

Kaarina Kailo

Terra Feminarum, The Land of Women.

New Evidence of Finno-Ugric matriarchies introducing new evidence pointing to the Northern matriarchal past

Heide Goettner-Abendroth has published a wealth of books and articles on matriarchies past, present and future (e.g. 2017, 2012, 2007, 1995 [1980]) establishing a field she created after her studies of philosophy in Germany. In her major works she exposes, first, the many stereotypes and false ideas about matriarchies and, then, develops a rigorous methodology and criteria for recognizing matriarchal societies. I have been greatly influenced by *The Goddess and her Heros*, which allowed me to revise the history of the North, written from a purely patriarchal point of view and totally excluding the matriarchal past of Scandinavian, Finno-Ugric, Slavic and other peoples.

How can I do justice to the mind-blowing wealth of theoretical insights, methods and primary materials that should be obligatory reading in schools and universities? While I have applied Heide's theories in my ongoing research into the matriarchal North, here I can only give a few examples of how she has helped me revisit Finnish and Finno-Ugric goddess mythology.

Heide has of course already exposed the way in which the Aesir, the mythic people led by Odin in Norse sagas, representing historical patriarchy, conquered the Vanir, the peaceful matriarchal peoples of Norse sagas. However, where I continue Heide's research is in revisiting specifically the Land of Women, Terra Feminarum. Old Europe does not end where Gimbutas and other archaeo-mythologists have set their boundaries. According to some Scandinavian scholars and myself, Old Europe extended way into the North. I argue that it covered Terra Feminarum.

These are some of the means through which patriarchy has taken over and weakened, then decimated the woman-centered civilizations that preceded it:

- absorption and deformation of matriarchal figures and ways,
- usurpation and changing of symbolic patterns,
- fusion of patriarchal gods with the matriarchal cults of the conquered peoples and a consequent set of shifts in meaning,
- transformation of a matriarchal mythical system to a patriarchal one by changing the gender of the primordial deity.

All of the above strategies characterize what happened to the Great Mothers, goddesses, mythologies and matriarchal territories in the North. In my years-long research on the Land of Women, I have found much new evidence to back up the thesis of a historical land of women using Heide Goettner-Abendroth's methods. The starting point was when thanks to Heide, I realized that myths and fairy tales are not just fictional and imaginary, but actually reflect and bring tidings of the past.

To quote Heide: "Fairy tales, like myths, are neither romanticized expressions of sublimated "souls of the people," nor simple reproductions of inexplicable natural phenomena...They are, as myths, reflections of the complex practices of early societies, which are, as we have observed, primarily matriarchal. ... A cultural-historical interpretation of fairy tales is the only interpretation with a scientific foundation, and the only one capable of providing us with enduring insights."

I agree, then, that the fairy tale, being a veiled myth, conveys the same religious message as the myth, and is equally complex. Legends, likewise, carry traces of the past, and in the case of both the Land of Women and the Golden Woman, there are numerous such narratives that point to the Golden Past, the matriarchal past, that we as humans now need more than ever.

All of this is highly relevant for the legend of Kvenland, the Land of Women has remained just that, a mere fiction, a fantasy rather than part of women's herstory—our very own golden past. That will now change—thanks to a great extent to Heide's magnum opus—the totality of her writings.

The Golden Woman, zolataja baba and Terra Feminarum are both vestiges of a past culture of matriarchal peoples whose convergence zone extended likely from parts of Sweden, maybe Norway across Samiland to Finland and the traditional lands of Ob-Ugrian Finno-Ugric peoples around the Ural Mountains---and beyond.

The Roman historian Tacitus first referred to a Terra Feminarum, in 98 CE. Likewise, Ohthere of Hålogaland (890 CE), and Adam von Bremen (a German medieval chronicler) mentioned a land east of Sweden that was not just ruled by women, as in having an occasional queen, but very vividly run by women. Tacitus commented that this is how degraded these people were, enslaved by women!

Adam von Bremen (Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte IV 14, 1075 CE) refers to a land where women are claimed to have killed male invaders by poisoned water. The historians also referred to powerful woman leaders, perhaps even Amazons, living in what is now Finland and maybe Estonia with its Naissaar (Island of Women). The Roman writer Tacitus talks about the tribes of Great Svíþjóð, Sviónés in his book Germania (98 CE). These scary women are likened to Amazons, the

ancient Greek staple concept of a female warrior.



