The Survival of the Neolithic Goddess in Polish Folklore, Myth, and Tradition

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Abstract

Within the past year, uncovering my ancestry and tracing my motherline has become an important goal of mine. My maternal Polish and Russian ancestries have sparked my interests in Slavic goddesses and the prehistoric female deity of Neolithic Europe. In this paper, I investigate the survival of the Neolithic Goddess in Polish folklore, myth, and tradition. Beginning with the Neolithic period of Poland, I explore the prehistoric cultures and civilizations of Europe in connection to the symbols and images of the Great Goddess. I then move into a discussion of the Slavic Indo-European colonization of central and eastern Europe and discuss how the Slavic goddesses retained ancient elements of the prehistoric female deity. I finally focus on analyzing Polish folklore, myth, and peasant tradition to trace the survival of the Neolithic Goddess into modern times.

My research methodology consists of a combination of approaches. I analyze primary and secondary books and scholarly articles from a variety of disciplines, including Polish and Slavic folklore, mythology, history, archaeology, and tradition. My goal of weaving together different disciplines of scholarly work draws on Marija Gimbutas’s interdisciplinary method of archaeomythology. I also rely on Gimbutas’s classification of Goddess symbols and images to understand Polish myths and customs. I employ Marguerite Rigoglioso’s definition of Gimbutasian symbolic analysis to assist my own analyses.

In this paper I seek to demonstrate the tenacity of the Divine Feminine and how she has survived in a patriarchal Catholic nation within the realms of folklore, myth, and tradition. There is a lack of English-written scholarly studies devoted specifically to the survival of the prehistoric Goddess in Poland. I hope my work begins to bridge this gap,
Muniz iv

contributing both to the field of women’s spirituality and to feminist reinterpretations of prehistory.
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my ancestors. The path that led me to my topic was inspired by the collective stories, memories, and mysteries surrounding your lives and the lives of your ancestors. Exploring the Sacred Feminine in connection to the homelands of my matrilineal ancestors has deepened my gratitude for the Mother’s blood that runs so deeply through my very being.
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To my older sister, thank you for taking many weeks and hours out of your busy schedule to edit the very first draft of my thesis. Your skills at writing and editing are something that I can only hope to attain some day. To my younger sister, I appreciate your help with further edits on my work, including all of the other papers that I wrote during my thesis. And to my youngest sister, if it weren’t for your incredible knowledge of grammar and the rules of the MLA format, I would have been forever lost in the nuances of writing. You gave me access to a scholarly journal that proved extremely valuable to my research.

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Table of Contents

Abstract............................................................................................................................iii-iv

Dedication.........................................................................................................................v

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................vi

Chapter 1: Introduction.................................................................................................1-5

Chapter 2: Literature Review.........................................................................................6-24

Chapter 3: Methods.......................................................................................................25-27

Chapter 4: Old Europe, the Neolithic Goddess, and Poland......................................28-58

Chapter 5: Pagan Slavs and the Coming of Christianity.............................................59-78

Chapter 6: The Survival of the Goddess in Polish Folklore, Myth, and Legend..........79-128

Chapter 7: The Survival of the Goddess in Polish Traditions.......................................129-161

Chapter 8: Conclusion..................................................................................................162-165

Works Cited....................................................................................................................166-175
Chapter 1: Introduction

In the first chapter of *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe: Myths and Cult Images*, Marija Gimbutas gives an overview of the geographical and cultural regions she deems the “Civilization of Old Europe.” Between circa 7000 BCE and circa 3500 BCE, the civilization of Old Europe extended “from the Aegean and Adriatic, including the islands, as far north as Czechoslovakia, southern Poland and the western Ukraine” (Gimbutas, *Goddesses* 17). Gimbutas’s mention of southern Poland immediately grabbed my attention; in that moment, I recalled my Polish heritage and my maternal ancestors’ homeland of Poland. A personal connection began to emerge between Gimbutas’s text and the knowledge of my heritage. I yearned to know more about the presence of the Neolithic Goddess in Poland and her various incarnations.

The topic of the Divine Feminine in Poland initially became a recurring interest of mine in my first year within the Women’s Spirituality Master’s Program at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. In my first quarter I read two books that gave me my cursory introduction to the Polish Black Madonna of Czestochowa: Elinor Gadon’s *The Once and Future Goddess: A Sweeping Visual Chronicle of the Sacred Female and Her Reemergence in the Cultural Mythology of Our Time* and China Galland’s *Longing for Darkness: Tara and the Black Madonna*. Immediately following my readings, my mother embarked on a trip back to Michigan to visit my grandmother. By chance I mentioned to my mother to ask my grandmother if she knew anything about the Polish Black Madonna. To my surprise, my mother brought back from Michigan a Polish handcrafted painting of the Black Madonna that my grandmother had hanging in her home and wanted my mother to give to me. This

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1. I use the terms BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era) throughout my paper instead of the Christian terms of BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini).
synchronous event confirmed my growing intuition that I should continue to learn more about my ancestors and their spiritual traditions.

Over the next few months after receiving the Black Madonna painting, I became enthralled with unearthing my maternal ancestry (which I traced back to both Poland and Russia) and my motherline (which I traced back to southern Poland, in particular). I witnessed my own growing desire to explore the pre-Christian Slavic goddesses of central and eastern Europe and the earlier Neolithic goddesses of these regions. I began to scour for literature related to my interests and ponder the possibilities out of which my own thesis question could emerge.

In my initial stages of literature browsing, I came across some feminist scholars who produced literature related to Slavic goddesses and the Black Madonna of Czestochowa. Mary B. Kelly’s book, *Goddess Embroideries of Eastern Europe* (1996) illustrates how the Goddess survived in eastern Europe up until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in women’s rituals and folk arts, such as ritual cloths and embroideries. *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (1988), by Joanna Hubbs, reconstructs the Russian Great Goddess and demonstrates the forms she took under both patriarchy and Christianity in Russia. Marija Gimbutas’s works, such as *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe: Myths and Cult Images* (2007), *The Language of the Goddess* (1991), *The Civilization of The Goddess: The World of Old Europe* (1991), and *The Living Goddesses* (2001), present archaeological evidence for the woman-centered and Goddess-revering cultures of Neolithic Europe and Anatolia. Also, works on the multitude of Black Madonnas found around the world have been studied by scholars and discussed in works such as China Galland’s *Longing for Darkness: Tara and the Black Madonna* (2007), Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum’s
Since Poland is a predominantly Catholic country, literature related to Polish Catholicism and the Black Madonna of Czestochowa appear more numerous than works devoted to the pre-Christian Goddess/goddesses of Poland and the survival of pagan traditions and customs. Therefore, my concern for a lack of works written in English on the pre-Christian female divinity in Poland led me to my research subject. The purpose of this paper is to explore the Neolithic Goddess and the central question: Can her presence still be found in various forms amidst Poland’s myths, folklore, history, and traditions?

With this research question, I hope to enhance the scholarly field of women’s spirituality by demonstrating a continuity of belief in the Divine Feminine in Poland from prehistory (ca. 15,000 years ago) to the present day. I hope to connect the past with the present, and demonstrate the forms the Neolithic Goddess of Old Europe took under patriarchal cultures and religions in Poland. It is my goal to make new connections and develop existing connections previous scholars have made in regard to Polish folklore, myth, archaeology, and the Divine Feminine. I feel my research is timely and necessary because it will contribute to the growing body of scholarly literature that strives for a feminist reinterpretation of patriarchy, religion, and (pre)history; at the same time it has allowed me to explore my spiritual connection with my motherline.

In this study I analyze textual, and when applicable, pictorial sources related to my topic. My research scope focuses solely on Poland and refrains from delving into Polish
American or Polish immigration customs, histories, and traditions. Although my research draws on Polish history, folklore, myth, ethnography, and archaeology, I by no means exhaust the rich depths and complexities of these subjects, nor do I position myself as a long-standing authoritative voice concerning these areas of focus. Rather, I hope my relative newness to Polish history and tradition brings a fresh feminist perspective into diverse subjects many scholars have explored before me but have yet to mine more fully for the presence of the Divine Feminine. I sweep over temporal, religious, and cultural spans of Poland, but due to limited space and scope, I do not delve too extensively into the histories of the disciplines. In addition, I can only rely on Polish literature translated to or written in English, although I realize future studies of my topic would benefit immensely from a more complete analysis of both Polish and English-written scholarly sources.

There are various terms I use throughout my paper that may need definitions. My use of the term “Goddess” will evoke reference to the Divine Feminine force in the universe, the one who Gimbutas says, “personified every phase of life, death, and regeneration. She was the Creator from whom all life—human, plant, and animal—arose, and to whom everything returned” (Living 5). My reference to the “Neolithic” centers on the early agricultural era of Europe. I use Gimbutas’s term of “Old Europe” to delineate the regions of Neolithic Europe and Asia Minor and the era between 7000 BCE and 3000 BCE (Living 3). Poland adopted Christianity around 966 CE, so my use of the term “Slavic goddesses” refers to the pre-Christian Slavic pagan divinities. The term “Slavic” or “Slav” itself will be defined in more detail in my paper in reference to the similar ethnic and linguistic groups of Indo-Europeans that reside in central and east European countries.
This paper is organized into sections that follow both chronological and thematic order. The first section focuses on prehistoric Poland and the Neolithic cultures and inhabitants of central Europe. I introduce the reader to the archaeological evidence for the Neolithic Goddess in Poland and the various forms, attributes, and animals sacred to her. The following chapter gives a brief historical examination of the presence of pagan Slavs in Poland and the shift towards Christianity in the tenth century. The next chapter explores the survival of Slavic goddesses in Polish folklore, legend, and myth. The last section centers on the survival of the Goddess and paganism within Polish peasant rituals and traditions of recent centuries.

Due to a flurry of synchronous events and timings, I arrived at my research subject by way of intuitive guidance from my ancestors and from the Divine Feminine of their homelands. By asking the question, can the Neolithic Goddess be found in Polish folklore, myth, and tradition, I embarked on a journey hoping to further my academic research and my personal connections to my maternal ancestors.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In order to examine the survival of the Neolithic Goddess in Polish folklore, myth, and tradition, I cannot restrict myself to a literary review of only one discipline. Rather, a more multidisciplinary approach to analyzing literature is necessary. In this chapter, I review scholarly books and articles from a variety of disciplines that proved pertinent to my overarching topic. This review is organized according to the fields of study I delved into: Polish archaeology, Polish and Slavic folklore and myths, Polish and Slavic histories, Polish customs and traditions, and women’s spirituality. By dividing my review into these areas of study, I explore the trends and topics within each; however, due to the limited scope of my research, I am not able to critique the full gamut of literature in each discipline. In some instances, I will briefly mention publications or sources that may be of assistance to the reader. My focus will center on primary and secondary scholarly sources, and in some instances, popular sources, that ultimately weave into my interdisciplinary study. I have not come across many works in English related to the survival of the Neolithic Goddess in Poland, and I hope by examining the literature available, I can demonstrate the need for this research and the purpose of my study.

Polish Archaeology and Neolithic Europe

Since my study begins with the Neolithic European Goddess cultures, my research would be incomplete without a sense of the history of Neolithic archaeology and the major prehistoric excavations performed in Poland. In the archaeological article, “Post-War Prehistory in Poland” (1949), author Józef Kostrzewski gives a short overview of the state of Polish archaeology both before and after World War II. Kostrzewski points out that Polish prehistoric archaeology flourished before the war with important sites undergoing systematic
excavations, such as the Early Iron Age site of Biskupin. Polish prehistoric archaeology suffered immensely during the war yet recommenced soon after (Kostrzewski 355). Due to the fact that Kostrzewski’s article is very outdated, there is less information available in reference to Neolithic settlements of Poland in comparison to the immediate post-war focus on “relics of the early historical era” (356).

More recent articles on Polish archaeology derive from the past few decades. Ryszard Grygiel and Peter Bogucki are two archaeologists who have published reports on Neolithic Polish excavations. In “Early Neolithic Sites at Brzesc Kujawski, Poland: Preliminary Report on the 1980-1984 Excavations” (1986), Grygiel and Bogucki discuss their excavation work at two early Neolithic sites at Brzesc Kujawski, located northwest of Warsaw. In 1976, the authors sought to obtain “radiocarbon-supported chronology of the Early Neolithic cultures of the Polish Lowlands”; however, in this preliminary report from their ‘80s excavations, they expand their research scope to include an “investigation of household activities and regional settlement distribution” (121). During the early ‘80s, the authors’ fieldwork uncovered flint objects from the Late Paleolithic (ca. 9000 BCE), postholes from the Linear Pottery Culture (ca. 4300-3900 BCE), and eighty pits, eleven graves, and a large trapezoidal longhouse attributed to various time periods, including the Late Lengyel Culture (ca. 3600-3200 BCE) (124-25).

Grygiel and Bogucki also report on excavations from Oslonki, another Neolithic settlement in north-central Poland located near Brzesc Kujawski. In “Early Farmers in North Central Europe: 1989-1994 Excavations at Oslonki, Poland” (1997), the authors discuss the thirty trapezoidal longhouses, eighty graves, a fortification ditch, and pit contents found at Oslonki. This preliminary report of their research is undertaken to begin an “investigation of
household organization and the procurement and use of various raw materials by the
inhabitants of Oslonki” (161). Grygiel and Bogucki’s preliminary reports provide me with
literature in English on some important Neolithic sites in Poland. Their reports do not touch
on the religious aspects of these Neolithic populations, and some of the artifacts, residential
structures, and rich female graves unearthed (“Early Farmers” 166) lead me to ponder the
status and roles of women in these societies. I am left to question how these discoveries may
connect to Marija Gimbutas’s work on the Neolithic Goddess in Europe.

Marija Gimbutas’s mythoarchaeological works are foundational to my own research.
Her books, The Living Goddesses (2001), The Language of the Goddess (1991), The
Civilization of The Goddess: The World of Old Europe (1991), and The Goddesses and Gods
of Old Europe: Myths and Cult Images (2007), skillfully demonstrate a rigorous
systematizing and deciphering of the images, symbols, and religion of Neolithic Europe. A
central thesis in her work is that beginning in the fifth millennium BCE, around 4300 BCE,
the pre-Indo-European (Old European) cultures of Europe, which were matrifocal,
matrilineal, agricultural, and peaceful, were overrun in waves of infiltration by patriarchal,
pastoral, and mobile proto-Indo-Europeans (Kurgans) from the Russian steppes (Goddesses
18). Old European religion, she says, focused on the Neolithic Goddess, who manifested
herself in the cyclical cycles and “personified every phase of life, death, and regeneration”
(Living 5). Gimbutas grounds most of her work in her own archaeological excavations, which
were undertaken in places such as Bosnia, Macedonia, Greece, Thessaly, and Italy (Living
xv). Her analysis of Old European culture and religion employs her interdisciplinary method
of “archaeomythology,” which incorporates folklore, mythology, archaeology, and history,
among other disciplines (Living xix).
In my studies of Gimbutas’s work, I discovered that the “Civilization of Old Europe,” referring to “the collective identity and achievement of the different cultural groups of Neolithic-Chalcolithic southeastern Europe,” extended northward into southern Poland (Goddesses 17). In The Language of the Goddess (1991), Gimbutas incorporates analysis and discussion of the survival of Neolithic Goddess images, symbols, and sacred animals in modern European folklore. She makes mention of Polish and Slavic goddesses and customs (Language 159, 320), which inspired me to trace the Neolithic Goddess in Polish folklore and tradition. Gimbutas focuses her work mainly on southeastern Europe, so I feel there is a need to apply her methods and build on her research in the outskirt areas of Old Europe, such as Poland.

Gimbutas’s mention of southern Poland led me to research archaeology digs in Poland. Her book, The Civilization of The Goddess: The World of Old Europe (1991), provides me with an in-depth exploration of the different Neolithic cultures of Old Europe. She studies the Neolithic cultures and traces the proto-Indo-European incursions into Old Europe that resulted in major social, economic, and spiritual upheavals. Other crucial sources on Neolithic Polish archaeology come from Archaeologia Polona, a Polish archaeological journal published by the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. I accessed this journal online and viewed archaeology articles dating back to 1958. This journal provided me with numerous articles related to Neolithic Polish sites. One of the great benefits of the website is that it presents works published in the English language, which makes Polish archaeology accessible to a wider audience.

Marija Gimbutas’s work on Old Europe and the Goddess has received critiques from various sources over the years. For example, in her book, The Myth of Matriarchal
Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won’t Give Women a Future (2006), author Cynthia Eller criticizes the notion of a “woman-centered” and “goddess-worshipping” past. The “myth of matriarchal prehistory,” as she calls it, entered mainstream culture through a variety of ways, such as through the popularization of Gimbutas’s archaeological findings (Eller 20). Eller says that “the most compelling evidence of matriarchal prehistory for contemporary feminist observers is that of prehistoric female figurines” (20). However, she says that the myth of matriarchal prehistory “does not represent historical truth; it is not a story built or argued from solid evidence, and it presents a scenario for prehistory that, if not demonstrably false, is at least highly unlikely” (14). Eller says that a matriarchal past does not represent historical truth, so she refrains from challenging the notion that patriarchy has historical origins.

Although Eller mentions Gimbutas and her work, she does not seem to have a full understanding of Gimbutas’s theories. Max Dashú, writing in response to Eller’s book, says that “Eller never describes Gimbutas’ theory in its own right or quotes from her historical analysis. Instead she assails it through a pastiche of descriptions by her detractors and supporters” (“Knocking Down”). An argument against Gimbutas cannot be made if one does not engage in a detailed reading of what Gimbutas, in fact, researched and published herself. Dashú notes how “Eller completely sidesteps the Lithuanian scholar’s heavily footnoted analysis of why she thinks the kurgan-builders were invaders, and why patriarchal” (“Knocking Down”). This seems to be a glaring flaw on the part of Eller, since Gimbutas’s research on patriarchal invaders was important to her analysis of Old Europe.

Other backlashes against Gimbutas’s work have occurred in the archaeological world. The “New Archaeology” of the late 1960s began to focus on scientific process rather than cultural analysis. This propelled a trend within archaeology of interpreting female images not
as sacred images or as goddesses, but as ‘fertility idols,’ ‘dancing ladies,’ ‘concubines,’ or
‘pretty ladies’ (Dashú, “Knocking Down”). Even today, backlashes against Gimbutas’s work
continue. In The Lost World Of Old Europe: The Danube Valley, 5000-3500 BC (2009),
some scholars reject the evidence for patriarchal invaders demolishing Old European
settlements and suggest, instead, that the Old Europeans burned down their houses
themselves.

Although Gimbutas has her critics, their words do not sway me from relying on her
theories and methodology in my own study. I see her theories as built upon strong evidence,
especially when her archaeological data is seen alongside evidence from multiple disciplines,
such as history, folklore, mythology, and ethnography. Since Gimbutas’s method of
archaeomythology draws from numerous disciplines, I have the benefit of challenging and
questioning her ideas by looking at my data through different disciplinary lenses. Dashú says
that Gimbutas’s “model for Indo-European origins is still the leading theory in the field. Its
basic outlines are upheld—minus the focus on women’s status and goddess interpretations—
by her former student J. P. Mallory, now one of the top authorities in IE Studies” (“Knocking
Down”). Gimbutas’s work on Indo-Europeans has been accepted to a certain extent by
academics, but when it comes to her research on women’s status and the Goddess, a fear of
women and the Divine Feminine remains within academia.

Polish and Slavic Folklore and Myth

Since the nineteenth century, Polish collectors have gathered and published Polish
folklore and folktales. Among the early Polish folktale collectors and publishers were Adam
Czarnocki (pseudonym Zorian Dolega Chodakowski), Kazimierz Wojcicki, Jozef Lompa,
and Oskar Kolberg (Malinowski and Pellowski 22). One late nineteenth-century article I
encountered in my research was Rev. Wladyslaw S. Lach-Szyrma’s article, “Slavonic Folklore” (1881). Lach-Szyrma focuses on analyzing the similarities between Slavonic and Celtic-British myths and legends to support the theory of a common origin of the Celtic and Slavonic races (52). While he does not provide detail on Slavonic goddesses and religion, the author does expound on some Polish peasant myths and beliefs that have cross-cultural comparisons in western Europe.

In my continued search for sources on Polish and Slavic folklore, one online source I stumbled across was the Slavic and East European Folklore Association (SEEFA). SEEFA publishes an annual scholarly journal, *Folklorica: Journal of the Slavic and East European Folklore Association* (previously known as *SEEFA Journal*), which showcases recent scholarly research, reviews, and conference studies within the field of Slavic and east European folklore. To my benefit, some articles focused specifically on Polish folklore. Anna Brzozowska-Krajka gave me insight into Polish folklore research methods and trends in her articles, “Select Bibliography of Polish Folkloristics for the Period: 1990-1998” (1999) and “Polish Folklore Studies at the End of the Twentieth Century” (1999).

The former article by Brzozowska-Krajka consists of a compilation translated in English of Polish folklorists’ primary sources, dictionaries, lexicons, and studies from 1990-1998. The bibliography discloses “trends typical of Polish folklore studies. . . . It especially reflects both textocentric and anthropocentric tendencies” (Brzozowska-Krajka, “Select” 11). Although I have yet to find these Polish texts available at my disposal in English, I nonetheless view this article as helpful in giving me an overall sense of the areas of study and approaches Polish folklorists explored in the 1990s. As I explore works published in the
United States on Polish folklore, it becomes important for me to learn about the texts that are published in Poland.

Brzozowska-Krajka’s second article deepened my understanding of Polish folklore studies by giving me an overview of the Polish institutions that provide folklore studies as a discipline and the various approaches towards folklore they promote. The author finds that after existing for nearly 200 years, Polish folklore studies have become more scholarly and four main approaches characterize scholars’ studies of Polish folklore (“Polish” 8-9). The four approaches focus on the historical, social, cultural, and oral aspects of folklore (Brzozowska-Krajka, “Polish” 9). The author concludes that present day Polish folklore studies, with its interdisciplinary character, would benefit if folklorists engage in comparative studies and open communication with eastern and western Europe, as well as folklorists worldwide (“Polish” 9-10). This interdisciplinary understanding of Polish folklore seems to parallel the interdisciplinary nature of the archaeomythology approach I use as I explore the Neolithic Goddess in Poland. Brzozowska-Krajka helps me see how other scholars can approach Polish folklore by synthesizing and integrating different disciplines and perspectives.

While Brzozowska-Krajka focuses on the publication of Polish folklore sources in Poland, books have also been published in the United States on Polish folklore and myth. Joanne Asala’s *Polish Folklore and Myth* (2001) is one of these publications. Asala, who has traveled throughout eastern and western Europe to collect folklore materials, presents a collection of thirty-six Polish myths. While this book is more of a popular than a scholarly source, Asala does something in her book that I have not found in other books on Polish folklore. Asala provides a short background introduction to almost every myth that explicitly
states the myth’s connections to pre-Christian goddesses and pagan themes. I found these introductions brief but informative and beneficial. Asala does not expand into more detailed examinations of Polish myths for their pre-Christian and ancient elements.

An even more recent publication on Polish folklore is the book Polish Folktales and Folklore (2009), by Michal Malinowski and Anne Pellowski. In their book, Malinowski and Pellowski retell over fifty tales from Poland with the goal of presenting a variety of themes—such as local legends, animal tales, magic tales, and religious legends—all within one book (xi). They also include a general introduction to Poland and a section of recipes, riddles, nursery rhymes, and games. Unlike Asala’s book, the authors do not mention the possible survival of pagan and Goddess elements in the Polish tales. Nonetheless, strong aspects of their book include the sheer number and variety of folktales presented, along with a succinct Sources section that provides further bibliographic information on each myth.

A study into Polish folklore must take into consideration the pan-Slavic deities and folk beliefs that Poland shares with other countries. A look into Slavic folk beliefs and myths from other countries may provide insight into the Slavic deities that existed in Poland before Christianity. For instance, Mike Dixon-Kennedy’s Encyclopedia of Russian and Slavic Myth and Legend (1998) is one of the first texts to present the myths and legends of the Russians and Slavs translated into English (ix). With the book organized into alphabetical entries, Dixon-Kennedy provides the reader with “a great deal of historical, geographical, and biographical information related to the Slavs and their mythology . . . so that readers may gain the deepest possible understanding of the myths and legends against their cultural and geographical background” (ix). The author’s encyclopedia is very detailed; under each entry heading is the country of origin for the myth, legend, or Slavic deity as well as citations of
sources that are expanded on in the References and Further Reading section. While not as numerous as the entries for Russia, the author does include some entries related to Poland. This work allows me to cross-analyze and compare different Slavic myths and legends.

As previously mentioned, the Slavic and East European Folklore Association (SEEFA) produces numerous scholarly articles on Slavic folklore from a variety of Slavic countries. Besides SEEFA, many books have been published pertaining to Russian folklore, fairytales, and myths. For instance, Linda J. Ivanits’s book, *Russian Folk Belief* (1992), speaks to the dual faith phenomenon of pagan and Christian elements coexisting in the lives of Russian peasants. Ivanits draws on ethnographic data from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as Soviet studies, in order to present to a broad audience “a basic survey of Great Russian (not Ukrainian or Belorussian) folk superstition” (xiii). Ivanits’s survey of folk beliefs about spirits, witches, and the supernatural demonstrates the “double faith” (*dvoeverie*), or “the interweaving of pre-Christian and Christian elements in the belief and practice of the Russian peasant” (4). She does not engage in cross-cultural comparisons with West Slavic beliefs, which would be pertinent to my study of Poland as a West Slavic nation. She does, however, present detailed accounts of the Russian *rusalki*, Mokosh, and Mother Damp Earth (e.g. 14-17, 75-82), which are feminine spirits and deities present within Polish folklore and tradition as well.

**Polish and Slavic Histories**

Before my entry into the women’s spirituality program, I knew next to nothing about Polish history. My growing interest in my Polish ancestry and women’s spirituality drew me to the exploration of Poland. I especially yearned to delve into the pre-Christian and pre-Indo-European roots of central and eastern Europe. Since my research spans wide time
frames in Poland, I will mention and review history texts related to modern Poles and the ancient Slavs.

One of the well-known texts on Polish history is actually a two volume set of works by Norman Davies: *God’s Playground: A History of Poland, Vol. 1: The Origins to 1795* (2005), and *God’s Playground: A History of Poland, Vol. 2: 1795 to the Present* (2005). Another work published in the 1980s was Adam Zamoyski’s *The Polish Way: A Thousand-Year History of the Poles and Their Culture* (2000). Zamoyski set out to write an overview of Polish history, because as he says, “[n]o satisfactory synthesis of Poland’s history has so far been achieved, principally because attempts at producing one have tended to reflect nationalist and even political viewpoints” (viii). One of the weaknesses of this text (and common to many history books) is that it is androcentric; a glance through the book gave me the false impression that women had little or nothing to do with Polish history and culture. While there are a few mentions here and there of famous historical women and of the Virgin Mary (e.g. 67, 201, 223), not much attention is given to women’s importance in Polish history. Androcentric historical texts inspire the need for feminist methodologies and re-readings of history from a feminist perspective. This is one reason why I am approaching my topic through a feminist lens.

Zamoyski’s text and other history books, such as Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki’s *A Concise History Of Poland* (2006), place an emphasis on Polish history beginning in the tenth century CE, when the nation emerged as a political and Christian nation (Lukowski and Zawadzki 3; Zamoyski 10). In order to research the Polish region before Christianity and to obtain a greater history of the Slavs, one has to look for sources elsewhere. The following books have been published on the Slavs: *The Slavs in European
History and Civilization (1962) by Francis Dvornik, The Early Slavs: Culture and Society in Early Medieval Eastern Europe (2001) by Paul M. Barford, and The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500-700 (2007) by Florin Curta. Besides books, there are numerous articles on early Polish/Slavic history from scholarly journals, such as the Slavic Review and The Slavonic and East European Review. These journals are devoted to Slavic studies of the past and present.

One of the first concise accounts of the early origins of the Slavs was published in the 1970s. Prior to her publication of books on the Old European civilization of the Goddess, Gimbutas focused her career on the proto-Indo-Europeans who invaded the homelands of what she calls the peaceful, Goddess-worshipping Old European cultures (Living xv-vi). The Slavs (1971) is one of Gimbutas’s earlier works. In it she provides a historical account of the proto and early Slavs based on her integration of historical, archaeological, linguistic, and folkloric sources (14). She demonstrates how the Slavs grew from an insignificant group of farmers to an “increasing population spreading their language and culture [in areas including the region of modern-day Poland] through aggressive migration and assimilation of native elements” (129). While devoting the majority of her book to tracing origins, migrations, and expansions, her last two chapters focus on the social structure and religion of the Slavs. The Slavs makes mention of some female Slavic deities, but the information on them is too brief to shed any new light.

Polish Folk Customs and Traditions

In tracing the continued existence of the Neolithic Goddess in Poland one must explore the ways in which the Divine Feminine has survived in Polish peasant rituals, traditions, and customs. Some early works in English related to Polish/Slavic customs derive
from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Two such sources are Harriette E. Kennedy’s “Polish Peasant Courtship and Wedding Customs and Folk-Song” (1925) and Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, the first edition of which was published in 1890. Kennedy discusses some Polish peasant wedding customs and retells the folk songs that accompany both courtship and wedding rituals. Some of the songs are addressed to a Slavic goddess (Kennedy 55-57), which reflects the survival of pagan elements in peasant folk songs. Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* gives some detail regarding Polish agricultural customs and, like Kennedy’s work, draws attention to a couple of Slavic goddesses. Both authors, however, provide only a few descriptive sentences of the Slavic goddesses in their relation to Polish customs and history.

Two well-known books devoted to Polish peasant folk life and tradition are Sula Benet’s *Song, Dance, and Customs of Peasant Poland* (1996) and Sophie Hodorowicz Knab’s *Polish Customs, Traditions and Folklore* (2007). Benet’s book has become a classic text on Polish folk life and lore. Fortunately, I obtained this out-of-print book through a used book website. In the 1930s and 1940s, Benet engaged in fieldwork to study the lives of Polish peasants in various regions of Poland. As a result of her studies of Polish folk life, Benet wrote this book in “an attempt to give the flavour and the colour of Polish peasant life,” as well as to demonstrate how Polish tradition survived “despite the upheaval of the war years, the post-war dislocations, and the increasing urbanization of the country” (15).

Benet provides a portrait of peasants’ ways of life in Poland by discussing numerous topics such as work, agricultural rituals and the cycle of the seasons, dance, dress, household life, marriage, birth, and death. As a result of her research, the author finds wide variations in custom among Poland’s peasants; however, despite variations she says that a collection of
Polish folk customs is “a record of national self-expression deliberately cultivated as an expression of patriotism and the will to survive” (15).

Important to my own study is Benet’s discussion of peasants’ agricultural rites and their ties to pre-Christian customs and beliefs that did not disappear with Poland’s adoption of Christianity (37). What is missing from the discussion is a study of the pre-Christian goddesses and female spirits underlying certain agricultural rites. Benet does give attention to the prominence of the Virgin Mary in the peasants’ holidays (74), but she does not connect her with the Earth Mother of pre-Christian times. Nonetheless, Benet’s work provides me with an invaluable early Polish folk life source gleaned from fieldwork experiences both before and after World War II.

Sophie Hodorowicz Knab has published several books on Polish folk customs. One of her books, *Polish Customs, Traditions and Folklore* (2007), provides a month-by-month overview of Polish people’s traditions and customs, many of which, Knab says, are extinct in today’s Poland (18). This book was my first introduction to Polish customs and one of the first English books on Polish traditions that I found. Not many English-written sources concerning Polish folk life exist, and *Polish Customs, Traditions and Folklore* was intentionally written to bridge this language gap (Knab, *Customs* 17). Furthermore, a mere glance through Knab’s chapters demonstrates the inextricable ties Polish customs have had to the cycles of the seasons and the remnants of pagan traditions that continue to exist in Poland. Neither Benet’s nor Knab’s work veers into territories exploring the pre-Christian Divine Feminine in connection to modern Polish traditions, and I feel my own research can delve deeper into this area.
Women’s Spirituality, Women and Religion

In the fields of women’s spirituality and women’s studies, feminist authors have made great gains in analyzing pre-patriarchal and patriarchal religions, women’s spiritual roles, and the worship of female deity throughout history. Some authors have focused exclusively on or included discussion of central and east European goddesses in their works. In *Goddesses in World Mythology* (1993), Martha Ann and Dorothy Myers Imel present an extensive collection of information about goddesses from cultures around the world. Until this publication, no other work had gathered information about global goddesses into a single location, created a master database of collected sources, or organized lists of cultures with identifiable goddesses (Ann and Imel ix). Ann and Imel’s book is divided by continent or subcontinent with encyclopedic entries of goddesses within each division. Entries for Polish and other Slavic goddesses are found within the “Eastern Europe” chapter (41-73). Encyclopedia entries in *Goddesses in World Mythology* provide useful information on Slavic goddesses, but they are ultimately a collection of short references that lack in-depth study of these goddesses. My search for in-depth descriptions of Polish goddesses has often been limited to brief encyclopedia entries (e.g. Dixon-Kennedy’s and Ann and Imel’s works).

One author who has analyzed the survival of pre-Christian goddesses in Polish and Slavic tradition in greater depth is Mary B. Kelly. In her book, *Goddess Embroideries of Eastern Europe* (1996), Kelly’s focus is specifically on women’s embroideries, textiles, and folk art of the nineteenth century in eastern Europe. Kelly spent a three-year journey traveling throughout Russia, Ukraine, Rumania, Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the United States, and Canada in order to research and document the Goddess motifs she encountered on ritual cloths and women’s textile and folkloric arts (5).
Kelly provides the reader with beautiful images of textile and folk art goddesses. While I would have liked to see more images of Polish textiles and designs, Kelly’s research is geographically broader than Poland. To my benefit, the author provides crucial evidence for the survival of the ancient Goddess in the Polish folk art of papercutting (149-52), as well as the Polish and Slavic egg-decorating traditions (145-49). Kelly’s book superbly demonstrates how the Goddess motif from ancient times survived in women’s folk embroidery up until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She says, “Although peasants were forced to become Christian. . . . Among women, the old paganism was probably never completely eliminated” (49). Kelly’s work propels me to question how Polish peasant women might have kept pagan rituals and the Goddess alive in other traditions, such as in storytelling, folklore, singing, and dancing. *Goddess Embroideries* shows how the rich, unexplored areas of women’s textile traditions are promising places scholars often do not look to uncover the ancient Goddess.

Kelly’s book is not the only text that traces the survival of prehistoric female deities in eastern Europe. Joanna Hubbs’s *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (1988) draws on archaeology, archaic myths, folktales, epics, ethnography, and modern literature to explore the myth of “Mother Russia” and “the impact of the myth of Russia and earth as mother upon Russian culture as a whole” (xvi). Hubbs’s goal is to examine the bonds between the peoples of Russia and the motherland as female divinity “to illuminate many of the beliefs, aspirations, and conflicts which underlie Russian cultural, social, and political life; which give shape to her institutions and historical evolution; and which express the ‘peculiar’ Russian character” (xvi). Hubbs’s work, along with Gimbutas’s and Kelly’s, has been formative to my own research question and interest. In Hubbs’s first few chapters, she
reconstructs the Russian Great Goddess, who has features “found in the folklore figures of the rusalka, the witch Baba Yaga, and Mother Moist Earth” (24). Although Hubbs’s study is confined to Russia, it is from her detailed reconstruction of the Russian Great Goddess that I began to ponder the possibility of Polish counterparts to the Russian folklore figures of the rusalka, Baba Yaga, and Mother Earth.

One author who has come the closest to my topic of the survival of the Neolithic Goddess in Poland is Malgorzata Oleszkiewicz-Peralba. Her book, *The Black Madonna in Latin America and Europe: Tradition and Transformation* (2009) is highly pertinent to my quest to understand the Divine Feminine in Poland and her ties to the Neolithic. Oleszkiewicz-Peralba considers her book both scholarly and personal (1). The purpose of her work is to analyze the “Black Madonna/Great Mother Goddess figure, as manifested since the Neolithic Age in east-central European, Iberian, African, and Amerindian cultures,” as well as to draw attention to the “syncretic interconnections of these cultures in Latin America” (1). The author’s research methods incorporate her personal experiences as a girl growing up in Poland, her on-site fieldwork and interviews in numerous countries, library and archival research, and her fluency in many Indo-European languages (3).

Oleszkiewicz-Peralba’s first chapter, “From Neolithic Traditions to Contemporary Fairy Tales: Popular Religiosity, Folklore, and Symbolic Space in East-Central Europe,” examines the “Great Mother/Black Madonna” (14) from prehistoric times to the present. Special attention is given to the Great Goddess’s survival in Polish folklore and ritual in the forms of the Slavic rusalka, Baba Yaga, and Mother Moist Earth, as well as her syncretism with the Christian Mary (11-47). Oleszkiewicz-Peralba’s discussion of the Goddess within Polish folklore and tradition is limited to this first chapter due to the wider scope of her
study. A more lengthy analysis of the prehistoric Goddess and her connections to Polish folklore and tradition is needed.

Oleszkiewicz-Peralba focuses her research on the traditions and transformations of the Black Madonna on multiple continents. Through my own personal experiences of the Black Madonna and my readings about her, I feel that I was led closer to my research topic. Although the Polish Black Madonna is not the central focus of my inquiry, I consider her the seed of my thesis subject. I am indebted to the many female scholars who provided me with my first introduction to a Christianized form of the Feminine in Poland. My introduction to the Black Madonna ultimately inspired me to research pre-Christian incarnations of the Polish Goddess. Although I will not review these texts, I would like to mention some of the authors and their works about Black Madonnas: Elinor Gadon’s *The Once and Future Goddess: A Sweeping Visual Chronicle of the Sacred Female and Her Reemergence in the Cultural Mythology of Our Time* (1989), China Galland’s *Longing for Darkness: Tara and the Black Madonna* (2007), and Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum’s *Black Madonnas: Feminism, Religion & Politics in Italy* (2000).

In this literature review, I have reviewed and mentioned an assortment of books and scholarly articles within the various disciplines of Polish and Slavic archaeologies, folklore and myths, histories, customs and traditions, and women’s spirituality. I have drawn attention to some of the important scholars and studies within each, and where information was lacking or insufficient regarding my own topic. This review hopefully gives the reader a brief introduction to the texts that have inspired and fueled my own questions and central investigation. The most in-depth studies of Slavic and prehistoric goddesses that I found are attributed to feminist scholars and their publications from the past few decades.
Gimbutas says in *The Civilization of The Goddess: The World of Old Europe* that archaeologists cannot disregard religious aspects of prehistoric cultures and “remain scientific materialists forever” because “the totality of culture” is neglected (x). By incorporating a variety of fields into one’s research the possibility emerges “for apprehending both the material and spiritual realities of prehistoric cultures” (Gimbutas, *Civilization* x). I agree with Gimbutas and believe that a more holistic picture of ancient cultures emerges when societies are studied through a wider, interdisciplinary lens. Ultimately, there is a dearth of comprehensive studies of the prehistoric Goddess in Poland that weaves together the various disciplines of archaeology, folklore, history, ethnography, and myth. It is my hope that my study of the survival of the Neolithic Goddess in Polish folklore, myth, and tradition will fill this void.
Chapter 3: Methods

In this chapter I address the research methods I employed in my study. My research synthesized and analyzed textual sources in order to trace the continuance of the Neolithic Polish Goddess from prehistory to modern times. The methods I used consisted of a combination of Marija Gimbutas’s archaeomythology and what Marguerite Rigoglioso has called “Gimbutasian symbolic analysis.” This combination allowed me to approach Polish folklore, myth, and tradition from a unique perspective.

My inquiry into the survival of the Neolithic Goddess in Polish folklore, myth, and tradition drew on Marija Gimbutas’s interdisciplinary method of archaeomythology. In understanding and reconstructing the religion of the Old European Great Goddess, Gimbutas expanded archaeology into an interdisciplinary endeavor. Gimbutas relied on “comparative mythology, early historical sources, and linguistics as well as on folklore and historical ethnography” (Language xv) to achieve a greater meaning of prehistoric art and religion. In her book The Language of the Goddess (1991), she employed her method of archaeomythology, combining archaeology, comparative mythology, and folklore when other archaeologists had yet to do so in the study of cultures (xviii). I relied mainly on an integration of archaeology, mythology, folklore, history, and comparative religion to guide my own research. By its very nature, my inquiry called for an integrative method approach, specifically Gimbutas’s method of archaeomythology.

I also drew on Gimbutas’s analysis of Old European Goddess images and symbols from her books, The Living Goddesses (2001), The Language of the Goddess (1991), The Civilization of The Goddess: The World of Old Europe (1991), and The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe: Myths and Cult Images (2007), to study how these images are apparent in
Polish myth, folklore, and peasant tradition. Marguerite Rigoglioso describes Gimbutasian symbolic analysis as the approach of “applying Gimbutas’s ‘lexicon’ of goddess symbols to analyze artifacts, symbols, and myths across cultures” (2). Gimbutas’s works inspired my exploration of the Neolithic Goddess in Polish folklore, myth, and tradition, and much of my investigation was guided by her analyses.

My own feminist perspective informed my research and my interpretations. Unlike androcentric research, my study does not seek to objectify, dehumanize, or ignore the presence of women or female deity. In my thesis, I treat women and the Goddess as active and engaging subjects within Polish history, myth, and tradition. I hope my work will be a step towards revising the interpretations and ideas surrounding women’s roles in prehistory and history, as well as a step towards strengthening the evidential support for the veneration of the Divine Feminine in Poland.

The books and articles I engaged emerge from various disciplines, such as Polish archaeology, folklore, history, and folk traditions, as well as Slavic mythology, history, and religion. I examined primary sources, such as field reports and published books by archaeologists who have themselves excavated Polish or other central European prehistoric sites. I studied primary sources from folklorists who have engaged in fieldwork related to collecting folklore and observing Polish folk life firsthand. These primary sources were complemented by numerous secondary sources, which spanned topics such as women and religion, and Polish and Slavic mythologies, histories, religions, and traditions. Due to the need to limit the scope of my research, I refrained from analyzing texts related to Polish immigrants, or traditions and customs in America or elsewhere outside of Poland.
It was my goal to draw on Gimbutasian symbolic analysis and archaeomythology as a means of analyzing books and articles on Polish (and Slavic) myth, folklore, religion, history, archaeology, and tradition. I sought to formulate both my own theories and build on scholars’ previous works related to or pertinent to my topic. My focus on the survival of the Neolithic Goddess in Poland was enriched by a feminist perspective that strove to honor the Feminine in both (pre)history and modern times.
Chapter 4: Old Europe, the Neolithic Goddess, and Poland

Searching for the Goddess in Poland, and in the related spheres of central and eastern Europe, is a journey that begins in the Paleolithic period rather than the Neolithic period of prehistoric humans. Eastern Europe and Siberia are home to some of the oldest Paleolithic sculptures of females; in fact, Russia is considered the “cradleland for the female statuettes (called Venuses by archeologists) made by mammoth hunters who roamed the Eurasian steppes during the Ice Age” (Hubbs 4). Eastern Europe contains a greater concentration of Goddess imagery even though female images are found throughout all Paleolithic sites of the Aurignacian period (42,000-31,000 BCE) (Kelly 65).

In central Poland, potential images of the Divine Feminine have been unearthed from the Upper Paleolithic period. Excavations at a Late Magdalenian site near the village of Wilczyce have brought to light thirty flint plaquettes dating to around 15,000 years ago and carved with curvy female silhouettes (Fiedorczuk et al. 97). The Polish flint plaquettes are not an isolated or unusual find of Magdalenian schematic female imagery in Europe. In fact, numerous schematic images of females outlined on bone, stone, and ivory have been found throughout Magdalenian sites all over western and central Europe (Fiedorczuk et al. 97). The prevalence of female sculptures and carvings found in Upper Paleolithic sites in Europe, as well as on other continents, suggests an ancient and deep human reverence for the Divine Feminine. The region of modern-day Poland formed a part of this geographically widespread spiritual and artistic tradition.

Marija Gimbutas intimately understood how images of the Goddess and her symbols—such as the bird, snake, fish, and horns—had their roots in the Paleolithic era.

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1. Although I focus on the Neolithic Goddess in Poland, I point out here that evidence for the veneration of the Divine Feminine can actually be traced much earlier in the Paleolithic era.
rather than the Neolithic era (Goddesses 11). However, it was in the Neolithic era, or the beginning agricultural period of human history, when Goddess religion became much more complex and prevalent in the archaeological record. Gimbutas used the term “Old Europe” to identify collectively the pre-Indo-European Neolithic cultures of southeastern Europe that developed complex social, technological, and spiritual traditions between circa 7000 and 3500 BCE. The area she deemed “Old Europe” stretched from the Aegean and Adriatic to Ukraine, and as far north as Czechoslovakia and southern Poland (Goddesses 17). The extension of Old Europe into southern Poland provides an image of Poland as within or on the outskirts of the civilization of Old Europe (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 20).

In her analysis of Old European settlements, cemeteries, and ceramic art, Gimbutas saw within Old European society the omnipotent presence of female deity and reverence for the cycles of life. An abundance of female symbolism and imagery found in Old European sculpture, tomb and temple architecture, cult equipment, and vases communicates the celebration and power of woman’s body and the Feminine (Gimbutas, Living 112-13). From her archaeological analyses, Gimbutas believed that the civilization of Old Europe flourished for millennia as a matrifocal, matrilineal, sedentary, peaceful, and egalitarian culture (Civilization 352). The indigenous peoples of Europe, therefore, exemplified a pre-patriarchal way of life. However, beginning in the mid-fifth millennium BCE, Gimbutas says that this way of life was disrupted by aggressive invasions into central and eastern Europe by semi-nomadic pastoralists from the Russian steppe. For the next few millennia, these proto or early Indo-Europeans superimposed their patriarchal, hierarchical, and war-oriented culture all over Old Europe and replaced the multitudinous forms of the Goddess with male divinities (Gimbutas, Civilization 352; Goddesses preface).
Before searching for the presence of Old European societies in the region of modern-day Poland, it is necessary to have as a guide Gimbutas’s analyses and classifications of the symbols, images, and forms of the Old European Goddess. Old European religion centered on the wheel of life (Gimbutas, *Living* 3), and the Neolithic Goddess represented all spokes on the cyclical wheel of life, death, and regeneration. She embodied a multitude of forms to correspond to various cyclical phases, natural forces, and human, vegetative, and animal life (Gimbutas, *Living* 3). Gimbutas classified these forms relating to the different functions of the Goddess.

The Goddess as Birth Giver, Life Giver, and cosmic Creatrix (Gimbutas, *Language* xxii) related to the watery origins of life on Earth. Gimbutas says, “Human life began in the watery realm of a woman’s womb. So, by analogy, the goddess was the source of all human, plant, and animal life. She ruled all water sources: lakes, rivers, springs, wells, and rain clouds” (*Living* 11-12). The fluids of the female body were linked to the moisture of the earth and sky. The Birth-giving Goddess could take anthropomorphic form, as well as animal form such as the bear, deer, and elk (Gimbutas, *Living* 11-13). Aquatic symbols, such as nets, streams, and parallel lines, were prevalent on sculptures and vessels relating to the Goddess as Life Giver (Gimbutas, *Living* 12).

The Old European Goddess’s procreative and life-affirming functions were also prevalent in her incarnations as the Snake and Bird Goddess. These goddesses connected land and sky and could appear as separate or singular deities; furthermore, they could appear in animal form or as woman-animal hybrids in sculpture or ritual vessel (Gimbutas, *Goddesses* 144-45). The Snake Goddess was known by her common symbols, such as dotted bands, snake spirals and coils, and zig-zag lines; the Bird Goddess was recognized by her
symbols of V’s, chevrons (multiple V’s), tri-lines, meanders, and streams (Gimbutas, Living 14-15). The Magdalenian feminine flint plaquettes from Wilczyce suggest an early representation of the Bird Goddess. Gimbutas says that Magdalenian rock carvings across Europe portray female/bird hybrids that emphasize the female buttocks and the long body of a bird. Buttocks, like breasts, “share the magical power of being double, while also being symbols of life proliferation” (Gimbutas, Civilization 235). Buttocks are similar to eggs, Gimbutas notes, for they “have special powers of generation” (Civilization 235). The schematic female images from Wilczyce have long narrow bodies and emphasis is placed on the buttocks (Fiedorczuk et al. 98), suggesting hybrid female/bird forms containing the powers of generation. The Goddess’s link to all water sources, and her incarnations as Bird and Snake goddesses, will be discussed in Chapter Six in connection to Polish mythology and folklore.

In the realm of agriculture in the Neolithic period, the fertility of the earth depended upon the life-stimulating powers of the Pregnant Vegetation Goddess. Gimbutas says that the Pregnant Vegetation Goddess was “one of the most-represented female figures depicted in Neolithic Old Europe” (Living 15). Pregnant Goddess figurines were associated with grain, pigs, and the cycles of planting and harvesting (Gimbutas, Living 16). The Pregnant Vegetation Goddess will be returned to in discussion of modern Polish agricultural traditions and the worship of Mother Earth.

The Old European Goddess of Birth and Life also presided over death and regeneration (Gimbutas, Living 19), for life and death were not disconnected or antagonistic in prehistoric times. The Goddess of Death and Regeneration could take the form of a stiff white nude figurine, or she could take the form of, or be accompanied by, a poisonous snake
or the following birds of prey: raptors, owls, and vultures (Gimbutas, *Living* 19-24). Symbols and images associated with the Goddess’s powers over regeneration and renewal were plant shoots, phalli, vines, trees, seeds, spirals, triangles, hooks, concentric circles, fish, frogs, hedgehogs, dogs, goats, and bulls’ heads (Gimbutas, *Living* 26). When taken all together, the Old European Goddess and her symbols represented the entire cycle of living, dying, and returning. Her imagery and symbols will be used as a source to understand Polish archaeology, and later, Polish folklore, myth, and tradition.

The evidence for the extension of the civilization of Old Europe into the region of modern-day Poland can be seen in Polish archaeology. The Linear Pottery culture (also known as the *Linearbandkeramik*, LBK, or Danubian I) was the first farming culture to appear in Poland. This culture was the earliest Neolithic culture of central Europe (Bogucki and Grygiel 400-01). Gimbutas distinguished the Linear Pottery culture (ca. 5500-4500 BCE) as an Old European culture that formed in the Middle Danube basin and the foothills of the Carpathians. The culture had influences from other Old European cultures, such as the Late Starcevo and Early Vinca cultures of the central Balkans (Gimbutas, *Goddesses* 27).

Early farming cultures settled in the loess-covered uplands that stretched across central Europe (modern-day Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, Slovakia, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands) and took advantage of the fertile loess soils (Bogucki and Grygiel 399-400). Besides the loess zones of central Europe, early farming communities also settled on the lowlands of the North European Plain, which stretched from the Rhine-Maas delta across northern Germany and Poland and covered areas of Poland such as the Kuyavia (Kujawy) region and the lower Vistula and Oder Rivers (Bogucki and Grygiel 400). In Poland, the Linear Pottery peoples first appeared in the southern region of Poland.
with settlements located in the river basins of the Oder and Vistula Rivers (Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 48). The best-known sites of the Oder basin area are from the Silesian Lowland, such as the sites from Stary Zamek and Gniechowice; the best-known sites in the Vistula basin area come from the Little Poland upland, such as Samborzec, Cracow-Mogila, and Zofipole (Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 50-51). An examination of the pottery from archaeological sites in southern Poland may provide insight into the spiritual culture of Neolithic peoples.

Despite the name Linear Pottery or *Linearbandkeramik* (LBK), the pottery of this culture included a wide range of designs such as “spirals, snakes, meanders, rectangles, concentric squares, triangles, V’s, chevrons, two lines, three lines, M’s, X’s” (Gimbutas, *Civilization* 37). Many of these designs represent an iconography of the Goddess that appeared in the Paleolithic era and flourished in the Neolithic culture of Old Europe (Gimbutas, *Civilization* 222). In the Oder and Vistula areas, pottery remains are common. Some bowls and dishes of the early Linear Pottery culture display the Gniechowice style of design, characterized by vertical or diagonal nicks and crooked or rectilinear spirals (Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 52-53). Spirals, as previously mentioned, were common symbols of the Neolithic Goddess, especially in her relation to snakes. Gimbutas says that the snake, and its abstracted form of the spiral, were the “dominant motifs of the art of Old Europe” and decorated various objects such as cult vases, altar tables, house walls, and statues (Goddesses 93-94). The early Linear Pottery culture in southern Poland displays the abstract spiral of Old Europe on some of its vessels. In comparison, on Neolithic vessels from the Starcevo culture, the snake coil as an isolated relief was used as an identifying symbol of the Goddess in her epiphany as a snake (Gimbutas, *Language* 122). Interestingly,
the first Neolithic communities of Poland had genetic bonds with the Starcevo-Körös culture (Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 58). Gimbutas says that the “[c]lose affinities between the Starcevo (Körös) culture and the LBK firmly suggest an actual movement of people from the southeast” (Civilization 37). The LBK groups emerged out of the Starcevo tradition in the Middle Danube basin around 5600-5400 BCE (Gimbutas, Civilization 37). Therefore, the Linear Pottery culture of southern Poland has roots in southern Old European Goddess cultures.

The site of Samborzec, in the Sandomierz district of southern Poland, has a long history of settlements, with the earliest Linear Pottery culture dating to the mid-fifth millennium BCE (Kamienska and Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 224-25). Pottery finds from early phases of a Linear Pottery culture display curvy lines and spirals (Kamienska and Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 229). These designs may represent the spiraling energy of the snake. A zoomorphic animal head was also found at Samborzec (Kamienska and Kulczycka Leciejewiczowa 230). When comparing this head to the earliest Neolithic terracotta snake heads found in southeastern Europe (Gimbutas, Language 122), the Samborzec animal is similar in appearance. The Samborzec animal may, therefore, be a representation of a snake. Snake heads with round eyes and long mouths (similar features found on the Samborzec animal) have been sculpted or featured on jars since 6500 –5500 BCE in southern and southeastern Neolithic Europe (Gimbutas, Language 122). It is possible that the Linear Pottery zoomorphic animal head found at Samborzec relates to this artistic tradition.

Linear Pottery is characterized by multiple phases and styles that differ in name and historical time of appearance depending on the regions of central Europe. In Poland, as well as in eastern Germany and Czechoslovakia, the early forms of Linear Pottery (characterized
by simple curvilinear lines and known under various names such as Ackovy, Zofipole, and Flomborn) were replaced by the “music note” (Notenkopf) style in the next phase of Linear Pottery (Bogucki and Grygiel 403). This phase of Linear Pottery lasted from the middle to the end of the sixth and early fifth millennia BCE (Gimbutas, Civilization 43). The “music note” motif on Neolithic Polish pottery can be considered a motif of the Goddess. Tri-lines, or three parallel lines, have appeared in association with the image of the Goddess since the Upper Paleolithic (Gimbutas, Language 89). Three parallel lines ending in a dot (depression) are common designs on Linear Pottery and Tisza pottery from central Europe (Gimbutas, Language 89). “Tri-lines with depressions” can be seen as a variation of the “music note” motif. In one study of “music note” ornamentation from Little Poland, pottery rim shards were studied from seven Linear Pottery sites: Olszanica B1, Samborzec, Targowisko, Wyciaze, Mogila 62, Bienczyce, and Rzeszów-Osiedle Piastów. In the few images from Samborzec and Olszanica B1 presented in the study, tri-lines ending in a depression on the rim shards are noticeable (Milisauskas, “Observations” 220). These finds provide insight into the triple nature of the Neolithic Goddess who presided over life, death, and regeneration. Gimbutas says that the tri-line is linked to the triple life substance of the Bird Goddess, and it is also connected to the Triple Goddess (Language 97). The presence of the tri-lines and other variations of the “music note” motif among the Linear Pottery cultures of Poland hint at a spiritual dimension to these symbols.

As previously mentioned, Gimbutas believed that Old European societies were non-hierarchical and non-patriarchal. There is reason to believe that this was also the case of the farming communities in Poland. Many longhouses from the Linear Pottery culture have been excavated in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Holland, and France (Gimbutas, Civilization
Excavations at Olszanica B1, near Kraków, have unearthed around ten longhouses from the Linear Pottery culture. Sarunas Milisauskas says that one of the longhouses, Longhouse 6, differs from the others in length and structural features. He believes that Longhouse 6 “is probably functionally different from the other longhouses” (“Analysis” 72). Milisauskas seems to consider the purpose of Longhouse 6 as a place for ceremonial functions, or functions not associated with regular houses; however, he also says that the house could belong to “the most important man of the village” (“Analysis” 72). He lists no evidence supporting this sexist theory that the larger longhouse is linked to a male or even to a male “chief.” Gimbutas says that “evidence for a hierarchical type of patriarchal society is totally lacking in settlement evidence just as in cemetery evidence or in any other facet of Old European life” (Living 117). In Linear Pottery culture, evidence does not exist for “chief’s or big man’s houses” (Gimbutas, Civilization 330). Milisauskas’s statement does not fit the archaeological evidence of Old European cultures.

It seems more likely that the longhouse functioned as a place for communal, possibly ceremonial and ritual, purposes rather than as a chieftain’s house. Many Old European cultures, like those of the Vinca and Tisza, had smaller houses surrounding a larger temple (Gimbutas, Living 117). Some Old European temples, such as those in Razgrad, Bulgaria, were two stories, with a workshop on the bottom floor and a sanctuary on the top floor (Gimbutas, Living 73). Since Linear Pottery culture derived from the Balkano-Danubian region and is related to the Starcevo-Vinca and Cucuteni village systems, “we should expect to find here [in LBK culture] a related social structure and similar house function” (Gimbutas, Civilization 330). Longhouse 6 at Olszanica B1 resembles the temple buildings of other Old European cultures. Milisauskas says that Longhouse 6 may have been a much
higher structure and may have had an additional level (“Analysis” 68). If the longhouse was a large two-story structure, then one cannot rule out the possibility that it functioned as a temple connected to the Goddess, as was common in Neolithic temples in southeastern Europe (Gimbutas, Living 75).

Gimbutas also considered Old European society matrifocal and matrilineal: “Given Neolithic religious symbolism, it is extremely difficult to imagine that Old European society would not be matrilineal, with the mother or grandmother venerated as progenitor of the family” (Living 113). It is possible to view Old European longhouses in terms of matrilineal descent, where matrilineal kin groups lived in houses and female family members cared for the communal shrine (Gimbutas, Living 117). This means that Longhouse 6 could have functioned as a shrine or communal place related to matrilineal kinship. Whatever their true functions, the Olszanica longhouses cannot be viewed in terms of modern patriarchal family structures.

More possible evidence that women and the Divine Feminine were honored in Neolithic Poland comes from central Poland. The Stroke-Ornamented Pottery culture emerged out of the Late Linear Pottery culture in some regions of Poland, Silesia, Germany, and Bohemia (Bogucki and Grygiel 404). This culture’s pottery was characterized by stab-and-drag techniques and punctuate ornamentation that formed rows of parallel lines (Bogucki and Grygiel 404). This late phase of Linear Pottery occurred from the late to the mid-fifth millennium BCE (Gimbutas, Civilization 43). The vessels of the Stroke-Ornamented Pottery culture continued to feature the symbols of the Old European Goddess. For instance, one vase from Dobre, in north-central Poland, is in zoomorphic form and is entirely covered with dotted vertical and horizontal straight lines, as well as dotted chevrons (Bogucki and Grygiel...
404). These detailed markings of parallel lines and chevrons on the zoomorphic vessel suggest that this is an animal of the Goddess. From the early Vinca period comes a ritual vase in the shape of a dog (Gimbutas, *Godesses* 169). This vase looks similar to the Dobre vessel. In Neolithic societies, the dog was a double of the Death and Regeneration Goddess (Gimbutas, *Living* 32). It is possible that the Dobre vessel is a ritual vessel and perhaps even a representation of a dog. Vessels featuring clearer representations of dogs have been unearthed in Poland. Late Cucuteni vases of the fourth millennium BCE featuring a dog as their central theme in connection to full moons have been found at Bilcze Złote, Galicia, southeastern Poland (Gimbutas, *Civilization* 109).

In Lower Silesia, examples of early Stroke-Ornamented Pottery show vessels covered in punctuated markings of chevrons, X’s, and horizontal, diagonal, and vertical parallel lines (Wojciechowski 106-07). Close analogies to this form of ornamentation are found at Samborzec and in Czech territory (Wojciechowski 108). The symbolic designs on vessels from Lower Silesia relate to symbols found on Goddess figurines. Frequent motifs found on hundreds of ornithomorphic figurines from the Cucuteni, Karanovo, Vinca, Bükk, and Tisza cultures are the chevron and the cross-band (X, or two V’s connecting top to bottom) appearing within the vicinity of dashed or groups of parallel lines and meanders (Gimbutas, *Language* 11-12). These Goddess motifs are exemplified on the pottery images from Lower Silesia; one pot shows the prominence of the cross-band in the center of the pot coupled with surrounding chevrons (Wojciechowski 107). The ritual nature of these vessels may be inferred from their symbols. Since the symbols are found on ornithomorphic figurines throughout all of Old Europe, it is plausible that the Polish vessels relate as well to the Bird Goddess.
Pottery from later phases of the Stroke-Ornamented culture from sites in Lower Silesia appears to become more complicated and intricate in design. V’s, chevrons, and triangles are still prevalent; however, there becomes an increasing importance for knob-like (or horn-like) protuberances on the vessels (Wojciechowski 108). These protuberances may symbolize the nourishing and life-giving qualities of the Goddess. The concepts of the “breasts as the divine source of life-giving moisture” and the “Goddess as nourishing vessel” are expressed on the Neolithic anthropomorphic figurines and vases with breasts, as well as on vases decorated with breasts and nipples (Gimbutas, *Language* 33-39). The concept of flowing streams of milk is expressed in the accompanying symbols of chevrons, parallel lines, zig-zags, or wavy parallel lines on the vases (Gimbutas, *Language* 39). The knob-like protuberances on pottery from Lower Silesia occur in rows on vessels, near the rim, or on the belly of the vessels (Wojciechowski 109-11). It is likely that the knobs relate to nipples or breasts of the Goddess. The accompanying dashed lines and parallel lines and chevrons surrounding the knobs could symbolize the concept of flowing milk or liquids. Some vessels have the knobs in the center of the vessel (Wojciechowski 109, 111), indicating, perhaps, the region of the breasts. One vessel (Wojciechowski 111), in particular, suggests the Goddess as a nourishing vessel. At the top of the vessel are two knobs that appear to represent eyes, and knobs at the center of the vessel appear to represent breasts. Under and above the knobs are dotted lines that flow like streams. This vessel is considered to have a zoomorphic handle like others found in Lower Silesia (Wojciechowski 114). The zoomorphic handle and the knob-like breasts or nipples may be considered the Goddess in hybrid anthropomorphic/zoomorphic form and relate to her life-giving and nourishing qualities.
In the Kujawy region of Poland resides the archaeological site of Brzesc Kujawski. The site is located northwest of Warsaw on a plain that is on the west bank of the Vistula River. Many remains and settlements of this site date back to the Linear Pottery culture (ca. 4500-4000 BCE) and the Lengyel culture (ca. 4000-3200 BCE) (Grygiel and Bogucki, “Early Neolithic” 124-25). The Lengyel culture is not disconnected from the earlier Goddess-worshipping cultures of Europe.

Gimbutas says that the first wave of proto-Indo-Europeans (Kurgans) into east-central Europe led to a chain reaction of Old European cultures migrating. At the end of the fifth millennium (4300-4200 BCE), the Lengyel and Tiszapolgár people, who were most likely being pushed north due to Kurgan invasions in the south, began colonizing the central areas of the Linear Pottery culture, which were located in the Middle and Upper Danube, Oder, Elbe, and Vistula basins (Gimbutas, Civilization 43). The Lengyel culture formed from “a Starcevo core” and supplanted the Linear Pottery culture of central Europe (Gimbutas, Civilization 77).

The Lengyel peoples also had longhouses like Linear Pottery groups, but the former became more trapezoidal in appearance. At Brzesc Kujawski, trapezoidal longhouses have been found that demonstrate “village-like configurations” and suggest that longhouses were used for a variety of functions: residential, storage, workshops, and stables (Grygiel and Bogucki, “Early Neolithic” 126). Considering that earlier Old European cultures had temples and shrines as a part of their settlements, it is likely that some Lengyel longhouses also served communal or ceremonial purposes. Lengyel trapezoidal longhouses have also been discovered at the Neolithic site of Oslonki, located near Brzesc Kujawski in north-central Poland (Grygiel and Bogucki, “Early Farmers” 161).
The Lengyel people of Biskupin, a site located 80 km from Poznan in the northern region of Great Poland, also built trapezoidal longhouses on strong pillars. Some groups settled near Lake Biskupin and Lake Wenecja, while others settled further from the lake in the surrounding slopes and marshy meadows (Rajewski 91-92). These Lengyel groups might have been matrifocal (matriarchal) and matrilineal. The Biskupin longhouses “belonging to particular groups formed probably only a single settlement consisting of one clan united by a system of matriarchal community, staying for a long time in one place and bringing factors of stable colonisation and visible alterations of landscape” (Rajewski 92). This statement resembles Gimbutas’s conclusions of Old European society as matrilineal and matrifocal in nature. The Biskupin longhouses, similar to the longhouses of Oslonki and Brzesc Kujawski, may well have housed matrilineal clans.

The funerary practices of Old Europe suggest that death was a part of life and that people returned to the earth, the Goddess’s womb, for rebirth (Gimbutas, Living 55). In Poland, there is funerary evidence suggesting the reverence for women and a return to the Earth Mother. In a grave of the early Linear Pottery culture from Samborzec, in southern Poland, a skeleton lying on its left side was found with ochre covering its head and adorned in the back of the hair and on the waist with strings of animal bones and teeth (Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 54-56). This skeleton may have been a woman since Lengyel female skeletons at Oslonki and Brzesc Kujawski were buried on their left sides (Grygiel and Bogucki, “Early Neolithic” 130; “Early Farmers” 166). Also, a female skeleton from the middle phase of the Linear Pottery culture at Samborzec was found buried on her left side (Kamienska and Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 225-28). At this site, graves were uncovered within rectangular dwellings. One woman, 50-60 years old, was found in a grave lying on her
left side in a crouching position in the dwelling. Her hands were folded, directed towards her face, and in her right hand was an amphora-like vessel filled with ochre. The remains of children only a few years old were found in grave pits, with one holding a broken vessel resembling the woman’s vessel (Kamienska and Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 228).

The burial of an older woman beneath the house relates to matrilineal family structure in Old European society. These burials are “the type of evidence we would expect to find in matrilineal culture in which the women were heads of families and extended clans” (Gimbutas, *Living* 113). Also, the ochre vessel in her hand was most likely a ritual vessel. Within Linear Pottery cemeteries, women’s graves often contained religious artifacts, such as ochre, decorated pottery, and palettes (Gimbutas, *Living* 114). The ochre in the vessel and the ochre on the head of the previously discussed skeleton at Samborzec suggest the ritual importance of ochre in Linear Pottery burials of women. Red ochre is a ritual substance found all over the world. Paleolithic human remains, graves, caves, shelters, and female sculptures were painted with red ochre, symbolizing a connection to the blood of life, “the blood of women” (Redmond 28).² Judy Grahn, in her book, *Blood, Bread, and Roses: How Menstruation Created the World*, elaborates further on the origins of the use of red ochre in connection to women’s rituals, menstruation, and Goddess worship. The connection of red ochre to the Divine Feminine can be seen in prehistoric Goddess sculptures. The Venus of Laussel (Sjöö and Mor 84) and the Venus of Willendorf (Grahn 185) are just some of the Paleolithic goddesses painted with red ochre. The red-painted goddesses indicate a spiritual

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² In one study of the organic components found in pottery dyes from Funnel Beaker communities in the Polish Lowland, blood and birch-tar were found in the dye mixtures on ceramic pottery (Langer and Kosko). In Paleolithic cave and rock art from 10,000 to 20,000 years ago, red pigment has been found in some locations containing human blood (Bahn and Vertut 34-35). Vicki Noble gave me the idea that this Paleolithic blood could be menstrual blood. Since making pottery was a sacred activity under the domain of Neolithic women (Gimbutas, *Living* 98), the blood on Polish pottery may be the menstrual blood of female potters. Furthermore, birch-tar hints at the sacredness of the birch tree in the Neolithic. The Slavic veneration of the birch tree survives in connection to the *rusalki*. 
link between the divine and women’s blood. Grahn says that many cultures around the world have associated red ochre with menstruation in their rituals. Among the Australian, Hottentot, and Bushmen tribes, ceremonial red paint (red ochre and grease) was associated with menstrual blood (Grahn 76).

The Samborzeć burial has counterparts throughout many Old European cultures. The placement of women and children beneath houses was a common practice in seventh and sixth millennia BCE southeastern European cultures of Sesklo, Starcevo, and Karanovo (Gimbutas, Civilization 331). The lack of adult male burials in houses supports the notion of matrilineal practices (Gimbutas, Civilization 331). Cemeteries began to appear around 5000 BCE, and in some Linear Pottery graves, males were buried with objects linking them to their roles as traders and craftsmen, while females were buried with objects (decorated pottery, ochre, jewelry, pallets, etc.) linking them to their religious roles (Gimbutas, Civilization 331-34). The grave goods of the Linear Pottery culture indicate that there was no male “ruling aristocracy,” and that “elder women, the great clan mothers, received the highest social respect” (Gimbutas, Civilization 334).

At Brzesc Kujawski and Osłonki, human burials have been found within the settlements. Skeletons are placed in a contracted position with heads oriented towards the south-southeast, males lying on their right side, and females lying on their left side (GrygIEL and Bogucki, “Early Neolithic” 130; “Early Farmers” 166). A contracted, fetal position suggests a return to the Mother’s womb for rebirth. Fetal positions are common burial positions that date back to the Paleolithic (Redmond 28). The direction and position of the female and male skeletons seem to hold ritual meaning. In the oldest settlements of the Linear Pottery culture in southern Poland, the dead were buried in contracted positions,
demonstrating that their rites were derived from southern traditions (Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 57-58). These southern traditions the author references are the southern Neolithic cultures of Old Europe.

The graves of Oslonki and Brzesc Kujawski may also provide insight into the status and roles of women in Neolithic society. Some of the graves are richly furnished. At Brzesc Kujawski, female graves contain numerous artifacts, including copper beads; two females, in particular, were buried with shell beads around their pelvises and necks (Grygiel and Bogucki, “Early Neolithic” 132). The women, considered to be middle-aged and beyond, contained in their graves a combined 8,000 shell beads (Grygiel and Bogucki, “Early Neolithic” 131-32). This suggests older women were highly honored in this society as in the earlier Linear Pottery culture.

Graves at Oslonki also seem to reflect the high status of women. One adult female skeleton was unearthed wearing a copper diadem around her skull, and numerous shell and copper beads and copper plaques were also discovered in her grave (Grygiel and Bogucki, “Early Farmers” 166). The copper found in her grave “is probably the most found in any single burial of this period north of the Carpathians” (Grygiel and Bogucki, “Early Farmers” 166). The copper diadem suggests that this crowned woman may have been a high priestess or a queen. In the early Neolithic onwards, the priestess played the part of the Goddess and was often portrayed as either crowned or enthroned (Gimbutas, Living 119). This rich female grave at Oslonki could indicate her priestly role and calls for further investigation. In comparison, two exceptionally rich graves of an older and a younger woman from Krusza Zamkowa, western Poland, suggest these women were important within their society, perhaps as “a revered spiritual leader and her daughter” (Gimbutas, Living 115). In the
Lengyel settlement belonging to the Brzesko-Kujawy group at Biskupin, three graves of women were found near a fountain of spring water. One woman’s grave contained a necklace made of spondylus shell and an armlet made of bison’s horn (Rajewski 91-92). Burials throughout Neolithic Poland provide evidence for the veneration of women (especially older women) and hint at their importance within their societies. These richly furnished female graves suggest that women held significant roles in their societies and were venerated after death. Other sites in the Polish Lowlands contain richly furnished female graves (Grygiel and Bogucki, “Early Neolithic” 132).

Although the pottery at Oslonki and Brzesc Kujawski is minimally decorated (Grygiel and Bogucki, “Early Farmers” 171; “Early Neolithic” 132), symbols of the Goddess are apparent on bone ornaments. At Oslonki, several burials have unearthed armlets made from the ribs of large animals and decorated with bands of incised chevrons (Grygiel and Bogucki, “Early Farmers” 173). The incision of chevrons, a common motif associated with the Bird Goddess, suggests that the symbols of the Goddess were inherited from earlier Neolithic cultures. Several rubbish pits at Oslonki contain numerous ribs of small animals, such as sheep, goats, and pigs, which are also incised with chevrons and notches (Grygiel and Bogucki, “Early Farmers” 174). Furthermore, armlets similar to the ones from Oslonki have been found at other Lengyel sites in the Polish Lowlands (Grygiel and Bogucki, “Early Farmers” 173). All these findings indicate that the symbol of the chevron was well-known in Lengyel sites throughout the region of modern-day Poland.

Linear Pottery settlements in southern Poland, as elsewhere in Europe, do not appear to be founded on invasion or conflict with indigenous, hunting-gathering peoples. Research has shown that “the territories occupied by the first [N]eolithic settlers had not been inhabited
prior to their influx” (Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 49). Some archaeologists say that “it would be wrong to assume that this area [the loess belt] was totally devoid of hunter-gather inhabitants, for Mesolithic settlements are known from the riverine zones of this area” (Bogucki and Grygiel 400). Mesolithic settlements are also “found in the hill regions of central Europe,” and “the areas bordering the loess belt, the Alpine Foreland and the North European Plain” (Bogucki and Grygiel 400). It may be that the agricultural communities of central Europe interacted with the indigenous foraging populations, but not in a war-oriented and imperialistic manner. The peaceful nature of farming communities supports the previous discussion of Gimbutas’s view of the civilization of Old Europe as nonviolent and peaceful.

As the proto-Indo-Europeans invaded the Danubian basin from the eastern steppes, the Funnel-necked Beaker (TRB) culture formed at the end of the fifth millennium BCE (Gimbutas, Civilization 127). The Lengyel peoples’ appearance in Poland and Germany and the existence of the Late Linear Pottery culture in central Europe influenced the formation of the Funnel-necked Beaker culture (Gimbutas, Civilization 127). The Funnel-necked Beaker peoples left many settlements in the uplands of southern Poland. The pottery left behind by them is decorated with symbols associated with the Old European Goddess. One of the oldest signs in human history is the vulva. The pubic triangle is a symbol dating back to the Lower Paleolithic Acheulian era (ca. 300,000 BCE) and is intimately tied to the life-giving and regenerating powers of the Goddess (Gimbutas, Living 38). The vulva can appear as “a triangle, an oval, an open circle, or even as a bud or branch—a fact that emphasizes its life-giving, rather than erotic, role” (Gimbutas, Living 8). Vulva symbolism can be inferred from the archaeological descriptions and images from Bronocice, a Funnel-necked Beaker site in the Kielce province of southeastern Poland. Ceramic material uncovered from this site
consists of beakers, amphorae, pitchers, cups, bowls, and different style pots (Milisauskas and Kruk 217). Some material is decorated with a variety of impressions, such as finger impressions, vertical impressions, V-like impressions, zig-zags, and triangular punctuations (Milisauskas and Kruk 217). The V impressions and triangular punctuations, especially, invoke imagery of the vulva. Since the Upper Paleolithic in eastern Europe and Siberia, the V and chevron have been connected with the Goddess in her ornithomorphic form (Gimbutas, Language 3). The Bird Goddess, as previously mentioned, is recognized by symbols such as the chevron, V, and water signs. These symbols of hers appear on the vessels from Bronocice, in addition to pottery from other Polish Funnel-necked Beaker sites (Milisauskas and Kruk 225).

The Funnel-necked Beaker sites of Radziejów Kujawski and Opatowice contain some vessels with what resembles branch or vine-like symbols on them (Gabalówna 127, 130). The vulva, as mentioned above, can appear in the form of a bud or a branch. Furthermore, symbols of the natural world, such as plant shoots, vines, trees, etc. are all symbols associated with regeneration and often appear fused with the Goddess’s regenerative body (Gimbutas, Living 26). These plant images on the vessels may relate to the regenerative qualities of the Divine Feminine. Branches and trees also connect the Goddess to her ancient symbol of the Tree of Life. In modern Slavic embroideries, the Goddess’s connection to agriculture fertility is emphasized in her transformation into the Tree of Life (Kelly 51). Spring embroideries portray the Goddess with trees growing out of her head or her arms as tree branches (Kelly 24). Furthermore, tree branches play important roles in spring rituals in Poland, as will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.
Besides abstract symbols, animals sacred to the Old European Goddess can also be found on Funnel-necked Beaker vessels in southern Poland. Among the discoveries at Cmielów, situated in the district of Opatów, are some ladles and jugs with handles ending as a ram’s head (one pot even has two rams’ heads) (Podkowinska and Rauhut 209-10). These vessels are most probably “connected with some ritual ceremonies” (Podkowinska and Rauhut 211). The ram is associated with the Bird Goddess; the Bird Goddess’s signs, such as V’s, chevrons, and multiple parallel lines, are sometimes found on zoomorphic figures of rams (Gimbutas, _Language_ 77). The vessels with handles ending in rams’ heads from Cmielów (circa 3500 BCE) are also decorated with parallel lines ending in chevrons, which Gimbutas says symbolize stylized bird’s feet (_Language_ 78-79). These hybrid vessels combining rams and birds illuminate the presence of the Bird Goddess at Cmielów in the fourth millennium BCE.

The Goddess’s ram is also found at another well-known Funnel-necked Beaker site in southern Poland. The site of Gródek Nadbuzny is situated on a plateau between the Huczwa and the Bug Rivers in the Hrubieszów district. Similar to Cmielów, some pots found at this site are decorated with rams’ heads (Kowalczyk 116). Besides the presence of the ram, there is another Goddess symbol found at Gródek Nadbuzny. The site contains many miniature clay axes, which were probably worn around the neck, and that are decorated with the “cult of the sun and of heaven” (Kowalczyk 116). The sun is tied to the Goddess of Regeneration; fourth millennium BCE ceramics found from Sardinia to Ukraine’s Cucuteni (Tripolye) culture display triangular goddesses with round heads sometimes radiating like the sun, and images of suns, branches, and sprouts appearing alongside them (Gimbutas, _Living_ 39). The clay axes decorated with the “cult of the sun and of heaven” may, therefore, be related to
regenerative rituals connected to the Goddess. Central to this supposition is the link found between the Tripolye (Cucuteni) culture of Ukraine and Gródek Nadbuzny. Evidence for imported Tripolye pottery and Tripolye-inspired pottery designs on Funnel-necked Beaker pottery at Gródek Nadbuzny attest to the intercultural exchange and contact between the two cultures (Kowalczyk 118-19). Therefore, it is plausible to imagine that the Tripolye vessels featuring the Goddess relate in some way to the Funnel-necked Beaker sun imagery. A vessel from Cmielów also features what looks like sun imagery next to parallel lines ending in chevrons (possibly bird’s feet) (Podkowinska and Rauhut 209). If the bird’s feet relate to the sun imagery, then this may demonstrate a connection between the sun and the Bird Goddess. In fact, the Goddess as bird of prey is associated with solar energy symbols on an early Vinca vase (ca. 5000 BCE), displaying her function to awaken nature after winter (Gimbutas, Living 40). The vessel from Cmielów possibly represents a ritual vessel related to winter/spring regeneration rites.

Funnel-necked Beaker settlements in southern Poland consisted of large villages, some covering ten hectares with ten to fifteen houses (Gimbutas, Civilization 133). Fifteen houses, either pit dwellings or aboveground houses, arranged in three groups, were uncovered at Cmielów from the mid-fourth millennium BCE (Gimbutas, Civilization 133). In a large pit house in the center of the village, vessels with rams’ heads (as previously discussed) were found along with vases filled with grain (Gimbutas, Civilization 133). Gimbutas says this building “could have been a temple with a storage area in which grain and fruit were kept for seasonal feasts” (Civilization 133). The ritual significance of the ram vessels seems all the more likely due to their connection to a temple. As discussed earlier in

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3. Double axes and triangle axes have been found throughout Old Europe and Minoan Crete. These ritual axes, made of stone, amber, or bone, symbolize regeneration (Gimbutas, Civilization 268).
regard to Linear Pottery longhouses, a larger building in a location central to the village suggests a temple to the Goddess rather than a chief’s house.

Graves belonging to the Funnel-necked Beaker culture indicate the continued reverence for female ancestors and for the Earth Mother. Across northern Europe in the fourth millennium BCE, Funnel-necked Beaker peoples built earthen barrows ranging from England to Poland (Gimbutas, *Living* 64-65). Long barrows are found in western and southern Poland, and the largest concentration is in the Kujawy area of western Poland (Gimbutas, *Civilization* 135). Funnel-necked Beaker barrow entrances are often oriented towards the rising sun and barrows are often found in clusters, such as the nine barrows found at Sarnowo in western Poland (Gimbutas, *Civilization* 135). Facing the entrance in the eastern direction suggests a theme of rebirth, connecting the burial to the rebirth of the sun. Barrows from Kujawy had rectangular structures built above the graves (Gimbutas, *Civilization* 137). Charcoal and ashes in the vicinity of these structures demonstrate their ritual purposes that centered on “deliberate burning, perhaps for purification purposes” (Gimbutas, *Civilization* 137).

Barrows of Poland and elsewhere in Europe have an architectural structure that evokes the imagery of the Goddess. Gimbutas notes that earthen barrows took a triangular or trapezoidal form, which, she says, is “symbolically inseparable from the regenerative female (or Goddess’s) triangle” (*Civilization* 137). The dead returned to the womb of the Goddess and passed through her sacred vulva for rebirth. A connection to female ancestors can also be seen in the barrows. In western Poland, archaeologists uncovered a thirty-meter long triangular barrow containing a 70-year-old woman from the Funnel-necked Beaker culture (end of the fifth millennium BCE) (Marler 9). This barrow could have been a shrine
honoring an Ancestral Mother (Marler 9) or a queen-priestess (Gimbutas, *Civilization* 336), and as mentioned above, the triangular shape of the barrow evokes the shape of the Earth Mother’s vulva. The veneration of female ancestors was, therefore, linked to the veneration of the Goddess.

Gimbutas says that the “triangular-trapezoidal shape recalls the trapezoidal Lengyel houses in western Poland” (*Civilization* 138). Images of the Lengyel longhouses show one end narrower than the other (Grygiel and Bogucki, “Early Neolithic” 125). Since the “triangular shape of the earthen long barrows seems to represent the goddess’ body,” with the narrow entrance resembling the vulva and the passage the birth canal (Gimbutas, *Living* 66), the Lengyel longhouses most likely are a part of this ancient memory of fashioning both sculpture and architecture in the shape of the body of the Goddess. The cave, with its analogy as the Goddess’s womb, “was probably the inspiration for erecting monumental structures aboveground” (Gimbutas, *Language* 153-54). An example of an aboveground grave in the shape of the Goddess’s body comes from western Poland. A Funnel-necked Beaker group (ca. 3500-3000 BCE) built a grave of large stones in the shape of a seated corpulent Goddess that resembles obese goddesses from Malta (Gimbutas, *Language* 153-54). This suggests that Poland was a part of a geographically widespread funerary tradition that perceived the earth as the body of the Goddess and associated her with death and regeneration. Although the longhouses are not funerary monuments, they nonetheless have a physical appearance that resembles this concept as architecture in the shape of the body of the Goddess. Gimbutas herself, as previously mentioned, even links the triangular-trapezoidal shape of longhouses to the vulva of the Goddess (*Civilization* 137-38).

4. Gimbutas also describes shelters as triangular or trapezoidal in shape from the Neolithic site of Lepenski Vir along the Danube River (ca. mid-seventh to mid-sixth millennia BCE). These shelters or shrines
Later Neolithic cultures in southern Poland provide further evidence for the presence of the Divine Feminine in anthropomorphic form. Archaeological sites are found in the village of Zlota in the Sandomierz district. At the Grodzisko I site at Zlota, a local Painted Pottery culture (Danubian II, similar to the Tisza-Lengyel culture) emerged following older Linear Pottery settlements (Podkowinska and Rauhut 195-96). A variety of pottery has been unearthed at Grodzisko I and II, including several fragments of hollowed female figurines and a male figurine (Podkowinska and Rauhut 204). These female figurines may possibly indicate evidence for female deity. It is important to note that the pottery found at the Grodzisko sites resembles the pottery of Tisza and Lengyel cultures from the Danubian basin, and the obsidian at Grodzisko comes from Hungary and Slovakia (Podkowinska and Rauhut 204). This means that the peoples of Zlota were in contact with other Old European cultures. The human figurines, especially, are evidence of Tisza influences (Podkowinska and Rauhut 204). The Tisza culture was also an Old European culture of the Middle Danube basin. Anthropomorphic figurines of enthroned goddesses covered in labyrinthine designs have been found at a Tisza settlement (Gimbutas, *Goddesses* 125). Rather than perceiving the female figurines at Grodzisko as isolated findings of anthropomorphic females, the figurines can be viewed as embodiments of female deity connecting Poland to Goddess images found outside of the region.

Movements of patriarchal Globular Amphora pastoralists into north-central Europe disrupted the homeland of the Funnel-necked Beaker peoples (Gimbutas, *Civilization* 141). The Baden culture, another patriarchal culture, also moved into the southern territories of the Funnel-necked Beaker culture (Gimbutas, *Civilization* 141). As a result, the southeastern recreated in structure the female reproductive system, symbolizing the Goddess’s regenerative powers (*Living* 56-59).
regions of the Funnel-necked Beaker culture were subject to violent destruction and population reduction (Gimbutas, *Civilization* 141). In southern Poland, evidence for invasion is seen in the Funnel-necked Beaker culture of Gródek Nadbuzny. An attack on the settlement is seen in the rubbish heaps of burnt clay (former dwellings), burnt pottery, and scattered and sometimes burnt human bones (Kowalczyk 116). Flint arrow points were also found, and since weapons were rare at Funnel-necked Beaker sites, this “shows that this settlement must have been imperilled (sic)” (Kowalczyk 116). The burning down of this Funnel-necked Beaker site provides evidence for an invasion. As Gimbutas states, “After reaching a flowering of culture in the fifth millennium B.C., the Old European way of life became submerged. Elements of the Indo-European culture—its religion, economy, and social structure—came to dominate life in Europe” (*Living* 121). The Funnel-necked Beaker site of Gródek Nadbuzny was not the sole site in Poland to be affected by invasions: “The fate of other settlements of the Funnel Beaker culture in this territory must have been similar” (Kowalczyk 116-17). The Goddess civilizations of Poland and Europe were now facing looming threats of cultural, spiritual, and physical destruction with the incoming patriarchal invaders.

The incursions of proto-Indo-Europeans into central Europe did not preclude the survival of the Old European Goddess or the civilization of Old Europe. In fact, “From about 3000 B.C. until the end of the first millennium B.C., much of central Europe was a hybrid of Indo-European and Old European culture” (Gimbutas, *Living* 176). In Poland, elements of this mixed cultural form are apparent. In the fourth millennium BCE, The Globular Amphora culture came to occupy the area north of the Carpathians: “This culture formed after the Kurgan [proto-Indo-European] peoples infiltrated the area from the region north of the Black
Sea, a result of the Kurgan superimposition and gradual amalgamation with the Old European substratum (the Cucuteni and the Funnel-necked Beaker cultures)” (Gimbutas, Living 188). The Globular Amphora culture left evidence of their culture in Poland. At the site of Zlota, in the uplands of southern Poland, a mix of Old European and Indo-European cultures existed. The Zlota culture group consisted of a local group that joined the elements of the Globular Amphora culture, the Cord Pottery culture, the Radiating-patterned Ware culture, and the Funnel-necked Beaker culture (Rauhut 161). The Funnel-necked Beaker culture did not disappear with the first incursions of Indo-European groups into central Europe. In fact, the culture coexisted with the Globular Amphora culture for nearly one thousand years in Poland and Germany (Gimbutas, Living 188). This means that the Old European and the Indo-European cultures mixed and coexisted for a time in Poland.

The patriarchal Baden culture consisted of a mix of “indigenous and alien elements” (Gimbutas, Civilization 372). It populated the Middle Danube basin, “with northern limits in Bohemia and southern Poland” (Gimbutas, Civilization 372). The site of Wyciaze is an upland settlement located near Kraków in southern Poland. In this settlement, a Radial Pottery/Baden culture left a pit with a clay hearth at the bottom with pottery fragments, including a roughly shaped female figurine (Podkowinska and Rauhut 206). This pit “may have been connected with some religious worship” (Podkowinska and Rauhut 206). Elaborating on the vagueness of this statement, this pit may have been connected to the continued Old European veneration of the Goddess. Gimbutas says that the Old European Pregnant Goddess was probably the prototype of the Grain Goddess and the Earth Mother of European folklore. In Old European settlements, the Pregnant Earth Goddess was often found near ovens or buried in pits beneath the floor (Gimbutas, Language 141-42). The female
figurine at Wyciaze was found in a pit in the earth, perhaps demonstrating her identity as Earth Mother. In comparison, around 6000 BCE in Achilleion, Thessaly, the Pregnant Goddess was worshipped in an outdoor space with a stone altar, a bread oven, a large hearth, and offering pits (Gimbutas, *Living* 79). The female figurine of Wyciaze may have been worshipped in similar capacity or may have acted as an offering to the earth. Several conical cups with high strap handles were also found in the Wyciaze pit (Podkowinska and Rauhut 206). In Old European temples, libation vessels and clay hearths were some of the equipment used in ritual (Gimbutas, *Living* 81). It is possible the cups near the Wyciaze female were libation (or other forms of ritual) cups and related to the female figure in a ritual manner. Even though this culture had patriarchal elements, an older matriarchal layer continued to exist.

The Goddess did not disappear during the Bronze or Iron Ages even though Old Europe was subjected to the imposition of Indo-European beliefs and culture. In some areas, such as Crete and the Aegean Islands, Goddess religion continued to flourish through the first half of the second millennium BCE (Gimbutas, *Living* 129). Although the Bronze Age saw a change in social organization towards patriarchy, in the Mediterranean, the Aegean, Northwest Africa, Europe, Turkey, and the Near East, the Goddess survived in changing forms (Sjöö and Mor 213-17). As Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor explain in their study of Crete and the Bronze Age, “Crete was the last, full flowering of matriarchal culture,” and many of the Greek goddesses originated in Crete (212).

In the region of Poland, the Goddess continued to survive in pottery, especially in connection to funeral urns. Anthropomorphic vases from the Gdansk area in northern Poland (ca. the end of the sixth century BCE) provide evidence for the Goddess of Death and
Regeneration in the form of an Owl Goddess (Gimbutas, *Language* 245). Anthropomorphic urns from this area have Owl Goddess facial features and bird’s feet decorating the shoulders and caps of the urns. One urn has the Owl Goddess wearing “a cap, triple earrings with amber beads, a broad collar, and a spiral-headed pin” (Gimbutas, *Language* 245). The Goddess as urn suggests that people in the Bronze and Iron Ages still believed in her protective and regenerative powers related to life and death. Anthropomorphic Goddess urns have been found in graves in eastern Germany and Poland filled with clean, white burnt bone, lime, or chalk with melted or unmelted glass, iron, or bronze objects (ARAS Record 4Zz-017). One vessel, found near Wirsitz, Poland (former Prussia) (ca. 750-400 BCE) has eyes, ears, a nose, a round body, a necklace, and incised garment pins (ARAS Record 4Zz-017). Another urn from Gdansk (ca. 750-400 BCE) has a round body, a cap-shaped lid, eyes and nose, a necklace, and a clothing pin (ARAS Record 4Zz-018). These vessels have features that likely resemble the Goddess in her bird of prey form.

Another interesting artifact from the Lusatian culture in western Poland is a female statue from the eighth century BCE (ARAS Record 4Zz.016). This statue is of a standing anthropomorphic female with pierced ears, a coiled collar necklace, and a triangle incised on her lower half. She holds, with both hands, a vessel. This female figure was found in a sand “grave field”; nearby were graves filled with urns (ARAS Record 4Zz.016). The location of this figure near urns in a graveyard, as well as the characteristics of her appearance, suggest that she is connected to the Old European Goddess of Death and Regeneration. As previously described, one of the Owl Goddess urns had pierced ears and a broad collar like this female statue. The pronouncement of a triangle on the lower half of her body signifies the regenerative vulva. The Goddess as bird of prey (vulture, owl, etc.) was the Goddess of
Death and Rebirth, and the “main component of her image—the triangle (vulva)—secures regeneration” (Gimbutas, *Language* 245). This female figure probably accompanied the urns buried with her. In the second millennium BCE, standing figurines with bird-like features and necklaces were found in cemeteries within or near cremation urns, representing a continuation of Old European traditions and images (Gimbutas, *Living* 177). The female figures found in Germany and Poland represent a continuation of Old European funeral traditions. Furthermore, the vessel in the hands of the western Poland female statue is reminiscent of earlier Old European female statues holding large basins in their hands to invoke rain from the Bird and Snake Goddess (Gimbutas, *Goddesses* 117, 145). The vessel of the Polish statue may relate to an invocation of the sacred waters of rebirth.

Old European figurines and pottery of divine animals, such as pigs, birds, boars, deer, and snakes continued to be produced during the Bronze and Iron Ages in central Europe (Gimbutas, *Living* 176). At the end of the Neolithic and beginning of the Bronze Age, patriarchal tribes moved into the site of Biskupin (Rajewski 93-98). The Iron Age Lusatian culture of Biskupin built a fortified settlement that is now known as the largest in central and northern Poland (Rajewski 98). Traditions of sculpting the Goddess’s animals continued to occur even in this patriarchal culture. There are finds of sculpted figures of birds and other animals (Rajewski 107). In the Kraków-Plaszow area of southern Poland, snakes and a frog-like figure appear surrounding an anthropomorphic figure with V-shaped hands on an engraved plaque from the late La Tène period (last centuries BCE). Gimbutas says that figures with V arms and legs are represented on Neolithic vases, especially on central European Linear Pottery vases from circa 5000 BCE. The V limbs and stance of the figure (one arm pointed up and one arm pointed down) portray the Bird Goddess and her
regenerative life powers associated with her bird of prey form (Gimbutas, *Language* 17). The Bird Goddess, therefore, can be seen at the center of the Kraków plaque, yet her connection to the Snake Goddess can also be understood in the lines of snakes above her head. Snakes can regenerate themselves by shedding their skins and metaphorically rebirthing themselves. The frog-like figure is also connected to regeneration. In the Neolithic, frogs and frog-shaped goddesses stressed the regenerative aspects of the Goddess and the connections between aquatic and uterine environments (Gimbutas, *Living* 27).

These brief examples of Polish archaeological sites and artifacts hint at how the Old European Goddess and her symbols continued to survive in the region of modern-day Poland after the Indo-European invasions into central Europe. Even with the increasing shifts to patriarchy, war, and male gods in the ensuing millennia, archaeological remains demonstrate the perseverance of the Neolithic Goddess. Her perseverance in Slavic religion, and later Polish folklore, myth, and peasant tradition, will be discussed in subsequent chapters. The focus will now turn to the Indo-European groups that came to reside in the region of Poland in the early centuries CE. The group that deserves special attention is the Slavs.
Chapter 5: Pagan Slavs and the Coming of Christianity

Many modern-day Poles are descended from Slavic tribes that inhabited the region of Poland during the ninth century CE: the Polanie, the Masurians, the Kaszubians, the Slovincians and other Pomeranians, the Slezanie (Silesians), the Vistulans, and the Warmians. Most of these Slavic tribes are descended from earlier Slavic tribes (Malinowski and Pellowski 5). Over the years, scholars have debated the origins of the Slavs in eastern and central Europe. Some scholars have tried to trace the Slavs from farming tribes of the third millennium BCE (Phillips and Kerrigan 9). The exact location of the Slavic homeland has been met with numerous theories over the years (Gimbutas, Slavs 17). The region of what is now Poland is included in theories of Slavic origins. Mike Dixon-Kennedy says that early Slavs lived as farmers and herders “in the marshes and woodlands of what is now eastern Poland and western Russia, Belorussia, and Ukraine” (259). In her study of the Slavs, Gimbutas says that the Slavs began as Indo-European farmers originating in the area north of the Carpathian Mountains and the middle Dnieper region (Slavs 14). Prehistoric Slavs (Proto-Slavs) inhabited a region connected to Bronze Age (second millennium BCE) Indo-European culture and were a branch of Indo-Europeans descended from the common proto-Indo-European stock (Gimbutas, Slavs 16-20). Archaeological evidence suggests that between 2000 and 1000 BCE “the Slavs began to differentiate themselves as a unique cultural group from their Indo-European ancestors” (Strong, “Rusalki”). As previously discussed, it was the proto-Indo-Europeans (the common ancestors of the Slavs) who infiltrated Europe beginning in the fifth millennium BCE, destroying and upending much of the Old European Goddess cultures in their wake.
In their location north of the Carpathians and the middle Dnieper region, the early Slavs were surrounded by other Indo-European groups: the Thracians (Dacians and Getae) to the south, the Illyrians and Germanic-speakers to the west, the Balts in the north, and the Iranians in the southeast (Gimbutas, Slavs 23). Surrounded cultures, some of which exerted strong influences over the Slavs, impacted Slavic culture and language. The Scythians, Sarmatians, and Goths exerted their cultures over the Slavs by subjecting them to foreign rule for over a millennium (Gimbutas, Slavs 25, 98).

Worship of the Goddess was not absent from early Slavic religion. In fact, even though the Slavs were of Indo-European stock, there is evidence that they worshipped, at one point, an all-powerful Goddess (Hubbs 10). Joanna Hubbs discusses how tribes affiliated with the early Slavs, such as the Dacians and Antes (in the early centuries CE) depicted the Goddess ruling over the “three zones of nature” and surrounded by her sacred animals such as horses, snakes, and birds (10). Among the Dacians, she was portrayed as a Tree of Life goddess and worshipped by horsemen (Hubbs 10). The sixth-century Roman historian, Jordanes, in his The Origin and Deeds of the Goths, links the Antes tribe to the Sclavini (Sclaveni) tribe (23). He locates the Sclavini in the land stretching from the Vistula River in modern-day Poland to the Dniester River in modern-day Ukraine (cited in Phillips and Kerrigan 12). Jordanes also links the Sclavini and the Antes to the Venethi (23), whom Gimbutas says are a possible Slavic group of peoples living at the source of the Vistula River (Slavs 62). Since the Sclavini might have been connected to the Antes, who on jewelry depicted their Goddess accompanied by snakes, birds, and horses (Hubbs 10), it is possible that the West Slavic tribes in the region of Poland were familiar with this Divine Feminine imagery. In early eastern Slavic art, the Goddess is schematized with a lozenge-shaped head.
or as a diamond-shaped ideogram (Hubbs 11). In tenth-century northern Russia, she is depicted as a Tree of Life pillar goddess surrounded by sun disks, horses, deer, and bears (Hubbs 11). It is apparent in these depictions that the Goddess retained her Old European symbols of the lozenge, the Tree of Life, and her accompanying sacred animals. Bird, snake, and sun imagery, familiar symbols in the archaeological remains of Neolithic Poland and Old Europe, demonstrate how Neolithic Goddess imagery survived among the early Slavs.

The Scythians and Sarmatians, who exerted strong influences over Slavic language and culture, also worshipped an all-powerful Goddess. The patriarchal Scythians who ruled the Russian steppes from 700 through 200 BCE continued to venerate the Goddess known in the forms of a serpentine Woodland Goddess and as a Great Goddess known by the name of Hestia or Tabiti (Hubbs 7-9). The serpentine Woodland Goddess brings to mind the Snake Goddess of Neolithic Old Europe. Hubbs notes that a process of accommodation between the native peoples of southern Russia and the Scythian invaders may explain why the Scythian Goddess legitimized the authority of tribal chieftains, kings, and patriarchal states. The patriarchal Scythian invaders had to accommodate the Goddess worship of the lands they invaded, and as a result, they used the Goddess to legitimize their rule over the native peoples (Hubbs 7-8).

The Sarmatians, who came after the Scythians, “appear to have had stronger ties with matriclan cultures than their predecessors” and represented their Great Goddess as a Mistress of Animals and as a Tree of Life (Hubbs 9). Some scholars believe that the Slavs learned the worship of the Goddess from the Sarmatians. In the first century BCE through the first century CE, the Sarmatians entered proto-Slavic territory (northeast of the Dniester) (Matossian 329). Hubbs, however, argues that the Slavs already venerated an archaic female
deity before Iranian influences (11). If the Slavs venerated a female deity, this suggests that there had to have been some cultural accommodation or amalgamation between indigenous Old European and Indo-European cultures and religions in early Slavic history. Gimbutas says that in some cultures, Old European divinities were still worshipped even though the culture adopted a hierarchical and patriarchal social structure. Slavic cultures, she says, demonstrate this process to a certain degree (Living 129). This cultural amalgamation helps explain why the Goddess survived among the patriarchal Slavs. While some scholars argue that the Slavs were always patriarchal, there is evidence to suggest that Slavic tribes preserved matrilineal customs even after they were conquered by patriarchal cultures (Hubbs 13). It should not be assumed that the Slavic tribes were always male-dominated, especially if Old European influences continued to exist among them.

Archaeologists can trace, with much confidence, a continuity of Slavic settlements from the end of the fifth century CE onwards (Gimbutas, Slavs 80). In southeastern Poland, archaeologists have unearthed evidence for the presence of the early Slavs. Early Slavic semi-subterranean square houses, clay or stone ovens, cemeteries with cremation graves, and handmade pottery have been found in relation to the Zhitomir sites, which extended into southeastern Poland (Gimbutas, Slavs 80-83). Archaeological evidence for early Slavs in Poland corroborates Jordanes’s accounts of the Sclavini and other Slavic tribes extending into this region. Also, as previously discussed, the region of southern Poland was the first area of modern-day Poland settled by Old European populations in the Neolithic period.

Cremation cemeteries and small villages belonging to early Slavic (500-700 CE) groups are found in Poland (Gimbutas, Slavs 110-11). These and other early Slavic sites contain pottery but lack clay figurines (Gimbutas, Slavs 110-11). Crude pottery and a lack of
clay figurines and other materials make it harder to search for the Goddess in Polish archaeology at this time. To further complicate matters, the Slavs were not literate prior to their conversions to Christianity (Gimbutas, *Slavs* 151), so there is no pre-Christian literature on Slavic religion that could provide insight into the Slavic Goddess or goddesses. Descriptions of Slavic religion most often derive from those who sought to destroy it (Gimbutas, *Slavs* 151). In ecclesiastical chronicles and missionary works, a hostile tone is taken regarding Slavic pagan practices. Attacks on pagan practices were often aimed at the priestesses officiating fertility rites (Hubbs 13-14). The search for Slavic goddesses, then, may need to take into account more modern sources in which ancient goddesses survived, albeit in different form. In the following chapter, Polish folklore and myth will be examined to shed light on the nature of the Slavic goddesses and their links to the civilization of Old Europe.

The information that does exist regarding accounts of early Slavic religion seems to suggest an “animistic” religion, with no divine hierarchy or organized priesthood (Hubbs 14). The sixth-century Byzantine historian, Procopius, describes the pagan Slavs worshipping spirits, such as river and tree nymphs, in forest groves and alongside rivers and lakes (qtd. in Hubbs 11). Later chroniclers refer to these nymphs as “*bereginy* (*bereg* means ‘shore’),” which Hubbs says, “represent the most primitive form of the hunting and fertility goddess” (14-15). An early name for a Slavic goddess, Berehinia, also appears to relate to the words *bereg* (Kelly 11) and *bereginy*. Her name may derive from the Russian word for bank, *bereg*, and she is often related to water (Kelly 11). This suggests Berehinia’s similarity to the river and lake nymphs. In sixth-century jewelry, Berehinia is associated with snakes, depicted as listening to or holding them, and in numerous tales and rituals, she is associated with birds,
water imagery, and frogs (Kelly 11-13). Bird and snake imagery indicates her connection to the Neolithic Bird and Snake Goddess. Berehinia and the bereginy had their images fused (and confused) with the later images of the rusalki of Slavic folklore (Kelly 15). It is the rusalki who appear in Polish (and Slavic) folklore. They will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Various ancient sources on Slavic religion stress the primacy of the male warrior and sky gods (Phillips and Kerrigan 29); however, as early Slavic art suggests, the Slavs worshipped an all-powerful Goddess who was identified with animals, hunters, and the three zones of nature (Hubbs 10-11). The contact the Slavs had with Iranian and Sarmatian peoples suggests a “merging of a preexisting and archaic goddess with the horse or warrior female deity who empowers armed men” (Hubbs 11). Iranian influences in Slavic religion are seen in the origins of male deities. Some Slavic male deities such as Svarog and Simargl have Iranian origins (Gimbutas, Slavs 162-64), which reveal the patriarchal influence of non-Slavic cultures within Slavic religion. Over time, the image of the patriarchal warrior god replaced that of the ancient Goddess in Slavic religion (Hubbs 11).

The worship of female deities and the shift to warrior gods can be seen among the West Slavs of Poland and the surrounding areas. The term “West Slav” relates to a branch of the Slavs that came about after centuries of migrations from their original homeland. When speaking of the Slavs, it is important to again note that they are not one group of people but rather many different groups of peoples. Although the Slavs shared a common language as late as the ninth century CE, they “are not a blood group; there is no Slavic race” (Gimbutas, Slavs 14). In the fifth and sixth centuries CE (Phillips and Kerrigan 14), or possibly a few centuries earlier (Strong, “Rusalki”), Slavic tribes began migrating from the Russian plain.
Faith Wigzell describes how Slavic-speaking peoples expanded in different directions; some groups went to Bohemia, Poland, and Germany, while others went to the Balkans, and yet others pushed into Ukraine and northeast Russia. The different paths of migration (west, east, and south) are reflected today in the linguistic and ethnic groupings of Slavs. West Slavs are known as the Poles, Polabians, Kashubians, Lusatians, Czechs, and Slovaks. East Slavs are known as the Belorussians, Ukrainians, and Russians, while the South Slavs are the Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Bulgarians, and Macedonians (Wigzell 207). Surrounding Germanic and Celtic cultures also influenced the West Slavs, inhabitants of today’s Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia (Strong, “Rusalki”).

The land of Poland was covered with and surrounded by different tribes in the late centuries BCE and the early centuries CE. Around the fourth century BCE, a Pomeranian culture of probable West Baltic peoples extended into “almost all of Poland and along the Western Bug river” (Gimbutas, Slavs 66). An ancient literary source reveals the worship of a Mother Goddess along the Baltic shore to the east of modern-day Poland. Tacitus, in his Germania (98 CE), mentions the Aestii (Aesti) tribe, worshipping a Mother Goddess: “They worship the Mother of the Gods, and wear images of boars as an emblem of the cult; it is this, instead of the arms and protection of mortals, that renders the goddess’ votary safe, even amidst enemies” (95; sec. 45.2). Jordanes acknowledges that the Aestii lived beyond the Vidivarii, who dwelled at the opening of the Vistula River into the Baltic (23). Jordanes, if one recalls, also places the Venethi (Veneti/Venedi) at the source of the Vistula River (23). This situates the Aestii, who worshipped a Mother Goddess, in close proximity to western Slavic tribes in Poland.
In the opposite direction, to the west of the region of modern-day Poland, Goddess worship was known among the Germanic tribes. Tacitus refers to Germanic tribes worshipping the goddess Nerthus, or Mother Earth (93; sec. 40.2). These tribes were located around the mouth of the Elbe River (modern-day Germany) and in the south (modern-day Denmark) (Jones and Pennick 117-18). As will be described in more detail shortly, a twelfth-century written account mentions the worship of the West Slavic goddess Zhiva among Elbe Slavs. This goddess was revered in Poland as well.

Archaeological findings provide evidence for Germanic tribes belonging to the Gotho-Gepid culture moving from the Lower Vistula basin up the Western Bug valley in the early centuries CE (Gimbutas, *Slavs* 68). As mentioned above, West Slavs came into contact with Germanic and Celtic groups in Poland. In southern Poland, the Przeworsk type of pottery is attributed to Germanic and Slavic peoples (Gimbutas, *Slavs* 116). Slavs began settling between the Elbe and Oder Rivers in the fifth and sixth centuries CE, forming five large Slavic groups in Germany and western Poland (Gimbutas, *Slavs* 128-29). The contact between East Germanic groups and Slavic groups leads to the question of Goddess worship in the region of what is now Poland. Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick state, “It seems that among the eastern Germanic tribes a female figure, a goddess or even an actual woman, carried greater authority than among the western Germans” (118). They go on to say that the “ancient Germanic tribes of the east overlap with the Slavic peoples of that area” (118). The region of modern-day Poland was a specific place for East Germanic peoples to overlap religious ideologies with Slavic peoples. The prominence of women and goddesses among the eastern Germanic tribes may have influenced West Slavic tribes in Germany and Poland. Tacitus mentions an East Germanic group, the Sitones, as being ruled by women (96; sec.
45.6), leading Jones and Pennick to interpret this group as matriarchal (118). New interpretations on the roles of female leaders elicit further questions regarding the social structures of ancient societies and women’s positions among various tribes in central and northern Europe.

Tacitus calls the eastern Germans the Suebi (cited in Jones and Pennick 116) and says that part of them sacrifice to Isis in the form of a ship (Germania 80; sec. 9.1). Jones and Pennick say that the “cult of ‘Isis’ was probably indigenous,” noting how the river goddess Sequana of the Seine River was also depicted as a ship (114). They say that the Oder River was called Suebus in Tacitus’s time and that the eastern Germanic tribes, known for their Goddess worship, may have attributed a water deity to the river (114). The Oder River runs through Poland, indicating that East Germanic tribes settled along it and possibly associated the river with a female deity. It is possible that Poland’s Vistula River was associated with a female deity in prehistoric times. In the following chapter, evidence will be provided to show that Poland’s Vistula River has historically been associated with goddesses, feminine spirits, and pagan rituals.

Although a fascinating subject that needs more study, this paper does not delve too deeply into an exploration of the Slavic goddesses in comparison to goddesses of the cultures ancient Slavs came into contact with, such as the Scythians, Sarmatians, Celts, Goths, Balts, and Finno-Ugrians. Harold Haarmann discusses Old European, Finno-Ugrian, Siberian, Iranian, and Germanic cultural influences in the worship of Slavic goddesses. He examines parallels between the East Slavic goddess Mokosh and Celtic and Norse goddesses and notes that the Slavic rusalki may have been influenced by Celtic beliefs.
As discussed above, in the colonization process, West Slavic tribes settled in the region of modern-day Poland. Modern scholars discuss how western Slavs shared a common religion that was non-hierarchical and centered on the worship of deities in nature (trees, stones, and rivers) (Zamoyski 10). Worshipping deities embodied in natural objects was more common than worshipping deities as idols or within circles or temples (Zamoyski 10). Worshipping the divine as immanent in nature reminds one of the Goddess of Old Europe who was “ultimately Nature herself” (Gimbutas, Civilization 223). A religion centered on deities in nature also parallels the religious practices of Germanic tribes. Hubbs notes these similarities by comparing the accounts of the Germanic tribes by Tacitus to Procopius’s accounts of the Slavs a couple of centuries later (11).

In the centuries after the expansion of the Slavs, western Slavic religion became increasingly centered on warrior and fertility gods in urban centers and temples. The West Slavs worshipped Slavic polycephalous (many-headed) male gods, such as Svantovit, in temples with priests (Hubbs 12). Hubbs says that the images and attributes of these gods is a result of the usurpation of the powers of the Great Goddess (12). Svantovit, a warrior and fertility god, was depicted in pillar form with four faces at his shrine on the island of Rüngen in the Baltic Sea. He replaced the ancient Goddess, who previously was associated with horses and fertility and imaged as a Tree of Life or all-seeing Eye Goddess (Hubbs 12). Svantovit became associated with horses, fertility, a pillar (Tree of Life), and multiple faces (like the Eye Goddess) (Hubbs 12). The usurpation of the Goddess’s powers is apparent in Poland as well.

In the upper reaches of the Dniester River in Poland, stone statues with three or four heads have been found holding drinking horns. These statues date to the fourth century CE.
Some of the statues “wear pointed caps and are decorated with carved symbols of horses and suns” (Phillips and Kerrigan 35). Thousands of years earlier, pointed caps, crowns, and elaborate coiffures were featured on Old European figurines, such as on Bird and Snake Goddess sculptures (Gimbutas, Goddesses 55). And as previously discussed, suns and horses survived as features on early Slavic Goddess art (Hubbs 10-11). These male statues dating to the fourth century CE wear Goddess symbols that appeared millennia before their carvings. Besides appropriating the symbols of the Goddess, pillar forms of male gods, as noted in the Svantovit discussion above, indicate an appropriation of the Goddess’s incarnation as a pillar or Tree of Life. In the Neolithic Narva culture located in the East Baltic area, wooden poles were unearthed with what appeared to be an Owl Goddess at the top (Gimbutas, Civilization 150-51). Gimbutas notes that these sculptures have similarities to the Owl Goddess stone stelae of western Europe (Civilization 150). The stone stelae of western Europe featured the Goddess of Death in her bird of prey form and were found at entrances of megalithic graves or within graves (Gimbutas, Civilization 238-39).

Hubbs says that a four-headed statue found near the Zbrucz River in the nineteenth century depicts the god Svantovit. On one side of the Svantovit statue “he appears in the guise of a goddess with breasts, carrying a rhyton in his right hand, resembling the one held by the Great Goddess depicted on Scythian artifacts or by the kamennye baby [stone women] guarding Scythian barrows” (Hubbs 12). All of this evidence suggests that the forms and symbols of the Slavic male statues have Goddess origins in Neolithic Old Europe. The Slavic males

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1. In her book The Double Goddess: Women Sharing Power, Vicki Noble also discusses the widespread tradition of ancient shaman-priestesses wearing tall, pointed caps.
gods took over the attributes and images of the Old European goddesses, and later, Slavic goddesses as well.

In the early Middle Ages, Pomerania (now confined to northwestern Poland) was known as the western land of the Wends and extended from the lower Oder River to the lower Vistula River (Gimbutas, *Slavs* 132; Jones and Pennick 168). In Pomerania, a three-headed god named Triglav was worshipped. Scholars sometimes associate Triglav with Svarog, an eastern Slavic sky god (Phillips and Kerrigan 35), who, as previously discussed, was of Iranian origin. A temple was built to Triglav at Stettin, in which resided animal, bird, and human sculptures (Phillips and Kerrigan 35). Sculptures of animals, birds, and humans are reminiscent of the Neolithic sculptures found in Poland and elsewhere in Old Europe. In addition, Triglav’s three heads represented his dominion over the earth, the sky, and the underworld (Phillips and Kerrigan 35). This is a clear usurpation of the Neolithic Goddess’s dominion over all the realms of nature and her powers of life, death, and regeneration. Triglav’s triple nature originally belonged to the Triple Goddess, in her forms of maiden, mother, and crone. Hubbs notes that Svantovit on the island of Rüngen was associated with a sacred white horse, suggesting he usurped the Goddess’s role as “the patron of horses” (12). Triglav’s shrine at Stettin included black horses (Jones and Pennick 168-69), which could be considered an appropriation of the Goddess’s role as patron of horses. Although male Slavic gods became associated with horses, the association of the Goddess with horses did not fully disappear in Slavic cultures. Russian embroideries have retained the connection of the Goddess as the Mistress of Horses (Kelly 38).

Among the West Slavs, there is evidence that both masculine and feminine cults appeared simultaneously in certain regions, which resulted from the interactions of
colonizing Slavic warrior elites with indigenous matrifocal clans (Hubbs 12-13). A twelfth-century work by the Saxon priest Helmhold mentions that the worship of the goddess Zhiva (from zhit’, meaning “to live”) continued to be practiced among the Elbe Slavs (cited in Hubbs 13). Hubbs says that this religion was “clearly more archaic”; both young and old women most likely officiated the ceremonies that took place in forests and by the meeting places of land and sea (13). The co-existence of masculine and feminine cults may relate to the co-existence of Old European and Indo-European beliefs in Old Europe. Hubbs indicates that the later practice of dvoeverie, or two faiths, among Russians began earlier with “the aggressive expansion of the Slavic tribes” (13). Gimbutas’s work, however, indicates this dual faith phenomenon is much more geographically widespread and occurred millennia earlier with the Indo-European incursions into Old Europe (Civilization 352).

Women leading rituals in the Zhiva cult relates to the discussion of how Neolithic women in the region of Poland were likely revered in their communities as spiritual leaders and priestesses of the Goddess. Worship of the West Slavic goddess Zhiva extended into the region of modern-day Poland, where she has been known as Zhiva (Zywa), Zhivie (Zywie), or Živa (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 28; Gimbutas, Language 195). This goddess was connected to the cuckoo bird—a bird considered sacred to the Slavs: “The Poles called him Zezula; in heathen times they had a goddess [Z]ywie with a temple on Mount Zywiec, where they prayed for health and long life. . . . This goddess was thought to have turned herself in like fashion into a cuckoo” (De Kay 116-17). The connection of the goddess Zywie to the cuckoo evokes the Neolithic imagery of the Bird Goddess. Gimbutas notes how birds “embodied health, fertility, and good fortune—all important to life sustenance” (Living 14). The goddess Zywie probably represented life sustenance, since she took the form of a cuckoo and was
prayed to for health and long life. The cuckoo is a spring bird linked to Neolithic Bird Goddess figurines (Gimbutas, *Living* 14). The Polish Zywie is “the life-giving Goddess of Spring,” and the cry of a cuckoo, a bird also sacred to the Baltic Laima, is a sign of spring (Gimbutas, *Language* 195). The West Slavic worship of the goddess Zhiva, or Zywie, continues the veneration of the Neolithic Goddess in one of her bird aspects. Her cuckoo symbolizes the regeneration of life in the spring and good health. Dixon-Kennedy also notes that some scholars consider the goddess Zhiva to have origins in the *bereginy*, which would relate Zhiva to the earliest hunting and fertility Goddess of the Slavs (37-38).

As mentioned above, the worship of the Polish goddess Zywie was associated with a temple on a mountain. Archaeology provides evidence for early western Slavs building wooden temples and idols within the ramparts of hill forts on high ground (Phillips and Kerrigan 35). In comparison, Neolithic groups in the region of Poland often settled on high ground, such as in the uplands of southern Poland. Building temples and villages on high ground suggests a connection to the Goddess as Earth Mother. Gimbutas says that hills and mounds, as well as smaller round objects, such as ovens and bread loaves, are metaphors for the pregnant belly of the Earth Mother (*Language* 149). Ritual offerings by western Slavs in their temples on high ground point to the continued reverence for the pregnant Earth Mother: “Worshippers made offerings of acorns, tiny replicas of bread and grains made from clay—and even of cooking pots” (Phillips and Kerrigan 35). These items are connected to the fertile Neolithic Goddess. Old European cultures used food, especially bread and grain, to venerate the Pregnant Vegetation Goddess (Mother Earth) (Gimbutas, *Living* 15-16). Malgorzata Oleszkiewicz-Peralba notes that the Polish Zywie is a form of the Great Mother archetype. The Great Mother has also been called Zaleta, Jezy Baba, Baba Yaga, and Baba Jedza.
Baba Yaga is a Slavic folklore character who will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

Worship of the Earth Mother (Mother Earth) is considered an ancient practice among the Slavs. On the Russian plains, the ancestors of the Slavs “almost certainly worshipped the earth in the form of an Earth Mother fertility goddess” (Phillips and Kerrigan 54). The Russian *Primary Chronicle* lists the East Slavic gods of Prince Vladimir’s pantheon in Kiev. Out of the six deities, five were male gods, Perun, Khors, Dažbog, Stribog, and Simargl, and one was a goddess, Mokosh (qtd. in Gimbutas, *Slavs* 156). A political motive to legitimize the rule of the Varangian princes is most likely the reason behind the organization of this pantheon in 980 CE. The pantheon includes a mix of Scandinavian, Iranian, Finnish, and Slavic divinities, suggesting a political maneuver “to provide divine sanction for the Varangian ruling class” (Hubbs 17). Mokosh, however, may well be the most ancient of these divinities. Nineteenth-century folklorists found evidence suggesting that the Slavs’ primary cults centered on Mother Earth and ancestor worship rather than the gods of the political elite (Phillips and Kerrigan 29).

Mokosh has uncertain origins; some scholars say she may have originally been a Finno-Ugrian goddess, while others say she is an autochthonous goddess of the tribes connected to Kiev, such as the Poliane (Hubbs 20). Mokosh’s uncertain origins do not hinder the fact that she “possesses all aspects of the Mother Goddess” (Hubbs 20). Her name is related to the Russian word for moist, *mokryi*, connecting her to “the waters of the skies and the earth” (Hubbs 20). She is a spinner of fate; a fertilizer, creator, and sustainer of all life.

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2. Hubbs notes that Mokosh, the only surviving goddess in Vladimir’s pantheon, took on “an adversarial role in regard to Perun and other male Varangian divinities” (19). Although she continued to be worshipped by Russian women up to present times, Finnish-Ugrian myths tell how she was denigrated by the male gods, who threw her to earth from her heavenly abode (Hubbs 19-20).
Earth; and a goddess of childbirth, women, and animals who became associated with or subsumed into Russian peasants’ worship of Mother Moist Earth (Hubbs 20). Some scholars refer to Mother Moist Earth as Moist Mother Earth. Gimbutas says that Moist Mother Earth \((\textit{Mati syra zemlja})\) is a “truly archaic female divinity” \((\textit{Slavs} 169)\). In the Middle Ages, the Church tried to assimilate the worship of the feminine earth to Mary (Hubbs 21).

Although Mokosh is identified as a goddess of the East Slavs, she has connections to Poland. The word, \textit{mokry}, means “wet” in Polish (“Mokry”), similar to \textit{mokryi}. Mokosh’s connection to earthly and celestial waters survives in the Polish word \textit{mokry}. Her connection to moisture parallels the Neolithic Snake and Bird Goddess’s connection to divine moisture. Hubbs says that “Mokosh left a mark on all of Russia” since villages were named after her (20). Poland also has places that carry Mokosh’s name, suggesting the extent of her influence into central Europe. Between the mountains of Lysa \(\acute{\text{G}}\)\(\text{\"ora}\) and Jasna \(\acute{\text{G}}\)\(\text{\"ora}\) are “a proliferation of villages and towns whose names seem to echo the name of the great goddess: Mokrzesz, Pniaki Mokrzeskie, Wola Mokrzeska, Malogoszcz, and Magdasz” (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 32). As will be explored in the following chapter, these two mountains have deep ties to the Divine Feminine.

Mokosh was connected to the East Slavic tribes of Kiev, such as the Poliane (Polanie). In the monk Nestor’s twelfth-century \textit{Primary Chronicle}, the Poliane are described as being highly reverent towards women and worshipping their ancestors by lakes and within forests (cited in Hubbs 13-14). Hubbs says that there are social customs that indicate the matrilineal traditions of the Poliane (14). A question arises as to whether the Poliane of Kiev were in any way related to or connected to the Polanie (Poliane) of Poland. The western Polanie settled mainly on the central plains of Poland and even gave their name to the
country (Malinowski and Pellowski 5). Polanie means “field dwellers” (Malinowski and Pellowski 5) and is associated with the word pole (“field”) (Hubbs 14). Although it is difficult to find connections, if any, between the eastern and the western Polanie, it would be interesting to learn if the matrilineal customs of the eastern Polanie were in some way present in the region of modern-day Poland as well. As discussed in the last chapter, matrilineal customs were most likely a part of Old European cultures in Neolithic Poland. The word pole is also related to the polianitsy: “Amazonian heroines of the Russian epic who rivaled their masculine counterparts in strength and valor” (Hubbs 14). Archaeology and mythology provide evidence for the existence of Sauromatian and Sarmatian women warriors (Hubbs 8-9). Archaeologist Jeannine Davis-Kimball, for example, has studied the graves of Sauromatian and Sarmatian warrior women and warrior priestesses and noted the high status given to women in these cultures. The root word pole links the word “Poland” to names for both eastern and western pagan Slavs (Poliane/Polanie, who were possibly matrilineal), as well as to the name for women warriors of Russian epics. Matrilineal customs of the eastern Poliane suggest that the Slavs adopted or retained some Old European influences.

The search to find the Goddess in Poland is difficult due to the religious and political history of the country. Poland was never conquered by Rome, so “there is no widely recognizable Year One from which to launch a historical survey” (Lukowski and Zawadzki 3). Instead, scholars refer to 966 CE as the beginning of the country we now know as “Poland.” In this year, the prince of the Polanie, Mieszko I, imposed Latin Christianity in Poland (Lukowski and Zawadzki 3). In the ninth century, the rulers of the Polanie formed the Piast dynasty at Gniezno, and over the next century, the Piast princes extended their territorial and political control (Zamoyski 10). In order to avoid war with Otto I, the King of
the Germans who was crowned Roman Emperor, Mieszko I converted to Christianity to secure political and cultural benefits this conversion would offer him (Zamoyski 10). While the ninth century saw the rise of nationhood in the region of Poland, it is Mieszko, who, in the tenth century, is attributed with “effectively creating the Polish state” (Zamoyski 20).

Poland’s conversion to Christianity therefore is historically linked to Poland’s emergence as a political nation. Due to the fact that literacy came to the Slavs only with the Christian missionaries (Gimbutas, *Slavs* 151), the search for Polish goddesses is a difficult endeavor since not much is known about Slavic Poles before Christianity, let alone the pre-Christian Slavic goddesses who were worshipped in the region of modern-day Poland. One must also be aware of the limitations of searching for the Goddess in Poland, since as long as “Poland” has been in existence it has been a Catholic nation. No doubt patriarchal religious antagonism towards anything hinting at “paganism” or “female deity” hinders the search.

Finding the Old European cultural stratum of Poland means one must first sift through the more historically recent patriarchal strata associated with Slavic Indo-Europeans and Christianity.

The imposition of Christianity in Poland did not preclude the practices and beliefs of Slavic paganism. In Russia, for example, there were centuries of opposition to Christianity by women. What resulted was “dvoeverie, ‘two faiths,’ which split the nation into a Christianized upper class and a rural population with strong attachments to paganism” (Hubbs 91-92). While the East Slavs were converted to Byzantine Christianity, over the centuries, West Slavs were converted to Roman Catholicism. Both forms of Christianity were misogynous (Hubbs 92).
In Poland, there is evidence for pagan Slavs fighting against the Christianity of the ruling class: “Few, if any, of the Slav tribes east of the Elbe accepted Christianity gracefully” (Lukowski and Zawadzki 8). In the two centuries after 966 CE, pagan revivals led to the burning of churches and priests being put to death. Pomerania, a place of strong pagan ties, fought to retain its autonomy from Polish overlordship (Zamoyski 23). As previously mentioned, the three-headed god Triglav, who usurped many powers of the ancient Goddess, was worshipped in a temple in Pomerania. His temple survived into the twelfth century CE, when in 1124, the Bishop Otto of Bamberg visited the temple and commanded Triglav’s three heads be chopped off (Phillips and Kerrigan 35). In 1128 CE, the Bishop Otto had a hand in converting the Pomeranians to Christianity, and in 1294 CE, Pomerania was absorbed into Poland (Jones and Pennick 169-70). The ruling elite enforced Christianity in Poland to foster their “own political and expansionist ambitions”; however, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries brought monasteries and friars to enforce Christianity further among the general populace (Lukowski and Zawadzki 9). East Slavic women fought the imposition of Christianity for centuries, and it is probably safe to say that West Slavic women took part in resistance efforts as well.

The origins and histories of the Slavs have not always resulted in a consensus among scholars. What is known with more confidence, however, is that Slavic tribes did settle in the region of modern-day Poland, and in the tenth century, Poland was converted to Christianity. The Slavs worshipped a Goddess or goddesses in their early history, taking different forms such as the bereginja, Berehinia, Mokosh, Zhiva/Zywie, and Mother Moist Earth. These goddesses in turn embodied elements of the Old European Goddess. The next chapter will
explore the Slavic goddesses and female spirits who have survived in Polish folklore and myth.
Chapter 6: The Survival of the Goddess in Polish Folklore, Myth, and Legend

As a result of the clash between Old European and Indo-European cultures, the “Goddess’s religion went underground” (Gimbutas, *Language* 318). Old European goddesses became preserved in the realm of “European folktales, beliefs, and mythological songs” (Gimbutas, *Language* 319). Gimbutas found that within the religions, mythologies, and folklore of the Slavs, Welsh, Germans, Irish, Gauls, Basques, Lithuanians, Latvians, Greeks, and Romans, an Old European layer of culture was richly preserved “beneath the intertwined layers of Christian and Indo-European influences” (*Civilization* 342). This chapter will explore the ways in which the Old European Goddess is preserved in Polish folklore, myth, and legend. The myths retold in this chapter originate in English-written sources on Polish folklore and myth. The myths are not restricted to one region or group of peoples in Poland, but rather incorporate a variety of popular Polish myths collected from different regions and time periods by folklorists and scholars.

Numerous Polish myths center on or include the great waterways that flow through Poland. Early Neolithic cultures of Poland often settled on the slopes of terraces in the Oder and Vistula river basins (Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 49-51), and millennia later, the ancestors of the Slavs built their homes along riverbanks and used waterways in Europe for trading and traveling (Phillips and Kerrigan 49). The important ties between the Neolithic Goddess and water were discussed in Chapter Four. The Goddess as Giver of Life ruled all water sources and forms of moisture, which were analogous to the fluids of her body (Gimbutas, *Living* 11-12). Neolithic pottery from Poland contains aquatic imagery, such as streams, parallel lines, and zig-zags that relate to the life-giving functions of the Neolithic Goddess.
In Poland, rivers are referred to as feminine in gender: *Mateczka Woda* (Polish for “little mother water”), and the same is true for the rivers in Russia: *Matushka Volga, Matushka Don*, etc. (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 32). The longest river in Poland is the Vistula River, and like the Neolithic Goddess who births all of creation, the Vistula inspires the birth of many female-centered Polish myths that speak to its link to the Sacred Feminine. One story is as follows:

Each morning, at dawn, the Guardian Mother of the Vistula, who dwells at the source of the river, far up in the Beskids, dispatches a green bird to follow her waters to the sea. At evening the messenger returns, bearing word as to the fortunes of those dwelling at the mouth of the river. The daily flight is a long one, six hundred and seventy miles, perhaps more, but it must be made, so that the Mother of Polish Waters may continue to guard and nourish her own.

(Coleman)

In this short tale, a Guardian Mother is said to watch over the Vistula River, and the river itself is referred to as the Mother of Polish Waters. The Mother of the Vistula offers protection and nourishment, which resemble the Old European Goddess’s procreative and life-affirming powers. The green bird that does the Mother of the Vistula’s bidding harks back to the Neolithic Bird Goddess. From morning until dusk each day, this tale suggests that the Goddess of the river, along with her sacred bird, sustain life through the very waters that flow throughout Poland. The Vistula, an important source of life and nourishment to Neolithic populations, continues to retain its sacredness and life-giving qualities in modern times.
An origin myth of the Vistula supports the connection of the river to the Divine Feminine. In the myth, “Two Sisters Journey Forth,” Czarnocha and Bialka, two female siblings, are given the responsibility of taking care of the rivers and lakes of Poland. When their parents pass away, Bialka takes over guarding the rivers of the mountains, while Czarnocha guards the rivers of the plain. The sisters never cross paths, but one day, Bialka descends from the mountain. They meet and decide never to separate because they enjoy one another’s company. The union of the two sisters forms the Vistula River, and the people name the river, Wisla, the name for the Vistula River in Polish, after witnessing the flood of water that results in the two sister rivers coming together (Coleman 1-2). In this myth, a pair of female siblings guards the rivers and lakes of Poland, and the Vistula River comes into creation by the coming together of two sister rivers. On the northern side of the mountain range known as the Beskids, the two sister rivers come together at the base of Mount Barania. Barania may take its name from Borana, the mother of Czarnocha and Bialka and guardian of the forests (Coleman 1-2). The three females, Czarnocha, Bialka, and Borana, recall the triple nature of the Goddess, and the sisters’ meeting place at the foot of their mother’s mountain brings to mind the Old European matrilineal practices that honored kinship through the mother.

Polish myth contains water stories related to the pre-Christian practices of Midsummer (summer solstice). In folklore, Midsummer’s Eve is a time of magic, divination, love spells, and roaming fairies (Asala 50). In one Polish myth, Kupaya, the Water Mother, is honored on this magical night. A young boy finds Kupaya in a linden tree. She directs him on a journey into the forest to gather the fire flower of the fern, which will blossom at midnight and grant wishes to its owner (Asala 50-53).
This myth contains pre-Christian elements that show the survival of a Water Mother Goddess in Polish folklore. In Christian times, the feast of Midsummer Night became known as the feast of Ivan Kupala (John the Baptist) among Slavic peoples (Kelly 25), which puts a Christian overlay on top of the goddess Kupaya’s special day. However, in this myth, there is no mention of Ivan Kupala. In the story, Kupaya sits in a linden tree. In Poland, the linden tree is sacred because it is associated with the Virgin Mary: “It was believed that the Blessed Mother often hid herself among its branches, revealing herself to children” (Knab, *Customs* 139). The Kupaya myth suggests that before Mary became associated with the linden tree, the tree was associated with a Slavic goddess. Before Mary, Kupaya sits in the linden tree and reveals herself to children. In addition, Laima, the Baltic goddess of life, “was venerated aniconically in linden trees” (Jones and Pennick 176). Despite Christian influences in Slavic Midsummer practices and beliefs, the Kupaya myth preserves a connection to pre-Christian beliefs and practices. In the next chapter, Midsummer will be explored further as a celebration of Moist Mother Earth (Gimbutas, *Slavs* 169). The Kupaya myth retains an aspect of the Divine Feminine in the realm of folklore.

In historical sources from the Greeks, Romans, Celts, and Balts, goddesses, nymphs, and female spirits are repeatedly associated with rivers, springs, and wells (Gimbutas, *Language* 43). The same may be said to be true about the Slavs. As previously mentioned, the river, lake, and forest nymphs, the *bereginy*, are considered to “represent the most primitive form of the hunting and fertility goddess” (Hubbs 14-15). Overtime, the *bereginy* became “distinct deities including: the goddesses of fate who live in bathhouses called the Rozhanitsy, the wild woodland spirits of the Vily, and the water-dwelling nature nymphs known as Rusalki” (Strong, “Rusalki”), and possibly the West Slavic goddess Zhiva as well.
Evidence for the survival of the prehistoric Goddess in Slavic cultures can be seen in folkloric figures, such as the *rusalki*. The *rusalki*, Mother Moist Earth, and the witch Baba Yaga together form a trinity that represents the Great Goddess: “The first embodies the fertile young virgin; the second, the nourishing mother; and the third, the crone or old wise woman connected to death” (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 16).

The *rusalki* (*rusalka*, singular) are known throughout Slavic folklore, but their appearances and functions tend to differ in Slavic countries. They are typically perceived as long-haired maidens who can appear in human form as well as in animal form, such as birds (swans and geese), fish, frogs and snakes, as well as hybrid bird-maidens or mermaid/fish-women (Barber, “Origins” 6-8). They are believed to reside in or near lakes, springs, rivers, and marshes, although they are also connected to fields, trees, and woods in some locations (Barber, “Origins” 8). A widespread belief surrounding the *rusalki* is that they are the souls of drowned maidens or the souls of unbaptized or stillborn babies, who all died before their time (Ivanits 75). The *rusalki* are known by various names such as *mavki, navki, faraony, vodianiani*, and *vily* (Hubbs 29). They have numerous powers that hint at their divine nature. They regulate the weather, the seasons, and the cycles of the moon (Hubbs 27). They are spinners regulating human, nature, and animal fertility, as well as fearsome creatures who live without men and can lure unsuspecting humans to their underworld realms, sometimes with their enchanting songs (Hubbs 27-29). Similar to a Mistress of Animals (Hubbs 29), the *rusalki’s* animal incarnations suggest ancient aspects of the Bird and Snake Goddess. Hubbs associates the *rusalki* with the “archaic image of the bird-headed transformational goddess who accompanies humanity from the period of the hunt to that of horticulture” and with the Goddess “who creates parthenogenetically by bringing moisture to the earth from below and
above, unaided by male consorts” (29). Elizabeth J. W. Barber notes that the *rusalki* can be traced back to the Iron, Bronze, and Neolithic eras in southeast Europe, in both Slavic territories and in the Aegean (“Origins” 6). These female spirits have prehistoric origins, and in their wide-ranging powers and physical manifestations, one is reminded of their link to prehistoric Neolithic goddesses.

The presence of the *rusalki* in the folklore of Poland speaks to the survival of the Maiden Goddess. In Poland, the *rusalki* are female spirits that reside in the forests, lakes, and rivers and cause mischief or harm to people (Malinowski and Pellowski 192). A popular type of *rusalki* in Poland are the *wilas*, beautiful incarnations of dead maidens who lead boys and shepherds astray (Malinowski and Pellowski 192). Some believe the *wilas* are ugly and vicious towards humans, yet in the past, peasants placed offerings of sweets and flowers at cave entrances for them (Asala 11). The appearances of the *wilas* as either beautiful or ugly may relate to specific geographical locations and climates in Poland. Barber says that in some countries, such as Poland and Russia, the *rusalki* are reported as uglier and meaner than the *rusalki* in Bulgaria or Ukraine, possibly due to the harsher northern climate in the former regions (“Origins” 18). The dwellings of the *wilas* in forests, lakes, and rivers resemble the ancient dwelling places of the *bereginy*, and the ritual offerings at cave entrances suggest the veneration of *wilas* as female deities.

One Polish myth of the *wilas* tells of a young orphan named Baltazar who prevents himself from falling prey to the *wilas*, who wish to steal his eyes. As Baltazar herds a blind man’s goats on a hill, three different maidens (*wilas*) approach him and try to entice the young boy with gifts: an apple, a rose, and a comb. Baltazar ties up the *wilas* with bramble and demands to know the whereabouts of the blind man’s eyes, to which the *wilas* direct him
to a cavern filled with piles of eyes. The three *wilas* misinform Baltazar as to which pair of eyes are the old man’s, so he tosses each one of the *wilas* over a cliff into the river. In the end, the boy and the blind man find the correct eyes (Asala 11-16).

In this story, the sacred number three represents the *wilas*, which hints at the triple nature of the Goddess. The number three has a sacred connection to the Goddess and has worldwide been associated with birth, death, completion, the moon, and menstruation (Grahn 158). The gifts of the *wilas* may symbolize their youthful nature and powers; the comb, in particular, may represent their hair. The *rusalki* are often believed to have long, flowing hair, which they spend long hours combing out (Strong, “Rusalki”). In Slavic countries, a woman’s hair is “a potent magical source of fertility” and “[o]nly witches and *rusalki* left their hair loose” (Barber, “Origins” 24). While the comb, rose, and apple may symbolize the life-giving and fertile powers of the maidens, their attempts to lead the men astray and steal their eyes demonstrate their death-wielding powers. Their darker natures represent the underworld aspects of the *rusalki/wilas*. The *rusalki* embody the untamed forces of nature; they enhance fertility but are also connected to the underworld, the “water realm of the dead” (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 26). Baltazar throws each of the *wilas* off the cliff into the river, which suggests their return to their watery underworld. The *rusalki’s or wilas’s* connection to both life and death echoes the life-giving and life-taking powers of the Neolithic Goddess.

The *rusalki’s* power to lure men to their deaths links them to the German Lorelei, the Celtic Melusina, the Greek Sirens and Harpies, and the French Ondine (Hubbs 29). The *sirin* is an anthropomorphic minor goddess in eastern Europe who “originated much earlier in Indo-European cultures” (Kelly 15). The *sirin* (siren) can be considered, along with the *rusalki*, a form of the Great Goddess as Virgin (Hubbs 27). The image of the *sirin*—that of a
woman with a bird’s body, tail, and feet—has adorned Russian household furniture and embroidery to this day (Kelly 15-16). While folk tradition images her as a bird with benevolent power, writers have compared the *sirin* to the Greek Sirens who lured sailors to their deaths (Kelly 16). Greek Sirens, along with other female monsters, such as the Furies, Gorgons, and Harpies, are descendants of Neolithic Snake and Bird goddesses (Dexter 141-45). These female monsters, along with witches in folklore, such as Baba Yaga, illustrate how prehistoric goddesses were transformed into monsters and witches in patriarchal classical traditions (Dexter 146-47).

One figure in Polish legend that appears to relate to the *rusalki* and the *sirin* is the Warsaw Mermaid. From about 1600 CE onward, a mermaid holding a raised sword in her right hand and a shield in her left hand has been the symbol on Warsaw’s coat of arms (Malinowski and Pellowski 70). In Poland she is referred to as *Syrena* or *Syrenka*, which means “mermaid” or “little mermaid,” respectively (Biega, “Warsaw’s Mermaid”). Although not located near the sea, Warsaw has an image of a mermaid to symbolize resistance to oppression (Malinowski and Pellowski 70). There are different variations of her story; however, the benevolent nature of the mermaid is repeatedly made apparent.

One version of the story tells of a nobleman who goes out hunting and comes upon a mermaid in the Vistula River. She directs him toward a village, and in the village a hospitable woman with twins feeds the nobleman. He tells the woman to name her children War and Sawa, and grants her the land along the river. The mermaid appears from the Vistula and predicts that the village will grow and that a city (Warsaw) will blossom there. The nobleman insists that the mermaid from the Vistula become the symbol for the city (Malinowski and Pellowski 70-71).
In a second version, a nobleman meets and falls in love with a mermaid from the Baltic Sea. He takes her back to Warsaw and keeps her hidden in his secret palace pool. The mermaid emerges from the pool and joins her husband in fighting with sword and shield against the Swedes in the sixteenth century. The Swedes are defeated, and the mermaid becomes Warsaw’s symbol of resistance (Malinowski and Pellowski 71).

These legends explain the origins of the mermaid as Warsaw’s symbol. Like the life-giving, nourishing Goddess of the Neolithic, the mermaid is associated with the waters of river and sea, specifically the Vistula River and the Baltic Sea. The mermaid appears in the image of half-woman, half-fish, which is similar to the hybrid Goddess imagery of the Neolithic. It is also similar to the fish or mermaid incarnations of Berehinia and rusalki. The ancient Slavic goddess Berehinia appears as a mermaid with a single or double tail in Russian woodcarving (Kelly 11). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Berehinia’s image became confused with the rusalka image (Kelly 15). In northern Russia, the rusalka has been called Berehinia and featured as a bare-breasted woman with a fish tail (Kelly 15). Melusine, a mermaid with two tails, is also found in German heraldry (“Heraldic Symbols”). As mentioned, the Slavic goddess Berehinia sometimes appears with a double tail. Goddesses in the forms of fish-women and mermaids are, therefore, predecessors to the Warsaw mermaid and other heraldic mermaids or sirens.

While her name, Syrena or Syrenka, suggests a comparison to the Greek Siren, the Warsaw mermaid’s protective and benevolent nature makes her resemble more the bird-woman sirin goddess of eastern Europe. The sirin’s image on objects has lent protective powers to homes and individuals, symbolizing “the magic of the rusalka in everyday life”
Similarly, the Warsaw mermaid protects her people against oppression, and her image can be found throughout all of Warsaw (Malinowski and Pellowski 70).

In an interesting piece of history, the Warsaw mermaid was not always the image on the Warsaw coat of arms. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a male griffin, modified from the classical griffin image, appeared on the Warsaw seal (Coleman 53). Over time, his gender and attributes changed: breasts and locks of flowing hair were added, followed by a mermaid tail replacing his dragon tail (Coleman 53). Although the male image antedates the mermaid image, female predecessors most likely inspired the male image. Like the hybrid half-man/half-animal Warsaw griffin, folk art of the *beregina* (pl. *bereginy*) and *rusalki* portray them as hybrid animals in either half-woman/half-bird form or half-woman/half-fish-*sirin* form (Hubbs 31). Tenth-century Slavic jewelry portrays the *sirin* with the wings of a bird and the tail of a dragon or lion (Hubbs 32). The *sirin’s* dragon tail recalls the description of the male griffin. All of these hybrid female and male images probably descend from the Old European Snake and Bird goddesses.

Another female figure in popular Polish legend that is connected to the Vistula River and the protection of her people is Queen Wanda. The legend of Queen Wanda begins with her father, King Krakus. King Krakus has three children, two sons and a daughter. After the youngest brother kills the older brother in order to obtain kingship and then goes into hiding, Wanda becomes queen and rules her country. Some years later, a Germanic ruler, Prince Rytygier, threatens to attack Poland, and Queen Wanda leads a surprise attack on his army. The prince sends an ultimatum to Queen Wanda demanding that she marry him and join their kingdoms, or else he will attack her land. Queen Wanda refuses to marry him, saying that she wishes to live in peace and would rather give up her life than be forced to marry against her
will. Early written accounts say the prince takes his own life, while later accounts say Wanda leaps into the Vistula River, sacrificing herself for her people (Malinowski and Pellowski 66-67).

Like the Warsaw Mermaid, Queen Wanda protects her people from oppression and tyrannical rule. Both are warrior maidens, taking up swords to defend their lands and its inhabitants. Queen Wanda drowns herself in the Vistula River to escape marriage to a German prince. Similarly, the rusalki are often considered spirits of young women who have drowned, even through the means of suicide (Strong, “Rusalki”). Hubbs says, “The cult of the rusalki expressed women’s desire for freedom and control” (35). The rusalki, as spirits of drowned girls, challenged patriarchal social order by living free of men and “from the constraints of patriarchal marriage” (Hubbs 35). Before battling the Germans, Queen Wanda is described as ruling alone, without a man, with wisdom and understanding (Malinowski and Pellowski 66). When she drowns herself, Queen Wanda frees herself from the constraints of a patriarchal marriage to Prince Rytygier and the tyrannical rule he would impose on the people and land of Poland.

Queen Wanda’s subtle connections to the rusalki link her in legend to these maiden goddesses. Her drowning death in the Vistula also links her to the Mother of Polish Waters. Historically, Polish writers and poets have identified the Vistula River with the maiden Wanda and vice versa (Kruszewska and Coleman 22). In popular imagination, Wanda has become “the very goddess of the great Polish stream, or a Naiad in its depths” (Kruszewska and Coleman 22). In a sixteenth-century piece of literature, Queen Anne appeals to Wanda by saying, “the goddess fair of fleet-flowing Vistula’s tide” (qtd. in Kruszewska and Coleman 23). The possible origins of the name Wanda suggest her connection to water and
fish, symbols of moisture that are connected to the Neolithic Goddess of Regeneration (Gimbutas, *Living* 30-31). An old Polish word, *weda*, meaning fish-hook, may relate to Wanda’s name, as well as the Polish word for water, *woda* (Kruszewska and Coleman 24). Furthermore, the Vistula River was known for centuries as *Biala Woda*, “White Water,” and was “used in pagan ritual” by the people living in its vicinity (Kruszewska and Coleman 24).

To summarize, the sacred Vistula River and the female spirit or goddess of the river have been historically linked to Queen Wanda.

As previously mentioned, the *rusalki* are identified with certain creatures, such as the snake. The *rusalka*’s hair is imagined as “a Medusa-like tangle of serpents” (Hubbs 32). When the maidens combed their hair, “the water snakes were ‘milked’ for their rain” (Hubbs 32). The *rusalki*’s association with snakes evokes the Neolithic Snake Goddess. The snake appears in some Polish myths, and in some tales, maidens are found marrying snakes. In the myth of “The Water Snake,” a young girl makes a promise to marry a snake she encounters by the river and is forced to keep her promise (Asala 111-13). Marrying or joining with a snake brings to mind the ancient hybrid woman/snake sculptures found throughout Neolithic Old European cultures.

In northern Poland, near the Baltic Sea, Polish myths continue to link watery realms to goddesses and female spirits. One myth tells of a race of sirens living on the Hel Peninsula, a piece of land “[j]utting out from the Polish coast into the Baltic beyond Gdansk” (Coleman 85). Interestingly, the Divine Feminine can be found in the very name of the peninsula. The Norse goddess of death and the underworld was named Hel. On the Hel Peninsula, sirens are linked in the myth to the watery realms of the underworld.

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1. In this tale, the snake’s name is Waz, symbolizing the World Serpent. In Russia, the snake is known as Koshchei the Deathless (Asala 111). Koshchei, in dragon form, is associated with Baba Yaga.
Three sirens, with tails for feet and amber-colored hair, reside in an underwater palace, which is the home of their father, the Amber King. The youngest siren desires to marry a Polish knight. One day, a witch who has been known to cut off the hair of other sirens, spots the youngest siren on the shore. She informs the youngest siren that her knight is coming, but that the golden ring that he throws into the sea will be the siren’s destruction.

When the siren witnesses a knight throw a golden ring into the ocean, she searches for days until she finally finds it. As she holds it up to the sunlight, it catches the eye of the witch who informs her that both the ring and the siren’s hair will be the witch’s to own. The siren does not listen to the witch; she longs only for the knight to wear the golden ring and accompany her to her underwater palace. The knight hears the siren’s mournful singing, but he imagines it is only the music of the sea. The witch continues to demand that the siren give her the ring, and when the siren keeps refusing, the witch raises her right hand to the sky, grabs the moon, and brings it down on the siren’s head. This action severs the siren’s amber locks. As the siren begins to die, she tells the knight to come to her palace and claim the ring. Sinking beneath the waves, the “last siren of Hel” asks an eel to hide the ring in the Amber Palace at the bottom of the Baltic Sea. The ring is meant to symbolize the betrothal ring of Poland (Coleman 85-92).

This myth presents the siren in conflict with a witch, who wishes to obtain the golden ring as well as the siren’s amber locks. As previously mentioned, rusalki and witches let their hair remain free and loose, symbolizing their fertility and freedom. In eastern Slavic countries, the bride’s hair is covered, braided, concealed, cut, and “sold” to the husband, symbolizing her loss of sexual autonomy and sexual potency (Rappoport 55-56). Philippa Rappoport says that it is possible that the rusalka, and her free-flowing hair, “is a remnant of
an older society in which women were freer to express their sexuality” (60). With the influence of male-dominated nomadic tribes, followed later by male-dominated Christianity, Slavic cultures became increasingly patriarchal over the millennia (Rappoport 60). The cutting and control of a bride’s hair at weddings may represent “an implicit attempt to order, own, or contain the chaotic freedom associated with the woman and her sexual energy and (sic) expressed in the rusalka” (Rappoport 62).

In Poland, traditional wedding customs include the oczepiny, the capping ceremony, whereby the bride receives the cap of the married woman on her head (Knab, Customs 210). Older practices that accompanied this ritual included the unbraiding and cutting of the bride’s hair (Knab, Customs 210). Brides would often try to run and hide from the groomsmen and delay the cutting of their hair, which in some regions, was cut by the groom himself (Knab, Customs 210-11). These Slavic wedding customs of cutting the bride’s hair relate back to the myth of the siren and the witch. In the myth, the witch ends up cutting the siren’s hair and the siren sinks into the sea. From one perspective, it is possible to see that the witch, in fact, prevents the siren from a patriarchal marriage by cutting the siren’s hair and killing her before she can wed the prince. On the other hand, a patriarchal influence in the myth can be seen in the battle between the witch and the siren.

Oleszkiewicz-Peralba says that the rusalka and the witch, Baba Yaga, are connected. Both give and take life, control the forces of nature, and have powers of transformation (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 26). These powers intimately relate to the Neolithic Goddess’s influence over life, death, and regeneration. Oleszkiewicz-Peralba goes on to say that the rusalka and Baba Yaga “are two aspects of the same triune goddess of all creation” related to the three phases of the moon and of womanhood: maiden, mother, and crone (26). It is
therefore suspicious to see in the myth the witch, most likely an incarnation of Baba Yaga, hunt and kill the siren, most likely an incarnation of a \textit{rusalka}. That the witch uses the moon, an ancient symbol associated with women and the Goddess, to kill the siren is all the more disturbing. The battle between maiden and crone disrupts the divine connections between the two, and the cutting of the maiden’s hair may symbolize a control of the \textit{rusalka’s}/maiden’s sexuality under patriarchal influences. Furthermore, the Amber King as ruler of the sea betrays the loss of power on the part of the sirens in the story. In folktales the \textit{rusalki} are sometimes represented as “daughters of a sea or bird king” (Hubbs 28). This most likely symbolizes a patriarchal addition to the tales of these ancient goddesses. Parthenogenetic goddesses of the Neolithic were gradually changed to brides, daughters, and wives in patriarchal cultures (Gimbutas, \textit{Language} 318). Instead of ruling the sea in their own right, the sirens’ father, the Amber King, now rules it.

A clash between an ancient matriarchal layer and a historically recent patriarchal layer of myth can also be surmised in the Polish myth, “Jurata, The Baltic Queen.” Long ago, the Queen Jurata ruled the Baltic Sea from her underwater amber and gold palace. She created laws to protect her sea and the creatures in it. When a young fisherman ignores her laws and begins catching too many fish, Jurata sets out to the surface of the water to drown him. When Jurata lays her eyes on the fisherman, however, she ends up falling in love with him. The fisherman returns the feelings when he catches sight of her. The two continue their contact, which angers the old Slavic thunder and lightning god Perkun, who is also in love with Jurata. Perkun is infuriated that Jurata has fallen in love with a mortal, and so he creates a storm so strong that it destroys Jurata’s palace and everything in the vicinity. Jurata and the fisherman are never seen again, and some people along the coast say that they continue to
hear their calls for one another. The amber that washes up on the Baltic shore is said to be pieces of Jurata’s undersea amber palace (Malinowski and Pellowski 79-80).

On painted Old European cultic vessels, the Great Goddess as an “all-seeing and all-creating Bird and Eye Goddess” is encircled by snakes and deer horn crescents, which link her to the three spheres of nature: sky, earth, and underworld (or sea) (Hubbs 6). By the third millennium, the Goddess’s realms “are circumscribed by masculine figures” who exert more power over the spheres of nature (Hubbs 6). In comparison, in the myth of the Baltic Queen, the Goddess’s three spheres of nature are shared with a male god. Jurata’s sphere is the sea; the Slavic god Perkun now reigns supreme in the sky. While Jurata still holds power in her undersea kingdom, she is subject to the violence of Perkun’s anger as he wields celestial powers in the form of storms.

The presence of a Baltic Sea Queen suggests the survival of an Old European element in the myth. It is Jurata who rules the sea rather than the Amber King. Gimbutas says that “[a] remnant in the historical era of the goddesses’ ruling power is indicated by the usage of the term queen for those who were not married to Indo-European deities but who continued to be powerful in their own right” (Language 318). In this myth, Jurata is known as the Baltic Sea Queen. She rules in her own right and is not married to the Indo-European god, Perkun. Also, her amber palace recalls the association of goddesses, such as Freya, Oshun, Amberella, and the Electrides, with amber (Holland 246). The destruction of Jurata, her lover, and her amber palace at the hands of Perkun, however, suggests an Indo-European patriarchal layer to the myth. This myth may reflect the historical realities of the invasions of Old European cultures by Indo-Europeans and the later usurpation of the Goddess’s powers by Slavic male gods.
While the Slavic pantheon that has come down to us from ancient (male) sources stresses the supremacy of male warrior and sky gods (Phillips and Kerrigan 29), Slavic myths sometimes tell a different story. The sun, for instance, was not always considered male.

Stories tell of the sun “dressed in female clothing” (Kelly 14). One Polish myth, “The Three Magic Wishes,” is about a woman named Saule, who is pulled in a large golden carriage by six cats. She offers to grant a man three wishes for helping her pull her carriage out of the mud. Saule and her carriage of six cats relate to Saule, the pre-Christian Slavic sun goddess (Asala 31-34). Saule is also the name of the Lithuanian sun goddess who lived with her daughters in a castle at the far end of the sea or beyond the high hill of the sky (Dixon-Kennedy 252). The presence of Saule in Polish and Lithuanian myths demonstrates how the Slavs and the Balts shared many deities. Jurata can be compared to the Baltic Sea goddess Juras Mate, and Perkun is connected to Perkunas (Perun to the eastern Slavs) (Jones and Pennick 174). Perun, “Chief of the Varangian pantheon,” is similar to the Norse Thor and the Greek Zeus (Hubbs 18). He “fertilizes” the land through war and “inseminates” with his thunderbolt (Hubbs 18-19), which hints at the violent male takeover of creative powers that once belonged to the parthenogenetic Goddess.

“The Three Magic Wishes” hints at how Polish myth can retain an ancient female sun deity without explicitly stating her identity as such. As previously noted, Old European Goddess imagery on Neolithic vases was sometimes accompanied by sun imagery, linking the Goddess to the powers of the sun and regeneration. The Funnel-necked Beaker site of Gródek Nadbuzny unearthed axes decorated with “the cult of the sun and of heaven” (Kowalczyk 116), and a vessel from Cmielow connected the Bird Goddess to the regenerative powers of the sun.
While “pagan Slavs personified the sky as the Svarog, whose son was named Dazhbog, which literally means ‘the Sun’” (Asala 81), the Polish myth, “The Death of the Sun Lord,” implies Dazhbog can only become Sun Lord by attempting to usurp the power of the feminine sun for himself. In the myth, Dazhbog is a boy who is called the Sun Lord among the people of the land. A girl dressed in red visits his parents in a dream and tells them that if Dazhbog wants to truly become the Sun Lord, he must find the Tree of the Sun and take a golden apple from it. When he finds the tree in a meadow, the girl in red appears and tells him that he must guard the Tree of the Sun for nine days and nine nights from two wild black wolves before he can take an apple. If he fails, the sun will kill him. The rusalki’s oracular powers allow them to foresee the sun killing Dazhbog, and so they place a spell over everyone in the world to prevent them from following the sun’s orders to take Dazhbog’s life.

Dazhbog fails in his mission to guard the Tree of the Sun, and a woman in black appears before him. She tells him that she is the Mother of the Sun and pronounces a death sentence upon him for taking the title “Sun Lord” without deserving the name. Dazhbog eventually forgets about his adventure, marries a maiden, and moves on with his life. Unfortunately for him, the rusalki forget to place a spell over one creature to prevent his death. While out hunting, Dazhbog goes to drink water from a stream and a crab rips out his tongue. On his deathbed, the Mother of the Sun appears once again and tells him that the sun was able to find someone to kill him after all and that he had no right assuming the title of the Sun Lord (Asala 81-84).

This myth is interesting in that the conflict between matriarchal and patriarchal layers of the story results in the ultimate victory of the matriarchal layer, represented by the girl
dressed in red and the Mother of the Sun. The Indo-European sun god Dazhbog is defeated.

The emphasis of his lack of entitlement to bear the title, “Sun Lord,” recalls the Indo-European male gods’ usurpations of the powers and functions of the Great Goddess.

Dazhbog is a god most likely of Iranian origins who was included in the Varangian pantheon of Kiev (Hubbs 17). However, Hubbs notes that the Varangian gods were still considered by the peasantry “to be goddess-borne or to derive their functions from earlier feminine prototypes” (17).2

In the Polish myth, the girl in red most likely is the sun herself. In Finnish and Ukrainian folklore, a woman or maiden described as “red” represents the sun (Hubbs 17-18). Haarmann says that for more than a millennium, eastern Slavs have had contact with Finno-Ugrians, and among the latter peoples, an “identification of the sun with a corpulent woman” survived into the twentieth century. In Slavic folklore, even when the sun is described as male, he is contained within the realm of maidens or mothers (Hubbs 18). The centrality of the maiden in red and the Mother of the Sun in this Polish myth demonstrate how Dazhbog must refer to them to obtain his own power.3

The *rusalki* also feature in this myth. They foresee the future and try to prevent the death of Dazhbog. It seems odd that as spirits associated with water, they forget to place a spell on a water crab. Hubbs says that as Fates, the *vily* (*rusalki*) of South Slavic folklore, can protect men or they can lure those men who denigrate them to their deaths (17). The *rusalki* seek to protect Dazhbog in this tale, but they forget to place a spell on the crab. Considering

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2. Dazhbog is also considered the father of the Zorya, the sisters of fate (Asala 81), but this is probably a patriarchal addition to the myths of these dawn and dusk sister goddesses.

3. Poles believed Dazhbog resided in the east and rode on a golden chariot drawn by twelve white, fire-breathing horses (Dixon-Kennedy 62). As discussed in the previous chapter, horses originally accompanied the Goddess.
that they hold divinatory powers to see into the future, their “forgetting” may have ultimately
been a part of a vision of allowing the will of the Feminine (the sun and the Mother of the
Sun) to come to pass. In this myth, the patriarchal takeover of the feminine sun by a male god
fails, which, interestingly, contradicts the realities of the male supremacy within the
Varangian pantheon. Although the male warrior and sky gods dominate the Varangian
pantheon, scholars note that they were most likely relatively new gods who were shortly
displaced by Christianity (Phillips and Kerrigan 29). Hubbs sees the pantheon reflecting an
amalgamation of fertility and warrior gods, deriving their functions from earlier goddesses
(17). This notion of ancient female predecessors is also found in the god Perun. Scholars
have made a connection between Perun’s name and the Norse Jord, Thor’s mother (Phillips
and Kerrigan 43), which may indicate the male god’s powers deriving from the ancient
Mother Goddess.

There is further evidence in Polish folklore of an association of female deities with
the sky. Another type of rusalki that frequent the folklore and folk life of Poland are the Sky
Women. The rusalki-Sky Women were believed to rise from the waters and dance at the
beginning of summer (Asala 72). They were responsible for snowstorms, especially the first
one of the year, and Slavic women honored the Sky Women by making snow women and
children (Asala 72). This connection of the Sky Women to water and sky evokes ancient
memories of the Snake and Bird Goddess of the Neolithic. The Snake and Bird Goddess is
“the goddess of waters and air” who ruled the life-giving, primordial waters of both earth and
sky (Gimbutas, *Goddesses* 112). The Sky Women are said to dwell in the waters of the earth,
but they are also connected to the weather and to the moisture of the sky. The fact that Slavic
women honored them by making snow figures suggests the special relationship Slavic women had with these goddesses.

In the myth, “Snowdrop and Flame,” a wife prays in winter to the Sky Women for a daughter. The woman wishes for as many children as there are icicles outside, and as she says this, an icicle falls into her mouth, warming her insides. That autumn, the woman gives birth to a snow child, and her rapid growth signals to the parents that she is an enchanted child. The child, named Snowdrop, associates only with winter and cold weather, sleeping outside and dancing in snowstorms.

Although the mother loves her daughter, she wishes for a fire son. Upon her request, a spark leaps from the fire and singes the clothing covering her stomach. After the summer solstice, the mother gives birth to a son, Flame, who only wants to associate with warmth and summer. Since Snowdrop cannot stand the heat and her brother cannot stand the cold, the two keep their distance from one another.

The mother and father eventually pass away, and when Snowdrop becomes a maiden, she relies on her mother’s teachings to discover how she and her brother can live together. Snowdrop makes a cloak spun of spider’s silk under the full moon to keep her brother warm in her presence. The two travel and live together, and soon a nobleman asks Snowdrop to be his wife. The nobleman makes an ice castle for her beneath the mountains and a second castle filled with fireplaces for her brother.

Snowdrop gives birth to a child. Her brother, Flame, attends the feast for the child, but scares away the guests with his searing heat. Snowdrop’s husband and brother argue, and Flame gives the nobleman a hug, which burns the nobleman to death. In her anger at the killing of her husband, Snowdrop attacks her brother and the two fight to the death.
Snowdrop becomes a melted puddle of water and her brother becomes a smoking cinder. In the end, three Sky Women descend from the heavens and return there with Snowdrop’s child. Snowdrop’s child is now the rainbow, visible, sometimes, after a storm (Asala 72-76).

In this tale, the Sky Women demonstrate their life-giving powers and control over nature’s forces by impregnating the mother with the elements of nature: water (an icicle) and fire (a flame). This form of impregnation relates to the parthenogenetic abilities of Neolithic goddesses who could create “from themselves without the help of male insemination” (Gimbutas, Language 318).

The mother’s request for her first child to be a daughter, and the fact that Snowdrop’s first child born to her is a daughter, suggests the matrilineal practices of Old Europe and the value of mother/daughter relationships. It also is Snowdrop’s mother who teaches her the old ways, which exemplifies the passing of knowledge from mother to daughter. Snowdrop’s predilection for wintry weather and the cold outdoors reminds the reader that she is both a daughter of a mortal woman and Sky Women (goddesses). In the end of the story, Snowdrop’s daughter returns to live with the Sky Women goddesses. Her incarnation as a rainbow, which connects earth to sky, mortals to immortals, can be likened to the powers of the Bird and Snake Goddess, as well as to the rusalki-Sky Women.

The rusalki are connected not only to the skies, rivers, and lakes in Poland, but also to the forests. In Belorussia, the rusalki are connected to the forest and field (Hubbs 28). Among South Slavic countries, where they are known as the vily, the rusalki are linked to Artemis as huntresses and warrior maidens (Hubbs 29). The connection between the rusalka and Artemis may also exist in Poland. Dilwica (Dziewona, Dziewana) is the name of an ancient goddess of the hunt in Poland (Dixon-Kennedy 68). She has close parallels to the
Slav and Czech goddess Devana and the Serbian Diiwica (Jones and Pennick 187). Dilwica “rode with her followers and her hunting dogs through the forests” and was “depicted as eternally beautiful and radiant and totally unapproachable” (Dixon-Kennedy 68). Her hounds would tear a person to pieces if she and her followers were stumbled upon in the forest (Dixon-Kennedy 68). The *rusalka* and Dilwica are both linked to the forests of Poland. Dilwica appears to have connections to the Roman Diana or Greek Artemis. The huntress goddess Artemis had a hunting party made up solely of young women, and she was known to have men killed for spying on her and her nymphs while bathing (Hubbs 28). In comparison, the *rusalki* are often a group of young girls. They live without men, who may end up as their victims (Hubbs 28). A *rusalka* “is virginal like Artemis, and yet the giver of life and death,” connected to the goddesses of the Neolithic (Hubbs 29). Dilwica, as well, probably has ancient origins. Some say she is an aspect of the Great Goddess and that “the name Dilwica was given her only to protect her true, secret name” (Dixon-Kennedy 68). Both the *rusalka* and Dilwica suggest the presence of the maiden aspect of the Goddess in Poland. Although only a small amount of information exists about Dilwica, her Amazon strength and power resemble that of the *rusalki*, the Warsaw mermaid, and Queen Wanda.

Other brief mentions in encyclopedic texts that include Polish goddesses mention Dziwożony, Wild Women spirits (or a singular spirit) of the woods who are connected to nature, the earth, and disorder (Ann and Imel 47). They discover the secrets of nature by burrowing in the forest floor (Ann and Imel 47). Wild Women spirits of the woods and forests suggest similarities to the free-natured *rusalki*. The Mamony, perhaps equivalent to the Dziwożony, is a Wild Woman spirit or spirits of the forest in Poland (Ann and Imel 55). In comparison, among the Balts, thirteenth-century texts reference the goddess Medeine as a
goddess of the forest (Jones and Pennick 176). Wild Women of the forest also suggest a connection to Baba Yaga, who is described in Slavic folklore as a witch living in a remote part of the forest. She is “the khoziaika lesa (‘mistress of the forest’)” (Dixon-Kennedy 25). Since Baba Yaga and the rusalka share similar powers and are connected as aspects of a triune Slavic Goddess (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 26), it is plausible that all these different feminine spirits of the forest share an underlying origin in the worship of an ancient Great Goddess.

Mother Moist Earth is the Mother Goddess aspect of the Slavic trinity that represents the Great Goddess (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 16). As previously noted, the Mother Goddess survives in Polish myth and folklore in her aquatic incarnation as the Guardian Mother of the Vistula and as Kupaya. The Mother Goddess also survives in myths related to the earth, to animals, and to the Black Madonna of Czestochowa.

In Old Europe, the Mother Goddess was a complex figure combining elements from both Paleolithic and Neolithic eras (Gimbutas, Goddesses 152). The earth was both her womb and her tomb. She was both light and dark, creation and destruction, the giver of life and fertility and the taker of life (Gimbutas, Goddesses 152). She was a Creator who created “from her own substance” (Gimbutas, Goddesses 196); however, her successor, the Indo-European Earth Mother, did not retain this power to create from herself, but rather was subject to impregnation by male gods (Gimbutas, Goddesses 196).

Among the eastern Slavs, the Earth Mother has survived in Indo-European Slavic mythology and culture in her representation as Mother Moist Earth (Moist Mother Earth); among the western Slavs, she is known as the Holy Earth (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 26). These representations of the Great Mother probably derive from ancient Slavic goddesses such as
The Finno-Slavic Mokosh and the Slavic Zlota Baba (Golden Woman) (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 28). The Earth Mother, while nourishing and life-giving, also “represents the utmost ethical values of truth and justice and is invoked as a witness in disputes” (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 33). She hears oaths, confessions of sins, acts as judge, and can take life by devouring the guilty (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 33-34).

These ancient memories of the Earth Mother as a judge and a hearer of oaths survive in the following Polish expressions of condemnation: “‘Let the earth swallow me up’ (Niech mnie ziemia pochlonie) or ‘Let the earth sink under me’ (Niech sie ziemia pode mna zapadnie)” (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 34). In multiple Polish myths, the earth devours the guilty, suggesting the presence of the Earth Mother as a representative of justice and truth. One myth tells of a starving old woman who comes to a town to sell her eggs to prevent hunger. The villagers turn her away, and on her way back home, the woman slips on ice, falls, and breaks all of her eggs. In her rage, the old woman curses the people and their village. At the moment she speaks her curse, the earth opens and the village and its inhabitants tumble to their deaths (Coleman 4-5).

In this myth, the starving old woman can be seen as an anthropomorphic incarnation or representative of the Earth Mother. The old woman embodies the Earth Mother’s powers to both bring life as well as take it. The eggs in her basket remind one of the ancient meanings of the egg. Ancient mythologies tell of the universe originating from a cosmic egg created by a cosmic snake or water bird (Gimbutas, Goddesses 102). Eggs, representing new life, potential, and fertility, decorated anthropomorphic vases and figurines of the Neolithic Goddess (Gimbutas, Goddesses 163-68). The old woman’s basket of eggs may represent the life-giving powers of the Earth Mother. When the old woman is shunned by the village folk,
her curse and the subsequent devouring of the village and people by the earth, symbolize the life-taking powers of the old crone and the Earth Mother. Just as the earth can issue forth new life (eggs), it can take life back into itself, acting as both judge and tomb for the perpetrators.

In Kievan epics of ancient Rus,’ the first Russian state, Mother Earth presides over the destiny of the male heroes. The heroes Ilya, Dobrynia, and Aliosha draw their powers from women and the land, and at the end of their stories they are dragged “to the depths of Mother Moist Earth’s womb” (Hubbs 154-55). The peasantry, who continued to worship Mother Moist Earth, transmuted “the epic tradition of their rulers into cautionary tales: Only those who protect the community and are close to Mother Moist Earth can hope to win her favor, and in doing so accept their ephemeral role in the cycle of life” (Hubbs 160).

In one Polish myth, Mother Earth acts in the same capacity as a devourer of men who stray from her rules. In the story, a soldier tries to free the Golden Goose, which is really an enchanted princess, from her imprisonment in a lake beneath Warsaw. In order to break the spell, the man must go to the lake three days in a row, obtain one hundred ducats in gold from it, and spend the money all in one day on frivolous items. On the last day, the man decides to help a starving friend, and in that moment, there is lightning and thunder; the earth opens and he sinks in. The Golden Goose princess continues to ride on the lake beneath Warsaw (Coleman 53-55).

In Polish legend, it is apparent that Mother Earth has the final say in the destiny of men and women. In one story, the Tatars are attacking the city of Kraków. The Norbertine nuns flee from the invaders and take refuge in a tiny chapel in the woods. Just before the Tatars are about to capture and slaughter them, God intervenes, and the entire chapel with the nuns in it sinks into the earth. The rocks near where the chapel previously was located are
called Virgins’ Rocks (Coleman 34). While this story is obviously a Christian story, it is interesting to note that “God’s” intervention is similar to the numerous stories detailing the intervention of Mother Earth/Mother Moist Earth in swallowing peoples and whole villages. The pre-Christian Earth Mother has her powers usurped by a Christian god in this story, yet the earth continues to act in “her” ancient capacity of deciding the fates of individuals.

Gimbutas notes that up to the twentieth century, the Earth Mother continued to be worshipped on summits with large stones. Stones of the Earth Mother contained the powers to bestow blessings and fecundity on those who rubbed, sat on, or crawled over the stones (Gimbutas, Language 150-51). The Virgins’ Rocks located near where the earth swallows the nuns suggest the powerful connection of the Earth Mother to stones.4

The ancient worship of the Earth Mother on mountain summits may shed light on why Slavic myths continuously feature hills and mountains, often with a palace at the summits. As previously discussed, worship of the Earth Mother was an ancient practice among the Slavs, who often built temples and forts on high ground. In the Polish version of a popular Slavic myth, “The Glass Mountain,” a palace of pure gold sits atop a mountain, harboring an enchanted princess inside (Lang 114-18). In another myth, a flaming castle is situated high in the Tatra Mountains. The ghosts in the castle scare anyone from entering or telling others of its secrets (Asala 101-03).

Besides Polish rivers, the earth and mountains in Polish (and Russian) are referred to as feminine in gender (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 32). In Polish, Mateczka Ziemia translates to “little mother earth” (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 32). The Polish word for earth, ziemia, is connected to names for the Earth Goddess. The Lithuanian goddess Žemyna (Latvian Zemes

4. Stones and rocks in the shape of a woman’s body were also considered sacred by Slavic peasants (Phillips and Kerrigan 55).
Mate) is the personification of Mother Earth and derives her name from the word for earth, žeme (Gimbutas, *Living* 208). Furthermore, the Slavic Mother Moist Earth is known as Mat’ Syra Zemlya (Gimbutas, *Living* 208). The personification of the earth as Mother survives in Slavic and Baltic languages.

In the Neolithic era, the earth (along with the cosmos, sea, and otherworld/underworld) was intimately connected to the Divine Feminine. As previously discussed, anthropomorphic female figurines found in Neolithic pits in southern Poland suggest prehistoric connections to the Earth Mother. Neolithic longhouses, along with the burial positions and the shape of burial mounds and barrows, evoked the body of the Earth Mother. Pre-Christian mounds found in Kraków, which probably date back to the seventh century CE, are attributed to the legendary rulers Wanda and Krakus (Deck-Partyka 122). Legend says that Wanda’s mound is the location where she jumped into the Vistula (Coleman 38). Polish writers tell of the mound being built in memory of Wanda, and that “the people threw it up with their own hands, mingling its soil with their tears, when . . . they were unable to find the actual body of their queen” (Kruszewska and Coleman 26). The connections between Wanda and a mound, and between Wanda and the Polish people, perhaps tap into ancient memories of female ancestor reverence and the veneration of the Earth Mother.

The association with mountains and the Goddess is found in the names for mountains in central Europe. Besides Zhiva or Zywie, other names for the Slavic Great Mother include “Zaleta, Jezy Baba, Baba Jaga, and Baba-Jedza (which correspond to the Russian Baba Yaga)” (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 28). Many mountains in central Europe include “Baba” in
their names and are “named from this ancient goddess” (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 28). The Slavic folk figure of Baba Yaga will be discussed shortly in more depth.

Mountains in Poland continued to be places of worship into Christian times. Pre-Christian places of worship were superimposed with Christian temples and sanctuaries. The erection of the Christian sanctuary, Swiety Krzyz (Holy Cross), on the mountain of Lysa Góra or Lysiec (Bald Mountain) in southern Poland, was built on the ruins of a pagan temple (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 31-32). Lysa Góra is associated in popular legend as a place where witches hold their Sabbaths (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 32). This legend of witches hints at the mountain’s association with pre-Christian Goddess worship. Max Dashú says that popular beliefs existed throughout Europe at the end of the Middle Ages of a divine “Mistress of the Night” who ventured out with spirits and witches on pagan festivals and presided over joyous revelries on mountaintops (“Tregenda”). The Lysa Góra legend speaks to this popular belief. The association of witches with devils in the Polish legend (Benet 72) indicates the Christian demonization of the Goddess and her worshippers.

The “presumed darkness” attributed to Lysa Góra “is countered by the nearby Jasna Góra, or ‘Bright’ . . . Mountain, where the sanctuary of the most venerated Polish icon, ironically the Black Madonna of Czestochowa, is located” (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 32). This juxtaposition of dark and light recalls the paradoxical nature of the Neolithic Goddess, who presided over both life and death. Dark and light did not carry the Christian connotations of dark (evil) and light (good) in Old Europe. In the Neolithic, black represented the color of the fertile soil of Mother Earth, while white symbolized the color of bones and death (Gimbutas, Language xix). The association of black with the fertile earth continued in Russian culture with the veneration of Mother Moist Earth (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 34). In an interesting play
on light and dark, the sanctuary of the Black Madonna is found on the “bright” Jasna Góra, perhaps a subconscious remembrance of the unity of light and dark in the Neolithic era. In Slavic countries, the cult of Mother Earth continued in the form of the veneration of Mary, known as the Mother of God, *Matka Boska*, in Poland, and the God Birth-Giver, *Boguroditsa*, in Russia (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 34-35). The Christian Mary, then, subsumed within her some of the qualities and associations of the Slavic Earth Mother.

The sanctuary of the Black Madonna of Czestochowa on an earlier pagan site links the Black Madonna to the pre-Christian worship of the Goddess on mountaintops. Numerous myths attest to the Black Madonna’s miracle-workings and her connection to Polish political sovereignty. In the seventeenth century, the Madonna’s sanctuary on Jasna Góra withheld a Swedish invasion for six weeks. The withdrawal of the Swedes “was hailed as a miracle” and the Black Madonna became “venerated as the ‘Queen of Poland’” (Jakubowska 12). Like the Baltic Sea Queen Jurata, the Madonna was given the title of “Queen,” recalling her association with females (goddesses) ruling in their own right. The Black Madonna of Czestochowa is also connected to the Vistula River. During the Polish-Soviet War of 1920, the “miracle on the Vistula” occurred, in which the Black Madonna descended on the Vistula River on August 15th (her Assumption day) in a fiery cloud to “smite the Bolsheviks with confusion” and protect Polish sovereignty from the Soviet army (Jakubowska 12). Her appearance on the Vistula River is similar to the Vistula’s connections to the warrior maidens, Queen Wanda and the Warsaw Mermaid, who fought to resist the oppression of the Polish people. The Mother of God’s appearance on the Vistula also brings to mind the Mother Goddess of the Vistula River.
To the Indo-Europeans the earth represented the Great Mother, but to the Old Europeans the Snake and Bird goddesses were maternal figures that were depicted, at times, in terracotta statue form holding a baby (Gimbutas, *Goddesses* 142). In Poland, snakes were connected to women giving birth. Snakes were considered “the spirit of both the hearth and the bathhouse (a sauna-type building where women often gave birth)” (Asala 35). Snakes have been associated in folktales with miraculous births (Asala 35), suggesting a connection between the Snake Goddess and expectant mothers in Polish myths. Among the Balts, a sacred house-snake, Zaltys, was kept as a guardian around stoves and sacred places and associated with the sun goddess Saule (Jones and Pennick 174, 177). While the Mother Goddess appears in the form of the Earth Mother in Polish myths, she also appears in animal form, which demonstrates the survival of an Old European mythical layer.

Known throughout Poland is the legend of three brothers, Lech, Cech, and Rus. The brothers have their own territories, but this does not stop them from fighting and invading one another’s lands. One day, Lech sees a mother eagle and he decides to steal one of her young. Every time Lech comes close to stealing a baby eagle, the mother eagle attacks him and makes him retreat. Eventually, Lech shares with his brothers the lesson he learns from the eagle: that the brothers should model the behavior of the mother eagle and respect one another’s territories or “nests” and not destroy them. The brothers agree to a truce and peace exists among the brothers as they each rule their lands: Lech’s land becomes known as Lechia (Poland), Cech’s land becomes the Czech Republic, and Rus’s land becomes Russia. The wisdom of the mother eagle leads to the first city in Lechia to be named Gniezno (“nest”), and the eagle becomes the symbol of Poland (Malinowski and Pellowski 59-60).
The mother eagle in this story suggests a connection to the maternal Bird Goddess figures of Old Europe. The mother eagle defends her young with a maternal ferocity that leaves Lech in perpetual defeat. Since the Goddess as Bird figures so prominently in Old European art, it is possible that the mother eagle is an epiphany of the Goddess, found within the eagle symbol of Poland. In comparison, Mary B. Kelly says that two-headed birds were associated with the Goddess before they later became the symbol for the imperial power of the Russian Czar (14).

Although the founders and leaders of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Russia are males, the story hints that these lands would not have grown or flourished if not for the lessons the mother eagle imparted to Lech in their interactions together. Like the Mother of the Vistula with her green bird guarding the sacred waters of Poland, the mother eagle guards her young, and she teaches the brothers the value of peace. A mother protecting her young can be compared to the animal-masked mother and child statues from the Neolithic era, which became the forerunners of the Madonna and child images within Christianity (Gimbutas, Living 12). The image of the famous Black Madonna of Czestochowa holding Jesus can be seen as a continuation of this pre-Christian spiritual tradition demonstrating the power and survival of the Mother Goddess in Poland.

Besides snakes and birds, other animals sacred to the Mother Goddess appear in Polish myth. Before Christianity, ancient Polish myth portrayed the dog as a symbol of the Mother Goddess; however, “[I]ater Slavic myth makes the dog an enemy of both vampires and snakes” (Asala 19). The dog, as previously mentioned in Chapter Four, was a double for the Death and Regeneration Goddess, and vases from north-central and southeastern Poland were linked to the Goddess’s epiphany of a dog.
The Mother Goddess is also represented in dual mother/daughter forms in Polish myth. The Old European Pregnant Vegetation Goddess was linked to the fertility of the earth and the annual cycle of growth and harvest (Gimbutas, *Living* 16). Later, in historical times, she became “represented in dual form, very likely depicting mother-daughter pairs, the spring-summer and fall-winter aspects of the goddess” (Gimbutas, *Living* 16). This duality of the Earth Mother and her daughter has survived in the Polish myth of “The Flower Queen’s Daughter,” which will be discussed in more detail in the Baba Yaga section.\(^5\)

In Slavic traditions, Mother Earth is related to another duality: divine twins. For instance, rituals related to the Russian agrarian calendar and Mother Moist Earth incorporate a mythology “centered on male and female Divine Twins,” which “resembles that of the Greek Apollo and Artemis born of the Great Mother Goddess Leto” (Hubbs 54). Some of the male and female divinities worshipped in Russia are a god called Lado/Ladon or Dido/Dida and a goddess called Lada (Hubbs 62). Poles worshipped twin mother goddesses who themselves were mothers of divine twins. Short encyclopedia entries reference the Polish goddesses Didilia and Zizilia as “twin mothers of divine twins” who “were venerated as goddesses of erotic and maternal love” (Dixon-Kennedy 67). Didilia is described as a creator of life and a fertility goddess; Zizilia is described as a goddess of love and sexuality (Ann and Imel 46, 73). Just as Lada was worshipped in Russia, she was also venerated among the Poles (Hubbs 62). Lada was linked to the Scythian Tabiti-Hestia as well as to the Greek Leda, the mother of twins Castor and Pollux (Hubbs 62). Lada has also been linked to a Latvian goddess, the Finnish-Slavic Mokosh, the Golden *Baba* of the Ugrians, the

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5. Mother/daughter motifs also survive in Slavic embroideries, which feature the Goddess and her daughter(s). The daughter can be seen emerging from between her mother’s legs, resting in the skirt or body of the Goddess, or standing next to or above her (Kelly 36-37).
Scandinavian Loduna, and the Great Mother Goddess of the northern Letts and Mordvins (Hubbs 61). Lado and Lada are names commonly found “in the songs and chants of girls and women planting, harvesting, or performing wedding rituals” (Hubbs 61). Polish wedding songs that incorporate some of the refrains to Lada and Lado will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

Fertility goddesses such as Didilia and Zizilia can be understood as the Neolithic Pregnant Vegetation Goddess in dual form. Myths of mothers and daughters, like Kore and Demeter, or the Polish myth of the Fairy Queen and her daughter, represent “the parthenogenetic aspects of earth’s creativity prior to masculine intervention” (Hubbs 53). They represent two females holding sway over the earth’s cycles of fertility, growth, and decay. The pairing of divine twins, such as Lada and Lado, suggests a more recent mythical layer where the parthenogenetic Goddess “shares her power with an equally mighty masculine challenger” (Hubbs 54). As will continue to be discussed in the next section, the Neolithic Goddess’s dual and triple natures continue to resonate in the folkloric figure of Baba Yaga.

In the Neolithic cultures of the region of modern-day Poland, the unearthing of rich female burials suggests how women, especially older women, were venerated in both life and death as priestesses, spiritual leaders, and ancestresses. In the Linear Pottery culture, elder women as clan mothers “received the highest social respect” (Gimbutas, Civilization 334). The denigration of crones today is paralleled in the demonization of the Slavic crone figure Baba Yaga, who nonetheless retains, in folklore, fragmented pieces of her ancient Goddess identity.
Baba Yaga is one of the best-known figures in Slavic folklore and fairy tales. In Russian folktales, she is known as Baba Yaga, while in Poland she is known as Ienzababa, Jezda, or Jezi Baba (Strong, “Baba Yaga’s Hut”; Asala 54). The Polish name for Yaga, Jezda, is associated with nightmares, which links her to her role as Goddess of the underworld and initiation (Hubbs 40-41). While Baba Yaga has become an “old witch with magical powers” in Slavic folklore (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 23), her many titles, qualities, and incarnations hint at her identity as a once all-powerful ancient Goddess. She has been referred to as “the Guardian of the Underworld, the Mistress of the Forest, the Goddess of Death and Regeneration, the Wolf-Goddess, the Bone Mother, the Mistress of the Animals, and the Guardian of the Water of Life and Death” (Strong, “Baba Yaga’s Hut”). In the Slavic trinity of the Great Goddess, Baba Yaga represents the crone or wise woman aspect of the Goddess (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 16).

Baba Yaga’s divine attributes and benevolent qualities are obscured in many ways by her appearance as a frightening witch in Slavic folklore. Baba Yaga is often described as a skinny old hag with a wild tangle of hair, withered skin, and iron breasts, nose, and teeth (Hubbs 38). She dwells in a magical hut in a dark forest, and her hut is surrounded by a picket fence made out of human bones crowned with glowing skulls (Hubbs 37-38). Her hut is made out of human body parts (Hubbs 38). Her dwelling suggests her cannibalistic nature, since she preys on those who stray into her realm (Strong, “Baba Yaga’s Hut”). Baba Yaga’s hut is not fixed to the earth but rather sits on chicken legs (Strong, “Baba Yaga’s Hut”).

The descriptions of Baba Yaga’s appearance and home contain aspects of the Old European Goddess. As previously discussed, the Neolithic Goddess was often depicted in snake or bird form. Descriptions of Baba Yaga’s tangle of hair “like the serpent-locks of the
Muniz 114

Medusa” (Hubbs 38), suggest a relationship to the Neolithic Snake Goddess as well as to the *rusalki*. Hubbs says that Baba Yaga is an archaic goddess with roots dating back to Paleolithic hunters. Her oldest form “is that of the shamanic Mistress of Animals, the ancient bird goddess whose abode on hens’ feet is as one with her own body” (Hubbs 41-42). Miriam Robbins Dexter links Baba Yaga’s bird-legged hut to Old European goddesses. She says that “since the goddess was the descendant of the Neolithic European bird and snake goddess, the bird’s legs were her own; the goddess and her dwelling were one. She was the hut on bir[d’s] legs” (147).

Baba Yaga’s bird’s legs hint at her ancestral link to the Old European Bird Goddess. Gimbutas compares Baba Yaga’s bird’s feet to the bird’s feet motifs on Upper Paleolithic walls as well as to vases from the Neolithic and Copper Ages in Europe and Anatolia. She makes mention of a vessel from the Funnel-necked Beaker site of Cmielów, in southern Poland, that features bird’s feet motifs and a handle topped with a mask of the Bird Goddess (*Language* 244). Also, she analyzes an anthropomorphic urn from Pomerania, which features bird’s feet for hands (*Language* 245). Bird Goddess funeral urns, discussed previously in the fourth chapter, portray the body of the Bird Goddess as a dwelling place for human remains. Just as Baba Yaga’s body is the hut, the Bird Goddess urns were the homes of the dead placed inside them. The vase from Cmielów and the Pomeranian urns symbolize the Goddess of Death and Rebirth in her bird of prey form (Gimbutas, *Language* 245) and demonstrate how Baba Yaga’s bird’s feet have prehistoric origins. Furthermore, a Slavic domestic spirit, known as Kikimora, was said to help women with household chores (Dixon-Kennedy 150). She is described as having chicken’s legs for feet and a beak-like nose (Dixon-Kennedy 150), which indicate her connections to the Neolithic Bird Goddess and the Slavic Baba Yaga.
Baba Yaga underwent a transformation from a goddess to a witch: “The woman-bird hybrid was a symbol of the chthonic goddess-turned-witch throughout Eastern Europe” (Dexter 147). In the folkloric image of Baba Yaga, one can see the denigration of the crone aspect of both women and the Goddess. *Baba*, once a name pertinent to the Great Mother Goddess figure of the Slavic Zlota Baba (Golden Woman), now often represents a derogative name for a woman in Poland and Russia who is old, married, or a peasant (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 170). In Polish, *baba* is a word with many meanings. *Baba* (old woman) or *pszenna baba* (wheat woman) is the name for the last sheaf of grain that is shaped into a woman (Knab, *Customs* 149). The word *baba* can refer to an old, married woman, a midwife, a type of pear, a constellation of stars (*baby*), or a name for a yeast cake baked at Easter (*baba* or *babka*) (Knab, *Cookbook* 182). The connection between the word *baba* and a constellation of stars interestingly evokes Baba Yaga’s aspects as “the queen of the skies and mother of the planets” (Hubbs 44). Baba Yaga’s ancient attributes are seen in how she rules the moon, the sun, the winds, and the rain, and how among Russian peasants, the moon is equated with her body (Hubbs 44). In the Polish myth of the last siren of Hel, the witch has the power to pull the moon out of the sky. This is similar to Baba Yaga’s powers over both earth and sky. Furthermore, the Polish Easter cake, *baba* or *babka*, is thought to have taken “its name from the Polish word for old woman because it is baked in a traditional fluted baking pan that resembles a woman’s thickly gathered skirt that fans out towards the bottom” (Knab, *Cookbook* 182). The connection between baking, women, and the word *baba* is also found in the figure of Baba Yaga. Baba Yaga herself bakes and weaves (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 23), and the *pech’* or stove, is at the center of her house, symbolizing her role as ancient clan mother and guardian of the souls of the dead (Hubbs 46).
Hubbs says that the “denigration of the power of witches by the church in Russia, as elsewhere, testified to the tenacity of the ancient woman-centered fertility rites” (41). Fertility rites were referenced in a fifteenth-century sermon to the Poles. In the sermon, the reference focuses on the “feminine fertility nature of these orgiastic rites . . . [performed by] girls and women playing and dancing . . . we hear that they do not allow the male relatives—only female in the family—to take part . . . and much evil takes place” (qtd. in Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 29). Women in fifteenth-century Poland were taking part in ancient female-only fertility rituals that were seen as a threat to the patriarchal, Christian structure of society. Baba Yaga’s embodiment of “the chthonic, fertility, and transformative aspects of the all-encompassing goddess of life, death, and regeneration,” which are aspects that threaten patriarchal society (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 19), may explain why Baba Yaga, along with women in Slavic cultures, have historically been denigrated and labeled witches.

Baba Yaga’s witch-like appearance and her ability to fly through the air have cross-cultural parallels in legends across Europe. Like Baba Yaga, the Germanic goddesses Frau Holle (Holda) and Percht (Frau Perchta) are described as having sharp teeth and long or iron noses, which appear “to be the vestige of a bird form of the goddess” (Motz 163). Beak-like noses refer back to the Neolithic bird goddesses. Dashú says that at the end of the Middle Ages, an international myth about a crone, who flies through the night with an entourage of witches and the undead, existed across all of Europe (“Tregenda”). Baba Yaga, Frau Holle, and Frau Percht, Dashú notes, are just some of the iron-nosed crone goddesses described in legend and folklore as witches who presided over night flights on the eves of pagan holy days (“Tregenda”). Baba Yaga can be understood as a Slavic version of the Crone and Bird Goddess who survived in various forms throughout Europe.
Like the *rusalki*, Baba Yaga also has strong connections to the Neolithic Snake and Bird Goddess, moisture, and the primordial waters of earth and sky. Just as the Neolithic Snake and Bird Goddess controlled the upper and lower waters and was invoked as a source of rain (Gimbutas, *Goddesses* 145), Baba Yaga and her serpent-dragons connect the earth and sky and have control over rain, moisture, and “all spheres of nature, the air as well as water” (Hubbs 44). Baba Yaga or her serpent guards the waters of life and death in Slavic folktales (Strong, “Baba Yaga’s Hut”).

In the Polish myth, “Sobotnia Mountain or The Search for the Water of Life,” the presence of Jezi Baba/Baba Yaga can be seen in the character of the Wise Woman. Three brothers, who love their dying mother very much, decide to search for the Wise Woman who lives on a hill to see if she can help heal their mother with herbs. Two of the brothers go in search of the Wise Woman, but when they return to their home with her, their mother has already passed away. Taking pity on the men, the Wise Woman says that she can bring their mother back to life but the brothers will have to risk their own lives. The Wise Woman instructs the men to head towards Sobotnia Mountain where they will find a talking tree with a spring below, flowing with the healing water of life. The brothers are to collect the water while not looking behind them; otherwise they will turn to stone.

After his two older brothers fail to return from the mountain, the youngest brother sets out for it. As he climbs the mountain, the brother encounters a seven-headed dragon in the rock. The dragon attacks, and he cuts off each of its heads with his scythe. Entering the rock, the brother sees a garden and comes to the tree. The golden hawk in it gives him a jug to fill with the water of life. On his way down the mountain, he sprinkles the water and brings back to life women, men, children, and his two brothers who had previously been
turned to stone. He returns home, sprinkles the water on his mother, and she miraculously comes back to life (Malinowski and Pellowski 84-86).

In this myth, the Wise Woman, who can be understood as the Polish Jezi Baba, has the power to bring the dead back to life with the healing water of life. The tree near the spring may represent the Tree of Life, a symbol of the Goddess present in Slavic women’s embroideries (Kelly 51). In Slavic folklore, Baba Yaga is said to fly through the skies in a mortar and propel herself with a pestle, while also sweeping away her tracks with a birch broom (Hubbs 39). The paradoxical nature of Baba Yaga is apparent in the symbols of the mortar, pestle, and broom: the mortar and pestle are instruments of creation and destruction, and the birch broom is a symbol of an inverted Tree of Life that destroys (Hubbs 39). The mortar can be seen as a symbol of the womb, the pestle a phallus (Hubbs 39). Baba Yaga exerts her influence over the connected realms of both life and death. Her inverted Tree of Life (birch broom\(^6\)) that brings destruction can be juxtaposed with the Tree of Life that guards the healing water of life in the Polish myth described above. The Wise Woman’s power to bring back the dead in the story identifies her as the Goddess of Death and Regeneration.

The dragon in the story is also linked to the Slavic figure of Baba Yaga. Baba Yaga is connected to “the snake in the shape of a serpentine dragon,” which “emphasizes her function as self-inseminated creatrix and ‘phallic’ or destructive mother” (Hubbs 43). Dragons, or flying serpents, link Baba Yaga to the Neolithic Snake Goddess. Baba Yaga often has dragon or snake servants who “kidnap maidens and challenge youths; they threaten

\(^{6}\) The birch tree and birch branches are also sacred to the rusalki, which will be discussed more in the following chapter.
to take back or interfere with the fertility she has created out of her own body” (Hubbs 43-44). In Polish myth, Jezi Baba is associated with dragons.

In one Polish myth, three soldiers decide to desert their army and hide in a cornfield for a couple of days. A dragon flies by and decides to assist them only if the men promise to serve the dragon for seven years. The dragon allows the men to live wealthy lives for seven years and then he comes to collect them. The only option the men have of escaping the dragon and obtaining their freedom is to answer a riddle correctly after their seven years.

The three men, troubled by the dragon’s demands, meet an old woman passing by who happens to be the crone enchantress, Jezi Baba. Jezi Baba decides to help the men escape their fate. She tells the men to go to a stone hut and there the men meet another old woman, the dragon’s grandmother. The grandmother allows the men to hide and listen to the dragon give the answers to the riddle away to his grandmother. The next time the men see the dragon, they answer the riddle correctly and obtain their freedom (Asala 54-59).

In this myth, Jezi Baba assists three men who are challenged by a dragon. In Russian myths, the dragons, Chudo-Yudo and Koshchei, are aggressive male dragons and are associated with “a destruction over which the witch has complete control” (Hubbs 44). In the Polish myth above, it is also a male dragon that threatens to enslave the three soldiers; however, Jezi Baba counters the destruction that the dragon represents. It is she who has the ultimate say over the fate of both the dragon and the men. This power over the fate of humans relates to Baba Yaga’s incarnation as the three Fates (Hubbs 38). Her ability to control the threads of life relates to her identity as a spinner. Her home stands on a spindle, and the “thread is made of the bones and entrails of the dead as the hut turns round and round on its bird feet” (Hubbs 38).
In the Polish myth of “The Flower Queen’s Daughter,” a prince helps an old woman out of a ditch, who just happens to be Jezi Baba. The prince escorts her back to her home at the edge of the forest, which consists of a hut standing on two chicken legs. Jezi Baba decides to assist the prince in finding a wife. She tells him that the daughter of the Flower Queen is in need of rescue, for she is being held captive by a dragon in a cave. For a long time the prince searches for the Flower Queen’s daughter. With the help of an old man, the prince is told that the dragon’s cave is on the top of a mountain and that the dragon sleeps for six months and then stays awake for six months.

The prince climbs the mountain and reaches a golden castle. The mother of the dragon swoops down and asks the prince what he is doing here. The price wins entry into the castle by flattering the mother dragon and becomes a guardian of her youngest son. One day, when the prince loses track of the young dragon, he remembers Jezi Baba’s words and calls on the assistance of the King of the Ravens. The prince is able to return the dragon to his mother, and in return, the mother allows the prince to attend the dance that evening.

At the dance the prince meets the daughter of the Flower Queen and they talk of escaping together. Hitching a ride on the prince’s horse, the Flower Queen’s daughter escapes with him down the mountain to the home of her mother. The dragon and his mother are furious the Flower Queen’s daughter escapes, and the dragon decides to hunt her down. The Flower Queen protects her castle from the dragon by calling up a bower of roses to protect the castle walls. The prince asks the Flower Queen for her daughter’s hand in marriage. The Flower Queen says that the choice is her daughter’s to make. The daughter says yes, but on the condition that for six months out of the year, when the earth is barren and
winter is upon them, she will fulfill her sacred duty by staying with her mother (Asala 66-71).

This story contains obvious parallels to the Greek Demeter and Persephone myth, which was a myth that reached Slavic lands (Asala 66). In the Polish tale, the Flower Queen can be seen as Demeter, and the god of the underworld, Pluto, can be seen as the dragon (Asala 66). This myth, however, also contains Old European mythical elements. The presence of the daughter, the Flower Queen, and Jezi Baba evokes the presence of the Triple Goddess, or maiden, mother, and crone. In folklore, Baba Yaga can appear as both old and young. She can be a maiden, a woman with a married woman’s headdress, an old woman, or she can appear as the three Fates (Hubbs 38-39). In “The Flower Queen’s Daughter,” Jezi Baba assists the prince in freeing the title character, which ultimately leads to the mother and daughter fulfilling their sacred roles associated with the changing of the seasons.

Mother/daughter pairs represent the seasonal aspects of the Goddess and represent in dual form the ancient Old European Pregnant Vegetation Goddess (Gimbutas, Living 16). Baba Yaga both gives life and takes life; she is a cannibal and a generatrix, and “[l]ike Mother Earth, she feeds and devours life” (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 23). The association of Jezi Baba, the Flower Queen, and her daughter, relates to the Neolithic Goddess’s powers over the changing of the seasons, which were intricately linked to the cycles of life, death, and regeneration. While Jezi Baba can usher in spring, life, and growth, she can also usher in winter, death, and destruction. The Flower Queen and her daughter also seem to embody these powers, perhaps indicating that the three women are triune aspects of the goddess Baba Yaga.
In Russian folklore, dragons in connection to Baba Yaga “symbolize the winter and underworld nature of Yaga, which the peasantry associate with a masculine aggressiveness and destruction” (Hubbs 44). In the Polish myth above, the male dragon can be understood as an aggressive and destructive force of the underworld that wishes to capture the Flower Queen’s daughter. However, at the end of the story, the daughter decides to stay of her own free will with her mother during winter, suggesting that the Feminine holds the ultimate power in the underworld realm of male dragons. The story aspects of the prince asking the mother for her daughter’s hand in marriage, and the daughter freely having a say in the decision to wed, suggest matrilineal kinship.

In another Polish tale, “About a Princess Bewitched into a Frog” (“O królewnie zaklejew zabe”), Baba Yaga helps a prince win the hand of an enchanted frog princess, who is the daughter of the queen-sorceress Swiatowida. The prince’s father gives the kingdom to his youngest son instead of his older sons because the frog-bride has greater abilities than the other brides (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 24). Oleszkiewicz-Peralba says the focus on the bride’s rather than the sons’ abilities in the competition can be perceived as “a remnant of matriarchal times when society was governed by priestesses representing the Mother Goddess of all creation. The fact that the frog princess is the daughter of Swiatowida underscores this hypothesis” (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 24). Some of the myths of Baba Yaga, as discussed above, suggest elements of Old European matrilineal practices.

The connections of serpentine dragons, caves, and maidens can be gleaned from the popular Polish myth of “The Dragon of Wawel.” In long ago times, it is said that a dragon lived in one of the caves in the high hill along the Vistula River in southern Poland. The dragon was in one of its sleep cycles, when one day, a group of young people exploring the
caves aroused the dragon from his sleep. The angry, fire-breathing dragon began to emerge from the cave each day in search of animals to eat. One day a man named Krakus tries to kill the dragon by mixing up a concoction of sulfur, tar, and poisonous liquids. He smears this concoction on sheep carcasses and places them near the dragon’s cave entrance. When the dragon devours the sheep, the poison begins boiling his insides. In a panic, the dragon rushes to the Vistula River and begins to drink the water, only to find that the water burns and boils his insides even more. The dragon drinks so much water that he explodes into pieces. Krakus becomes the ruler of the town that is later named after him, Kraków (Malinowski and Pellowski 65). In another version of the story, the dragon demands an innocent young maiden for food. The king announces to the people that anyone who slays the dragon will marry his daughter. Krakus slays the dragon and marries the princess (Asala 85-86).

The Dragon of Wawel’s sleep cycles may symbolize the changing of the seasons; sleeping represents winter and the awakening of the dragon represents spring. The cave brings to mind the references to Baba Yaga as Guardian of the Underworld, while the sleep/wake cycles of the dragon bring to mind Baba Yaga as the Goddess of Death (winter) and Regeneration (spring). The dragon’s demand for a maiden in one version of the tale may relate to Baba Yaga’s function as “the guardian of the initiatory feminine mysteries of the Underworld” (Strong, “Baba Yaga’s Hut”). Journeying into a cave and being devoured by a dragon may symbolize a death and rebirth of a maiden, possibly associated with puberty initiation rites over which Baba Yaga holds influence. Other stories of Baba Yaga and youths relate to rituals of initiation; the Russian tale of Vasilisa the Wise (or the Fair) is a specific story of female initiation (Hubbs 47-49). Dashú says that as late as the nineteenth century, 7

7. Today in Poland, a dragon statue stands in front of this cave, where “every night fire is said to issue forth from his mouth” (Asala 85). Furthermore, a dragon parade occurs annually in Kraków, where dragons are paraded through the streets and along the Vistula River (“Great Dragon Parade”).
Baba Yaga masks were a part of Ukrainian girls’ womanhood rituals (“Tregenda”). This indicates that Baba Yaga played a role in real-life female puberty rites.

It is important to note the historical association of male heroes and saints to the killing of dragons in myths. Indo-European mythology records the attempts of patriarchal cultures to suppress the Goddess in her ancient symbol of the serpent-dragon, which was transformed into an evil symbol (Redmond 145). In Babylon, Marduk kills the dragon goddess Tiamat, the Hebrew Yahweh slays the serpent Leviathan, Indra of India kills the serpent goddess Vrta, and Perseus slays the serpent-haired Medusa (Redmond 145). St. George is attributed with the slaying of a dragon to free a maiden. In Poland, St. George is the guardian of spring vegetation who has the keys to open the earth (Benet 61). He also is a bringer of dew and rain to the earth (Benet 61). St. George’s slaying of a dragon, and his powers to bring moisture and spring to the earth, indicate how this Christian saint appropriated the powers of the Goddess.

Besides Jezi Baba/Baba Yaga as the Goddess of Death and Regeneration, Polish folklore tells of a goddess of death known as Marzanna. Marzanna is a beautiful maiden in white who personifies death. In one tale, Marzanna travels in a boat on the Vistula River and comes ashore in Warsaw. She carries the plague with her, and anyone who sets eyes on her will bring death back to his or her house. Marzanna comes to the home of a blind woman who allows her to step inside and warm herself by the fire. Marzanna, surprised that this woman welcomes her, decides to spare the woman and Warsaw from death. Marzanna returns to her boat and changes the destiny of the village (Asala 87).

Marzanna travels the Vistula River, perhaps connecting the Vistula River to Baba Yaga’s waters of life and death. While the Guardian Mother of the Vistula River and her
green bird can provide nourishing life for Poles with her sacred waters, death can also travel or emerge from the waters, by burning and boiling the insides of the Wawel dragon, by drowning Queen Wanda, or by allowing Marzanna (Death personified) to float up or downstream. Marzanna and her white dress have direct ties to the death aspect of the Neolithic Goddess. In prehistoric times, the color of bone (white) signified death. In the Neolithic, Copper, and Bronze Ages, stiff nude female figures made of marble, alabaster, or bone were found in graves and cemeteries (Gimbutas, *Language* 185, 198). The “stiff white lady” of Paleolithic and Neolithic origins has come down through the centuries as the “anthropomorphic female Death of European folklore,” who “is imagined as tall, bony-legged, and dressed in white. No doubt is she inherited from the Old European substratum when death was bone white, not black like the terrifying Indo-European male god of death and the underworld” (Gimbutas, *Language* 198).

Marzanna, and other female death figures in Poland, are successors to the Old European bone-colored goddesses of death and regeneration. Their white dresses or sheets reflect the Old European color symbolism that links white to death. In Kraków, death was called *Jagusia* or *Zoska*; in Mazowsze, she was called *Baska* (Knab, *Customs* 257). She most often resided in cemeteries, carrying a scythe, wearing a white sheet, and taking the form of a woman, a black cat, a goose, a stone figure of Mary, a white crow, or a priest (Knab, *Customs* 257). She would come three nights in a row, knocking on windows or doors, knowing that no one could avoid her (Knab, *Customs* 257). In an article from the mid-twentieth century, the author says that Poland had numerous pictorial representations of the Death Goddess. She was imaged as a tall female with disheveled hair, and often found sitting on a cart (Krappe 181). In one Polish tale, the plague appears “as a tall woman in white
garments, with her hair floating about her, and is hunted by dogs” (Lach-Szyrma 65). The personification of the plague or death as a woman is not restricted to Poland. Evidence for the plague personified as a woman (Plague Maiden or Plague Woman) has been found among the medieval and modern Slavs, in the Balkans, in ancient Greece, in the Near and Middle East, and all over the European continent (Krappe 182). Furthermore, the symbol of the plague, a tall gaunt woman in a white dress, is the same in Slavic and Celtic lands (Lach-Szyrma 65).

Gimbutas classifies two folk images that are linked to the prehistoric Goddess of Death and Regeneration: “1. the White Lady as death messenger, and 2. the Killer and Regeneratrix, degraded to a witch in historical times” (Language 209). Both figures, Gimbutas says, can be anthropomorphic but can have attributes of poisonous snakes or birds of prey (Language 209). Marzanna fits into the first category as a white lady who brings death. The Goddess as Killer and Regeneratrix has survived in the Baltic Lithuanian and Latvian folk traditions as Ragana and in Slavic folk traditions as Baba Yaga (Gimbutas, Language 209). Baba Yaga, who is often described as a tall, bony-legged woman with disheveled hair (Gimbutas, Language 210), has a similar appearance to the Polish images of the Plague Woman. Baba Yaga, the “ancient Goddess of Death and Regeneration in Slavic mythology,” has been demonized and degraded to a witch in folklore (Gimbutas, Language 210).

In Poland, the poudnica are whirlwinds of dust that appear on hot summer days and are sometimes referred to as “Maidens of Midday” (Asala 114). In Polish folklore the poudnica can take the form of a crone or witch who emerges when the sun reaches its highest point in the sky midday (Asala 114). She may cut off a person’s head with a scythe or cause
heatstroke (Asala 114). In Russian folklore, the goddess of the fields was known as *poludnitsa* (pl. *poludnitsy*) (Dixon-Kennedy 227). She was “[r]epresented as a tall, beautiful woman dressed in white” who would punish people in the fields who worked at her sacred hour, midday (Dixon-Kennedy 227). The *poludnitsy* of Ukraine were moon maidens who ensured the fertility of the fields by guiding the sun’s rays towards the fields (Dixon-Kennedy 227).

The *poudnica* have powers that resemble Baba Yaga’s powers. They are linked to winds and dust clouds, and they hold power over people at midday (Malinowski and Pellowski 192). In similar fashion, Baba Yaga has power over the winds (Hubbs 44), and she is said to have power over night and day (Phillips and Kerrigan 104). In Polish myth, a farmer in the fields encounters a witch who approaches him in a whirlwind by knocking down grain (Asala 114). Baba Yaga was also known to frequent cornfields: “When the wind bowed down the cornstocks, for instance, people said that Baba Yaga was chasing after children” (Phillips and Kerrigan 104). The harvest of grain is linked to the scythe, and harvesting and the scythe are both linked to death. Like the *poudnica*, who frequent fields and kill with a scythe, Baba Yaga was associated “with the grim harvest of death; the stalks which fell in swathes before the reaper’s swishing scythe were like men and women mown down by fate” (Phillips and Kerrigan 104). The *poudnica*, therefore, are whirlwind spirits, who, like Baba Yaga, bear attributes of the Old European Death Goddess.

As this chapter demonstrates, the Goddess of Old Europe, along with her sacred animals and symbols, has survived within the realm of Polish folklore, legend, and myth, albeit in sometimes hidden, obscured, or Christianized form. The pre-Christian Slavic goddesses, who survive in the forms of female spirits, fairies, and witches in Polish and
Slavic myths, have inherited many of the powers, attributes, and functions of their predecessor, the Great Goddess of Old Europe. The *rusalka*, Mother Moist Earth, and Baba Yaga, especially, represent a Slavic trinity of the ancient Goddess. The next chapter will continue to examine the survival of the Old European and Slavic goddesses in Polish folk traditions and customs.
Chapter 7: The Survival of the Goddess in Polish Traditions

This chapter traces the survival of the Goddess in Poland in the realm of Polish traditions and customs. Even with Poland’s conversion to Christianity around 966 CE, this did not result in the Polish peasantry giving up “the customs and habits of pre-Christian times” (Benet 37) in the centuries, or millennia, to follow. The peasant’s “pagan divinities to whom he (sic) paid homage, and whose services he (sic) invoked at certain seasons of the year, remained with him (sic); and only gradually their attributes were transferred to the Christian saints” (Benet 37). This chapter will explore the survival of pre-Christian female divinities in Polish culture and folk life.

When studying Polish peasant traditions and their spiritual/religious aspects, it is first necessary to grasp the different cultural strata that shape Slavic beliefs and rituals. Gimbutas distinguished three cultural levels shaping Slavic religion and mythology: the Old European layer, the Indo-European, patriarchal layer, and the Christian layer, where pagan and Christian figures fused and created a “double faith” (Brzozowska-Krajka, “Coexistence” 16). Although Indo-Europeans superimposed their beliefs over Old Europeans, and then in the tenth century CE, Christians superimposed their beliefs over Indo-Europeans in central and eastern Europe, the older beliefs of subjected peoples did not disappear (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 19). As Oleszkiewicz-Peralba notes, “[e]ach new stratum of culture introduced to the existing system was gradually integrated into the old set of beliefs and rituals, resulting in syncretic cultures and religions” (19). In regard to the ancient worship of female deities in the regions of central and eastern Europe, the Christian Virgin Mary did not entirely replace earlier Slavic goddesses but retained and subsumed certain functions and attributes of her

1. Since the male gender is not inclusive of the entire human race, the use of the terms “he” or “him” do not accurately represent both women and men.
predecessors. Over the centuries, the Finno-Slavic goddess Mokosh was reassimilated into
the figure of Mother Moist Earth, and Mother Moist Earth was later assimilated and adapted
into the figure of the Virgin Mary (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 19). In Russia, *dvoeverie* is the term
for the dual belief system of paganism and Byzantine-influenced Christianity (Hubbs 92). In
Poland, the survival of pagan beliefs and practices is coupled with western Christianity, or
Roman Catholicism (Brzozowska-Krajka, “Coexistence” 16). The dual faith phenomenon in
Poland can be witnessed in Polish holidays and rituals throughout the year.

Poland existed as an agricultural country for many centuries, if not millennia, and so
the Polish peasant’s holidays were intimately linked to the agricultural cycle and to the
seasons (Benet 36). With the growing authority of the Church, agricultural traditions became
influenced by Christian elements (Benet 36-37; Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz,
“Peasant Rituals” 1-2). The Polish farmer’s year began in spring (Benet 43), which was
considered the agricultural New Year.

In early spring in Poland, cranes, storks, and other birds return home, and to honor
their return, children were given baked cookies made in the shape of swallows and cuckoos
(Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz, “Peasant Rituals” 14). Cuckoos, as previously
discussed, were sacred to the Polish goddess of spring, Zywie. Zywie and her cuckoo
represented health and the regeneration (resurrection) of life in the spring. In Russia, “young
women greeted spring by calling on the souls of the dead, in the form of birds and insects”
(Hubbs 69). Pastry birds decorated the girls’ hand-held tree boughs, and the girls would call
to “the female cuckoo, a *psychopomp* or spirit of the dead linked to the goddess Zhiva”
(Hubbs 69). The Polish practice of baking bird-shaped cookies may also relate to welcoming
the *rusalki* in their bird form in the springtime. Up into the twentieth century, Slavic peasants
baked bird pastries (Barber, “Origins” 10). This probably related to the *rusalki*, who “were sought as bestowers of fertility” and who, in bird form, “were believed to bring the Spring itself and to lock away Winter” (Barber, “Origins” 10).

In spring, an old custom that has survived even up to present day is the custom of the Drowning of Marzanna (*Topienie Marzanny*) (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 25). Often on the fourth Sunday of Lent, an effigy, named Marzanna, was made of straw and dressed in the clothes of a girl. She was then taken to the lake and drowned. This custom symbolized the drowning of Death, and it was done to ensure the protection of the village from illness and plague (Knab, *Customs* 84-86). Marzanna, as already discussed, represents the personification of death in Polish myth, and her image as a White Lady of Death links her directly to the Neolithic stiff nude goddesses. Marzanna also symbolized winter in the spring ritual (Benet 45). After the figure of Marzanna was drowned or burned, a decorated branch, known as a *Gaik*, *Maik*, or *Nowe Lato* (New Summer) was carried back into the village: “This ritual is believed to symbolize the destruction of winter and the revival of nature” (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 25).

One source says that an adorned figure called Dziewanna, who was the goddess of spring, was brought back to the village in some Polish districts (Frazer 362). Dual goddesses, Marzanna (winter) and Dziewanna (spring), recall the division of the Neolithic Pregnant Vegetation Goddess into mother/daughter aspects presiding over the seasons. These spring rituals, known in numerous European countries besides Poland, demonstrate how winter/death was carried out of the village while summer/new life was brought back into the

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2. On Easter Monday, a young man would go about the village dressed as a bear. The bear was then drowned, like Marzanna, in a stream or pond (i.e., the young man was drenched with water) (Benet 59). In Poland, instead of watching for the groundhog, as Americans do, to predict the coming spring weather, Poles in the Tarnów-Rzeszow region watched for the bear (Knab, *Customs* 68). As mentioned in the fourth chapter, in the Neolithic the bear symbolized an epiphany of the Birth-giving Goddess. These Polish traditions show the continued reverence for the Goddess’s bear.
village. Also, the Slovakian goddess of life, Zivena was counterposed with Morena, a godess of death (Jones and Pennick 187), which may relate to the pairing of Marzanna and Dziewanna. Marzanna has cross-cultural parallels in the Russian Marena (Dixon-Kennedy 178) and the Baltic Mara (Jones and Pennick 176). Jones and Pennick state that Mara was a goddess of the material world as well as a giver, preserver, and taker of life. Marzanna was her form in southern Poland where she was connected to fruit (Jones and Pennick 176). Perhaps this association with fruit relates to the blossoming of spring. It may also call forth the ancient memories of the Goddess as both a creator and a destroyer of life, before death was split apart from life under patriarchy.

Among the early Slavs, a female priesthood most likely served the Goddess (Hubbs 29). The ancient role of the priestess emerges in the spring ritual honoring Marzanna. It was young Polish girls who would often decorate and drown Marzanna, and then parade through the village with the decorated branch (Knab, *Customs* 86-89). Related themes of priestesses in connection to the *rusalki* and branches representing Trees of Life will be discussed in more detail shortly.

Easter is one of the most important holidays among Catholic Poles (Knab, *Customs* 41); however, the holiday has its roots in ancient pagan spring regeneration rituals (Gimbutas, *Language* 213). A well-known symbol of Easter is the egg, an important symbol of regeneration and rebirth associated with the Goddess in both the Paleolithic and the Neolithic eras. As discussed in Chapter Four, Magdalenian female flint plaquettes from Poland portray early representations of the Bird Goddess, whose egg-shaped buttocks evoked the powers of generation. In the Neolithic, intricate egg designs were found on Cucuteni and Karanovo vase painting of the fifth and fourth millennia BCE and in artwork from the
Aegean and Mediterranean areas (Gimbutas, *Language* 213). Some Neolithic peoples had their remains placed into egg-shaped burial pithoi (jars) to symbolize rebirth within the womb of the Goddess (Gimbutas, *Language* 213). This connection between the dead and the symbol of the egg was carried into Slavic burial traditions. Throughout the Middle Ages and almost up to present times, Slavs laid eggs and meat in graves (Gimbutas, *Slavs* 122).

The egg continues to have prominence in Easter Polish traditions. Egg coloring was an exclusive female activity done in secrecy; the room in which the eggs were colored was considered “off limits” to men (Knab, *Customs* 100). There were different names for the types of colored eggs: “malowane or malowanki, when a colorful design was painted on top; or kraszone or kraszanki, when a single color made from a dye using herbs and roots was used. . . . Pisanki were batik style eggs on which wax was carefully applied . . .” (Knab, *Customs* 100). Designs on eggs frequently reflect pre-Christian symbols. Kelly says that the Goddess motifs that have survived on Slavic embroideries are also found in egg-decorating traditions. On Ukrainian eggs, the goddess Berehinia or Bohynja-Berehynja is portrayed with upraised arms and outspread legs; on Czechoslovakian eggs, stylized goddesses are portrayed with downturned or upraised arms (Kelly 148-49). Easter eggs from Slavic countries portray pagan motifs such as suns, rhombs, circles, rosettes, geometric designs, plants and animals, and stylized goddesses (Kelly 148-49). Polish girls’ egg coloring traditions reflect a connection to the ancient worship of female deity. Their egg designs include “geometric patterns, stylized representations of household furniture and tools, and motifs from plant and animal life” (Benet 51). These designs relate to the motifs of the Goddess mentioned above.

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3. After a priest blessed Easter food, it was said to contain magical powers. To improve crops, Poles placed Easter eggshells on fruit trees or scattered the shells in the nooks of houses to keep out pests (Benet 54-56). On St. George’s Day, April 21st, Easter eggshells were buried in the earth to promote growth (Benet 62).
In Russia, women served Mother Moist Earth by performing ceremonies that would stimulate the fertility of the earth and skies (Hubbs 56). In comparison, Polish women also appear to have served Mother Earth. One Shrove Tuesday dance in Poland was the domain of married women. The married women would go to a tavern, drink liquor, dance around a figure that represented a little ram, and then try to leap as high as they could to make the hemp grow tall (Benet 47). Using their jumps to affect the growth of hemp demonstrates the women acting in the capacity as Mother Earth’s priestesses to help create abundant crops. Dancing to make crops grow also links the women to the rusalki, who were sought everywhere “as bestowers of fertility” (Barber, “Origins” 10). The figure of the ram connects the women to the Neolithic Goddess. The ram, sacred to the Bird Goddess, as noted earlier, was a Neolithic image found on the pottery vessel handles from Cmielew in southern Poland dating to circa 3500 BCE.

In the Neolithic era, communities of priestesses and women’s councils existed, and even up to modern times, folklore and myth have preserved priestesses as magicians, oracles, and prophetesses (Gimbutas, Living 119-20). The historical survival of powerful groups of priestesses appears in the stories of groups of fairies who dance in circles around stone rings or in meadows (Gimbutas, Living 120). Ring dances can be seen as “an extension of the centrally concentrated Goddess energy,” and fairies as “the maidens of the Goddess” (Gimbutas, Language 311). In Russia and Ukraine, accounts of rusalki describe them as “naked girls with long, flowing light-brown or green hair, who left their underwater homes to dance the khorovod (circle dance) and sing by the light of the moon and (sic) to entice and drown passing villagers” (Ivanits 75). Where there existed a darker circle of grass, there the rusalki were said to have danced (Phillips and Kerrigan 67). The khorovod was a dance
connected not only to the *rusalki* but also to the women and girls who honored them. *Rusal ‘naia* Week (Trinity Week), which occurred during the seventh or eighth week after Easter, was the most important time to celebrate spring vegetation in Russia (Ivanits 9). Peasants believed that the *rusalki* rose from their watery winter abodes in the spring to dwell in trees; around summertime, they moved into the fields and danced (Hubbs 31). During this week, girls honored the *rusalki* by leading them from the forest into the community in the form of birch branches (Hubbs 71). The girls went into the forest and decorated a birch tree (the first tree to bloom in spring) with garlands and cloth (Ivanits 79). They would then gather around the tree, weaving garlands, singing ritual songs, dancing the *khorovod*, and swearing “vows of eternal friendship and sisterhood” (Ivanits 79).

Another part of *Rusal ‘naia* Week consisted of the burial of or fare well to the *rusalka* (Ivanits 80). Sometimes a female figure representing the *rusalka* would be carried to a field or nearby river to be burned, drowned, or torn to pieces (Ivanits 80). Scholars have proposed different theories as to why the *rusalka* was destroyed. Linda J. Ivanits notes how some interpret the ritual as the banishing of winter and the welcoming of spring (81). She says that the *rusalka* is a complex figure who symbolizes both dangerous/unclean and fertilizing forces, and these contradictory symbols are expressed in the *rusalka* rituals (78-79, 81). After the *rusalka* was bade farewell, the girls would sing and dance the *khorovod* (Ivanits 80). These traditions show that the circle dance was an important part of the girls’ rituals honoring the *rusalki*. Also, the decoration of trees and branches and the death of a *rusalka* doll are similar to the Marzanna Polish rites.

As previously mentioned, Polish married women danced to ensure the growth of crops in the springtime. Like their eastern Slavic counterparts dancing the *khorovod*, Polish
girls also danced a circle dance. The *kola* was a dance performed only by young women around the festival fires on Midsummer Night as a defense against evil spirits (Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz, “Folk Dances” 26-27). At marriage ceremonies, married peasant women danced to ensure the growth of hemp and flax (Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz, “Folk Dances” 27). Polish wedding traditions also link women’s dance and song to the Goddess. In Mazovia, the province of Warsaw, women would visit the bride’s home to bake the wedding cake and sing to “the pagan goddess, Lado, the goddess of good housewifery” (Kennedy 55). During the wedding procession, the bridesmaids again invoked the blessings of Lado and the god of love, Lelum, in song (Kennedy 56-57). There is some uncertainty as to the author’s use of the name “Lado” for the pagan goddess, when it was mentioned earlier that Lada was the goddess and Lado was her male counterpart. It may be that Lado was the feminine form in some Polish regions and was interchangeable with the name, Lada. Hubbs says that “Lado, Ladon, and Dido as the son or twinlike companions of the goddess all derive their name from her” (63). The goddess Lada subsumes within herself the names, such as Lado, since the name ultimately derives from her.

The connection of women’s dance and song to the Goddess may explain why the Church tried to curtail women’s dancing and women-only rituals. A fifteenth-century sermon to the Poles, mentioned in the last chapter, condemns the fertility nature of women’s rites. It also indicates the fact that rituals of women dancing and playing were done without the company of male relatives (qtd. in Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 29). Furthermore, priests and the Church tried to strictly forbid the dances and celebrations on Ash Wednesday, in which married women were central participants and leaders (Knab, *Customs* 78). Women’s dance was “at the heart of the old spring and summer *Rusalii* celebrations” that honored the *rusalki*
in eastern Slavic countries (Barber, “Origins” 20). The Church condemnation of Polish women’s dancing most likely indicates that women continued, in Christian times, to celebrate female rituals that venerated female deities, such as the *rusalki*.

The ancient practice of priestesses dancing and worshipping the Goddess on hilltops may relate to the widespread belief in Slavic countries of witches holding their Sabbaths on Bald Mountain. Bald Mountain is a name given to numerous hills in eastern and central Europe (Ivanits 100). In eastern Europe, the Bald Mountains are a mountain range near Kiev where witches held their Sabbaths (Ivanits 100; Dixon-Kennedy 31). As discussed in the previous chapter, in Poland, Lysiec or Lysa Góra (Bald Mountain) is the place of witches’ Sabbaths in popular legend (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 32). A Midsummer’s Eve belief in Poland says that on this night witches and devils have great power (Benet 72). They gather on Bald Mountains for feasts, revelry, and to cause mischief, droughts, and disasters to humans and animals (Benet 72).

Some Polish dances have their origins in women’s spinning activities. Winter was a time for women to spin wool and flax. Polish women would gather at one another’s home to spin, gossip, sing, and tell ancient stories and legends to children (Knab, *Cookbook* 107). Dances emerged out of the spinning, such as the fast tempo *oberek* and the *lenek*, or dance for high flax (Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz, “Peasant Rituals” 11). Spinning out the dance of life is a power associated with the Divine Feminine. Symbols of chevrons, meanders, M signs, V signs, and zig-zags on Neolithic and Copper Age spindle whorls and loom weights demonstrate the clear connection between spinning and the Bird Goddess (Gimbutas, *Language* 67). Prehistoric spindle whorls that are hollow, notched, and sand-dollared have been uncovered in southern Poland and Ukraine (Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles*).
In the fourth millennium BCE, cupped whorls appear in an east to west movement from Ukraine towards Poland, or in other words, from the Tripolye to the Funnel-necked Beaker cultures (Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles* 306). Funnel-necked Beaker sites in Poland, such as Gródek Nadbuzny and Cmielow, have yielded hundreds of spindle whorls (Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles* 306-07). Spindle whorls were connected to the Goddess of Fate, the spinning Goddess (Gimbutas, *Goddesses* 158). The archaeological evidence of ceramic loom weights and spindle whorls in Old European temples demonstrates how spinning and weaving were sacred activities (Gimbutas, *Living* 73). Further study of the large quantity of spindle whorls in southern Poland might reveal women’s spinning practices as being connected to the worship of the Goddess, since the Goddess’s association to spinning and weaving has been known throughout many cultures. Inanna, Neith, Atargatis, Ishtar, Athena, Kybele, Persephone, the Greek Moirai, the Roman Parcae, the Scandinavian Norns, and the Baltic Laima are just some of the goddesses associated with spinning, weaving, and fate (Gimbutas, *Language* 109; Matossian 331).

In Europe the Neolithic Birth and Life-giving Goddess has survived as a Fate or three Fates who spin out the threads of human life (Gimbutas, *Language* 109). The ancient Finno-Slavic goddess Mokosh was a goddess of marriage and spinning from whom the saint Paraskeva Piatnitsa was derived (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 28). Furthermore, the *rusalki*, Baba Yaga, and Mary (the Christian Mother of God), all are known as spinners of life (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 29). Saint Paraskeva, linked to the spinning of flax, was also associated with a taboo against spinning on Fridays (Hubbs 119). Hubbs says that a taboo against spinning may have origins in the Neolithic Eye Goddess:
She was the one who created and oversaw all things. . . . Spinning was an analogy for the creation of life. It was assimilated to the harvesting and ‘taming’ of the flax, through which fields and human fertility were connected. . . . Fridays gave rest to the saint and to those whom she guarded. . . . By dishonoring Friday and disobeying the saint, a woman betrayed the cult which stressed feminine hegemony over all life. (119-20)

Friday was a day sacred to the Goddess; besides Paraskeva, Friday was also sacred to “the western Slavic Zhiva, the Roman Venus, and the Scandinavian Freya” (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 28-29). Taboos against spinning also exist in Polish tradition, although the Goddess’s associations with the taboos are shrouded by Christian overlays. For instance, spinning was done until dusk from Christmas to New Year’s, and only until supper from New Year’s to Epiphany (Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz, “Peasant Rituals” 11). If spinning was done at any other time, it was thought that chicks would “hatch with twisted necks” (Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz, “Peasant Rituals” 11). In Poland, Mary subsumed some of the spinning functions of her predecessors. In October, Mary was thought to journey to help souls at the gates of Paradise, taking up her spinning wheel in order to spin threads to clothe the souls in purgatory (Knab, Customs 219-20). The floating white particles in the air at this time of year were seen as pieces of Mary’s spinning material (Knab, Customs 219-20).

In Lithuania and Latvia, birth rituals into the twentieth century included offerings to Laima, a goddess of both fate and birth (Gimbutas, Living 200). It is believed that the birth of a child brought Laima or three Laimas to predict the child’s fate (Gimbutas, Living 200). In comparison, pagan tradition in Poland included offering the goddesses birth gifts such as kasha (a porridge), honey, and cheese to ensure the health and long life of a newborn baby.
These Polish goddesses possibly relate to the Russian *rozhanitsy*. The “domesticated” *bereginy* became known as the *rozhanitsy*, goddesses of fate who were worshipped by Russian women in the bathhouse, which acted as both a temple and a place for women to give birth (Hubbs 15). Russian women prepared *kasha* for the *rozhanitsy* (Fates) after the birth of a baby (Matossian 334). Birth goddesses who preside over the fate of newborns have direct ties to the Neolithic Birth-giving Goddess. Gimbutas says that the Birth-giving Goddess survived “in pan-European folklore as one of three goddesses or Fates” (*Living* 12).

Spinning, fate, birth, and death have a long history of association with female deities. Women’s spinning of various materials led to the creation of textiles. Kelly has done groundbreaking work in tracing the survival of images and symbols of the prehistoric Goddess in eastern European women’s textiles and embroideries. The conversion to Christianity in Slavic countries did not eliminate the paganism of the peasants, and women’s folk embroidery and motifs, passed down from mother to daughter, escaped notice of the male-dominated Church (Kelly 49). Women were able to embroider “hundreds of powerful female figures on ritual towels and on their clothing, continuing to make ritual, harvest or marriage presents right up through the nineteenth century” (Kelly 49). Goddess worship, dating back to the Neolithic and Paleolithic eras in modern-day Poland, persisted in an underground stream in women’s embroideries. Kelly says that the Neolithic cult of the Goddess “appears strongest in the Carpathian Basin and east and north into the Ukraine and Soviet Union” compared to countries further west (73). This may “account for the fact” that nineteenth-century Goddess embroideries are mainly concentrated “in the Soviet Union, then Poland, and Rumania, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary” (Kelly 73). Kelly’s inclusion of Poland
as a country with a high concentration of Goddess embroideries signifies the continued reverence for the Divine Feminine from prehistory into modern times.

Slavic embroideries reflected the seasons and the corresponding rituals linked to agriculture, as well as to the cycles of the moon and sun (Kelly 22-29). Kelly says that the Goddess motif on Slavic textiles can be easily grouped into two categories: the first group relates to agricultural fertility while the second group relates to human fertility (50). A common motif in the first group is a standing female figure whose arms are either raised or lowered, and animals or plants accompany her. A Tree of Life, deer, birds, or flowers can accompany the Goddess, or she can be transformed into them (Kelly 51-57). The Polish tradition of papercutting (Wycinanki) has preserved many of these same Goddess motifs that appear in Slavic embroideries. In one image from Kurpie, the Goddess is standing within a Tree of Life with her arms lowered, and two cocks surround her (Kelly 51). In other designs, the Goddess is shown in abstract form with arms raised and branches and leaves forming parts of her body (Kelly 150-51). One image shows her holding two birds in her raised arms, while another shows a row of goddesses holding hands with branches coming out of their shoulders (Kelly 151). The Polish papercuttings also portray an abstract Goddess with upraised arms, wearing a headdress, and another with upraised arms and spread legs (Kelly 152). Kelly says that all of these paper goddesses reflect Goddess motifs found in Ukrainian papercuttings, in Slavic embroideries, and on decorated Slavic eggs (150, 152).

The paper goddesses holding or surrounded by birds are reminiscent of the Old European Bird Goddess. The ancient Goddess symbol of the Tree of Life survived in Polish traditions. One Polish Christmas tradition involved hanging pinewood tips, “little trees of

4. Motifs of the Mother Goddess, Tree of Life, and birds and other animals have also been found decorating Polish farmhouses, clothes, and tools (Phillips and Kerrigan 26).
life,” upside down from the ceiling to “symbolize constantly regenerating nature” and ‘new spring’” (Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz, “Peasant Rituals” 3). The tip of the tree was decorated mainly by girls (Knab, Customs 33), and it was also the role of young girls to make elaborate paper cutouts to hang on the walls or to border tablecloths (Benet 95). At Easter time, as previously discussed, young girls would walk around with a decorated fir tree in order to greet the “new summer.” And during May, the month dedicated to Mary, girls would decorate with garland the holy images and wayside figures attached to trees (Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz, “Peasant Rituals” 16-17).

The link between the Divine Feminine and the Tree of Life in these Polish traditions may be understood by looking at the key players in these rituals: young girls. Young girls and women played priestess roles in the worship of the Slavic bereginy and the rusalki. Twelfth- and thirteenth-century artifacts from Ukraine and central Russia show young girls dancing and whirling with very long sleeves (Hubbs 29; Barber, “Origins” 20-21). The girls’ sleeves would emulate the wings of the rusalki-swan maidens (Barber, “Origins” 23). The dances allowed the girls to become the rusalki and tap into their functions as rainmakers and bringers or bestowers of fertility (Hubbs 29; Barber, “Origins” 23).

As previously mentioned with regard to the khorovod dance, Rusal’naia Week, which is also known as Rusaliia, Rusalka Week, Trinity Week, or Zelenye Sviatki, was a spring celebration in which Russian peasant girls escorted the rusalki from the forest to the village. Young women would carry birch branches, sometimes called rusalki, from the forest into the community (Hubbs 71). The central ritual of the week, Semik, was celebrated by girls moving into the woods to pick a Semik birch (Hubbs 72). The girls would return to the birch tree the next day to offer food (eggs and beer) for the dead and to decorate the rusalka’s tree
with ribbons and towels (Hubbs 72). In comparison, as noted earlier, Polish girls ushered death and winter out of the village through the Marzanna doll, and brought back new life/fertility to the community in the image of the *Gaik*, or decorated branch. As in Russian tradition, Polish girls carried branches (Trees of Life) back into their community, which connects them to the *rusalki* and to the well-being of their communities. The tradition of Polish girls decorating trees with garlands and holy images in May possibly relates to Russian girls decorating the birch tree in honor of the dead and the *rusalki*. In Ukraine, girls would decorate birches with ribbons and votive towels as gifts for the *rusalki*, who were believed to sit in trees in the springtime, combing their hair and weaving linen garments (Hubbs 28). Ukrainian *rushnyky*, or embroidered towels in red featuring roses, girl-faced birds (*vily/rusalki*), and a woman (the “Protectress”) holding or accompanied by birds, were special ritual cloths connected to the *rusalki* (Barber, “Origins” 11). There is evidence for Polish women also honoring the *rusalki* with embroidered ritual cloths. Up until recently, Poles and Russians embroidered *rushnyky* towels (Barber, “Origins” 11). The image of a woman holding or flanked by birds on ritual cloths mirrors the Goddess imagery found in Polish papercutting.

Hubbs says that the *Rusal’naia* or *Rusaliia* ritual of peasants bringing the *rusalki* out of the forest and into the village “was a ritual presided over by the female deity as the Tree of Life” (71). The tree was analogous both to the *rusalka* and to the Goddess found in embroideries, and the birch tree was a symbol that “bound together the feminine population in what appeared once to be matrilocal and matrilineal associations” (Hubbs 33). The Polish traditions of decorating and carrying branches representing “new summer” suggest links to the worship of the *rusalka*/Tree of Life Goddess.
In Poland, similar to East Slavic traditions, the onset of summer was ritually celebrated with the Green Holidays (Zielone Swiatki) (Benet 66). As in Rusal ‘naia celebrations where Russian peasants “decorated their houses inside and out with branches” (Ivanits 9), Polish peasants used branches of birch, ash, or fir to decorate houses, barns, and churches (Benet 67). A green figure, known as the May princess, was paraded through the fields to bring about a good harvest (Benet 68). In some traditions, a real girl was chosen to play the princess and was crowned with wild flowers (Benet 68). As she was led around the boundaries of the fields, villagers would sing:

Where the princess walks
There the wheat will grow
Where the princess walks not
There wheat will not grow. (Benet 68)

The May princess may be perceived as embodying the fruitful and fertile powers of the rusalki. In folk rituals in Russia and Ukraine, women and girls escorted the rusalki to the fields so that the rusalki would bring their fertility from the forest into the fields (Hubbs 34). The girls were identified with the rusalki (Hubbs 30). During the farewell of the rusalka, a village girl might assume the role of a rusalka (Ivanits 80). One belief about the rusalki is that where they frolic, the grass grows thicker, which indicates that they were connected to agricultural fertility and “spring vegetation” (Ivanits 79). In a similar vein, the May princess was associated with the fertility of nature, which the rusalki embodied. Where she walked, she could make the wheat grow. Celebrating the feminine, life-giving powers of the earth may also figure in to the end of the Polish harvest ritual, whereby a young girl was given a beautiful wreath to wear that was made from ears of grain and “decorated with flowers,
ribbons, hazelnuts, and the fruit of the mountain ash tree” (Knab, *Customs* 152). The girl was pulled in a wagon to the church in the Kraków districts (Knab, *Customs* 152). These Polish rituals suggest girls were identified with the *rusalki*. Harvest wreaths also associate the powers of girls to the Corn Mother. In Galicia, a girl received a wreath made out the last stalks of grain and kept it until spring so it could be mixed with seed-corn (Frazer 465). The stalks were called “Wheat-mother, Rye-mother, or Pea-mother,” and their union with the seed-corn symbolized the “fertilising power of the Corn-mother” (Frazer 465).

Wreaths and flowers featured into ceremonies honoring the Goddess. Flower motifs on Slavic embroidery show the Goddess holding flowers or having a stylized, flower-like head (Kelly 52). Polish textiles continue to feature floral design motifs. Colorful cross-stitched flower motifs decorate linen shirts made by Polish brides for themselves or for their bridegrooms (Paine 59). Roses, along with hooked lozenges, are found covering the aprons, sleeves, and bodices of girls from Poland and Russia and further south in Bulgaria and Greece (Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles* 297). The hooked lozenge signifies female fertility (the vulva), and appears as far back as Paleolithic cave paintings (Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles* 297). The lozenge with a dot in the center is a symbol found incised or painted on sculptures of Old European enthroned pregnant goddesses and schematic figurines, probably symbolizing an “invocation to secure fertility” (Gimbutas, *Goddesses* 205). The long-lasting symbol of the lozenge suggests the continued importance and power of this Goddess symbol in modern Slavic girls’ clothing.

Barber says that the Slavic folk costume color scheme of red, white, and black “is clearly an old Indo-European color scheme fraught with social and cosmic significance” (*Prehistoric Textiles* 297). As previously discussed in the last chapter, colors held different
meanings in Old Europe compared to Indo-European cultures. Indo-European symbolic traditions view black as the color of death and evil, and white the color of good and light. On the other hand, in Old Europe black was the color of fertility, the soil, “the womb of the Goddess where life begins” (Gimbutas, *Language* xix). White “was the color of death, of bones” (Gimbutas, *Language* xix). The color red was the color of blood, of life (Gimbutas, *Living* 11). Some of the graves from Neolithic Poland contained deceased females painted with red ochre or buried with ochre in a jar. The red ochre symbolized rebirth within the womb of the Mother. The colors found in Slavic folk costumes were important to pre-Indo-European peoples of Neolithic Europe. Slavs retain these ancient color schemes in their folk costumes. Besides folk costumes, the importance of red and white can be seen in the two stripes that comprise the Polish flag. The Old European connections of black to the fertile soil and to the earth survive today in the veneration of the Black Madonna of Czestochowa (Gimbutas, *Language* 144).

The rites associated with Midsummer in Poland have roots in pre-Christian solstice celebrations. Christians superimposed their feast of St. John or Ivan Kupala (John the Baptist) on the pagan Midsummer holiday (Kelly 25). As mentioned in the last chapter, Kupaya, the Water Mother, survives in myth in association with Midsummer’s Eve rites. Kupala, meaning “bathing” in Russian (Kelly 25), appears to relate to the Water Mother’s name, Kupaya. Kupala is also the name of a Slavic goddess of peace, water, magic, and herbs, whose Midsummer worship involved ritual bathing, offerings of flowers, and purifying bonfires (Dixon-Kennedy 159). The Polish Kupaya can therefore be seen as a variation of the Slavic goddess Kupala.
Gimbutas says that Kupala was the festival of Moist Mother Earth and Kupala ("bathing") refers to the public bathing at springs that occurred on this day. A straw idol of Kupala was dressed as a woman (Gimbutas, Slavs 169). The nature and activities of this holiday demonstrate how the Goddess (Kupaya/Moist Mother Earth/Kupala) presided over Slavic Midsummer celebrations. In Poland, Midsummer’s Eve was associated with magic; plants and herbs took on magical qualities and animals could converse with human voices (Benet 71-72). Fire and water rites were central to summer solstice celebrations. Huge bonfires were lit on mountaintops and hills, while young women and men leapt over the flames hand in hand and everyone danced around the fires (Knab, Customs 133-35). Rituals including hills, rivers, herbs, flowers, animals, bonfires, and the sexual relations of women and men are pre-Christian rituals honoring the gifts and bounties of the Earth Mother. The reference to rivers in Poland as feminine in gender and the association of rivers in Poland to feminine spirits and solstice rituals, indicate that the Midsummer’s Eve rites celebrated the Divine Feminine as both Water and Earth Mother. Midsummer offerings to the water “preserved the cult of water spirits” (Phillips and Kerrigan 49), perhaps acknowledging the continued worship of the bereginy and rusalki who dwelt in or near rivers and lakes.

The importance of the sun⁵ and fire in Midsummer rites recall the Neolithic Goddess’s connection to solar symbols on Old European pottery. This connection survives in Slavic spring embroideries, which feature solar discs and the Goddess holding a sun disk in each upraised hand (Kelly 24). In Polish tradition, fire as a sun symbol is found in the “custom of rolling hoops of fire down the hills in spring to warm and fertilize the earth” (Kelly 24). On Midsummer’s Eve, in Upper Silesia, cakes were offered to the sun and girls.

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⁵ There is evidence that the ancient Slavs worshipped the sun. In more recent times, Polish and Ukrainian traditional prayers to the sun have been collected (Phillips and Kerrigan 40).
danced “after the sun” (Benet 71). They would follow it across the sky while dancing and singing, “Play, sun, play, here are your little suns!” (Benet 71-72). In their song, the girls associated themselves with the sun. As the Polish girls invoked the powers of the sun they seemed to be identifying with the Sun Goddess to come and warm the earth with her light. Offering cakes to the sun has a cross-cultural comparison among the Saamic people of the Arctic regions. In one ritual, offerings were made to the sun, sometimes in the form of a baked cake mixed with female reindeer blood (Haarmann). To the Saamic people, the sun “was believed to be a female divinity with big hot breasts, who was responsible for the well-being of the reindeer herds and for success in hunting” (Haarmann). The cake would be hung on a birch tree (Haarmann). As mentioned earlier, Slavic girls and women would hang offerings, such as votive towels and ribbons, on birch trees for the *rusalki*.

In the Polish sun ritual referenced above, it is also likely that the girls danced “after the sun” in circle dances. Kelly says that solar dances were danced “in circles or rings to encourage the sun to come” (24). Ring dances of young girls dancing to the sun were also featured on Slavic spring embroideries as rows of dancing figures (Kelly 24). And in Polish papercuttings, solar motifs are preserved, sometimes shown surrounding a central goddess figure (Kelly 149-50).

In the nineteenth century, Kelly notes that sun disks and solar motifs were found on beams of Polish farmhouses, weaving equipment, ceramic pitchers, metal jewelry, embroidery, and wall papercuttings (96). She adds that metal brooches, still commonly found today in Poland and Slovakia, are descendants of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century brooches that depicted the Goddess with her solar and lunar motifs (144). The history and prevalence of the solar motif in Polish folk life demonstrate the longevity and importance of this
Goddess symbol. Hubbs notes that there is an “archaic solar identity of the rusalki,” which can be found in northern woodcarvings of the sirin and in the Russian folktale of the magical Firebird (34). Russian prialki (distaffs), which feature Goddess imagery resembling the metal brooches described above, also portray this solar identity of the rusalki by combining solar motifs with the image of the rusalka-sirin (Kelly 134). Goddess imagery on distaffs echoes the connection between Neolithic women’s spindle whorls and the Goddess as a spinner. The Polish spring and Midsummer solar rites, along with the numerous Polish household items that feature solar motifs, provide evidence for ancient female deities associated with the sun.

Midsummer rituals in Poland included unmarried Polish girls throwing wreaths of flowers and herbs in the river to divine whether they would marry within the year (Knab, Customs 134). In comparison, during Rusal ‘naia Week in Russia, girls would throw woven garlands of birch branches into the river to divine their future marriages (Ivanits 10).

Documents from Kievan Rus’ describe the Rusalii (Midsummer and Midwinter festivals), which honored the rusalki (Barber, “Origins” 16). Divination was an important activity done at Midsummer and Midwinter because these solstice days were liminal points on the wheel of the year when the veils between the worlds were thin (Barber, “Origins” 19). Women were the ones who performed divinations, by throwing wreaths into lakes and rivers at Midsummer and divining with mirrors, wax, and bowls of water at Midwinter (Barber, “Origins” 19). Divination rites in Poland paralleled these Rusalii practices. Polish girls not only divined with wreaths at Midsummer; in the winter months, they performed a variety of divination methods to foretell their futures. On the Eve of St. Andrew’s, November 30th, girls who wished to see their future spouses poured wax on cold water, fasted to obtain important dreams, carried hemp seeds tied at their waists, or looked into mirrors and wells (Benet 89-
90). Fortunetelling was also commonly done on New Year’s Eve (Knab, *Customs* 57).

Divination links Polish girls to the *rusalki*. As discussed in the Dazhbog myth, the *rusalki* are associated with oracular powers. In Russia, the *rusalki* are imagined as sitting in birch trees, spinning out the fates of humans (Hubbs 33). The *rusalki* “instructed young women to take up spinning and weaving and foretold whether they would or would not marry” (Hubbs 35). Slavic divination rites are therefore linked to the ancient worship of the *rusalki*. Divination practices featured young girls cultivating their own oracular powers, mirroring that of the divine maidens.6

The ancient veneration of Mother Earth on Midsummer reflects her continued presence in Slavic peasant traditions. In spring, the Earth Mother was thought to be pregnant, and in western Ukraine and Belorussia, it was forbidden to dig in, strike, or plow the earth before March 25th (Gimbutas, *Language* 159; *Slavs* 169). The association of human mother to Earth Mother is common in Poland. In Poland and Russia, there is a saying: “[T]o strike the earth is the same as striking your own mother” (Gimbutas, *Language* 159). In Polish peasant literature, the earth is identified with a woman who both gives birth and takes the dead back into her womb (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 33). As discussed in regard to Polish myth, the Earth Mother represents truth and justice. Slavic peasants believed the Earth Mother would listen to their appeals, settle disputes, and punish the guilty. To settle legal disputes, peasants would call on the earth as witness and swear their oaths on the earth by putting a clod of dirt on their head or by swallowing it (Gimbutas, *Language* 159). In Christian times, Slavic veneration for the earth became connected to the veneration of Mary.

6. Besides divination methods, young girls used spells to find husbands. In an old Polish spell, young girls address the goddess of dawn to help them seek husbands. This spell was later changed into a Christian prayer, whereby God, Jesus, and Mary were sought for help rather than the dawn goddess (*Zorze*, “Morning Star and Evening Star”) (qtd. in Brzozowska-Krajka, “Coexistence” 22).
The survival of the Earth Mother and Mother Goddess in Poland today can most vividly be seen in the veneration and devotion given to the Virgin Mary. In Poland, Mary is known as *Matka Boska* (Mother of God) (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 35). In Polish literature, folklore, and song, she is called Queen of Heaven and Earth, the Mother of All Creation, Queen of Poland, Eternal Lady, and Mistress of the Sky, of the Beginning, and of the End (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 36). In popular religiosity she is known as a creator or co-creator of the world, while patriotically, she is called *Matka Polka* and *Matka Polska* (Mother Pole and Mother Poland) (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 37, 39). These titles and descriptions demonstrate how ancient titles of the Goddess were incorporated into the titles for Mary within Christianity. In Poland, Mary’s motherhood is stressed more than her virginity, which associates Poland with eastern Slavic Greek Orthodox traditions even though Poland is Roman Catholic (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 35). This emphasis seems to relate to Mary absorbing elements of the pan-Slavic veneration of Mother Earth.

In Poland, there are more churches named for Mary and more holidays devoted to her than to any other saint (Benet 74). Over a thousand miraculous pictures of her exist in the country; one of the most famous is the Black Madonna of Czestochowa, which is the focal point of a pilgrimage every year (Benet 74). Mary’s connection to the Slavic Earth Mother and the Neolithic Pregnant Vegetation Goddess can be seen in her connections to the earth. The Polish Marian calendar follows closely the cycles of agriculture, and evidence for the coexistence of pagan and Christian beliefs is found in the fact that Catholic Marian holidays have two names, a Catholic name and another one that refers to Mary’s connections to the earth (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 37). May is an important month dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Polish Crown. The Annunciation of the Virgin on March 25th is a day also
known as “Our Lady of the Brooks because from then on the ice begins to break in the streams, loosening the spring freshets. The Holy Mother, like some of the lesser saints, helps to warm the air, open the earth, bring back life to the wakening vegetation” (Benet 65-66). The title “Our Lady of the Brooks” illustrates how Mary is connected to rivers and streams, just as the *rusalki* are connected to sources of water in Poland. As discussed, the *rusalki* can take the form of Sky Women, bringing snowstorms to the lands. The winter feast of the Immaculate Conception is also known as Our Lady of the Snows (Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz, “Peasant Rituals” 23), which associates Mary with snowy weather. Mary’s associations with the moistures of earth and sky are reminiscent of the ancient powers of the Neolithic Bird and Snake Goddess, as well as of the Slavic *rusalki* and Baba Yaga.

Mary’s powers to help awaken new vegetation and new life in spring suggest her strong connection to the Earth Mother. In fact, the most important holiday in the agricultural and Marian calendar takes place on August 15th, the Ascension of the Virgin (Mother of God of the Herbs) (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 37). This day “is also a celebration of Mother Earth, and the women carry bouquets of various grains, vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers to the church” (Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz, “Peasant Rituals” 20). The bouquets are thought to have medicinal, healing, and protective powers and are placed in barns, fields, and houses (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba 38). Although the Church has a role in blessing the women’s bouquets, it is the women who are celebrating the fruits of the harvest and playing the role of the earth’s priestesses. The fertile powers of the Earth Mother and women are linked to Mary’s holy day.

The sowing of winter crops is also connected to Mary; September 8th is celebrated as the day of the Birth of Mary and is also called Our Lady of Sowing (Baudouin de Courtenay
In the Neolithic era, agriculture, grain, and the fertility of the land were connected to the Pregnant Vegetation Goddess, the likely predecessor of the Grain Goddess and the Earth Mother of European folklore (Gimbutas, *Language* 141). Polish harvesting traditions seem to have ancient ties to the Neolithic Vegetation Goddess.

Harvesting usually began at the end of July, and it was important that the first stalks were cut on the day blessed by Mary, Saturday (Knab, *Customs* 145). Many customs were associated with the first and last cuts of grain. The last sheaf of grain was commonly referred to as the *Baba*, the Old Woman, who was imagined as sitting in the last sheaf (Frazer 469). As mentioned earlier regarding harvest wreaths, the last stalks were also known as Wheat-mother, Rye-mother, or Pea-mother (Frazer 465). The last sheaf was sometimes made into the shape of a woman and dressed up in a skirt, blouse, and scarf and called *baba* (old woman) or *pszenna baba* (wheat woman) (Knab, *Customs* 149). The Slavic Baba Yaga, if one recalls, bears the name “Baba” and could take the form of an old woman. In fact, in Slavic culture, the last sheaf of grain, dressed in female rags to create an effigy of a crone, was often offered to Baba Yaga (Phillips and Kerrigan 104).

In Kraków, there was a custom where the woman binding the last sheaf was also wrapped up in it: “Thus encased in the sheaf, she is carried on the last harvest-waggon (sic) to the house, where she is drenched with water by the whole family. She remains in the sheaf till the dance is over, and for a year she retains the name of Baba” (Frazer 469). The woman embodies or represents the feminine spirit of the grain. She becomes intimately linked to the last sheaf of grain and ritual is done to honor her.

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7. September 8th was the ancient birthday of the Great Goddess. To celebrate this day, Slavic women gave one another special fabrics featuring the Goddess’s image (Kelly 17).
In the previous chapter, the *poudnica* and Baba Yaga were discussed in connection to the fields and to the harvest. Polish tradition abounds with stories of feminine spirits connected to the grain and to the fields. In Pomerania, the “rye woman” or “rye mother” was said to live in the grain (Benet 79). Some of the female grain spirits have been demonized to an extent in Polish tradition. For example,

[T]he mountaineers speak of a black and naked ‘wild old woman’ who lurks there [in the grain]. She seizes children and carries them off to her underground home. Elsewhere are huge demons, white robed and terrifying. Here and there they are pictured as half woman, half animal, with the head of a frog, the teeth of swine, the eyes of cows, and with claws on hands and feet. The people of the Krakow region say these creatures are women with flames shooting from their breasts. (Benet 79)

Beneath the demonized layer of descriptions preside female spirits that retain aspects of the Old European Goddess. The black and naked “wild old woman” who carries off children to her underworld may relate to the demonized witch Baba Yaga in Slavic folklore. Black, an Old European color related to the fertile earth, signifies chthonic, underworld qualities connected to the Goddess of Death and Rebirth. Demons dressed in white echo the Old European color of death, as well as the goddess of death, Marzanna, in her white dress. The images of hybrid forms, half animal/half woman, have direct correlations to the hybrid Neolithic Goddess statues. Frogs, sows, and cows were sacred animals of the Old European Goddess, representing her powers over life, death, and rebirth (Gimbutas, *Language* 134, 146, 251). The powerful image of a woman with flames shooting from her breasts perhaps connects life (nourishing breasts) to death (shooting fires). Harvesting crops meant food (life)
for the people, but ensuing death (winter) for the fields of grain. This paradox seems to be represented in the different names for and descriptions of the Grain or Earth Mother.

The Slavic names for autumn emphasize the Grain Mother’s dominion over harvesting traditions of summer and fall. In Poland, October’s mild weather before winter was known as Babie Lato, “Old Woman’s Summer” (Knab, Customs 219). In comparison, in Russia Bab’e Leto was the name for “Women’s Summer” (Hubbs 79) or “Old Woman’s Summer” (Dixon-Kennedy 28). Bab’e Leto began after the harvest with a feast on September 1st (Hubbs 79). The feast contained numerous important events, such as the extinguishing of old fires, lighting new fires to honor ancestors, brewing beer, arranging marriages, and beginning times of spinning (Hubbs 79).

Harvesting traditions in Poland have parallels in other central and east European countries. In Lithuania the last sheaf of grain was called Boba (Old Woman) (Frazer 469). The sheaf took the form of a woman and was carried throughout the village on a wagon, and then drenched with water (Frazer 470). In Russia, the last sheaf was made into a woman, and in Bulgaria, a doll, called a Corn-queen or Corn-mother, was made out of the last sheaf (Frazer 470). As can be ascertained from these traditions, the grain that was harvested contained the spirit of the Divine Mother or Grandmother within it. One Polish custom consisted of announcing, “You have cut the navel-string” when the last corn was cut (Frazer 471). One of the names for the last stalks in western Poland was pepek (navel) (Knab, Customs 148). The grain was perceived as an umbilical cord connected to the Earth Mother. This custom portrays the earth as pregnant and envisions the pregnant Earth Mother providing food for her children, similar to the Neolithic Pregnant Vegetation Goddess.
Gimbutas says that European peasants perceived hillocks of rye, barley, wheat, and oats to be the pregnant bellies of the Grain Mother and at the end of the harvest, tops of hills were left uncut and grains were tied together (Language 149). In Polish harvesting traditions, it was important to leave some uncut stalks in the field. Sophie Hodorowicz Knab tells of one tradition in which a lead woman harvester, the przodownica, picked a spot in the field to leave uncut. After the rest of the grain was cut, the people would return to this spot to braid together the remaining wheat into a dome shape. Under the dome was placed a rock covered with a white fabric, and on top of this was placed a piece of bread, money, and salt. A young girl, helping with the harvest for the first time, would then be dragged by the leg three times around the uncut stalks in a custom known as oborywanie przepórki (ploughing the quail) (Knab, Customs 148). A dome shape suggests the belly of the Earth Mother, while the table with bread, money, and salt suggests a harvest altar to her. The important roles of women and girls in this ritual link the fertility of women and young girls to the creative energies and abundance of the Goddess.

Women’s important connections to grain and to the Earth Mother are also seen in the Polish traditions of baking bread. Baking bread was a sacred activity in Old Europe and took place in the temples dedicated to the Goddess (Gimbutas, Language 147). The stove in Poland has a history of being the literal and symbolic “hub of household activity” connected to women (Benet 179). The typical Polish home would have a sacred corner devoted to images of the Virgin Mary and saints, and the corner would be decorated with flowers and green boughs during the holidays (Benet 181). This sacred corner was opposite the stove (Benet 181), perhaps remembering the prehistoric practice of women baking bread for the Goddess in Old European shrines.
The ancient tradition of shaping bread into various forms, such as snakes, birds, flowers, and animals, or marking bread with Goddess symbols, such as snake spirals and lozenges, suggests a tradition that focused on providing sacred offerings to the Earth Fertility Goddess (Gimbutas, *Language* 147). As previously mentioned, Polish spring rituals involved baking cookies in the shape of birds. On New Year’s Eve, people in Pomerania would bake a “new summer” of dough in the shape of “human figures, little trees, animals, and [would place] them in glass cabinets” (Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz, “Peasant Rituals” 9). Besides taking the shape of the Goddess’s sacred animals or trees, some Polish bread was marked with her symbols. In one image from 1965, a country woman is holding an enormous braided bread, known as a *kukielka*, decorated with snake-like double spirals (Knab, *Cookbook* 253). The *kukielka* was baked by a godmother for her new godchild (Knab, *Cookbook* 253). Double spirals, or snake designs, are linked to the Old European Snake Goddess. Furthermore, the Snake Goddess was sometimes portrayed holding a baby (Gimbutas, *Goddesses* 142), and Polish folktales tell of miraculous births associated with snakes (Asala 35). The image of the woman holding her *kukielka* connects women, bread, birthing, and snake imagery.

Prehistoric traditions of offering bread to the Grain Mother survived into the twentieth century in rural eastern and northern Europe (Gimbutas, *Language* 147). In Poland, traditions survived involving bread offerings. Women preparing the Christmas Eve supper (*wilia*) with the harvests of the fields would scatter crumbs and food in the corners and interiors of their homes for spirits and ancestors, as well as leave food on the table all night for deceased relatives (Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz, “Peasant Rituals” 5). It was said that, “The more grains of cereal disappear from the Christmas Eve bowl, the better the
crops will be!” (Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz, “Peasant Rituals” 5). The ancestors were also connected to grain and the bounty of next year’s crops. Traditions associated with All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day in Poland show traces of ancient ancestor worship. On the Eve of All Souls, it was believed that the dead returned to the earth to visit their families and their homes (Knab, *Customs* 225). Housewives baked special bread, known as Soul Bread or Bread of the Dead, to represent a dead person and take to the cemeteries (Knab, *Customs* 226). Special cookies or cereal were placed on the graves of people who passed away and candles were placed in cemeteries (Baudouin de Courtenay Jedrzejewicz, “Peasant Rituals” 21). These traditions continue the ancient Slavic practice of ancestor worship, as well as the even older Neolithic practice of honoring ancestors in burial graves or mounds.

Birth practices among the Poles contain a combination of Christian and pagan elements. It was not uncommon in the past for peasant women to give birth in the field, on the road, or at the marketplace (Benet 194-95). When labor was difficult, a woman “may be laid on the ground so that the magical strength of ‘the holy earth’ will flow into her” (Benet 195). Lying on “the holy earth” channels the strength of the Earth Mother to flow into the mother giving birth. A pregnant Polish woman was forbidden to pick fruit from a tree or walk across a newly sown field so that she would not kill the tree or cause weeds to grow in the field (Benet 194). A woman bearing new life also held deathly powers, just as the Neolithic Goddess yielded both creative and destructive powers.

In Poland a general belief in changelings accompanied the birth of newborn babies. In one popular story, a woman nurses her child for five years. The child, however, does not grow. An old beggar woman knows that the baby is a changeling, so she lays the baby on the threshold and strikes it with an axe. The axe reveals a nest of snakes resting in a rotten tree
stump. The snakes have been suckling at the mother’s breast instead of her own baby (Benet 200). This story hints at the demonization of snakes and the ancient Snake Goddess. Terracotta figurines from Old European, Minoan, Cypriote, and Mycenaean cultures portray an anthropomorphizing snake nursing or holding a baby at her breast (Gimbutas, Goddesses 142). The nursing Neolithic Snake goddesses were transformed within a patriarchal, Catholic culture into evil female snakes that switch mothers’ babies at birth with changelings.

The belief in the rusalki as the souls of unbaptized babies (Ivanits 75) appears to be a Christian demonization of these ancient goddesses. Oleszkiewicz-Peralba notes that rusalki are sometimes portrayed as female demons and linked to Boginki (191). In Poland, Christianity influenced women’s birthing practices. If a woman died before churching (a church purification ritual after a woman gives birth), she was thought to turn into a demonic creature called Mamuna, “who steals healthy children and substitutes her own” (Benet 205). Gateways and boundaries were considered places where the evil Mamuna or Boginki resided (Benet 206). The term Boginki bears similarities to the word bogini (meaning “goddess” in Polish) (“Bogini”). The word Mamuna brings to mind the Mamony, the Wild Woman spirit of the forest. Just as Baba Yaga became demonized as a witch in Slavic Christian nations, the Boginki and Mamuna bring to mind ancient goddesses transformed into evil spirits that prey on pregnant women.9

Traditions surrounding death provide evidence for the survival of the Neolithic Goddess in Poland. As previously mentioned, there is a Polish tradition of personifying death

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8. Polish roadway shrines have a tradition of being placed at the edge of a village, such as at a crossroads, which marks a boundary line and works to keep evil spirits at bay (Benet 28).

9. In comparison to the Mamuna and Boginki, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic beliefs that Lilith, Adam’s first wife, steals or kills babies can be seen as a patriarchal demonization of a feminine spirit or goddess who women sought for help and assistance during childbirth, as well as probably during miscarriage and abortion (Grenn 40-41).
as a woman, which links her to the Neolithic death goddesses. In Neolithic Poland as well as in the wider scope of Old Europe, the dead were interred in the earth, demonstrating their return to the Earth Mother to await rebirth. As Gimbutas notes, “In Neolithic religion, the processes of death and transition were cyclical. . . . Symbolically, the individual returned to the goddess’ womb to be reborn” (Living 55). A more modern custom found among Poles, Czechs, and Serbs was to place a dying individual on the ground, in hopes that his or her soul would go underground (Knab, Customs 261). The prehistoric Goddess of Life was also the Goddess of Death, and just as a pregnant Polish woman could rely on Mother Earth to assist her in labor, a dying Pole could rely on Mother Earth to take her or his spirit back into the soil.

White was the color of mourning in Poland while red was avoided (Knab, Customs 278). In older traditions, the deceased were buried in a death shirt that was often the color white or gray (Knab, Customs 262). The color white in connection to death can be seen as a remnant of an Old European tradition. Birds, such as owls, were important messengers of death in Poland that signaled the impending demise of individuals (Knab, Customs 258). Owls as harbingers of death are reminiscent of the Old European Bird Goddess in her bird of prey form. Owl Goddess urns, as previously discussed, were found in Neolithic sites in regions of what is now considered modern-day Poland.

Women’s primary role in caring for the deceased evokes the image of the priestess midwifing the dead. Women washed the deceased’s body and sang holy songs during the ritual washing: “In some areas of Poland, assistance with washing the deceased was done by the same designated women who heated water with herbs of rue, myrtle, mugwort, or any of the herbs blessed on Blessed Mother of the Herbs (August 15)” (Knab, Customs 262). Like
the Neolithic Goddess, women were linked to rituals of both life and death, and women helped facilitate these cyclical processes for their families and communities.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explore the Neolithic Goddess and the central question: Can her presence still be found in various forms amidst Poland’s myths, folklore, history, and traditions? My search for the Goddess in Poland benefited immensely from an interdisciplinary approach to research, which allowed me to gain a more holistic perspective on the survival of the Goddess in Poland that may not have occurred if I had attempted to study her through the lens of a single academic discipline. The literature that I relied on emerged from a variety of fields, including Polish and Slavic history, folklore, mythology, ethnography, archaeology, and women’s spirituality. My research was enhanced by creative methodologies that assisted me in looking between the lines at different cultural strata. The research methods of archaeomythology and Gimbutasian symbolic analysis provided me with an initial framework through which I was able to build connections among the diverse sources that I relied on.

My journey to learn more about my maternal ancestors inspired me to uncover the goddesses who were, or continue to be, venerated in Poland, the country to which I can trace my motherline. The motivation for my research was fueled by the lack of scholarship on the Goddess in Poland. My sweeping journey through Poland’s Neolithic past to the present is meant to demonstrate the perseverance of the Sacred Feminine through the millennia and the ways in which her identity and forms of worship changed in various cultural, religious, and historical contexts.

The exploration of the Neolithic Goddess in Poland ultimately led me to discover her survival in numerous realms, such as in archaeology, mythology, folklore, myth, legend, peasant tradition and custom, and in the veneration of Mary. Although patriarchal culture and
religion have attempted to eliminate, demonize, or deny the worship of the Goddess in Poland, remnants of the civilization of Old Europe continue to shine through the patriarchal layers of history. The ancient Goddess, along with her symbols, attributes, and sacred animals, has been preserved, often on the part of Polish women, in stories and myths, textiles and embroideries, rituals and traditions, and in the very landscape of *Matka Polska* herself.

Studying the survival of goddesses and female spirits in patriarchal cultures often necessitates an investigation in locations that one might not immediately think to look. Historical sources related to Slavic religion and culture tend to focus on the domination of men and male gods. It was only as I began delving into the realms of archaeology, folklore, mythology, and peasant traditions that I began to see how women’s spiritual heritage was richly preserved in different forms of material culture throughout the millennia. The Polish folktales and traditions that I discuss in this paper demonstrate the continued reverence for the Sacred Feminine into present times. I do not think that I would have noticed this if I limited my research to solely androcentric literary sources. The worship of the Goddess may survive in women’s embroideries, folk arts, and rituals. Women’s arts and rituals can actively preserve such pre-Christian cultural elements that should not be overlooked or dismissed by scholars.

The enduring legacy of the Goddess in Poland can be found in her prehistoric forms, symbols, and animals that reappear in historical and present times. In my research, I was surprised to discover how the Old European Goddess’s sacred powers, animals, and symbols were preserved to an extent in Polish myth, folklore, legend, and folk life. Even with the increasing shifts to patriarchy and Christianity in Slavic cultures, female deities were not completely eliminated. Polish folklore and tradition speak of female spirits of the corn and of
the harvest, of rivers, forests, and lakes, and of birth, life, and death, which provide evidence for the survival of ancient goddesses in modern guises. The Slavic Goddess trinity of the *rusalka*, Mother Moist Earth, and Baba Yaga still resonates in central and eastern Europe. While over time the *rusalki* survived as nature spirits with both benevolent and malicious powers, the reverence for the prehistoric Earth Mother became subsumed in the reverence for the Christian Mary. Baba Yaga, with all her many names and titles, has been relegated to the realm of folklore and fantasy, and her presence continues in popular culture. In my research I found that although patriarchal culture and religion have sought to demonize and eliminate Goddess worship in Poland, matriarchal elements have survived among the peasantry up until recent centuries. Ancient memories of female deities and women’s prominent spiritual roles linger in peasant ritual and folk life.

Studies of pre-patriarchal cultures and ancient goddesses have important implications for our modern views on prehistory and the past. These studies challenge androcentric research and patriarchal historical interpretations that do no justice to women’s spiritual legacy. The study of female deities and women’s spiritual positions has not gained the same amount of attention and respect as male deities within Western academia. Therefore, I think my research points out the important need for the meticulous and respectful exploration of female deity in a patriarchal culture.

My study of the Goddess in Poland pays special homage to Marija Gimbutas and her works on Old Europe. Gimbutas’s method of archaeomythology is a rich interdisciplinary methodology that I encourage more scholars to incorporate into their own research and expand on in detail. I believe that my research will help enrich the many fields of study from which I drew. I understand that much more can be said on the subjects that I discuss, and
aspects of my study can be interpreted in various ways. Further information is needed to truly begin to understand the rich and complex history of the Goddess in Poland.

I hope this paper motivates people to continue to seek and recover the Sacred Feminine in Slavic cultures and traditions. It would be highly beneficial if Polish and English-speaking scholars would come together and share information and publications to deepen the studies of women and religion in Poland. My position as an outsider, along with my limited knowledge of the Polish language and access to Polish-written literature, necessitates further research into my subject by Polish speakers and Polish natives themselves.

Women’s spirituality holds a much-needed place in the academic world from which feminist scholars can launch crucial investigations into the reinterpretations of prehistory, history, and religion. Women’s spirituality is also a personal journey, whereby women can connect with their ancestors and reclaim the feminine faces of deity. It was my own connections with my foremothers that taught me to regard women and the Goddess as sacred and important. It was from that place that I was able to shed some light on the survival of the Neolithic Goddess in Polish folklore, myth, and tradition.
Works Cited


