

***The Beginnings of Patriarchy in Europe:  
Reflections on the Kurgan Theory of Marija Gimbutas***

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An investigation of the beginnings of patriarchy in Europe is more than an intellectual exercise. Its path crosses the boundaries of archaeology, anthropology, gender studies, history, linguistics, mythology, genetics, among other disciplines, and inevitably leads to a constellation of assumptions, interpretations and beliefs about the origin story of European civilization.

Patriarchy has been defined as the social arrangement in which men possess structural power by monopolizing high-status positions in important social, economic, legal, and religious institutions (Glick and Fiske 2000:373). As a designation of social structure, it is associated with patrilineal inheritance and a patrilocal system of residence. Patriarchy typically promotes warfare which further intensifies male dominance on every level of society (see Christ 1997:60-62). While there is no universal consensus about exactly how and when full-fledged patriarchal institutions were first established in Europe, it is clear that by the Early Bronze Age patterns of male dominance in various regions were well established.

Some researchers prefer the idea that male dominance always existed or that patriarchal structures resulted from internal “evolution” out of more “primitive” social systems. Lithuanian/American archaeologist Marija Gimbutas (1921-1994) posits that the earliest societies in Europe were neither male dominated nor primitive and that patriarchy became established as the result of a “collision of cultures” that triggered the spread of androcratic patterns. According to her Kurgan Theory, the progressive intrusion of nomadic pastoralists from north of the Black Sea disrupted the mature, matrilineal, horticultural societies of southeast Europe. Between the mid-fifth to the mid-third millennia BC, radical changes took place throughout Europe in language, social structure, and ideology. This paper investigates the beginnings of patriarchy in Europe in light of Gimbutas’ Kurgan Theory which has been at the center of scholarly debates for more than half a century.

**Background**

As a Research Fellow in East European Archaeology at Harvard University (1950-1963), Marija Gimbutas devoted herself to the question of post-Palaeolithic European origins. Her monograph, *The Prehistory of Eastern Europe* (1956), was the first text to evaluate and summarize all archaeological research from the Baltic to the northern Caucasus up to 1955. Until Gimbutas produced this work, the prehistory of Eastern Europe had been available to Western scholars only in fragmentary form due to political and linguistic barriers. This research provided a considerable quantity of data indicating extensive culture change in Europe with the appearance of “intruders from the east” whom she named Kurgans after their distinctive burial mounds (Gimbutas 1960: 549).<sup>3</sup> Gimbutas also authored the comprehensive volume, *Bronze Age*

*Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe* (1965), among other texts which established her reputation as a specialist on the Indo-European Bronze Age.<sup>4</sup>

In the mid-1950s, Gimbutas combined her extensive background in linguistic palaeontology with archaeological evidence to locate the homeland of Proto-Indo-European (PIE) speakers and to explain the rapid and extensive spread of Indo-European languages. This theory stimulated a renewed interest in the “Indo-European problem” resulting in a number of other homeland theories (see Mallory 1989:143-185; Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 1985:3-91; Makkay 1987; Renfrew 1987).<sup>5</sup> In *In Search of the Indo-Europeans* (1989), James Mallory writes, “the Kurgan theory has been accepted by many archaeologists and linguists, in part or total, and is the solution one encounters in *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the *Grand Dictionnaire Encyclopédique Larousse*” (Mallory 1989, 185; see also Dergachev, 2002). The Kurgan theory continues to be critiqued and debated among a new generation of scholars (see, e.g., Manzura 1999; Stefanovich 2003; Nikolova 2003).

Gimbutas coined the term “Kurgan culture” to refer to the pastoral communities documented from the fifth millennium BC in the harsh environment of the Volga-Ural-Caspian region. These peoples, who are assumed to have spoken a Proto-Indo-European language,<sup>6</sup> appear to have gone through a long process of convergence that resulted in the consolidation of shared morphology and lexicon (Gimbutas 1997:307; Mallory 1989:195; Anthony 1991:196; Lehmann 1997). “This chronology does not represent the evolution of a single group, but of a number of various steppe peoples who shared a common tradition, extending over broad temporal and spatial parameters” (Gimbutas 1991:352). “As numerous historical instances testify, pastoral societies throughout the Eurasian steppe are typified by remarkable abilities to absorb disparate ethno-linguistic groups” (Mallory 1989:260-261).