Kvenland, known as Cwenland, Qwenland, Kænland or similar terms in medieval sources, is an ancient name for an area in Fennoscandia and Scandinavia. Kvenland, in that or nearly that spelling, is known from an Old English account written in the 9th century, which used the information provided by the Norwegian adventurer. The most important source for both the Golden Woman and Terra Feminarum is, however, the Norse sagas which obviously are not just fiction but carry traces of a past most meaningful to women and all those who wish to transform the current dysfunctional western patriarchal regimes.

Why has no feminist raised the possibility of a land of women, a Northern “Old Europe” with powerful matriarchs and shaman women, even amazons?” Because they don’t read Heide. I am now translating her writings into Finnish.

Finnish and Scandinavian women have been brainwashed to buy into the hegemonic view that the land of women is nothing but a wondering legend without any basis in reality, and feminists themselves have argued in the 1980s that matriarchies are a figment of the imagination (Nenola 1986). I continue to battle against the religious studies institutions that continue to act in the ways Heide has exposed; presenting the Great Mother of the North as a neutral god or interpreting him as male, using the pronoun he to refer to “him”. The Golden Woman has been absorbed into patriarchal myths and master narratives and turned into the monotheistic Virgin Mary. Among the new evidence putting the masculated scholar to shame is the news reported in the newspaper

guardian according to which the legendary island of women exists even today, being interpreted as the last matriarchy in Europe.

Golden woman worshipped by Permians on the right



KIHNU, WOMEN*s ISLAND in ESTONIA TODAY

KIHNU, WOMEN*s ISLAND in ESTONIA TODAY

It is thought to be Europe's last matriarchy, a tiny Baltic island where women are in charge and weddings can last three days. Photographer Anne Helene Gjelstad's portraits of Kihnu are a lament for a dying way of life



It is thought to be Europe's last matriarchy, a tiny Baltic island where women are in charge and weddings can last three days. Photographer Anne Helene Gjelstad's portraits of Kihnu are a lament for a dying way of life. Further proof on Northern lands of women provided by Adrienne Mayor. 2014. (*The Amazons: Lives and Legends of Warrior Women Across the Ancient World*. Boston: Princeton).

Both Finland and Estonia have had in recent history with women as presidents and prime ministers. What Heide has written about a new political system based on matriarchal practices is not an idle fantasy; if a life-oriented, much more humane political system reigned in the past, it can be reinstated, when knowledge increases about the maternal principles that reign in matriarchies past and present.

Ásgeir B. Magnússon, a Norwegian linguist has gathered the ancient terms that suggest that the memory of the Vanir, the legendary matriarchy of Norse sagas can be proven on the basis also of linguistic evidence. Bjarnadottir writes that "in ancient times, the river Don that runs into the Black sea, was called Vanakvísl (the Vanir delta), and on its west banks lived the people called Vanir. Their name has been connected to the Latin venus (love), and their goddess Venus, the rune wunjo (joy), and the Icelandic words vina/vinur (friend), vin (oasis), una (enjoy) and unna (to love)". Another explanation may be that the word is related to vána (wood or grove) (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989). Bjarnadottir finds that the relation to Venus, vinur/vina/vin and wunjo, i.e. the connection to love, friendship and joy, so illustrative of their culture that she needs not to look further (Bjarnadóttir 2009[2002], 60). Van-related terms apply also to Estonian and Finnish and mean "the old ones", and the Estonian old faith still being practiced is called vana-tru.

Scandinavian scholars Bek-Pedersen and Märta-Lena Bergstedt & Kirsten Brunsgaard Clausen have made similar arguments showing that Scandinavian history is being radically revised (2018, 137). Märta-Lena Bergstedt & Kirsten Brunsgaard Clausen: *The Norse Goddesses Behind the Asir Veil: The Vanir Mothers in Continental Scandinavia—A Late Shamanistic Culture Rooted in Old European Civilization*, 152.

Bergstedt & Brunsgaard Clausen in *The Norse Goddesses Behind The Asir Veil: The Vanir Mothers In Continental Scandinavia—A Late Shamanistic Culture Rooted In Old European Civilization* write that "it is tempting to cast a sidelong glance at the many vaner-words in modern Scandinavian languages, the meaning of which most often lie within the sphere of common, plain, non-admirable, powerless, wrong, distorted, customs and old habits, old ways, etc. (vanlig, vanmakt, vantro, vanskapt, vantro, vansinne, vana, etc.). Noble Aesir worshippers may well have perceived Vanir believers as rural peasants sticking to old habits (vanor), as well as unbelievers or wrong-believers (vantró) and twisted van-words into negative connotations. The alleged beauty of the Vanirs on the other hand may be preserved in words like vän, vänlig, vän, etc. (beautiful, kind, friend).

