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Baltic Archaeology, Cultural History, Ancient Lithuanian Symbolism, Old Europe, and the Archaeomythology of Marija Gimbutas

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Abstract. Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė (Gimbutas) (1921–1994) was born and raised in Lithuania within a family of physicians and intellectuals devoted to the preservation of Lithuanian folk culture. She studied archaeology with Professor Jonas Puzinas who was the first scientifically trained archaeologist in independent Lithuania. Marija Gimbutas was thoroughly trained in Eastern European archaeology, Baltic prehistory, Indo-European linguistics, ethnology, history, folklore, mythology, and European languages taught by the most accomplished Lithuanian scholars in their fields. In 1942 she earned a Master's degree at Vilnius University for her thesis on "Burial Practices in the Lithuanian Iron Age." In 1946 she earned her doctorate in archaeology from Tübingen University in Germany before immigrating to the United States in 1949. This paper traces her prodigious production of major publications and scholarly achievements fostered by her multidisciplinary education in Lithuania. It discusses the development of her Kurgan hypothesis, her excavations in Southeastern Europe, her theory of Old Europe, her formulation of archaeomythology, and the ancient veneration of the earth as the source of life.
Keywords: Marija Gimbutas, Jonas Puzinas, The Balts, Old Europe, archaeomythology.

Baltų archeologija, kultūros istorija, senovės lietuvių simbolika, Senoji Europa ir Marijos Gimbutienės archeomitologija

Santrauka. Marija Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė (Gimbutas) (1921–1994) gimė ir užaugo Lietuvoje, gydytojų, mokslininkų, istorikų ir intelektualų šeimoje. Buvo atsidavusi lietuvių kalbos, tapatybės ir liaudies kultūros išsaugojimui. Ji studijavo archeologiją pas profesorių dr. Joną Puziną, kuris buvo pirmasis aukštuosius mokslus baigęs archeologas nepriklausomoje Lietuvoje (1918–1940). Jo sistemingi kursai Vytauto Didžiojo universitete Kaune ir Vilniaus universitete padėjo šios disciplinos mokslinį pagrindą. Marija Gimbutienė buvo atsidėjusi mokslui. Ji nuodugniai studijavo Rytų Europos archeologijos, baltų priešistorės, indoeuropiečių kalbotyros, etnologijos, istorijos, tautosakos, mitologijos ir Europos kalbų dalykus, kuriuos jai dėstė geriausi tų sričių Lietuvos mokslininkai. Ji dalyvavo etnografinėse ekspedicijose, jose rinko tautosaką ir kaimo moterų išsaugotus dainų žodžius. 1942 m. Vilniaus universitete įgijo magistro laipsnį apgynusi baigiamąjį darbą „Laidosena Lietuvoje geležies amžiuje". 1946 m. Tiubingeno universitete Vokietijoje ji įgijo archeologijos daktaro laipsnį. 1949 m. Marija Gimbutienė emigravo į Jungtines Amerikos Valstijas. Savo mokslinių tyrimų ir rašymo metais Harvardo universitete, o vėliau dirbdama Europos archeologijos profesore Kalifornijos universitete Los Andžele, Marija Gimbutienė buvo pripažinta pasaulinio lygio Rytų Europos priešistorės ir indoeuropiečių bronzos amžiaus žinove.

Šiame straipsnyje pasakojama apie nuostabų Marijos Gimbutienės stambių knygų bei straipsnių rašymą ir pasiekimus moksle, kuriuos paskatino jos daugiadalykis išsilavinimas, įgytas Lietuvoje. Be to, aptariama jos dėmesys lietuvių liaudies simbolikai, kurganų hipotezės formuluotė ir kasinėjimai Pietryčių Europoje. Taip pat nagrinėjama jos skelbta Senosios Europos, kaip taikios, matrifokalinės, ne indoeuropietiškos civilizacijos, teorija, tarpdalykinė archeomitologijos formuluotė ir senovės žemės, kaip gyvybės šaltinio, garbinimo pripažinimas. Be viso to, šis straipsnis aprašo Marijos Gimbutienės sugrįžimą į Lietuvą metai prieš jos mirtį, kai jai buvo suteiktas Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto garbės daktaro vardas.
Reikšminiai žodžiai: Marija Gimbutas, Jonas Puzinas, baltai, Senoji Europa, archeomitologija.

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Introduction – Early Years in Vilnius

Marija Birutė Alseikaitė was born on January 23, 1921, in Vilnius, the ancient capital of Lithuania, into a family of intellectuals and cultural activists who worked diligently for freedom from oppression under extremely turbulent conditions. Her parents, Dr. Veronika Janulaitytė-Alseikienė (1883–1971) and Dr. Danielius Alseika (1881–1936), were both medical doctors who founded the first Lithuanian hospital in Vilnius in 1918. They tirelessly supported Lithuanian independence and the preservation of Lithuanian language, arts, and folklore. Marija Alseikaitė inherited a complex stream of historical, intellectual, and spiritual influences, resulting in a lifelong dedication to interdisciplinary scholarship. This paper traces her unique educational experiences and the prodigious production of major publications and scholarly achievements fostered by her multidisciplinary education in Lithuania. It discusses the development of her Kurgan hypothesis, her excavations in Southeastern Europe, her theory of Old Europe, her formulation of archaeomythology, and her recognition of the ancient veneration of the earth as the source of life.

On January 23, 1921, while Dr. Alseika was visiting the United States to gather financial support from Lithuanian communities to assist his cultural work in Vilnius, Veronika Alseikienė gave birth to their daughter, Marija Birutė Alseikaitė. A few months later, Veronika took baby Marija to the seaside town of Palanga and dipped her in the water of the Baltic Sea, not far from the hill shrine dedicated to Marija's namesake, Queen Birutė, mother of Vytautas the Great. Birutė was also known as a priestess who tended the sacred fire honoring the pagan deities.

Marija described herself as a beloved child surrounded by her extended family that included, not only her parents, but her brother Vytautas Alseika (who became a journalist, publisher, and film critic), her aunt Julija Janulaitytė-Biliūnienė-Matjošaitienė (1880–1978) (a dentist, who was like her second mother), and her cousin Meilė Matjošaitytė-Lukšienė (1913–2009) (a cultural historian and educational activist). Marija's mother operated a successful ophthalmology practice specializing in early cataract operations. Her father, Dr. Danielius Alseika managed their hospital during the day and worked on his cultural, historical, and political writings at night. As a small child, Marija would tiptoe out of her room and crawl onto his lap where she learned to read while he edited his publications.[1]

Dr. Alseika was the primary leader of Lithuanian resistance to Polish occupation in the Vilnius region and was frequently persecuted, arrested, and threatened with deportation by the Polish authorities who considered him to be an enemy of the state. In the midst of this atmosphere of ongoing struggle, the finest traditional and contemporary writers, artists, activists, and musicians would gather in their large apartment where Dr. Alseikienė would organize concerts, lectures, dinners, and intellectual discussions. Marija recalls, "I had the opportunity to get acquainted with writers and artists such as Vydūnas, Vaižgantas, even Basanavičius, who was taken care of by my parents. When I was four or five years old, I would sit in Basanavičius's easy chair, and I would feel fine. And later, throughout my entire life, Basanavičius's collected folklore remained extraordinarily important for me" (Lukšaitė, 1994, p. 7).

Dr. Jonas Basanavičius (1851–1927), Marija's "adopted grandfather," who was the first to sign the Lithuanian Declaration of Independence in 1918, was a towering figure within Marija Alseikaitė's extended family, and for all Lithuanians. He was a noted physician, folklorist, founder and tireless promoter of the Lithuanian Scientific Society, and a highly respected cultural leader known as the "Patriarch of the Lithuanian National Renaissance" (Senn, 1980, p. 79). In 1882 he founded the clandestine Lithuanian newspaper, Aušra ("Dawn"), that was smuggled into the Russian controlled Lithuanian region during the Tzarist regime to stimulate a new appreciation for Lithuanian language and cultural identity. Although Basanavičius died when Marija was only six years old, his dedication to the preservation of Lithuanian language, ancient folkloric traditions, and his lifelong contributions to science and social development remained a lasting influence throughout her life.

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[1] Interview with Marija Gimbutas by J. Marler, Topanga, CA, 1988.

Marija Alseikaitė's exposure to Lithuania's rich but vanishing heritage was encouraged by her extended family from an early age. They understood that these folkloric treasures were being lost and had to be preserved. When she was a child, Lithuanian deities were still honored in rural communities through songs, stories, dances, and daily and seasonal rituals. "The rivers were sacred, the forest and trees were sacred, the hills were sacred. The earth was kissed and prayers were said every morning, every evening" (Gimbutas quoted in Marler, 1997, p. 9). In the countryside she observed the village people working the soil, seeding and harvesting in their traditional ways. "The old women used sickles and sang while they worked. The songs were very authentic, very ancient. At that moment I fell in love with what is ancient because it was a deep communication and oneness with Earth. I was completely captivated. This was the beginning of my interest in folklore" (Gimbutas quoted in Marler, 1997, p. 9).

