

THE EVERYDAY SPIRITUALITY OF WOMEN IN THE ITALIAN ALPS:
A TRENTO AMERICAN WOMAN'S SEARCH FOR
SPIRITUAL AGENCY, FOLK WISDOM, AND ANCESTRAL VALUES

by

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read THE EVERYDAY SPIRITUALITY OF WOMEN IN THE ITALIAN ALPS: A TRENINO AMERICAN WOMAN'S SEARCH FOR SPIRITUAL AGENCY, FOLK WISDOM, AND ANCESTRAL VALUES by Mary Beth Moser, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy and Religion with a concentration in Women's Spirituality at the California Institute of Integral Studies.

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ABSTRACT

This study presents an inquiry into the everyday spirituality of folk women in Trentino, Italy, and nearby regions from the fifth millennium BCE to present times. It integrates themes from archaeology, folk stories, and women's lives from the perspective of a third-generation Trentino American woman. Utilizing the methodology of feminist cultural history, exemplified by the foundational work of Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, it adopts feminist and indigenous research methods to interpret specific cultural information gathered from local literature, on-site research, and oral interviews of women in Trentino and in the United States.

Drawing from the archaeological record, this study focuses on representations of goddesses, ancestresses, and females in ritual whose iconography conveys an embodied relationship of women with nature and the cosmos. This study contributes an analysis of the folk stories, which villagers once told in nightly gatherings known as the *filó*, offering insights into the characteristics and actions of the Anguane, magical women who dwell in the wild. It proposes that their "mysterious" taboos, when interpreted with Judy Grahn's metaformic theory, can be understood as rules which are menstrual in origin, and thus associated with the oldest sacred female ritual. Along with the Winter Goddesses, whose rules govern the end of the annual cycle, the Anguane maintain

the sacred order of life. The magical agency found in the folk stories is echoed in the everyday spiritual agency of folk women, which is examined through their use of adornment, textiles, food, and medicine.

Throughout the study, women's relationship with the sources and cycles of life is made explicit. As spiritual agents, women protect, utilize, and transform the sources of life; they maintain, embody, and renew the full cycles of life, which spiral forward and connect with the past.

Through the oral tradition and everyday activities, women transmit values that include sharing and caring, honoring the ancestors, respecting elders, caring for children, protecting nature, and keeping one's word. Folk wisdom communicates the interconnectedness of all life and responsibility to future generations, offering timely knowledge for living sustainably and in balance.

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Dedications

To all Wild Beings, and to the Wild in all Beings.

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1. Introduction

The mountains and valleys of the northern border of Italy are steeped in spiritual mysteries. The snowy Alps are marked by the striking presence of the even older Dolomites, which the people who dwelled in their presence called *I Pallidi*, the pale mountains, once the reefs of an ancient sea. Glaciers shaped the fertile river valleys. High mountain meadows offer lush seasonal wildflowers and herbs. Forests of larch, pine, and fir shelter wild animals. Alpine lakes and thermal pools beckon from deep within the mountainous terrain. The long history of the mountain people is held in the land itself, upon which they depended, a relationship infused with reverence and influenced by the moon, sun, and stars. Women's spiritual history is present although it has been submerged by layers of time, overlooked by the recorders of history, dismissed, negated, and at times suppressed. Yet the evidence is there. The long story of women's spirituality is carved in stone and bone, marked with ochre red, and crafted into metal; it is held by the magical powers of the female characters in the folk stories once told in nightly gatherings; it is manifest in the everyday spiritual acts of folk women that honor the sources and cycles of life; it is spun, stitched, and washed; it is cooked, celebrated, and shared; it is gathered, boiled, and distilled; it is defended by maidens and voiced by Old Wives. It is transmitted in the values that have been passed down over the ages and carried by immigrants across the sea.

This study of the folk culture of the Italian Alps focuses on the villages and valleys of Trentino to identify women's agency in the spiritual realm. It seeks to retrieve the voices, values, and wisdom of folk women, who were in close

communication with their natural environment, active agents in contact with the sources of life and with the cycles of life in their everyday acts.

For this inquiry, “spiritual” is defined as that which gives life meaning and “agency” is the capacity to act or to exert power or influence. Both terms are intentionally open in their circle of reach so that “women’s spiritual agency” can include everyday actions through which women, as spiritual agents, give life meaning. The word “folk” emphasizes that the focus is on “the people” of everyday village life, rather than the elite. This study investigates women’s spiritual agency over time with the following questions: *What does the archaeological record suggest about women’s spiritual agency? What are the sources of women’s spiritual agency and how do they demonstrate it? What values do folk women’s lives convey? Are those values relevant today?*

As a feminist cultural history, it focuses on women, utilizing all sources of cultural information across time, including the archaeological record, folk stories, and women’s lives to tell a story of women’s spiritual history. Folk stories have been a particularly valuable source of information. They were told from generation to generation, often at night during the long winter months in the stable with the warmth of the animals, and were a vital part of agricultural family life. The details of the stories are often rooted in specific places and in events that reach across time. Mauro Neri, a prolific recorder of Trentino folk stories, has analyzed and mapped out nearly a thousand folk stories for their datable historical

content from biblical times to the Second World War.¹ More important than the factuality of the folk stories, for this study, are the values and beliefs they reflect. “Popular beliefs represent the true soul of the people,” according to Umberto Raffaelli, the former director of the *Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina*, Museum of the Customs and Traditions of the Trentini People, an expansive folk museum in San Michele all’Adige in Trentino. “They are the empirical thread that connects one generation to the other.”²

This inquiry presents a view of Trentino cultural history, focused on folk women’s spirituality, integrating themes from archaeology, folk stories, and folk women’s lives by a third-generation, Trentino American woman living in the United States.³ As a feminist cultural history, it aims to tell a story across time which includes women and their spirituality as part of history, contributing new perspectives and analysis to the growing body of knowledge gathered and recorded by the women and men of Trentino, from which I also draw. It utilizes feminist and indigenous research methods and theories to interpret specific cultural information gathered from a wide variety of sources including local literature; archaeology sites, museums, churches, and libraries; cultural experiences; hikes on mountain trails; and oral interviews conducted in women’s

¹ Neri, *Mille Leggende del Trentino*, 365–76.

² Raffaelli, *L’Influsso della luna* [The influence of the moon], 13.

³ Terminology and my choice of defining cultural identity are expanded later in this chapter. My grandparents were immigrants from Trentino to the United States, and thus first-generation; my parents, born in the United States, are second-generation; I am third-generation, having also been born in the United States.

homes. It rests on a foundation of relationships and experiences from numerous trips to Italy conducted over three decades of genealogical research and several years of research throughout Italy on folk Catholicism.

This study focuses attention on female representation of divinity and female ritual in the archaeological record, whose iconographic representation bring together nature, cosmos, and women's bodies. A significant contribution of this study is an analysis of the female characters in the folk stories known as Anguane to identify the agency of their magical actions and their negation as so-called witches. The study suggests that the "mysterious" taboos of the Anguane—when viewed through the lens of metaformic theory, which postulates that menstrual rites are an originating step in human consciousness—are similar to menstrual taboos, and thus with the oldest sacred female ritual. The Anguane, together with the Winter Goddesses who enforce the rules governing the end of the yearly cycle, keep the sacred cycles of life.

The study highlights the transformational acts of women in the folk stories, in the recent past, and into present times. It offers insights into the actions of women in everyday life that give life meaning: protecting; making clothes, food, and medicine; rising up against injustice; and using voices of experience to tell stories, counsel, heal, midwife, envision, and speak out. It listens to the folk wisdom transmitted in the oral tradition and folk practices, finding values of sharing and caring, honoring the ancestors, respect for elders, care for children, reverence of nature, and keeping one's word. It cites evidence of these values in the lives of women of Trentino and Trentino American origin. Throughout this

inquiry, the study brings attention to the sources of life and the cycles of life that were once explicitly acknowledged, valued, and utilized as a source of women's agency.

Where Are the Women in History?

Women's history, women's spiritual history, and folk history have often been excluded from the story of human history up until a few decades ago. Literacy and what has been considered knowledge has been controlled by an elite class of men who have been writing about men and women from a certain point of view for centuries. Eventually it seemed "normal" that only men had a history. Being "educated" came to be equated with being "lettered," rather than knowing the skills of how to live sustainably, in close relationship with nature and the cosmos. Further, the culture of the land-based people, if recognized at all, was cast into the realm of superstition by the elite.

While women's spiritual power and agency have always been present, the history of women's religious experiences has largely been excluded from historical documents and sacred canons, which have been written from a dominant view. Since the Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the 1960s new inter-disciplinary fields of study including Women's Spirituality and the entry of more women into academia and religious institutions have broadened the perspective. The study of women's spiritual history is located across several specialized disciplines, including archaeology, anthropology, mythology, folk studies, theology, and history; yet it is not contained solely within any one of them. Cultural history, which includes folklore and all parts of the non-dominant

culture, is a particularly appropriate area to seek folk women's history and their spirituality.

Folk Women's History

Almanacs and periodicals from Trentino describe the traditions of past and present times in the mountains, valleys, and villages. One publication on folklore, part of a series that was published by the provincial government and distributed to all known descendants of immigrants so that they would know their homeland, states that many traditional Trentino customs were "vigorously repressed by the civil and religious authorities."⁴ Further, Neri acknowledges that, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries in Trentino,

the figure and the role of the woman was hushed up and remained in the shadow of a violently male-dominated culture, which alas still today is handed down in certain attitudes.⁵

Retrieval of folk culture is exemplified by the displays, library, and sound recordings of the museum of Trentino folk history noted earlier, the *Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina*, Museum of Customs and Traditions of the Trentini People, which notably was founded in 1968 by Giuseppe Sebesta, in which the people tell their own history, and both women and men are included.

The culture of folk women is specifically addressed in *Soggetto Donne Montagne*, Subject Mountain Women, a permanent exhibit curated by Rosanna Cavallini in Casa Andriollo in Valsugana inaugurated in 2008 on International Women's Day, March 8. In her opening remarks, Cavallini observes:

⁴ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Songs and Tales*, 149.

⁵ Neri, *Women and Girls*, 11.

We think, therefore, of the Alps, the great mountains of Europe, not only as natural elements of conquest to climb with masculine heroism, we think of them as powerful mothers whose rhythmic breath blends vital rhythms: the cycle of the seasons, the migration cycle, the human cycle of life and death.⁶

Her words poetically address the theme that is at the heart of my study: women's embodied relationship with nature and the enduring cycles of life.

Unseen, Magical, or Witches

An example of how mountain women are unseen, and clues to finding their presence and power in the past, is the presentation in a 2006 travel film about the region of Trentino, which features spectacular aerial views of the mountains and valleys. However, the profiles are nearly exclusively of men during its one hour presentation which focuses on men's relationship to nature, as well as men's traditional everyday skills and crafts.⁷ Yet my research and visits to Trentino over the decades indicate that women are and were a vital part of everyday life. Women's traditional roles included all aspects of life and an enviable list of skills and knowledge in providing food, clothing, and medicine for themselves and their families. For example, Onorina Bortolamedi, one of the women in Trentino whom I interviewed in 2009, stated with pride: "I could do

⁶ Rosanna Cavallini, presentation of *Soggetto Montagna Donna* [Subject Mountain Women]; email containing transcript of speech sent to the author by Cavallini, December 1, 2010.

⁷ Chiodin, *Magnificent Italia: Trentino*. Only after more than forty minutes into the film is the first woman interviewed, Gabriella Belli, the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art. (Chiodin, *Magnificent Italia: Trentino*, 43:40.) Notably, films of other regions in this twelve-part travel series about "magnificent Italy" are more inclusive of women.

everything by the time I was married!” Women have transmitted cultural knowledge and values through everyday activities, language, and story-telling.

Equally as important to the film’s omission of contemporary women’s lives is its inclusion of references to females as princesses, magical creatures, and witches. Notably, the film opens with the folk story of *La Soreghina*, the Daughter of the Sun, who—as the folk stories examined in this study will show—lives at a time when queens rule and women live in close relationship with nature, the cosmos, and each other.⁸ The most famous song of the mountains, *La Montanara*, which is sung by mountain choral groups, includes reference to *La Soreghina*. So-called “sprites”—woodland spirits who “stole the hearts of the young men they met”—are noted as living among the forests of spruce trees.⁹ Witches are associated with the rocks and mountains. The group of the Dolomites known as the Brenta—the mountains that guard the valley of my maternal grandmother’s birthplace—is said to be “the remains of witches turned into stone.”¹⁰ One of the megalithic peaks is named in dialect the *Campanile della Stria*, the Bell Tower of the Witch. Small folk figures of friendly-looking witches stitched from fabric and riding on twig brooms are shown hanging in the barns of Canazei in Val di Fassa, home of the Ladin people, an ancient culture group whose native language bears the influence of the Latin language of the Romans.

⁸ Chiodin, *Magnificent Italia: Trentino*, 1:51.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 12:20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32:25.

“All believed in the power of the witches’ magic,” according to the film’s commentary.¹¹

The inclusion of female folk characters in the film reinforces the importance of utilizing folk stories to search for women’s agency. Women’s influence and stature is not conveyed in the few references to them above, whose titles of princess, sprite, and witch seem respectively diminutive, un-embodied, and fearful. An important part of this study is the analysis of the characteristics of females in the folk stories that came to be represented as witches, women whose very agency could make them vulnerable.

Pinuccia Di Gesaro of Bolzano has researched and summarized the trial proceedings of actual women and men accused of being witches; she points to Tyrol, both German and Italian, as an area where the phenomenon arrived early, had a maximum representation, and was late to be eradicated.¹² From archival records, Di Gesaro has compiled a table of ninety-nine tribunals held from 1296 to 1738 in Tyrol, in which she lists the names of those summoned by the Inquisition, provides details of the accusations against them, and their punishment which included life imprisonment, exile, decapitation, and death by fire.¹³ In Trentino, “*processi delle streghe*” or witch trials took place in the seventeenth century in Val di Non, Val di Fiemme, and Val Lagarina, according to Aldo

¹¹ Ibid., 6:30.

¹² Di Gesaro, *Giochi* [The games of the witches], 8.

¹³ Di Gesaro, *Streghe* [Witches], 620–43.

Bertoluzza, author of numerous historical books on Trentino.¹⁴ In nearby Lombardy, in the town of Edolo in Valle Camonica, some sixty witches were sent to the stake in 1510. Seventy were burned in 1517, and a third wave of executions occurred in 1518.¹⁵ The witches of Lombardy allegedly flew on sticks and bewitched horses to Tonale Pass, where they gathered; after they were burned, their possessions were given to the church.¹⁶

Life as a Cycle—An Introduction and Explanation

Before reviewing the details of the study by chapter, it is important to introduce the cyclical view that permeates the study. What began as an observation of cultural differences became a persistent and recurring theme. This awareness developed into the premise that folk women, through their everyday acts, understood the alignment of natural cycles, and actively utilized that information to restore the balance and to heal. Women’s agency draws from this knowledge; their everyday spirituality spirals through, around, and from these cycles. The following paragraphs describe the underlying observations about the cycles of life that provide the groundwork for later chapters.

When I first started visiting Italy, I noted the rhythms and pauses of life, especially those that were different from the United States. Cycles and pauses of the day, week, and year are honored. Trentini people, like other Italians, eat their

¹⁴ Bertoluzza, *Dizionario dell’Antico Dialetto Trentino* (1997), 264.

¹⁵ Provincia di Brescia Assessorato al Turismo, *The Camonica Valley*, “Faith Procured Visions of Madonnas and Witches,” 25.

¹⁶ Ibid.

large meal at around noon, during the fullness of the day. Ample time is allowed for eating and digesting before businesses re-open. Most businesses are closed on Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday, allowing for time in nature or with family and friends. August marks a time for an annual period of pause for a month-long vacation, often to the sea or to the mountains, although now more people vacation at other times, I am told.¹⁷

A folk story, discussed in Chapter 6, tells of a woman who violated the “pause” in the harvest on August 5, a holy day to the Madonna of the Snow, by continuing to work while the others stopped and feasted together. This violation resulted in a severe punishment: a snow storm came, ruined the entire crop for everyone, and left a permanent glacier so that the land could no longer be farmed.¹⁸ Not only did the woman violate the mandatory annual pause, but she did not pause to eat midday or that night, when she continued to work under the full moon. In 1874, Rachel Harriet Busk, an English journalist noted that “there is no tradition more universally spread over Tirol than that which tells of judgments falling on non-observers of days of rest.”¹⁹

Less apparent, but perhaps the most influential at one time, is the lunar cycle. The yearly calendars mailed to me from Trentino as well as from sanctuaries throughout Italy often show quarterly phases of the moon. Through

¹⁷ When I was in Italy in 1984, the major highways were completely at a standstill on the first weekend of August as local vacationers headed to their destinations.

¹⁸ Neri, “The Marmolada glacier,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 77–79.

¹⁹ Busk, *The Valleys of Tirol*, 380.

my interviews and research, I learned that there is a long lunar legacy in the folk culture and that some villagers still consider the cycle of the moon for certain activities.

The stars influence the body and presumably the best time to do something. A drawing, likely centuries-old, in an illustrated dictionary of ancient Trentino dialect portrays a human figure with connecting lines between primary parts of the body and the twelve houses of the zodiac.²⁰ A contemporary folk calendar from the Val di Mocheni is noted with daily astrological signs. On liturgical calendars, each day lists at least one saint or the Virgin Mary who is honored that day. Folk sayings refer to the saint's day on which something is to be done.

In a painting in a folk museum, described in detail in Chapter 6, a woman's life is portrayed in a cyclic regenerative way, centered on the image of a woman spinning. The importance of a woman's monthly menstrual cycle is indicated in folk practices that maintained certain rules regarding menstruation and childbirth, and by the use of specific plants noted for their ability to bring on menstruation.

As will become more evident in this study, these clues reveal an understanding of life as a cycle, of a correspondence of these cycles, and of folk wisdom that emerges from this understanding. Folk women, in particular, likely understood and honored the cycles of life through the lived experience of their

²⁰ Bertoluzza, *Dizionario dell'Antico Dialetto Trentino* (1997) [Dictionary of ancient Trentino dialect], 300.

bodies' fertility cycle and its synchronization to the moon's cycles. Their agency was expressed by their knowledge of and maintenance of these cycles. A list of the cycles that are considered in this study and the chapters in which they are primarily addressed is shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. Cycles of Life Addressed in This Study by Chapter

Cycles of Life	Chapters
Birth/life/death	5, 8
Monthly fertility	5, 6, 7, 10, 12
Eating/digestion	9, 10
Plant growth	5, 10
Lunar—month, year	5, 6, 8, 10
Solar —day, season, year	5, 10
Stellar—night, year	5

Note. Author's table.

Attention to the cycles of life likely ensured the ongoing continuity of life, not in the sense of “immortality,” but as an ongoing spiral of regeneration, providing for future generations. Attunement with the cycles of life could ensure the maximum flow of life, which imparted health and well-being.

In their everyday activities, women were also connected with the very sources of life. Their nurturing fluids and the life-giving ability of their bodies, the nature around them, and the cosmos brought forth and sustained life. A list of the sources of life addressed in this study and the chapters in which they are primarily addressed is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Sources of Life Addressed in This Study by Chapter

Sources of Life	Chapters
Ancestors/Goddesses	4, 5
Women—menstrual blood, birth, ritual, word	4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12
Nature—water, plants, animals	4, 5, 8, 9, 10
Cosmos—moon, sun, stars	4, 5, 6, 8

Note. Author's table.

Overview of Study by Chapter

Table 3 shows the general sources and time frames of the information presented. Although there is not a rigid separation of these categories, they form a natural grouping of information and organization across the chapters of the study. The material evidence of the archaeology, the animating word of the folk stories, and the embodiment in the lives of women all contribute towards a fuller view of women's everyday spirituality.

Table 3. General Sources and Time Period of Information by Chapter

Sources of Information	General Time Period	Chapters
Archaeological artifacts and data	5000 BCE to 4th century CE	4
Folk stories	Bronze Age to 20th century CE	5
Folk women's lives Folk stories Museums Literature Conversations Nature	Middle Ages to present times	6–12

Note. Author's table.

The presentation of the material begins after a review of literature in Chapter 2 and a description of the methodology, along with an overview of the study design, in Chapter 3. Examples of venerated females in the archaeological evidence are described in Chapter 4, whose iconography indicates women's affinity with nature, their portrayal as the Source of life, and the importance of women in the spiritual realm. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the transformative actions of the female characters in the folk stories that dwell in the wild and embody the very mystery and awe of nature.

Chapters 6 through 12 focus on folk women's lives. Chapter 6 presents evidence and insights that folk women, through their everyday acts, understood and embodied the sources of life and acted as keepers of the cycles of life, focusing on lunar and menstrual cycles. Chapter 7 presents women's agency as

protectors of life in the spiritual realm through jewelry, sacred images, and letters. Spinning of fiber and the creation, care, and adornment of cloth, which is used to bless, protect, heal, and convey information, are discussed in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 considers the roles of food in everyday life and in the folk stories, which convey enduring values, like sharing and caring. Chapter 10 discusses the close and important relationship of women and plants, particularly as it relates to healing. In Chapter 11, the folk stories convey how folk women, noble women, and folk men rose up in defense against injustice with nature as a protective ally, an active source of knowledge and an agent of the people. Chapter 12 addresses the agency of wise Old Women who speak from experience as *Comari*, literally co-mothers, Godmothers, and Grandmothers. They counsel, advise, heal, protect, tell the future, and share stories. Chapter 13 reviews the findings for the key questions of this inquiry, considers the benefits of restoring and remembering the sources and cycles of life, and offers a personal reflection on the experience of this study.

A Geographical Overview

The borderland area between what is now Italy and the neighboring countries of France, Switzerland, Austria, and Slovenia is known as the Alpine Arch. It stretches from the Italian regions of Piedmont and Val d'Aosta in the west and, moving eastward, includes Lombardy, Trentino, South Tyrol (also known as Alto Adige), the Veneto, and Friuli-Venezia Giulia. (See Figure 1, Map of the Alpine Regions of Italy). Trentino lies in the north-eastern part of Italy, in the southern part of the Alps, placing it geographically between northern continental Europe and the Mediterranean. Its location at the crossroads has

resulted in it being described as “a land of encounter, exchange, and comparison” from the passage of populations across time into and through the area.²¹



Figure 1. Map of the Alpine Regions of Italy

Moser, “Alpine Regions of Italy.” Based upon “Worldatlas: Regions Map.” 2013. Graphics support courtesy of Richard Rotruck.

²¹ Valduga, *Harmony*, 49.

Trentino is characterized by its mountainous terrain, with some peaks reaching over 10,000 feet.²² Its valleys, forests, and meadows shelter roe-deer, chamois, goats, red deer, marmots, and eagles. There are nearly 300 lakes and 177 glaciers.²³ A complex system of valleys, along with deep canyons, steep mountains, rivers, and torrents have influenced where the people can live. The population outside of the bigger towns of Trent and Rovereto is dispersed among the smaller towns and villages, politically and administratively organized as *comune*, literally communes, which are surrounded by hundreds of even smaller hamlets.²⁴ Several Trentino valleys are referenced throughout the study, including three which have held onto their traditions more vigorously: Val di Fassa, Val di Non, and Val di Mocheni.

The Val di Sole is of additional interest for this study because of its proximity to specific points of interest as well as its ancestral significance in being the birthplace of my maternal grandmother (discussed in the following section). It is surrounded by mountain ranges including the Brenta, Ortles Cevedale, and Adamello Presanella. As shown in Figure 2, “Map of Trentino,” there is a natural connection of the valley to the west, over the Tonale Pass, with

²² UNESCO, *2013 Calendario*, August.

²³ Valduga, *Harmony*, 1.

²⁴ In 1997, out of 223 communes, 55 were less than 500 inhabitants. Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Trentino Today*, 21.

Valle Camonica in Lombardy, and to the east with the Val di Non along the river valley.

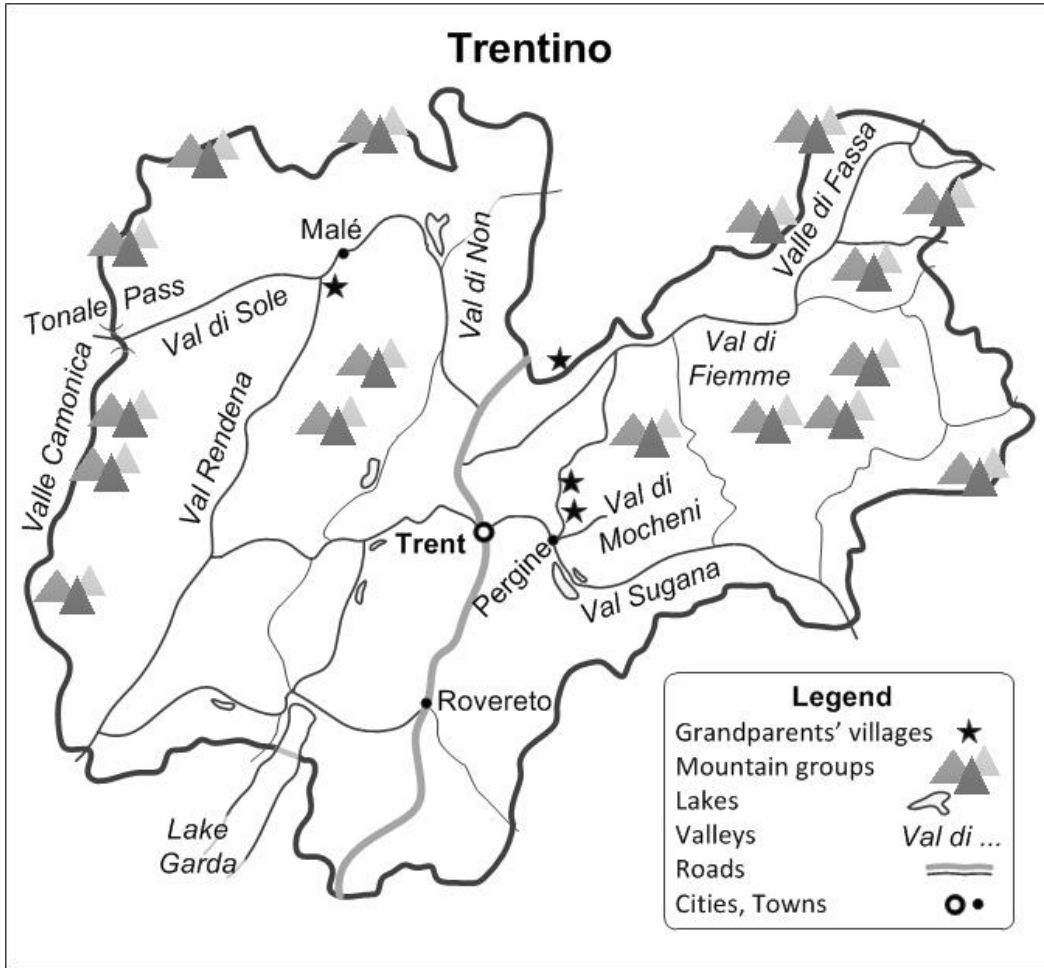


Figure 2. Map of Trentino

Moser, "Trentino." Map of Trentino based upon Provincia Autonoma di Trento, 2007, "*Biotopo Palù di Boniprati: Approaching Map.*" Graphics support courtesy of Richard Rotruck.

Water is a predominant feature of Val di Sole. The Noce River flows through the valley, glaciers characterize the highest peaks, and two side valleys, Pejo and Rabbi, are known for their thermal springs, each with its own healing

properties. To the south, beyond the high point of Madonna di Campiglio, lies the Val Rendena. The open valley is cultivated.

A Complex Political History

This study focuses on Trentino, Italy, also known as the Autonomous Province of Trento, once part of a larger territory known as Tyrol whose mountainous peaks form a natural watershed for Europe. The political history is complex, involving power struggles of dominant groups to control borders, mountain passes, land, resources, and the people. Although the focus of this study is on folk history, the selective events presented here highlight, for me, why peasants would seek the security of their land-based traditions. They also provide a context for terminology describing cultural and religious identity. Perhaps most importantly, they reveal the presence of traditional Alpine culture before Roman colonization.

The Alps, populated by numerous Alpine peoples, separated Germanic northern Europe from the Roman-controlled Mediterranean south. The Romans sought to secure transit routes across the Alps, which served as a security buffer, as well as to ensure Roman sovereignty and power. Roman military troops pushed north in the winter of 16–15 BCE. The Venosti, Isarci, Breoni, and Genauni tribes of what is now South Tyrol are among those who fought the Romans. Those who survived were forced into military service or taken as slaves, some of whom were

retained locally in slavery to cultivate the land. Over time, through deportation of the males and adaptation of the people, the local people were Romanized.²⁵

Some parts of Trentino were occupied by the Romans for nearly a century before this event as they moved north, according to historian Vigilio Inama, who describes the conquest of the Alps as long and difficult, and provides details from the written records of battles against, and at times alliances with, the Romans by various groups.²⁶ The monument known as the Trofeo d'Augusto, named for the Roman Emperor Augustus and erected a few years after the conquest of 15 BCE, names forty-five Alpine peoples, including the Trumplini of Val Trompia and the Camuni of Valle Camonica.²⁷ Decades later, among the people named as being granted the rights of Roman citizenship in 46 CE on a tablet from Cles, are the Anuani of Val di Non, the Siduni presumably of Val di Sole, and the Tuliassi.²⁸

The Romans established the settlement of Trent as the city of Tridentum, which later became the location of a Christian bishop in the fourth century. Roman influence is still evident in the Latinized words of the local dialects spoken today. Beginning around the fifth century, after the Romans could no longer control the northern border, and once Roman sovereignty ended, the next

²⁵ Hartungen, "Rhaetians and Romans," 32–34. He specifically refers to them as tribes.

²⁶ Inama, *Storia delle Valli*, 38–41.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 41, 43.

²⁸ Cole and Wolf, *The Hidden Frontier*, 97.

centuries were marked by the presence of the Ostrogoths, Lombards, Bavarians, Franks, and Alpine Slavs.²⁹

Trentino was a sovereign principality under the Holy Roman Empire for eight centuries, between 1004 and 1803. It was ruled by prince-bishops who were accountable to both the Emperor and the Pope. Because, out of piety they could not perform certain duties like torture and capital punishment, the bishops were required to enlist the services of aristocracy who served as overseers.³⁰ These feudal counts, who also had military commands, became their advocates. The Counts of Tyrol, whose name comes from the Castle Tirolo near Merano, were the fief-holders and advocates for the prince bishops for much of that period. They gradually assumed military control of what is known historically as Tyrol, and today as the three areas of Trentino, South Tyrol (Südtirol in German, Alto Adige in Italian) and North Tyrol. Tyrol's expansion added the Val di Sole and Val di Non in 1803.³¹ The authority of the Counts of Tyrol also grew to "enormous proportions" when they became emperors.³²

Tyrol became a province of Austria from 1803 to 1918, except for a period of French/Bavarian occupation between 1806 and 1813.³³ With the treaty of St.

²⁹ Hartungen, "Rhaetians and Romans," 34, 39.

³⁰ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *800 Years*, 29.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

³² *Ibid.*, 29.

³³ *Ibid.*, 128.

German in 1919, following World War I, Tyrol was divided: the “cisalpine” Tyrol south of the Brenner Pass was ceded to Italy, becoming the two provinces of South Tyrol and Trentino; the north or “transalpine” Tyrol remained part of Austria.³⁴ Figure 3 shows a contemporary map of Trentino and Tyrol.



Figure 3. Map of the Areas of Tyrol

Moser, "Areas of Tyrol." Based on map from *The Hidden Life of Tirol* by Martha C. Ward, 1993, x. Graphics support by Richard Rotruck.

³⁴ Cole and Wolf, *The Hidden Frontier*, 25.

Trentino or Tyrolean?

Regional and national identity, ethnic alliances, language, and political governance are dynamic, contested, and complex issues in this region. The residents of Trentino are primarily Italian-speaking. An excellent scholarly study of ethnicity in two Alpine villages in the same valley is documented in *The Hidden Frontier* by John W. Cole and Eric R. Wolf.³⁵ They explain that the area of Trentino before 1919 was often known as *Welschtirol*, from the Indo-European root *walos*, meaning stranger, a somewhat derogatory term used by German speakers implying to me that these Tyroleans were “others.” In other words, they were Italian-speaking people, not like those of *Deutsch* or German-speaking “*Deushtirol*.”³⁶

The residents of South Tyrol are primarily German-speaking. During fascism and Mussolini’s rise to power in 1922, Italian became the official language. Family names and town names of the Germans in South Tyrol were subject to forced Italianization.³⁷ Today there are three officially-recognized languages in South Tyrol: German, Italian, and Ladin.³⁸

Cultural identity is an ongoing discussion for people of both Trentino and South Tyrol, not only in resolving the past, but also in ensuring the fair treatment

³⁵ See an excellent discussion of ethnicity in Cole and Wolf, *The Hidden Frontier*, 18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 17. Cole and Wolf elaborate that the term *walo* was applied by Teutonic tribes to Celts and Romance speakers, and survives in the names Welsh, Wales, and Cornwall.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 57–58.

³⁸ Kronbichler, “Language and Identity,” 75.

of traditional ethnic minority cultures, as well as in accommodating waves of new immigrants. Identifying oneself as Trentino or Tyrolean could be interpreted as a political statement, although efforts for resolving past ethnic conflicts reportedly have been very successful. For immigrants, when and specifically where they were born and lived during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and their experiences, influence how they self-identify. In my maternal grandmother's village of Dimaro, for example, the roads are named after Italian patriots, indicating to me an Italian affiliation; however my paternal grandmother identified her homeland as "Tyrol." Although this particular discourse of disputed identity is not the primary focus of this study, it will enter the discussion as appropriate for clarity.

Cristoph Hartungen of Bolzano gives a detailed description of the turbulent history of South Tyrol in four chapters of the *Insight Guides: South Tyrol*.³⁹ A contemporary cultural anthropologist, Martha C Ward, describes Tyrol as a hidden culture, of which she writes in *The Hidden Life of Tirol*.⁴⁰ While these reports and other literature focused on Tyrol are very valuable, the Trentino cultural history I seek seems further hidden within that designation, due to language and geography. By describing myself as Trentino American, I am choosing to recognize a more specific geographic and cultural identity than is reflected in the word Tyrolean. Using the word "American," although it lacks

³⁹ Hartungen, "Rhaetians and Romans." Hartungen, "The Middle Ages." Hartungen, "The Habsburgs." Hartungen, "The 20th Century."

⁴⁰ Ward, *The Hidden Life of Tirol*. See Ward's chapter "Traveling Behind Tourist Lines" for an informative discussion on cultural biases of travelers, 187–211.

specificity, pays homage to *l'America*, the name of the land used by my grandparents and so many others who emigrated west, without distinction of South America or North America, Canada or the United States.

The deeper roots of my Alpine culture however precede both the Trentino and Tyrolean identities. Before the colonization by the Romans, the people who lived in the remote valleys of the Alps were known as the Reti, or Rhaetians, a culture group likely composed of several different groups of Alpine people with a similar sacred script and religious practices.⁴¹

Although the official language of Trentino today is Italian, there are numerous distinct dialects, still spoken by some today, which even further and perhaps more truly characterize the traditional culture of the valleys and villages, three of which have now been officially protected by the provincial government: Ladin, Mocheni, and Cimbri.⁴² Even in a single valley there may be variances. In Val di Non, for example, the dialects differ on either side of the river, and in Val di Sole the dialects vary along the valley.⁴³

Important Institutional Religious Influences

In addition to political forces, institutional Christianity brought change to the lives of the people. Vigilio, a patrician Roman, is recorded as the third bishop of Trent in the late fourth century. He requested assistants, three missionaries

⁴¹ Hartungen, "Rhaetians and Romans," 31–32.

⁴² Viola, "The protection of small languages in Trentino," 156–57.

⁴³ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Trentino Today*, 113–14.

from Cappadocia, and sent them to evangelize in Val di Non, who were killed in 397 CE when they tried to interfere with the peasants' agricultural rites to bring fertility to the fields.⁴⁴ No written accounts of this event from the peasant's view exist, although folk stories told by Nepomuceno Bolognini and Giovanni Borzaga tell of Vigilio's own evangelical experiences in Val Rendena, and the resistance he experienced from the people, whom Bolognini calls "wild pagans."⁴⁵ Borzaga, writing more than eighty years after Bolognini, is more sympathetic to the people of the valleys, noting that the Romans, who also tried to impose new social and administrative structures, were the last invaders. The unpopularity of Vigilio likely came from Christianity's equivalence with Romanization.⁴⁶

More than a thousand years later, the Italian Alps became a borderland between the Catholic Mediterranean and the growing Protestant movement to the north. As part of the Counter Reformation, a gathering of Catholic bishops and cardinals known as The Ecumenical Council was held in Trent in 1545–1563 CE to reform the Roman Catholic Church and to establish dogma. According to Hartungen, whose account is described as "affectionate but at the same time, critical,"⁴⁷

the Counter-Reformation in Tyrol was pursued particularly zealously. All employees of the Church and State were required to report any people

⁴⁴ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *800 Years*, 16.

⁴⁵ Bolognini, *Leggende del Trentino*, 13.

⁴⁶ Borzaga, *Leggende del Trentino* (1988), 10.

⁴⁷ Chwaszca, *Insight Guides: South Tyrol*, 7.

considered to be “religiously suspect” and to ensure that regulations pertaining to fasting and the correct receiving of the sacrament were followed. Baptismal registers, confessional papers and confessional registers served as a control. Anyone who refused to confess to Catholicism was forced to leave the country. During the so-called “book visits,” hundreds of printed works which were not approved by the Catholic Church were confiscated from people’s homes and later burned. This interference by the sovereign in religious matters was an attempt to establish and enforce the government’s absolutism.⁴⁸

The author continues that all areas of life were impacted. By the seventeenth century, Tyrol, with its emphasis on religious education, church services, processions, prayer and rosaries, was transformed into the “Holy Land of Tyrol.” The impact of the Council on women surfaces in the folk stories, in which the “witches” were banished. According to Ward, the Counter-Reformation also resulted in a fervent “folk Catholicism” in the eighteenth century, rooted in the land, which is part of Tyrolean identity, which includes devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus celebrated by annual bonfires across the mountaintops through the night on Pentecost Sunday.⁴⁹

My Relationship to This Study

In 1885 my maternal grandmother, Edvige Albasini, was born in Val di Sole, or Valley of Sun. She and my other three grandparents emigrated from what was then Tyrol to the United States between the years of 1901 and 1913. Edvige’s birth certificate states her birthplace as Austria. Immigration from the area now known as Trentino was a small stream of a much larger flow of Italian emigration, the largest movement of free labor in world history with over twenty-

⁴⁸ Hartungen, “The Habsburgs,” 50–51.

⁴⁹ Ward, *The Hidden Life of Tirol*, 45–46.

six million people emigrating from the 1870s to the 1970s.⁵⁰ Before 1900, 77% of the emigrants from Trentino to the Americas went to South America.⁵¹ While the objective of some Italian emigrants was to make enough money to return home, Edvige never returned to her homeland, where her two older sisters remained. She died in 1951, before I was born.

My paternal grandmother, Anna Casagrande, was born in a village near Bedollo in 1896. When, as a child, I asked her where she was from, her answer was “the Old Country,” and sometimes “Tyrol.” Once, when I needed the name of a nationality for a grade-school homework assignment, she said Austrian, although I never remember her speaking about any of these places. That was the extent of my explicit knowledge of my cultural heritage. I did learn from her that she immigrated at age sixteen to Central City, Colorado, that she married soon after, and had two sons, my father, John, and his brother, Frank. She spoke English with an accent.

My paternal grandfather, Giovanni Moser, whom I did not know, was born in a village on a high plateau of pines known as the Altopiano di Pine. He immigrated with his brothers to Colorado, worked as a gold miner, and died when my father was only fourteen from lung disease, known as miner’s consumption.

⁵⁰ Email to author from Calandra Institute, May 14, 2008. Calandra Institute announces: Call for Papers "The Land of Our Return: Diasporic Encounters with Italy" Conference, April 23–25, 2009.

⁵¹ This percentage is calculated from the following cited statistics: of the 23,846 emigrants from Trentino to the Americas between 1870 and 1899, 18,487 went to South America, 5,068 went to North America, some died enroute and others decided to return home. Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *The Beautiful Trentino*, 15.

His sister, Rosa, wanted to emigrate with her brothers, who said they would return for her. When her brothers did not return to get her, she remained in Trentino, married, and had three sons. These men, Giuseppe, Angelo, and Costante, and their families, with whom I established contact, have become a vital link to me for knowledge of my culture and heritage.

Emanuele Faustini, my maternal grandfather, was born in a hamlet near Salorno, in what is now South Tyrol. He too spoke with an accent, although I never heard him speak a word of Italian. Before he immigrated to the small mining town of Russell Gulch, Colorado, he was taught German in school, although his language is listed as Italian on the 1920 census. Once in the United States, he likely changed his name to Faustin which sounded less Italian, as did other immigrants to avoid racial prejudice against Italians.⁵² He died when I was eight years old.

Loss of Ancestral Knowledge

When my grandparents left their homeland, they left behind the places, and the stories about the places, where our ancestors had been born, lived, worked and died for centuries, disrupting the link to my ancestral wisdom. With the pressure to assimilate, their language was not passed down, and in our family, once the people who spoke that language died, communication with their homeland was lost. Many Trentino Americans, like other European Americans, have been cut off from knowledge of their ancestry.

⁵² His daughter, Emma, whom I interviewed, remembered her father being viewed suspiciously by the postal worker for receiving an Italian language newspaper in the mail, although I do not know the time frame.

Decades ago, after my grandparents had died, I felt called by my ancestors to visit my ancestral homeland and to find my grandparents' birthplaces. With the foundational genealogical research conducted by my sister Marlene, local maps, public transportation, and the keen navigational skills of my husband, Rich, we were able to find each village and eventually reconnect with relatives there.

From the years of genealogical research that followed, I know that I am the daughter of Lena, granddaughter of Edvige, great granddaughter of Felicita, and great great granddaughter of Margerita. It is these women who beckon me to retrieve my cultural heritage with a focus on folk women's culture. On the eve of February 2, 2007, the midway point on the solar cycle of the year between the longest night and the spring equinox, I opened *El Meledri*, the periodical from the village of my maternal grandmother in northern Italy, named for the river that borders the village. Inside, there was a photo of three women: my great grandmother, at the center, and her two oldest daughters, Emma and Erminia on either side. Their eyes seemed to look straight into mine across the ages and say, "We have been waiting for you."

Knowledge of my culture was not handed down to me explicitly, as it was for centuries from mother to daughter, for a number of reasons including early deaths, immigration to the United States, loss of language, discrimination, fear of

Italians by the US government during wartime, poverty, and the missing link of stories tied to particular places.⁵³

A single US government document reveals the slow erasure of ancestral heritage, the loss of oral tradition, and the negation of women's history and knowledge. On the 1920 census conducted by the United States government is a record of my maternal grandmother's presence in this country. Her first name, Edvige, is misspelled. Her last name, Albasini, is unlisted, as she is married.⁵⁴ Following her name are the entries of the names of four children, ages two, four, and five, along with a fourth older child, her twelve-year-old son. The place of

⁵³ I cite three examples of why it may have been unsafe to claim Italian ethnicity in the United States.

1. In "Labor, Gender, and Generational Change in a Western City," Janet E. Worrall writes that

When Italians began to appear in significant numbers in Denver, they received a less than enthusiastic reception. . . Denverites disliked the Italians "for their inability to speak English, their Catholicism, their eating and drinking habits, and their occasional criminality."

The article Worrall cites addresses the years 1858–1916. All of my grandparents arrived in Colorado between 1901 and 1913. (Worrall, "Labor, Gender, and Generational Change in a Western City," 442.)

2. The documentary *Sacco and Vanzetti*, a documentary directed by Peter Miller, portrays an unfavorable time to be an Italian in the 1920s in the Boston area.

Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian immigrant anarchists who were accused of a murder in 1920, and executed in Boston in 1927 after a notoriously prejudiced trial. . . The ordeal of Sacco and Vanzetti came to symbolize the bigotry and intolerance directed at immigrants and dissenters in America, and millions of people in the U.S. around the world protested on their behalf. (First Run Features, "Sacco and Vanzetti: Synopsis," para 1–2).

This case was evidently extremely well known at the time.

3. When Italy declared war on the United States in December, 1941, many Italians living in the United States cut off ties with Italy, and became even more assimilated, according to historian Stefano Luconi of Rome. (AIHA Conference notes "Italian Americans and Trans-nationalism: Old Wine in New Bottles?" November 2, 2007).

⁵⁴ In Trentino, as elsewhere in Italy, women use their given name on all legal documents.

residence for the fifty entries on the page is listed as Russell Gulch, Gilpin County, Colorado.

The entries, perfectly penned in cursive by the enumerator, Mrs. Gertrude Rical, are telling in what is included and excluded. My grandmother's life is summarized in less than a dozen categories. Relationship of this person to the head of the family: wife. Color or race: W, presumably for White. Age: 34. Year of immigration: 1908. Able to read: yes. Able to write: yes. Able to speak English: no. Place of birth: Tyrol, Austria, with Austria crossed out in a neat stroke angling from left to right. Mother tongue: Italian. Place of her mother's birth: Tyrol, Austria, this time with Tyrol crossed out. More than half of the fifty entries on the page have similar revisions to the birth places, all regarding Tyrol. The mother tongue of her mother is listed as Italian, with a small annotation of "OL" above it. Is this an abbreviation for Old Language or Old Latin? Does this refer to the dialect which the people of her valley spoke?

