

Reconstructing Her-Story: the multidisciplinary method applied to East Asia

at the 10th EGEP 2016 in Seoul Korea

Abstract. Before male-dominated societies there were egalitarian societies of peace, in which the mothering female was at the center, matriarchies. They were peaceful; graves from this period do not show weapons, settlements are not walled for defensive reasons and art does not depict weapons. These female oriented societies used a lost language of symbols that mostly is not understood by traditional science. You have to deconstruct His-Story in order to reconstruct Her-Story. A multidisciplinary method is used to reconstruct and remember this lost language of symbols. Retracing sacred feminine art or 'Venus Art' can provide a great leap forwards in retrieving women friendly egalitarian cultures. This new Her Story approach maps the contribution of woman to evolution and brings to an end a male world history without women.

Keywords: lost language of symbols, egalitarian societies of peace, matriarchies, multidisciplinary.

1. Introduction

Remembering the language of symbols. In July 2016 I was invited by the Asian Center of Women's Studies to lecture at the 10th Ewha Global Empowerment Program (EGEP) at Ewha University in Seoul. My audience consisted of 26 participants, feminists and activists from 22 Asian and African countries, the staff of the Asian Center of Women's Studies, interested researchers from Ewha University and members of a newly founded Korean Goddess Group.

One of my goals was to familiarize my audience again with the ancient *language of symbols* rooted in ancient female-oriented egalitarian 'societies of peace', also called 'matriarchies'. I wanted them to recognize these symbols in their surroundings, whether they lived in Asia or in Africa, wherever they lived on earth. This was to empower them and give them hope for a better future. The land of our mothers, our 'motherland', is under our feet and we do not recognize it. You have 'to peel the onion', to peel of the patriarchal layers and to recognize the *language of symbols* in art, landscape, folklore and myths. You have to deconstruct His-Story in order to reconstruct Her-Story. And then you can construct Our-Story: a new story for the generations to come in the 21st century.

A new interdisciplinary method. For this construction work I used an interdisciplinary method. I give new insights about the lost language of symbols that enables us to reconstruct Her-Story from several scientific disciplines; archaeology, anthropology, art history, mythology, sacred geography, landscape mythology, ethnology, linguistics, religious studies, psychology and inner alchemy. When you put the lost letters of the female language of symbols together as if they were pieces of a puzzle, you start to see the global picture. You cannot deny the existence of ancient egalitarian 'societies of peace' – often called 'matriarchies' – anymore.

In my lecture I used global examples but laid special emphasis on the East Asian area. In this article I will do the same, but have to restrict myself. An extended version of the lecture and this article you will find on my website.¹

2. My way into Egalitarian 'Societies of Peace' or 'Matriarchies'

In the beginning of my lecture I gave an introduction into *matriarchal studies*. How did I arrive in this field? What was my way into this field? Before the year 1989 I studied history (masters in 1979) and theology (Ph.D in 1989) in a traditional and a quite patriarchal way. After my divorce and burn-out I started to ask myself why do these things happen to me. Finally I had time to read theologian and goddess studies; I recovered and started to travel around the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Far East. I visited archaeological sites and museums only to find out that the patriarchal study books gave patriarchal interpretations of female art and symbols which did not justify this art. I started to see it differently. My books were published from 2006 on. I began to reconstruct the lost language of symbols. The contours of what I call 'the Motherland', started to show themselves to me. I had to familiarize myself again with the symbols of the language of the Divine Feminine or MA or the Mother and I am still learning. In the English edition from 2013 of my book *The Language of MA the primal Mother* I inventorized, systematized and categorized a global sacred language of symbols and iconography of the Divine Female.² This classification showed the evolution of the female image in earlier egalitarian or matriarchal societies and the degeneration in later patriarchal ones on a global level.

Matriarchal studies. Somewhere around 2000 I came across the books of dr. Heide Göttner-Abendroth. Her work on matriarchal studies changed my world and worldview. This made me realize that the Divine Feminine was part of a much bigger and well structured social picture. The Mother Goddess was not the marginal phenomenon that she had become later in patriarchy. No, she was central in a pre-patriarchal global egalitarian society of peace. I followed Heide's example and founded in 2008 in Holland a school called the Academy Pansophia.³ From 2009 on I started to travel to matriarchal conferences (Canada, Germany, Italy and Switzerland).⁴ I rediscovered *modern* egalitarian societies of peace or *modern* matriarchies – although more and more under pressure of state involvement, mass tourism and multinationals. To my surprise I found out that they are still alive in some remote parts of this patriarchal world. While visiting matriarchal world conferences and being a member of the international matriarchal studies network I learned about the multidisciplinary method which was presented in these circles and started to use it.

The definition of matriarchy. Heide Göttner-Abendroth redefines the term 'matriarchy'. We are used to the patriarchal definition: 'domination by mothers'. But the Greek word *archè* has a double meaning: it means 'beginning' and 'domination'. Women have to reclaim this term because reclaiming the term matriarchy in the sense of 'the mothers from the beginning' means reclaiming cultures that had women in the center, and these were egalitarian and peaceful (mater-mother and *archè* or begin, compare to archetype).⁵

Other scholars have presented other names because they thought the term 'matriarchal' too stressful. You also find the terms *matristic*, *matricentric*, *gylanic*. We could theorize endlessly about various labels. But in my opinion all researchers agree that in these societies the mother or the mothering female is central and while being central the mothering female (and male) is *not* dominating but caring and sharing and leading. Female leadership is embedded in the solidarity of the clan in the enlarged family.

The structure of egalitarian societies. This brings me to what Heide Göttner-Abendroth calls 'the deep structure of matriarchal societies'.⁶ Ancient as well as modern egalitarian societies have much in common on the economic, social, political, cultural and spiritual levels, although there is a enormous variety on world scale.⁷

*At the economic level these mostly agricultural societies create a balanced economy; they are societies based on economic reciprocity, balanced by gift-giving.

*At the social level they are based on the clan; a matri-clan lives in a large clan house from 10 to 100 individuals. At the social level these are societies based on matrilineal kinship, whose characteristics are matrilinearity and matrilocality within the framework of gender equality.

*At the political level there is a structured consensus process. These are societies based on consensus. The clan house is the basis of decision making, both locally and regionally, and is represented externally by an (often) male delegate.

