PRAISE FOR *VIBRANT VOICES*



So many forces in our hypermodern culture have denied the ancient triad of women, art, and the sacred that we can barely grasp all that has been lost to us. *Vibrant Voices* makes an insightful and deeply beautiful contribution to the recovery, as well as inspiration for creative new directions.

— Charlene Spretnak, author of *The Spiritual Dynamic in Modern Art, 1800 to the Present*

A stunning testimony to the importance of the path-breaking, boundary-crossing work of the Association for the study of Women and Mythology.

— Carol P. Christ, author of *Goddess and God in the World and A Serpentine Path*

This stunning volume reveals and celebrates the female divine through artistry, poesy, and superb scholarship. The thorough integration of historical, experiential, and visionary voices is a pivotal achievement. *Vibrant Voices* is an essential guide and touchstone for all future work on women and mythology.

— Miranda Shaw, author of *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* and *Buddhist Goddesses of India*

This collection of wisdom of foremothers of women's spirituality is indispensable for understanding the possibilities today in the midst of converging environmental, political, gender, and spiritual crises - - and to birthing a new civilization where nobody is 'othered' everybody creates a society of love and justice.

— Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, author of *Dark Mother* and *Future Has an Ancient Heart*

SAMPLE

This Anthology is an amazing amalgam of art, vision and scholarship by women dedicated to bringing Goddess consciousness to light in whatever form She is experienced and expressed. That Her presence has prevailed across cultures throughout time attests to the power of women spirit rising now to create Mother World in Her image. Her powerful presence across cultures throughout time gives hope that this troubled world can yet be re-created in Her image, as attested to by the power of women rising today! That She continues to emerge across cultures throughout time is a balm to the soul in today's troubled world.

— Musawa, founder of *We'Moon Gaia Rhythms for Womyn*

This is a rich and beautiful volume, presenting a vivid conversation among goddess scholars and artists working in many genres. In many of the chapters the text offers important insights into the artists' own journeys. In addition, the book takes seriously issues of indigenization and decolonialization in order to further a practice of transformational multiculturalism. Congratulations to all who brought this book into being. I am moved and inspired by this work.

— Mary Jo Neitz, Professor Emerita, Women's and Gender Studies, University of Missouri

This is an engaging and fascinating volume with a broad array of offerings. It features interdisciplinary and embodied research from diverse perspectives — those of emerging voices as well as familiar voices of established scholars and foremothers in the women's spirituality movement. The narrative, enriched with poetry, art images, and photographs, ensures that *Vibrant Voices: Women, Myth, and the Arts* is aptly titled. Anyone interested in mythological and archaeomythological studies, ritual studies, iconography, art and creative processes, women's studies, women's spirituality, and goddess spirituality will find a rich selection from which to gain inspiration, to explore and savor.

— Susan G. Carter, Ph.D.

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VIBRANT VOICES:
Women, Myth, and the Arts

PROCEEDINGS OF THE ASSOCIATION
FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN AND MYTHOLOGY
VOLUME II



Edited by
Sid Reger and Marna Hauk

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"Storytelling and Goddess Scholarship" by Nancy Vedder-Shults was previously published in *SageWoman*, Volume 83, Winter 2012, pp. 63-65. Reprinted by permission.

DEDICATION

This volume is dedicated to Mary B. Kelly and Lydia Ruyle, foremothers in art and research. Each of them brought to life images and symbols of goddesses in world cultures, inspired countless artists, scholars, and students, and shared their wisdom with our founders.

We also dedicate this book to our personal foremothers, who gave us our love of words and images:

> Carol Ashby Reger, artist and lover of nature and folklore, whose generosity and enthusiasm inspired many to find the art forms of their lives.
>
> Barbara Louise Hauk, artist and poet, who authored multiple volumes of poetry and co-edited the poetry magazine Pearl for more than twenty years with two other amazing women.

May these women's works spark future explorations of the arts and mythology.

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FOREWORD

JUDY GRAHN



Art has always a major part of the development and wisdom teachings of women's spirituality, from the earliest known stone goddess icons to the sometimes controversial and often political art shows in contemporary times. Judy Chicago's installations, including *The Dinner Party*, are only the best known of what has been a continual outpouring of visual interpretations of the sacred feminine since the resurgence of women's spirituality in conjunction with waves of feminism and women's activism, especially since the late 1960s. These early movement images were skillfully contextualized by art critics such as Lucy Lippard, Gloria Feman Orenstein, and Elinor Gadon and by works by artists as various in approach as Yolanda Lopez, Mayumi Oda and Monica Sjöö. It is no surprise, then, but sheer delight to find that this book is primarily an art volume, with plenty of reflection and a plethora of color images accompanied by explanatory essays and representing contemporary artists from many traditions. The essays add to our sensual experiences as well as to our ever-expanding knowledge base of exactly what qualities goddess practices and beliefs bring to the human table, and they address how we can more effectively learn to call on the spirit powers that can help to guide us and unite us in the current crisis-ridden times.

The art does not simply illustrate a concept. It actually *is* the concept. It also is a knowledge-endowing text, in part because of the historic layer that is always present and in part because the artists frequently use their art to imaginatively replicate possible deeper cultural, spiritual, communal and psychological meanings from the past or present. Such an artist in this volume is Aprina Murwanti, who defines herself as an Asian Javanese Muslim woman artist and whose installation art was created for the goddess Sri, uses *lurik* cloth to portray the pregnancy safety ritual *Mitoni*, which the

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artist experienced firsthand during her own pregnancy. Murwanti closely describes her use of bricolage—mixed media of nontraditional materials—in creating sewn-cloth soft sculpture figures at floor level that cast dramatic shadows high on the wall, implying a goddess with powers that fill the space both subjectively and objectively, an immanent goddess who occupies one's body while simultaneously watching from overhead. In Murwanti's essay, one experiences the art, even flat on the page, and simultaneously learns and feels something about the culture and character of the goddess.

This simultaneous combination of the subjective and the objective is what artist Laura Fragua-Cota calls her voice through "many languages of art." Her Pueblo Indian village scenes depict dances, sculpted and painted faces of members of the community, masked men dressed in deer antlers and dancing a blessing for the animals, and Mother Earth dressed in dark blue and pouring out water and abundance. Fragua-Cota herself has participated in Pueblo dances, and her art offering, like others in this volume, conveys the seamless fluidity between human lives and other earth lives, held together by spirit.

The invitational qualities and broad diversity of origin and expression of the selections in this volume—including an essay on the impossibility of depicting the Yoruba goddess Oshun, because she is a divine energy—are balanced by histories of the colonization that the foremothers and preservers of indigenous religions and community have had to endure. This historic truth, which continues to this day, is further balanced by thoughtful essays by Christina Rose Smith, about decolonizing the self, and by Kathryn Henderson, about ways that a seeker of current goddess knowledge from living traditions not her own can avoid the pitfalls of appropriation and misuse of partially learned practices. Inclusion is crucial at this time, and "the door is opening," she says. Walk through it.

An optimism pervades this volume, perhaps in part because, as Joan Marler says, making art is itself a form of praying but also because, I feel, these artists and authors are pointing us toward the future, toward what is possible.

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INTRODUCTION: VIBRANT VOICES: WOMEN, MYTH, AND THE ARTS

Sid Reger, Marna Hauk and Cristina Biaggi



Paints fly out across sacred texts, forming words. Strings, flutes, and tambourine delight and ripple out: Music, in a welcome, echoes in the constellations. Women and goddesses awaken and converge. A bridgework forms from our world to this exceptional convergence. These sentinels—the wisdom carriers, path blazers, summoners, stokers of powers, old friends, world makers, heart tenders and catalysts of gifts—turn to welcome us and crowd the bridge from their realm to ours.

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There is an old proverb that states that when you stand to do good in the world everyone who has ever done the same stands with you. From the beginning of humanity, art has been the sacred and necessary work of women. When we celebrate women's creativity and scholarship, we can feel the presence of all of those who came before us in creating art for the good of individuals and community. In this spirit, we have collected these articles and artworks.

> *We make space for voices and ideas that represent the emergent cresting wave of the field of women and mythology. We include bold voices, tender voices, voices at the front of the frothing wave of academic research in the field and voices from the margins.*

As the Association for the Study of Women and Mythology (ASWM) has gathered in large conferences alternating with regional symposia, so too these articles are the gifts of convergence dedicated to women and myth. This book represents the same values, the same variety of offerings and

the same balance between academic and personal ways of knowing that we encourage in ASWM's events. We invite women's curiosity, creativity and conversation.

> *This book, this text and the offerings within it are the hymns, tunes, susurrations, and insights of this gathering of energies across time and space. Here dedicated scholars, priestesses, colleagues and friends share their research and wonderings about this most passionate topic: the arts. The inquiries include as scholarship all creative works—visual arts, textiles, sculpture, dance, poetry, dream, altar making and storytelling.*

This book, *Vibrant Voices: Women, Myth and the Arts*, includes a diversity of voices from the wave crest of women and mythology. It is divided into five sections: From the Beginning: Research into Images of the Female Divine; Inquiry into the Art of Experiencing the Goddess; Honoring Our Artist–Scholar Foremothers; Artists, Their Words and Their Works; and Herstories and Solidarities.

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From the Beginning: Research into Images of the Female Divine

In "Art, Myth, and the Sacred Feminine," Arisika Razak sets the context for the volume by providing a deep-time view of the foundations of modern scholarship about women and the arts. She traces the origins of art as a necessary response to our sacred connections with spirit and land and to our earliest beginnings. She firmly places women's creativity at the center of human survival and advancement.

Miriam Robbins Dexter examines and documents sacred display figures that countered, with humanity and humor, the fierce extremes of patriarchy. In this article, she tracks the widespread, persistent use of figures that display female genitalia for both warding off attack and protecting women and the land.

Yuria Celidwen addresses the complexity of native populations' relationships with three archetypes of the divine female: the Lady of Guadalupe, Tonantzin and Coatlicue. She invites us to confront the shadow side of

cultural icons that were imposed by colonizers but that persist as symbols of resistance and reconciliation.

Aprina Murwanti examines the *Mitoni*, the Javanese pregnancy ritual associated with Sri, the most important Javanese goddess, and the political and religious reasons for the decline of her presence in contemporary society. Murwanti uses practice-led research with visual and textile installation art—specifically, ritual woven sacred cloths—to study this goddess, whose culture is being resuscitated through this ritual.

Inquiry into the Art of Experiencing the Goddess

In Section 2 of this volume, scholars explore how nondominant modes of inquiry, including dreams, altars and rituals, are vital to scholarship about women and myth. A personalized approach to research is exemplified by Mei-Mei Sanford's examination of representations of the orishas—female and male deities who appear and interact with their devotees through trance, dreams and apparitions. Her exploration of non-iconic images of the divine and iconic exceptions in Yoruba religion focuses on nature, trance and art and the goddess Osun.

Toni Truesdale reflects on the fact that women's dwellings have traditionally been considered spiritual places of prayer, safety and sustenance. Through her vibrant, colorful illustrations, she gives voice and image to the idea that the hearth, fire, food and altars are metaphoric examples of the importance that women have placed on their daily life-sustaining routines.

Marna Hauk explores ancient dream temples, using dream recovery techniques to explore diverse modes of co-evolutionary contact that have the potential for healing and transformation. Hauk shares her arts-based findings and research, resuscitating ancient Hygeian dream healing ceremonies and practices to liberate the prophetic power of dreaming for social healing and for regenerating living earth systems and women's power.

Honoring Our Artist–Scholar Foremothers

Section 3 includes tributes to two artist–scholars, foremothers who not only shared their creative work with us but were instrumental in providing ASWM leaders with guidance through its early years as members of the advisory board. We celebrate the tapestry of culture making that lives in and through the legacies of these two amazing artists.

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Lydia Ruyle (1935–2016) is best known for her series of Spirit Icon Banners, more than 300 larger-than-life banners of goddesses from many traditions, which have been featured in pilgrimages, festivals and conferences around the world. She also was a pioneer in restoring women to the field of art history. Her goals were to restore women's contributions to the public consciousness and to inspire her students to further study. Because much has been written about Lydia elsewhere, we have chosen to include a biography with a personal connection: one written by her longtime friend Joan M. Cichon. Joan's article includes a remembrance by Lydia's niece Katie Hoffner, which demonstrates Lydia's vigorous, determined approach to discovering and studying goddess artifacts wherever they were to be found.

Mary B. Kelly (1936–2016) was another remarkable artist-scholar whose research into women's textile arts greatly expanded our understandings of symbolism in folk art. In addition to painting and creating textiles, Mary wrote books about sacred weaving and ritual cloths. Those books are invaluable contributions to goddess scholarship, making visible the forgotten symbolic language of European textiles. Joan Marler's tribute to Mary makes clear that Mary's art and research both grew from her appreciation of the spiritual foundation of art. Because the online listing of much of Mary's work no longer exists, we have added to this article a complete list of her scholarly publications. We hope that this bibliography will facilitate further study of her remarkable work. We also have included images of Mary's series of goddess paintings, which she created in response to her research discoveries. We have included an appendix listing of her scholarly publications.

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Artists, Their Works and Their Words

From the earliest planning stages, ASWM founders Patricia Monaghan and Sid Reger defined goddess scholarship as including representations and discussions of the arts. They recognized that many artists contribute to the advancement of knowledge through their creations and through innovative, independent scholarship. Section 4 of this volume presents the work of three contemporary artists whose visions from a diversity of cultures and folk traditions advance our understanding.

Cristina Biaggi extols Medusa's apotropaic gaze, using Medusa images from the National Archaeological Museum of Taranto as well as her own

work inspired by Medusa. Her sculptures capture both the benevolent and the enraged aspects of this misunderstood goddess.

Laura Fragua-Cota shares her widely varied work—sculptures, two-dimensional work, mixed media and poetry—inspired by the Pueblo Indians and their past and present culture. Her article addresses the symbolic and narrative conveyance of Pueblo prayers and blessings and provides critical reflections on colonization and cultural appropriation.

Finally, Lydia Ruyle's lecture notes about mermaids represent a work in progress that she presented in the year before her passing. Ruyle explores the herstorical cultural iconography of the mermaid across cultures and shares her banner images of mermaid-related goddesses, including the Fish Goddess of Lepenski Vir, Melusine, Oshun, Sedna, Nu Gua and Mami Wata.

Section 4 also includes a gallery of twelve artists whose work has been featured in panels at past ASWM events. Our first event, in 2008, featured a panel of visual artists, which we titled The Holy Wind. This phrase was given to Sid by a young Navajo *hatalii* during a conversation about creativity. In his culture, he said, people did not concern themselves with "art" or "pieces of work that hang on a wall." Instead, they speak of "the holy wind," a spirit of creativity in which the maker, the material, the object and the community all are in harmony. All benefit from the making. In the lives and work of contemporary feminist artists, we have found a striving for creativity that will benefit all.

Each of the artists included in this section of the volume brings a clear, positive vision of the female divine. Rae Atira-Soncea illustrates a powerful birth-giving goddess. Helen Klebesadel's inspired Medusa resonates with domestic tactility; Carmen R. Sonnes's Mexican-American female divine throbs; and Lisa Noble's *Labyrinth Bee* is clear and profound. Sid Reger's mandala draws on ancient symbols of harvest and migration; Louie Laskowski's collage-like painting of a praying mantis praying to the Butterfly Goddess pulsates; Merry Grant Norris's mandala celebration of crones is inspiring; Barb Lutz's double goddess made of earth, in honor of Lydia Ruyle, is very moving; Lisa Levart's work *Goddess on Earth*, which she included in her books, is beautifully conceived and executed. Cristina Rose Smith dreams of homecoming in her evocative watercolor of the river swallow; Denise Kester vibrantly embraces planetary possibilities in vivid textures;

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and Lauren Raine's compelling "Masks of the Goddess" put beautiful women's faces to awe-inspiring goddess archetypes from many world cultures.

Herstories and Solidarities

The final section of this book explores diverse perspectives on goddess archetypes in art and story, multi-ethnic solidarity and respectful engagement across cultures. These articles offer reflections on identity based on integration of myth and sacred story. The authors share inspiration about ancient archetypes and practices and reveal possibilities for cross-cultural redemption, connection and regeneration.

Simone Clunie's work explores the context and themes of goddess imagery in contemporary visual art. She traces the history of second-wave feminist art and describes the major factors that caused a resurgence of interest in goddess mythology. She then analyzes the creative mythic origins of the work of five major artists: Monica Sjöö, Mary Beth Edelson, Mayumi Oda, Yolanda Lopez and Ana Mendieta.

In her very readable article told like a story, Nancy Vedder-Shults examines the Hindu goddess Kali's contradictory aspects, her unbound nature beyond the constraints of human nature. She discusses her own emotional experience with Kali and with the Greek goddesses Demeter and Persephone. Vedder-Shults argues that storytelling can enrich scholarly engagement with myths in order to restore the myths' power as holistic modes of knowing.

Cristina Rose Smith explores how the female divine is manifested in mestiza cultures. Her interdisciplinary mestiza approach advances multicultural solidarity through sharing of personal and literary stories. She combines critical literary and auto-ethnographic approaches to study the renewal of integrative solidarity from her multiple ancestral traditions.

The final article in this volume is an invitation to move forward into a deeper conversation about cross-cultural research and scholarship. Kathryn Henderson offers speculations about how practitioners of goddess spirituality may engage with living traditions in a manner that avoids appropriation. She recounts her interviews with five spiritual leaders from various faith streams who responded from the wisdom of their experience and traditions.

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Poetic Accompaniments

Opening the sections of this book are poems by other accomplished members of ASWM. Gina Belton's renga recognizes the arts as gifts and offerings to the ancestors. Ann Filemyr's "Calling You-who!" is a chant, a call to arms—to sing, to dance, to do, to experience joyously in the doing. Anne Finch's short invocation is haunting. Judy Grahn's "Geology Lesson" suggests a powerful, earth-shaping cultural continuity with women who have crafted this way before us. Marna Hauk situates the arts as a continuity, remembrance and honoring of matrilineal healers and elders. Patricia Monaghan's "Litha" is a lovely paean to striving, struggling and achieving that is rewarded with untold vistas of beauty and the need to keep moving.

The words and images of our contributors invite us—across time, context and art form—to engage with the sacred arts. We hope that this volume will be an invitation to you to connect with this generative research convergence across media, methods and cultures and to join us in celebrating the power of women, myth and art.

> *May our creative ventures be urged on by the delight and need of the lineage of foremothers and by generations of future beings, even if they are but distant echoes of the cacophonous, delightful hubbub, litany, elegy, invocation, dedication and earth making of the gathering of mythic women, goddesses, makers and matriarchs that they thank for continuing inspiration.*
>
> *May this volume be a kind gathering of insight, connection and transformation.*
>
> *May the words and images shared here open worlds and awaken depths of velvet memory and remembrance.*

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SECTION 1



FROM THE BEGINNING: RESEARCH INTO IMAGES OF THE FEMALE DIVINE

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A GEOLOGY LESSON



Here, the sea strains to climb up on the land
and the tree blows dust in a single direction.
The trees bend themselves all one way
and volcanoes explode often
Why is this? Many years back
a woman of strong purpose
passed through this section
and everything else tried to follow

~ *Judy Grahn*
From *Love Belongs to Those Who Do the Feeling*
(Red Hen Press, 2012, 2017)

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SACRED DISPLAY: DIVINE AND MAGICAL FEMALE FIGURES OF ANCIENT EURASIA

MIRIAM ROBBINS DEXTER *



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Introduction

This article focuses on magical female dancing and display figures, especially those that appear in prehistoric and early historic Eurasian cultures. Very similar female figures were depicted throughout Eurasia in a broad chronological sweep, beginning with figures depicted in the aceramic (pre-pottery), pre-agricultural Neolithic—dating at least from 8000 BCE in Southeast Anatolia—and the early and middle Neolithic in southeastern Europe—Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia—continuing through the late Neolithic and the Bronze Age in Western China and the Indus Valley and working its way into early historic Greece, East Asia, India, Ireland and elsewhere.

Sacred Display: A Definition

Female figures making a *sacred display* of their genitals are found in two iconographic forms: 1) a bent-knee dance in which the legs often form an M position and 2) a crouch that strongly displays the genitals. Some figures, such as the Irish Sheela-na-gig from Kiltinan, do both—doing a magical dance while opening and displaying her vulva. In prehistory as well as the modern era, piscine imagery is frequently connected with these figures.

Sacred display figures represent both the beneficent and the ferocious aspects of the divine feminine: They are apotropaic, warding off the enemy, and—a natural concomitant—they are protective of their people. They bring

---

* My co-author on the work of *Sacred Display* (rather than this article) is Victor H. Mair.

both fertility and good fortune. The apotropaic function of female genitals has been found as early as the Aurignacian era of the Upper Paleolithic, ca. 35,000-32,000 BCE.

The V in Upper Paleolithic Cave Art

The phenomenon of sacred display goes back many thousands of years. Cave art dating to the Upper Paleolithic—ca. 35,000 BCE through ca. 10,000 BCE—depicts a powerful symbol: the V, the female pubic triangle. A female figure composed of only a huge pubic triangle and legs was recently highlighted in a documentary film about Chauvet Cave, a vast underground cavern in the Ardèche Gorges in the south of France, which was discovered in 1994 by spelunkers.[1] At the time the cave was discovered, it had not been disturbed for 20,000 years, because a massive rockslide had sealed the original entrance. Because the cave had been undisturbed for so long, the paintings inside are exceptionally vivid—so much so that at first there were doubts as to their authenticity. But the paintings are covered in layers of calcite and concretions, which take thousands of years to grow, so the paintings cannot be forgeries.

The documentary film, *The Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, directed by Werner Herzog, shows a female figure with large pubic triangle, carved on a limestone outcropping; she dates to the Aurignacian period (ca. 35,000-32,000 BCE).[2] She is located in the last and deepest chamber of the 1,300-foot long cave, the Salle du Fond, and she may well have had an apotropaic function,[3] guarding the entrance to the farthest gallery, the holy of holies. She is in an area where lion paintings are found. The association of apotropaic female figures and felines has continued for many thousands of years. The cave includes four other female representations, each limited to the pubic triangle and indicating an entrance to an adjacent cavity.

