

## What are the ancient roots of Goddess culture in which our modern Goddess spirituality is based?

by Freddie Finotto

*We are in search of our roots  
We go back to our home of spirit  
We love you with all our hearts  
We call to you, Great Mother of Safinim  
Maatreís, Maatreís, Ma-Ma-Ma-Maatreís*

As a Priest and Man, I worship the Great Goddess, She who is One and Many, immanent and transcendent, personal and impersonal, immutable and changeable, local and universal, within and without all creation, manifesting Herself through Nature, the landscape, the cycle of seasons, the wheel of the year.

In Avalon, Goddess manifests Herself as the Lady of Avalon, Lady of the Isle of Apples, Nolava of the Sacred Land. As I prepare to dedicate myself as a Priest of Avalon, re-mem-bering and reclaiming my sacred ancestry of Avalon, I was inspired to unearth and honour the roots that I have laid down into my homeland of Italy in this incarnation. These roots have urged me to co-found *Kaíla Maatreís* (Oscan for ‘Temple of the Great Mother’), a sacred community dedicated to *Maatreís*, the Great Mother of Safinim. I shall offer in this essay a brief overview of the body of knowledge and intuitions that have inspired and guided my soul sister Antonella Della Morte and me along this ongoing sacred endeavour.

**Safinim** is an Oscan (ancient language of Italy) word that identifies the ‘Land of the *Safineis* (or *Safinos*)’, a group of pre-Roman indigenous Italic people who shared a common ethnic origin and pastoralism, descended by populations who settled in Italy between the 7th and 5th Millennium BCE. This mytho-historical region covers much of modern-day Central and Southern Italy (*Viteliù* in Oscan), the mythical *Hesperia* (or *Oenotria*) in Ancient Greek, the ‘Land of the Sunset (and Wine)’, where the nymphs Hesperides, together with the dragon Ladon, guarded the garden of the golden apples of Hera, the Holy Heifer, Lady and Queen of the Earth. Hesperia, like Avalon, is the Western Paradise.



The Safineis of my birth region of Campania (Opici) used the archaic name ‘**Ma**’ to refer to the Earth Goddess of their land, who later became *Mater Tellus* by the Romans and *Ge/Geal/Gaia* by the Ancient Greeks.



The ancient Italic people also used the sound “ma” to indicate the passage between darkness and light, the morning, the white dawn. For this reason, the Goddess Ma is the Guardian of the Passage and the Announcer of the Birth of the Sun.

The letter “m” itself is considered to be sacred, since it symbolizes a manifestation of the fertile feminine that welcomes and gives. Graphically,



it depicts a woman sitting with open legs, ready to engage in sexual practices or childbirth.

Etymologically, “m” is derived from the Phoenician word for ‘water’, *mēm* (  ), believed to be a stylisation of the Egyptian hieroglyph for ‘water level’ (  ), which connects this letter to the vaginal and amniotic fluids and the menstrual flow. Goddesses related to this letter are *Mena* or *Mene*, the Roman Lunar Goddess of Fertility and Menstruation, the Ancient Greek *Meti*, or *Metide*, Goddess of Wisdom and Mother of Athena, the Etruscan *Menerva*, the Oscan *Mefitis*, ancient Goddess of Lake and River Waters, Sulphurous Springs, Goddess of Passage and Ecstatic intoxication.

Traditionally, the letter “a” represents the origin of all. In the Phoenician alphabet, it derives from the word for ‘ox’, *’ālep* (  ), cognate of the Egyptian hieroglyph depicting an ox’s head (  ), a symbol of nourishment and abundance. This shape of this letter suggests a connection between earth and sky, and its sound can help connect our low and high chakras.

‘Ma’ is at the heart of many common Italian and Indo-European words, such as Latin *mater*, Italian *mamma* and *materia* (‘matter’), English *mother* and *matrix*, and a plethora of Goddess names: Amma, Mae, Maia, Mata, Mater Matuta, Mari, Marica, Mahadevi, Maat, Mama Killa and many more. Among the Oscan peoples, ‘Ma’ became *Maatreís*.