* At the spiritual and cultural level these are societies based on an all-permeating spiritual attitude that regards the whole world as divine, originating from the Feminine Divine: this engenders a sacred culture. Therefore Göttner defined them as sacred societies and cultures of the Feminine Divine. See her '*The Way into Egalitarian Society. Principles and Practice of Matriarchal Politics*' for more details.⁸

3. Reconstructing Her-Story

My lecture was a kind of wake-up call to inventarize what is left of egalitarian cultures under the patriarchal veneer in the homelands of the participants. What are the left-over's? Which elements in the landscape and culture belong to the lost language of symbols of egalitarian cultures? I also indicate in which academic disciplines these elements are researched.

1. Megalithic structures (*mega* in ancient Greek for 'big' and *lithos* for 'stone'): stone circles, standing stones or *menhirs*, and tables or *dolmen*. These structures of huge stones were erected in hunter-gatherer and early agricultural societies. The megalithic monuments often function as astronomical calendars. The scientific study of these archaeological sites is called archaeo-astronomy or astro-archaeology.⁹ There is also a connection with ancestral veneration and shamanism.

2. Venus Art, abundant sacred female art in houses, graves, clan centers, sacred open air places and temples. The art is excavated up by archaeology and researched by several disciplines: gender archaeology, symbolic anthropology and in female symbolism and iconography (art history).

3. An abstract language of geometric signs on figurines, pottery, ceramics, textiles, jewelry and wall and floor painting in and around the house developing itself in the first sacred scripts.¹⁰ When under patriarchy writing became prohibited for women, they developed secret scripts.¹¹

4. Clan mother graves with grave gifts like womblike vases with the abstract language of geometrical symbols, female figurines and spindle whorls (discs of wood, stone or clay and part of the spinning and weaving technology).

5. Long houses where in egalitarian societies lives an extended family with the clan mother in the center.¹² In some cultures this changes into a patriarchal pattern.

6. Textiles and cloth, weaved, plaited and embroidered with a feminine **language of abstract and realistic symbols**, researched by symbolic anthropology, ethnology and folklore.

7. The sacral landscape of Mother Earth as sacred temple with mountains, caves, rivers, sources and megaliths as part of the 'temple', researched by sacred geography, archaeology and mythology.¹³

8. Primal myth, oral tradition and folk stories connected to the landscape (mythology).

9. Folk customs and folk religion. Motives and characters in **folkdance** and **folksongs** (ethnology and folklore).

10. Food and dishes of the folk culture and stories around it (culinary history, food history).

11. Midwifery, healing and curing with herbal knowledge and recipes for ancient contraception and aphrodisiacs (history of healing and medicine).

12. Modern matriarchies or balanced and peaceful egalitarian societies (matriarchal studies, anthropology).

13. Blood group and genetic research in ancient egalitarian societies on mothers and children proving matrilineal and matrilocal settlements (matrilocal: children, specially the girls, continue to live as adults in the mother house).¹⁴

4. The multidiscipline method in a bird's eye view

Several disciplines give new information that helps to reconstruct Her Story.

1. Reconstructing Her-Story and archaeology. Archaeology is a young discipline: around 1850 the first archaeologist started to discover the ancient history of humankind. In 1865 the word 'prehistory' was introduced.¹⁵ At first people had no idea how old these new finds were. But the C14 method proved the very old age. A never ending flow of archaeological finds started and to the present day many new sites are found all over the world. In China Neolithic cultures of Yangshao, Hongshan and Bronze Age Shang were excavated. In Korea archeologists excavated Old Shilla from the Iron Age. In Japan more than 10.000 (mostly female) figurines were found, belonging to the Jomon art. Archeologist Olga Soffer e.a. in *The invisible Sex* threw new light on the invisible woman of prehistory.¹⁶ In 2013 a book of Judy Foster was published with the significant title *Invisible Women of Prehistory. Three million years of peace, six thousand years of war.*¹⁷ She wants to make women visible in new archaeological finds over the globe. They were there, but till now they were hardly seen or mentioned in archaeological reports and his-story books, because the archaeologists did not know the language of symbols anymore. Foster gives an overview of new finds in new and hidden worlds which shed new light on the now *visible female*: she describes non-western cultures in India, China, Korea, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Australia, Oceania and the Americas. In desertificated regions that nowadays are very dry and stony, in the distant past there was much more water; in these areas many cave art and artefacts are still found and in the near future will be found.

Pottery proves the link between Korea and Japan with Mongolia. Paleolithic people could freely move to Korea and Japan during cold phases. Between 16,000 and 7,000 the Jeulmun people of Korea and the Jomon people of Japan came from the Altai region of southern Siberia.¹⁸ Jeulmun pottery was similar to that produced in Mongolia and parts of Manchuria.

Gina Barnes records that in Korea during the Jeulmun culture (8000-1500 BC) and in Japan during the Jomon-culture (16.500-300 BC) the pottery was well developed without having originated in an agricultural society; the abundance of seafood and edible plants meant that agriculture was unnecessary. The Neolithic started here without the transition to agriculture. People settled down and gathered food and hunted. From 7000 BC the abundant food supply provided women with time to develop more advanced, refined pottery techniques as shown in the complex and very fine examples of the period.¹⁹ Pots were wide-mouthed, pointed bottomed pots with simple incised geometric designs.²⁰

Brian Griffith reports that in Korea just like in China and Japan there were traces of earlier women-centred cultures after the beginning of the historical period in which nurturing, kindness, harmony and selfless giving were encouraged, with the same values expected of both women and men.²¹

Megalithic structures. Early agricultural cultures left *all over the world* a trail of megalithic structures and Venus Art.²² You can recognize this in the landscape all over the world. They were multifunctional. They occurred as astronomical and seasonal calendars, because the annual cycle was celebrated in seasonal festivals. Megalithic structures also were grave monuments where the living people met the ancestors; they came together here; these were gathering places for the community and sacred sites.

They erected *menhirs* (standing stones) and *dolmens* (on high stones a flat stone was put as a kind of table).²³ Sometimes standing stones (male and female) show faces and have markings that indicate sexual organs.²⁴ Ancestors were revered in large *stones*, megaliths, and stone circles.