Horse domestication, which provided a powerful means of transport, was most likely accomplished by 5000 BC or earlier between eastern Ukraine and northern Kazakhstan (Bökönyi 1987; Gimbutas 1991:353).<sup>7</sup> Access to horse riding may have intensified the aggressive territoriality and warlike behavior that typify these increasingly mobile tribes.

The use of horses as mounts led to an expansion in the size of potential exploitative territories by a factor of five and therefore to conflicts over localized resources that had formerly been beyond effective reach (Anthony 1986:302).<sup>8</sup>

As early as the first half of the fifth millennium BC in the lower Volga basin, male burials appear in pit graves covered by *kurgans* (round barrows). These graves contain prestige weapons indicating both the importance of warfare and the establishment of social hierarchy. The similarity of grave goods and evidence of a horse cult in burial sites separated by thousands of kilometers suggest the existence of phenomenal mobility and intertribal relations between peoples of the Caucasus and the North Pontic steppe.

While some scholars question the association of language with specific ethnic groups (Renfrew 1987; Anthony 1991:194-195; Makkay 1992:194), Gimbutas emphasized the connection between PIE speakers and *an entire complex of traits* found progressively from the Volga steppe to the Dnieper. The Kurgan culture is reconstructed according to a lexicon of PIE terminology verified by archaeological data and comparative Indo-European linguistics. This multidisciplinary investigation points to a pastoral economy with rudimentary agriculture, crude cord-impressed pottery with solar motifs, horse domestication, territorialism, warfare, and a patrilineal, patriarchal social system (Gimbutas 1991, 1997; Mallory 1989:123-124; Whittle

1996:137; Best 1989:337). Such elements were unknown west of the Black Sea before 4400 BC, but were spread throughout Europe accompanied by the appearance of Kurgan burials. The Kurgan Theory posits three infiltrations of Kurgan peoples into Europe resulting in the Indo-Europeanization of the continent over a two thousand year period (Gimbutas 1992:400-405).<sup>9</sup>

### **The Civilization of Old Europe**

The development of radiocarbon dating and dendrochronology during the mid-twentieth century revealed the true antiquity of the earliest food producing cultures in Europe which were suddenly understood to have flourished between the seventh and fifth millennia BC. Gimbutas' research on the archaeology, symbolism and social structure of these Neolithic<sup>10</sup> peoples indicates balanced, egalitarian, matrilineal societies with no indication of domination of one sex over the other.<sup>11</sup> She coined the over-arching term "Old Europe" in recognition of the commonalities of economy, ritual life and social structure of horticultural societies before the Indo-European influence.<sup>12</sup> Early Neolithic farming cultures from the Balkan peninsula to the Ukraine and throughout southeast and central Europe, represent "old histories of tradition, renewal and reaffirmation . . . [with] little evidence for overt lineage or other internal differentiation" (Whittle 1996:121). Colin Renfrew describes the Neolithic farmers of this period as "egalitarian peasants" whose societies were non-hierarchical. "[T]here is no reason to suggest the existence in them of hereditary chieftains, and certainly none to warrant a specialized functional division of population into warriors, priests and common people" (Renfrew 1987:253).

The well-constructed Neolithic settlements of southeast Europe are typified by elegant sculptural and ceramic art, craft specialization and elaborate ritual traditions. Of the thousands of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic sculptures found in households throughout the region, the vast majority of identifiable images are female, reflecting the centrality of women's ritual activities (Gimbutas 1974, 1989, 1991; Hodder 1990:61-63). Archaeologist Henrieta Todorova (1978:83) writes that more than ninety percent of the Neolithic figurines found in Bulgaria are female. Of the two hundred fifty figurines from Gimbutas' excavation at Sitagroi, northern Greece, "not one can be clearly identified as male" (Gimbutas 1986b:226).<sup>13</sup>

In Gimbutas' view, Old European female imagery expresses metaphoric concepts of sacred cosmology within a mother-kinship structure. The vast body of Neolithic symbolism represents a "cohesive and persistent ideological system" reflecting an abiding respect and consciousness of interconnection with the cycles of life in nature (Gimbutas 1989a).<sup>14</sup> Female images (often pregnant) are associated with grain storage containers and areas where grain was ground or baked into bread. Elegantly decorated anthropomorphic vessels and figurines incised or painted with symbolic signs, sometimes with bird or animal masks, are found in house shrines and other domestic contexts. Andrew Sherratt takes Gimbutas' lead by noting that the similarity of figurine forms that circulated through regional trading networks may have carried "ritual codes" representing consciously held ideological beliefs. Moreover, the "pervasive ritual and symbolic character of material culture. . . lacks the marks of individual rank and achievement" (Sherratt 1997:140).

