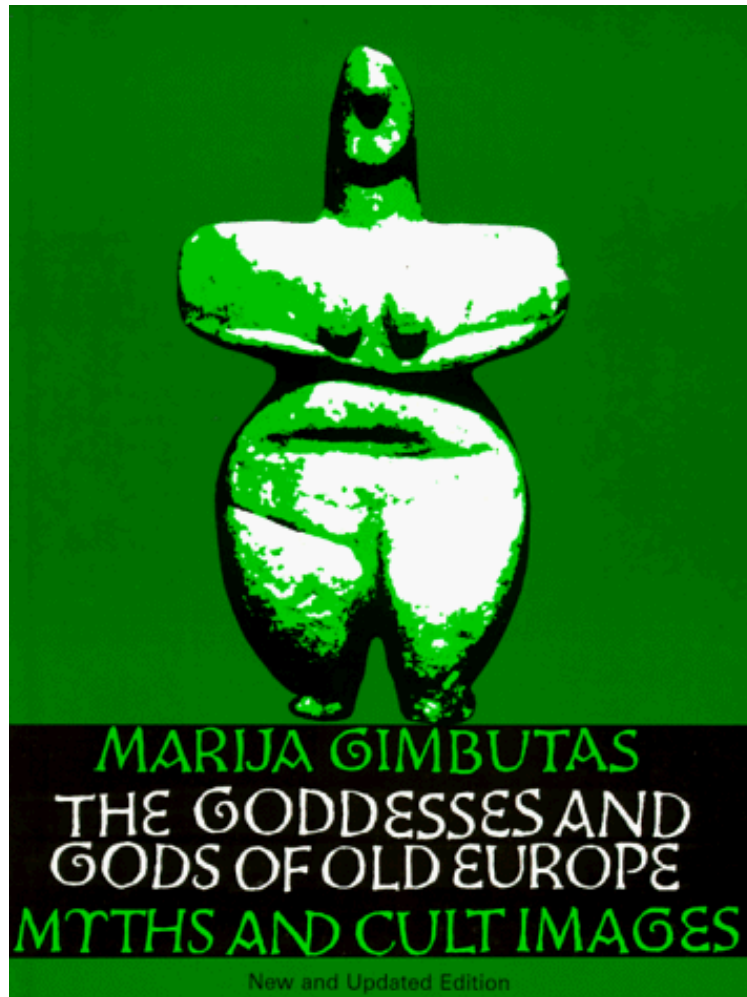


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Marija Gimbutas

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. ONE OF THE BEST-KNOWN WORKS OF THE FAMED ARCHAEOLOGISTBy Steven H ProppMarija Gimbutas (1921-1994) was a Lithuanian-American archaeologist known for her research into the Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures of "Old Europe"; she was a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at Harvard and was made a Fellow of Harvard's Peabody Museum. She wrote a number of books, such as The Language of the Goddess, The Living Goddesses, The Civilization of the Goddess, etc. Her