A review of the census document indicates that the occupation of nearly all the men, including my immigrant grandfather, Emanuel Faustini, is a gold miner. The women have no occupation listed, except for one, Elizabeth Wood from England, whose occupation is "Baking." She is listed as a "Head" of household, which is then crossed out to clarify she is the "Wife." The names of four children follow hers in the census. I am imagining that she is a widow, like so many other women whose immigrant husbands work inside dust-filled hard rock tunnels drilled into the Rocky Mountains. Edvige had already been widowed, leaving her with one son of her own and two children of her deceased husband's

first marriage. My paternal grandmother, Anna Casagranda, would join that circle of widowed women before the end of the decade.

My grandmother Edvige, according to the US government, had a name whose completeness or accuracy did not matter in America, a birthplace whose political boundaries had shifted, and a mother tongue that did not match the national language of her former or present country. Her work was not considered an occupation.

Much of the oral history was lost with the loss of language. My mother could understand her mother's dialect, but she responded to her in English. Here in the United States, my grandmother's language—the very medium of agency through which her culture had been communicated for generations—became a source of shame, due to her inability to speak “good English.” She brought her oldest daughter, Annie, along as a translator in shops to conduct transactions. My grandmother later mastered the English necessary to pass the difficult exam for citizenship which became a source of pride. In 1951, three years before I was born, my grandmother died while sitting in my mother's kitchen. As a result, I did not hear a single word of the “old language” growing up. Only in 1981, when I traveled with my mother to Italy so that she could see the birth village of her mother, did this hidden language that she held inside for thirty years tumble out.⁵⁵

Recovering Ancestral Heritage, Reclaiming Folk Women's Wisdom

In this unfolding story of my heritage, I seek to recover and make more evident the folk wisdom of my ancestors, particularly of my female ancestors, and

⁵⁵ Moser, "A Verbal Umbilical Cord," 5.

the values that they transmitted. Because the study focuses on the homeland of my grandparents, it is meaningful to me both personally and academically. Relatives both in Italy and in the United States have contributed invaluable knowledge of the local cultural history over the years and more recently through oral interviews. With this endeavor, I reclaim the values and value of the motherline, my line of ancestral mothers.

While US culture considers me well-educated, since I graduated from a university, attained a scientific degree, and had a professional career in engineering, it is the wisdom of the Trentino folk culture that I seek. I did not learn about the influence of lunar cycles, how to gather wild herbs and plants for food and medicine, or about the female folk characters that embody the mystery of life. Over the years, I have studied Italian as an adult, but I did not hear the mother-tongues of my grandparents, likely four distinct but similar dialects.

Although I was not raised with explicit knowledge of my ancestral culture, in this study I search for the numerous ways that cultural values have been transmitted to me in everyday family life, including through food, clothing, medicine, religious practices, acts of service, and celebration.

Why This Particular Story Is Important

Although the details of this inquiry address my specific cultural story, this exploration is relevant to European Americans who have been cut off from their ancestral cultures. Each person's cultural history informs who they are, adds to the fabric of life, and contributes to the collective wisdom needed for the way ahead. Cultural specificity contributes to diversity: it adds to our understanding of

each other and adds to the larger story we share; through our differences we can find shared values especially those rooted in traditional cultures. The values from folk culture in which the people lived sustainably, in harmonious relationship with Nature, are relevant today as we strive toward a more balanced future. Ancestral values include an awareness of the interdependence and interconnectedness of all life and of our responsibility to future generations.

Feminist studies and indigenous scholars validate the importance of researching one's specific cultural heritage. Both fields of study sort through the layers of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, colonialism, and imperialism in search of submerged history and identity to come to common ground, which literally is an earth-based culture. Describing cultural history as writing or telling a story, Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum emphasizes that everyone's stories are needed "in order to release the energies and imaginations that will accelerate our passages to an equal and just world." While the submerged stories of humans carry painful memories, she writes, they also carry hopes and visions of a better time.⁵⁶ Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ stress the importance of particularity of women's experiences, so that significant differences are not homogenized. It is the particularities of ethnicity and place, along with gender and class, to which women turn "as a source for knowledge, strength, and possible vision for social change."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Birnbaum, *Future Has an Ancient Heart*, xxiv, 6. 8.

⁵⁷ Plaskow and Christ, "Introduction," 3–4.

Women who have reconnected with ancestral wisdom report feeling more responsibility for future generations.⁵⁸ Apela Colorado, of Oneida and Gaul origins, maintains that indigenous consciousness is not only recoverable but essential. She teaches a graduate program in “Indigenous Mind” to facilitate students’ journeys to learn traditional ways of knowing grounded in their own cultural backgrounds.⁵⁹

With its inclusion of women’s voices, past and present, this study brings a female-centered focus to the cultural history of Trentino as it investigates a range of folk women’s everyday actions. This study helps make explicit values that are shared among earth-centered cultures. An aim of this study is that both women and men of Trentino ancestry will become interested and knowledgeable in Trentino women’s lives, spirituality, stories, and wisdom. By including my story in this study, I join Carol Christ who states that “My conviction that theology begins in experience means that I, like many other feminist scholars, can no longer write in an impersonal voice.”⁶⁰

My Standpoint

Feminist research emphasizes sharing details about the social forces that have intentionally or unintentionally influenced one’s views. In addition to my working-class upbringing in a large Catholic family, my worldview is shaped by

⁵⁸ Wisdom University, “Masters Program – Indigenous Mind: Faculty.”

⁵⁹ Worldwide Indigenous Science Network, “Indigenous Mind Program: Educational Approach.”

⁶⁰ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 36. Theaology is spelled with an “a” in order to include the female in the study of religion.

being European American and female. Race, gender, and class are “interlocking systems of domination which *together* determine the social construction of femaleness,” bell hooks explains.⁶¹ Colonialism and imperialism have further permeated western worldview, which is addressed in academia as “postcolonial discourse” and in indigenous studies as “decolonization.” Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan warn that “without . . . critical and methodological self-reflexivity, feminist scholarship, even with good intentions, might nevertheless reinscribe colonialist paradigms.”⁶² Although my grandparents arrived in the United States from Europe only a hundred or so years ago, my worldview has been influenced by the colonial ethos that is part of the dominant culture. Luisa Del Giudice asserts that, from the Italian folk perspective, most of the immigrants who arrived here “were as much victims of a capitalist, colonial mentality—the pawns in global relocations of labour and resources—as the people these new waves of migrants might have displaced.”⁶³

The teachings and research of Laguna Indian Paula Gunn Allen about tribal North America suggest to me that Trentino culture, in its tribal origins, may have been significantly different than the dominant cultures that overlaid it and that values of tribal cultures are similar to each other. Allen emphasizes that “Indian America does not in any sense function in the same ways or from the

⁶¹ hooks, “Feminism: A Transformational Politic,” *Feminisms and Womanisms*, 112. The author spells her name without capitalization.

⁶² Donaldson and Kwok, *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*, 15.

⁶³ Del Giudice, *Studies in Italian American Folklore*, 3.

same assumptions that western systems do.”⁶⁴ Allen states that there is more similarity among tribal worldviews of the North American continent alone, even given the wide diversity of tribal cultures, than any of them have with the patriarchal worldview.⁶⁵ In American Indian cultures whose ways endure, their women-centered tribal lifestyles focus on social responsibility.⁶⁶ As a specific example, relevant to this study, the Nuche or Ute Indians in southern Colorado, who lived sustainably on the land for millennia as did my ancestors in northern Italy, express similar values in their traditional culture: they honor the land, ancestors, and children, and emphasize sharing and caring.⁶⁷ I am informed by living traditional cultures in all lands, whose values and way of life have helped educate me in a worldview vastly different than that of the dominant history, which has excluded the folk history of Europe as meaningful, relegating it to the world of quaint superstitions.

My identity has transformed, over the decades, from being “American” and “White,” to Italian American, and then to *Trentina Americana*, that is, a female Trentino American. Now I am further rooted to the specific locations of my grandparents’ births. I am Solandra-Pinetana in heritage, that is, with ancestors from Val di Sole and Baselga di Pine, whose names invoke,

⁶⁴ Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁷ These values were reflected in sayings posted on the walls of the Ute Indian Museum in Montrose, Colorado.

respectively, the sun and the trees, and thus I am bound to them also. My tribal origins are likely tied to the Reti culture. My surname, Mosèr, is properly pronounced with an accent on the second syllable, I now know, to indicate that my origins are from Trentino. Although some of my ancestors have likely dwelled in the land of Trentino for at least several hundred years, and maybe even millennia, my deepest ancestral roots reach to Africa. Analysis of my mitochondrial DNA indicates that my oldest known foremother is from East Africa dating from 150,000 years ago, that her descendents migrated out of Africa more than 60,000 years ago, and that one branch eventually made their way to Europe.⁶⁸

Recovering an Indigenous Consciousness

An important finding for me has been the folk stories that are held in my ancestral lands. Although at first they seemed unfamiliar and even irrelevant in their context, they eventually revealed a wealth of insight into another worldview. I have been steeped in a Western worldview that is human-centric and hierarchical. In American Indian cultures and worldview, spirits are always present.⁶⁹ For the Okanagan Indians in the northwest United States, along with other indigenous peoples, there are societies of non-human beings with

⁶⁸ National Geographic Society, “Migratory Crossings,” para. 1, 7.

⁶⁹ Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 2.

communities.⁷⁰ Among the Saanich tradition, trees are perceived as beings with special powers and mountains have supernatural and human traits.

Consistent with indigenous science that emphasizes relationship, participation in the cosmos, and the idea that all creation is alive,⁷¹ I include non-human nature and non-human beings in my goal of recovering untold and suppressed folk histories. Recovering the value of and knowledge from non-human nature is an important area of feminist and indigenous studies. Approaching the inquiry with this openness has revealed new insights and relationships, reflected in the review of the literature in the next chapter, in the methodology in Chapter 3, and throughout this study.

Experiencing Tribal Connections

Carol Lee Sanchez, an American Indian writing about her Tribal connections, informs my sense of displacement and my desire for reconnection with my Trentino and Trentino American “tribes.” She writes that “‘going home’ stabilizes us again, reestablishes our sense of being in balance and connected to everything” and that “being connected is fundamental to the mental health of Tribal people.”⁷²

In 2010, I recovered a tribal connection here in the United States when the *Circolo Trentino di Seattle*, the Seattle Trentino Club, was formed in my

⁷⁰ Turner, *The Earth's Blanket*, 88.

⁷¹ Worldwide Indigenous Science Network, “Distinctions of Indigenous Science.”

⁷² Sanchez, “New World Tribal Communities,” 349.

geographical area. All clubs, found in the primary locations around the world to which Trentini immigrated, are considered to be *Circoli* (circles) by the parent organization in Trentino, reflecting cultural values. Agricultural co-operatives and credit unions are evident throughout Trentino today. Communities across the Alpine Arch beginning around the twelfth century met in self-governing groups to make decisions about common land, with each family represented. When our *Circolo* meets for cultural events, during which we prepare and eat the traditional food of Trentino and celebrate together, it feels like a gathering of kin. At the Polenta Picnic in 2012, one member, Mauro Rizzi, brought a dessert known as Zelten, a type of cake with dried fruit and nuts, using a recipe of his great great grandmother's in Val Rendena. The president, Joan Barker, is a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother with ancestry from Val di Non who dons traditional folk clothing, including a large flowered shawl over her shoulders, at our winter gathering and impersonates the female-gift bringer, La Befana, giving candy to the children. This tribal connection has been an encouraging presence during the course of this study.

Some Notes on Style

Certain words are occasionally capitalized in English and Italian to denote their relative importance, either singularly or collectively, equivalent to that of a proper name or title, for example Anguane, Queen, and Old Woman. As appropriate, this reasoning and capitalization is at times extended to non-human entities as well, such as Nature, Cosmos, Tree, and Star. In the Italian language, proper nouns are generally downsized, creating a “downward equivalence”

whereas I have leaned towards an “upward equivalence” which allows more consistency with the rules of English grammar. At times this creates some inconsistencies in the capitalization of titles of books, folk stories, and articles, which have been translated by their authors into English using the rules of Italian grammar. Also, when referencing information from a folk story, I have listed its name in the footnote, which seems to preserve or communicate more of its cultural identity. Some adjectives are modified to indicate female gender consistent with Italian grammar, by using a final “a,” for example Trentino in English, used for male and female becomes *Trentina* in Italian to describe a female.

The names of the valleys have been written in Italian rather than translated to English to preserve name-recognition. In the United States, descendants generally refer to the name of their homeland in Italian, for example, Val di Non, rather than the Non Valley. The Italian designation of Trento is used interchangeably with the English Trent for the town name.

The words in dialect, which can have various spellings depending on location, at times resemble Italian. I have attempted to indicate in the text when a phrase or word is in dialect so that readers of Italian will not be searching their Italian dictionaries for non-existent words.

Because certain words or abbreviations utilized in the study may differ from their common use or be unfamiliar, I provide a short list of definitions here. My goal is to use a vocabulary that is precise, yet common, while avoiding terminology that bears cultural judgment or bias.

Definitions of Terms for This Study

Agency is the ability to act as an agent of influence.

An *ancestress* is a female ancestor with whom one is in relationship after she dies.⁷³

Before Common Era, abbreviated BCE, is used to indicate dates in studies previously labeled BC, for Before Christ.

Common Era, abbreviated CE, is used to indicate dates in academic studies previously labeled AD, for Anno Domino, the Year of the Lord.

Cosmos is a collective term used for general reference to include the moon, sun, planets, and stars, recognizing that each may have their own influence.

Cultural history is a field of study and a methodology that includes all aspects of history, including archaeology, oral traditions, art, language, food, and religion. The work of Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum is formational and foundational in the field of feminist cultural history.⁷⁴

Ethnobotany is a field of study of human's relationship with plants.

Folk refers to the people, the non-dominant class in hierarchical societies, or tribal people.

Folk traditions are the traditional, non-institutional parts of culture that encompass the values and beliefs transmitted orally or by customary examples. In Trentino, the phrase *usi e custumi* (customs and traditions) describes the elements

⁷³ See Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, for a discussion of the term ancestor, especially page 125.

⁷⁴ See Birnbaum, *dark mother* and *The Future Has an Ancient Heart* as examples of feminist cultural history.

and practices of folk culture. For this study, I use the term *folk traditions* with the intention of describing the traditional culture and its living legacy. Folk stories are part of the folk tradition and a primary source of information in this study.

Nature encompasses all entities on earth including humans. The term “non-human nature” is used at times to emphasize all things in nature other than humans. There are uses of the word “nature” throughout the study without the qualifier “non-human” for simplicity and to express the idea that humans are part of nature.

Nature Beings is a general term created for this study to categorize folk characters with special abilities in the folk stories that dwell in the wild. The Anguana is an example a Nature Being.

Metaformic theory is a theory of cultural origins by Judy Grahn, which proposes that human consciousness and human culture come from menstrual and related blood rites, with the connection between the lunar cycle and the menstrual cycle as the originating step. A *metaform* is defined in Grahn’s theory as an enacted or embodied idea with menstrual ritual as one part of its equation.⁷⁵

Spiritual refers to that which gives life meaning.

Women’s spirituality is an inter-disciplinary field of study as well as a methodology focusing on women and their spirituality in the past and present.

⁷⁵ Grahn, “Are Goddesses Metaformic Constructs,” xviii. See Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses* for development of this theory

In the review of the literature which follows, the context of these terms will be amplified. The research and theories of women's spiritual history, particularly regarding female divinities, women-centered cultures, and indigenous worldviews help situate the specific cultural information of the Italian Alps in a larger philosophical matrix.

2. Review of Literature

This section presents a review of the literature for the exploration of women's spiritual agency in the folk traditions of Trentino, Italy. It begins with a selected overview of relevant research in the field of Women's Spirituality, which provides a philosophical framework for this study. It follows with a survey of the literature specific to northern Italy from Trentino, and including the nearby Alpine regions of Alto Adige, Lombardy, Piedmont, Veneto, and Friuli.

Reviewing the literature within these two general categories highlights a major contribution of this study, which is its application of feminist research and theories to detailed information of the folk culture of Trentino with the aim of bringing a female focus with an integral view to the exploration of women's everyday spirituality. Equally important, the specificity of Trentino culture grounds the theories and broadens the knowledge of goddess/ancestress veneration, healing, and women's embodied rituals.

Literature in Women's Spirituality/Feminist Studies

Feminist research over the last forty years has influenced numerous scholarly fields of study. The multi-disciplinary works of several scholars inform this study, some key examples of which are presented here under the categories of female divinities, women-centered cultures, indigenous worldviews, healing, women and nature, and women's embodied sacred ritual. These categories, while overlapping in their content, provide a lens to examine and engage the literature about Trentino in order to glean and gather the ways in which women act as spiritual agents in the folk culture of the Italian Alps.

Female Divinities

The work of archaeologist and mythologist Marija Gimbutas is valuable for understanding the central roles of women, both spiritually and socially, and the widespread presence of female divinity in Neolithic Europe, a subject largely ignored or trivialized by the male-dominated field of archaeology during her career which spanned several decades of the twentieth century. The symbolic language of the generative female, which Gimbutas names as Goddess, is closely tied to nature and manifest in natural forms. Gimbutas' research draws upon her own Lithuanian culture, with its rich folklore, her knowledge of twenty languages, and her professional career in archaeology, to theorize about the spiritual aspects of prehistoric cultures, which she views as "intertwined" with the material aspects.⁷⁶ Gimbutas created the field of archaeomythology, which utilizes material archaeological finds, comparative mythology, historical references, folklore, and linguistics to comprehend the civilization of "Old Europe." Her theories and evidence about the centrality of female goddesses in the Neolithic are documented in *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*. Although none of the five major excavations Gimbutas directed were in northern Italy, her theories address the geographical area in northern Italy of interest to my study.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Gimbutas, *Civilization of the Goddess*, x.

⁷⁷ These excavations were: Obre in Bosnia, Anza in Macedonia, Sitagroi in northwestern Greece, Achilleion in southern Thessaly (Greece) and Manfredonia in southern Italy. See Gimbutas, *Living Goddesses*, xv.

In *The Civilization of the Goddess*, Gimbutas portrays and analyzes artifacts from Lombardy and Alto Adige, which border Trentino.⁷⁸ Gimbutas argues that the social structure in Indo-European patriarchal culture is mirrored in religious symbols and structure.⁷⁹ Gimbutas proposes that it is possible to reconstruct social structures of pre-Indo-European cultures using linguistics, history, myth, religions, and archaeological evidence which she concludes was matrilineal.⁸⁰ “Given Neolithic religious symbolism it is extremely difficult to imagine that Old European society would not be matrilineal, with the mother or grandmother venerated as progenitor of the family.”⁸¹

In *The Living Goddesses*, edited and supplemented by Miriam Robbins Dexter and published posthumously, Gimbutas discusses the Etruscans and the Celts, both of which influenced Alpine culture. According to Gimbutas, the Etruscans preserved matrilineal customs. The women were priestesses, seers, and “a force in politics.”⁸² The Celts were among other predominantly Indo-European cultures that also preserved matrilineal traits.⁸³

⁷⁸ Gimbutas, *Civilization of the Goddess*, 185, 193, 396–98.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 124.

⁸⁰ Gimbutas, *Living Goddesses*, 125.

⁸¹ Ibid., 113.

⁸² Ibid., 122.

⁸³ Ibid., 122.

The research of Hilda Ellis Davidson in *Roles of the Northern Goddess* contributes knowledge of local goddesses who were involved in matters of women's everyday life and community. Worldviews in northern mythology, whose influence is evident in the mountainous Alps which served as both barrier and crossroads between northern Europe and the southern Mediterranean, are important to consider. Lotte Motz also focuses on northern mythology in "The Winter Goddess: Percht, Holda, and Related Figures," and *The Beauty and the Hag: Female Figures of Germanic Faith and Myth*. Her research of Winter Goddesses contributed significantly to my study of female figures in the folk stories. The historically-rooted female-centered novels of Donna Gillespie, *Lady of the Light* and *The Light Bearer*, which portray the culture of the tribal north during the times of Roman conquest resonate with scholarly studies and my imagination.

Studies of rural communities contribute towards the understanding of village women's roles for this study. In this regard, the research of Pupul Jayakar in *The Earth Mother: Legends, Ritual Arts, and Goddesses of India* documents the centrality of village women who ritually invoke the energy of nature in order to maintain the primacy of the primordial, creative goddess. Jayakar writes:

A substratum of female memories of power and energy has existed from the primordial past. Within this stream, women were the holders and sustainers of heritage. Integral to this was an understanding of the nature of cyclic time, and the rites of passage, of seasons entering creation. All transmission of myth, the contacting of energy sources and the initiating of rites of the auspicious, flowed from mother to daughter, through poesy, art, skill, ritual, and unspoken word, and gesture.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Jayakar, *Earth Mother*, xiii.

The village goddess as a living tradition in Orissa, India, has been one area of research and fieldwork by Elinor Gadon, author of *The Once and Future Goddess*. Of her first year in India decades ago, during which she repeatedly saw images of beautiful, sacred females, Gadon writes “I experienced the power of *shakti*—cosmic energy as female force. And I could never go back to my old ways of seeing and being in the world.”⁸⁵

Women-Centered Cultures

The research of cultural historian Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, whose exploration of Italian feminism, religion, and politics from a women’s spirituality perspective spans more than twenty-five years, has expanded women’s cultural history in several significant ways to this study, including philosophically by considering the transmission of values and geographically by including African influence, often left out of Eurocentric studies of the Mediterranean. Birnbaum’s stated concern is for women and all subordinated others whose stories have been left out of dominant histories and whose cultures have been negated. Her publications exemplify non-dominant history in both content and method.

In *Liberazione delle donne: Feminism in Italy*, Birnbaum expressly aligns Italian women’s history with peasant history in her study of Italian feminism in the context of Italian cultural and political history, focusing on Sicily, her ancestral homeland. Defining folklore as the culture of subaltern classes, Birnbaum uses it to search for submerged beliefs in *Black Madonnas: Feminism, Religion, and Politics in Italy*, proposing that Black Madonnas can be understood

⁸⁵ Gadon, "My Life's Journey as a Researcher," 5–6.

as signs of resistance to the dominant culture of church and state, as well as signs of the dark mother's values of justice with compassion and equality. Birnbaum's research provides validation for the use of folk stories and folk traditions in the study of Trentino submerged beliefs. Birnbaum's research reinforces the agency of peasant women of Italy, "who continued to teach (usually under the cover of names of catholic saints) the values of the ancient peaceful and harmonious civilization."⁸⁶ While Birnbaum's focus is on the human story, her insights of negated others applies to non-humans as well. My study philosophically extends Birnbaum's thinking to plants, some of which have been negated as weeds, colonized, eliminated and demonized.

The recognition and inclusion of Africa in the cultural history of humans is a primary contribution of *dark mother: african origins and godmothers*,⁸⁷ in which Birnbaum brings together matricentric and African-centric studies to propose that the earliest woman divinity was a dark mother of Africa. Birnbaum utilizes cultural history and science (genetics and archaeology) for hypothesizing that, as Africans migrated to all continents around 50,000 BCE,⁸⁸ they carried with them signs of veneration of a dark mother (red ochre and the pubic V), which persist today, along with her values of justice with compassion, equality with

⁸⁶ Birnbaum, *Black Madonnas*, 169.

⁸⁷ Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum notes on her style that "I have adopted contemporary italian style in removing capitals from as many words as possible, agreeing with Italians that this is a step toward democratization of all institutions." See Birnbaum, *dark mother*, xxiii.

⁸⁸ Research conducted since the book's publication indicates this date may be even earlier. See National Geographic Society, "The Human Journey," para. 2.

difference, and transformation. Paleolithic rock art shows a harmonious, ancient, mother-centered culture characterized by no separation between the sacred and the profane, veneration of the ancestors, and the sacredness of all life, according to Birnbaum.⁸⁹ The belief in the dark mother persists in the folklore, in images of dark women divinities, and in subaltern cultures around the world, all continents having been reached by primordial African migration routes.⁹⁰

The research of the matriarchal Minangkabau culture of Indonesia documented in *Women at the Center: Life in a Modern Matriarchy* by anthropologist Peggy Sanday Reeves, highlights important themes relevant to my study, including the ceremonial power of women, ancestral queen mothers, spirituality and nature as related, the idea of nature as a teacher, and nature as the basis of a code of ethics. Numbering some four million, the Minangkabau are one of the largest ethnic groups in West Sumatra, Indonesia. They are matrilineal (heredity through the mother) and matriarchal, in the sense that maternal, culturally-significant symbols are predominant.⁹¹

While men hold political power, women hold ceremonial power, which is central to the individual, the society, and to the generation of life. The three guiding ethical principles of the Minangkabau are: *adat*, which is their indigenous

⁸⁹ Birnbaum, *dark mother*, 6–7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, xxxiv.

⁹¹ Sanday, *Women at the Center*, 236. See Chapter 14 “Redefining Matriarchy” for a more detailed discussion.

law, Islam, and the official post-colonial government code.⁹² *Adat* is considered sacred because it is a primordial aspect of nature. Nature is the teacher of the Minangkabau. Plants and animals, in their maternal nurturing, hold the immanence of *adat*.⁹³ Sanday eventually learned about a fourth code: *ilmu gaib* (magical knowledge), the world of spirit and healing.

Matrilineal law is considered a natural law handed down from the godhead and can elicit an ancestral curse if violated.⁹⁴ At the center of the Minangkabau world is the divine queen mother, Bundo Kanduang (Our Own Mother), who is the source of wisdom, the center of the universe, and the symbol of social unity.⁹⁵ Sanday makes the important observation that these primordial female figures not only emphasize the womb, they represent a philosophy of life and death, “not just the source, origin and growth of life, but the completed life cycle, the union of all that is necessary for the regeneration of life.”⁹⁶ Senior women are thought of as Bundo Kanduang, symbolized by the butterfly, and representing the common good. A woman’s role is considered the central pillar of the household; she holds the key to the chest with the clothes and jewelry, ancestral objects to be handed

⁹² Ibid., 16.

⁹³ Ibid., 24.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 237.

down.⁹⁷ To some degree, all of these themes—women as source and cycle, ancestral mother as the ultimate source of life and embodied by elder women, and the importance of the complete life cycle—are reflected in the themes of Trentino folk women’s lives.

Indigenous Cultures

Cross-cultural studies of living women-centered and indigenous cultures are invaluable for understanding non-dominant worldviews which inform this study’s focus on the non-dominant folk culture. They provide affirming guidance for exploring the themes of this study: ancestral females as honored along with grandmothers and mothers, women as active agents of spirituality in close contact with nature, and embodied females in cyclic harmony with the universe. Foremost among these studies is the research of the indigenous people of North Africa by anthropologist and historian Makilam, which is particularly useful in revealing the spirituality of everyday acts of women aligned with the natural cycles of life. In *The Magical Life of Berber Women in Kabylia*, Makilam, who is an indigenous Kabyle, focuses on everyday practices of village women, whose ancient traditions—steeped with spirituality—were still intact until the twentieth century. The Kabyle peoples (more commonly known as Berbers) populate the region of Kabylia in the High Atlas Mountains of Algeria. The central and essential position of women who participated in every aspect of life, documented by Makilam, has alerted me to possible avenues of female spiritual agency in women’s activities in village life in general. In their role of “magicians”—what I

⁹⁷ Ibid., 82–83.

am calling acts of everyday spirituality in my study—the Kabyle women made pottery, marking them with a secret, sacred script, and coordinating the ritual of pot-making with the cycles of the seasons and of the phases of the moon. They wove fabric, imbuing it with magic, and made foodstuffs ritually, transmitting the knowledge from mother to daughter.⁹⁸ All human activities in Kabylia respected the cyclic harmony of the cosmos, earth, and the cycle of the seasons. Mothers were the keeper of the language and traditions, and were seen to be the incarnations of the myth of creation. According to Makilam,

Woman was never elevated to the rank of a goddess, because they knew in the depth of their being that their human essence was divine, like the whole planet and all its natural life.⁹⁹

Their mysticism was not dogmatic or written—rather it was lived.

Makilam describes a series of interconnected cycles of traditional activities that reconnect with their original source.¹⁰⁰ In this traditional world, the wisdom of the old women, the mothers, and the ancestors is central; everything has an invisible spirit; every act addresses the sacred life within objects; and the ancestors are present in daily life. Makilam re-creates the worldview of Berber spirituality through the memories of women in remote villages, the use of oral and written texts, and her own initiation into the tradition of pottery-making, even though the traditional activities of women have disappeared because emigration

⁹⁸ Makilam, *The Magical Life of Berber Women in Kapylia*, 45–46. Pottery is still made, apparently, but not used as primarily cooking utensils.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

broke the oral tradition. Makilam's stated intent is to share this knowledge so that the ancestral wisdom of the Berbers can benefit all, as well as to show the importance of women and their spirituality to the integrity of any society.¹⁰¹

In addition to spirituality and nature, the importance of communal relationships to survival in indigenous culture is highlighted in the dissertation "Feminine Spiritual Roots of the Tree of Life: Prehistory and History of the Sami and Basques as Indigenous Europeans," in which Victoria Estelle Logan, a European American of Basque heritage, presents a feminist study of indigenous Europe.¹⁰² Logan's study describes the values of the Sami in the Arctic and the Basque in Spain, living indigenous peoples who were not colonized by Indo-European speaking cultures, using a multidisciplinary approach including linguistics, archaeomythology, religious studies, and philosophy to reconstruct their pre-history, to investigate how their cultures survived imperializing and colonial forces, and to present their cultures as possible examples from which to learn. Similar to my study of Trentino, Logan seeks to understand the role of gender, women's roles, and female divinity. Her study affirms the importance of language in this endeavor, illustrated by the Sami word for the alder tree, *laeibe*, which also means women's menstrual blood, whose blood-red sap is used to paint the Shaman's drum.¹⁰³ The nuances of Sami's language allowed them to conceal

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰² Logan, *Feminine Spiritual Roots of the Tree of Life*.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 74.

messages from the public officials who did not know the language well, thus becoming a form of political resistance.¹⁰⁴ The very language of the Basques, Logan notes, indicates a relationship with all that surrounds them, with terms largely derived from nature.¹⁰⁵ For the Sami, spirituality is at the center of life, a belief system Logan classifies as shamanism. The Sami's survival, Logan states, is primarily because of their "indigenous understanding of being in communal relationship with their environment, ancestors, reindeer, and each other."¹⁰⁶

Stripping away the layers of colonization and patriarchal bias in history is taking place in indigenous studies as well as feminist research. Paula Gunn Allen views her Laguna tradition from a female-centered perspective in *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Traditional tribal lifestyles are never patriarchal, and more often than not have a woman-centered social structure. Allen emphasizes that "Indian America does not in any sense function in the same ways or from the same assumptions that western systems do,"¹⁰⁷ which influenced my realization that my Trentino culture, in its tribal origins, may have been significantly different than the dominant cultures that overlaid it. In Allen's view, there is more similarity among tribal worldviews of the North American continent alone, even given the wide diversity of tribal

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 85.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 119.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 108, 119.

¹⁰⁷ Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 2, 7.

cultures, than any of them have with the patriarchal worldview.¹⁰⁸ This observation supports my alignment of Trentino folk culture with indigenous cultures in my search for values.

Both indigenous studies that are feminist and feminist studies that are decolonizing in their aim, are striving to reach a shared place of earth-centered, mother-honoring, peace-promoting values. Lakota Elder Russell Means promotes the matriarchal social structure and values as needed guidance for the world today.¹⁰⁹

Healing

Folk healing is described as an embodied interaction with nature and living earth energies in *Woman Who Glows in the Dark: A Curandera Reveals Traditional Aztec Secrets of Physical and Spiritual Health* by Elena Avila and Joy Parker. Avila is a *curandera* or healer of Mayan, Spanish, Zapotec, Aztec (*Mexihka*), and European ancestry, whose healing tradition is known as *curanderismo* in Mexico.¹¹⁰ It is a living tradition, handed down orally, and rooted in African, Native American, and Spanish medicine. In a comparison of the African and Native American worldviews, the authors' description of healing resonates with those of other traditional cultures:

Both practiced an earth-oriented spirituality that saw the world as alive and inhabited by spiritual energies with which they could interact through

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰⁹ Rigoglioso, "Lakota Elder Russell Means."

¹¹⁰ Avila and Parker, *Woman Who Glows in the Dark*.

ceremony, offerings, and prayer. Both saw soul and spirit not as something holy and disconnected from the body...but as inside of us, grounded in our physical body, emotions, and mind.¹¹¹

The diseases that *curanderos* treat include physical ailments of *bilis* (rage), *empacho* (blockage), and *mal aire* (bad air); mental disorders like *envidia* (envy), *mal puesto* (hex), *mal ojo* (similar to the “evil eye”), and *mala suerte* (bad luck); and spiritual illness including *susto* (soul loss) and *espanto* (soul loss caused by fright).¹¹² The tools and ceremonies that Avila uses to heal and cure include *limpia* (a purification of spiritual energy with herbs and/or flowers) and *plática* (deep heart-to-heart talks).

The long legacy of women as healers and seers in close contact with nature and the cosmos is evident in research regarding female shamanism. An influential study is *Shakti Woman: Feeling Our Fire, Healing Our World—The New Female Shamanism*, by Vicki Noble, a European American healer and astrologer who writes from an embodied perspective that includes years of hands-on healing experiences.¹¹³ Noble presents multicultural examples of healing traditions that integrate scholarly research, personal story, and images of archaeological finds from around the world. Noble is also co-creator of the Motherpeace tarot deck.

European scholar and shamanic practitioner Jenny Blain asserts the importance of people turning to their own ancestors, and to spirits of place,

¹¹¹ Ibid., 22.

¹¹² Ibid., 44.

¹¹³ Noble, *Shakti Woman*.

animals, and plants in *The Nine Worlds of Seid-Magic*. Her research includes direct experience with trance and *seidr*, an ancient ecstatic Northern European shamanistic practice found in the Icelandic sagas.¹¹⁴ Blain has conversed with the spirits, danced with the ancestors, and spoken from the mound. She describes shamans as active agents of change in relationships and communities,¹¹⁵ which could describe the folk women in my study, although I have deliberately chosen different terminology to highlight their everyday spirituality.

Women's many ways of knowing are evident in Barbara Tedlock's exploration of the hidden female roots of shamanism from pre-historic times to living women in *The Woman in the Shaman's Body: Reclaiming the Feminine in Religion and Medicine*. Tedlock's expertise as an anthropologist is complemented by her experiential knowledge gained in childhood from her Ojibwe Grandmother who was a midwife and herbalist, and in adulthood from her shamanic initiation by the K'iche' Maya of highland Guatemala. Tedlock explicates the association of shamanism with sexuality, dreaming, and herbalism, as well as the spiritual power of menstrual blood, birth, and creation.

Gloria Feman Orenstein relates shamanism to ecofeminism in the article "Toward an Ecofeminist Ethic of Shamanism and the Sacred."¹¹⁶ Her anthology, *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, co-edited with Irene

¹¹⁴ Blain, *Nine Worlds of Seid-Magic*, 153.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹¹⁶ Orenstein, "Toward an Ecofeminist Ethic of Shamanism and the Sacred," 172–90.

Diamond, includes essays by leading ecofeminist scholars, writers, and activists.¹¹⁷ Prominent voices in this anthology and in the field of ecofeminism include: Charlene Spretnak, co-founder of the Green Party in the United States and author of *Relational Reality: New Discoveries of Interrelatedness That Are Transforming the Modern World*;¹¹⁸ Carol P. Christ, an influential theologian (her spelling) in the women's spirituality movement;¹¹⁹ holistic philosopher Mara Lynn Keller, an expert in the Eleusinian mysteries;¹²⁰ and writer Susan Griffin, all of whom have numerous publications on women, nature and religion.¹²¹ Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies address the spiritual and political aspects of ecofeminism cross-culturally, calling for a non-commodified material spirituality that is rooted in the sacredness of Mother Earth as a living being upon which our survival depends.¹²²

Women's Embodied Rituals

Judy Grahn's metaformic theory in *Blood, Bread, and Roses* proposes that menstruation and menstrual rites were foundational to the formation of human culture and human consciousness. Possible menstrual-related themes, even if they

¹¹⁷ Diamond and Orenstein, eds., *Reweaving the World*.

¹¹⁸ Spretnak, *Relational Reality*. Spretnak, "Ecofeminism."

¹¹⁹ Christ, "Rethinking Theology and Nature."

¹²⁰ Keller, "The Eleusinian Mysteries."

¹²¹ Griffin, "Curves Along the Road."

¹²² Mies and Shiva, "Ecofeminism."

are not explicitly recognized as such in the culture, surface in several chapters of my study, including the taboos surrounding the female folk characters known as Anguane, the blood-red jewelry and lunar amulets worn by folk women, lunar and menstrual rules in the folk tradition, rules regarding spinning, and in folk stories about the moon. These themes provide clues towards and evidence of women's spiritual agency.

The path-finding theory and research of parthenogenetic birth practices in the ancient Mediterranean by Marguerite Rigoglioso in *The Cult of Divine Birth in Ancient Greece*, also published in Italian under the name *Partenogenesi* (Parthenogenesis), and *Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity* lays the groundwork for understanding this study's brief exploration of certain folk practices regarding fertility in the Italian Alps. Rigoglioso's extensive scholarship focuses on the dedicated rites of priestesses and parthenogenetic goddesses documented in mythology. Examples of folk practices and folk stories in the cultural history of the Alps presented in my study suggest that belief in non-ordinary conception extended to everyday women in close contact with nature and the cosmos.

Literature about Northern Alpine Italy

The following sources provide the main body of literature for this study's exploration of the cultural history of the Trentino region and the nearby geographical regions in the Alpine arch which share its mountain culture. The literature review is organized into categories of archaeology, Trentino cultural history, folk stories, folk women's lives, plants, and women's spirituality. Several

of the volumes contain multiple aspects of culture and thus overlap within categories. There is also a review of sources that address the negation of women's agency, and finally, a survey of Italian American folklore studies, in which Trentino is generally omitted.

Archaeology

An extensive documentation of Trentino archaeological history appears in *Storia del Trentino: la preistoria e la protostoria* by Michele Lanzinger, Franco Marzatico and Annaluisa Pedrotti. The prehistory of Valle Camonica is documented by Emmanuel Anati, an Italian archaeologist who founded and directs the *Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici* in Valle Camonica, Italy. Anati is recognized as a world expert on rock art, and he has published extensively. Important works by Anati include a series of fourteen volumes entitled *Camuni Studi, A Monograph of Art, Archaeology, and History*. Among the titles used for this study are: *World rock art: The primordial language*; and *Valcamonica rock art: A new history for Europe*. Archaeologists Umberto Sansoni, Silvana Gavaldo, and Cristina Gastaldi discuss images of "stele," carved stones, from Trentino and Valle Camonica, as well as stone slabs engraved with rock art found near chapels, shrines, and churches in the central Alps in their book, *Symbols on the Rock: The Rock Art of Central Valtellina from Weapons of Bronze to Christians Signs*. Ausilio Priuli, archaeologist and director of the Didactic Museum of Prehistoric Art and Life in Capodiponte, is author of *Valcamonica: Valley of Prehistory* in which he documents the presence of indentations in the

rock known as cupmarks, or what he terms cupholes, which are often-overlooked but clearly related to, at least in part, women's ritual.

Trentino Cultural History

Key literature for understanding Trentino cultural history comes from the Trentino people themselves. Invaluable for their visual and written description of folk traditions and everyday culture are the books of journalist Alberto Folgheraiter, including *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, translated by Fr. Marco Bagnarol.¹²³ The Italian version of this book, *La Terra del Padri* (The Land of the Fathers), which also contains numerous photographs, provides additional information and is presented in a different format. Folk religious practices are described, photographed, and mapped in *I Sentieri dell'Infinito: Storia dei Santuari del Trentino-Alto Adige* (Paths of the Infinite: History of the Sanctuaries of Trentino-Alto Adige).¹²⁴

A series published by the Autonomous Province of Trento over a period of eleven years (1986–1997) and sent to all known Trentini living abroad so they would know about their ancestral homeland is directly relevant to this inquiry. While the content relies on several consultants noted in each volume, the presentation of these books emphasizes a collaborative publication by the province rather than individual authors. Revealing the values of family and place, and the importance of all family members wherever they reside, Mario Malossini of the Department of Emigration states: “This series is . . . intended to ensure that

¹²³ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*.

¹²⁴ Folgheraiter, *I Sentieri dell'Infinito*.

the ‘homeland’ represents for the children of its emigrants a concrete reality rather than a vague inquiry.”¹²⁵ The series begins with a volume devoted to the earth, which seems to indicate the importance of the land to the Trentini. *The Beautiful Trentino: Atlas of the Alpine Region from the Dolomites to Lake Garda*, highlights natural terrain, relief maps, photographs, and key items of interest in each valley of Trentino.

The second book in the series, *Art Treasures in the Trentino: Historical outline and descriptions*, describes art contained in seventeen churches throughout Trentino. The churches and museums often contain works of art that are informative for understanding what has been submerged, even though they may not be called out as the most significant works or be fully portrayed in the literature. One church in Val di Sole that is noted in this volume is Santa Maria in Pellizzano, whose Madonna is a relevant figure in the folk stories of this study. Although the text reveals that the statue of the Madonna is “the object of much devotion,” her image is not pictured.¹²⁶

The third book in the series, *Voices of Trentino Poetry* edited by Elio Fox, is an anthology of poets, organized by valley. These poems are valuable because they are written in the dialects of the valleys, as well as in Italian and English,

¹²⁵ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *The Beautiful Trentino*, 4.

¹²⁶ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Art Treasures in the Trentino*, 95.

providing a sort of “Rosetta stone” of poetic language.¹²⁷ Two poems by Simone Daprà are from my maternal grandmother’s valley, Val di Sole. However, only one of the thirty-four poets, Nedda Falzolgher, is female. Periodicals cited later in this review include poetry by women and men.

Typical Products and Dishes is the fourth book in this series, which contains “the most traditional of local recipes.”¹²⁸ Familiar foods and dishes include polenta, *crauti* (sauerkraut), and *gnocchi*, a type of flour mixture boiled in water, similar to American dumplings. Specialty foods from Val di Sole include casolet cheese and honey.¹²⁹

The fifth book, *800 Years of the Principality of Trento*, covers a concise chronological overview from prehistory to the present, with a focus on the years 1004 to 1803 during which time Trento was “one of the most important principalities of the Germanic holy Roman Empire.”¹³⁰ In the section on prehistory, one of the three artifacts that are illustrated is of a bronze ornament from Val di Non, “probably depicting the Goddess of the Horses (fifth to third centuries BC).”¹³¹ This text highlights key historical events which are relevant to

¹²⁷ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Voices of Trentino Poetry*, 12.

¹²⁸ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Typical Products and Dishes*, 5.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³⁰ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *800 Years*, 24.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

this study, including: Christian evangelization, the Council of Trent (1545–1563), and a chapter entitled “Religion and Customs before the Council of Trent.” The essays and maps offer insights into the complexities of cultural identity, a subject which I have addressed in the introduction.

One important event addressed in *A Courageous People from the Dolomites: The Immigrants from Trentino on U.S.A. Trails*, by Bonifacio Bolognani, a Trentino American Franciscan missionary priest, is a discussion of The Rustic War, a peasant uprising in 1525 against the “exorbitant taxes” and “immense privileges of the nobility.”¹³² It involved farmers from many valleys including Val di Sole, and left fifty of them dead, imprisoned, or mutilated.¹³³ The grave injustices and abuses resulting from the accumulation of power and class privilege surface in themes of the folk stories referenced in several chapters of my study.

Returning now to the review of the series, the sixth volume, *Songs and Tales: Trentino Folklore*, is a valuable contribution to the cultural history. It includes images of *ex-voto* (gifts of devotion or gratitude to the Madonna, the Saints, or Jesus), proverbs, magic tales, mountain songs about love, work, war, and emigration, and drawings of late nineteenth-century costumes. The final chapter on “Masques: the folklore of festivals both sacred and profane” explains

¹³² Bolignani, *Courageous People*, 26–28. While Bolognani’s research seems oriented towards the lives of immigrant men rather than immigrant women, it provides an invaluable collection of data about the destinations and lives of Trentino Americans, including those in Colorado, where my grandparents emigrated.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

that the folk events celebrated today at one time used to mark the passing of the days and the seasons.¹³⁴ Providing an important understanding to this study, it states that many traditional customs were “vigorously repressed by the civil and religious authorities.”¹³⁵ Numerous and varied carnival rites are still celebrated; they may include masked figures, bonfires, processions, dance, re-enactment of an historic event, or participation by those passing from adolescence to adulthood. The principal characters of the carnival in Palù in Val di Mocheni are *la vecia* (old woman), *il vecio* (old man) and *l’oiertrogar* (the egg-carrier).¹³⁶ They visit the houses of the village, sow seed, dance, and other activities. Between Christmas and the Epiphany in areas throughout Alps is the tradition of the Stella, a spinning lighted “Star” that is carried by singers from house to house, who in turn receive gifts.¹³⁷

The book by Claudio Fabbro, *I Mòcheni: Ritorno nella valle incantata*, (The Mocheni: Return to the enchanted valley), is a beautifully illustrated and intimate description of the culture and traditions of Val di Mocheni, which he describes in the preface as a magic place. Fabbro provides more details and photos of the carnival rites mentioned briefly above.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Songs and Tales*, 149.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 157–59.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 159–60.

¹³⁸ Fabbro, *I Mòcheni*, 84–93.

The seventh volume of the series, *The Last Two Hundred Years*, describes political events of this time period including World War I (1914–1918) and the Second World War (1939–1945), events that directly impacted the people of Trentino. The co-operative movement was birthed during this time period, the last years of the nineteenth century. This volume offers a short section on emigration, which began only in second half of the nineteenth century. Notably it speaks of the loss that Trentino has suffered as a result, and makes a commitment on the part of the Province to maintain “cultural and emotional contact” with those who have left.¹³⁹

The final book in the series, *Trentino Today: Institutions, Economy and Society*, presents a view of Trentino as of its publication date in 1997. Of particular interest are details of cultural associations, cultural events, and a section on “Religious Values” that describes the Trentini people as “religious people in a different way, in a more complex, personal, less constitutional way.”¹⁴⁰ A final section on “Ethical Values” emphasizes the solidarity of Trentino social life, with numerous cooperatives, high participation in elections, care for others through voluntary service, and a willingness to work for the common good.¹⁴¹

For three years, 1983, 1984, and 1985, the Autonomous Province of Trento published and distributed beautiful large almanacs to emigrants and their

¹³⁹ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Last Two Hundred Years*, 83; also in the preface on page 5.

