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The Past is a Foreigners' Country: Goddess Feminists, Archaeologists, and the Appropriation of Prehistory

KATHRYN ROUNTREE

ABSTRACT *Feminist archaeologists and others have criticised the Goddess movement, and Marija Gimbutas in particular, for producing 'Golden Age' theories about the past, claiming that there is no convincing archaeological evidence that Old Europe was universally peopled by matrifocal, peaceful, egalitarian societies who worshipped a Great Goddess. Goddess feminists are accused of appropriating and mythologising the past to serve their contemporary political agenda. This paper considers such criticisms and argues that archaeologists, too, can be shown to have agendas of their own in relation to the past. Following a theoretical discussion, the issues of appropriation and colonisation are considered with respect to Malta's neolithic 'Temple Culture', and the agendas and activities of Goddess feminists in relation to it. The discussion is based on recent anthropological fieldwork in Malta.*

Introduction

Since its infancy, and despite its flourishing popular appeal, Goddess feminism has been under attack on several fronts from within feminism's own ranks. In particular, criticisms have come from feminist anthropologists, archaeologists, and scholars in religious studies. On the one hand, the movement has been criticised as "romantic, solipsistic and politically lethargic" (Weaver, 1989: 62), abandoning politics for mysticism (Evans, 1995: 80), while on the other hand, it has been accused of determinedly and self-consciously 'using' the Goddess to pursue a feminist political agenda (Meskell, 1995; 1998; Budapest, 1982: 536). Thus, adherents are seen by some as escapists who have opted for a personal, spiritual solution to the problem of patriarchy, and by others as reconstructing (wrongly) and exploiting the past to support contemporary feminist struggles. Either way, the Goddess feminist vision of the pre-Christian past and the interpretations it produces are dismissed by some critics as "simply hopeful and idealistic creations reflecting the contemporary search for a social utopia" (Meskell, 1995: 74).

Feminist anthropologists and others have accused the movement's adherents of embracing a damaging (to feminism), essentialising view of 'woman', reinforcing connections between women, nature, and nurturance (Bamberger, 1974; Binford, 1982; di Leonardo, 1991; Hackett, 1989; Ortner, 1974; 1996; Goodison & Morris, 1998). Such connections, along with what some have claimed is a misrepresentation of history (Meskell, 1995; 1998; Conkey & Tringham, 1995; Tringham & Conkey, 1998; Brown, 1993) and a misrepresentation of ancient goddesses (Hackett, 1989; Westenholz, 1998), are thought problematic, not least because they rationalise and reinforce a patriarchal agenda which would keep

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women locked within a narrowly-constructed and inferior maternal role. For feminist critics of the Goddess movement, the Goddess is the wrong symbol to use and religion is the wrong instrument to advance a feminist cause.

Elsewhere I have addressed the charge that Goddess feminists are a-political, showing that politics has been a part of the movement since its inception, and suggesting that such a charge seems to rest more on a Marxist theory about the relationship between politics and religion than on the demonstrable failure of Goddess feminists to be as politically aware and active as other feminists (Rountree, 1999). Indeed the dichotomous separation of spirituality and politics may well be challenged on the grounds that it robs the power and natural kinship of both, and demonstrates the susceptibility of the movement's critics to the dominant world-view which constructs everything in terms of binary oppositions. With respect to the claim that the movement reinforces essentialist constructions of woman, my understanding is that the Goddess feminist solution to the low value attached to the maternal role (just one of women's many possible roles) is not to reject this role, but to reject all phallo-centric terms and values which have been employed to construct woman, and "to represent woman and femininity *otherwise* … [t]o reconceive of women and femininity in terms independent of men and masculinity" (Grosz, 1989: 110).[1] A number of writers in the movement have rejected, some vehemently, the accusation that the movement is fixated on the 'Great Mother' or fertility aspect of goddesses or the Goddess (Long, 1995: 20; Starhawk, 1989: 249; Johnsen, 1996: 30; Gimbutas, 1999: 5; Göttner-Abendroth, 1987). Goddess feminism's reclaiming of the female body is in line with some recent feminist re-thinking of essentialism, difference, feminine specificity, and the body (Frye, 1996; Rooney, 1994; Kirby, 1992; Irigaray, 1985; Grosz, 1989; Schor, 1994).

In the same paper I suggested that while stories (fantasies) about glorious matriarchies were certainly present in the movement's early days (Davis, 1972),[2] and have lingered (Eller, 1993), there has been a dwindling of simplistic forms of this belief, and there have long been those within the movement who have been critical of and exasperated by 'Golden Age' theories, preferring to posit that pre-patriarchal pasts offer an alternative model for structuring gender relations along other (especially partnership) lines (Spretnak, 1982; Eisler, 1987; Goodison, 1990; Passman, 1993). In any case, some of those who invoke visions of a matrifocal (if not matriarchal) Golden Age are open about deliberately and self-consciously mythologising the past, repeatedly quoting Monique Wittig's advice: if you cannot remember, invent (Wittig, 1972: 95). Such invention is considered a justifiable means to achieve a future where women are (again) free and equal with men, the assumption apparently being that if you can visualise a better past, it should be easier to visualise, and more importantly to create, a better future (Orenstein, 1990; Passman, 1993). This is not the same as naively longing for "essentially de-evolutionary" cultural change, or using archaeology and history as "the basis for millenarian reconstruction" (Wood, 1996: 13). It is not simply a matter of the "past becom[ing] a template for the future", as Wood (1996: 21) suggests, although such a claim could fairly be made about the movement in its earlier days and still applies to some authors.

Of course, archaeologists, particularly feminist archaeologists, have had much to say about this kind of approach to and use of the past, and the central concern in this paper is to consider their criticisms. My interest in the writings of

archaeologists on this theme was fuelled by three visits to Malta in 1998, 1999, and 2000 to carry out anthropological fieldwork. Malta figures prominently in Goddess literature because of its remarkable neolithic remains, which include megalithic stone temples dated 6000–5000 BP, and numerous figurines and statues popularly interpreted as representing a fertility Goddess. My research focused on attitudes of the Maltese towards the neolithic 'Goddess culture' of their islands and towards reconstructions of it by foreign women belonging to the Goddess movement, who make pilgrimages to the renowned temple sites. I was interested in finding out whether indigenous Maltese saw 'their' past as being mythologised and romanticised, and possibly misinterpreted, appropriated, and colonised by foreign spiritual pilgrims. My interest in Malta grew from a decade-long involvement in the Goddess movement in New Zealand, four years of which were spent in anthropological research.[3] Thus, the latter part of this paper deals more specifically with the issues of appropriation and colonisation in respect to the Maltese past and Goddess feminist agendas and activities in relation to it.

