marler during an interview in 1987:

... Archaeology now is interested mostly in excavation techniques and they want to be very precise ... Of course you can reach some conclusions using statistics, but if you do not have a vision as a person, if you are not a poet, or an artist, you cannot see much.

The interdisciplinary methods she pioneered are certainly a way to see systemic patterns, and these continue to develop in scholarship supported by the Institute of Archaeomythology. So too are the perspectives of depth psychology and archetypal art-making from which I am developing *The Ethos Epic*.

## RESEARCH FOCUS

I focussed my research on Gimbutas's description of the following three core elements of European culture:

- The healthy substrate of European cultural formation, which Gimbutas sees as continuous from the Upper Palaeolithic (c. 30000 BC), through the Neolithic era (from c. 10000 BC) when people began to farm and form settled communities, into twentieth century tradition-maintaining, earth-focused communities.
- The continuing lineages of hegemonic rule and “trauma-inducing institutions”, which were imposed over the healthy substrate by proto-Indo-European warrior people who invaded Europe from the Russian Steppes between 4500 and 3000BC, according to the “Kurgan” theory Gimbutas first advanced in 1956<sup>4</sup>. (It is important to note that research across numerous disciplines has continued to corroborate the Kurgan theory, and that this remains the most widely accepted explanation for the Indo-Europeanisation of Europe as well as for the introduction to Europe of the horse, pastoral economy, and the fortification of communities and aggrandisement of warrior heroes that accompanied the Indo-European priest-ruler/warrior/producer tripartite social structure first described by George Dumézil.)
- Potentials for cultural revitalisation — in relation to which my New Mythos Grant application noted that “a powerful-enough ‘planetary, evolutionary sustainable mythos’<sup>5</sup> for present global changes and challenges will be ancient as well as new”.

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<sup>4</sup> Presented at the International Congress of Ethnological Sciences in Philadelphia.

<sup>5</sup> This phrase is from the Opus Archive and Research Center briefing document for the New Mythos Grant.

The following sections identify some more specific areas of interest — both those I intended to research and others that emerged as I immersed myself in the Collection. I have included some quotations, together with a few initial reflections on some of these subjects.

## TWO-TIER SOCIAL SYSTEM

Gimbutas gave a succinct summary of the two-tier system, together with the case for archaeomythology — the interdisciplinary method of scholarship she developed — in her Introductory Remarks to the Proceedings of the Second International Conference on *The Transformation of European and Anatolian Culture 4500 – 2500BC (Part I)*, Dublin, Ireland, September 15 - 19, 1989:<sup>6</sup>

The two millennia between the mid-5<sup>th</sup> and the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> BC were a period of traumatic change and convulsive upheavals for European and Anatolian prehistory. The social fabric was marked by radical changes reflected in a transition from matristic to patriarchal social structure and a striking turnabout in religion from a goddess-centred religion to the worship of warrior gods. These reversals were accompanied by fundamental adjustments in the patterns of governance, habitation, architecture, and art. In addition, and of equal significance, we presume this also was the time of Indo-European linguistic divergence and of the major spread of Indo-European speakers into non-Indo-European speaking areas of Europe and Anatolia. The formation of Western civilization cannot be adequately understood without in-depth study of this critical period.

The culture that we refer to today as Western is not the result of a smooth and peaceful development. Rather, it was subjected to many disabling disruptions. However, there are two essential strata with many regional variations that played a decisive role in this evolution – the earlier, the Old Anatolian and Old European, and the later, intrusive Indo-European. The characteristics, hallmarks and metamorphoses of these strata can only be interpreted with the assistance of an interdisciplinary methodology.

In the Collection, I found numerous statements she made about the non-integration of the two systems — e.g., in the Indana Films interview with Kell Kearns, January 1990 (which I transcribed):

... it is very clear that the Old European structure was not the Indo-European structure, and that the Indo-European could not have developed from the matristic. It had to be a clash between the two because after that, we have the hybridisation of the two.

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<sup>6</sup> Published in *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Vol. 17, Numbers 3 and 4, Fall/Winter 1989

In the final volume of the draft of *Language of the Goddess*<sup>7</sup> (page 277), under the heading ‘Continuity in the Indo-European and Christian era’ she writes:

The process of the Indo-Europeanisation of Europe was not, however, a replacement of one culture by another, but a gradual transformation of two different cultures and symbolic systems. ... the total uprooting of Old European sacred images and symbols never happened; these most persistent features in human history were too deeply implanted in the psyche.

