

## First Goddess - The Great Mother

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**Abstract:** *The beginning of religion overlaps in most parts of the world with the image of female fertility. Female goddess image is omnipresent, having forms and different characteristics, which are depending on the time and area of origin. The idea of the Great Mother is probably the oldest and fundamental religion of prehistoric man and therefore it remains as poignant in all world cultures. Its characteristics have been preserved in all subsequent religions, and this study aims to present some common aspects of these first female representations.*

**Key-words:** *Goddess; Great Mother; Mythology; Female; Prehistoric Symbolism*

The image of the female goddess is ubiquitous, dressing in shapes and having different characteristics, depending on the moment and the area where it comes from. The idea of the Great Mother is probably the oldest and most fundamental religious faith of the prehistoric man, and for this reason it keeps so tenacious in all cultures of the world.

The climax of the veneration of femininity was very likely in the late Paleolithic, when the former hunters and harvesters became farmers, linking the interdependence between femininity and spring fertility. In Paleolithic, the woman had a leading role in plant cultivation, which raised her social position and led her to creation and creativity. This institutions, such as the matriarchy, whereby her husband was forced to live in his wife's home, according to Mircea Eliade's observations in "The History of Beliefs and Religious Ideas" lead to the conclusion that *woman power* was their invention. The same author also notes that the fertility of the earth is consistent with feminine fecundity, and therefore women become responsible for the abundance of crops, for they know the mystery of creation.

Thus, the earth is assimilated to the woman while the Mother-Earth conceived and gave birth alone, through parthenogenesis. Remembering this mystery, it also survived in Olympic mythology. For example, Hera conceives and gives birth to Hefaistos and Ares alone. Of course, feminine and maternal sacredness was not ignored in the Paleolithic, but the discovery of agriculture greatly increases its power.

Not at all coincidental, the first works of art are expressions of this belief in the power of creation, therefore, in this Great Mother. The series of over a hundred feminine statuettes made of clay, stone, bone or ivory, discovered in several resorts from Siberia to France, confirms this theory. "These small figures, among the first seeds of religion on earth, with their heavy breasts and barely suggested faces, were found in almost all of Europe, their quintessence seeming to be confused with primordial myths. Without presenting a particular individual, they have the neutral expression of the Great Mother who, impersonal and omnipotent, is life-giving."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Miller, Henri; Feining, Andreas, *The image of Woman*, Thames and Hudson, 1961, p 430

The fact that these figurines are called "Venus" is somewhat wrong, but in our minds this name suggests quite different concepts. Certainly they are sacred figures, endowed with magical powers, but their forms have nothing to do with the beauty ideals of the Stone Age hunters, as originally thought. This concept, however, was not important in ancient cultures, proof being the naturalism and the sense of observation that the people of those times proved in the cave painting, but not in the interpretation of the sculpted feminine form that always appears in a sphere of magic religious beliefs and where fidelity to nature is never sought.

In the "History of Culture and Civilization", Ovidiu Drîmba gives an explanation to the exaggerated forms these figures have: "The fat and steatopige forms, which of course had a meaning and a magical function, expressed the idea of maternity; the magical function related to the cult of fecundity becomes evident in the figures representing pregnant women (Gagarino Grotto). " In these cases, "as the representation of the face was insignificant to suggest the idea of fecundity, it did not find its place in the magical purpose of the figurine."

The "universal mother" reason, offering breasts with both hands to the world, portrays an old and fundamental belief. One of the oldest examples is the Ur fertility idol (2000 BC), part of the Sumerian culture from which Western civilization was founded, and through which this belief in Magna Mater spread to the west and north to Scandinavia and England .

Cameroon's sculpture, dated almost five thousand years later, has the same attitude and contains the same message. Both types of sculpture symbolize the mother's basic qualities: fertility, dedication and sacrifice.