Sometime after the female figure guarding the "Salle du Fond" was carved, a bison that some call the Sorcerer[4] was superimposed on her.[5] Although some have written that the bison and the female figure were engaging in a "hieros gamos,"[6] that has held true only since the bison was carved. The female figure was carved earlier than the bison, so the original intent was to depict not sex between male and female but the sacrality of the pubic triangle. The Chauvet Cave was a place of ritual rather than habitation.[7] Bones, including skulls, of cave bears have been found within.[8]

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One bear skull, unfortunately lacking collagen for use in DNA analysis, was placed on a rock—likely by a human who was using the cave.[9]

In the Upper Paleolithic, female figures with large pubic triangles, often called Venus figures, also were often sculpted. The oldest yet discovered is the tiny female figure, carved from a mammoth tusk, that was found in 2008 in Hohle Fels cave in southwestern Germany (*Figure 1*). She dates to between 40,000 and 30,000 BCE, the Aurignacian period—the same dating as for the female figure from Chauvet Cave.[10] A flute made from a vulture bone was found just 70 cm from the female figure.[11] The combination of music and a sacred female figure probably indicates a ritual space.

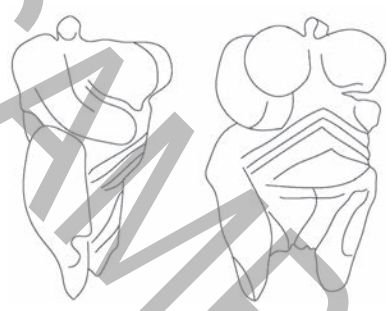


Fig. 1. 35,000-year-old female figure in the Hohle Fels cave in southwestern Germany. Photograph n.d.

There was an earlier find in Städel cave in the Swabian Alb, a plateau in Germany: a sculpture of an anthropomorphic lion, dating to the same Aurignacian era as the Chauvet Cave's pubic triangle. The combination of animal and human characteristics has led researchers to interpret this sculpture as a shaman taking the form of a lion. The lion seems to be standing on tiptoe, perhaps an indicator of a shamanic dance. Although many pieces were missing from the original find, about 1,000 more pieces were found in a more recent investigation of Städel cave.

The statue has six stripes on its upper left arm. The small plate on its abdomen originally was interpreted as a penis in a hanging position. Recently, paleontologist Elisabeth Schmid has classified it as a pubic triangle. The navel is especially pronounced, and a horizontal crease runs across the lower abdomen; these are features typically belonging to female figures.[12] If this is a female figure, it is further indication of the association

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of female and feline, which has been found in the earliest Upper Paleolithic artifacts and has continued through time.[13]

The Neolithic

Spiritual phenomena related to caves and rock art continued into the Neolithic. A cave painting at Peri Nos Cape at Lake Onega in the Republic of Karelia[14] depicts a dancing figure, likely doing a religious, perhaps shamanic, dance. Neolithic rock art also depicts a female figure holding a bow and doing a magical dance.[15] The bow and sometimes arrows, according to Elisabeth During Caspers, are the paraphernalia of what she calls the shaman, male or female, as hunting magician. The religious adept employs the bow and arrow as objects of divination.[16]

In the earliest Neolithic period, this magical dance was combined with display of the female genitals; in such a display, the female figure often was depicted nude with a large, magical vulva.

Göbekli Tepe

In the earliest Neolithic, the image of the sacred pubic triangle and the function of apotropaia evolved into female display figures. One dancing figure found in level II of the Southeast Anatolian site of Göbekli Tepe dates to the aceramic, pre-agricultural Neolithic of no later than 8000 BCE; she is crouching in a magical dance or stance, with her arms and legs bent in an M position. She was carved on a stone slab that was found on the floor at the entrance to a room in the lion pillar building.

One had to step on the Göbekli Tepe female figure to enter the room; she was therefore the ground upon which one walked.[17] Because she protected the entrance to the room—just as the pubic triangles in Chauvet Cave protected the entrances to galleries—the female figure of Göbekli Tepe too was apotropaic, similarly to most Upper Paleolithic, Neolithic and later female figures that did sacred display. She was the goddess who protected the worshippers in the temple. This apotropaic function has been assigned to female display figures for millennia; the early historic Greco-Roman Medusa and the medieval Irish and British Sheela-na-gigs are examples of historic female figures whose functions included the apotropaic.

The female figure was found between pillars containing depictions of felines, continuing the association of the apotropaic female figure

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and the feline throughout Anatolia, the Indus Valley and historic India. Those associations likely continued an association that had begun in the Upper Paleolithic.

The T-shaped limestone pillars excavated in numerous small buildings at Göbekli Tepe have attracted media attention, and there is much speculation about the function of this site. In a *National Geographic* article published in June 2011,[18] Charles Mann began, "We used to think agriculture gave rise to cities and later to writing, art and religion. Now the world's oldest temple suggests the urge to worship sparked civilization." This is a quite revolutionary thought, since it directly disagrees with V. Gordon Childe's theory of the Neolithic Revolution, in which scarcity of food led to the need for plant domestication and sedentarism, which then would have given rise to both hierarchical societies and religion. However, as Mann reported, there is, as yet, no good evidence for social hierarchy. Klaus Schmidt, the excavator, speculated that peoples living within a hundred-mile radius of Göbekli Tepe created the site as a holy gathering place, yet nearby are several other sites, including Nevali Cori and Çayonu, which also show evidence of T-shaped pillars. There are multiple sophisticated religious sites in Southeast Anatolia, which may have been a larger area of gatherings. That this area—near the Karaca Dağ Mountains—gives us the first evidence of domesticated einkorn wheat may be significant as well.[19]

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Lepenski Vir, Serbia

Lepenski Vir, in the Iron Gates section of the Danube River in Serbia, contains several female fish sculptures, copies of which are now in the Lepenski Vir Museum. One in particular is crouching; her arms reach down to indicate a deeply incised vulva (Figure 2). One can see two tiny breasts by the hands, perhaps representing those of an adolescent girl.



Fig. 2. Crouching stone "fish" figure from the Mesolithic site of Lepenski Vir. Lepenski Vir Museum. Photograph by Gregory L. Dexter, n.d.

The other sculpture is a fish figure with elaborate vesica piscis design—piscine imagery that we also see elsewhere.

Elsewhere in Southeastern Europe—Romania and Bulgaria

Neolithic dancing figures have been found throughout southeastern Europe. In Stara Zagora, Bulgaria, there are several such figures depicted on pots and potsherds and dating to the early Neolithic; the figures appear to be doing a magical dance. In two potsherds, the figure has one arm raised and the other lowered—a typical and magical position.[20] Similar figures have been found in Romania. Two figures excavated and published by Cornelia-Magda and Gheorghe Lazarovici also demonstrate this magical dance. The first, excavated by Cornelia-Magda Lazarovici, dates to Cucuteni A-3 (4300–4050 BCE); it is from Scânteia, Romania.[21] Its arms are raised and its legs form a crouching position in mirror image to its arms. The second, excavated by Gheorghe Lazarovici, dates to Vinca B (4300–4200 BCE); it is from Zorlentu Mare, Romania.[22] Further, there are Romanian pots that suggest the *hora*, or round dance; these pots are related to the ritual life of the communities that make them.[23]

Sacred Display and Chinese Pots

A pot from the Machang phase of the Majiayao culture of Liuwan in Western China (ca. 2300–2000 BCE) depicts a female figure in a display position. The pot was found in the Hexi corridor, part of the Northern Silk Road, a route from North China to the Tarim Basin and East Central Asia. The figure has tiny breasts much like those of the Lepenski Vir figure and a distended navel similar to that of the Upper Paleolithic lion sculpture. The woman's hands are positioned in such a way that they clearly are meant to expose her genitalia.

There are several pots from Western China that show the body of a human with arms and legs spread out in an M position; there are finlike appendages on the knees and shoulders. The fins link these images to the piscine imagery of the Lepenski Vir fish figures.

Yangshao Pots

Gheorghe and Cornelia-Magda Lazarovici and Senica Ţurcanu, in their book on the Romanian Cucuteni culture, discussed pots that had been

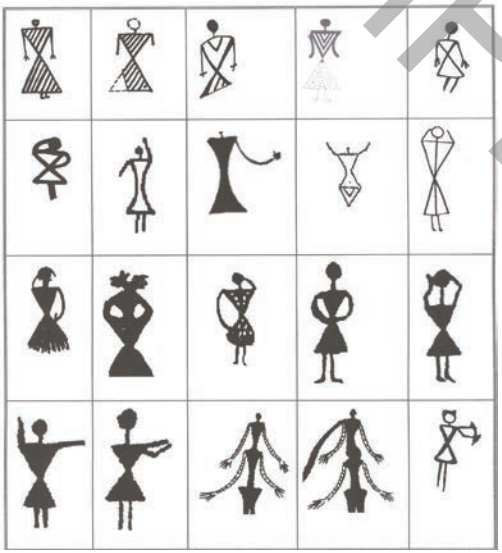
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excavated from the Chinese Yangshao culture and dated to 5000–3000 BCE. The Yangshao civilization flourished along the Yellow River, through numerous provinces. One Yangshao pot illustrated by the authors is remarkably similar to the pots that depict figures with finlike protuberances at their elbows and knees.[24]

Artifacts from the Yangshao culture include pots with representations of fish, birds, animals, celestial bodies and the "primordial egg"—all symbols exceptionally similar to those found on artifacts from the southeastern European Cucuteni culture. Although the distance between southeastern Europe and China (more than 4,000 km) is huge, the authors point out that, in the same way, the Cardial Ware complex spread from east of the Mediterranean Sea, from Mersin to the Bay of Biscay to the south of Brittany—also a distance of 4,000 km. Given enough time and roadways between the cultures, such symbols and mythological themes can spread incredible distances. We will see shortly that we may assume a similar trajectory between southeastern Europe and the Indus Valley.

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Additional East–West Connections



Petroglyphs incised into a high cliff face at Kangjiashimenzi, near Qutubi, north central Xinjiang, in Western China (*Figure 3*), dating to ca. 1000 BCE, depict dancing figures with triangular bodies,[25] strongly resembling those incised and painted on pots from the Cucuteni-Tripolye culture of Romania and other cultures from Ukraine and Poland, which date to ca. 4000–3500 BCE.[26]

Fig. 3. Female silhouettes, painted and incised, Cornelia-Magda (Mantu) Lazarovici, excavator. C-M Lazarovici, 2009: 93, fig. 9. Cucuteni A-B, B = Tripolie BII and CI; ca. 4100–3500 CAL BCE. Sites from Romania, Poland, Ukraine. Courtesy of Cornelia-Magda Lazarovici.

The V

The V, which takes the shape of a triangle open at the top, is found inscribed on many artifacts of Neolithic southeastern Europe, which is often called Old Europe. This V was also used as the base for many symbols of the Danube script.[27] It is an important symbol in the art and language of many cultures,[28] because it can be expanded by means of multiple diacritics.[29] The V may well have as its base the magical and enlarged vulva of the female figures that were excavated by the thousands from Neolithic and Chalcolithic sites throughout prehistoric Anatolia and Europe[30] and that continued to be depicted in iconography and text into the early historic period.[31] Even though the V must have been an abstract symbol, given the multiplicity of diacritical markers, we believe that the core spiritual meaning would have remained within each symbol.

By the time the Danube script was being formulated, female figures with large pubic triangles were being crafted throughout southeastern Europe and elsewhere.

The M

In Old European cultures, the legs of a figure often were depicted in an M position;[32] this M is a character of the Danube script as well, and it represents the position taken by the legs in a ritual dance.[33] In representations of that dance, the legs are usually bent in an M position, and often the arms mirror the legs, raised and forming an M. One or both of the arms may hang from the elbows, and the legs can be spread wide or with one leg up but one leg down.

The Indus Valley culture also incorporated the iconography of the M.[34]

The M of the Danube script is the underpinning of a particular type of female figure, the display figure that Marija Gimbutas associated with birthing and "the frog goddess as life regenerator,"[35] and we find that the frog, a symbol of both fertility and the fertilizing rain, is depicted with its legs in this position.[36] K. de B. Codrington illustrated a figure from Mathura, the front of which is a crouching Lajja Gauri and the back of which is a frog.[37] Codrington dated the figure to the early 2nd century CE. Thus, one display figure brings together the principles of female human fertility and the fertility thought to be brought by frogs.

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The Indus Valley

The cultures of the Indus Valley, also known as the Indus/Saraswati Valley[38] had many features that echoed those of the earlier Danube cultures, including sacred display figures. These civilizations produced few weapons and did not leave evidence of hierarchy. Each produced a script—still undeciphered—as well as beautiful pottery and other evidence of high culture.[39] There are several characters in the Danube script that have correlates in the Indus script.[40] Further, there is evidence that the cultures used comparable ornamentation.

Very well made armlets or bangles were used by the Indus/Saraswati Valley peoples,[41] as well as India's early historic and recent cultures. Bangles appear not only as indications of jewelry on artifacts but also as grave goods themselves. An elderly woman was buried with seven shell bangles, worn smooth, seemingly from having been worn for many years.[42]

Bangles have also been found in excavations of Danube cultures. The ritual pit of the Lady—or priestess—of Tartaria shows signs of great honor paid to this elderly woman. A *Spondylus gaederopus* armlet was found in her ritual pit; it showed signs of having been deeply worn—that is, worn throughout a lifetime.[43] This bangle may have been one sign of her office rather than customary ware of other women of the culture. Indeed, we postulate that this may have been the first use of bangles/armlets. A like phenomenon is the transition of tall "witches'" or priestesses' hats to bridal hats in Central Asia.[44] That is, the hats became generalized to ceremonial garb for young women, where before they had been used by priestesses in special female burials—for example, in the Tarim Basin[45] and the Altai Mountains.[46] Perhaps the bangle was originally a marker of a priestess or shaman, exemplified by the Spondylus shell bracelet found in the burial pit of the Lady of Tartaria. Later, the bangle would have become a more general marker for women in the Indus Valley and then in historic India.

Display figures with armlets have been found in several excavations of Neolithic southeastern European sites: An armlet encircles the left arm of a figure from Durankulak, Bulgaria, dating to 4550–4450 BCE; one encircles the right arm of a pregnant figure from the Pavlovac site (FYROM); and three encircle the right arm of a Vinca terra-cotta figure from the Stublive site in Serbia.[47]

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There are other correlates between Indus Valley cultures and those of Old Europe. Early historic Indic female figures have correlates in the earlier, Bronze Age Indus Valley culture and the Bactria–Margiana Archaeological Complex; these cultures produced seals that depict both Durga-like (that is, in the image of the Great Goddess Devi/Kali/Durga) and Lajja-Gauri-like (female display) figures. A large wooden sculpture (28 inches tall) of a nude female from the Harappan culture, dated to ca. 2400 BCE, is squatting and displaying her genitals.[48]

This figure and Indus Valley seals[49] of female figures in display position relate Indus Valley iconography to later Hindu and Buddhist Lajja Gauri figures, nude figures that hold their legs in positions that boldly display their genitals. In fact, the Indus script itself includes a crouching figure that seems to be in a sacred stance or dance.

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Pre-Durga

In Indus Valley stamp seals, a yogi (more likely, a yogini) has a tiger beard.[50] This is enough to make most archaeologists deem it a male figure with breasts. However, a 3rd century BCE to 3rd century CE display figure from the Nilgiris District is a ferocious-looking female figure with breasts and the beard of a tiger[51]—a historic age depiction that echoes the earlier, Indus depiction of a goddess turning into a tiger.

The historic-age Great Goddess Durga has been depicted with felines. Her mount is the lion in the *Devi Mahatmyam*, but she is associated with the tiger elsewhere. The tiger may have been replaced by the lion later.[52]

There is a carved steatite[53] seal from the Mohenjo-daro culture of the Indus Valley, dating to ca. 2600-1900 BCE. It depicts a woman standing between a Shami tree and a tiger. The tiger has the leaves of a tree as head-dress. The woman is undergoing metamorphosis: Her feet have become hooves or claws, and she has developed a tail and horns.[54]

Two other seals from Mohenjo-daro depict tree goddesses that appear to be summoning tigers, which are looking back at them.[55]

In a seal from Mohenjo-daro, the tiger and the woman are united.[56] The woman has the distinctive horns of a markhor goat. A square stamp seal from Kalibangan also depicts the unification of woman and tiger, with a tiger-bodied goddess that has the horns of a markhor goat.[57]

The human–tiger motif is repeated on another seal from Kalibangan. A woman with long, flowing hair is standing between two males; she is wearing a long skirt, and she has bangles on her arms.[58] Nearby is the tiger goddess, also with long, streaming hair,[59] and her arms too are covered from wrists to shoulders with bangles. The tiger-woman is wearing a headdress with animal horns and a tree branch.

The female deity of the tree is depicted on a seal from the site of Nausharo. A seal from Mohenjo-daro illustrates the tree deity along with seven female figures, with long braids, that border the bottom of the seal. The seven female figures may represent the Pleiades[60] and may have evolved into the Saptamatrika, the powerful seven mother goddesses.

The pre-Indic iconography may underlie the possibility of a later Buddhist goddess-feline, such as the Tantric lionheaded goddess Simhamukha.[61]

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East Indian Female Figures—Southern Asia—Kali

With the Indus Valley material in mind, we consider again the Hindu Great Goddess Devi/Kali/Durga.

The Indic goddess Kali brings death but also protects the worshiper from death—that is, she is apotropaic, like the Paleolithic carved pubic triangles guarding the entrances to chambers in Chauvet Cave, the Neolithic Göbekli Tepe woman, and the Irish and British Sheela-na-gigs. Kali has been represented in the same bent-knee or dancing pose taken by several of the prehistoric figures we have discussed.[62] Many other Indic female figures are portrayed in the dancing position as well.[63] Kali, as well as other Indic goddesses, can appear in the cremation grounds, the place of death, dancing on the corpse just as she dances upon her consort, Shiva, to awaken him.[64]

Kali is one of the forms of the Indic Great Goddess Devi; in one of Devi's ferocious forms, Durga, she appears as a rather bloodthirsty savior of the Indic gods in her battles against the asuras, the demons. Kali becomes a major figure in the *Devi Mahatmyam* (from the *Markandeya Purana*), one of the earliest and most significant Tantric hymns to the Great Goddess Devi in her many manifestations, which was written in the 4th or 5th century CE. In chapter seven of the *Devi Mahatmyam*, the asuras Chaṇḍa and Muṇḍa, are threatening Devi and trying to capture her. Devi becomes furious, and her countenance becomes dark.

> Then, [as Durga] contracted her brows, out of the flat surface of her forehead came Kali, the gaping-mouthed one, having a sword and noose.[65]

Thus, in this version of the myth, Kali is born from Durga's forehead. She wears a tiger's skin and a necklace of skulls. She is emaciated, and her eyes are sunken and reddish. She kills Chaṇḍa and Muṇḍa and then receives the epithet Chamunda.

Indic Lajja Gauri Figures

The large wooden sculpture that we discussed earlier, as well as the Indus Valley seals of female figures in a display position, relate Indus Valley iconography to later, Hindu and Buddhist Lajja Gauri figures—nude figures that hold their legs in positions that display their genitals. These figures date from the 1st century BCE through approximately the 16th century CE and have been found in temples throughout India. Some Lajja Gauris have human heads, but by the first few centuries of this era most of the heads had been replaced by lotuses[66] and snakes.[67] There is also a froglike Lajja Gauri with a lotus head.[68] The Buddhist Lajja Gauris retained human heads but with the addition of the long ears emblematic of Buddhist iconography.[69] The snakes and lotuses symbolize fertility: Snakes can shed and then regenerate their skin, and so they give a visual demonstration of the possibility of regeneration, while the lotus is a symbol of regenerative vegetation. Many images of Lajja Gauris were abstracted as flowers.[70] Some of the early Lajja Gauris were depicted with vegetation growing out of their mouths or navels.[71]

It is the concept of fertility that is important. The female gives birth to all things out of her body:

> Thereupon, O Gods, I shall maintain the whole world by means of life-sustaining vegetables, produced from my own body, until it rains.[72]

This is a promise made by the Goddess Devi/Durga. Thus, both Durga and the Lajja Gauris are sources of vegetation. According to Laura Amazzone,[73] on the ninth day of the great festival of Durga in contemporary India, the goddess manifests as nine forms of sacred plants;[74] Durga is the power inherent in all vegetation.[75]

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Another symbol of the Lajja Gauris, who bring good fortune to the temples in which they reside, is the "brimming vase [of fortune]," the *pūrṇa kumbha; kumbha* means both pot and womb.[76] In village societies of India, the pot is the symbol of the divine feminine, the mother.[77] The Mangala Gaur celebration is important for new brides in Maharashtra. In the month of Shravan, within a year after a new bride's marriage, she performs the Shiva lingam puja for the well-being of her husband and her new family.[78] Sanskrit *maṅgala* means "happiness, welfare, auspiciousness,"[79] so the festival is the Gauri Auspiciousness or the Auspiciousness of Gauri. Further, at one point during the Durga festival a pot is identified with the goddess; edible fruit and plants are placed in the pot, which also contains water from the Ganges, and the priest says a prayer to identify the pot with the source of the nectar of immortality, the *amṛta*,[80] which is produced by the churning of the Sea of Milk. Thus, the brimming pot of auspiciousness or good fortune is associated with the genital display of the propitious Lajja Gauris.

In one silver seal from Kashmir Smast (*Figure 4*), the legs of the Lajja Gauri are in an M position and the mirrored arms are in a W position.[81] A seal with a comparably positioned Lajja Gauri, from the Allahabad District, dates to the Kushana period.[82]

One of the names given to Devi, the great goddess, is Gauri, the shining one. Sanskrit *gaura* means yellowish and also white, brilliant, and shining; it is a description given to several goddesses, including Parvati Gauri, the wife of Shiva.[83] Devi is given the epithet Gauri in *Devi Mahatmyam* 4.11, 41; since she is paired there with Shiva, she is Parvati Gauri. A gauraki is "a girl 8 years old



Fig. 4. Silver seal of Lajja Gauri from Kashmir Smast, silver, 1.9 cm × 1.9 cm, 2nd century CE. Private collection of Max Le Martin, purchased from an auction gallery in British Columbia, Canada. Photograph n.d.

