

Exploring Some Roots of Goddess Culture and Spirituality Today

Essay/homework by Marga in Spiral 3 Priestess Training



Goddess of Lauselle, 25 000 BC (Musée de l'Aquitaine)

Something is stirring deep within Earth. She is consciously and continuously giving birth to All Life Forms. Some of us became aware of that stirring - a vibration not physically felt but known deep within as we started to understand that we walked upon Her sacred body. Many of us got this awareness already as young children. Some of us were lucky enough to come from a culture where this was part of the common knowledge, while most of us were torn in between our own inner knowledge and the so called scientific opinions of the majority, which did not embrace the idea of a living Mother Planet, nor the ideas of a mighty Goddess - or a multitude of them. So how come that now, suddenly, this awareness is booming and blooming? Well, as a tree has many roots, so does this modern Goddess oriented spirituality. A tree can hardly grow great and strong without many roots that nourishes it - and it needs space for the branches and leaves to develop as well.

So what are the roots of this new Goddess Oriented Spirituality? Well, first of all Goddess is in the land speaking to each one able to hear Her. And hear Her we were better enabled to do through the praxis of shamanism, so when this praxis started anew in the -70's among western people, some realised that She was there and started to look deeper for Her in the myths while also speaking to Her, and listening for Her in the land. Second - She is actually alive - and has always been - among many indigenous people in the world and they have been trying to tell us about Her, wanting us to respect Her, but it took unto the -60's and 70's until some of us started to seriously listen to them... Third, She has always been easily found in the myths from all over the world - even in the fairy tales. Surely sometimes twisted and in disguise but there...

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Fourth, She has been speaking to us through the archeological findings, even though Her images was often misinterpreted by people who had biases from their own cultural upbringing. Here the science of anthropology has helped archeologists revealing Her as the authors and scientists at least tried to understand the religious ideas of many indigenous cultures and finally could think in manners that acknowledged female shamans, priestesses and The Sacred Feminine Power(s). Early on this started with Robert Graves book *The White Goddess* but much of this we have to thank great authors like Marija Gimbutas and Merlin Stone for. Fifth, Goddess arose again in Wicca, founded by Gerald Gardner in the 1950's and refined by the high priestess Doreen Valiente. Feminist activist Zsuzsanna Budapest found her way into Wicca and were not to interested in neither the God part or the High Priest part. She created a Goddess Oriented form, the Dianic Wicca, in the middle of the -70's that gave a great upswing to Goddess Spirituality. Here I really have to mention Starhawk to (who once trained with Zsuzsanna), as one of the most influential women in the Goddess movement. Who didn't read her *Spiral Dance*? Sixth

root could be Jungian, or rather post Jungian female authors in the 1980's¹. Seventh root - novels of fiction and fantasy - I believe that the Goddesses of the world have always had a highway to our minds through stories, such as *The Mists of Avalon*, as it stirs something old within our souls... Up here in Scandinavia other authors has brought the Norse pantheon alive again, mainly focusing on male Gods but including some of the Goddesses as well.

As the eight root I will name the Glastonbury Goddess Temple, founded by Kathy Jones who has done a great work when it comes to inspire and initiate many women into the Goddess Spirituality. Every year now new priestesses (and a few priests) all over the world self initiate through Kathy Jones's and Erin McCauliff's Priestess of Avalon trainings, or in other trainings which originate in those, so now there are priestesses of Rhiannon, Kerridwen, Freya, Hel, Sea priestesses and many more. This movement is growing and Goddess is alive and well - and Her servants are eager to wake the sleeping Goddesses all over Europe...

¹ such as "five biographical 'rebirth' memoirs published between 1981 and 1998: Christine Downing's (1981) *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine*; Jean Shinoda Bolen's (1994) *Crossing to Avalon: A Woman's Midlife Pilgrimage*; Sue Monk Kidd's (1996) *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine*; Margaret Starbird's (1998) *The Goddess in the Gospels: Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine*; and Phyllis Currott's (1998) *Book of Shadows: A Modern Woman's Journey into the Wisdom of Witchcraft and the Magic of the Goddess*" (source: <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/7313/>)

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There are probably as many roots left as those I have mentioned, if not more - and the ones mentioned are not chronological but rather entwined and I wish to explore some of them a bit further here.



