

DNA evidence reaffirming aspects of the research of Prof. Gimbutas invites us to revisit ancient woman-honoring societies and the resurgence of the Women's Movement. Both promote action to reclaim the sacred nature of all creation and women's right to fully participate in all areas of social life.

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Ancient (Egalitarian) Societies, Modern (Women's) Marches

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by [Liz Fisher](#)

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Events today move quickly but they also have a “spirally through time” quality. I have been struck recently by the synchronicity of two recent developments: one reopening a nature-honoring and goddess centered interpretation of early cultures; and the other an upsurge in our contemporary culture of women asserting their right to equal gender relations.

The first was a presentation recently at the University of Chicago by a prominent British archeologist concerning the inferences of recent DNA findings about the development of ancient Neolithic Europe. The second was the outpouring around the world this past weekend, and last January, of millions of women demonstrating for equality and social justice, supported by men and children who also attended these gatherings. Here's what has been happening.



DNA Confirmation of Gimbutas' Hypothesis



Those of us who believe in equal relationships among all peoples and the sacredness of Nature are also interested in ancient egalitarian cultures described by Marija Gimbutas, an accomplished archeologist. Dr. Gimbutas was the author of 20 books and more than 200 articles on European prehistory and folklore. She was an authority on the prehistoric incursions of Indo-European speaking people into Europe and how they changed society there.

Dr. Gimbutas assembled, classified, and interpreted some 2000 symbolic artifacts from the Neolithic Village sites of Europe. She analyzed patriarchal cultures and contrasted them to peaceful societies that her research revealed in Eastern Europe, Turkey, Malta and elsewhere. The UU Curriculum *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven*, first published by the UUA in 1986, and revised in 2007, introduced many of us to the work of Marija Gimbutas.



Controversy over Pre-History Interpretations

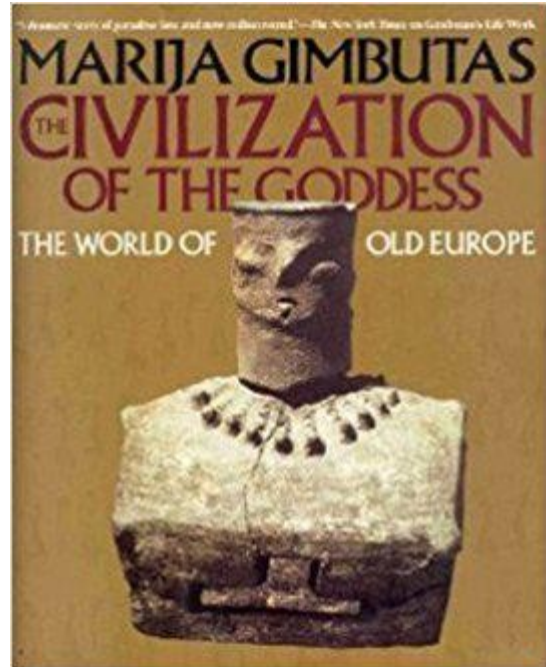
Dr. Gimbutas claimed peaceful Old European communities that worshipped a Mother Goddess had been invaded and violently overcome by patriarchal tribes who honored a Father-Creator. She called this the Kurgan Theory. This conclusion was thought to be incorrect by some archeologists and religious leaders who publically questioned her findings. Even though other academics and theologians did agree with her hypothesis and thought it should be considered, her detractors were able to get her point of view removed from academic curricula and ignored in theological discussions.

Now it has been confirmed by DNA testing that the sky-god worshipping Kurgans did in fact invade the cultures of Old Europe. Dr. Colin Renfrew, a pre-eminent archeologist from the University of Cambridge, England, gave a lecture at the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago last fall about Marija Gimbutas. Once one of Gimbutas' greatest critics, Prof. Renfrew now proclaims that this new DNA evidence vindicates her work, at least in this key aspect of the invasions. This is important because these findings encourage the reconsideration of all of Dr. Gimbutas' work. You can see his lecture by clicking [Prof. Colin Renfrew's lecture about Marija Gimbutas](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmv3J55bdZc).

