

# GODDESS CONVERSATIONS

at Catalhoyuk, July 17, 2005

LYDIA RUYLE



Resit, Lydia, Katie & Goddess Womb Bus

Fifteen years ago the Ancient Mothers called me to Anatolia where I met Resit Ergener, an economist, tour leader and author of *Anatolia Land of the Mother Goddess*. We kept in touch and did several projects together over the

years. Last year Resit felt it was time to bring together the Goddess community with Ian Hodder and the archaeology team at Catalhoyuk for a dialogue. My niece, Katie Hoffner, agreed to help market the event on the internet, I offered to invite scholars I knew to speak, and Goddess Conversations was born. All three of us envisioned a Goddess Conference at Ephesus, a journey to sacred sites in Turkey and a conversation at Catalhoyuk. We also envisioned 40 people showing up.

Resit is president of Turkish Friends of Catalhoyuk. He met with his board and developed this Mission Statement.

Turkish Friends of Catalhoyuk will bring together the Goddess community, Catalhoyuk archeologists, and other scholars in Turkey and abroad, in a series of four conferences to:

- Exchange opinions with archaeologists at Catalhoyuk
- Create a dialogue between the worldwide Goddess community and Turkey
- Experience the ancient Goddess history and Goddess traditions still alive in Turkey
- Promote the study of the Goddess in Turkey

The first Goddess Conference was held July 20-23, 2005 at the Ephesus Museum. Ten years ago in 1995, the Museum sponsored an exhibition of my Goddess Icon Banners at the Celsus Library. Those 18 banners based on Goddesses of Anatolia grew to 180 worldwide Goddess Icons of the Feminine Divine today. Some of the Anatolian banners returned in 2005.

The theme of the Conference was the Goddess in the Ancient Past whom the Turks call Ana Tanrıça.

The conference was dedicated to Asphodel Long whom I met in Turkey in 1990. Her friend, Daniel Cohen gave a tribute to Asphodel at the opening. The speakers and their topics were: Joan Marler, author, *From the Realm of the Ancestors* and biographer of Marija Gimbutas, "The Neolithic Goddess: An Intimate Exploration of a Visual Metaphor"; Cristina Biaggi, artist, author, *Habitations of the Goddess*, "The Dark Mother She Who Is Returning";

Vicki Noble, independent scholar, creatrix of *Motherpeace* cards, author *The Double Goddess: Women Sharing Power*, "Artemis and the Amazons at Ephesus"; Peggy Reeves Sanday, professor of anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, author *Female Power and Male*

*Dominance, On the Origins Of Sexual Inequality*, "The Moral Authority of the Maternal"; Harald Haarmann, Indo-European scholar, linguist, author from Finland, "Goddess As Landscape", Kathryn Rountree, cultural anthropologist and professor at Massey University, New Zealand, author of *Embracing the Witch and the Goddess: Feminist Ritual-makers in New Zealand*, "Keeping the Goddess Alive at Catalhoyuk"; and Pia Anderson, PhD candidate from Sweden, "Religion and Science". Resit Ergener spoke on "Anatolia Land of the Mother Goddess" and Belkis Balpinar, artist, museum curator, co-author with James Mellart of *The Goddess from Anatolia*, spoke on "Turkish Rug Designs". I presented my personal "9,000 Years of the Goddess in Anatolia" story and research with my art and banners. The Conference itself and the topics presented are material for another article as are the Pre-Conference and Post-Conference Tour



Goddess Conference Ephesus Speakers:  
Back row: l to r, Pia Anderson, Cristina Biaggi, Peggy Reeves Sanday, Lydia Ruyle, Belkis Balnibar, Kathryn Rountree, Resit Ergener  
Front, l to r, Joan Marler, Harald Haarmann, Vicki Noble

visits to the sacred places of the Goddess. The Pre-Conference Tour to experience the Goddess in Turkey before the conference began July 13. Thirty-five people joined us in Istanbul. We visited Medusa in the Cistern, the Virgin Mary in the Aya Sophia, Chora, and Zoodochus Pege before flying to Ankara to the Anatolian Civilizations Museum to see the Great Mother of Catalhoyuk, Kubaba, Kybele and many other Goddesses of Anatolia.

After the museum visit and lunch, the group climbed onto a bus which became the Mother Goddess Womb for our trip to Konya, Catalhoyuk and beyond to Ephesus. Knowing the importance of sacred space and travelers, we prepared for our visit to Catalhoyuk by creating a sacred container to focus the energies several days before we arrived with group processing and conversations on the bus. The diverse group, with many individual intentions and agendas, all were called at some level to be at Catalhoyuk. Every person was important to the process. Every person in the group helped hold the sacred energies. From my previous journeys, I knew the special energy holders and asked them to do their thing. It worked beautifully.

Sunday July 17 was a very early morning for some of the group as they got up before dawn to take a hot air balloon ride over the unique rock landscape of Cappadocia. A long bus ride to Konya focused the group energy on our visit. We showed Marija Gimbutas' film *Signs Out of Time* and passed the microphone to check in with each pilgrim. Vicki Noble shared her dream which was very prophetic.