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prior to menstruation," that is, a virgin.[84] Forms of Gauri are worshipped throughout rural India.[85] Lajja means shame in Bengali and other Indic languages, so the Lajja Gauri could be a shameful young woman, because she makes a bold display. This is a rather negative naming, in contrast to the fact that Lajja Gauris are believed to bring good fortune.[86] Indeed, an alternate etymology was given by Dr Ramchandra C. Dhere in his book, *Lajja Gauri*. He believed that Lajja is a form of Lanja/Lanjika, which means naked.[87] Certainly, that definition would better fit the nude female figures.

Medusa

In the earliest Greek texts that contain myth, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Medusa was a monstrous head associated with the underworld.[88] She was the only mortal of three Gorgon sisters. The adjective γοργός means terrible, fierce, and frightful. Medusa's staring eyes play a role in her myth from her textual inception: her eyes literally petrify.

Medusa was apotropaic, and for that reason shields bearing Gorgon heads abound in Greek iconography.

In *The Theogony*, written by the Greek poet Hesiod, Perseus decapitates the Gorgon (*Figure 5*). We may note that in this illustration the wings are Medusa's, not those of the horse Pegasus; Medusa, with her wings and snaky hair, is the descendent of the Neolithic bird and snake goddess.[89] Interestingly, despite being thought of as monstrous, Medusa was attractive enough for the god Poseidon to want to sleep with her; the two lay in a soft meadow, in the midst of spring flowers.[90]



Fig. 5. Perseus slaying winged Medusa, Melos, terra-cotta relief, circa 450 BCE. British Museum, 1842.7.28.1134. Courtesy of the British Museum. Photograph by Gregory L. Dexter, n.d.

Medusa's apotropaic function was manifested iconographically by the numerous Gorgon antefixes that have been found in Greece and Italy. Over time, Medusa also accrued a lolling tongue,

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comparable to that of the Indic Kali. The Medusa head was placed on soldiers' shields, over doorways, as antefixes on roofs, on doors of ovens and kilns, and on Athena's aegis. Again, we may compare her to the prehistoric figures: the goddess as vulva on the limestone outcropping in Chauvet Cave, who protected the entrance to the Salle du Fond, and the dancing female figure from Göbekli Tepe, who protected the temple at whose entrance she lay.

In addition to Medusa's head being a protectress, her blood had a function: In Euripides's *Ion*, we are told that one drop of Medusa's blood is deadly but that the other drop brings healing.[91] Further, we are told by Apollodorus that the blood from Medusa's left side is poisonous but that from the right is healing.[92] Thus, Medusa represents regeneration as well as death.



Fig. 6. Gorgon pediment from Artemis Temple in Corfu. 590–580 BCE. The Medusa on this pediment is nine feet tall. Her waist is cinched with serpents, and there are snakes in her hair. She appears with a lion and her children, Pegasus and Chrysaor. Courtesy of the Kekyra Archaeological Museum. Photograph by Gregory L. Dexter, n.d.

Just like the prehistoric figures, Medusa has a bent-knee pose. The Medusa portrayed on the pediment of the Artemis temple in Kerkyra is in this posture (*Figure 6*). In an Etruscan artifact, she is in full display pose with her legs in an M position.

Irish and British Sheela-na-gigs

Sheela-na-gigs also served an apotropaic function; in the medieval era, many Sheela-na-gigs were sculpted and placed above the doors to churches and castles. These Sheela-na-gigs protect these powerful and sacred places. Sheela-na-gigs were sometimes presented as old and emaciated and sometimes as young and even pregnant. They may represent all of a woman's life phases. The magical stance or dance and the erotic display that we have found in other female figures are shared by the Irish Sheela-na-gig from Kiltinan, which stands on one foot with her left hand lifted to her face and her right hand displaying her vulva (*Figure 7*). Her knees are bent as if in a dance.

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The Sheela-na-gigs take magical postures –the crouching Moate Sheela-na-gig (*Figure 8*) takes a position comparable to that of the Lepenski Vir fish figure. Further, both the Moate and the Cavan Sheela have huge mouths, similar to the fishy mouth of the Lepenski Vir fish figure. The Cavan Sheela has a magically large vulva that hangs down below her knees. She is emaciated as well, with well-defined ribs, just like the Indic goddess Kali.



Fig. 7. Kiltinan Sheela-na-gig from Fethard, County Tipperary, Ireland. Photograph courtesy of Joe Kenny (www.fethard.com), n.d.



Fig. 8. Moate Sheela-na-gig. This Sheela is above a door behind the Moate castle in County Westmeath, Ireland. Photograph courtesy of Starr Goode, n.d.

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We can see the vesica piscis, the double-pointed oval, in the huge vulva of the Cavan Sheela-na-gig. Vesica piscis literally means fish bladder, and this takes us back to the Lepenski Vir fish figure and the figures on Neolithic Chinese pots that have finny protuberances.

One would touch the vulva of a Sheela in order to obtain fertility—the ability to have a child. Birth is magical, miraculous and sacred, and this was especially true in antiquity, when the rates of infant and mother mortality were very high. The Sheela-na-gigs represent more than a human woman giving birth. There is the addition of magical postures and the juxtaposition of the aged woman and the young, fertile woman. Two Neolithic figures may illustrate this concept. The first, a figure from the Neolithic site of Achilleion, Thessaly, in Central Greece, is depicted in

a normal birth-giving position. The second, from the island of Malta in Southern Europe (south of Sicily), is also depicted in a birthing position, but to that is added magical gestures (*Figure 9*).

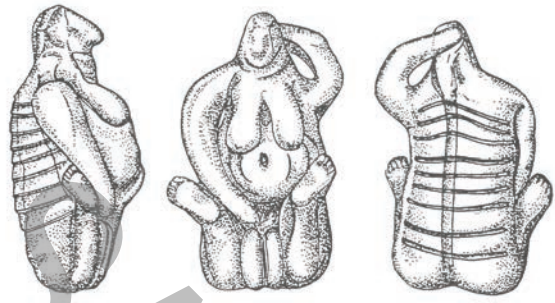


Fig. 9. Birth-giving woman from Malta, in a magical stance. End of 4th millennium BCE. Figure 7.2 of Marija Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe*, ed. Joan Marler (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), with permission from the literary estate of Marija Gimbutas.

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Female Display Figures of the Pacific

Female display figures also have been found in the Pacific. Douglas Fraser found that Pacific display figures (in Sepik art in New Guinea, Borneo, Sumatra, Hawaii, New Zealand and some other cultures) were brought from Changsha in the Chu culture area of South China to this region during the late Zhou period. These cultures had the Gorgon in their repertoire by the 3rd-4th centuries BCE, employing them as tomb guardian figures.[93] The Gorgon was not depicted in the art of the original Malayo-Polynesian peoples when they first migrated into the Pacific, ca. 2000–700 BCE.[94]

Fraser found the same motif on the northwest coast of America, among the Nootka, the Kwakiutl, the Haida, the Tsimshian and the Tlingit. In this area, when the display figure is not a human female, it is a bear, otherwise depicted in northwest coast art with a long, protruding tongue.[95] This strikingly reminds one of the bear display figure from the early Neolithic Anatolian site of Çatalhöyük.[96]

Display figures also have been found in the pre-Columbian art of central Peru, the Peruvian coast and Ecuador.[97] In Ecuador the figures sit with their legs in an M position and their arms mirroring their legs, upraised in a W position.[98] This position strongly recalls figures found

throughout Neolithic southeastern Europe and the Indus Valley, which we have already discussed.

Robert von Heine-Geldern believed that the images were transmitted from the West to China via a route in Central Asia. This diffusion of the idea of female display figures explains why so many parts of the world, hitherto thought unconnected, have Gorgon-like figures. In its origins and development, sacred display is a distinctly Eurasian phenomenon.

Conclusion

Evidence demonstrates that female display figures have had apotropaic and protective functions, from the earliest Upper Paleolithic era—for example, in Chauvet Cave—through the modern era. Sheela-na-gigs were placed on the walls of churches and castles, presumably to ward off the enemy and protect those inside. Gorgon antefixes were placed on the walls of houses, on roofs, on ovens, on shields and even in the aegis of the goddess Athena, for the same purposes. Further, gorgon figures were placed on tombstones[99] and sarcophagi,[100] most likely as a symbol of, and hope for, regeneration. Even today, Indic Lajja Gauri figures are thought to bring good fortune to the temples in which they reside.

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Fig. 10. Sign in front of Starbucks in Del Mar, California. Photograph by Gregory L. Dexter, n.d.

There is also a contemporary and pervasive image of the display figure that many of us may take for granted (*Figure 10*). The early form of the Starbucks logo depicted a woman in a double-tailed mermaid display position, with her two fish legs uplifted.

There is a continuum between erotic magical figures and erotic religious figures. There is no sharp line of demarcation between magic, including folk magic, and religion, since what may be cult magic, folk magic or even myth to one person may be religion to another. These fierce and often voluptuous female figures, nude and dancing a magical dance or nude and crouching to display their vulvas, are magical figures and, likely, religious figures. They date to the earliest Neolithic in Anatolia and Europe, the mature Neolithic in southeastern Europe and the late Neolithic/Bronze Age in eastern and central Asia and the Indus Valley, and they appeared in early historic Europe, East Asia and South Asia and later cultures throughout the world. The sacred display of these female figures reflects the huge numinosity of the prehistoric divine feminine.

These figures represent apotropaia, protection, birth, death and regeneration. In displaying their genitals, they are potent images of the gateway to the womb—the womb of the Great Mother, the literal matrix of birth, the place to which one returns at death and the source of regeneration.[101]

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Endnotes

1 Jean Clottes, "France's Magical Ice Age Art: Chauvet Cave," National Geographic, August 2001, 104–21.

2 Hervé Bocherens, Dorothée G. Drucker, Daniel Billiou, Jean-Michel Geneste, and Johannes van der Plicht. "Bears and Humans in Chauvet Cave (Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, Ardèche, France): Insights from Stable Isotopes and Radiocarbon Dating of Bone Collagen," *Journal of Human Evolution* 50 (2006): 370, 374. Chauvet Cave has yielded the oldest parietal art yet.

3 Bradshaw Foundation, "The Salle du Fond Chamber—The Venus and the Sorcerer," accessed August 3, 2017, www.bradshawfoundation.com/chauvet/venus_sorcerer.php. That article states, "Perhaps the female representation relates directly to the corridor to the chamber, which opens just behind her. A cluster of convergent data suggests that the Venus is Aurignacian and that she was created in the first period of the decoration of the Chauvet Cave."

4 Clottes, "France's Magical Ice Age Art," 2001; J. Francis Thackeray, "A 'Venus' and 'Man-Bison' in Upper Palaeolithic Art at Chauvet Cave," *The Digging Stick* 25, no. 1 (2008): 21.

5 According to the Bradshaw Foundation, "the Venus is the earliest of the designs. The feline on the left, the Sorcerer, and the multiple lines on the right, are all painted or engraved later" (Bradshaw Foundation, "The Salle du Fond Chamber—The Venus and the Sorcerer").

6 Thackeray, "A 'Venus' and 'Man-Bison,'" 21; Clottes, "France's Magical Ice Age Art," 2001.

7 Clottes, "France's Magical Ice Age Art," 2001, 111.

8 Bocherens et al, "Bears and Humans in Chauvet Cave," 2006, 372 and 375. The authors analyzed the DNA of cave-bear bones found at the site. The radiocarbon age of eight samples of cave-bear bone collagen clustered between 30,690 before present (BP) plus or minus 180 BP and 28,850 BP plus or minus 170 BP. One sample, a jawbone buried in red clay and then exposed by water erosion, measured 37,410 BP plus or minus 290 BP. Unfortunately, a bear skull that seemed to have been consciously placed on a rock in the Salle du Crâne

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contained insufficient collagen and therefore could not be dated. The bear bones that were able to be dated originated from areas close to paintings and hearths. According to the authors, the dates for the bear bones cannot be converted into historical ages, because the Carbon-14 calibration curve goes back only 26,000 years. The authors suggest that calendar ages are older than Carbon-14 ages in this time range. Although both humans and bears used the cave between ca. 32,000 and 28,000 BP, it is possible that the two species alternated in habitation over the course of years or centuries.

9 Clottes, "France's Magical Ice Age Art," 2001, 212.

10 Nicholas J. Conard, "A Female Figurine from the Basal Aurignacian of Hohle Fels Cave in Southwestern Germany," *Nature* 459 (May 14, 2009): 248–52. The image of the 35,000-year-old female figure from the Hohle Fels Cave in southwestern Germany is from Miriam Robbins Dexter and Victor H. Mair, *Sacred Display: Divine and Magical Female Figures of Eurasia*, Amherst, NY: Cambria, 2010, figure 47.

11 Victor Mair, "Prehistoric and East Asian Flutes," in *Studies in Chinese Language and Culture-Festschrift in Honour of Christoph Harbsmeier on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday*, ed. Christoph Anderl and Halvor Eifring (Oslo: Hermes Academic Publishing, 2006).

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13 Miriam Dexter, "Ancient Felines and the Great-Goddess in Anatolia: Kubaba and Cybele," in *Proceedings of the 20th Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference*, ed. Stephanie W. Jamison, H. Craig Melchert, and Brent Vine (Bremen, Germany: Hempen, 2009), 53–67.

14 Harald Haarmann and Joan Marler, *Introducing the Mythological Crescent: Ancient Beliefs and Imagery Connecting Eurasia with Anatolia.* Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008, figure 4. A figure from the roof stone at Peri Nos, Lake Onega, Republic of Karelia in the Russian Federation.

15 Haarmann and Marler, *Introducing the Mythological Crescent*, 2008, figure 16. A rock painting from Astuvansalmi (Ristiina, Finland).

16 Elisabeth During Caspers, "Another Face of the Indus Valley Magico-Religious System," in *South Asian Archaeology 1991: Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe. Berlin, 1–5 July 1991,* ed. Adalbert J. Gail (Stuttgart, Germany: F. Steiner, 1993), 70.

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17 We thank Joan Marler for the following insight: "She is the earth beneath our feet, and her body is the temple" (personal communication with the authors, September 2, 2011).

18 Charles C. Mann, "The Birth of Religion," *National Geographic*, June 2011.

19 Manfred Heun, Ralk Schäfer-Prefl, Dieter Klawan, Renato Castagna, Monica Accerbi, Basilio Borghi, and Francesco Salamini, "Site of Einkorn Wheat Domestication Identified by DNA Fingerprinting," *Science* 278 (1997): 1312–4.

20 An early Neolithic potsherd showing a dancing pose. Nova Zagora Historical Museum, Bulgaria.

21 A dancing figure excavated in Scânteia, Romania, by Cornelia-Magda Lazarovici. It dates to Cucuteni A-3 (4300–4050 BCE). From Lazarovici 1992.

22 This female silhouette from Zorlenţu Mare, Romania, which dates to Vinca B, 4300–4200 BCE, was excavated by Gheorghe Lazarovici. From G. Lazarovici 2008 fig. 4c.

23 Cornelia-Magda Lazarovici, Gheorghe-Corneliu Lazarovici, and Senica Ţurcanu, *Cucuteni: A Great Civilization of the Prehistoric World* (Iaşi, Romania: Palatul Culturii, 2009), 75 and for figures that may represent the magic dance, 76 and cat. nos. 135, 242 and 263.

24 Lazarovici, Lazarovici, and Ţurcanu, *Cucuteni*, 11, figure 2C and, for discussion of the notable resemblances between pottery from southeastern European cultures and that of the Yangshao culture, as well as samples of highly congruent symbols from writing systems of the two cultures, 11–3.

25 Wang Binghua, 1990, figure 7.

26 Cornelia Magda Lazarovici 2008, figures 9–13. Similar Middle Neolithic figures have been found throughout Southeastern Europe and elsewhere. See also Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989), 239–43; Marija Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe*, ed. Joan Marler (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 170 and the following.

27 See Gheorghe Lazarovici, Cornelia-Magda Lazarovici, and Marco Merlini, *Tărtăria and the Sacred Tablets* (Cluj-Napoca, Romania: Editura Mega, 2011), 114 for further information regarding the V as a sacred sign of the Danube script, incisions in a V shape on the forehead of an anthropomorphic protome from Tărtăria, and comparable incisions on the base of the head of a monumental idol from the Zau culture. Linear motifs such as Vs decorate a vessel found in the Middle Neolithic Starčevo settlement of Porodin as well as a mask of a ram from Balatonszárszó-*Kis-erdei-dűlő*. According to the authors, "the linear sequential organization of the frieze and the selected geometric elements

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indicate that the decoration did not function as a pure aesthetic ornament, but carries a symbolic meaning and message" (153). The V is discussed throughout their book, with relation to many artifacts dating to the Upper Paleolithic through the Neolithic (183–208, 222 and the following).

28 Pupul Jayakar, *The Earth Mother: Legends, Goddesses, and Ritual Arts of India* (San Francisco/New York: Harper and Row, 1990), wrote about rural art in India, comparing it to the art and symbols of the Indus Valley and saying that "the goddess was the seed of the universe in the form of a triangle."

29 Lazarovici, Lazarovici, and Merlini, *Tărtăria and the Sacred Tablets,* 285.

30 Gimbutas *The Language of the Goddess*; Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*; Marija Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, ed. and supp. Miriam Robbins Dexter (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

31 Dexter and Mair, *Sacred Display: Divine and Magical Female Figures of Eurasia.*

32 See, for example, the clay tablet dating to ca. 7000–3500 BCE in the Museum of Alexandria, Romania.

33 Dexter, "Further Thoughts on the V and the M in the Danube Script: The Danube Script and the Old European Goddess," in *On the Trail of Vlassa, Fifty Years of Tărtăria Excavations*, proceedings from a conference sponsored by Eftimie Murgu University, Reșița, Romania and the Institute of Archaeomythology, Sebastopol, September 1–5, 2014.

34 A figure from Harappa, dated to the Kot Diji phase, 2800–2600 BCE. It illustrates the V and the M.

35 Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, 46.

36 See, for example, the black greenstone pendant of a frog figure from Sesklo, shown in Marija Gimbutas, Shan Winn, and Daniel Shimabuku, *Achilleion: A Neolithic Settlement in Thessaly, Greece, 6400–5600 B.C.* Vol. 14 of *Monumenta* Archaeologica (Los Angeles: Institute of Archaeology, University of California Los Angeles, 1989), plate 7.11.

37 K. de B. Codrington, "India. Iconography: Classical and Indian," *Man: A Monthly Record of Anthropological Science* 35 (May 1935): 65, plate E. See also Carol R. Bolon, *Forms of the Goddess Lajja Gauri in Indian Art*, vol. 49 of *Monographs on the Fine Arts* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), figures 66–68.

38 The Indus Valley culture flourished in the river valley between the ancient Indus river and the now dried-up Saraswati/Ghaggar Hakra River (Jane R.

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McIntosh, *The Ancient Indus Valley: New Perspectives* Santa Barbara, CA: ABC Clio, 2008, 3, 19ff, and 116). There were many more settlements along the Saraswati (approximately one thousand) than along the Indus (approximately fifty) (20). Therefore, a better designation for the culture would be the Saraswati Valley (or, at least, the Indus/Saraswati Valley) culture.

39 Miriam Robbins Dexter, "Substrate Continuity in Indo-European Religion and Iconography: Seals and Figurines of the Indus Valley Culture and Historic Indic Female Figures," in *Archaeology and Language: Indo-European Studies Presented to James P. Mallory,* Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph Series no. 60, ed. Martin E. Huld, Karlene Jones-Bley, and Dean Miller (Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of Man, 2012), 197–219.

40 Lazarovici, Lazarovici, and Merlini, *Tărtăria and the Sacred Tablets,* 315, 317–9, 326 (table) and 329.

41 Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and the American Institute of Pakistan Studies, 1998), 122). Bangles were traditionally worn on the left arm of adult women of the Indus Valley.

42 Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*, 144, cat. no. 90 and text figure 7.43.

43 Lazarovici, Lazarovici, and Merlini, *Tărtăria and the Sacred Tablets,* 109, 125 and 146–7 and figures VIIB. 23–24.

44 Jeannine, Davis-Kimball, *Warrior Women: An Archaeologist's Search for History's Hidden Heroines* (New York: Warner, 2002), 38.

45 James P. Mallory and Victor H. Mair, *The Tarim Mummies* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 220, figure 132.

46 Natalya Polosmak, "A Mummy Unearthed from the Pastures of Heaven," *National Geographic*, October 1994, 79–103.

47 Lazarovici, Lazarovici, and Merlini, *Tărtăria and the Sacred Tablets,* 221–2.

48 TantraWorks, "Tantra in Ancient Times," accessed August 3, 2017, www.tantraworks.com/Ancient_Tantra.html#indus. We thank Vicki Noble for this reference.

49 A is an Indus Valley cylinder seal from the Mature Harappan Period, 2700–2300 BCE. In black marble, it is from the private collection of Max Le Martin. B is a Bactria–Margiana Archaeological Complex Lajja Gauri as flower and lion, dated to the 3rd century or early 2nd century BCE. It is from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

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50 Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*, figure 6.19, cat. no. 23 and the book's cover.

51 Corinna Wessels-Mevissen, "Creative Legacy of the Nilgiri Hills: Terracotta Offerings from South Indian Megalithic Burials," in *Indian Terracotta Sculpture: The Early Period*, ed. Pratapaditya Pal (Mumbai: Marg, 2002), 24, figure 3. Ferocious goddess, part of a lid, burial offering at Nilgiris, red terracotta, dated between the 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin–Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Museum fuer Indische Kunst.

52 Alf Hiltebeitel, "The Indus Valley 'Proto-Śiva,' Reexamined through Reflections on the Goddess, the Buffalo, and the Symbolism of Vāhanas," *Anthropos* 73, no. 5/6 (1978): 777.