Since all societies contain both sexes, anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday asks the following questions:

Which sex bears the symbolic and social burden for conjugating the social universe?  
Which sex is imbued (naturally or socially) with the reproductive powers that recharge the sources of supernatural fecundity? What is the gender of the dominant symbols tying

the archetypal to the social? How do males and females complement one another in the political arena and how is this arena tied to the cosmological order? (Sanday 1998).

Sanday's primary research among the Minangkabau people of West Sumatra suggests an ethnographic parallel with Gimbutas' description of Old European societies in which the mother/child bond is sacred; customs associated with matrilineal descent reside at the foundation of collective identity; and women nurture and uphold the ancient traditions centered around life cycle ceremonies which bring members of different clans together through which all members of the society are integrated. Female symbolism is manifested in social practices that *authenticate* and *regenerate* the social order, influencing the lives of both sexes. Women do not exert power *over* others, but function in their roles as mothers and senior women "*to conjugate* – to knit and regenerate social ties in the here-and-now and in the hereafter" (Sanday 1998, 2002).<sup>15</sup>

During the Early Neolithic (7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> millennia BC) in southeast Europe, the mother-child bond and a respectful continuity between the living and those "in the hereafter" are indicated by the fact that women and children were buried within settlements, often under house floors. Houses, therefore, functioned as abodes for the living as well as for the ancestors. Before cemeteries came into use, c. 5000 BC, adult male burials are conspicuously rare (Gimbutas 1991:283, 331).

In the later Neolithic, the ancestors were honored in graveyards and in communal burials, such as the megalithic tombs of Western Europe, where no emphasis on individual power or hierarchy can be found. The offerings left at these tombs must have strengthened social relations within an extended community in which ritual, rather than rank, functioned as the organizing principle (Sherratt 1997:144). Gimbutas associates the symbolism of Old European tombs with the womb of the Great Goddess – as ritual centers of regeneration within the cycles of life (1989:151-158).

### **A Collision of Cultures**

The cultures Old Europe reached a florescence of sustained development during the fifth millennium BC made possible by long-term dynamic stability. Between the mid-fifth and the mid-third millennia, however, mature culture centers throughout southeast Europe suffered a crisis of disruption. When the first barrow graves appeared in Europe, nearly seven hundred major habitation sites, representing a rich fabric of cultural and technological development, disintegrated after flourishing undisturbed for hundreds of years. So many Late Neolithic/Copper Age sites throughout southeast Europe were consumed by fire during that period that the stratigraphic level is called the "Burned House Horizon" (Tringham and Krstić 1990:116). Previously stable populations were dislocated and societies became increasingly stratified.

Gimbutas' Kurgan Theory describes the progressive collision between two entirely different social systems, languages and ideologies which resulted in the disintegration of Old European societies, the introduction and dispersal of Proto-Indo-European (PIE) language, and the creation of hybrid societies composed of Old European and Indo-European elements.<sup>16</sup> Kurgan I, c. 4400-4300 BC, developed in the Volga steppe, expanded throughout the North Pontic steppe, down along the Black Sea coast and into the Danube basin; Kurgan II, c. 3500 BC, moved into Europe from the North Pontic region; Kurgan III, c. 3000-2800 BC, migrated again from the Volga steppe (see Gimbutas 1991:352-401).

The movement of three “waves” of Kurgan peoples into Europe introduced an ensemble of technological, social and ideological features, previously unknown in Europe, that spread, in various degrees, among the Neolithic populations. These features include a hierarchical, patriarchal social structure, warfare, bronze metallurgy, weapons, horse riding, pastoral economy, worship of sky gods, ceramics tempered with crushed shell and decorated with stabbed, combed, or cord impressions, solar symbolism, and élite burials under tumuli often with human and animal sacrifice.