Marija's parents were founders of Kultūra, the educational society of the Vilnius Lithuanians, with her father as its chairman. When Marija was ready for formal education, they organized a liberal school for her and other Lithuanian children because it was unthinkable for them to attend Polish or Catholic schools. In 1938, Marija Alseikaitė wrote an article "Mano Mokyklai" (My School) describing her experience of attending this Lithuanian school which had a lasting effect upon her attitude toward formal education. She emphasized that its well-rounded program, so loved by the children, contained a sound pedagogical system that was fed by practice. She wrote, "The fact that today I am interested in music, art, and folklore with all my heart, I am grateful not just to my nature, but mostly to my little school because every day it inspired and awakened and upheld in me that love of the arts" (Alseikaitė, 1938, p. 5 [translated by Indre Antanaitis-Jacobs]). Moreover, her devotion to intellectual achievement that originated in her home environment was formalized in that small but dynamic school. Marija recalls, "From the very beginning the children had total freedom. We were free to create our own individualities, although work for our nation and education always came first."[2] At home she studied and performed classical piano and received private tutelage in multiple languages.

From the time she was a child, Marija bonded with Vilnius as her sacred city, although for Lithuanians the daily realities under Polish occupation were harsh. The city of Vilnius is saturated with history. As a child, she explored every narrow alley and courtyard of the Old City, memorizing its architectural treasures. She had a special love for the SS Peter and Paul Church as her secret "art monument."[3] Marija would disappear on her own to commune with its more than 2,000 historical and mythological sculptures that cover every surface within the whiteness of its Baroque interior, speaking their own gestural language.

The Move to Kaunas

In 1931, when Marija was ten years old, her mother made the fateful decision to move with Marija and her brother Vytautas from Vilnius to Kaunas, Lithuania's provisional capital. Although Dr. Alseikienė had a thriving ophthalmology practice in Vilnius, her health had suffered from the continual stress of living under Polish occupation, and she wanted the children to be educated in free Lithuania, not in Polish or Catholic schools. For Marija, to be separated from her father who remained in Vilnius was the first great shock of her life. A greater shock came in 1936 when her beloved father suddenly died. Following his death, she fell into a depressive tailspin. In an attempt to find her balance, she recalled that her father had encouraged her to become a scholar within the humanities. "All of a sudden I woke up. I had to think what I shall be, what I shall do with my life."[4] So she vowed to fulfill his wish that she would contribute something of value to the world. She began to read intensively and devoted herself to scholarship.

In preparation for her university education, Marija studied multiple Eastern and Western European languages, literature, and history at Aušra Gymnasium in Kaunas. She participated in ethnographic expeditions where

2 Marija Gimbutas interviewed by J. Marler, San Francisco, CA 1987.
3 Marija Gimbutas interviewed by J. Marler, Topanga, CA 1988.
4 Marija Gimbutas interviewed by J. Marler, Topanga, CA 1990.

she sat with village women and recorded their stories and the lyrics of their traditional songs, organized by the Lithuanian Folklore Archives in Kaunas, directed by the respected folklorist and ethnographer Dr. Jonas Balys, with whom she later studied.

In 1938, after graduating with honors from Aušra Gymnasium, Marija Alseikaitė enrolled at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. She initially studied English Literature before focusing on Indo-European philology. She took all of the courses available concerning Indo-European linguistics in the Faculty of Humanities, including the history of Lithuanian language, historical grammar, dialectology, Prussian language and Slavic studies with Professor Pranas Skardžius. She also studied comparative linguistics and Baltic and Slavic languages with Professor Antanas Salys, ethnology and folklore with Professors Juozas Baldžius and Jonas Balys, and history with Professors Ignas Jonynas and Levas Karsavinas (Butrimas, 1997, p. 32). All of her professors represented the most accomplished Lithuanian scholars in their fields.

Marija Alseikaitė's excellent work in these courses was noticed by Professor Jonas Puzinas who encouraged her to study archaeology and to develop an interdisciplinary focus. It was his intention to select the most promising students and to train them in the latest scientific methods in order to cultivate the next generation of professional Lithuanian archaeologists. Marija Alseikaitė appreciated the museum exhibitions of archaeological finds which Dr. Puzinas had meticulously curated, but she was most fascinated by the excursions he organized to early Lithuanian burial sites. To honor her father's memory, she developed a burning desire to study all that could be known about Indo-European burial rituals and folkloric beliefs concerning death and rebirth within Old Lithuanian traditions. She accepted Professor Puzinas's invitation to study archaeology and to join other hand-picked students including Pranas Kulikauskas, Regina Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė, and Rimutė Jablonskytė-Rimantienė who, with Marija, "left a bright mark on Lithuanian and global archaeology" (Zabiela, 2005, 19).

Professor Puzinas was the first scientifically trained archaeologist belonging to the earliest generation of specialists who developed in independent Lithuania (1918–1940). He studied European prehistory, comparative linguistics, and classical archaeology at the University of Heidelberg (1930–1934) where his doctoral dissertation discussed prehistoric research and national consciousness in Lithuania (Dainauskas, 1984, par. 2). He introduced the first systematic study of Lithuanian archaeology that laid the scientific foundation of the discipline, including its periodization, the latest excavation and dating techniques, and the use of Lithuanian archaeological terminology, which he developed in collaboration with the noted linguist Dr. Antanas Salys. Puzinas's habilitation work, *Naujausių proistorinių tyrinėjimų duomenys* (Findings of the most recent archaeological explorations), was published as a textbook in 1938 in which he assembled, summarized, and interpreted data from a range of excavations from 1928 through 1938. This text, in which he created the most contemporary outline of the prehistory of Lithuania (Dainauskas, 1984, par. 8), was studied in depth by Marija Alseikaitė.

Professor Puzinas's courses, which she absorbed, included a wide range of lectures concerning the arrival of the Indo-Europeans, their mixture with indigenous inhabitants of the Baltic region, and the importance of linguistic studies in association with archaeological data to help determine their origin, range of movement, and interaction with other culture groups. He pointed out differences in lifestyle practices within specific bioregions, noting patterns of stasis, movement, and interactions with other peoples over time as reflected in archaeological as well as linguistic evidence, indications of artifact production, trading activities, and evidence of warfare as well as peaceful co-existence. His systematic training informed Marija Alseikaitė's abilities to perceive the results of human activities indicated by current and previous excavations. She utilized these skills to great advantage two decades later when she produced her first two monographs at Harvard University, as discussed below.

In late August 1939, Nazi Germany and the USSR joined forces by signing the Molotov–Ribbentrop Nonaggression Pact that contained a secret rider allowing these previously antagonistic states to divide a large part of Europe into their own spheres of interest. After a series of clandestine negotiations, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia ended up in the Soviet sphere, then on September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, initiating World War II. On September 19, the Soviets captured Vilnius, ending Poland's grip on the Vilnius region. In an attempt to manipulate Lithuania into his own hands, Stalin briefly turned Vilnius over to Lithuania (Venclova, 2009, 182–84).

Return to Vilnius

Many Lithuanians, despite their distrust of Stalin, enthusiastically embraced the liberation of Vilnius as the sudden fulfillment of their ardent dreams, especially Marija, who was ecstatic to be able to return to her beloved city. Vilnius's historic university, which had been operated by the Poles during their occupation, was closed for reorganization on December 15, 1939. Vilnius University was recreated with Lithuanian as its official language, and the Faculty of Humanities and other Faculties from Vytautas Magnus University were transferred from Kaunas to Vilnius.

The new academic term began on January 22, 1940. Professor Puzinas was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Humanities where he established and chaired the Department of Archaeology (Zabiela, 2005, 18). Marija Alseikaitė continued to study with all of her professors who had moved from Kaunas to Vilnius, including Professor Ignas Jonynas, who stressed the importance of using primary sources for historical research, which influenced her future scholarship and teaching. Her ongoing studies of cultural history and philosophy with Professor Levas Karsavinas encouraged her cultivation of scientific and philosophical thought and terminology (Lazauskaitė, 2012, par. 2). Marija's friend and classmate Rimutė Rimantienė, who became a highly respected archaeologist in Lithuania, commented that their mastery of psychology and other subjects served as a stimulus not to stop but to continue to go further in their scholarship. She recalls, "Marija and I observed this principle. Puzinas also encouraged us. … It seemed to us that we knew what we were going to do in the future. We wanted to embrace all the branches of archaeology. Some of us would do research into the Stone Age, others some other fields. … It was a war time. … We assigned what we should do or shouldn't do and what we should write. We were shaping our lives, thinking what to explore in archaeology separately in order to supplement each other."[5]

In-depth studies of the prehistory of Lithuania, as presented by Professor Puzinas, combined with lectures by other specialists with whom Marija was studying, providing an ideal interdisciplinary laboratory for the application of archaeology, Lithuanian philology, comparative Indo-European linguistics, the study of ancient documents, the influence of various landscapes on cultural development, and evidence concerning people's beliefs and ritual practices as reflected in Lithuanian folklore, compared over various regions.

Due to the ongoing devastation caused by the war, Lithuanian refugees from remote villages in Byelorussia began flooding into Vilnius in early 1940. Marija realized that the ancient folkloric traditions they embodied would be threatened by urban life resulting in the loss of their traditional lifeways, so she spent precious time over several months with the displaced families gathering songs and stories from their rich oral tradition while continuing her formal studies. "This was my own university; this was how I trained myself" (recollection by Marija Gimbutas in Marler, 1997, 10).