**Maatreís** is the Great Mother of Safinim, She who is the Earth and the primordial Source of Creation, the Womb of Life, She who provides what we need. Her soil nourishes and gives humans stability, Her rocks solidify our bones, Her herbs cure us, Her trees give us oxygen, Her minerals are in our blood.



She is the Sacred Breath through which She inspires and whispers knowing into our ears. She is Lady of Abundance and Dark Mother: She is the fertile and pregnant earth belly that gives life and the earth cradle that welcomes the souls of the Dead in the Realm of Shadows.

Maatreís resides at the centre of the *Húrz*<sup>1</sup>, Oscan for the ‘Sacred Garden’. Worship areas, delimited by circular fences near oak woods and springs or rivers, were quite common among the Safineis. These Sacred Gardens (Húrz) contained numerous altars dedicated to different Divinities and *Numina* that shared common properties. Húrz Deities were celebrated at different times of the year, following a calendar of which the fence itself was an expression. To perform purification ceremonies, people stopped at each altar inside the Húrz. A central sacred fire was lit twice a year.

In the Kaila Maatreís tradition, the Húrz is the etheric expression of the Wheel of the Goddess, or Wheel of the Year. Through visualization, prayer and movement, the Húrz is

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<sup>1</sup> On the right, an image of the front side of the Oscan Tablet (British Museum), a bronze inscription detailing to what deities the Húrz of the Goddess Kerres was dedicated.

re-erected at the beginning of each ceremony. During the opening of the Húrz, the different faces of Maatreís are invoked with the multiple seasonal, archetypal and elemental energies of Goddess associated to each segment. *Maatreís* is the radiant point from which everything is created and to which everything returns; She is also the permeable circumference of the circle, the all-bearing, all-unifying Divine Womb, the Web of Existence and the Spider that incessantly weaves it.

The Húrz helps us harmonise ourselves with the natural cycles of the Earth, the Moon, the Sun. It is a multifunctional compass that guides us in the space and time and the spiritual dimension. It is a map for personal growth and evolution, a stylised representation of the macrocosm and the microcosmos, which enables us to deeply experience the Divine within us and within the world around us.

The Húrz is inspired by the Wheel of Avalon. Its elements, starting from the thinnest to the most dense and solid, correspond to the Realms of Existence and are part of the Manifestation Cycle (air-fire-water-earth), expression of all creation processes:

- Air in the North represents the spiritual dimension, our breath, our memories, inspiration, vision and our voice, the wind, the fog, the clouds and the resin of the plants.
- Fire in the East represents the mental dimension, our synapsis, our thoughts, the energy of our bodies and cells, our creativity, passion, courage, strength, will, actions, the Sun, lightning, heat, lava, essential oils and plant seeds.
- Water in the South represents the astral dimension, our emotions and feelings, our blood and our body fluids, plant sap and all the waters of the earth and the skies.
- Earth in the West represents the physical-etheric dimension, our bones, our body, the soil, the Earth, the rocks and crystals, the roots, bark and the fruits.

In-between the apical elemental points of the Húrz, we honour the following four archetypes:

1. *Futír* ('maiden') in the North-East.
2. *Herentas* ('lover') in the South-East.
3. *Maatuís* ('mother') in the South-West.
4. *Casnar* ('crone') in the North-West

which represent the Cycle of Life:

- Vegetable world: sowing, flowering, fullness and harvesting.
- Animal/human world : birth, youth, maturity, old age/death.
- Solar: sunrise, morning, afternoon, sunset.
- Lunar: new, ascending, full, waning.