"I had a dream on the morning of our encounter which bode very well in my mind. In my dream, there was to be a family reunion and my Dad was coming (he actually died in 2000), which meant that my Dad and my Mom (long divorced) would be coming together under the same roof. In the dream, I couldn't quite imagine it, but on waking it seemed an obvious good omen for our meeting that day."

After checking into our hotel in Konya and a brief lunch, the bus headed for Catalhoyuk an hour's drive away. My anticipation was intense after all the months of planning and emails, the time was at hand. My inner knowing knew the meeting would unfold with respect and excitement on both sides

and be instrumental in changing the paradigm. Just before we arrived, I gave each person on the bus a small prayer flag to wear with images from my Goddess Icon Banners of Anatolia. When the bus drove up to Catalhoyuk, the site looked very different than it did on my first visit in 1990 when it was closed or even my last visit in 1998!

The sign was still there now surrounded by Coca-Cola banners—one of the corporate sponsors. A group of children was painting a wall with Neolithic symbols on the side of a mud brick house as part of one of the education projects. As

I was taking photos of the children, I saw Ian Hodder approaching. He welcomed me with a warm smile and handshake. We had corresponded via email prior to our visit. Pia Anderson, the Swedish doctoral student who had contacted me via the internet about my Goddess banners and asked why Goddess pilgrims were not coming to Catalhoyuk, also came forward to greet me.

At Ian's suggestion we began the tour with a brief visit to the Visitor's Center where the excavations are explained with visual presentations. Goddess Herstory created by Kathryn Rountree, a cultural anthropologist from New Zealand, is one of the presentations. Next we went into a reconstructed living space where Ian described the areas and activities. It gave us a sense of enclosed space and the activities which people did in them.



Lydia at Catalhoyuk 1990 and 2005



Mural painting



Ian Hodder, archaeologist, director of excavations at Catalhoyuk in reconstructed exhibition space with volcano fresco



*Walking up the mound*



*Excavation area*



*Excavation area*



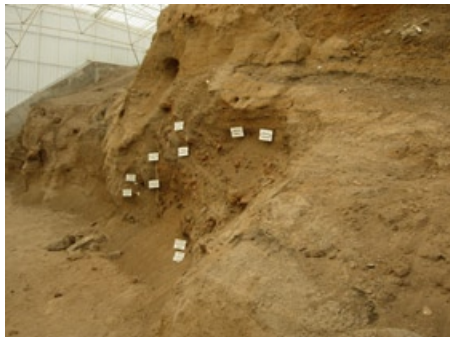
*Mellart excavation area, virgin soil in center*



*Top of mound*



*Volcano fresco discovery location*



*Mellart trench where Birthing Goddess found*



*Asphodel and Birthing Goddess Ritual 1990*



*Birthing Goddess*

As the digging ends each day at 3:00pm, our large group trekked up the mound to a covered area where several people were excavating. Ian explained the process, the layers and the stories. A Turkish guard followed the group everywhere. The pole on the top of the mound is still there surrounded by a short fence. Several of our pilgrims did a discreet unobtrusive ritual at the top to say "Thank YOU!" Just to the right towards the west is a huge permanently covered area which includes the Mellart trenches. Ian climbed down to

the first level of settlement virgin soil which was discovered in 1999. He also pointed out the place where the Goddess birthing figure was found which is now reproduced in the Anatolian Civilizations Museum in Ankara where we saw it. This was the spot where Asphodel Long did a ritual in 1990 which is another story. The place where the fresco of the volcano was discovered has a huge billboard reproduction erected at the spot. It was a hot day which gave the group a sense of the physical conditions during a summer excavation.

After much phototaking, we gathered in the dining hall for Turkish tea and the inevitable shopping. Women from the nearby village of Kucukoy are crocheting edges on beautiful cotton scarves. Our group gobbled them up. Men and women were making lamb patties in huge tubs for our barbecue dinner later that evening.



*Turkish tea in dining hall*

Katie came up to me and said, "let's go to the meeting room for a surprise." When I walked in four of my Goddess Icon Banners were hanging! PiaAnderson had found them in a drawer last summer. Eight chairs were arranged in front of the banners for the speakers. In 1995, I



*Lamb patty production*



*Lydia, Ian, Katie*

gifted ten banners, which were based on Mellart's drawings, to Catalhoyuk after they flew at the Celsus Library in Ephesus. I had not seen the banners hanging on my visit in 1998 and

inquired about their whereabouts. It warmed my heart to see them on the wall. Resit Ergener opened the conversations as the host and President of Turkish Friends of Catalhoyuk. He said he was the person in the middle who has been visiting Catalhoyuk for 15 years with both the Goddess community and the archaeological community. It was exciting to him to have them together talking with each other.



