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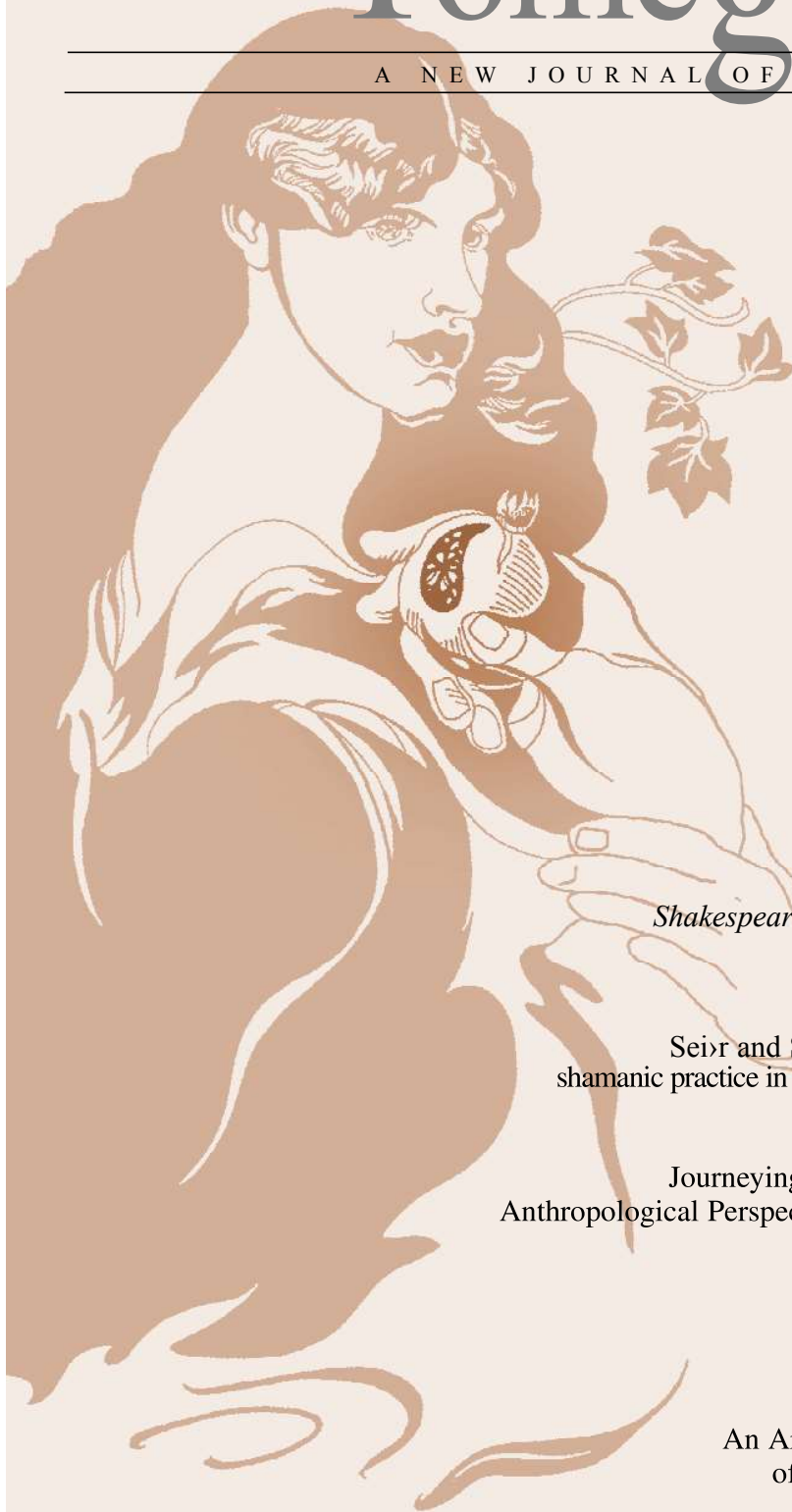
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The Pomegranate

A NEW JOURNAL OF NEOPAGAN THOUGHT



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The Pomegranate

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The Pomegranate is the combined effort of a group of senior Pagans in the United States and Canada. Its purpose is to provide a scholarly venue for the forthright and critical examination of Neopagan beliefs and practices. We intend this Journal to be a forum for the exchange and discussion of the philosophy, ethics, and spiritual potential inherent within modern Paganism's many Paths. The consideration of new ideas, as well as the exploration of the roots of our current practices such as classical Paganism, western esoteric traditions and influences from other disciplines, will be included.

Notes from the Underground

Even before *The Pomegranate* began publishing, we were receiving requests for articles which addressed the wider interests of the broader Neopagan community. We are pleased to present two such offerings in this issue. The first is by Jenny Blain, from Canada's Dalhousie University, and deals with an exciting oracular element as it appears in both modern Heathen practice and its related history. The second, by England's Robert Wallis, has been adapted from a paper he presented at last year's Anthropology of Consciousness conference in Portland, Oregon. This controversial piece represents its author's evaluation of the current relationship between native shamans, Neoshamanic practitioners, and the interest taken by the academic community in both.

We are also delighted to be able to reprint an article, "The Old Religion", which originally appeared as the introduction to *Gnosis* magazine's recent issue on Neopaganism. In our editorial opinion, *Gnosis* magazine, from its beginning in 1985, has always stood head-and-shoulders above those current alternative religions publications which are aimed at the broader reading public. *Pom* readers are encouraged to check out its early issues, particularly #9: "Northern Mysteries" and #13: "Goddesses". We especially recommend the recent issue #48: "Witchcraft & Paganism" (in which this article appeared) and the subsequent #49: "The New Age?" (especially those Letters to the Editor addressing issues raised in the previous issue) as required reading for all those interested in continuing to push the edges of the Neopagan envelope.

We are also pleased to present yet another article on the Gimbutas paradigm, this one original to *The Pom*, written from the point of view of academic archaeology.

And speaking of Letters to the Editor, we would like to thank all our subscribers who contributed to the Readers' Forum — which we are happy to reinstate in this issue. Because of space constraints we were only able to publish a fraction of the many letters we received. We hope that this enthusiastic engagement with the process of scholarly dialogue on the part of our readers in not a one-time event. Keep up the good work, and keep those cards and letters coming! We hope, by the next issue, to be able to continue our 'Workings' and 'Book Review' sections, to which we encourage our readers to contribute.

Persephone's Hard-working Minions

The Pomegranate READERS' FORUM

We are pleased to be able to resume publication of our Readers' Forum. Please contribute so that we may continue to present this valuable venue for the exchange of ideas. Letters may be edited to conserve space or to avoid repetition. Deletions are indicated by ellipses (...) and the full text will always be made available upon request. Writers of published letters will have their subscriptions extended by one or two issues.

Chas Clifton writes:

Maggie Carew's excellent piece in *The Pomegranate* #4, with its thesis that William Shakespeare had some knowledge of ceremonial magic, is intriguing and provocative. I wish to point out one misreading of his text, however.

Shakespeare, as Carew rightly said, preferred to elevate ordinary language rather than write some artificially latinized tongue. So he would not have gone to Classical mythology for "eyas/Aias/Ajax" in the lines, "... an aery of children/little eyases, that cry out on top of the question ..."

An eyas is a young hawk or falcon, and the image is one of a nest full of hungry little birds, mouths gaping, up in an "aerie" or "eyrie" or "aery" or however you wish to spell it — a place where raptors nest.

Although falconry tended to be an upper-class recreation, perhaps he thought his audience would have some passing knowledge of it, the sort that we might have about yacht racing from watching footage of the America's Cup races. And the wealthier of them might well have gone hawking themselves.

If you know falconers, when they get going with the Anglo-Norman technical jargon, it's like a quick trip back to the late fifteenth century, let alone Shakespeare's era!

Maggie Carew replies:

I am grateful to Chas Clifton for pointing this out to me. The whole point of The Pomegranate is that we should learn from it — contributors as well as readers. We always learn from our mistakes. However, I have no excuse for a second mistake in the essay, this one made not from ignorance but from carelessness. It was Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden, who died in 1609; his wife outlived him and inherited the 'second-best bed'. Documents exist which show that Shakespeare was good to his mother and provided well for her after she was widowed, so he must have loved her, and her death might well have affected him in the way I suggested.

Carmella Huggins writes:

Thank you very much for Jenny Gibbon's excellent article on the Great European Witch Hunt. I especially enjoyed the "Burning Times Quiz." My husband, who is not a Pagan but is a lawyer, took the quiz and scored 9 out of 10! "Of course," he said, "trial by neighbors is going to be a bloodbath. Of course things like this happen when central authority breaks down. Of course the Inquisition refused to persecute witchcraft and protected the accused whenever it could. Don't you people know any European history?"

I would like to ask one question, however. The article never mentions the actual source of the preposterous (and embarrassing) figure of 'Nine Million Women.' The first record I know of it was as a dedication at the entrance to Old Gerald's Witchcraft Museum on the Isle of Man. Did Gardner simply make it up, or was he quoting an existing source?

Jenny Gibbons replies:

Matilda Gage is the person originally responsible for the estimate that there were 9,000,000 deaths in the Great European Witch Hunt. Gage was a suffragist and an early feminist writer. The figure first appears in her book Women, Church, and State (1893). If I remember her book correctly, she was describing how the Church had oppressed women throughout time. Since at that point the Great Hunt was generally blamed on the Catholic Church, I believe Gage created the figure to emphasize the enormity of the Church's "crimes against women".

Gage offered no evidence to support this number, and there was no reliable information available to her: at the time, no one had counted the trials of any country. And although she wrote when estimates were at their absolute highest, her figure was still uniquely enormous. The highest estimates of the time generally fell into the one to three million range.

From Gage, the figure entered popular history in two ways. First, as Ronald Hutton noted in Enchante, Gerald Gardner used the number in his witchcraft museum and in The Meaning of Witchcraft. Gardner didn't credit Gage or cite her directly, though she appears to be his source.

Second, Mary Daly used this estimate in her book Gyn-Ecology. Unlike Gardner, Daly did credit Gage. Many authors picked the number up from Daly's influential book and repeated it, usually without crediting (or questioning) its source. It quickly became "common knowledge": a "fact" everyone knew, but no one could explain.

Cat Chapin-Bishop writes:

I'm writing to tell you of my disappointment with Mara Keller's article,

“The Interface of Archaeology and Mythology: A Philosophical Evaluation of the Gimbutas Paradigm.”

I have always loved the implications of Marija Gimbutas' work. I had never seriously thought about women as important in prehistory before I read her stuff, and I have found it continuing to liberate my imagination even as, through wider reading, I've come to see more and more of her ideas as resting on less and less of a foundation ... Keller wants me to take Gimbutas' "methodology of archeomythology" seriously (and I want to, Goddess knows!) but she doesn't give me much in the way of reasons for it: there is very little examination of the details of the interpretations Gimbutas makes, and virtually no attempt made to define "archeomythology", let alone defend it. ... And she goes into great detail to explain the theory of knowledge held by Plato, I suppose in order to support the suggestion that Gimbutas' work ought properly to be evaluated according to the rules for *noesis*, or "mystical intuition" as opposed to — what? — critical thinking, such as ordinary and less loveable theories are subjected to?

Frankly, this seems like smoke and mirrors to me — or maybe just a plain old-fashioned appeal to authority sort of argument: "Marija Gimbutas (who is smarter than you because she spoke twenty languages) and Plato (who is smarter than you because he's a famous dead philosopher) both thought this kind of argument made sense. So who are you to question it? ... To me, this is less a "feminist epistemological critique of modern science" than it is an almost insulting disdain for my ability to think for myself when given evidence to consider. ...

Cat Chapin-Bishop holds an MSW from the University of Illinois, and has a private practice in psychotherapy. She is also a Wiccan High Priestess and longtime feminist and gadfly.

Jenny Blain writes:

... I'm sure others will raise questions of interpretation of the archaeological data, which I'll refer to here only briefly. Suffice it to say the old concepts of both peaceful "Old Europeans" and warlike "Indo-European speaking invaders" have been challenged on the basis of what is found in their burial or dwelling sites (as well as on theoretical grounds).

How about the "Kurgan" invasions, and the changes they wrought in society? Surely they occurred — doesn't the Cavalli-Sforza article demonstrate this? The answer, I'm afraid, has to be "No". Cavalli-Sforza *et al* (*Science*, 259: 639-646, 1993) are displaying a principal components mapping of present-day population data. To illustrate their technique and its results they give maps of Europe showing the values of the first to fourth principal components from

Keller wants me to take Gimbutas' "methodology of archeomythology" seriously (and I want to, Goddess knows!) but she doesn't give me much in the way of reasons for it ... virtually no attempt is made to define "archeomythology", let alone defend it.

statistical analysis of gene frequencies, based on 95 genetic markers. Frequencies for the third principal component for Europe, responsible for about 10 percent of the measured genetic variation, are on a gradient from approximately south-east to north-west. This map is "data in search of a theory", and could be explained by Gimbutas' postulated rapid expansions of bronze-age warriors, [however] Cavalli-Sforza *et al*, [invoke] Renfrew's theory of an earlier, slower, spread of neolithic farming people, bringing with them their language — which would make the "Old Europe" neolithic dwellers speakers of Indo-European languages. Indeed, say Cavalli-Sforza *et al*, it may be that both, together with some much later "expansions of, for example, the Scythians and of barbarians who infiltrated or conquered the Roman Empire before and after its fall" may be responsible, so that "a sharp distinction may require better genetic and archeological data" (p.642-3). Other events have been proposed to account for the map — such as Jonathan Adams' and Marcel Otte's suggestion of an earlier (~9,000 b.p.) rapid expansion of a particular Mesolithic gatherer-hunter population (Current Anthropology: in press. See <http://www.esd.ornl.gov/projects/qen/Indo2.html>). Adams and Otte conclude that from the Cavalli-Sforza data there is no way to evaluate the "truth" of these competing hypotheses.

Next, the uniqueness of Gimbutas' vision of a Goddess-worshipping, matrifocal Old Europe. The concept of a Great Goddess, whose culture was destroyed by invaders, can be traced back at least 150 years, and its roots lie deeper. (See e.g. Ronald Hutton, 1997, "The Neolithic great goddess: a study in modern tradition", *Antiquity* 71 (1997) 91-9). Gimbutas' work, and methods of interpretation, took this concept out of the realms of romanticism and into those of feminist discourse, but she did not create the concept. Indeed, Gimbutas' narrative of the Great Goddess and her civilization, demolished by warlike Indo-Europeans, is merely the other side of the coin of earlier stories of these noble Indo-Europeans bronze age warriors who brought their "superior" qualities as overlords to an "inferior" people. Both are sweeping simplifications, both read

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SEIDHR AND SEIDHRWORKERS: Recovering shamanic practice in contemporary Heathenism

by Jenny Blain
Dalhousie University

The Saga of Eirik the Red describes the visit of a *spákona*, a seeress, to a Greenland farm, one thousand years ago. Her clothing and shoes, her staff and cloak, are detailed. She is asked to predict the progress of the community; she eats a meal of the hearts of the farm animals, and the next day a “high seat” is made ready for her, where she will sit to foretell. She engages in ritual practices known as *seidhr*, which requires a special song to be sung to “the powers” in order that she may gain their knowledge, in trance.