Marija's father had been an active member of the board of the Lithuanian Science Society founded in 1907 by Dr. Jonas Basanavičius, which contained extensive collections of Lithuanian folklore, folk arts, and numerous volumes of scientific works in a range of subjects that Basanavičius and dedicated colleagues had assembled. This collection had been closed by the Polish regime, but by 1940 the Society's holdings were incorporated into the newly formed Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. Its museum was divided into the departments of ethnography, archaeology, history, and natural sciences. One of its aims was to provide sources for research into Lithuanian language, literature, and literary science. Marija spent countless hours in the bitterly cold rooms studying and absorbing the knowledge contained in these collections that she considered to be treasures of her own cultural lineage.[6]

In 1940, Marija Alseikaitė traveled to southeastern Lithuania, to Dzukija, where she recorded the texts of *dainos,* traditional songs sung by an elderly woman from her repertoire of more than three hundred songs. She considered such "great singers" to be "the last bards of Lithuania, the chief transmitters of its heritage from past

5 Rimutė Rimantienė interviewed by J. Marler, Vilnius, 1992.
6 Marija Gimbutas interviewed by J. Marler, Topanga, CA 1988.

ages into the twentieth century" (Gimbutas, 1964, 11). These songs, she later wrote, cannot be separated from their environment: "The woman, reaping oats with a sickle, sang in a full voice. . . . As the woman sang, the earth seemed to move and breathe hope, together with the daina's three-tone melody and simple rhythm" (Gimbutas, 1964, 11).

In June of that same year, Marija was enjoying a holiday with her boyfriend Jurgis Gimbutas on a little boat in the lake region of eastern Lithuania. In the midst of their idyllic journey, the sky suddenly filled with war planes. On 15 June, 1940, in the midst of the young generation's enthusiastic pioneer spirit, the Red Army invaded Lithuania. By the time they returned to Vilnius it was overrun by Soviet troops. The country was paralyzed, Vilnius University was taken over by Stalinists, and thousands of people – whole families – were being arrested and deported to Siberia including numerous members of Marija's own family. When the deportations began, she gathered the research for her thesis on Lithuanian burial rites and returned to Kaunas to take refuge with her mother.[7]

The German occupation that followed in June of 1941 ravaged the multicultural inhabitants of Lithuania, especially the vibrant Jewish population. Marija and her mother sheltered a Jewish woman and her daughter from certain death, recognizing that Lithuanians found hiding Jews would be shot. To find some stability in the midst of this roiling horror, Marija and Jurgis decided to elope in the summer of 1941 to be married by her uncle, Pranas Janulaitis, in the peacefulness of his lovely parish church. This village priest, who was known for his kindness, was later imprisoned and tortured to death by the Soviets who returned in 1944.[8]

After their marriage, in order to find some sense of sanity, Marija Gimbutienė returned to Vilnius to focus on completing her diploma work on Lithuanian burial practices in the Iron Age. According to Rimutė Rimantienė, the students had been encouraged by Professor Puzinas to work on their own and to come to their own conclusions, and the subject of Marija's thesis represented original research.[9] In a letter to Jurgis dated November 3, 1941, Marija wrote: "Perhaps I will continue with the same scientific topic until my dissertation because something new can only be discovered after a long life with your chosen subject" (Butrimas, 1997, 33 [translation by A. Butrimas]). In a following letter to Jurgis, after presenting a paper on the continuity of the Curonian culture according to burial practices, Marija describes Puzinas's comments that her work was good, well written in a short period of time with much new material. Marija wrote, "I turned red with joy. I feel I have made progress and have created something new for our young science" (Butrimas, 1997, 32).

In a 1997 publication, Dr. Adomas Butrimas, Pro-Rector of the Vilnius Academy of Arts, wrote that Marija Gimbutienė was able to utilize historical sources in their original languages to gain insight into Lithuanian prehistory for her Master's work. She read numerous sources in Latin and drew from Lithuanian and Latvian songs and folklore, as well as archaeological materials and linguistic studies in order to designate Lithuanian cultural regions according to grave types. In the final chapter of her thesis, she demonstrated their correspondence with different ethnicities: Curonian, Semigalian, Jotvingian-Sudovian and Lithuanian. "Her conclusions became very popular during the 1960s and 1970s for the study of ethnic archaeology in the East Baltic region, and they are still used. . . expanded by new research" (Butrimas 1997, 32–33). Marija Gimbutienė received her diploma in archaeology in June 1942, with secondary studies in folklore and comparative philology. Rimutė Rimantienė and her other archaeology classmates earned their diplomas at that time, as well.[10]

Marija Gimbutienė became pregnant with their first daughter while continuing to write articles about the Balts and prehistoric burial rituals in Lithuania. Sections of her Master's work were published that same year in the journal *Gimtasai kraštas* (Native Land) (Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė M. 1942, p. 1–11). Her cousin Dr. Meilė Lukšienė described Marija writing about burial practices with one hand, while rocking her daughter with the

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7 Marija Gimbutas interviewed by J. Marler, Topanga, CA 1988.
8 Marija Gimbutas interviewed by J. Marler, Topanga, CA 1988.
9 Rimutė Rimantienė interviewed by J. Marler, Vilnius, 1992.
10 Rimutė Rimantienė interviewed by J. Marler, Vilnius, 1992.

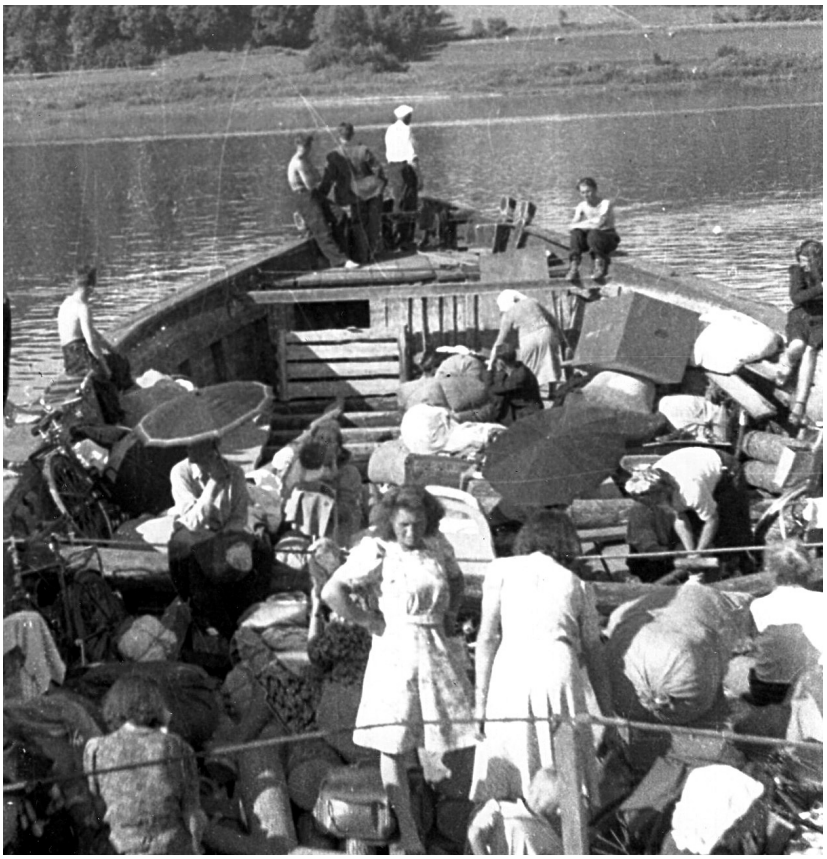

Fig. 1. Barge from Kaunas to Jurbarkas on the Nemunas river, July 8, 1944 (*photo by J. Gimbutas, with permission*).

1 pav. *Barža iš Kauno į Jurbarką Nemunu, 1944 07 08 (J. Gimbuto nuotrauka, gavus leidimą)*

other. "Marija was a person of incredible will and organization. This was a phenomenon that continued throughout her entire life."[11] Marija recalled: "That clearly kept me sane. I had something like a double life. I was happy doing my work; that was why I existed. Life just twisted me like a little plant, but my work was continuous in one direction" (Gimbutas quoted in Marler, 1997, 11).

Fleeing to the West

In July of 1944, in advance of the second Soviet invasion, Marija, Jurgis and baby Danutė squeezed into a crowded barge on the Nemunas river to begin their journey to the West (Figure 1). By the time they boarded a train with forged passports, Marija had published more than twenty articles on ancient Lithuanian and Baltic traditions. Most of her professors also left Lithuania with their families instead of risking the real possibility of being sent to Siberia or to hard labor camps.[12]

The young family took refuge in Vienna and Innsbruck, then moved to the secluded village of Urnau in the southern Württemberg region (Figure 2) where Marija worked to expand her dissertation and to translate it into German. As soon as the war ended in 1945, she was one of the first students to enroll at Tübingen University in the French occupation zone (Figure 3). By the spring of 1946, she earned her doctorate in archaeology combined with ethnology, mythology, and the history of religion. Her doctoral work, "Die Bestattung in Litauen in

[11] Dr. Meilė Luksienė interviewed by Joan Marler, Vilnius, 1994.

[12] Professor Levas Karsavinas refused to leave Vilnius because of his dedication to scholarship and to preserve his archive. He was arrested by the Soviets, his archive was stolen, and he was transferred to the "Abyss" camp in far northern Siberia where he perished.

Fig. 2. Arriving at Urnau village, southern Württemberg, Germany, April 1945 (*photo by J. Gimbutas, with permission*).

2 pav. *Atvykimas į Urnau kaimą pietų Viurtembergo dalyje, Vokietijoje, 1945 m. balandis (J. Gimbuto nuotrauka, gavus leidimą)*

Fig. 3. Jurgis, Danutė, and Marija near Tübingen University, September 1945 (*photo courtesy of J. Gimbutas*).

