
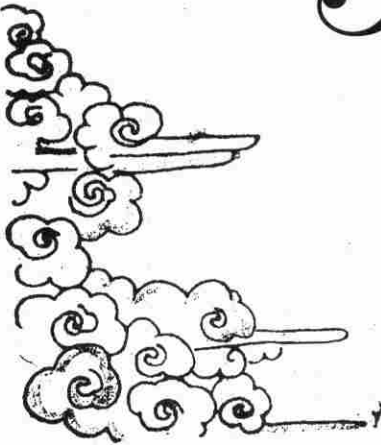




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Female Shamanism, Goddess Cultures, and Psychedelics



The Goddess came consciously into my life after I moved to Berkeley, California, in 1975. I began attending Goddess rituals, studying with psychic healers, practicing yoga, and looking at images of goddesses in prehistoric and indigenous art. Many experiences came together in rapid succession to lead me to co-create the Motherpeace Tarot deck with Vicki Noble. The Motherpeace deck is based on the iconography and consciousness of the Goddess. The psychedelic world view is represented in the deck by *Amanita muscaria*, peyote, cannabis, morning glories, datura, poppies, and tobacco.

Karen Vogel

The viewpoint I gained from psychedelics and my ongoing relationship with the Goddess propelled me to search for the roots, history, and practices associated with the three important threads in my life: female shamanism, goddess cultures, and psychedelics. I'm following a calling to research these realms and create art that is informed by my exploration. As part of my quest, I carved in wood a close replica of a relief carving from the Louvre of two women, or goddesses, holding mushrooms (fig. 1). The original carving is on a funeral

Women healers have been around as long as there have been women. I imagine these early women healers had many skills and much knowledge, which eventually developed into a tradition of female shamanism.

Our human ancestors had the ability to self-medicate in part because of our animal heritage. Animals are incredibly adept at diagnosing ailments and seeking out certain plants or minerals to treat those ailments. They are also very precise about using the correct dosage. Animals even know how to get intoxi-

go back more than 5 million years and be linked with our ancestors' upright posture. According to Ian Tattersal, one of the leaders in the study of human evolution and curator at the Museum of Natural History in New York City, once our ancestors stood upright there began to be a need for midwives (1998, 121–22).

It is rare for women to give birth alone; most cultures have midwives. The !Kung San, or Ju/'hoansi (pronounced *zhu-twasi*) as they prefer to be known, a gathering and hunting people of Botswana, in southern Africa, are

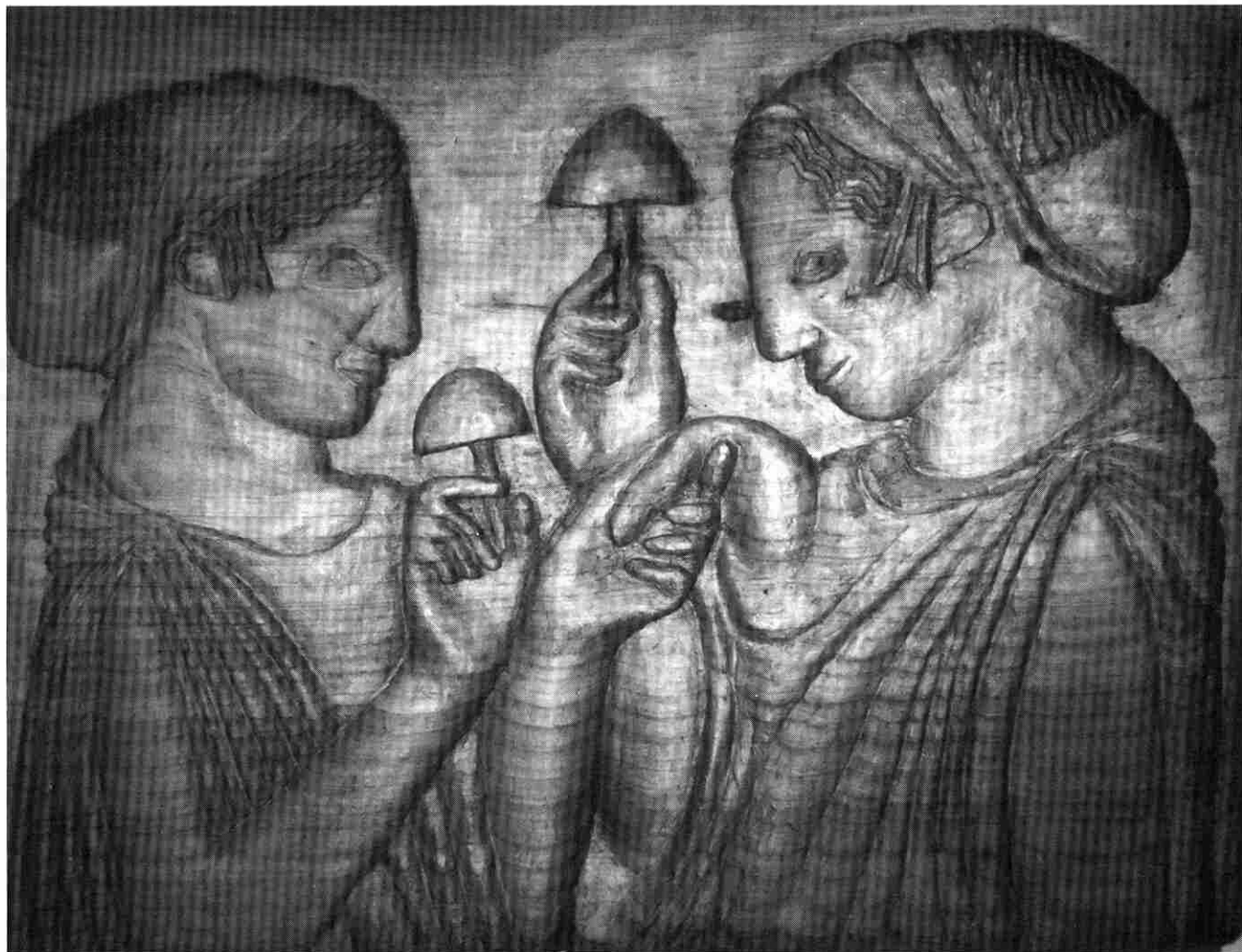


Figure 1. Mushroom shaman-priestesses woodcarving in cypress, 11" by 15", by Karen Vogel. Replica of Exaltation of the Flower, stele from Thessaly, 470 B.C.E., in the collection of the Louvre Museum, Paris.