In East Asia we find a high density of megalithic structures, marking stones of Neolithic times. Megalithic culture spread over China, Korea and Japan to South Asia and Indo-China, Indonesia, Oceania and Easter Island. The highest density in East Asia is found in Korea with an estimated amount of 5000 to 30,000.²⁵ According to dr. Heide Göttner-Abenroth there is a clear relation between Neolithic early agricultural societies, megaliths, a matriarchal family structure and female shamanism.²⁶

2. Reconstructing Her Story and anthropology. Anthropologists globally are doing research in non-western *modern* balanced and peaceful egalitarian societies. They do field work in modern hunter-gatherer and agricultural cultures, egalitarian cultures.²⁷ They link modern data of these societies with ancient ones in order to understand these ancient ones better. With these data we reconstruct the economic, political, social, cultural and spiritual level of ancient egalitarian societies, as Heide Göttner-Abenroth does.

The first shamans were female. In this field a special interest is shown in shamanism. American anthropologist Professor dr. Barbara Tedlock researched this subject and made it very clear: Female shamanism is demonstrably older than male. The first shamans were female.²⁸

In East Asia to the present day it is believed that women have more and a better access to the spirit world.²⁹ In China, Korea and Japan female shamanism is still very popular; in Korea it is considered a national cultural heritage and an official 'important and intangible treasure'.³⁰ This is exceptional in modern rationalist and materialist society.³¹ This subject overlaps archaeology, anthropology, mythology and psychology. Rituals are linked with totemism, animism, shamanism, ancestress/ancestor veneration and even cosmology and astronomy.³²

Female shamanism in East Asia. Shamanism is very old and is rooted in hunter-gatherer societies of the Old Stone Age. Traditionally it is said that Siberia is the homeland of shamanism.³³ The word *sa* in the original Tungusic word *saman* means *to know*. In East Asia, especially in Korea, female shamanism is still alive in modern industrial nations. The *Wu*, the name for Chinese (female) shamans, meant the 'knowing ones', the 'wise ones'. The Chinese *wu* finds its equivalent in the Korean *mu*. In Korea the mostly female shaman is often called the *Mudang*.³⁴ In Japan the female shaman is known under the name the *Miko*.³⁵ In East Asia the goal is to communicate with the spirits of the ancestors/ancestresses and *to call them down* in ritual, drumming, making rhythms with bells and other instruments, songs and dancing.³⁶ A *Mudang* can heal with herbal medicine and exorcise disease spirits. She also is clairvoyant and can foretell the future. She occupies herself with ancestor cult and funerary rites, with midwifery and psychic and spiritual guidance.³⁷

Female shamanism in East Asia is ancient. It existed already in the Paleolithic and Neolithic and was passed on to the Bronze Age cultures in China of the late Shang ca. 1500 BC: in the grave of Lady Hao's, one of the wives of a Shang king, bells, knives and *mirrors* were found. In Korean Shilla-culture archeologists found a golden shaman's crown and belt in queen Poban's grave.³⁸ She is buried in Gyeongju in an exceptional double mount with her partner king Naemul (356-402). The tombs date from the late fourth or early fifth century. I was able to visit this extraordinary place during my stay in Korea in 2016. Written testimony indicates that early kings from the Shilla dynasty practise matrilineal residence, they lived with the parents of their spouse, probably because the throne passes from mother to daughter. Kings are men who marry into the line and receive permission to act as delegates in the outside world.³⁹

Now we know what treasure this double tomb hides... It hides the secret that the Shilla 'kingdom' in fact was ruled by king Naemul and queen Puban, a shaman.

Mudangs in modern Seoul. Near the old city wall in Seoul I climbed to the Inwangsa temple on Inwangsan Mountain on Sunday the 10th of July. While ascending we visited a place where the day before - on Saturday the 9th of July - a group of 5 or 6 Mudangs gave a 'gut' (séance) and went into trance. I saw the stairs that one of them had climbed. On the top she stood on sharp knives without being wounded. This was told to us orally by the female guardian of 'Grandmothers well' a little higher on the mountain. Female shamanism is more than a cultural heritage. It is part of Korean society.

3. Reconstructing Her Story and Art History. Paleolithic or Ice Age cultures depict mostly (pregnant) animals. When they depict humans, they depict the female human being. **Of all the prehistoric findings in the Paleolithic (40,000-10,000) and Neolithic (9,400-3,500 BC) not even 2 percent of human art is male.**⁴⁰ A famous archaeologist had to admit: *'It is the statues of women which determine the portrayal of humankind'*.⁴¹

Who made this mostly female art? Women or men? In the 19th century the first male archaeologists thought women were not able to make 'art'. Recent research on the thousands of handprints pressed on rocks made clear that there were many female handprints too. This was the ultimate proof that cave art was produced by female artists too. Not only males but also females could paint, potter, shamanize and heal!⁴²

The oldest symbols

The most ancient symbols on a global level were *the vulvas* (symbol of the life-giving womb) carved on and in the rocks of caves⁴³ and *red ochre* (life-blood) sprinkled on dead bodies and female statues.⁴⁴ The *moon* is a third important symbol: these ancient cultures were female-oriented moon cultures, with a respect for the moon- and star cycles. People used moon-calendars to measure time.⁴⁵

And what about those fat female figurines, called 'Venuses'? Many of them had fat **Bellies**, **Bottoms** and **Breasts**, showing the three B's. Why did ancient cultures make them? I called this still growing global collection of sacred female art 'Venus Art'. Venus Art was also found in China and Japan.

Definition of Venus Art. Venus Art is defined as the sacred feminine art of nature peoples with birth, death and rebirth as its central themes. Patriarchal scholars interpreted them as 'pin up girls of stone age' but goddess scholars believe it is **art of the primal mothers and ancestresses**.

Ancestresses become deified much later and develop into goddesses; that there is a clear relation between the two is proven by the fact that both groups stand in the same sacred body positions; I researched 13 in total.⁴⁶ The life-giving female organs are significantly enlarged, this is a characteristic of global ancestress/ancestor art. Animals come from the mother's womb; animal figures are part of Venus Art. The masculine element is depicted in connection with the feminine

giving life and is part of the annual cycle.⁴⁷ The vulva and the phallus are often depicted in relation to each other; traditional science calls this 'fertility religion' but this symbolism goes much deeper; it's symbolism about birth, death and rebirth.