3 pav. *Jurgis, Danutė ir Marija prie Tiubingeno universiteto, 1945 m. rugsėjis (nuotrauka spausdinama J. Gimbuto leidimu)*

Fig. 4. Celebration of Marija Gimbutienė's doctorate, Tübingen, 1946; standing: Vl. Jakutis, Ant. Trimakas, Zen. Ivinskis, S. Salienė, Dalia Kaupienė, Saulius Matjošaitis, Kar. Dvinga, Ant. Mažiulis, Eng. Kaciūnaitė, Ant. Salys; seated: Jonas Grimus, Turnakienė, M. Gimbutienė, J. Gimbutas, Vl. Brazaitienė, O. Janutienė (*photo courtesy of J. Gimbutas*).

4 pav. *Marijos doktorato šventimas, Tiubingenas, 1946; stovi: Vl. Jakutis, Ant. Trimakas, Zen. Ivinskis, S. Salienė, Dalia Kaupienė, Saulius Matjošaitis, Kar. Dvinga, Ant. Mažiulis, Eng. Kaciūnaitė, Ant. Salys; sėdi: Jonas Grimus, Turnakienė, M. Gimbutienė, J. Gimbutas, Vl. Brazaitienė, O. Janutienė (nuotrauka spausdinama J. Gimbuto leidimu)*

der vorgeschichtlichen Zeit" (Burials in Lithuania in the prehistoric time), was published in Tübingen that same year. Jurgis arranged for her book to be distributed among the Lithuanian refugees who purchased enough copies to pay for the printing costs. A group of their respected Lithuanian colleagues who also escaped the Soviets gathered in Tübingen to celebrate Marija Gimbutienė's new doctorate (Figure 4).

The following year, in 1947, their second daughter, Živilė, was born. Marija Gimbutienė continued her research in the Tübingen University library and did postgraduate research at Heidelberg and Munich universities. While waiting with their two young children in an American-run refugee camp she developed the manuscript of her book on *Ancient Symbolism in Lithuanian Folk Art*, a subject that was virtually unknown to Westerners. She wrote a number of articles during that time that appeared in Lithuanian cultural journals in Munich, Tübingen, Augsburg. These include, among numerous others, "Mažosios Lietuvos antkapiniai paminklai" (The Tombstones of Lithuania Minor) (Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, 1946b, p. 108–109); "Mūsų protėvių pažiūros į mirtį ir sielą" (The Concept of Death and Soul in Lithuanian Folklore) (Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė, 1947, p. 516–534); and "Senoji lietuvių religija" (Ancient Lithuanian Religion) (p. 4–12). Jurgis completed his doctorate in engineering at the University of Stuttgart and taught engineering through the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (Marler, 1995, p. 5).

Entering a New World – Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

In 1949, the Gimbutas family received sponsorship to immigrate to the United States where Marija Gimbutienė began using the surname Gimbutas. Jurgis found a good job as an engineer in Boston, which he maintained until he retired. Jurgis's mother, Elena Gimbutas who joined them, cared for the children while Marija worked at odd jobs in the Boston area until she presented herself at Harvard University in the fall of 1950. She arrived with her published dissertation from Tübingen University, her knowledge of Eastern and Western European languages, and her broad background in Eastern European prehistory. Very few scholars in the United States were knowledgeable at that time about Eastern European archaeology due to the Cold War, so she was invited to do translations, to write about Eastern European archaeology, and was given access to the Peabody Library with a small desk in the basement, but was told never ask for any money. She immediately agreed and set to work as a translator, researcher, and writer with no payment from 1950 to 1963, except for research grants.

Dr. Marija Gimbutas was equipped with knowledge that Professor Puzinas had meticulously passed on to his students about how to assemble, summarize, and interpret data from a wide range of excavations. The systematic training he provided tuned her capacities to recognize patterns of human activities within excavations of prehistoric sites. She was eager to apply these abilities to tasks which, under linguistic and geopolitical restrictions, were not possible for most Western archaeologists. She outlined her projects, determined their challenges, then systematically went about solving them.

In 1954 their third daughter Rasa was born, and in 1955 Dr. Gimbutas was honored as a Research Fellow of the American School of Prehistoric Research at the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. She discovered, while working at Harvard, that well known European archaeologists would visit this esteemed university, so she was able to meet and become colleagues with scholars knowledgeable about Eastern European archaeology, such as Christopher Hawkes from Oxford, and Stuart Piggott from the University of Edinburgh, among others.

The Prehistory of Eastern Europe (1956)

Dr. Marija Gimbutas's first monograph, *The Prehistory of Eastern Europe, Part I: Mesolithic, Neolithic and Copper Age Cultures in Russia and the Baltic Area,* was published in 1956 by the American School of Prehistoric Research, Peabody Museum, Harvard University. To enable this project she received financial assistance from the Bollingen and Wenner Gren Foundations. In her introduction, she states that the purpose of this monograph is to present a comprehensive summary of archaeological research, conducted from 1852 to 1955 in Eastern Europe, from the post-glacial era to the end of the Chalcolithic period. In order to reconstruct the picture of Eastern European prehistory, she drew from all existing excavation reports, articles, and monographs in their original languages concerning archaeological work done in Poland, the former East Prussia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, White Russia (Bielo Russia), Russia, Ukraine, and the northern Causasus. Gimbutas stated, "My chief task has been to date the various archaeological monuments, to revise the distribution of cultures from the point of view of geography and chronology, and to present their essential features. . . . In writing this study, the author hopes to overcome the political and language barriers which continually retard the growth of knowledge of European prehistory as a whole" (Gimbutas, 1956, 3). She went on to describe the physiography of this vast research area informed by the application of "landscape archaeology" from her studies in Vilnius to determine general environmental and cultural conditions between different locations affecting prehistoric cultural development.

Marija Gimbutas noticed, from the excavation reports, that collective burials within the Volga Basin were abandoned in favor of pit-graves covered with stone cairns that represent the earliest kurgan mounds. While she was aware of the different names given by excavators to the creators of these burials in various locations, she nevertheless created a blanket term in 1956 named after their distinctive burial mounds.[13] She used the term

[13] "Kurgan" is a turkic loanword into Russian to name these burial mounds.

"Kurgan culture" to highlight the widespread similarities of burial practices and related artifacts found over thousands of kilometers that represent the mobile, warlike, horse-riding patriarchal Proto-Indo-European pastoralists occupying the steppe zone north of the Black Sea and Caucasus Mountains (Gimbutas, 1997, p. xvii).

According to Gimbutas, this Kurgan culture located over a broad geographical region, is a phenomenon of the steppes which represents several groups of steppe peoples differing spatially and diachronically sharing a common tradition. Significantly, as she pointed out, "there are several types of evidence that allow us to trace the movements of the Kurgans westward: the appearance of Kurgan tombs, the abandonment of Old European settlements, and the disruption of long-lasting traditions in pottery and architecture" (Gimbutas 1997, p. 360). In 1956, Gimbutas presented a paper at the International Council of Ethnological Sciences in Philadelphia about the traumatic changes that took place in Eastern and Central Europe which, she explained, were due to the war-like incursions by steppe people from the east. Radiocarbon dating was not yet available, so her chronology at that time was too low.

The Prehistory of Eastern Europe was well-distributed and reviews poured in, not only from English speaking countries, but from Eastern and Western Europe, published in Lithuanian, German, Polish, Hungarian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Czech, and Italian. Scholars were uniformly grateful for what they considered to be an erudite work of synthesis, the first comprehensive and accessible survey of the Mesolithic, Neolithic, and Chalcolithic societies of the eastern half of the European continent. Dr. Stuart Piggott from the University of Edinburgh wrote, "The comparative inaccessibility of the area itself, exacerbated by modern political conditions, and the language difficulties presented to the average Western scholar, have rendered our knowledge lamentably imperfect . . . nothing comparable in scope or treatment to Gimbutas's work has hitherto been attempted. We are deeply in her debt" (Piggott, 1958, p. 608–609). In another review, Dr. Jonas Puzinas emphasized the unique importance of this work, including her presentation of previously little-known Neolithic and Copper Age cultures in Ukraine and southern Russia. He especially welcomed her discussion of the origin of the Indo-European societies and the implications of their westward cultural expansion (Puzinas, 1957, p. 26–28).

Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe (1965)

After the completion of *The Prehistory of Eastern Europe,* Dr. Gimbutas received a National Science Foundation Senior Post-doctoral Fellowship for the preparation of *Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe.* Her stated goal was to define the formation, distribution, continuity, and expansion or disintegration of the Early, Middle, and Late Bronze Age cultures of Central and Eastern Europe excavated within fifteen countries over an entire century, representing approximately one thousand years "from the period when large scale copper manufacturing began in central Europe to the times when iron gradually supplanted bronze" (Gimbutas, 1965, p. 18). She points out that no comprehensive survey and evaluation of these cultures, period by period, had previously been made beyond singular typological descriptions of finds. Just as for her previous monograph, many of these sources were inaccessible to Western scholars due to linguistic and political barriers (Gimbutas, 1965, p. 20). This manuscript was primarily written during her years at Harvard with the assistance of various colleagues and the generosity of numerous archaeologists and institutions throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Since she had very few funds to pay for the copious illustrations required for this monograph, her mother, Veronika Alseikienė, hired an excellent illustrator in Lithuania to produce numerous drawings. The finished result of this the enormous tome features 681 pages of text, 462 figures containing multiple images, 100 pages of plates, and a comprehensive index of place and personal names, archaeological sites and cultures. This monumental work was published in 1965 by Mouton in The Hague.

After the success of *The Prehistory of Eastern Europe,* her work on the Bronze Age was awaited with enthusiasm. Numerous reviews appeared in German publications, as well as Lithuanian, British, and American scholarly journals. In the British journal *Antiquity*, Colin Renfrew began his review by stating that Gimbutas "has boldly set about synthesizing a coherent picture out of the confused and complex material which several

generations of European scholars have mercilessly Balkanized. Her achievement . . . is remarkable: probably no one else alive could have undertaken it" (Renfrew, 1965, 64).