Within the community of those following Norse Heathen practices today, people are making attempts to reclaim practices of *seidhr*. They rely on accounts from the sagas and Eddas, scholars’ analyses of this literature, and parallels with shamanic practices elsewhere, using these within a framework of Norse cosmology and beliefs about soul, afterlife, and the nine-worlds. Seidhr-workers engage in faring-forth, trance-journeying, for a variety of ends, including healing and divination.

This article discusses *seidhr* as sets of practice informed by shamanism within a non-shamanic community, both today and in the past. It indicates some of the ambiguities inherent in early descriptions and how those affect present-day understandings of *seidhr* and its practitioners, and examines how today’s workers are reconstructing *seidhr* along with its dilemmas and contradictions, as shamanic practice within late-twentieth-century Heathenism.

fiorbjörg the Greenland seeress

An increasing number of people within today’s Heathenry, and more generally within paganism, are developing an interest in the practices known as *seidhr*, which some consider represent the remnants of shamanic tradition among the Scandinavian peoples of Northern Europe. In this article I will attempt to outline something of how these are being developed by some groups in North America today. Many diverse interpretations of *seidhr* are possible, and the term does not imply the same practices to all people. Let it be clear from the outset that what I am describing is how some groups do *seidhr*; and in particular “high-seat” or “oracular” *seidhr*. Neither I nor these groups claim to have uncovered the ultimate or only meaning of the term.

As part of my task, I indicate the sources from which reconstructions commence, and some of the debates, or arguments around *seidhr*-practice, today or in the past. As today’s Heathens are well aware, the past shapes the present, with actions

or thoughts long within Wyrd’s Well forming part of the weaving of present-day Earth-religion.

So I will begin with the most complete account of the phenomenon known as *oracular seidhr*: the visit of the *spákona*, fiorbjörg, to that Greenland farm, one thousand years ago, as described in the Saga of Eirik the Red. She wears a hood of lambskin lined with catskin, and has white catskin gloves. Her gown is girdled with a belt of touchwood, from which hangs a bag to hold magical items. Her cloak is blue, fastened with straps and adorned with stones, and stones stud the head of her staff. Her calfskin shoes are tied with thick laces, with tin buttons on their ends. The next day she sits in the high seat, on a cushion stuffed with hen’s feathers, to make her predictions.

The description continues:

A high-seat was prepared for her and a cushion laid under her; ... at sunset, she made the preparations which she needed to have to carry out *seidhr*. She also asked for those women who knew the wisdom (chant) which was necessary for *seidhr* and [who were] called Vardhlokur. But those women could not be found. Then the folk dwelling there were asked if anyone knew it. Then Gudhríðr said, ‘I am neither magically skilled nor a wise-woman, but Halldis, my foster-mother, taught me that chant in Iceland which she called Vardhlokur’...The women made a ring around the seat, and fiorbjörg sat up on it. Then Gudhríðr recited the chant so fairly and well, that it seemed to no one that they had heard the chant spoken with a fairer voice than was here. The spae-wife thanked her for the recital and said (that) many of the powers were now satisfied and thought it fair to hear when the chant was recited so well... “And now many of those things are shown to me which I was denied before, and many others”. (*Eiríks saga raudha* 4. From the translation used by Kveldúlfur Gundarsson, in “Spacraft, Seidhr and Shamanism,” I, *Idunna* 25, December 1994, p.33.)

The song Gudhríðr sang is, unfortunately, not given us.

The account of fiorbjörg the seeress, is the basis for today’s practice of *oracular seidhr*; also known as *high-seat seidhr* or spae-working. In this article I intend first to look at the construction of high-seat or oracular *seidhr*; then refer to other uses and “ways of knowing” related to *seidhr*; and finally touch briefly on some of the contradictions and ambiguities, including ambiguity involving gender. However, the relation of *seidhr* and gender is complex, with a basis in how the gender practices of one thousand years ago were themselves constructed and how they are echoed in the present. The details of that story are for another day.

Seidhr in today’s Ásatrú practice

I have observed a number of high-seat *seidhr* rituals conducted by practitioners of Ásatrú or Heathenism, a religion reconstructed from the extant material on Norse and Germanic pre-Christian practices, and participated in these on a variety of levels. Within North America, a school of practice is emerging, based on the work done by the Californian group known as Hrafnar (the Ravens), and particularly the author Diana Paxson, to reconstruct oracular *seidhr*. Hrafnar began its reconstruction with the

account of *fiorbjörg*, quoted above, using such details as were available: the seeress needed first to familiarize herself with the community and its energies, she then sat on a high seat and a special song was sung to ‘the powers’ that enabled her to gain her knowledge — or ‘the powers’ to give it to her. The word ‘powers’ (*náttúru*, from latin *natura*, nature, in plural meaning spirits, rather than an Old Icelandic word) is uncertain: it may refer to ancestral spirits, elves (*álfar*) or other wights, or deities. The mechanism of how the seeress entered the trance in which she was able to acquire knowledge, or the process of questioning her, has not been handed down in the account. *Hrafnar* have therefore gone to other sources to find details of how a *seidhr* trance might be conducted.

Their main resources have been the Eddic poems *Völuspá*, *Baldur draumr*, and *Völuspá in skamma* (the shorter *Völuspá*, forming a part of the poem *Hyndluljóð*). Each of these appears to show part of a question-and-answer process, in which one who knows, a seeress, a *Völva*, is asked to reveal her knowledge. In *Völuspá* the seeress speaks in answer to Óðhinn, the god/magician; in *Baldur draumr* Óðhinn travels to a grave-mound, just outside Hela’s realm, and there raises the dead *Völva* to answer his questions. In *Hyndluljóð*, the giantess/seeress *Hyndla* is speaking to *Freya* and her follower *Ottar* about *Ottar*’s ancestry, when (in the portion known as *The Shorter Völuspá*) she starts of foretell the coming of *Ragnarok* and the fates of the Gods. From *Baldur draumr* *Hrafnar* has taken the calling of the seeress:

Way-tame is my name, the son of Slaughter-tame,
Tell me the news from Hel — I know what’s happening in the world:
For whom are the benches decked with arm-rings,
The dais so fairly strewn with gold?
(*Baldur Draumar* 6, *Poetic Edda*. 244)

From *Völuspá* and the Shorter *Völuspá* comes the pattern of question and seeress’s answer.

Much we have told you, we will tell you more,
It’s important that you know it, do you want to know more?
 (“Song of *Hyndla*”, *Poetic Edda*. 258.)

or more simply:

Do you understand yet, or what more?
 (“*Voluspa*”, *Poetic Edda*. 7.)

Diana Paxson has described the construction of the high-seat *seidhr* ritual in *The Return of the Völva*, an article written for a Heathen journal, *Mountain Thunder*, and available through the world wide web at <http://vinland.org/heathen/hrafnar/seidh.html>. Drumming and singing accompany and facilitate the induction of the trance state. The guide narrates a meditative journey whereby all present, seers and questioners alike, travel through a tunnel of trees, down to the plain of *Midgardhr* and the great tree *Yggdrasil*, then below one of its roots past

As today's Heathens are well aware, the past shapes the present, with actions or thoughts long within Wyrð's Well forming part of the weaving of present-day Earth-religion.

Urdh’s well and through caverns of Earth, across the echoing bridge with its guardian maiden *Móðgudhr* to the gates of *Hela*’s realm, the abode of the dead, for in Old Norse tradition wisdom comes from the dead, the ancestors. There the audience participants remain, in a light trance state, while the *seidhr*worker enters deep trance and journeys on her or his own, assisted by her or his spirit allies or “power animals”. One participant will act as *seidhr*-guide, singing the seeress through *Hela*’s gates, and calling to other participants to ask their questions, and the seeress to answer.

A seidhmadhr, *Jordsvin*, describes the journey and what he finds there.

... there’s a guided journey down to *Helheim*. The people that are doing the public oracular *seidhr* go with me, they stop at the gate. We stress stay with the group, don’t go runnin’ off and stirring up the *totnar*, you can mess yourself up. This is real stuff, you’re dealing with real beings, it can have real results. ... I go down, I go through *Hela*’s gate ... I see a lake, an island and a torch burning on it. It lights up, the torch and the lake light up the area enough to actually see the dead people. And I walk down there and they tend to gather round, and I’ll say, would those who need to speak with me or speak with the people I’m here representing please come forward. ... I’ve never seen anything scary, they look like people, the ones that have been there are passing on I guess to another life or whatever they’re going to do, sometimes they’re just like shadows, some look like living men and women, some are somewhere in between. Of course there’s many, many many of them. They ask me questions, sometimes they’ll speak. Sometimes I’ll be in trance to where I’m answering the questioner, and the voice that’s coming out of my mouth is, the intonation’s different, the accent’s a little different ... Sometimes I hear voices, sometimes I see pictures, impressions, feelings, I have my eyes closed physically, and I’m in a trance, and I got a shawl over my head, sometimes it’s almost like pictures on the back of my eyelids ...
(Interview, 1996)

Not all *seidhr*-workers see what *Jordsvin* sees. Even within *Hrafnar*’s scenario, each worker faces the task of seeking knowledge in their own way, within the trance. For *Winifred* — another seeress who has received training from *Hrafnar* — a large part of her work is in making contact with deities, and attempting to place other people, her *seidhr* clients, in a relationship with them.

(O)ne of the reasons that I love the *seidhr* work is that due to people’s questions I have the chance to see their relationships with the deities that are, for example *Sif* comes often for a friend of mine, whom I do seeings for...

And one of the most interesting seeings that I had was for a young man, and *Heimdall* came for him. I’m trying to bring people closer to the gods and to their own souls...
(Interview, 1996)

In Völuspá the seeress speaks in answer to Óðhinn, the god/magician; in Baldrs draumr Óðhinn travels to a grave-mound, just outside Hela's realm, and there raises the dead Völva to answer his questions.

Another seidhrworker known as RavenHorn traces his seeings to varying sources depending on the questioner: after passing Hela's gates, he often journeys on a ship, which transports him to where the answer to the question can be found. At other times he travels in the form of a raven, seeing the countryside below him. Sometimes a question brings contact with a deity, particularly Heimdallr, Freyja, or Óðhinn. My own experiences as a seidhrworker usually involve being in darkness within a mound, solitary, and called forth by the seidhr-guide; visions, sounds, sensory experiences then arise in response to the questions that are asked, and these may involve people, animals, birds or trees, specific scenes or objects, sometimes music.

Hrafnar has now trained several people in their methods, and these people are training others, so that a fellowship of seeresses, and seers, all working in similar ways and following broadly similar methods, is emerging across North America. However not all *seidhr* workers follow this method, and even for those who do, not all *seidhr*-workings are oracular. Jordsvin uses similar methods of trance-journeying to dispell ghosts and finds himself called upon by people outside his religion to “unhaunt houses”. Some have derived their practices independently of Hrafnar. Bil Linzie's work is chiefly in healing and soul-retrieval, and in dealing with death. He terms himself “seidman” and “wholemaker” his task is to make others whole. (See web pages at <http://www.angelfire.com/nm/seidhman/index.html>, *The Seidman Rants*.) Again, he finds himself called upon, as a shaman, by people outside his religion.

The seer/ess as shaman

It should be stated at once that Norse culture of 1000 years ago was not “shamanic”: we do not find a shamanic complex of activities, no shaman is described as central to community life. There are kings and queens and battle-leaders, godhar associated with different deities, and in Iceland the emergence of a representative system of godhar, as regional administrators, coordinated by a “lawspeaker” — and no shamans, only occasional *seidhr*workers, and other magic practitioners. Rather, it seems likely that oracular *seidhr* and other magical practices may form part of the rather scattered remnants of shamanic techniques in Norse culture, related to the shamanic practices of other cultures. Stephan Grundy points out (1995: 220) that “The only figures in Germanic culture which we can point to as bearing significant resemblance to the ‘professional shaman’... are the seeresses who occupy a position of respect based on their visionary capabilities” though they do not demonstrate other shamanic techniques

or activities. These seeresses often are said to have been trained by “the Finns”, which probably refers to the nomadic Saami, a truly “shamanic” people.

These seeresses enter again and again into the Icelandic poems and sagas. Katherine Morris has catalogued some of their activities. For instance:

Heidh, the sibyl of Hrólf's saga Kraka 3, was also treated hospitably and then asked to prophesy ... King Frodi asked her to make use of her talents, prepared a feast for her, and set her on platform for her spell-making. She then opened her mouth, yawned, cast a spell and chanted a verse ... (Morris 1991:45).

fiórdís, the seeress of Kormáks saga and Vatnsdæla saga, was “held in great esteem and knew many things”, and the hill behind her dwelling was named after her Spákonufell, the mountain of the seeress. These women, and others, such as Oddbjörg of Víga-Glúms saga, Kjannok of Heidharvíga saga, Heimlaug of Gull-fióris saga, are woven into the fabric of the family sagas, the stories of everyday life, written by Icelanders two or three hundred years after Christianization to tell of the lives of their ancestors who settled the country. They can be seen as semi-historic; they, and others like them, lived and had their being within a cultural framework in which trance, magic and prophesy were possibilities for women: to the extent that in the later legendary sagas and short stories (told for entertainment value), the seeing-women appear once again.

In the fláttir of Norna-Gest, it is told that three wise women came to the house of Norna-Gest's parents, at his birth, and foretold his future: a lack of attention to the youngest nom caused her to attempt to countermand the great prophesies of her elders, stating that the boy's life would be no longer than that of the candle burning beside him. The eldest nom extinguished the candle and gave it to the boy's mother to preserve. Three hundred years later, so goes to story, Norna-Gest related his story to the king of Norway, accepted Christian baptism, and had the candle lit, dying as the flame expired. Arrow-Odd, the hero of (the late and fantastical) Örvar-odds saga, likewise had an extended life, of 300 years, and both this life and the strange death that ended it were predicted by a *seidhkona* known as Heidhr.

Seeing might be only one component of what one who was *fjölkyngi* — possessing much (magical) knowledge — could do. A number of accounts refer to people who change shape, to avoid enemies, to seek knowledge, or to cause trouble. In sagas and in today's folktales, it is told of how people would discover that their problems were associated with the appearance of a particular animal. When this animal was wounded or killed, a woman would have a similar wound. For instance, the in Saga of Kormák the Skáld, when Kormák and his brother set off in a ship, a walrus appears close by. Kormák aims a spear at it, striking it, and it disappear and does not come up again. The walrus had the eyes of the woman Thorveig, described in the saga as *fjölkyngi*. “fióttust menn flar kenna augu fiórveigar.” (Men thought they recognized Thorveig's eyes.) Thorveig was reported as dying from this wound.

