

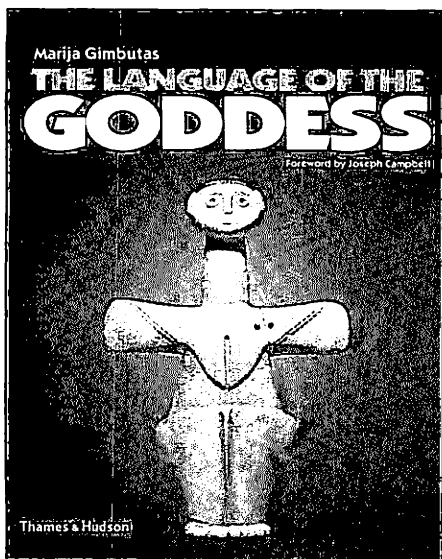
Signs Out Of Time

The Story of Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas

SIGNS OUT OF TIME is a new documentary film by Donna Read ("The Goddess Remembered") and Starhawk. The film is narrated by Olympia Dukakis.

Determined and courageous, Marija Gimbutas stayed true to what she saw, amidst ridicule, criticism, and controversy. If her theories are correct, then reverence for the Earth, peace, and cooperation are the very underpinnings of European civilization.

To order or for more information, contact www.gimbutas.org



The Language of the Goddess

In this profusely-illustrated book published near the end of her life, Marija Gimbutas boldly laid out the specifics of her theory that the seemingly "decorative" motifs of ancient European art were in fact a complex coded system in which "every unit is interlocked with every other... in patterns that cross the boundaries of space and time." Published by Thames & Hudson.

Who Was Marija Gimbutas?

MARIJA GIMBUTAS was born in Vilnius, Lithuania in 1921, and maintained a lifelong interest in the culture and customs of her homeland. She came to the United States as a refugee from the Soviet regime in 1949 after earning a Doctor of Philosophy degree in archaeology in 1946 at Tübingen University in Germany.

Her background included linguistics, ethnology, and the history of religions, which was unusual for an archaeologist. Marija was engaged by Harvard University in 1950 to do research and to write texts on European prehistory. She remained at Harvard for thirteen years, where she also became a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology. In 1963 Marija Gimbutas was invited to teach at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she remained until her retirement in 1989.

In 1956 Marija presented her "Kurgan Hypothesis" at an international conference in Philadelphia. With this theory, she brought together linguistic and archaeological knowledge to address the problem of the origins of Proto-

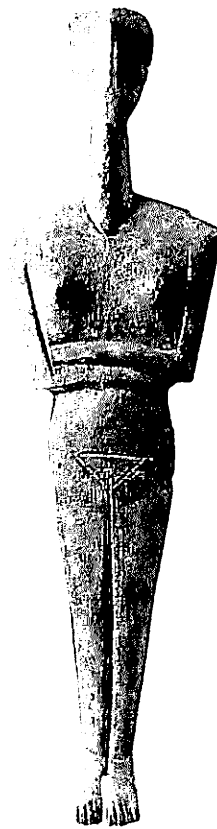
Indo-European speaking peoples and to trace their migrations into Europe.

Marija was project director of five major excavations between 1967 and 1980. These excavations in the former Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Greece, and Italy focused on the Neolithic period

(which she termed "Old Europe") in order to understand cultural development before the Indo-European influence. Her work resulted in the publication of *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe* (1974, republished in 1982 as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*).

DURING HER LIFE, Marija Gimbutas published nearly twenty books and over three hundred articles on European prehistory. Her three best-known books have stimulated vigorous responses. *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (1974, 1982), *The Language of the Goddess* (1989), and *The*

Civilization of the Goddess (1991) reveal an interpretation of European prehistory that challenges many traditional assumptions about the beginnings of European civilization.



Marble figure from the Cycladic Islands off the coast of Greece, c. 2800 BCE. Gimbutas refers to the flat face as a "mask," and slight remnants of paint are found on some figures.

While the severe geometric outlines seem to presage modern European art, the symbolic pubic region is carefully etched onto the figure.

Signs Out of Time — A Review

PORTRAYING THE LIFE and works of one of the most prolific archaeologists of the twentieth century is a daunting undertaking. Compressing it into a one-hour documentary seems well-nigh impossible.

That they succeed is a tribute to the understanding and film-making skills of Donna Read and Starhawk. A decade after their collaboration on the “Goddess and Spirituality” trilogy, the two team up to present this film-biography of one of the true prophets of our hidden past.