The 13 bodypositions of the Divine Female. The EGEP staff requested me on the Friday 14th of July, the second day of the Open Forum, to do meditative bodywork presenting these 13 sacral positions in the Convention Hall and going through them with the audience. We stood silently and with respect in 1. the birthing position; 2. the Clanmother or Dea Genetrix posture; 3. the Dea Gravida pose; 4. the Dea Nutrix pose; 5. the pose of the Mother of Plants and Animals; 6. the pose of invocation or the 'hurray' pose; 7. androgyny; 8. Mother with child or Dea Lactans; 9. blessing; 10. mourning; 11. praying; 12. Feminine duality and trinity; 13. the Dea Regeneratrix pose. We had a lot of fun when we were standing in the position of the bird goddess and imitating the octopus and jelly fish! (The bird, doe and fish are partner animals of the Divine Female belonging to pose 5).

Venus Art and social status. Does a preponderance of female Venus Art reflect a social structure where women were central and revered because of their important economic, social and spiritual functions? In my opinion this is the case. But not everybody agrees. Who are depicted? Are they prostitutes, fat ladies, goddesses, female ancestors, spirits or just normal 'women'? The answer depends on which current in archaeology you follow.

3.1 The interpretation

*This 19th century interpretation one was the erotic one. Because of their enhanced vulva, breasts, bellies and buttocks, they were 'sex-bombs and pin-ups'! Play girls or Prehistory! In Christian circles people saw them as 'fertility-idols', from horrific *pagan* times.⁴⁸ Unfortunately many contemporary (male) archaeologists still adhere this 19th century old sexual approach!

*The beginning of the 20th century started in the USA, England and the former Soviet Union with the veneration for and adherence to 'The Goddess'.⁴⁹ Archaeologists were impressed by the many, many female figurines they found: that must had something to do with the veneration of nature and Mother Earth; the figurines were Mother goddesses.

*After the 1960s the 'Goddess' tide changed. Postmodern times of criticism, rationalism and skepticism dawned. Goddess-theories were sent home. The New Archaeology became the influential current in western universities and important museums. The 'New' Archaeologists were measuring, calculating and only looking from the outside. One could not prove that the female figurines were 'goddesses'. They were 'normal women'. Although an enormous majority of female art was found in Neolithic sites worldwide, the New Archaeology archaeologist (processual and postprocessual) stated that it was inappropriate to draw *conclusions* to gender and high female status, although the many female figurines could be an *indication*!⁵⁰ But to name the figurines' 'goddesses' was prohibited. The figurines had to be 'normal women'.

*In the 21st century the contours of new ways of interpretation present themselves. The female statues reflect social status. But some archaeologists see more in them. There is an inclination to a symbolic, spiritual and shamanistic interpretation.⁵¹ Harald Haarmann: Hunter and gatherers cultures from Paleolithic Siberia and Europe viewed and still view the ancestral mothers as protective spirits of the home and the hearth. The *full-figured* figurines of women symbolize the life-giving and life-maintaining aspects of the clan mothers. The stiff and stick-like figurines are said to represent the soul or the spirit who departed. They are said to protect the hearth in particular because this is the place where fire transforms life and food.⁵²

The crack in sisterhood: 'a goddess' or 'a normal woman'?

The debate about 'goddesses' caused a split in the women/gender/feminist world. It was one of the first cracks in sisterhood. The feminist world split in two halves:

1. The *academic feminist world* in archaeology and women studies focused on 'women'.
2. The *spiritual goddess movement* focused on 'Goddesses', and shamanism. Goddesses and shamans became a topic in the women's spirituality movement. The goddess movement was ignored by the academic world and excluded.⁵³ Change is needed: the movement must be integrated.

Solving the problem. In *The Language of MA* I stated that goddesses were deified clan mothers. This statement was based on the elaborate research work on Venus Art in the Middle East of Professor dr. Othmar Keel and Professor dr. Silvia Schroer from Switzerland.⁵⁴ They concluded on the basis of studies on *hundreds* of sites in Anatolia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan that in the *early agricultural* communities human art was mostly female art. The figures are shocking.⁵⁵ They found out that sites like Ain Ghazal contained life-size *ancestral* mother statues; they did not call them *goddesses*. From these large female statues smaller copies were made which were kept in sacred places of the big family-house and the larger clan or community center.⁵⁶ The oldest figures and figurines represent *clan mothers or nana's*. For their contribution to evolution they became so important for later generations that they were deified.⁵⁷ This happened globally. What a joy to encounter 'Chinese Venuses' in China in Hongshan culture too⁵⁸. A building with large female statues and one life-size red face is called 'the goddess temple' and the face is called 'the face of a goddess'.⁵⁹ In reality we have to do with the ancestress and Chinese archaeologists agree.⁶⁰

3.2 Venus Art and Japan

The Ainu were the aboriginal people of Japan. Jomon pottery originated with the ancestors of present day Ainu people from Japan around 16,500 BCE.⁶¹ The Jomon people were descendants of an ancient Paleo-Asiatic lineage which may also have included the Jeulmun people of Korea. Luigi Cavalli-Sforza gives genetic evidence concerning the likeness of the northern Chinese to the Manchurians, Koreans and Japanese.⁶²

The Jomon culture lasted from 16,500 till 300 BC. They were semi-sedentary hunter-gatherers and fisher people with an animist religion. They lived in pit houses around a central open space. Jomon pottery is the earliest known pottery. Women made clay pots, coiled ones and low fired, finely shaped and finished. They were peaceful people until 500 BC. At that time the patriarchal Yagoi culture arrived; they merged with the Jomon cultures between 300 and 0 BC. Together they became the ancestors of the modern Ainu people.⁶³

Jomon figurines. With the incipient Jomon period (16,500 BC) the first fired clay female figurines appeared; they are *semi-abstract*.⁶⁴ Other ritual clay artefacts appeared too as the first evidence of egalitarian cultures.

Earliest Jomon female figurines from late Paleolithic are *stones* incised with symbolic markings including breasts. Female figurines range in size from 3 to 30 centimeters, usually standing, and a few crouching. In later phases they show generous figures with large hips and breasts and pubic triangles and triangles, spirals, running spirals and zigzags. Colors are red.

Over 10,000 figurines have been found and most of them are female.⁶⁵ This corresponds with the amounts of female Venus Art found in the Middle East and Old Europe. Is this an indication or a proof of women's status in egalitarian societies? For me it is.