Depending on whether we want to work with the energies of Maatreís specifically, or the energies of the various historically attested Goddesses of Safinim (including Etruscan Goddesses, worshiped in many areas of Campania, especially Capua), we use the 'Húrz of Maatreís' or the 'Húrz of Safinim', or a combination of both, as described below.

## Húrz of Maatreís



<i>North</i>	<b>Mana</b> , Air Mother, She who Breaths. Diva Geneta, Creatrix.
<i>North-East</i>	<b>Futír</b> , Divine Maiden, Kerres' daughter, Awakener, New Seed. The Free one, Maiden of Light, Regeneratrix, Virgin, Prophetess.
<i>East</i>	<b>Maia</b> , Fire Mother, She who Dances. Fertile One, Nourishing and Fruitful Goddess, Nurse and Midwife of the New Sun, Bearer of Rain, Shining Star.
<i>South-East</i>	<b>Herentas</b> , Lover, Lady of Desire.
<i>South</i>	<b>Mara</b> , Mother of Water, She who Sings.
<i>South-West</i>	<b>Maatuís</b> , Amma, Fertile Mother, Dispenser of Abundance and Morning Dew.
<i>West</i>	<b>Mata</b> , Mother of the Earth, She who Feeds.
<i>North-West</i>	<b>Casnar</b> , Crone, She who Transforms.
<i>Centre</i>	<b>Maatreís</b> , Great Mother of Safinim.



## Hürz of Safinim



### Vacuna (North)

Great Mother of the Sabines and Sabellians, also called *Angerona* or *Tacita*. Lady of Silence and of Winter Solstice, Guardian of the Mysteries, Bearer of Rest, Peace, Wisdom, Knowledge and Death. Mother of Souls, Source of Prophecy. Goddess of the Healing Sacred Waters, Lady of the Snakes, Dispenser of Gifts and Abundance for the new year.

### Other Goddesses:

- **Iuno-Uni.** Queen of Heaven and the Stars, Lady of the Storm, of the Monthly Kalends and the New Moon, She who Renews Herself, Protectrix of Birth and of Women, Lady of Beginnings, Queen of the Milky Way, Weaver of Dreams, Lady of Fate, White Lady, Sacred Heifer (*iunix*), Cosmic Mother, Goddess of the Life Force, She who Throws Lightning, who Grants Grace and Abundance, Benevolent One, Iuni/Yoni-universal One.
- **Strenia,** Strenua, Strina, Strinia, Strenna. Sabine Goddess, symbol of the new year, of prosperity and good luck, Bearer of Good Health and Willpower, Old Witch (Stria), Befana (Epiphany-Bifania), Norse Berchta, Holle, Grandmother of the Yuletide, She with the Luminous Face, Young and Old. From Her, the tradition of gift giving originated (green branches of verbena, laurel and olive, figs and apples, candles and terracotta figurines). Lunar Goddess of the Sacred Forest, Keeper of the Hearth and the Mystical Mystery of the Transmutation of Coal into Diamond, She who Renews and Regenerates Herself, turning into the Maiden.
- **Nurtia,** Nurti, Northia, Nursia, Athrpa, Atharpa, Voltumna, Urcla, Goddess of Flowing Time and of Fate (in Her temples, it was common to put a nail into the wall to count years). Sorceress who wards off evil, Ancient Moira, Weaver of Existence, Winged

Goddess. Also called *Bona Nortia Argentea*, perhaps to indicate her connection with the moon, water and healing, Lady of Oraciling and Divination, Goddess of Justice, also identified with Fortuna.

### **Vesuna** (North-East)

Vesuna, Vesolia, Vesona, Vesullia. Pan-Italic Goddess, also identified with Vesta, Feronia, or with Cupra. Lady of Awakening, of the Nature that is Reborn, She who Brings the Light that guides us out of the cold and dark winter, Lady of the Sacred Flame, Keeper of the Hearth, Protectrix of the Home and Family, Divine Midwife, Lady of Medicinal Herbs, Goddess of Healing, Protectrix of Woods, Animals and Births, Lady of Snakes, Ecstatic Maenad, Prophetess, young nymph, Lady of the Threshold and Fertility.