A long-running prejudice of historical studies holds that civilization and written language were born together in the ancient Middle East amid an orgy of empire-building. Some of the oldest extant writings record the exploits of conquering kings.

Gimbutas challenged this view by showing three things:

First, that Neolithic urban settlements greatly predated the “first cities” of the patriarchal tradition;

Second, that at least some of these settlements had no defensive walls, no military burials, and no artwork recording warfare;

Third, that the decorative designs of the artwork of these cultures may actually be a sophisticated system of symbols through which ideas and values could be re-

coded and transmitted.

BIOGRAPHY AND TEACHINGS

Signs Out of Times surveys Gimbutas’s life and early academic career, in which she combined an interest in folklore with a deep knowledge of European languages. This combination helped open insights that remained closed to scholars whose cultural focus was classically formed, and whose standard of “language” was Latin or Greek.

Against the backdrop of her life, the film turns to

Gimbutas’s theories about language and symbolism in Old Europe. Her conjectures sometimes seem

far-fetched, as when she states that two spirals are in fact snakes coiling into two divine eyes (see graphic on page 63).

But once we see some of the dozens or hundreds of similar pieces that Gimbutas studied — some naturalistic, others more abstract — the common symbolism becomes clear.

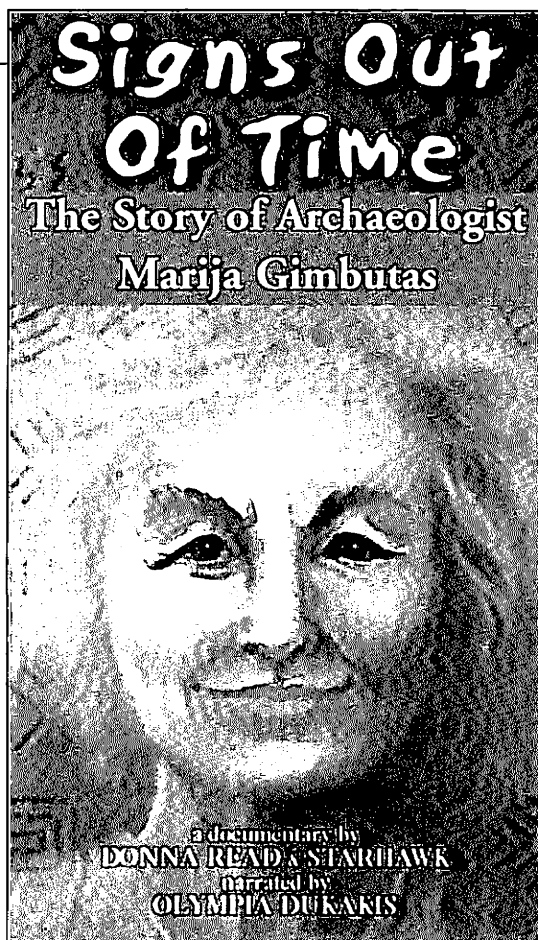
From this discovery to the view that the symbols form a variegated system of interlocking meanings capable of carrying complex ideas and traditions is still quite a leap,

and many scholars have rejected Gimbutas’s theories. Even some of her admirers consider her views “outdated” and of “suggestive power” only.

But during the last few years of his life, the great archaeologist and visionary historian Joseph Campbell spoke



The bulging belly and buttocks of Old European figurines were interpreted by Gimbutas as symbols of heightened fertility. In this piece from c. 21,000 BCE in Haute Garonne, France, the belly, breasts, and buttocks become a cluster of “eggs.”



Signs Out of Time

The Story of Archaeologist
Marija Gimbutas

a documentary by
DONNA READ & STARHAWK
narrated by
OLYMPIA DUKAKIS

frequently of Marija Gimbutas, regretting that her research on the Neolithic cultures of Europe was not available during the 1960s when he was writing *The Masks of God*. Otherwise, he would have “revised everything.” Campbell compared the importance of Marija’s work to Champollion’s decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics. He was not alone in this appreciation. According to anthropologist Ashley Montagu, “Marija Gimbutas has given us a veritable Rosetta Stone of the greatest heuristic value for future work in the hermeneutics of archaeology and anthropology.”

REWRITING THE PAST

JUST AS controversial have been Gimbutas’s theories about a “prehistoric” age of the Goddess, in which matrifocal societies built cultures, developed symbolic language as well as decorative arts, and lived for centuries in undefended, unmilitarized cities.