From the early days of humanity we (the humans) have known that She was in the very land we walked upon. She was also seen in the stones, trees and plant life, and in the animals we hunted. We knew Her as the Mother with the horn of abundance, bringing forth a steady flow of life forms, all living from each other. Culture after culture all around Earth have praised Her until the warring waves of patriarchal conquering tribes arose and slowly managed to hide Her greatness and Her story under their stories. The tales about wicked dragons with their monster babies, the jealous wives of the great gods and eventually the evil fairy queens and witches - all came from the conquering cultures as the victorious ones always write history... We can follow the myths and archeological findings in the Middle East and see the mighty Goddess and Her story changing, as She changes from Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth into the Babylonian Ishtar and later into Mary - still often carrying the symbols of heaven and earth when depicted, but loosing power in the religious texts.

In the Babylonian myth Tiamat, the first dragonlike Goddess of salt water, mated with Apsu, the sweet water and gave birth to the first life forms. Marduk, the so called hero God, killed Tiamat, and created the world from her body and Milky Way from Her tail. Some scientist, including Merlin Stone (if I remember right) has seen this as one of the first descriptions of the fall of the matriarchy. Whether there was a matriarchy or not, Goddess was honoured among people in almost all cultures until the three "new" religions of Middle East (christianity, islam and judaism) invaded big parts of the Earth. How this came about is disputed, but as we have seen that colonialism paired with monotheism works in this sinister way, so it might have happened before as well... What is interesting is how people managed to somehow keep in touch with Goddess. In the catholic version of christianity people had a chance to disguise their great Goddess and female deities in the shapes of Virgin Mary and some female saints, which we can see even today in the Vodou religion of Haiti, but otherwise Her picture was seldom seen or heard of. Also among the Sami people in Northern Scandinavia the Virgin Mary came to embody the traditional female deities and help keep them somehow alive, even through the harsh Lutheranism that was forced upon these indigenous groups. Here no pictures



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were allowed at all so She had to be kept in utmost secret among the families. What they did have was the Hearth, Nature, and the Seites, that is special formations of stones or trees made by nature and honoured as divine places where offerings were left and prayers given.



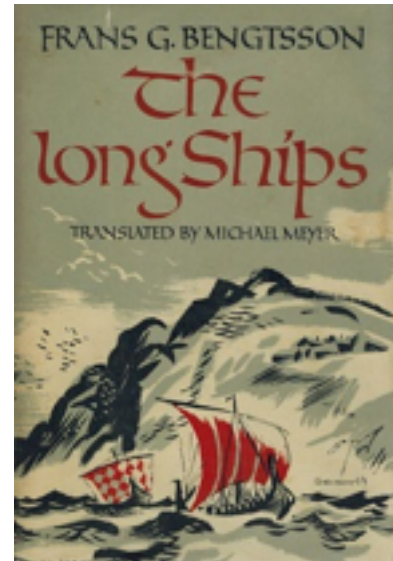
These three patriarchal religions brought with them the notion that Earth herself were dead matter for the human men to use as they liked - a manner in which they also managed to treat the whole female population of Earth, and the children and the animals... (Now I know that I tell not only the story of what we call the "West", because patriarchy reached much further than so, even before colonisation.) What might be of interest for us, as we search the roots of our Goddess Spirituality today, is maybe that the scientific "revolution" weakened the grip of the Christian church, in the West, so that new religious thoughts were at all possible without the thinker being burnt at the stake... And when thinking was again more freed from religion and religious customs, a new great source for re-exploring the greatness of Goddess came from feminism. Some of the great feministic explorers of the myths and archeological remains from Goddess oriented cultures were inspired by the ideas of the 19'th century scientist Johann Jacob Bachofen, a historian of law, who also inspired Engels. Early marxists and some feministic spokespersons embraced, in parts, his ideas of a overthrown matriarchy (of course under the protests of a whole lot of others). For the marxists it was much about the roots of capitalism; for the feminists it was more about the roots of how women became inferior to men - but importantly - there was some female scientists who woke to the sense of an entirely different way to look upon the world, the Earth and our relation to it - a culture where Earth was our friend and mother, a culture where we nurtured and respected Her and each other... Two of these scientist, the archeologist Marija Gimbutas and sculptor and art professor Merlin Stone, literally unearthed Goddess from some of the layers of dust that patriarchy shovelled over Her. I cannot say that I agree with them on everything they say about matriarchy, Goddess cultures or the reasons for the patriarchy ruling the world, but I surely can acknowledge the importance of their work and see it as an important root of todays Goddess Spirituality.