In some areas, Old European traditions were incorporated into new hybrid societies. In other areas, indigenous and alien elements coexisted for various periods. The direct and indirect results of Kurgan influence led to on-going cultural instability that fostered the adoption of aggressive behavior by populations that may never have come into direct contact with peoples from the steppe. Some Old European cultures developed “secondary chiefdoms” as a protective response against the encroachment of mobile, kurganized groups.

The “collision of cultures” did not only involve those elements that survive in the archaeological record, but the non-material dimensions as well, such as stories, songs, myths, rituals and beliefs which function within complex webs of meaning. Some of these cultural elements were assimilated into new contexts, while others were transformed or eventually forgotten. New beliefs and behaviors, typical of Indo-European patterns, were introduced that legitimated the imposition of male power, dominant status and privilege. Motifs common to Indo-European mythic schemes include bride stealing, cattle raiding, heroism in combat and the worship of male warrior gods (see Brenneman 1997:239-240).

When cultures are disrupted, gender – which is culturally constructed – is also affected (see Kent 1998:18). The big question is how and why do previously balanced societies become male dominated?

Researchers have found that matrilineal patterns are adaptive in favorable environments where people are not subjugated by conquest, whereas patrilocality and patrilineality are more likely to be found where there is endemic warfare, where resources are scarce or where populations have been conquered by “patrilineal invaders” (Martin and Voorhies 1975:222, in Sanday 1981:176; Sanday 1981:269-70, n. 21). Sanday comments that in some circumstances, women actually accept male dominance for the sake of cultural and social survival:

It is easy to imagine dependence on the male world evolving when expansion, migration, or social stress puts men in the position of fighting literally and figuratively to maintain an old or to forge a new sociocultural identity in the face of pressures threatening to destroy this identity. In such circumstances, both men and women work to protect the larger identity and supporting world view that mediates sexual identities. . . . [Women’s] lives and those of their children may rest on the willingness to do so (Sanday 1981:181-82).

Sanday also suggests that the oppression of women can result from men taking wives in the new land and treating them as something to be controlled. “Once a stance of control and manipulation is adopted, it is not easily abandoned” (Sanday 1981:50-51).

It is important to emphasize that the Indo-Europeanization of Europe was not a simple replacement of Old European peoples by barbarians from the east. Cultural changes were the result of destabilization, complex movements, fusions, overlays, and ideological and

technological transformations that took place over two thousand years resulting in the entrenchment of patriarchal institutions. Nevertheless, certain deeply-rooted Old European cultural and mythic patterns persisted as subcurrents within the superstratum of Indo-European traditions (Gimbutas 1991, 1997; Marler 2001). These include remnants of matrilineal kinship patterns, non-Indo-European terminology, worship of female deities, female-centered rituals and a continuity of certain Old European artistic traditions.

The dramatic social, economic and ideological changes that took place between 4500-2500 BC are well known among prehistorians. Sherratt, for instance, acknowledges the destruction and dispersal of previously stable regional societies whose communal rituals and symbolism centered around female imagery. He describes the appearance of a completely different social order based on competition and “a self-aggrandizing ethos” with “sumptuous codes of artifact use and symbolic analogies” based on the image of the warrior male. The prevalence of stone and copper battleaxes and prestige items deposited in graves emphasized individual rank and status. “[T]his type of organization has the property of being able to spread at the expense of surrounding groups,” which Marshall Sahlins (1961) calls “an organization of predatory expansion” (Sherratt 1997:152). According to Marvin Harris, male supremacist institutions arise as a “by product of warfare, of the male monopoly over weapons, and the use of sex for the nurturance of aggressive male personalities” (Harris 1977:81 in Sanday 1981:174).

While Sherratt’s description of two different culture systems seems parallel to Gimbutas’ “collision of cultures,” he distances himself from the Kurgan theory by avoiding any association with “external influences” before 3500 BC. Only then, after male dominance is well established, does he acknowledge a cultural “discontinuity caused by incorporation of new features . . . from the Steppes” and “some actual penetration of Steppe tribes” (Sherratt 1997:141).<sup>17</sup>

This concerted attempt to “avoid constant recourse to external causes” (Sherratt 1997:252) is symptomatic of a current vogue in archaeological interpretation to explain cultural changes in terms of internal development. Popular trends in European archaeology have gone from identifying population movements as stimulators of culture change, to an anti-diffusionist / anti-migrationist position (interpreting changes only in terms of local processes) which Christopher Hawkes termed “Immobilism” (Hawkes 1987:203).<sup>18</sup> Sherratt represents a somewhat middle ground that emphasizes internal development during the Late Neolithic/Copper Age while accepting the possibility of demic diffusion during the Early Bronze Age only after patterns of aggressive dominance are already in place.<sup>19</sup> Some archaeologists have commented on the futility of clinging to a Eurocentric approach that rejects all evidence of intrusive elements in the prehistory of Europe (see, e.g., Özdoğan 1997:1; Anthony 1990).