¹⁴⁰ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Trentino Today*, 153.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 157–59.

descendents. These provide a treasure of information and photos about the culture, history, and natural elements of the mountains and valleys of Trentino.

The *Almanacco Trentino 1983* (Trentino Almanac 1983), includes, for each week of the year, short articles and color photos of mycology, proverbs, alpinism, sport, gastronomy, ethnography, and alpine flowers. There are photo insets of festivals and carnival celebrations that provide insight to the themes, songs, dances, costumes, and traditions. Val di Non is said to be particularly rich in “popular legends tied to superstitious and religious beliefs, or tied to natural facts and historic facts.”¹⁴²

The *Almanacco Trentino 1984* (Trentino Almanac 1984), focuses on castles, lakes, sport, ethnography, cooking herbs, and proverbs, with photos and descriptions of festivals and carnivals that are of particular interest to this study.¹⁴³ The *Almanacco Trentino 1985* (Trentino Almanac 1985), highlights mycology, proverbs, alpinism, mineralogy, sport, ethnography, art and alpine flora. The cover of the book portrays two carnival figures, one with a black face and hands, wearing a bell, and carrying a rod. Of particular note are the details of medicinal plant use.¹⁴⁴

Local periodicals from Trentino are invaluable sources of cultural information. The periodical *el Meledri* is published twice a year in Italian by the

¹⁴² Autonomous Province of Trento, *Almanacco Trentino 1983*, n.p. The text appears between May 23 and May 30.

¹⁴³ Autonomous Province of Trento, *Almanacco Trentino 1984*.

¹⁴⁴ Autonomous Province of Trento, *Almanacco Trentino 1985*.

communal offices of Dimaro, an essential source regarding the specific cultural history of this village. It contains historic information, current events of this small community, including *feste* and *carnevale*, and photos of the town, people, and natural environment. Another valuable periodical, *Strenna Trentina*, a yearly Italian-language publication, provides cultural and religious information, and includes female contributors. The 2008 edition, for example, contains essays about Trentino folklore, poetry written in dialect, and history. *Pine Sover Notizie* is a valuable periodical of the regions of my paternal grandfather and paternal grandmother.

History

A prolific local historian, Udalrico Fantelli, has authored numerous books and publications with the clear mission of preserving the rich heritage of the people and a passionate love of his *terra materna* (mother land).¹⁴⁵ *Dimaro: La Carta di Regola*, which describes the charter of self-rule, and *Carciato: Il Paese e la Gente* are key sources about the history of the birth village and hamlet, respectively, of my grandmother. Fantelli, the director of a local cultural center, has utilized original historical records to document the history of the region.

Publications by non-Trentino scholars include in *The Hidden Life of Tirol* by Martha C. Ward, a participatory ethnography focused on the culture of Tyrol, a larger geographic and cultural area than Trentino. In this valuable addition to English-language literature on Tyrolean cultural history, Ward reviews the few studies that have been done on Tyrol, includes her experiences and those of her

¹⁴⁵ Fantelli, *Dimaro: La Carta di Regola*, 223.

students, and clearly calls out her point of view. *The Hidden Frontier: Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley* by John W. Cole and Eric R. Wolf, is an important study of ethnicity which highlights the differences between the two cultures, Trentino and Alto Adige by looking at two towns in the same valley. Travel guides containing cultural information are the *Insight Guides: South Tyrol* edited by Joachim Chwaszeza, with important observations by local experts and scholars on archaeology and religion, and *The Dolomites of Italy* by James and Anne Goldsmith with valuable maps and geologic information.

Folk Stories, Fairy Tales

The folk stories from Trentino and nearby locations are a key source of literature for this study. They are analyzed in context of feminist theory and folk women's lives to highlight women's spiritual agency. The "magical" female folk characters, namely the Anguane and the Ladies of Winter, as well as the so-called witches, provide a bridge in this study between the archaeological evidence and the "spiritual" everyday acts of folk women.

Most of these stories have been left out of compilations of folk stories from Italy, which themselves have been overlooked in the folklore community. *Italian Popular Tales* by Thomas Frederick Crane, one of the founders of the *Journal of American Folklore*, is the first compilation of folktales from different regions of Italy.¹⁴⁶ Originally published in 1885, it was largely overlooked until its recent re-publication in 2001, according to editor Jack Zipes, a contemporary scholar recognized for his expertise in European fairy tales. Zipes cites the

¹⁴⁶ Crane, *Italian Popular Tales*, xiv.

general interest in the rich culture of the common people that the work of the Brothers Grimm, among others in the early 1800s, kindled, as well as the specific influence on Crane of the work of Giuseppe Pitre (1841–1916), a renowned Sicilian folklorist. Crane’s work, Zipes notes, omitted the works of Rachel Harriet Busk, who wrote *The Valleys of Tirol* and included only a single Tyrolean tale from *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*, a collection of sixty-nine tales from the Italian Tyrol by Christian Schneller.¹⁴⁷

Italo Calvino’s book, *Italian Folktales*, first published as *Fiabe italiane* in Italian in 1956, and translated for English publication in 1980, is described as a master collection of Italian folktales.¹⁴⁸ Calvino’s stated goal was to represent all regions of Italy, as well as every type of folktale. Only two of the 200 stories are from Trentino, although there are several from Piedmont and a few from Friuli and other regions in northern Italy.

In the introduction of *Spells of Enchantment: The Wondrous Fairy Tales of Western Culture*, Zipes explains the historical context of literary tales.¹⁴⁹ Upper class males appropriated oral folk tales, which submerged the voices of non-literate peasants and women. Thus it is important to emphasize this study’s use of the folk stories rather than fairy tales, which, even though some of them were eventually written down, are not the literary tales of the upper class. Characteristic

¹⁴⁷ Zipes, “Introduction,” ix–xxiii.

¹⁴⁸ Calvino, *Italian Folktales*.

¹⁴⁹ Zipes, *Spells of Enchantment*.

of the folk stories, as will become evident throughout the study, is their specificity of place.

Some of the folk stories of the Alps were collected and written down over the last two centuries; more recently scholars and researchers from the region have continued to gather, reinterpret, and translate earlier written collections. For this analysis, I have used the publications of authors in Trentino and Alto Adige discussed in the following paragraphs.¹⁵⁰

Mauro Neri is a writer and journalist in Trento who has authored more than 130 books. Neri's books have been invaluable in informing this study. His trilogy, *Mille Leggende del Trentino* (A thousand legends of Trentino), documents the folk stories of Trentino.¹⁵¹ Neri published 365 folk stories in English in *The Secret Heart of Trentino: A Calendar of Legends*, a four volume set with subtitles of Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall, in 2010, in conjunction with the Autonomous Province of Trento.¹⁵² *Donne e Bambine nelle Leggende del Trentino* (2008), (Women and girls in the legends of Trentino), is a selection of his works chosen to highlight stories in which females were the protagonists. In the preface to the English translation of this book, *Women and Girls in the Legends of the Trent Region*, translated by Fr. Marco Bagnarol, Neri pays tribute to the female descendents of Trentino in North America. Both editions were

¹⁵⁰ For a general overview of these collections see *Italy Magazine*, "A World of Legends."

¹⁵¹ Neri, *Mille Leggende del Trentino*.

¹⁵² Neri, *Secret Heart of Trentino*.

valuable to this study, not only for vocabulary comparisons but also context and commentary. In the introduction to the English edition, Lucia Larentis Flaim, an emigrant from Trento to Toronto, Canada, where she is President of the Trentino Club, writes “Women and girls are at the core of life itself.”¹⁵³ In her introduction, Iva Berasi, Councilor for Emigration, acknowledges the role of women emigrants in carrying the customs, traditions, and stories with them.¹⁵⁴

Giovanna Zangrandi, a pen name of Alma Bevilacqua, (1910–1988) documented the stories she heard while traversing Cortina d’Ampezzo, Pieve and Borca di Cadore as a teacher of natural sciences. Although born in Bologna, she lived in Veneto more than sixty years. *Leggende delle Dolomiti* (Legends of the Dolomites), written in 1951, was recently published in 2000. Zangrandi offers a valuable perspective in her last chapter, “Vita delle Leggende,” (Life of the Legends), in which she traces the cultural history of Ladinia, Ampezzo and Cadore where the stories took place, and where the folk stories were told to her orally, in dialect, noting that the stories changed over time, with each wave of arrival with new characters grafted on the originals.¹⁵⁵ Literary culture also influenced how the stories were perceived (in a more negative sense).¹⁵⁶ The value of her work, according to the editor’s introduction, is that she resisted the

¹⁵³ Neri, *Women and Girls*, 9.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵⁵ Zangrandi, *Leggende delle Dolomiti*, 135.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

temptation to augment or embellish the stories. The custodians of the stories trusted her due to her wanderings among the mountains.¹⁵⁷

Several stories and an appendix about Anguane, key female characters of this analysis, and several stories about women are presented in *Dolomiti storie e leggende* (Dolomite stories and legends), by Gari Monfosco (pseudonym of Gabriella C. Montefoschi) a Roman writer, journalist, and art critic. She claims a maternal ancestry to Veneto, and an experiential knowledge from traveling through the mountain villages on foot during long summer vacations there.¹⁵⁸

Monfosco heard many of the legends from *i veci* (the elders), who spoke of “Anguane, fate o streghe. . . gli spiriti folletti e la fata Samblana, l’unica fata delle Dolomiti”¹⁵⁹ (Anguane, fairies or witches—the spirits, elves and the fairy Samblana, the unique fairy of the Dolomites).

Described as a “passionate scholar of culture and the local traditions,”¹⁶⁰ Giovanna Borzaga (1931–1998) of Rovereto in Trentino is a journalist, poet, and author of numerous books for children and adults. Her publications include: *Leggende del Trentino*, *Leggende dei Castelli del Trentino*, and *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi de Valle e Boschi*. In the introduction of this last

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵⁸ Monfosco, *Dolomiti: Storie e leggende*.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶⁰ Borzaga, *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi di Valli e Boschi*, jacket.

book, her editor Luigi Reverdito states that stories are tied to very precise places “to defend and keep alive the memory of events and places.”¹⁶¹

The book *Gnomi, anguane e basilischi* by Dino Coltro contains valuable specific information on the folk characters as well as folk traditions in the Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trentino, and Alto Adige.¹⁶² Other well-known and respected contemporary researchers and scholars of folk stories are Brunamaria Dal Lago Veneri and Ulrike Kindl although regrettably their work, along with that of nineteenth-century author Angela Nardon Cibebe, was limited in availability. Veneri’s essay “Tessere e Filare e Cucire” (Weaving and spinning and sewing), in the book *Un punto più del diavolo*, (One stitch more than the devil), by Rosanna Cavallini, contributes an integrated view of the knowledge and mystery of the female folk characters.¹⁶³

Six folk stories appear in Italian and English in the volume already mentioned, *Songs and Tales: Trentino Folklore*.¹⁶⁴ Andrea Foches researched and analyzed stories and images of Anguane for his illustrated book *Leggende delle Anguane* (Legends of Anguane). It is invaluable for its inclusion of a

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁶² Coltro, *Gnomi*.

¹⁶³ Veneri, “Tessere e Filare e Cucire.” Curiously, two of these authors’ surnames are related to goddesses, with Veneri referring to Venus and Cibebe the Italian word for the Asian Goddess Kybele.

¹⁶⁴ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Songs and Tales*.

recorded DVD in which the stories are narrated both in Italian and dialect, as well as being animated.

The collections gathered by journalist Carl Felix Wolff (born in 1879), while characteristically different in their particular polished use of language, offer important views into a female society of queens, matriarchal structure, and women's closeness to nature. Although criticized for his methods, his book *The Pale Mountains: Folk tales from the Dolomites*, translated from German by Francesca la Monte in 1927, was highly successful.¹⁶⁵ A second English translation under the name Karl Wolff and the title *The Dolomites and their Legends*, includes fifteen stories, nine of which are found in the other volume, although their translations and content differ.

Wolff wrote about what is known as the Fanes saga. This work is amplified, analyzed, and contextualized by Adriano Vanin, a contemporary researcher who has published his extensive and valuable work online in both Italian and English.¹⁶⁶ Vanin's essay on the Anguane was foundational for undertaking an analysis of them for this study. London-born journalist, Rachel Harriet Busk, wrote *The Valleys of Tirol* (1874) containing folk beliefs and stories, which provided some important details for this study.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Wolff, *The Pale Mountains*.

¹⁶⁶ Vanin, "A Summary of the Legend."

¹⁶⁷ Busk, *The Valleys of Tirol*.

Folk Women's Lives

Rosanna Cavallini, the curator of an exhibit dedicated to mountain women at Casa Andriollo in Comune di Borgo Valsugana, seeks “to give voice to the anonymous existence of female ancestors and progenitors, fundamental links in a chain that indissolubly ties us to a unique territory.”¹⁶⁸ The museum website provides the text of the written exhibits. Cavallini's book *Gioie Comuni: L'Ornamento femminile popolare in Trentino 1850–1950* (Common joy, popular female ornament in Trentino 1850–1950), provided the basis for this study's chapter on jewelry. The book *Un punto più del diavolo* (One stitch more than the devil), a set of essays collected by Rosanna Cavallini on women's cloth-related activities was key to this study's chapter on women, spinning, and cloth. The publications by Folgheraiter, already mentioned, include invaluable details of multiple aspects of folk women's lives.

Plants

The *Atlante Dalle Erbe la Salute, Piante Medicinali dell'arco alpino*, (Atlas of the Herbs of Health, Medicinal Plants of the Alpine Arch) by Ferrante Cappelletti includes a copy of a handwritten letter dated 1966 of Mario de Gerloni, botanist, chemist, and pharmacist of the *Antica Farmacia Gerloni* (Ancient Gerloni Pharmacy), in Trento who advises that many of these medicinal herbs grow in the wild on nearby Mt. Bondone, and that he has used them in his

¹⁶⁸ Chiesa, “La Donna e La Montagne,” 16.

seventy-five-year practice as a pharmacist in Trento.¹⁶⁹ Folgheraiter's chapter, "Illness and Popular Cures," in *Beyond the Threshold of Time* lists numerous folk medicinal cures, including the use of wild plants as well as other biological substances.¹⁷⁰

Fernando Zampiva, whose work was published posthumously in 2003, is described as "a great local expert of herbal folklore" by ethnobotanist Andrea Pieroni.¹⁷¹ Known primarily as a tanner, he documented the herbs and lore of Val di Chiampa in an article "Sacred Plants and Cursed Plants."¹⁷² Zampiva names several "arcane" (hidden, secret, or mysterious) uses of herbs, which are addressed in Chapter 10.

Maria Treben is a highly-regarded herbalist born in Bohemia, whose book, entitled *Health through God's Pharmacy* in English, and *La Salute dalla Farmacia del Signore* in Italian, has been translated into twenty three-languages and sold millions of copies. These works, along with her book *Health from God's Garden*, provide insights for contemporary herbal knowledge in Europe.

Women's Spiritual History, Female Divinity

Of particular importance is literature about the Trentino area that highlights women's spiritual history and the suppression of women's spiritual

¹⁶⁹ Cappelletti, *Atlante Dalle Erbe la Salute*.

¹⁷⁰ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 59–78.

¹⁷¹ Email to author from Andrea Pieroni, October 7, 2010.

¹⁷² Zampiva, "Piante Sacre e Piante Maledette."

practices. Italian cultural anthropologist Michela Zucca utilizes a multi-disciplinary approach, including artifacts, place names, mythology, etymology of place names, and first-hand accounts to research women-centered spirituality in the mountain cultures of the Alps in *Matriarchy and the Mountains 3*, published both in Italian and in English.¹⁷³ In the essay “Mothers and Madonnas of the Mountains,” Zucca cites the presence of numerous stele from Neolithic times that have been found in the Alpine region etched with primarily female figures, the iconography of the Celtic mothers, and the Black Madonnas in Christianity in historic times as evidence that the Mother has always been honored in the stone of the mountains.¹⁷⁴ Zucca argues that the “sabbaths” of the witches that were virulently persecuted were reflections of a long animistic, shamanistic tradition, which included altered states of consciousness, whose main function was propitiatory.¹⁷⁵ In her most recent book, *Donne Delinquenti: Storie di streghe, eretiche, ribelli, rivoltose, tarantolate*. (Delinquent women: stories of witches, heretics, rebels, revolutionaries, and *tarantolate*), Zucca continues her analysis drawing from multiples sources.¹⁷⁶

A very succinct overview of the many names of the Alpine mountain goddesses in myth and legend is summarized in the article “Danu, Raetia, Marisa:

¹⁷³ Zucca, *Matriarchy and the Mountains 3*.

¹⁷⁴ Zucca, "Mothers and Madonnas of the Mountains."

¹⁷⁵ Zucca, "The Orgy, the Feast, the Witches' Sabbath."

¹⁷⁶ Zucca, *Donne Delinquenti*.

Mountain Goddess of the Alps,” by Tyrolean-born Claire French. To this multi-disciplinary and female-centered research, my study contributes an analysis of the folk stories, details of folk women’s everyday agency, examples from oral interviews, and explication of the values that have been transmitted to Trentino Americans.

Negation of Folk Women’s Spiritual Agency

The research of several scholars, a sample of which is discussed here, contributes to the awareness and understanding of how aspects of folk women’s spirituality came to be negated, feared, and suppressed in the dominant culture. It also has helped shape a vocabulary for this study that intentionally avoids use of terminology that has assumed academic or religious bias, while at the same time being aware of that bias in the literature sources. The negation of folk wisdom as “primitive superstition” by an elite male academy is made clear by Ernesto De Martino, widely recognized in Italy for his 1961 anthropological study on tarantism in southern Italy, *La Terra del Rimorso* (The Land of Remorse) which is considered a landmark for its interdisciplinary approach, field research, and peasant-honoring worldview. In *Primitive Magic: The Psychic Powers of Shamans and Sorcerers*,¹⁷⁷ De Martino acknowledges the point of view of the practitioners of magic—so-called “primitive” peoples—who are typically observed and analyzed by scholars, scientists, and historians of religion. For De Martino, “magical powers” are what the scientific community refers to as

¹⁷⁷ This was published in Italian as: *Il mondo magico: prolegomena a una storia del magismo* in 1973.

“unexplainable phenomenon” or “paranormal psychic powers,” such as clairvoyance, divination, communication with the dead, fire-walking, and exorcism. According to De Martino, the attitude of the researchers toward the existence of these powers is of primary importance, for it impacts how the study is conducted and recorded. In Section 3, “The Problem of Magical Powers in the History of Ethnology,” De Martino effectively “de-constructs” the bias of the research and findings of influential scholars of who have addressed these issues. He specifically critiques Edward B. Tylor’s *Primitive Culture*,¹⁷⁸ part of the emerging natural science of ethnology in the nineteenth century which studied so-called “primitive” civilizations. De Martino charges Tylor with discrediting all animistic, magical, and modern spiritualistic ideology as superstitious, savage, and subjective, which, De Martino claims, influenced decades of ethnologists to claim that magic was only an illusory belief. Analyzing the research and publications over the decades in anthropology, psychology, and anthropology, De Martino uncovers varying degrees of bias against the possibility that the phenomena that they were observing were real at some level of reality not apparent in Western scientific thought. A persistent attitude that De Martino challenges in the scholarship is one of the superiority of modern cultures over “primitive” cultures, which allegedly show vestiges of animism, simplicity, and less spiritual evolution. De Martino writes:

We can only attain a proper historical notion of magic through the opening up of our *own* awareness to new perspectives; it is only *within us*

¹⁷⁸ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*.

[emphasis in original], within our own awareness, that we shall arrive at an exact notion of magic.¹⁷⁹

The further negation of folk women in the visual culture during the late medieval and Reformation time period is illustrated in *Exorcising Our Demons: Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*, by Charles Zika, a cultural and religious historian who acknowledges that there are those who have been excluded from history based on class, occupation, gender, and ethnicity.¹⁸⁰

Zika utilizes imagery from the turn of the sixteenth century in his analysis of the visual language of witchcraft. His book contains 115 illustrations including woodcuts, drawings, and engravings by Hans Baldung Grien and Albrecht Dürer which are analyzed within their cultural context. Often these works associate witchcraft, sexuality, and women, as illustrated in Chapter 6, “Fears of Flying: Representations of Witchcraft and Sexuality in Early Sixteenth-Century Germany.” Discussion of the cauldron, for example, in Chapter 7, “She-Man: Visual Representations of Witchcraft and Sexuality,” links the destructive power of witchcraft to the seduction of sexuality and women’s traditional role in food preparation. In Chapter 8, “Dürer’s Witch, Riding Women and Moral Order,” Zika focuses on a specific engraving of Dürer, *Witch Riding Backwards on a Goat*, to investigate the transgressive, sexual nature of this representation, since women were “seldom depicted as riding in this period,” especially alone.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ De Martino, *Primitive Magic*, 154.

¹⁸⁰ Zika, *Exorcising Our Demons*.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 329.

Dürer's journeys took him through the hamlet of Pochi di Salorno, birthplace of my paternal grandfather, where he walked a trail to avoid the flooded river valley.¹⁸²

The demonization of magic in the Roman Empire is one of the discussions in the six-volume series entitled *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark,¹⁸³ which presents a chronological anthology of European witchcraft and magic. Representing a multi-disciplinary approach (history, cultural anthropology, historical psychology, and gender studies), the volumes titles are *Biblical and Pagan Societies; Ancient Greece and Rome; The Middle Ages; The Period of the Witch Trials; The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries; and The Twentieth Century*. In the second volume the editors assert that “the roots of European witchcraft and magic lie in Hebrew and other ancient Near Eastern cultures and in the Celtic, Nordic, and Germanic traditions of the continent,” apparently excluding the possibility of any African influence.¹⁸⁴

Randolph P. Conner, whose stated worldview is non-Eurocentric, includes African influences in his Ph.D. dissertation, “The Pagan Muse: Its Influence in Western Culture. Embodying and Transmitting Ancient Wisdom from the Middle Ages through the Early Twentieth Century.” Defining paganism for his study as “indigenous, earth-centered spiritual traditions practiced primarily in Europe,

¹⁸² Weinstrasse.com, "Pochi di Salorno," para. 2.

¹⁸³ Ankarloo and Clark, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, Vol. 1–6.

¹⁸⁴ Ankarloo and Clark, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, ii.

primarily those of Greeks, Romans, Celts, and Germanic, Slavs, and Baltic peoples, and their European forbearers,”¹⁸⁵ Conner finds the expression of a “pagan worldview”—that is, “the reverence of deities and spirits; the veneration of Nature; the multidimensionality of reality; and diverse forms of sacred communication including divination, magic, and the creation of sacred arts”—throughout Western arts and philosophy.¹⁸⁶

Witches

Pinuccia di Gesaro provides analysis and summary of the proceedings of the witch trials in *Streghe: L’Osessione del diavolo, il Repertorio dei Maleffizi, La Repression* (Witches: The obsession of the devil, the repertoire of evildoing, the repression), a massive work of over a thousand pages. Di Gesaro devotes an entire section, *Libro Quarto* (Book Four), of her book to Tyrol. In her book I *Giochi delle Streghe* (The games of the witches), Di Gesaro focuses on the confessions of witchcraft in the 1500s and 1600s.

Another key work for understanding the accusations of the witch trials in northern Italy is Carlo Ginzburg’s *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath*, translated into English from Italian in 1991.¹⁸⁷ Ginzburg, recognized as Italy’s premiere historian, utilized the records of the Inquisition to investigate the witch-trials of northern Italy. Using the view of the peasants rather than the authorities,

¹⁸⁵ Conner, “Pagan Muse,” 5.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

¹⁸⁷ Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*.

he discovered a folkloric element in the region of Friuli reported by people who claimed that they participated in processions of the dead and battles for fertility, social functions similar to those performed by shamans.¹⁸⁸ In the second part of his book, Ginzburg amassed a very broad body of literature describing cults, myths, and rituals across Europe that indicates shamanic origins.

Literature about Northern Italy in Italian American Folklore Studies

Italian American folklore studies received relatively little attention by folklorists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, despite the fact that Italian Americans were one of the largest ethnic groups in the United States. Further, while much has been written about southern Italy by Italian Americans in the area of folklore studies, information about the north has been under-represented, perhaps attributable to the vast majority of Italian immigrants to the United States having come from the south. In the anthology *Studies in Italian American Folklore*, editor Luisa Del Giudice specifically includes an essay about the culture of immigrants from Piedmont by Sabina Magliocco¹⁸⁹ in an effort to help “right the imbalance in Italian American studies, which have so often focused on southern Italians.”¹⁹⁰ *Italian American Folklore* by Frances M. Malpezzi and William M. Clements includes interviews of first and second generation Piedmontese, although there are no entries from Trentino.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 14.

¹⁸⁹ Magliocco, “Playing with Food.”

¹⁹⁰ Del Giudice, *Studies in Italian American Folklore*, 6–7.

Giovanna Del Negro affirms the importance of further research on folk women in *Looking Through My Mother's Eyes*, a feminist folkloric research of Italian-Canadian women.¹⁹¹ Del Negro conducted oral interviews of nine women immigrants, two of whom are from northern Italy. Del Negro asserts that women's experiences have been understudied in academia. She seeks to redress this imbalance by focusing on women's folklore, which she finds to be subversive.

An especially valuable publication because it is the first ethnography of a northern Italian storyteller, is *Italian Folktales in America: The Verbal Art of an Immigrant Woman*. The stories were first collected by Bruna Todesco from her mother, Clementina, an immigrant to the United States from the Italian Alpine village of Faller. This work was later annotated, augmented, and published by folklorists Elizabeth Mathias and Richard Raspa. It contains twenty-two *märchen*, magic stories, and legends related in their cultural and historical contexts. According to the authors, the *märchen* reflect the peasant village life, and were often told in the stable during winter nights known as the *filò*, where both stories and wool were spun. The final section of the book recounts Clementina's "Narratives of Personal Experience." Born in 1903, Clementina shares detailed recollections of village life before she immigrated 1930.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Del Negro, *Looking Through My Mother's Eyes*.

¹⁹² Mathias and Raspa, *Italian Folktales in America*, 257.

Contribution of This Study

The categorical review of the literature presented here represents a body of literature from which the dissertation draws, to various degrees. It highlights the benefits of a study that integrates across these categories to present a focused look at folk women's everyday spirituality and values.

A major contribution of this study is its application of feminist research and theories to detailed information of the folk culture of Trentino, which furthers the studies of both subjects. The specificity of Trentino culture grounds the theory and broadens the knowledge base; the research and theories in feminist and indigenous studies expand the knowledge of the Trentino cultural history by situating it in a larger framework. The geographical and cultural separation resulting from being a granddaughter of four immigrant grandparents grants me new perspectives, viewed from afar and nourished from within. Broad in scope yet specific in its inclusion of women's voices and submerged spirituality, this study brings a female-centered focus to the cultural history of Trentino as it queries a range of folk women's everyday actions. The analysis of the magical actions of female folk characters of the distant past lends insight into the spiritual actions of folk women of more recent times. This study contributes knowledge of women's wisdom, past and present, in a specific culture to an ever-growing body of literature about folk culture, women's spirituality, and traditional cultures. The study benefits from the insights of women-centered and indigenous studies in the Mediterranean and beyond as it searches for and makes explicit shared values.

3. Methodology

Consistent with women's spirituality methodology, this inquiry rests upon the tenet that there are many ways of knowing, which is acknowledged by utilizing a multi-disciplinary approach. In this section, the different methodologies that are engaged are described first, followed by the study design which shows how they were applied. The research, which is holistic in nature, resides in various academic disciplines and is treated within a feminist methodological framework. Shulamit Reinharz characterizes feminist research methods as creative and varied in their nature in *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, from which the following description draws.¹⁹³ An underlying tenet of all feminist research is that women's lives are important, both as individuals and as a social category. Women's experiences are heard and contextualized through a multiplicity of perspectives, including the social research method of oral interview.¹⁹⁴ This study utilizes the beliefs transmitted orally in the folk stories, as well as oral interviews of contemporary women, to listen to women's experiences. Feminist research often "claims to name new topics, to examine the invisible, to study the unstudied, and to ask why it had been ignored."¹⁹⁵ Consistent with feminist methodology, this study strives to recognize diversity and is open to a cross-disciplinary framework, with the goal of affecting social

¹⁹³ Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, 243.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 244–45.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 248.

change. By examining the details of folk women's lives and contextualizing them in a broader feminist context, this study reclaims the value of women's actions and influence in the world. The methods and knowledge provide insights for women and men to research their own cultural histories, which inform who they are, add to the fabric of life, and contribute to the collective wisdom needed for the way ahead.

The primary methodology for this study is feminist cultural history, elaborated below. It draws from supporting methodologies including feminist hermeneutics, oral interviews using organic inquiry, intuitive knowing, ethnobotany, and metaformic theory which are addressed in the following sections. My epistemology is grounded with a review of the literature from a variety of sources representing a diversity of worldviews that provide a system of checks and balances. Reviews with diverse others provide an assessment of knowledge and recognize the possibility for new understandings.

Feminist Cultural History

Utilizing feminist cultural history as the primary methodology, this study focuses on popular cultural traditions rather than those of the elite. The research of cultural historian Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, who refers to cultural history as telling or writing one's story, exemplifies this approach.¹⁹⁶ In her most recent publication, *The Future Has an Ancient Heart*, Birnbaum emphasizes the

¹⁹⁶ Birnbaum, *Future Has an Ancient Heart*, xxiv, 8.

importance of everyone's story to accelerate justice and equality.¹⁹⁷ Birnbaum investigated the story of her Sicilian ancestry in the context of "women's history, subaltern history, and the true history of Africa," all of which she says have been distorted or omitted by western historians, most of whom are "imperialist male western elites deluded by notions of white supremacy."¹⁹⁸ As a feminist cultural historian, Birnbaum insists on telling the story "from the beginning" which includes the African origins of humanity, and whose exclusion, along with women's history, has led to "incalculable damage."¹⁹⁹

A key resource in cultural history is folklore which Birnbaum describes as "indispensable for women's history because women (at least in Italy) were the main carriers of this oral tradition."²⁰⁰ Ideologically, the writings of Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) have strongly influenced Italian studies of folklore. Gramsci, a Sardinian, was imprisoned for more than a decade for opposing Fascism during which time he wrote prolifically on a broad range of subjects including philosophy, politics, and history. Gramsci wrote that folklore should be taken seriously, and "must not be conceived as an oddity, a strange,

¹⁹⁷ Birnbaum, *Future Has an Ancient Heart*, 6.

¹⁹⁸ Birnbaum, "African black mothers and black madonnas," 7.

¹⁹⁹ Birnbaum, "Feminist cultural history," 2.

²⁰⁰ Birnbaum, *Liberazione della Donna*, 10–11.

ridiculous, or at best, a picturesque thing; rather, it must be conceived as something very serious.”²⁰¹

One definition of folklore given by Jan Brunvand, former president of the American Folklore Society, is

the traditional, unofficial, non-institutional part of culture. It encompasses all knowledge, understandings, values, attitudes, assumptions, feelings, and beliefs transmitted in traditional forms by word of mouth or by customary examples.²⁰²

This study uses the term “folk traditions” as the encompassing term rather than folklore, which can carry a connotation being untrue or solely belonging to the past. In Trentino, the phrase *usi e costumi* (traditions and customs) describes the elements and practices of folk culture. For this study “folk traditions” is used with the intention of describing the traditional culture and its living legacy. Folk stories are part of the folk tradition and a primary source of information in this study.

Feminist Hermeneutics

Key to the analysis of all textual sources in this study is the application of critical feminist hermeneutics, described by Christian theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, a researcher in the field of religious studies whose philosophy and methods have far-reaching effects for feminist studies.²⁰³ Hermeneutics, Fiorenza says, can be understood as “the theoretical exploration of the cultural

²⁰¹ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 187.

²⁰² Brunvand, *Study of American Folklore*, 4.

²⁰³ Fiorenza, "Method in Women's Studies in Religion."

and political presuppositions of inquiry and the meaning of texts.”²⁰⁴ These explorations must further be “critical” in the sense that they weigh, evaluate, and judge.²⁰⁵ A critical feminist interpretation “insists on a hermeneutics of suspicion,” which does not only uncover or unmask a deeper truth, but also calls attention to ideological constructs that marginalize women.²⁰⁶ Fiorenza’s methodology is invaluable to feminist research of religion because it considers not only what is written but also what is unwritten, thus making the implicit explicit and highlighting the omission of women’s history.²⁰⁷

Oral Interviews Using Organic Inquiry

In conducting oral interviews, this study draws from Organic Inquiry, a qualitative research methodology developed by Jennifer Clements, Dorothy Ettlting, Dianne Jenett, and Lisa Shields.²⁰⁸ A key feature of this approach is that it allows the methodology to fit the topic, rather than the topic being reshaped to fit the methodology. Organic inquiry allows for the use of both rational and intuitive means, and values the researcher's own experience and story as primary

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 207–8.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 212.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 224.

²⁰⁷ Fiorenza proposes additional hermeneutics in the interpretive process, including the hermeneutics of: ethical and theological evaluation, remembrance and reconstitution, creative imagination and ritualization, desire, and transformation. See Ibid., 223–27 for a complete discussion and description.

²⁰⁸ Clements, Ettlting, Jenett, and Shields, “Organic Inquiry: If Research Were Sacred.” This methodology is also described in a journal article by Clements (Clements, “Organic Inquiry Research in Partnership with Spirit”).

instruments of the study. The nature of an organic study is to reveal and suggest, inquire, uncover and present. By drawing from this methodology, I could allow the conversation with my interviewees flow outside of the formatted questions and into larger insights.

Intuitive Knowing

Intuitive knowing, in which meaningful synchronicities play a role in providing guidance, is also engaged throughout the study. Like organic inquiry, intuitive knowing is consistent with the heuristic method discussed in *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences* which allows for “total involvement of the researcher and all forms of knowing” in the study, including the use of dreams and other states of consciousness.²⁰⁹ Intuitive knowing is also consistent with indigenous science, “a holistic discipline that draws on human senses and ways of knowing to reveal the balance of all things,”²¹⁰ taught by Apela Colorado, a member of the Oneida Tribe and part of the Worldwide Indigenous Science Network, who created the first accredited doctoral program in traditional knowledge in 1993.²¹¹ Throughout the last two years of this study, my participation in a twice-monthly local dream circle has aided my understanding of guiding dreams. At times, an unusual theme appeared in a dream that inspired me

²⁰⁹ Braud and Anderson, *Transpersonal Research Methods*, 266.

²¹⁰ Worldwide Indigenous Science Network, “Philosophy,” para. 5.

²¹¹ Wisdom University, “Masters Program – Indigenous Mind: Faculty.” Colorado’s Indigenous Science methodology, along with other methodologies, is applied in the PhD dissertation “Personal Dreamscape as Ancestral Landscape” by Karen Ann Jaenke, who utilized her dreams as a central source for retrieving knowledge of her Germanic ancestry. (Jaenke, “Personal Dreamscape.”)

to look closer at that topic in my research. By paying close attention to my dreams, I allowed for their influence, messages, and healing energy. This study has revealed that ancestral themes have surfaced in my dreams throughout my life.

Ethnobotany

Additionally, this research is informed by the field of ethnobotany, the scientific study of the relationship between humans and plants, to understand the spiritual knowledge that can emerge from the relationship between women and plants. A respected leader and author of numerous publications in the field of ethnobotany is Nancy Turner, whose gendered research has focused on the ethnobotanical and environmental knowledge of the indigenous peoples of British Columbia in Canada.²¹² The recognition of plant knowledge as a source of women's power is emerging in a number of academic fields, including anthropology, ethnobiology, and sociology.²¹³ Explorations in these fields further refine and substantiate a central insight of ecofeminism—that the denigration of nature and the denigration of the female are linked and run throughout Western history. Charlene Spretnak, a leading ecofeminist activist and philosopher, explicates the relationship of political activism, philosophy, and spirituality in

²¹² For example, see Turner *The Earth's Blanket* and Deur and Turner, *Keeping It Living*.

²¹³ See the multi-disciplinary essays in the anthology *Women & Plants: Gender Relations in Biodiversity Management and Conservation* (Howard, *Women & Plants*.)

numerous publications.²¹⁴ Starhawk, a leading feminist ecologist, proposes listening to nature.²¹⁵

Women are reclaiming plant knowledge as a source of power and teaching it using oral transmission as a primary method. Notable among the experiential ethnobotany teachers in the Northwest United States is Erin Kenny, a respected herbalist, author, and lecturer.²¹⁶ Kenny founded and directs Cedarsong Nature School whose goal is “to increase awareness of and connection to the natural world in order to foster compassion and empathy for the earth and all its inhabitants.”²¹⁷

The use of ethnobotany methods in this study involved learning the attributes and uses of local plants in order to better understand the possible use of plants in Trentino in historical and present times, which is described in more detail in Chapter 10. Using an ethnobotany approach explicitly recognizes that there is and can be a relationship between humans and plants, and by extension, between humans and non-human nature. In the field of Indigenous Science, nature is an active research partner, alive and intelligent.²¹⁸ Establishing a relationship

²¹⁴ See for example, Spretnak, “Critical and Constructive Contributions of Ecofeminism.”

²¹⁵ Starhawk, *Earth Path*.

²¹⁶ See Kenny, *Naturalist's Journal*.

²¹⁷ Cedarsong Nature School, "Welcome to Cedarsong."

²¹⁸ Worldwide Indigenous Science Network, “Philosophy.”

with—rather than solely use of or power over—nature more closely represents a folk worldview.

Metaformic Theory

The study is deepened and amplified throughout by the research of Judy Grahn whose “metaformic theory” describes the elements, practices, and embodied symbols related to menstrual rites. In *Blood, Bread, and Roses: How Menstruation Created the World*, Grahn proposes that menstruation and menstrual rites are the basis for not only human culture, but also the very genesis of human consciousness. Metaformic theory is based on the premise that the menstrual cycle entrained with the lunar cycle, which provided an originating step into "human" consciousness. The word ritual comes from Sanskrit *r'tu*, which means menstrual, leading Grahn to suggest that all ritual began as menstrual acts.²¹⁹ Menstrual seclusion rites for menarche were particularly important, and basic taboos typically prohibited the menstruant from seeing light, touching water, or touching earth.²²⁰ Metaformic theory provides guidance in this study for interpreting taboos in folk stories, as well as for identifying elements in folk life having a possible menstrual theme, including ochre red artifacts, jewelry, spinning, all lunar-related activities, plant medicine, and lakes that turn red.

Study Design

This study of folk women’s spiritual agency integrally engaged with the methodologies discussed above as appropriate in each of its characteristic phases:

²¹⁹ Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses*, 6.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

honoring of ancestors, literature research and analysis, oral interviews, nature-based research, field research, and final integration. Although these phases are presented as sequential, they overlapped, blended, and were interdependent.

Honoring of Ancestors through Ritual and Analysis

In this initiatory phase, and throughout the study, I invited in direct knowledge from and about my ancestors through ritual, dreams, intuition, and meaningful synchronicities. Ritually, this included creating and decorating an “ancestor box” with photos of my grandparents and other ancestors inside. Crafted on the Day of the Dead, it became a vessel for small sacred items.

Since my first trip to northern Italy to conduct genealogical research in 1980, I have compiled numerous details about my family history from primary records. In preparation for this study, I created a calendar of birth and death dates for my ancestors and relatives who have died, in order to increase my awareness of them on significant dates and to honor their ability to be present.

Contextualizing this data and comparing it to my own life and those of my living family members has enhanced my embodied awareness of my ancestors’ lives. From the data emerged the realization that my maternal great-grandmother was only fifty when she died. My maternal grandmother lost her mother on her twelfth birthday. My mother was only twenty-eight when her mother died. All of these early deaths in my female lineage likely contributed to a loss in the transmission of oral tradition.

At certain times during the study, I felt compelled to do more genealogical research on the life of someone in my family. One gift of this time period came

from the genealogy chart of a California relative informing me that my paternal grandmother's grandmother came from Val di Mocheni, the location of several folk stories, and a place with fond memories from my visits there—thus giving me a genetic link to this place.

Awareness of the death anniversaries of my relatives and ancestors provided an opportunity for me to respect the importance of honoring the dead, which is evident in Trentino and elsewhere in Italy. The graves in the cemetery of my maternal grandmother's village of Dimaro are tended frequently and decorated with flowers and plants. A photo of the deceased person is displayed as part of the tombstone. When someone dies, multiple death notices are posted on the outer walls of buildings to alert fellow villagers of the person's passing and the date that the funeral will be celebrated. Here in the United States, my mother remembers the dead by making a request to the local priest to celebrate the Roman Catholic church service on that date intentionally for the soul of the person, giving an optional monetary offering to the church for this request, and attending the service if possible.²²¹ Honoring the dead in a way that is meaningful to me has helped me connect with family traditions as well as with ancient traditions in my ancestral lineage. Traditional cultures around the world hold ancestor reverence as important and maintain that communication with our ancestors is possible. A culmination of ancestral knowledge for me took the form

²²¹ In the vernacular this is referred to as “having a Mass said” by the priest. My cousin-in-law Irma expressed gratitude that my mother had sent her a Mass Card, a formal written announcement of this action contained in a beautiful card, for her newly-deceased husband, noting that this is no longer common practice in Trentino as it was at one time.

of scientific analysis of my DNA, showing that my oldest known mother of 150,000 years or so ago is from East Africa. Mitochondrial DNA information, passed down from mother to daughter, indicates that her descendants eventually left Africa; the branch becoming my ancestresses journeyed into the Near East and eventually into Western Europe.

Literature Analysis

The literature sources, reviewed and presented in Chapter 2, acquired from previous field research, as well as periodicals from my ancestral Italian villages, and ongoing literature acquisition and review, provided a substantial resource from which to draw. Folk stories were transmitted orally across the ages; eventually, beginning in the nineteenth century, writers who were traveling through the Alps, anthropologists, or people with ties to the culture, began to collect them and write them down, which has given me access to them. As discussed in the previous chapter, folk stories were a significant source of information. Oral history is central to understanding folk culture. Yoruba chief Luisa Teish uses storytelling as part of her teaching:

As a storyteller, I experience myth and folklore as one of the great ancestral gifts. They tell us what a people think of themselves and their world. The origins of most beliefs and practices can be found in these stories.²²²

Oral Interviews

As part of my study, I interviewed second-generation Trentino American women in the United States and Trentino women in Italy to learn more about folk

²²² Teish, *Carnival of the Spirit*, xiv.

traditions and values. Because the study involved the participation of human interviewees, it followed the guidelines published by the Human Resource Review Committee (HRRC) at California Institute of Integral Studies, which requires protection and consent of participants. Since the intent of my study, supported by these interviews, was to highlight folk wisdom that has been handed down orally, I received permission from the HRRC to request and obtain consent of the interviewees verbally, which I felt was more culturally appropriate than in writing. I read the consent form in Appendix A in the appropriate language and recorded the candidates' permission to use their responses. I also read aloud the Bill of Rights found in Appendix B. Although the reading of these forms felt formal, I began each interview with an expression of gratitude for and naming of some of the specific gifts I felt I had received from that person in my life, which helped the conversation feel more heart-centered.

In the United States, I interviewed four Trentino American women to obtain insights into women's culture and guidance for my later interviews in Trentino: my aunts, Anne Ress, Emma Fortarel, and Louise Kulp, and my mother Lena Moser. At the time of the interviews in May 2009, their ages ranged from 81 to 94, and all lived in or near urban areas in Colorado. They were chosen as candidates because of their first-hand knowledge of traditions passed down to them by their mother, Edvige Albasini, an immigrant to the United States from Trentino in 1906. In the interview I asked them about the details of their lives and the life of their mother, my maternal grandmother, whom I did not know. The

questions in Appendix C served as a guide and were also used later during my oral interviews in Italy.

The results of the interviews have been utilized in my dissertation primarily as examples of various cultural aspects. The rewarding personal impact of the experience of interviewing them is discussed in the final chapter of this study. I have shared copies of the recorded interviews with them or their family members, as appropriate, as part of our family history.²²³

Although my aunt, Mary Faustin, was not available for this interview, having died in 1999, her felt presence, along with the values of generosity and gratitude she demonstrated while living in my childhood home and from our experiences together, inform my life and this study.

In September, 2009, as part of an on-site visit described more fully in the next section, I conducted pre-arranged oral interviews with four Trentini women, recording the conversations with a digital sound recorder and/or a digital video recorder, and using written notes taken during and after conversations, as I did for the earlier interviews. The women included relatives, friends, and acquaintances I have met. Often other family members were present, participating and offering information.

Their names and relationships are as follows: Onorina Bortolamedi, cousin-in-law, and a great grandmother. She speaks the regional dialect, gardens, and is the first relative I met on my father's side in Italy in 1980 when, although I

²²³ Two of the women in Colorado whom I interviewed died within eight months of the interviews. I have provided copies to their family members.

was unannounced and a stranger, she opened the door and invited me in; Irma Bortolamedi, cousin-in-law, who is a grandmother born and raised in a small village in Val di Mocheni. She has hosted me several times and shared insights of her culture long before I recognized their importance. Carmela Moser, friend, and a grandmother who lives in the village of my paternal grandfather. She was one of my first acquaintances in the region, having taken me home with her after we met on the local bus and I told her I was searching for my grandfather's village. After a few hours together of exchanging information, from her impressive memory of village and family history, she determined to which of the numerous Moser families I belonged and directed me to the nearest living relatives in another town; Carmela's sister Hilda also joined us for part of the interview in 2009, along with Carmela's son, Alfonso, and Hilda's grandchildren. Erminia Stanchini, cousin, and a grandmother knows my maternal grandmother's village well and has lived in the area all her life. Her husband, Marino, contributed to the interview, and we were joined later by their children and grandchildren. In all of these interviews, I was treated to feasts of local food, eaten together with family.