(Icelandic courtesy of “Netútgáfan”, <http://www.snerpa.is/net/netut-e.htm>, Kormák’s saga, 18.)

At other times the metamorphosis was made for protection, as in accounts of swan-maidens who guarded chosen warriors. The shapeshifter is *hamhleypa*, one who is *hamrammr*, shape-strong. Another example from Kormák’s saga is Vigi, who is both *fjólkunnigr* and *hamrammr*; he sleeps by the door of the hall, and knows the business of everyone who enters or leaves.

As Bil Linzie points out, in the old material there is no overall word for shaman, but many words for the components of shamanic practice. This may be evidence that by the time of the composition of the sagas, two hundred years post-Christianization, the practices were in decline. And it is from these doubtful remembrances, this fragmentation, that today’s practitioners are attempting to work to construct *seidhr*, not as an individual technique in itself, but as part of a developing complex of beliefs about soul and self, person and community, within community relationships that involve people with other beings, Wights of land and sea or stream, deities known to Heathens as their Elder Kin. All these beings, like people, form part of the fabric of Wyrð, the destiny which people and deities make together, and which will form part of their lives, woven by the Norns, Urdh, Verdhandi and Skuld, who are invoked within Hrafnar’s *seidhr* ritual, as they sit by Urdharbrunn, Urdh’s Well, at the root of the Ash Yggdrasill.

Bil Linzie himself works within a community. His work, as he describes it, is about transformation, death, life, and is focused externally to himself, on those others for whom he does his work. A requirement for practice, he says, is to lose one’s ego: he emphasizes that his work is for the community, not for personal development. As “wholemaker” his task is to make others whole. In pursuit of wholeness, he uses the techniques of trance and journeying to effect healing which is spiritual, emotional, physical, or all of these.

He points out that “wholeness” is not the same thing as physical “normalcy”. Being whole is:

for the average person, a friend tried and true. For the musician it is a tune well turned. For the artist, it is just the right color in just the right spot... it’s when things just seem to go smooth.

He is seeking to find ways of encouraging wholeness. One such is expression of self. He says “Expression is a method, a technique, for attaining Wholeness,” and compares the human organism with a mill-stream which can be blocked upriver from the millpond, in which case the pond dries up and the mill-wheel disintegrates, or down-river, in which case the water becomes stagnant and the mill-wheel rots. The first he sees as akin to lack of *impression*, lack of imagination: the second to lack of *expression*, or outlets for that imagination, as he explains in his webpages at <http://www.angelfire.com/nm/seidhman/index.html>:

In Old Norse tradition wisdom comes from the dead, the ancestors.

The form of expression of the Whole-maker is to see how he or she can assist in bringing other beings into their full form of expression. The Whole-maker shows the sick individual the way to access impression and expression most completely and efficiently. There is much talk about something called balance. Balance, however, relies on comparison to some sort of standard. But what is the standard for a person dying from Alzheimer’s? What is the standard for a schizophrenic? What is the standard for one suffering from depression?... The Whole-maker, rather than looking for what is normal or what the standard is, expresses himself by helping others to open up the mill pond of their lives. That is his art.

Seidhr as evil magic?

Most of those whom I have quoted as today’s practitioners — the Hrafnar group, Bil, RavenHorn — use the word “*seidhr*” for what they do, and this is also used by others whom I have not directly quoted in this paper, whether they work as community-diviners using oracular *seidhr*; or seek private knowledge through techniques of “sitting out for wisdom”. However, some prefer to use another term, well-attested in the sagas for those who speak with foreknowledge. Thus Winifred is a *spákona*, Jordsvin a *spámadhr*. *Spá* refers to foretelling, or prophesying. These words, *spá* (or *spae*, as in the Scottish “spawife”) and *seidhr* have differing implications within the old literature — the *spákona* or *spámadhr* is spoken of with respect, for the most part, whereas the practitioner of *seidhr* (*seidhkona* or *seidhmadhr*) is often regarded rather negatively. *Seidhr* may imply not only trance-divination, but what Jordsvin calls “messing with people’s minds” (this is not, he emphasizes, what he does, whatever people call it); or using shapeshifting to journey in this world, not the spirit world, and use the knowledge gained to the detriment of others, and influencing or affecting other people’s behaviour by means of the journey.

An example from the old literature is from *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. Egill is in the power of his enemies, in York, England, attempting to write a poem which will save his life. He cannot concentrate for the twittering of a swallow — all night long — by his window. His friend goes up onto the roof, and sees the bird flying off. The implication is that the bird is his arch-enemy Gunnhildr — Queen at York, and later of Norway — who is attempting to prevent his composition and thereby cause his death. Gunnhildr is spoken of negatively, in this saga and in others, as a sorceress, who was taught *seidhr* and shapeshifting by “Finns” (usually meaning Saami), and used these skills to further her own ends; and in the passage referred to, as *hamhleypa*, a shapeshifter. Previously the saga informs us that “*Svo er sagt, adh Gunnhildur lét seidh efla og lét fladh seidha, adh Egill Skalla-Grimsson skyldi aldrei ró bída á Íslandi, fyrr en hún sei hann.*” (“It is said, that Gunnhild worked spells [*seidhr*] and spelled out this

*Norse culture of 1000 years ago was not
“shamanic”: we do not find a shamanic
complex of activities, no shaman is described
as central to community life.*

[did seidr], that Egil Skalla-Grimson should never know peace in Iceland until she had set eyes on him”: Fell 1975:103). Icelandic from “Netútgáfan”, <http://www.snerpa.is/net/netut-e.htm>.) The first mention of Gunnhildr is that “of all women she was the loveliest and wisest, and had considerable knowledge of magic” (p.53). (*Gunnhildur var allra kvenna vænst og vitrust og fjölkunnug mjög*.)

This leads to another important point about the old literature. It deals in seeresses and *fordædha*, female practitioners. Most accounts of seidr are of women. The seidr-workers of saga-times appear to have been mostly female: male practitioners — in the late, christian accounts that we have — were deemed to be “ergi”, un-masculine, possibly crossing gender barriers in ways not then acceptable. It is unclear at what time this negativity spread to include *seidhkomur* (seidr-women), or how the spread of Christianity affected how seidr-workers were regarded.

Another word is *útisetá*, and this is how some men — including leaders, kings — are spoken of in the sagas as gaining knowledge, *seta úti til fróðhleiks* (sitting out for wisdom). A variant of this may be going “under the cloak” as it is said did *fiórgeirr* the lawspeaker of the Icelandic Alfling, prior to taking to the decision to have Iceland formally convert to Christianity (Blain, 1998). The knowledge gained through sitting out would be used by the out-sitter, or revealed at a later stage, rather than narrated in trance. Sitting out typically involved sitting on a gravemound or at a crossroads, going under the cloak could be done wherever one was, but both implied a distancing of oneself from the other human members of the community. The one who was sitting out was not to be disturbed, and in particular their name should not be mentioned. (Adhalsteinnsson 1978). *Útiseta* also became problematic, proscribed in Iceland in the laws of the 13th century, which remained in place until the 19th, in terms that name “... *fordædhuskap ok spáfarar allar ok útisetá at vekja tröll upp ok fremja heidhni*,” “sorcery and spae-working (foretelling) and sitting out to wake up trolls and practising heathenism”, a wording which associated *útisetá* with gaining knowledge from other beings or spirits (we can treat the term “trolls” as a derogatory re-working during Christian times). Referring to this law, Hastrup comments that “By the act of sitting out, which was a metaphor for leaving the ordinary social space, it was possible to invoke supernatural beings.” While the penalty was death, no-one was convicted until Iceland’s small witch-craze in the 17th century (Hastrup 1990:391. The translation of the OI law is mine.)

As with *seidr*, members of today’s Heathen community are attempting to

rediscover techniques of *útisetá*, seeing it as a solitary practice, whereas oracular *seidr* is a community ritual.

Men (and some women) appear also as practitioners of *galdr*, sung or spoken spells, which do not involve the shapeshifting, journeying or other shamanic/ecstatic components (and which together with knowledge of runes in the early modern period formed the basis of the few witchcraft accusations and convictions in Iceland, according to Hastrup). However, that men could perform *seidr* is evident. Snorri’s history of the Kings of Norway recounts how Haraldr Finehair (who became king of all Norway in the 9th century C.E.), and his son Eiríkr called Bloodaxe, were responsible for the death of Eirík’s brother Rögnvaldr rettilbeini, a *seidhmadhr*; and the troop of 80 *seidhmenn* with whom he was associated, seemingly because Eiríkr and his father did not like “magic” or *seidr*. (*Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, ch 36. See e.g. Monsen 1932.) If political motivations were involved, Snorri does not recount those.

One of the best-known accounts of any type of *seidr* work is by a male: in this case, Óðhinn, euhemerised by Snorri Sturluson in his *Ynglingasaga*, written approximately 1225, as an invading king and master magician, and described here (in Samuel Laing’s 1844 translation) as both shapeshifter and seidr-worker:

Odin could transform his shape: his body would lie as if dead, or asleep; but then he would be in shape of a fish, or worm, or bird, or beast, and be off in a twinkling to distant lands upon his own or other people’s business. With words alone he could quench fire, still the ocean in tempest, and turn the wind to any quarter he pleased ... Sometimes even he called the dead out of the earth, or set himself beside the burial-mounds; whence he was called the ghost-sovereign, and lord of the mounds... Odin understood also the art in which the greatest power is lodged, and which he himself practiced; namely, what is called magic [*seidr*]. By means of this he could know beforehand the predestined fate of men, or their not yet completed lot; and also bring on the death, ill-luck, or bad health of people, and take the strength or wit from one person and give it to another. But after such witchcraft followed such weakness and anxiety [*ergi*], that it was not thought respectable for men to practice it; and therefore the priestesses were brought up in this art (Online Medieval and Classical Library Release #15b, <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Heimskringla/yngrlinga.html>.)

For the words given in parentheses, the translation is particularly problematic. This extract implies that seidr-practice was valued differently in men and in women. The word *ergi*, translated into this 19th century discourse as “weakness and anxiety”, might be more accurately glossed as “demasculinization”. There is considerable debate over this word, within the Heathen community and among researchers, though this debate is outside the scope of the present article. A man who was “ergi” may have been either a receptive partner in male homosexuality, or engaging in some other activity viewed as appropriate for women but not men. Seidr-work is associated elsewhere with Óðhinn, in a poem which states “*Yggr* performed *seidr* at Rind” and another, *Locasenna*, 24 from the *Poetic Edda*, where Loki raises the accusation of “*ergi*” against Óðhinn.

Enn flic seidha kóðho Sámseyo í
oc draptu á vött sem völor;
vitca líki förtu verfiúðh yfir,
oc hugðha ec flat args adhal.

(“Locasenna,” 24, Kuhn and Neckel 1962:101.)

But you once practiced *seidhr* on Samsey
and you beat on the drum as seeresses do (*völor*, *volvas*)
in the likeness of a *vitki* you journeyed among people
and I thought that showed an *ergi* nature.

(“Loki’s Quarrel,” 24, Larrington’s translation, p 89, modified to give more precision
in words relating to *seidhr*.)

In the passage from *Ynglingasaga* quoted above, it is clear that Óðhinn’s practice of *seidhr* does not only relate to fore-knowing and fore-telling the fates of people’s lives, but to magically influencing these fates: he could “bring on the death, ill-luck, or bad health of people, and take the strength or wit from one person and give it to another.” Within the Heathen community, Kveldúlfur Gundarsson has claimed that *seidhr* is always used to denote negative practices — and does not relate specifically to foretelling, but rather to contacting spirits for that purpose or for purposes of ill-wishing, “messing with people’s minds”, affecting motivation or intention, courage or concentration — whereas *spá*, referring to foretelling, was viewed positively in the old literature. The word *völva* related to a woman who had knowledge.

Gundarsson draws on the old material to suggest that for both men and women *seidhr* was viewed as negative, even evil. He would apparently name today’s practices *spá* and *útiseti*, not *seidhr*. Some *seidhr*-workers disagree, pointing out that the term may have become increasingly negative due to Christianization, and draw on the work of, for instance, Jenny Jochens (1996) who suggests from a study of terms used in the sagas and in law codes that magical practice (*fjölkyngi*) was originally a complex of female skills, which became taken over by male practitioners, with some of these skills then viewed very negatively, others (*spá*) positively. Even the (negative) term *fordædha*, originally used of women, became a term used only for men, as an insult for which full compensation was demanded in law!

Jochens suggests that “Rooted deep in paganism, the oldest magical figure in the north was not the skilled male magician but the female diviner,” (1996:130).

Conventional scholarship has it that *seidhr* was women’s magic, and was evil: men who took to performing it were therefore seen as evil also, and terms such as *ergi* applied. It may be, however, that women’s magic was only seen as “evil” depending on the observer’s point of view. A woman or man who uses knowledge for protection may be seen as “evil” working against an aggressor — from the aggressor’s point of view. In any case, we have one word — *fordædha* — referring to a woman (originally) who engages in deeds against the community, regardless of whether these are magical —

Seeing might be only one component of what one who was fjölkyngi — possessing much (magical) knowledge — could do. A number of accounts refer to people who change shape, to avoid enemies, to seek knowledge, or to cause trouble.

and many words which refer to techniques or knowledge gained, *spákona*, *seidhkona*, *fjölkyngi*. The second woman magic-worker from *Kormáks Saga*, *fiórdís*, is termed both *spákona* and *fordædha*. The distinction seems to depend on who she is working for at the time, and whose point of view is expressed in the saga, with *spákona* as a term of respect for her knowledge, for the most part, *fordædha* a term of abuse. *Seidhr* performed by men, or by large numbers of either females or males, may have been politically threatening; also, with increasing Christian influence, gender categories seem to have become much more rigid so that the charge of *ergi*, for men performing activities otherwise associated with women, may have become increasingly important over time.

Conclusion: *seidhr* and its valuation today

Jochens tells us that “Although the word *völva* never appeared in the law codes, the practice of divination and prophesy continued.” (1996:129) To her, this indicates that these were being performed increasingly by men, including churchmen, who took over the practice of *spá*, and to a large extent rune-work. And this divination became increasingly problematic. However, the fact that the word *völva* never appeared and that male practice was increasingly targeted as unlawful does not necessarily mean that women ceased practicing, only that they were less targeted. Katherine Morris (1991) appears to suggest that “seeking for knowledge” in Iceland remained part of the complex of activities that were appropriate for women: it became problematic only when men practiced it, possibly (in my conjecture) for political reasons.

Iceland’s current *Allsherjargodhi*, Jörmundur Ingi, believes that women in Iceland have maintained some of the practices associated with *seidhr*; often unthinkingly, as everyday activities, simply things that women do in their households and kitchens:

I remember when I was a little kid living out in the country, there’s always something that the women would close themselves into the kitchen, to, ah, to do some things that they were whispering about, and the men would simply keep away ... and we were just little kids, we sometimes stayed in there, they didn’t bother with us. They were doing some sort of little magic tricks which we didn’t know was magic and probably they didn’t know either ... from some signs or whatever, usually you know, whom they should marry or how things

The sei>r-workers of saga-times appear to have been mostly female: male practitioners in the late, Christian accounts that we have were deemed to be “ergi”, un-masculine, possibly crossing gender barriers in ways not then acceptable.

should go and so on, and so they have been doing it all the time.