The image of (pre) His-Story without women is coming to an end. Art history can provide an extra proof in the dismantling of the image of His-Story without women. Retracing Venus Art can provide a great leap forwards in retrieving women friendly egalitarian cultures.

4. Reconstructing Her Story and mythology. We use *origin myths* as indicators for gender-relations in Neolithic societies. Myths are often rooted in ritual and have a core of historical truth. Oral

tradition transmitted them in an egalitarian way before they were written down (by men) in a patriarchal way. Robert Graves⁶⁶ and Riane Eisler saw myth as mirror of social and gender relations.⁶⁷ Peggy Reeves Sanday saw a link between origin myths and gender relations.⁶⁸ She stated that origin myths reflect the gender-roles in societies. Origin myths are a matrix for interpreting the relationship between males and females. In her cautious way of putting it: a major female presence could *indicate* but does not *prove* the high status of women.⁶⁹

My research in ancient Egypt showed the majority of the oldest deities to be female energies related to nature, later called 'goddesses'.⁷⁰ In East Asia deities that are female, are particularly worshipped. They belong to nature: to the mountains, springs, seas and trees. Myths are related to special places in the landscape; this new field is called landscape-mythology.

The evolution in myths. Myths reflected a female-friendly society before they were reformed and adapted to patriarchal standards. When you study mythology you discover that primal goddesses are demonized in later theology, sacred texts and His-Story and are depicted as dangerous and malicious. A good example is the snake in Christianity. From a positive symbol of shape changing and renewal the snake in the first bible book Genesis became the source of evil and the devil ~~her~~himself. Most patriarchal creation myths begin with the murder of a monster which represents the expiring matriarchal order.⁷¹

Amaterasu. In Japan the myth of Amaterasu shows the transition from a female oriented society into a male oriented one. The Amaterasu myths were written down in the late 600 and early 700s CE but oral myths were at that time at least 2000 years old.⁷² It gives us a glimpse in the historical situation that matriarchal queens sometimes had to deal with patriarchally influenced brother-regents, Heide Göttner-Abendroth states.⁷³ With the Yayoi Period (500 BC-300 CE) immigrants arrived from the mainland and the culture started to change in a socially stratified society engaged in armed conflicts over land and resources. Around 300 CE with the Kofun Period the patriarchalization process in Japan started (300-710 CE).

5. Reconstructing Her Story and sacred geography. There were special places in the body of Mother Earth that were considered very sacred⁷⁴: mountains in general, specially mountains/vulcanoes with two (breastlike) tops; islands in the form of a pregnant women as Pulau Dayang Bunting in the Langkawi archipel in Malaysia⁷⁵; a womblike cleft in a mountain; sources and places where two or three rivers flow together. In southern Germany in Passau a *white, green* (stands for *red*) and *black* river flow together; exactly at that place a church for a threefold Mary appeared, an ancient place of pilgrimage.⁷⁶

But we also find in the north of Vietnam a large delta that is fed by three rivers: the white, the red and the black one; the three unite into one, the red river, and flow into the ocean.⁷⁷

In the southern part of Vietnam you find the delta of the Mekong; the name of this river literally means 'Mother of all water bodies'. In this delta we find the holy mountain called Ba Den, literally 'Black Women Ancestress'; another one is found in the centre of Vietnam. Sometimes the ancestress is addressed as Po Ino Nagar. 'Nagar' means snake or dragon, it is the classical animal for the underworld of the Earth or Sea Goddess.⁷⁸ Many examples could be given from China.

Granny Buddha. During my visit in Korea I visited Gyeongju and on the North side of Mt. Nam in Bucheogol we found a rock where a female Buddha was cut. According to the nearby description she was 'Granny Buddha'. In the guide book she was called 'Aunti Buddha'.⁷⁹ She is the oldest image of all Buddhist images that remain on Mount Nam. Labels as Granny or Aunti indicate that this Lady is coming from an older cultural layer than the Buddhist one. From a source on the top water sometimes flows over the statue and the enormous rock: Granny Buddha made the land fertile and before her a female shaman was starting her ritual when we arrived.

When I visited in Seoul the sacred mountain Inwangsam I came across a Grandmother Well and a Grandfather Well. We passed the rock 'Gijaam', the rock of childbearing prayers' where women who long for a baby, used to pray.

In many sacred places the ancestress or the goddess is related to the source or river, mountains or other elements in the landscape. At that place there also will be an oral tradition handed down in folk tales and folk songs.

Geomancy. In ancient China scientists developed the science of geomancy and called it Feng Shui. They used the dowsing rod of divining rod already in 2200 BC. Our ancestors could see and feel small and bigger energy lines on the surface of Mother Earth and used it for healing purposes. Heide Göttner-Abendroth describes geomancy as one of the oldest matriarchal arts or techniques.⁸⁰ There are some special places where the energy of Mother Earth is particularly high. Modern scientific geomancy uses new measuring techniques and is able to measure and make statistics. These places are marked by megalithic stones (big stones) or megalithic structures (stone circles and dolmens), or by a special tree or they are close to a natural source. In Europe Black Madonna's are often found on these crossroads of energy lines which are marked by these signs. I researched this phenomenon in 2015 in France. Here the veneration of the Black Madonna is scientifically linked to the veneration of high-energy places and also with Mary Magdalene who worked and lived here.⁸¹

6 Reconstructing Her Story and ethnology. Research in textile arts is very young because it is only recently accepted as a sub discipline of archaeology and symbolic anthropology. In the past academia labeled weaving as a folk-art or folklore; by this happy circumstance weaving stayed in the domain of women, even in male-dominated societies. Working with textile, bread, eggs, paper, straw, palm leaves and paint (also for mandala's on walls and floors) was considered to be an innocent household activity whereas usual male crafts working with metal or wood became controlled by church and state.

Mary Kelly is an artist and professor of art who documented folk textiles all over the world.⁸² She discovered that globally textiles and cloth had certain symbols in common. She writes about 'the great Mother in her *naturalistic* or human form or in a very *abstract* form in which you will not recognize her when you do not know her language of symbols'. You see her body in different shapes: a tree of life connected with the soul world in upper- and under worlds; her horned headdress that sometimes consists of very long horns; you will find her as a doe, roe of hind, or as a bird. Several male animals as the deer and the horse and predators pop up in the textile folk arts. There is a balance between male and female; the male is also depicted.