As indicated in Appendix C, my questions focused on subjects that relate to current and past traditions and practices including festivals, healing, prophecy, birth, death, marriage, planting, harvesting, and seasons, following the categories of interest in this study. Examples drawn from our conversations have been incorporated into the study.

The interviews provided a focused opportunity for sharing and for honoring the value of the interviewee's knowledge. Far more than answers to

questions, these people provided me with an integral experience—reflected by their homes, their families, and our meals together—one of several that we shared over the decades.

In addition to the interviews of women, other contacts provided invaluable information: Udalrico Fantelli, scholar, and prolific author of publications on the history of Val di Sole which he gifted me; Maurizio Bontempelli, a storyteller from Val di Sole who leads walks in nature and further promotes folk culture by operating a water-powered sawmill and demonstrating ancient wood-working crafts; Pina Trentini, friend, a key cultural consultant, whom I had previously met, who is fluent in English, German, Italian and a resident of Trentino.²²⁴ Franco Gaudiano was my knowledgeable guide in Valle Camonica, about which he has written several novels;²²⁵ cultural anthropologist Michela Zucca, whose book, *Donne Delinquenti* (Delinquent Women), had just been published gave a public presentation on shamanism, culminating in a communal meal, which I was able to attend. Angelo Bortolamedi, my cousin, died shortly before my visit in 2009; however, our experiences over the years, particularly during 1995 which included a hike to Lake Erdemolo, provided extensive cultural background. He alerted me to the presence of two goddesses of antiquity who had been venerated in the region, was very knowledgeable about trees and wildlife, and passionately upheld,

²²⁴ While I was not able to interview Pina Trentini in person in 2009, she provided ongoing support, literature, and insights via mail and internet.

²²⁵ Gaudiano, *L'Altra Faccia*, Vols. 1, 2 [The other face]. Gaudiano, *Occhi di Luna* [Moon eyes]. Gaudiano, *La leggenda della Rosa Camuna* [The legend of the Camunian Rose].

along with his brothers Giuseppe and Costante, the millennia-old local tradition of hunting.

Nature-Based Research

Nature is an invaluable source of direct knowledge, according to indigenous teachings, ethnobotanists, and ecofeminists. Non-human nature—mountains, lakes, animals, and plants—is prominently included in the cultural literature of Trentino. Several of the same herbs, plants, and trees that grow in Trentino are found where I reside in the northwest United States. As part of my embodied methodology, I participated in a four-month course from local ethnobotanist Erin Kenny, on learning to forage for plants as food and for medicinal remedies. By learning more about the relationship between humans and plants, I more fully understand the lives of rural women who have had a close relationship with plants. My worldview toward plants has been changed, inverting my ideas about “weeds” not as something to be eradicated, but instead as highly beneficial food and medicine.

In Trentino, my field research also involved interactions with nature, by walking the roads, hiking the trails, and listening to what “non-human nature”—that is the rocks, water, land, trees, plants, and animals—had to tell me. Maurizio Bontempelli, who calls himself *L’Om dela Storia*, dialect for “the man of the story,” led me up the trail above my grandmother’s hamlet through the forest, passing by a massive rock wall to a striking waterfall, not far from a location on a hill known as Santa Brigida. There was once a holy spring or fountain there,

where women went for fertility and blessings.²²⁶ When I lamented to him that so much had been lost, he replied that the knowledge is always there; we have just forgotten it.

The field of Indigenous Science recognizes nature as an active research partner that is intelligent and alive.²²⁷ Paula Gunn Allen describes learning from “the wind and the sky, the trees and the rocks, and the sticks and the stars” as part of her methodology in *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*.²²⁸ Requesting nature to be a source of knowledge and a partner requires being fully present and listening. I come from a long line of *contadini* (farmers), and before that, hunters and gatherers who had close ties to earth and sky. The ancestors that call me are more than my human ancestors—they are also nature and the cosmos.

Onsite Studies in Trentino, Italy

Since 1980, I have traveled to Italy twelve times to conduct genealogical and graduate level research, most recently in 2009. During an extensive stay in 1995, I spent four of the six months living in Trentino, following a month-long immersive language study at the *Università per Stranieri* in Perugia, Umbria to deepen my knowledge of Italian. As an undergraduate, I studied Italian for two

²²⁶ Fantelli, *Dimaro: La Carta di Regola*, 209.

²²⁷ Worldwide Indigenous Science Network, “Philosophy,” para. 5.

²²⁸ Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 7.

years as part of my B.S. in mathematics, supplemented by evening classes in Italian in later years through the Dante Alighieri Society in Washington State.

From my research trips to Italy, I have accumulated numerous sources of information, as well as embodied experiences of the land, the culture, and the people. In 1980, I first visited all the villages where my grandparents had been born and met several of the people whom I interviewed for this study. The people of Trentino and nearby areas have been a primary and invaluable source of knowledge.

A key contact for understanding folk women's culture was my cousin Daria Fantelli, who lived in the village of my grandmother and who became like a grandmother to me. Daria lived in a multi-family dwelling built in 1562, cooking primarily on a wood-fired stove, and using cold mountain water piped into her kitchen sink. She maintained a small garden in a nearby plot of land and walked wherever she needed to go in her daily activities—to the church and nearby cemetery, the butcher, and the small grocery store, all of which were nearby. The village has changed significantly since 1980, even in this short span of time. After her death in 1993, Daria's home was sold and the building was later modernized into condominiums available for rental. Tourism, oriented towards winter and summer sports activities, has become an important part of a local prosperous economy.

Building upon past fieldwork over the last decades and these experiences, I revisited Trentino and Lombardy in September 2009 to amplify my study with visits to cultural centers, museums, and sanctuaries, several of which I have

visited before, and to acquire recent literature. As part of this trip, I also conducted oral interviews, discussed previously.

Museum displays, curators, and associates provided valuable sources of information including the *Centro Studi per la Val di Sole* in Malè, an institute dedicated to the preservation of the culture of the valley and the *Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina* (Museum of Traditions and Customs of the Trentino People) in San Michele all'Adige, a museum of folk history. The permanent museum exhibit *Soggetto Donne Montagne* (Subject Mountain Women) at Casa Andriollo in Valsugana, has been very informative; although I was unable to visit in person, the displays are available through online photos and text. The curator of the exhibit, Rosanna Cavallini, has provided me with valuable literature sources, as well as photos of her artwork. The South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology, in Bolzano, Alto Adige is an excellent modern archaeology museum which documents the history of South Tyrol from 15,000 BCE to 800 CE.²²⁹ The rock carvings of Valle Camonica in Lombardy, recognized and protected as a world heritage site, are preserved in parks that provide open-air museums for public viewing. Indoor exhibits and museums provide further information. The *Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici* in Valle Camonica, Italy, which I visited in 2004, is a center for scholarly research and offers the publications of archaeologist Emmanuel Anati. The Didactic Museum of Prehistoric Art and Life in Capo di Ponte directed by archaeologist Ausilio Priuli emphasizes hands-on learning experience. Local bookstores, shrines, churches,

²²⁹ South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology, "Iceman," para. 1.

and shops were valuable sources of cultural knowledge. Conversations with the local people provided additional information as well as participation in local fiestas, celebrations, and events.

Final Integration

Upon return from my field research, I reviewed the interviews, written materials, and photos; continued the literature research; and incorporated my findings into the dissertation, integrating the research from all the phases of my study into a written document. As with any comprehensive study, it was difficult to choose what to include and what to defer for future studies. Using both rational and intuitive means—daily journaling, diagrams, analysis, time in nature, prayer, listening, writing down my dreams, artwork, and formal presentations of my research to scholarly communities—helped bring the structure into form.

The research is generally organized across time, addressing the sacred females of antiquity in the archaeology, the magical females in the folk stories, and the folk women of more recent times, exemplified and amplified with material from my interviews of contemporary women. The characters in the folk stories known as Anguane, who dwell in or near the water, presented themselves during the course of the study and firmly claimed their place.²³⁰ Their arrival came via the publication in English of a series of folk stories, in which their cultural importance as keepers of magical power became evident. By utilizing the

²³⁰ The timing of the Anguane's arrival coincided with oil gushing uncontrollably into the Gulf of Mexico for months during the spring and summer of 2010. Their persistence continued through the spring of 2011 and beyond, as radioactive elements from the nuclear reactors in Japan washed into the Pacific Ocean.

folk stories, I am drawing from the oral history of the people which has been written down. The extensive analysis of the Anguane that I include in this study provides an important contribution to folk women's spiritual history.

The oral interviews provided both seeds and fruit for understanding the culture, as well as a record of oral history. Their content will be documented separately in a more comprehensive way, oriented toward family history and drawing from the knowledge I have gained in this study.

As a feminist cultural history, it felt important to include multiple aspects of women's lives across time. While each subject merits its own focused study and future research, key examples have been presented in this study. The chapter on plants, in true organic fashion, willingly responded to my attention by growing beyond my expectation.

By approaching the data I had collected with the methodology of organic inquiry, I allowed the spiraling pattern of the study to unfold and reveal itself. Each topic seemed holographic in the sense that it contained elements of the whole. The integral nature of the knowledge was mirrored in the oral interviews, during which several aspects of women's lives were often present, for example food, family members, storytelling, hand-crafted items, and sacred imagery. Although I had originally planned to devote a separate chapter to women's practices and sacred female imagery in folk Catholicism, due to its prominence in the culture, the discussion was more-easily integrated into the other chapters.

Delimitations

This study engages with the cultural history of folk women across time to create a more integral understanding of women's spiritual roles in rural Alpine villages. Recognizing the specificity of language and customs from valleys across the Alpine arch, it is important to clarify that a tradition from one valley may be unfamiliar to someone in the next valley. The intention is not to universalize the experience of all women in these villages, but rather to gather and glean what has been hidden or submerged, to assemble a female-centered view of the spirituality of my ancestral culture, and to highlight the values that folk women's traditions communicate.

Referring to this as a feminist study in search of women's spiritual agency—terms that are useful to me as part of an academic study—does not imply that the participants in the interviews, my living relatives, or my ancestors would identify themselves or their traditions using those terms. “This is just what we do,” said one of my participants. The study is presented with the greatest respect for the people I interviewed, our shared heritage, and what they do.

4. Goddesses, Ancestresses, and Women's Ritual in the Archaeology

The archaeological record offers evidence of women's spiritual agency as goddesses, ancestresses and women in ritual. The examples presented here illustrate themes that appear in folk culture throughout the study which are sources of spiritual agency including women's bodies, menstrual blood, the moon and sun, plants, trees, animals, water, stone, jewelry, and cloth. There is evidence of the persistence of sacred place and a thread of veneration of and by females that can be perceived, even with successive waves of cultural and institutional influences.

This sampling spans a considerable length of time from the fifth millennium BCE into the Christian era. It includes a female figure carved on bone from the fifth millennium BCE, known as the Venus of Gaban, who wears a crescent pendant and bears a conifer tree from her prominent red vulva; petroglyphs of female figures in ritual and cupmarks from nearby Valle Camonica; monolithic carved stones known as *stèle*, possibly ancestors or deities, from the Bronze Age; Reitia, the goddess for whom the Retic culture may have been named, whose people crafted amulets of metal and made inscribed offerings at outdoor sanctuaries in high places; an indigenous water goddess, whose sacred site was overlaid by a Roman temple to the Goddess Minerva; and Diana, midwife and moon goddess of the Romans whose temples were overlaid by Christian churches.

Gaban “Venus”

Outside of what is now the city of Trento, in a narrow valley bordered by a hill, a rich source of archaeological evidence was discovered in 1970 in a natural rock shelter or *riparo*. Known now as the Gaban site by archaeologists, it was used almost uninterruptedly for nearly six thousand years, from the Mesolithic to the Middle Bronze Age.²³¹

Among the artifacts uncovered is a carefully-incised female figure from the fifth millennium BCE.²³² The Gaban figure, carved on the bone of a red deer,²³³ measures five cm (about two inches) in size.²³⁴ Her form has several attributes of note including a downward-pointing crescent moon pendant that hangs from a necklace-like collar, a belt with parallel vertical notches, and a large and prominent vulva, below which is an incised reticular design. A tree-form emerges from the top of the opening of the vulva. The front and back of the figure are marked with red ochre, considered a symbol of blood, life, and regeneration since the Paleolithic, states Trentino archaeologist Annaluisa Pedrotti in her chapter on the Neolithic in the detailed volume *Storia del Trentino: La preistoria e la protostoria*. The Gaban female is interpreted as a “representation of the

²³¹ Cristiani, Pedrotti, and Gialanella, “Tradition and Innovation,” 192. Specific dates cited are from the Mesolithic (7500 calibrated BCE) throughout the Neolithic and Middle Bronze Age (1600 calibrated BCE).

²³² Lanzinger, Marzatico, and Pedrotti, eds., *Storia del Trentino*, 140.

²³³ Cristiani, Pedrotti, and Gialanella, “Tradition and Innovation,” 193.

²³⁴ Gimbutas, *Language*, 103.

rebirth and growth of the vegetal world through the earth mother, here symbolized by a female divinity.”²³⁵

As a source of life, menstrual blood, and erotic mystery, the vulva is a potent sign of female agency. Vulva symbols have been present in the archaeological record from the Upper Paleolithic through succeeding ages into historical times, and represent the powerful, generative powers of the Goddess, according to Marija Gimbutas.²³⁶ In European folk traditions, women sought to influence the growth of flax through their exposed genitals.²³⁷ Lotte Motz presents cross-cultural evidence in archaeology, folk customs, folk tales, and mythology of the power attributed to a woman exposing her vulva, whose impact, she concludes, acts to “shock, shatter, and dispel danger and aggression.”²³⁸

The tree form is paired with vulva symbols in Paleolithic caves and sometimes takes the place of the vulva on figurines from the Neolithic in Europe.²³⁹ A conifer-like form similar to that sculpted on the Gaban female dating from the upper Paleolithic was engraved fourteen times in flint found on the Plain of Marcesina in Trentino.²⁴⁰ Fred Hageneder, who has researched and

²³⁵ Lanzinger, Marzatico, and Pedrotti, eds., *Storia del Trentino*, 138. (My translation.)

²³⁶ Gimbutas, *Civilization of the Goddess*, 223.

²³⁷ Gimbutas, *Language*, 102.

²³⁸ Motz, *The Beauty and the Hag*, 22.

²³⁹ Gimbutas, *Language*, 102–103.

²⁴⁰ Lanzinger, Marzatico, and Pedrotti, eds., *Storia del Trentino*, 60.

documented the deep cultural significance of trees in Europe, presents the symbol on the Gaban image in context of the birth and rebirth aspects of the Tree of Life.²⁴¹

Indeed, the trees that established themselves after the receding of the glaciers, eventually becoming conifer and deciduous forests, have been vital to the life of the mountain people as a source of shelter, food, clothing, and medicine.²⁴² Images of trees appear on the *stemma* or coat of arms for the municipalities of my grandparents' birthplaces: three fir trees for Dimaro, a single large pine with ten branches for Baselga di Pinè, and three pine cones along with a birch tree, shown with its roots, for Bedollo.²⁴³ During a nature hike, Maurizio Bontempelli, a Trentino story-teller who also works with trees and wood, explained that birch acts as a kind of mother tree that grows first in the field if everything has been cut; it helps the forest expand by fixing nitrogen in the soil so other types of trees and plants can grow.²⁴⁴ He characterized this action by referring to the birch as *Dea Madre*, an Italian title meaning God the Mother, and said it is considered a sacred tree, not used casually. Later that day, in an act of

²⁴¹ Hageneder, *Yew*, 167–170.

²⁴² See Priuli, *Valcamonica: Valley of Prehistory*, 16, for progression of flora and fauna over time.

²⁴³ Comuni-Italiani.it, “Stemmi Comuni Prov. di Trento.”

²⁴⁴ Kenny notes the nitrogen-fixing attribute of Red Alder, *Alnus rubra*, in the Northwest US. See Kenny, *Naturalist's Journal*, 24.

transformation, he crafted a *scodella* (bowl) from pine wood, as a gift for me and my husband to take home.²⁴⁵

In Nordic mythology, first woman and first man were made from the wood of two different trees, Elm and Ash.²⁴⁶ In explaining the possible origins of a Trentino folk story, Giovanni Borzaga notes the presence and influence of the Etruscans, whose Goddess Velthe/Urcla creates humans from one of the most beautiful forests on Mt. Cimini in Tuscany.²⁴⁷

The Gaban figure is sometimes referred to as the “Gaban Venus,”²⁴⁸ a misnomer in the sense that Venus is the Roman goddess of beauty who arrived thousands of years later. The name does, however, acknowledge her importance with its bestowal of divine status and implicitly links her with veneration of the female across the ages, specifically with the other so-called “Venuses” found throughout Eurasia from thousands of years earlier made from bone, stone, ivory, or clay. Venus is the “morning star” the name given to the bright planet that shines in the morning and evening, a cosmic entity connected to the divine female in antiquity, notably the Sumerian Goddess Inanna whose written sign from the fourth millennium BCE includes a star, a designation of divinity.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ In dialect this word is *la scudela*. After he crafted the bowl, he applied bee’s wax and rubbed it with a wool cloth to protect it.

²⁴⁶ Bjarnadottir, *Saga of Vanadis, Volva and Valkyrja*, 211.

²⁴⁷ Borzaga, *Leggende dei Castelli del Trentino*, 145–46.

²⁴⁸ Cristiani, Pedrotti, and Gialanella, “Tradition and Innovation,” 193.

²⁴⁹ Meador, *Inanna, Lady of Largest Heart*, 12–13.

Venus is retained in popular culture in Trentino. The poem by Simone Dapra (1872-1965) from Val di Sole refers to “*la stela de la di*” in dialect, which is translated in the English version both as Venus and “the morning star.”²⁵⁰ Venus is portrayed as a nude figure with a dolphin on the *stemma* for the municipality of Ziano di Fiemme.²⁵¹ Friday, *Venerdi* in Italian, is named for Venus, *Venere*.²⁵² In German, *Freitag* (Friday) is related to the Goddess Frigg and the older Goddess Freyja.²⁵³ Freyina, “little Freya” is said to be the oldest village in Ampezzo Valley in Wolff’s folk story, “The Artist of Faloria.”²⁵⁴

Another artifact from the Gaban site includes a handle carved of an animal bone on which is inscribed a figure with arms upraised in orans position and legs spread downward, whose form is similar to the petroglyphs in Valle Camonica discussed in the next section; the figure is standing above a zigzag motif, which appears to represent a course of water.²⁵⁵ Although the gender of the figure is unknown, it evokes a ritual act in connection to water, a subject that also emerges in the folk stories in Chapter 5.

²⁵⁰ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Voices of Trentino Poetry*, 126–27.

²⁵¹ Comuni-Italiani.it, “Stemma Comune di Ziano di Fiemme.”

²⁵² Bonomi, “Dizionario Etimologico Online,” “Search: Venerdi,” lines 3–5.

²⁵³ Metzner, *Well of Remembrance*, 154.

²⁵⁴ Wolff, *The Pale Mountains*, 83.

²⁵⁵ Lanzinger, Marzatico, and Pedrotti, eds., *Storia del Trentino*, 137.

Valle Camonica Petroglyphs—Women, Rocks, and Ritual

In Valle Camonica, Lombardy, adjacent to Trentino and accessible via Tonale Pass from Val di Sole, numerous petroglyphs have been carved into the mountain-side rocks over the millennia. Deemed so important, it has been designated as a UNESCO “World Heritage Site,” this record of history includes figures of interest to this study, including women in ritual, vulva symbols, and cupped indentations, which are addressed in the following sections. Additional relevant examples of engraved symbols will be cited throughout the study.

Overview of the Valley

Like other Alpine and pre-Alpine river valleys, Valle Camonica was covered with glacial ice several times during the major ice ages. During the last ice age, the glaciers covering the plains and valleys of Northern Italy receded, smoothing and sculpting large dark surfaces of Permian sandstone along the slopes of the valley. After the glaciers finally withdrew, around 8000 BCE, and continuing over the ages until the Romans arrived and beyond, these rock surfaces have been engraved with figures.²⁵⁶

Numbering over 300,000, the engravings shed light on the history of the Alpine zone.²⁵⁷ Archaeologist Emmanuel Anati, who has conducted significant research since 1956 and founded the *Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici* where research is still done today, refers to the rock engravings as “primary

²⁵⁶ Anati, *Valcamonica rock art*, 47–50, 54.

²⁵⁷ Anati, *Valcamonica rock art*, 27.

documents.”²⁵⁸ He challenges the division between history and prehistory, arguing that engravings, like written texts, are meaningful. Recognizing that the written records of the Romans are limited and from their point of view, Anati observes that the record of Valle Camonica:

adds eight thousand years to the last two thousand, full of emperors and generals, of “wars won” and “glorious anniversaries,” which separate us from the day Augustus’ monument at La Turbie was erected, when the Camunians [the people of Valle Camonica] become merely an historical footnote, dismissed with the dry definition of *Gentes alpinae devictae* (conquered Alpine peoples).²⁵⁹

While Anati rightfully argues for inclusion of the archaeological record as history, a rich oral legacy also exists in the folk stories and living people of the Italian Alps, as we shall see in the following chapters of this study.

Moss and vegetation have naturally covered the rocks over the years. This can happen in a relatively short period of time: during my field research in 2009, for example, one guide commented that the rock with engraved symbols in front of us, which he had discovered a few years earlier, was already becoming hidden with natural growth. Although large scale exploration, documentation, and research of the rock art in Valle Camonica have taken place in the last fifty years, it is an emerging story since it is unknown how many petroglyphs are still hidden.

The magnitude of the number of carvings seems to signify their importance. Engravings have been found on more than 2,500 rock surfaces.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 11.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 167–68.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 27.

Several parks or reserves have been created as viewing areas. Areas of rock art are named and the rocks are numbered within each section. Most of the rocks have been carved with stones implemented using a pecking technique. Some engraved surfaces are more than 150 feet long and have more than a thousand figures.²⁶¹ At Luine, a sacred hill near the town of Darfo Boario Terme, a great, inclined surface known as Rock 34, bears the most inscriptions of any rock in the valley with thousands of signs spanning more than 8,000 years.²⁶² Figures include humans and animals, shields, deer, solar symbols, lobed figures with nine dots known as Camunian Roses, and labyrinths.²⁶³ In Foppe di Nadro, there are several engravings in “Reto-Etruscan” characters.²⁶⁴

Females in Ritual

Early anthropomorphic figures from the Neolithic time period are simple engravings, like stick-figures, characterized by arched downward legs and mirrored by a similar shape of the arms reaching upward, creating a kind of symmetry, with a single straight line for the torso and a dot for the head. Some of the figures have identifying anatomy, indicated by a dot for a vulva and/or

²⁶¹ Ibid., 78.

²⁶² Ibid., 196.

²⁶³ Priuli, *Valcamonica: Valley of Prehistory*, 66.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 38. See Lanzinger, Marzatico, and Pedrotti, eds., *Storia del Trentino*, 547 for a map of the distribution of inscriptions in north-Etruscan alphabet in the Alps, including the alphabet of Sanzeno, the alphabet of Magré, and the alphabet of Sondrio-Valcamonica.

sometimes two dots for breasts, or male anatomy, and others do not.²⁶⁵ Often called a “worshipping” figure because of the raised arms, Anati characterizes their appearance in Valle Camonica as “rather frequent.”²⁶⁶

Among the carvings of this type, is a figure with raised arms and spread legs dating from the fifth millennium BCE, near a circle or “disk” with a dot in the center, which has been interpreted both as sun and as “female symbol.”²⁶⁷ The volunteer guide from the museum during my visit in 2004 said that at that time, scholars considered it to be the “sex” of the figure, thus identifying her as female.

An important interpretation of the figure with upraised arms, sometimes described as orans, Latin for praying, comes from the work of Mary B. Kelly, who found repeated images of “strong female images” in her analysis of international textiles. The orans figure is widespread in folk women’s textile art in Europe and Central Asia, according to Kelly, who calls them goddesses. Sometimes they were named as a local goddess or more likely in recent times as Queens, Ladies, or Mistresses.²⁶⁸ In Romania, “one of the most enduring motifs is

²⁶⁵ Presentation by Franco Gaudiano, lecture at Vashon Island King County Library, August 2010.

²⁶⁶ Anati, *Valcamonica rock art*, 103.

²⁶⁷ Anati notes other interpretations that have been proposed, such as a psychological symbol of “self” as well as interpretations in other cultures of the disc symbol as a place, water hole, hut, egg, sun, moon, star, island, or all-seeing eye of God. *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁶⁸ Kelly, *Goddess Embroideries of the Balkan Lands*, xiii.

the figure of the goddess with upraised hands,” a figure also common throughout Bulgaria.²⁶⁹

Large Female with Necklace, Breasts, and Vulva

A well-known engraving possibly dating from around 3300 BCE is the so-called “Sellero Idol” whose name comes from its location in Sellero Park, and whose designation as “idol” apparently results from its large size and specific portrayal.²⁷⁰ This figure stretches over a large rock engraved with over 700 figures.²⁷¹ Two circles in the breast area of a body and a circle with a dot in the center at her vulva area (also referred to as a cupped disk) identify her as a female—and would seem to support the interpretation of this symbol as a vulva. In an illustration that highlights her image, she appears to wear necklaces. The figure is flanked by additional circles with dots in the center.²⁷²

Vulva Symbols—Female as Source

Circular, almond shaped, or v-shaped figures are among the shapes categorized as “vulva symbols” by Ausilio Priuli, director of the Didactic Museum of Prehistoric Art and Life, and an archaeologist who has made significant discoveries in Valle Camonica. He groups the “figurative culture and traditions in Italy and in the alpine arch” into a hundred categories in his

²⁶⁹ Kelly, *Goddess Embroideries of the Northlands*, 54, 27.

²⁷⁰ Anati, *Valcamonica rock art*, 112–13.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 206.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 112, Figure 81.

publication, *Valcamonica: Valley of Prehistory*, including symbols of interest to this study: stars, trees, numerous types of animals, “decorations” (which appear to include necklaces), looms, and cupmarks.²⁷³ Priuli notes three vulva symbols on a rock in Sellero that likely served as an altar, a term that seems to indicate its sacred ritual use.²⁷⁴ A rock at Seradina incised with figures is itself in the form of a vulva.²⁷⁵

Groups of Females in Ritual

Other carvings include a line of females with arms raised and legs spread at Naquane on Rock 32. Scholars cite the possibility of initiation, healing, or funerary rites. In *Valcamonica Rock Art*, this scene is summarized as

a clear composition referable to the Neolithic Age which describes either a funerary ceremony or one of healing: female figures are next to an elongated being who is positioned near a figure with arms raised, defined as a praying or shaman figure.²⁷⁶

Priuli describes this as a “probable scene of initiation: female figures seem to dance alongside a woman lying down, not far from a place of worship.”²⁷⁷

Naquane, the name of the region, is similar to Anguane, female water deities that have continued in the local oral tradition, a subject that will be addressed in the

²⁷³ Priuli, *Valcamonica: Valley of Prehistory*, 8–9. Priuli uses the word cupholes.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 4. They are portrayed in Priuli, *Preistoria*, 20, Figure 15.

²⁷⁵ Anati, “Way of Life,” 14.

²⁷⁶ Anati, *Valcamonica rock art*, 204. This description is in Appendix III, “Itinerary for Viewing Camunian Rock Art,” compiled by Tiziana Cittadini Gualeni, 195–207.

²⁷⁷ Priuli, “La Donna nella Preistoria,” 18, Figure 5.

next chapter as protagonists of the folk stories.²⁷⁸ In a similar scene carved on Rock 1 at Naquane, at least three females are in a line with raised arms, with a horizontal female figure below, which Priuli also describes as women's initiatory rites.²⁷⁹

To these possible interpretations, I propose the addition of birth, menstruation, and fertility rites. When I presented a photo of this image to a group of female graduate students in the United States, one of them immediately connected it with women giving birth. Also significant to the interpretation, according to Franco Gaudiano, is a water groove or hollow underneath the figure.²⁸⁰ In the next sections, I present ways in which women ritually engage, or may have engaged, with the rock as a life-giving source, via water and directly. They attest to a worldview in which nature is directly experienced and valued as a source of life, a theme which recurs in the folk stories and in folk women's lives, discussed in the following chapters of the study.

Cupmarks—Signs of Women's Ritual

Cupmarks, or *coppelle* in Italian, small carved indentations which form depressions or cups in the rock, are a very common figure. According to Priuli, they belong to a classification into which falls an "enormous" disproportionate number of all the rock art; they are so commonly found and easily made that they

²⁷⁸ The similarity of the name Naquane to Aquane was pointed out to me by a local guide and author, Franco Gaudiano. Email to author from Franco Gaudiano, January 20, 2010.

²⁷⁹ Priuli, *Valcamonica: Valley of Prehistory*, 28

²⁸⁰ Email to author from Franco Gaudiano, January 20, 2010.

were probably made by “common folk” rather than specialists, whom he postulates may have done the more elaborate engravings.²⁸¹ Perhaps it is this reason that they have received less attention; however it is precisely because of their relationship to everyday people, and as we shall see, to women, that they are of particular interest to this inquiry.

Blessed Water from Rocks

The presence of cupmarks in Europe is extremely ancient. They were engraved into stones before 40,000 BCE in Europe, according to Gimbutas.²⁸² The water from cupmarks is considered sacred, healing, and a source of life that even today is considered efficacious.²⁸³ Women in the Baltics and Scandinavia use water from cupmarks for offerings, according to Kelly. A contemporary photo from Estonia shows water-filled indentations in a rock with a sacred cloth draped nearby.²⁸⁴

Italian archaeologists Umberto Sansoni, Silvana Gavaldo, and Cristina Gastaldi present important evidence on the apparent relationship of water, cupmarks, women, and sacred sites in Valtellina, a mountainous region in Lombardy.²⁸⁵ Their documentation includes a tally of the number and types of

²⁸¹ Priuli, *Valcamonica: Valley of Prehistory*, 13.

²⁸² Gimbutas, *Civilization of the Goddess*, 222.

²⁸³ Gimbutas, *Language*, 322; also Gimbutas, *Civilization of the Goddess*, 432.

²⁸⁴ Kelly, *Goddess Embroideries of the Northlands*, Plate 32.

²⁸⁵ Sansoni, Gavaldo, and Gastaldi, *Simboli sulla Roccia*.

figures on rocks, photos of the rocks, and the local traditions in the surrounding areas. In the 1800s, before the rock was moved, they report that in the small village of Ca' Bianchi, at a small chapel to the Virgin of the Rosary, women would meet near a round rock slab with cupmarks to recite the rosary, using the blessed water in the cavity of the rock to sign themselves.²⁸⁶ Centuries earlier, in Vione in Valle Camonica, women processed to a rock with cupmarks where they poured water into the cavity from the baptismal font in order to obtain the gift of rain from Santa Paola; the rock was destroyed in 1624 by order of San Carlo Borromeo.²⁸⁷ In other localities, cupped rocks were used as baptismal fonts and basins for holy water inside the church. Also mentioned is the rock altar at Naquane and the cupped rock in the narthex of Sant' Ambrogio in Milano.²⁸⁸ In Trentino, cupmarks appear on a smooth curved boulder at Lago d'Esza in Val di Mocheni.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 132, see also 148.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 132.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 149.

²⁸⁹ Fabbro, *I Mòcheni*, 180.

Cupmarks and Menstruation

Not mentioned among these interpretations are specific women's rituals of menstruation and menarche rites.²⁹⁰ The "dot" under the legs of some female figures could be a record of menstrual rituals. The cupmarks, prolific in number, may have been places in the rock where menstrual blood was offered during puberty rites or monthly menstruation. Puberty rituals and rock art are linked in the US Southwest and elsewhere.²⁹¹ The girls of the Nez Perce reportedly made pictographs of objects that they saw or dreamt about during their puberty ceremonies. Painting of the rocks is part of the puberty rites of the girls of the Thompson River Indians and Luiseno.²⁹² Illustrations of the "cupholes and incisions" at Lago Nero in Valle Camonica appear similar to the "pit and groove" markings of the Pomo in California associated with fertility and weather rituals.²⁹³

If women believed, perceived, or experienced that the rocks held the fertilizing life force, then offering life-giving menstrual blood, and perhaps also birth blood, back to the rocks as replenishment would have seemed reasonable—

²⁹⁰ In a query regarding the possibility of rock engravings in Valle Camonica made as part of female menstruation rites, Emmanuel Anati, noting the presence of female initiation in the Neolithic, responded that the subject had never adequately been considered, and that further research would be welcome. Email from Emmanuel Anati to author, March 30, 2010.

²⁹¹ Hays-Gilpin, *Ambiguous Images*, 107–126.

²⁹² McGowan, *Ceremonial Fertility Sites in Southern California*, 15.

²⁹³ Hays-Gilpin, *Ambiguous Images*, 80–81. See Priuli, *Valcamonica: Valley of Prehistory*, 61.

as well as seeking this generative force of the rocks for fertility. This could have been viewed as a mutually fertilizing relationship with the rocks giving and receiving life energy. In Hawaii, there are numerous rocks with *puka* or cupmarks into which the umbilical cord stump, or *piko*, of a newborn is placed to give it strength and spiritual health.²⁹⁴ These brief observations introduce some possibilities and point to future investigation, especially when considering the strong relationship of rocks and fertility in the following discussion.

Rocks of Fertility

A further intimate association of rocks as a source of women's agency is manifested in women's rituals in the past regarding fertility. Sansoni documents the presence of so-called "rocks of fertility," already well-known in the popular culture.²⁹⁵ Sansoni further asserts that

many rocks with cupmarks of the alpine arch were utilized also as *scivoli* (slides) in pagan rites of fertility: the women were utilizing the cupmarks for spilling out oily substances or water, and then, they were sliding from the summit of the mass for propitiating the birth of children.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ Petroglyphs illustrating round piko points are said to represent the navel, the genitals, a woman's birth canal, and blood relatives. James, *Ancient Sites*, 66, 114, 132, 166.

²⁹⁵ Popular knowledge of fertility rocks was confirmed in my presence. At Foppe di Nadro, near the autumnal Equinox in September of 2009, one of the local women in the group, in response to a question from the guide, knew that the shininess of the rock in a certain place—visibly evident—was from being used as a fertility slide. This was at Rock 1 in Foppe di Nadro on the same rock surface and not far from the Neolithic figure with raised hands and spread legs next to a vulva or solar disk described earlier in this section.

²⁹⁶ Sansoni, Gavaldo, and Gastaldi, *Simboli sulla Roccia*, 132.

A photo of a large rock at San Giovanni di Teglio engraved with cupmarks shows a clearly visible shiny band on the rock from its use as a slide.²⁹⁷

Priuli has identified numerous carved rocks in the area of Edolo and records the presence of a fertility slide at Mu, above the town of Edolo, and another at Fobia on a rock covered with cupped indentations. At Mu there are boulders and rocks “profusely carved with cupholes.”²⁹⁸ At Corteno Golgi, in Valli di Sant’Antonio, a boulder with over three hundred cupmarks, often joined by channels, is pictured.²⁹⁹ Rocks with cupmarks and fertility slides lend support to the idea that they may have been used in sacred rites not only for women to receive fertility but also for women to make offerings of their fertility.

A study by Fabio Copiatti and Alberto De Giuli on the practice of using rocks as fertility slides presents specific evidence that supports the connection of rock and women’s sacred rites.³⁰⁰ Although the authors say that these practices were suppressed, there is still a “roc de vita” or rock of life at sanctuaries in Oropa, in Varallo, and in Boca.³⁰¹ Numerous examples are cited of fertility practices in Europe by the authors. In Trentino, there were particular rocks used by women more than a century ago to *sdrucchiolo*, presumably meaning to slide in

²⁹⁷ Ibid., see Figure III.74, 163.

²⁹⁸ Priuli, *Valcamonica: Valley of Prehistory*, 58.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 59.

³⁰⁰ Copiatti and De Giuli, “Sfregarsi,” 21–36.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 28–29.

dialect, if they wanted to become pregnant.³⁰² The rocks that were used until recent times in Borzoli, near Genova, were made of green serpentine.³⁰³ Rock of the color green was also prized as amulets for childbirth, *parto*.³⁰⁴ A saying still exists in the town of Mergozzo, Piedmont, that if a girl is pregnant without being married, è *scivolata*, she has slid.³⁰⁵

The archaic cults to “Dôn, Dana, or Ana” became Diana, according to Copiatti and De Giuli, and then substituted by Saint Anne mother of Mary, whose cult is “most diffuse” in the valleys, with many chapels dedicated to her where women go to pray for having children.³⁰⁶ Roberto Gremmo has also collected evidence of the popular perception of what he calls “magic rocks,” which includes standing stones, boulders, pyramidal stones, natural caves, and rocks imbued with fertilizing, healing power in the Alps, especially in Piedmont, stating that “the main centers of devotional pagan stones have become the most important Christian sanctuaries in the Alps.”³⁰⁷

Sacred rocks, although too vast of a subject to be treated adequately in this study, are closely linked to women and sacred ritual, as presented in the evidence

³⁰² Ibid., 34.

³⁰³ Copiatti and De Giuli, “Sfregarsi,” 34.

³⁰⁴ Höck and Sölter, *Culti*, 144.

³⁰⁵ Copiatti and De Giuli, “Sfregarsi,” 36.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 26.

³⁰⁷ Gremmo, *Le Grandi Pietre Magiche* [The great magic rocks], 130.

here. Rocks become places of both shelter for the wild women in the folk characters, and a place of banishment for the witches as we shall see in the next chapter.

Stele

Carved standing stones of human effigies from the fourth to the second millennium BCE, known in Italian as *stele* have been found throughout the Alpine Arch, notably in Northern Italy, Switzerland, and Liguria.³⁰⁸ Having been submerged, forgotten and hidden, they have resurfaced in people's fields, gardens, building foundations, and chapels. In 1942, in Valtellina a woman discovered three stele covered with carvings in her vineyard.³⁰⁹ Six came to light in Trentino during excavation in Arco of the new hospital in 1989 and 1990. In Laces, Bolzano, a stone of white marble, carved with engravings and dating from at least 5,000 years ago, was discovered under the altar of the Church of Our Lady in 1992 during the restoration of the church.³¹⁰

Although gender representation can be difficult to assign, some stele are carved to have breasts, as does "Arco IV" which measures a little less than three feet.³¹¹ Cloth mantles or shawls with a striped or checked pattern are engraved

³⁰⁸ The authors of the website "Stone Pages" define stele as monoliths of less than 75 centimeters high, with one face only decorated with cut-away carving or low relief sculpture. See Arosio and Meozzi, "Stone Pages, Glossary." "Stele."

³⁰⁹ Anati, *Valcamonica rock art*, 27.

³¹⁰ Cordier, *Guida ai Luoghi Misteriosi d'Italia*, 131.

³¹¹ Lanzinger, Marzatico, and Pedrotti, eds., *Storia del Trentino*, 218.

on some of the stones of both females and males. Anati describes the stones as “the body of the ‘supernatural’ being,” noting their carved displays of breasts, necklaces, weapons, pubic triangles, or snakes.³¹² Gimbutas names the stele with carved owl-like faces as “goddesses,” calling attention to the change in symbolic carvings after the arrival of the Indo-Europeans from the second half of the fourth millennium BCE to include male gods, weapons, and solar symbols.³¹³ Max Dashu, a “herstory of suppressed histories,” refers to them as “ancestral mothers” part of a foundational matrilineal culture across Europe and Africa.

These early monumental women are omitted by nearly all histories and minimized even in many archaeological surveys. The cultural focus on ancestral mothers suggests matrilineage, while the communal burials in the megalithic womb tombs (“passage graves”) reflect a collective clan-oriented society.³¹⁴

Anthropologist Michela Zucca cites the enduring presence of the female form in the Alpine region across time, beginning with the numerous stele from Neolithic times and continuing with the iconography of the Celtic mothers, and the Black Madonnas in Christianity in historic times, as evidence that the Mother has always been honored in the stone of the mountains.³¹⁵ Megaliths mark the prehistoric migration paths of Africans, according to Birnbaum, calling attention

³¹² Anati, “Way of Life,” 22.

³¹³ Gimbutas, *Civilization of the Goddess*, 396.

³¹⁴ Dashu, “Grandmother Stones,” para. 2.

³¹⁵ Zucca, *Matriarchy and the Mountains* 3.

to the sanctuary of Har Karkom, known as Mt. Sinai, dating to 40,000 BCE, which features arrangements of upright stones, incised to resemble humans.³¹⁶

Goddess Reitia

From 3000 BCE, the alpine region experienced the development of metals: copper, bronze, and then iron. After the Hallstadt culture of the first Iron Age, a new identifiable culture group emerged in the fifth century BCE in the central Alpine area of Trentino and Alto Adige, named by archeologists as the Fritzens-Sanzeno culture,³¹⁷ which was characterized by “cultural and tribal unity.”³¹⁸ The writers of antiquity named the people of the Alps as Reti (Raeti, Rhaeti, Raetians or Rhaetians),³¹⁹ various tribes or groups of people whom the Romans subdued.³²⁰ While these writings are valuable, they must be read with the understanding that they are from the conqueror’s point of view, rather than the Alpine people’s description of themselves.

³¹⁶ Birnbaum, *dark mother*, 44–47.

³¹⁷ Hartungen, “Rhaetians and Romans,” 31.

³¹⁸ Demetz, *South Tyrol Museum*, 27.

³¹⁹ Various spellings in English are used in the literature: Raeti, in Demetz, *South Tyrol Museum*; Rhaeti in Hartungen, “Rhaetians and Romans;” Raetians, on the web site South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology, “The Celtic helmet from Pfatten: The Raetians;” and Rhaetians in the Museo Retico Museum Guide by the Center for archaeology and ancient history of Val di Non. In this study, I use “Reti” following the spelling in Lanzinger, Marzatico, and Pedrotti, eds., *Storia del Trentino*, as on page 484, for example.

³²⁰ See Lanzinger, Marzatico, and Pedrotti, eds., *Storia del Trentino*, 486–92, for excerpts of these ancient texts about the Reti. See also p. 485 for references to them as wild.

“The most plausible explanation of the name Raetians is that the Alpine tribes were given the name by outsiders because they worshipped the goddess Reitia,” according to the web site for the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology.³²¹ My cousin Angelo, upon learning of my interest in female deities, first alerted me to the Goddess Reitia, stating that the area was once named after her. In Sanzeno, the Museo Retico, a new museum about the Retic culture seems to symbolize an emerging identity as studies of the archaeological artifacts reveal more details.

The Reti were characterized by their religious ritual—specifically by their outdoor shrines, near the larger farming communities, where they made sacrifices which were burned and offered votive objects.³²² A written text used for religious purposes emerges in the archaeological evidence around 500 BCE.³²³ Inscriptions on bone, stone, horn, ceramics, and metals have been found, along with representations of divinities in human form.³²⁴ Like Etruscan and other non-Indo-European languages, the Retic alphabet does not contain the letter “o.”³²⁵ The Etruscans and the Celts, who were present in the Alpine region, both preserved traits indicative of matrilineal society, according to Gimbutas, a social

³²¹ South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology, “The Celtic helmet from Pfatten: The Raetians.” The spelling of the name of the goddess, like the area, can include Rhetia, Raetia, Rehtia, and Reitia, the name I have used in this study.

³²² Demetz, *South Tyrol Museum*, 27, 28.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 29.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29–31.

³²⁵ Lanzinger, Marzatico, and Pedrotti, eds., *Storia del Trentino*, 546.

structure that she proposes is highly likely to have existed throughout Europe during the Neolithic, based upon the religious symbolism.³²⁶ As we shall see in the next chapter, the folk stories also present evidence of lineage being traced through the mother.

The locations of several sanctuaries where offerings were made have been identified. The museum of Reti culture in Sanzeno, which gave its name to the Fritzens-Sanzeno culture by which the Reti are also known, is built on the high cultivated terrain near where a sanctuary once was. A bronze ornament of an “anthropomorphic female” or “Lady of the Animals” was found in Sanzeno, dating from the fifth to the second century BCE, and may represent the Goddess Reitia.³²⁷ This “Goddess of the Horses,” as she is also called,³²⁸ stylistically holds two horse heads, a motif also found in pendants from Greece. In another pendant, her head appears sun-like and the horses’ heads are more prominent. Other pendant/amulets have a triangular body and outstretched or upraised arms.³²⁹ Mary Kelly, in her comparison of symbols on textiles throughout Europe and Asia, documents similar motifs on Russian amulets, which she calls “riding

³²⁶ Gimbutas, *Living Goddesses*, 122, 113.

³²⁷ This representation however differs from the Venetic Goddess Reitia. Lanzinger, Marzatico, and Pedrotti, eds., *Storia del Trentino*, 524, 538.

³²⁸ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *800 Years*, 10.

³²⁹ Lanzinger, Marzatico, and Pedrotti, eds., *Storia del Trentino*, 538–39.

goddesses.”³³⁰ The Goddess Epona, a horse-riding goddess, was prevalent in Celtic Europe.³³¹

In Val d’Ultimo in South Tyrol, an outdoor Retic shrine was located at S. Valburga, consisting of a series of stone altars and clay sacrificial platforms, where there were fires. A large gravel mound ringed by stones in the center of the shrine likely had a cult image at the top, which is portrayed as dark and female in the reconstruction of the shrine in the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology.³³² The sanctuary site bears the name of a female saint, Saint Valburga, implying the recognition of this place as dedicated to the sacred.