marker or stele from Thessaly, in northern Greece, dated around 470 B.C.E. Through the story of this particular image I will explore what might have happened in ancient Greek culture to the Goddess, female shamanism, and psychedelics in the transition to a more patriarchal way of life.

cated; some use psychedelics (Engel 2002). Caribou, for instance, seem to love to ingest the hallucinogenic mushroom *Amanita muscaria* (Devereux 1997). Our ancestors also knew about psychedelics. Human use of psychedelics is likely as old as humanity.

The roots of female shamanism may

reported to ideally give birth alone. Marjorie Shostack says in her book *Nisa* that a woman may give birth alone, but close enough to camp that she can call out for help. Shostack explains:

A !Kung woman will have, on average, four or five live births during her reproductive life. With each successive birth,

she is more likely to attain the ideal of delivering alone. Without telling anyone, she walks a few hundred yards from the village, prepares a cushion of leaves, and gives birth to her child. Accompanied or not, most births occur close enough to the village so that others can hear the baby's first cries. This signals the woman's female relatives and friends that the child has been born and that the mother may welcome assistance in delivering the afterbirth, cutting the umbilical cord, and wiping the baby clean. Perhaps carrying the baby for her, other women will accompany her back to the village. Only the most experienced and determined women insist on being alone during these last stages. (1981, 181)

Humans are almost unique in our use of midwives. Most animals give birth alone, though midwives have been observed among elephants, dolphins, and bats. The human need for midwives undoubtedly increased as the size of newborns' heads increased. The trend in the human line (hominids) has been for babies to be born less mature so that a great deal of brain growth happens after birth. As a result of this evolutionary strategy, human babies need care for a longer time than those of other animals. This puts demands on the social structure and nursing mothers in particular.

Midwives have the experience of catching babies and usually at some points in their own lives also give birth. This double experience, over millions of years, gave midwives a vast body of knowledge about pregnancy, birth, and child rearing. This body of knowledge would include what to do if something goes wrong or someone gets sick or hurt. The importance in human evolution of the tradition of midwifery seems to me to be the logical root of female shamanism.

Shamanism is a concept that has many meanings attached to it. The more I study shamanism, the broader I become in my use of the term. I think it encompasses a world view as profound as, yet very different from, those of other world religions. I believe that there are many ways of being a shaman and using shamanic energy, and that we all have shamanic moments, such as in birth and in death.

Some people draw distinctions between true shamans and herbal practi-

tioners. Others draw the line between shamans, doctors, and priest/priestesses. I think it is impossible to make such distinctions. Shamanism is a profession or calling with no set rules about either entry or practice.

A shaman can gain the position hereditarily. Family or community members will see that a young child has talents or special experiences, and these can grow into a calling to undertake a period of apprenticeship to become a shaman. Bonnie Glass-Coffin, who worked with female healers in northern Peru, reports that some of the healers inherited their *mesa*, or altar, and healing tools from relatives.

The period of apprenticeship can include many ways of learning. A person may study with other shamans, or study directly with a certain plant or substance. The apprenticeship may include accidental or chosen "ordeals" both physical and mental. The apprentice develops a reputation based on results and is eventually acknowledged for her abilities as a shaman.

An individual may be recognized for certain talents, such as midwifery, healing a particular class of diseases, protecting, finding things (plants, animals, or lost objects), or controlling weather. A shaman may use touch and massage, sweats, medicinal plants, animals, and minerals. These techniques or substances can produce altered states or be medicinal in other ways.

A shaman may be particularly adept at entering trance and altered states and dealing with unseen forces, restoring balance, and doing "soul retrieval." The repair work or healing may be for an individual, a community, or Earth itself. These so-called world renewal ceremonies and dances are still performed by local tribes in many of the roundhouses found throughout northern California.

A shaman can also harm others by being a poisoner, sending darts or illness and death. A shaman can make or have power objects, which some shamans believe are the source of their power. A shaman can be an artist, storyteller, or ritual leader. A shaman may use sandpaintings, songs, dances, sweats, and community rituals to create and heighten the energy used to heal.

Shamans may use power for war and peace and to control weather and other environmental factors. Some shamans may be feared for, or be afflicted with, what is perceived as mental or physical illness. In other cases, a shaman can be an exceptionally strong and clear individual who is loved and respected by an extended community.

The respect, participation, and belief that a community accords shamanism enable individual talents to flourish and grow. Shamanism is a group activity and a world view. Shamans interact and trade plants and techniques. It is easy to be dazzled by someone's talents and forget all that goes into making the magic, ritual, or healing happen. Many people tend to collect the plants, gather and grind the pigments, paint the rock walls, create and learn the songs and dances, and make the regalia that are used in the rituals of the shaman.

Shamanism is a community activity especially, it seems, when it comes to females. Glass-Coffin explains female healing traditions with the term *coessence*.