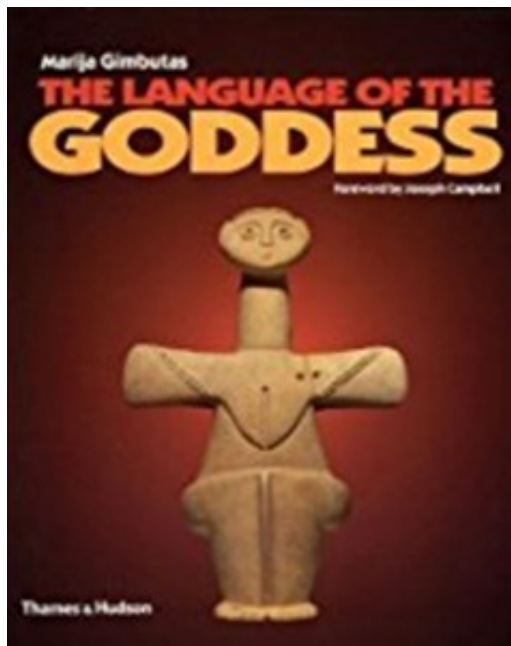
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmv3J55bdZc>)

Joan Marler, editor of Gimbutas' important second book *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe* is the founder of the Institute of Archaeomythology which has published a wealth of information about this work. She explains the importance of Gimbutas' theory of Kurgan invasions in her article. To read it, click [The Kurgan Theory by Joan Marler](http://belili.org/marija/marler_article_02.html) (http://belili.org/marija/marler_article_02.html)

Marler makes this summary statement: "By defining Old Europe as the foundation of European civilization, and hypothesizing the beginnings of patriarchy as a later phenomenon, simultaneous with the Indo-Europeanization of the continent, Gimbutas' Kurgan Theory challenges the doctrine of universal male dominance that has functioned as the origin story of Western civilization."



Unity, Peace and Creativity



The words of Prof. Gimbutas best present her findings about the spirituality of this era. In her book *The Language of the Goddess* published in 1989 she says: "The Goddess in all 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. Hence the holistic and mythopoeic perception of the sacredness and mystery of all there is on Earth."

Peace and non-violence were characteristics of these cultures. Maria Gimbutas says in *The World View of the Culture of the Goddess*, a section in *The Language of the Goddess*: "This culture took keen delight in the natural wonders of *this* world.

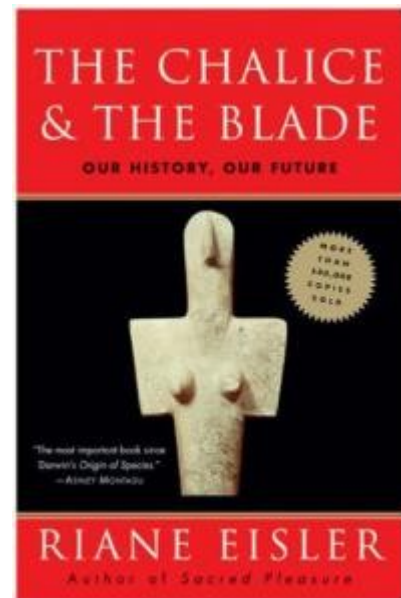
Its people did not produce lethal weapons or build forts as their successors did, even when they were acquainted with metallurgy. Instead, they built magnificent tomb-shrines and temples, comfortable houses in moderately-sized villages, and created superb pottery and sculptures. This was a long lasting period of remarkable creativity and stability, and age free of strife. Their culture was a culture of art."



Joseph Campbell, in his foreword to the *Language of the Goddess*, contrasts the religious beliefs of societies that Gimbutas describes with later Father-Creator ones. He says: “Marija established the themes of a religion that venerated both the Universe as the living body of a Goddess-Mother Creator and of all the living things within it as partaking of Her divinity – a religion in contrast to that of Genesis 3:19 where Adam is told by his Father-Creator: ‘In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust you shall return.’ In this earlier mythology, the earth out of which all these creatures have been born is not dust by alive, as the Goddess-Creator herself.”

Another source of information and inspiration on the relationship between ancient cultures and modern concerns is the works of Riane Eisler which are offered on her website [Center for Partnership Studies](#).

The bestselling book *Chalice and the Blade* by Riane Eisler is now celebrating its 30th anniversary and has been republished with a new epilogue by Eisler. It discusses these ancient cultures and their relevance today. Other books by Eisler, including the *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economy*, take up the concerns of those who have been marching and organizing around modern day concerns.



