

Introduction

Worldview

This book is the result of a lifetime spent living in and studying different cultures on several continents, including my earliest experiences and young adult years in Poland, part of my childhood in Uruguay, my adulthood in the United States and Peru, as well as multiple, extensive research trips to southern and central Mexico, northeastern Brazil, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Greece, Malta, Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, among others. My first motivation for this fieldwork was the research of different topics connected to my universities' studies, both in Warsaw, Poland and in New York City; when I settled in San Antonio in the mid-1990s to teach at the Modern Languages and Literatures Department of the University of Texas, my participant observation and research experience culminated in the publication of two scholarly books that make connections between the different worlds I embody, namely *The Black Madonna in Latin America and Europe: Tradition and Transformation*, and *Fierce Feminine Divinities of Eurasia and Latin America: Baba Yaga, Kālī, Pombagira, and Santa Muerte*. The current book constitutes a further development not only in harmonizing different parts of myself but, primarily, in finding connecting threads and continuity between the symbols, rituals, and beliefs that unite humanity throughout different continents and cultures of the world.

Through my years of study of the Pre-Indo-European, Neolithic, Trypillian-Cucuteni civilization from ca. 5,500–2,250 BC, as well as other Eurasian cultures, from the Paleolithic to the present,¹ a number of distinct, recurrent symbols and patterns, such as the rhomb/diamond/lozenge, the triangle, the circle, the cross, the “Birth Diagram,” the lattice motif, the Tree of Life, the tri-partite division, and the horned figure, emerged. I discovered similar motifs in the designs of Native civilizations of North, Central, and South America, as well as on other continents. From the symbols and their spatial arrangements, as well as related myths and rituals, the mythic tradition and worldview of these civilizations came forth, speaking across national, cultural, and temporal boundaries. Although in the secularized West this cosmic vision is largely forgotten, the sacred symbols continue to be reflected on garments, folk art, and everyday objects of many traditional cultures, especially in eastern, central, and southern Europe, the Near East, as well as in western, central, and eastern Asia. Many of these beliefs, myths, and rituals are still alive in Siberia and

Mongolia. To this day, in contemporary Indigenous American cultures, such as the Middle American Maya, the Uto-Aztecan Huichol, Cora, Yaqui, and Hopi, and the Apachean Navajo, we can observe similar symbolism in iconography, myth, and ritual. In this book, I reconstruct the elements that constitute the worldview and religious practices of the above-mentioned civilizations and cultures, based on the analysis of ancient as well as contemporary materials.

I am also aware and wish to call attention to the danger of cultural appropriation of designs, such as the predatory use of sacred iconographic patterns from disenfranchised ethnic and minority groups solely for the capital gain of commercial companies, without any acknowledgement and appreciation. An example is the incorporation of portions of these designs as adornments of branded women's and men's garments sold at extremely high prices in exclusive boutiques on central plazas of Mexican cities, such as Oaxaca. Interestingly, the same plazas are full of Indigenous vendors wearing their traditional garb that offer garments with the same designs produced by them in a traditional manner, at lower prices. This process of appropriation does not stop there, as these expensive branded garments are exported and sold at other fancy destinations of the world, such as Santa Fe, NM in the United States.²

This book draws on my own fieldwork and research, which repeatedly took me to various areas of the "Old European" civilization,³ such as Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Lithuania, Hungary, Turkey, and Greece (Crete) (1970s–2019), to Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Malta (1970s–2019), as well as to South, Central, and North America (Peru, Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, USA, and Canada [1980s–2018]). I visited museum collections, open-air museums, and archaeological sites; interviewed experts; participated in ritual ceremonies; and conducted research in on-site collections and archives. In addition, I attended related professional congresses, such as the ones of the Association for the Study of Women and Mythology (ASWM), the Mediterranean Studies Association (MSA), and the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), exchanging ideas and receiving feedback in different countries. The fieldwork, research, and conference exchanges were greatly facilitated by my cross-cultural background and knowledge of pertinent languages, such as Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Spanish, Catalan, Galician, Portuguese, French, and Latin, as well as basic notions of Quechua.

As I was conducting this fieldwork in European, Near Eastern, and south, central, and north American locations, I started to notice striking analogies in designs and patterns, as well as in legends, tales, and beliefs. Many of the objects I encountered in my travels throughout the world were imbued with the same symbols and motifs I had observed since my earliest years in Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian artifacts and fairy tales. Among them were the star, the rhomb, the Goddess-flower Tree of Life, the Mistress of Animals, the Snow Maiden, the bird, the deer, and the dragon. They were present on weavings,

embroideries, paper cut-outs, Easter eggs, and wood and metal-carved objects, to mention just a few. Moreover, I lived surrounded with such designs in my own home. In addition, when I was working with the deer/elk persona, besides the iconography, I started to notice a real deer presence in my surroundings, finding their antlers and skulls nearby, and even deer visiting my back yard. I live in an urbanized area of San Antonio, Texas city limits, and these occurrences point to the likelihood that the deer is my *nabual* or power animal in the Native American system of beliefs (see Chapter 1, Note 27).

