

Vicki Noble: Report on Turkey and the Goddess Conversation with Ian Hodder

Dear Motherpeace Friend:

So many of you have asked me about the Turkey trip and especially our visit with Ian Hodder at Catal Höyük, that I decided I better write a general letter to send to the whole list. It was, as I have told many of you already, a wonderfully enjoyable trip across Turkey--organized very well by Rashid Ergener, along with Lydia Ruyle and her niece Katie Hoffman. A total of forty of us were in the bus at any given time, in the pre-conference tour which included the visit to Catal Höyük, then the conference in Ephesus itself, and finally the post-conference tour that included a visit to the Bronze Age site of Troy.

I will speak from my own perspective, since of course everyone will have their version of what happened and how it felt. But generally, by the end of the trip, we were in fairly strong agreement that things went well in the formal discussion between our group and the members of the excavation team at the site--and that something beneficial will come of it. Rashid (Resit) Ergener, our Turkish tour guide and author of his own book on ancient Turkey, *Anatolia: Land of the Mother Goddess*, catalyzed the discussion, feeling as he does "in between the two sides, the archaeological team at the site and the Goddess movement." Each of five scholars from our group spoke for five minutes: Joan Marler (Marija Gimbutas's longtime assistant and editor, who carries on her work), Harald Haarman (international linguist), Peggy Reeves Sanday (tenured feminist anthropologist), myself, and Lydia Ruyle (artist), along with a Swedish archaeological student named Pia who acted as a liaison person.

Then Ian Hodder and several of his team presented their own five-minute talks. After the formal presentations, we broke into discussion groups, which were extremely lively and animated. I don't think anyone really wanted to stop, but there was a barbecue which we were invited to share with the team before we left the site at the end of the evening.

Because our group was quite varied in terms of scholarly interest and experience in the matter of Catal Höyük, and because there was a certain amount of anxious anticipation of this potentially historic and momentous invitational "Goddess conversation," we spent several days preparing for the encounter through group ritual and personal sharing. I felt that we were "in ritual" for three days, the encounter itself being only the last portion of this powerful unifying work. We shared information with those who didn't know the history of the site (its early excavation in the 1960s by James Mellaart, its closure after four years on account of some legal troubles between Mellaart and the Turkish government, the work of Marija Gimbutas

and that of the Goddess movement spanning three decades, the subsequent backlash in archaeology to her work and the idea of a "Mother Goddess" in general, and the re-opening of the archaeological site in 1993 with Ian Hodder (Cambridge University) and Ruth Tringham (UC Berkeley) at the helm). And we shared ideas and thoughts as a group about how it might be best to approach the subjects we wanted to raise with the archaeologists, and so on. By the time we arrived at the site on July 17th, we were excited.

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. When we arrived at the site and were greeted by Ian Hodder, I felt immediately that he was approachable and quite appealing as an intellectually open man who likes his work. (I was quite amazed that he didn't, after all, have horns.) He showed us all around the excavation, which is the first time I've ever seen the site open, and it was thrilling. Then we settled in an indoor room where his team of around a hundred people came together with our group of forty.

In my own short presentation, I began by sharing the Motherpeace cards as an example of the kind of creative burst of intuitive research that took place in the 1970's in the women's spirituality movement. Then I suggested that he might want to read more carefully the work of Marija Gimbutas and some of our recent scholarly work as well, and finally I shared the dream I had had that morning with the hope that we might be having a kind of metaphorical "sacred marriage" (hieros gamos) that we know about from ancient times. Lydia and Katie presented the site with a new banner of the famous enthroned female figure found there, as well as a "Goddess library" of books donated by all of us on the trip. He seemed receptive to each of our talks and the gifts, listening and taking in what we offered from our different scholarly perspectives, and at the end of the day he invited us to return for more discussion next summer.

He also brought up the issue of ritual at the site, especially pertaining to "Goddess pilgrims" who used to come in groups to visit, but whose visits have recently dropped off. He said the Turkish government won't allow ritual on the mound itself, but he was open to some other solution. Lydia suggested a grove of trees (a "sacred grove") and in typical British style, he joked that they had a "grove that is not a grove" but rather an orchard, which he later took Katie to see in person, so that we could begin to make plans for its use as a ritual site (or a site of simple contemplation at least) for visitors who come to visit the site with spiritual agendas.

Joan Marler, who was Marija Gimbutas's editor and right hand person in her final years, invited Ian Hodder to become an "Associate" on the board of the Archaeomythology Institute, which is the organization that carries on the

work of Gimbutas. He accepted! It remains to be seen how all of this "feel good" stuff will shake down into concrete action and change, but it seems to me an excellent move forward. My own experience was somewhat in the nature of a personal breakthrough and included more illuminating dreams that followed the one I mentioned, providing food for thought in my ongoing process of communicating with establishment authorities.

One last item of interest: I sat with two women on the team during dinner, one a Turkish woman who has been there for ten years in the area of "human remains," and the other a UC Berkeley woman, the head of human remains, who has been there six years. It turned out that the two significant finds from the last season--a plastered skull (like those found at Jericho) and a female figurine (like others found in the earlier excavation by Mellaart)--were discovered by these two (lucky) women. They were ecstatic!

There was more to our trip across Turkey, including the Ephesus conference itself where we presented papers and slides, but it is the Catal Höyük event that most people have written to ask me about. So I will stop here for now, and send this out for you to enjoy. The papers we presented will be up on the GoddessConversations website, along with other interesting stuff as well--hopefully photos from the trip!

There is likely to be a second conference next summer, so you might want to mark your calendar now if you think you will be interested to attend. Turkey is a fabulous country with wonderful people and delicious food, beautiful textiles, thermal healing spas, and a variety of landscapes and climates. Ruins are everywhere--their history is absolutely phenomenal--and it's a place I never tire of visiting.

So thanks for asking and please be well.

Blessings, Vicki Noble