Coessence, in contrast to both transcendence and immanence, locates shamanic power and spiritual energy upon which shamans draw neither within nor without the boundaries of this world. Instead, coessence implies that this thing flows between worlds. When the shaman taps into this source of power, she is not transcending dichotomies and she is not healing "on behalf of" her patients. Instead, she is facilitating a reestablishment of the energy flow between spirit and matter, between individual and group, and between shaman and patient. Shamanic power and shamanic voyage [are], thus, inherently relational. (1998, 188-89)

Human experience of altered states became evident in the Paleolithic, around forty thousand years ago, in a creative flowering of art and ritual. At that time what I call *goddess culture* took hold in the art of a number of places around the world, a significant milestone in the development of female shamanism.

My personal experience with the Goddess and my discovery of prehistoric goddess cultures came after my first experiences with psychedelics. I felt immediately connected with early art because the things that I had seen

The Goddess is a midwife, as well as the mother from which everything is born.

and felt when under the influence of psychedelics were reflected in these first images of forty thousand years ago. The geometric and other abstract patterns of early art painted on rock and cave walls were often linked with female imagery. In my mind, it makes sense to put together the great mysterious realm of shapes and colors of psychedelics with my experience of the Goddess.

This eruption of art is remarkable because it happened in many places around the world at about the same time. Paintings and engravings on rock walls from around thirty to forty thousand years ago are found in Africa, Asia, and Europe; the Americas may be added to the list if controversial early dates are substantiated. I use the term *rock art* to refer to paintings and engravings on rocks, including those inside caves.

The sudden worldwide proliferation of art is shocking. The only vague explanation I've found attributes it to "a slow acting neural transformation in the human brain" (McKie 2000, 195). I think that is just a fancy way of saying that we don't know how or why art started at the same time in different locations that had no known contact.

Even if we don't know why art began, many scholars have tried to figure out what the early art means. David Lewis-Williams, a South African archaeologist, has become well known in the field of rock art. He has used the innovative

approach of interviewing people from cultures where rock art is still used. He discovered that the !Kung San people go into trances by touching the images on rock walls.

Lewis-Williams also studied altered states with T. E. Dowson. They developed a system to describe the three stages of visual imagery that people experience when in altered states. The stages are a way of recognizing and discussing imagery that can seem random. The incomprehensible array of dots, lines, and geometric shapes is considered the first stage, and supernatural beings are the third stage. The second stage is an intermediary between the two in which things may be recognizable but not animated or mythological as in the third stage. There are no hard-and-fast lines between the three stages (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1998).

In other work, Lewis-Williams collaborated with Jean Clottes, an eminent scholar of the rock art of Ice Age Europe. They believe that the early rock art is evidence of shamanism and comes from shamanic practices, rituals, and altered states (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1998).

Female figurines also say something about Paleolithic humans. These so-called Venus figurines are found in great numbers all over Europe. There is much speculation about what they are, ranging from representations of goddesses to early male pornography.

I think they are goddesses. In particular, they seem to be very good depictions of what it feels like to be pregnant. I would venture to say that whoever made these early sculptures knew from the inside what it was to be pregnant. If that's true, then the artists of the figurines were mothers. This flies in the face of the standard theory that sculptors of hard materials, such as stone, must be male.

Hermeneutic archaeology encourages researchers to participate in the culture they are studying as a more accurate

way to gain understanding. As a sculptor of hard materials myself, I have found insight into what may have motivated these early sculptors. I need inspirations strong enough to motivate me to sit for countless hours chipping, etching, and slowly, almost imperceptibly, grinding away at hard surfaces. I also need time to sit for long hours. No matter how much the Paleolithic mind and culture may have differed from ours, I don't believe that a Paleolithic sculptor was much different from me in these essential qualities, whether that person was male or female. We know the Paleolithic sculptors and painters had a good deal of time to be creative because we have the art as evidence of their labor-intensive work. The nature of the inspiration is open to speculation.

The goddess figurines are often said to be symbols of a fertility cult. I think that interpretation is too narrow. Instead, I believe they speak of many things, including a profound sense of awe around birth and death. The Goddess is a midwife, as well as the mother from which everything is born. These early goddesses are impressive expressions of the pregnant state. They are also good depictions of a baby's view of its mother as a large, round, encompassing being. In many of the Paleolithic figurines I also see old age and the forces of gravity and erosion returning matter to the earth. These figurines could represent the knowledge that we come from the mother in birth and we return to her in death. Perhaps these figurines were shamanic tools of midwives in their important role as priestesses to new life and healer/shamans when necessary.

Though the roots of shamanism are probably much older, Siberian shamanism is often used as the model for all shamanic traditions because it was where shamanism was first extensively studied. Among the many tribes found across Siberia, the word used to indicate a male shaman varied, whereas the term for a female shaman was the same. Archaeologist Jeannine Davis-Kimball concludes in her recent book, "In fact, if we are to believe the linguists, women were also the first shamans. The roots of shamanism are to be found in Paleolithic Siberia, where a single term . . .

always referred to the female shaman” (2002, 236).

So, here we are forty thousand years ago with evidence of female shamanism and goddess culture. What about the third thread, psychedelics? There is no direct evidence that our Paleolithic ancestors used psychedelics, yet I believe our animal lineage indicates that humans always knew about them. “The use of hallucinogens is in fact one of humankind’s most widespread practices. Everywhere people in small-scale societies have remarkable knowledge of plants and their psychoactive properties, and this was almost certainly the case in the Upper Paleolithic” (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1998, 22). Based on this assumption, I would conclude that the use of psychedelics was an intricate part of the female shamanistic tradition and the developing goddess culture.

I use the term *goddess culture* not because I think there was a monotheistic ideology of goddess worship sweeping across the world during the Paleolithic. Instead, I am painting broad brush strokes across time to show a pattern and possible trend in human history. I believe the widespread creation of female figurines indicates that the great mysterious spirit realm began to be personified as the Goddess.

What I have always loved about the Goddess is that I have my own idiosyncratic relationship with her. She can have many aspects or personas. I learn from others’ experiences and certainly have been inspired by all sorts of images, writing, and rituals. Still, it is all mediated through my direct experience and relationship with the Goddess.