work is also summarized in the documentary, *Signs Out of Time: The Story of Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas*. She wrote in the Preface to the revised (1982) edition of this book, Much new material on the mythical imagery of Old Europe has emerged during the ten-year interval between the writing of [this book] and the present edition, but the basic concepts have remained unchanged. The new discoveries have served only to strengthen and support the view that the culture called Old Europe was characterized by a dominance of woman in society and worship of a Goddess incarnating the creative principle as Source and Giver of All. In this culture the male element, man and animal, represented spontaneous and life-stimulating---but not life-generating---powers. This priority is represented in the present title by a change of word order, from *The Gods and Goddesses* to *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*. The term Old Europe is applied to a pre-Indo-European culture of Europe, a culture matrifocal and probably matrilinear, agricultural and sedentary, egalitarian and peaceful. It contrasted sharply with the ensuing proto-Indo-European culture which was patriarchal, stratified, pastoral, mobile, and war-oriented, superimposed on all Europe between 4500 and 2500 BC. During and after this period the female deities, or more accurately the Goddess Creatrix in her many aspects, were largely replaced by the predominantly male divinities of the Indo-Europeans. What developed after c. 2500 BC was a mlang of the two mythic systems, Old European and Indo-Eurpoean. She begins Chapter 8 with the statement, The Fertility Goddess or Mother Goddess is a more complex image than most people think. She was not only the Mother Goddess who commands fertility, or the Lady of the Beasts who governs the fecundity of animals and all wild nature, or the frightening Mother Terrible, but a composite image with traits accumulated from both the pre-agricultural and agricultural eras. During the latter she became essentially a Goddess of Regeneration, i.e. a Moono Goddess, product of a sedentary, matrilinear community, encompassing the archetypal unity and multiplicity of feminine nature. She was giver of life and all that promotes fertility, and at the same time she was the wielder of the destructive powers of nature. The feminine nature, like the moon, is light as well as dark. (Pg. 152) She wonders, The question now arises as to what happened to the prehistoric goddess after the third millennium BC. Did she disappear after the advent of the patriarchal Indo-European world or did she survive the dramatic change? (Pg. 196) She notes, It is no mere coincidence that the venerated goddess of the sixth and fifth centuries in Ancient Greece resembles the Goddess of Life and Death of the sixth and fifth millennia BC. Mythical images last for many millennia. In her various manifestations the Great Goddess existed for at least five thousand years before the appearance of Classical Greek Civilization. Village communities worship her to this day in the guise of the Virgin Mary In European folk beliefs, she still moves within pregnant women in the shape of a wandering uterus or a toad. Each of her feminine aspects, virginity, birth-giving and motherhood, as well as her Terrible Mother aspect, is well represented in figurine art throughout the Neolithic and Chalcolithic eras of Old Europe. (Pg. 199-200) She begins Chapter 9 with the statement, A goddess symbolizing earth fertility was the natural response to an agrarian way of life. Her image harbors no accumulation of symbols from the proto-agricultural era as do those of the Great Goddess and Bird Goddess. She develops her own character in the course of time, but her intimate relationships to the Upper Paleolithic Pregnant goddess is obvious. The seed must have been recognized as the cause of germination and growth, and the pregnant belly of a woman must have been assimilated to a field fertility in the infancy of agriculture. As a result, there arose an image of a pregnant goddess endowed with the prerogative of being able to influence and distribute fertility. (Pg. 201) She concludes, The task of sustaining life was the dominating motif in the mythical imagery of Old Europe, hence regeneration was one of the foremost manifestations. Naturally, the goddess who was responsible for the transformation from death to life became the central figure in the pantheon of gods In Old Europe the world of myth was not polarized into female and male as it was among the Indo-European and many other nomadic and pastoral peoples of the steppes. Both principles were manifest side by side Neither is subordinate to the other; by complementing each other, their power is doubled The pantheon reflects a society dominated by the mother. The role of woman was not subject to that of a man, and much that was created between inception of the Neolithic and the blossoming of the Minoan civilization was a result of that structure in which all resources of human nature, feminine and masculine, were utilized to the full as a creative force. (Pg. 236-238) This lavishly-illustrated book (BW photographs and drawings) is an excellent introduction to Gimbutass work. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. As a book exploring an alternative theory of prehistoric religion, it is a great book. Do read it. By JSTAs a layperson interested in mythology and archealogy, I did find this work to be very interesting, though over-scholarly for my taste. What was I expecting? A third-grade reader? Silly me. I choose to read it since it offers an alternate perspective to male-centric views. On that note, I wasn't disappointed. It took awhile to build the backdrop for her evidence and interpretation, but I found it was helpful to do so. Any arguement that the "art" was less than perfect or was actually pathetic ignores the nature of prehistoric art - and Ms Gimbutas does address and explain why she choose the specific illustrations; mainly, to illustrate her points and to provide a visual for her narrative. Never did she claim it to be a book on art, and it should not be read as one nor critique as if it were one. Still, the illustrations were very helpful for this non-scholar. Her assertion that original religion was goddess based I am not qualified to critque, but still, her evidence, speculations, and interpretations do give one pause for thought, especially when one realizes and accepts that history has been perceived and presented from a male point of view. I tend to think, if not Goddess based, then perhaps prehistoric societies and religions were a lot more equalitarian than was origianlly supposed. Perhaps we

have a lot to learn from our ancestors. The two negative reviews that I read did the typical name-calling attack as a defense without offering constructive counter-arguments. I trust the review by the scholar to be spot-on for those with academic interest or with a scholarly bend. As for me, I will look for the middle school reader on this subject while still giving this work praise. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Seminal Incite of Pre Judaic, Christian, Islamic Eras By Edwardus, III One of the most seminal books I have read on early human history. Exposes our great urge to find answers to life's most intriguing questions. It helped me better grasp the thinking that led to Greek history and the Judaic, Christian, Islamic era.

European civilization between 6500 and 3500 BC - long before Greek or Judaeo-Christian civilizations flourished - was not a provincial reflection of neighboring Near Eastern cultures but a distinct culture with its own unique identity. The mythical imagery of this matrilinear era tells us much about early humanity's concepts of the cosmos, of human relations with nature, of the complementary roles of male and female. Through study of sculpture, vases, and other cult objects from southeastern Europe, Gimbutas sketches the village culture that evolved there before it was overwhelmed by the patriarchal Indo-Europeans. The Goddess incarnating the creative principle as a Source and Giver of All, fertility images, mythical animals, and other artifacts are analyzed for their mythic and social significance in this beautifully illustrated study.

About the Author Marija Gimbutas (1921-1994) was Professor of European Archaeology at the University of California, Los Angeles, and Curator of Old World Archaeology at what is now the Fowler Museum of Cultural History. Her book *The Living Goddesses* (California, 1999) was published in April 1999.