The extent to which these activities would be considered *seiðhr* is of course debatable. The word seems to cover a range of meanings, not necessarily the same as those of the Heathen period. However Jörmundur's point is that practice of “magic” by women was continued, as part of everyday life. On occasion this practice, and possible links with *seiðhr* or *spá*, could become more evident, as with the coming of the “spiritualism” movement to Iceland, in the 19th century:

... while this movement was sort of a fringe movement everywhere else, it was here part of, ah, high society. It was introduced into Iceland mostly by priests and lawyers ... so right from the start, it got a socially accepted stamp on it, it was the in thing, to be an adherent of this, and very strangely what happened was that women would flock to this, and all of a sudden, you would have mediums, women, everywhere, and the most astounding thing about that was that they way they were conducting these seances, what they were doing of course, was that you can read the story of the *Völva*, in the saga of Eric the Red, and they held the ceremony exactly. So I have the theory that women were doing this all through the Christian era, they were simply having little ceremonies like that without even realizing that this was religion, this was just something that women did, and men didn't interfere in (Interview, 1997).

Elsewhere *seiðhr* is being revived, as stated at the beginning of this paper, in association with the reconstruction of Heathenism, as a specific set of skills. By whatever means the 10th-century gendering of *seiðhr* came about, in today's Ásatrú in North America the majority of *seiðhr*-workers are female, with a number of gay men, and fewer heterosexual men, among the best-known practitioners. Women and gay men have held marginal positions in North American society within recent history, and gay men are still marginalized in popular discourses to which some Ásatrú followers subscribe. However, high-seat *seiðhr*-working is now coming to be an expected part of larger-scale Heathen gatherings, though its techniques are still regarded with some suspicion and its rituals viewed by some as marginal to the “main purpose” of the gathering. Other members of Earth Religions are also coming into contact with oracular *seiðhr*; at festivals or local events.

How *seiðhr*, *spá*, or shamanic journeying is viewed within Heathenism, or Ásatrú, depends very much on which group one focuses on. Many people are

enthusiastic about the techniques, and about their potential for use in healing and alternative medicine, as well as divination. They also see journeying and *útisetá* as a way to gain personal knowledge of deities and other wights, and so to explore the possibilities of the religion together with conceptions of self and spirit. Others cling to an image of Ásatrú as a religion of viking warriors, and reject signs of “weakness” (including *seiðhr*; women's magic, and gay men). The position of *seiðhr* is being played out against a background of debate on who or what Ásatrú or Heathenism is. Though some conventional scholarship still associates *seiðhr* with evil, scholars within Heathenism and Earth Religions generally are raising questions and exploring possibilities raised by different definitions. My hope is that this article contributes to that debate, as well as to an examination of how today's workers are reconstructing *seiðhr* along with some of its dilemmas and contradictions, as shamanic practice within late-twentieth-century Heathenism.

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JOURNEYING THE POLITICS OF ECSTASY: Anthropological Perspectives on Neoshamanism

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In anthropology, archaeology and popular culture, 'Shamanism' may be one of the most used, abused and misunderstood terms to date. Researchers are increasingly recognising the socio-political roles of altered states of consciousness and shamanism in past and present societies, yet the rise of 'Neoshamanism' and its implications for academics and their subjects of study is consistently neglected. Moreover, many academics marginalise neoshamans and, as a result, neoshamanic interaction with anthropology, archaeology and indigenous peoples is often regarded as neocolonialism. To complicate the matter, indigenous peoples express multivocal opinions of Neoshamanism, from blatant condemnation to active encouragement. I first trace the roots of Neoshamanism in order to compare neoshamanic and academic approaches. Criticisms of Neoshamanism as expressed by academic and native critics are presented and I suggest these conflicting views are potentially reconcilable. Crucially, post-processualist praxis should be practically implemented via programmes of research and communication.

The terms Neoshamanism and shamanism are used here to differentiate 'Western' shamanism from its more 'traditional' counterpart. The distinction does not intend to privilege one over the other, nor is it exclusive; frequently the practitioners blend so that definition is difficult. Indeed, defining shamanism is intrinsically problematic, mainly because, as this paper suggests, it is a Western construction. In this sense, a pristine form of 'classic' shamanism has never existed, the idea is a fabrication.

Comparing Academic and Neoshamanism

Origins of Neoshamanism stem from use of the term 'shamanism' in 18th century ethnographic and antiquarian texts. The 'sam-n' were originally Siberian Tungouse practitioners of altered states of consciousness encountered by German explorers. But, by the end of the 18th century, 'shamanism' had become the generic term used to describe similar forms of ecstatic religion (Flaherty 1992). Essentially then, shamanism is an academic construct, a word for the West, its meaning inevitably universalised, repeatedly re-fabricated, its definition contested. Fascinated by its titillating bizarreness, people romanticised shamanism, associated themselves with the 'noble savage' and became neoshamans. Goethe, for instance, probably

styled Faust as a shaman, (Flaherty 1989) thereby paving the way for 'the artist as the shaman of higher civilisation' (Flaherty 1988). Neoshamanism and academic study of shamanism essentially emerge at the same time then, both approaching indigenous peoples, past and present, in ways which are politically sensitive.

Criticisms of Neoshamanism

Neoshamanism today describes a spiritual path for personal empowerment utilising altered states of consciousness and the shaman's world-view. A primary source text is Michael Harner's *The Way of the Shaman* (1980). Once Professor of anthropology, Harner and colleagues at the Foundation for Shamanic Studies currently teach courses in experiential shamanism throughout the Western world. In The Basic Workshop, participants are taught that anyone can enter an altered state of consciousness or trance, which Harner names the 'shamanic state of consciousness' (SSC). During shamanic experience people lie down and relax with their eyes closed or covered. The 'journey', accompanied by monotonous drumming, begins by entering the earth at a place well known in the physical world such as a cave, and the experient then travels down a tunnel, into a spirit world. Here, the aspirant meets and interacts with spirit helpers and power animals and, as he or she becomes more adept, learns divination and to heal sickness. These 'Core Shamanism', 'Harner Method' techniques are probably the most widely known and practised in the West, and have come under the closest criticism (see, for example Johnson 1995, Harvey 1997).

For instance, during his publishing career Johnson believes Harner shifts "from the particular to the universal, from the locative to the utopian" (Johnson 1995:171). 'Core shamanism' is described as being universal to shamanism across space and time, thus decontextualising aspects of shamanism from its original 'owners'. Furthermore, Harner's techniques are held to be safe but this is in sharp contrast with many shamanic traditions which can be dangerous and potentially life-threatening. According to Brown (1989) neoshamans avoid this 'dark side of the shaman', such as death threats and battling with malevolent spirits.

Neoshamanism is also portrayed as something available for everyone. Westerners can choose shamanism as a spiritual way of life. This is in contrast to many 'traditional' shamans whose roles are viewed with a healthy fear in their societies. Shamanic trance is often described as being painful, can kill as well as heal, and characteristically, the spirits choose the shaman, not the other way round. In another instance, Harner is accused of decontextualising when selling Western orientated 'rapid results', in terms of spiritual development and healing (see, for example, Atkinson 1992: 322). In contrast, the 'traditional' shamanic path is not a psychological tool for self-discovery or empowerment which can be used for a few minutes with dramatic results. In my view, Harner erroneously privileges the

shaman's altered state of consciousness then, when stating that what a shaman can do in a few minutes takes a yogi many years (Harner 1980:xiii).

Johnson suggests an inevitable 'individualising' inherent in Neoshamanism: "a plurality of religions ... leads to ... a focus on individual agency, choice, 'needs' and preference in the religious 'marketplace' ... an obsession with the 'self' ... individuals are free and capable of converting to any religious system in any place and at any time" (Johnson 1995:174). Emphasis on the individual inner journey, personal psychology and explanations according to Jungian archetypes, suggests to Johnson that Neoshamanism psychologises the world of the 'traditional' shaman leaving itself open to "the risk of solipsism" (Johnson 1995:175).

'Appropriation' (indeed misappropriation) is not too harsh a charge in some instances where Neoshamanism interacts with 'traditional' shamanism, even perpetuating racist stereotypes of indigenous peoples. Early ethnographic notions of 'Indians' as *Naturvölker* (natural peoples) and medicine 'men' who work a spirit world in harmony with nature, inaugurated the Western masculinist primitive premise (Kehoe 1990). Kehoe describes how inauthentic 'plastic medicine men' such as Hungry Wolf reinforce these stereotypes in their 'teachings' of native spirituality. Rather than actually promoting respect and sensitivity towards native peoples as intended, these authors paradoxically portray mistaken and outmoded ideas, while believing they are getting closer to the native shaman's viewpoint. As Harvey points out, "some Pagans appropriate shamanic techniques without returning any benefit to the 'donors', they appear to be 'playing Indians' and some even insult the 'Indians' by continuing to use the derogatory term 'Red Man'" (Harvey 1997:120). Clearly, as Kehoe suggests, many neo-shamanic writers adopt imperialist approaches, "defining for themselves the mission of bringing their 'knowledge' of American Indian spirituality to the peoples of modern Europe and America" (Kehoe 1990:195).

This neo-colonial attitude perhaps affects Harner's Foundation for Shamanic Studies which appears somewhat naive in Johnson's description, when it:

... awards monetary contributions to those they designate 'Living Treasures of Shamanism', such as Wangchuk, a 68-year-old Tibetan shaman living in exile in Nepal. While the award serves the admirable goals of enabling the shaman to continue to practise his 'traditional' form and preserving the rituals on tape for archives both in Tibet and at the Foundation, it also, in an ironic twist, promotes itself to arbiter and authority over who is and who is not a 'true shaman' (Johnson 1995:172).

Indigenous Perspectives: Neoshamanism as Spiritual Genocide?

Many native critics compare neoshamans and anthropologists in terms of cultural imperialism. Hobson, a Cherokee critic, coined the term 'whiteshaman

... shamanism is an academic construct, a word for the West, its meaning inevitably universalised, repeatedly re-fabricated, its definition contested. Fascinated by its titillating bizarreness, people romanticised shamanism, associated themselves with the 'noble savage' and became neoshamans.

movement' to describe white poets who assume the persona of Native American shamans in their writings (Hobson 1978). 'Whiteshamans' compare the poet's vocation with the shaman's in order to add authenticity to their work, but Native Americans strongly criticise them (see comments by Rose 1992) because they do not make their actual ethnicity plain. Andy Smith (Cherokee member of Women of all Red Nations) suggests: "the New Age movement is part of a very old story of white racism and genocide against the Indian people" (Smith 1994:168). According to these writers, cultural imperialism continues, with the spiritual persona of indigenous peoples now up for grabs (Kehoe 1990), by 'Wannabee Indians' (Green 1988).

Castile (1996) considers this a 'Commodification of Indian Identity' and suggests it creates a market for Indian teachers: "The audience of these teachers is not the Indian communities they claim to represent, but the book-, lecture-, and even ordeal-buying public — the litterateurs of dominance" (Castile 1996:745). In response, 'real' Indians endeavour to expose "the falsity of the unreal" (Castile 1996:745), the "Great Pretenders" (Rose 1992). Of concern then, is the legitimacy of shamanistic teachers and teachings (see, for example, Joralemon 1990). For example, 'women's mysteries' are in vogue at present and a concomitant surge of female neoshamans has emerged (for example, the 'female Castaneda' Lynn Andrews). But, were women in Native American and other shamanic traditions afforded the attentions Western women are now afforded?

'Native American' Teachers

The diversity of opinions becomes more complicated when 'genuine' native shamans encourage neoshamans and teach them their practices. Peruvian shaman Eduardo Calderfín, for instance, publicised by anthropologist Douglas Sharon, promoted by Alberto Villoldo (Joralemon 1990). Black Elk published his Ogala Sioux medicine practices via Neihardt (1932), and clearly meant his visions and life story to be read by both natives and Westerners. Similar divulgence of previously 'secret' knowledge has been given by many Native Americans, including Leonard Crow Dog, Lame Deer and Brooke Medicine Eagle. The idea of 'mixed

Neoshamanism's interactions with native shamans can be seen as a positive force for indigenous peoples; ideologically and financially supporting, publicising and drawing considerable attention to, the rights and acts of cultures formerly and currently suppressed.

blood, mixed ethnicity, shamanic paths' however, highlights the problems of authenticity and legitimacy which concern some critics of Neoshamanism.

For instance, popular use of the Lakota sweat lodge ceremony by neoshamans, has recently been condemned by some Native Americans elders: they state the ceremony is not to be enacted by non-Natives. Fulfilling the (mainly) Lakota elders' request is not a simple matter however. What of 'mixed bloods'; to what extent does 'tradition' belong to them? And, where natives, mixed bloods and neoshamans are encouraged to meet in sweat lodge ceremonies, it is impossible to discriminate according to blood-lines alone. Indeed, the one-quarter blood denoting genuine Indians is a problematic concept (Castile 1996:744), and determining where genuine 'culture' or 'tradition' begins and ends is a matter of opinion.

Kehoe is damning of Sun Bear and his 'Bear Tribe', perceiving an easy to consume spirituality, purely for profit making (Kehoe 1990:199-200). She suggests the 'Medicine Wheel' teachings used by Sun Bear and popularised by Hyemeyohsts Storm were simply of utilitarian value in Cheyenne society (Kehoe 1990:200; see also Rose 1992). Storm's Native American ancestry is questionable according to Kehoe however, as is that of other popular so called 'Native American' teachers. Storm, alongside Carlos Castaneda and Lynn Andrews is immensely popular; their books on shamanism are unquestionably the most widely read and the Medicine Wheel teachings are particularly well known. Yet, the 'authenticity' of Castaneda's and Andrews' teachings is hotly disputed.

The issue of payment for teaching provides another reason for people to slander Neoshamanism. Kehoe criticises Wallace Black Elk who is genuine Lakota and charges for shamanic seminars and workshops. And Smith states: "True spiritual leaders do not make a profit from their teachings, whether its through selling books, workshops, sweat lodges, or otherwise. Spiritual leaders teach the people because it is their responsibility to pass what they have learned from their elders to the younger generations. They do not charge for their services" (Smith 1994:168).

"Seeing' toward 'Extra Pay'

This discussion shows how Neoshamanism is strongly criticised by

academics and native peoples. In some respects however, Neoshamanism compares with traditional shamanism and benefits the cultures 'borrowed' from: what Harvey calls giving 'extra pay' to shamanism (Harvey 1997). For instance, many neo-shaman's describe experiences which are anything but safe. Howard Charing, co-founder of Eagle's Wing for Contemporary Shamanism, UK, told me that a near-fatal and almost disabling lift crash lead to communication with spirits and subsequent healing (personal comm.). Only later did he come to call these practices 'shamanism'. Another informant, explained that while conventional medicine was unable to help a psychopathological condition, communication with spirits allowed a self-healing; in retrospect he understands his experiences as 'shamanic'. Furthermore, Wiger (Bend & Wiger 1987) reports how sex and drug abuse, prostitution and multiple personality disorder were overcome with shamanic techniques which she now teaches.