Feminist Archaeologists, Gimbutas, and the Goddess

As Long (1997) has shown in her discussion of the responses of feminist archaeologists to the Goddess movement, most of the attention has concentrated on the work of the archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, author of a number of books which have been immensely influential in the development of the Goddess movement because of their portrayal of 'Old Europe' as peopled by matrifocal, sedentary, peaceful, egalitarian societies who worshipped a female deity.[4] The figure of Gimbutas has assumed iconic status for both adherents and critics of the movement: critics point to many faults in the scholarliness of her work and blame her for encouraging Golden Age theories, while adherents treasure her books, savour her conclusions, and "defend her against what they believe to be patriarchal vilification" (Long, 1997: 14).[5] Indeed, feminist archaeologists seem to have been at least as critical of Gimbutas as traditional male archaeologists have been, and they take pains to contrast their own approaches with hers, emphasising that Gimbutas does not present herself in her writing as a feminist, although others have presented her as such (Brown, 1993: 254; Meskell, 1995: 83). Brown, a feminist archaeologist reviewing criticisms of Gimbutas, writes:

> … she illustrates material that validates her assertions, rather than presenting reasoned arguments; she uncritically selects objects from scattered sources, regardless of era, geography, or context, eliminating those that do not "fit"; and she ignores alternative explanations for the images she cites, including ones not at all clearly associated with a Great Goddess. (Brown, 1993: 255)

While feminist archaeologists are "sometimes angry at current archaeological approaches to research, and often excited about new ways to envision and interpret the past", Brown writes, they are "usually not sympathetic to broad, generalizing Goddess theories or feminist visions of a past pansocietal matristic culture" (Brown, 1993: 261). Indeed, Gimbutas is "perhaps regarded as something of a traitor to the profession", and Goddess feminists are accused of

"hijacking" figurines for "purposes other than academic archaeological study" (Hamilton, 1996: 284).

Lynn Meskell sees the Goddess movement as another "fad and fiction" to exploit archaeology, intent on "re-weaving a fictional past with claims of scientific proofs" without aiming for a complete understanding of ancient societies (Meskell, 1995: 74). She deplores the harnessing of a re-created, idealised past to serve a contemporary socio-political agenda, even if it is a feminist one. It is not the goal of the agenda to which Meskell objects, but the Goddess movement's means of achieving it. Meskell implies that it is misguided, or downright dishonest, to claim that archaeological evidence proves that a Goddess was the primordial deity throughout Southern Europe, when in her and many other archaeologists' opinion, the evidence confirms no such thing. She reiterates Gimbutas's faults as a scholar, emphasising that the ancient Mediterranean was not the single cultural unit that Gimbutas implies, that Old European societies may not have been as peaceful and egalitarian as they have been portrayed, and that even if female deities were worshipped, ethnographic evidence shows that in such societies, women may still occupy a low-status position. As others have shown (Tringham, 1991; Hayden, 1986), Meskell points to Gimbutas's determination to read all evidence as symbolic of the Goddess, her tendency to overlook, diminish or dismiss evidence of male representations, and her habit of making detailed assertions about ancient lifeways which are based on slim and inconclusive evidence.[6]

One senses in Meskell's writing both frustration and anger. One reason for this may be that while the male archaeological establishment can afford to hold its tongue to some extent, since—as Brown (1993: 256) says—Gimbutas does not threaten the archaeological status quo, feminist archaeologists feel they risk being seen as tarred with the same brush as Gimbutas. At several points in her article, Meskell (1995) laments the damage that Gimbutas's methodological and analytic weaknesses do to the attempts of feminist archaeologists to take fresh approaches to considering gender within archaeological contexts. She clearly fears that gender studies will not be taken seriously by the establishment, if they are seen in any way as running along the same track as Gimbutas's work. Undoubtedly, this partly accounts for Meskell's highly-charged distancing of herself from Gimbutas. Likewise, Ruth Tringham, in her less heated, but no less unequivocal critique of Gimbutas, says that accounts such as Gimbutas's have prevented "the whole topic of gender relations to be taken at all seriously by Establishment (yes, undoubtedly male-dominated) archaeology in Europe" (Tringham, 1991: 97). In the same vein, Naomi Hamilton, reviewing the waxing and waning of Goddess theories in archaeology, writes that "goddesses have little place in current figurine theory, and are seen as millstones round the necks of feminist archaeologists, millstones which kept them at bay decades after feminism had entered many related academic fields" (Hamilton, 1996: 284).

One can sympathise with the frustration of feminist archaeologists when they see the fruits of their profession's scientific labours being appropriated for a contemporary agenda which has nothing to do with science, and arguably little to do with a genuine desire to achieve a fuller understanding of ancient societies. As a social anthropologist, I know the frustration of seeing ethnography used to portray a simplistic (or wrong) popular rendering of a society. While feminist archaeologists want to challenge the androcentric biases of their discipline, there

is no compromise in their view that archaeology is a scientific enterprise and should remain so in its purposes, methodology, and modes of interpretation, while being informed by a thorough and continuous feminist critique. The "hijacking of figurines for purposes other than academic archaeological study" is not acceptable. This is not to say that feminist archaeologists believe there can only be one valid interpretation of the past (Goodison & Morris, 1998; Meskell, 1998) or that they cannot have a role in producing and scrutinising the production of social knowledge and in developing theory which can guide current political practice (Conkey & Tringham, 1995: 231).

It is on the crucial issue of how archaeological evidence should be used that the Goddess movement is ambivalent. On the one hand, there are those, among whom Gimbutas is pre-eminent, who genuinely believe that past societies 'really were' matrifocal and Goddess-worshipping, showing that patriarchy is not normative and providing a model for different social relations in the future. In the 1990s, one seldom hears Goddess feminists speak of ancient 'matriarchies', preferring terms such as 'matristic', 'matrifocal', and 'matricentric' (Johnson, 1988: 4; Orenstein, 1990: xvii), despite their critics' persistence in making this claim. Even Gimbutas herself says that the social order during the neolithic "was not necessarily [a] 'matriarchy' " (Gimbutas, 1991: x). On the other hand, there are those to whom it no longer particularly matters whether matriarchies or matrifocal societies existed historically or not. As Goldenberg says, most women in the movement "are more concerned with the concept as a psychological and poetic formula than as an historical verity" (Goldenberg, 1979: 89). Any fantasy is "real to the degree that it influences actions in the present. In this sense a remembered fact and an invented fantasy have identical psychological value" (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1989: 90).