In Etruscan iconography, especially in scenes related to prophecy (Iecanomancy), she was depicted as a maenad in ecstasy, accompanying the God Fufluns, wearing fawn skin and a crown with a crescent moon.

Other Goddesses:

- **Februa**, Februo, Febris. God/dess of Sabine origin. Purifier, She who Frees the Breath of the Cosmos from Impurities, Savior, Auspicious One, Healer. Februa was invoked to burn and dissolve the ailments brought by winter, with particular attention to the swamp fevers.
- **Lucina**, Lucentia (epithet of Diana/Juno/Mater Matuta), Lusia/Lucia (epithet of Ceres). She who Carries the Seed of the Light in the Darkness of Winter, Keeper of the Mystery of Wheat, She who Guides us with Her Torch out of the darkest period of the year, She who Points the Way and Brings the Light to the Eyes, Sight in the Darkness, Opening of the Eyes at Birth, Veiled Lady who dispenses gifts of abundance and regeneration, traditionally flying on Her broom (or donkey) during the winter nights, with Her procession of fairies and souls, dispensing blessings.
- **Thesan**, Albina, Goddess of Dawn, Divination, Birth, Generation of Life, She who Opens the Gates of the Day, Renewal and Awakener, Goddess dressed in pink light, Etruscan *Thesan Tinś* ('Dawn of the Day') and *Thesan Eiseraś Šeuś* ('Dawn of the Gods of Darkness', or 'Dawn of the Evening'), Bright One, Winged Goddess, Midwife of Souls, She who Illuminates the Darkness and Sheds Light onto the Future and the Past, Mater Matuta, Mother of the Morning.

### **Perna** (East)

Perna, Pales, Pennina, Pelina, Magna Pale, Goddess of the Mountains, Woods and Pastoralism, Mountain Mother, Protectrix of Borders and of the Natural Order, Renovatrix, Demonstratrix, Regulatrix of the Balance between Wild and Cultivated Land, Goddess of Earth and Fire, Purifier, Protectrix and Healer, Lady of the Springs, Lady with Ram Horns, *Prena* (She who is Full of Life), Dispenser of Nourishment, Mother in Whose Womb the Seed Germinates.

Other Goddesses:

- **Menerva**, Menrva, Menrfa, Menarea, Mera, Virgin Goddess, Lady of Fire and the Arts, Wisdom and Strategy, of Herbal Medicine, Menerva Medica, Mene-Mena, Lady of the Moon and Menarche. Goddess of Mind and Thought, of Trades, of

Craftsmanship and of Commerce. Goddess of Healing Sulphurous Waters, Oracle Goddess (Sibyls were associated to Her).

- **Bellona**, Neriene, Neera (strength, virtue), Venus Bellona, Duellona, Powerful one, Impetuous one, Free and Wild Amazon, Sparkling Virgin, Protectrix of the Weak, Lady of Trumpets and Drums, Rescuer, Inspirer of Strength, Courage, Value and Honour, Lady of Victory, Beautiful Queen of Snakes, Brilliant Mother of Fire, Lady of Prophetic Summers and Vital Energy, Wild Dancer.
- **Feronia**, Sabine Goddess of Wild Nature and Life Force, of Fire and Water, of Wild Animals, Fertility, Health and Abundance. Lady who Grants Freedom to Slaves, Protectrix of Travellers. She who Fertilises and Heals. She receives the first fruits of the harvest, because She allows humans to tame the wild forces of vegetation, promoting the transformation of what is rough into what is grown. Fields, orchards, volcanoes and thermal springs are Her sacred places. Lady of the Fire of Reproduction and Vitality and of the Magma that moves under the Earth's crust. Firewalking can be offered to Her.
- **Cautha**, Catha, Cath, both Solar and Lunar Goddess, rising from the ocean, holding the burning flame, Daughter of the Sun (Usil), Eye of the Sun, Lady of Cats (cf. Sulis and Sol/Sunna, also Freya), Lady of New Beginnings. In Pyrgi, Cautha was worshipped alongside Thesan, Divinity of Spring and Aurora, and she may have played a role as a Guide of Souls towards Rebirth, or through the Underworld.