53 Soapstone (also known as steatite or soaprock) is a metamorphic rock, a talc-schist. It is largely composed of the mineral talc and is thus rich in magnesium. Wikipedia, "Soapstone," accessed July 2, 2011, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soapstone.

54 Miranda Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India* (Princeton, NJ/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 429, figure 21.3; Jayakar, The Earth Mother, figure 6.

55 A is from Jayakar, *The Earth Mother*, figure 5. B is from Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*, text figure 6.22, cat. no. 26.

56 Seal from Mohenjo-daro. National Museum, New Delhi, India. Jayakar, *The Earth Mother*, figure 7.

57 Square stamp seal from Kalibangan (K-50). Asko Parpola, *Deciphering the Indus Script* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 254, figure 14.26; Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*, 117, figure 6.32.

58 Cylinder seal impression from the Harappan culture at Kalibangan: tiger figure and female figure wearing bangles and skirt, with two anthropomorphic figures. Next to that scene, the body of the female figure merges with that of the tiger figure. The tiger-woman wears a headdress with animal horns and a tree branch. Parpola, *Deciphering the Indus Script*, figure 14.25.

59 Painted pottery from Samarra, depicting female figures, probably dancers, with streaming hair. See Garfinkel 2003: 86.

60 Nude female figure in pipal tree, Mohenjo-daro. Steatite seal depicting a deity standing in a pipal tree and looking down on seven female figures that have long braids and are wearing skirts. Both the deity and the seven female figures are wearing multiple bangles. Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*, figure 6.1, cat. no. 24.

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61 Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 428–9; Amdo region, Tibet, 19th century. The Newark Museum, 1936, 36.518, plate 15.

62 Cosmic Form of the Goddess Kali (recto). Folio from a book of iconography. Nepal, Himalayas. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

63 Red figure of a dancing Vajravārāhī/Dorje Pagmo, Nepal, Himalayas, central Tibet. Himalayas 1, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, LACMAM74_106_1. Dancing Vajravārāhī/Vajrayoginī, Himalayas, central Tibet. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

64 Kali dancing on Siva to awaken him. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

65 *Devi Mahatmyam* 7.6., ca. 500 CE. Translations from the Sanskrit are by Miriam Robbins Dexter. The following Sanskrit text is in Jagadiswarananda, *Devi Mahatmyam, 7.6:*

Bhrukuṭīkuṭilāttasyā lalāṭaphalakāddatam
Kālī karālavadanā viniṣkrāntāsipāśinī.

66 Lajja Gauri, stone, from Naganatha Temple, Karnataka, India, dated to the late 7th century CE. See, for example, Bolon, *Forms of the Goddess Lajja Gauri in Indian Art*, figure 48.

67 Lajja Gauri with snake head, stone, from Madhya Pradesh, India, dated to the 6th or 7th century CE. Bolon, *Forms of the Goddess Lajja Gauri in Indian Art*, figure 98.

68 A frog-like Lajja Gauri with lotus head, terracotta, from the Allahabad District, Uttar Pradesh, India, dated to the 4th century CE. Bolon, *Forms of the Goddess Lajja Gauri in Indian Art*, figure 38.

69 Lajja Gauri with human face, stone, from the Rajkot District, Gujarat, dated to the 7th century CE. Bolon, *Forms of the Goddess Lajja Gauri in Indian Art*, figure 82.

70 Lajja Gauri as flower, in a stūpa II railing medallion from Sanchi, Raisen District, Madhya Pradesh, dated to the 1st century CE. Bolon, *Forms of the Goddess Lajja Gauri in Indian Art*, figure 111.

71 Two flower Lajja Gauri figures, stone, in stūpa railing medallions from Bharhut, Sama District, Madhya Pradesh, dated to the 1st century CE. Bolon, *Forms of the Goddess Lajja Gauri in Indian Art*, figures 119, 120.

72 The following Sanskrit text is in Jagadiswarananda, *Devi Mahatmyam, 11.48:*

Tato'hamakhilaṁ lokamātmadehasamudbhavaiḥ
bhariṣyāmi surāḥ śākairāvṛṣṭeḥ *prāṇadhārakaiḥ.*

73 Laura Amazzone, *Goddess Durgā and Sacred Female Power* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton, 2010), 99, 183. See also David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, vol. 12 of *Hermeneutics:*

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Studies in the History of Religions (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 95, 111.

74 Amazzone, *Goddess Durgā and Sacred Female Power*, 99, 183.

75 Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 111.

76 Bolon, *Forms of the Goddess Lajja Gauri in Indian Art*, 13–4, figure 10: Lajja Gauri as pot, terracotta, from Ter, Osmanabad District, Maharashtra, Ter Museum 785, dated to the 3rd or 4th century CE.

77 Jayakar, *The Earth Mother*, 31.

78 Wikipedia, "Marathi People," accessed July 2, 2011, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marathi_people#Mangala_Gaur.

79 Monier-Williams 1899: 772.

80 Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 111–2.

81 From the private collection of Max Le Martin, purchased at an auction gallery in British Columbia. Dated to the 2nd century CE. 1.9 cm × 1.9 cm.

82 Samir Kumar Mukherjee, "Terracotta Art in the Gangetic Valley under the Kushanas," in *Indian Terracotta Sculpture: The Early Period* (Mumbai: Marg, 2002), 84, figure 12. Kaushambi, Allahabad District, Kushana Period, Patna Museum, dated to the 1st–3rd cCenturies CE.

83 Monier Williams 1899: 369.

84 Monier-Williams 1899: 370.

85 Jayakar, *The Earth Mother*, 130 ff.

86 For additional information about the Lajja Gauris, see Bolon, *Forms of the Goddess Lajja Gauri in Indian Art*; Robert L. Brown, "A Lajjā Gaurī in a Buddhist Context at Aurangabad," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 13, no. 2 (1990): 1–18; Thomas Donaldson, "Propitious–Apotropaic Eroticism in the Art of Orissa," *Artibus Asiae* 27 (1975): 75–100; V. H. Sonawane, "Some Remarkable Sculptures of Lajjā Gaurī from Gujarat," *Lalit Kalā* 23 (1988): 27–34. Donaldson demonstrated that the erotic art decoration of the temples of Orissa served two functions that display figures worldwide seem to serve: blessing the temple and warding off natural disasters.

87 Wikipedia, "Lajja Gauri," accessed July 2, 2011, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lajja_Gauri.

88 For additional information about Medusa, see Miriam Robbins Dexter, "The Ferocious and the Erotic: 'Beautiful' Medusa and the Neolithic Bird and Snake," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26, no. 1 (2010): 25–41.

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89 Miriam Robbins Dexter, *Whence the Goddesses: A Source Book, Athene Series (*New York: Pergamon, 1990).

90 Hesiod, *Theogony*, ca. 700 BCE, 270–83.

91 Euripides, *Ion*, lines 1003–5.

92 Apollodorus, *Atheniensis Bibliothecae* 3.10.3. Apollodorus was born ca. 180 BCE.

93 Douglas Fraser, "The Heraldic Woman: A Study in Diffusion," in *The Many Faces of Primitive Art: A Critical Anthology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966), 51.

94 Fraser, "The Heraldic Woman," 51.

95 Fraser, "The Heraldic Woman," 57–60. Fraser regarded this as a particular index of Late Zhou influence. See also Dexter and Mair, *Sacred Display*, figure 34, for a Mother Bear doorway of a Tlingit culture tribal house on Chief Shakes Island, Wrangell, Alaska, dated to the 19th century CE.

96 See the bear display figure at the Anatolian Civilizations Museum, Ankara, Turkey. Tableau of display figure and bovine heads. See also Dexter and Mair, *Sacred Display*, figure 35, a bear stamp seal from Çatalhöyük.

97 Fraser, "The Heraldic Woman," 71–4.

98 Fraser, "The Heraldic Woman," 74–5.

99 See Fraser, "The Heraldic Woman," 42.

100 Numerous examples of gorgons on sarcophagi are extant—for example, in the Antalya Museum in southern Turkey. Here are a number of sarcophagi that include garlands and images of Medusa.

101 Today more and more artists are honoring sacred display. "The Great Wall of Vagina," (www.greatwallofvagina.co.uk) by British artist Jamie McCartney, was exhibited in London in May and June 2012. The exhibit consisted of monumental wall sculptures of castings of the vulvas and labia of 400 women. Its purpose was to enable women to see that there is beauty, not shame, in the female genitalia. We thank the poet Annie Finch for referring us to this exhibit.

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THE GODDESS SRI SPIRIT IN JAVANESE *MITONI* PREGNANCY RITUAL: TRADITIONAL *LURIK* WOVEN CLOTHS IN INSTALLATION ART

APRINA MURWANTI

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Introduction

Feminist artists have been taking inspiration from goddesses and featuring goddesses in their works since at least the 1970s. The goddess plays an important role as a symbol of women's power in visual art practice. The feminist art movement of the 1970s is a significant inspiration for female artists, today, to use goddesses to represent women's power in their visual art practice. By using goddesses in their works, second-wave feminist artists also portrayed women and their important positions, both social and spiritual. Female artists explored "historical female ancestors" to empower their artworks.[1] G. F. Orenstein found that the use of the pre-patriarchal goddess by second-wave feminist artists was based not on an interest in "mythical expression" or their personal experiences with the goddess but rather on artistic, historical and archeological studies.[2]

In exploring the Javanese goddess Sri, I use a slightly different perspective than did second-wave feminist artists. My creative practices not only are based on artistic and historical study of the goddess but also include study of Sri's mythical expression that I have found, firsthand, in Java. In my practice, I use as the main visual reference the personal engagement with Sri that I experienced in a *Mitoni* ritual during my first pregnancy, in 2006. I tell stories of Sri through installation art using woven textiles named *lurik* cloths, the most sacred cloths in *Mitoni*. I tell these stories from my perspective as a Javanese Muslim female artist. For me, telling those stories is important, because the disappearance of Sri from Java has

been entangled with many issues, including the politicization of religion. The disappearance of Sri has reduced the number of ritual practices in Java which, in turn, has reduced the demand for *lurik* cloths, affecting the livelihood of craftspeople in the *lurik* home industry.

In this project, I used a practice-led research methodology interwoven with the material culture of actual objects tied together by a bricolage aesthetic. Practice-led research acknowledges art practice as a form of research.[3] I utilized material culture in my research to observe, discuss and highlight *lurik* cloth, *Mitoni* ritual and their relationship with Sri in the traditional Javanese context. Material culture engages the past through its emphatic approach in identifying cultural objects.[4] Bricolage is useful in connecting the fragmented narratives of the cultural histories and mythology that underpin the *Mitoni* ritual, the *lurik* cloths and Sri with visual art theories and studio practice. Bricolage in installation arts becomes a conduit of memory and history in narrative threads that activate the mythopoetic approach.[5]

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The Importance of the Goddess Sri in Javanese Culture

Sri is known as the goddess of agriculture and fertility.[6] Moreover, she is believed to represent the death, reincarnation and rice growth.[7] Dewi Sri (Goddess Sri) is a Javanese goddess who reflects Hindu influence in Javanese ritual and ceremony.[8] Javanese ritual is believed to have come from the Majapahit Empire, which ruled Java from 1331 to 1389.[9] The Hindu god Shiva and goddess Sri were closely identified with elements of Javanese local deities, because the Majapahit emperors claimed to be descendants of Siva and Sri.[10] Sri is believed to have become the Javanese Earth Mother during the Majapahit period,[11] but the ritual of worshipping Sri as the goddess of fertility was an indigenous local tradition in Java prior to that outside incursion.[12]

Two characters of Sri exist in Java. The first character, Sri Widawati, is the wife of Vishnu (also spelled Wisnu) and mother of Kamajaya, the god of love.[13] She was widely known as Lakshmi in India, and she was associated with the Javanese-Hindu fertility rite.[14] Lakshmi is the goddess of fortune, wealth, beauty and fertility in India.[15] Irvine explained that there were many incarnations of Sri Widawati: Dewi Citrawati; Sinta (also spelled *Sita*), the wife of *Rama*, an incarnation of Vishnu; *Rukmini*; and Sumbadra.[16]

The second character of Sri was associated with rice fields and harvesting; she is the granddaughter of Vishnu. Because of the similarity of the name Sri, people perceived this second character of Sri as one of the reincarnations of Sri Widawati.[17] This second version of Sri is also associated with her brother Sadana, the god of harvests, who was believed to be the reincarnation of Vishnu.[18] There is a famous folktale in Java, titled *Sri Sadana*, in which Sri was searching for her brother Sadana, who had run away from the palace.[19] During Sri's journey, an evil giant, who disguised himself with many forms of animals, chased Sri across the land. During her escape, Sri suggested to an elder named Kyai Wrigu that he encircle his house with *lawe* (cotton yarn) to protect his baby from the demon.[20] Similarly, the *Mitoni* pregnancy ritual includes a segment in which a *lawe* (coconut leaf) is placed around the mother's belly and cut with a keris (Javanese sword), symbolizing the disappearance of obstacles. The use of *lurik* cloths, made from lawe and worn with a motion of encircling to symbolize prayers of protection, in the *Mitoni* recalls the story of Sri in the *Sri Sadana* folktale. The activity of encircling the human body or a sacred object with textiles or yarns—symbols of protection—has been adopted in the performance of sacred rituals in many cultures worldwide.[21]

Sri and representations of her various incarnations also were depicted in *wayang purwa*, the tradition from Central Java of shadow puppet play. The shadow puppets are not realistic, because *wayang purwa*'s recent visual style was developed by *wali songo* (the nine proselytes) to infuse Islamic sharia (basic rules and law of Islam) into the art form of Java. In Islam, the depiction of real-life creatures, especially animals and humans, is *haram* (highly forbidden), except for use in educational materials for children.[22]

Places Sacred to Sri

Traditionally, Javanese people arranged special spaces in the palace and in the rice fields to recall Sri's spirit. The *keraton* (Javanese palace) and the traditional Javanese house each contained a special room named a *krobongan*, which was devoted to Sri. The *krobongan* was usually decorated to be the most beautiful room in the palace or the house.[23] The special sacred places in the paddies looked like small houses, the size of birdhouse, built of natural materials and surrounded by offerings. Such houses are believed to have the power to call Sri to fertilize the paddies and spread prosperity.

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Mitoni, Lurik Cloths and Sri

Sri is an important female figure. She underpinned the Javanese *Mitoni* ritual and Javanese society.[24] My direct participation in the *Mitoni* ritual during my first pregnancy, in 2006, connected me with the story of Sri. I felt protected, safe and secure.

Mitoni is a Javanese traditional ritual for a woman in the seventh month of pregnancy. It wishes her a safe labor. The *Mitoni* ritual is divided into five main segments. It begins with an act of *sungkeman* (asking for blessing from the woman and her husband), followed by *siraman* (holy bathing). Next are the ceremonial acts of breaking a water pitcher, splitting coconuts and cutting yarn or coconut leaves, all of which symbolize the breaking of obstacles. The next phase, *Nyamping*, is the distinctive act of wrapping the woman in seven pairs of traditional Javanese cloths, including *lurik* cloths *(Figure 11)*. Finally are the *dhawetan* or *dodol dhawet* and the *rujakan*, in which the woman and her husband pretend to sell sour and sweet dishes.[25] All segments symbolize the prayers of the family for a healthy, safe delivery. *Lurik* cloths are the most sacred cloths in the *Mitoni* ritual.[26]



Fig. 11. My Mitoni ritual, Nyamping segment. Photograph by Santi Sidhartani, n.d.

Lurik cloths are Javanese traditional woven cloths with horizontal and vertical lines in check or plaid patterns.[27] The word *lurik* comes from the Javanese word *rik*, "a symbol for fence and protection lines."[28] *Rik* also can be interpreted as "a shallow moat or line that cannot be erased or removed, surrounding the wearer."[29]

Lurik cloths *(Figures 12 and 13)* have existed in Java for more than two centuries. Many pattern variations of *lurik* cloths were available in Central Java and East Java, but particular patterns of *lurik* cloths were used in the *Mitoni* ritual.[30] One set of *lurik* cloths for the *Mitoni* ceremony contained patterns of *dringin* (drizzle), *tumbar pecah* (crushed

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coriander) and *liwatan* (leap). The pattern *lurik toh watu* or *tuluh watu* (sacred stone) was also worn as a *jarit* (Javanese wrap skirt) in the *Mitoni* ceremony in the past.[31] The wearing of *lurik tuluh watu* was believed to give the wearer strength and tenacity.[32] Wearing a *lurik* cloth with *tuluh watu* pattern also had a strong philosophical meaning that symbolized "the lasting relationship between the mother and the child throughout life and their life-long inseparability."[33] There is strong motherhood wisdom in the philosophy of wearing *lurik* cloths.



Fig. 12. Lurik cloth with dringin pattern. Photograph by Aprina Murwanti, 2012.



Fig. 13. Lurik cloth with tumbar pecah pattern. Photograph by Aprina Murwanti, 2012.

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Many of the goddesses in world cultures associated with weaving were associated with magic and fertility.[34] The immortal characters that created life in these folk stories, usually depicted as goddesses, were portrayed as "spinners and weavers."[35] The common associations of goddess figures with weaving, life giving, magic and sacredness[36] are similar to those that existed in the Javanese pre-Islamic era, when Sri was worshipped and played a pivotal role in Javanese society. In West Java, Nyi Pohaci (Sri) was a weaver worshipped for granting human prosperity. In Bali, the Balinese traditional woven textile was used for worshipping the Dewi Sri in the temple.

Furthermore, the connection between textiles and fertility also relates to the myth that traditional, handmade textiles generate magical protective powers for pregnancy and birth. This myth is found in traditions from Bethlehem, the Himalayas, Mayan culture and Germany, which connect textiles to fertility, birth, pregnancy and the cycle of life.[37] In the *Mitoni* ritual, *lurik* cloth was believed to protect and save both the mother and the baby in her womb. The repetitive action of encircling *lurik* cloths around the woman's body during the *Mitoni* is a metaphor of protection; meanwhile, the patterns in the *lurik* cloths contain symbols of prayer and positive expectations from the family.

The rule of the Majapahit Empire in Java ended in the early 1500s, and the previous role of Brahman priests as spiritual advisers to local rulers was overtaken by the *wali* (great Islamic proselytizers).[38] This decline in Hindu influence explains, in part, why finding statues of Sri in Java is difficult. The Islamic influence in Java also explains how the story of a once-powerful goddess, Sri, vanished from Javanese culture.

The concept of Sri as the divine of the *Mitoni* ritual and the *lurik* cloth, as well as the central figure in most traditional Javanese rituals, is not compatible with Islamic doctrine. Islamic beliefs center on the single power of Allah as the almighty god; representing any other figure as associated with divine power is strongly forbidden. This is one of the reasons that figures of Sri were gradually removed from Javanese culture. Sadly, this religious prohibition also contributed to the decline of *Mitoni* ritual practice, so important to women and their families, and, in turn, affected the economic condition and social position of *lurik* craftspeople in Central Java.

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Goddess in Feminist Installation Art Practice

By the 1970s, feminist artists had reclaimed and reglorified the goddess as the symbol of women's empowerment and as a way of redressing the patriarchal history of "removing the goddess in history."[39] During the 1970s, female Western artists regarded the ancient goddess as representing women's "talent, powers, creativity and important cultural contributions."[40] Insights into how goddesses were depicted in the West's second wave of feminist art are useful in studying how the use of ritual, the goddess and mythology was politically motivated to venerate women's power, both in art and in society.[41] Depictions of the goddess were regarded as engagement with ritual. In my study, Sri represents women's empowerment as mothers and birth givers, because she was an important female figure underlying the Javanese *Mitoni* ritual and she represented the importance of women in the society. Sri linked rituals, textile tradition and sociocultural issues in one political context in Java, and she does so again in my art installations.

Ana Mendieta's works during the 1970s are excellent examples of the use of goddess figures in installation art practice. In her work *Incantation to Olokun-Yemaya*, Mendieta merged and associated herself with Olokun, the Cuban goddess who came from the bottom of the ocean.[42] Olokun is the grandmother of the goddess Yemaya.[43] Both Olokun and Yemaya are

invoked when one is in need of a "place to call home."[44] Mendieta demonstrated that the silhouette she had made from her body trace enabled her to channel herself to her "home"—her origin culture—and to symbolically connect with the goddess.

Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* installation also used goddess imagery that spanned Western and Eastern cultures.[45] By borrowing these goddesses, Chicago inspired women to claim their power in society. Regarding the craft strategies in Chicago's installation, Orenstein noted that *The Dinner Party* linked "feminist iconography and feminist reinterpretation of the creation myth" through monumental artworks involving traditional female craft.[46] Chicago's feminist narrative in *The Dinner Party* was enriched by her use of mythical women figures and handmade objects.

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Misrepresentation of Goddess Sri and Other Javanese Female Divines

Representations of female divines from a male perspective are often misleading. Such representations include images in paintings by Basuki Abdullah and Agus Djaya and in Jim Supangkat's sculpture (1975) of Ken Dedes. In Abdullah's paintings *Djoko Tarub* (1940–1960) and *Janoko Bertapa* (1940–1960), he depicted nymphs and princesses from Javanese folklore as seductive, sexually inviting women. In *The Battle between Rahwana and Djataju in the Abduction of Sita* (1940s), Abdullah visualized the goddess Sita as a pale, powerless, helpless woman. In his painting *Nyai Roro Kidul*, he highlighted the beautiful physical appearance and sexuality of the Javanese mystical queen of the Javanese South Sea rather than her divine power. Similarly, Agus Djaya's version of *Nyai Roro Kidul* (1950s) is sexually inviting, with a seductive glance in Nyai Roro Kidul's eyes, ignoring her fundamental quality as a powerful divine who ruled the Javanese South Sea. Jim Supangkat depicted Ken Dedes, the first queen of Singhasari in Java, in a controversial way: Her head and shoulder are shown in a classical Javanese sculpture, but her body—from breast to toe—is given a comic style, suggesting that she is "a prostitute."[47] Supangkat's visualization of Ken Dedes is far from the "feminine beauty, purity and magical power" that she symbolized in Javanese culture.[48]

These misleading depictions of Javanese female divines motivated me to evoke the narratives of Sri from a female perspective—my own

perspective. Concerns about the representation of Sri and the relationship of such imagery to changes in sociocultural conditions drew my attention to a similar phenomenon of glorification of the goddess figure in Western art practice during the 1970s. I found that not only were narratives about the Dewi Sri connected with the history of the *Mitoni* ritual and *lurik* cloth but the demise of those narratives was linked with the role of patriarchy in Indonesia's art and society.