The many goddesses that follow the Magna Mater cult are in fact a continuation of it, though in form aspect they can vary sensitively. Even Isis appears in Egypt as a reminiscence of the Great Mother. She is the mother devoted to Horus and the faithful wife of Osiris, but she also has a side that approaches her mortal, as well as the following: "I am the mother of the whole nature, the master of all elements, the origin and the principle of the ages , the supreme divinity, the queen of the souls of the dead, the first among those who dwell in the heavens, the good winds of the sea, the gloomy silence of the Infern".<sup>3</sup>

Although in the universe of the Indian gods the female force is an attribute of the God-man, there are feminine Gods that proclaim their omnipotence. For example, Aditi is a rajaputra or "one whose sons are kings," "one whose sons are strong," "one whose sons are good".<sup>4</sup> She is the mother by excellence and can be defined as the Great Mother: "Aditi is heaven Aditi is the atmosphere. Aditi is the mother, he is the father and the son. " Moreover, unlike the Christian Triad "Father, Son and Holy Spirit", Aditi also represents the ensemble of the gods of the five races. "Aditi is the one who was born. Aditi is the one to be born "(Riga Veda, I, 89, 10)

Another Hindu deity is Durga, "the mother of the gods, the force of desire, action, and knowledge." It is considered the future, the destiny and the power of death at the end of the world.<sup>5</sup>

And the examples do not stop there. The Anahita Persian goddess is usually assimilated with the goddess Ishtar, Aphrodite or Diana. However, the translation of his name, which in Persian means "strong and immaculate" leads us to the Great Mother, but also to the Virgin Mary. Initially, the goddess of rivers, it is later, as Georges Dumézil says, "the

<sup>3</sup> Sauneron, Serge, *Dictionnaire de la civilisation égyptienne*, Hazan, p. 68

<sup>4</sup> *Saura-purana*, VIII, 14-22

<sup>5</sup> *Saura-purana*, VIII, 14-22

great mythical river, the common source from which all waters flow, all the rivers of the earth" Anahita is defined as "the saint that increases the energy" increases the flocks, "" the saint that increases riches ", " the holy one that increases the earth ".

And Tiamat, the goddess of Mesopotamia, represents the primordial nature. At first she was considered the queen of the sea, her body forming the world in the end of the myth: "Marduk takes Tiamat's body and cuts it in two like a dry fish. In half he makes the heavenly vault, ordering them not to let the waters drain. On the other, the Earth is dying. (...) Set his head, and a mountain ascends; springs springs and rapid waters flow here. From the eyes, Marduk opens the Tiger and the Euphrates, and from the stuffy nostrils he makes water reserves. On the breasts they raise the distant mountains. "

Even in China, we can see a continuation of the cult of the Great Mother by the legend of the good goddess Guanyin, the goddess of compassion and mercy, because she is the one who teaches people to cultivate the rice, which makes the nourishment "filling every bob with milk They". Simply by saying her name, she saves people from out-of-the-way situations and manages to transform the Inferno into Paradise.

Another wonderful appearance is Amaterasu, whose name means "the one that shines in paradise." The importance of this goddess is all the greater, since every Japanese is obliged to visit his temple at least once in his life.

Since ancient times, the woman has been in direct connection with nature, and the motives of this attachment are a sum of attributes that possess both them: mystery, beauty, and last but not least the ability to procreate. Andrei Pleșu mentioned in "Pitoresque and Melancholy" that before being visually and aesthetically interesting, from the early antiquity nature was extremely stimulating in allegorical terms. So before she was a "sight," she was "a character" and always a "female character".

The principle of nature understood as a feminine expression appears in Parmenides along with the concept of "being-image", that of a goddess "who keeps the karma of all things" and, being in close connection with birth, it can only be assimilated to Aphrodite. Pythagorean literature often makes "universal mother" - (kosmu mater) a complementary character, like the Moon, to the diurnal deity of the Sun. In this context, it appears as assimilable not only to Aphrodite but also to the goddess Rhea-Cybele.

Goethe and especially Christof Tobler, his young Swiss theologian from the Weimar group, wrote important pages about the manifestations of what we call "Mother Nature," including an "Hymn to Physis", made up of almost all of its defining terms : Natura-Polymechanos (All-Producer), Natura-Kibernetaira (The Guide), All-Purpose (Pandamator), Indeterminate (Adamaste), Ever-Moving (Kinesiphore), Seed (Polisporos, rich in seeds).<sup>6</sup>

From the representations of the divine child Horus on the arm of his mother Isis and passing through those of the divine Cretan Velchanos on the arm of a Great Mother Mother, there is a direct way to the Christian representations of Madonna with the infant Jesus. In all these cases, it is the same image of the Great Mother and her divine child threatened by the evil enemy, an image that has fascinated the Mediterranean Mediterranean region for thousands of years. "The names of the mothers and divine infants are changing, but the myth remains the same."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Pleșu, Andrei, *Pitoresc și melancolie*, Ed.Humanitas, București, 2003, p. 21, 25

<sup>7</sup> Miller, Henri; Feining, Andreas, *The image of Woman*, Thames and Hudson, 1961,

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