Two intriguing images, which come from widely separated cultures, both around ten thousand years ago, to me look like possible connections between goddess cultures and the use of psychedelic mushrooms. The first is from a famous and extraordinary rock art complex called Tassili in southern Algeria (fig. 2). In this image, a large goddesslike figure gestures to a smaller individual in a mask and a net garment sprouting four mushrooms. A number of other mushroom beings have been found at Tassili as well. The other image (fig. 3), from a site in Turkey, depicts a mushroom-headed goddess

who, with her prominent vulva, may be giving birth.

Currently I know of two cultures that use psychedelics as part of labor. Midwives among the Mazatec of Mexico sometimes give a woman in labor morning glory seeds (Harrison 2000). Women among the Huichol (or Wixarika, as they prefer to call themselves) may take peyote during pregnancy (Susana Valadez, pers. com., 2002). Stacy Schaefer reports that Huichol women use peyote “especially while in labor, to ease the birth process” (2002, 56).

I would link female shamanism to midwifery and psychedelics even if psychedelics weren’t used in labor for two reasons. First, midwifery encompasses more than delivering a baby and can include many aspects of women’s and children’s health. A midwife or shaman may use a psychedelic substance to diagnose an illness or foresee a problem and how to effect a cure. Second, psychedelic experience integrates into a culture as a whole. It informs and affects daily life in many ways, from the patterns in the artwork to the entire world view of a group. Even if a particular individual has not taken a psychedelic, they are affected by living in a psychedelic culture.

The gathering and hunting cultures of Paleolithic Eurasia lasted for about thirty thousand years, until around ten thousand years ago. Then humans, most likely women since they were the primary plant gatherers, invented methods to grow plants and select for more productive crops. This new subsistence strategy emerged in a number of cultures around the world (Hawkes 1976). The tending of plants and animals enabled settled agricultural civilization to flourish in Neolithic Europe, in the period from ten thousand to three thousand years ago. These cultures continued to make art in which goddess figurines were pervasive features.

There is a great debate about how goddess-centered cultures of Neolithic Europe ended. Some believe that war-

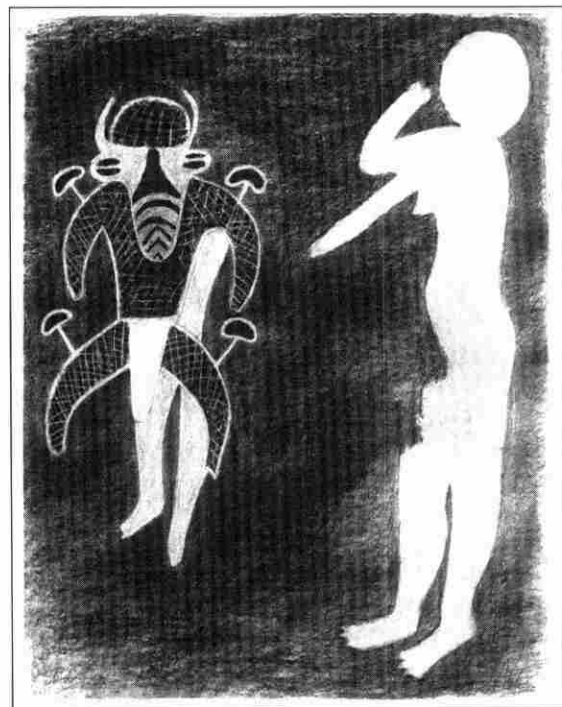


Figure 2. Rock painting from Tassili, southern Algeria, 6000 B.C.E. Drawn by Karen Vogel.

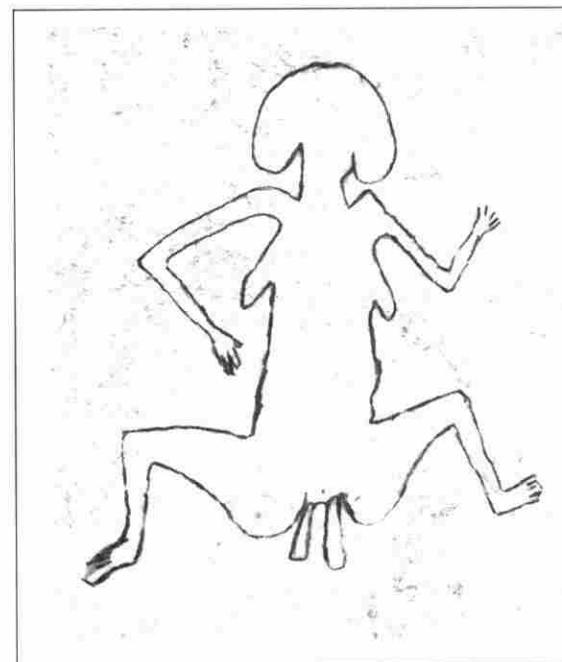


Figure 3. Image on a rock wall of a sacred building in Göbelki Tepe, Turkey, 9000 B.C.E. Drawn by Karen Vogel.

rior nomadic horse cultures invaded from the eastern steppes. Still others look to causes from within the cultures. There is also evidence that cataclysmic events, such as drought and flooding, displaced people.

The Neolithic was changed five thousand years ago by the discovery of met-

Belgrade

allurgy, first with copper, and then with bronze and iron. This led to the need for huge amounts of wood for smelting the raw ore into usable metal. One of the first large-scale operations was on the island of Cyprus. The island is endowed with an excellent source of copper, iron, and trees. The forest was cut down and regrew at least sixteen times over two thousand years of copper mining and smelting (McPhee 1993, 143). Finally the trees were decimated, and the island was abandoned by 90 percent of the inhabitants (Perlin 1989).