A sanctuary to the Goddess Reitia near a branch of the Adige River in Este, Veneto, is considered to be “the most important Retic sanctuary” by archaeologists.³³³ Originally under Etruscan influence in the seventh century BCE, it remained in use until the second or third century CE.³³⁴ Numerous ex-voto offerings have been found, including more than a hundred figures in bronze, hundreds of figures made from thin sheets of metal, numerous anatomic figures, items related to cloth and weaving, and tablets with written dedications to

³³⁰ Kelly, *Goddess Embroideries of the Northlands*, 216.

³³¹ Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 104.

³³² Demetz, *South Tyrol Museum*, 32.

³³³ Höck and Sölter, *Culti*, 42.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

Reitia.³³⁵ Andrea Zanzotto refers to Reitia as “straightener of the world, weaver, and healer at the head of a pantheon almost entirely female.”³³⁶ In Swiss Alpine regions, the name of the Goddess Reitia became Risa, Madrisa, or Mother Risa, reflected in similar place names.³³⁷

On a round votive disk from Montebelluna, a figure described as a goddess carries a large key; she is flanked by an animal and a bird; other bronze disks with women bearing keys are interpreted as “priestesses of a divinity tied to birth and to fertility.”³³⁸ Numerous actual iron keys which are large, curved, and elaborate have been found as part of the Reti culture.³³⁹ According to Hilda Ellis Davidson in *Roles of the Northern Goddess*, keys held by a sacred female in iconography symbolize the power to control wild animals, guardianship during the transition after death to the Otherworld, and help to mothers during childbirth for releasing the child from the womb.³⁴⁰ Gimbutas seems to substantiate the latter role in her reference to the Venetic Goddess Retia as “the Birthgiver,”

³³⁵ Ibid., 42–43.

³³⁶ Zanzotto, *Euganean Hills*, 140.

³³⁷ French, “Danu, Raetia, Marisa,” 284.

³³⁸ Höck and Söldner, *Culti*, 141. The female is portrayed in profile, with a large nose and a large eye. She wears a long gown covered with spirals and a veil on her head that falls below waist level.

³³⁹ Lanzinger, Marzatico, and Pedrotti, eds., *Storia del Trentino*, 526. See portrayal of key opening a door in Demetz, *South Tyrol Museum*, 31.

³⁴⁰ Davidson, *Roles of the Northern Goddess*, 34–35, 43, 149.

whom she also relates to Artemis.³⁴¹ Language analysts Alfred Toth and Linus Brunner propose that the Veneti assumed the name and veneration of the Reti Goddess from the adjacent region of Reitia.³⁴²

Indigenous Water Goddess and Goddess Minerva of Valle Camonica

In 1986, a sanctuary to the Goddess Minerva, described as “one of the most interesting modern archaeological discoveries in Northern Italy” in the archaeological brochure, was discovered by chance during a construction project in Breno in Valle Camonica.³⁴³ It provides a case study for the presence of female deity associated with natural water, the continuity of sacred place, and the long memory of oral tradition.

Described as “a site of great mystery and sacredness,” the sanctuary was built on the bank of the Oglio River, at a place with natural caves and water gushing from the rocks. Water was “at the core of the open air cult of a female deity established by the local alpine population in the fifth century BCE,” according to the sanctuary guide.³⁴⁴

The outcropping of water from the earth was felt in fact as the epiphany, the manifestation of the deity, whom men could be brought into contact with through ceremonies and purification rites. During the Iron Age, the dwellers of Camonica valley had associated a female deity to the springs

³⁴¹ Gimbutas uses the spelling Rehtia. Gimbutas, *Civilization of the Goddess*, 314.

³⁴² Toth and Brunner, “Raetic,” 28–29.

³⁴³ Superintendent of Archaeological Goods in Lombardy, Sanctuary of Minerva Archaeological Park, “The Archaeological Excavations.”

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, untitled summary section on last, unnumbered page.

in the caves, personification of the immanence of Nature in the life of men.³⁴⁵

In 2003, an amulet of a water goddess was found at an outdoor shrine located near a sacred spring that gushed out of the rock nearby. The votive pendant, cut and worked from a sheet of bronze, from the fifth century BCE was found in a sacrifice area which had a place for burned offerings. The pendant is described as “a stylized goddess on a solar boat.”³⁴⁶ The upper body is of a stylized orans figure, that is, with raised arms extending upward. In this stylized representation, the head and two upraised arms form a trident of three equal shapes, each squared on top. Below the waist is a crescent shaped “boat” with the head of a water bird at each end. The pendant is decorated with four disks of concentric circles on the body, five triangles opening downward from below the belt, evoking a kind of flow or fringe, and numerous dots outlining the figure.

Filli Rossi, who has documented the iconographical connections of this figure with others in Europe in the book *Unknown Goddess*, includes for comparison bronze votives from Alpine shrines; artifacts of female divinity of central Europe, the Mediterranean, the Balkans and Adriatic; and the bronze icon known as Sequana found in Dijon, France, protective deity of the Seine River, which is a standing figure of a goddess in a curved boat with the head and tail of a duck.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ Ibid., “The Site.”

³⁴⁶ Ibid., “The Archaeological Excavations.”

³⁴⁷ Rossi and Miazzo, *La dea sconosciuta* [The unknown goddess], 15–40.

A larger-than-life statue of Minerva was also discovered in-situ in 1986, the central figure of the temple, in view of a large stone altar for offering rites and sacrifices. Minerva's healing attributes are reflected in her form. She wears an aegis with a "gorgonian" head necklace centered between her breasts, modeled after the Greek Goddess Athena Hygeia, Athena the Healer, of the fifth century BCE in Athens. The Gorgon breastplate of Athena was considered apotropaic, that is having the ability to turn away harmful spirits, like an amulet. Minerva's right hand once held an offering plate to receive offerings. The statue, which is headless, was deliberately defaced in ancient times.³⁴⁸ Minerva is a virgin goddess.³⁴⁹

The sanctuary to Minerva represented "the fulfillment of the Roman conquest of Camonica Valley," while maintaining the more ancient water cult.³⁵⁰ Similar practices may have occurred elsewhere, as there is a folk story about *Lago di Lagole*, addressed in Chapter 5, which tells of Anguane whose sacred spring was taken over with a temple built nearby to Hecate.³⁵¹

Although the sanctuary to Minerva was destroyed by fire in the fourth century, and buried in the mud from floodwaters in 1200, the memory was

³⁴⁸ Superintendent of Archaeological Goods in Lombardy, Sanctuary of Minerva Archaeological Park, "The Rites," "The Statue of Minerva," and "The Archaeological Excavations."

³⁴⁹ Bernstein, *Classical Living*, 56.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., "The Rites."

³⁵¹ Monfosco, "Le Anguane del Lago di Lagole," *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 65–72.

retained by the people in the oral tradition. Near the sanctuary, south of Breno, is a small sixteenth century church to the Virgin Mary known as the “church of the Minerva,” with a dedication inside to Minerva from the eighteenth century.³⁵²

The common name of the medieval bridge not far from where the Minerva statue was found is *Ponte della Minerva*.³⁵³ Even though the existence of the temple was submerged and forgotten, the memory of the sacredness of the place and of the Goddess Minerva was retained in the oral tradition, *before* any artifact or temple was found. This serves as an important example of the oral tradition and its value in cultural history.

Goddess Diana in Trentino

The presence of the Goddess Diana at two churches near Lake Caldonazzo in Trentino points to the importance and continuity of sacred place and to Diana’s attributes which are strongly tied to women and nature. Just as the Romans apparently overlaid indigenous sacred sites, Christianity overlaid the sites of Roman religion.

The church of San Ermete on a rocky relief above the lake in the town of Calceranica al Lago, about ten miles from Trento, is described as *antichissima*, most ancient, by Trentino historical journalist Aldo Gorfer.³⁵⁴ At the back of the

³⁵² Ibid., untitled summary section on last, unnumbered page.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Gorfer, *Le Valli del Trentino* [The Valleys of Trentino], 849.

church, there is a votive altar to Diana and another Roman stone pillar.³⁵⁵ On the stone brick wall at the gated entrance to the church, a sign in three languages says: “Church S. Ermete. Church from 4th century A.D. built in an ancient place of pagan faith dedicated to the goddess Diana.”³⁵⁶ In the town, popular *giochi* or games still endure on the traditional *sagra* festival day, one of which is *l'albero della cuccagna*, literally, the tree of abundance, likely a greased log or pole with a prize affixed at the top.³⁵⁷

The church of San Cristoforo near Pergine in the tourist hamlet of San Cristoforo al Lago, about seven miles from Trento, was, according to tradition, erected on a place that was a sacred temple to Diana and to Neptune.³⁵⁸ Perched on Permian metamorphic rock in a serene location above the lake, with a large rock in front, this is the church where my cousin Angelo, a skilled hunter, got married; he informed me that it had been a temple to the Goddess Diana,. At one time there were fresco paintings portraying the hunt with Neptune, Diana and the Nymphs, which were deleted in a reconstruction commissioned by Domenico Prada of Pinè in 1703, along with the Romanesque-gothic structure.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Busk notes that it was Diana of Antioch. Busk, *The Valleys of Tirol*, 388.

³⁵⁷ Gorfer, *Le Valli del Trentino*, 850.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 846.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 847.

In addition to being the Roman goddess of the hunt, Diana is the goddess of wilderness, of the moon, and protector of women and childbirth, all elements that are still important in the folk culture of the region today. Frances Bernstein, an archaeologist in the US who has specialized in documenting Roman goddess traditions, calls attention to her roles of Moon Goddess, Aid Bringer, Huntress and Mistress of the Wild Animals, and Virgin Goddess; in her most ancient guise, Diana was an “Italic Goddess of the Earth, Woods, and Groves.”³⁶⁰ She was especially revered by women, and her special day was the Ides, or full moon of August. Women of Rome processed to a sacred grove and sanctuary at Nemi, Bernstein says, an event that slave women were able to attend. During the ritual, women washed their hair and made votive offerings, including hand-sculpted models of uteri.³⁶¹

Carlo Ginzburg, an Italian historian, has documented widespread cults, myths, and rituals in Europe that involved nocturnal gatherings to a female deity, sometimes called Diana.³⁶² Randy Conner’s research presents extensive evidence of Diana’s presence in literature.³⁶³

Diana was one of several names for female divinity across Europe, according to Pinuccia Di Gesaro who identifies in her and others “traces of a most

³⁶⁰ Bernstein, *Classical Living*, 151–152.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 152, 154.

³⁶² Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 98.

³⁶³ Conner, “Of Diana, Witches and Fairies,” 179–208.

ancient pre-Christian religion” dating back to the Neolithic and centered on a beneficent female divinity, Dea Madre. She was the *Signora del Gioco* (Lady of the Game) in Tyrol, Venus in other zones, and Diana for the church of Rome. In Germany she was Holda, Perchta, or Abonde.³⁶⁴

Summary

The presence of goddesses, ancestresses and women in ritual in the archaeological record offers evidence of women’s spiritual agency especially through their affinity with nature and their portrayal as the source of life. While only selected examples have been included here, they illustrate themes that appear throughout the study, which I propose are sources of spiritual agency including women’s bodies, menstrual blood, the moon, plants, trees, animals, water, stone, jewelry, and cloth. Fertility rocks and cupmarks indicate a close relationship between women and rock. The discovery of a statue of the Goddess Minerva near a church and bridge bearing her name affirms that the oral tradition and place names hold valuable information, as we shall see in the next chapter.

³⁶⁴ Di Gesaro, *Giochi*, 8–9.

5. Anguane of the Waters and the Ladies of the Winter

Folk stories told across the ages feature female characters who demonstrate everyday spiritual agency. With characteristics that seem to bridge the human and other-than-human worlds, these females dwell in the wild and embody the very mystery and awe of nature. They are important because village women told and listened to stories about them in the nightly winter gathering of the *filò*, a dialect word that comes from the verb *filare*, to spin. It was a place of entertainment where customs and rules were collectively elaborated. My great grandmothers could have heard and told some of these stories; my grandmothers could have heard them before they left their motherland as young women to emigrate to the United States. The magical actions of the characters in the folk stories lend insight into the spiritual actions of folk women addressed in later chapters. I propose that the female protagonists of these stories and their actions are conveying the long memory of female power. They communicate values that call for respect of women and of nature, and the consequences of violating that respect. The females in the stories specifically ask to be remembered.

This chapter first focuses on the *Anguane*, women of the waters. They can be regarded as embodied nature deities, associated with the cycles of life and the sources of life, and holders of beneficent and terrifying power. From analyzing the folk stories, I present evidence of Anguane's agency in their characteristics and roles, address how their agency has been negated, and discern what values they are communicating. The second part addresses the Ladies of the Winter, or Winter Goddesses. These females, when considered in all their forms, embody,

and enforce the rules regarding, the full cycle of life: birth, life, death and renewal. They govern the life-giving waters of summer and the life-threatening snows of winter.

The Anguane

The Anguane, embodied females who primarily dwell in or near water, are primary characters that appear in “hundreds and hundreds” of folk stories in Trentino and throughout the Alps by various names.³⁶⁵ While their actions can seem mysterious or even dangerous, in the examples I present they can be viewed as indications of female power. Anguane demonstrate their agency through their strong affinity with and knowledge of nature and its wildness, and through the cosmos. Their roles of Queen, Ancestress, and Mother indicate their status. Anguane are Daughters of the Sun, and associated with the Moon and the Stars. Although the Anguane have been labeled as witches in some stories, even their negated powers demonstrate their embodied knowledge of the forces of nature.

For this analysis, the publications of authors in Trentino and Alto Adige, have provided the primary sources of information. Specifically, that includes the research of Mauro Neri, Giovanna Borzaga, Gari Monfosco, Giovanna Zangrandi, Andrea Foches, Brunamaria Dal Lago Veneri, Dino Coltro, and Adriano Vanin. Also utilized are the collections of Carl (or Karl) Felix Wolff, born in 1879, translated from German into English by two separate authors, as well as stories reported by Rachel Harriet Busk, who traveled through the region, published in

³⁶⁵ Iva Berasi in Neri, *Women and Girls*, 13.

1874. By drawing primarily on the stories recorded by or interpreted by people within the Trentino culture, the goal is to glean a representative cultural context.

Their Names and Place Names

Before discussing the folk stories in which Anguane appear, it is revealing to review the multitude of their names and the prevalence of their place names. Like the rivers and streams that flow with their own intelligence from the mountain waters where they originate, Anguane are not contained by geopolitical borders, which have shifted over time, even though their stories likely do reflect political influences over time. Thus I include folk stories from the eastern Dolomites in provinces and regions near Trentino, whose people share common values. In the introduction to an English-language version of a compilation of stories focusing on females, the translator, Fr. Marco Bagnarol, acknowledges that Trentino Alto-Adige, Veneto, and Friuli-Venezia Giulia are three “sister” regions of northeastern Italy who share common values, ethics and ideals.³⁶⁶

Anguane are known by dozens of names in the folk stories of the Alpine mountain areas, depending on the local dialect of where the story is told. Similar names include: Angane, Agane, Longane, Gane, Aquane, Naquane, and Pantegane.³⁶⁷ In his dictionary of mythological characters, Mauro Neri adds: Aguane, Anghiane, Guane, Inguane, Bèle Putèle (Beautiful Girls), Fade (Fairies),

³⁶⁶ Neri, *Women and Girls*, unnumbered. Dino Coltro also addresses the regions of Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trentino, and Alto Adige (Coltro, *Gnomi*.)

³⁶⁷ Monfosco, *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 130. She relates them to the words *gana*, *gènes*, *vagàna*, *sagàna*, *ssana*, *bagàna*.

and Fòle.³⁶⁸ Anguane are similar to the females known as Salinghe³⁶⁹ and Vivane,³⁷⁰ with variations including Aivane, Vane, Vivane, Vivene, and Valdane.³⁷¹ Selvane (from *selva* meaning wild) and Bregostane also appear in the stories.

In areas with German influence in and near Trentino they may be known as *sàighele bàibele* or *beate donnette* (literally, blessed little women).³⁷² As Donna Berta (Italian for Lady Berta) and Froberta (from Frau Berta, German for Lady Berta) in Trentino, we see a form of Perchta, a German Goddess of Winter, discussed in the next section. Andrea Foches has compiled the names of Anguane in Trentino by location and placed them on a map, illustrated in his book *Leggende delle Anguane*.³⁷³ A listing of that data alphabetized in table form is shown in Figure 4. I shall use the name Anguane for simplicity and consistency in general discussion, with variations by story as appropriate.

³⁶⁸ Neri, *Mille Leggende del Trentino*. Definitions (along with many others), 326–32. Dialect translations are from Bertoluzza, *Abbicci: Dizionario dell'Antico Dialetto Trentino*.

³⁶⁹ Neri, “The brief of the Vivana,” *Women and Girls*, 97.

³⁷⁰ Neri, “Poor Anguana,” *Women and Girls*, 83.

³⁷¹ Vanin further specifies their name (in singular) by location: *vivana* or *vivena* in the Val di Fassa, *gana* or *pantegana* in the Val di Badia, and *langana* in the Cadore. Vanin, “Short Essays—The Anguane,” para. 1.

³⁷² Kezich, “Le leggende delle Anguane (Introduction),” 2.

³⁷³ Foches, from the map “Le Anguane nel Trentino,” *Leggende delle Anguane*, 5. The names are listed in their singular form; thus *Anguane*, plural, becomes *Anguana*, singular, for example.

Altipiano di Folgaria Donna Berta	Sardagna Anguana	Val Genova Femmine della Famiglia dell'Om Selvadegh
Altipiano di Luserna Donnetta Beata	Tenno Giana	Val Rendena Fada Fata
Altipiano di Pinè Giubiana Vivana	Terlago Strega	Vallagarina Aguana Donna Berta Donna Straniera Frobèrta Guana Iguana
Comano Sibilla	Val dei Mocheni Aguana Donna Straniera Heilige Frau Salinga	
Fai Angiana Anguana	Val di Fassa Vivana Vivèna	Valli del Leno Donna Selvaggia Donna Straniera Frobèrta
Giudicarie Angana Anguana Fata Pagana Subiana Zabiana	Val di Fiemme Anguana Bregostana Regina delle lódrìe	Valli del Noce Angana
Mezzocorona Angana Anguana	Val di Non Angana Anghiana Angiana Anguana Gana Vivana	Valsugana Aguana Angana Eguana Enguana Vivana
Primiero Anguana Guana		

Figure 4. Names of Anguane in Trentino listed by location.

Taken from the map “Le Anguane nel Trentino” (The Anguane of Trentino), by Andrea Foches in *Leggende delle Anguane*, 5. Author’s figure.

While Neri describes them as “fate delle acque” or fairies of the waters,³⁷⁴ and Giovanna Borzaga refers to them as “creatures of the water,”³⁷⁵ I prefer the

³⁷⁴ Neri, *Donne e bambine*, 77.

³⁷⁵ Borzaga, *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi di Valli e Boschi*, 67.

term “donne dell’acque,” women of the waters, used by Brunamaria Dal Lago Veneri and Adriano Vanin, which acknowledges their embodied status.³⁷⁶ Like other women, they enjoy the pleasures of life, bear and raise children, suffer great loss, and die. Although at times they may seem to mysteriously disappear from the view of men who violate their rules, I maintain that they are not disembodied spirits, since their children often continue to see them and to receive their care.

Anguane are primarily of the mountain waters (streams, lakes, rivers, and springs) but they also can live in rock crevices, in the wild, or in the woods. The Latin word for water, *aqua*, says Borzaga, is related to the words “ega” or “aga,” in Trentino dialect, citing the proximity of actual bodies of water to the location of their stories.³⁷⁷ Giovanni Kezich includes the derivation *anguie* (serpent) as a possible source of their name, noting that Anguane have been assimilated at times with serpents in other traditions.³⁷⁸

In addition to their prevalence in the oral tradition of the folk stories, Anguane have left their memory in place names in Trentino and beyond: there are numerous *busi de le Anguane* (literally, holes of the Anguane in dialect, most likely rock crevices or caves) and *cròzi de le vivane* (rocks of the Vivane),³⁷⁹ one

³⁷⁶ Veneri, “Tessere e Filare e Cucire,” 14. Similarly, Vanin uses the term “woman of the water.” Vanin, “Short Essays—The Anguane,” para. 1.

³⁷⁷ Borzaga, *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi di Valli e Boschi*, 67.

³⁷⁸ Kezich, “Le leggende delle Anguane (Introduction),” 3.

³⁷⁹ Foches, *Leggende delle Anguane*, 3. *Busi* in dialect is *buchi* in Italian, meaning “holes”; *cròzi* in dialect is *rocce* in Italian, meaning “rocks.” Translations from dialect into Italian are from Bertoluzza, *Abbicci: Dizionario dell’Antico Dialetto Trentino*.

of which is in the hamlet of Martinei,³⁸⁰ not far from my paternal grandmother's village of Bedollo, and told of in the folk story "El caradór e le Vivane" (The cart-driver and the Vivane).³⁸¹ Another story, "La bella aguana," (The beautiful Aguane), presented by Borzaga begins: "Everyone in Valsugana knows that the great rocks near Maso Fraineri of Roncegno are not other than the ancient habitation of the 'aguane.'" ³⁸² The crevices and small caves in the rocks of Combra are known as *ghiana*—similar to one of their names, *anghiana*.³⁸³

As noted in Chapter 4, at the locale of Naquane, in Valle Camonica, whose name is very similar to "Anguane," there is a petroglyph showing a row of females in apparent ritual, with water marks indicating the flow of water over a reclined figure.³⁸⁴ Mermaids with twin tails are carved at the top of the column near the entry of the church of San Siro in Cemmo, Valle Camonica. Other twin-tailed figures include a fresco, with tails crossed, on the walls of the church of St. Jakob near Tramin in South Tyrol, built on the foundation of a Roman temple to

³⁸⁰ Italian Towns in Full Details. "Martinei". The story's location is listed as from Martinei (Regnana); both Regnana (population 79) and Martinei (population of 12) are less than two miles from Bedollo.

³⁸¹ Foches, "El caradór e le Vivane" [The cart-driver and the Vivane], *Leggende delle Anguane*, 14–23.

³⁸² Borzaga, "La bella aguana" [The beautiful aguana], *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi di Valli e Boschi*, 64.

³⁸³ Monfosco includes an appendix to the Anguane "Le favolose Anguanes" [The fabulous Anguanes]. Monfosco, *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 129–30.

³⁸⁴ Email to author from Franco Gaudiano, January 20, 2010.

the Goddess Isis.³⁸⁵ The Anguane in all of their manifestations across time seem to remember that the entire area—where stories and place names of Anguane still linger—was once an ancient sea.³⁸⁶ Mt. Concarena and the Dolomites still bear the physical evidence of marine fossils.³⁸⁷

Primordial water deities were painted on rocks nearly 28,000 years ago in Africa, where a contemporary double-tailed Water Spirit known as Mami Wata is still said to swim.³⁸⁸ In their multicultural presence across the ages, female water beings seem to be shimmering reminders of a shared ancestral African origin, and even earlier, of the primordial waters that are the source of life.

A Framework for Analyzing the Agency of Anguane

Based upon the characterizations of the Anguane by the regional experts and my own analysis of the folk stories, I propose that Anguane are embodied nature deities in sacred relationship with the essential cycles of life and close to the source of life. This framework, discussed briefly here and developed in more detail through my analysis of their characteristics and roles, provides insight into the agency of the Anguane—and in later chapters, insights into the everyday spirituality of folk women. The taboos associated with them demonstrate a rule-

³⁸⁵ See Südtirol Marketing Gesellschaft KAG, “Church of San Giacomo.”

³⁸⁶ UNESCO, *2013 Calendario*.

³⁸⁷ Email to author from Franco Gaudiano, March 31, 2013.

³⁸⁸ Drewal, *Mami Wata*, 28. Drewal comments that from the first evidence of image making on the continent and throughout the millennia, diverse African cultures have stressed the value and power of water not only as a source of sustenance but also as a focus of spiritual and artistic expression. (28)

keeping or regulatory aspect, which can be viewed as beneficent and terrifying powers. Their negation as witches seems to come from fear of their agency—their embodied knowledge of nature, which includes the ability to merge with plants and animals, and their ability to utilize nature as an ally for punishment.

Embodied Nature Deity

Anguane, as characterized, embody divine—in the sense of all-giving—and human characteristics, firmly connected to nature. Their characteristics are not static over time, cautions Adriano Vanin, who has catalogued dozens of their attributes, and explored the caves of their dwelling places. And yet, even so, they seem to retain some elemental authentic character that places them in contact with what is essential, he says.³⁸⁹ Giovanna Zangrandi, who collected folk stories in the Dolomites, describes Anguane as “part wild, part divine, part human”—what I am calling an embodied nature deity—and “one of the elements most ancient and alive” in the folk stories; even after alteration, she says, they retained an aspect of “original alpine deity.”³⁹⁰ Gari Monfosco also characterizes them as goddesses, proposing that at one time Anguane were honored as divinity of the woods, and protectors of the fields, animals, and family.³⁹¹ The Anguane’s actions (bringing forth life and fertility, caring for children, protecting nature, giving gifts, bestowing hidden knowledge, and maintaining the rules), roles (Queen, Mother,

³⁸⁹ Vanin, “Short Essays—The Anguane,” para. 6, 9.

³⁹⁰ Zangrandi, *Leggende delle Dolomiti*, 130–31.

³⁹¹ Monfosco, *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 130.

Virgin), and cosmic connections (Sun, Moon, and Stars) in the folk stories that I have analyzed later in this chapter evoke the power of a self-generating and protective deity or ancestress.

These characteristics evoke the numerous images of the female that survive from the Neolithic in Europe, whom archaeologist Marija Gimbutas describes as the source of life, “parthenogenetic, creating life out of herself. . . a primeval, self-fertilizing ‘Virgin Goddess’ who has survived in numerous culture forms to the present day.”³⁹² The main theme of the symbolism of the Goddess is the

cyclic mystery of birth, death, and the renewal of life, involving not only human life, but all life on earth. Symbols and images cluster around the parthenogenetic (self-generating) Goddess who is the single source of all life. Her energy is manifest in springs and wells, in the moon, sun and earth, and in all animals and plants. She is the Giver-of-Life, Wielder-of-Death, Regeneratrix, and the Earth Fertility Goddess, rising and dying with the plants. Male gods also exist, not as creators, but as guardians of wild nature, or as metaphors of life energy and the spirits of seasonal vegetation.³⁹³

Associated with the Cycles of Life and the Sources of Life

Anguane are associated with the cycles of life and the sources of life; their stories spiral around and through the processes of renewal, fertility, and life/death/and rebirth. Anguane are associated with the moon and lunar deities, in the assessment of Brunamaria Dal Lago Veneri. They have miraculous capabilities in laundry, she notes, which I view as a cycle of renewal. In their acquired attributes, or other masks, they exhibit special abilities in spinning,

³⁹² Gimbutas, *Civilization of the Goddess*, 222–23.

³⁹³ Gimbutas, *Civilization of the Goddess*, 399.

which she associates with menstrual initiation. The Anguana is midwife and mourner, who is present at the passage of life and death, and represents a transition from the old to the new year.³⁹⁴

Anguane are often in numbers of three, like the Fates of mythology, according to Kezich, who notes their association with spinning, presiding over life and death with the *la rocca*, *il fuso* and *le forbici* (the rod or staff, the spindle, and the scissors).³⁹⁵ The presence of triple deities, venerated over the past two millennia, was widespread in Germanic Europe, according to the recent research of Dawn E. Work-MaKinne. Describing them as “goddesses of the entire life continuum,” they include the *Deae Matronae* of the Romans; the *Norns*, goddesses of fate from the Viking Age in Scandinavia, the *Disir*, goddesses of guidance and protection, and the *drei heiligen Jungfrauen*, the Three Holy Maidens of medieval Catholicism who offer healing, protection and help.³⁹⁶ Roberto Gremmo claims that the *Matronae*, the Mothers, were “the most important divinities of the Cisalpine Gaul,” citing evidence of a Celtic cult to them in nearby Piedmont.³⁹⁷

Anguane are associated with the source of life, specifically with the water and the sun. Contemporary visual images of Anguane convey their strong

³⁹⁴ Veneri, “Tessere e Filare e Cucire,” 15–16.

³⁹⁵ Kezich, “Le leggende delle Anguane (Introduction),” 2–3.

³⁹⁶ Work-MaKinne, “Deity in Sisterhood,” i, 1–2.

³⁹⁷ Gremmo, *Le Grandi Pietre Magiche* [The great magic rocks], 84.

relationship with the watery realm. The painting *Racconto di Anguane* (Story of Anguane) by Trentino artist Rosanna Cavallini, portrays four white female figures in motion, flowing hair and mermaid-tail gowns, rising up in the blue watery depths from a luminous form, with an umbilical-like ribbon that also rises up and spins around and through them. In another contemporary illustration by an unknown artist, three Anguane circle a central white light in a sea of dark blue.³⁹⁸

Vanin characterizes Anguane by their “cult of the sun.”³⁹⁹ For people in northern latitudes, the longer days resulting from the return of the sun heralded life. One town in Valle di Ledro in Trentino is completely without sun for almost three months during the winter due to the steep valley walls; the villagers celebrate its return with a parade of an enthroned “Sun King,” accompanied by the most beautiful woman of the village, who is designated to be the Queen, and a great feast.⁴⁰⁰ Ancient sundials still appear painted on the outside of some buildings. The sun in Neolithic Europe was “a symbol of regeneration and one of the manifestations of the Goddess of Regeneration,” according to Marija Gimbutas, who notes that the gender for the sun is female in Celtic, Germanic, Baltic, and Slavic languages.⁴⁰¹ The sun goddess is African, according to Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, noting that in ancient African belief, the light and warmth of

³⁹⁸ Foches, *Leggende della Anguane*, 11.

³⁹⁹ Vanin, “Short Essays—The Anguane,” para. 9.

⁴⁰⁰ Autonomous Province of Trento, *Almanacco Trentino 1985* [Trentino Almanac 1985], n.p. The text appears between the January and February calendars.

⁴⁰¹ Gimbutas, *Civilization of the Goddess*, 400.

the sun are birthed out of the darkness. The sun is personified as the mother, a solar goddess who is the precursor to the light-bringing figure of Santa Lucia.⁴⁰²

Beneficent—and Terrifying—Power

Several authors note the ambiguous nature of the Anguane. Their desire to interact with humans, even if there are “mysterious taboos” that usually become violated, is an important characteristic in the summary of Vanin.⁴⁰³ They are ever-ready to help humans, in Neri’s characterization, but with a nature that is at times good and generous, at others having traits of the most evil witches.⁴⁰⁴ They can charm, bewitch and seduce, writes Veneri characterizing the power of the Anguane as “beneficent” and “terrifying,” especially when seen through the eyes of men.⁴⁰⁵ Monfosco describes their actions as “avenging atrocity,” a phrase that implies their severe acts are done “in response to,” rather than being initiated for no reason.⁴⁰⁶ The Anguane of the Novella stream in Val di Non are described as *mezze fate e mezze streghe*—part fairy, part witch.⁴⁰⁷ Fairies are good, a Trentino woman told me when I asked her about folk stories, and witches are bad—and the witches are always women. As I will further discuss later in this section, I propose

⁴⁰² Birnbaum, *Future Has an Ancient Heart*, 198.

⁴⁰³ Vanin, “Short Essays—The Anguane,” para. 9.

⁴⁰⁴ Neri, *Mille Leggende del Trentino*, 326.

⁴⁰⁵ Veneri, “Tessere e Filare e Cucire,” 14.

⁴⁰⁶ Monfosco, *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 130.

⁴⁰⁷ Foches, “L’Oro delle Angane” [The Gold of the Angane], *Leggende delle Anguane*, 8.

that the “mysterious taboos” can be understood as the rules regarding menstruation and the consequences if the rules are not respected. Disrespect of nature, of women’s ritual domain, or of the rules regarding the greater cycles of life (yearly, agricultural) can result in even more severe consequences.

The Agency of Anguane in their Actions and Characteristics

In this section I analyze and present examples of folk stories in which Anguane show agency as embodied nature deities in sacred relationship with the essential cycles of life and close to the sources of life. I also address—and bring insight to—their associated taboos as indicators of their female power.

In the folk stories presented here, Anguane embody sensual pleasure and wildness; they are of this world (eat cheese, give birth, raise children), they enact cycles of renewal (washing clothes) and acts of transformation (making cheese). They bring forth fertility and abundance. They have an affinity with plants and animals. They protect the gifts of nature (waters, fields, and springs), guard its treasures, and offer to teach its secrets to people with kind hearts. They care for all children. They offer gifts to those who protect them. They maintain rules that I propose protect the creative principle of life and the cycles of life.

While at times only a summary of the story is presented in the interest of brevity, it is important to emphasize that the folk stories are quite specific to place. The village and sometimes even the specific location within the village (such as a farmhouse or a natural feature) is named, which gives the story a sense of authenticity and relevance, especially for those familiar with the location. This cultural specificity has the ability to reach deep within, as well as across time with

its genetic resonance. As in traditional cultures, stories tied to the land can give the people a sense of belonging.

As a format, the Anguane characteristics in the following paragraphs are summarized in the title and first sentence, followed by examples from the folk stories that validate those characteristics.⁴⁰⁸ I have referenced the name of the story in the footnote for readability, along with more details as appropriate.

Embody Sensual Pleasure

Anguane like to eat and drink, sing and dance—that is, they enjoy the sensual pleasures of the body. A young Vivana goes home with a man and eats cheese.⁴⁰⁹ Salinghe like singing, dancing, and kind hearted herders.⁴¹⁰ A group of Anguane, who live in the mountains among gold and silver, sing a song about drinking the water of love.⁴¹¹ The Fade of Veneto dance inside the caves to the sound of fifes and drums.⁴¹² Guane live in a cave and have “orgies” on Friday night.⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁸ For this general format, I am grateful to the list of characteristics presented by Vanin. Ultimately I had to do my own analysis, utilizing the sources I had available, for the categories of interest to this study. Vanin, “Short Essays—The Anguane,” para. 9.

⁴⁰⁹ Neri, “The Vivana’s plaits,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 93–94.

⁴¹⁰ Neri, “The stones of the Salinghe,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 37, footnote 1.

⁴¹¹ Neri, “The defeat of the Anguane,” *Secret Heart* (Spring), 15–16.

⁴¹² Coltro, *Gnomi*, 25.

⁴¹³ Neri, “The queen of the Guane,” *Secret Heart* (Spring), 33–34.

Have Children, Care for Children

Anguane are nurturing mothers and foster mothers; they watch over and raise children, sometimes secretly, even if not their own or at their own risk. An ongana from Lago Scin comes to watch over and secretly raise the five children of a widowed man.⁴¹⁴ An aguana near Primiero, marries a young man and has five children; he breaks a taboo and she must leave, but she comes back to watch them.⁴¹⁵ An Aguana in the town of Malosco dies from mistreatment in her marriage, but returns during the days as a beautiful ghost to care for her children and home, until they are raised.⁴¹⁶

Enact Cycles of Renewal

Anguane are associated with laundry, which I view as a cycle of renewal. A Salinga emerges at midnight to do laundry with the help of a magic circle,

⁴¹⁴ Zangrandi, “L’ongana del Larin” [The ongana of Larin], *Leggende delle Dolomiti*, 60.

⁴¹⁵ Borzaga, “Leggenda dell’arnica” [Legend of the arnica], *Leggende del Trentino: Magici personaggi di Valli e Boschi*, 80–83. She is the mother, whom after the taboo of not touching her hair was broken, had to leave her five children, including her daughter who wishes upon a star to see her. She comes back during the day to care for them until her husband hides so he can see her again, and she must leave for good. She becomes the wild healing plant of Arnica. Her daughter, advised by an old woman, comes to a field on the nights of S. Lorenzo and wishes upon a falling star to see her mother, who comes to her in the fields of flowers. The guane are beautiful and kind, although one of her feet is half-reversed.

⁴¹⁶ Borzaga, “l’aguana dei comorandi” [The aguana of the comorandi], *I Teschi d’Avorio*, 65–67.

magic words, and a fountain.⁴¹⁷ There are numerous stories about Anguane laying the laundry out in the field to dry.⁴¹⁸

Eat Transformed Food; Teach the Process of Transformation

Anguane eat cheese, a traditional food in the Alps, and are associated with the transformational processes involved in making it. A young Anguana goes home with a woodsman and eats cheese.⁴¹⁹ The *Fade* of Veneto teach the mountain dwellers how to make butter, cheese, and ricotta.⁴²⁰ An old woman “witch” teaches a poor old woman how to make butter and cheese out of kindness.⁴²¹ A wild man who is the husband of Donna Berta, a wild woman, teaches people to make cheese.⁴²²

Bring Forth Fertility and Abundance

The Anguane know how to bring forth abundance in nature, which they offer as a gift. A Vivana of the woods knows how to make barley grain multiply and offers to help.⁴²³ Fields are fertile and goat’s milk is abundant under an

⁴¹⁷ Neri, “The Clothes of the Salingas,” *Women and Girls*, 21–23.

⁴¹⁸ For example, Monfosco, “Pie di capra,” *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 29. Neri, “The Clothes of the Salingas,” *Women and Girls*, 21–23.

⁴¹⁹ Neri, “La treccia della Vivana” [The braid of the Vivana], *Donne e bambine* [Women and girls], 90–91.

⁴²⁰ Coltro, *Gnomi*, 25

⁴²¹ Neri, “The dairy witch,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 70–71.

⁴²² Neri, “Donna Berta and her husband,” *Secret Heart* (Winter), 110–11.

⁴²³ Neri, “The Vivana of the barley grains,” *Secret Heart* (Autumn), 71–72.

Anguana's care.⁴²⁴ Donna Berta helps women and provides endless source of thread.⁴²⁵

Bring and Become Flowers

Anguane bring, gather, sell, or become flowers. Several stories involve forget-me-nots, or beautiful blue flowers. Three young Anguane gather and bring flowers to sell and leave behind fields of forget-me-nots.⁴²⁶ An Anguana near Primiero becomes the wild healing plant of Arnica after she dies and comes to her daughter in the fields of flowers.⁴²⁷ As will be discussed in Chapter 10, one plant bears a nickname relating it to Anguane.⁴²⁸

Become Animals

Anguane become animals (otters, marmots, birds), and turn other people into animals (foxes, badgers, birds). The Anguane of Cismon, who bring beautiful blue flowers to sell, also turn into otters.⁴²⁹ A woman named Jendsana is raised by otters after she was thrown in the river as a baby, although she clarifies that she is not one of the "Anguanes" who are "mysterious forest-women." However,

⁴²⁴ Monfosco, "Piè di Capra" [Goat's feet], *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 30.

⁴²⁵ Neri, "The generous Donna Berta," *Secret Heart* (Winter), 110.

⁴²⁶ Neri, "The Anguana of the mysterious flowers," *Secret Heart* (Spring), 115–16.

⁴²⁷ Borzaga, "Leggenda dell'arnica," *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi di Valli e Boschi*, 80–83.

⁴²⁸ *Chelidonium majus* was known as *erba de le angoane* in valle del Chiampo "perhaps for its strange hypnotic properties." Zampiva, "Piante Sacre e Piante Maledette," 188.

⁴²⁹ Foches, "Le Anguane del Cismòn" [The Anguane of Cismon], *Leggende delle Anguane*, 36–42.

like the Anguane, she brings forget-me-nots, and befriends a man Zompo (meaning cripple) who has an injured foot.⁴³⁰ In Andraz, an otter woman marries a man and has many children who live on with the *sopranome* (a kind of nickname, identifying which family or clan one belongs to) of *Salvatica*, meaning wild.⁴³¹

In the story “Piè di Capra,” (Goat’s feet), many Anguane secretly attended a wedding between an Anguana and a young man under the aspect of otters and of marmots.⁴³² An Anguana greets the sun each morning surrounded by marmots.⁴³³ In nature, otters are of the water and marmots dwell in the rock. Perhaps they represent sister groups of people, each with their own totem animal.

A young woman artist known as the Filadressa is turned into a vulture; she eventually returns to being a woman, marries, and becomes the ancestress of many over the centuries.⁴³⁴ The Anguane of Fravort turn all their prisoners into

⁴³⁰ Wolff, “The Hut of the Forget-Me-Nots,” *The Dolomites and Their Legends*, 90–92.

⁴³¹ Zangrandi, “La Salvatica di Andraz” [The wild woman of Andraz], *Leggende delle Dolomiti*, 89–95.

⁴³² Monfosco, “Piè di Capra” [Goat’s feet], *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 30.

⁴³³ Vanin, “Short Essays—The Anguane,” para. 4. Vanin, “A Summary of the Legend,” “2.1 The Myth of the origins.”

⁴³⁴ Wolff, “The Artist of Faloria,” *The Pale Mountains*, 83–102. Filadressa meets “Anguans” in the story, so she is not technically one herself, but, as a wild mountain person, she seems to share characteristics with them: her wildness, her knowledge of special skills which she is willing to share, her animal features, and her care for children, even though she steals them.

foxes and badgers after one of the Anguane was stolen as a bride and remained with her captor.⁴³⁵

Protect Nature and Guard its Treasures

Anguane protect what is sacred to them (waters, fields, springs, and mountains). They guard the treasures of nature, especially from those who appear to seek personal gain or who share the knowledge with others. The fatal ending of the violators seems to indicate the importance of what is being protected. An Angana threatens the shepherds who try to use her verdant fields for grazing.⁴³⁶ Three Vivane sitting at the top of a rock know of treasures within the mountain, which vanish along with the people who try to reach them out of greed.⁴³⁷ A young woman who is a *fata* with golden hair and blue eyes guards the golden treasure in the cave called Pagan Rock, killing the man who betrays her secret.⁴³⁸ The Anguane of Lago di Lagole, who used to bathe in a miraculous spring with prodigious virtues, destroy the women of Sabasa who had taken over the pool and the temple to Hecate that *il Capo*, the male leader, had erected there.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁵ Neri, “The defeat of the Anguane,” *Secret Heart* (Spring), 15–16.

⁴³⁶ Neri, “The Angana’s sack,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 9–10.

⁴³⁷ Neri, “The hill of the Vivane,” *Secret Heart* (Spring), 14–15.

⁴³⁸ Borzaga, “La Fata di Rocca Pagana” [The Fairy of Pagan Rock], *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi di Valli e Boschi*, 161–67.

⁴³⁹ Monfosco, “Le Anguane del Lago di Lagole,” *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 65–72.

Know the Future

Some Anguane have oracular abilities. The Sibilla, or Sibyl, is listed as one of the names of the Anguane by Foches.⁴⁴⁰ In a story entitled “The Cavern of the Sibyl,” a *maga* (magician or sorceress) named Sibyl has oracular and healing abilities.⁴⁴¹ The Sibyl lives in a deep cave with healing thermal waters known as Comano Terme. People come to her for matters of love and for knowing the future. She helps a wounded knight who had protected her from being killed by another knight who intended to violate her domain by having him drink and bathe in waters. In the story, the Sibyl promises to restore life to the person who would remember her. Many years later, long after she has disappeared, the knight whom she healed as a young man comes back to find the healing waters for his sick grandson. He forsakes his wealth, chooses to live in the cave, and becomes the dispenser of the water.⁴⁴² In Borzaga’s version of the story, she refers to the Sibyl as a mysterious prophetesses, whose origins and age were unknown, but who may have been “as old as the Earth.”⁴⁴³

Sibyls, holy women considered to have oracular power, are portrayed in the iconography of Catholic churches and sanctuaries in the towns of Tirano, Trent, and Edolo. In the Sanctuary of the Madonna of Tirano in Valtellina,

⁴⁴⁰ Foches, *Leggende delle Anguane*, 5.

⁴⁴¹ Neri, “The Cavern of the Sibyl,” *Women and Girls*, 15–20.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴⁴³ Borzaga, “L’antro della Sibilla” [The cavern of the Sibyl], *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi di Valli e Boschi*, 170.

paintings of Sibyls surround the chapel where the miraculous Madonna is venerated. The marble organ loft sculpted in 1534 in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Trent (site of the non-plenary meetings of the Council of Trent) depicts a scene of the Virgin Mary being adored by the Magi and a large standing female described as “*la Sibilla*,” (the sibyl), on the right.⁴⁴⁴ In Edolo, a painting of the Sibyl from the 1530s appears in the church of St. John the Baptist, which is said to be “the most significant monument.”⁴⁴⁵

Have Knowledge of Medicines

We can glean from the folk stories that Anguane were close to herbs (making meadows grow, laying out laundry on the fields, and bringing, or even turning into flowers). The nickname of a powerful herb known as the “plant of the Anguana” indicates that they understood the healing properties of plants. They also knew how to make ointment and salves to “fly,” an apparent knowledge of the ecstatic properties of some plants. For example, an Anguana from Cloz in Val di Non, who is also labeled a witch, uses magic salve on her body at midnight to fly to a gathering of witches.⁴⁴⁶ Another Anguana uses salve on her hair at night.⁴⁴⁷ The medicinal use of plants and salve is discussed further in Chapter 10.

⁴⁴⁴ *Atlante Storico del Trentino*, 47.

⁴⁴⁵ Provincia di Brescia Assessorato al Turismo, *The Camonica Valley*, “Faith Procured Visions of Madonnas and Witches,” 25.

⁴⁴⁶ Neri, “The world of the Anguane,” *Secret Heart* (Spring), 19–20.

⁴⁴⁷ Busk, *The Valleys of Tirol*, 415.

Offer Gifts if They Are Protected

Anguane reward those who protect them. An Anguana offers to bring riches, marriage, and happiness to a cheese-maker if he protects her against the wild hunter who threatens her.⁴⁴⁸ Two *fate*, fairies, are protected from the sun by a boy in an act of unsolicited kindness and they repay him with a gift of a whistle, which protects him against misfortune.⁴⁴⁹ A young man helps an old woman, whom Busk names as an Angana, carry water; she rewards him with a precious ring, which helps him achieve his desires, and with a dog and a cat to help him.⁴⁵⁰ Froberta protects good families who respect her.⁴⁵¹

Of the Moon, Sun, and Stars

Anguane are in close relationship to the cosmos, specifically to the Moon, Sun and Stars. Veneri associates Anguane with the moon and lunar deity.⁴⁵² The Anguane come out and dance frenetically on the full moon.⁴⁵³ Women who are

⁴⁴⁸ Neri, "The Poor Anguana," *Women and Girls*, 82–83.