Only recently women and goddess scholars like Elisabeth Barber, Olga Soffer and Mary Kelly took up this exciting new field of research. The patterns form a new and very interesting source of research to reconstruct egalitarian times with their global impact and appearance. They open ancient doors of perception to egalitarian times in balance. When folklore is fading away, go to a regional folklore museum, research and see!

Korean Guardian poles. When you travel in the countryside in Korea you can encounter 'guardian poles' or 'Jangseung'. Carved village guardians are traditionally *a pair*, a male and a female. The totems stand together on each road leading into the village.⁸³ This female-male partnership relation is not transmitted in modern reports (Wikipedia). They are made of wood or stone. They are called the 'Great General under Heaven' en the 'Female General under the Ground'.⁸⁴ People of Jeolla-do identify them as Grandmother and Grandfather. Inscription on the posts name them Earth Grandmother and Sky Grandfather. They are thought necessary for protection from wandering spirits.⁸⁵ I encountered Grandmother and Grandfather on Inwangsam Mountain in Seoul. Often you also find the *sotday* or 'bird totem poles' with one or more bird(s) on top of the poles. They symbolize the Tree of Life with soul birds in it. This custom derives from Korean Altaic roots and

pre-Buddhist shamanism. These cultural Korean habits date from this common origin: the Altai region of southern Siberia. Korean people are said to built *sotday* or bird poles since the period of the Three Kingdoms (57 BC-668 CE). But this custom must be much older.

7. Reconstructing Her Story and linguistics. Linguists start to uncover the older languages of egalitarian cultures, languages from before the time they were overruled by the Indo European steppe nomads who brought a male dominated society in Eurasia. In *The Chalice and the Blade in Chinese Culture* (1995) Min Jiayin records: Many ancient writings can be found in China which record a time when 'a man knew his mother without knowing his father' and (later on) when a husband resided with his wife's family. Children adopted their mother's family name. The Chinese character *xing* (family name) is an associative compound formed by combining the element meaning 'woman' and the element meaning 'bear' The character itself carries some shade of the matrilineal system; some other family names were passed down from ancient times which also contain the element meaning 'woman' or 'Ji' such as Jiang, Jao of Si.⁸⁶

8. Reconstructing Her Story and Philosophy. The original respect for Nature, the female body, sacral female rituals and motherhood faded away and changed in a rationalized and more mechanic view on nature, history and evolution. Philosophers became openly misogynistic. Lawmakers produced new anti-female laws. Fatherhood became important; motherhood was secondary. Philosophers even philosophized motherhood away. The mother is only a nurse for the embryo; she was a stranger who was temporarily 'hosting' the baby. She was a passive instrument; the male seed was the origin of the child, preferable a son. Reincarnation through the female body was denied. In Greek tragedies the wicked mother was murdered.⁸⁷ Society started to see the mother as biologically and spiritually inferior!⁸⁸

Inferiority of females was codified. When males started to write His-Story down, they wrote it down from their perspective of history in which the feminine was not seen because the female was considered inferior. Philosophy, laws, theology and religion, everything was assimilated to this worldview.

In the 6th century BC Confucius codified laws in which the inferiority of females was organized. We have to deconstruct these texts.⁸⁹ It took centuries before these misogynistic laws were accepted in society.⁹⁰ And unfortunately they still do in a large part of the world. Even worse: most people think that it has always been like this and cannot be changed. We need Her-Storians to correct this world view.

9. Her Story and Religious studies. It is fruitful to search in world religions for their roots in older egalitarian cultures. World religions suppress what in their eyes is nothing more than simple and primitive superstition, the older egalitarian worldview. But they could not suppress the longing of the folk people and peasants for Mother Earth, for her blessings and happiness. Old religious habits were transformed into allowable customs: Granny or Auntie Buddha appeared on the world stage.⁹¹ Much of the female heritage from the period *before* the world religions was demonized: female shamans, priestesses and goddesses became either holy immaculate virgins or prostitutes and witches. Female priests who celebrated the Sacred Marriage were written down into His-Story as courtesans and prostitutes; female shamans became witches.

10. Her Story in Psychology. We use new insights in **psychology** to uncover the *mindset* of female friendly egalitarian societies. This has to do with the cycle of nature: birth, death and rebirth. In traditional (and patriarchal) archaeology these cyclic goddesses are called 'fertility' goddesses. In *The Language of MA* they are seen as Goddess of Birth, Death and Rebirth. The rituals are often about

entering caves, going downwards into the dark and coming back upwards into the light. These global cave-rituals during menstruation have to do with the monthly dark side of the moon and the dark side of the year, during autumn and winter. During darker times females enter the darker or right side of their brain and shamanize. What happens when they drum, play the flute, the cymbal or ring the bell, or making rhythmic sounds and movements in circle dance? They are able to reduce their brain wave frequency. They know to synchronize their left and right brain wave pattern and by this they reach the knowledge of their hearts.

11. Her Story in inner alchemy. This field is enhancing the necessity of balancing the male and the female energy inside of us: the other half of Woman is Man; the other half of Man is Woman. When we balance these energies, we open our heart. Now we find the Middle Way which our ancestresses knew. Now we understand their way of living and their enlarged consciousness.

5. Final remarks

The reactions of my audience after the lecture were encouraging and even heartwarming. Tahira Khan from Pakistan enthusiastically promised that with this new view on Her-Story she would take up her PhD study again; now she could look to her very patriarchal Pakistani culture from a different angle; I had changed her worldview and others agreed.

Smita Magar from Nepal put forward that she would look differently to old people practicing shamanism in her Nepalese culture. She now understood that it was not primitive or scary; she would start to write down the recipes which herbal healers used.

Jue Sun from China asked me about sexuality and love in egalitarian societies. Love and affection had a primal place. Sacred Marriage was important, the sexual aspect was part of the spiritual. Midwives were known for their herbal knowledge to enhance fertility and lust but also to reduce it by making herbs for natural anticonception. That gave much freedom to youngsters to experiment and adult women not to have too many babies so that all the mouths could be fed.