The increased trade of metal and other goods created a need for bigger boats, which also required more and more trees. Imagine this pattern occurring over and over across Europe for several thousand years. This had to be a tremendous factor in the development of warfare to find, control, and steal resources, a familiar pattern to this day. Repeated raids and invasions transformed the Neolithic civilizations of Europe. People fought back, ran, hid, and adapted.

The pressure of war and raiding may have been a major reason for the breakup of the large settlements that had developed across Neolithic Europe, including Thessaly. War came from many sources, including city-states expanding their domain and nomadic cultures raiding and conquering. It became impossible for large peaceful communities to survive, though some were able to continue for a time on islands such as Crete. By this time, Thessaly had become a key factor in the struggle between the city-states of Athens and Sparta for domination of the Greek peninsula and lands beyond. This is the backdrop for life in Thessaly

Nea Nikomedeia

Pharsala

Athens

Sparta

Figure 4. Map of Greece and surrounding area. Drawn by Karen Vogel.

when the stele shown in figure 1 was carved in 470 B.C.E.

Thessaly is in an important geographic location for a number of reasons. For one thing, it sits at the doorway to the vast timber resources of Macedonia. Athens's power was based on dominance of the sea. To maintain its position of power Athens needed reliable access to wood to build more ships and forge metal weapons. Whoever controlled Thessaly could block attacks by land by controlling the mountain pass that led from Macedonia into Thessaly and the rest of Greece. This would force anyone who wanted to attack Greece to do so by ship. Thessaly tried to make an alliance with Sparta; Sparta declined, and Thes-

saly made a deal with Athens. Athens became the dominant power until it fell to Sparta in the Peloponnesian War fought during the latter part of the fifth century B.C.E.

By 470 B.C.E. earlier invaders of the Greek peninsula had already pushed many of the previous inhabitants of Thessaly into the mountains. These so-called mountain people are important links to the earlier female shamanism of the Neolithic goddess cultures of Thessaly.

From Neolithic Thessaly, including the archaeological sites of Nea Nikomedeia, come numerous female figurines. These artifacts, as well as others, indicate that a strong orientation to the Goddess existed in that part of Greece at least six thousand years ago. Vicki Noble (2003) believes the name Nea (new) Niko (victory) Medeia (wise woman) may be "referring to a 'dynastic' legacy or lineage of shaman-priestesses."

The most compelling evidence that these Neolithic goddess cultures may have used psychedelics comes from a site around four hundred miles north of Thessaly near Belgrade. Mushroom stones from a Neolithic goddess culture site from seven thousand years ago were found in an area known as Vinca. Marija Gimbutas, archaeologist and renowned scholar of Neolithic European goddess civilizations, says: "The fact that the mushrooms were carved out of the best available stone alone speaks for the prominent role of the

mushroom in magic and cult . . . and it is possible that the Vinca mushrooms were connected with intoxicating drinks" (1982, 220) (fig. 5).

By the time the stele was made, the earlier inhabitants, who had become the people of the mountains, were a number of different tribes renowned for their horse riding skills and herbal practices. In fact they are believed to be the basis for the legendary centaurs. The most popularly known form of centaur is the horse-and-human amalgam, but numerous other animals are also called centaurs. The centaurs were known as sorcerers or witches. They practiced the shamanic art of shape-shifting by turning into animals and used animals as allies to augment their human power (Lawson 1964, 252).

The ancient Greek writer Apollodorus said that Thessaly was "always the home of magic" (Harrison 1963, 81). There is evidence that the people of Thessaly coped with drought by having rituals to make rain. According to Jane Ellen Harrison, a scholar of ancient Greece, "Magic was no hole and corner practice but an affair of public ritual, performed with full social sanction" (1963, 82).

The Greeks were able to dominate the land of the earlier inhabitants, but not the spirituality and healing practices of the people. The name of the Thessalian goddess was Enodia. She was represented riding a horse on the coins of a city in Thessaly beginning in 480 B.C.E. (Rabinowitz 1998, 37). Enodia became the Greek goddess Hekate in the fifth century B.C.E. Hekate was originally a multifaceted goddess who was associated with childbirth, death, the crossroads, and healing. She embodied the mother (Demeter), the maiden (Persephone), and the crone. She was also sometimes called Artemis, and both goddesses represented childbirth and wild places. Eventually Hekate was relegated to the image of a crone and goddess of witches and the underworld.

Hekate is considered a midwife to birth and death. The following quote from Hesiod speaks to Hekate's power over birth and

death: "and those whose business is in the grey uncomfortable sea, and who pray to Hekate and loud-crashing Earth-Shaker, easily the glorious goddess gives great catch, and easily she takes away as soon as seen, if she so will" (*Theogony* 440–52).

Thessaly is renowned for its female healers, or witches, as they are called in the writings of Greek historians. Robert Graves writes, "That Zeus did not deny her (Hekate) the ancient power of granting every mortal his heart's desire is a tribute to the Thessalian witches, of whom everyone stood in dread" (1955, 124–25).

Part of what must have made people stand in dread is the shaman-priestesses' use of poisons such as aconite and hallucinogens such as datura. According to Graves, aconite was called *hecateis*, named for Hekate, who first used it. Aconite creates a numbing sensation and was used by the Thessalian witches to make a flying ointment (1955, 471–72). *Datura stramonium* is what the English herbalist Gerard

thought the Greeks called *hippomanes*, known for driving horses mad (Schultes and Hoffman 1992, 109).

Originally when I carved my version of the stele from Thessaly I thought the figures were Demeter and Persephone. I had read that the stele was connected with the Eleusinian mysteries, associated with Demeter and Persephone and the use of hallucinogenic mushrooms (Samorini 1998, 60). Giorgio Samorini's initial assumption is that the two women are Demeter and Persephone. From there, he reasons that, as Demeter is associated with the Eleusinian mysteries, the stele is evidence for hallucinogenic mushrooms' being used in the mysteries.

