

Professor **Marija Gimbutas** and Those Indo-Europeans



The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago – a leading center for the study of ancient Near Eastern civilizations Part of the collection of the Oriental Institute.

• Lectureship at the Oriental Insitute • Genetic studies confirm her theory • Faced and overcame discrimination



Prof. Marija Gimbutas

AUDRIUS V. PLIOPLYS

Marija Gimbutas (1921-1994) was an accomplished, world-renowned scholar, known for her studies on ancient European civilizations. She created a new field of scientific investigation—archaeomythology by combining archeology, linguistics, ethnology, and religion into a single discipline. Her approach significantly impacted today's understanding of prehistoric Europe.

During World War II, faced with the Soviet occupation, she fled Lithuania with her husband and two young daughters. She completed her archeological studies in Germany and then moved to the United States. She worked at Harvard University and later at UCLA. In 1993 she received an honorary doctorate from Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania. Marija Gimbutas was also an active member of the Santara-Šviesa organization. She helped Vytautas Kavolis edit the *Metmenys* journal in which she published her own scientific articles in Lithuanian.

On November 8, 2017, at the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, Marija Gimbutas was the subject of a lecture which I helped organize and un-

derwrite. The talk presented her scientific contribution in establishing the origins of the Indo-Europeans. The presenter was Lord Colin Renfrew, Senior Fellow of the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Formerly Disney Professor of Archaeology and Director of the McDonald Institute, University of Cambridge. He flew in from England for the sole purpose of giving this lecture.

Oriental Institute

The Oriental Institute is an internationally recognized center for the study of archeology of the ancient world. In addition to undertaking and sponsoring a large number of archeological excavations and publishing its findings, the Institute, as part of the University of Chicago, has an active undergraduate and postgraduate education program. The Institute also maintains a museum that has an impressive array of unique artifacts from the ancient Near East.

The Oriental Institute is presently involved in a multi-year project, The Hittite Dictionary, where extant linguistic material regarding the Hittite language is being collected. It is the oldest known Indo-European language. The Hittite empire flourished in central Turkey from 1,600 to 1,200 BC. Thus, Indo-European origins are of considerable interest to the Institute.

As part of the Institute's educational program, a monthly public lecture is presented on a current archeological topic. This is the first time that the Institute sponsored a lecture to honor a specific person, namely, Marija Gimbutas.

Origins

The question of origins has always been a matter of great importance to me. What are the origins of the universe? How did life appear on earth? From where did our Indo-European culture and language arise? It is this last question that brought me to Marija Gimbutas's research.

In general terms, Marija Gimbutas presents a hypothesis that ancient Europe was settled by a peaceful, matrifocal society. From the steppes of the Caucasus, the Indo-Europeans came in like an invading force—on horses, militaristic, and patrilineal. Our own Lithuanian ancestors descended from these invading forces. She called this the Kurgan hypothesis.

An alternative hypothesis,

advocated by Lord Colin Renfrew, maintained that Indo-Europeans originated from what is now central Turkey and that they slowly, and gradually spread through Europe.

The question which of these two theories is correct has intrigued me for some time.

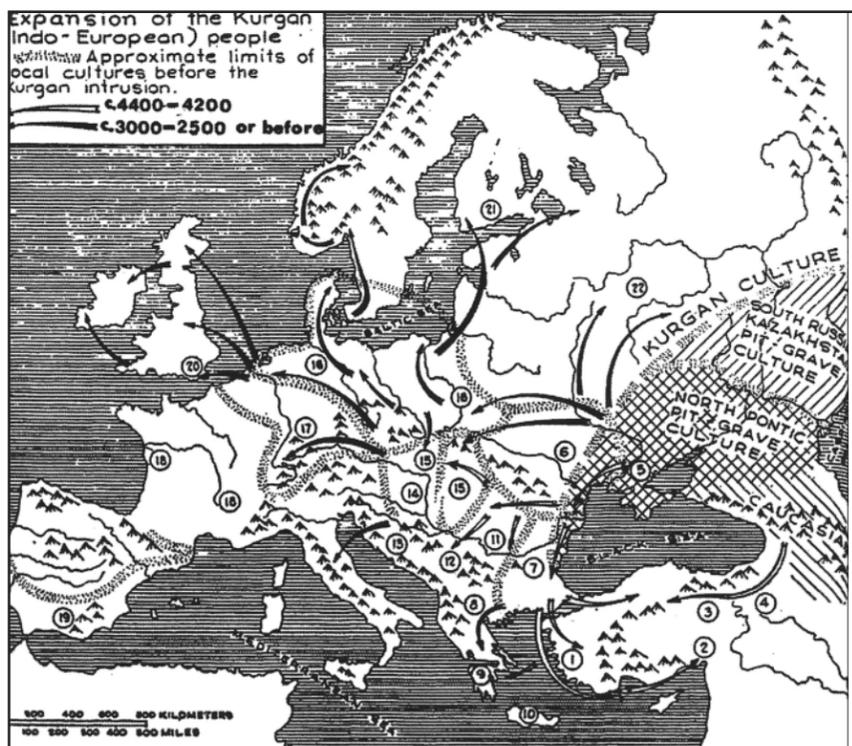
In studying the literature about Indo-European origins, a year and a half ago, I ran across a DVD featuring an interview with Marija Gimbutas, entitled "Signs Out of Time." The conversation covered her entire life, from her early education in Lithuania to her professorship at UCLA. This DVD was produced in 2003 by Belili Productions and Canadian Donna Read and was narrated by Olympia Dukakis. (You can view the interview on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjE2-H1R9Zs.)