During the second half of the 4th millennium BC (Gimbutas’ second Kurgan wave), the four-wheeled wagon, the plough, arsenic bronze metallurgy and a distinctive battery of bronze tools and weapons were introduced into Central and southeast Europe.<sup>20</sup> These elements, mostly found in graves, can be directly traced to the North Pontic region where massive hillforts and hundreds of similar tumuli are found (Gimbutas 1991:369-371). In northwestern Ukraine, tumulus cemeteries of the kurganized Usatovo complex contained skeletons of a “dagger-wielding warrior elite, many of whom died of hammer-type skull wounds, and who exploited the surviving late Tripolye<sup>21</sup> agricultural population of the adjacent uplands” (Anthony 1991:212).

By the early 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, a massive incursion from the Volga steppe (Gimbutas’ third Kurgan wave) is evidenced by thousands of Yamna-type (pit-grave) burials that spread throughout the Balkans and into eastern Hungary (Mallory 1989:241; Dumitrescu 1980). New

population dislocations and drastic changes in the ethnic configuration of Europe resulted in the further entrenchment of patriarchal patterns.

While it is currently popular among some archaeologists to question Gimbutas' Kurgan Theory (especially the first Kurgan wave), Valentin Dergachev states that, after a detailed investigation of the evidence, "Gimbutas was right" (Dergachev 2002). Geneticist L. Luca Cavalli-Sforza concludes that Gimbutas' theory of migrations of Proto-Indo-European speakers from the Euro-Asiatic Steppes after 4500 BC, "strongly correlates" with his "third principal component of European genes" (Cavalli-Sforza and Cavalli-Sforza 1995:155; Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1994:265; Cavalli-Sforza 1997).

Regardless of ongoing arguments, the mid-5<sup>th</sup> to the mid-4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC timeframe is extremely significant in terms of determining the initial impulse toward the establishment of patriarchal structures in Europe.

### **Theories of Internal Transformation**

Researchers who reject the possibility of external influences have no recourse but to seek internal explanations for social changes. Since elite dominance, cultural stratification and warfare are endemic to the Indo-European Bronze Age, it is therefore assumed by some scholars that the roots of these patterns *must* be found during the Neolithic or Copper Age in societies that are otherwise described as egalitarian.

It has become common for archaeologists, who are searching for signs of dominance and social tensions in Neolithic societies, to interpret evidence of ritual activity as a sign of social control and competition.<sup>22</sup> For instance, instead of interpreting female figurines as visual metaphors of deeply held cosmogonic beliefs, Alasdair Whittle assumes that the prevalence of their use in ritual "symbolises a general concern with increased conflict at the family level between men and women, and with an increased conflict within and between communities for social leadership and the control of production." He infers that ritual activity with figurines was used "as a means of alleviating social tension" (Whittle 1985:155-156). Since direct evidence of conflict, control and competition cannot be found, he concludes that these features "seem to have been regularly masked or concealed" but are nevertheless "a dynamic source of change" (1985:165).

Ruth Tringham and Dušan Krstić discuss the social inequalities and exploitation which they assume exist "in all societies, including those traditionally classed as 'egalitarian'" (Tringham and Krstić 1990:605). Although inequality and exploitation within the Neolithic cultures of Southeast Europe have "low archaeological visibility," they nevertheless consider these factors to be crucial in the process of socioeconomic transformation. In their view, the enormous production and ritual use of figurines functioned to maintain structures of hierarchy, power, status and dominance. They describe the disintegration of ancient Neolithic and Copper Age settlements as the internal evolution of social fissioning into small scattered villages reflecting new patterns in the structure of dominance (Tringham and Krstić 1990:609-612).