Ludovic Laugier, scientific collaborator of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the Louvre Museum, said of the stele: "Here, the dead woman seems to be on the right: She's the one receiving gifts. We don't know whether this indicates a mother and daughter or two sisters. Another mystery: the contents of the bag of seeds

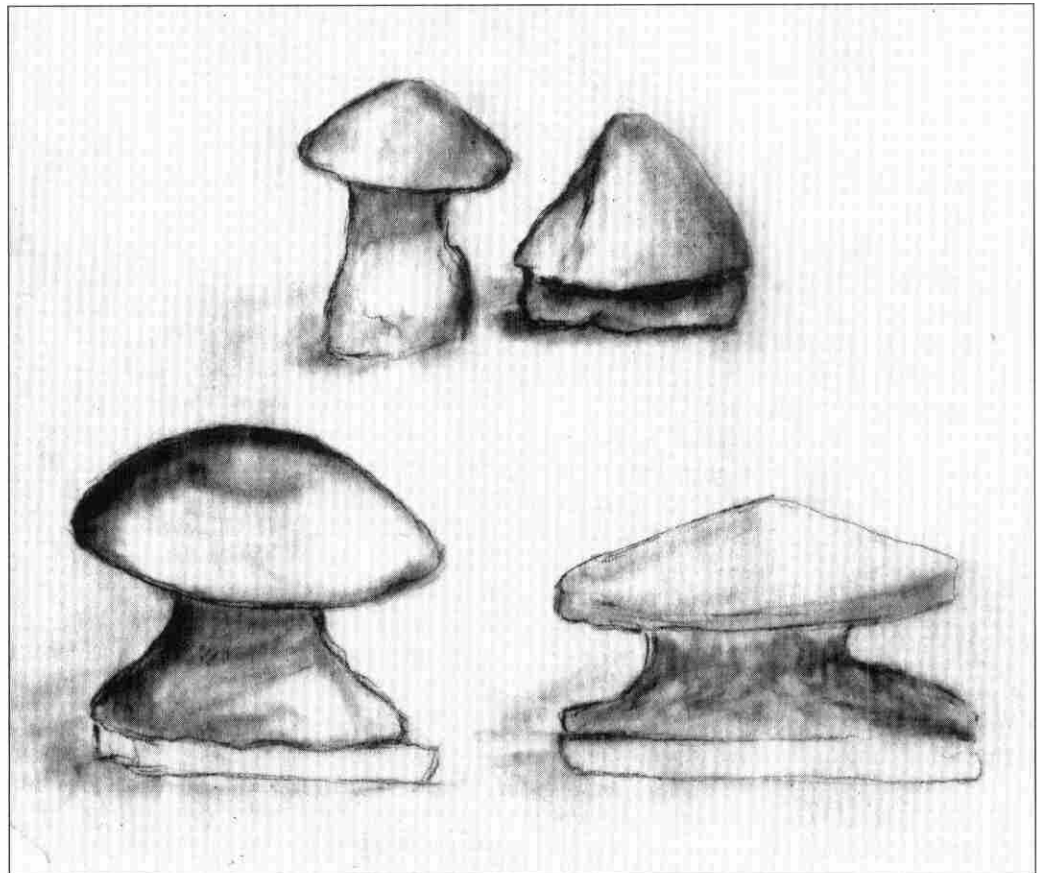
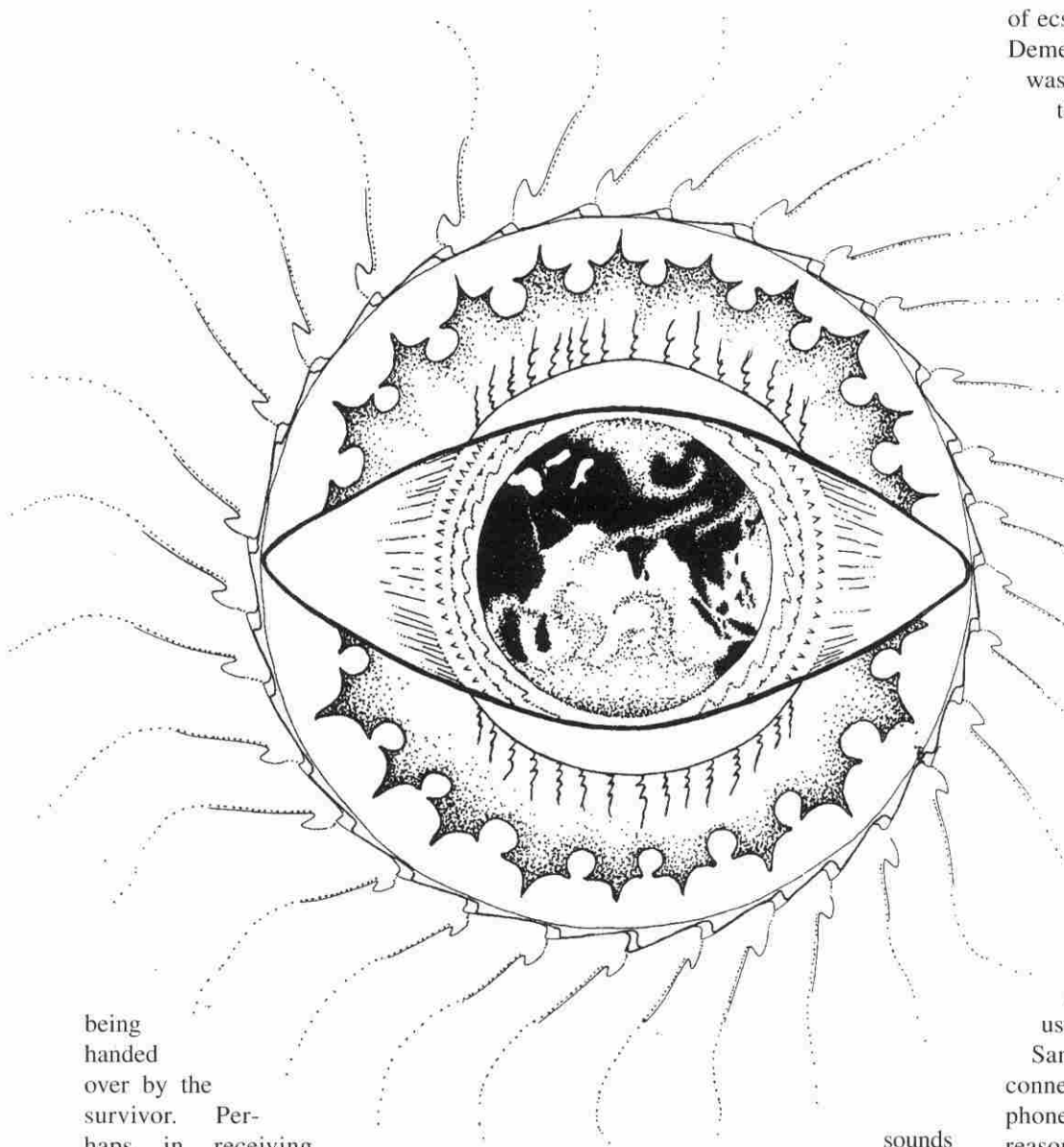