Concerning Marija Gimbutas's production of *The Prehistory of Eastern Europe* and *Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe,* the archaeologist David Anthony wrote: "She organized and synthesized large bodies of archaeological evidence from across eastern Europe and she presented these syntheses in monographs that opened the door to this region's prehistory for many grateful followers, including me" (Anthony, 2022, p. 71).

The wide distribution of this monograph ensured Marija Gimbutas's reputation as a world-class scholar of the Indo-European Bronze Age. Nevertheless, in the foreword to *Bronze Age Cultures*, she expressed her disappointment – after nearly a decade of extensive research and writing – to be presenting this enormous work without the benefit of the new technology of radiocarbon dating. She understood that the correct dating of Bronze Age sites throughout Central and Eastern Europe would show this work to be chronologically obsolete. But she could not wait (Gimbutas, 1965, 20).

The eventual availability of calibrated radiocarbon dates had a tremendous impact upon Gimbutas's understanding of both Neolithic and Bronze Age chronologies. She recalls, "Radiocarbon technology and dendrochronology . . . tremendously impacted my understanding of when the first Kurgan incursion into central Europe occurred. I promptly abandoned my earlier belief that drastic changes commenced in Europe in the 2nd millennium BC" (Gimbutas, 1997, xviii).

Ancient Symbolism in Lithuanian Folk Art (1958)

Ancient Symbolism in Lithuanian Folk Art was published in 1958 by the American Folklore Society in Philadelphia and is dedicated to her mother, Dr. Veronika Alseikienė, who avidly promoted the preservation of Lithuania's traditional arts and folklore. Marija Gimbutas began to collect material for this text while she was a student in Lithuania. She continued to gather information in the university libraries in Tübingen, Heidelberg, and Munich during her years as a refugee, and finalized the text at Harvard's Peabody Museum. Its final composition was completed at the Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore, and Linguistics in Bloomington, Indiana.

Marija Gimbutas understood that Lithuanian folk symbolism was richly expressed in the oral traditions of village people through songs, stories, and verbal metaphors. Their vibrant symbols were preserved in elegant weavings, as well as in wood carvings displayed on houses, and on a variety of tools and domestic utensils. This book focuses primarily on the beautifully ornamented wooden poles, erected throughout the landscape, containing ancient symbols expressing people's beliefs in the sacredness of life. As Gimbutas wrote, these Lithuanian monuments "rose from the earth, as the folksong had risen, as various customs had risen, out of religious beliefs that challenged definition through artistic creation" (Gimbutas, 1958a, 1). In her view, these ancient symbols belong to a single religious system "expressing the spirit of a folk which was drawing its elixir of life from roots firmly set in the soil" (Gimbutas, 1958a, 3). She also noted, "Symbols in folk art and its predecessor, prehistoric art of the agricultural era, were elements in a well-ordered system, not spontaneous, unconnected inspirations" (Gimbutas, 1958a, p. 5). These insights informed her later interpretations of the symbolism of the Neolithic societies of Old Europe.

Honoring Lithuanian Heritage

Marija Gimbutas took every opportunity to honor Lithuanian heritage from her position as an immigrant to the United States who had fled from Soviet occupied Lithuania. She and Jurgis organized a Saturday School where their children studied Lithuanian language, history and culture. She contributed ongoing articles to Lithuanian publications, was elected president of the Association for the Advancement of Balkan Studies (AABS), and managed to visit her beloved mother during the height of the Cold War by arranging lectures in Russia and Lithuania

through the highest academic channels. In 1960 she lectured in Moscow as an exchange scholar at an Orientalist Congress where she arranged a secret meeting with her mother for the first time since 1944. When Marija Gimbutas returned to the US, she received the Outstanding New American Award from the World Refugee Committee and the Boston Junior Chamber of Commerce for her tireless work assisting Lithuanian émigrés (Marler, 1997, 13–14). She understood the difficulties for émigrés to reestablish their professional lives in American society. She saw too many brilliant professors, artists, and poets wasting away in factory jobs having lost their respected positions in society.

According to Professor Adomas Butrimas, "the first five books written by Marija Gimbutas, including *Rytprūsių ir Vakarų Lietuvos priešistorinės kultūros apžalga* (A Survey of Prehistory of East Prussia and Western Lithuania) (1958b), were devoted to Baltic prehistory and cultural history. … It is significant to note that during the first fourteen years after World War II, not one monographic study on Baltic prehistory appeared in Lithuania or Latvia" (Butrimas, 1997, p. 33). Moreover, during the first thirteen years after her graduation from Vilnius University (1942–1955), she published nearly fifty articles in Lithuanian, German, and English on Baltic archaeology and cultural history. "Clearly, her productive scientific life during that time was mostly concerned with Baltic prehistory – especially the burial practices of the Balts during the Iron Age, ancient Baltic and Lithuanian religion, and the symbolism of Lithuanian folk art" (Butrimas, 1997, 34).

The Balts (1963)

In 1961, Marija Gimbutas was honored as a Fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University in California which made it possible for her to spend an entire year in ideal conditions completing her book about the Balts, published in London in 1963 (Gimbutas, 1963, 11). The ancient Balts are the ancestors of the Lithuanians, Latvians, and Old Prussians who settled on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea in prehistoric times (Gimbutas, 1963, 21). Gimbutas's history of the Baltic tribes covers their linguistic and historic background, their Indo-European and pre-Indo-European origins, their religion, society, and development until the establishment of the Lithuanian state in the thirteenth century CE . Dr. Jonas Puzinas, who reviewed *The Balts* for *The Baltic Review* in 1964, commented that the problems of Baltic antiquity have been researched by Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, Swedish, German, Polish, and Russian archaeologists, linguists, historians, and historians of religion, "Yet until now we have not had a general survey on the Balts. This gap has been filled by Dr. Marija Gimbutas" (Puzinas, 1964, 57–62). *The Balts* was later translated into Italian, German, Portuguese, Latvian, and Lithuanian.

The former Dean of the Medical Faculty of Vilnius University, Dr. Gintautas Česnys, described his surprise to find a copy of *The Balts* in the foreign reading hall of the Lenin Library in Moscow University in 1969. "The name of Marija Gimbutas . . . was forbidden in Lithuania during my childhood and youth. One had no possibility to know Marija's works because they were buried in dark special book depositories of Lithuanian libraries. Reading those texts might arouse 'bourgeois nationalism,' the greatest enemy of the Soviet regime" (Česnys, 1997, p. 26). After secretly reading a hidden copy of *The Balts,* Dr. Česnys recalls, "I was very surprised by her bold synthesis of archaeological, historical, linguistic, mythological and even anthropological data. With a unique interdisciplinary approach, she drew an ethnogenetic picture of the Balts, in general, and the Lithuanians, in particular. The richness of the specific factual examples from Lithuanian folk art and their comparison with analogous phenomena in other ancient cultures were quite impressive" (Česnys, 1997, p. 26–27).

The University of California, Los Angeles (1963–1989)

In 1963, Dr. Gimbutas accepted the position offered to her of assistant professor of European Archaeology in the Classics Department at the University of California, Los Angeles. According to her colleague, the Estonian–American Indo-Europeanist Professor Jaan Puhvel, Marija Gimbutas's arrival at UCLA "meant the proximity

and participation of the one person who was, even then, revolutionizing the study of East European archaeology and was laying the groundwork of a new synthesis of the Indo-European question."[14] These two colleagues intensively collaborated to conceptualize a unified field of Indo-European studies – one that would bring together archaeology, linguistics, philology, and study of the nonmaterial aspects of Indo-European cultural patterns. They worked together to establish the Graduate Interdepartmental Program of Indo-European studies. Before she arrived, there was an anthropology department but no European archaeology taught at UCLA, only American archaeology. The following year, in 1964, Dr. Gimbutas became a full professor at UCLA where she established the Archaeology Program and the Archaeology Institute in which European archaeology was taught in both Indo-European studies and in the Archaeology Program. She did not neglect her dedication to Lithuanian and Eastern European matters, and became a member of the editorial board of *Metmenys.*

In 1966 Dr. Marija Gimbutas became Curator of Old World Archaeology of the Museum of Cultural History at UCLA. Her dream of having a major Lithuanian folk art exhibition at the university became a reality made possible through the efforts of her Mother, Dr. Veronika Alseikienė in Kaunas, who organized and gathered a representative collection of folkloric art to send to California. These pieces included sculptures known as *dievukai*, and other traditional creations that were acquired by UCLA. Some folk art pieces were sent as gifts from the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography in Vilnius, including 19th century woodblock prints. Other traditional items included examples of Lithuanian textiles, women's national costumes, amber artifacts lent by Dr. Gimbutas, along with other examples of Lithuanian folk art (Gimbutas, 1966, p. 14). For most Americans, Lithuania and its folk culture was virtually unknown in the United States at that time outside of various Lithuanian communities. The exhibition was accompanied by lectures, Lithuanian dance and music, and an array of other educational events visited by thousands of people during the year-long exhibition whose eyes were opened to the richness of Lithuanian history and folk culture.