For me: I was very surprised to find in East Asia a living heritage of many symbols and aspects from ancient egalitarian societies. I found out that in this area the lost language of symbols is much easier to reconstruct than in the West where we have lost so much more. I truly hope that the Her Story information empowered the EGEP participants. I could remove a tip of the veil that was laid over the past of their countries. Their presentations during the Open Forum made very clear that we still live in a male dominated society. There is an awful lot to do in this world before it is transformed in a balanced and egalitarian society of peace. But what our ancestresses could, we can do too. Female leadership and solidarity is the key for a better world.

Dr. Annine van der Meer, 7th of August 2016, the Netherlands.

About the contributor.

Dr Annine E.G. van der Meer (1953) is a Dutch historian of religion and holds a PhD in theology from the University of Utrecht. She is a specialist in worldwide feminine symbolism. She has travelled widely to retrace the lost language of the divine feminine in sacred art, symbols, texts and myths. She is the author of 8 books. In English she published *The Language of MA the primal mother. The evolution of the female image in 40,000 years of global Venus Art* (2013) with 1300 images of Venuses, each provided with a number and description; the corresponding characteristics are linked to each other with numbers.

She is the founder and president of the Dutch PanSophia Academy, school of Wisdom, where she also teaches. Since 2009 she represents the Netherlands in the digital international matriarchy studies network. Since 2009 she has visited various international matriarchy- and gift economy conferences in Toronto (Canada, 2009), Hambach and Winzer (Germany, 2010), Rome (2009, 2015), and Sankt Gallen (Switzerland, 2011).

Notes

¹ www.anninevandermeer.nl under articles 2016.

² Annine van der Meer, *The Language of MA the primal mother. The evolution of the female image in 40,000 years of global Venus Art*, The Hague, 2013 (**Abr. LOMA**).

³ See website www.pansophia.nl

⁴ See www.anninevandermeer.nl articles for English reports with English flag from 2009, 2010, 2011, 2015.

⁵ Heide Göttner-Abendroth ed., *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies past present and future*, World Congress on Matriarchal Studies, Luxemburg, 2003; Second World Congress on matriarchal Studies, 2005, Toronto, 2009, 17.

⁶ *Societies of Peace*, 17.

⁷ Heide Göttner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Societies, studies on indigenous cultures across the globe*, New York, 2012, 'General Introduction: Philosophy and Methodology of Modern Matriarchal Studies', xxv.

⁸ Heide Göttner-Abendroth, *The Way into Egalitarian Society. Principles and Practice of Matriarchal Politics*, Edited by the 'International Academy Hagia', Winzer, Germany, 2007, see complete English PDF on www.hagia.de.

⁹ *LOMA*, 65 n 49.

¹⁰ *LOMA*, 64, 220 n 279, 280.

¹¹ The Kabyle women of the Berbers in Algeria have a secret script; women started to write their own script in China, too. Nüshu is women's secret script, which according to Cathy Silber started in south-western Hunan.

¹² *LOMA*, 134 n 178, 179, 182, 183, 184, 185 with several ref.

¹³ *LOMA*, 328.

¹⁴ *LOMA*, 124-25 n 54, 55, 58; 132; *Van Venus tot Madonna*, 149 n 23 with ref. to Marija Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, 335 and the blood group and serogenetic research in the Lengyelcultures in Hungary where Imre Lengyel found out that women and children had the same blood group.

¹⁵ *LOMA*, 36.

¹⁶ Adovasio, Jim M., Page, Jack, Soffer Olga, *The Invisible Sex. Uncovering the True Roles of Women in Prehistory*, Smithsonian Books, 2007.

¹⁷ Judy Foster, *Invisible Women of Prehistory, Three Million years of peace, six thousand years of war*, Spinifex Press, Queensberry, North Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, 2013.

¹⁸ Foster, *Invisible Women of Prehistory*, 216.

¹⁹ Gina Barnes, *China, Korea and Japan: The rise of civilization in East Asia*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1993, 17; Foster, *Invisible Women of Prehistory*, 216.

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- ²⁰ Brian Griffith, *A Galaxy of Immortal Women*, 2012, 78; Foster, *Invisible Women of Prehistory*, 217 n 66.
- ²¹ Griffith, *A Galaxy of Immortal Women*, 127; Foster, *Invisible Women of Prehistory*, 217 n 67.
- ²² *LOMA*, 242.
- ²³ *LOMA*, 328-29 n 158 with photo from 1879 of dolmen of Khasi people in north-east India.
- ²⁴ *LOMA*, 327-340.
- ²⁵ Göttner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Societies*, 132.
- ²⁶ Göttner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Societies*, 134 n 10, 135.
- ²⁷ Steve Taylor, *The Fall. The Insanity of The Ego in Human History and The Dawning of A New Era*, Winchester, New York, 2005 gives an overview.
- ²⁸ Barbara Tedlock, *The Woman in the Shaman's body, Reclaiming the Feminine in Religion and Medicine*, New York, 2005, 28, 34 n 14 and n 15, 42, 70; *LOMA*, 103 n 285.
- ²⁹ Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Shamans, Queens and Figurines. The Development of Gender Archaeology*, Walnut Creek California, 2015, 135.
- ³⁰ *Religion in Korea. Harmony and Coexistence*, Korea Essentials, The Korea Foundation, Seoul, 2012, 24: a ceremony to the east of Jeju City was designated 'an Important Intangible Cultural Property' by the government of Korea in 1980, and an 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity' by Unesco in 2009.
- ³¹ Choi Joon-sik, *Folk Religion. The Customs in Korea*, Ewha Womans University, 2005; Kim Tae-Kon, *Korean Shamanism-Muism*, Korean Studies nr 9, Seoul, 1998.
- ³² Nelson, *Shamans*, 198.
- ³³ Nelson, *Shamans*, 192.
- ³⁴ Göttner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Studies*, 131-142; Nelson, *Shamans*, 203.
- ³⁵ Göttner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Societies*, 143.
- ³⁶ Nelson, *Shamans*, 192.
- ³⁷ Göttner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Societies*, 136-7, 140.
- ³⁸ Nelson, *Shamans*, 97, 126, 171.
- ³⁹ Yung-Chung Kim, *Women of Korea. A History from Ancient Times to 1945*, Seoul, Korea, 1976, Ewha Women's University, 1976, 164-166; Göttner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Societies*, 134 n 12.
- ⁴⁰ *LOMA*, par 4.7 'The masculine barely depicted', 69 n 74; 124 n 60; 182.
- ⁴¹ *LOMA*, 69 n 75: prof. dr. Nicholas Conard, the 'finder' of the Venus of Hohle Fels in 2009.
- ⁴² *LOMA*, 68-69 n 71, 72.
- ⁴³ *LOMA*, 62-63.
- ⁴⁴ *LOMA*, 63.
- ⁴⁵ *LOMA*, 66.
- ⁴⁶ *LOMA*, 220-228.