Figure 5. Stone mushrooms, approximately 3", from Vinca, near Belgrade, 5000 B.C.E. Drawn by Karen Vogel.



being handed over by the survivor. Perhaps in receiving seeds, the deceased is receiving symbols of renaissance? This is but a hypothesis" (pers. com., 2001).

The site of the Eleusinian mysteries was a temple fourteen miles outside of Athens. The first temple was built in the eighth century B.C.E. It was destroyed during the Persian Wars around 480 B.C.E. The temple was rebuilt after 460 B.C.E. It became widely known for the Eleusinian mysteries after it was rebuilt. This chronology seems important to me because the stele was made during a time when there was no temple at Eleusis.

What actually occurred during the ceremonies in the temple is secret. We do know that participants drank something called *kykeon* and had amazing experiences of life and death. It certainly

sounds as if the drink was hallucinogenic. Psychedelic and entheogen scholars have tried to discover what was in the brew. Some people think it was ergot, a fungal parasite on grain that can have effects similar to those of LSD. Others think the Eleusinian drink contained a hallucinogenic mushroom containing psilocybin. Some suggest it was a combination of ergot and psilocybin or some other species of hallucinogenic mushroom such as *panaeolus* or *Amanita muscaria* (Graves 1960; Samorini 1998). Whatever the actual content of *kykeon*, it is an impressive feat to dose and conduct a ritual in a temple with three thousand people in an altered state.

The Eleusinian mysteries seem to have provided an important experience

of ecstasy and goddess energy through Demeter and Persephone. Perhaps it was a revitalistic practice and a reaction to the repression of goddess culture and ecstatic experiences of an earlier era. Women in fifth century B.C.E. Athens were under male authority and expected to stay in the home. For all its so-called democracy, Athens was firmly in the grips of patriarchy. The Eleusinian mysteries may have provided a controlled outlet for lost freedom. Through the power of psychedelics, people could experience the goddess and the mysteries of life and death.

The potential link between the stele from Thessaly and the use of hallucinogens at the Eleusinian mysteries is important to psychedelic and entheogen scholars because it provides a history and distinguished lineage to the use of psychedelics.

Samorini's theory about the stele's connection with Demeter and Persephone is likely wrong for one crucial reason: the stele comes from Thessaly. Steles are thought to show the deceased person's life, not to depict deities. Also, the stele is dated 470 B.C.E., which is exactly the time when there was no Eleusinian temple, and so presumably there were no Eleusinian mysteries. It was after the first temple was destroyed and rebuilt that the Eleusinian mysteries gained widespread fame. In 470 B.C.E. Thessaly, it would be unlikely to have the mysteries portrayed on a stele.

I think the stele is of two shaman-priestesses. I believe that the long tradition of shaman-priestesses played an important part in the development of cultures. It makes sense that the tradition be honored on a funeral stele, thought to represent an important event or aspect of someone's life. Perhaps the

stele is an image of two priestesses honoring the death of one of them.

The two women in the stele look the same age, not younger and older. To me, the women in the stele are entranced with each other and the mushrooms. I think these shaman-priestesses of Thesaly were commemorating their relationship as colleagues and the use of hallucinogenic mushrooms.

What is the object (often described as a bag) in the hand of the woman on the left? In the carving I did of the piece, I left the object obscure, because it looked as if she could be holding the end of the other woman's peplos (dress or robe). Were they lovers? Perhaps the removing of the peplos has symbolic meaning. A Greek ritual existed in which a larger-than-life wooden "puppet" of a goddess would be renewed yearly by redressing it with a new robe (Harrison 1913, 179–80). The removing of the robe could be a symbol of rebirth.

In my own experience, death and psychedelics go hand in hand. During my first experiences with psychedelics, over thirty years ago, I was mesmerized by the visual effects and sensations in my body. Over the years, as I've developed in other areas of my life, I've learned to navigate the psychedelic terrain. I've also learned how to work with patterns and disharmony, repairing and soothing what is broken or tangled in the design of the world and in my life.

A near-death experience when I was eighteen preceded both the Goddess and psychedelics. I was unconscious for two days with a fractured skull, the result of a car accident. When I woke suddenly, I was flooded with the most extraordinary and powerful feeling of love.

I know there are all sorts of brain chemistry reasons why I might have waked up telling my mother and everyone else I knew that I loved them. I was changed and opened in a way I'll never forget. This experience has continued to fuel and inform my life. Certainly it deeply colors my expectations about death. It was my initiation into my future work with psychedelics, the Goddess, and love.

