

Kathryn Rountree:
Transforming Goddesses: Neo-Pagan Projects of Revival and
Reinvention

This paper examines various ways in which deities from the ancient religions of the Mediterranean region have been appropriated, re-interpreted, transformed and invented for contemporary religious and political purposes by modern Pagans and followers of Goddess Spirituality. The impulses for such transformations come both from within contemporary Mediterranean societies and from far away. In Greece there has been a fresh growth of interest in the heritage of ancient Greece, with Pagan groups, philosophical societies, Spartan schools, “Hellenist” magazines and performances of classical theatre flourishing in the last two decades. Greek Neo-Pagans have rejected the Orthodox Church followed by the majority of Greeks and established the Return of the Hellenes Movement, intent upon reviving the worship of the twelve Olympian gods and fostering religious freedom. This has been attributed to a nationalistic urge in the face of ever-increasing foreign travel, globalization, international integration and economic pressure. Maltese neo-Pagans differ from revival or reconstructionist groups such as those in Greece, instead combining Wicca – a religious movement originating in Britain in the 20th-century – with the eclectic veneration of deities from various pantheons, mostly from the Mediterranean, along with an invented Maltese earth Goddess and sea God. Meanwhile, in Italy, Neo-Pagans do not worship only the well-known Roman deities of Diana, Minerva, Vesta and Venus; they are recovering local deities, mythologies and traditions little known outside those regions. Finally, followers of the global Goddess Spirituality movement, which originated in the United States and spread to many parts of the world during the last decades of the twentieth century, including New Zealand, have taken delight in reviving particularly the Greek goddesses to serve as diverse, sacred, powerful and empowering symbols of womanhood as part of a feminist project. From its non-Mediterranean (and non-European) source, the Goddess Spirituality movement spread back into Europe, taking different forms as it was re-indigenized, for example, in Catholic Spain, Portugal and Italy. This paper explores such Neo-Pagan transformations of ancient religions for contemporary purposes in contemporary societies.

Keywords:

[Feminism](#), [Goddess-worship](#), [Greece](#), [Italy](#), [Neo-Paganism](#), [North America](#)

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