

Mother Earth: Part II

Guide

20 Helck, Wlfgang.
*Religion & Kulture Der
Alten*, 1971. "Die
Figurchen", pg 33.

Now, leaving the Paleolithic age and moving into what is called the "Neolithic" (9,000 B.C. to 5,000 B.C.) we will narrow our focus down to Western Civilization. The next two slides are drawings of artifacts found in the area east of the Mediterranean. Artifacts made of stone, horn, bone and pottery tell the story of the millennia between the Great Mother worshipers and agrarian societies. With a profundity which words cannot express, these ancient images tell us about the decline of Goddess worship in women-centered societies and the rise of patriarchy. The art is moving away from the rounded abstractions of the cave figures.

Although many of the figures which follow are of obese women, they do not observe the rule of fitting into a lozenge or rhomboid and therefore are not a part of the Paleolithic canon of art.

21 Helck, Wlfgang.
*Religion & Kulture Der
Alten*, 1971. "Die
Figurchen", p. 36

Excavators of the ruins of this period have found that the skeletons of males and females are the same size. There are no weapons other than those used for hunting, and the villages and cities were unfortified. People seem to have been at peace with one another.¹⁵

22 *Gaia*, Terracota
from Tanagra. Borely
Museum, Marsailles.
Giraudon. From:
*Larousse
Encyclopedia of Myth*.
Paris, undated. p. 91.

There are references made to these little female figures in the *Old Testament*.

There they are called the "teraphim", "terra" being the Latin word for earth. Clay idols like these were stolen by Rachel in the story of Jacob. In the novel, *The Red Tent* by Anita Diamant, (St. Martin's Press. 1977) she describes the way goddess worshiping women, such as Rachel, Leah and Diana, would have used their earth idols. A similar word, "seraph", or, "seraphim" is used in Isaiah 6:2 to refer to winged angels who guarded the throne of god in the sky. The "teraphium" are divinities of the earth, the "seraphim" are divinities of heaven. Before this distinction between heaven and earth was made, did humans divide the world into "up there", heaven, and "down here", hell? Was it then that unity with all of creation was no longer reflected in myth and art?

¹⁵ (Gimbutas, Marija. *The Language of the Goddess Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization*. Harper, 1989)

In the newer translations of the *Old Testament*, the word “terraphim” may be translated as “household gods.” Almost the entire book of “Hosea” is a rant against religious practices that are not acceptable to the Hebrew tribes. By reading what he is objecting to, it is possible to pick up what some of the faith and practices of the goddess worshipping people were at the time of this writing.

In Judges 17 we find the story of Micah who carved an idol for his mother, which brought down the wrath of the community, (18:14 – 24) which they revenged by killing “the people who were quiet and carefree.” In “Ezekiel” 21:21 “terraphim” are consulted.

There is one reference to idols of silver made of the Goddess Diana in the *New Testament* (Acts 19:23-41) By this time the one Great Goddess had splintered into many, most of them representing different stages and characteristics of women and their lives.

23 Prehistoric,
Sardinia. Limestone.

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Background:  
El. Greco. Assumption  
of Virgin. Art Inst. Of  
Chicago. Rosenthal  
slide.

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Fire courtesy of Wide Iris
Productions.

It seems to contain both goddess and Christian symbols. As an indication of how powerful and threatening terraphim were, leaders of Israelite warriors gave instructions before the beginning of battle to, first destroy the terraphim.

All governments, military and religious leaders know that if a person takes their religious and spiritual symbolism, faith and practice into their own hands, to meet their own spiritual needs, then they are out of control of the organized political and religious institutions ... they are truly free. Three hundred years of witch burning were the culmination of this threat to the establishment by women who were in touch with and could use Earth energy.

What the leaders of Israel went to battle to gain changes as the story develops. Moses wanted tribal loyalty to one god. Joshua coveted land and established “patrimonies”. The “begats” establish the male rather than female line of inheritance. This required the enslavement of women to their husbands in order to establish certainty of fatherhood. Subsequent battles established laws and theocratic monarchy. Then the purpose returns to the destruction of heathen idols and their worshipers.