During the highly productive years while teaching at UCLA, Marija Gimbutas traveled and lectured internationally and continued to write for numerous scholarly publications. She also produced *The Slavs* (1971) as a companion volume to *The Balts*. She credits her impulse to write this book to the Russian American linguist Professor Roman Jakobson with whom she taught a year-long course at Harvard University on prehistoric Slavic culture. Her book *The Slavs* traces the earliest development of the Slavs before the establishment of the Slavic States in the ninth and tenth centuries AD, for which she received a grant by the American Council for Learned Societies. Gimbutas writes, "The challenge of evaluating the tremendous amount of literature in numerous Slavic languages, containing conflicting views on the problem of the Slavic homeland, was akin to a long trip through a jungle. Whether or not I have succeeded in locating it with the aid of the available archaeological and linguistic data, future scholars will judge" (Gimbutas, 1971, 12).

After years of intensive study of prehistoric societies, Marija Gimbutas recognized major differences between the material culture of the Bronze Age and the Neolithic period. She recalls, "I was well trained in what is Indo-European in Russia and in all of Eastern Europe. And then I meet something of another order, another creative energy—especially the painted pottery and thousands of figurines. I simply had to understand why the material culture of these societies are so different."[15] It became obvious to her, then, that she had to begin her own excavations of Neolithic habitation sites. Her position at UCLA made these investigations possible.

Excavations in Southeastern Europe (1967–1980)

Between 1967 and 1980, Professor Gimbutas served as project director of five major excavations of Neolithic culture sites in the former Yugoslavia, Greek Macedonia, Thessaly (Greece), and southern Italy. These excava-

[14] Recollection by Dr. Jaan Puhvel, Memorial Service for Marija Gimbutas, Fowler Museum of Cultural History, UCLA, March 3, 1994.

[15] Interview with Marija Gimbutas by J. Marler, Topanga, CA, 1988.

tions took place nearly every summer over thirteen years in collaboration with international universities, museums, students, and colleagues. As project director of these excavations, Dr. Gimbutas was determined to collect excellent specimens for calibrated radiocarbon dating to establish an accurate chronology for each site.

The 1967–1968 excavations of stratified Neolithic and Chalcolithic Starčevo and Butmir settlement sites, located in the Bosna Valley 65 km northwest of Sarajevo, were jointly conducted by UCLA and Dr. Alojz Benac of the Zemaljski Muzej, with Smithsonian sponsorship. The results of calibrated radiocarbon dating of both Obre sites yielded a time span of almost two thousand years. Both settlement areas were continually inhabited between 6000 and 4000 BC, which established the genesis and chronology of the Neolithic Butmir culture. Gimbutas wrote, "This gives a splendid possibility for the observation of cultural development from the beginning of the settlement by the Central Balkan farmers in Bosnia throughout the flourishing period of the Butmir civilization" (Gimbutas, 1974a, p. 4, 11).

In 1968–1969, the excavation of the stratified Karanovo and Early Bronze Age tell (5000–2000 BC) at Sitagroi (Photolivos) near Drama, Greek Macedonia, was jointly conducted by UCLA and Sheffield University, co-directed by Colin Renfrew, with sponsorship by the National Science Foundation. In her chapter of the excavation report for Sitagroi, Marija Gimbutas writes that nearly 250 figurines were found that provide important material for studying the Sitagroi community. "Their analysis elicits aspects of prehistoric life which cannot be reconstructed from the investigation of pottery, tools, or house debris" (Gimbutas, 1986, p. 225). All of the figurines are highly schematic with their entire surfaces engraved with symbols. "They were intended and produced as a means of communicating with the supernatural. They can be considered the small, ragged remnants of a rich fabric constituting the mythical world of their time" (Gimbutas, 1986, p. 226). Unfortunately, they were found in levels of habitation debris not from in situ locations of meaningful use. Ideal contexts needed to be found in other excavations.

The 1969–1971 excavation of the stratified Starčevo and Vinča settlement (6300–5000 BC) took place at Anza, near Štip in the former Yugoslav Macedonia, carried out by UCLA and Štip Muzej, with Smithsonian sponsorship. Calibrated radiocarbon dates for Anza from the Neolithic through the Chalcolithic period date from c. 6400/6300 to c. 5000 BC. Early Neolithic Anza vases are dynamically painted with floral and geometric motifs in dark brown and orange. Stylized Bird Goddess sculptures with hip belts and headgear painted in orange were found, as was a white marble Birth-Giving Goddess in the shape of a toad, similar to a black stone image found at Achilleion. A large, elegant pithos in the shape of a Bird Goddess, 92 cm high was found painted with red and cream colored bands, c. 5300 BC (Gimbutas, 1972, p. 112–122).

In 1973–1975, the excavation of the stratified Neolithic tell of Achilleion, near Farsala, Thessaly, Greece, c. 6400–5600 BC, was sponsored by the National Science Foundation and the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. As project director, Dr. Gimbutas required her team to carefully notate the discovery context of each specific artifact and to save everything that had been created by human hands for detailed study. This process was particularly fruitful at the Sesklo culture site of Achilleion in Thessaly. The two hundred sculptures found at Achilleion were documented as to their specific settlement contexts in association with other features which contributed substantially to Gimbutas's interpretations of their functions. Gimbutas reports, "In spite of the relatively small area excavated at Achilleion, the number of figurines found there exceeds the total recovered from all other contemporary Neolithic sites in Greece. The high incidence of sculptures at Achilleion most probably is due to methods of recovery and identification" (Gimbutas, 1989a, p. 171). At Achilleion, sculptures ~~of~~ identified by Gimbutas as Pregnant Goddesses, for instance, were found within outdoor areas between houses on altars overlooking places where grain was ground and bread was baked. Sculptures of Bird Goddesses and Snake Goddesses were found only on platforms (altars) within special structures. These associations and others were consistently found over 800 years during the life of the settlement (see Gimbutas, 1989a, p. 171–227).

By the 1970s, two decades after the development of calibrated radiocarbon dating, the implementation of this technique was revolutionizing earlier chronologies and overturning previous assumptions demonstrating

the antiquity of European prehistoric cultures (Gimbutas, 1974b, p. 15). The site of Achilleion is dated to c. 6400–5600 BC and functions as the chronological yardstick for the Early Neolithic sites in Greece (Gimbutas, 1989a, p. 1–6, 171–201).

In 1977–1980, the excavation at Scaloria cave in southeast Italy near Manfredonia was conducted by Marija Gimbutas of UCLA in collaboration with Dr. Santo Tiné, director of the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of Genoa University. The excavation was in two sections: the top area was a wide hall with ceramic and stone tools suitable for habitation, dated to the end of the 7th to the end of the 6th millennium BC. The lower cave is narrow and long with a live spring at the bottom with stalagmites and the remains of many ceramic vases dated to c. 5600–5300 BC. According to Marija Gimbutas, the pottery was decorated "with symbols of regeneration: eggs, triangles, snakes, plant and sun designs, and symbols of the Goddess of Regeneration herself – V's, triangles, hourglass shapes, and butterfly motifs. . . . Ceremonies which took place at this mysterious depth near the 'water of life' must have been related to regeneration" (Gimbutas, 1991, p. 292).

The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe (1974)

Between 1973 and 1974, Marija Gimbutas was a Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study at Wassenaar, near Amsterdam, which provided the most ideal conditions for her to excavate during the summer then to return to Wassenaar during the rest of the year to study the results of her excavations. She also traveled throughout the region doing research in as many local and regional museums as possible.

Inspired by the wealth of Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultural material – including around 30,000 sculptures of clay, marble, bone, copper, or gold known at that time from 3,000 Old European sites (Gimbutas, 1974b, p. 11), and especially by her own excavations, she produced *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe* in the midst of her excavation at Achilleion. She coined the term "Old Europe" to indicate the peaceful, non-Indo-European, egalitarian, farming societies of Neolithic Europe. "The Gods and Goddesses was a result of five years of thinking, written in three months, which was too fast. It was a sturm birth" (Gimbutas quoted in Marler, 1997, p. 16). This work presents hundreds of Old European sculptural images previously unknown in the West. A stated purpose of this book is to introduce "the spiritual manifestations of Old Europe" and to demonstrate the mythological richness of the long-lived, autochthonous cultures comprising the earliest civilization of Europe (Gimbutas, 1974b, p. 13). In her introduction she writes, "Mythological imagery of the prehistoric era tells us much about humanity – its concepts of the structure of the cosmos, of the beginning of the world and of human, plant and animal life, and also its . . . relations with nature" (Gimbutas, 1974b, p. 13).

Travels to Lithuania

Marija Gimbutas was eager to return to Vilnius after the enormous response she received during her first lecture at Vilnius University in 1968. When she entered the elegant hall, the room was packed with students sitting everywhere yearning to hear her speak. During her lecture, she was profoundly moved by how deeply they were listening to everything she was saying. Later she exclaimed that she could feel that the nation was alive through these students. "The young people were not afraid. There was such a resistance and daring in the younger generation. They refused to be crushed!"[16]

In 1981 Marija Gimbutas returned to Vilnius for three months on a Fulbright fellowship. This time, in the spirit of her family lineage of "book carriers," she smuggled in clandestine copies of *Ancient Symbolism in Lithuanian Folk Art* and *The Balts.* Both texts were laboriously translated and shared with upmost secrecy. The Lithuanian literary critic, Vytautas Kubilius, recalls, "With what passion we passed around her book, *Ancient*

[16] Interview with Marija Gimbutas by Joan Marler, Topanga, CA 1990.