Those who hold such a view have, of course, no professional investment in archaeology and have nothing at stake professionally. They clearly do not hold the same view as professional (including feminist) archaeologists about the sanctity of science, about the relationship between 'evidence' and interpretation, or about the implications and appropriate uses of the past. Compared with feminist archaeologists, they want something different from the past and feel quite at liberty to take (or make) it. Being polytheistic, they do not believe in a monolithic category of discoverable Truth (this is not to say that all archaeologists do), whether in relation to theology or to history. The hypothetical ancient 'matricentric' society is referred to as an 'originary myth' and an 'ideal' (Passman, 1993: 182–183). Even so, 'the facts' about the past are not disregarded altogether. I have never read or heard anything to suggest that Goddess feminists of any persuasion cunningly invent a tale of the past, which *they know* is unlikely, given the material evidence available. Where a particular scenario is shown to be false, it is reconstructed, for example, in the way that the term 'matriarchal' has been exchanged for the terms 'matrifocal' or 'matricentric'. Goddess feminists will fabricate beyond, but not against, the evidence: invention begins where the material evidence stops. Fleshing out the bones of the past to give substance to a vision of the future is seen as a justifiable and unproblematic means to achieving the all-important end of transforming society.

It is this view with which feminist archaeologists vehemently disagree. According to Long, Meskell acknowledges that such uses of the past may be

understood as a form of mythopoetics, but laments the loss or transformation of the original contextual meanings which result from such appropriation (Long, 1997: 16). One could argue that Goddess feminism is doing self-consciously what religions have always done: the history of religion is a history of appropriated beliefs, concepts, symbols, sacred places, and rituals. Christianity, a prime example, appropriated much from Judaism (Plaskow, 1992) and from various 'pagan' traditions. Moreover, as Richlin, a feminist classicist, points out, those who attempt interpretations of the past are 'colonisers' of the past, invading "cultures that did not ask us to come" (Richlin, 1993: 279). This includes archaeologists.

One could further argue that Gimbutas is simply putting a human (or a Goddess's) face on what are so often de-peopled, dry archaeological accounts: a task Tringham (1991) herself has wrestled with and recommended (although done very differently from Gimbutas). The problem, as Tringham shows, is that all Gimbutas's faces are female, and that for her everything about prehistoric life has to do with the Goddess. This is because of her particular "underlying assumptions and beliefs about the world" (Tringham, 1991: 112). However, Tringham shows that all archaeologists approach a body of data idiosyncratically and select different aspects of the data according to their pre-existing assumptions and beliefs, arriving at different sorts of interpretations of the past. So why has Gimbutas's particular interpretation met with such antagonism from feminist archaeologists?[7] The latter would say that this is so because Gimbutas's scholarship leaves much to be desired, and because she presents an interpretation of the past which, in its insistent and assertive style, forecloses other possible interpretations, including other feminist ones. However, the antagonism seems to be deeper and more general than accounted for by such reasons. It would seem that the feminist archaeologists discussed here share the general antagonism of feminist anthropologists (summarised at the beginning of this paper) towards the mixing of politics and spirituality, politics and prehistory, and visions of past and future in the name of feminism.

There can be no dispute that Gimbutas's methods and style of interpretation are fraught with irritating problems and deserve the criticism they have received from both traditional and feminist archaeologists. It is not true, however, that everyone in the Goddess movement slavishly follows Gimbutas or embraces Golden Age theories, whether for their historical or psychological value, despite the persistence of critics in stereotyping the movement as a homogeneous unit. Many have adhered and do adhere to a Gimbutas–style recreation of the past, but there have always been those who have offered a critique of it (Goodison, 1990; Adler, 1982; 1989; Spretnak, 1982: 553; Lunn, 1993; Long, 1997). A number of the New Zealand women I interviewed thought it was a nice, but naive idea, and emphasised that alongside the positive aspects of ancient societies, there were also negative ones. An American woman, who has had a great influence on the growth of the movement in New Zealand through running Goddess workshops since 1984, told me: "The Goddess cultures in Europe were not 'Golden Ages'—this is narrow-minded thinking. We don't want to bring them back again."

While objecting to Gimbutas's "monolithic account of 'Goddess-oriented Old Europe' ", critics unfairly present the movement as a monolithic entity which has produced a single story of the past "following the authority of Gimbutas"

(Conkey & Tringham, 1995: 223, 228). There are, however, many differing and dissenting voices within the movement. Here are three examples of responses to the movement's critics on different topics.

Margot Adler says the following on the subject of a universal Mother Goddess and matriarchy:

> As a Pagan polytheist, I have problems with the notion of a single Great Mother Goddess. I find it more reasonable to assume that different cultures created different Gods out of different needs, each one of them expressing different aspects of the ultimately unknowable. The whole notion of a single Goddess religion coming to us from the beginning of time seems to me suspiciously monotheistic; the concept of a single beneficient Goddess seems very Christian. I am more comfortable with the idea of many cultures throwing out a plethora of images—from warriors to nurturers, from saviors to destroyers… Goddess Spirituality as a whole honors the Goddesses of a thousand cultures.
>
> What about the question of matriarchy? The polytheistic perspective says that it is unlikely there was ever a universal matriarchy, for the same reasons there was probably not a single Goddess religion. (Adler, 1989: 97–98)

Tina Passman comments on peaceful, nurturing matricultures:

> Those reconstructing early matriculture do not agree that this culture was completely life-affirming. As noted above, some feel that it was often women's own abuse or misuse of power, or their complicity in their disempowerment (Lerner, 1986) that accounted for the destruction of matricentric culture (see especially Stein, 1991: 32–48). (Passman, 1993: 187)

Asphodel Long speaks about the uniform portrayal of a fertility Goddess:

> Perhaps at this point I should say formally that there is total disagreement with the conventional view that the goddesses signify fertility only. Restoring sacrality to sexuality does not mean restricting it in this way. (Long, 1995: 20)

In debunking the Goddess movement, feminist archaeologists have sometimes misrepresented or over-simplified adherents' positions. For example, Meskell, quoting Passman (1993: 187), says that writers who have adopted Gimbutas's theories stress the superiority of "assumed matristic cultures" with "their peaceful, egalitarian, non-fortified communities and even their predisposition to vegetarianism" (Meskell, 1995: 79). However, in the passage which Meskell quotes, Passman explicitly makes the point that there are polarised views within the movement on the question of how 'life-affirming' such cultures were.

Reviewing feminist archaeologists' criticisms of Gimbutas, I have to agree with Long: "interesting and useful though their work is on its own terms, it has been caught up in a sort of contra-Gimbutas fever" (Long, 1997: 25–26). Gimbutas has been set up as a straw woman. By dismissing her—and she is an easy target—some of her critics seem to believe that they have convincingly and legitimately dismissed the whole idea of Goddess-centred belief systems in European neolithic communities, although others concede that Gimbutas's interpretation "can be considered plausible within the constraints of the material

evidence" as one possibility (Conkey & Tringham, 1995: 223). It is very unfortunate that Gimbutas and her theories seem to have become inseparable. It is difficult not to feel that it is Gimbutas's politics as much as her flawed scholarship which upset her critics. Yet as Hamilton, a feminist archaeologist, has pointed out, personal politics have always played a part in how the figurines have been interpreted and frequently give it an emotional fervour (Hamilton, 1996: 282). While it is true that some Goddess movement adherents have appropriated the past to serve a contemporary feminist agenda, one might cynically argue that feminist archaeologists have appropriated the past and invested considerable effort in debunking Gimbutas to reinforce their own professional status within the discipline. If Goddess feminists have appropriated and colonised the past and produced subjective, partial accounts, so, too, have archaeologists, including feminist archaeologists. Any interpretation of the past is a social product which arguably has as much to do with the historical moment in which it is produced as it has to do with the historical moment to which it refers. At this particular historical moment, feminist archaeologists seem bent on producing arguments and interpretations which undermine and oppose those of Gimbutas and others (like Mellaart) who have proposed the existence of ancient Goddess-centred societies.