Tringham also proposes an internal explanation for the widespread conflagration that destroyed Late Neolithic/ Copper Age villages throughout Southeast Europe, rejecting any connection between the wholesale burning of houses and nearby Kurgan presence. Instead, she imagines that the inhabitants burned their own houses upon the death of the resident "patriarch."<sup>23</sup>

Researchers frequently assume that social inequality and patterns of domination are normal conditions in all human societies. Even when gender is not specified, references to

domination, competition, status and exploitation tacitly imply the function of male, not female, power. In fact, male-centered reconstructions of human societies and kinship have dominated archaeology for more than two centuries (Arnold and Wicker 2001, p. vii). All gender, social, political, and economic differences are typically arranged hierarchically and male power is considered ubiquitous and is “observed” even when it is not (Kent 1999, p. 38; see also Nelson 1997, 116).

During the Late Neolithic/Copper Age, radical changes can be observed in habitation patterns, social structure, economy, symbolism, material culture and ideology: many large, stable horticultural settlements that had developed for hundreds of years in peaceful conditions were abandoned or fractured into scattered hamlets in marginal areas, often becoming fortified; crude pottery and craft techniques similar to those used by mobile steppe tribes began to be produced in contrast to the elegant Old European ceramics and other mature traditions; there was an increasing reliance on pastoralism; balanced, egalitarian societies in which women were honored became stratified and male dominated; female figurines and female centered rituals and symbolism were largely replaced by male-centered imagery and rituals; barrow graves or tumuli containing prestige items and weapons, often honoring heroes and warlords, appeared alongside and later replaced Old European cemeteries and communal graves; warfare and weaponry (previously unknown) became widespread. To interpret these changes only in terms of local developments blurs the distinctions between the mature cultures of Old Europe and Indo-Europeanized societies that replaced them.

The scenario of internally motivated transformation is well aligned with 19<sup>th</sup> century models of cultural evolution. According to Sherratt, “Technological change and the unilinear development of increasingly hierarchical forms of society still lie at the base of many current interpretations” (Sherratt 1997:134). As Alison Wylie states, our knowledge of the past is limited less by the fragmentary nature of our data than by the limitations of our epistemologies (Wylie 1991).

### **The Myth of Cultural “Evolution”**

During the mid-nineteenth century, anthropologists began formulating evolutionary models of social development that have had a marked influence on archaeological reconstructions of past societies. The theory of patriarchal universalism was first articulated in *Ancient Law* (1861) by Sir Henry Maine who described patriarchal society as the culmination of a long, evolutionary progress out of the primitive conditions of savagery. Maine considered societies with women in power to be lower on the evolutionary scale and matriarchy (interpreted as rule by women) as impossible, virtually laughable. In general, Victorian anthropologists viewed patriarchy as an evolutionary advance over matriarchal or matrilineal societies.

In *The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man* (1870), John Lubbock described male rule within the patriarchal family as the pinnacle of civilized evolution, elevated from the *natural* (associated with women and indigenous societies) which he described as primitive and savage. Lewis Henry Morgan took a further step in *Ancient Society* (1877), by proposing an evolutionary sequence of cultural development from savagery to barbarism to civilization. This model was adopted by Engles as well as by the prominent archaeologist V. Gordon Childe. In his treatise, *Social Evolution* (1951), Childe identifies the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic eras as “savagery,” and the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages as “barbarism,” whereas Classical Greece and Rome represent “civilization.”<sup>24</sup>

In *From Savagery to Civilisation* (1946), J.D.G. Clark elaborates Morgan's sequence into bands (lower savages, primitives), tribes (upper savages, lower barbarians), chiefdoms (upper barbarians), and states (civilization). The band-tribe-chiefdom-state sequence was further codified by Elman Service in *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective* (1962) and *Origins of the State and Civilization* (1975).

While the limitations of the evolutionary model have been discussed by a number of scholars (see, e.g., Diamond 1974; Maisels 1999; Trigger 2003), an internal trajectory of male dominance is often taken for granted. For instance, Trigger (2003:186) asserts that "the bias of family organization in all the early civilizations was masculine, but not always patrilineal." In this way, male dominance is assumed to be normative even within non-patriarchal or non-patrilineal social structures -- only to bloom at a later period to fulfill its full patriarchal potential.

The evolutionary model presents civilization – and patriarchy by extension – as the height of social development. Civilization is generally defined as a political state with a hierarchy of social classes, unequal access to wealth, power and social prestige, full time specialists, large urban centers, monumental architecture and art, and an assumed patriarchal social structure.