She found evidence for the profound differences between the two systems in cyclical and linear attitudes to death, and articulated these in a clear, psychologically minded way in the 1990 interview with Kell Kearns:

[In Old Europe], ... attitude to death ... [was] very different to Indo-European beliefs. There, death is the end of the line. But then, the individual continues his life of the same kind – king, warrior, farmer. No, in Old Europe, it’s something totally different. It’s another psychology. There are no heroes, no individuals in death. In death, we are all equal ...

It was easier probably to take death than in our modern times or in the Indo-European beliefs, when they killed so many human beings and animals – for the death of a king, for example, when even the wife was killed and buried with the dead husband. Such things didn’t exist in Old Europe ...

[There,] tomb is where the regeneration begins and the elemental form of the tomb was the egg. Egg is symbol of regeneration. There are many tombs which are cave or egg shaped, or even in a cemetery, they are not rectangular but egg shaped. Also newborn babies were sometimes placed in egg-shaped pots called pithos. And then the later development of Megalithic tomb, shows the same idea. The tomb is in the form of a uterus – or egg is one and the same thing. And then sometimes the tomb shape appears as the body of the goddess. There is a long corridor and then a chamber – so this is a vagina and uterus, sometimes a chamber next to the uterus like goddess’ arms, sometimes this entrance the corridor has a court, and the court is nothing else than the open legs of the goddess. This is the entering into the goddess and the beginning of regeneration.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FOLK LORE

Gimbutas mentions the important place of folklore in her family life. Until I visited the archive, I had not realised the very ancient provenance of some Lithuanian folk traditions. Gimbutas knew this, of course, as she indicates in the following statement about her childhood, which I transcribed from her interview with Joan Marler on Pacifica Radio KPFA 94.1, recorded at Topanga and broadcast on 8 October 1989:

Everybody more or less felt the same way – closeness to nature. It was still there. It was not yet killed with this technological civilisation [which] was just

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<sup>7</sup> in Box 114 of the archive

entering our country, and the farmers and the villagers – well, people did works in the ancient ways with horses. There were no machines. That area where my farm was – we had more modern equipment. Right next door in the hilly areas, the women were cutting rye, oats, barley with sickles. And I was going to these areas, where they were using sickles, and listening to the women singing songs. And usually, the older women did it and the songs were very very ancient, and I think this is what really incited me. And I fell in love with what is ancient. It was a feeling of directness, of the communication with earth. And the whole work is made more easy for a person who is working hard with the sickle because of singing all the time.

It is in my memory, one moment of listening to a song which was a working song. At that moment I thought: this is a deep, deep communication with earth and oneness of earth — the rhythm of the song and the rhythm of the workers, one. That captivated me. That was the beginning of my interest in folklore.

This sense of the tremendous significance of song in “deep, deep communication with earth” reminds of the role of ‘lawsongs’ in traditional Australian Aboriginal cultures. It is inspiring guidance for me as a composer of story-songs like *The Ethos Epic*, and its earlier, sister work *The Gifts of the Furies* which draw on ancient traditions as they set out to give contemporary citizens a way to help sing back the right relations between the laws of people, and the laws of nature.

Later in the KPFA interview, Gimbutas told Marler:

I was 15 or 16 years old [when] I started collecting songs. I went to ethnographical expeditions organised by the museum in Kulnus, and about six or seven people were going to a certain area — what was considered a primitive area usually in eastern Lithuania.

... I was always collecting folk songs. I continued to collect for about four to five years, so I count maybe 5000 folk songs that I have collected and they are now in the Vilnius Folklore Archives. Of course, it was unfortunate that we didn't have phonographs. We didn't record the melodies. This was done later on, but it was really quite late.

Then in 1940 when the Russians came in, they took away from south-east Lithuania a good part of a Lithuania-speaking region and attached it to Belorussia. And [the people from that region] came to Vilnius, my own city ... There were hundreds of women, greatest singers from that part of Lithuania, so I was sitting with them days and nights recording folk songs, beliefs, riddles, proverbs, anything they knew. This I regard now as one of my universities, where I learned on my own.

Near the beginning of the Belili Productions documentary about her, *Signs Out of Time*, Gimbutas says “song was the very beginning”.

A helpful passage that explains the significance now accorded to the oral transmission of folkloric motifs through many millennia is given by the Romanian linguist and

archaeomythologist Adrian Porouic in the latest publication of the Institute of Archaeomythology<sup>8</sup>. (In this book, published just after my visit to the Gimbutas Collection, Professor Porouic acknowledges that “my line in dealing with both classical mythology and folk traditions owes at least as much to Gimbutas as to Eliade”<sup>9</sup>):

My analyses of Romanian folk productions ... led me to the conclusion that archaic ritual-cultural patterns preceded mythologies, theogonies and theologies, and that, instead of hurrying to go “beyond the motif analysis” we should stay there as long as we can in order to reveal the original nuclei of both myths and religion.