Goddess Feminism and Appropriation

Where the issue of appropriation *has* arisen for discussion within Goddess feminism, it has been in connection with living spiritual traditions rather than ancient ones. Asphodel Long describes how, as time has gone on, the focus of the movement in Britain has shifted away from South American, African, and other traditional religions to 'home goddesses'—those of ancient Britain and northern Europe. She tells of the dilemma she faced when asked to teach a postgraduate course on African goddesses, which she refused because she did not want to take up a 'colonialist' position (Long, 1995: 26–27). At the same time as the British movement was turning to 'home goddesses', however, it appears that they were readily embracing material on ancient Greek, Roman, and Near Eastern goddesses. The Fall 1992 issue of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* includes a special section on "Appropriation and Reciprocity", but again, it has to do with the appropriation of living traditions and with the way in which feminists make use of one another's work, rather than with appropriation from prehistoric societies. A number of New Zealand women are uncomfortable about or critical of the way in which elements of Native American religions in particular (for example, ideas and practices relating to shamanism) have been appropriated by the North American Goddess movement. At worst, this is regarded as cultural theft by a more powerful social group (mostly white, middle-class women), as well as being a phoney de-contextualisation of religious cultural elements. There is a hyper-sensitivity in this country about appropriating any kind of cultural property from indigenous peoples because of the challenges which *Pakeha* (non-indigenous, European-descended) New Zealanders have faced from Maori, particularly in relation to land, but also in relation to all kinds of cultural knowledge. (However, to my knowledge *Pakeha* have not been specifically accused of appropriating Maori spirituality.) Thus the Goddess movement in New Zealand, which is largely a middle-class, *Pakeha*

phenomenon, while highly respectful of Maori spirituality, does not attempt to pursue or incorporate it to any great extent. At most, well-known *wahine atua* (female deities) associated with particular points of the annual seasonal round may be verbally acknowledged at the beginning of a ritual, and when a ritual is held outdoors in a public place, the tribe associated with the area, the *tangata whenua* (literally 'people of the land') are often honoured. I have never heard a discussion about appropriation in relation to ancient goddesses or ancient societies among New Zealand women.

There are, of course, many Goddess feminists, including some in New Zealand, who seem to see the appropriation of religious elements from other societies as unproblematic, claiming that there is universal value in a great diversity of spiritual beliefs and practices, and that indigenous cultures in particular are the repositories of valuable spiritual knowledge which has been lost and needs to be retrieved by Western societies. These women see themselves as learning respectfully, rather than poaching, from other cultures. Starhawk writes:

> [A]ny real spiritual power we gain from any tradition carries with it responsibility. If we learn from African drum rhythms or the Lakota sweat lodge, we have incurred an obligation to not romanticize the people we have learned from but to participate in the very real struggles being waged for liberation, land, and cultural survival. (Starhawk, 1989: 214)

Starhawk herself has a long history of dedicated political activity in this and other vital areas, but it could not really be said that the movement as a whole mobilises for such causes (although individuals within it have done and still do). Whatever Starhawk says, one senses a mix of romantic nostalgia for the 'primitive' or exotic and cultural ignorance, when women proclaim the potency of, for example, their power animal or dream-catcher.

Some women in the movement defend and even celebrate their borrowing of religious elements from past and present cultures, seeing the resulting collage of de-contextualised beliefs, deities, and ritual practices as legitimate in a post-modern world. One New Zealand woman described to me the movement as "very much part of the postmodern moment". She saw no problem in gathering up spiritual elements from a range of sources, or indeed inventing Goddesses and rituals, if that was what women wished to do. The creative aspect of the movement, where women choose and define their beliefs and practices as they see fit, is what many hold dear about Goddess spirituality. It seems that there is little agreement with Goodison and Morris's injunction that "'The past is a foreign country'; and it is not there to serve us" (Goodison & Morris, 1998: 20).

The Past is a Foreign Country: Malta

The Goddess literature paints Malta, a small archipelago (316 square km) lying in the middle of the Mediterranean, 93 km south of Sicily and 300 km north of Libya, as one of the most important sites of ancient Goddess worship. Gimbutas describes Malta as possessing "some of the most magnificent Neolithic temples" where rituals connected with birth, death, and regeneration were carried out by a society in which "women's activities took on sacred meaning" (Gimbutas,

Figure 1. Popularly known as the 'Sleeping Lady'. Clay figurine with traces of red colouring on a couch. According to Gimbutas, she is a Goddess or priestess, possibly practising the rite of incubation. Hal Saflieni hypogeum, 3300–3000 B.C. Length: 12 cm. Photograph courtesy of National Museum of Archaeology, Malta.

1999: 93, 98). Johnson describes the temples as "awesome" and "fabulous" (Johnson, 1988: 25, 63). Baring and Cashford say that Malta has "the earliest and most interesting complex of megalithic temples in the world (apart, perhaps, from Stonehenge and Avebury)" and suggest that Malta, with its mid-Mediterranean location, may have been "a sacred centre of influence" (Baring & Cashford, 1991: 101). Donna Read's film *Goddess Remembered* of 1989[8] opens with a large Maltese 'Goddess' statue (see Figure 1) gliding across the screen while the narrator re-creates a utopian ancient world which was peaceful, matrifocal, egalitarian, earth-honouring, and Goddess-worshipping. An internationally distributed newspaper, called *Goddessing Regenerated*, is edited from Malta; it identifies Malta as possessing many remnants of an ancient, woman-centred religion and culture.[9]

Malta's reputation in the Goddess movement draws sizeable numbers, although not droves, of women pilgrims from many countries each year. Some visit as independent tourists, while others join tours organised by a number of operators based mostly outside Malta. In 1999, there were tours from Germany, Holland, and a number from America and Canada. Women who make the pilgrimage often enthuse about their experiences, relating epiphanic moments in the temples and their sense of 'coming home' to matrifocal roots.[10] One described the Hypogeum, a remarkable subterranean temple, in the following way:

> … I felt moved beyond words and I felt immense gratitude for having the opportunity to be there. The power of the Hypogeum to heal and transform felt very alive even in these modern times. I experienced the energy there as a profound kindness that opened my heart and flooded me with a sense of being held, loved, forgiven, empowered. I left with