Symbolism of Lithuanian Folk Art, translating it in secret, searching for the persistent roots and a new trust in our nation's cultural patterns. Lithuanian art, music, and literature were slipping away from us due to Soviet ideology. In the work of Marija Gimbutas we came to understand that our own folk art preserved a symbolism thousands of years old, from the earliest agrarian layer. . . . The poetic expression of the earth as the source of a nation's vitality, so strong in Lithuanian and exodus poetry, came from this ancient tradition: the earth as the mother of all varieties of life."[17]

After returning to California, Marija Gimbutas documented her lecturing experience in Vilnius from March 1 to June 1, 1981 in the newsletter of the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies. She wrote about the dedication of the audience and that each room she was given was too small for the numbers of people who wanted to attend. This situation intensified each day with the officials trying to turn people away. Finally she was able to use lecture rooms holding 500 people, and she insisted that everyone should be allowed to attend. She wrote, "Never in my life have I had such enthusiastic audiences … yearning for information so difficult to obtain" (Gimbutas, 1981b, p. 2).

The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe (1982)

In 1982, *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe,* was republished as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500–3500 BC, Myths and Cult Images.* In her preface to the new edition, Gimbutas explains that the new archaeological material excavated in southeast Europe during the previous decade strengthened her view that Old Europe was characterized by "worship of a Goddess incarnating the creative principle as Source and Giver of All" (Gimbutas, 1982c, p. 9). As she had stated in other writings and in her presentations, most of the Old European anthropomorphic imagery is female. In this new preface, Gimbutas recognizes the function of the male element, both human and animal, as representing spontaneous and life stimulating – but not life-generating – powers." She explains the change of word order in the title as an expression of this basic priority and the prevalence of female forms. Gimbutas goes on to clarify that the term "Old Europe" refers to the peaceful, agricultural, egalitarian, matrifocal culture that predated the influx of the patriarchal, stratified, pastoral, mobile, and war-oriented Proto-Indo-European society that arrived between 4500 and 2500 BC from the Russian steppe. The imposition of a radically different stratified, war-oriented social structure and religious system created "a mélange of the two mythic systems, Old European and Indo-European" (Gimbutas, 1982c, p. 9).

Return to Lithuania in 1988

In 1988, Gintautas Česnys recalls hearing Marija Gimbutas when she lectured on the old mythology of the Balts, sponsored by the Union of Lithuanian Artists. He wrote, "The lecture was very dynamic and was particularly meaningful since expectations of our national rebirth were beginning to stir in the depth of Lithuanian society at that time" (Česnys, 1997, p. 27).

Marija Gimbutas understood quite well the cultural, educational, and personal damage that people were enduring under the Soviet system. It was a deliberate decision on her part to encourage the professors in the humanities, especially those working in folklore and mythology. The late Lithuanian folklorist, Norbertas Vėlius, recalls the importance of her lecture in Vilnius: "Before Marija there was a view that Lithuanian mythology was primitive, that we did not have holy places, that we did not make images of gods, that we worshipped only the primitive forces of nature. . . . She began to see which part of the old religion and mythology of Lithuanians and the Balts were inherited from the Indo-Europeans. Old European mythology was not known . . . Marija initi-

[17] Excerpt from the speech delivered on June 11, 1993, by Vytautas Kubilius during the ceremony for Marija Gimbutas's honorary doctorate at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania (recorded by Joan Marler, translated by Indre Antanaitis).

ated that new classification of the pantheon of our most important gods and mythical beings" (Vėlius quoted in Marler, 1997, p. 14). He appreciated her protective outlook for Lithuanian education, especially the humanities, which had been stifled by the Soviets. "We were not allowed to write about it. Mythology was not a welcome course of study. . . . She tried to encourage and strengthen me and the other researchers. During her lectures she made the impression that we were important scholars of the community. She raised the status of the scholars of mythology and archaeology. She acted as our guardian. When she came the second time and lectured at Vilnius University, the authorities were very restrictive and made it so that we could not participate. . . . They did not want to let us through. Marija demanded that everyone who wanted to listen to the lecture be let in to hear it" (Vėlius quoted in Marler, 1997, p. 14).

An ongoing flood of publications

From the time of the publication of The Goddesses and Gods in 1982 to the appearance of *The Language of the Goddess* in 1989, Marija Gimbutas published more than fifty articles in English, French, and Lithuanian languages. Her numerous review articles, published in the Quarterly Review of Archaeology, and other publications, reflect an ongoing scholarly engagement with her international colleagues. The subjects of these reviews written by Marija Gimbutas concern publications about European prehistory of Neolithic and Bronze Age Europe; the earliest copper mines in the central Balkans; the Sesklo culture as the earliest Neolithic settlement in Europe; megalithic tombs of Western Europe; Studies in Baltic Amber; and Gimbutas's review of *Art and Religion in Thera* by Nanno Marinatos. Other articles by Gimbutas during this period discuss discoveries from her own excavations, while a growing number of articles focus on the religion and social structure of Old Europe. Her ongoing writings about Lithuanian and Baltic subjects include "The Lithuanian God Velnias"; Review of *Pirmieji Lietuvos gyventojai* (The earliest inhabitants of Lithuania) by R. Rimantienė; "Šviesos ir nakties deivės lietuvių mitologijoje" (Light and night goddesses in Lithuanian mythology); "Apie lietuvių mitologijos populiarizacijos reikalą bei šaltinius baltų mitologijai atkurti" (On the need for the popularization of Lithuanian mythology and on the sources to reconstruct Baltic mythology), Reply to J. Balys's review "Mitologija ir poezija" (Mythology and poetry); "Senoji Europa ir pilkapių kultūra" (Old Europe and the burial mound culture); "Katedrą steigiant" (The establishment of the Lithuanian department); "Šeštoji baltų studijų konferencija Švedijoje" (The sixth conference of Baltic studies in Sweden); "Senosios Europos deivės ir lietuvių mitologijoje" (Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe in Lithuanian mythology); "Senųjų europiečių raštas" (The writing of ancient Europeans); and numerous others. It is important to point out Marija Gimbutas's 1978 article in memory of Professor Dr. Jonas Puzinas "Tavo mokinių vardu–Profesoriui daktarui Jonui Puzinui in memoriam" (In the name of your pupils: In the memory of Professor Jonas Puzinas).

On June 24–26, 1987, Marija Gimbutas was invited to take part in a celebration of 600 years of Christianity in Lithuania that took place at the Vatican in Rome. She presented an article on "The Pre-Christian Religion of Lithuania" where she lectured to a large auditorium of Cardinals. Afterwards she was given an audience with the Pope, and the Vatican published her article in 1989 (Gimbutas, 1989b, p. 13–25).

The Language of the Goddess: Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization

The same year that her Vatican article appeared, *The Language of the Goddess* was published by Harper & Row. This highly illustrated text introduced a wealth of Neolithic imagery not previously included in *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe.* Its vivid presentation of Neolithic ceramics and elegantly stylized sculptures express a wide range of mythological imagery that had a strong influence on visual artists, as well as poets, writers, mythologists, and others working within the humanities. Simultaneously, critics who did not know what to make of the spontaneous popularity of this text outside the parameters of traditional archaeology expressed their con-

cerns. There were multiple dismissals of this text in the press, but very few serious discussions of Gimbutas's theories. Hundreds of articles appeared in journals and periodicals about the phenomenon of Goddess worship, the rise of the women's spirituality movement, the profusion of new artistic expressions, and meaningful personal stories mixed with jocular criticisms and not so subtle caricatures. Some articles were syndicated through well-oiled networks of central and regional newspapers throughout the United States, Canada, Eastern and Western Europe, Japan, and Korea – that amplified people's awareness of the work of Marija Gimbutas and the enormous influence she was having, especially for women, artists, poets, mythologists, and writers. This wildly expanding phenomenon took Gimbutas by surprise. She commented that she had no idea that her work would be meaningful for women, or for anyone outside the world of archaeology (Marler, 1997, p. 20). But as her own colleagues began to step away, she was embraced by enthusiastic readers eager to express their appreciation.

The term "Goddess" is difficult for many critics to accept, but it is important to notice how Gimbutas defines this term. She writes, "The Goddess in all her manifestations was a symbol of the unity of all life in Nature. . . . Hence the holistic and mythopoeic perception of the sacredness and mystery of all there is on Earth" (Gimbutas, 1989c, p. 321).

In her Introduction to *The Language of the Goddess*, Gimbutas explains that this volume is "a study in archaeomythology, a field that includes archaeology, comparative mythology and folklore, one that archaeologists have yet to explore" (Gimbutas, 1989, p. xviii). Gimbutas emphasizes that there are two different symbolic systems found in Europe, one reflecting a matristic system and another which is androcratic, parallel to the Old European and Indo-European cultural patterns. The contrasts of these systems are found in mythological imagery reflecting ideological structures. She understood that people's deeply held beliefs – their sacred concepts about the interrelated web of life and their place within it – provided the source of this ancient imagery that functioned for thousands of years as "a cohesive and persistent ideological system" (Gimbutas, 1989c: xv). In her fine grained investigation to discover the main themes of Old European imagery, Gimbutas explains: "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'etre* of this art and basis of its form" (Gimbutas, 1989c, p. xv).

The images discussed in *The Language of the Goddess* are organized in terms of the great cycles of life, death, and the regeneration of life. Numerous culture systems are represented in the pages of this work. They include those from the Baltic region in recognition of the painting of eggs with ritual designs to celebrate the birth of spring; the caring and honoring of snakes that bring health and well being to the family; references to Laima in her singular and triple aspects, responsible for the entire cycle of life, determining birth, death and human fate; images of bears from the Baltic area carved of amber, bone, and clay; the recognition of the Baltic Ragana, the seer and shape-shifter who can be both beautiful and nightmarish; and the white lady of death as the poisonous snake who reminds us that death is an unavoidable aspect of life.