In these examples, the individuals did not 'chose' shamanism and their descriptions parallel the 'calling', 'initiatory sickness' and self-healing of shamans world-wide; they are 'wounded healers' (Halifax 1982). Furthermore, many neoshamans express beliefs in spirit worlds and spirits outside themselves. These testimonies exemplify Harvey's idea that some neoshamans substantially change their views beyond safe and acceptable Jungian (and other) psychological models.

Neoshamanism's interactions with native shamans can be seen as a positive force for indigenous peoples, ideologically and financially supporting, publicising and drawing considerable attention to, the rights and acts of cultures formerly and currently suppressed. Harner, for instance, does emphasise the complexity of shamanic cultures (they are not evolutionarily simple) and the value of their modes of awareness (altered states are not just for 'hippies' and the 'insane'). The 'Living Treasures' award, though viewed with scepticism by some, suggests Neoshamanism is giving back to the cultures it has 'borrowed' from.

Indeed, where Neoshamanism is active in environmental education for instance, it "moves towards being properly shamanic ... the word is paid extra: it is honoured as a force for change, an imperative in the growth and evolution of Paganism" (Harvey 1997:117). The socio-political context for Neoshamanism and its benefits is becoming evident; indeed, in the context of Paganism, Neoshamanism "becomes an important part of the postmodern critique of modern society" (Harvey 1997:122), not simply a symptom of modernity, of neo-liberalism.

Interestingly, representatives from Native American, Sami and Inuit groups have approached Harner, requesting that he teach 'core shamanism' to restore their sacred knowledge which was lost due to conquest and missionisation (Harner personal comm.). Perhaps this is another example of Neoshamanism's benefits, although indigenous critics may instead see a white shaman returning stolen shamanism in a revamped format to aboriginal owners. It is pertinent to note

however, that most criticisms surround Harner's basic workshop and its methods. The less publicised, more advanced training programmes, certainly contain aspects which require considerable skill and strength on the part of the practitioner (Harner personal comm.), and compare more suitably with traditional shamanisms.

'Extra pay' may also be given in use of the term shaman itself. Neoshamans tend to find the prefix 'Neo-' offensive; to themselves, they are shamanic practitioners. There is also a general consensus that to call oneself a shaman is inflated, at least a little suspect, and to an extent disrespectful to 'traditional' shamans. Harner's workshops in particular promote this perspective. In this instance the term becomes honorific: you don't call yourself a shaman, but other people do; neoshamans in this case, honour 'traditional' shamans by using the term sensitively.

Conclusion

This paper has presented various criticisms and benefits of the Neoshamanism movement. Perspectives among all the interest groups are extremely diverse, often deeply personalised and politically motivated; it is therefore unrealistic to suggest there is a single 'right' view. At the individual level, it is possible to single out certain charlatans, or 'well-rounded' practitioners, even extremist voices; yet all are likely to conflict in some way. As with 'traditional' shamanism, Neoshamanism is not an homogenous entity. Simply put, and from my own perspective, Neoshamanism has its good and bad points and too many voices downplay opposing views.

By focusing on criticisms, many academics neglect positive aspects of Neoshamanism, which merely legitimates avoidance of its impact on their subjects of study. Furthermore, academics are reticent to recognise benefits of the shamanistic approach in recent studies. In all, they are 'shamanophobic' (Dowson 1996) and aim to strengthen this position with 'neo-shamanophobia'. Paradoxically though, I have shown how academic and neo-shamanic approaches are intrinsically comparable, indeed they are historically related.

Following a circular argument then, academics, when they do examine shamanism, tend to universalise it. They then criticise neo-shamanic universalising and decontextualising, actually reproduced from academic publications! Similarly, as Atkinson states: "The romanticisation of shamanism by its current Euroamerican promoters is also unsettling for anthropologists (despite — or perhaps because of — their own familiarity with romantic tropes)" (Atkinson 1992:323).

Crucial, I think, to both shamanism studies and when approaching Neoshamanism, is socio-political context. The perspectives presented here show all too clearly the 'politics of ecstasy'. Exploring shamanism world-wide, past and present, in Western and non-Western societies, need not denote a metanarrative.

Dowson's 'elements of shamanism' (Dowson, in press) suggest: shamans enter an altered state of consciousness, interact with a spirit world and have their role sanctioned by the community. This approach promotes cross-cultural studies of shamanism in terms of certain features, but stresses the importance of cultural context in order to embrace diversity. Apart from enabling a better approach to shamanism, emphasising socio-political specificity facilitates appreciation of Neoshamanism as an embodiment and expression of the contemporary West, a consciousness and culture we are all inseparable from. When considered in this light, Neoshamanism cannot be ignored.

As an archaeologist, I believe that archaeology is a discipline which has ignored neoshamans, their views and practices, without recognising their intellectual and experiential impact on our subjects of study (Wallis 1998). Future research will suggest guidelines and potential action which should reciprocally benefit all interest groups. For instance, while current academics can revise the work of their forebears, it is also vital to express current ideas in the popular realm so that stereotypes embedded in the public imagination can be changed. Furthermore, indigenous critics draw attention to manifestly negative aspects of Neoshamanism, but have yet to discuss the issues with neoshamans directly in what may be a productive dialogue.

I think the at face-value conflicting modes of consciousness expressed by the groups concerned, are potentially reconcilable, via informed research and much needed communication. Academics and indigenous people are embarking on productive dialogues which look towards mutual benefit and understanding. Similarly, people involved with shamanism and Neoshamanism must be encouraged to develop forums for meeting, and ways of communicating and understanding each other's perspective. This consideration seems timely, for if avoidance of Neoshamanism continues, an hitherto neglected contemporary shamanic agenda for the archaeological past and ethnographic present will compromise curators into increasingly difficult positions.

This is a revised version of a paper presented as 'Altered States, Conflicting Cultures: Shamans, Neoshamans and Academics,' at the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness Spring Conference 1998, Portland Oregon.

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THE OLD RELIGION

by Richard Smoley
Editor, *Gnosis Magazine*

The theme of this article is a movement that has been called the fastest-growing religion in the US. Nobody knows exactly how many Americans identify themselves as Witches, Wiccans, and Neopagans. The number has been estimated as anywhere from 200,000 to 500,000, but there are no hard statistics and few formal organizations. Besides, religious prejudice still makes it expedient for many of today's Pagans to keep quiet about their preferences.

The first question, of course, is just what Neopaganism is. Many of its adherents say it's an attempt to return to the polytheistic faith that prevailed in Europe before Christianity. And while the word "witchcraft" used to be applied to any form of attempted sorcery or enchantment, modern Witches see the matter differently. Many of them regard themselves as the heirs of a specific form of this ancient faith. They call it "the Old Religion."

They draw their inspiration from Margaret Murray, an early 20th century scholar who investigated the witch hunts that seized Europe sporadically between 1450 and 1750. Before Murray's time, historians had assumed that the witch hunts were a form of mass psychosis projected onto some unfortunate individuals (chiefly women). But in books like *The Witch-Cult in Northern Europe* (1921) and *The God of the Witches* (1931), Murray contended that there were witches, and that they were really adherents of the Old Religion who had been driven underground. They met in covens of thirteen members each, and they worshipped a deity known as the Horned God, whom the Christians equated with the Devil.

Murray's theories were endorsed by Gerald Gardner, a retired customs official who happened upon what he claimed was a practicing coven in England's New Forest in the late 1930s. In a number of books including *Witchcraft Today* (1955), Gardner set out the theory and practice of this religion, which he called Wicca. (This word is used today as an abstract noun more or less equivalent to "Witchcraft," but actually it's an Old English word meaning "male witch"; the feminine equivalent is *wicce*). Gardnerian Wicca is still practiced today throughout the English-speaking world.

Both Murray and Gardner said the Old Religion worshipped the deity in a dual aspect — the Horned God, or Cernunnos, and the Great Goddess, known as Diana, Herodias, or Aradia. Today many Witches and Neopagans focus their

rites around the central mystery of this divine union of male and female. In recent years, however, for many Neopagans the Goddess has come to be seen as the more important figure (Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 1989:22-23).

Again scholarship has played its role in this development. As early as 1861, a Swiss jurist named J.J. Bachofen was arguing that before the male-dominated social system that we know from written history, humanity had had a phase when it was matriarchal: women were socially dominant and descent was traced through female lines.

Bachofen's theory proved highly influential. A version of it resurfaced in *The White Goddess* by the poet Robert Graves, published in 1948, in which Graves argued from his own rather idiosyncratic use of evidence that Europe had in prehistoric times worshipped the goddess of the moon — the White Goddess of his title.

Graves admitted that he had written his book in a kind of Muse-inspired frenzy, but that didn't keep it from being taken as history. Archaeologist James Mellaart's excavations at Çatal Hüyük in Asia Minor seemed to corroborate the existence of this matrifocal phase of civilization. The Lithuanian archaeologist Marija Gimbutas took up this theme and developed it further in books like *The Language of the Goddess* (1989). Together with Murray's and Gardner's ideas, these theories have been woven into a kind of foundation myth for today's Neopaganism.

According to this view, in the Neolithic era people throughout most of Europe lived in a peaceful, egalitarian society that was ruled by women (to the extent that it was ruled at all). It was this phase of civilization that produced the enormous numbers of figurines that have been found of rotund, obese, often pregnant female figures. These were images of the Great Goddess.

This peaceful culture was destroyed by the coming of the Indo-Europeans, a war-like, patriarchal race that swept in from the steppes on horseback and crushed "Old Europe," setting up a belligerent, hierarchical, male-ruled society. We are the descendants of that culture.

The patriarchy reached its zenith — or nadir, depending on your point of view — with Christianity, which, after it came to power, systematically attempted to extirpate the old Pagan religion. The new, upstart faith was very much focused on the transcendent. Unlike the Old Religion, it taught people to hate their bodies and to hate the earth, laying the ground for today's sexual hang-ups and the ecological crisis.

The process of conversion to Christianity took centuries; the witch hunts of the early modern era were the last phase of warfare against the Old Religion. And it was a true holocaust: according to a frequently cited figure, nine million Witches were killed during these centuries, nearly all of them women (eg,

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Gardner 1955:35 *et passim*; Starhawk 1989:20). The Old Religion went into hiding for centuries, and resurfaced only in the mid-20th century when the Christian establishment had lost its power.

This is an extremely compelling myth: you will find it stated over and over again in countless Neopagan books and magazines. Many Wiccans and Neopagans seem to regard it as a matter of historical fact. Unfortunately, according to most scholars today, nearly every detail of this picture is wrong.

The concept of a Goddess civilization today is a minority view among scholars, most of whom regard Gimbutas' views as highly speculative and as taking excessive liberties with the evidence; Emory University historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese dismissed them as little more than "absurdities" (Osborne 1998:52).

Adherents of Gimbutas' theories regard such criticisms as evidence of an entrenched patriarchal mind-set (eg, see the interview with Starhawk and Carol Christ in *Gnosis*, Summer 1998:29-34). But the evidence is considerably more moot than many of today's Neopagans believe. Just to take one example: "Male figurines constitute only 2 or 3 percent of all Old European figurines," Gimbutas contended (1989:175). But Lotte Motz, in her book *The Faces of the Goddess*, argues that "images of men and animals are just as numerous as those of women" (Osborne 1998:53). Moreover, as more than one scholar has pointed out, there is nothing in the female figures themselves that indicates that they are necessarily images of a deity (Hutton 1991:4).

Until recently Çatal Hüyük was considered to be the one incontrovertible site of a matrifocal society. But now scholars aren't even sure of that. Ronald Hutton, a British historian not unsympathetic to Paganism, writes, "We cannot tell ... whether the women of Çatal Hüyük were powerful, feared, and honored, or suspected, feared, and constrained" (1991:42). As for the Indo-

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European invaders, our picture of them has been complicated by the fact that, to judge from some archaeological evidence, women were warriors and leaders in this supposedly patriarchal culture (Osborne 1998:51-53). Were the warlike Indo-Europeans more egalitarian and feminist than the peaceful people of Old Europe? We really don't know.

We don't even know if the people of Old Europe *were* peaceful. Carol Christ says that mainstream academe refuses to admit that there was a phase of history when war was unknown. One archaeologist found exactly the opposite. Lawrence H. Keeley, a professor at the University of Chicago, wanted to get a grant to investigate an Early Neolithic fortification in Belgium dating to c.5000 BCE. He couldn't get the grant because the prevailing academic opinion was that Neolithic societies were peaceful, therefore they couldn't have fortifications. Keeley had to rewrite his grant leaving out the term 'fortification' before he could get any money. Once he did, he investigated the sites and found they were in fact fortified. The experience led him to write a book about prehistoric warfare and why scholars have so much trouble accepting it.

This is not to say that Gimbutas' theory is totally without merit. I personally find it interesting, much as I find the theories of Graham Hancock and Zecharia Sitchin interesting; they suggest that prehistory is far from clear-cut and may differ radically from what the textbooks say. But many adherents of Gimbutas' view not only seem to regard it as incontrovertibly proven, but are even irate about these events that may or may not have happened six or eight thousand years ago. And this strikes me as going far beyond what is justified by our present knowledge.

The witch hunts provide a similar situation. Most Wiccans and Neopagans gingerly admit that there was no such thing as an organized Old Religion in Murray's sense, but many still believe the witch hunts were an organized effort to suppress Pagan survivals such as the 'cunning men' and women, the folk healers and wizards of the villages of Western Europe. (The commonly cited figure of nine million victims, by the way, is generally thought to be ridiculously inflated; more sober estimates say that the witch hunts claimed

40,000-50,000 lives over three centuries, about 75% women. See Briggs 1996:8).

Even this picture is more complicated than you might think. The 'wise women' and 'cunning men' often bore the brunt of witch accusation, it is true, but they also created a lot of them. A contemporary account described the process thus: "A man is taken lame; he suspecteth that he is bewitched; he sendeth to the cunning man; he demandeth whom they suspect, and then sheweth the image of the party in a glass" (Thomas 1971:549).

Today the standard academic view has reverted to the idea that the witch hunts were not the persecution of the 'Old Religion' but were a delusion chiefly generated by fears and suspicions rampant in the era, which were themselves fueled by a social and economic crisis. The British historian Robin Briggs observes. "Virtually everywhere it was the half-century between 1580 and 1630 which included the great majority of all [witch] trials; ... it is hard to avoid the ... inference that a simultaneous sharp decline in living standards and individual security played a large part in this" (1996:292).

By this view, witch persecutions were a matter more of neighbor pitted against neighbor than of the schemings of the Inquisition. Certainly the Catholic Church fueled the witch-hunt craze at its outset, with a 1484 bull by Pope Innocent VIII declaring witchcraft a heresy (the Church had previously taught that it did not exist) and with the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* ("The Hammer of the Witches"), a lurid antiwitch text, in 1486.