> a joyful heart and a feeling of deep longing for what I know we have lost in this modern culture … [11]

The enormous enthusiasm for Malta's Temple Culture expressed by foreign pilgrims is not shared by the majority of today's Maltese, who are overwhelmingly Roman Catholic (98% of the population). Certainly, if one is looking for evidence of a contemporary veneration of the sacred feminine, signs of a deep reverence for the Madonna are visible everywhere: as well as in churches, there are statues in street corner niches, shrines in buses, and plaques beside people's front doors. The Madonna has her own radio station, and her name is frequently recalled in people's names, both female and male.[12] The Madonna is by far the most popular village patron saint, being represented in a number of versions 44 times (Jesus is represented only five times).[13] One woman told me that in her experience, Marian devotion is stronger in Malta than anywhere else in the Mediterranean.[14] Just as many in the Goddess movement see Mary as a survival—in diminished form—of the ancient Mother Goddess; at least some Maltese trace a relationship between Mary and the neolithic Goddess in Malta. A prominent Maltese priest, Professor Peter Serracino Inglott, wrote a paper which makes such a connection, entitled "The Fat Lady of Tarxien: A Dialogue on Woman as God, Priest and Politician" (Serracino Inglott, 1986).[15] Professor Richard England, a renowned Maltese architect, draws inspiration for some of his contemporary churches from the distinctive, rounded shapes of the neolithic temples, which he says evoke the womb of Mother Earth, and he asserts that a continuous thread in Maltese religious history has been the central importance of the feminine dimension of divinity.[16] When I asked another Maltese man, a teacher in a tertiary institution, why people prayed to Mary instead of to God or Jesus, he replied that "The cult of the Mother Goddess is still alive in Malta".

However, these individuals are exceptions. While a few Maltese make an intellectual connection between the past and present, most devout Maltese Catholics seem to see and feel little or no connection with the pagan Goddess-worshippers of 5000 years ago. Professor Serracino Inglott, although a priest, certainly does not represent the mainstream view of the Catholic Church. Even those who trace an historical link between the past and present seldom express a deep, personal, spiritual or emotional connection to the temples and their remains in the way that the foreign, modern Goddess-worshippers do who visit the sites. Certainly, there are those in the middle classes for whom the temples are very important symbols of national and cultural identity which are unique on a global scale and urgently require greater efforts in terms of conservation. Those involved in guiding tourists and guarding temples and those with an interest in history and heritage are often extremely knowledgeable and passionate about the sites. However, members of these special groups and the great majority of Maltese more generally rarely sense a *spiritual* link to the pre-Christian period. People have a sense of the temples as being part of their general cultural heritage, and they are proud that Malta is the home of such remarkable sites, but the importance of the temples is not a contemporary religious one. My conclusion is the same as that of the Maltese archaeologist Reuben Grima: the temples are things that tourists are interested in; for the Maltese, they are places which have commercial and general historical value only (Grima, 1998).

A growing number of Maltese artists constitute an important exception to this

generalisation. I interviewed a number who have drawn on the symbolism of the Temple Culture in their work, and several expressed a deep sense of spiritual rootedness in the Maltese landscape of which the temples are an integral part. They talked about the value of the metaphor of the earth as the Great Mother, of the themes of cyclicity, fertility, and nurturance, and they spoke nostalgically of a peace-loving, earth-honouring neolithic society. Yet all, even those sympathetic to feminism and those who have friends among the foreign Goddess-worshippers, were quick to distance themselves personally from a gendered or politicised approach to the Temple Culture, such as that adopted by many of the foreign pilgrims, feeling that it is inappropriate for contemporary gender politics to co-opt the past.[17]

Explaining the lack of high value placed on neolithic culture and its remains by the majority of Maltese in a discussion of 19th-century painting, Sant Cassia, a Maltese anthropologist, states that for Maltese, the arrival of St. Paul on the island in A.D. 60 marked not only the beginning of their 'history', but also their designation as a 'chosen people'. "[B]ecause Christianity has been taken to be one of the most potent symbols of ethnicity", he writes, "it acted as a barrier to a fuller identification with, and understanding of the pre-Christian period… [T]he ruins are mute testimonies of an unknown silent past with very little connection to contemporary realities" (Sant Cassia, 1993: 358–359). Grima argues that the 'otherness' of the past has been reinforced by "a long history of exclusion". During "the early 19th century the people actively interested in these sites were almost exclusively foreign and primarily British" (Grima, 1998: 39). Grima claims that Maltese people have "not yet appropriated" the prehistoric sites; the conclusion has been that "it is the foreigner who can relate to these stones, and make them speak" (ibid).

Of course, one specific group of foreigners who are currently 'making the stones speak' are the Goddess feminists. I asked a class of Maltese anthropology students to whom I showed the *Goddess Remembered* video for their thoughts about it. They enjoyed the film as a whole, but some seemed surprised at the way in which the Maltese past was represented, and several objected to it. There was an implied, although not explicit, accusation of appropriation in the criticism that the film was "using archaeological evidence to prove their point", and presented a particular view of the past without acknowledging that it was not the only view. One student criticised the film for being 'unscientific', and another was irritated by the emphasis on the feminine. ("Why do they always talk about priestesses, why not a priest?"[18]) The students seemed as astonished by the orthodoxy presented in the film as I was by the very different orthodoxy (discussed in the following section) which I encountered in archaeological circles regarding a 'proper' interpretation of the 'Goddess' statues.

In a discussion with other Maltese anthropology students, during which I explicitly asked them whether in their view Maltese people felt their past was being appropriated by foreigners, my question was initially met with incomprehension, not because of a linguistic problem, but because such a concept seemed to have not occurred to them. I explained the situation in New Zealand where the Maori vociferously assert their ownership rights over all kinds of indigenous cultural property, including prehistoric sites, and constantly challenge and thwart attempts at appropriation by *Pakeha*, whether they are government officials, land developers, historians, anthropologists, tourists,

museum personnel, or anyone else. As I was concerned that the students would not tell me what they truly thought about their own situation for fear of causing me, another foreigner, offence, I made it clear that I sympathised with the Maori position.

Yet the students were adamant that the Maltese do not feel the way the Maori do; indeed, they implied that the latter seemed rather bad-tempered and bad-mannered. Firstly, they stressed, the temple sites should not be regarded as the exclusive property of the Maltese, just because they are on Maltese soil. They are designated 'World Heritage sites' and are far too important to be regarded in a possessive way. Rather, they should be available to all who wish to appreciate them. Secondly, I was told, Malta's temples have been a destination for religious pilgrims since the period in which they were originally built, when people are believed to have visited them from around the Mediterranean. So nothing is new. Malta has always been regarded as a sacred isle; the modern pilgrims are part of a long tradition and are not harming anyone. Thirdly, the students said, most local Maltese do not appreciate the temples enough or place sufficiently high importance on their conservation. (This view is re-iterated in a newspaper item quoted below.) At least the foreign Goddess pilgrims care about the temples, some lobby and raise money for their preservation. Moreover, the Maltese can learn a lot from foreigners who research the temples and this knowledge is valuable in enhancing a Maltese understanding of the neolithic. Finally, I was told, the temples are a source of national pride and, along with other heritage sites, provide important financial income. Malta needs the tourists.