Gimbutas’s views challenge the

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The war on alchemy, in turn, formed an absolutely essential aspect of the wider spiritual warfare, for it was directed against the very possibility of wildness. Its mandate was to prove that matter itself, the "stuff" of the cosmos, was dead.

For in a cosmos made dead — the historical tragicomedy about which these essays have been woven — true wildness would be, by definition, only a chimera.

For the previous installments of David Kubrin's work on the magical and scientific revolutions of early modern Europe, see RQ #81, 86, and RQ #93. These essays are available online at www.ReclaimingQuarterly.org, or send \$10 to RQ for a complete set of the four essays — see page 3 for address.

See also the History sections of RQ #71 ("The Diggers and the English Revolution") and RQ #75 ("The New View of the Burning Times").

David Kubrin's researches into the work on Isaac Newton began with his Cornell university doctoral dissertation in 1968. He has been a longtime political activist, and teaches Science and Math at a San Francisco public middle school, where he is also the shop steward of the United Educators of San Francisco. These essays have been adapted from his manuscript, "Marxism & Witchcraft."

Gimbutas Film

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Hobbesian thesis that "primitive man" was brutish, violent, grasping, and incapable of living in society except under the thumb of a tyrant — and along with it the modern political structures which still assume that humans are naturally vicious and destructive and must be repressed by a strong government and social structure.

Riane Eisler, in *The Chalice and the Blade*, carried these theories further, postulating a veritable golden age of feminism prior to what we usually know as written history. A highlight of *Signs Out of Time*, in fact, is footage of Eisler interviewing Gimbutas, who died before *Signs*

Out of Times was begun.

COMPUTERIZED ARCHAEOLOGY

COVERING THE VAST richness of Gimbutas's thought in one hour is impossible, but the film makes good use of computer-enhanced graphics to convey her theories. Pictures are indeed worth a thousand words, and the ability of film to "morph" and highlight graphics is used to good advantage here.

Maybe the highest compliment I can pay the film is to say that after watching it, I went out and bought Marija Gimbutas's *Language of the Goddess*, illustrated with hundreds of sketches and photos from her excavations. In the wealth of images that fill this book, Gimbutas's theories come alive, and the language of Old Europe takes shape before our eyes.

Whether we can ever decipher that language as we have Egyptian hieroglyphics or Sumerian script is still an open question. Gimbutas's achievement was to convince at least some scholars and readers that such a language did exist, and is worth our study.

In the end, the film is tantalizingly too short. As I watched the VCR counter tick down, I felt an urgency for more images, more ideas. And most of all, for Gimbutas's vision of a world where the highest

values were peace, justice, and harmony.

If it once existed, it can be reclaimed.

PARALLELS WITH GIMBUTAS'S THEORIES

IN THE Introduction to *Language and the Goddess*, Marija Gimbutas writes:

"Some twenty years ago when I first started to question the meaning of the signs and design patterns that appeared repeatedly on the cult objects and painted pottery of Neolithic Europe, they struck me as being pieces of a giant jigsaw puzzle — two-thirds of which was missing. As I worked at its comple-

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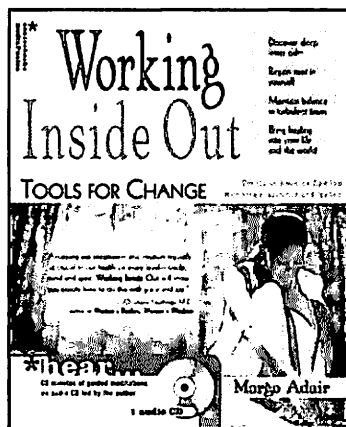
tion, the main themes of the Old European ideology emerged, primarily through analysis of the symbols and images and the discovery of their intrinsic order. They represent the grammar and syntax of a kind of meta-language by which an entire constellation of meanings is transmitted. They reveal the basic world-view of Old European culture.

"Symbols are seldom abstract in any genuine sense; their ties with nature persist, to be discovered through the study of context and association. In this way we can hope to decipher the mythical thought which is the *raison d'être* of this art and its form."

Gimbutas's theories of contextual meaning — that the meaning of any given symbol can be understood only in relation to other symbols and finally to the context in which the symbols were used — has been echoed in modern linguistics and hermeneutics by writers such as Jacques Derrida and Hans-Georg Gadamer, both of whom saw the roots of linguistic meaning in the contrast among a set of symbols. Derrida, a contemporary of Gimbutas, wrote extensively on his theory of *différance*, which contends that words only have meaning in relation to other words — there is no "absolute meaning" of any word. Context and relation are determinant, and meaning is always in flux as new relations emerge.