Contemporary Relevance

Does this interpretation provide lessons that relate to what we are going through currently? I believe it does. I remember growing up with the patriarchal monotheistic worldview of religion as the only possible sacred story. It left the female, and by extension, me, and all women, out of the positive aspects of the creation story. In the patriarchal creation story, a woman, Eve, is represented as weak, talking to the snake, another sacred being in Old Europe who in this version confers evil to Eve. Female bodies were seen as tempting the religious male away from God. War was inevitable. Then we heard a different story, an older story, confirmed by the findings of Marija Gimbutas. Hearing this story in the presence of others as we sat in spiritual circles created a paradigm shift.

“The Goddess-centered religion existed for a very long time... leaving an indelible imprint on the Western psyche.” — Marija Gimbutas

This fresh perspective gave women back our innocence, our self-respect and our appreciation for the processes of our own sacred bodies. It reminded us of our responsibility to be involved in society and the world. These stories also have appeal for men who have been able to step away from the traditional domination story of men over women and claim their own caring qualities.

Women’s Marches – Female Leadership

Moving forward to present day. On January 20-21 marches all across North America and around the world were broadcast on television so we all could participate. The phrases *#MeToo* and *#TimesUp* protesting sexual abuse toward women were on the minds of many marchers. Signs also called attention to immigration policies and LGBT rights. At rallies women were urged to run for leadership positions at all levels of government. Speakers affirmed women’s contributions to varied social institutions and the family.



One of the central focuses of the protests is a woman’s right to control her own body. In the landmark Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade* which was handed down 45 years ago this week, women were granted the right of privacy, protecting our ability to make our own decisions about when or whether to become mothers. For more information on what the UU Women’s

Federation is doing to advocate for women’s right to choice and to protect the full range of services for women’s reproductive needs, including access to birth control, see [UUWF Actions](https://www.uuwf.org/actions). (<https://www.uuwf.org/actions>)

It seems to me, then, that the DNA evidence reaffirming aspects of the research of Prof. Gimbutas which invites us to revisit ancient woman-honoring societies and the resurgence of the Women’s Movement both promote action. This extends to reclaiming the sacred nature of all creation and women’s right to fully participate in all areas of social life. The evidence of peaceful societies where women and men were able to co-exist and flourish in equal partnership continues to inspire us. Those who speak out invite us all to continue to make our own voices heard whenever and however we can.

Art credits:

Antithetic spirals whirl around this lidded vase, stimulating the life power of the central egg, which is marked with a net design. Cucuteni, Romania, c. 42nd-41st centuries B.C. Plate 22 from *The Language of the Goddess: Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization* by Marija Gimbutas.

Portrait of Marija Gimbutas, 1970 (*Institute of Archaeomythology* archives)

Illustration of a ceramic dish decorated with double eggs, joined by a snake, symbol of becoming. Western Ukraine, c.3500 BC, from *The Language of the Goddess*, by Marija Gimbutas. Figure 248-1, page 161.

Cover of *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe*, 1991 by Marija Gimbutas (Author), Joan Marler (Editor)

Cover of *The Language of the Goddess: Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization*, 1989 by Marija Gimbutas (Author), Joseph Campbell (Foreword)

Illustration of a terracotta figurine. Northwest Bulgaria; 5000-4500 BC, from *The Language of the Goddess*, by Marija Gimbutas. Figure 257(a), page 165.

Cover of *Chalice and the Blade* by Riane Eisler reissued with new epilogue in 2017. Available in Kindle format.

Women's Marches photo, REX/Shutterstock featured on Facebook page of Women's March 2018.

Additional Resources on Marija Gimbutas:

The Women's Well: Women's Way, Women's Wisdom, Women's Spirituality.

<http://womenswell.org/marija.html>

Belili Productions — An important film *Signs Out of Time* about Marija Gimbutas. It includes statements by many scholars explaining the significance of her work. For more information: <http://belili.org/marija/aboutmarija.html>

[To watch Signs Out of Time on YouTube, click here](#)

Website dedicated to Marija with links to everything that relates to her work

<http://marijagimbutas.com/biography.html>

The Living Goddesses by Marija Gimbutas; edited and supplemented by Miriam Robbins Dexter © 1999. Available in Kindle format.

Liz Fisher is a professional writer and editor, the author of the courses *Rise Up and Call Her Name: A Woman-honoring Journey into Global Earth-based Spiritualities* and *Gender Justice: Women's Rights are Human Rights* and a variety of essays and publications. For more information and to read her writings, see www.RiseUpandCallHerName.com