These ideas were echoed by many others with whom I discussed the issue of appropriation. I was astonished that very few saw a problem. One person said she had heard grumblings that one of the Goddess tour guides was "building her business on our temples", emphasising again the commercial value of the temples to the Maltese, and two others said they became "a little irritated" when the Temple Period was portrayed as a feminist utopia. This seemed to have more to do with an objection to feminism than an objection to using the past for a contemporary agenda. Yet, on the whole, the Maltese are slow to express indignation that the remains of their past are being eagerly claimed to represent the spiritual roots of women who visit from distant countries and cultures, and incorporated in utopian reconstructions of the past.

However, in the middle of 1999, an event happened which did raise cries of indignation. On 1st June, *The Times of Malta* announced that one of the American women who leads tours to Malta, and who has established a foundation to promote greater understanding of Malta's prehistory and to assist in the preservation of the temples, was hoping to build a replica of Mnajdra temple in Florida.[19] The objective was to create an open-air museum and a learning centre (with people re-enacting the past in period costume) so that visitors could have something akin to a 'living experience' of prehistoric Malta. The park would be self-financing and any extra revenue would be put towards the conservation of the 'real' Maltese temples. Ten days later, Conrad Thake declared in *The Times* that the plan was a Disney-inspired farce:

> To build a sham replica of a world monument over seven thousand years old in an entirely different geographical and cultural context,

> with some additional exotic palm trees thrown in for good measure (as if it were a reminder of one of our more recent embellishment promenade projects) represents in my view the ultimate in pastiche and tasteless kitsch …This replica initiative makes a mockery of all that Mnajdra stands for. Instead of stone megaliths weighing a few tons, one would presume the mock-up to be made up of some hollow expanded polystyrene blocks. (*The Times*, Friday, 11th June, 1999)

The writer, who unfortunately did not spell out 'all that Mnajdra stands for' (and added 2000 years to the site's age), implored the local authorities to "dissuade our Florida friends from pursuing this replica project any further". A week later, another correspondent of *The Times*, Vanessa Macdonald, scolded Thake:

> I do not know if Mr Thake knows the lady behind this project. It is his loss, as apart from the fact that she is luminously beautiful, she has also worked ceaselessly (and thanklessly, it seems) to promote the temples in the US, lecturing, passing on information by internet, collecting money, organising awareness campaigns in schools here.
>
> The idea is that if we are unable or unwilling to care for our temples ourselves, then at least the rest of the world can care enough about them to force us to look after them. But before that happens, someone has to know about them! ….
>
> Get down off your ideological high horse [Mr Thake] and be grateful that there is at least someone—and a foreigner to boot—who cares enough. (*The Times*, Friday, 18th June, 1999)

I asked a number of Maltese people for their views on the planned imitation temple. One professional man said that he understands and appreciates that the Goddess pilgrims want to visit Malta, but when they start building replicas, "That, I'm afraid, gets slightly on my nerves". He felt all efforts should be directed at preserving the real temples. An archaeologist said, pragmatically and somewhat ruefully, that a virtue of the plan was that at least many Americans would be able to have some kind of experience of a Maltese temple cheaply and without causing further damage to the real temples. Another man, a craftsman who makes his living moulding neolithic Goddess replicas for the Maltese tourist market, saw the potential for a lucrative contract and promptly wrote to the American woman offering his services to produce a better product than he presumed she had planned. Thus, the range of responses has been considerable, but no-one suggested that Malta's religious heritage is appropriated, although Thake is clearly concerned about Malta's cultural heritage being poached and reproduced synthetically in the United States.

While one can conclude from this discussion that Goddess feminists are seen by some Maltese as appropriating the Maltese past, they are the last in a long line (including foreign artists, archaeologists, tourists, and others) to do so, as Maltese writers Grima and Sant Cassia have shown. In fact, despite the recent (brief) uproar over the Florida replica, most Maltese still seem unaware that their temples are the destination of Goddess movement pilgrims; the women constitute a tiny component of the large mass of tourists who daily visit the sites. Few of the Maltese who know about the Goddess pilgrims' visits and attitudes to the sites resent their appropriation, most do not care, some are flattered,

Figure 2. Popularly known as the 'Venus of Malta' and interpreted as a 'fertility Goddess'. Clay figurine from Hagar Qim temple, 3500–3000 B.C. Height: 13 cm. Photograph courtesy of the National Museum of Archaeology, Malta.

virtually all welcome any tourists, so long as they are careful, respectful, and rich. It has to be said that the alienation of the Maltese from their pre-Christian past has probably as much to do with their vigorous embrace of Christianity and their conception that Maltese history and nationhood began with the arrival of St. Paul, as Sant Cassia (1993) argues, as it has to do with a sense of alienation resulting from foreign appropriation, constant though it has been. This is not to diminish or excuse the Goddess movement's appropriation of the Temple Culture, but to place it in context.

Contesting Discourses

The neolithic temples and hypogea (underground temples) in Malta have produced a range of statues and figurines, all of which are believed by Goddess movement adherents to represent a Great Goddess. Some of these figurines, such as the famous 'Sleeping Lady' (Figure 1) and the 'Venus of Malta' (Figure 2) are full-breasted and obviously female, but most are much more stylised figures, with very full, rounded hips, thighs, calves and upper arms, and a relatively small fold across the chest (Figure 3). They either wear skirts (pleated like that of the 'Sleeping Lady') or their legs are positioned so that their genitalia do not show. In popular Maltese discourse, all these figures are said to represent a 'Mother Goddess' or a 'fertility Goddess'; they are commonly referred to as 'Fat Ladies'.

Figure 3. Limestone statuette with socket for insertion of separately worked head, one of several in this style (some of which are seated on the ground), from Hagar Qim temple. Popularly known as one of the 'Fat Lady' series representing the Mother Goddess. Archaeologists emphasise that the statue has no visible gender. Gimbutas describes it as 'Standing Goddess'. Height: 38 cm. Photograph courtesy of National Museum of Archaeology, Malta.

