



*The Woman Who Married the Bear--The Spirituality of the Ancient Foremothers*  
Barbara Alice Mann and Kaarina Kailo (Oxford UP, 2023, summer)

*The Woman Who Married the Bear* surveys Indigenous traditions across the global North, including North America and Eurasia, with matriarchal traditions of Women marrying the Bear in both, sporting caves as wombs, water as earth's amniotic fluid, and birth-renewal as the point of thanksgiving. In North America, traditions stretch back to the Bölling-Allerød warming, 15,000 BP and come forward into historical times. In Eurasia, starting with the earliest "Venus" figurines of bear-headed women, 35,000 BP, traditions connect fire, water, earth, forest, and "Bear-Women" spirits to matriarchy. In both instances, women and bears originally collaborate through time-keeping star configurations and winter cave-dwelling, as symbolized by the spring awakening from hibernation followed by the birth of "cubs." The woman-bear interface bifurcates coming out of the Little Ice Age, with the authors exploring both the before and the after storylines, noting that their mutation from woman-honoring to woman-blaming apparently began with the Firestone comet swarm of 12,900 BP followed by the eight-hundred-year nuclear winter of the Younger Dryas. Before this event, women were the timekeepers and honored creators of life; after it, their story of Bear marriage turned to one of male rescue, hunting, and danger. From two different continents, across the global North, come stories of the Woman Who Married the Bear. Not only are the stories present, but they are also widespread across modern cultures from Indigenous North America and Scandinavia to Russia and Korea.

Modern matriarchal studies has also exposed the way in which the narratives like the one on which the authors focus epitomize the shift from matriarchal to patriarchal narration and lifeways. Alas, the mighty male hunter plot flies in the face of cross-cultural evidence of a worldview honoring both bears and great mothers (grandmothers). The bear husband is the protagonist, not later male hunters who kill him. Celebrations were about renewal and rebirth. They dealt with respect and mutuality, the recognition of how human persons are interconnected with nonhuman persons, that is, the Original Instructions. The core issue was the respectful and thankful treatment of Bear by humans. Two scholars on two

continents join forces to examine these questions, first by surveying and then by quizzing the Bear husband stories on their respective continents, winnowing down to the common elements of the stories, and finally, seeking out their commonalities of meaning in terms of matriarchal/matristic culture. The consistent patterns that emerge in the multiplicity of stories will be analyzed in search of their original purposes and meanings, again looking for the contiguities among them.

To accomplish this deep dive into sifting, the authors scour traditions culled from old tomes as found in various archives and other repositories from the Americas, Scandinavia, Russia, and Armenia, scraping off the overlay of the later ages, in the foreign and damaging interpretations thrust upon them over time, looking for their original patina as best it can still be made out.

## Contents

*List of Figures*

*Acknowledgments*

First, There Is Mother: An Introduction

### **Part I: Indigenous North America and the Younger Dryas**

**Barbara Alice Mann**

1. Messengers of Sky: A Traditional Overview
2. A New and Frightening Reality: Analysis of Tradition

### **Part II: Indigenous Eurasia and the European North**

**Kaarina Kailo**

3. Original Instructions: Bear Spirituality and Great Mothers
4. First Beings: A Historical Shift and the Mother behind It All

Conclusion: Retrieval

*Notes*

*Bibliography*

*Index*