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- ⁴⁷ LOMA, 248.
- ⁴⁸ LOMA, 36, 70.
- ⁴⁹ LOMA, 37,70.
- ⁵⁰ Nelson, *Shamans*, 114.
- ⁵¹ LOMA, 41, 70-71.
- ⁵² LOMA, 71.
- ⁵³ Nelson, *Shamans*, 105.
- ⁵⁴ LOMA, 141 n 2, 3 and 4.
- ⁵⁵ LOMA,63, 141, **182, 187**.
- ⁵⁶ LOMA, 142-143, 503-507.
- ⁵⁷ LOMA, 177 nr 7, 178; 230, 248 nr 16.
- ⁵⁸ *The Chalice and the Blade in Chinese Culture*, 117-118.
- ⁵⁹ Min Jiayin ed., *The Chalice and the Blade in Chinese Culture, Gender Relations and Social Models*. Chinese Partnerships Research Group, China Social Sciences Publishing House, Beijing, 1995, see 10 plate 2 ‘Head of a goddess’, 119 ‘The Goddess Temple at Niuheliang’.
- ⁶⁰ *The Chalice and the Blade in Chinese Culture*, 121 n 15; Nelson, *Shamans*, 119.
- ⁶¹ Foster, *Invisible Women of Prehistory*, 218.
- ⁶² Luigi L. Cavalli-Sforza, *Genes, Peoples, and Languages*, New York, 2000, 101-162; Foster, *Invisible Women of Prehistory*,219 n 78.
- ⁶³ Foster, *Invisible Women of Prehistory*, 221 n 82.
- ⁶⁴ Junko Habu, *Ancient Jomon of Japan*, Cambridge University Press, New York, Cambridge, 2004; *The Power of Dogu, Ceramic Figures from Ancient Japan*, Simon Kaner, ed., The British Museum Press, 2009.
- ⁶⁵ LOMA, 236, 237 diagram nr [I.8.1].
- ⁶⁶ Robert Graves, *Greek Myths*, London, 1955; Robert Graves, *The White Goddess. A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, Manchester, 1970.
- ⁶⁷ Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*, 40 (Dutch transl.).
- ⁶⁸ Sanday, *Female Power and Male Dominance*, 132; Nelson, *Shamans*, 114.
- ⁶⁹ Sanday, *Female Power and Male Dominance*, 132; Nelson, *Shamans*, 114.
- ⁷⁰ Van der Meer, *Van Venus tot Madonna*, 182 n 20.
- ⁷¹ Mariam Tazi-Preve, *Motherhood in Patriarchy, Animosity Toward Mothers in Politics and Feminist Theory - Proposals for Change*, Opladen, Berlin, Toronto, 2013, 94.
- ⁷² Susan Gail Carter, ‘Amaterasu-O-Mi-Kami, Japanese Sun Goddess’, *Societies of Peace*, 394-404, 394.
- ⁷³ Heide Göttner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Studies*, 150.
- ⁷⁴ *The Language of MA*,328.

⁷⁵ Kurt Derungs, 'Landscapes of the Ancestress. Principles of Matriarchal Natural Philosophy and Landscape Mythology', *Societies of Peace*, 323-333, 238.

⁷⁶ *LOMA* part II ch 2.1.3 'Rivers and sources', 294.

⁷⁷ *LOMA*, 293.

⁷⁸ Derungs, 'Landscapes of the Ancestress', *Societies of Peace*, 323-333, 325.

⁷⁹ Gyeongju. *A Field Guide to History*, Korea Cultural and Historical Survey Society, 2007, 164-165.

⁸⁰ Annine van der Meer, *De Drie dames uit Duitsland*, The Hague, 2015, 48-53: all literature I used about this subject is in German, French or Dutch; see literature only in German and not in English yet of Heide Göttner-Abendroth en Kurt Derungs; see also in German literature on 'Geomantie' (Geomancy or Feng Shui) and in French about 'Géo-biologie'; see Paul Devereux, *Sacred Geography*, Octopus Publishing Group Ltd, 2010; see several books of John Michell and prof. dr. Alexander Thom, *Megalithic sites in Britain*, 1967.

⁸¹ Annine van der Meer, *De Zwarte Madonna van Oer – tot Eindtijd* (about The Black Madonna), Den Haag, 2015; this book will be translated into English.

⁸² Mary Kelly, *Goddess Women Cloth, A Worldwide Tradition of Making and Using Ritual Textiles*, Studiobooks, Box 5623 Hilton Head SC 20038, 2011.

⁸³ *Religion in Korea*, 12; Nelson, *Shamans*, 84, 135, 197.

⁸⁴ Marinus Anthony van der Sluijs, 'Korea's Prehistoric Past', PDF, p. 3 and 4 see www.mythopedia.com; first published in *East Asia Monthly Business Newspaper* 9 (2008), 28-29.

⁸⁵ Nelson, *Shamans*, 84 135 197.

⁸⁶ *The Chalice and the Blade in Chinese Culture*, 553.

⁸⁷ Mariam Tazi-Preve, *Motherhood in Patriarchy, Animosity Toward Mothers in Politics and Feminist Theory*, ch 3 on matricide or the murder of the mother in ancient Egypt and Greece.

⁸⁸ Annine van der Meer, *Van Venus tot Madonna*, The Hague, 2006 ch 3.7 Egypt, degrading in 350-354.

⁸⁹ Sang Wha Lee, 'Patriarchy and Confucianism: Feminist Critique and Reconstruction of Confucianism in Korea', *Women's Experiences and Feminist Practices in South Korea*, Pilwha Chang, Eun-Shil Kim eds., Asian Center for Women's Studies, Ewha Woman's University, 2005, 67-113; Nelson, *Shamans*, 49.

⁹⁰ Nelson, *Shamans*, 115.

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