⁴⁴⁹ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, "The Whistle," *Songs and Tales*, 51.

⁴⁵⁰ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, "The Ring" (or, "A Dog, a Cat and a Magic Spell"), *Song and Tales*, 66–70. Once he has found happiness, he brings his mother to live with him. Also, Busk, *The Valleys of Tirol*, 425.

⁴⁵¹ Neri, "The generous Donna Berta," *Secret Heart* (Winter), 110.

⁴⁵² Veneri, "Tessere e Filare e Cucire," 14.

⁴⁵³ Monfosco, "Le Anguane del Lago di Lagole," *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 65–72.

Daughters of the Sun share characteristics with Anguane.⁴⁵⁴ Although not named as Anguane, folk stories feature additional women who are also in close relationship with the Moon, Sun, and Stars.⁴⁵⁵

Maintain Rules That Protect the Creative Principle of Life

Anguane are associated with mysterious taboos, broken by men whom they marry or accompany. Once the taboo is violated, through the man's ignorance, curiosity, thoughtlessness, or anger, the woman departs. Although sometimes presented as a minor action on the part of the male, or as a spell that has been placed on the female, I propose that the taboos that surface in the folk stories and become enigmatic to the male characters are repositories of ancient menstrual power. The menstrual-related elements of the taboos, which involve touch, seeing light, and speaking, become more evident when viewed with the knowledge of metaformic theory. Grahn's research of menstrual seclusion rites over the last few centuries reveals that there were strict taboos for the menstruant against touch, seeing light, and speaking.⁴⁵⁶ In their primordial roots, these rites

⁴⁵⁴ For example, Elba and Soreghina in Wolff, "Children of the Sun," *The Pale Mountains*, 165–179. A female who is a "Daughter of the Sun" can be read as "in close alignment with," even suggesting, at some level, that she is the result of female/cosmic union. Vanin notes their similarities with Anguane. Vanin, "The Fanes Saga: Analysis of the Legend—Related Legends," "Elba."

⁴⁵⁵ For example the Moon Princess or Daughter of the Moon of "The Pale Mountains" is a well known figure. (Wolff, "The Pale Mountains," *The Dolomites and Their Legends*; and Wolff, "The Pale Mountains," *The Pale Mountains*.) Some priestesses or holders of a sacred office may have become princesses, or royal maidens in the stories, even though some stories are likely about actual figures of nobility. Busk notes the tie of the people to the cosmos in their use of rhyming riddles (Busk, *The Valleys of Tirol*, 440).

⁴⁵⁶ Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses*, 11, 18.

helped reenact human comprehension of separation and thus creation. The disciplined ritual separation of the menstruants maintained human consciousness.⁴⁵⁷

Taboo of Touch

In several folk stories, it is forbidden for the man to touch the braid of the Anguana while she is sleeping. Often the long hair is touching the ground and he has lifted it, upon which she immediately awakens and leaves him. A young woodsman in Val di Non invites a Vivana home; she falls asleep but when he reaches over to lift her braid from the ground, she gets up silently and leaves.⁴⁵⁸ A young man with an oxcart marries a Vivana and they have children; one night, after he touches her braid to lift it from the floor, she disappears.⁴⁵⁹ A typical taboo of menstrual seclusion rites is that menstruants were not allowed to touch water or the earth.⁴⁶⁰ Further a menstruant was often not allowed to touch others, or to touch herself, particularly her skin or head.⁴⁶¹ The first proto-human females, Grahn proposes, set themselves apart and did not touch themselves or the

⁴⁵⁷ Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses*, 38.

⁴⁵⁸ Neri, "The Vivana's plaits," *Secret Heart* (Summer), 93–94.

⁴⁵⁹ Foches, "El caradór e le Vivane" [The cart-driver and the Vivane], *Leggende delle Anguane*, 14–23. In this story from Pinetana, the driver of a cart pulled by oxen uses magic words given to him by his mother to choose one of three Anguane, whom he marries; she later disappears when her hair is touched at night, but returns to care for their daughters unseen by him.

⁴⁶⁰ Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses*, 11.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 37–38.

earth to keep separate and thus sacred the surface of the earth, symbolically and ritually. This ritual reenactment of the creation of the earth kept it solidly in human consciousness.⁴⁶²

Hair has strong associations with menstrual flow, according to Grahn's research. The maiden's hair, upon emergence from seclusion, is meticulously tended in culturally-significant ways, including braiding it, as part of menarche rites. Control of the maiden's hair symbolizes control of menstrual flow and of chaotic forces; its wetness can impact the weather in its ability to attract moisture.⁴⁶³ Kezich notes that both hair and yarn are braided.⁴⁶⁴ The three-part braid (*treccia* in Italian) of an Anguana is a further association with menstruation. Three is considered to be a sacred number as it marks the number of days of menstrual seclusion, as well as the conventional period for the dark of the moon during its "menstruation."⁴⁶⁵

In the folk stories, the hair is touching the ground at night, which seems to align its power to the darkness of night and of seclusion. Barbara Walker associates hair, water, and menstruation in her citation of a "durable myth" that a witch's hair placed in water, especially if she were menstruating, would become a

⁴⁶² Ibid., 38.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 72, 81.

⁴⁶⁴ Kezich, "Le leggende delle Anguane (Introduction)," 3. Yarn and thread are further related to the flow of life/blood in Chapter 8.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 155, 158.

serpent.⁴⁶⁶ Combing hair was thought to cause thunderstorms in Tyrol, she notes.⁴⁶⁷ One contemporary Trentino woman, Pina Trentini, was taught that hair should not be washed during menstruation, as it would not be good for the hair. Menstruation, she said, was at one time known as *le regole*, the rules; a menstruating woman was said to have her *regole*. This term were used when she was a child, she clarified. “Now it’s called menstruation.”⁴⁶⁸

In the folk story “The Clothes of the Salingas,” it is understood by the villagers that they should not touch the dazzling clothes laid out to dry or they will burn up.⁴⁶⁹ The cloth, in its ritual care with harmful consequences, seems to carry the potency—and restrictions—of the menstrual-like thread from which it is woven.

Taboo of Light

In the story of “The Matrimony with the Angana,” it is forbidden for her husband to view her at night by candlelight.⁴⁷⁰ Also in the story of Merisana, she

⁴⁶⁶ Walker, *The Woman’s Encyclopedia*, 370.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 368.

⁴⁶⁸ Email to author from Pina Trentini, November 28, 2010.

⁴⁶⁹ Neri, “The Clothes of the Salingas,” *Women and Girls*, 21. This story takes place in Fierozzo, Valle dei Mocheni. The Salinga emerges from the mountain at midnight to wash her clothes within a magic circle.

⁴⁷⁰ Foches, “Il matrimonio coll’ Angana,” *Leggende delle Anguane*, 25–35; also Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, “The Marriage with the Witch,” *Songs and Tales*, 47–48, in which the Anguana is referred to as a witch.

could not have light fall on her at night.⁴⁷¹ In both stories, the husband violates the taboo; in the first story the woman departs and in the second story, Merisana dies. This “intrusion” of light into the darkness of night seems to violate a separation, a sacred order of day and night.

Not seeing light, particularly at menarche (first menstruation) was a menstrual taboo. Almost universally, the maiden at menarche was secluded and strictly prohibited from seeing light until her emergence into the light, which Grahn proposes, at its primordial source, was a re-enactment of the separation of light and darkness in human consciousness.⁴⁷² Women’s ritual separation from light was therefore honoring its source and maintaining its creation. Through sacred ritual, women were participating in and acting as agents of its cyclic return.

Taboo of Speech

There are several examples of the male partners speaking the name of their female Anguane wives—intentionally, unintentionally, or in anger—even though they are specifically requested never to say it. Often this is a nickname indicating their wildness, including “goat’s feet,” “Lontra” (otter) and “Crivapeta” (inverted foot or blood heel).⁴⁷³ Two similar stories come from Friuli. In one, a man marries one of the wild women who lives in a grotto with water and travels the

⁴⁷¹ Wolff, “Children of the Sun,” *The Pale Mountains*, 179.

⁴⁷² Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses*, 11–18.

⁴⁷³ Coltro associates the derivation of *Krivopete* to “blood talons,” *criva* (sangue)—blood; *peta* (tallone)—heel, although others scholars relate it to a curved foot. (Coltro, *Gnomi*, 61.)

woods predicting the future; when he calls her Crivapéta she leaves.⁴⁷⁴ In another, a man calls his wife Krivòpetà and she leaves, never to return.⁴⁷⁵ In both cases, the women had begun to harvest before their husbands thought the grain was ready. Once the name is spoken, and the women leave, the men must never see them again. Monfosco relates a similar story in which an Anguana agrees to marry a young man of Deppe, at his request, if he agrees to never call her “piè-di-capra,” which he does one day in anger.⁴⁷⁶ Coltro refers to “the taboo of the name” when describing the prohibition regarding marriage to an Anguana.⁴⁷⁷ The departure of the Anguane, which is sometimes portrayed as her being under a spell, clearly communicates the consequences of the man breaking his word by uttering a name of disrespect or taboo. Could he be trusted to keep other agreements? When the action is intentional, it seems to convey the need for respecting and honoring verbal agreements, which must have been paramount in an oral culture.

In some stories, the Anguana is described as silent, especially when she leaves after a taboo is broken.⁴⁷⁸ Was she returning to her matriarchal clan where

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., *Gnomi*, 61.

⁴⁷⁶ Monfosco, “Piè di Capra” [Goat’s feet], *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 29–31.

⁴⁷⁷ Coltro, *Gnomi*, 58.

⁴⁷⁸ Neri, “The brief of the Vivana,” *Women and Girls*, 96. Note: “brief” should have been translated as “braid.” In the Italian version of this story it is “La treccia della Vivana.” See Neri, *Donne e bambine*, 90.

the power of the word was honored? Silence was also a common menarche requirement; in some cases the menstruant's name could not be spoken during their seclusion, suggesting to Grahn that these rites were enacted as though they came from a time before speech, when only ritual existed.⁴⁷⁹

Not having a name or having a pejorative nickname could have also been a way of identifying the Anguane as separate and "other." In a story from Calalzo, Anguane were baptized with the name of *Donne selvareghe* (women of the wild) implying they did not take a Christian name.⁴⁸⁰ In another story, Redòsola, who is a "reformed witch," asks each spring to be baptized, but is denied and given another year of penance by the priest.⁴⁸¹

In "La Salvatica di Andraz," a man accidentally learns and speaks the otter woman's name, upon which she disappears. Not naming in this case seems to be safeguarding her wildness.⁴⁸² A custom in some parts of Germany lends support to this idea: in December, according to Motz, the name of the wolf is not to be spoken.⁴⁸³

I propose that these examples of the actions of the Anguane regarding their taboos of touch, light, and speech are holding the memory of rules of

⁴⁷⁹ Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses*, 18.

⁴⁸⁰ Coltro, *Gnomi*, 57.

⁴⁸¹ Zangrandi, "La Redòsola," *Leggende delle Dolomiti*, 44–51.

⁴⁸² Zangrandi, "La Salvatica di Andraz" [The wild woman of Andraz], *Leggende delle Dolomiti*, 89.

⁴⁸³ Motz, "Winter Goddess," 160.

menstrual power and demonstrate the consequences for violation of those rules. Menstrual rules as we shall see in Chapter 6 were still remembered by some women of Trentino in the twentieth century. This persistence speaks to their importance, not as shameful, as they are sometimes viewed today, but as sacred rites that reflect women's spiritual agency. At their source, the rules are maintaining the creative principle of life.

Impact Flow, Moisture, and Fertility

Anguane, especially in their negated role of witches, can impact the flow of life: that is the fertile flow of menstrual blood, milk, or moisture from the sky. Using metaformic theory, the acts of punishment attributed to Anguane—taking away fertility, causing storms, or drying up cows' milk—can be viewed as an indication of their menstrual powers. Grahn research shows that in traditional cultures, menstrual blood was considered to be the primary life force, the generative principle whose flow could impact the surrounding fertility and flow of waters. It was considered so powerful that a single drop on a path could take away the fertility of someone who encountered it. A menstruant's gaze, filled with the numinous power of her menstrual blood, could impact bodies of water, cause a stream to go dry, or make a cow's milk dry up. Since menstrual rites had created these elements, they could also take them away.

Hers was the power of raveling and of unraveling, since what consciousness (spirit, mystery, and mind) gives us, it can also take back. And the power of creation and destruction, as at one time evidently all humanity believed, was in the woman's blood.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸⁴ Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses*, 6, 18.

In the folk stories that follow, the Anguane are attributed with the power of taking away fertility, impacting the weather, or drying up milk. The Anguane punished men near Valle del Bòite who hunted and killed an Anguana child by cursing the babies born to their women to die for several years.⁴⁸⁵ The Anguane called up a storm in retribution to a young woman who was tricked by her mother-in-law to do laundry using the well of the Anguane (where, we are told, that a group of pagans lived, near the Christian community in Serdès).⁴⁸⁶ In another story, the old Longhana summoned the storms of the Lago Cadin.⁴⁸⁷

It is often the women bearing the label of witches who demonstrate what I am calling “negated” menstrual powers; that is, menstrual powers that are presented only as destructive, intentional, and harming. There are numerous stories of witches in this capacity. The witches of Pilcante, for example, bring hail as revenge during midsummer festival.⁴⁸⁸ An old witch who comes begging punishes the selfish girl who refuses her by drying up the milk of her cow.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁵ Monfosco, “I Mazzamorelli” [The Mazzamorelli], *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 41–43. Mazzamorelli are the spirits of babies who died before birth.

⁴⁸⁶ Monfosco, “Il Pozzo delle Anguanes di Senes” [The well of the Anguae of Senes] *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 91

⁴⁸⁷ Monfosco, *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 81

⁴⁸⁸ Neri, “The Witches’ envy,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 104–105. The witches are not referred to as Anguane.

⁴⁸⁹ Neri, “La Strega che chiedeva l’elemosina” [The Witch that was asking for alms], *Mille Leggende del Trentino*, #775, 107.

The Agency of the Anguane in their Roles

Now that we have seen some of the characteristics of Anguane, it is useful to step back and name their roles in the stories. They are holders of positions of honor, leadership, and the creative life principle. Their roles indicate their status, their autonomy from men, their ties with family, and their bond with nature. The Anguane hold what could be termed “Sacred Offices” of: Ancestress, Queen, Grandmother, Mother, Daughter, or Virgin. They merge with Plant and Animal; they are of the Moon, Sun and Stars. When viewed through these roles, Anguane are embodied (mother, daughter, granddaughter), of nature (plants, animals), and like deity (progenitor, leader, cosmic origin); they are the source of life (ancestress, solar, lunar); and hold the cycles of life within them (alignment of cosmos and earth).

Ancestress

In the folk story “The Beautiful Aguana” of Roncegno, Valsugana, she is a foremother and ancestress of many. A handsome, hard-working young man with two wise oxen meets some Anguane one Friday as they are spreading their laundry out on the herbs. With the help of his oxen’s judgment and the spoken word, he chooses and marries the most beautiful Anguane. They have many beautiful children and grandchildren that today populate the world.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁹⁰ Borzaga, “La bella aguana” [the beautiful anguana], *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi di Valli e Boschi*, 64–67.

Queenship, Female Leadership, and Matriarchal Culture

Female leadership of the Anguane takes the office of Queen. Foches lists *Regina* (Queen) as one of their titles in Trentino.⁴⁹¹ In “The Queen of the Guane,” a beautiful queen leads the Guane in procession in the fields and woods; they live in a cave, still known as *Bus de le Guane* in San Martino.⁴⁹² Samblana is the “most beautiful” Queen of the Anguane who loves the hard-working people of the Dolomites.⁴⁹³ In Wolff’s stories, the Queen of Winter is Semblana or Samblana,⁴⁹⁴ the Queen of the Croderes is Tanna,⁴⁹⁵ and the ruler of the mountain is Donna Kenina, “the most beautiful lady in all the mountains.”⁴⁹⁶ Merisàna is the Queen of the forest and of the water virgins.⁴⁹⁷ The “Virginal” Snow Queen is the female protagonist in the book *Dietrich of Berne*, “a favorite hero of the early Middle Ages throughout Europe,” whose laws forbid her to marry a human.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹¹ Foches, *Leggende delle Anguane*, 5.

⁴⁹² Neri, “The queen of the Guane,” *Secret Heart* (Spring), 33–34.

⁴⁹³ Monfosco, “Le Sette Cime di Diamante,” *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 24. See also Monfosco, “I Mazzamorelli,” *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 42.

⁴⁹⁴ Wolff, “Children of the Sun, Soreghina (2),” *The Pale Mountains*, 178. Also, Queen is mentioned in Monfosco, *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 65.

⁴⁹⁵ Wolff, “The Queen of the Croderes,” *The Pale Mountains*, 123.

⁴⁹⁶ Wolff, “Children of the Sun, Tschan-Bolpin (3),” *The Pale Mountains*, 185.

⁴⁹⁷ Wolff, “Merisana’s Wedding,” *The Dolomites and Their Legends*, 103.

⁴⁹⁸ Sawyer and Molles, *Dietrich of Berne*, 7.

Princess Aulasa in Mastellina in Val di Sole, although not named as an Anguana, is “beloved by the good spirits of the hills, of the forests, and of the waters.” She goes into the heart of the mountain where she can reign as Queen forever rather than having her secrets taken from her by two princes of nearby castles who are jealous of her happiness and intend to kill her.⁴⁹⁹

And finally, the witches too are led by a Queen. The young man who is caught intruding out of curiosity on the domain of witches in the Vajolett Valley, where they dance on moonlit nights, is asked by the Striona, the head of the witches, “Who is your Queen?”⁵⁰⁰

In Vanin’s analysis of the Fanes’ saga, he proposes that the Anguane had a matriarchal-structured society, with the marmot as their totemic animal. The Queen and her daughters were the religious intermediaries with the animal; power was handed down matrilineally.⁵⁰¹ Extending Vanin’s idea to include otter as a totem animal could account for the report of Anguane as protective mothers, since otters are fierce protectors of their young in the wild.

In the stories of Aguane, there are communities of women with daughters, often unmarried. The Wild Women occasionally marry Wild Men of various

⁴⁹⁹ Neri, “Princess Aulasa,” *Women and Girls*, 65.

⁵⁰⁰ Wolff, “The Spring of Forgetting,” *The Pale Mountains*, 143.

⁵⁰¹ Vanin, “The Cultural Background—Cults and Myths,” para. 22, 24.

names throughout Trentino and the Alps.⁵⁰² When Anguane marry and live with non-wild men, it often does not work out. Anthropologist Michela Zucca refers to the Alpine culture as a “de facto matriarchy,” since the men were often absent or far away.⁵⁰³ Linguists Alfred Toth and Linus Brunner, who have studied the etymology of the names in the Ladin folk stories, conclude that the Reti were organized in a matriarchal manner.⁵⁰⁴

In the story of Merisana’s wedding, she is named as being a Salvadega. Merisana’s mother is also a Selvadega; her midwife was *La Luce di Meriggio*, the Light of Midday.⁵⁰⁵ Zangrandi likens them to bees, noting that the presence of the male is not important.⁵⁰⁶

Virgin

In Wolff’s account of Merisana, she is the Queen of the Water Virgins who lives in the water and wanders over the forest meadows at noon. She eventually marries the “King of Rays” at noon, at which time everything is filled with joy and peace.⁵⁰⁷ The characterization of Merisana as a Water Virgin seems

⁵⁰² Vanin notes the Salvani and salvans in the Fanes’ saga who sometimes were married to Wild Women, known as vivane or Bregostane (Vanin, “Short Essays— The Salvans,” para. 7.)

⁵⁰³ Zucca, “The Orgy, the Feast, the Witches’ Sabbath,” 63.

⁵⁰⁴ Toth and Brunner, “Raetic,” 34.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Zangrandi, “Il Velo di Merisana,” *Leggende delle Dolomiti*, 7.

⁵⁰⁷ Wolff, “Merisana’s Wedding,” *The Dolomites and Their Legends*, 102–7.

to indicate her ability to bring forth the fertility of nature in her body directly or, in this case, via sacred union with the sun, personified by a male.

Other evidence, in addition to this story, hints of women's perception of being able to receive impregnating energy from relationship with Nature, a practice whose knowledge has persisted in the folk memory. As noted in Chapter 4, several "rocks of fertility" are found throughout the Alps, including in Valle Camonica . At Foppe di Nadro on the autumnal equinox the sun sets directly in a vulva-like opening on the crest of Mt. Concarena, in view of a fertility rock with an engraving of a ritual orans figure next to an engraved circle. There is a rock of fertility at the Sanctuary to the Black Madonna of Oropa located in the mountains of Piedmont.⁵⁰⁸

High in the wooded mountains above my grandmother's hamlet of Carciato where the river known as *El Meledrio* begins, there was once a sanctuary where women went to pray for fertility. Documentation from 1819 indicates that, at one time, this was a place of a *sacra fonte*, a sacred spring.

It is said that young spouses rushed to this sanctuary with devotion for obtaining fecundity, the virgins prayed for a husband, the poor mothers for procuring some dowry for their daughters, and such discourse according to the needs of the female sex.⁵⁰⁹

The manuscript further describes the spring or fountain of fertility as indoors, surrounded by a wall, and illuminated from above by a round opening in the roof.

⁵⁰⁸ Moser, *Honoring Darkness*, 75.

⁵⁰⁹ Fantelli, *Dimaro: La Carta di Regola*, 209. (My translation.) Citing earlier historical record by Guglielmo W. di Berlino.

It was reached by a portico where no men could set foot, except for the religious men of the chapel there.⁵¹⁰

Scholars attribute veneration of St. Anne with the continuity of the fertility traditions in the Alps.⁵¹¹ In Trentino, the church of St. Anne at Montagnaga is an apparition site of the Virgin Mary and a place of pilgrimage. The sanctuary in Pellizzano is dedicated to the birth of Mary, whose mother is St. Anne. The conception of Mary, celebrated on December 8, and the conception of Jesus, celebrated on March 25 as the Annunciation are major dates of celebration in the Roman Catholic church.

In Vanin's analysis, he proposes that the Anguane were "priestesses" of an animistic cult of the waters, sun, and mountains.⁵¹² Were Anguane the keepers of the mysteries of the creative principle of life, guardians of life-giving practices understood and protected by traditional cultures across the ages? Traditional cultures around the world have stories about a natural element containing an accessible life energy that can become a fertilizing force, for example, Sun, Tree, or Pond. In the northwest United States, the gum of Western White Pine was thought to give women fertility.⁵¹³ Apela Colorado describes a sacred pond in

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ See Chapter 4.

⁵¹² Vanin, "Short Essays—The Salvans," para. 8.

⁵¹³ Among the Kwakwaka'wakw, "The gum was chewed to give women fertility, and it was thought by some to cause pregnancy without intercourse." Pojar and MacKinnon, *Plants of the Pacific Northwest*, 39. The botanical designation is *Pinus monticola*.

Hawaii as “a seed point of life for the Hawaiian culture and the feminine spirituality of the islands;” the powers of conception, cared for by women, include “conception of ideas, conception of babies, conception of every form.”⁵¹⁴ The pond is home to the Kihawahine, the life energy of fresh water, whose animal form is the lizard. The Kihawahine brings the spiritual and earthly realms together through her heart, according to Colorado.⁵¹⁵

Dedicated groups of Virgin Priestesses in ancient Greece were believed to practice parthenogenesis, that is, procreation without males, according to the extensive doctoral research of Marguerite Rigoglioso, published in *The Cult of Divine Birth and Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity*. Citing numerous examples from mythology of virgin births, Rigoglioso suggests that non-ordinary conception was believed to be possible as a spiritual practice.

Mother, Daughter, Granddaughter

Anguane are mothers, daughters, and granddaughters with a close tie to nature.⁵¹⁶ In the multi-part story “Children of the Sun” by Wolff in *The Pale Mountains*, Elba is a mother of two children, a daughter, Soreghina, (who dies from her husband’s violation of taboo) and a son, Tschan-Bolpin.⁵¹⁷ Elba herself is a Daughter of the Sun. Thus, her daughter Soreghina is both a Daughter of the

⁵¹⁴ Colorado, “Awakening our Indigenous Powers,” starting at 14:30.

⁵¹⁵ Jones, “Calling Kiawahine,” para. 2 (PDF).

⁵¹⁶ For reference to Daughter of the Sun, see, Vanin, “The Fanes Saga: Analysis of the Legend—Related Legends,” “Elba.”

⁵¹⁷ Wolff, “Children of the Sun,” *The Pale Mountains*, 163–204.

Sun and a Granddaughter of the Sun. In the story “Gordo and Vinella,” Vinella is the daughter of a Vivana (who died in a river) leaving Vinella unknowingly to be raised by foster parents.⁵¹⁸ This naming of the lineage of mothers seems to denote matrilineal if not matriarchal heritage.

Anguane Become Witches: Negated Powers and Negated Titles

Anguane became equated to or negated as witches in some of the folk stories. *Strega* or witch is one of the titles included in Foches’ summary of names of Anguane in Trentino. While there are numerous folk stories that refer to witches, here I have focused on stories that refer to Anguane as witches, noting when the stories about *streghe* do not specifically mention Anguane.

Negated Agency

In my analysis of the folk stories, if Anguane have unexplainable behavior (their children are cared for without the Anguane being visible), have taboos (about touching hair, seeing light, or having their name spoken), or exhibit special knowledge (knowing the future or past), they have been referred to as witches. If they show agency through their body (using unguent on their body, knowing magic formulas, dancing, or partying) or through nature (being wild, using ointment, changing into animals, or turning others into something), or through what I am proposing are negated menstrual/fertility powers (stealing babies, taking vengeance on a lover, causing storms, making milk go dry, or spoiling wine), they have been referred to as witches.

⁵¹⁸ Wolff, “The Fountain of Oblivion,” *The Dolomites and Their Legends*, 123.

How Anguane are Negated

There are levels of how Anguane are negated. They may be described with negative titles (temptress, witch) or attributes (mean, cruel, or ugly). They are falsely flattered or deceived by non-Anguane who are often presented as being clever. Ultimately, they are banished, turned to stone, or killed.

Negative Labels and Attributes

Anguane have been labeled as wicked, witches, cruel, and ugly. In one folk story, an Otter Woman defends herself by saying *non siamo salvarie cattive*, essentially, “we are not wicked wild ones,” implying a negative association for being wild or that there are different groups living in the wild;⁵¹⁹ her descendents bear the *sopranome* (nickname) of *salvatici*, also related to being wild.⁵²⁰ A Zubiana, who is a tavern owner, is described as a temptress.⁵²¹ A Giobiana is described as an “ogre in a skirt.”⁵²² An Aga (which evokes the word hag in English) is described as old evildoer who reads lines of someone’s hand and tells the future.⁵²³ *Streghe* (witches), whose name derives from the Latin word for owl (*striga*), indicates women who hold magic power whose source is attributed to the Devil, and who bring every type of evildoing, such as storms, abductions, and

⁵¹⁹ Zangrandi, “La Salvatica di Andraz” [The wild woman of Andraz], *Leggende delle Dolomiti*, 90.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵²¹ Neri, “The temptation of the Zubiana,” *Secret Heart* (Autumn), 88.

⁵²² Neri, *Mille Leggende del Trentino*, 328.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 326.

assassinations.⁵²⁴ Agàne, zubiàne, and zabiàne are all witches, along with the Aga and the Niaga in the story *Le Streghe di Roncone*, (The witches of Roncone), in Valle del Chiese.⁵²⁵ *Zobia* is the name for Thursday, the day dedicated to the *Zobiane*, witches, in the dictionary of ancient Trentino dialect.⁵²⁶ *Zabiana* and *Subiana* are names for Anguane included on the list compiled by Foches in Trentino. Coltro says that women with specialized powers met to offer their services to undo spells at the crossroads on Thursdays, which resulted in their label of *Zobiana* and *Donna del giovedì*, literally woman of the Thursday.⁵²⁷ In northern European folk culture, there were spinning prohibitions on Thursday related to a sacred female.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 331. Neri adds that this diabolic association resulted in many women being arrested, horrendously tortured, and put to death.

⁵²⁵ Borzaga, “Le Streghe di Roncone” [The witches of Roncone], *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi di Valli e Boschi*, 148. One of their punishments included making them laugh until they died. When the shoemaker was drawn to go there one night by their power, he tricked them by falsely praising the beauty of the “hags” and wounding one of them.

⁵²⁶ Bertoluzza, *Dizionario dell’Antico Dialetto Trentino* (1997), 299.

⁵²⁷ They had other gatherings they called a game, “gioco” or a dance “ballo.” (Coltro, *Gnomi*, 91.)

⁵²⁸ Specifically spinning practices that Hilda Davidson cites include: no spinning on Thursdays in Blekinge, as the goddess Frigg did her spinning that day; no spinning on Thursday evenings in Latvia, where the goddess of spinning is Laima; and no spinning on the Thursday before Whit Sunday, the special day to the Rusalkas in Russia. Davidson, *Roles of the Northern Goddess*, 104.

Deceit and False Flattery

Although Anguane are sometimes been characterized as *ingannatrice* (deceitful),⁵²⁹ there are stories in which *they* have been deceived and falsely flattered, sometimes resulting in their death. Neri relays a story about a young man who lures an Anguane to his cart, laden with gentian and rhododendrons, and kidnaps her, although they fall in love and end up happily married.⁵³⁰ In a folk story of the Cadore with a less happy ending, the people of Calalzo decide to get rid of the Anguane with the help of a hermit, famed as a *stregone*, who arranges a feast and invites them, sending a carriage decorated with wildflowers and tree branches to transport them. When the Anguane, dressed in their finest clothes, arrive at Val d'Oten where the hermit lives, he speaks the magic words in dialect: “*In nome de Dio e dela Madonna ciar e rode e dute de pagogna*” (In the name of God and of the Madonna, wagons and wheels and all of viburnum) with the plant in hand and they disappear.⁵³¹

In “The Three Stone-throws” the devil’s wife is “an ugly witch” (not named as an Anguana) who is visited by a man seeking to be rich. The devil, described in the story as “more intelligent than all men,” understands the secrets of nature; the man seeks the wife’s intercession to learn this information. The

⁵²⁹ Monfosco, *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 129.

⁵³⁰ Neri, “The defeat of the Anguane,” *Secret Heart* (Spring), 15–16.

⁵³¹ Coltro, *Gnomi*, 57. After they disappear, they are turned into viburnum, which Coltro names as “magic plant.” Translation provided from Erminia Stanchina. Email to author from Erminia Stanchina, November 23, 2012.

man flatters her, feigns sympathy for her troubles, and promises he will do his utmost to help her once his mission is fulfilled—which he does not.⁵³²

Although the woman has seemingly lost her own agency in this story, by being described as “married” to the devil, she still has access to this knowledge through him, which she gains by querying him in his waking stupor. The witch learns from him how to make springs flow again, the formula for a healing remedy, and how to get fruit trees to bear. Notably, in the closing notes we are told that the story has been handed down *from grandmother to granddaughter* across the ages.⁵³³ Was it a reminder to females about their access to knowledge which has been demonized?

Treated with Disrespect

Especially as “old witches,” the Anguane have been treated with disrespect. In “La Longagna del Lago Cadin” (The Longagna of Lake Cadin), bold boys climbed up and taunted the Longhana, who lived in a rocky grotto under La Croda del Vedòrcia in the Cadore, calling her an old witch; she responded by calling forth a huge storm that brought damaging rains.⁵³⁴

It is *notable* when old women who have been labeled as witches are treated with respect. A clever girl, Caterina, of Val di Sole gains safe passage through the land of the feared witches of Passo Tonale by falsely flattering one of

⁵³² Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, “The Three Stone-throws,” *Songs and Tales*, 58–62.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Monfosco, “La Longagna del Lago Cadin” [The Longagna of Lake Cadin], *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 81.

the witches and admiring the rags which she wears. The witch, appreciating the kindness, allows Caterina to pass without harm, and the people of Caterina's town learn from her act to treat the witches respectfully.⁵³⁵

In Neri's version of the folk story "Gordo e Vinella" Vinella meets an old woman at a *malga*, a mountain hut in the high meadows used for making cheese, and addresses her as "signora," lady. The old woman is surprised, noting that it is the first time that she has been called that, and proclaims: "Io sono vecchia e gli anni ti regalano esperienza, saggezza e anche preveggenza!" (I am old and the years give you experience, wisdom and also foresight!)⁵³⁶ Her words seem to speak on behalf of all the old women who have been marginalized.

The fear of the witch, marginalized and condemned, made old women vulnerable. According to Coltro,

Fear often turns into hostility and in the life of the country or region, until recently, the poor old women, not well-dressed and alone, were excluded for the image they were offering or maybe hearsay.⁵³⁷

A quote in the archives from 1630, by a legal defense advocate, reflecting on the witch trials in Val di Non of 1612–1615, lends support to the idea that old women were vulnerable.

⁵³⁵ Neri, "The Good Catherine and the Witches," *Women and Girls*, 63–64. In the story, the witches, devils, and male witches are said to dwell on Passo Tonale, which served as a place to organize their sabbaths and raids into the valleys on both sides of the pass.

⁵³⁶ Neri, "Gordo e Vinella" [Gordo and Vinella], *Donne e bambine*, 73. Wolff has a longer version of this story. See Wolff, "The Spring of Forgetting," *The Pale Mountains*, and Wolff, "The Fountain of Oblivion," *The Dolomites and Their Legends*.

⁵³⁷ Coltro, *Gnomi*, 93. (My translation.)

One can easily blunder in various ways because it is not easy to express judgment and to proceed against any woman for her bad reputation, because such bad reputation easily comes up especially against a woman who is old, widowed or ugly.⁵³⁸

In Neri's version of the folk story referenced earlier about the Sibyl of Comano Terme, she is initially described as good-looking, and later, by the man who is going to kill her, as old and ugly.⁵³⁹ In Borzaga's version, antiquity seems to indicate ancestral reverence with her description of the Sibyl as "old as the earth."⁵⁴⁰

How Anguane React to Negation

While the infractions against the Anguane are sometimes presented as minor, they are often the one condition that is specified to the future husband: "I will marry you if you never say or do this one thing." Other times it is presented as an unknown taboo that was violated. In my observation of the stories, if the Anguana willingly enters into partnership with a man, and he violates taboo, the punishment is her withdrawal: she departs and he can never see her again. In the stories where there has been no willing invitation—that is, the man has transgressed a boundary out of curiosity, bravado, allurements, or greed, even though the rules seem to be well known—the punishment to the violator is more severe (becoming non-human or death). As punishment, young women are more

⁵³⁸ Di Gesaro, *Giochi*, 121. (My translation.)

⁵³⁹ Neri, "The Cavern of the Sibyl," *Women and Girls*, 16.

⁵⁴⁰ Borzaga, "La leggenda della Sibilla," [The legend of the Sibyl], *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi di Valli e Boschi*, 170.

likely to withdraw from the person who has broken taboo; “old, mean, and ugly” women are more likely to take revenge.

Vanished, Banished, Turned to Stone, Bottled, and Defeated

In the folk stories, the witches vanish, are banished to remote places, or are turned to stone by the Council of Trent. Val Genova, a place of striking beauty with a waterfall and scattered massive rocks, is said to be a dwelling place of witches; they are relegated there, along with the devils, by the Council.⁵⁴¹ The witches of Valòrz, women who meet periodically near the rocks, are banished to Val di Saènt by the Council of Trent.⁵⁴² The Brenta group of the Dolomites is said to be “the remains of witches turned into stone.”⁵⁴³ In the story entitled “The Angana’s Sack,” the witches are utterly defeated. The Angana in Val di Non, though her magic, had turned the rocky ravine of Moscabrì valley into a verdant field with grasses and flowers. Described as evil and a witch, she threatens vengeance against shepherds who try to graze it, having already killed those who violated her territory. After a shepherd repeatedly brings his sheep to graze there, and she unsuccessfully tries to capture him, she summons all the witches, wizards and devils in the valley to confront the people of Romeno, who through their

⁵⁴¹ Borzaga, *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi di Valli e Boschi*, 46.

⁵⁴² Neri, “The witches of Valòrz,” *Secret Heart* (Spring), 47–48.

⁵⁴³ Chiodin, *Magnificent Italia: Trentino*, 32:25.

“cunning and courage” defeat all the wicked creatures. The Angana is bound in a sack and thrown into the Noce River by the shepherds whom she threatened.⁵⁴⁴

A print from the sixteenth century illustrates the “ordeal of the sack.” It shows a man getting ready to dump a person, bound in a sack closed at the top, in the water, with male authorities (in tall hats) standing by and women onlookers.⁵⁴⁵ Several people from Romeno, where the battle in the story takes place, were accused of *stregoneria*, witchcraft, according to the archival documents of the trials in Val di Non from 1612–1615. Accusations included bringing harm to the oxen, the weather, the fertility of the spouses, and the cows’ ability to give milk, acts that were perpetrated on Monte Roèn, where the witches met on Thursday nights to feast and dance with the devil.⁵⁴⁶

In Faver, “they still believe in witches,” according to immigrant storyteller Clementina Todesco. “Before the Council Trento, there were really evil spirits loose in the world. All the bishops at the council had condemned these evil spirits to the sea and the mountains, where they couldn’t hurt people.”⁵⁴⁷

In the folk story “La Redòsola,” a kind and beautiful young woman, is tricked one day by a male giant who teaches her the malignant arts of magic and love. Over time she becomes a “stria in piena regola,” a full-fledged witch: she

⁵⁴⁴ Neri, “The Angana’s sack,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 9–10.

⁵⁴⁵ Di Gesaro, *Giocchi*, 225.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 104–105.

⁵⁴⁷ Mathias and Raspa, *Italian Folktales in America*, 257.

rides a broom, goes to the great Sabbaths, dances in the clearings of the forest, kidnaps a young man, is able to turn herself into an animal, comes down a woman's chimney (which the woman inadvertently left unblest with holy water) as a dirty and disheveled old woman, threatens to boil children, is given a black basket (which does not hold water) instead of a pot, and plots revenge. Eventually Redòsola, along with all the evil spirits are called in to make a treaty, whereupon the Bishops at the Council of Trent close them up inside their empty wine bottles they have stored under their chairs. She dances inside the bottle for centuries and eventually the glass is worn down and gives way.⁵⁴⁸

Yet the benevolent figure of the old woman witch persists in popular culture: she decorates the barns of Val di Fassa.⁵⁴⁹ A figure of a smiling old woman in black with long gray hair, a pointed hat, and riding a broom was for sale in 2009 at the gift shop of a Marian sanctuary. La Befana, sometimes portrayed as an old woman riding a broom, brings the gifts on the eve of the Epiphany.

Coltro devotes a short but informative chapter to La Befana, whose tradition, he says, was suppressed years ago and put back on the calendar by demand of the people. In Coltro's summary, Befana is old, decrepit, and dressed in black with a scarf on her head; she is the personification of winter, of the cold that brings death to nature. She becomes *la Vecia* (the old woman), who is burned in bonfires, known as the *falò*, in many parts of Veneto, symbolizing the death of

⁵⁴⁸ Zangrandi, *Leggende delle Dolomiti*, 44–51.

⁵⁴⁹ Chiodin, *Magnificent Italia: Trentino*, 6:30.

the old vegetation that allows for the new growth. Like Berchta of Nordic mythology, who protects and blesses the fields, Befana comes on the eve of the Epiphany. She descends the chimney, bringing gifts to the good children.⁵⁵⁰

Possible Causes of Negation

It is important to remember that Anguane are being described from the view of those who were likely other than Anguane. Evidence of “otherness” is indicated by the name of *Donna Straniera* (foreign woman), which Foches includes in his list of names of Anguane in Valli del Leno.⁵⁵¹

If the Anguane were “other,” to whom were they “other”? Since elements of the stories may reach over centuries and even millennia, the answer is complex and likely still emerging. The Italian Alps were populated by numerous tribes prior to Roman conquest, including the Reti, Euganei, and Veneti, and influenced by both Celts and Etruscans. The Reti (or Rhaetians) are likely ancestors to the Ladin people, Vanin says, who retained their language and culture, and whose DNA is different than those of their neighbors.⁵⁵² Busk notes that the Eugani dwelled in Val Sugana, where there are stories of Anguane.⁵⁵³ Monfosco proposes that the Anguane were of the last of a Celtic race, forced to flee for survival and live hidden in the grottoes; the animal skin boots which they wore,

⁵⁵⁰ Coltro, *Gnomi*, 88–89.

⁵⁵¹ Foches, *Leggende delle Anguane*, 5.

⁵⁵² Vanin, “Researches on the Legend,” para. 2.

⁵⁵³ Busk, *The Valleys of Tirol*, 341.

Etruscan in style, could have become the goat's feet they were sometimes said to have in the folk stories.⁵⁵⁴

While it is difficult to assess the complex political and religious influences across time on the characters of the folk stories, the sources cited here provide some clues. Zangrandi says at one time there were no laws of “Good and Evil.” While the Romans had altered the characters of the folk stories (like appending goat feet onto the Anguane), major changes came after the dying of the Roman Empire with waves of invaders who used the roads, built by the Romans. With them came the sense of “Evil” and “Sin,” waves of invasions, the birth of fear and the transformation of the mythic characters. Now there were “Witches and Demons, damned souls, the Ogres became incarnations of Satan, the Dragons of the Alpine Lakes. . .vomited fire.”⁵⁵⁵

Over time, the wild characters were mixed and confused, Vanin observes, and then further, the impact of Christianity created a dualistic nature:

The advance of Christendom heavily contributed to gradually shift all these figures of a past. . .into the sphere of myth. . . as well as to force them into a devilish-angelic ambiguity that was not at all their own at their origins.⁵⁵⁶

Luigi Reverdito, the editor of Giovanni Borzaga's *Leggende del Trentino*, differentiates between “Guane or Aguane, related to ancient nymphs, beautiful, bewitching, elusive and at times willing to marry” and “the true witches, *le strie*,

⁵⁵⁴ Monfosco, *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 129.

⁵⁵⁵ Zangrandi, *Leggende delle Dolomiti*, 134–135.

⁵⁵⁶ Vanin, “Short Essays—The Salvans,” para. 9.

cruel old women in combat with Satan.”⁵⁵⁷ For diverse reasons, he continues, both recall “the dark times of the Counter-reformation when in Tyrol and Trentino tens of innocents —widows, midwives, prostitutes, and herbalists—were tried and burned alive with accusations of witchcraft.”⁵⁵⁸

Is Reverdito noting something *characteristically* different between the taboos that the young, fertile Anguane enforce and the fierce power that the old witches hold? If so, this supports my understanding of the old woman who could indeed have been feared having accumulated the knowledge of her entire life. As a Hag, she is a wise woman, (*hagia* meaning holy/wise). She seems to symbolize, and thus hold the power of, the culmination of all the cycles of life: the fertility cycle, the yearly cycle, and a woman’s life cycle. This will become more evident after considering the characteristics of the Winter Goddesses in the next section.

Fernando Zampiva, a keeper of folk wisdom about plants (a subject further explored in Chapter 10), states that, after the Council of Trent, the magic protagonists of the legends disappeared; the Anguane, mythical woodland goddesses, were no longer able to freely communicate with humans. He describes the event as a cultural “watershed,” to indicate life before and after the Council, an interesting choice of words that also refers to the flow of water in nature.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁷ Borzaga, *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi di Valli e Boschi*, 9.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 9–10. Referring, presumably, to the events resulting from the Council of Trent discussed in the introduction and again in Chapter 10.

⁵⁵⁹ Zampiva, “Piante Sacre e Piante Maledette,” 181.

Did the Anguane Exist?

Some interesting details imply the real existence of Anguane. Coltro states that intermarriage between humans and *Fade* (who, as described by him, share characteristics with the Anguane) were prohibited by the Council of Trent.

The Council of Trent banned these mixed unions. It is argued that the *Fade* belong to a particular and not well-defined species of Witches; there are those who feel that they hold the spirits of women who died in childbirth.⁵⁶⁰

Busk, in describing the story of a marriage between a man and an “Enguane” that did not work out, relays that “a holy hermit” advised him that she “was not a proper wife for a Christian man.”⁵⁶¹ One family in Auronzo claims to have a beautiful embroidered *fazzoletto* (handkerchief or head scarf) of an Anguane.⁵⁶²

The title of one story evokes their real existence, or at least their memory:

“Quande gh’era le vivane” which, translated from dialect, means “When there were Vivane.”⁵⁶³

Values Conveyed and Traditional Wisdom

Both in their actions and in their offices, the Anguane have a close embodied relationship with Nature and the Cosmos. They are wild and live in the wild.

⁵⁶⁰ Coltro, *Gnomi*, 24–25. (My translation.)

⁵⁶¹ Busk, *The Valleys of Tirol*, 415–416.

⁵⁶² Becher, "Auronzo," three para. after "Le anguane."

⁵⁶³ Carla Zocchio, “Quande gh’era le vivane” [When there were vivane], cited in Foches, *Leggende delle Anguane*, 45.

The folk stories communicate the importance of respect for the sacred, respect for wild, helpfulness to others, care for children, self-respect, importance of keeping one's word, the gift given freely (of their knowledge, of nature), and protection of those who are "other." The Anguane are not separate from nature but part of it. Their ethics also seem to come *from* nature, not outside of nature or "supernatural." In Vanin's assessment, when ethical concepts are evident, they seem "not to have any supernatural root" and "to be based on a correctness of human behaviour: one must keep his word; collective interest must take priority over the individual's."⁵⁶⁴ Vanin continues that the cultic actions directed towards the spirits of nature are "to maintain a relationship of harmony and respect with them;" at times the spirits incarnate and bestow their gifts to the humans.⁵⁶⁵

This is at the essence of my understanding about the Anguane: women in harmonious relationship with nature and the cosmos, understanding the benefits of being in resonance with them, and facilitating that state in one's self and others through education and protection. They keep the sacred rules. They stress the importance of not violating the rules of nature. They warn against improper use of power.