This definition is in direct contrast to Gimbutas' interpretation of Old Europe as the foundation of European civilization:

I reject the assumption that civilization refers only to androcratic warrior societies. The generative basis of any civilization lies in its degree of artistic creation, aesthetic achievements, nonmaterial values, and freedom which make life meaningful and enjoyable for all its citizens, as well as a balance of powers between the sexes (Gimbutas 1991:viii).

Gimbutas not only defines Old Europe as a true civilization, but she considers the Kurgan culture to represent a more primitive level of development. The cultural chaos following the Kurgan movements into Europe is sometimes referred to as the "Balkan dark age" (see Mallory 1989:238). Not only is Gimbutas' sequence the opposite of the evolutionary model, but to present Old Europe as a highly developed civilization flies in the face of previously held notions about the inferior status of non-patriarchal societies.

In Gimbutas' view, it is impossible to understand the development of subsequent European cultures without recognizing the legacy of Old Europe and the complex processes of amalgamation with Indo-European traditions. Remarkable cultures, such as the Thracians, the Celts, and the Greeks, arose as the result of vigorous hybridizations between Old European and Indo-European elements. Each of these Indo-European cultures is warlike and fiercely territorial, featuring mounted warriors, highly skilled craftsmen creating magnificent works of art in precious metals, while maintaining elements of the substrate culture. Both gods and goddesses are worshipped and elaborate mythic traditions feature powerful female figures as well as heroes. "Although, the Indo-European patriarchal world-view admittedly dominates Greek antiquity, indigenous elements and ideas of pre-Indo-European origin are perpetuated . . ." (Haarmann 1996). Gimbutas postulates that matrilineal cultural and ritual elements, observed in ancient Greece, among the Etruscans, Basques and in other non-Indo-European societies, represent remnants of ancient Old European traditions that have survived as substratum features

within patriarchal social systems (see Gimbutas 1989:xx, 1991). This ancient legacy continues to perpetuate ongoing challenges to the forces of male hegemony.

## Conclusion

Marija Gimbutas emphasizes that patriarchy did not arise in Europe as a natural “evolution” out of earlier, egalitarian structures, nor was male dominance a universal feature of prehistoric societies. The destabilization and collapse of Old European societies resulted from a progressive “collision” and amalgamation between two diametrically opposed cultural and ideological systems. The Kurgan culture developed patterns of territorial aggression in the harsh environment of the Circum-Pontic steppe and imported distinctive cultural features into Europe. Once Old European societies were destabilized and seeded with Kurgan or kurganized elements, social, ideological, economic and material changes spread through both external and internal dynamics resulting in the intensification and entrenchment of patriarchal patterns.

By defining Old Europe as the foundation of European civilization, and hypothesizing the beginnings of patriarchy as a later phenomenon, simultaneous with the Indo-Europeanization of the continent, Gimbutas’ Kurgan Theory challenges the doctrine of universal male dominance that has functioned as the origin story of Western civilization.

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<sup>1</sup> "Matristic" combines matrilineal, matrifocal, matricentric and egalitarian (in the sense that the sexes were balanced and complimentary).

<sup>2</sup> Gimbutas used "agriculture" as a general term for food producing societies. Horticulture refers more specifically to gardens cultivated by hand before the use of the plow.

<sup>3</sup> Radiocarbon dates were not available when Gimbutas did her research for *The Prehistory of Eastern Europe* (1956), therefore the dates of the first presentation of the Kurgan Hypothesis, at the Fifth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Philadelphia, September 1-9, 1956, and the 1960 publication, were too young.

<sup>4</sup> The complete bibliography of Marija Gimbutas (up to 1996) is published in *From the Realm of the Ancestors*, (Marler 1997: 609-25).

<sup>5</sup> For a response to Gamkrelidze and Ivanov, see Gimbutas 1985:185-202; 1997:301-314. For a response to Renfrew, see Gimbutas 1988a:714; 1988b:453-456; 1997:334-337, 338-344.

<sup>6</sup> "Indo-European" is a linguistic term that refers to a large family of related languages spoken from Europe to India. "Proto-Indo-European" is the mother tongue, hypothesized from ancient elements preserved within early historic daughter languages.