On the other hand, over the next two centuries the officials of the Inquisition became increasingly skeptical of witchcraft claims. Strange as it may sound, the Inquisition often exercised a moderating influence on rabid witch hunters in local courts. The countries where Inquisition was the strongest — Spain and Italy — had very few witch trials (Briggs 1996:327, 335-36).

The history of Gardner's own influences is equally vexed. The most ardent Gardnerians seem to believe that his coven's rites and doctrines can be traced in a virtually pure form back to the pre-Christian era. But again, most credible researchers don't buy this. They have found many 20th-century influences on Gardner: Aleister Crowley; Charles Godfrey Leland, an American who wrote a book called *Aradia* about his encounters with the Witches of Tuscany; even Woodcraft, a movement started by the Canadian writer Ernest Thompson Seton. For my self, I think it likely that Gardner's coven may have had ancient roots but felt free to create and adapt new rituals and prayers, much as Neopagans do today.

This is far too short a space in which to try to argue these points in detail; I can only refer the reader to the works I've cited. My central point, though, is this: Paganism is a legitimate religious impulse. To connect with the divine through nature, through the feminine, and through the multiplicity of the

world is honorable and necessary, But if Neopaganism is to take its place among the great religions, it has to come to terms with its own history.

Here Neopaganism is in a sense in an opposite position from much of mainstream Christianity, which, obsessed with an elusive chimera known as the 'historical Jesus,' has come more and more to cut itself off from spiritual experience. Neopaganism, by contrast, with its abundance of rituals and invocations, has plenty of room for experience but needs to deal more forthrightly with its own past. If it does, it will probably find that it is the 'Old Religion' not in a literalistic sense but in recapturing some of the deepest and most ancient aspects of the spiritual impulse.

In an attempt to help advance this process, here is an "Alternate Reading List" on Pagan history. These books and articles are all intelligent, well-researched, and often dense. But if you're interested in contemporary scholarship about the Goddess, the witch hunts, or ancient Paganism, they're well worth the effort.

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GNOSIS: A Journal of the Western Inner Traditions,
which we recommend wholeheartedly and unequivocally to our own readers.
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An Archaeological Evaluation of the Gimbutas Paradigm

by Brian Hayden
Simon Fraser University

As an archaeologist, I found Mara Keller's assessment of the discipline and Marija Gimbutas' contributions to it in the August 1998 issue of *The Pomegranate* both inaccurate and disturbing. Keller's portrayal of archaeologists is a parody of the discipline a half century ago, while she uncritically accepts Gimbutas' interpretations which are fraught with very real problems.

Archaeology

While there undoubtedly still are a few narrow empirical archaeologists who hold positions such as Keller describes (uninterested in anything else beside the artifacts themselves), the vast majority of archaeologists today are keenly interested in cultural meaning, ritual, symbolism, myth, social structure, politics and issues of gender. In fact, archaeologists have *always* been interested in these topics. The discoveries of Middle and Upper Paleolithic burials at the beginning of this century immediately gave rise to involved discussions of Paleolithic notions of the afterlife, religion, and rituals by Bouyssonie and others. The documentation of incontestable Paleolithic cave art in 1895, and the recognition of Paleolithic sculptured art some decades before broadened and enriched the scope of inquiry into the realms of sociopolitics and the supernatural. Similarly, discoveries of Maya ruins, early Mesopotamian temples and palaces such as those at Ur, megalithic monuments, and the Minoan centers have engendered queries about political organization, religion, and women's roles in societies long before Gimbutas began studying archaeology. Even the "overly empiricist" New Archaeology had as its goal the reconstruction and understanding of *all* aspects of past cultures. As Lewis Binford, the archdeacon of archaeological empiricists, stated it in 1962: "The formal structure of artifact assemblages together with the between element contextual relationships should and do present a systematic and understandable picture of *the total extinct* cultural system (the emphasis is his)." Walter Taylor made essentially the same arguments in 1948 and tried to show how this might be done for some parts of past cultures.

The problem in wrestling with such issues as religion, mythology, and gender, however, has always been how to evaluate the many conflicting ideas and claims on these subjects, claims that range from extra-terrestrial origins, to creationist accounts, to lost tribes from Israel, to diffusing influences from Egypt, to

cultural evolution. The best scientists in *all* disciplines are always willing to consider all the possibilities and to evaluate and re-evaluate them on their relative merits.

In archaeology, the problem has never been a lack of interest in these topics, but rather the difficulty of using archaeological evidence in evaluating claims and counter claims pertaining to these areas of interest. For example, it has never been clear how gender-related activities or roles could be inferred from stone tools, bone refuse, or pot shards. Burials can offer some insights, but they are often ambiguous as Howard Winters discovered in his attempts in the 1960s to deal with this issue. While archaeologists have made great strides in developing new approaches for understanding gender roles, political organization, social structures, and religious behavior (see Renfrew and Bahn 1996), the process is far from complete and there are still many contentious issues and problems. Nevertheless, some things can be, and have been, established as reliable and realistic.

Keller also misrepresents archaeologists' views on specific topics. Contrary to her claims, most archaeologists readily accept the close integration of economic, social, and ritual spheres of activity in traditional societies. Archaeologists were keenly interested in using myths to help locate sites and reconstruct past societies. In fact, Henrich Schliemann used myths to locate and excavate Troy in the mid-nineteenth century. Since then, many archaeological projects have followed his example. Dumézil (1952, 1958), Littleton (1973), and others developed the study of comparative mythology to study the religious, social, and political organization of specific prehistoric cultures like the Proto Indo-Europeans. In his well-known studies in the 1960s, Andre Leroi-Gourhan also used cave art to elucidate prehistoric mythology and successfully demonstrated some of its basic components. For the past two decades, Jacques Cauvin has been continuing this tradition in his analysis of Near Eastern Neolithic ideologies as well. Thus the use and study of mythology is nothing new to archaeology. Keller's arguments that Gimbutas was a revolutionary that tried to introduce studies of mythology but was spurned by archaeologists because they were hostile to dealing with such topics is simply untrue.

Keller also portrays archaeologists as rejecting Gimbutas' model of a Bronze Age, war-like, patriarchal Indo-European culture which invaded Old Europe. Yet, up until Renfrew's proposed alternative model of a Neolithic Indo-European expansion, Gimbutas' model was, and may still be, the most widely accepted one. The relative merits of the two models are still being actively debated as is normal in scientific inquiry. Similarly, archaeologists have not generally been blinded by their cultural values of an "exclusively male-centered concept of divinity." The great goddesses of Sumerian city states, such as Inanna, and the very prominent role of goddesses in Minoan Crete and other Neolithic cultures have long been recognized by leading scholars such as Noah Kramer, Arthur Evans, and James Mellaart. Keller similarly misrepresents archaeologists' views on the origin of European civilization

... Gimbutas completely ignores the overwhelming importance of the bull as the main masculine element in Neolithic religion ... As the dominant ideological symbol of the Neolithic, the bull represented the antithesis of a peacefully sedentary society or one in harmonious equilibrium [and] seems to have established the tradition of warrior sky-god dominated pantheons long before the advent of the Bronze Age warrior gods like Zeus, who, incidentally, also took the form of a bull.

and seems to misunderstand the technical definition of this term (equivalent to a state with at least three levels of political hierarchy). She is also oblivious to any notion of incremental cultural evolution involving complexity, inequality, and political control through tribal, chiefdom and state levels.

In a broader context, she characterizes scientists, including archaeologists, as divorced from the use of intuition. This, too, is patently erroneous as any reading of the great physicists' ideas on nature and reality clearly shows (see especially Wilber 1984, a book of essays by the leading physicists of this century). As in the preceding examples, Keller seems to be misrepresenting archaeology as a discipline so that she can sustain her thesis that Gimbutas' ideas about the existence of Neolithic matrifocal societies have not gained any acceptance because of the narrow, conspiratorial attitudes of archaeologists (and scientists in general) rather than the actual merits of Gimbutas' ideas. This is a ploy which simply cannot be sustained in this case. What the great thinkers of science do maintain is that before accepting ideas or statements about the world as reliable or true, whether they derive from intuition, logic, or other sources, they must undergo rigorous reality testing. Without such a step, no real progress in understanding can be made. Remains from the past constitute our primary means of testing our ideas about the past. So, let us see how Gimbutas' notions stack up against the physical remains.

Archaeological Evidence

Accepting Gimbutas' interpretations at face value, Keller makes a number of claims about Old European Neolithic society, and by extension, the Near Eastern Neolithic culture from which it was derived. Keller claims there is no evidence of war (no fortifications, no weapon caches), no warrior or father gods, no evidence of hierarchies or dominant males, but abundant evidence for goddess worship and artistic creations. Such an assessment has been contested by numerous archaeologists of both sexes and diverse theoretical schools (see the articles cited by

... there is recurring evidence of human sacrifice both in the PPNB cultures of the Middle East and in the heart of the Old European cultures. Surely this is the ultimate expression of power and forced submission typical of aggressive and dominating elites. It is utterly unknown among truly egalitarian people.

Keller as well as Anthony's critiques [1995] and Hutton's overview [1991]). The major critiques have been about Gimbutas' slipshod and highly subjective analyses and her tendency to ignore or blatantly manipulate data that does not conform to her ideas.

Gimbutas claims to have identified 30,000 goddess representations from southeastern Europe, yet this data has never been presented in any form remotely like a full analysis and many of the examples that she does illustrate are of indeterminate sex or portray a wide range of animals and symbols that Gimbutas *assumes* to represent a universal goddess. These symbols encompass a wide range of phenomena, including: oblique parallel lines, horizontal parallel lines, vertical parallel lines, chevrons, lozenges, zigzags, wavy lines, meanders, circles, ovals, spirals, dots, crescents, U's, crosses, swirls, caterpillars, double axes, chrysalises, horns, butterflies, birds, eggs, fish, rain, cows, dogs, does, stags, snakes, toads, turtles, hedgehogs, bees, bulls, bears, goats, pigs, pillars, and sexless linear or masked figures. One wonders what is left. Over 10 years ago, I drew attention to this deficiency in methodology (Hayden 1986) and to the fact that at least some of these forms are more generally associated with male deities (pillars, stags, bulls, snakes). Given this poor quality foundation of the basic data, it is difficult to take Gimbutas' subsequent claims very seriously.

Moreover, in adhering to her *idee fixe* approach to the archaeological data in order to prove her ideas about goddess dominated cultures, Gimbutas completely ignores the overwhelming importance of the bull as the main masculine element in Neolithic religion — a role acknowledged by most archaeologists. Phalluses also constitute an abundant Neolithic type of ritual artifact that has been generally ignored by most prehistorians (Hutton 1991:42). As well, representations of bulls are probably far more common than of goddesses, and bull representations are sometimes prominently juxtaposed with goddess representations such as those in the Neolithic shrines of Çatal Hüyük and in Minoan buildings. Cauvin (1994: 166, 176), in his thorough synthesis of the Neolithic expansion from the Near East has even termed the Neolithic the "People of the Bull" culture. According to Cauvin, the bull is *the* major ideological theme in this culture, although goddess figures are also prominent. He notes that the wild bull was a terrifying animal for prehistoric people,

an animal that symbolized brute instinctual force, violence, great power, great virility, and great ferociousness. As the dominant ideological symbol of the Neolithic, the bull represented the *antithesis* of a peacefully sedentary society or one in harmonious equilibrium. The bull was later explicitly associated with Near Eastern solar images such as the Bull of Heaven, and this association probably existed in Neolithic times. Cauvin thinks that the bull was revered by the expanding Neolithic peoples as a supernatural warrior patron similar to the eagle and jaguar patrons of Aztec warriors. Cauvin argues that the bull, therefore, seems to have established the tradition of warrior sky-god dominated pantheons long before the advent of the Bronze Age warrior gods like Zeus, who, incidentally, also took the form of a bull.

What other evidence exists to support Cauvin's views of the Neolithic? First of all, he notes that the very fact that Near Eastern Pre-pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) culture expanded at the rate of one kilometer per year from the Near East to the farthest reaches of Europe is a strong indication by itself that Neolithic cultures were not peaceful, especially since the indigenous cultures were generally *replaced* rather than assimilated. It is naive to think that all the cultures in this expansion area would politely vacate their traditional lands upon request of foreigners.

Secondly, there is a strong emphasis on prestige items including carefully made arrowheads that proliferate to a far greater extent than might be expected in stock raising societies *versus* those that hunt wild game. This indicates that arrows were being used for war and that war was a prestige activity (Cauvin 1994:168). Similar observations have been made in western and northern Europe (Keeley 1997: 309).

Thirdly, there are many indications of fortified, palisaded, walled Neolithic sites from early to late Neolithic times, from southeastern Europe (sites such as Dimini in Greece) to northeastern Europe, including ones with mass graves in the bottoms of encircling ditches. These are described in most standard works on the Neolithic (see Scarre 1984; Milisauskas 1986: 787; Webster 1990: 343; Evans and Rasson 1984: 720). Gimbutas dismisses the fortified character of these sites on the basis that many of them are on open plains. However, except in the most extreme combat situations, most ethnographic tribal communities that are fortified against attack are located close to their fields and on floodplains where the best soils occur, rather than on remote hilltops. Similarly, while it is true that caches of weapons from the Neolithic are rare, weapons caches do not really characterize any warring tribal societies or most chiefdom societies, such as those of the Northwest Coast where violence related mortality afflicted 20-30% of everyone buried in cemeteries. Weapons caches only became common when state level societies evolved with standing armies financed by the state. Despite this general pattern, there are still

many sanctuaries in Minoan Crete, in the heart of Gimbutas' "peaceful" Old Europe, where the primary figures are male and weapons offerings are common (Marinatos 1993:125).

Fourthly, over the past two decades there has been mounting evidence for mass killings during the Neolithic. While it is true that a half century ago archaeologists thought of the European Neolithic as being peaceful, egalitarian, and non-hierarchical in general, this view has undergone an almost complete transformation with new evidence that has come to light. Earlier scholars also seemed to ignore the considerable evidence that did exist at the time for fortified sites. At Roaix, in southern France, there were 700 Neolithic skeletons stacked on top of each other, some with arrowheads embedded in the bones clearly indicating a war grave (Mills 1984). At Talheim in Germany, there is a mass Neolithic grave with 35 skulls fractured by adzes being used as maces (Wahl and Konig 1987), and Keeley (1997, 1996) reports many other similar occurrences such as at Schletz, Aspam, Tiefenellen, and others. There are also occurrences of war trophy heads and skull caps at places like Herxhiem where up to 1,000 homicidal deaths are probably represented. Of special interest is the use of the adze as a weapon of war which probably explains its high prestige value and elaboration of form and materials in some Neolithic cultures. There are also the ubiquitous arrowheads and maces, the latter being used exclusively as a weapon of war. Finally, warriors are portrayed in Minoan frescoes on Crete and Thera, some clearly going off for conquest (Marinatos 1993:59,244).