In crafting my ethnographic narrative of the practices that engage Sri, I used my personal experience and creative practice and positioned my artistic endeavor as political statement. I employ two philosophical frameworks in my installation art practice: first, Joseph Beuys's concept of "social sculpture" and, second, Carol Hanisch's well-known feminist concept "The personal is political," which was reinterpreted by feminist artists in the 1970s and by Asian female artists contemporaneously.

I utilize Beuys's concept of social sculpture, which extends the concept of sculpting from visual art to a sociocultural and sociopolitical context. In asking "how [do] we mould and shape the world in which we live?"[49] Beuys provided artists with the opportunity to respond, through creative practice, to the particular society and culture in which they live. With this perspective, the practice of art as a form of sociopolitical activism can be seen as an invitation to the art's viewers to engage in social and political discussions. Shaping the world in social sculpture provides an opportunity to draw society's attention to something. My installation art is my political sign, an invitation to the audience to explore the entangled stories underneath the disappearance of Sri.

The phrase "The personal is political," which was popularized by liberation activist Carol Hanisch,[50] was widely borrowed and transformed as a political rationale for 1970s-era feminist activism and art.[51] "The personal is political" was used to interpret women artists' work in western Europe and the United States as well as in the critical reading of Asian women's art. "The personal is political" idea was implemented in art when "'personal stories' began to be interpreted as the logical consequence of much larger political structures."[52] Thus, "personal experiences" were also seen, anew, "as symptoms of a larger political factor which inspires the artwork."[53] In my art installation, I used my personal experience of the *Mitoni* ritual and my perspective as a Javanese Muslim female artist as the political foundation.

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Installation Art Practice and Exhibition

I created two major art exhibitions for this project: *Recalling the Goddess Sri* (2012) and *Mitoni. Lurik and the Stitches of Lament* (2013). Both exhibitions were shown in Wollongong, Australia. *Lurik* was the main material used in those installations. In a form of bricolage to connect all of the stories, I used a hand-stitching technique to construct soft sculpture objects. Hand stitching has three functions in these two installations: first, a metaphoric act of mending the wounds imparted by society and lamenting the disappearance of Sri; second, a response to the Islamization of Java; and, third, a technique for constructing the objects in the installations.

The costumes for covering the body—made by use of the stitching and sewing process of traditional Javanese costume making—were results "of the twin historical processes of Islamization and creation of states ruled by the Dutch."[54] Prior to the arrival of Islam, the traditional Javanese costume for a man or a woman was unsewn cotton cloth that draped around the body. The transformation of Javanese costume was political and economic, with the Dutch promoting covering of the body, which benefited the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC) or Dutch East India Company. Textile importation was the VOC's main business in Indonesia.[55] In addition, Islamic missionaries promoted costumes that were more modest to their eyes, in order to spread their religious culture and doctrine in Java. Gradually, stitched garments became integrated into traditional Javanese costume design. These historical and political dimensions of stitched garments and stitching in Java gave me an opportunity to highlight the histories that related specifically to my personal interests. I made use of old Javanese traditions and traditions of Islamization in Java, by employing stitching as the main technique in constructing the objects for my installations.

By transforming *lurik* cloths into soft sculptural objects and using stitching to construct the objects in my installations, I highlighted the stories of the *Mitoni* ritual, *lurik* cloths and Sri—stories that had been buried and hidden as a consequence of the spread of Islam. In this way, the action of stitching became a political statement about my being both a Javanese woman and a Muslim. By stitching, I questioned freedom in society from a perspective of dual self-identity. In addition, my stitching was intended to metaphorically stitch together the wounds in Javanese society. The use of

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lurik cloth and stitching in the making of the objects in my installations was intended to engage both artistic and political qualities of this practice-led research and to engage the viewers of the work.

Recalling the Goddess Sri

In this art installation *(Figures 14-17)* is a central object: the figure of a woman, a representation of Sri. The figure is surrounded by soft sculptured offerings to her. The installation is centered on the floor and inspired by the way the Javanese give offerings in traditional ritual. By arranging objects that were inspired by a part of the *Mitoni* ceremony, I brought the sacred ambiance of Javanese ritual into the art installation. Light and shadows were utilized as features to dramatize the atmosphere of the site. The figure of Sri emerges from the floor and represents the spirit of waking up and expressed reciprocity. One of my intentions in this work was to connect my art practice with the heart of social conscience and position my art as a statement of refusal to be part of political oppression.



Fig. 14. Aprina Murwanti, *Recalling the Goddess Sri*, art installation of lurik cloths and soft sculptures, FCA Gallery, University of Wollongong, 2012. Photograph by Aprina Murwanti.



Fig. 15. Detail of the goddess Sri and the rice cones offering in Aprina Murwanti, *Recalling the Goddess Sri*, art installation of lurik cloths and soft sculptures, FCA Gallery, University of Wollongong, 2012. Photograph by Aprina Murwanti.

In making the Sri figure, I used myself as a model. Sri was believed to be a form of spirit, and therefore she was too vague to imagine. Instead, I started with the logic that Sri was the greatest ancestor of Javanese women and that I may be one of her descendants. I traced myself to capture her presence and thus encapsulate her spirit in the work. I traced my face and used that tracing to reconstruct her face. In fact, the thought of myself as one of her descendants strengthened the bond that I already felt with her. Through this authoritative act of self-tracing, I connected her

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with my personal story. A similar creative method of self-tracing was used by Ana Mendieta in her *Silueta* series.

Recalling the Goddess Sri includes soft sculptures in the shapes of flowers and fruits, inspired by offerings in the *Mitoni* ritual. *Liwatan lurik*, hung on the walls, encircles the space. There is a chandelier made by soft sculptures, inspired by chandeliers in *krobongan*–Sri's sacred room in Javanese palaces. A couple of coconut-shaped soft sculptures with embroidery of the Javanese symbols of long-lasting love, Kamaratih and Kamajaya, also inspired by *Mitoni* ritual, are included in the offerings to the goddess. The hand-stitched soft sculptures are imperfect, highlighting humanness in the installation.

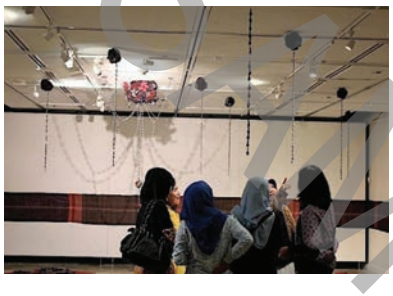


Fig. 16. Viewers of Aprina Murwanti's *Recalling the Goddess Sri* exhibition, FCA Gallery, University of Wollongong, 2012. Photograph by Bharoto Yekti, 2012.



Fig. 17. Detail of Kamaratih and Kamajaya in Aprina Murwanti, *Recalling the Goddess Sri*, art installation of lurik cloths and soft sculptures, FCA Gallery, University of Wollongong, 2012. Photograph by Aprina Murwanti.

Mitoni, Lurik and the Stitches of Lament

This art installation *(Figures 18-21)* was made through a bricolage process in which I interconnected ethnographic narratives from myths and folklore with my art and ideas. I used playfulness to express my lament for Javanese cultural loss and my personal fears, melancholies and disappointments. The animal figures are inspired by folktales about Sri, fabric patterns used in *Mitoni* ritual, Javanese palaces and offerings for Sri. The empty chair, a fragile throne made from *lurik* cloths, indicates Sri's absence.

My position in this installation is that of a bricoleur and storyteller who has woven together the threads of these fragmented stories. I used stitching to link the fragmented narratives about Sri that are contained in the *Mitoni* ritual and *lurik* cloths with the social and political stories. The metaphor of stitching



Figure 18. Aprina Murwanti, *Mitoni, Lurik and the Stitches of Lament*, art installation, FCA Gallery, University of Wollongong, 2013. Courtesy of Photography by Appleart.



Figure 19. Aprina Murwanti, *Mitoni, Lurik and the Stitches of Lament*, art installation, FCA Gallery, University of Wollongong, 2013. Courtesy of Photography by Appleart.



Fig. 20. Aprina Murwanti, *Mitoni, Lurik and the Stitches of Lament*, art installation, FCA Gallery, University of Wollongong, 2013. Photograph by Aprina Murwanti.

enabled the pieces and bits of fragmented narratives to connect and retell these stories.

I installed amulets in the chandelier; these amulets combine my identities as a Muslim and as a Javanese. I used soft, sculptured scissors, a razor blade, flowers and goddess images in the amulets to represent Javanese myth. Scissors, razor blades and other sharp utensils are believed to protect a pregnancy from evil. I also installed on the chandelier hand embroideries of Javanese goddess amulets. One of the amulets is embroidered with the Arabic calligraphy for Allah. I united Javanese mythical beliefs and Islamic symbols in the chandelier object. My intention in *Mitoni, Lurik and the Stitches of Lament* is to highlight that the story of Sri in Java is surrounded by complex influences and interventions.

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Conclusion

In this project, I extended the process of evoking Sri, through traditional Javanese *Mitoni* pregnancy ritual, to an installation art practice. By evoking and revisualizing the spirit of Sri in installation art, I connected and retold multiple stories associated with Sri, with a focus on the effect of politicization of religion. Using *lurik* cloths as the main material in the installations, I lamented the disappearance of Sri from Javanese society and expressed my disagreement with and critique of misleading representations of Javanese female divines. To make a statement, I stitched together the wounds and the ethnographic narratives; I brought the story into the present; I applied realities and myths to a discussion with political context. I utilized "The personal is political" phrase and social sculpture to evoke and revisualize Sri's spirit from my own perspective. I offered an alternative perspective for seeing and exploring the goddess through the lens of an Asian Javanese Muslim female artist.



Fig. 21. Aprina Murwanti, *Mitoni, Lurik and the Stitches of Lament*, art installation, FCA Gallery, University of Wollongong, 2013. Photograph by Aprina Murwanti.

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TONANTZIN-COATLICUE-GUADALUPE: CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM, COLONIZATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Yuria Celidwen



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Introduction

Feelings of atonement and empowerment arise in personal and cultural narratives from the reconciliation of seemingly opposite views of life. Abusive situations compel us to stand up and call for dignity and respect. Through understanding the causes of suffering, we can gain compassion. By acknowledging our unconscious bias as individuals and as societies living in cultural constructs, we can grow in collective awareness. Based on this premise, in this article I aim to contribute to the dialogue about psychological atonement between the peoples of indigenous descent in Latin America, on one side, and the Christian faith—specifically, the Catholic Church—on the other side. To some, placing these two groups in confrontation may seem surprising, especially when 97.3% of the population of Mexico admits to practicing some form of Christianity, with the largest group being Catholic (89.3%), followed by Protestant and Evangelical (8%).[1] The standpoint I use here is that of the indigenous peoples as a subjugated group, originally oppressed by religious mandates of the Spanish Catholic crown, when pre-Hispanic cultures were violently deprived of their cultural values, symbols and social status, and then further persecuted precisely by those representing the Christian faith during the colonization period that started in the 16th century.

The dialogue that I propose entails an exploration of the aspects of the shadow side of the Catholic faith. In depth psychology, the shadow is akin to the unconscious, the side of the psyche or mind that is unacknowledged by the individual This side includes the personal characteristics, good and bad aspects of instincts, abilities and moral qualities, all of which the ego

has repressed, never recognized or never even been conscious of. Generally, these character traits are experienced in others through the mechanism of projection.[2] In this article, I make the point that the shadow of the Catholic Church was projected as conflictive fear and aversion to the otherness of the indigenous populations in Latin America, and it was acted out through manipulation, subjugation and oppression by means of religious imposition and conversion.

The driving forces of the shadow manifest not only in individuals but also culturally in social groups and the dynamics of any community attempting to act as a whole. The innovative field of interpersonal neurobiology—brought forward by Daniel Siegel, one of its pioneers in the past decade—proposes that integration is central to the developing mind as it aims to interlace separate modes of information processing into a coherent whole, giving rise to flexible, adaptive, harmonious functioning.[3] That is, seeking integration is inherent in the capacity of the psyche, and such integration can be achieved by acknowledging aspects that are unconscious or dissociated. From that perspective, I find it imperative to recognize and unveil the cultural narratives that underlie destructive behavior, since these are part of the identity function of the brain that is unacknowledged, separated and dissociated from a state of awareness and wholeness.

Based on these concepts, the process that I call shadow-facing involves a dialogue between the complex cultural aspects of identity conditioning as seen in its holistic nature, in both its nurturing and destructive tendencies. Once both aspects have been acknowledged, it is possible to understand their causes and conditions and therefore achieve a psychological integration. I argue that it is imperative to understand the unconscious bias we have been conditioned to by self-serving systems of power and to focus rather on the community at large. The objective is to transform self-centered dispositions into ways of relating that are conducive to communal, collaborative living.

I propose that, by realizing the connotations of the narratives that create our identity, we necessarily comprehend the ideologies by which we live. By understanding the origins of these ideologies, we can better respond and re-create new perspectives that can benefit us all. As we understand the complexity of our beliefs and behavior, we open ourselves to compassion. I claim that transformation begins with the realization that sensible beings matter and that to stand for justice means to call for social engagement in the form

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of a radical revolution of collaboration that burns away the impurities of a self-image that is concerned only with its own well-being. This alchemical process transforms the psyche through relentless scrutiny. The result is a mind compelled to live compassionately and ethically, replacing the establishment of power and subjugation with trust, unity, dignity and freedom.

In this article, I concentrate on developing a dialogue by acknowledging the aspects of the shadow side of the cultural constructions defined by the Catholic faith in Mexico. This process is essential for changing the conditions of misery and dehumanization brought upon the collective psyche of those living in unprivileged situations. The shadow aspects that I examine are expressly the symbolic and depth-psychological aspects of the development of the icon of the Lady of Guadalupe. I address how that image initially was used as a semiotic medium for the manipulation of the native population, as Patricia Harrington suggested, through which the traditional polytheistic beliefs were forced into conversion to Catholicism in the 16th century.[4] I deduce that the tones of the devouring aspect of this archetype are correlated with the sense of defeat that still subdues many indigenous populations in Mexico and the rest of Latin America. This self-defeating mechanism is particularly evident in regards to obstacles that indigenous peoples face in their efforts to protect sacred landscapes from exploitation and destruction. Hence, my perspective necessarily assumes an anti-neoliberal stance.

I approach this inquiry as a way of a metaphorical, convivial meal. I intend to provide food for thought and for emotion, bringing together mind and heart for reconciliation. This offering comes in four main courses. First, the table is set by describing the dynamism of the Lady of Guadalupe as the mother archetype of compassion, strength and unity for the indigenous, dispossessed and immigrant populations of Hispanic descent. Her image has been used as an icon of insurgency (in the movement for Mexican Independence and the Mexican Revolution), but also of conquest and subjugation (during the Spanish colonization of Mexico) and revolution (in liberation theology movements). Second, the spice comes with the exploration of the devouring aspect of the Lady of Guadalupe as an image of indoctrination and oppression of indigenous peoples. This elucidation is supported with historical accounts of the use of the icon by Spanish colonizers and a mythological analysis of the symbols in its iconography. Third, at the table sit the Nahuatl mother goddesses Tonantzin and Coatlicue and the Lady of Guadalupe, all sharing an

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inquiry on the symbolic archetypal elements they have in common. Finally, dessert comes with the sharing of the bread: The bodies of the three goddesses join as a compassionate mother/goddess archetype. In modern days, this archetype manifests in the very figure of Pope Francis, who has taken unprecedented steps as the head of the Catholic Church, offering an apology to the indigenous peoples of Latin America and acknowledging the practices of violation and abuse that were carried out by Spanish colonizers in the name of the Catholic faith. Moreover, he has encouraged Catholic devotees to come together in an act of forgiveness, unity and reconciliation. This process of shadow-facing is, in my opinion, a heartening start to a sense of restitution and a restoration of trust.

Setting the Table: Our Lady in Time

Every 12th of December, the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City is flooded with pilgrim devotees who come from near and far to honor the figure of the Mesoamerican Mary (*Figure 22*). The Basilica is the most visited Catholic shrine in the world, with approximately 20 million visitors per year.[5] The communal celebrations each December are largely joyful events for the numerous pilgrims, who stand during an all-night vigil and take part in nine days of jubilation and prayer. In the past century, the Lady of Guadalupe has been adopted as a symbol of Hispanic cultural identity for destitute, indigenous and immigrant populations around the world.[6] These populations regard the image as an exemplary icon of spiritual refuge, for its archetypal qualities of motherhood and compassion.[7] She has become such an influential representation of the indigenous divine feminine[8] that just having made the pilgrimage is cause for admiration.



Fig. 22. Man walking on his knees to the Lady of Guadalupe shrine, on pilgrimage for the Lady of Guadalupe, December 2015. Basilica de la Virgen de Guadalupe, Mexico. Photograph by Yuria Celidwen, 2015.

As a foundational symbol in the history of Mexico, the image of Guadalupe was used as the insignia of empowerment and unity in the nation's two most important fights for social justice. In 1810, the Catholic priest Miguel Hidalgo carried a flag with the image of Guadalupe encouraging the natives to fight for

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independence from the Spanish authorities.[9] A hundred years later, during the Mexican Revolution, General Emiliano Zapata carried a banner with the image of Guadalupe to protest for the rights to land.[10] From that time to today, carrying a banner with the image of the Lady of Guadalupe has come to signify the unified call for equality and freedom.

Regardless of the Lady's historical presence in Mexico, the Lady's association with battles for justice and civil rights goes even further back in time and outside Latin America. By 1340, the image of the Virgin Mary as the Lady of Guadalupe in Extremadura, Spain, already was associated with Spanish royalty, as an icon of the Christian struggle for freedom against the Moors.[11] Therefore, it is not surprising that Mary was adopted as an emblem of Spain as it advanced in its Christian conquest campaigns in the New World.[12] Spanish colonizers carried statues and banners of Mary with them as they conquered indigenous territories. They replaced native idols with images of the Virgin.[13] In the advancing conquest of Mexico, within the first hundred years of contact—by 1620—the native population had been eradicated almost in its entirety. Natives found their deaths in battle, suicide or disease. As the worship of the traditional Nahuatl pantheon was banned, with the conversion of the indigenous population to Catholicism, natives were dehumanized, tortured and abused to bring about completely subjugation. People were slaughtered if they refused religious conversion.[14] The native population suffered from such traumatic psycho-cultural dissolution that they found ways to stop bearing children in order to protect them from oppression. There were mass suicides and epidemics from viruses to which the native population had no immunity.[15] All of these factors brought the population close to extinction.[16] From this, Harrington affirmed that the natives must have associated the images of Mary with the destruction of their culture during the period of conquest.[17]

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The Spice: Our Devouring Lady

As the destruction of the indigenous pantheon advanced, and its substitution with the new Christian faith was established, the population developed ingenious practices to continue their worship in secret. Figurines of the Nahuatl mother goddess Coatlicue, "Snakes-Her-Skirt" (*Figure 23*), were placed inside the statues of the Lady of Guadalupe, so that the traditional worship of the chthonic goddess could continue. The hill of Tepeyac, where



Fig. 23. Mother goddess Coatlicue. Aztec. Basalt, 2.57 m, circa 1500 CE. National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico. Photograph by Yuria Celidwen, 2015.

faith, used by both the native population and the Catholic Church, that religious conversion was established.[20]

Tonantzin is also identified with Nahuatl chthonic mother goddess Coatlicue, the mother of the moon, the stars and the sun, according to the Nahuatl creation myth (*Figure 24*).[21] These elements would have been familiar and recognizable in the picture of Guadalupe. Going back to the *Leyenda de los Soles*, Coatlicue is one of the five creator goddesses who gave their lives to give birth to and energize the fifth and present sun, Huitzilopochtli, the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe was later built, was a well-known place for Nahuatl ritual festivals to honor several chthonic mother goddesses, of whom the most revered was Tonantzin.[18] Friar Bernardino de Sahagún mentioned that the ritual site of Tonantzin—a Nahua appellative meaning "Our mother"— was merged with that of the Lady of Guadalupe and that the Lady later adopted the goddess's name, becoming Tonantzin Guadalupe.[19] It was through this strategy of merging mythic pagan elements with those of the newly established



Fig. 24. Mother goddess Tonantzin. Nahuatl. Ceramic, circa 16th century CE. National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico. Photograph by Yuria Celidwen, 2015.

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which personifies the new era and the most important Nahuatl god.[22] This is another motif that appears in the mythology of Mary as Guadalupe, mother of Jesus Christ, the son of God, the solar god image of the new faith. Other significant similarities between the two faiths are that Coatlicue and Guadalupe are both represented as a conciliation of opposites: day and night, light and darkness, life and death. They are the Great Mother in the archetypes of compassion, fierceness, nurturance, death, strength, transformation and protection.