Having heard and read about these 'Goddesses' in the Goddess literature, and having been told about them by many Maltese people, I was astonished to find that in the extensive, handsomely renovated display of neolithic material in the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta, the capital, there was no mention in any of the information panels of a 'fertility Goddess'. Indeed, the term 'goddess' (lower case 'g') is used once only in the display in connection with the 'Sleeping Lady', and it is placed in inverted commas, presumably to indicate that this is a popular interpretation of the figure. (Interestingly, a more common popular interpretation of this statue is that she is a priestess of the Goddess.) The word 'fertility' is used once only in the museum display, in connection with a solitary case of 'Phallic Symbols' (some of which are not indisputably phallic to my eye).[20] There are a number of figurines with exaggerated female genitals on display, but these are discussed as if they are genderless: they are simply called 'figurines'. The 'Venus of Malta' (Figure 2) is described as a piece of art which uses naturalistic representation, she is not linked with fertility, despite the name by which she is popularly known, and the viewer is directed to look particularly at the *back* of the figure (which thus bypasses her obvious femininity). A case displaying a number of fragments depicting pubic triangles and obviously female figurines, three of which have large breasts and bellies and swollen vulvae (Figure 4), has no information panel.

Clearly, archaeological discourse and popular discourse, the latter coinciding with the Goddess feminism discourse, are poles apart regarding the proper interpretation of the Temple Period and its artefacts. When I spoke with two archaeologists on separate occasions, it was obvious that neither had much time for a Gimbutas-inspired reconstruction of the Maltese neolithic (although they

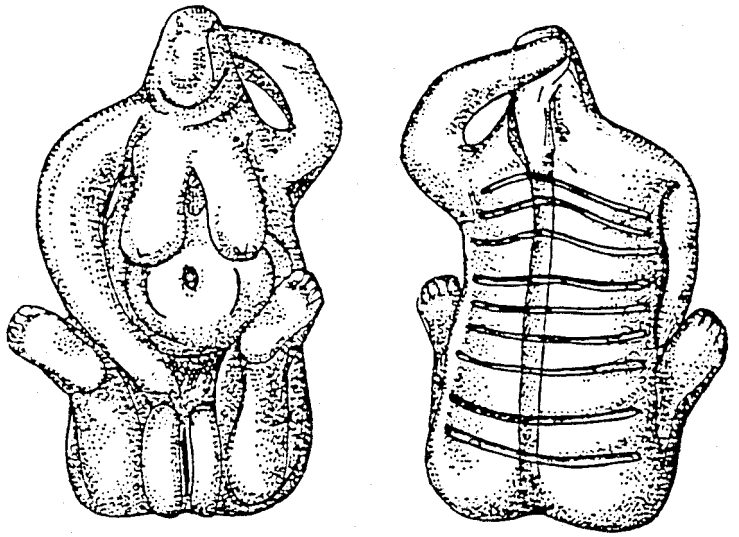

Figure 4. One of several clay figurines described by Gimbutas (1991: 224) as "The Birth Goddess of Malta" and by J. D. Evans (1959: 148) as "pathological", "deformed", with an "abdominal tumour". The nine lines inscribed on her back may represent the nine months of gestation. Drawn in reconstruction (found with right leg and face damaged). Height: 7 cm. Source: Gimbutas, 1991: 224.

were both polite and very helpful). One told me that it is foreigners who "become dewy-eyed" about the idea of an ancient Mother Goddess. The official archaeological line in Malta, which coincides with that of the British archaeologists who have excavated there, is that the bulk of the statues and figurines are not obviously female, and that there is no conclusive evidence that Malta was ever the matristic, Goddess-worshipping utopia it has been portrayed by Gimbutas and others (for example, see Malone, 1998: 163). Again, Gimbutas is credited with interpreting the neolithic religion of Malta as centred on a "fertility deity" (Malone, 1998: 151), which makes it easier to dismiss her interpretation as simplistic, although Gimbutas herself spoke in much broader terms of a Regeneratrix who gave, took, and regenerated life (Gimbutas, 1991: x).

The recently opened (April 1998) museum display in Malta, with its virtual silence on femininity and Goddesses, strongly resists a Gimbutas-style or popular interpretation of the material. Yet archaeological discourse in Malta was not always divorced from popular discourse, but has become increasingly so in recent decades. One explanation for the gulf between discourses could be that the popular discourse simply has not yet caught up with the revised archaeological interpretation. It is, however, very noticeable that archaeologists became vehemently opposed to interpretations which follow a Gimbutas line at the time when the Goddess movement became widely interested in the possibility of ancient matristic societies. It is hard not to conclude that they objected to the political agenda of the Goddess movement as much as they objected to Gimbutas for her faulty methods and style of analysis. Just as an explicit politics informs Goddess feminists' interpretations of the past, a philosophical position and politics inform all interpretations of the past. Much archaeological effort at present is directed towards undermining Gimbutas and those within the Goddess movement who have adopted her ideas. In terms of

a favoured archaeological interpretation, the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction from Gimbutas's stance.

All interpretations of the past have a bias, and—as feminist archaeologists have shown—traditional interpretations frequently demonstrated an androcentric bias. This is also true with regard to Malta. For example, the British archaeologist, J. D. Evans, who has published the most comprehensive archaeological summary of Malta, describes the small figurines with the large bellies and breasts (Figure 4) as "pathological", "deformed", "horribly distorted female forms" with an "abdominal tumour" (Evans, 1959: 148). In 1996, he was still saying that these figures, which look very much like women in a late stage of pregnancy, have a "pathological condition" (Evans, 1996: 44). Whether this is blindness to, or prejudice against, the pregnant body, it is very much the view of a male gaze. Androcentric bias can be seen in the way in which artefacts and anthropomorphic figurines in the museum display are interpreted or not interpreted: figurines with exaggerated female genitals and breasts are labelled as if they are genderless ('Red Skorba Figurines') or they are not labelled at all, while a handful of phallic representations are labelled 'Phallic Symbols' and explicitly interpreted as pertaining to fertility.

It has to be said that the discussion about the anthropomorphic statues, particularly the stylised, ample-bodied figures (see Figure 3) found in Malta's neolithic temples has become bogged down in unresolvable squabbles about the sex of the statues. The debate has become politically charged to the extent that attributing or denying female sex in relation to the statues is taken as an indication of where one stands in relation to the Goddess movement, Gimbutas, scientific rigour versus fanciful dreaming, and even feminism itself. The debate could profit greatly from a consideration of Green's (1997) discussion of the interpretation of ambiguous or ambivalent iconographic representation. Green argues that the expression of gender in imagery has to do not only with biological sexual identity, but also with the determination of gender as a social construct within the society which produced the image. Imagery cannot be interpreted simply in terms of a dichotomous male/female framework; "gender-attribution may be fluid and mutable" or liminal (Green, 1997: 899). Green says that we need to take a fresh look at anthropomorphic images which exhibit a-sexuality: "in some instances the lack of gender-identification may itself be a positive, deliberate symbolic device to represent something different or other: an individual whose status is manifest by genderless depiction, or a deity perceived as above gender stereotype" (Green, 1997: 901). Similarly a "monstrous" image may indicate "its removal from the earthly world of humans and its attachment to the spirit world, where the terrestrial confines of gender and species are irrelevant" (Green, 1997: 899). I think it seems very likely that Malta's 'monstrous', anthropomorphic images (see Figure 3) signal, among other things such as abundance and fullness, transcendence above both biological sex and the human realm in general. It is missing the point to focus on their (absent) sex. It is also missing the point to focus on their obesity, which scholars do incessantly (Malone, 1998: 155), and ignore their composure, grace, and elegant roundedness (which need not be read as obesity). So much of the archaeological debate about neolithic figurines and statues is taken up with a-sexuality that the fact that there are numerous identifiably female figurines from a number of sites (undoubtedly with different meanings and functions), but no identifiably male figurines, is overlooked.[21]