Winter Goddesses—Ladies of Winter

The Winter Goddesses embody spiritual agency, symbolizing the end of a life cycle and the beginning of a new year. Winter is a powerful season in mountainous Alpine climates. The presence of snow dominates, with permanent

⁵⁶⁴ Vanin, "The Cultural Background—Cults and Myths," para.5.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 2.

snow in the form of glaciers that remain year round. Avalanches of snow, rock, and ice can take life away or bury a village in an instant. Ice is a primal, elemental, destructive, and creative force. The snows and glaciers of the mountains give birth to the waters of the rivers.

There are rules associated with the snow as well. These customs, traditions, or rules impact the fertility of the land and the common good. In the folk story “The Marmolada Glacier” from Val di Fassa, discussed in the introduction of this study, a summer snowstorm freezes the crops and then becomes a permanent glacier covering the fertile fields, because a woman did not stop her harvest to join the other peasants to celebrate the day in honor of the sacred female, in this case the Madonna of the Snow. Her violation impacted the whole community—it ruined the harvest for everyone, not just the woman who broke with tradition.⁵⁶⁶

Names and Attributes

Using folk customs, legends, and beliefs, Lotte Motz highlights similarities among the numerous Ladies from Northern Europe who come during the Twelve Nights, the period between Christmas and the Epiphany in her essay “The Winter Goddess.” Motz describes Perchta, Holda, and other female figures, as “potent female forces” and asserts that they are indeed divinities due to their stature among the people as well as the efforts of the institutional religion to

⁵⁶⁶ Neri, “The Marmolada glacier,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 77–79. August 5 is the day when the Madonna of the Snow is celebrated in Trentino and other parts of Italy, including in Rome at the Santa Maria Maggiore, a Black Madonna, although with a very different origin story. See Moser, *Honoring Darkness*, 37.

eliminate their traditions. Further, she proposes that they emerged from indigenous beliefs belonging to the North and Northwest of Europe. Their powers, to various extents depending on location, could impact the course of the entire year, fertility, the health and well-being of the household, the weather, and the prosperity of the population.⁵⁶⁷

The details that Motz provides of the Winter Goddess lend insight into some of the characteristics which may have been overlaid on the Anguane in the previous section of this chapter, as well as a context for examining the folk stories and traditions from Trentino. Donna Berta, Froberta, and “Heilige Frau” (Holy Lady) are listed by Foches as names of Anguane in Trentino.⁵⁶⁸ Yet their traits align them with the Ladies of Winter, as we shall see. Berta is most likely a variant of Perchta.

Drawing from several specific locations in Northern Europe, Motz summarizes commonalities of traits: the Winter Goddess is a virgin, has a dual aspect, educates young girls by supervising their spinning, is given food offerings, and is celebrated in the winter with rites of ecstatic motion and terrifying sound. It is worth listing some details of the characteristics that emerge for Frau Perchta, who belongs to the Alpine regions, Frau Holle, and their variations (Stampa, Rupfa, Luzie, Frau Frie, and Frau Gode), even at the risk of over-generalizing

⁵⁶⁷ Motz, “Winter Goddess,” 151–52.

⁵⁶⁸ Foches, *Leggende delle Anguane*, 5.

Motz's specific documentation, to gain an overall sense of the nature of the Winter Goddess.⁵⁶⁹

The Winter Goddess is in close alliance with women and children. Women are often her followers and she grants them fertility: Holle from her well and Berchta from her cave. Perchta watches over and is surrounded by babies who died before being baptized. Stampa, on the other hand, is feared to steal the young from their parents. The Winter Goddess is not a mother and is often unmated; yet she fosters children and educates them.⁵⁷⁰ She supervises the spinning of girls and women, punishing those who do not follow the rules.⁵⁷¹

Her traditions in the Alpine regions are marked by masked performances, with frenzy and noise. Men impersonate Perchten in folk costumes, sometimes either in beautiful or ugly form; the hideous form involves terrifying masks and the clamor of bells hung from their belts.⁵⁷² There was a consistent attempt by the medieval Church to ban traditions at the beginning of the year, at the calends (new moon) of January, when men donned masks, impersonated the animals, and shed their human identity.⁵⁷³ Motz submits that the impersonation of wild beasts

⁵⁶⁹ Motz, "Winter Goddess," 157.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 155–56.

⁵⁷¹ Motz, "Winter Goddess," 154.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 153.

⁵⁷³ Motz, "Winter Goddess," 159.

enacted in the midwinter celebrations are archaic in origin, the mark of a hunting civilization.⁵⁷⁴

The Winter Goddess is of the forest, mountain, cave, or well. Perchta is wild and of the forest; Holle has designated places in a landscape (a stone, tree, or lake). Her dual aspect can bestow happiness or bring harm; she is often an old woman, a hag who is unkempt, although she can be young, beautiful, and clothed in white; she may bear animal features—a nose resembling a beak or the long teeth of an animal; she is associated variously with goats, a donkey, dogs, horses, and birds of prey; she can influence the fertility of the earth by riding across the fields or walking around them; in North Germany she introduced the cultivation of turnips; she is a protector of the wilderness and the wild animals; she sometimes takes the appearance of animals; and she leads the Wild Hunt. Her role extends beyond the forest to help care for fields and families; she sometimes marries the wild man; and she is able to manipulate the weather.⁵⁷⁵ The beaked nose may be a vestige of the bird goddess, Motz proposes, and Stampa in Tyrol is associated with a horse's head.⁵⁷⁶ She is a Mistress of the Wild who represents “the force of nature, which is both life-giving and life-taking.”⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 160.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 155–59.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 163.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 163.

Further, Motz relates the Ladies of Winter to spinning and female initiation:

The association for the Ladies with the craft of spinning, in its turn, points to their *initiatory function*. It seems that in archaic thought the labour of producing thread from a shapeless mass of wool or flax created the same awe as the forming of a tool from stone or iron, so that spinning, like smithcraft, was imbued with magical properties. Just as in myth the creation of the world is often achieved with the help of a specifically manufactured tool or weapon, so the destiny of men is wrought through the spinning of a thread. The place where girls and women gather to spin may become the site of *the enactment of the female mysteries*, as the smithy may become the meeting place of men's secret societies.⁵⁷⁸

While I would propose that smithcraft was treated with the awe of spinning/menstruation, rather than the other way around, these associations support the idea that the Winter Goddess holds the instruction and responsibility for the continuity of the life cycle, which includes women's sacred menstrual seclusion rites. The rules regarding spinning, discussed in Chapter 7, support its associations with menstrual power which is characterized by taboos.

In the folk stories from Trentino, Donna Berta holds life-giving power (an endless source of thread, children), is associated with menstrual-related themes (seclusion, water, hair), and levies consequences (cessation of flow, death) if not respected. She lives in a cave, has three women cook for her who also curl, comb, and plait her hair (or alternately, has children herself and tends their hair, combing, straightening, and curling it), looks after women, protects good families, is the source of endless thread, is given food by other women, and takes revenge

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 161. My emphasis.

for being given a leaky water carrier that spills all over her. If she is disrespected by people, their cows do not produce milk.⁵⁷⁹

In another folk story, Froberta described as a “malevolent hag” with a very long nose, arrives at the *filò* of twelve women who are spinning at almost eleven at night without a man present.⁵⁸⁰ One by one more Frobertas arrive until there are twelve of them. When one Froberta requests a bucket to get water for laundry, the women fear she is going to cook them in boiling water. They manage to trick Froberta by giving her a leaky container, thus escaping to return safely to the beds of their husbands. The next night they make sure that a man is among them—who promptly kills all the Frobertas when they showed up.⁵⁸¹ Is this story suggesting the arrival new social norms, an attempt to eliminate the rules imposed by the Winter Goddess? By denying Froberta the ability to gather water, they deny her agency, which seems to be in the water itself and in the use of the water, for laundry, cooking, or even for threatened punishment by death. The life-giving, life-taking water spills out, a sign of disrespect.

Winter: the Most Powerful Season, the Most Important Rules

The winter season is the time that gifts are offered and received. Winter traditions and carnivals take place during the dark season, before spring. Perhaps,

⁵⁷⁹ Neri, “The generous Donna Berta,” *Secret Heart* (Winter), 110; Neri, “Donna Berta and her husband,” *Secret Heart* (Winter), 110–11.

⁵⁸⁰ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Songs and Tales*, 35–36. Notably this introduces the section on folk stories.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

as the most powerful season in terms of its life-ending ability, its forces of ice and snow, and the Females who govern it, must be the most propitiated. Although I have not personally experienced the winter season in the Alps, some specific examples are presented here from the local literature, recognizing that each village likely has its own traditions. The most important tradition is the visitation of La Stella, a large star carried high on a pole from house to house on the eve of the epiphany, accompanied by the Three Kings, who sing traditional songs and bring blessings for each house.

In Val di Mocheni, Krampus (a wild hairy creature), St. Nicholas carrying a staff, and Santa Lucia are all present in one photo. In Sover, Roberto Bazzanella documents the season's "genuine" tradition, before it was forgotten, changed, or commercialized. It begins with Santa Lucia (Sànta Lùzia in dialect) who arrives on a donkey on the evening of December 12. Food, in the form of farina for her and salt for her donkey, is placed outside on a plate, and prayers are said, along with a chant to her. She leaves gifts on the plate (or black coal if they are bad) for the small children to find the next morning.⁵⁸²

In Sover, Redodesa is present during the Twelve Nights, the nights between December 25th and January 5, the night of the feast of the Three Kings. One must be cautious not to linger on the snow or ice, although no further explanation is given. Redodesa is the "signora delle dodici notti" (the Lady of the Twelve Nights):

⁵⁸² Bazzanella, "Sover e le antiche tradizioni natalizie" [Sover and the ancient Christmas traditions], 63–64.

And, more than that, designated by the All-powerful as spirit of the mountains and of the snow in supervising nights between Christmas and the feast of three kings, she has been charged with also taking care of newborn babies, so much so that when one of them dies, she claims it.⁵⁸³

The Winter Goddesses seem to rule over the powers of frozen water, the other part of the water's life cycle. They embody snow and ice, important primal elements of the northern latitudes that are part of the living legacy of the glacier-carved land. In one folk story about the peaks above Valle del Bòite, as punishment for the intentional murder of an Anguana who is an innocent child, the Anguane curse the babies of the hunters' wives to die, sometimes even before they are born, for many years; the babies become Mazzamorelli, swirling clouds of snow that melt into water in the spring and then transform back into snow the next year, a repeated cycle.⁵⁸⁴

Winter Snow as Source of Waters

The Anguane seem to embody the summer life-giving cycle (flowers, fertility) while the Winter Goddesses seem to embody the life-ending, life-renewing cycle. The winter snows are the source of river waters. To the Puyallup Indians in the Northwest United States where I live, the nearby glacier-capped volcano is referred to as Grandmother Tacobet, who feeds them and her other grandchildren through her rivers, filled with life-giving fish. The Nisqually

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 63. (My translation.)

⁵⁸⁴ Monfosco, "I Mazzamorelli," *Dolomiti: Storie e Leggende*, 41–43.

recognize the mountain's role as a Guardian over the land of the Nisqually people
"who feeds the river, the home of our salmon."⁵⁸⁵

Embodiment and Alignment of the Full Cycles of Life

Integrating across all her characteristics, the Female Force is related to the Turning of the Year, and the Cycling of the Moon. She is the Keeper of the Order—of one's house, and of the Sacred Order—which is cyclic. Order here can be thought of as cyclic and spiraling forward, not as unchanging. She reminds us that we get things in order by beginning "at home." In fact the Winter Goddess checks to make sure homes are in order. If one's house is in order, isn't that keeping the Sacred Order?

Masks of the "bel" and the "brut," the beautiful and the ugly are on display in the folk museum *Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina* from Val di Fassa. Like the "beautiful" and the "ugly," the maiden and the hag seem to embody the full cycle of fertility, of life, of the moon, and of the year. As in the lunar cycle, the crescent that begins the new cycle holds the seeds of fertility. Renewal is necessary for fertility to begin again.

If the Old Woman is denied or negated, there cannot be the full cycle of transformation and rebirth. Ignoring, denying, fearing, or negating the Old Woman is negating all that the Winter Goddesses and the Female Forces of Winter represent: the dark season, chaos, the wild, and the pre-human

⁵⁸⁵ National Park Service, "Since Time Immemorial." The Puyallup call the mountain Tacobet.

consciousness of the animal world. If her traditions are not respected, remembered, and propitiated, what will happen?

Do Not Forget Me. . .

Significantly, the old and young women in the folk stories ask not to be forgotten: the Healer/Sibyl of the thermal spring of Comano promises life to the person who remembers her. The Anguane ask not be forgotten and bring fields of “forget-me-nots.” The ugly witch who is “married to the devil”—even in her twice-negated form of being labeled as a witch and of being married to the devil—reminds the man whom she has helped not to forget her. At the end of the story, the commentary adds that grandmothers told this story to their granddaughters. Women’s access to this knowledge of nature’s abundance (water, fruitfulness) is being remembered by women. Folk men are also keepers of this memory: the knight whom the Sibyl healed repeatedly tells the story to his grandson and in his later years chooses to become a hermit, and the carrier of the tradition held by her, dispensing advice and prayers; the men who were helped by the old woman of Valbona go to find her, name the place after her, and place a saint’s image there.⁵⁸⁶

I suggest these female characters are asking all of us to remember the generative, regenerative, transformative powers of women and the respect that is due to them. They are asking us to honor the full life cycles of life, the diminishing as well as the growing, the elders as well the youth, and ultimately the sources of life whose continuity depends on these cycles. The folk women of

⁵⁸⁶ Neri, “The Old Woman of Valbona,” *Women and Girls*.

Trentino reflect these life-giving powers in their everyday spirituality as we shall see in the next chapters about folk women.

Analysis of Anguane, Winter Goddesses and Witches

Table 4 summarizes the actions and characteristics of Anguane and Winter Goddesses from the folk stories and customs that were previously recounted.

While not an exhaustive analysis, it provides some useful insights into female agency related to the full cycles of life. Aspects of spinning, food, and medicine in the culture are continuing themes that are addressed in the following chapters.

The table also indicates characteristics that are associated with witches. The old woman is particularly associated with being a witch. If she wears rags, is ugly, or lives in certain areas (on the meadows of Passo Tonale, for example, a boundary area between Trentino and Lombardy) she is subject to being labeled a witch.

Table 4. Attributes of Anguane, Winter Goddesses, and Witches

Anguane	Winter Goddesses	Witches
Enjoy life		Celebrate at night together
Care for children	Care for others' children	
Protect marginalized	Care for newborn babies	Steal babies and children
Make things grow	Burned to allow new growth	Ruin crops
Bring and become flowers		Turn others into trees
Become animals	Animal features, protect wild animals	Become animals
Turn others into birds		Turn others into animals
Protect nature; may take revenge	Protect wilderness	

Offer gifts for being protected	Punish if not respected	Take revenge for violation of territory
Do laundry	Given leaky bucket	Do laundry in certain ways
Spin, embroider	Supervise spinning	Wear rags
Uphold taboos regarding hair, light	Enforce consequences if rules violated	
Hair care important	Hair care important	Disheveled
Impact fertility	Grant women fertility, impact fertility of earth	Take away fertility
Impact storms	Impact weather	Impact storms
Know future		
Have special knowledge		Have knowledge about love
Make cheese		Know how to make cheese
Eat cheese	Are offered food	
Fly with ointment	Lead wild hunt	Fly with ointment
Mothers, daughters, granddaughters	Protect families, initiate children	
Foster mothers	Foster mothers	
Queens	Queens	Queens
Virgins	Virgins or unmated	
Young	Old	Old
Beautiful	Both beautiful and ugly forms	Ugly
Associated with water	Associated with snow, ice	Associated with hail
Associated with rocks, crevices, caves	Live in caves	Get turned into rocks, live in caves

Note. Author's table.

The Anguane seem to hold rule-bearing menstrual power, and the Winter Goddesses hold the fierce power of all the cycles of life. The Witches hold the power of vengeance, which may have been considered a way to restore the balance.

Values Communicated by the Anguane and Winter Goddesses

The values that are communicated by the Anguane and the Winter Goddesses show respect for the source of life (women and nature itself) and the cycles of life. There is the acknowledgement of the full cycles of life, which they keep, including women's fertility mysteries, death and rebirth, winter and summer, the forces of destruction and creation, the old and the new. The fertility and well-being of all life is interdependent. Care is given to the next generation and for all children. Keeping one's word is important.

Conclusions

The folk characters known as Anguane and Winter Goddesses demonstrate agency through their bodies, nature, and the cosmos. Their magical powers can be considered as spiritual agency, with actions that are carried forward by the folk women addressed in the next chapters. The Anguane, together with the Winter Goddesses, have a relationship with nature that brings fertility to them both. The Anguane safeguard the rules of fertility: they maintain taboos, which I suggest are menstrual in their origin. The Winter Goddesses enforce the rules regarding the end of the life cycle and the beginning of the new one. Anguane protect what is important to them: nature (water, springs, treasure in nature, meadows), themselves, children, and cloth. Their clothes are white, the

color of the moon, or green, the color of plants. Their relationship with laundry, a ritual of renewal done cyclically and in harmony with nature and the cosmos, calls attention to the importance of cloth. There are rules regarding spinning, particularly enforced by the Winter Goddesses. Anguane have the knowledge to create medicine from nature: beverages that bestow health, joy, beauty, and love, and ointments for pleasure and knowledge. They are associated with cheese, food that has undergone a transformative process. Food is offered to propitiate the Winter Goddess, who governs the hearth, and may bring food. When sacred territory is violated—their ritual space, meadows, sacred pools, or wells—or innocent life is taken, they will take revenge. They know the words that bring change.

As we shall see in the next six chapters, folk women continue this agency of the Anguane and Winter Goddesses as keepers of the cycles of life and protectors of the sources of life. They create and utilize cloth, food, and medicine; they rise up in protest when the sacred has been violated; and they speak out.

6. Folk Women as Keepers of the Cycles of Life

Like the female characters of the folk stories who are closely aligned with nature and the cosmos, I propose that folk women not only embodied the source of life, but through their everyday acts, were also keepers of the cycles of life. In this chapter, I present evidence that folk women understood life as a cycle from their own lives and bodies, and from life around them, particularly the moon. Women's agency draws from this knowledge; their everyday spirituality spirals through and from these cycles, as we shall see in later chapters.

Folk Women's Life as a Cycle

An untitled, unattributed painting in the folk museum at San Michele d'Adige portrays a female at each decade of her life, from birth to a hundred years. From long periods of gazing at a photo of this image, which I viewed in 2009, I have discerned that it shows the important events of a woman's life. The women's long dresses indicate that this scene is from the past, perhaps the nineteenth or early twentieth century. More important than the time period, however, is the cyclic view of life that it implies. The images rise up with stair-steps of time on the left side of the image, until the top of the painting, where there is a figure of a grandmother, and then continue down on the right, with the last figure facing towards the first, creating continuity around a central figure.

A visual description of each figure (and the corresponding life passage I propose) follows: At age zero, the female baby bundled in white and bound with a red cord emerges from parted curtains in her mother's arms (birth). On the first step at age ten, the girl is shown in a red dress (menarche). At age twenty, she

appears with a young man (marriage, sexual union). The image at age thirty shows her with a child in her arms (childbirth, motherhood). At age forty, she stands hand in hand with a young woman, with her other hand on the shoulder of a young man (marriage of her daughter). At age fifty, she stands behind a younger woman who is sitting with a baby in her lap, to whom she reaches out (becoming a grandmother). This is the apex of the cycle—a woman’s daughter becoming a mother, the assurance that life will continue. Notably, St. Anne, the mother of Mary, and the grandmother of Jesus, is a venerated figure in the Alps.⁵⁸⁷

At age sixty, the woman in the folk painting is walking by herself with a flowered hat and an umbrella (menopause). At age seventy, she bends over to greet a young girl (becoming a great grandmother). At age eighty, she is walking, her back slightly curved, like the crescent moon, assisted by a young man. Finally, at age ninety she is sitting down in a red chair. The 100-year-old woman, dressed in black—like the dark moon—sits in a chair, with a cane in her hand.⁵⁸⁸ Importantly, she is facing to the left of the image. She looks back—and thus simultaneously ahead—towards the beginning of the cycle: the birth of a child. At the center of the painting, a mother sits near a ceramic wood-burning stove, with a

⁵⁸⁷ Gremmo calls St. Anne a “mystical figure” and cites several ancient practices in her veneration. (Gremmo, *Le Grandi Pietre Magiche* [The Great Magic Rocks], 125–36.) See Chapter 4.

⁵⁸⁸ This longevity is indeed possible. Folgheraiter notes the 105th birthday of Marie Mattivi of Pinè in Trentino. Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 85.

dog under her chair, spinning at a wheel like the Fate who spins life.⁵⁸⁹ Her young daughter tends a baby in a wooden cradle. Red roses in bloom fill the space underneath the progression of life and curve around the central ovular-framed image of the woman.

As we shall see throughout the following chapters on folk women, this image holds knowledge of women's wisdom and their everyday spirituality. It is a female-centered view of life, not one without men, but certainly supported by them.

Lunar Cycles

Embodied knowledge of the moon and its cycles was a source of women's agency. Like the moon which waxes and wanes, all of life has cycles of growth and dying back. Folk women understood this from their everyday acts closely tied to the sources and cycles of life. Lunar presence is evident in the archaeological record, as we saw in Chapter 4, in the folk stories of Chapter 5, in the folk traditions investigated in this chapter, and in the jewelry, which will be addressed in the next chapter. Lunar logic and menstrual rites are connected, and signs of both permeate folk culture.

Lunar Folk Traditions

The folk traditions reflect the importance of the moon in the lives of villagers in northern Italy. Imbedded in this lunar lineage, that extends over

⁵⁸⁹ There was a temple to the Fates in Trentino near Castle Toblino. Brunelli, "Castel Toblino," 6.

millennia and continues today in folk practices, is evidence for the spiritual roles and sacred rites of women.

In my childhood dream, I am in the back yard of my home at night alone under the apple tree. The full moon is shining above. Without warning, its moon beams, in which I am standing, start to lift me up off the ground, as if taking me up to it.

I first consciously learned about the lunar traditions in Trentino in conducting oral interviews of villagers in the Alpine valleys, from people who still remember and even practice some of the old ways. From them and from oral sources that have been collected and written down by others, I learned that people once considered the phases of the moon for planting, cutting hair and nails, and the cutting of trees. Additionally, agriculture, wine-making, the preservation of food, and distilling of spirits are governed by the phase of the moon and its cycle of growth, fullness, decay, death, and rebirth. The moon's full rays in the past were thought to bestow life, bring lunacy, or summon witches.

The phases of the moon referred to in the folk literature are: growing (*crescente*), full (*luna piena, plenilunio, or colmo*), shrinking (*calante*), and dark or old (*vecchio*). The changes between phases, from growing to shrinking, and from shrinking to growing, mark important shifts.

Calendars

One of my cousins sent me a copy of a page of a calendar for December 2010 to be sure I understood when the *crescente* was, which she indicated was from the dark moon to the full moon, the entire period of its growing. Liturgical

calendars that I have received from Italy over the years, in addition to listing the saint honored each day, show icons every month marking four phases of the moon: dark, growing half moon, full, and shrinking half moon.

Almanacs, known as *lunari*, were commonly found in homes in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.⁵⁹⁰ *Lunario* is one of the words listed for “calendar” in my Italian dictionary.⁵⁹¹

Umberto Raffaelli, former director of the Museum of Customs and Traditions of the Trentini People in San Michele all’ Adige, has documented practices and beliefs regarding the moon, according to the folk wisdom of various valleys and villages, contextualized in a larger historical and mythological matrix. In his article “L’Influsso della luna sull’agricoltura nella tradizione popolare Trentina” (The influence of the moon on agriculture in the popular Trentino tradition), Raffaelli submits that a different point of view, one that is “magical” rather than mechanistic, is needed to understand these beliefs. Explicitly acknowledging the association of the moon to women and to the source of life, he emphasizes that the moon was viewed as the symbol of women’s fertility and of the continuity of life itself.⁵⁹² “We’ll see the moon as a living being, even as the mother and womb of everything that resides in the world under the moon.”⁵⁹³ In

⁵⁹⁰ Raffaelli, “L’Influsso della luna” [The influence of the moon], 4, 8.

⁵⁹¹ Rébora, Guercio, and Hayward, *Cassell’s Italian Dictionary*, 297.

⁵⁹² Raffaelli, “L’Influsso della luna” [The influence of the moon], 18.

⁵⁹³ Raffaelli, “L’Influsso della luna” [The influence of the moon], 2.

a shift away from dominant culture, Raffaelli observes that lunar rites preceded the Romans, the Greeks, and other civilizations. They are the legacy of a most ancient culture that reach back to the dawn of humanity. Calendars and ceremonies arose in response to plants, human, and animal life.⁵⁹⁴

That lunar celebrations were important in European folk tradition is indicated by their prohibition. Raffaelli reports that the lighting of fires and dancing around them on nights of the new moon were prohibited by a Council in 692, and again by the Council of Rouen in France in 878, which prevented celebration of the first new moon of the year.⁵⁹⁵ This also indicates an alignment of the cycle of the year to the cycle of the moon.

In ancient Rome, a high priest called out the sighting of the crescent's arrival.⁵⁹⁶ The appearance of the crescent marking the arrival of the new moon is so important to the Lemba and Orthodox Jews elsewhere that two or three people must "call" its official arrival. The moon is then blessed with recitation of a special prayer of sanctification.⁵⁹⁷ The visibility of the new crescent after the dark moon varies by location, time of year, weather conditions and skill of the observer, and thus cannot be predicted with certainty.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁴ Raffaelli, "L'Influsso della luna" [The influence of the moon], 18.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁹⁶ Bernstein, *Classical Living*, 5–6.

⁵⁹⁷ Grenn-Scott, "For She is a Tree of Life," 317–19.

⁵⁹⁸ For a discussion of this subject, see the US Naval Observatory, Astronomical Applications Department, "Crescent Moon Visibility."

Contemporary Lunar Wisdom Rooted in Tyrolean Past

Lunar folk wisdom validates the idea of cyclic influences and affinities. Johanna Paungger and Thomas Poppe have documented lunar wisdom in their book *Servirsi della Luna: Il suo influsso positive su natura, salute e vita quotidiana* (Help of the Moon: its positive influence on nature, health and daily life). Paungger lived in a large agricultural family in Tyrol and her grandfather taught her “the science of the lunar rhythms, and their influence on nature, people, animals, and plants.”⁵⁹⁹ The index lists numerous areas of lunar influence (*influsso*, in Italian, calling to mind flux, or flow), including food, health, medicinal herbs, and scheduling medical interventions. The moon can affect activities in the garden, nature, farming, forestry, and the everyday chores of life like cleaning, airing out the house, and making a journey.

These are not theories or suppositions, Paungger and Poppe emphasize, but rules learned from actual experience, careful observation, and attention by our ancestors. They are not simply rules to be followed without comprehension, but more a way to become attuned to the rhythms of nature. No rules would last, they state, unless they were rooted in the reality of nature and of humans.⁶⁰⁰

The authors call attention to the importance of the moon relative to the stars. Not only is it important to consider the phase of the moon, but also what constellation it is in. Further, each organ in the body is thought to be governed by

⁵⁹⁹ Paungger and Poppe, *Servirsi della Luna* [Help of the moon], 10.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

a constellation, and the position of the moon in that constellation will have specific influences.⁶⁰¹

Lunar Folk Traditions Organized by Phase

The following paragraphs discuss a few lunar folk practices and beliefs organized by lunar phase. The details of lunar wisdom are complex and nuanced. Hundreds of proverbs, often rhyming, were used to transmit the large body of knowledge surrounding the cycles of agriculture and life.⁶⁰² Some traditions were widespread; others were more localized. Humans, plants, and animals are all included in the influence of the moon, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life.

While it is relatively easy to find Trentino people today who know that there once were lunar-based practices, it is hard to know how widely they are still practiced. “Up until a short while ago,” writes Trento journalist Alberto Folgheraiter, “one still trusted in the moon, in the calendar of *Frate Indovino*, ‘Friar Soothsayer,’ in proverbs and in the wisdom of the elderly.”⁶⁰³ The calendar he references is somewhat akin to the Farmer’s Almanac in the United States. He continues, “The moon dominated over everything.”⁶⁰⁴ One of my relatives in Trentino considers the phase of the moon before cutting his hair and nails, and for

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 21–22.

⁶⁰² Much could possibly be learned from a contemporary analysis of this information by modern farmers and foresters.

⁶⁰³ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 12; and Folgheraiter, *La Terra*, 137.

⁶⁰⁴ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 13.

planting. Another relative had the *Frate Indovino* almanac hanging in her kitchen, noting her fondness for it, rather than an actual use of it.

As the moon grows, so does its fertilizing power which influences plants, animals, and humans. During this time, Raffaelli notes the moon's impact on menstruation, tides, and epilepsy. Hair and nails cut during this phase of the growing moon will grow back more quickly. This is considered a favorable time, even today.

The full moon is described as *colmo* or *pieno*. At its full potency, it was thought to have the power to impregnate a female if she gazed too long at it; if she was already pregnant, looking at the moon could cause harm to the future health of the child, who could be born as a "lunatic" and therefore nervous and *incostante*, changeable.⁶⁰⁵ Describing a woman as *sul crescer de luna*, on the growing of the moon, was a way of indicating, in Trentino dialect, that she was pregnant.⁶⁰⁶ As a midwife, the moon helps childbirth. Several sources noted a correlation between the moon and the number of births. One of my Trentino contacts, Pina Trentini, emphasized that it is the moon that signals to the baby when it is time to be born, assuming no intervening drugs are used.⁶⁰⁷

Herbs are harvested on the full moon for maximum potency, according to Paungger and Poppe. Roots harvested on the full or waning moon are stronger.

⁶⁰⁵ Raffaelli, "L'Influsso della luna" [The influence of the moon], 2.

⁶⁰⁶ See use of this phrase in Valentini, *Strenna Trentina 2010*, 137. Interpretation provided in email to author from Erminia Stanchini, August 14, 2010.

⁶⁰⁷ Email to author from Pina Trentini, November 11, 2010.

Herbs that are to be used for serious illnesses must not be exposed to the sunlight, they emphasize.⁶⁰⁸

Folgheraiter cites several prohibitions associated with the full moon. Hay was not cut, grain was not sown, wood was not cut, and distilling did not take place. Nuts collected for making grappa-based liquor were not collected on the full moon or at dusk.⁶⁰⁹ Raffaelli notes, however, that it is a favorable time for cutting certain trees, like the oak and some resinous trees. Hair was not cut, nor was wine decanted on the full moon.⁶¹⁰ A husband could be found by thinking of the desired person's name while gazing at the full moon. The full moon could cause sleepwalking. Its potentially harmful influences could be mitigated by wearing certain amulets.⁶¹¹ Wool that was carded and woven on the full moon would bring bad luck to the person wearing that vestment.⁶¹²

In the folk stories of Lombardy, a male figure who limps comes out of the woods on the night of the full moon to dance around a tree and then to return. Limping is a diffuse lunar motif in mythology, according to Raffaelli.⁶¹³ Ginzburg found widespread evidence throughout Eurasia of a limping

⁶⁰⁸ Paungger and Poppe, *Servirsi della Luna* [Help of the moon], 52.

⁶⁰⁹ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 13, 46.

⁶¹⁰ Raffaelli, "L'Influsso della luna" [The influence of the moon], 5, 6.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14, 15.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

mythological figure that he attributes with the ability to journey into the realm of the dead, a sort of shamanic function.⁶¹⁴ The figures of the *le filatrici*, the spinners of popular traditions sometimes had a deformed foot and were capable of great tasks.⁶¹⁵

Mal di luna, or epilepsy, was viewed as possession, or a “sacred disease.” Many women with epilepsy were accused of being witches or having a demon, and some were burned alive, Raffaelli states. He lists several popular cures, including drinking pulverized scrapings from “sassi di luna,” moon rocks, gathered during the growing moon.⁶¹⁶

As the light of the moon gradually shrinks each night from full to dark, a period described as *calante*, its influence on menstruation, tides, and epilepsy also lessens.⁶¹⁷ Hair and nails cut during this phase will grow back less quickly. It is the favorable period for preserving fruit and pickling, for cutting firewood, and for planting potatoes, salad, and parsley. Sowing seed for the garden under the “wrong moon” will cause salad to go to seed, or to grow poorly.⁶¹⁸ A more general rule told to me was that plants that grow under the surface are planted

⁶¹⁴ Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 226–42, especially 241–42.

⁶¹⁵ Veneri, “Tessere e Filare e Cucire,” 14.

⁶¹⁶ Raffaelli, “L’Influsso della luna” [The influence of the moon], 8–10.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶¹⁸ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 13; and Folgheraiter, *La Terra*, 145.

during the waning moon; those growing above ground are planted during the growing moon, with some exceptions and further special rules.⁶¹⁹

Mushrooms grow well in the waning moon. Elders further advised on when to pick.⁶²⁰ One elder recounts, in dialect, of times past: “*Se la luna la era bona te empienivi el zesto de brise, fonghi dal pin e dal sangue e capelete*” (If the moon was good, you could fill up the basket with boletus mushrooms, pine mushrooms, blood mushrooms, and *finferle* mushrooms).⁶²¹

Distilling of grappa would only take place on the waning moon. Particular wood was used for the distillation.⁶²²

According to Paungger and Poppe, in addition to many tasks in the garden and nature that are favorable during this time, the waning period is considered generally good for having operations and for housecleaning. One can eat a little more during this time and not gain weight.⁶²³

⁶¹⁹ The rules evoke taboos. Potatoes, seeded during the waning of the moon, are not planted on days with the letter “r” in them, that is Lunedì (Monday), Giovedì (Thursday), and Sabato (Saturday). (Raffaelli, “L’Influsso della luna,” 6.) Potatoes are in the nightshade family, whose botanical family members contain alkaloids. The “R” shape is like a waxing moon, which may have been perceived as contrary to the desired waning moon for a plant grown under the soil. *Granturco*, corn, is not planted on days with a “7” – that is, on the seventh, seventeenth, or twenty-seventh day of the month. (Raffaelli, “L’Influsso della luna,” 6).

⁶²⁰ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 13.

⁶²¹ Valentini, *Strenna Trentina 2010*, 137.

⁶²² Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 46.

⁶²³ Paungger and Poppe, *Servirsi della Luna* [Help of the moon], 20.

Folk Stories with the Moon

In the previously-mentioned story “The Pale Mountains,” small wild men known as Salvani spin the moonlight into a silvery cloth which they drape over the rugged Dolomites, giving them their white alpenglow. In return for their gift, they are granted permanent residence in the caverns of the mountains. They perform this task so that a Moon Princess, with whom a prince has fallen in love, can come to dwell on the Earth and feel at home.⁶²⁴ Moon, mountains, women, wilderness, and nature are woven together and remembered in this tale.

In one version of this popular story, the princess brings white flowers from the moon with her, which spread to the all the high peaks. Known as Edelweiss in German, these star-shaped flowers are called *stelle alpine*, literally Alpine Stars, in Italian.⁶²⁵ Lunar in origin and stellar in name, the flowers in this story seem to unite the Earth and the cosmos with their arrival.

In the folk stories, witches also gather on the full moon. The witches of Ciampedie, for example, are said to cry out like wolves on the night of the full moon, sending enormous wheels of fire into the air on the crests of the mountain.⁶²⁶ Perhaps their fires were thought to be adding strength to the moon or to be mediating any harmful effects it might have.

⁶²⁴ Wolff, “The Pale Mountains,” *The Dolomites and Their Legends*; and Wolff, “The Pale Mountains,” *The Pale Mountains*. The story appears in both translations, although with slightly different details.

⁶²⁵ Wolff, “The Pale Mountains,” *The Pale Mountains*, 11.

⁶²⁶ Neri, “Gordo and Vinella,” *Women and Girls*, 79.

Moon and Menstruation—Entrained Cycles

Embodied knowledge of the moon and its cycles through menstruation is a source of women's agency. Women's menstrual cycle and the lunar cycle are related, both of which are 29.5 days, which Judy Grahn established as part of metaformic theory. The periods of menstruating women in a non-disrupted environment will often synchronize with each other and with the cycle of the moon.⁶²⁷ The moon has conventionally been considered to be dark for three days, according to Judy Grahn, which is retained by the Jewish calendar.⁶²⁸

The logic of lunar prohibitions described in the previous section can be understood as deriving from the menstrual taboos enacted for individual and communal instruction. In other words, the lunar legacy in Trentino and its rules come from embodied female knowledge about cycles.

Menstrual Cycle

At their origin, the practices regarding menstruation and childbirth discussed in the following sections can be understood as honoring the power of menstrual blood, kept separate as part of sacred menstrual seclusion rites.

Violation of taboos could result in harm to self or the community.

Menstrual Practices

In Trentino, menstruation was at one time known as *le regole*—the rules. From women in Trentino, I learned of menstrual practices that were practiced into

⁶²⁷ Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses*, 7, 13.

⁶²⁸ Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses*, 158.

the twentieth century. Pina Trentini, in her 60s,⁶²⁹ cited practices taught to her by her mother: that is, not touching flowers, which would wilt; not touching metal which would change color; and not washing one's hair which would not be good for it, she explained.⁶³⁰ Erminia, another contact, in response to my inquiry about menstrual practices wrote that: "During menstruation, it was prohibited to wash your head, the feet, and to take a bath because of the fear of hemorrhage."⁶³¹

This separation from water further evokes menstrual seclusion rites in which the menstruant had to be kept away from bodies of water. Grahn explains menstrual blood flow as the original comprehension of water. The consequences of letting the fluids mix could be dire: flooding and the loss of conscious memory of land. Among the origin stories in Australia, for example, mixing of menstrual blood and water would cause chaos, by angering "snake" and stirring up spirits of the waters—resulting in floods and the loss of separation of land and water. Flood mythologies exist in several cultures, according to Grahn.⁶³² In the Trentino folk practices, bathing during menstruation would result in the "flood" of uncontrolled liquid (in this case hemorrhage).

As proposed in the introduction, I perceive an alignment, or at least a correlation in important life cycles, including the daily, monthly, and yearly

⁶²⁹ Giuseppina (known as Pina) Trentini was born in 1946.

⁶³⁰ Email to author from Pina Trentini, November 22, 2010.

⁶³¹ Email to author from Erminia Stanchini, August 14, 2010.

⁶³² Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses*, 24, 25, 30–34.

cycles. The dark night and dark winter may have been understood to be similar in its nature to the dark of the moon, a time of pause, caution, and being attentive to the rules. Breaking the rules regarding menstruation, as Grahn's research revealed, was thought to cause imbalance and illness.⁶³³

Also, re-stating here the observation by Busk cited previously in the introduction, "there is no tradition more universally spread over Tirol than that which tells of judgments falling on non-observers of days of rest."⁶³⁴ In an implicit relationship to my observation of the importance of the pause, and its relevance to lunar and menstrual cycles, Busk includes a folk story from her childhood English culture, which she found analogous, in which a young woman worked on Sunday (a day of rest), pricked her finger, and bled to death.⁶³⁵ Although this story is not explicitly about menstrual blood, the consequences evoke the "hemorrhage" that could result from violating menstrual rules, as noted previously by one Trentino woman.

The display in Casa Andriollo Museum in Valsugana states:

Nowadays the belief that a menstruating woman has the power to issue harm persists and is witnessed by the prohibition against women touching metal, flowers, and more "at that period."⁶³⁶

⁶³³ Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses*, 129.

⁶³⁴ Busk, *The Valleys of Tirol*, 380.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 381. In another story a woman and her son pierced a consecrated host (which, I am noting is round like the moon) for use in an incantation, upon which it began to bleed and drowned all the people.

⁶³⁶ Casa Andriollo, "L'arco dell'esistenza: La geografia del corpo," para. 6 (my translation).

The touch or gaze of menstruating women and old women was believed to be able to “corrupt” children, the display continues. I propose that it was awe of the numinous power of menstrual blood that was “corrupted,” becoming fear. The jewelry described in the following chapter, for example, seems closely linked to this concept of the life-giving, protective power of menstrual blood. Mayonnaise—a type of transformational process—was not made by menstruating women, at one time, because it would not be successful.⁶³⁷

There are a number of references about laundry and the Anguane in the folk stories, which I discussed in the previous chapter, as well as in Chapter 8, which I propose as a cycle of renewal, recalling the practice of the *mikvah*, the ritual bath of renewal of Jewish women after menstruation.

Childbirth Practices

Church prohibitions, which Folgheraiter describes as “reaching back to Mosaic law” (that is, the law of Moses, and thus Jewish origins) were in practice at one time in Trentino regarding childbirth.⁶³⁸ Women were prohibited from receiving the sacraments for forty days after they gave birth, at which time they had to go to church to receive a special blessing with holy water and words by the priest. In return, the woman gifted the priest eggs or money. The eggs and money offered to the priest in exchange for the blessing are female symbols of fertility. Did the mother at one time make a fertile offering (her blood, the umbilical cord

⁶³⁷ Erminia said this was practiced when she was young. Email to author from Erminia Stanchina, August 14, 2010.

⁶³⁸ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 94, 95.

or the placenta) back to the source (earth, rock, tree, or the ancestors) out of gratitude for the blessing of a child?⁶³⁹

In an interview of Trentino elders, published in a booklet of compiled stories from research and interviews by young people, Celestina (meaning little star) Ricci and Anna Pedrini, share their recollections about childbirth in dialect: “Le done per 40 di, le doveva restar serade en casa, finchè el paroco no le benediva.” (The women had to rest at home for 40 days, until then the parish priest did not bless them).⁶⁴⁰ Roberto Bazzanella, who writes a regular column on customs and traditions of Baselga di Piné, states this was the practice up until 1969 when church law was changed. He describes the prayers as giving thanks for the child and wishes of prosperity for the new mother.⁶⁴¹

A folk story, “The Mystery of the Disappeared Woman Who Had Just Given Birth,” emphasizes the importance of the blessing and the consequences of not receiving it. In the story, the new mother left her home to visit with friends without receiving the blessing, upon which she disappeared. When she was finally found and brought home by her mother, it took a year for her to recover. Iva Berasi, in her commentary on the story, reflects that

It was ignorance that guided the reactions of men who, for example, would have the woman who just gave birth blessed in order to make them come

⁶³⁹ The round placenta and umbilical cord photographed by Nané Ariadne Jordan evokes a tree with branches, as well as the rock-carvings of round labyrinths with their single-entry corridors. In her artwork, Jordan depicts her womb as a labyrinth. See Jordan, “A Poetics of the Placenta” in Saracino and Moser, *She Is Everywhere! Volume 3*, 291, 292.

⁶⁴⁰ Corpo Bandistico di Calavino, “Storie del nos paes,” n.p.

⁶⁴¹ Bazzanella, “Il Battesimo nella tradizione” [The Baptism in the tradition], 53.

out from the condition of “impurity” caused by the pregnancy, or who would not teach women during the menstrual period.⁶⁴²

Yet, implicitly these practices were an acknowledgment of the awesome power of women’s blood. Berasi, in addressing both menstrual blood and birth blood in her comments, seems to recognize their relationship. Birth blood was understood to be metaphorically connected to menstrual blood, according to Grahn, and therefore birth rites were created from blood rites.⁶⁴³ Some interesting details provided in Bazzanella’s description substantiate this idea: during the forty-day rest, the new mother could not leave the house and she abstained from putting her hands in water.⁶⁴⁴ Both of these rules, her seclusion and her separation from water, recall menstrual seclusion rites practiced cross-culturally at one time.

The painting of a woman’s life cycle in the folk museum in Trentino discussed at the beginning of this chapter shows a woman emerging from a curtained room holding a swaddled baby. In rural Slovakia, a newborn and its mother would be hidden behind a curtain embroidered with protective stitching known as a *kutnice* for forty days along with other amulets to protect against

⁶⁴² Neri, “The Mystery,” *Women and Girls*, 70–72. What is now known as post-partum depression was seen as the woman’s fault or as a spell caused by mysterious and occult forces, Berasi adds.

⁶⁴³ Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses*, 124.

⁶⁴⁴ Bazzanella, “Il Battesimo nella tradizione” [The Baptism in the tradition], 53.

damaging spirits.⁶⁴⁵ In Norway, the baby was swaddled in highly embroidered cloth for protection before it was carried to the church for baptism.⁶⁴⁶

A Trentino American woman in the Northwest United States told me that she was “churched” for her baby at a Roman Catholic church in 1961, considering it to be a special blessing.⁶⁴⁷ None of my interviewees in Colorado mentioned this practice. The purification of the Virgin Mary is a Marian holy day in the Roman Catholic Church on February 2, which is forty days after the date celebrated for Mary giving birth to Jesus, although canonical calendars I have received from Italy over the last decade or so note it only as the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the temple to be blessed.⁶⁴⁸

Conclusions

Like the female characters of the folk stories who are closely aligned with nature and the cosmos, I propose that folk women not only embodied the sources of life, in the form of menstrual blood and new life, but through their everyday acts, were also keepers of the cycles of life. Folk women understood life as a cycle from their own lives and bodies, and from life around them, particularly the moon. Women’s agency draws from this knowledge; their everyday spirituality spirals through and from these cycles, as we shall see in later chapters. Embodied

⁶⁴⁵ Paine, *Amulets*, 153.

⁶⁴⁶ Kelly, *Goddess Embroideries of the Northlands*, 243–44.

⁶⁴⁷ Email to author from Joan Barker, August 2, 2012.