<sup>7</sup> Sándor Bökönyi gives the mid-fourth millennium as the uncalibrated date of horse domestication in Ukraine (Bökönyi 1974:238, 1987:136) which he says corresponds to Gimbutas' older calibrated chronology.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony is referring to the adoption of the horse in North America as an analogy to the situation in the Circum-Pontic Caspian region.

<sup>9</sup> Initially introduced in 1956, the Kurgan Hypothesis was developed and refined over the next three decades. For a complete chronicle of this development, see the posthumous collection of Gimbutas' articles, *The Kurgan Culture and the Indo-Europeanization of Europe*, edited by M. R. Dexter and K. Jones-Bley (1997).

<sup>10</sup> "Neolithic" is a term usually applied to earliest sedentary food producing societies followed in Europe and elsewhere by the Bronze Age.

<sup>11</sup> Ethnoarchaeologist Susan Kent (1999: 38-41) notes that egalitarianism is not an absolute or static category and is represented cross-culturally as a continuum between highly egalitarian and highly non-egalitarian societies.

<sup>12</sup> The earliest languages spoken in Europe were most probably non-Indo-European as indicated by a non-Indo-European substrate containing place names, personal and tribal names, agricultural, technological, and social terminology (Gimbutas 1988b:454; Haarmann 1996; Mallory 1989:180; Meid 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Between 1967 and 1980 Gimbutas was project director of five excavations of sites in Bosnia, Macedonia, Greece, and Italy.

<sup>14</sup> *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (1982) and *The Language of the Goddess* (1989a) present an archaeomythological analysis of Old European art and symbolism. In *The Civilization of the Goddess* (1991), Gimbutas describes the habitation patterns, religion, social structure, script, and eventual demise of the cultures of Old Europe.

<sup>15</sup> The Minangkabau call themselves "matriarchal" which is not to be confused with the 19<sup>th</sup> century interpretation of domination by women.

<sup>16</sup> Ideas are carried by migrating people and can also be transmitted without the need for population movements. Once the process of disruption began, both forms of transmission may well have taken place.

<sup>17</sup> While Gimbutas describes the dispersal of previously stable populations to marginal areas as a result of invasion, Sherratt turns the scenario around by reversing the causal connection: The horticulturalists, for some unexplored reason, moved to poorer land. "Within the interstices created by this shift, some actual penetration of Steppe tribes seems to have occurred. . . (Sherratt 1999:142).

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<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., the “Social Change Theory” as an explanation for the transformation of Balkan societies in the late 5<sup>th</sup>-early 4<sup>th</sup> millennia BC, contra Gimbutas (Nikolova 2002). Western archaeologists have tended to avoid migration as a stimulus for cultural change after its misuse by Nazi propagandists who promoted the notion of Aryan migrations.

<sup>19</sup> Nikolova writes that “the theory of social change implies migrations” (Nikolova 2003:16-17). Although this is intended to contradict the Kurgan Theory, it is actually harmonious with Gimbutas’ theory if applied to culture change that continues *after* the initial shock and disintegration of previously stable societies.

<sup>20</sup> While pure copper metallurgy was practiced in Old European Copper Age societies, alloys of copper and arsenic, copper and tin, and copper with arsenic-tin were developed in the Circum-Pontic region during the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. These new harder metals were crafted into daggers, knives, halberds, chisels, flat axes, shafthole axes and other items that have analogies in the north Caucasus, in Transcaucasia, and further east (Gimbutas 1991:369).

<sup>21</sup> Known as “Cucuteni” in Romania, and “Tripillya” in Ukraine, the Russian term “Tripolye” was typically used during the Soviet era. This long-lived Old European culture is known for exquisite ceramics and figurines from hundreds of well-built settlements, some with more than 2000 inhabitants.

<sup>22</sup> A prime example of this type of interpretation is applied to the Neolithic Temple Period of Malta (see Mallone et al. 1993; Stoddart et al. 1993).

<sup>23</sup> Tringham discussed her theory at the 7<sup>th</sup> Gender and Archaeology Conference, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California, October 4, 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Childe assumed that early farming communities were egalitarian as a result of a “primitive” level of agriculture with no surplus available for trade. According to the model of cultural evolution, surplus production would automatically give rise to social hierarchy. While social inequality has been associated with the development of agriculture in the Near East and Mesopotamia, the Neolithic societies in Europe, which developed productive, sustainable economies, “cannot adequately be described by a simple evolutionary succession of increasingly ranked societies” (Sherratt 1997:252).