Thanks to my particular life history of living in and extensively traveling to pertinent locations, as well as years of intentional study and participant observation, I have been able to witness and relate the beliefs, rituals, and iconography of several traditions, seemingly distant in time and place. In this book, I approach these topics, finding commonalities among the cosmology and symbols of the above-mentioned cultures, and demonstrating that, in spite of appearances, there is more that unites us than divides us. My approach coincides with that of the French structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who in his fieldwork noticed “striking parallels between art and mythology in societies which are widely separated in time and space” (Jacobson, Claire, xiv) and cannot be explained through cultural contacts, diffusion, or borrowings. He concluded that certain designs could only persist through extremely long stretches of time and in distant locations through internal connections that refer to a reality of a different order and have a social, magical, and religious function (Lévi-Strauss 258, 263). This idea is further reinforced by Joseph Campbell’s comparative mythology; he believed that the psychic unity of humankind is interconnected beyond thought and words and that it finds its expression through symbols, metaphors, and myths.⁴ This symbolic language appears in dreams, visions, religious art, and fairy tales and may be enacted through rituals. Symbols and myths convey sacred meanings and spiritual truths, and according to Carl Jung they are part of our collective unconscious, which is expressed in archetypal images in art, mythology, esoteric teaching, dreams, visions, and fairy tales. Nevertheless, we observe a “progressive impoverishment of symbolism,” as “[d]ogma takes the place of the collective unconscious [creating] dogmatic archetypal ideas.”⁵ To this view, I am contributing the depth of a feminine sensibility attuned to the dimensions of the “Mistress of All Creation” that appears in images and tales in anthropomorphic as well as zoomorphic forms. Moreover, I add a more precise analysis of the evolution of myth, religious ideas, and imagery throughout different social and economic systems. I am aware that mythology and religion respond to changing socio-economic circumstances and evolve through hunting-gathering, agrarian, pastoralist, feudal, and modern societies. As I pointed out earlier, there are different theories that ascribe the analogies in symbols and myths to various other reasons, such as migrations, borrowings, parallel developments due to similar natural cir-

cumstances, and human brain neurology. Although this discussion is beyond the scope of the present study, in my view, this phenomenon is largely due to the unity of humanity's collective unconscious, in addition to the spread of ideas and patterns through migrations, throughout millennia.

In Chapter 1, "Cervids and Their Associations," I discuss ancient and contemporary beliefs related to the deer, elk, and reindeer in Eurasia and Indigenous Americas, including their role as the first parents of humanity, their relation to the earth, the sun, the cosmos, and their liminality. The deer as a symbol of sexuality, abundance, regeneration, and the hunt is also examined. Moreover, the mythical figures of the Mistress of Animals and the Animal Master, and their relation to cervids, are discussed.

Chapter 2, "Goddess Civilizations and Their Symbols," examines the prehistoric as well as the historical importance of Goddesses and women, as expressed in iconography, such as the Bird Goddess and the birth-giving Parturition Goddess. The process of degradation of the female-beast, the Mistress of All Creation, over time and changing economic conditions led to her transformation and replacement with anthropomorphic male images, producing a patriarchal system that incorporated Shamanism.

Chapter 3, "Image of the Universe," focuses on the ancient quadripartite horizontal, and the tripartite vertical divisions of the world—the image of the universe, as seen in the mythology and iconography of Eurasia and Mesoamerica. I pay special attention to the persistence and wide reach of the universal rhomb/diamond/lozenge, the quincunx, the "Parturition," the Tree of Life, and the snake motifs, as well as to particular symbolic compounds, such as the Aztec Goddess Coatlicue. These ancient, universal ideas, expressed in myths and diagrams, to this day are widespread on different continents, including Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

Chapter 4, "Weaving and Embroidery: A Semblance of the Cosmos," discusses the great meaning of the sacred feminine action of weaving, and designs, embodied in fabrics and embroideries of contemporary Ukraine and of the Mayan people of southern Mexico and Guatemala. I focus on the eastern European Hutsul folk blouse and the Mesoamerican *huipil* and demonstrate how the main sacred concepts of their wearers' worldviews are embodied in the woven and embroidered patterns, and how the women wearing those garments are equated with the central sun—the ancient Goddess and life-giving force of the universe.⁶

This book is intended for scholars and students of anthropology, mythology, ethnography, philosophy, comparative religions, Eurasian and eastern European studies, Latin American studies, Indigenous American studies, Women and Gender studies, as well as for the general public, for all those eager to unravel the mysteries imbued in the designs and patterns of everyday objects, traditional rituals, and their ancient significance.

Notes

1. I refer to the Ukrainian-Romanian-Moldovan Trypillian-Cucuteni civilization from ca. 5,500 to 2,250 BC, the Balkan Vinča from ca. 5,500 to 3,500 BC, the Starčevo-Körös-Criș culture from the seventh millennium BC, the Karanovo culture from central Bulgaria, the Tisha from northern Greece, and the Anatolian, Çatal Höyük culture from ca. 6,300 to 5,500 BC, among others.
2. The irony is that Santa Fe, NM became a destination for the rich and famous as a consequence of its special Native American cultural appeal (my fieldwork in Oaxaca in 2016, and in Santa Fe in 2001).
3. “Old Europe”—term coined by the archaeologist Marija Gimbutas to designate a native European, pre-Indo-European, agricultural, Goddess- and woman-centered civilization, dating from ca. 7,000 to 3,500 BC and characterized by common beliefs, practices, and iconography. This concept encompasses the geographical area of either all or part of today’s south-western Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, Greece, and Turkey (see *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* 16).
4. See Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*; *Occidental Mythology: The Masks of God*; and *Primitive Mythology: The Masks of God*.
5. See C.G. Jung, *Collected Works Vol 9.1: Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*.
6. In his *Myth and Symbol*, Ariel Golan argues that in Neolithic religion the sun was a feminine deity, and the moon a masculine one (see discussion on pp. 54–56). This is confirmed by the gender of these words in Slavic languages, such as Polish, where the sun is neuter, and the moon, masculine. Similarly, in Norse mythology, there is the Sun Goddess Sol, and the Moon God Mani.