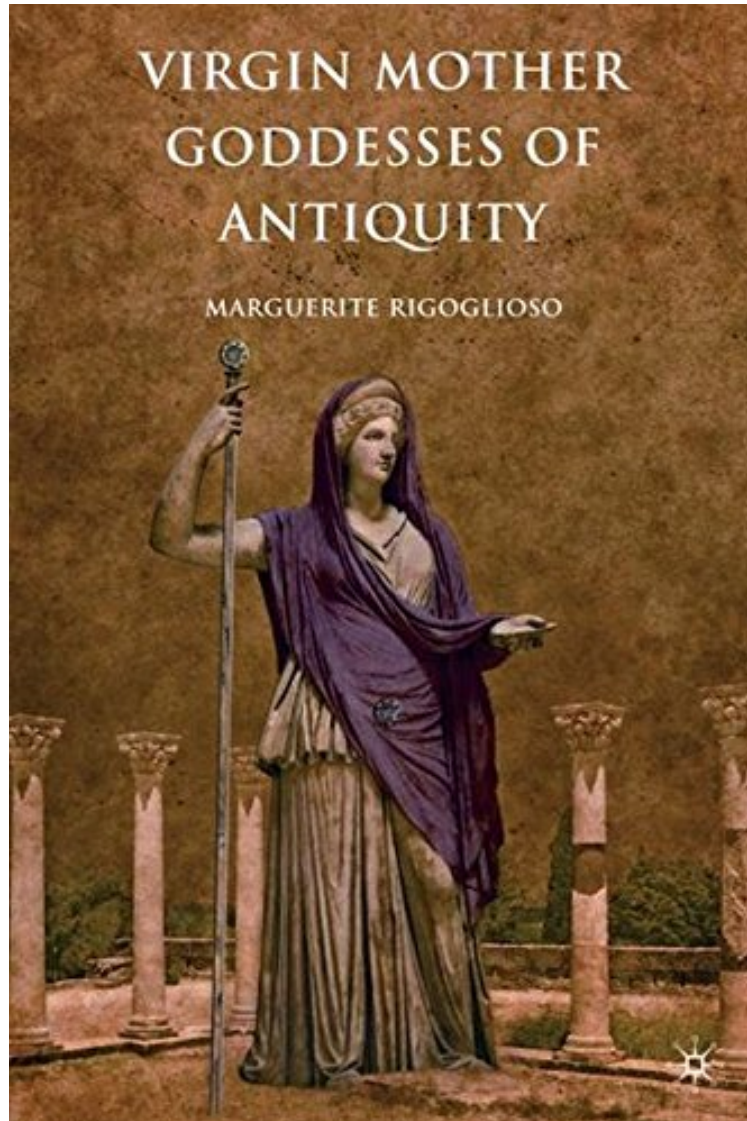


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## Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity

*M. Rigoglioso*

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**M. Rigoglioso : Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Denise StroudGreat book2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Full of informationBy Elaine WhiteThis was an interesting read for me because I am interested in the topic. The text tends to read like a dissertation, but the information is well-documented and met my need.21 of 23 people found the following review helpful. Indispensable resource for religion and mythology scholars