### **Fluusa** (South-East)

Fluusa, Flora, May Queen, Flowery One, Fruitful One, Goddess of Spring, Love, Sexuality and Pleasure, Flower Maiden, Sorceress of Herbs and Flowers, Fragrant and Voluptuous Dancer, Sweet like Honey, Fertile Lover.

Other Goddesses:

- **Turan**, Herentate, Venus, Alpan. Goddess (often winged) of Love, Sensuality, Desire and Sexuality, Beauty, Seduction, Youth, Fertility and Vitality, Lady of the *Lases* ('guardian deities'), She who Grants Grace. She also has a dark aspect, which reflects the binomial opposition love/death. Swan/Dove/Goose Goddess, Goddess of the Gardens.
- **Cubrar**, Cupra, Red Goddess, Good Goddess, Desired One, Goddess of Sacred Sexuality, Sea and Mountain Goddess.

### **Dijana** (South)

Dijana, Di-Jana, Dia Jana, Diana, Antiqua Janua, Eka Diana, Eka Coeli, Goddess of the Moon and the Waters, Queen of the Fairies, Lady of the Mystic Walnut, Guardian of the Passage, Goddess of the Lake. Diana Tifatina, Queen of Mountains and Woods. Dia, Diviana, Bear Mother, White Goose, White Doe, Domina Herbarum, Silvana, Iana, Stella Diana, Meridiana, Lady of the Springs and of the Lake. Lucifera, Bearer of Light, Trivia, Karyatide.

Other Goddesses:

- **Tana**, Thalna. Etruscan Goddess, sometimes associated to Uni, wife/lover of God Tinia. Perhaps related to Anat or Tanit. Protectrix of Women, Childbirth, Childhood and Prophecy. Goddess of Magic, of Transformation, Freedom/Liberation and the Stars.
- **Marica**, Mari, Mara, Maga, Enchantress, Nymph of the Waters and Swamps, Lady of Fertility, Protectrix of Pregnant Women and Children, Goddess of the Sea, Prophetess, Healer, Chthonic Goddess, Regulatrix of Life and Death, Diana of the Mouth of the River, Lady of Animals, of the Sacred Forest and of Magical and Healing Herbs, Aphrodite Pontia, Protectrix of Sailors, Sparkling like the Sun reflecting on the water.
- **Losna**, Lusna, Lala, Moon Goddess of the Sea and Tides, Eye of the Night, White Goddess.

### **Kerres** (South-West)

Kerres, Kerri, Keria, Ceres, Fertile Mother, Horta (Etruscan), Lady of the Cultivated Land, Dispenser of Gifts, Harvest Mother, Creatrix, Generatrix, Womb of Creation, Goddess of the Fields, Queen of the Hive.

Other Goddesses:

- **Maatuís**, Matura, Mater Matuta, Juno Matuta, Albunea, White Goddess, Mother of the Morning, Mother of the Dawn, Virgin Mother, Mother of the Waters, Lady of the Sea, Nurse, Mother of the Morning Dew, Mother of the Rising Sun, Announcer of the Day, Moon Goddess, Goddess of Childbirth, Manifested Nature, Goddess of the Origins, Morning Star, Light Bearer, Good Goddess, Midwife, Mefitis Domina Iovia.
- **Ati Catha**, Golden Mother of the Sun.

### **Opi** (West)

Opi, Ops, Dispenser of Gifts, Wealth and Abundance, Earth Goddess of the Vegetative cycle, Protectrix of Ripe Wheat, Mater Turrita, Crowned Sovereign.