The Formulation of Archaeomythology

In order to adequately study the wealth of Neolithic artifacts, Marija Gimbutas found it necessary to expand the parameters of her discipline to include an interdisciplinary focus, which she called archaeomythology. This field includes archaeology, comparative mythology, folklore, linguistics, comparative religions, and other disciplines appropriate to specific areas of research. Through the application of this methodology, she began to recognize the main themes of Old European beliefs and practices through detailed analyses of a multitude of symbols and images through a variety of disciplinary lenses.

Although a multidisciplinary approach to scholarship is not a unique concept, archaeomythology is distinguished by synchronic and diachronic research informed by the following assumptions: Sacred cosmologies are central to the cultural fabric of all early societies; beliefs and rituals expressing sacred world views are conserva-

tive and are not easily changed; and many archaic cultural patterns have survived into the historical period as folk motifs and as mythic elements within oral, visual, and ritual traditions (Marler, 2000, 2).

Throughout her career, Marija Gimbutas encouraged academic specialists in various fields to step outside the limitations of their own disciplines in order to benefit from the scholarship developed within other traditions. In *The Language of the Goddess,* Gimbutas writes, "Mythologists on their part have ignored the rich archaeological sources in spite of enormous possibilities they provide. It is hoped that this work will open avenues to folklore treasures as another source for reconstructing prehistoric ideology. Further research should yield a rich harvest" (Gimbutas, 1989b, p. xviii).

The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe (1991)

In 1991, Marija Gimbutas's magnum opus, *The Civilization of the Goddess,* was published by HarperSanFrancisco as the sister volume of *The Language of the Goddess*. This publication brings together the major themes of Gimbutas's life's work in one large volume. It begins with an explanation of the spread of agriculture from Anatolia into Europe during the seventh millennium BC with their domesticated plants, animals, tools, and Neolithic knowledge. This major text describes sequential Neolithic development in Southeastern and Central Europe, Northern Europe and in the Adriatic and Central Mediterrean regions, and in far Western Europe.

The prehistoric cultures of the Baltic region are especially recognized. The Nemunas culture, found in a broad region between the Lower Vistula in southern Lithuania and northeastern Poland, had its origins in the Mesolithic period, lasting into the Neolithic. Descriptions of Nemunas finds include evidence of habitation sites, pottery, antler, bone, and flint tools and extended burials in pit graves sprinkled with ochre (Gimbutas, 1991, p. 141–144). An illustrated discussion of the Narva culture follows, located between the southern coasts of the Baltic Sea and the Bay of Finland, an area Gimbutas describes as a "fisherman's paradise" with remains of fishing nets, wooden ores, and dugout canoes. Other Narva finds include tall wooden sculptures, graceful carvings of water birds in wood, amber, and bone, as well as stylized amber figurines, and tools for agricultural activities (Gimbutas, 1991, 144–147).

Marija Gimbutas's description of the maturation of European civilization in East-Central Europe, 5500–3500 BC, illustrates the high culture that developed in this region as a result of several millennia of peaceful living. She considered the earliest agrarian societies of Old Europe not only to be non-Indo-European, but also egalitarian, highly artistic, and peaceful. She defined Old Europe as "a true civilization in the best meaning of the word" (Gimbutas, 1991, p. viii). At its florescence, during the fifth and early fourth millennia BC, the Old Europeans constructed large towns with spacious houses and temples with multiple rooms and stories; skilled artisans produced elegant ceramics and weavings; the earliest metallurgists did not produce weapons, but an array of symbolic images skillfully crafted, not only in stone and well-fired clay, but in copper and gold. Moreover, a flourishing network of trade routes existed that circulated items such as obsidian, shells, marble, copper, and salt over hundreds of kilometers (Gimbutas, 1991, p. 118). Marija Gimbutas presents her concepts of the religion of the Goddess and discusses the development and widespread use of the linear signs and symbols she refers to as a "sacred script." She states that the Old European script signs are not random markings; they appear in rows or clusters, with different signs following one another. These are linear, abstract signs that are elaborated by strokes or dots creating more than one hundred modified signs. They are found inscribed on the bodies of figurines, on special plaques and vessels, on spindle whorls, and on various other ceramic items, some of which were found in religious contexts. In her discussion of Old European social structure, she draws from burial evidence, habitation patterns, ceramic miniatures of temples and workshops showing women's activities, and thousands of female images as the basis for her concept of the centrality of women in Old European society. The final chapter, "The End of Old Europe," presents her theory of the Kurgan invasions from the North Pontic-Caspian steppes that resulted in the Indo-Europeanization of Old Europe. Of this, Adomas Butrimas wrote, "When Marija Gimbutas

presented her theories on the Kurgan culture, the migrations of the Indo-Europeans and the civilization of Old Europe (c. 6500–3500 BC), she made a deep impact on the thinking of her time and became a *Magna Mater* on Indo-European and Old European societies. In the development of these theories, she used Baltic material for her interpretations of European archaeomythology. Baltic prehistory, mythology and linguistics became part of her magnificently illustrated volumes on Old European civilization" (Butrimas, 1997, 34).

In *The Living Goddesses,* published in 1999 five years after her death, Marija Gimbutas writes about the continuity of Old European elements in Lithuania in which "the Baltic pantheon remarkably preserves an almost complete Old European family of goddesses and gods. . . . Best preserved are the goddesses, who were life and birth givers, healers, protectresses of households and communities, bringers of earth fertility, death messengers, and life regenerators. Until recently, people kissed Mother Earth as if she were a human mother, in the morning and in the evening ... The snake [was] the symbol of life energy for millennia" (Gimbutas, 1999, 213).

Conclusion

Marija Gimbutas's personal life, cultural lineage and classical education in Lithuania – guided by Professor Jonas Puzinas, and all of the other brilliant professors who nurtured her eager mind – had a profound impact upon her development as a scholar. The powerful vitality that flowed through her, which her cousin Meilė Lukšienė described as "volcanic," seemed to arise from a great depth carrying ancestral knowledge that animated her Baltic roots (Figure 5). She was nurtured by her remarkable family with Dr. Jonas Basanavičius who devoted their lives to gathering the seeds of knowledge to be planted into the future – believing that fertile ground could still be found, even during the darkest, most destructive periods. She came to understand that the prehistoric worlds she was studying revealed patterns of relationships, that were never simply collections of disconnected objects.

Marija Gimbutas was a world class scholar who continued to refine her observations and discoveries, and she took to heart Dr. Puzinas's admonition to be willing to let go of even the most cherished beliefs in the presence of more viable evidence. During the last decades of her life, she continued an in-depth study of cultures she named as Old European, which represent a complete contrast to the warrior tribes of the steppes. She relished the beauty, stability, peacefulness, and enormous outpouring of ritual items, elegant ceramics, and sculptures from Neolithic Old Europe that express the beliefs and world view of the earliest horticulturalists of Europe who knew how to live in balance with the living world.

Marija Gimbutas had no way to know that her Kurgan theory would be vindicated by the development of ancient DNA technology. Moreover, the hybridization she described between Old Europeans and Indo-Europeans can now be examined, as with X-ray vision, proving that many of her most significant interpretations were correct. During her centennial year in 2021 she was honored by UNESCO as one of the "eminent personalities who have helped shape the civilization we share by contributing to the mutual enrichment of cultures for universal understanding and peace."[18]

In 1993, Marija Gimbutas returned to her beloved Lithuania to receive an Honorary Doctorate from Vytautas Magnus University. The entire nation rose up to greet her and to celebrate the return of its faithful daughter. On February 2 of the following year, Marija Gimbutas passed into the realm of the Ancestors. Her ashes were placed in an owl urn symbolic of regeneration, created by Julija Ikamaitė. Her funeral ceremony took place at Vilnius University's St. John Church on May 7, 1994, before she was taken to the Petrašiūnai cemetery to be buried

[18] Excerpt of announcement by Asta Junevičienė, Secretariat of Lithuania's National UNESCO Commission, concerning the inclusion of Marija Gimbutas in the official list of significant memorial dates during the 40th session of UNESCO'S General Assembly. The inclusion of the 100th anniversary of Marija Birutė Alseikaitė-Gimbutienė/Gimbutas was supported by the National UNESCO committees of Latvia and Germany, and by Pacifica Graduate Institute in the USA. I am grateful to Živilė Gimbutas for sharing this announcement with me and for translating this excerpt into English.

Fig. 5. Marija Gimbutas at the studio of New Dimensions Radio, Sausalito, CA, 1991 (*photo by Jane Heaven, with permission*).

5 pav. *Marija Gimbutas „New Dimensions Radio“ studijoje, Sausalito, CA, 1991 (Jane Heaven nuotrauka jos autorės leidimu)*

next to her mother accompanied by a thousand mourners. Gintautas Česnys was asked to say these few words of farewell: “The grand personalities of a small nation come to light only against a worldwide background. This is the case with our great Lithuanian-American archaeomythologist Marija Gimbutas. Now she has returned and belongs to us: a small sand grave on the bank of the Nemunas River, piles of books and the powerful fluttering of Goddess’s wings over the ancient land of the Balts and all of Europe” (Česnys, 1997, p. 29).

On September 1–7 of 1994, the international, interdisciplinary conference which Marija had planned as “The Indo-Europeanization of Northern Europe” was held in her honor. Dr. Česnys recalls, “This conference was a significant event in the scientific and cultural life of Lithuania. It had a spirit of academic, international and human cooperation that was so characteristic of Marija Gimbutas. The results of the conference shed light on the processes that transformed the culture of ancient Northern Europe into the Indo-European world, especially in the circum-Baltic area” (Česnys, 1997, p. 30). It is certain that her spirit and scholarship live on.

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