... The outlines of what was to become classical mythology can be perceived in prehistoric items unearthed by archaeologists, but such outlines also appear to be (paradoxically, from a chronological standpoint) “foretold” in folk productions recorded only as late as modern times. ... [M]uch of what we know as mythology derived, more or less directly, from the ritual-cultural life of prehistoric peasants.<sup>10</sup>

In relation to *The Ethos Epic*, this is important because ritual – like song – precedes theatre, and my epic spans imaginatively across 15000 years, moving more through such thematic motifs as people’s relations with oracle birds than myths.

I hope my work will be a useful kind of answer to the question with which Gimbutas concluded the draft of *The Language of the Goddess* (Box 114). This archival text is an important record of her passionate concern about the implications of her discoveries for how we live now, since she or her publisher followed her pencilled margin note “Omit?” and did not include this in the book:

As I am now writing the last sentences of this book, I ponder the question: What kind of culture would I live in and by what symbols would I be surrounded if Goddess centered religion and art had persisted to our time, undestroyed by androcracy? And we who pride ourselves on the advanced state of our civilization, can we truly say that we represent progress over the “primitive” cultures of Old Europe? **Just what are the criteria for a civilized society?**<sup>11</sup>

## APPENDIX I

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<sup>8</sup> *Prehistoric Roots of Romanian and Southeast European Traditions*, Volume I, 2010 (ed. Joan Marler and Miriam Robbins Dexter), Sebastopol CA (page xiv)

<sup>9</sup> *op. cit.*, page xii

<sup>10</sup> The same conclusions about traditional Bulgarian dances have been reported by Anna Ilieva and Anna Shturbanova in ‘Zoomorphic Images in Bulgarian Ritual Dances in the Context of Old European Symbolism’ in *From the Realm of the Ancestors*, (1997) *ibid*

<sup>11</sup> my emphasis

## SPECIFIC MATERIALS I RESEARCHED IN THE MARIJA GIMBUTAS COLLECTION

### LITERARY MATERIALS

#### Archive Boxes

Box 108: Unpublished English manuscript of *Baltic and Slavic Mythology* (apparently published in Vilnius by Lietuvos Rasytoju sajungos leidykla, 2002, as *Baltu mitologija: senoves lietuvin deiviu deives ir dievai*, Marija Gimbutiene.) [I apologise for being unable to reproduce the diacretic marks]

Box 109: 'Part II. Indo-European Mythology' in another manuscript of *Baltic and Slavic Mythology*

Box 114: The 1986 draft of the book that was to become *The Language of the Goddess* (published in 1989).

Box 166: undated lecture notes, apparently a draft of *The Language of the Goddess*, especially p.243, from 'Categories, Functions, and Symbolism of Deities documented by Archaeology, History and Folklore' within Chapter V. The Religion of the Goddess in *The Neolithic of Southeast Europe*, for Indo-European course 131, UCLA.

Box 198: Symbols including Birds and Bird Goddess

Box 202: Symbols, including Owls

#### Published writings by Marija Gimbutas:

"The Monstrous Venus" of Prehistory – Divine Creatrix", first published in *Comparative Civilizations Review*, No. 7, Fall 1981 (pp.1-27), later in *In All Her Names – Explorations of the Feminine in Divinity*, ed. Joseph Campbell and Charles Muses, Harper San Francisco 1990

*La Cristianizzazione della Lituania, The Pre-Christian Religion of Lithuania* from Pontificio Comitato di Scienze Storiche, Atti e Documenti 2, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Citta del Vaticano, 1989

Introductory Remarks to the Proceedings of the Second International Conference on: *The Transformation of European and Anatolian Culture 4500 – 2500BC (Part I)*, Dublin, Ireland, September 15 – 19, 1989. Published in *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Vol. 17, Numbers 3 and 4, Fall/Winter 1989

'Implications of *The Chalice and the Blade* for the Relation of Archaeology to Social Science' (1988) in *World Futures*, Vol.25, pp.289 – 295, Gordon and Breach, Science Publishers, Inc.

'The First Wave of Eurasian Steppe Pastoralists into Copper Age Europe', *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Vol. 5, no. 4, Winter 1977

## AUDIO MATERIALS

I transcribed substantial passages from audio tapes of:

- Marija Gimbutas interviewed by Joan Marler on Pacifica Radio KPFA 94.1, recorded at Topanga. 8 October 1989
- The world premiere of *The Civilization of the Goddess*, including the lecture by Marija Gimbutas, Los Angeles. 8 November 1991
- Indana Films – Marija Gimbutas Interview with Kell Kearns, Interview/Producer. January 1990

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