The stories related to the apparition of the Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico were first told in Spanish in the 1648 booklet *Imagen de la Virgen María, Madre de Dios de Guadalupe* [Image of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God of Guadalupe] by theologian Miguel Sánchez. In the following year, 1649, a religious tract called *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* [The Great Happening], written by the vicar of the Catholic sanctuary at the hill of Tepeyac, Luis Laso de la Vega, appeared in Nahuatl. That narrative is divided into seven parts, one of which is the *Nican Mopohua*. This section seems to have come from an original manuscript by Antonio Valeriano, a Nahua scholar who worked alongside friar Bernardino de Sahagún on the *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*.[23] The *Nican Mopohua* is the story of the apparition of the Virgin Mary as seen by a Nahua young man named Cuauhtlatoatzin (Talking Eagle). The narrative says that in the young man's grief the Virgin appeared to him as an indigenous young woman, the Lady of Guadalupe. She embraced him and said out loud, "Do not be troubled or weighed down with grief, my son. Am I not here, who am your Mother?" After this, she asked him to gather the roses that were blooming around him and to bring them to the bishop of New Spain, Juan de Zumárraga. The bishop initially dismissed the man's account and demanded proof of his veracity. The young man showed him his *tilma* (a traditional Nahua robe of rough cloth) that held the roses. Imprinted on the cloth was the image of the Lady of Guadalupe. Cuauhtlatoatzin, the narrative continues, then converted to Catholicism and was baptized as Juan Diego. Later a shrine in honor of the Lady of Guadalupe was built on the site of these apparitions. In 2002, Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin was canonized by the Catholic Church.[24]

It must be assumed that the aforementioned narrative is part of the Catholic mythology for the Lady of Guadalupe, as there is no historical record of these apparitions. What is indeed known, however, is that the image was painted in the sixteenth century on a six-by-three-foot cloth

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made of linen and hemp. It follows a Byzantine painting style that uses tempera made with organic materials such as pine soot, calcium sulfate, copper and iron oxides, sulfur, and mercury compounds and cochineal dyes.[25] The style of imagery is evidently Spanish and the methods in use reflect European Christian iconography of the period.

The reasons developed below support the argument that the image was created to promote the religious conversion of the indigenous people, as the symbols depicted on it were identified and reinterpreted as part of Catholic mythology. The stellar symbols and the colors have meaningful religious connotations for both the Nahuatl and Catholic traditions. Indeed, it has been suggested that the image was created as a means of establishing the new faith.[26]

The theory of depth psychology states that the unconscious is "the source of the instinctual forces of the psyche and of the forms or categories that regulate them, namely the archetypes."[27] I suggest that, because the mind creates a sense of self from archetypes and images perceived, the story of the apparition was intended to be a model for an attitude to be adopted by the indigenous population toward the institution of the Catholic Church and the Spanish colonizers. Therefore, I argue that the elements on the image of the Lady of Guadalupe present established Christian symbols intended to institutionalize religious and political power and domination. An examination of these symbols enables us to come to terms with their sources and possible significance.

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Sharing the Table: An Inquiry into Symbols

The central figure in the image of the Lady of Guadalupe (*Figure 25*) is an indigenous young woman who appears as a young Mary. This image has been indicated, by Ernesto de la Torre Villar and Ramiro Navarro de Anda, to relate to the description of Mary referenced in the book of Revelation in the New Testament of the Bible:[28] "A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth."[29] In the image of the Lady of Guadalupe, a halo surrounds her as the "woman clothed with the sun." Allegorically, the light rays can be interpreted, from a depth-psychological perspective, as referring to a solar god, the new sun that is born in the winter solstice

announcing a new birth, a new cycle, a renovation of the establishment. The Lady is in prayer, indicating devotion, an attitude of deference that I interpret as a model of submission to a hierarchical structure, subordinate to the solar god. This subservience also appears in another mention of Mary in the Bible, in Acts 1:8. The angel Gabriel tells her that she will bear "the Son of the Most High" and that "The Holy Spirit will come upon [her], and the power of the Most High will overshadow [her]." Does this denote an action of divine creation that alludes to the imminent subservient disposition the Virgin should render? In similar terms, in Luke 1:26–38 Mary responds by indicating her obedience to Jesus Christ: "Let it be with me according to your word." To me, this version of the mother figure supports a patriarchal religion. According to Christian cosmology, Jesus Christ is a symbolic personification of the cosmic principles of creation,[30] which I see translated as representing a new belief system. The red border around the sun's rays can, thus, be interpreted as a sign of the rising solar influence of the new royal heir and of the transition of power.



Fig. 25. Unknown artist, Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe [Our Lady of Guadalupe], also known as the Virgin of Guadalupe, shown in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in México City, painting, presented by Juan Diego in 1531. Photograph by Wikimedia Commons contributors, "File:1531 Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe anagoria.jpg," Wikimedia Commons.

Similarly and as I mentioned above, the rays of the sun would have been recognized by indigenous people as a symbol of their highest solar god, Huitzilopochtli. Pre-Hispanic traditions also followed a patriarchal foundation of solar gods. The myth in the *Leyenda de los Soles*[31] is a token of this bias. Not surprisingly, the Nahuatl narrative also has been suggested to be about domination.[32] However, the difference between the Christian myths and the Nahuatl myths is that the latter characterizes the feminine figure as an equal in divine status; both mother and solar son are divine in origin. This difference is extremely important, contrasting the Nahuatl faith with the Christian faith, in which women are discriminated against. That is, in the Christian tradition the female figure remains of a lower status and under the domination of the male figure.

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The image of the Lady of Guadalupe exhibits many aspects of the established Marian iconography of the 17th century that referred to basic Christian dogmas, such as perpetual virginity, the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption, and the Virgin as *Theotokos* (Mother of God) (*Figure 25*).[33] From the perspective of depth psychology, a reading of some of these symbols makes reference to the shadow aspect of the mind. For example, the illustration of the crescent moon under the Lady's feet is usually interpreted as a feminine symbol denoting the internal physical and psychic energies of the shadow aspect. These energies are, as mentioned earlier, the repressed instinctual forces that manifest unconscious behavior. On the other hand, the compassionate qualities that characterize the Virgin Mary, and hence the Lady of Guadalupe, are interpreted as a force to overcome the aggressive nature of the mind, which is the shadow or unconscious. The Lady can be said to represent reflective consciousness at the dawn of solar awareness, the solar god, which is Jesus Christ. The depiction of her standing on the moon, therefore, would be an ascension over the instinctual tendencies—that is, an assimilation of the shadow aspect.[34] This quality points toward integration.

Moreover, for the Nahuatl cultures the moon was the celestial symbol of the god of night and the underworld, which represents the unconscious. The psychic energies were assigned to the lord of the shadows, the lord of the dead, Mictlantecuhtli. Moreover, during the time of the colonization of Latin America, the Catholic Church dismissed polytheist beliefs as savage, so that standing on the moon could also indicate a triumph over those pagan indigenous convictions.

As mentioned above, the colors in the image of the Lady of Guadalupe have meaning for both Christian traditions and Nahuatl traditions. The mantle is blue-green or turquoise, which is the color with which the gods are depicted in Nahuatl culture and the color of the natural forces of water.[35] Members of the elite class wore mantles made of garments interwoven with exquisite jewels, feathers and threads, and for special ceremonies the emperor wore a mantle of fiber net studded with turquoise beads.[36] Further, in the Hebrew tradition blue is the color of the robe worn by the high priests, and in Christian symbolism the robe of the cardinal is purple.[37] The stars on the Lady's mantle also indicate royalty in her position as Mother of God. The color of the stars is gold, indicating solar qualities and an association

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with the royal family. All of these symbols indicate that the Lady is portrayed as a sovereign.

Continuing with the explorations of possible meaning of the image of the Lady, we see that she carries a cross, a pre-eminent Christian symbol. Based on depth-psychological interpretations, I see the cross as the intersection of opposing forces meeting at the heart—that is, the conciliation of opposites that I mentioned earlier.[38] The symbols found in the image indicate a tension of opposites that brings creation. Therefore, the Lady is a symbol of fecundity, the creation of new life, or the establishment of a new order that is to be accepted as a cycle of transformation that brings psychic integration. This quaternity of the cross also is present in the four-petaled flower girdle around the Lady's waist, which may have been intended as a motif of perpetual virginity, also referencing to Immaculate Conception ("she who is about to give birth").[39]

This cross or flower motif was also recognized by the native population. The motif is the preeminent Aztec Glyph 4 Movement, which represents the fifth sun or *nahui ollin*.[40] This glyph not only represents the current Fifth Age but also is a symbol of life, transformation and the recreation of the universe. Enrique Florescano noted the following:

From the chaos and darkness appears again the new order: the collapsed sky is lifted and returned to its place; the earth and water, furnished with their generative powers, surge froth again from the chaos; the gods create humans anew, along with the necessary gifts (fire, foods so that they can reproduce and people the earth.[41]

An interesting contrast to indigenous iconography is the way in which the eyes of the Lady of Guadalupe are depicted. Aztec gods have large, bulky, prominent eyes that look straight out in a manner of threat and power. For such a violent, war-driven society as the Aztecs, this empowering feature must have served to induce the passion needed in battle. Even more, perhaps a *participation mystique* took place and the devotee experienced the divine force as a power being created from within. (*Participation mystique* is a term derived from Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and which denotes a psychological association of a subject with the objects of his or her experience, as if the subject cannot clearly distinguish experience from the object itself.[42]) Conversely, the eyes of the Lady of Guadalupe look down, discreet and humble. One could certainly argue that this humility is a characteristic of kindness, but I would contend that the downward cast of the

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Lady's eyes also could have been used as a model for submission for the subjugated population, a call for the native people not to challenge the system in power.[43]

The Dessert: Forgiveness, Unity and Reconciliation

In conclusion, the mixture of traditions is an organic process. It happens physically and psychically. When the process is a forceful, coercive one, scars remain. Intergenerational trauma manifests in the indigenous populations, as noted by Brave Heart and Debruyn ("The American Indian Holocaust: Healing Historical Unresolved Grief") and Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins and Altschul ("Historical Trauma Among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas: Concepts, Research, and Clinical Considerations").[44] Equity, dignity, freedom and respect are inalienable rights that the indigenous populations still struggle to access.[45] Their sacred landscapes are constantly desacralized for economic and political interests, leaving these populations even more vulnerable, and rarely are the people taken into account in the decision-making process.[46] Just as the first churches in Mexico were built from the rubble of Nahuatl temples that had been destroyed, the first spiritual foundations were constructed from the blood of Nahuatl goddesses. Over time, these combinations resulted in a hybrid tradition that has the Lady of Guadalupe as its pre-eminent icon. In symbol and in essence, the Lady of Guadalupe represents the *mestizaje* (racial and/or cultural mixing) of today's Mexican identity.

As I see it, the trinity of mother goddesses has returned as one: Tonantzin Coatlicue Guadalupe. She is an interdependent, relational, enriched figure composed of different, varied elements, in a whole complexity and fertility. She is the compassionate, the devouring, the tender, the young, the mother, the wise, the furious and the fearsome. She is the love-giving wise woman. She is the fierce warrior ready to fight for her people. She encourages truth making through relationality, enhancing our capacity for unity and respect, which can be achieved only through comprehension of the complexity of human nature.

A case of shadow-facing that I propose in this article has come to be manifested: Recently, the Catholic Church has taken unprecedented steps to adapt to an inclusive, nondiscriminatory world. The first-ever Latin American Pope, Pope Francis, has publicly acknowledged the abusive

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crimes committed against indigenous peoples during the colonization of Latin America. In July 2015, during a meeting in La Paz, Bolivia, with leaders of indigenous groups from the Amazon, led by indigenous Bolivian president Evo Morales, Pope Francis pleaded forgiveness for the abuse carried out in the name of the Christian faith.[47] Following suit, in his February 2016 visit to Mexico, Pope Francis spoke before a crowd of indigenous people and mestizos in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas and offered another apology: "How worthwhile it would be for each of us to examine our conscience and learn to say, 'Forgive me!'"[48] More recently, he insisted for the rights of indigenous peoples over their lands.[49]

Pope Francis's recent public stance shows an unquestionable disposition toward openness and reconciliation. Furthermore, he is not only looking for the reunification of the indigenous peoples but going further, to take in account the whole of our planet. His public position is one of awareness and of working together in joint measures to address urgent matters that involve the people and the planet, bringing topics such as climate change and social justice to the conversations with those involved in political decision making. Pope Francis declared, "Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the Earth and human labor is not mere philanthropy. It is a moral obligation."[50] Indeed, our moral obligation is to nourish a sense of community and belonging so that an imperative sense of justice is established. But before a sense of community can be achieved, a process of atonement must take place. The atonement process starts by recognizing our own human shadow and the unconscious attitudes of exploitation that we as cultural societies have imposed on others and that have been imposed on us.

Political considerations aside, Pope Francis's apologetic attitude seems a courageous commencement of the process of shadow-facing by the Catholic faith. It certainly is a restitution of hope and a renewal of the nourishing archetype of a goddess mother figure. Perhaps, this time of intensely manifesting opposing forces signals the coming of a new order. Independently of a specific faith, we are being called to a renewal of a belief system based on ethical principles.

We are entering a moment in which the qualities of compassion, collaboration, courageous action and protection for our fellow human beings and for the environment will bring the change we need in order to better the quality of life. I emphasize that, as we acknowledge the shadow side,

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we also should praise the conscious side that takes responsibility for our choices and the effects we have on the rest of the world. Consciousness means taking action to change the conditions that perpetuate the vicious cycle of abuse. Awareness entails relating to others and embracing our rich diversity. Compassion involves understanding the causes and conditions of our confusion and regarding the other as being as important as oneself. It is essential to cultivate these new global narratives that nurture altruistic interactions among humans. It is imperative that we encourage ourselves to act as caregivers of one another and of the Earth. This is a time of transition, indeed, and a new sun for the betterment of human interactions with the world may be dawning.

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SECTION 2



INQUIRY INTO THE ART OF EXPERIENCING THE GODDESS

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LITHA



She had been climbing, climbing. She
had reached the place beyond which is nothing
but sky and descent.

At the summit, no fanfare, no balloons,
no celebration. One step like all the other
steps, and she was there. One more step,
and the descent would begin.

As she climbed, she did not think of
the summit. She watched her hands, her
feet, her balance, as she rose high,
high, higher.

Suddenly, she had taken the last
upward step.

Do you think she made camp and
slept? Do you think she stopped moving? Do
you think she lives there still, at the height
she sought and won?

No. What would life be without movement,
without struggle? How can a clutched
hand hold freedom?

She stood for a moment, entranced
with the beauty of the world beneath her feet.
Then she took another step.

~ Patricia Monaghan

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ABUNDANT EMBODIMENT IN AN ANICONIC TRADITION: NATURE, TRANCE AND ART IN YORUBA RELIGIONS

MEI-MEI SANFORD

SAMPLE

Dedicated to Akinsola Akiwowo, of blessed memory, and to the Iyalaase Osun of Iragbiji, Osun mi toto.

"If you want to know about Osun, go study fish."
—Osun Priestess Luisah Teish

"It is during the scarcity of water that we seek abundant water."
—Babalawo Professor Akinsola Akiwowo, Ifa divination verse

Introduction

West African Yoruba religions are religions of continual embodiment. The *orisa* deities, female and male, appear to and interact with their devotees through trance, in nature and in ritually prepared images. They speak through the dolls, cowries and palm nuts of diviners and appear in dreams and apparitions. Yet the images of the orisa, with a few specific exceptions, do not portray the deities themselves but rather their devotees in the moment of trance or animal messengers called *iko*. The orisa are visible everywhere—in lightning, water, peacocks and crocodiles, metals and colored cloth, numbers, elderly priestesses and priests, the beautiful or terrible stranger in the market—and yet they are invisible



Fig. 26. The source of the Osun River, Igede, Nigeria. Photograph by Mei Mei Sanford, 1992.

in the sense of lacking a consistent identifiable shape (*Figure 26*). The orisa are protean in nature. What is constant is their changing form and continual appearance. Their forms of embodiment are endless. What orisa images make visible is not the likeness of the deity but rather the moment of embodiment itself, the orisa's descent into human being or animal or other elements of the tangible world. In this essay, I examine forms of Yoruba trance, aniconic images of the divine, and iconic exceptions to the rule in traditional Yoruba religions, their diasporic descendent Santería, and a contemporary Yoruba priestly artist's depiction of the goddess Osun.

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The Aniconic Tradition in Yoruba Art

The Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria and the Republic of Benin have been urban for more than nine hundred years. They are the creators of a consummate tradition of carving, including *ere*, images made for and about the orisa deities. Yet, with certain exceptions, these images do not depict the deities but rather their priestesses and priests.

Why is this? In an example of a dance wand for the god Sango by carver Lamidi Olonade Fakeye (*Figure 27*), the figure is a priestess of Sango, kneeling in the position of childbirth, opening the conduit to the other world. The shape above her head is the emblem of Sango, twin meteoric stones that carry his presence. The emblem's placement is a clue. The *olorisa* priestesses and priests—the word *olorisa* has no gender in Yoruba and simply means "the ones who 'have' the orisa,"; the orisa, too, are female and male—have their heads prepared when they are initiated, in order to receive their deities in trance. Slits are made in the skin between the forehead and the crown and then substances are introduced to facilitate trance and the entrance of the deity. *Olorisa* enter trance to bring the deities into their communities to teach, heal, admonish, comfort, council and transform.



Fig. 27. Lamidi Olonade Fakeye, *Ose Sango*, wood carving, 1991.

In this carving, ("Ose Sango") the double emblem rests on the kneeling priestess's head. The emblem's position is how we know that she is in trance. Her face is composed in intense concentration. In some carvings, her eyes are open wide; Robert Farris Thompson has suggested that those eyes are pressing outward, pushed outward by the deity's presence.[1] The emblems on the priestess's head have no fixed form, and carvers carve them in many ways: simple lozenges, shapes inscribed with the *gbere* (cheek scarifications indicating the group to which the patron belongs) and even faces or drums. The faces refer to Sango's "children" or followers and to *ibeji* (twins) who are orisa in their own right and under Sango's special protection. The drums depicted are bata drums, which belong to Sango. Only the emblems' doubleness and position signal that they are the twin meteoric thunderstones that rest on the devotee's altar. The carving, then, is not a picture of an orisa but a picture of a moment of trance.

In slavery-era Cuba, Yoruba people encountered Catholicism and created the hybrid religion of Santería (the way of the Saints). Chromolithic images of the saints were matched with orisa with whom they shared characteristics: Osun with *La Caridad del Cobre* (Our Lady of Charity of Copper), because they shared characteristics of water, maternal care and copper, and Sango with Santa Barbara, because they shared lightning, the martial sword, sovereignty and the colors red and white. Notice that quality, not gender, determined the match. Cuban folklorist Lydia Cabrera reported that Afro-Cubans called the *orichas* (the Spanish spelling of *orisa*) *caminos de los negros* (the way of the blacks) and the chromolithic saints *caminos de los blancos* (the way of the whites).[2] Religious studies scholar Joseph Murphy believed that Yoruba in Cuba saw the saints as avatars or embodiments of the *orichas*. More exactly, he stated that Yoruba saw the saints in the chromoliths as white people embodying the *orichas* in moments of trance.[3] Catholic religious images were conceptualized by Yoruba people in the same way they conceptualized their own religious carvings: depicting the protean orisa by depicting their entranced devotees.

Art historian Marilyn Houlberg identified "More is more" (the opposite of the Bauhaus principle of "Less is more") as a central aesthetic principle of the Yoruba.[4] I contend that it also is a central religious principle of the Yoruba. While the world is full of the orisa presence, that presence can always be intensified by the spontaneous actions of the orisa

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or by ritual. People become more intensely orisa in initiation, in trance, and in the subtle form of trance that infuses priestesses and priests in everyday life. Art, clothing, jewelry, medicines and divining materials are placed on an altar not only to praise the orisa but also to be recharged, to soak up the orisa's potency.[5] The core of the altar—*fundamentos* (foundations) such as Sango's meteoric stones and Osun's river stones—must be periodically refreshed by ritual washing. Even Osun's sweet water, her element, is more potent in some places than in others and can be ritually intensified by offerings, the presence of certain objects, prayer and the deity's spontaneous appearance. Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, in her film *Mammy Water: In Search of the Water Spirits in Nigeria,* presented astounding footage, unique to my knowledge, of a water deity in aquatic form, roiling up the river to receive offerings.[6]

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Iko: Messengers of the Orisa

The animals that belong to specific orisa and appear in art dedicated to them are no exception to the rule of intensification. Although some animals are offerings to the deity, many are *iko* (messengers). A friend of mine remembers that her family's compound in Ibadan, Nigeria, of a lineage dedicated to Osun, had crocodiles living in a pit in the center of the courtyard. The crocodiles were carefully tended as embodiments of Osun. Fish belong to Osun, as do ducks, snakes, snails, frogs and other aquatic creatures. This is why Osun Priestess Luisah Teish said, "If you want to know about Osun, go study fish."[7] Yet certain fish, snakes or snails become more Osun when they appear to deliver a gift: They become messengers of the orisa.

The story of the founding of Osogbo, Nigeria, is that Osun made a pact with the first inhabitants, agreeing to be the town's tutelary deity and protect the town forever. As part of the pact, she sent a piscine *iko* every year, during the town festival, to leap from her river to the sovereign's hand and spray him with water infused with her blessing. This act is the core of the sovereignty of the ruler, whose title, Ataoja, means "the one who stretches forth a hand to grasp a fish." People remember witnessing this event as recently as the 1950s, and in 1957 Ulli Beier wrote of it as current practice.[8] The Iyalaase Osun, the senior priestess of Osun in Iragbiji, Nigeria, told me that the *iko* still exists but

has hidden itself away because foreigners have tried to steal it.[9] Such stealing can take many forms: religious persecution, wildlife killing and international trade in antiquities.

Human Messengers in Trance

Osun's messengers, animal and human, may be her spontaneous creations, like the apparitions that fill the stories of Osun's devotees: the beautiful woman on a lonely road who gives a gift to a child and then disappears and the woman and child who appear with a message in the waters flooding Ibadan. Or they may be the analog of human trance.

At the time of the creation of the new Osun state, a newspaper article titled "Unbelievable, Osun Comes Out Live, Out of the River and Speaks"[10] (*Figure 28*) reported that a person who was both a deity who could walk out of the river in dry clothes and a young married woman with a difficult life came to the residents of the new state with a message from Osun. If they behave properly, she said, "I will make this state great."[11] The speech, as recorded, moved back and forth between the divine speaker and the human speaker who inhabited the same physical body. The young woman said that she was delivering a message and praying that Osun would reward her with children and peace with her in-laws, and Osun made a pact with the city. A priestess of the Osogbo city shrine confirmed that the event was an authentic appearance of Osun. As an example of trance,


The
PEOPLE'S VOICE
for defenceless voices
August 29 — Sept 11, 1992
Unbelievable
OSUN
CAME
OUT LIVE
FOCUS ON MINISTRIES
Who is Osun
THE JOURNEY SO FAR
NUJ Patron I beg sir
Ifedayo L.G. to spend N14m

Fig. 28. Jimmy Babalola and Tunde Bolatiti, "Unbelievable, Oshun Comes Out Live, Out of the River and Speaks," *The People's Voice* (Osogbo, Nigeria), August 29–September 11, 1991. Photograph of the article by Mei-Mei Sanford.