Furthermore, I have found that the primal Finnish goddess, Veen Emo, Mother of waterways, is also linked with the Dvina river and the words that echo the Vanir. A male hero in Finnish Kalevala has absorbed this figure, when it comes to public importance given to mythic characters. The main goddess and matriarch, Louhi, for her part is linked again with the geography of giantesses and

matriarchal lands, based also on toponyms in Northern Karelia. More evidence of Terra Feminarum, which male scholars insist on denying and concealing.

The Northern landscape has hundreds of geographical Van-names: Vansbro, Vanered, Vanatjärnen and Vänern, whispering and testifying to their old presence (212). The written mythology of the Aesir indirectly reveals traditional Vanir customs like women being the guardians of land and nature.⁵³ It seems the old society was oriented towards the giving and sustaining of life, not towards war and male domination. Although the information is vague, it seems that land, children, and spirituality were associated with women and the female. The Eddas, as well as Tacitus and Caesar reported that children had matronymic last names, were raised in their mothers' families and tribes, belonged to their mothers and were brought up and protected (or "socially fathered") by their maternal uncles. The Old Scandinavia culture exhibits marks of shamanism and a high level of spiritual and symbolic involvement, in line with the Old European civilization (Märta-Lena Bergstedt & Kirsten Brunsgaard Clausen, 2018, 173).

Not only have Norse legends and Permian or Finno-Ugric deities been reversed to empower men, but the fusion of patriarchal gods with the matriarchal cults of conquered peoples affects Russian and other Slavic mythologies as well. Heide Goettner-Abendroth shows how the transformation of a matriarchal mythical system to a patriarchal one was done by changing the gender of the primordial deity. Jomali or the Golden Woman with her numerous localized names has now become a male god. The variants of the Golden Woman among Finno-Ugric peoples have experienced the same lot.



What Heide Goettner-Abendroth has written about matriarchal culture and its economic values comes through in all of this research. Like the legendary Plenty Way of the matriarchal Iroquois, the Vanir and the Land of Women are known for their riches, their abundant and fertile lands that seems to have fed everyone.

In Finland, the Bjarmians provided a great past for the Finns. It was thought that the “wealthy and prosperous” Bjarmians (who were considered “Finnish”) had once ruled over a vast area and the Bjarmaland/Perm’ theory remained popular for reproduced them. Many historians who locate Bjarmaland by the Northern Dvina River also support the view that the names Bjarmaland and Perem’/Perm’ are derived from the Finnish word perämaa meaning “the hind land”, “the land beyond the border”. What Heide has written about the cultural criteria of matriarchies also fits perfectly with the Vanir, and the bjarmians with their endless treasures and the coveted goddess Jomali, the Golden Woman whose statue Vikings tried to rob numerous times—never succeeding.

The Vanir culture, too, was prosperous. They were wealthy and their lands fertile. This comment by Bjarnadottir on the Norse Vanir fits perfectly the Bjarmians. Their wealth and huge riches have been commented on by many historians. ¹

As Heide has shown, woman is made to represent all that is evil in the eras following the change of matriarchy to patriarchy at the same time as her divinity is moved to men as their exclusive essence.

Fact and fiction interact in ways that makes it hard to distinguish reality, history and the imaginary. I have found that indeed, amazon-like women have lived not only in Scythia and what is now Finland, and Terra Feminarum, but the most demonized man-eating, man-poisoning ones are part of the legends and fairy tales of the neighboring peoples, the Slavs. Finns, Samis, Permians and Slavic peoples have a long history of co-existing and intermarrying; it is no doubt impossible to define social customs, myths and deities as belonging only to one particular ethnic group. Influences have travelled in many directions across the borders, and the Finns and Karelians have adopted or their customs have been absorbed by the Russians and other Finno-Ugric peoples.

Northern scholars have a huge task ahead of them to rewrite history as herstory, but Heide’s methods will allow them, us, to get through the layers of falsified history--history masked as mere fairy tale or fantasy. I will do my share by translating what I can of her methodological and theoretical writings—a job I have already begun.

Happy Birthday, dear Heide!

¹ The following description reveals the male bias: “The best known expedition was that of Tore Hund (Tore Dog) who together with some friends, arrived in Bjarmaland in 1026. They started to trade with the inhabitants and bought a great many pelts, whereupon they pretended to leave. Later, they made shore in secret, and plundered the burial site, where the Bjarmians had erected an idol of their god Jómali. This god had a bowl containing silver on his knees, and a valuable chain around his neck. Tore and his men managed to escape from the pursuing Bjarmians with their rich bounty. (Wikipedia)