Other Goddesses:

- **Pomona**, Liganakdíkei Entraí, Wife of Vertumno, Goddess of Fruits, Vegetation, Harvest and Autumn, Lady of the Orchard. Ligana Intera, Lady of the Deep Roots that Sink into the Earth, Lady of Nourishment, Protectrix of agreements and contracts. Lady of the Umbilical cord and Nourishment of the Foetus in Pregnancy.
- **Semia**, Semla, Semele, Earth Goddess, Mother of Fufluns (Bacchus/Dionysus), Goddess of Fertility, Joy and Wine, Lady of Seeds and Rooting.
- **Cels Ati**, Tellus, Gaia, Mother Earth.
- **Patanaí Piístiaí**, Goddess of Wine, of the Ear of Corn and of Threshing. Some identify Her to Panda, Roman Goddess of possible Sabine origin. *Empanada* or



*Empanda*, perhaps an epithet of Juno. Goddess of Kindergarten, Hospitality and Charity, She who Opens, Protectrix of Travelers and the Needy, especially in the countryside, to protect villages. Lady of Crushing, Trampling and Grinding, Protectrix of Cereal and Grape Processing, Mother of Abundance.

### **Mefitis** (North-West)

Dark Mother, Powerful and Wise Witch, Lady of the Scythe, Guardian of the Threshold and Guide of Souls. Chthonic Queen of the Ansanto Valley, navel of Italy and gateway to the Underworld, where Her Temple rose close to a pond of seething muddy and sulphurous waters, which emitted mephitic and dangerous gases.

Mefitis is the Matriarch, the Old and Wise Woman, Goddess of Occult Knowledge, Lady of the Mysteries of Night and Death, the Sulfur that Deeply Purifies. She is the Screaming and frightening Hag, the Destroyer, She who Mercilessly Cuts Everything that is Destined to Die, who dismembers, scrambles and constantly regenerates life in Her bubbling black cauldron, She is death, which is necessary for life. She is Midwife of Souls, She who Protects the Threshold and allows passage and communication between the worlds, She is the bridge between the physical, astral and spiritual dimensions. Her key opens doors, Her breath lifts the veil.

She is the one who cries and screams with us in moments of loss and suffering, who allows us to bring pain to surface and process it. She shows us our darkest shadows, our wounds, our fears and our demons, She is a Powerful Initiator. She leads us from Light to Dark and from Dark to Light. Like Hekate, she is a psychopomp, connected to oracular practices, linked to the magic of the moon and herbs, knower and teacher of the power of poisonous herbs, which can kill or heal, Guardian of the Threshold, Holder of the Key, She illuminates the way and the mind with the fire of Her torch.

Other Goddesses:

- **Deivai Genetai**, Diva Geneta, Mana Genita, Mania, terrifying Gorgon, Queen of the Moon, Heaven and Hell, Dark Mother, Lady of the Spirits of the Night and the Souls of the Dead.
- **Artume**, Artumes, Artames, Aritimi, Hekate, She who Transports Souls to the Otherworld, Patroness of Young Women, *Arduina*, Huntress, Lady of Animals, Goddess of the Night and Magic, armed with bow and arrows.

### **Vitula-Anagtia** (Centre)

**Vitula**, Vitellia, Vitalia, Heifer Goddess with Milking Breasts, Mother of the Sacred Land of Viteliú, Dispenser of Perpetual Gifts, of Sacred and Ecstatic Joy, Womb of Life and Cradle of Death, Lady Nature, Crowned with the Crescent Moon.

**Anagtia**, Angizia, Anaceta, Anxa, Anctia, Divia, Queen of Snakes, Powerful Sorceress, Lady of Healing Herbs and Poisons, Healer, Prophetess, Enchantress (cf. Morgana of Avalon), Funereal Goddess.