Thus, as was the case of the Maya, who scholars 50 years ago also believed were a peaceful society of intellectuals and artistic craftsmen, there is now abundant graphic and gruesome evidence that both the Maya in Mesoamerica and the Neolithic societies in Europe were strongly immersed in warfare on a regular basis. In Europe, the evidence extends from the beginning of the Neolithic to its end. On the other hand, there can be little doubt that the incoming Bronze Age Indo-Europeans took warfare and combat to new heights and intensities generally not witnessed by many Neolithic communities.

Keller's discussion of hierarchies is somewhat similar to her treatment of warfare. A half century ago, it may have been more fashionable to imagine Maya and European Neolithic society as embodying idyllic, egalitarian, non-hierarchical ways of life. The intervening years have made it abundantly clear, however, that increasing social complexity and craft specialization are based upon, and intimately linked to the development of social, political, and economic hierarchies involving major inequalities. The beautifully crafted objects of art that Gimbutas and Keller dote upon as expressions of an artist-oriented society should be more realistically viewed as expressions of powerful and wealthy elites. Do they really believe that the abundant gold ornaments accompanying select Old European burials (see Renfrew

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and Bahn 1996:387) were acquired by egalitarian, non-hierarchical means? The idea that people can or should produce great art (art that is exceedingly expensive and time consuming to make) simply to satisfy personal inner needs (art for art's sake) is a very unusual notion that is only found in the modern industrial world. It is a completely foreign and bizarre notion in traditional non-industrial societies where great art is used exclusively for rituals or to display wealth (Dissanayake 1988). Moreover, the specialized ceramic production centers of the Tripolye region in the heartland of Gimbutas' Old Europe are more indicative of something approaching a market economy rather than individual artisans producing for their self-fulfillment (Anthony 1995).

Civilizations and even chiefdoms simply cannot and do not function in an egalitarian fashion. Hierarchical control is their *defining* feature and no amount of philosophical or idyllic reverie seems capable of changing this characteristic in the real world. The topic is too vast to deal with in detail here, but I know of no ethnographic or archaeological examples where any credible claim of a non-hierarchical chiefdom or state exists. In the European Neolithic, fortified sites were often at the top of local settlement hierarchies indicating at the very least the existence of political hierarchies, while their sheer size (up to 300 hectares) and complexity indicates centralized political control by elites (Scarre 1984: 242, 335; Milisauskas and Kruk 1989; Anthony 1995; Demoule and Perles 1993). On the basis of community sizes, settlement hierarchies, wealth discrepancies, and craft specializations, archaeologists do not hesitate to ascribe a chiefdom status to the most important Old European sites described by Gimbutas, and a state level of organization to the major centers on Minoan Crete. These are some of the most certain conclusions archaeologists have established in the past half century. Describing Neolithic Old Europe as egalitarian and non-hierarchical is simply inconsistent with all the current ethnographic and archaeological data. For an archaeologist, maintaining that complex societies can develop without socioeconomic inequalities or hierarchies or heterarchies is on a par with arguing that the earth is flat or arguing that the world was created without the process of evolution.

In addition to these general indications, there is recurring evidence of human sacrifice both in the *PPNB* cultures of the Middle East and in the heart of the Old European cultures (Cauvin 1994: 120-2; Marinatos 1993: 102, 136; Sakellarakis



... feel good methods are disturbing and dangerous because ... these are the methods used by fundamentalists and totalitarian movements to obscure reality and truth. ... maintaining that complex societies can develop without socioeconomic inequalities or hierarchies or heterarchies is on a par with arguing that the earth is flat or arguing that the world was created without the process of evolution.

and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1981). Surely this is the ultimate expression of power and forced submission typical of aggressive and dominating elites. It is utterly unknown among truly egalitarian people.

Hierarchies are also apparent in the Old European Neolithic cemeteries such as at Nitra in Czechoslovakia and Tiszapolgar in Hungary where most burials contain no grave goods, but a few contain important items of value such as axes, adzes, copper bracelets, daggers, and shell ornaments. At Varna, in Bulgaria, and Duronkulak, wealth differences reached extreme forms with remarkable amounts of gold interred with some individuals. Contrary to Gimbutas' and Keller's portrayal of burials and relative gender roles, the burials at many of these sites show an impoverished, almost non-existent material wealth status for women in contrast to the obvious prestige objects buried with men, such as objects frequently associated with war (daggers, axes, adzes, and maces). At Varna and Duronkulak, the richest sexable graves are those of males (Anthony 1995; Chapman 1991). The high status male buried with the most remarkable amount of gold held a war adze or mace and wore a gold penis sheath (Renfrew and Bahn 1996:387). In the Neolithic of Central Europe, Larry Keeley (1997) noted a similar pattern of high prestige weapons being buried with men, especially older men who, given their age, would have been at the top of the socioeconomic hierarchies. In fact, in Europe, as in ethnographic New Guinea, stone adzes and axes were often made exclusively out of prestige materials and in prestige dimensions. The same pattern has been documented for the megalithic cultures of western Europe, and for Minoan Crete in Gimbutas' Old Europe, where weapons were used as symbols of high status (Marinatos 1993:125).

While some cemeteries and burials and frescoes do demonstrate that women could attain relatively high status, there are no indications that they were in charge of Old European society or even surpassed men in power. In fact, world ethnographic surveys by Marxist and feminist scholars have shown that such cases do not occur anywhere in the world, and that literal matriarchies are non-existent (see Hayden 1993: 350-353 for references and further data). In Near Eastern and

European Neolithic societies, males rather typically seem to have controlled the weapons of war and used them in aggressive fashions, emphasizing aggressive iconographies like the wild bull to energize their expansions and personal ambitions.

In short, there is no theoretical or empirical support for the idea of non-hierarchical, egalitarian, peaceful chiefdoms or states in the European Neolithic, and no support for colonies of artists producing art for art's sake. Given the above evidence, especially the very rich male burials with weapons at Varna, Keller's statement that privileged males burials with weapons and extraordinary wealth was a phenomenon introduced by Indo-Europeans into Old Europe is simply erroneous. Nor was human sacrifice introduced to Europe by Indo-Europeans. It was there all along. Nor did the incoming Indo-Europeans simply destroy all the beautiful Old European art. The incoming Indo-European warrior elites appropriated and employed resident Old European artists to make traditional prestige objects as well as new forms such as the magnificent inlaid Mycenaean bronze daggers. In western Europe, the incoming Bronze Age Indo-Europeans also appropriated, rather than destroyed, the major megalithic monuments such as Stonehenge and Avebury (and probably much of their associated rituals). The Indo-Europeans carried on the development of these monuments to far greater pinnacles of expression than these monuments reached in Neolithic times. They are the forms we see today.

Feel Good Epistemology

Thus, Keller's and Gimbutas' views of Old European matrifocal societies simply do not hold up under any degree of reality testing, which is why no reputable archaeologist has ever endorsed them and why they have been severely criticized. In order to hide such deficiencies, Keller and Gimbutas declare that archaeologists and scientists are narrow minded people, prejudiced by male dominated values, scientific conceptual constraints, and narrow empiricism. Instead of rigorously scrutinizing their ideas in the bright light of reality, Keller proposes that we should adopt a "feel good" method of evaluating competing theories. She wants readers to open themselves to her vision of the source of all life as though beholding the brilliance of the sun and then ask which proposals we would like to believe: ones that make her (and if we open ourselves the right way, us) feel good, or ones that make her feel not-so-good. Whichever interpretation of the past makes us feel the best should be adopted as true and reliable as long as we can find some empirical support for it. But 'some' empirical support can be found for almost any proposition on earth.

This approach leads too easily to gross distortions of facts and interpretations, and to self-delusion. Choosing between alternative explanations on the basis of "What if ..." hypothetical questions, which may only be delusions, is to reduce real inquiry to absurdity. Nor should the relevance for today's social problems be a factor in assessing the relative merits of ideas about the past.

Relevance can certainly be a criterion for choosing our initial research questions, but should never enter into the evaluation of our models of the past. Nor is there any reason to think that whatever Plato conceived as a (very speculative) highest level of truth has any relation to reality. In fact, given the wide range of opinions, mind games, and arguments among philosophers today and in the past, is there any reason to assume that anything has been established with certainty after 3,000 years of inquiry using their methods? We are all interested in finding the real principles that govern the universe. That is the ultimate goal of scientists, philosophers, mystics, and many others. But how do we do that with any confidence? There have been countless visionaries who have seen “the light” that gave them ecstatic experiences and the feeling of great intuitive insights: endless millenarian cults that proclaimed the end of the world or contact with comets or aliens, political adherents to ideologically dominated movements like Communism and Fascism, and there have also been people with golden tablets that would save the world. How do we separate the delusional enlightenments from those with genuine insights? The only method that has so far proved to be of any reliable value is the scientific method.

In archaeology, while we may not have the answers to all the questions viewed as important, we have been able to at least establish some major milestones of understanding with relative certainty using the reality-testing methods of science. We have established the time scale of human existence, the overall physical and cultural evolution of humans, criteria for recognizing and charting warfare as well as social and political complexity and social inequality. We are still working on refining many of these conclusions and we are still trying to usefully describe and understand other phenomena such as ritual behavior and gender roles, but the essential framework is in place and is solid.

Rejecting or minimizing methods that adhere closely to reality testing in favor of politically correct or feel good methods is disturbing and dangerous because, as Marvin Harris notes, these are the methods used by fundamentalists and totalitarian movements to obscure reality and truth. In this respect, Keller’s constant use of terms exhorting readers to “believe,” “accept,” “embrace,” “open your mind” to “radiance” and “vision,” and avoid “resistance” to Gimbutas’ semi-mystical methods have an unsettling evangelical fundamentalist ring to them. According to Keller, people who do not believe that an illuminating experience of the essential nature of reality is possible cannot use Gimbutas’ method. What is the difference between this and ‘born again’ fundamentalism?

In closing, I would like to iterate that I am not against the use of intuition in helping to understand our universe. In fact, I view ecstatic experiences as one of the most unique aspects of the human emotional makeup in the animal kingdom (Hayden 1987). I have proposed that near death experiences, and the ecstatic states that probably derive from them, may be our best approximation of contact with

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transcendent realms. Ecstatic experiences should be highly valued and sought out; and, in some situations, they may provide real insights into spiritual dimensions of the universe. However, they are *not* automatically reliable or realistic representations of the universe. Therefore, I insist upon rigorous evaluation of such insights before I will accept them as real, especially where they purport to say something about verifiable domains of inquiry like prehistory. Nor am I saying that we can know nothing about past religions or rituals. I think we can know a great deal; but given the many different views on this topic, all ideas must be carefully scrutinized and evaluated on the basis of real evidence. In this respect, Gimbutas’ views about Old European Neolithic society simply do not stand up to testing. Other ideas, such as those of Cauvin and Marinatos, stand up far better, and it is here that we should begin our modeling of past Neolithic religions and societies. There is a long and strong tradition in archaeology of dealing with social, political, religious, and mythological aspects of culture as they evolved through time. I am happy to be part of that tradition, for archaeologists have many very significant things to say about these issues, but a full discussion of them is a far larger undertaking than space permits here.

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READERS' FORUM *continued from page 5*

the ideologies of their times into the data, and both are reliant on an opposition of two cultures, conceived as essentially static and homogeneous, despite the length of time and breadth of geography involved. Can these be the two "competing theories" that Keller refers to? They hardly define the field, and they are equally outdated.

The rest of Keller's article deals with the myth of the Civilization of the Great Goddess, in the present day, and seems to focus on whether archaeologists (or presumably other social scientists) "accept" it and what may be causing them difficulty. The attempt here seems to be to incorporate spiritual and artistic components, in order to create a successor science, a replacement paradigm which will give a women-centered account convincing enough to be accepted as a better approximation to What Really Happened™ in prehistory. Apply the right method, i.e. Gimbutas' method, to "the empirical data", and truth will emerge. But within any such attempt, founded in a realist approach to scientific endeavour, the data become the crucial test — and here, surely, in the neolithic figurines we have an outstanding example of how "the data" in themselves have no meaning until they are interpreted ...

As I see it, Keller's article is founded on a paradox. She seeks a way to see "clearly into the radiant, vibratory nature of reality" (p.33) but which, or whose, reality? The methods of Gimbutas, within realist science, are so far foundering on the test of "empirical data". The search for The Truth of past or present requires proof. So Keller speaks of Gimbutas' work as in line with the "more post-modern expansion of human knowledge", a "New Science" that does not seek "absolute certainty" (p. 35). Here, Gimbutas' interpretations become part of the multiplicity of meanings I referred to already — and what is most meaningful becomes the construction and use of the paradigm in its own day and for today's women and men. In short, the kind of truth claims made by Keller do not seem, to me, compatible with a postmodern approach. And Gimbutas' own methodology can hardly be described as postmodern, surely, dealing with, as Meskell, says "the 'establishment' epistemological framework of polar opposites, rigid gender roles, barbarian invaders and cultural stages" (Meskell 1995, Goddesses, Gimbutas and 'New Age' archaeology, *Antiquity* 69: 74-86, p.82).

But today's world is where Keller's vision applies, and here, at least, I can have some agreement with her. It is clearly, even obviously, more possible to create a world in which peace and cooperation are centrally valued, if we see such a world as possible and these values as centrally human. But that is not to say that such a world would look like any of our imaginings, or that it need have happened that way before, especially on a large-scale, intersocietal, level. Keller's

... the kind of truth claims made by Keller do not seem, to me, compatible with a postmodern approach. And Gimbutas' own methodology can hardly be described as postmodern, surely, dealing with ... the 'establishment' epistemological framework of polar opposites, rigid gender roles, barbarian invaders and cultural stages...

article frames her vision in terms of a return to the Mother Goddess, but it is today's women and men who have seen the pictures of the big blue marble, the third planet hanging in space like a jewel, and speak of Earth as one, fragile and precious, so that the concept of an Earth Mother takes on new layers of meaning. And fortunately the ability to speak of Goddess, or Goddesses, and ally ourselves with Earth, does not require a belief in Kurgan invasions. For today's feminists, Gimbutas' work provides a challenge indeed — to explore further the shifting dimensions of meaning in both present and past, to find ways to articulate visions like those of Keller without requiring certainty and conversion, without claiming ownership of the True Version of the past, while yet to retain multiple voices without falling into the trap of postmodern incomprehensibility.

While writing this comment, I was preparing to talk to graduate students about research methods, and simultaneously planning an equinox ritual to my own Harvest Lady, working with yet another set of meanings around earth and concepts of Goddess; and my mind was drawn back to a recent time when women from my community came together to nurture a need, displaying all the compassion and cooperation that Keller might wish. Did they hold a belief in the Civilization of the Goddess? Some, perhaps. Did I? Not as such. But as we danced, we created our own meanings of mind, body and spirit, Goddess within and without, to give strength to all to return to the workings of our everyday lives, and to create changes where we could.