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the young woman was both herself and more (Osun) than herself, in a kind of undulating shifting of identities. She was a human *iko*. An *iko* animal messenger, as the fish who jumps into the Ataoja's hand during the Osun festival is itself and more (Osun) than itself: an animal in trance.

Iko in Art

Batik artist and Ogun and Sango priest Adeleke Sangoyoyin has created a series of works called "Blessing from Iko *(Figures 29a and 29b*)." An art movement in Nigeria in the early 1960s, led by Kenneth Murray and Ulli and Georgina Beier, encouraged a generation of painters to paint the life that they saw around them. Their work on ritual subjects resembled their work on other subjects. It was illustrative and physically descriptive. These artists painted people, animals, things and events. The resulting art included snapshots, country scenes, and ethnographic recordings.

In contrast, a metal panel by Osogbo artist Asiru Olatunde achieves a ritual purpose, that of *oriki*. In the panel, an Osun priestess appears in procession, a sovereign makes an offering at the river, drummers drum and fish swim nearby. The panel shows images of Osun worship as a visual *oriki*, with the praise poetry enumerating the powers and attributes of the deity. *Oriki*, verbal or visual, simultaneously praises and invokes the deity. The purpose and achievement of *ere*, shrine sculpture, such as Lamidi Olonade Fakeye's "Ose Sango," does this and something more.

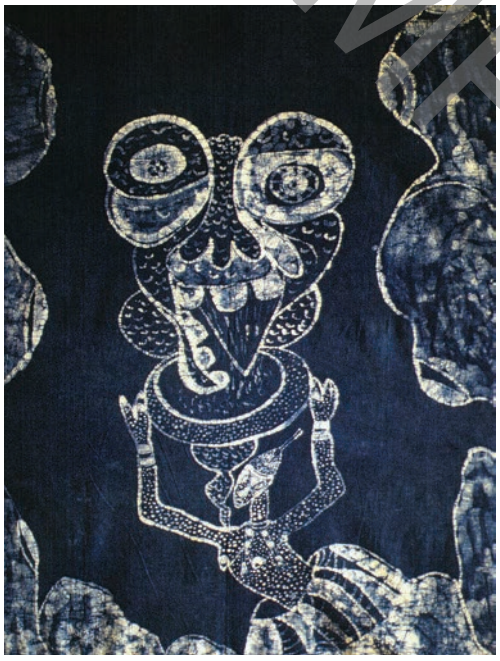


Fig. 29a. Adeleke Sangoyoyin, *Blessing from Iko I*, batik, n.d.

The subject is not only the priestess and the shrine objects—in this case, the drum and the doubleness of the meteoric stones and the twins—but also the moment of transformation, trance and

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embodiment. In Yoruba terms, the *ere* is carved with the *oju inu* (inner eye) as well as the *oju ode* (outer eye). It is concerned with the inner reality as well as the outer reality. The double lozenge on the head of the priestess is an emblem of the deity Sango being connected to the priestess in this moment of trance. The lozenge has no particulars other than its twoness and its placement. That is why carvers carve it, like Sango's embodiments, in a profusion of forms.

Adeleke Sangoyoyin's first "Blessing from Iko" (*Figure 29a*), though created by painting in the medium of batik, is in the tradition of Yoruba shrine sculpture. Painted by a priest, it concerns the moment of trance and embodiment. Painting in Yoruba, especially on the walls of shrines, was traditionally the province of women and priestesses. "Blessings of Iko" is also new and innovative. In Sangoyoyin's batik, embodiment becomes visible. The priestess tilts her head and body in a gesture of trance as she holds a calabash over her head. The *iko*—a crocodile or perhaps a serpent—rises from behind the priestess, perhaps from her own body, to spit water of blessing into the calabash. The priestess has ritually prepared herself with medicines beneath a molded indigo protrusion of hair, with brass bracelets on her arms and the brass insignia of the society of elders and the Earth hanging from her neck. The figure is surrounded by the great granite outcroppings of the artist's own landscape, rounded like breasts and pregnant bellies.



Fig. 29b. Adeleke Sangoyoyin, *Blessing from Iko II*, batik, n.d.

The moment shown in the second "Blessing from Iko" (*Figure 29b*) is similar. This time, red color indicates the elements of particular *ase* (potency), Osun's most intense embodiment. We can see that the *iko*, shown in the strongest red, begins as a spiral in the priestess's groin, moves up her spinal column, and then, with a face that may be

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a duck's or a serpent's—with the crowning horns of a snail or five (Osun's number) red parrot feathers—gazes over her head. Her mouth is red, with Osun's incantations on her tongue, as is her beard, a sign not of gender but of age and otherworldly potency. Her brass anklets, *jinwinjinwin*, are red, as are her fingertips. Tiny red gourds of medicine surround the water container she holds, infusing it with Osun's potency.

In both batiks, Sangoyoyin innovated to make the moment of epiphany more visible. He linked animal and human messenger, even showing *iko* rising out of the priestess's body. As in the *ere*, the focus is on the moment of embodiment, not the face of the deity. Both the *ere* Sango and the batiks show us two actors: thunderstones and priestess or *iko* and priestess. Sangoyoyin shows us a third embodiment as well: the gift of blessed water. The deity is either multiply manifested or invisible, jumping like a spark between poles of divine current.

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Exceptions to the Rule: Intermediaries, Ancestors and Twin Spirits

There are some exceptions to the rule that *ere* do not depict the Orisa: the orisa Esu, ancestors and the *ibeji*. These three have in common that they are messengers, infinitely multiple, and close to the individual and the family. The orisa Esu is the messenger and connector between human beings and the other orisa. It is also said that every orisa has his or her own *esu* to communicate with devotees. Some even say that each human being has his or her own *esu*.[12]

In Yoruba thought, ancestors have continuing interest in the affairs of the living, sending messages and gifts from the other world. We, their descendants, have some of their selves (*ori)* in us, and that is why, even from infancy, we behave like them. *Egungun*, the ancestor masquerades of individual lineages, are a way in which ancestors council and protect their children. The masquerades are distinct, individual and built up from layer upon layer of cloth. Their appearance is a spectacle. Women of the family dance in their honor. Rowland Abiodun identifies the face on the Ifa divination tray as Esu, while *babalawo* (diviner) and scholar Akinsola Akiwowo says that it is the ancestor Ajagumale, a chief diviner from ancient times who continues to give assistance to diviners.[13] The face on a crown is the ancestor of the lineage of the monarch's royal family.

Finally, *ibeji* are carvings meant to house the spirits of twins who have died, so that they can continue to be honored by the family with food, clothing and dancing. The Yoruba have the world's highest birth rate of twins. Their traditional belief is that every human being has a twin in the other world. When twins are born, the otherworldly one comes through into this world. If one or both of the twins dies, the links—both otherworldly and familial—are nurtured carefully. As family members, parts of the self and messengers from the other world, all of these divine beings are close, familiar and easily encountered, imagined and depicted.

Conclusion: Reverberations

In contrast, the variety of the modes in which most orisa appear to us is more vast. Their appearance can be human, animal, geographical, elemental, meteorological, numerical, chromatic, temperamental or gastronomical. The orisa are present, every day, in profusion. Walt Whitman could have been describing them when he wrote the following:

> Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
>
> I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then,
>
> In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass,
>
> I find letters from God dropped in the street, and every one is signed by God's name,
>
> And I leave them where they are, for I know that others will punctually come forever and ever.[14]

With so many reverberations of the orisa, how could we fix on one?

My last argument for multiple embodiment of orisa is personal testimony. I have visited and lived in Nigeria off and on for twenty-five years. Iragbiji is my hometown. I have been a priestess of Osun for twenty-two years. when I think of the face of Osun, I see the Iyalaase Osun, my ritual mother who initiated me (*Figure 30*). Or the Jagun Osun okunrin, the Osun priest who also initiated me. Or the Osun priest who invited me into his home with great kindness, gave me the first new yam of the season and showed me his

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new kitten. When I knelt at his shrine, I felt a little warm weight against my leg, and there was a kitten, curled up asleep on the edge of my wrapper. Or the woman in a Nigerian church, who danced with me, fed me and looked after me during service one afternoon. Or a woman in a New York subway, wearing a gold sequined cap and an amorous smile. Or a samba dancer, dressed in copper and surrounded by Bahianas on the streets on New York City's East Village. I also see sunlight on water, taste honey and remember a golden orb spider on my porch.



Fig. 30. Iyalaase Osun of Iragbiji, Nigeria. Photograph by Mei Mei Sanford, 1992.

My mother heard Osun laugh once, in a dream. It was a deep rich laugh, she said, and then she heard Osun say, "Honey, don't you know I've been with you all your life?" In a film about South American religions, called *The Southern Cross*, a Brazilian priestess of Osun was interviewed. She said, "In so many religions, people are waiting for God to come. We're not waiting for anybody. Everyone is already here!"[15]

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6 Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, *Mammy Water: In Search of the Water Spirits in Nigeria*, directed by Sabine Jell-Bahlsen (New York: Ogbuide Films, 1989), available from University of California Extension Media Center, Berkeley, CA, catalog no. 38097, VHS.

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9 Mei-Mei Sanford, "Powerful Water, Living Wood: The Agency of Art and Nature in Yoruba Ritual" (PhD dissertation, Drew University, 1997), 197.

10 Jimmy Babalola and Tunde Bolatiti, "Unbelievable: Osun Came Out Live, Out of the River, and Speaks," *The People's Voice* (Osogbo, Nigeria), August 29–September 11, 1991.

11 Babalola and Bolatiti, "Unbelievable."

12 Sanford, "Powerful Water, Living Wood," 130.

13 Akinsola Akiwowo, personal communication to the author.

14 Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *The Portable Walt Whitman*, ed. Mark Van Doren (New York: Viking, 1974), stanza 48.

15 Patricio Guzman, *La cruz del sur* [*The Southern Cross*], directed by Patricio Guzman (Spain: Quasar Films and Radio Televisión Española, 1991).

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SANCTUARY: FEMININE CENTERED DWELLINGS AS AREAS OF SACRED PROTECTION

TONI TRUESDALE



Fig. 31. Toni Truesdale, *Grandmother's House*, acrylic painting, 2012.

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Historically, the homes of women are spiritual places of prayer, safety and sustenance. The female-centered house, with the kitchen as the apex of feminine activity, has always held sacred symbology.

Throughout time, women's altars within the house, often set inside the kitchen, reflect a relationship to the ancestors, protective spirits, saints and household deities. From generation to generation, women's hands have carefully chosen material images and made offerings. They continue to pass on these traditions, within households, from mother to daughter, for all mothers are the first teachers of culture, language and tradition. And these simple practices of honoring link us not only to our maternal ancestors but also to one another as women across human migrations, into all civilizations and through

time itself, creating a common culture of women. Because I am an artist, my honoring takes the form of sharing my own paintings (*Figures 31-42*) and words that explore these sacred, female-centered spaces.[1]

The culture of women exists with each prayer; centered in the hearth with our daily bread.

The family is sheltered within the home, protected with feminine presences,

Shrines to ancestors, and beautifully evolving altars evoke the art of the household.[2]

Embellishments to altars can take on many forms: flowers, candles, votives, food, figures, seashells, seasonal representations, small, meaningful objects and photos of loved ones. All are symbolic gestures that show thought, emotion and devotion. In this way, the home can become a shrine in itself, filled with sacred objects and offered prayers that transcend the mundane. Some indigenous households, as well as contemporary Western households, make use of symbolic art forms as visual spiritual practice. Women of all cultures appear to share a love of the beauty that emerges in the preparation and presentation of food, as well as hospitality, decoration and festive adornments. Everyday life is celebrated in what is still the domain of women. This is the legacy of the hearth, the central fire, the altar within the home.



Fig. 32. Toni Truesdale, *House Shrine*, oil painting, 2012.

The hearth, fire, food and altars are metaphorical examples of the importance that women have placed on their daily life-sustaining routines. According to Jungian Erich Neumann, even the village is a symbol of the feminine "natural nourishing principle," for "great round" is the center of the circle of life that is dominated with female mysteries.[3] The hearth, signifying warmth, food and love, is the original altar. Here too we find the timeless practice of sacred protection and invocation.

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The construction of a house can be undertaken with intentional consciousness. This intent is reflected in the dwellings of matrilineal cultures, such as the Diné (Navajo) hogan, which is dedicated to the four directions, and the structure by the Turkanoans of Columbia that evokes the very cosmos itself.[4] The structures of the Dogon people of West Africa inspired architect Aldo van Eyck in his search for sacred architecture. Meaningful even to the smallest item, an object has the potential to transform the mundane into spiritual connections.[5]



Fig. 33. Toni Truesdale, *Basket-House-Village-Universe*, acrylic painting, 2013.

Baskets of women
Reflect nourishment
Physical as well as spiritual
Object to concept
Keeping sacred the spirit of everyday life;

Within the home
Utilitarian to universal
Dwelling to village
Community to cosmos
Each human passage
Through 140 thousand years...

Birth to death
The finite to consummation
End to beginning. . .[6]

We can draw a timeline of women's practices across millennia, beginning with ancient Canaanite rites approximately 8,000 years ago in the Middle East and crossing those years and many continents to modern

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multicultural traditions. The seeds of female folk religion—or house religion, as it is sometimes called by academics—connect diverse women in the act of creating sacred spaces for the same essential purpose. That purpose is protection against all that would harm their children and loved ones. "They placed figurines that represented and invoked protective deities in front kitchens or courtyards near doorways that provided access to the roof and interior living and work areas."[7]

Archeology has uncovered evidence to support a devotional purpose for the kitchens and households of ancient women. Various cultures had similar practices; in both Çatal Hüyük and Crete, the feminine sphere was exalted with the use of protective goddesses. But in early Palestine the finds are quite stunning. Evidence has been discovered of Israelite households, as early as the 8th century BCE, worshipping with the forms of votive candles, small female figures, incense and lamps juxtaposed with looms, needles vessels and bowls in situ with feminine implements.[8] Alongside cooking bowls found in domestic cult rooms, amulets were discovered that depict objects of devotion. Prayer was probably invoked on a daily basis to combat the many uncertainties of life, as demonstrated in this prayer to Ishtar.

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Fig. 34. Toni Truesdale, *Ancient Kitchen*, watercolor painting, 2017



Fig. 35. Toni Truesdale, *Clay Prayers*, watercolor painting, 2017.

Oh, Ishtar, merciful Goddess, I have come to visit you,
I have prepared for you an Offering: pure milk,
A Cake baked in ashes,
I stood up for you a vessel for libations,
Hear me and act favorably towards me.[9]

In *Did God Have A Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel*, William G. Dever wrote about the overwhelming archaeological evidence that the worship of Asherah—probably connected to the archaic goddesses Ishtar, Hathor and Astarte—in ancient Israel continued well into patriarchal religions and beyond.

Some of the historical household goddesses invoked by women are well known through written myth and oral tradition: Greek Hestia of the hearth, sacred fire and home; Roman counterpart Vesta (virtually every home contained a statute of her sacred central fire, which was never to be extinguished); Ishtar of the ancient Middle East; Asherah of Israel; Celtic Morrigan, in one of her many aspects; Callileach of the pre-Celtic United Kingdom; Pachamama of Central America; Arani, Hindu goddess of the hearth; Ayaba of the African Fon; Brigid of the sacred fire (both Celtic and Catholic traditions); Esta, the Etruscan goddess of the household; Huchi of the hearth, in the cosmology of the indigenous Ainu of Japan; and many, many more across the continents. These goddesses are various representations of the eternal fire, the hearth, the sacred center in the feminine divine.[10]



Fig. 36. Toni Truesdale, *Callileach*, oil painting, 2013.

Early Christianity, too, harbored the divine feminine; the church went through many changes before finally sublimating womanhood into the symbolic wisdom of Sophia. To further that end, the medieval Christian church began a feminization of the Christ figure to include the sphere of the household, most notably, intellectually and aesthetically, in the mystical works of Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich and Bernard of Clairvaux. Christ symbolically became the house of God, which Christians entered through the metaphorical door of his wound. The body of Christ became the church. Christ gave the milk of nourishment.[11] Healing and miracles were attributed

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Fig. 37. Toni Truesdale, *Sacred Writing*, oil painting, 1996.

to holy shrines and reliquaries; 6th century work about the life of Saint Symeon the Stylite, the younger, refers to a woman who set up an image of him, in her house, that worked miracles, including curing people of diseases.[12]

In the many traditions of household, women have invoked practices of blessings that create and permeate sacred spaces. They rely on the help of guardians in the form of icons, to invoke ancestors, deities and saints, in performing heritage rites of protection for both their loved ones within the home and those who are crossing into the outer, more dangerous world. These practices of prayer span virtually every race and era. This commonality is part of the culture of women that has always existed secretly but in sight, and, in many instances, separate from male-dominated society and religion.

Little Blessings

Each and every daybreak;
We ask the spirits to watch over us
As we go about a busy day.
For our children to be well,
Healthy and thrive;
And our loved ones;
Sometimes far away,
To be protected please.
And for angels to smile upon this beautiful day,
We ask for our
Little Blessings.[13]

The formal, institutional religions of the patriarchs build huge fixed structures that are ordered, authoritarian and static and that rise high to proclaim dominance. Through these structures they claim to be the gatekeepers of knowledge, social mores, aesthetics, history and the very structure of the world.

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Yet women have enshrined their homes, gardens and nature with icons and offerings to a spirit world that evoke prayers of peace, health and safety for family, community and even the world through the entire history of organized religions. For each household embellishment has an iconic value that flows and changes with seasons, passages and feasts. Even the daily bread has an intrinsic value created with love served with beauty. Textiles are created to reflect sacred images passing through each generation,

Connected by the hands of women;

Stories are told, language and traditions are learned, songs are sung in celebration of

The mythologies of imagery that encircle loved ones and celebrate ancestry.

In commonality, all women have brought comfort within the loving walls

That holds who is dear. To nourish with food, warm by fire, and clothe in our handmade legacy.

Each day is a sacred exercise in timeless feminine spirituality.[14]

Both Westernized and indigenous cultures hold the seeds of original civilizations within the rites of women in the household. Multiple sources refer to traditions associated with the sacredness of the home. For the N'Debele of South Africa, decorative elements inside the house and external murals both represent abstractions of the natural world. The Basotho, also of South Africa, have constructed their homes with beautiful paintings rich with vivid designs that reflect the vegetal world and natural environment as well as the cosmos. According to Roann Barris, "the Basotho house becomes the womb; the Basotho woman becomes the house."[15]



Fig. 38. Toni Truesdale, *Daily Bread*, oil painting, 2012.

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"Within those interior house spaces, ceremonial healings also happen. All houses are healed periodically and fed cornmeal. Traditionally, some burials occurred in the floor of the houses. Houses are deemed to be alive and have energies which can bring harmony if recognized and treated with proper respect."[16]



Fig. 39. Toni Truesdale, *N'Debele Woman*, gouache painting, 2015.

In her signature work *From the Milk River: Spatial and Temporal Processes in Northwest Amazonia*, Christine Hugh-Jones wrote, "They construct their houses to represent the universe" and this "universe is a womb."[17] Kay Turner, in *Beautiful Necessity*, emphasized that a modern woman's altar is "a different altar, one that is not male-dominated or dogma-bound. It is an intimate altar, a home altar, made by a woman and dedicated for her own personal devotion to the deities she chooses."[18] She went on to explain that "cultures of the Goddess and her domestic altars were transformed and diminished but never fully obliterated."[19]

In *Face of the Gods*, Robert Farris Thompson documented altars of the African diaspora that link West African traditions, which survived slavery, to the modern trans-Atlantic world.[20] In "The Matrifocal Household: Santeria Religious Practice and Gender Relations Explored," Carin Tunaker wrote about Hispanic house traditions of "the Mother as giver of food (and, symbolically, the giver of life)," quoting Stener Ekern: This not only locates the mother (or women) at the center of the household but also "epitomizes how life in Nicaragua's barrios revolve around this institution . . . the household is where the stream starts, is sustained and also eventually ends."[21]

Women's rituals in the home have remained constant even under the most repressive of cultures, where inside the house may be compromised. Dever wrote about Muslim households today that re-create ritual outside the house: "Located in external sacred spaces, meetings of women and children join together in 'joyful' gatherings with food and music away from Muslim orthodoxy."[22]

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Women have always found ways to rejoice in time-honored feminine rites. From the table decorated with flowers and candles to the photos of loved ones set beside memorabilia, feminine values are celebrated outside the sanctified church.



Fig. 40. Toni Truesdale, *The Culture of Women*, oil painting, 2013.



Fig. 41. Toni Truesdale, *Feast Day*, gouache painting, 2012.



Fig. 42. Toni Truesdale, *The Return*, oil painting, 2013.

Dever described how archeology has brought to light "folk religion," which is feminine, fluid and personal, as opposed to "book religion," which fixed, literal and authoritarian.[23] We can see now the unbroken chain of the simple, everyday practices of women. We can call them sacred acts that still take place in the sanctuary of women-centered dwellings all over the world.

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House Shrines, Feminine Spaces and Women's Altars

The body of the home is a woman;
Within, we build shrines to our family and ancestors decorating
Constantly changing altars; in the act of sanctifying.
Archaic houses too contained
The arts of women.
Stones, shells, bones, votives and clay goddesses were
Placed for prosperity, health and protection;
Evolving into dwellings with flowers, candles and
Photos of loved ones with small objects;
Images to keep, memories to honor;
Purposely and unconsciously evoking
Female divinity honoring spiritual bridges to
Peace, hearth and womb, with neither beginning nor end.
Nourishment is at the eternal center of the house;
Sustenance from the body or hands of mother and wife.
Clothing and utensils lovingly crafted or chosen
for their beauty;
With archetypal images passed through the generations
To connect genetically to our primordial Mother.
As we continue women's prayers to our children,
In every culture, on all days, in so many ways.[24]

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Endnotes

1 All poems by the author have been published on Tonitruesdale.blogspot.com

2 T. Truesdale, "The Culture of Women."

3 Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 283.

