

Lily A. Bonga: Mother-Goddess Misconceptions

Both in popular culture and in scholarly publications, it is often asserted as fact that in Prehistoric cultures in Europe believed in the existence of a “Mother-Goddess.” One scholar, Marija Gimbutas, is particularly associated with Mother-Goddess theories and the belief in prehistoric matriarchy. Yet Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures, particularly those of Southeastern Europe, did not believe exclusively in a Mother-Goddess, and were not matriarchs – and Gimbutas knew it.

The reasons why one scholar’s name became fallaciously associated with arguments that she did not make include historical biases, poor scholarship and oversimplifications. This paper consists of a historiographic synopsis on how the idea of an archetypal Mother-Goddess began with Romanticism in the late 18th and 19th centuries, when the origins of the Olympian Gods were considered by men such as Frazer, Gerhard and Bachofen, who were not academics. Philosophers, writers and psychologists such as Jung and Graves continued research into archetypal deities during the first half of the 19th century. While in the latter half of the 20th-century, feminist reactionaries such as Stone and Göttner-Abendroth reinvented the existence of matriarchs and the Mother-Goddess in order to serve their ideological needs.

Some scholars, like Gimbutas and Eisler, took a more open-minded approach and looked at the facts and archaeological material, rather than projecting their etic perceptions onto the past in order to prove a point. They recognized that prehistoric pantheons consisted of many male and female deities and considered the possibility for egalitarianism. Other 20th-century archaeologists, like Evans and Mellaart, did, however, explicitly state their beliefs in the existence of the Mother-Goddess and tried to use their finds as proof of their theories, rather than letting the evidence speak for itself. Both Evans and Mellaart’s excavations were so sensational at the time that their research became known outside the academy – particularly the mistaken notion of a Mother-Goddess, which was presented as fact, repeated as fact, and continues to be propagated as such.

Keywords:

[Goddess-worship](#), [Feminism](#)

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