Conclusion

While it is true that Goddess feminists have produced utopian reconstructions of Malta's past, which Maltese archaeologists dismiss rather scornfully, personal relationships between the two groups appear to be surprisingly friendly, mutually supportive, and fundamentally pragmatic. One archaeologist facilitates special entry for Goddess enthusiasts to the Hypogeum, a spectacular site which has been closed to tourists for years due to major conservation work. I am personally very grateful to him for making my own visits possible. Another Maltese archaeologist gives talks on Malta's prehistory to tour groups, and experts on the temples have also been flown to the Unites States to give talks to Goddess enthusiasts. Intellectually, they may have little time for 'dewy-eyed' reconstructions of Malta's past, but they are grateful for the money raised and donated by the American-based foundation towards the conservation of the temples, education programmes, a new archaeology laboratory, chairs for the museum's seminar hall, and so on. The primary goal of both sides is to preserve the temples, and both sides appear to believe that they are benefiting from the deal.

Just as Malta has been colonised by a stream of different peoples over seven millennia, its past continues to be colonised by foreigners with competing interpretations, politics, and agendas, including foreign archaeologists. While the Goddess movement has produced feminist utopian reconstructions of the past, the reconstructions of archaeologists, both foreign and local, seem to me often determinedly blind to the sacred feminine, determinedly (and angrily) anti-Gimbutas, and sometimes androcentric. While archaeological scholars, including feminists, have debated the politics of representation in relation to Europe's neolithic past, they have been noticeably unconcerned with the politics of their own interpretations. It is ironic that the most vigorous accusations of appropriation have tended to come from feminist scholars rather than from the indigenous peoples whose pasts have been appropriated.

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NOTES

1. Here Grosz is discussing Luce Irigaray's ideas.
2. For a succinct summary of Goddess theories since the mid-19th century, see Hutton's article (1997). See also Goodison and Morris's recent book *Ancient Goddesses: The Myths and the Evidence* (1998).
3. My DPhil dissertation, completed in 1993, is entitled "Re-membering the Witch and the Goddess: Feminist Ritual-makers in New Zealand" (University of Waikato, New Zealand).
4. Gimbutas's best known works are *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500–3500 B.C.: Myths and Cult Images* (1982), *The Language of the Goddess* (1989), and *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe* (1991). The editing and finishing work on Gimbutas's last book, *The Living Goddesses* (1999), was carried out after her death from cancer by Miriam Robbins Dexter at the request of Gimbutas's daughter.
5. See *From the Realm of the Ancestors: An Anthology in Honor of Marija Gimbutas* edited by Joan Marler (1997), a collection of writings dedicated to the memory of Gimbutas. Since her death, her devotees have continued to meet at lectures and conferences to discuss her work. Courses in archaeomythology, which explore the international influence of her work, are offered from the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. 'Archaeomythology' is a term said to have been created by Gimbutas meaning "a multidisciplinary approach to scholarship that includes not only mythology and archaeology, but linguistics, comparative religion, ethnology and cultural history" (Cichon, 1999: 26).
6. Given her criticism of the Goddess movement for presenting de-contextualised considerations of figurines, it is surprising to see Meskell's superficial, de-contextualised comment about the Maltese carved stone figure from Hagar Qim (Meskell, 1995: 77, Figure 2): "From a purely representational point of view we could be witnessing obesity rather than divinity." There is no discussion of the statue's archaeological context or the neolithic Maltese cultural context.
7. Gimbutas also has critics from other disciplines. Juliette Wood, a folklorist, finds Gimbutas's use of 'ancient beliefs' problematic because she moves "from period to period and from culture to culture with no indication of context, …. uses analogy and suggestion but offers no supporting evidence", fails to document fully her claims, and (in *The Language of the Goddess*) presents a bibliography which "contains very little modern and mainstream folklore research, and too much fringe and outmoded nineteenth-century material" (Wood, 1996: 20).
8. The film is a Studio D Production of The National Film Board of Canada, and is distributed by Educational Media, Australia.
9. The paper comprises 36 pages and is published twice a year. It is an eclectic forum for interviews, articles, poetry, art, reviews, letters, and a great deal of information about 'Goddess events' world-wide.
10. An advertisement in *Goddessing Regenerated* (Issue 10, p. 17) for a tour in November 1999 invites women to explore Malta's prehistoric places "and our matrifocal roots".
11. This quotation is from an e-mail message sent to me by a woman I met in the Hypogeum shortly after I returned from my first visit to Malta. I myself also experienced the Hypogeum as awe-inspiring.
12. Many names for girls and women are versions of the name 'Mary' or are in some way related to the Madonna. For example: Marija, Concetta, Cettina, Cetta, Assunta, Sunta, Carmela, Nunzjata, Lourdes, Fatima. Male names include Mario and Carmelo.
13. Of 91 statues pictured in Joseph Grech's *Vari ta' Malta u Ghawdex* (1998), the Madonna is represented in various forms 44 times, Jesus is represented five times, other female saints five times, and a great variety of other male saints account for the remaining 37 statues.
14. On Marian devotion generally see, for example, Marina Warner (1976), Benko (1993), Carroll (1986), Baring and Cashford (1991: chpt. 14).
15. The 'Fat Lady of Tarxien' refers to a megalithic monument (thought to have been originally two metres high) of the lower half of a skirted figure, declared in popular discourse to represent a Great Goddess. The statue was found at Tarxien temple complex.
16. I interviewed Professor England on 26th January, 2000.
17. My next research project will focus explicitly on the way in which Maltese artists relate to and use neolithic symbols.
18. For this Maltese Catholic, who has grown up surrounded by priests, the idea of a priestess seems quite outlandish.

19. This woman first visited Malta in the early 1990s, became entranced with the temples, and has made it her life's work to help preserve them. She runs tours for American and Canadian tourists, lobbies UNESCO for funds to conserve the temples, and helped the Department of Museums launch a major education programme in Maltese schools in 1999. The foundation helped sponsor an astronomy conference which was attended by international astronomers, historians, scientists, and artists in January 1999. (Mnajdra temple has astronomical alignments.)
20. A Maltese feminist laughed when she read this in draft, saying that in her view *most* of these artefacts are not phalli.
21. The 'phallic symbols' are symbols only: none are connected to torsos.

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