4 Paul Oliver, *Dwellings: The House Across the World*, University of Texas Press edition (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1987), 158–60.

5 There are many resources about the groundbreaking architect Aldo van Eyck, but Edwin Heathcote's summary is particularly well stated: "At one time, objects defined us far more clearly. Every 'thing' had a purpose and its centrality to the rituals of everyday life made it a vessel for containing meaning. Architect Aldo van Eyck once described the phenomenon of 'basket-house-village-universe,' in which everything, even the smallest receptacle, expresses ideas about our being in the world, our picture of the cosmos. Now we have so much more 'stuff' and so many technological devices for which no deeper cultural language of meaning has developed, that the individual items have lost their symbolic potency. This makes the image of the house even more important." See Edwin Heathcote, "Home Is Where the Heart Is," *Financial Times*, January 30, 2009.

6 Toni Truesdale, "Basket-House-Village-Universe."

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13 Toni Truesdale, "Little Blessings."

14 Truesdale, "The Culture of Women."

15 Roann Barris, "Metaphors and Meanings of House: African Painted House Traditions," Eastern Illinois University, February 15, 2004, 13, accessed November 25, 2008, www.ux1.eiu.edu/~rbarris/paintedhouses.htm.

16 In this statement, Santa Clara Pueblo architect Rina Swentzell was referring to the adobe dwellings that are often many generations old. See Tito Naranjo and Rina Swentzell, "Healing Spaces in the Tewa World," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 13, nos. 3 and 4 (1989): 264.

17 Christine Hugh-Jones, *From the Milk River: Spatial and Temporal Processes in Northwest Amazonia*, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology, no. 26, first paperback ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 325.

18 Kay Turner, *Beautiful Necessity: The Art and Meaning of Women's Altars* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 7.

19 Turner, *Beautiful Necessity*, 14.

20 Robert Farris Thompson, *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas*, African Art (New York: Prestel, 1993).

21 Tunaker, Carin, "The Matrifocal Household; Santeria Religious Practice and Gender Relations Explored.", Graduate Journal of Social Sciences, 8, no. 2 (Oct. 2011)

22 Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?*, 245.

23 Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?*, 314.

24 Toni Truesdale, "House Shrines, Feminine Spaces and Women's Altars."

SAMPLE

DREAMS OF EARTH: MYTH AND PLANETARY PRESENCE WHILE CONVENING A VIRTUAL HYGEIAN DREAM TEMPLE

Marna Hauk



In ancient Greece, Hygeian dream temples were alternate medicine centers, retreat spaces in natural settings where those seeking healing meditated and made sacred contact with earth to incubate healing dreams. A current-day researcher convened two dozen participants to incubate dreams for earth healing in a virtual Hygeian dream temple. Sparked by the desire to directly interview the earth, this research extended women's dream research infused with Gaian and arts methods to explore diverse modes of co-evolutionary contact with the numinous. The depth dimension of international dreamers birthed more than eighty earth dreams, constellating into themes such as the living land, matriarchy, interspecies collaboration, earth superpowers, and disaster and sanctuary. Muddying the question of whether the dreams surfaced from individual women, emergent dreamtime collectives, and/or from the planetary supersystem, the pathways of these dream pilgrimages suggest effective practices for much-needed presence, healing and regeneration.

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The Matrix of Earth Dreaming: A Theoretical Convergence

The planetary living system is in a time of healing and regeneration. Some imagine a resurgence of the matrix cultures or mother cultures as a remedy to deepen humans' relationship within the collaborative matrix of place. Bracha Ettinger's work on the matrixial borderland[1] focused on the co-being of the fetus with the pregnant mother as an alternate model of co-presencing. Carol Flinders imagined matrix cultures as cultures of belonging: woven within, embedded and generative.[2] Evolutionary

microbiologist Lynn Margulis studied the collaborative nature of evolution articulated as a "symbiotic planet."[3] Marija Gimbutas emphasized the third core role of the Goddess of Old Europe as not only life-giving and death-bringing but also "transformational…self-renewing…regeneration," immanent and physically manifest as nature itself.[4] My research extends matrixial theory and culture, mythopoetic regenerative earth cultures and planetary symbiotic evolution to theorize humans as matrixially implicated and co-presencing within place, ecosystem and planet. Movements toward Gaia theory,[5] naturecultures,[6] relational reality,[7] and the Ecozoic era[8] offer alternate paths through an age of domination, patriarchal cultural threats and industrial-caused challenges to global living systems. My intention in this study[9] was to make use of the patterns of these ancient dream healing practices combined with shared and social dreaming methods to serve as a way of interviewing women and the Earth system directly and collectively to actively foster and participate in Earth's regeneration.

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Herstorical Precedents: Dream Healing

In ancient Greece, Hygeian dream temples were alternative medicine centers, retreat spaces in natural settings where those who were seeking healing meditated and made sacred contact with earth to incubate healing dreams. This study arose from dream healing practices and traditions from deep history, including the Hygeian and Asklepian traditions of earth dream healing. In these healing traditions, querents meditated in nature healing sanctuaries and contemplatively entered a space carved into the earth. There they incubated healing dreams that were understood to come directly from the earth and could include what today would be considered spontaneous healings or guidance on curative regimens.[10] The rituals around incubating such a healing dream included rest, meditation, preparation and the feeding of honey cakes to nonvenomous tree snakes before descending into the earthen spaces within the dreaming temple to incubate the dream. Often the dreams themselves were curative via the appearance of a healing deity and direct healing occurring during the dreamtime. At other times, dreams offered prescriptions or regimens for cures. Upon waking, the dreamer shared the dream with a temple scribe, who inscribed the dream on a clay tablet. These clay tablets were then placed on the walls of the healing sanctuary.[11]

Imaginally, Asclepius held a staff on which snakes twined, with the snakes symbolizing closeness to the earth and healing. This is the image from which the caduceus, the symbol of modern medicine, originates. Hygeia, the goddess of healing and Asclepius's daughter, needed no mediation through a staff; instead, the snakes coil directly around her healing body.[12] Snakes are particularly potentized as symbols of healing. Gimbutas described the "dynamic energy of the snake as a symbol of regeneration . . . exud[ing] regenerative force."[13] These dream-healing practices have precedents in the practices of Egyptian curative dream healing,[14] and they correlate with other cultural traditions, including indigenous, earth-based and Chinese, Islamic, Indian, Japanese and Hebrew cultural traditions.[15]

Planetary Dreaming

The design of this study was to extend this inspiration from the ancients and mix it with the praxis of modern earth dreaming, which attends to planetary healing and regeneration, to create a shared earth dreaming temple with a virtual repository for the dream scribings. Current-day conceptualizers of earth dreaming include depth ecotherapists such as Meredith Sabini,[16] Karen Jaenke[17] and Laura Schneider,[18] who mix social dreaming approaches, connections with planetary presence, plunges into the depths of ecotherapeutic connection and the cultivation of earth dreams as a way in which the earth and other species may be cultivating bidirectional communication, expression and healing. Also incorporated are healing dream approaches, such as those suggested by Marc Barasch.[19]

For example, Sabini's approach to earth dreaming is applied, immersive, embodied, multidisciplinary, arts-based, evolutionary and depth-oriented. She viewed the earth and dreaming as "universally available source[s] of guidance"[20] and argued that "dreaming itself is a natural resource, abundant and self-renewing."[21] She described dreaming as "a 140-million-year-old survival function in all mammals" and dreams related to the earth as reaching a planetary presence, including "a nature god, the Great Mother, on whose body we are mere dots," and she has reminded us that "the life force extends beyond our species' reach."[22] Sabini's Dream Institute offers monthly programs "in which dreams are explored for their larger sociocultural implications rather than for their personal meaning to the dreamer,"[23] which she has connected

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with the social dreaming work of W. Gordon Lawrence (in the '80s, at the Tavistock Institute).[24] She imagines that these kinds of dreams and the intercultural, artistic relationship and re-ritualizing of them will help to "restore the living connection between spirit and matter."[25]

Karen Jaenke suggested that "impending environmental collapse presents humanity with the necessity of a collective initiation, along with renewal of ways of knowing and being more attuned to nature, the earth, the body, matter and the deep feminine."[26] She contended that connection with dreams and embodiment can increase connection and respect for the earth:

> Cultivating respect for the natural mind present in the dreaming self and for the sensitivities and intelligence suffused within the body offers a doorway into renewed respect for the earth body.[27]

Jaenke further suggested that earth dreaming can be curative: "We must plummet the depths of our psyches in order to heal the human–earth split, outwardly manifested as our ecological crisis."[28] She also offered earth dreaming as reconnective, a gateway to "reconnect to our essential relatedness," because dreams "pull back the veil, revealing the hidden energies into which our lives are cast . . . transport[ing] us into this seamless fabric of being."[29] She went further, saying that "dreams labor to heal the fragmented breaks with our relationships with our deep nature . . . and the entire web of earthly life." Jaenke viewed earth dreaming as reconnective and revelatory, mending the web of life.

She identified several kinds of earth dreams and pointed out how earth dreaming can be restorative and catalytic: "earth communing dreams also inspire and enliven, bestowing infusions of numinous psychic energy."[30] Earth dreams can further nurture parts of ourselves that have lacked mothering and reconnect us to place and earth: "Mirroring, mothering, and mending the isolated and wounded soul, earth communing dreams generate in the dreamer deep feelings of kinship between person and place."[31] Earth dreams give energy and lead to "the recovery of psychic kinship with the earth . . . bath[ing] the dreamer in the same bath of animating energy that washes over the planet."[32] Earth dreams not only increase the aliveness and animation of being in the presence of elemental forces (such as those in earth destruction dreams), but also psychically open humans to "the vital guidance from beyond the life-and-death moment,"[33] cultivate reverence, connection and respect and heal humans'

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relationship with the living earth. Schneider[34] echoed these insights, particularly the cross-species possibilities, in her scholarship on ecodreaming.

Methods

This study has leveraged the extensive insight and depth/ecotherapeutic earth dreaming research of Sabini, Jaenke and Schneider; studies by the leading researchers of women's dreaming, Patricia Garfield,[35] Connie Kaplan[36] and Karen Signell;[37] and the dreaming practices of many wisdom and indigenous cultures (for example, the Senoi[38]). I positioned this inquiry as an extension of my previous work in practical methods for cultivating earth empathy.[39] At the beginning of this study, a participant shared an earth dream that captured the possibility to articulate what I have termed Earthvox, the prophetic, polyvocal voice of the planetary system:

> When I first heard about this project, I had a dream about a standing stone which wanted to speak. Next to the stone was a room-sized depression in the grass, which began to form a sort of spiral, then it changed into a vulva-like opening . . . with a stairway going down. Voices were coming out of the Earth, and the standing stone was vibrating in resonance-like frequencies.[40]



Fig. 43. Marna Hauk, 2017. "Stone Portalway and Earth Spiral Opening" dream montage from initial participant Survey 1. Composite digital image by Hauk, 2017, used with permission.

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I convened two dozen participants to incubate dreams for earth healing in a virtual Hygeian dream temple. Over a six-month period, the participants shared their incubated earth dreams in a virtual *temenos* (dream sanctuary), virtually inscribing their dreams and their impressions via a private electronic wiki and commenting on one another's dreams. The qualitative methods of data synthesis included the creation and visual sorting of image mandalas from the dreams (*Figures 43-45*). These mandalas were created by the researcher, for the purpose of qualitatively coding the dreams.[41] Methods also included member checking. Sparked by the desire to directly interview the earth, in this study I extended women's dream research, infusing it with Gaian and arts methods to explore diverse modes of co-evolutionary contact with the numinous.

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Findings and Discussion

The depth dimension of dreamers from Arizona to Africa birthed more than eighty earth dreams. The findings included health- and hope-giving possibilities for cross-species collaborations, experiences of the living land, transformative supercapabilities of earth and women (e.g., flight, submersion and reclamation) and sanctuary from earth disaster.

Cross-Species Collaborations That Heal

Many women in this study reported dreams of snakebites or spider bites with transformative effects. Other earth dreamers collaborated with bears to save lives from earth catastrophes such as tsunamis or glacial melt caused by climate change. Sometimes the dreamers themselves became cross-species hybrids, sprouting butterfly wings, flying as birds or breathing underwater. These impossible possibilities were hope-giving if chimaeric. One participant described merging with avian and Terran elements, with vivid effects (see the account in the next section).

Living Land

For some participants, the merging with or as other elements of the natural world brought fresh perspective, shared presence and healing sense of aliveness:

> When I think about how the Earth is alive, and how dream and reverie take me out of my smallbuzzing brain into

> the larger aliveness, I think about a dream I had a long while back that stays with me, about flying. In a way, the dream feels like earth connection in that it's like I'm in a bird body. I can see acutely down into the landscape that's going by. I feel the air buoying my body and also whizzing past my face, it's exhilarating. I am particularly connected with the trees, I can see/sense their large green presences far out from their physical branches. Also, my sense of "I"-ness is different than in my waking human body. It's almost like if I put my attention to something, I go down into it, into its center and also see/sense from its perspective. Each part of the aliveness has a different signature/feel/way of see/sensing. —I also get this feeling sometimes while gardening, tuning into a particular plant, I can feel its ?aura? ?energy body? ?presence?, also from its being, its aliveness/wholeness.—In the fragment of the dream of flying, I go down to sit/sense/rest am in a large tree, inside of its greenness, both physically and in that feltsense extending beyond the tree body form. That's it, like many dreams, it's not a story, it's just a moment that stays, that felt sense, that different way of being. When I think of your question about how it feels to connect with the larger Earth, that's what comes to me, these bird-being tree-presence senses and feelings. In good, whole moments of waking, I also feel inklings or moments like this. And when I arrive/arise/realize that's where I am, I feel renewed, deepened, fresh, alive. Something else, almost covered, underneath, but which is tingling and alive, surfaces. My senses widen. I know I am whole while also being dissolved/merged/thrummed/extended into everything else, and that too feels whole.[42]

Another participant described an earth dream of her family's ancestral home, offering an alternative to the construct of land ownership by returning it to shared access, tearing down fences and creating an unseen ribbon of connection: "to hold the land: lightly, not with our hands but with our eyes and hearts. This creates a tie to the land which cannot be severed."[43]

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Perhaps these imaginal mergings and uncoverings of "something underneath but which is tingling and alive [that] surfaces"[44] can be construed as the resurgence of the older ways of co-presencing that are offered by matrix/mother cultures.

Matriarchal Dreams

Some women in the study dreamed of matriarchy. In the following earth dream, attention brightens the world and places come back to life, through women in community offering movement and ceremony and attending to place presence:

> Then we are walking back down from the (north/up) point we had been walking before, to the first of the three side points of the triangle canyon. As we walk back, yes, that's when there are waterfalls being lit up.
>
> It is tawny desert with scrub and trees. Also, though, there are these vortex portalways that have waterfalls or other painting/altar/magic made to cross between. The altars aren't static placements of objects. They are more like weave-painting new realities (the waterfalls) with our arms, and from the imagination the new terrain/feature/beauty springs—*but like it was always there in the landscape, it was just not lit up yet. As we bring our attention to it, the world brightens. The inherent natural beauty that was in that place awakens/comes alive/is catalyzed/activated, and colors enrich and water/life sparkles.*
>
> There are dozens of dozens of women in various places, communing with the earth/the land/a tree/a crook of rock, a particular place and each other. There is a sense of calm, meditative enchantment, something being made, something coming alive.
>
> . . . Afterwards is when D. shows me how the walls and terrain awaken in collaboration with the priestesses/women all around.

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> I awake with the final images of walking with D. and the waterfall making and a holistic/synergistic/epiphanic/totalistic/gestaltic ah-hah understanding in body depth of how the land can wake up, the earth-land-women complex can awaken with colorful, verveful, artful, alive attention. Splendid. (emphasis added).[45]



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Fig. 44. Marna Hauk, 2014. "Triangle Canyon of the Goddesses Dream" dream montage from Dreamthread 36. Composite digital image by Hauk, 2014, used with permission.

Earth dreaming can envision possibilities, perhaps sourced from the generative, collaborative ecomind,[46] ecological intelligence,[47] or Gaian intelligence[48] of planet and people. The revivification of land via prophetic/projective movement, the world-brightening power of attention and the lively "earth-land-women complex" are moving, ecocommuning, mutualistic collaborations suggested by these earth dreams. Earth dreaming is a current option for reaching underneath the grid culture overlay of (post) modernity and recontacting the primary biocultural matrix.

Sanctuary and Disaster

Perhaps related to the treasure tradition in wisdom lineages and the seed pattern and possibly connected with the nest pattern of convergent radiance, sanctuary and cavern also arose as a meta-pattern in the study. The refuge concept was often the regenerative counterpoint in earth dreams related to earth disaster or catastrophe. At least twenty of the eighty earth dreams (twenty-five percent) related to earth disaster, destruction or catastrophe. The metapattern of sanctuary and cavern recurred repeatedly, especially in the disaster dreams. This metapattern was exemplified by getting to high ground during tsunamis, discovering a nest or a puppy litter at the base of an uprooted tree,[49] retreating to an earth cavern for healing after violation,[50] and getting to the safety of a kayak, raft, rock or shore during flooding caused by global warming (e.g., Dreamthread 20 and 50, P-01-019).

The Earth itself was often the sanctuary. Gardens, walking and hiking in wild nature all became forms of sanctuary held within the larger, healing matrix of earth.[51]

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Fig. 45. Marna Hauk, 2014. "Traveling Tsunami Bear Dream" dream montage from Dreamthread 1. Composite digital image by Hauk, 2014, used with permission.

This sanctuary theme reflects how the earth metapattern of sanctuary is a form of emergent ecosocial regenerative, collaborative creativity. Together, women in the study dreamed of earth–culture collaborations that modeled Margulian symbiotic and mutualistic possibilities featuring nurture, caring, heightened creativity and what R. Keith Sawyer has termed collaborative emergence.[52]

Conclusions

Connecting the questions of whether the dreams surfaced from the individual women, emergent dreamtime collectives, or a planetary supersystem, the pathways of these dream pilgrimages suggest effective practices for much-needed presence, healing and regeneration.

Dreaming has been typified as the "hyper-connective" end of the creative spectrum,[53] related to thin boundary states.[54] For millennia and across cultures, earth dreaming and ecodreaming have been used as methods for direct healing with the numinous and communication of healing regimens. The results of this study suggest that the collaborative co-evolution of the human-naturecultural matrix and life-on-earth-enhancing mother cultures can be regenerated in shared healing and earth dreaming. Earth dreaming can catalyze earth healing, including at greater scales than the individual life. It is possible these shared circles of intentional social dreaming serve as omphali (navels) of the living earth, generating polyvocal spaces for Earthvox, the earth's voices, to communicate across, through and with human collectives and collective consciousness. It is possible that this communication initiates emergent properties of Gaian knowing and intelligence. The resonance of the superinfused, supraordinary states of dream, earth dreaming and what are termed big dreams or extraordinary dreams resonate with other forms of mythological material that also convey a depth of meaning and supraordinary content for expanded possibility, as was revealed in the data generated by this study. Gimbutas confirmed this conclusion:

> These symbols remain the only real access to this invigorating, earth-centered, life-reverencing worldview . . . 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

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> and mythopoeic perception of the sacredness and mystery of all there is on Earth.[55]

As we cogenerate prophetic, nurturing, healing, strength-giving processes of earth regeneration that make space for a fuller range of individual and collective intelligence and creativity, including the imaginal and mythological dimensions, we step into new possibilities of presence, connection and capability. Layers of presence elide and merge.[56] It is possible that the dream visitations from superpowered deities or numinous entities and the superpowers revealed in this study and rife in current culture offer a return to meta-conscious possibilities and Gaian knowing/being/presencing beyond our current conceptions of what is humanly possible. Perhaps earth dreaming can return us to our larger and emergent co-presencing and matrixial, earth-embedded powers. Confronted by the seeming impossibility of recovering from the current life system threats from industrial growth society, we see no better time to shift our sense of what is possible. Physician Michael Kearney emphasized that incubating healing dreams is a practice of returning to a state of "wholeness [that] is already there. . . . Wholeness and interconnectedness are a priori."[57] Earth dreaming practices cultivate reconnection with these larger states of planetary systemic intelligence and wholeness. Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone described practices for active hope: "We belong to this world / The web of life is calling us forth at this time."[58] Gimbutas affirmed that view:

> Human alienation from the vital roots of earthly life ensued, the results of which are clear in our contemporary society. But the cycles never stop turning, and now we find the Goddess reemerging from the forests and mountains, bringing us hope for the future, returning us to our most ancient human roots.[59]

Because we are actually embedded and embodied within Gaia E/mergent,[60] this thinking suggests possible avenues for future research, the cultivation of earth dreaming temples, and the sharing of the material from many earth dreaming temples. One of my colleagues has noted that within this study the dream temple was not virtual; rather, the dream repository was.[61] Ancient dream sanctuaries, *temenos*, were located in places of great natural beauty. The results of this study suggest that earth dreaming awakens

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heightened states of sensory awareness such that the beauty of wherever we find ourselves awakens and shines. In this understanding, the entire Earth becomes a shared dreaming temple for incubating earth dreams, regenerating capacities and embodying expanded, planetary-curative states. Whether through setting intention for incubating earth dreams,[62] group appreciation of dreams[63] or active development of physical or virtual earth dreaming temples,[64] we are birthing a renewing world from the dreaming matrix, becoming imaginal, oracular portals and instantiations of the voice(s) of the Earth while re-embodying regenerative and life-giving wholeness.

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43 Participant P-01-023, Dreamthread 01.07 from this study, March 11, 2012.

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64 Hauk, "Gaia E/mergent," 471–75, 478–79.

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