What I heard, stunned me. After surviving the ravages of World War II, and ultimately arriving to the safety of the US, she nevertheless suffered unimaginable indignities in pursuing her professional goals. She asserted that the discrimination which she faced at Harvard was inherently misogynistic. That is probably true. But, I also believe, given the severity of what she had to endure, that there was an additional catalyst for discrimination—the fact that she was an immigrant from Eastern Europe.

Given her archeological accomplishments, and now knowing the discrimination she had to confront, I felt an obligation to bring her saga to the highest levels of academia. I jumped to the task. A year and a half later, the Marija Gimbutas Memorial Lecture took place.



Archeologists and colleagues (from l. to r.) Ernestine Elster, Colin Renfrew, and Marija Gimbutas in 1986 at the publication celebration for their edited work reporting on the Sitagroi excavations – a middle neolithic to early bronze age site in northeast Greece.



Map of Indo-European migrations from ca. 4000 to 1000 BC according to Marija Gimbutas' developed Kurgan model.

Professor Marija Gimbutas and Lord Colin Renfrew

As the director of the McDonald Institute for Archeological Research at Cambridge University in England, Lord Renfrew is considered by many to be one of the most accomplished living archeologists in the world. In 1967 Lord Renfrew was invited to be a visiting professor at UCLA, where he met Marija Gimbutas. In 1968 he initiated a three-year archeological dig in Sitagroi, Greece, while Marija Gimbutas was conducting excavations in Obre, Bosnia. The distance between these two locations was some 250 miles. They visited each other's archeological sites and collaborated in presenting their research results. They became close friends and participated in archeological explorations together. However, they parted ways over the issue of the geographic origins of the Indo-Europeans. Lord Renfrew became a vocal opponent of Marija's theory.

Recently, however, Lord Renfrew has surprisingly changed his view on the question and dramatically reversed himself. Lord Renfrew is involved in ongoing Near East and European genetic mapping studies. As in many areas of biologic and medical research, genetics is now the cornerstone. It appears that the same is happening in archeology. Based on the latest genetic population analyses Marija's theory is proving to be correct. In his talk, Lord Renfrew reviewed all of the re-

cent genetic studies concerning Indo-European origins. These results strongly support Marija's Kurgan hypothesis. The title of his lecture was "Marija Rediviva: DNA and Indo-European Origins." The word "rediviva" means to be rediscovered, or reborn.

Discrimination: a woman and an immigrant

I have had the honor of hearing Gimbutas speak in Chicago on two occasions. The last time was but a few months before her death. The difficulties that she faced in her professional career were not evident in her presentations and publications. Only in the DVD interview does she recall any discriminatory events. Thus, the following information was gleaned from the filmed account. The observations were confirmed in conversations with Dr. Ernestine Elster, an archeology researcher at UCLA, and one of Gimbutas's first students, subsequently a close colleague.

Gimbutas worked as a research fellow at Harvard University's Peabody Museum from 1950 to 1963. She was given a table in the basement of the Museum to work. She taught students, conducted research, and published her results in Harvard University publications. However, she was not paid. She did not even receive royalty payments for her books which the university published. She also suffered other indignities. Several research libraries

that she needed to use barred women from entering. This made obtaining needed reference material difficult.

As a fellow, she was not allowed to join the University's Faculty Club. She could only enter the club if a male member invited her and physically escorted her in.

Marija was fluent in several European languages. Male Harvard faculty members repeatedly requested her to translate material for them. She did this, receiving no payment and no acknowledgment. Misogyny was thriving. I do not know whether a similar attitude was prevalent at other US universities at that time. I am confident, however, that no male, not even an Eastern European immigrant, would have been treated in the fashion which Gimbutas was.

Named lectureship

The Marija Gimbutas Memorial Lecture is the first named lectureship in the history of the Oriental Institute since it was founded in 1931. It re-

ceived significant attention. Four representatives from the UCLA archeology program flew in from Los Angeles to Chicago to hear it. The lecture was videotaped, and it will soon be posted on the Oriental Institute's website. Anyone, anywhere in the world, will be able to view it. This will be a fitting memorial to a woman who overcame discrimination and accomplished so much.

Vytautas Kavolis, a renowned cultural historian and Gimbutas's colleague wrote, "She was the only scientist in the 20th century who succeeded in finding and researching a civilization that was not yet known. She summarized the abundant excavations in the Balkans in her substantial works on the civilization of ancient Europe, gave it a name, and was able to decipher its language. Thanks to her extraordinary erudition, Marija Gimbutas was able to discover traces of a lost world and the fact that in the Neolithic, women played a much more important role than they were attributed to in history."

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Audrius V. Plioplys, advocate of the Marija Gimbutas Memorial Lecture at the Oriental Institute.

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