An example of this drive to personal expression of one’s spiritual needs outside of established state sponsored religions is found in seventeenth century when monarchs lost the power of “divine right.” In order to escape religious persecution, thousands left land and family behind to make a perilous three month journey across the Atlantic into unknown land. Oddly, after they arrived, some chose blind obedience to religious leaders (Puritans). Others established religious societies with little pastoral leadership and greater emphasis on inner spiritual leadings, (Quakers). The

last “witch” was burned or hung in England in the early 1600s. Those who evidenced clairvoyance or extra sensory experience were institutionalized well into the twentieth century. Today laws against “fortune tellers” are still on the books in many places in the United States.

24 Pre-dynastic Egyptian. *LaRousse Encyclopedia of World Mythology*. British Museum, 1963. p. 40.

Here we have a figure from the time when Egyptians worshiped goddesses. Severely abstract, the arms are in a powerful position. One woman writer said she feels that this goddess is channeling spiritual energy down to earth.¹⁶

Other women, particularly dancers, looking at these Egyptian goddesses say that this is a very power-filled position for them, too. This energy is what the Chinese call, “chi” as in Tai Chi, the Japanese call, “ki” as in Aikido and in India it is called, “prana.” Western civilization does not have a word for this inborn power, and therefore most of us in the West are spiritually handicapped, unable to live our lives fully aware that we can call on and use this force field.

25 Dolce Vystonice. Racz, Istvan. *The Unknown God*. Sheed and Ward, NY. Undated. P. 3.

This little statuette looks as if she could have been made today. Instead of depicting an abstract sense of “woman”, she becomes an individual with features on her face, and she has legs and feet. No longer does the statuette depict the principle of female. She defines a specific female.

26 “Cycladic marble idols” from the 3rd Millenium B.C. (Neolithic). *Minoan and Mycenaean Art*. Plates 62 & 63, p. 60. Reynold Higgins, Praeger, NY. 1967.

Good-bye fertile and nourishing hips and breasts. These poses are rigid and self-protective. They lack any spirit or intelligence, and don’t show much indication of gender. This one is called a fiddle idol because it has no head. This type of idol continued to be produced for a thousand years. Marija Gimbutas types these as, “stiff nudes” and says that because they are the color of bone, they are symbols of death. They are found in graves, in front of the skeleton, often near the hand.¹⁷

¹⁶ Sjoon Monica and Mor, Barbara. *The Great Cosmic Mother*, Harper, 1987. pg. 118ff. discusses this in full.

¹⁷ Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, (ibid. Gimbutas. Pgs 198 –205)

27 Boeotia, Archaic Period. Terracotta. (8th c. B.C.?) Boston Museum of Fine Art. *Horizon Book of Ancient Greece*. Hale, William Harlan. American Heritage Publishing Co., NY. 1965 Pg. 210.

This odd little figure and others like it were found at archeological sites in eastern Mediterranean areas. Jungian scholar, Erich Neumann, says that the legs are movable. Another book says that it is probably a funerary offering. Many find it has a rather forbidding character. We can see that this is no longer a motherly figure, and she certainly was not made to be held in the hand to comfort the frightened.

28 Two Minoan Priestesses. Slide purchased in Crete.

These two statuettes were found on Crete. Everyday dress exposed the breasts. Both have pop-eyes. Crete is the place where artifacts tell us there were many temples dedicated to Goddesses. When I was there, visiting the ancient sites, they seemed to mirror the way women, around the world, are beginning to celebrate their spiritual lives with new and healing rituals.

29 *Horizen Book of Ancient Greece*. William Harlan Hale, 1965. p. 38, #34. 1600 B.C., Faience. Herakilon Museum, Crete, Greece.