And so I end this comment with what I wrote then, as an offering to uncertain interpretations, and to whichever Goddesses are listening to this debate:

last night I danced with the women
to earth's drum beat, bare
feet on dust and stone,
brown needles on the thirsty soil;
around, children of earth, small
creatures of the forest, scuttling beetles,
birds, squirrels, web-weavers,
predators and prey, above, within,

beneath deep-rooted trees where met
earth and sky, a turning moment,
dark and bright together, growth and death

as a wolf runs in the forest, and stands
in starlight, and howls her song,
feeling the pulse of earth beneath her feet.

Jenny Blain is an Assistant Professor in the School of Occupational Therapy, Dalhousie University, with a PhD from Dalhousie in Educational Foundations, who considers herself as an anthropologist, more or less. Her current research is on identity and construction of meaning within nature-religions, with a particular focus on women's spirituality, Heathenism, and shamanism.

Rita Rippetoe writes:

This letter will address two of the areas of discussion I would like to open in regards to Keller's article. Primarily, Keller's association of Gimbutas' theories with Socratic philosophy seems problematic to me. First we might note that, from what I know of his philosophy, Socrates himself displayed little concern with mythology or history. His methods of inquiry were designed to determine the nature of, and lead to the practice of, virtue: the ethical requirements for social life. His method was also based on the belief that ideas precede their material manifestations and exist in a realm accessible only to the philosopher. The dialectical method helps us "remember" what our souls know from having resided in the realm of ideas prior to birth. It is difficult for me to see how such a disputed philosophical position on the very nature of knowledge can contribute to an understanding of the facts of human history. I include emotions and beliefs in my definition of facts. It may not be as easy to determine whether a culture believes in the Christian Trinity, or uses the color red to symbolize danger, for example, as whether it's members customarily wear nose rings or eat beef — but all four conditions are susceptible of proof. Unless I have misunderstood Socrates or Keller's use of Socratic theory I would hesitate to employ this approach to Gimbutas or to any other theory about history.

While Gimbutas, as Keller notes, believes that the society of Old Europe was transformed by invasion, Colin Renfrew theorizes that the changes came from within the culture. I would like to clarify why this is an important controversy.

Briefly, if hierarchy, patriarchy, and war-focused cultures evolve independently in different areas it can be claimed that such structures are necessary stages through which all cultures must move — and even that they are

beneficial, with hierarchy and wealth accumulation through war causing specialization and advances in technology and the arts. War, slavery, female submission, etc. can be portrayed as minor prices to have paid for the glories of civilization. But, if these developments were imposed on a previously peaceful and egalitarian culture (*ie*, Old Europe), which appeared to be developing the variety and plenty associated with historical civilizations, either by conquest or by the need to resist conquest (*ie*, we must have war leaders to fight *their* war leaders, so even if never conquered we become like our enemy) then it can be argued that the new traits are a caused by accidents of history rather than necessities of cultural evolution. Thus, the argument that civilization has always required inequality and must, because of human nature, require it in the future, is attacked at its root.

This explanation has led me to ... my perception that Keller thinks we should believe the theories of Gimbutas because such belief would be good for us as a culture. Keller explicitly ties her vision of a future global civilization to the ability to question “the inevitability of warfare, economic hierarchies of dominance ... and the exclusively male centered concept of divinity” (34). This ability seems tied in her mind to acceptance of the Gimbutas theory of Old Europe. But what if the truth of Gimbutas’ views can never be established? What if she is wrong? What if Western culture has always depended on the pain and poverty of many for the pleasure and riches of a few; is there still hope? Can there be reform? I personally believe that much of Gimbutas’ work will be confirmed by other scholars and that as new generations learn a different view of the human past their dreams of future possibilities will be enlarged. Such a shift in consciousness ... will be very helpful in building a better society. However I hope that it is not essential. I am leery of relying for future reform on a view of past accomplishments which could be dismissed as wishful thinking based on a discredited theory.

Rita Rippetoe holds a BA in cultural anthropology from U. California, Davis (1970), a MA in English from Calif. State U. at Sacramento (1993), and is currently a PhD candidate in English at U. Nevada, Reno.

Nancy Ramsey writes:

... The main criticism I have of the article lies in the conclusion. Keller states, quite accurately, that new paradigms often meet with resistance due to the emotional investment tied into old paradigms. Keller seems to suggest that we should choose to believe the new Gimbutas paradigm because it leads to the idea of the possibility of a “kinder, gentler world.” I agree. The idea that once things were different, that “good old days” actually existed and can exist again is a

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longing that has no doubt held humanity’s imagination since the “good old days” when we no doubt regretted leaving the trees for the savannas.

Gimbutas does present an attractive past, perhaps a bit too forcefully. This can lead to dangerous extremes. I would like to believe that as a species we were incapable of enslaving each other, stealing entire continents from their indigenous populations, genocide, war, flagrant disregard for the earth and the other beings that dwell here, and a million other petty cruelties that seem part of the package of human life and being. But to choose to believe a paradigm because it makes us feel good about ourselves does not lead to good archaeology or history. Love is blind and this sometimes goes for the love of a theory or idea as well. The tendency exists to cut data to size so that it fits our beloved theories. And that can lead to the silencing of voices we need to hear, both from our past, our present, and our future ...

Nancy Ramsey is a PhD candidate in Religious Studies at UC Santa Barbara. She has an MA in Religious Studies and another in Sociology from the U of South Florida. Her main area of research is Wicca, Neopaganism and other assorted Goddess and nature religions.

Ann-Marie Gallagher writes:

The Interface of Archaeology and Mythology: A Philosophical Evaluation of the Gimbutas Paradigm by Mara Keller: A Response

Having read Mara Keller’s article carefully, particularly her conclusions in relation to the entrenched rejections of Marija Gimbutas’s work, I agree with her proffered suggestion that: ‘resistance to her discoveries stems more from the investment individuals have in the paradigm of civilization that is constructed in accord with the prevailing gender, race and class hierarchies etc.’ ...

Mara Keller’s description of the tautologies of positivist frameworks is a veritable paean to the efficacy of post-modernist approaches when put to useful purpose — and as an arch-materialist, I have little enough occasion to see post-

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modernism as an 'efficient cause'. She is right when she stresses the importance of multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to reconstructions of the past, and recognizes that intersubjectivity is even finding its way into the sciences. ... However, given the impact that feminist research methodologies have had in the academy in the past twenty years, Plato (and his noetic insights) is hardly the first natural port of call for a shift from the thought-paradigm his reasoning demonstrates par excellence.

... Marija Gimbutas's work primarily recommends itself to students not because of her painstaking empirical research, nor even via her frankly valid and proper challenges to the patriarchal assumptions underpinning and framing much archaeological research: rather its main attraction is that it imports an unreconstructedly twentieth-century essentialist paradigm into an historical period beginning some 8500 years ago in a huge land-mass extending throughout what is now Southeastern Europe and ending around 5,000 years ago and posits within that period first the existence and then the overthrow of a matrilinear and therefore peaceful civilization. However it is on two counts other than ahistoricism that I wish to raise issues that were absent from Mara Keller's argument.

Firstly, the issue of intersubjectivity. Part of the problem of Marija Gimbutas's archaeomythology is the absence of hermeneutically-aware acknowledgement of the interpreter's interests — the question is begged, and begged loudly 'whose mythology'? In this respect it is not worse than some of Gimbutas's most vociferous detractors, who assume that the paradigm within which they operate is somehow neutral, objective. However, it is certainly no better. ... In short, if we are to attend to the intersubjective within the research paradigm, it is imperative that the researching subject is as interrogative of herself and her status within the research as she is the subjects whose lives she seeks to study and discover. ... Both Marija Gimbutas and Mara Keller appear to be proponents of a worldview which is itself significantly gendered and unproblematized, and here I come to the second point, which is to raise the

possibility that Marija Gimbutas's theory may be interpreted as being seriously in conflict with feminism rather than of a piece with it.

Without wishing to detract from the very valuable points that both Marija Gimbutas and Mara Keller make in relation to the resistance of the academy to feminist incursions regarding the underpinnings of the relevant disciplines, I am nonetheless concerned to find the vocabulary of gender being so unproblematically deployed in the interests of revisionism. When Mara Keller uses the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' to describe the processes of logic and analogy, the alarm bells immediately ring: is this not the language of dualism, of polarity which also underpins and supports an emphatically patriarchal worldview? And this is pivotal flaw in both Marija Gimbutas's theory and Mara Keller's support of it; that it is the story of the overthrow of the 'feminine' by the 'masculine', and that because the purported civilization was matrifocal that it was also peaceful. The theory itself is soaked in the type of gendered essentialism that feminism in the 1990s continues to challenge. It is the vocabulary that, as part of what Karen J. Warren has called a 'logic of domination', has kept women, people of colour and the labouring classes in a position of subordination within capital patriarchy. Essentialism as a force for matriarchy does not travel towards the shifts in worldview envisaged so inspiringly and movingly by Keller in her concluding wishes.

As a feminist, I would be far more interested in a starting-point which proceeded to investigate the preponderance of female imagery in a given geographical location within a given historical period, and which acknowledged the avowed unconscious mental habits of the period from which we investigate: this to incorporate in particular the point from which the researcher herself begins. In this way, a preponderance of female imagery, rather than leading to the conclusion that women in the producing society were held in higher esteem, might be the subject of discussion in relation to contemporary understandings of the presence/absence of prehistorical female figures to better frame our interpretations. The meaning of the high presence of female imagery can then be discussed in terms of a number of available possibilities other than that which would be the natural result of imposing contemporary gendered ideologies onto past, and perhaps lost, mentalities. The contemporary relevance of Marija Gimbutas's work in terms of its applications both inside and outside of the academy, in short, is not as straightforward as 'masculine' enclaves resisting 'feminine' incursion; the resistance is far more complex, as complex, perhaps as the lives of our Neolithic ancestors may have been.

Ann-Marie Gallagher is the course leader of Women's Studies at the University of Central Lancashire in the U.K.

She writes and publishes on feminist pedagogy, women and spirituality, paganism and as a historian (recovering). She is currently editing a book on women and history titled Changing the Past: Women, History and Representation, which is scheduled to be published in 2000.

Wendy Griffin writes:

Gimbutas and the Goddess: An Evaluation from the Social Sciences

In her article on Marija Gimbutas, Mara Keller chose an interesting approach. It certainly is one that allows us to envision a future where we might want our children to raise their children. But regardless how useful a thing may be for the future, it doesn't mean it is accurate ... [Gimbutas'] theories tend to be judged as either absolutely true or absolutely false, and both are positions that lean more toward the political than the scholarly. Scholarship today indicates that her conclusions were true in some places — some times. There is good evidence that matrifocal villages in Old Europe and parts of the Mediterranean were indeed invaded by aggressive patriarchal outsiders. There is also excellent evidence that in Mesopotamia, for example, internal not external developments created male dominance.

Why and how did male dominance develop originally and why did it succeed? It seems fairly logical to most of us today that there is no biological mandate for patriarchy. It's doubtful if our species would have survived the early milleniums if we had wasted female productivity, intelligence, and creativity the way patriarchal societies have always done. We know that there was a sexual division of labor during this time, and it was almost certainly interdependent and complimentary.

Gimbutas doesn't address these questions of why and how, but the social sciences argue that patriarchy grows out the material conditions of people's lives. Anthropologist Peggy Sanday has demonstrated that where the physical environment and climate are beneficial, women and men tend to work together and relations between them appear to be fairly egalitarian and interdependent. Men join in primary childcare and societies develop religious symbol systems that include either a primary female divinity or a female creator who is equal to the male. Where the physical environment is harsh, nature is defined as hostile, or the culture revolves around hunting or herding, the sexes tend to separate from each other. Men are removed from childcare responsibilities, the creative powers are viewed as male, and male dominance and violence are not uncommon. In her study of tribal societies, Sanday further showed that the roles we play as women and men reflect the images the cultures uses to understand the Divine. Religion tells us how and where we fit in the world and makes that meaningful for us.

But with rapid change, such as that which can occur in time of war, the

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invention of some revolutionary technology, or the dramatic climatic changes Keller discussed in her article, the meanings that religion gives us may not make as much sense as they once did. It's important to note that significant material and technological changes always go hand in hand with changes in symbols and religious thought. We see that happening today. Gimbutas argues convincingly that warfare didn't exist in Neolithic society, at least not organized warfare, and certainly nothing like what we see beginning in the 3rd millenium. Religious scholar Rita Gross wonders if perhaps warfare was an effect of rather than the cause of change.

In Mesopotamia, along with the invention of the plow and the accumulation of agricultural surpluses, came labor-intensive grain crops and an increased demand on women for more children. At the same time, the increased food supply permitted a bigger population to survive. Specialization emerged and, with it, some measure of hierarchy. Population density resulted in internal and external threats that were met with the rise of a 'warrior class' and the removal of young men from childcare responsibilities. These social changes were reflected in cultures' religious symbols. If the Neolithic Goddesses were autonomous, their Bronze Age descendents were not. Inanna got her power from her father. Isis ruled with Osiris and Horus at her side. Women's roles had changed with or without the arrival of the Kurdish hordes.

Marija Gimbutas was an extraordinary woman and scholar. But the ease and absolute certainty with which she drew conclusions about extremely detailed myths and rituals from very limited materials is disturbing. The reconstruction of ideas from 8,000 years ago is wide open to wishful thinking. We bring ourselves to our research, even when we believe we are being objective.

Every religion mythologizes its own origins. As such, it isn't the truth of sacred history that I'm challenging, though I certainly can't teach it as history to my students. I do tell them, however, that the proliferation of Neolithic female



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figures and the places where they were discovered suggests an appreciation of female Divinity, and I discuss Gimbutas' contributions. These may have provided a catalyst for contemporary Goddess Spirituality. But the material conditions of today and tomorrow will shape our future social relations as well as our understanding of the Divine. No Neolithic nor Bronze Age Goddess will serve us well today.

She is still and always in the state of becoming.

Wendy Griffin is presently an Associate Professor of Women's Studies at California State University in Long Beach. She received her PhD in the interdisciplinary social sciences with an emphasis on the sociology of sex and gender from UC Irvine. Besides publishing academic articles on women in Goddess Spirituality, she recently completed Daughters of Gaia: Healing and Identity in Goddess Spirituality, an edited collection of research by academics and nonacademic scholar/practitioners. The book will be released in April 1999 by AltaMira Press. Her relevant scholarly articles can be read at: <http://www.csulb.edu/~wgriffin/publications/publications.html>

The Pomegranate would like to thank Dana Kramer-Rolls for guest-editing this issue's Readers' Forum. Ms Kramer-Rolls hold an MA in Systematic Theology from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley where she is now a PhD Candidate. Her dissertation topic is "Morphology of Medieval Marian Miracle Tales", an interdisciplinary study utilizing folkloric and anthropological methodology on hagiographic literary material. She has been a practicing Wiccan for over twenty-five years, is a science-fiction and fantasy author, and is a supporter of animal rights issues.