and students By Acharya S aka D.M. Murdock Whatever one takes away from "Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity" by Dr. Marguerite Rigoglioso, the book certainly is a tour de force. Phrases like "parthenogenetic creator deity" and "virgin creatrix" readily convey the concept of a virgin mother from remotest times, like a splash of cold water waking up our long dormant female spiritual traditions. There can be no doubt that the virgin-mother concept did not originate with Christianity and that the idea of the Virgin Mary as a historical personage appears unsupportable from this and much more evidence. Suddenly, it all makes sense: Of course, the Great Creator of the Universe has been viewed as a female--a goddess--during a significant period of human culture. Evidence in many places points to this idea of a self-generative--essentially virginal--female creator preceding the development of a male counterpart. For, if God the Father or Yahweh is the creator, yet he has no consort, according to Christian tradition, and is basically asexual, then he too is virginal. Like Isis and so many others, God the Father is the Great Virgin. Nevertheless, like them he too begets. He is the Virgin Father--a concept applied to the Greek god Zeus as well, despite how many times he is said to procreate, since he is called in antiquity "parthenos" or virgin. As mythologist Robert Graves says, "Thus the Orphic hymn celebrates Zeus as both Father and Eternal Virgin." Rigoglioso also discusses Zeus as virgin creator, as in Orphic fragment 167: "Zeus's parthenogenetic capacity is expressed here in the idea that all existence was 'created anew' in the moment of his ingesting of the older god [Phanes]." While reading about the Egyptian virgin-mother goddess Neith, I was struck once more with how spiritually and religiously sophisticated were the Egyptians. Their high culture as revealed in their social structure and architecture is also expressed in their religion, mythology and spirituality. In many ways, in the Egyptian culture we are looking at an advanced level of civilization seldom reached since then. Regarding Neith, Rigoglioso relates: "As a divinity of the First Principle, Neith was an autogenetic [self-begetting] goddess who, in the ultimate mystery, created herself out of her own being. ...an inscription on a statue of Utchat-Heru, a high priest of Neith, relates that she 'was the first to give birth to anything, and that she had done so when nothing else had been born, and that she had herself never been born.'" After studying the attributes of Neith as a 7,000-year-old Virgin Mother, the parthenogenetic or virgin-birth capacity of other ancient goddesses becomes so blatantly obvious and cosmologically sound that discussions of whether or not a figure was "really a virgin" seem absurd. As does nitpicking a certain term, as to whether or not it might mean "virgin" or just a "maiden" who is fertile. The bottom line is that we are discussing a cosmological ideal, not real women who possess body parts. Although I have been studying Greek religion and mythology for decades, including in college and post-graduate studies in Greece itself, I was nonetheless intrigued to review the evidence concerning not only the antiquity of the pre-Olympian goddess Hera as a virgin mother but also her primacy over the male gods, who appear to be later interlopers and usurpers. Indeed, the struggle reflected in the mythology between Hera and Zeus, or the goddess and the god, in ancient Greece appears to have begun around 1,000 BCE and may have lasted some 300 or so years, before the Olympians finally ascended to the throne. Marguerite further states: "Strong indicators that Hera was originally conceived as a parthenogenetic goddess can be found in association with her cult on the island of Samos, located off the coast of ancient Anatolia (Turkey). On Samos, one of the primary and earliest seats of her worship, she was known as Hera Parthenia, 'Hera the Virgin'... Such a title was apparently not uncommon in association with this goddess..." "Renewing her virginity annually in a river, Hera was nonetheless the mother who gave birth parthenogenetically to the Greek god of the forge, Hephaistos. The concluding chapter, "The Gnostic Sophia: Divine Generative Virgin" by Dr. Angeleen Campra, ties the subject together nicely by providing a bridge between Paganism and Judeo-Christian tradition, as it shows precisely how this ages-old concept of the divine feminine as primordial creator was demoted, at precisely the same time when Christianity was being formed, with its subordinate female figure of the Virgin Mary. Says Campra: "Sophia rose out of a patriarchal worldview, but I argue that both iterations--Hochma/Sophia of the Wisdom literature of the fifth to first centuries B.C.E. and Sophia of the Valentinian Gnostic myth of the first centuries C.E.--reveal the attributes of the more ancient Virgin Mother deities from the areas neighboring West Asia." Campra's extensive survey clearly reveals that parthenogenesis was part of the enigmatic Gnostic doctrine, which brings this extremely ancient concept right down to and into the Christian era, with its evident remake of the Virgin Mother Goddess in Mary, whom I and many others contend is a mythical not historical figure, largely based on this widespread and ancient goddess concept. Rigoglioso's important study goes a long way in resurrecting the works of Marija Gimbutas, Riane Eisler and Merlin Stone in the "Great Matriarchy v. Patriarchy Debate," in which their thesis of Goddess or female primacy has been assailed and claimed to be "discredited," replaced with more oblique terminology describing "partnership" versus "dominator" cultures. Indeed, in this regard Marguerite has come out in support of this earlier research and says in VMGA: "Critics of the theory that a matriarchal phase of human history preceded patriarchy will no doubt deride the fact that I am even considering such a concept as basis for this book. Haven't we thoroughly trounced the notion and shown it to be archaeologically and anthropologically untenable or unprovable, after all? Haven't we shown, in fact that matriarchies never existed? I would argue, no." Concerning Gimbutas in specific, Rigoglioso also remarks: "Although controversy surrounds Gimbutas's methods and conclusions..., the viewpoint I adopt is in accord with those of archaeologists and other scholars who are verifying and expanding on various aspects of Gimbutas's theories... I believe that, because prominent classics scholars... independently held to similar theoretical views, the assumption of an early matriarchal