This one is called, by archaeologists, the Snake Goddess, or, Snake Queen or Priestess. Myth tells us that Zeus, the rapist, was born on Crete.¹⁸

The snakes that she is holding up so defiantly may represent the greatest female mystery, the umbilical cord. This glistening, writhing cord appears from nowhere, creates new life, is discarded, and then magically appears again to repeat the process. I believe that snakes, representing the umbilical cord, could be the most powerful symbols of her goddess worshiping religion and spiritual life. Joseph Campbell said that every creation story involves a snake.¹⁹

Eve sinned because she had knowledge from the snake, Saint Patrick rid Ireland of the snakes, St. George killed the snake that morphed into a dragon and so forth. I am left with the clear impression that the snake represents the Goddess religions. Here, in the light of the threat by the birth of Zeus to her Goddess tradition, for me she is saying,

“This far and no further.”

¹⁸ Donald E. Strong. 1965. *The Classical World*. p. 25,

¹⁹ Campbell, Joseph. *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*.

30 "Artemis of Ephesus", original. Larousse *Encyclopedia of World Mythology*, 1960, pg 148. terracotta 2nd – 1st century B.C. British Museum

Found in the city of Ephesus in what is now Turkey, Eric Neumann called her, "The Lady of the Beasts", writing that Her many breasts were to suckle litters of animals.²⁰ Some other interpretations are that these are not breasts but, eggs, or bull testicles, or, if you prefer, that skins of wine were hung from the nipples of each breast to celebrate the harvest.

31 Mary R. Hopkins

Every one of these figures is subject to personal interpretation. Among them there may be some that are personally significant to you. Interpretations are made to meet personal and social needs. Some of us share the same needs and therefore we are inspired by similar symbols. My interpretations are not definitive, but I do mean for them to stimulate your mythic imagination as you meet your own spiritual needs.

32 "Artemis of Ephesus", Roman copy. *Classical World*. P.. 141. 1st or 2nd century A.D.. Alabaster & Bronze. National Museum, Naples

Here is a later Roman copy of the same statue made of alabaster and bronze. Many centuries later, a pope had the nipples on her breasts removed, as he felt uncomfortable when looking at her. The purpose of women's breasts, to nurture new life, has in modern times given way to women filling their breasts with a toxic plastic, silicone, in order to attract the attention of a powerful male.

Now, quite apart from the comforting figures of the ancients, we will explore the dark and angry side of female in art and myth.

33 "From a black-figure dinos by the Gorgon Painter, 600 B.C." *Encyclopedia of Art*. Book 2, plate 40.

The Goddesses did not go quietly. Gorgons are common figures on ancient Greek vases, coins and temples. They emerged in art history when religious myths began to describe male gods giving birth and raping. Female, these Gorgons always show great energy with the legs running, arms akimbo, tongue out, eyes popping with passion and usually with the snakes for hair or around her waist. She was considered so frightening that some great Greek warriors are shown with her face on their shields. I have never found a depiction of a Gorgon, or Medusa, carrying a weapon of any kind. She doesn't need one. Her anger was enough to defeat a male warrior.

²⁰ Neumann, Eric. 1955. *The Great Mother*. Bollingen Series XLVII, Princeton, pg 124ff.

34 bas-relief on pediment at Corfu. "Temple of Artemis". Early 6th c. BC. *Greek Sculpture*. Lullies, Reinhard. Abrams 1960. #17. From West pediment, center section.

From the pediment of a temple found on Corfu, an island off Greece. This temple was the same size, shape and design as the great Parthenon,

35 Athena Parthenos. Reconstruction. Brilliant, Richard. *Arts of the Ancient Greeks*. McGraw-Hill. plate 200

erected to honor the patriarchal Goddess Athena.

36 Athena. Photographed by , Rebecca Foster 1989

If you can remember the grave dignity of statues of Athena like this

37 Athena. National Archeology Museum of Athens. *Arts of Ancient Greeks*. Ed. Richard Brilliant. McGraw Hill. p. 210

and this.

