

**Cindy Biboux published these essays in her local newspaper, *The Tri-County News* of Junction City, Oregon. The first column humorously describes her fears, while in the second the fears are overcome with joy and insight.**

*On a Goddess Odyssey*

Twelve Voices, April, 2006

Cindy Biboux

Approaching my sixtieth birthday, I realize there are a number of experiences I have not had. I have only thirty or forty years left to try new things, so I'd better pick up the pace! In this spirit, I am soon to travel on 'The Goddess Pilgrimage to Crete.' This column covers some thoughts—and I have to admit—trepidations—before the journey. I'll write another after I get back about what really happened.

I've done a lot of traveling in the two years since I retired from teaching. It in fact has been my favorite activity these past few years. But most of it has been pretty conventional, that is, following paths I at least know something about and touching on past experiences. My husband and I are off the beaten track travelers and continue to traverse the more remote areas, whether it be the Kauri Forest in New Zealand, the mountain village of Alamos in Mexico, the old Denali Highway in Alaska, or Sucker Creek Canyon in our own state. These places are new to us, yet tied to the familiar.

The pilgrimage will really stretch my comfort boundaries. My perception, whether right or wrong, is of a much more spiritual and intellectual experience than my current quiet life contains. The woman who leads the tour has a PH.D from Yale and has done extensive study in women's spirituality and goddess archeology. Many of the women who come are scholars, priestesses, witches. Does Mrs. Biboux, who reads mysteries and loves children books, belong with this group? As a friend asked, do they keep their clothes on?

I knew I would be going on this odyssey four years ago, when my older sister/mentor/friend made her own first pilgrimage. As I listened to her experiences, "woo-woo stuff" was flashing on a big neon sign in my mind. But as Susan has become part of the Ariadne Institute and now helps with the trips, I have accepted the idea, if not being entirely comfortable with it, that I would be visiting those caves, mountaintops and museums one day. I

often do things with my sister or suggested by her and they usually turn out to be good, often wonderful, experiences.

But what about dancing to a Greek band? My most recent dancing session was been boogying to Alaskan tunes with my first and second graders as we studied the Iditarod. Oh, I was flung into the Old Time Fiddlers circle as I innocently walked past to see about them coming to a school event. Is this sufficient background to dance with the goddesses?

What about those rituals? Are we going to be sacrificing anything, um, I don't want to sacrifice? I will be coming back, won't I?

What about that archaeology? Do I need to know who lived in each layer? Were the Minoans in the Neolithic period? What were the Venetians doing on Crete? Who the heck is Adriane?

I guess I'll find out about these things. I am excited about going, want to go, know it will be good. I'm just spending some time with that human companion, fear of the unknown. I'll do some background reading such as "Why Women Need the Goddess," by Carol Christ, the leader. I'll practice a few dance steps and look at a diagram of archeological layers. I'll buy a flowing, toga-like outfit to wear.

But will I keep it on?

*After a Goddess Odyssey*

Twelve Voices, June 30, 2006

Cindy Biboux

Two months ago I wrote about my fears before going to Crete on a women's goddess pilgrimage. I joked as to whether I would keep my clothes on. Worrying over the "fig leaves" of modern day life gave way to a much deeper contemplation of my life as a woman in a world where one worries about such things at all.

Carol Christ, a feminist theologian, led the pilgrimage. A pioneer scholar in the field of women's spirituality ([www.goddessariadne.org](http://www.goddessariadne.org)), she turned to Crete's archeology and landscape as a way to make a vivid, physical connection to the feminine divine. For the past ten years she has shared her insights with over six hundred women on this intricately designed pilgrimage. The two weeks were a rich blend of archeology, rituals, natural beauty, involvement with the current day Greeks and a wonderful group of women.

We studied the Minoan period (labeled by Arthur Evans, an early 1900's archeologist, who assumed a king he named 'Minos'), stretching from 3000 BCE to 1450 BCE (before the common era) and visited a dozen sites, from the grandiose Knossos, home to 10,000, to the small Trapeza cave, home to perhaps thirty people around 6000 BCE and then a sacred place/burial site for the Minoans. He and others found technologically advanced building and thousands of clay and bronze artifacts at these sites.

Marija Gimbutas, a twentieth century archeologist, theorized that this group worshiped a feminine presence, each site producing goddess figurines tied to nature. She saw the "palaces" of kings as "sacred centers" of a peaceful (no weapons or fortifications found) group tied to the cycles of nature. She speculated that women started agriculture and made the pottery as men hunted, built and crafted. She saw the group as "matrifocal," valuing women. And the heated debate was on.

What is so threatening about the idea of a feminine, or a non-gendered presence, one that honors creation of life, the beauty and harmony we can find in nature? I felt a bond to the Minoans, their reverence and joy felt for

the earth. It affirmed my sense of spirituality as part of the natural order, not of a creationist deity.

Present-day Crete is a beautiful, sensuous place. We hiked the mountains, smelling the naturally occurring sage, thyme, oregano; we swam in the indigo and turquoise-colored sea; we explored sacred caves. We performed simple rituals, honoring our ancestors, affirming our self-worth as women, feeling our place in the natural order of life.

A wonderful aspect of the trip was Carol's ties to the people. Cristina, image of our grandmothers, at her house cooked a traditional Greek feast: dolmades (stuffed grape leaves), moussaka (a rich meat/vegetable,/cheese casserole), Greek salad, Myzithra cheese sweet pies. We chatted as Carol interpreted. Cristina's life was hard—tending goats, grapes, and olive trees, marrying early, caring for children and husband.

We visited the 7<sup>th</sup> century Paliani Convent, where tiny, black-robed women tend their gardens and their souls, and welcome pilgrims who come to the 1000 year old myrtle tree of life that grows in their courtyard. We shared their wonderful coffee, talked about our respective lives. Unlike most nuns, they own the land and pass it on in their order.

At Zaros, Carol enlisted a local band, which played traditional instruments: bouzouki, tsbouna, lyra. We danced for hours. The steps were simple, but the bond with the music, the place, the Greeks, my pilgrimage sisters went to my soul.

Those sisters. What an abundant blend of experience, wisdom, support. From twenty-two year-old Marta, a wannabe actress from New York, looking for perspective on her life, to sixty-five year-old Anne, an Australian nun who has seen our specie's horrors and joys, wanting to honor the feminine divine within her church, we bonded as women on life's journey. It is rare experience to be valued as oneself, with all the warts and beauty marks.

A rich, experiential journey. I went to Crete worrying about clothes and came back ready to build on my natural-order sense of spirituality and with a hope that things could be different in the world. Joseph Campbell writes in a forward to Gimbutas' The Language of the Goddess, "The message here (in Minoan Crete) is an actual age of harmony and peace in accord with the

creative energies of nature which for a spell of some four thousand pre-historic years anteceded the five thousand years of what James Joyce termed the 'nightmare' (of contending tribal and national interests) from which it is now certainly time for the planet to awake." So could it be.