substratum in Greece, upon which my analysis is based, is built on firm, if not conclusive, footing."The only serious criticism I have of the book is its price, which is unfortunately that of an academic press and too great for the average reader, who will thus miss out on all the fascinating and important information. Moreover, for the average reader this book may seem dense and, at times, tedious, as well as challenging because of the academic style of citation that includes the author, year and page number parenthetically in the text, rather than as footnotes or endnotes. Non-scholars may find the style initially distracting or intimidating, but they may also get used to it in their quest to pull out all the gems, which are plentiful. Also, in the chapter on Demeter and Persephone, whom she demonstrates were "originally conceived as Virgin Mothers," Rigoglioso goes into a lengthy discussion of the rape of the virgin goddess and the ritual use of a phallus by initiates into the Eleusinian Mysteries, both male and female. This section is important for historical purposes, but it may make some readers uncomfortable in its frankness and graphic depictions. Although it is a scholarly work that may be difficult for some to tackle, *Virgin Mother Goddesses* readily proves Rigoglioso's major points, including and especially the existence in the human psyche, religion and mythology extending back millennia of the concept of a self-generating or parthenogenetic female divine creator. *Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity* is an indispensable resource for scholars and students of comparative religion and mythology, as well as women's spirituality and goddess studies, that I personally will be using for years to come.

This study of various female deities of Graeco-Roman antiquity is the first to provide evidence that primary goddesses were conceived of as virgin mothers in the earliest layers of their cults. By taking feminist analysis of divinities further, this book provides a fresh angle on our understanding of these deities.

"Rigoglioso explores the power of virgin birth, or parthenogenesis, as the primal creative process. The clarity of her analysis reveals how pervasive and influential this motif and its rites were in the ancient world. Most interesting is her remarkable explication of the Eleusinian Mysteries, where - by her application of the 'missing piece' of virgin birth - she makes sense of much that has been passed over or ignored in the ancient texts. This is an original piece of scholarship that dares to imagine traditions at the foundation of Western culture in an entirely new light. As with any paradigm-shifting theory, some may challenge Rigoglioso's interpretations, but all readers will recognize that parthenogenesis, as a symbol of profound spiritual perception, could not have received a more articulate spokesperson. One feels in reading her work that she is writing from inside a tradition that we didn't even know existed, and the authenticity of her writing makes it all the more accessible and inviting." - Gregory Shaw, Professor of Religious Studies, Stonehill College and author of *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* "With this study, Rigoglioso has substantively corrected the common perception that 'a few' of the Greek goddesses have an inconsequential association with parthenogenesis. Her insightful explication of the parthenogenetic motif in the attributes of all the pre-Greek goddesses, as well as in the Thesmophoria and the Eleusinian Mysteries, establishes the generative powers of the Virgin Mother goddesses as a central dynamic in the pre-Greek substratum of Western religion." - Charlene Spretnak, author of *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece* About the Author MARGUERITE RIGOGLIOSO is an Adjunct Instructor at the Dominican University of California, USA and the author of *The Cult of Divine Birth in Ancient Greece* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).