Gimbutas on the symbology of Old Europe: "They constitute a complex system in which every unit is interlocked with every other in what appear to be specific categories. No symbol can be treated in isolation; understanding the parts leads to understanding the whole, which in turn leads to identifying more of the parts."

She goes on to tie this research to the study of ancient Goddess religion. "These systematic associations in the Near East, southeast-



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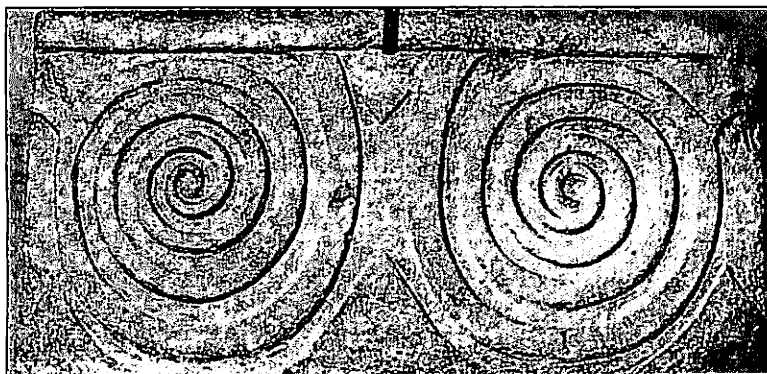
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"*Working Inside Out* is not about having to go elsewhere to be "spiritual"; instead, it shows how to bring spiritual techniques and practices into daily life and into the world." —*Margot Adler*



Marija Gimbutas was the first archaeologist to decipher the "written language" of the Old Europe. While her specific interpretations are based on conjecture and have often been challenged even by her supporters, she established beyond reasonable doubt that a common set of symbols was used by cultures long supposed to have lacked such skills.

Gimbutas demonstrated that the apparently decorative design shown here is in fact two snakes spiraling into a pair of eyes. Other illustrations in "The Language of the Goddess" demonstrate this kinship vividly, as endless variations are spun on this simple theme.

ern Europe, the Mediterranean area, and in central, western, and northern Europe indicate the extension of the same Goddess religion to all of these regions as a cohesive and persistent ideological system."

Gimbutas acknowledged the difficulties in deciphering an ancient linguistic system in which no firm anchors existed. Yet she remained optimistic. "I do not believe, as many archaeologists of this generation seem to, that we shall never know the meaning of prehistoric art and religion. Yes, the scarcity of sources makes reconstruction difficult in most instances, but the religion of the early agricultural period of Europe and Anatolia is very richly documented."

Gimbutas's work is a cornucopia from which many fruits will pour. As a visionary, the specifics of her research and conclusions will be disputed and perhaps rejected by future generations. But future archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, and social scientists will owe a debt to her opening of a new field of research — and to her belief that

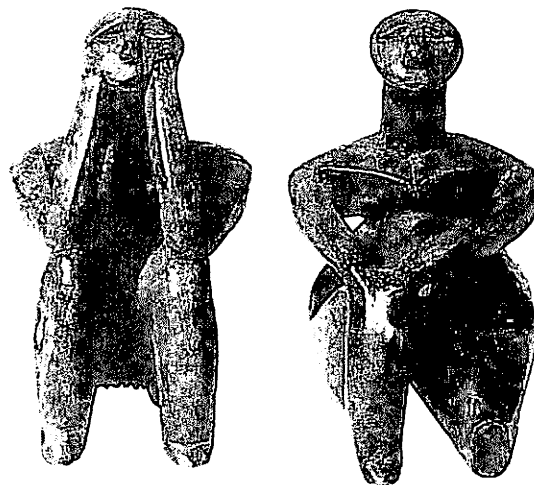
people have and will again live in peace and harmony.

This film is a testament to the power of her vision.

Signs Out of Time is produced by Donna Read and Starhawk, with narration by Olympia Dukakis. Also available are uncut videos of the original interviews that were edited for this film. Contact www.gimbutas.org.

Reviewed by George Franklin.

GIMBUTAS INTERPRETED these two figures from Romania, c. 5000 BCE, as male and female divinities. The matched male-female pair, apparently by the same artist, is unusual in archaeological finds from Old Europe. The pensive male figure has been called a "sorrowful god," and is found in a number of variations during this period.



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