In the course of my research I found a quote from the Jungian therapist and scholar Nor Hall in which she refers to the stele. She thinks the figures are

Demeter and Persephone holding poppies. She gives a lovely summing up of goddesses, female shaman-priestesses, and psychedelics:

The frieze of the poppy-bearing goddesses arrest them eternally in the moment of passing into each other. Sometimes the point of passage is thought of as the Maiden Well, where Demeter sat grieving awaiting "the flowering from the depths."

Hall goes on to warn:

Hekate becomes a witch whose power is magic rather than realization, and the passing of the phases or psychological states into each other is accomplished—if at all—by the use of too many "aids" (seeds, brew, grass, chemical), rendering the experience inaccessible and antipodal to consciousness. Hekate can poison as well as intoxicate, turn ecstasy into madness, and cause death where incubation—or short journey—was intended. (1980, 63–64)

In this passage Hall is using Hekate to represent the negative or shadow side of psychedelics. Psychedelics are a powerful tool for healing, but they can certainly be misused or overused. People can become numb or deluded when the primary focus becomes high dosage, frequent use, and multiple combinations without a sacred setting.

It has been important to me to link the use of psychedelics to shamanism and the Goddess. Susana Valadez says of women's ritual among the Huichol, who use peyote and other hallucinogens:

Women perform many rituals for healing and shamanic powers where they invoke the Mother Creator, Tacutsi. The goddess reveals knowledge the women seek only after a long arduous path. Magical plants and animals provide the women with the power objects and "tools" they need in order to successfully channel communication from the spirit world into their everyday lives. (1992, 39)

Shamanism, the Goddess, and psychedelics are widespread despite concert-

ed efforts to stamp them out. The inquisition did significant damage wherever the hand or ideas of the church reached. But people are good at hiding, retreating to wild places, disguising and adapting practices. The Mazatec Indians pray to the Virgin of Guadalupe in their mushroom ceremonies. Ayahuasca takes on a Christian flavor as Santo Daime. Southern California Indians developed Chingchinix, a syncretic mix of Christianity and Datura.

Our modern day inquisition makes hallucinogens and other mind-altering medicine illegal. In addition, ridicule, accusations of prescientific thinking, superstition, and co-opting have made inroads in old, well-developed practices of shamanism, goddess worship, and psychedelic use. Much is lost, yet many practices remain, some taking root in new soil.

There is an image from a Greek vase that I found instructive (fig. 6). The

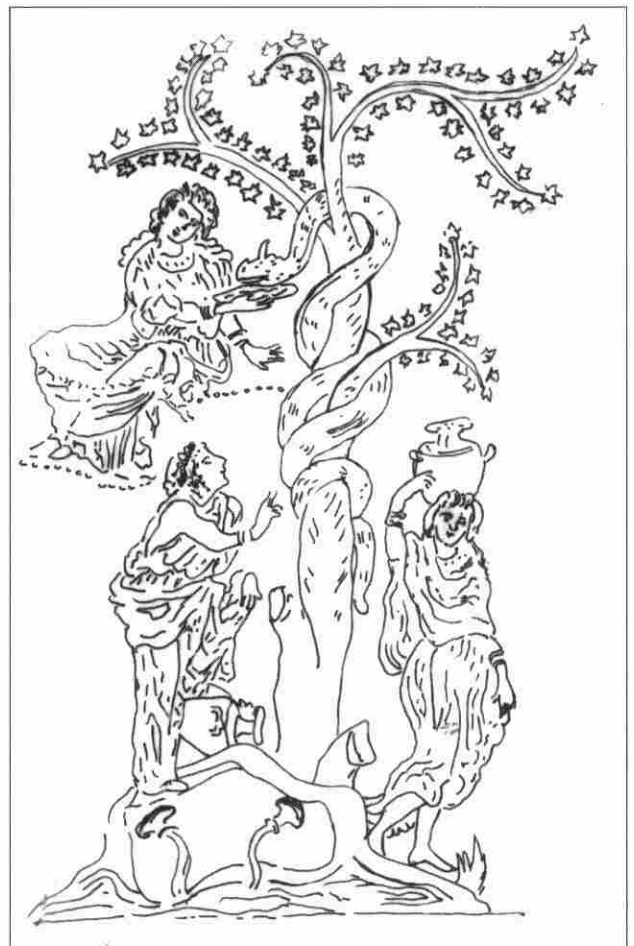


Figure 6. Image on Greek vase, from a lantern slide in the collection of Jane Ellen Harrison (1963, 431). Drawn by Karen Vogel.

horned snake is coiled around a tree. Two mushrooms grow at the spring flowing from the roots of the tree. One priestess steps on her vase to begin her ascent. The second priestess floats beside the tree offering the snake a plate. The third priestess descends with her vase filled.

To me the ritual use of psychedelic mushrooms is clear in this image. Go to a sacred space. Empty yourself as you begin the climb. Enjoy yourself, and honor, respect, and feed the snake guardian of the medicine. Receive the healing and descend back to the ground with your vase refilled.

My hope is that everyone who wants to can find productive, healing, and ecstatic uses for psychedelics. Female shamanism, the Goddess, and psychedelics have a long lineage. I hope that women in particular can continue to develop psychedelic healing traditions that serve us all in the future.

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Karen Vogel co-created, with Vicki Noble, the Motherpeace Tarot deck in 1981. The deck is a fundamental part of women's spirituality and is based on extensive research into goddess cultures and indigenous spiritual practices; there are currently over 200,000 in print. Vogel's training is in anthropology, shamanism, and art. Her art has appeared in shows and public events, such as Jennifer Berezan's *Praises for the World*. Her other work includes the *Motherpeace Tarot Guidebook*, writing, teaching, and tarot consultations. For more information, visit <motherpeace.com>.