*Resit welcoming Goddess pilgrims and archaeology team*

Ian Hodder welcomed the group formally and talked about his vision for Catalhoyuk as a place which welcomes many stories and dialogue. Vicki Noble spoke about how Catalhoyuk influenced her Motherpeace Tarot cards. She suggested the team read the books we brought. Joan Marler focused on the power of images and language to frame stories. Peggy Reeves Sanday described her experiences as an anthropologist studying female power and its cultural manifestations. Harald Haarmann talked about the importance of the landscape as a metaphor.

Finally, I talked about the influence Catalhoyuk has had on my art, research and teaching Herstory. I

presented a Goddess Icon Banner of the Great Mother to Ian Hodder and the dig at Catalhoyuk. I used the image of the Great Mother to illustrate three themes.

She is the oldest figure in art history seated on a throne. She is an older woman as evidenced by the folds of her body. She is accompanied by lions who are matriarchal.



*Peggy, Vicki, Lydia, Joan*

Three members of the archaeological team Basak Boz, Claude Larson and Carey spoke on human remains and figurines, describing their work, discoveries and interpretations.

I presented a library of fifty books about the Goddess which we had brought with us from the speakers and the group. Ian told me it will be housed in the Visitors' Center. Katie presented a monetary gift from the group and from Goddess

Conversations with the intent of being listed as one of the sponsors of the site. I suggested creating

Goddess Friends of Catalhoyuk also as a sponsor. Later, I talked with Ian about a welcoming place for Goddess Pilgrims at Catalhoyuk to meditate and do ritual. I suggested it could be a grove of trees. That struck a chord with him. He told Katie and me that they had planted an orchard. Ian took Katie to see it and talked about cleaning it up. We suggested the monetary gift could help with the cleanup.



*Bear Mother clay stamp found summer 2005*

Then we adjourned and formed four smaller groups for conversations with our pilgrims and the Catalhoyuk team. I was struck with the young age of many of the team members. The group I was in talked about human remains with a Stanford graduate and a young man from Leeds. Since the woman from Stanford was interested in architecture, we got into the structure of the mud dirt walls and how they were formed. She said they were formed in place with using the foundations of older structures. The layers were built up over hundreds of years. One fascinating aspect to me were the layers of plaster. One of the spaces had over 400 layers. There was discussion and speculation on the purpose of so many layers. One idea was to keep the spaces lighter as the ovens, fires and soot would build up. Personally, it was an amazing experience for me to be discussing earth walls in the middle of Turkey as I live in a rammed earth home and studio in Colorado. My parents were visionaries who got into rammed earth construction in the 1940's! They built six homes of rammed earth in Greeley, Colorado and were on the covers of *Architectural Digest* and *Mother Earth News*. From my studio made of Mother Earth, I create Goddess Icon Banners. At the end of the discussions, we came back together and reported briefly to the larger group.

A festive barbecue in the large courtyard celebrated and continued the conversations. I ate with Shahina Farid, the chief excavator of the site. She told me stories of the Mellarts whom she visits in London. Shahina told me she excavates and gives the finds to others to interpret their meanings.

As the sun set, the group slowly walked to our bus. Joan Marler invited Ian Hodder to become a fellow with the Institute of Archaeomythology. He accepted. A tired and excited group boarded the bus and waved goodbye to Catalhoyuk and the team.

On the drive back to Konya, I called my oldest

granddaughter, Mae Elizabeth Rukstalis, on my cell phone. It was her 12<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Mae was born in 1993 just before the first Goddess Tour of England, Wales & Cornwall which came about as a result of my visit to Anatolia and Catalhoyuk in 1990 ! That's also another story. Cell phones are magical.

A month later, I received a warm email from Ian Hodder thanking me for the group's

visit, the conversations and dialogue, the library, the banner of the Great Mother, and the monetary gift from the group. He graciously invited us to return next season. He told me the team found some exciting materials after we left. I went to the website:

[www.catalhoyuk.com](http://www.catalhoyuk.com)

A Great Mother Bear clay stamp was discovered by the Istanbul team. Bear shrines and rituals are among the oldest in human history dating back 75,000 years. A small unique Goddess figurine which seems to symbolize both birth and death was also found. I think the Great Mother is sending us a message.



*Figurine of life and death found summer 2005*

The second Goddess Conference will be held in Istanbul, June 27-30, 2006. A Post-Conference tour will include a visit to Catalhoyuk along with other Goddess sites in Turkey. The theme of the 2006 Conference is The Goddess and The Social Order. In many societies, including the Turkish, women are strong at the family level, yet are often less powerful at the societal level. The Goddess and matriarchy or patriarchy will be explored along with the status of women in the contemporary family. The Goddess and Mystical Traditions including Sufi and Moslem mysticism is the theme for 2007. The Divine Feminine in the Monotheistic Traditions is the theme for 2008. Please visit [www.goddessconversations.com](http://www.goddessconversations.com) for details. You are invited to join Goddess Conversations for these exciting events.

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