38 Gorgon. Terracotta Metope, c 600bc, Syracuse. *Encyclopedia of Art*

Contrast it with this wild woman.

39 "Cadmus". *Horizon Book of Greece*. p. 81

This is Cadmus, the Greek King and Warrior, ridding the temple of snakes. – snakes which, as we have seen, probably represented goddess worship. The battle between the primacy of male gods over goddesses is unmistakably depicted in the art of this period and in later texts such as the Torah. You see the face of the angry woman, the Gorgon on his shield, put there to terrify his enemies.

40 "Athena". Bronze. circa 375 B.C. National Archeology Museum, Athens. Photo by Voutras. Imprime en Grece par Voutsas Freres. © C. Voustas. (photographed in the early 1980s.)

Athena, with the severed head and snakes of the gorgon Medusa on her breastplate. The patriarchal Athena always is found with weapons of war. We begin to find the snaky head

here between three and four thousand years ago. That was the time that the energetic, weaponless, wild woman who had knowledge of death as well as birth was banished from the pantheon of divinities and our consciousness.

41 *The Blue Fairy Book*. Andrew Lang, ed. Dover, NY. Illustration, pg 192 by H.J. Ford.

42 *Assumption of the Virgin*. El Greco, 1577 Oil on canvas. Art Institute of Chicago. Purchased from, Rosenthal Art Slides.

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(background) Pre-dynastic Egyptian. See

It is common psychological knowledge that we fear, more than anything else, the power of the shadow, the dark unseen side of ourselves and our society. With the Gorgon banished to our unconscious, it is easier to understand a priesthood's need to have dominion over Mother Earth, be celibate, remove the nipples from the many breasted Artemis and why, our great Judeo-Christian myth tells us that when we die, we do not return to be absorbed back in to Her and be born again, but that we completely disconnect and ascend to eternal life, in heaven, beyond the confines of time, space and our home, Mother Earth.

The theological word for living in harmony with life on earth is "immanence." The opposite, leaving earth, is "transcendence." The Christian ideal is to transcend the dirty, sinful earth by going to heaven. The Catholic Church reinforced this when the Pope, in the 1950s, decreed that, along with God, His Son and the Holy Ghost, the Virgin Mary had also been bodily assumed into heaven. The psychiatrist, Carl Jung, noted that now this completely separates Christian culture from earth. We can also interpret this as an attempt to transcend the power of earth because earth is life-giving as well as life-taking and therefore, female. Our goal can be a balance of both immanence and transcendence.

**43** Benvenuto Cellini. *Perseus and Medusa*. mid XVIc. Hermitage, Leningrad. *Great Museums of the World*, Pg. 57.

Sculpted just four hundred years ago by Cellini, *The Triumph of Perseus* still stands in the Loggia in Florence. You see the body of Medusa, or the Gorgon, under his feet. Title this famous statue, *Woman Conquered*. However, she is coming alive once again. The Gorgon is emerging in some women's art.

**44** Christina Biaggi, *Raging Medusa*. 2000

Here are two modern versions:

**45** Anderson,  
Judith. *Medusa  
Unwound*. Etching,  
2/2/93.

Judith Anderson describes this painting most eloquently in her artist's statement (Artist's Statement, *Appendix B*).

**46** Anderson,  
Judith, *Call Me  
Judith*, intaglio,  
sepia ink, summer  
solstice, 1989.

She titles it "*Call Me Judith*." Rarely, in the history of patriarchal art would a female figure as power filled and independent of the male gaze be put on public exhibition. Here Judith Anderson is expressing her anger at the way we are devastating the earth. She imagines herself as an enormous woman crushing the guilty with her Labrys, her axe. Included around the figure are images of other mythic women who have expressed their fury, Medusa, Kali and the Biblical Judith. In her artist statement she describes the dense symbolism and then says, "In the distance, on the cracked earth, five stones begin a medicine wheel in the hope of the return of wholeness and balance." (Artist's Statement, *Appendix C*)