In school we learned about the myths and pantheon of the Mediterranean areas and met Goddess as Afrodite, Artemis, Hecate, and many more powerful Goddesses. We also met the jealous Hera who had to stand that Her husband Zeus ran after all women and Goddesses, which made Hera punish the women or Goddesses rather than punishing Zeus. Maybe that is the cover up story for how women compete with each other - and a mirror for how we are made to act in a culture where women are inferior to men? Amazingly enough, and another cultural mirror, is that I never learnt

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about the Norse religion and pantheon in school here - and kids still don't necessarily do. Luckily there are books, and authors that tried to make the history come alive through fiction - so I think that fiction novels is a root that brought interest in Goddess (and Gods) to the women and men of our time. Myself I read a lot of historical fiction novels, and I was not alone. But a neo paganistic movement in Sweden did not take place until the interest for Native American Spirituality and shamanism bloomed. Once it did, one of the invited teachers, Rolling Thunder, asked his audience why they didn't look into their own roots for a spirituality that was their own rather than copying the North American indigenous ones. So, a small group started to experiment with a Norse shamanism inspired by the Norse myths, and this included the start of working anew with Seidr. This was not even thought of as the start of a Goddess movement but a Norse Pagan one, and soon people realised what a treasure we had up here. I joined this movement myself in 1992. One of the important women, when it comes to Seidr and the recovering of the Vólva, the Female Shaman In the North, is Anette Høst, shamanic teacher at *the Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies* in Denmark. In Sweden the shamanic circles were still quite patriarchal in structure, so I chose to learn from the Danish, Anette Høst and Jonathan Horwitz, but however and with whomever people studied, the Norse myths became very important. There we met Goddess in the Norse tradition as Freya, Frigga, Hel, Ran, Idun and a whole lot more names



from our rich panteon. We also became interested in the myths among the Sami people where She is MaddrAkka with Her three daughters, and Beave, the great Sun Goddess. On Her sun rays the human beings are said to walk down to earth to incarnate. So in a way She was always the center of the Universe, which can be seen in the picture of the drum.



Many of the women who were among the early ones experimenting with shamanism are great personalities who brought forth the Goddesses in Seidr and songs during the ceremonies. And all of us who came in contact with the Northern brands of neo shamanism got inspiration to study the Norse myths and pantheon deeper - in theory and practise. It still was not a Goddess Spirituality, although one in which Goddess was strong. Now we see the shamanic- and Goddess movements intertwining - from Tealogists to Seidr priestesses - many of whom are inspired by the Priestess of Avalon

trainings that gave obviously added something that we needed. I look forward to see how this develops and I hope that we will also be able to support our indigenous sisters who always fought - and still fight for PachaMama, Mother Earth or which ever sacred name they might have given Her.

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Image sources:

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Morgan le Fay: <http://www.ancient-origins.net/sites/default/files/Legends-of-King-Arthur.jpg>

Triple Goddess Pentagram: https://img0.etsystatic.com/016/0/5170423/il_340x270.419945022_iw9l.jpg

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Drum image: <https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaivi>