

Andrea Fleckinger

The Methods of Matriarchal Landscape Mythology

Or: How to find matriarchal traces in a landscape?

Today I have the honor to present a part of Heide Goettner-Abendroth's research work: the matriarchal landscape mythology. She developed the matriarchal landscape mythology as a theory and practice to make visible the culture of matriarchal neolithic Europe.

Matriarchal landscape mythology is based on a methodology opens ways to connect to ancient knowledge and thus gain a deeper understanding of human history. Further, it consists of an important element for our intentions to transform society by embracing the matriarchal paradigm. It helps us finding connections, and to anchor new perspectives on history and traditional knowledge.

Even today, we can still find remnants of matriarchal symbolism that have usually been passed on unconsciously from generation to generation. Usually, the deeper and complex meanings of these symbols and/or traditions are passed to the unknown, and most central European people are no longer aware of what they are practicing. Matriarchal landscape mythology gives itself the important task to contribute to make the meaning of the traditions, symbols, and sacred places visible again and thus raising awareness.

Although matriarchal landscape mythology had been developed in the European context and had so far it has been practiced only within Europe, this does not mean that this methodology could not be applied in other contexts. For me, it would be a pleasure to discuss on the international significance the matriarchal landscape methodology could gain and what elements need to be added or modified for doing research in your contexts.

In my contribution, I would like to talk specifically about the methodology. Matriarchal landscape methodology is composed of ten steps which I will explain now in detail.

1. The first step in applying the matriarchal landscape methodology is to walk the landscape. It is important to walk several times the same landscape in order to familiarise with it. The walking is significant as also neolithic people walked. It is kind of a meditative walking in which the landscape beings "speaking" to you. Gradually you will start seeing the womb valleys and the breast mountains. Every time you walk through, you will see more and gradually these insights come together to a whole, and the symbolic image of the landscape emerges. To a certain extent, it could be compared to what anthropologists call "going native". By walking the landscape, you are going native step by step with the land.

You will start to see mountains with smooth twin mountains, the breasts of mother earth or valleys and canyons looking like the goddess womb.

2. The second step is to look across the landscape and to notice hills. You will discover hills that are free standing and not too high, so that they can quite easily be reached by human people. Often these elevations are occupied by churches, monasteries or castles. Especially

regarding churches, the question arises: What are they doing up there, far away from the people and the villages? Regarding the castles quite easily their position could be explained as a strategically important place. But what role they really played on such a hill?

Once you have reached such an elevation, it is important to check the horizon. If you have a beautiful view there, you will notice the horizon seem lowered, and it appears almost flat, although you are not on the sea but in the mountains. This particular phenomenon was central to Neolithic people to observe the rising and the setting of the stars and thus develop the first calendars. This way, the sunrise and the sunset could be recorded, a significant element for agriculture. Often at these hills you can find menhirs on the summits, which have the function of a sun-clock or calendar.

3. The next element is to individuate sightlines. The focus is on the astronomically important lines: from east to west, from north to south, or from northeast to southwest or from northwest to southeast. These lines had a practical and symbolic meaning for Neolithic people and reflect that there was no division between sacred and profane, but their worldview was rather imminent and holistic.

4. The fourth step examines cult lines and cult paths. Often on the astronomically important sight lines, other hills with churches or castles can be found. The buildings line up like a string of pearls. If you find this in a landscape, you find a cult line. Long distance communication via fire and smoke signals took place on these lines as people gathered in these places. Usually these cult lines are connected by paths. This is how the earliest trade and pilgrimage routes across land and rivers had been created. These lines give a further indication of the significance of a place.

5. An interdisciplinary approach is crucial for the matriarchal landscape mythology. The fifth step is to look for archaeological analysis of the area, which provides the evidence that Neolithic people lived in these landscapes. This information is a core element, as it is the basis for continuing with the research. Only if neolithic people lived in a certain area we can continue with the landscape mythology. Without this evidence we have to abandon it. In this context, it is important to note that we cannot assume that archaeologists have already explored all corners of the world, especially in less known areas archaeological research is often not sufficiently supported.

6. The names of the landscape can often reveal a lot about the past. It is possible that they go back in linguistic history to the pre-Indo-European roots of Europe. Thus, we arrive at the Bronze Age. Linguistics is very important for deciphering landscape names and thus, to get some insights into the meaning of a certain place. Particularly the sacred places where a goddess was seen in the mountains or the rivers could not easily be erased. Often the name of the goddess changed, it got celticised, romanised or germanised but the meaning was kept all the time. Names of sacred hills could often reveal a lot, as well as the many local names we find in German speaking countries where villages or places contain the word "Woman".

To give you an example from the place I am living. I am from South Tyrol, a small province in the heart of the Alps. Different sacred places had been researched there by Heide Goettner-Abendroth with the methods of the matriarchal landscape mythology. Those of you who

read German can explore them in her books. One place I would like to talk to you by example of the importance of the linguistic analysis is the Similaun. The Similaun is a 3,597 m high mountain and surrounded by a glacier. In the 90s it was often reported about in the media, because a natural mummy, the Ice Man, or so called "Ötzi", was found there. He lived sometime between 3350 and 3105 BC. The Similaun has a harmonious triangular shape, and the white glacier-womb makes it appear as a white mountain goddess. As in other areas in the Alps, the Neolithic people assumed that the ancestral souls lived in the glacier with the white goddess. On a closer look, the word Similaun, goes back to a pre-Indo-European language and consists of three syllables: Sam-alu-ana. Sam means white, alu means divine, and ana is the European word for mother or ancestress. Similaun thus translates as: The white mother goddess.

7. As we have already heard, often monasteries or churches are placed on old sacred places. Along with these buildings the Christians tried to replace old symbolic ideas with Christian motifs. That happened especially in those places of worship that could not be destroyed because the population held on to celebrate their sacred places. Therefore, pre-Christian symbolism was simply transferred to and obviously distorted in the meaning by Christian figures. As for example, the different goddesses had been subsumed by the holy Mary. Pilgrimage churches are particularly striking. If there was a sky goddess before: Mary is shown as a sky woman. If there was an earth goddess before: Mary's role as mother is emphasized. If there was a goddess of the underworld, Mary appears as black Madonna. Thus, for this step in applying the method of the matriarchal landscape mythology it is crucial to be familiar with the Christian and the matriarchal symbolism, in order to individuate contradictions and discrepancies that could then reveal their original meaning. Of interest are also those places the church had demonised and called devil's or witch's places. Important rituals and festivals of the matriarchal population often took place there, which is why the church was eager to cover them with horrible stories to frighten the population. The dragon is also a motif that points to the earlier matriarchal cultural epoch. When St. Michael or St. George slays the dragon in churches, this image symbolically shows the violent destruction of the matriarchal culture and gives an important indication to the significance the place had.

8. As the name suggests, mythology is very important für the matriarchal landscape mythology. Through myths it is possible to tap into the worldview of earlier cultures. By legends and myths ancient knowledge has been passed down from generation to generation. Over the millennia, many of these legends and myths had been distorted and adapted to patriarchal values. Nevertheless, there are indicators that allow us to draw conclusions about their original version. Therefore, a deep knowledge of matriarchal mythology is central for applying the matriarchal landscape mythology and thus for going back to the oldest patterns and motifs. The myths have to be "dusted", the various layers of cultural epochs have to be removed in order to return to their original meaning.

For example: The widespread legends on three women in Europe refer to the holy trinity of the goddess of neolithic Europe. The concept of the holy trinity was widespread among the Neolithic culture and very significant. Therefore, also the Christian church adapted it, although in very disturbing way. The motif of the holy trinity in Neolithic Europe referred to

the great goddess in her threefold appearance as a young white woman, as the red mother, and as the black, wise, old woman.

9. The penultimate step of the matriarchal landscape mythology I would like to give is: Folklore research. Similar to the knowledge that has been saved in legends and myths, it is equally important to look at customs, folk songs, dance performances, conventional patterns in wall paintings, especial forms of pastries, folk festivals and other so-called pagan remnants. Local customs are essential to understand the landscape, as among these rituals the seasons are celebrated, and the connection to the landscape is established and continuously renewed.

The tarantella, for example, represents a widespread dance in the Mediterranean region in which women dance to ecstasy. This dance is said to bring healing. Another example are the solstice fires in the Alps, which are lit every year at summer- solstice to celebrate the sacred marriage between heaven and earth.

10. The last of the ten steps refers to find cultural niches and retreats. These “forgotten” places attract our attention. Cultural niches and retreats develop when older traditions and customs are preserved regardless of newer or modern influences. Often this happened on islands or in lonely valleys in the mountains. These places are often economically weak, and people experience poverty until modern tourism discovers them and commercializes their traditions as a curiosity. For matriarchal landscape methodology these places are of particular interest because knowledge about ancient cultures and traditions had been conserved to a higher degree than in urban contexts.

Local history records can provide additional important information regarding the questions:

- How developed the localities?
- Had there been once flourishing cultural centres, and when?
- When did they become a remote, forgotten province?

These individual steps serve as guidelines for recognizing connections and understanding their deeper meaning. They do not follow a hierarchical order but are rather to be understood as an iterative process in which the individual steps intertwine, complement, and enrich each other.

Only by putting all the pieces together is it possible to form a complete picture of a landscape and to understand the matriarchal way of life, as well as the matriarchal view of the world. In this respect, the overall social benefit of matriarchal landscape mythology is not "only" to develop a profound knowledge of the past, but it can also be an added value for our current way of being in the world. Thus, it might contribute to a more conscious and connected life in and with the world.