⁶⁴⁸ New Advent, “Candlemas,” para. 1.

knowledge of the moon and its cycles through menstruation was a source of women's agency. Like the moon which waxes and wanes, all of life has cycles of growth and dying back. Folk women understood this from their everyday acts closely tied to the source and cycles of life. Lunar and menstrual presence is evident in folk life, as we have seen, and in the jewelry, which is presented in the next chapter. Lunar cycles impact spinning, food, and medicine as we shall see in later chapters.

7. Folk Women as Protectors of the Source of Life

Women were agents of protection in the everyday spiritual realm. They wore jewelry that not only communicated information, but offered protection in its link to the sources of life—menstrual blood, ancestors, earth, water, and moon. Just as females in the folk stories drew a circle of protection around themselves, folk women protected the vessels of life: their bodies, their children, their homes, the cradle, their spinning implements, and the trunk holding their dowry with sacred images and letters.

Protection of the Body with Jewelry

Jewelry's purpose in some cultures is used not only to display wealth, but also to protect as an amulet. In its form and color, the jewelry in Trentino suggests that protection is related to menstrual blood, the moon, and eyes.

Sheila Paine's extensive cross-cultural research of amulets offers insight into jewelry's protective function. She states that its protective power comes from deflecting the gaze of others directed at the wearer to the bright attractive material. Further, the gem or stone itself holds intrinsic qualities of nature; turquoise for example is a stone of the air and sky. Both its decoration and content can be attributed with power.⁶⁴⁹

Paine uses the term "evil eye," a concept found throughout the world and related to the perceived potential harm emanating from someone's envious eyes. This envy, even if unintentional, as in the form of excessive admiration, can bring an accumulation of energy to someone, which can do harm, explains Lawrence Di

⁶⁴⁹ Paine, *Amulets*, 92.

Stasi.⁶⁵⁰ Florence Beatrice Sicoli, who has studied this phenomenon of *mal'occhio*, evil eye, in southern Italy, prefers the term “fascination” as a better description of the power attributed to the eye, which she says retains a more nuanced meaning, reflecting the complex relationship that humans have for the world around them and for each other.⁶⁵¹

One of my Trentino contacts, Erminia, although clarifying that people in Trentino were not superstitious, remembered her father’s story of his cow being inadvertently afflicted by *mal'occhio*, “evil eye” from a woman who had to be called back to undo it. In a folk story, “La Strega che chiedeva l’elemosina” (The Witch that was asking for alms), that takes place in Almazzago, a hard-hearted girl refused to give food to an old woman who came begging; that night her cow went dry, apparently in retribution for her act of selfishness.⁶⁵² This imbued power of the eye, having the ability to dry out or dry up moisture, is related to the menstruant’s gaze, according to Grahn; post-menopausal women in particular were attributed with this power, since they were thought to hold their menstrual blood within themselves.⁶⁵³

Eyes are also attributed with their ability to bestow positive influences. In India, holy women and men are thought to confer blessings through their look, or

⁶⁵⁰ Di Stasi, *Mal'occhio (evil eye)*.

⁶⁵¹ Sicoli, “The fascination of women, animals and plants.”

⁶⁵² Neri, “La Strega che chiedeva l’elemosina” [The Witch that was asking for alms], *Mille Leggende del Trentino*, #775, 107.

⁶⁵³ Grahn, *Blood, Bread, and Roses*, 261–62.

darshan.⁶⁵⁴ The eyes of some Black Madonnas are attributed with beneficent power.⁶⁵⁵ The evil eye gets more attention because its harm is often believed to be involuntary, says Grahn.⁶⁵⁶

Coral as Protective and Symbol of Blood

Coral was highly prized by women among all classes in Trentino, according to Rosanna Cavallini in her book *Gioie Comuni: L'Ornamento femminile popolare in Trentino 1850–1950* (Common Joy: Female popular ornament in Trentino 1850–1950). It was known as *corài* in dialect, a term which also came to include jewelry of deep red garnet as well.⁶⁵⁷ It was worn as necklaces and as pendant earrings in the form of a *goccia*, meaning a drop, which resembles a round drop of red liquid. The position of coral on the ears and around the collar seems to indicate protection of these areas, observes Cavallini.⁶⁵⁸ Coral necklaces on women are illustrated in photographs of women as well as in ex-voto images. In one photo, a young girl wears a long necklace wrapped around her neck three times; she stands by her mother also adorned in a coral necklace.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁴ Sheldrake, *Sense of Being Stared At*, 184.

⁶⁵⁵ The Black Madonna of Montevergine in Avellino, Campania is one example. See Moser, *Honoring Darkness*, 93–94.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁶⁵⁷ Cavallini, *Gioie Comuni*, 68. Busk says garnet was found on Cima d'Asta, the highest peak in Trentino (Busk, *The Valleys of Tirol*, 396–397).

⁶⁵⁸ Cavallini, *Gioie Comuni* [Common joys], 68.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

Cavallini describes coral's "living red color" as a "symbol of the vitality of blood, tied intimately to the representation of female fertility."⁶⁶⁰ These descriptions support Grahn's view of red coral as "metaformic"—that is, it conveys instruction about menstrual blood or menstrual rules. As further evidence of the ability of adornment to communicate menstrual knowledge, Cavallini notes that dark red or black jewelry is worn in some countries to indicate the cessation of fertility.⁶⁶¹

Coral's red color was specifically attributed with apotropaic virtue and the capacity to repel all adversity; it was used in sacred items of devotion in the Alps, including in a rosary.⁶⁶² Coral appears in a sacred context in Sardegna, Italy, as a necklace adorning the Black Madonna of Valverde, perhaps aligning the protective power of coral to her for those who view the statue.

Women in the past always wore their coral with pride, according to the caption in a book on Val di Mocheni, which shows a photo of a smiling older woman wearing a coral necklace and coral earrings in the shape of drops.⁶⁶³ One of my relatives in Trentino, born in Val di Mocheni, showed me her *corài* necklace, which had been her mother's, when we first met, clearly a prized

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁶¹ Email to author from Rosanna Cavallini, December 16, 2010. Attachment originally sent December 1, 2010.

⁶⁶² Höck and Sölder, *Culti*, 144–45.

⁶⁶³ Fabbro, *I Mòcheni*, 40.

possession. In Trentino, earrings or a necklace of coral or garnet were given as gifts indicating betrothal.⁶⁶⁴

In a photo from Trentino of my maternal great grandmother, Felicita, she wears a long necklace as do each of her daughters. My paternal great grandmother, Domenica, also wears a long necklace in the photo I have of her, reaching almost to her waist, with a cross hanging from it. Since these photos are in black and white, it is not possible to determine their color.

Moon as Protective

Jewelry with moon symbolism was worn as protective amulets to protect against spiritual harm, specifically *malefici* (harm) and *mal di luna* (epilepsy, literally harm of the moon), according the research of Cavallini. Two such amulets from the twentieth century are portrayed. One is a circular brass brooch with a lunar crescent on the left and the number thirteen described as follows:

Circular metal brooches with the number “13” added to the growing moon. Lunar crescents were used to prevent and break the evil spells of witches and demons. They were thought to be effective as anti-epileptic drugs, since this disease was among those due to phenomena of possession and was connected to the lunar phases, hence the name *mal di luna*, moon sickness. It was believed that the attacks of epilepsy were affected by astrological changes.⁶⁶⁵

Two young girls are shown in a photograph, one seated, one standing, each wearing a small amulet as described above, on a chain so it falls at their chest

Another amulet, labeled as a *chatelaine*, is a metal circle enclosing the number “13” from which hangs seven chains, each with a different pendent: *il*

⁶⁶⁴ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 110.

⁶⁶⁵ Cavallini, *Gioie Comuni* [Common joys], 96. (My translation.)

gallo, il corno, il cestino, il ferro di cavallo, il maiale, il pesce, il liuto, that is the rooster, the horn, the container, the horseshoe, the pig, the fish, and the lute.⁶⁶⁶ There are thirteen moon cycles in a year. The horseshoe with its downward crescent shape resembles the moon.

Dangling chains, ultimately representing the Goddess, were considered effective as an amulet, according to Mary B. Kelly who has noted evidence for the similarity between designs on archaeological finds and those embroidered on cloth.⁶⁶⁷ Metal amulets or pendants in female form with dangling attachments from the fifth through the first centuries BCE in Trentino include a bronze pendant from Sanzeno, Val di Non with six round dangles from the bottom of the skirt-like form, labeled as a female anthropomorphic pendant,⁶⁶⁸ although another publication refers to her as the “Goddess of the Horses.”⁶⁶⁹ Freyja, the Germanic goddess of the seers, wore a shining necklace possibly of gold or silver that was an “instrument of magical transformation,” according to Ralph Metzner.⁶⁷⁰

Eyes as Protective—and Visionary?

Jewelry representing the protective eye was worn. Cavallini’s publication on jewelry includes photos of two round, white pendant necklaces mounted in

⁶⁶⁶ Cavallini, *Gioie Comuni* [Common joys], 96.

⁶⁶⁷ Kelly, *Goddess Embroideries of the Northlands*.

⁶⁶⁸ See Lanzinger, Marzatico, and Pedrotti, eds., *Storia del Trentino*, 538–39, illustration.

⁶⁶⁹ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *800 years*, 10.

⁶⁷⁰ Metzner, *Well of Remembrance*, 155.

silver from the twentieth century in Trentino, commonly called *l'occhio di Santa Lucia*, the eye of Santa Lucia, or *pietra dell'occhio*, the eye stone. They were worn as amulets for preventing eye maladies.⁶⁷¹ One of them is a round white fossilized shell spiraling into the center; the other is white, smooth and round like a pearl, resembling the shape and color of the moon. Shells from the primordial sea may still be found in the Dolomite Mountains. The spiral symbol is linked to the water, moon and fertility in the silver amulets of Morocco.⁶⁷² Pearls in women's jewelry were associated with the moon, women, and water in India.⁶⁷³

The eyes of Santa Lucia appear in a large mural from 1470 in the Church of the Nativity of Mary in Pellizzano in Val di Sole. Depicted with golden hair, reddened cheeks, a red dress, and a golden and white outer garment, the saint's unfocused eyes look to the side; in her left hand she holds a round tray with two eyes that seem to look at the viewer.⁶⁷⁴ Were women's natural roles of "seer" and their gifts of prophecy suppressed? Did the figure of Santa Lucia become the recipient of the seer's ability? After a pastoral visit by the bishop in 1617, the

⁶⁷¹ Cavallini, *Gioie Comuni* [Common joys], 95.

⁶⁷² Paine, *Amulets*, 132.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶⁷⁴ According to the Christian legend, Santa Lucia's eyes were ripped from her when she would not marry a non-Christian. As a Virgin she would have also been yielding her virginity, which may be an important detail. Yet, in this image, she still has her own eyes in place.

image, along with other frescoes, was covered over according to the dictates of the Council of Trent.⁶⁷⁵

Jewelry with decorative symbolism, including the ancient symbol of the cross, also served as protection. In the Christian era, small pieces of paper or fabric known as *breve* with images of saints or religious symbols were worn for protection.⁶⁷⁶

Protection of Home and Belongings

Women protected all the vessels of life: the home, the crib, and the trunk holding her handmade goods. Religious images known as *stampe*, stamped prints of holy figures, were centrally displayed on the wall, and affixed to the lids of chests and on closet doors.⁶⁷⁷ In the folk museum at San Michele, holy images were shown affixed to the wooden crib for the baby, and above the beds of the adults. Protective images or sacred letters adorned the implements used for spinning and storing lace, as discussed in Chapter 8.

The property that a woman brought to her marriage, her *corredo*, was held in a carved wooden chest, called a *cassone* or trunk, originally made of a tree trunk. The description in the Casa Andriollo museum literature suggests an almost magical quality due to its interior and external nature. “The dowry chest was used to store, preserve and protect what often was the only female property, her alter

⁶⁷⁵ Mezzi and Ambrosi, *Chiesa Parrocchiale della Natività di Maria*, 2, 10.

⁶⁷⁶ Casa Andriollo, “La medicina del corpo e dell’anima: La protezione magico religiosa,” “Il breve,” para. 1.

⁶⁷⁷ Casa Andriollo, “L’arco dell’esistenza: Il giardino di fede privato,” para. 2.

ego, the *corredo*,” according the museum exhibit.⁶⁷⁸ Further there was a secret compartment within for special items, like jewelry. One trunk carved in beautiful detail is pictured with three symbolic religious images on the front of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Traditions Carried Forward—the Value of Spiritual Protection

In a photo of my paternal grandmother, Anna, and her siblings, taken in Denver, Colorado in 1913, she wears a round pendant on a chain that falls to her chest and appears to be a gold pocket watch or a locket for photos. Two of her three sisters, in dark dresses and presumably married, wear similar necklaces. The third sister, age fifteen, in a light dress, wears no pendant. The jewelry may be implicitly or explicitly communicating marital status.

Images of the Virgin Mary and Jesus adorn several walls of my mother’s home. The dresser in her bedroom is a sort of home shrine with holy images, a burning candle, and a collection of rosaries hanging nearby. Aunt Annie had a similar “dresser shrine” in her studio apartment when I visited her in May 2009. An image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, given to her as a wedding gift more than seventy years earlier, was displayed on her wall.

When I was born, a nun from the nearby Queen of Heaven orphanage gave my mother a tiny blue medal of the Virgin Mary to pin on my clothing for protection and blessings. The medal, which my mother saved, is affixed to the last page of my white satin baby book, along with her written notes of its origin.

⁶⁷⁸ Casa Andriollo, “L’arco dell’esistenza: I mobili dotati,” para. 3.

Conclusions

Women were the protectors in the everyday spiritual realm. They guarded new life, children, and their own fertility. One way this was accomplished was through jewelry, which could act as an amulet and offer spiritual protection. In its form and color, the jewelry in Trentino suggests that protection is related to menstrual blood, the moon, and eyes.

The jewelry in these examples links to the source of life: to the family past, if the jewelry was handed down, to the natural source of its origin—garnets from the rock of the mountains, red coral from the sea, amber from the resin of ancient pine trees, pearls or shells from the sea, to the deep past of women's source of power—her menstrual blood and life-giving ability, to place—and thus to ancestors, to the healing cycles of the moon, and to the healing and visionary eyes of sacred females. By wearing it, a woman would be visibly displaying her connection to source. In its attributed power to protect, this jewelry seems to convey the understanding: “Protect and honor the source of life and it will protect you.” As amulets and adornment, jewelry would have been a source of women's agency.

Evoking the Anguane in the folk stories in Chapter 5, who drew a circle of protection around themselves, folk women protected the vessels of life: their bodies, their homes, the cradle, their spinning implements, and the trunk holding their dowry with protective images. Trentino American women display sacred images in their homes.

8. Folk Women as Creators of Cloth

Women traditionally have had the knowledge to transform the fiber of plants into usable thread for making cloth. Spinning is a gift attributed to divine protection, is associated with prohibitions, and, as I described in Chapter 4, is closely tied to the female Nature Beings having special powers. In this chapter, we see how folk women upheld the importance and rules of spinning. Preparing the materials for, and caring for the products resulting from, spinning also reflect women's agency, and derive from their close relationship with nature and its cycles. Cloth, the result of a long process of plant growth and harvest, spinning, and weaving, became a medium for conveying information, divine energy, healing, protection, and veneration. The renewal of cloth through laundry was closely tied to nature and its cycles. Cloth provided a medium for women who wrote with thread, blessed with thread, created beauty, and identified what was sacred. Spun yarn could be knitted or crocheted into items of protection and beauty. Prohibitions and other practices regarding spinning and cloth associate them with menstrual power.

Spinning—an Act of Transformation and Spiritual Agency

Spinning transforms plants and wool into usable material, an act of agency. Women spun fibers into thread and words into stories in the evenings of the dark winter, when farming families in the Alpine villages gathered in the warmth of the stable for exchanging news, storytelling, and indoor work. Women would spin, sew, knit, and embroider. The communal gathering was referred to as *il filò*, a dialect word related to the Italian words *il filo*, thread, and *filare*, to spin.

Like the thread spun onto the spindle, stories that entertained and conveyed the rules of behavior were spun into form.⁶⁷⁹

A description of the process of spinning and its long history is detailed by Elizabeth Wayland Barber in the first chapter of her book, *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years*.⁶⁸⁰ The tools used by European peasant women to spin by hand involve a rod or staff to which a mass of prepared fiber is attached to supply the raw material and a spindle, onto which the spun yarn is wound. A spindle whorl in the shape of a disk can be used as a kind of flywheel to stabilize the spinning motion. A photo of older women spinning together in Giudicarie Valley from the 1920s portrays the typical hand-spinning mode with the staff (*la conocchia* or *la rocca*) held under the left arm, and the spindle (*il fuso*) hanging free.⁶⁸¹ The image of Santa Brigida, carried in procession to the mountain sanctuary above my grandmother's village, is portrayed as an old woman carrying a staff in her left hand.⁶⁸² Vicki Noble describes the staff as a designation of matrilineal descent.⁶⁸³ In Nordic culture, a woman whose role was a sibyl or seer

⁶⁷⁹ Mathias and Raspa, *Italian Folktales in America*, 3.

⁶⁸⁰ Barber, *Women's Work*, 30–39.

⁶⁸¹ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Songs and Tales*, 95.

⁶⁸² "El Meledri," Anno 2007–n.2–dicembre 2007, Front cover. In the image, Santa Brigida who is standing seems to lift her gown to show her right foot. At the top and center of the image, the Virgin Mary is seated and dressed in red with Jesus on her lap; Mary holds a long necklace, and Jesus holds a rose.

⁶⁸³ Noble, *Motherpeace: A Way to the Goddess*, 78, 220.

carried a staff or wand. She was known as a völvu and was originally a priestess of the Goddess Freyja.⁶⁸⁴

Cycles of Growth, Preparation, Divination

In the act of spinning, women transform plant fiber and animal wool into usable thread and yarn. Rosanna Cavallini has collected the details of this process in *Un punto più del diavolo* (One more stitch than the devil), a catalog with photos and essays of an exhibit she curated in Valsugana.⁶⁸⁵ The materials that were used for spinning in Trentino included plant fibers from flax (*Linum usitatissimum*), hemp (*Cannabis sativa*), and wool from sheep.⁶⁸⁶ Planting, growing, harvesting, and preparing each material required an in-depth knowledge of how and when it needed to be worked, handled, and cared for.

Like the thread whose twisted spirals give it strength, spinning is inherently linked to cycles. The plant's growth is subject to a monthly, seasonal and yearly agricultural cycle. Women could forecast or influence the growth of the flax in popular beliefs. February 2, a traditional day of divination in the folk tradition for weather and crops, was a time for observing the flax harvest for the coming year; the height of the plants' growth was influenced by women jumping or being raised up as high as possible during the carnival dance.⁶⁸⁷ One folk story

⁶⁸⁴ Bjarnadottir, *Saga of Vanadis, Volva and Valkyrja*, 167.

⁶⁸⁵ Cavallini, "Intrecci Divini e Umani."

⁶⁸⁶ Canestrini, "Le Principali Fibre Vegetali," 41, 43. Zanetti, "Il Progetto 'Ritorno della Lana,'" 51.

⁶⁸⁷ Canestrini, "Le Principali Fibre Vegetali," 43.

tells of an apparently Christianized tradition in Castello, a hamlet of the village of Ossana, in which the height of the last woman to receive ashes on Ash Wednesday—which marks the beginning of the forty-day period of Lent preceding Easter—is used to forecast the abundance of flax harvest.⁶⁸⁸

Once the flax is harvested, in order to be usable, the plants are often soaked in water, a process known as retting, a “rotting away” of the unusable parts of the stem, leaving the fibers to be used. The origin of the verb “to ret” is related to the verb “to rot.”⁶⁸⁹ In implementing this process, women would have had an inherent understanding through their experience that decay and disintegration are a critical part of the process of creation. The properties of the water influence the fiber. For example, the healing waters of the Comano Terme were reportedly rediscovered thanks to local villagers who noted its superior retting ability.⁶⁹⁰

The use of animal fibers is linked to the agricultural cycle and lunar cycle, reports Laura Zanetti in her essay on the use of wool in Valsugana. Shearing of the animals was done with the waning moon twice a year. The whole process was cyclic: the seasonal transit of the animals, the shearing of the sheep, and the

⁶⁸⁸ Neri, *Mille Leggende del Trentino*, #846, 167.

⁶⁸⁹ Barber, *Women's Work*, 69.

⁶⁹⁰ Neri, *Women and Girls*, 20.

spinning, weaving, and dyeing of the wool in the wintertime.⁶⁹¹ The spindle of white wool may have appeared like the growing moon as it got fuller.

Power, Prohibitions, and Lunar Association

Spinning had power, prohibitions, and lunar associations, all of which can be related to menstrual rites. Spinsters (women who spin) were considered to have an affinity with the rain. Folgheraiter reports that:

The spinsters were considered to be *privileged ambassadors in the relationship with the sacred*. In 1661, a year of “great drought” the population of Meano [part of Trento] had sent five spinsters to the [Madonna] shrine of the Laste. As soon as the decision was made, “they were hampered by such abundant water” that they had to postpone the pilgrimage to a later date.⁶⁹²

Veneri cites a dangerous, fatal quality to spinning if it were done at certain times:

It was prohibited to spin on the streets or to carry the spindles uncovered for fear of damaging the harvests. Or else it was prohibited from spinning on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evening, or the last day of *Quaresima* [the forty-day fast of Lent].⁶⁹³

The girls of Alto Adige had to finish all the spinning before the beginning of Natale (Christmas) or be punished, because the twelve days that followed were often decisive for the whole year.⁶⁹⁴ Spinning prohibitions were not limited to Trentino. Davidson cites practices in northern countries of a special day that was set aside for no spinning because it was sacred to the goddess or female spiritual

⁶⁹¹ Zanetti, “Il Progetto ‘Ritorno della Lana’” [The project “Return of the wool], 51–53.

⁶⁹² Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 109. My emphasis.

⁶⁹³ Veneri, “Tessere e Filare e Cucire,” 14.

⁶⁹⁴ Raffaelli, *L’influsso della luna*, 12.

guardian.⁶⁹⁵ In the popular folk story, “The Pale Mountains,” recounted in Chapter 6, a group of little wild men who live in the mountains spin the moonlight into a shimmering cover for the Dolomite Mountains so that a Princess from the Moon can come to live on earth.⁶⁹⁶

The ability of spinsters and their spindles to impact moisture and fertility evokes the power attributed to menstruants and their blood. There are strict rules of enforced “pauses” at periodic times associated with spinning, as there were with menstrual seclusion rites at one time. The spindles of thread, like menstrual blood, can negatively impact the fertility of the crops.

In the stories in which a maiden draws blood from a needle while sewing Veneri associates the passage into womanhood with the arrival of menstrual blood.⁶⁹⁷ Busk references a story from her British homeland about a maiden who pricked her finger while working on a designated day of rest and died from the flow of blood.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁵ As noted in Chapter 5, spinning practices in the traditions of other countries that Davidson cites include: no spinning on Thursdays in Blekinge, as the goddess Frigg did her spinning that day; no spinning on Thursday evenings in Latvia, where the goddess of spinning is Laima; and no spinning on the Thursday before Whit Sunday, the special day to the Rusalkas in Russia. Davidson, *Roles of the Northern Goddess*, 104.

⁶⁹⁶ Wolff, “The Pale Mountains,” *The Dolomites and Their Legends*; and Wolff, “The Pale Mountains,” *The Pale Mountains*. The story appears in both translations, although with different details.

⁶⁹⁷ Veneri, “Tessere e Filare e Cucire,” 16.

⁶⁹⁸ Busk, *The Valleys of Tirol*, 381.

In the years before matrimony, young women prepared the yarn and thread for bales of linen and wool fabric that became part of their dowry.⁶⁹⁹ Through their knowledge and labor, women thus created a kind of currency and financial security. Balls of spun fiber were able to be made into the stuff of everyday life—not unlike their menstrual blood which held the potential for becoming human life.

Spinning and Divine Protection

Women's tools for creating thread, yarn, and cloth, and storing lace from the twentieth century are marked with sacred letters and engravings as portrayed in an illustrated catalog of essays edited by Rosanna Cavallini on spinning and cloth in the cultural history of folk women in Trentino.⁷⁰⁰ A shuttle for weaving bears the letters AVM for Ave Maria, while another has the letters IHS, a protective monogram representing the name of Jesus.⁷⁰¹ Two *rocche* are shown, each with an image of the Madonna inserted, and a painted wooden box for storing lace is carved with the sun, moon, and stars on the side, and the sacred letters IHS on the end.⁷⁰²

In the folk tradition, there is a story about a special rock in Val di Mocheni near a malga where Saint Orsola came through with a group of Virgins. The

⁶⁹⁹ Canestrini, "Le Principali Fibre Vegetali," 43.

⁷⁰⁰ Cavallini, *Un punto più del diavolo*.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, 22, 27.

boulder bears the bench-like indentation in the rock of where she sat and the imprint of where she laid down her ball of yarn. Today the village of Sant'Orsola, which is famous for its healing thermal springs, is named in her memory, along with the Valley of the Virgins.⁷⁰³ The story draws together some interesting elements: spinning by a sacred female, a group of virgins led by a Holy Virgin, sitting on the rocks, and, presumably, a round imprint on the rock.⁷⁰⁴ The rock holds the memory of these things.

The name of the female protector of spinning varies across northern Europe depending on the region. The Goddess Holda protected all phases of the spinning of flax, including the growing of the plants.⁷⁰⁵ The Goddesses Freyja and Frigg were likely the deities of spinning and weaving in the Norse tradition, according to Davidson, who cites several traditions honoring a special day—often Thursday, which was considered sacred to the Goddess or to the protective female—on which no spinning was done out of respect.⁷⁰⁶ These females also strictly enforce the rules surrounding spinning, and the threatened or feared punishment could be significant. In one untitled story about Froberta (Frau Berta), referenced earlier in Chapter 5, twelve women gather to spin during the *filò* one

⁷⁰³ Fabbro, *I Mòcheni*, 126.

⁷⁰⁴ Although I have not seen the rock in person, I wonder if the imprint attributed to her ball of yarn, which can be considered the stuff of life, appears to be a cupmark. *Orso* is Italian for bear, so the saint is also related to the bear. Malga Pez is the vicinity.

⁷⁰⁵ Folkard, *Plant Lore, Legends, and Lyrics*, 340.

⁷⁰⁶ Davidson, *Roles of the Northern Goddess*, 104.

evening; after they violate the rules for gathering, they are visited by twelve Froberte, whose actions seem to implicitly threaten their death.⁷⁰⁷ In South Tyrol, Frau Berta was said to bring thread and yarn, and in return, the women offered her food.⁷⁰⁸ This seems to indicate the essential value of thread and yarn to life, as well as the importance of expressing gratitude to the bringer or source of life-giving gifts by giving something in return, in this case, life-sustaining food.

A curious historical note by Folgheraiter under a section entitled “Quando Berta Filava” (When Berta used to spin), cites a law of 1749 from Trent when men were “strictly forbidden” to participate in and speak at the *filò*.⁷⁰⁹ There were spinning places exclusively for women in nineteenth-century Salzburg, according to Davidson.⁷¹⁰

Cloth Created from Spun Fiber

After the fiber was spun, it was woven into cloth, which was highly valued—even sacred—and had the ability to communicate, identify, heal, protect, and bless. Because the process of spinning, weaving, and making clothes is very labor intensive, women would have devoted much of their lives to its creation, care, and ornamentation. All cloth would have been made by hand up until the

⁷⁰⁷ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Songs and Tales*, 35–36.

⁷⁰⁸ Davidson, *Roles of the Northern Goddess*, 105.

⁷⁰⁹ Folgheraiter, *La Terra* [The land], 32. The preceding passage mentions the names of popular books that were sometimes read. The law-giver, Ernest Leopold Firmian, assistant administrator and Plenipotentiary of Trent, later became a prince-bishop and a cardinal.

⁷¹⁰ Davidson, *Roles of the Northern Goddess*, 101.

twentieth century.⁷¹¹ In Trentino, women who did not have a loom would send the yarn they had spun over the winter to a weaver.⁷¹² Winter was the time for women to spin, card, felt, and dye the wool in Trentino.⁷¹³

The strenuous work of felting and weaving the heavy loden cloth of Tyrol was done by men, according to Ward, including sheep shearing, dying, building of the massive looms, and the actual weaving. She notes that women carded and spun the wool, loaded the bobbins, cut and sewed the fabric into clothes, and fed the sheep and workers. Producing the sensuous, hair-like flax for linen was women's work.⁷¹⁴

Sacred Origins and Use

A vertical weaving loom is engraved on the "Great Rock" of Naquane in Valle Camonica.⁷¹⁵ Stele found in Trentino are incised such that the figure appears to wear a shawl. Among the ex-voto offered at the temple to Reitia in Veneto are those related to spinning and weaving.⁷¹⁶ Cloth decomposes with time, making it more difficult to learn about, observes Barber.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹¹ Canestrini, "Le Principali Fibre Vegetali," 41.

⁷¹² Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 108.

⁷¹³ Zanetti, "Il Progetto," 52.

⁷¹⁴ Ward, *The Hidden Life of Tirol*, 72.

⁷¹⁵ Anati, "Way of Life," 28.

⁷¹⁶ Höck and Sölter, *Culti*, 42.

⁷¹⁷ Barber, *Women's Work*, 24.

Cloth is considered sacred in European countries, according to Mary Kelly, whose research on textiles spans the continents of Europe and Asia. Cavallini, the curator of the mountain women's museum in Trentino, states that the women conserved items like scraps of fabric and buttons not because of poverty but "from a sense of the sacredness of things, so the luck of possession was considered a divine gift not to be wasted." In the female family economy, she continues, "thrift was considered a fundamental ethical principle."⁷¹⁸

Clothes Convey Cultural Information and Values

Cloth was also made into special clothes for festival days. The festival clothes varied by valley in Trentino. Not only would folk women have experienced the agency of creating special clothes, but the power of wearing them. A contemporary group of female folk singers, Juliana & PAVA, who sing ancient songs from remote villages in Russia, claim that the authentic costumes they wear, some more than 300 years old, have "an almost mystical effect" on them.⁷¹⁹ The linen would have been specially prepared by soaking it in a bog and spreading out in the sun, Juliana Svetlitchnaia explained after their performance.

In Trentino folk customs, how a female was dressed could indicate her marital status, whether she was a widow or a girl of marriageable age.⁷²⁰ In my interviews of contemporary women from Trentino, I learned that black was

⁷¹⁸ Casa Andriollo, "L'arco dell'esistenza: Fare e disfare," para. 6.

⁷¹⁹ Mandel, *Let the Bird Fly*, para. 5.

⁷²⁰ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Songs and Tales*, 140.

traditionally worn at one time for the wedding because, as a special garb, the dress could then also be worn for a funeral. In a photo taken in Colorado of my maternal grandmother, Edvige, and her husband Emanuel, presumably for their wedding in 1912, she wears a dark dress.

One folk story tells of a young woman who tried to put on airs by wearing fine clothes, and was tricked by an *Oca* (Ogre), who publicly shamed her by making them disappear.⁷²¹ The power of clothes and cloth is also indicated in its absence: if a woman was *malvestito* (poorly dressed), she could be regarded or called a *strega* (witch), according to Coltro.⁷²² In the folk stories, the witches were sometimes described as wearing rags. Perhaps this signaled the danger, and dangerous power, that could accumulate from not properly caring for cloth, a sacred substance. It may have also been a way of negating women by commenting negatively on their clothing, which was a medium of their agency.

Cloth Imparts Blessing, Fertility, Healing, Sacred Presence

In the folk story previously referenced, “The Dress of the Blessed Virgin Mary” by Neri, a woman of the village who is terribly ill is healed from being dressed in the clothing of the Sorrowful Virgin Mary, *Madonna Addolorata*.⁷²³ At Madonna sanctuaries in other parts of Italy, I have purchased holy cards decorated with a tiny bit of cloth attached, considered blessed from touching the

⁷²¹ Neri, “The Ogre’s joke,” *Secret Heart* (Spring), 29–30.

⁷²² Coltro, *Gnomi*, 93, 139.

⁷²³ Neri, “The Dress of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” *Women and Girls*, 73–74.

altar or statue of the Madonna. Gremmo notes a sanctuary to the Virgin in Fours San Laurent in the French Alps where women go so that they can touch their clothing—notably “clothing of their intimate parts”—to her to receive fertile blessings.⁷²⁴

In the funeral customs of Rumo before Vatican II, people kissed a special cloth draped over the left arm of the priest officiating at the funeral as a visible sign of peace with the deceased.⁷²⁵ A *gonfalone*, a banner of colored cloth adorned with a sacred image and sometimes bordered with fringe, is carried high on a pole in religious processions.⁷²⁶ As mentioned in an earlier chapter, small pieces of fabric known as *breve* with images of saints or religious symbols were worn as for protection.⁷²⁷ Canestrini cites the magical properties of linen in popular belief.⁷²⁸

Cloth serves as a medium of women’s agency to keep the cycles of life and to honor the source of life. In the valleys of Ticino in Lombardy, Berta

⁷²⁴ Gremmo, *Le Grandi Pietre Magiche* [The great magic rocks], 130.

⁷²⁵ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 123.

⁷²⁶ Folgheraiter, *I Sentieri dell’Infinito*, 280 and *La Terra dei Padri*, 117, 199, 266, 270. In one photo from 1958, the black banner is of a skeleton with a sickle, carried by the “confraternity of the Good Death.” Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 121.

⁷²⁷ Casa Andriollo, “La medicina del corpo e dell’anima: La protezione magico religiosa,” “Il breve,” para. 1.

⁷²⁸ Canestrini, “Le Principali Fibre Vegetali,” 43. Also “Il lino,” the linen, appears in a magical chant noted by Coltro whose aim is unclear. See Coltro, *Gnomi*, 94.

appears in radiant vestments to sow flowers and fruits.⁷²⁹ The female life cycle becomes aligned with the yearly cycle.

Clothes Washing—Enacting Cyclic Renewal

Cloth is a potent medium of women's power. I propose that the washing of clothes, in its use of cyclic time and its association with women and water, is enacting a cycle of renewal. Particularly in its association with Anguane in the folk stories, laundry is an act of transformation, with taboos. Ashes from the wood fire added to the boiling wash water were used to make clothes white, I was told by women in Trentino, which also suggests renewal from death. Washing can be helped by the phase of the moon, according to the Tyrolean folk traditions reported by Paungger and Poppe; marks in the *biancheria* (the linen and cotton household and personal items) come out more easily with the diminishing effects of the shrinking moon.⁷³⁰ Women in Romagna would never do laundry on the full moon.⁷³¹

Some women still gathered at the public basin doing laundry together when I first visited my maternal grandmother's village in 1980. In the past, the important work of laundry was done communally and served as a place of visiting and exchanging information.

⁷²⁹ Coltro, *Gnomi*, 89.

⁷³⁰ Paungger and Poppe, *Servirsi della Luna* [Help of the moon], 152.

⁷³¹ Raffaelli, *L'Influsso della luna* [The influence of the moon], 6.

Davidson addresses the ritual aspects of laundry, citing practices at one time of the professional washerwomen in the village of Minot, France, who also washed the newborns and those who had died. There were days of the year when doing laundry was forbidden. Several cultures have stories associating what Davidson calls “supernatural” female beings with washerwomen.⁷³²

In a folk story entitled “The Clothes of the Salingas,” a young man hides so that he can discover who owns the woman’s clothes, dazzling by day and fluorescent by night, laid out to dry on the herbs by a fountain in Fierozzo, Val di Mocheni. He discovers that a *Salinga* (similar to an *Anguana*) emerges from the mountain at midnight, draws a circle on the ground around a particular fountain carved from the trunk of a tree, and instructs her clothes to clean themselves. She lays them out on the herbs to dry, again in a magic circle, and speaks words to invoke the help of the sun. The next day, the man imitates her ritual including the spoken words. He also reaches out to touch the white garments, which is forbidden, burns his hand, and washes it in the fountain. When she returns to find him, she turns him into a black bird, and he flies over the area to warn others.⁷³³

I propose this final action is a reminder to others to honor the rules. This story conveys the strong element of touch. It emphasizes sacred boundaries physically drawn, the consequences of knowledge taken without permission, and presents a strong image of a female standing inside her power to access alliance with nature spirits. The herbs, sun, earth, mountain, and running water all seem to play a role

⁷³² Davidson, *Roles of the Northern Goddess*, 136–138.

⁷³³ Neri, “The Clothes of the Salingas,” *Women and Girls*, 21–23.

in the clothes' luminosity. A circle drawn on the earth is a source of power.

Whiteness here seems to indicate accumulated potency of the forces of nature, so powerful in fact that the cloth may not be touched without consequences.

In some folk stories, the Anguane have green garments, which they wash by dropping them into the mountain lakes at night from the cliffs above where they live. The seaweed that gathers in the lakes is attributable to the "rags" of the Anguane; a phrase in dialect still exists for the laundry of the Anguana, *bucca del ognane*, which conveys doing the laundry in a hurry and not very well. In this case, the Anguane are associated with cloth that is not beautiful or well-cared for. Did the Anguane have to do laundry by night to be safe? Or did they understand and seek that time to gather special properties from nature and the cosmos into the cloth?

Embroidery—Everyday Writing, Symbolic Language, Sacred Script

Cloth could be further transformed with thread. Women wrote with thread and blessed with thread. Their stitches could create beauty, transmit knowledge, and identify what was sacred. "Embroideries were the texts of the pre-literate world," according to Mary Kelly. "They contain the essential meanings not easily articulated in speech or words but nonetheless, vitally essential to life in the world."⁷³⁴ Cavallini also describes embroidery as writing with thread; she refers to the stitches as "a sequence of coded signs" in describing an image of

⁷³⁴ Kelly, *Goddess Embroideries of the Northlands*, xviii.

embroidery in red thread from Trentino that shows rows of symbols, which she notes look like the results of someone practicing a script.⁷³⁵

Young women embroidered their linens during the *filò*, according to Clementina Todesco of the village of Faller. Women identified ownership of their fabrics, like sheets and pillowcases, using red thread to embroider the initials of the head of household.⁷³⁶ Women brought the linens they needed to the marriage as part of her dowry. Red is the most favored and important color for embroidery throughout the Mediterranean/Balkan and Central European areas, according to Kelly, particularly for ritual textiles.⁷³⁷ Like the Anguane of the folk stories who brought forth flowers, women could bring forth the fruitfulness of nature with their stitching. The Anguane were also said to have beautiful embroidery.⁷³⁸

In Trentino and throughout Italy, embroidery of words, symbols, or flowers often adorns the sacred cloth covering the altar in Catholic churches. In 2009, the altar cloth – also adorned with beautiful hanging lace, the subject of the next section – upon which was placed the protective “Madonnina” (little Madonna) in the chapel near the Meledrio River was embroidered with swirling grape vines, leaves, and fruit along with the words “Regina della Famiglia,” Queen of the Family. The embellishment serves to bless, identify, call attention to

⁷³⁵ Casa Andriollo, “Soggetto Montagna Donna: I saperi femminili,” para. 2.

⁷³⁶ Mathias and Raspa, *Italian Folktales in America*, 39.

⁷³⁷ Kelly, *Goddess Embroideries of the Balkan Lands*, 108; see also frontispiece.

⁷³⁸ Becher, “Auronzo,” three para. after “Le anguane.”

its sanctity, pay honor, and adorn. In the folk story previously referenced, “The Dress of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” from Val di Sole, the sick woman who is healed from the clothes of the statue of the Sorrowful Virgin Mary, *Madonna Addolorata*, makes a new vestment for the statue, embroidering it with silver and gold.⁷³⁹ Embroidery in this story serves to honor, to express gratitude, and to acknowledge the gift of healing. Ritually giving thanks to the source is an important value that is communicated.

Mary Kelly asks her readers to consider the symbols placed on cloth by women in their ritual, spiritual context:

In the end, we need to look at the embroideries as holy, ceremonial objects too, ritually used as power cloths. We need to really look at them; not aesthetically, although that is good, but learn to read them, to de-code their symbolic systems. We need to see them as their makers did, as ritual objects and as possible records of events and beliefs. We need to believe, as people surely did from time immemorial that the *cloth held powerful symbols* and like earlier tattoos on the skin or motifs on metal and ceramic objects, could *effect change, heal, protect, enhance or grant fertility* by the symbols and motifs inscribed in thread on its lustrous surfaces. These precious symbols were highly valued and the ritual objects which they embellish were the first things to pack up as migrants left and the most important items to be buried on the head, over the heart or in the hand of their owner at death.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁹ Neri, “The Dress of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” *Women and Girls*, 73–74.

⁷⁴⁰ Kelly, *Goddess Embroideries of the Northlands*, xvii–xviii. Emphasis added.

Knitting, Crocheting, and Lace-Making

In the folk traditions, elders shared stories with Cavallini about competing with their sisters at Christmas on who could knit the first pair of wool socks for the father, which in Tirol, was rewarded with a small gift.⁷⁴¹

While in Trentino, I observed crocheted items more commonly than knitted items. My Trentino cousin Daria had crocheted long white lace-like window coverings that hung over every window as adornment. Each panel had two long flowers stitched as a central pattern. She crocheted and wore shawls for herself, and when she came to visit the United States in 1984, she presented my aunts and my mother with crocheted shawls for their shoulders, each in a different color. In the home of Irma, the bed I was sleeping on was covered with a crocheted afghan, made of spirals of different colors. Each spiral connected with the nearby spirals, which seemed to be a manifestation of the ongoing cycles of life. In my cousin Erminia's home in Trentino, a vase of crocheted roses were displayed on her shelf. When I told her that I had seen similar flowers in front of the Madonna in the church in Dimaro, she said "Ho fatto io" (I made those).

With *merletti*, or lace, beauty is created by the space—the void enclosed by the thread. Folk museums display the tools of an extremely fine lace-making process with thread, pins, bobbins, and a pillow known as *il tombolo*. The addition of lace to cloth was adornment. In the single picture I have of my maternal great-grandmother, Felicita, in Trentino, thin white lace trims the neck and sleeves of her dark dress.

⁷⁴¹ Cavallini, *Un punto più del diavolo*, 32.

Lace as sacred adornment manifests in several ways. Small paper images of holy figures (saints or Jesus) known as *santini* used for devotion and protection were adorned with lace.⁷⁴² Photos of priests in Trentino-Alto Adige show them dressed in white vestments trimmed with several inches of lace on the hem and sleeves.⁷⁴³

Traditions and Values Passed Forward to Trentino American Women

The value of cloth, its cyclic renewal, reuse, and adornment were transmitted in the traditions passed forward by my grandmothers. The items resulting from thread and their use conveyed their ability to protect, heal, celebrate, and inform.

Lunar Cyclic Renewal—Laundry on Monday

My maternal grandmother did wash on Monday, *Lunedì*, according to my mother, and so does my mother, as she has all her life. *Lunedì*, the Italian word for Monday, comes from the Italian word *luna* for moon. Perhaps this tradition of Monday clothes-washing is remembering or acknowledging lunar assistance. In my interviews with my aunt Annie in the United States, she described the process of doing laundry when she was growing up in Denver in the 1920s and 1930s. Her mother would boil water on the stove which was then transferred to a tub in which the clothes were immersed; they were washed by hand, wrung out, and hung outside on a line to dry.

⁷⁴² Ibid., 34–35.

⁷⁴³ See Folgheraiter, *La Terra*, 82, 267. Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 123.

Cloth Is Valued, Used for Everything, Re-Used

Growing up and still today in my mother's home, cloth is re-utilized rather than discarded. Old cloth is known as "rags," a common word in our family lexicon. Cloth is used for cleaning, drying, and even for beauty. Strips of cloth were used by my mother to tie up the hair of my older sisters overnight to make spirals of hair that we called "long curls" for the next day. For her wedding ceremony, my older sister Barbara specifically requested that my mother prepare her long hair for her by "tying it up in rags," enacting this fond childhood ritual. My grandmother taught my mother how to crochet old cloth into rugs as a child. Circular hand-crocheted "rag rugs" decorated and protected the floors of the hallway and in the bathroom of my childhood home. Fascinated with their variety of colors and textures, I was unaware of how they were made until I was an adult.

My aunts and mother all sewed and wore clothes made by hand growing up. Aunt Mary attended sewing school after high school and made my mother's graduation dress. My aunts and mother have crocheted afghans, embroidered tea towels, and made quilts. As their mother taught them, my mother taught me to sew, embroidery, knit, and crochet. Clothes that my mother made for me mark important events in my life: my first trip to Europe, my wedding reception, and my first day of work as an engineer.⁷⁴⁴ As a wedding gift for my husband and me,

⁷⁴⁴ When I made my first trip to Europe in 1974, a denim jacket and two blouses that my mother had made for me were in my backpack. She made a wrap-around skirt of batik fabric for me to wear for my departure after my wedding reception, which I still have. On my first day of work as an engineer, one of two women in a sea of men, I wore a blue dress of batik cotton she had made me. Batik is an ancient method of dyeing cloth practiced in Africa and Asia utilizing wax, or sometimes paste, on cloth which is carved away to allow the dye to penetrate.

she crocheted a large wool afghan of variegated colors, with which I cover myself when I am sick or need extra warmth. Kiva, my cat, is buried under the fir tree in the back yard, wrapped in a small afghan my mother had made for her. The clothes my mother has made have served to protect, heal, celebrate, and commemorate.

The value of cloth and the values of thrift, continuity, celebration, protection, beauty and even the motifs of Trentino have continued in the making of quilts. The quilt on my mother's bed, which she made, in my childhood home had the central pattern of an immense Star. My three older sisters, Dianne, Barbara, and Marlene have made numerous quilts of various creative designs, including flowers. Now they are more likely to purchase new cloth in the desired colors and patterns rather than using remnants of previous sewing projects or old clothes. Dianne gifted her daughter Chelsea, a fabric artist, with a quilt for her wedding, and has made for her grandsons. Barbara repaired a hand-made quilt by our paternal grandmother, Anna, in addition to creating several of her own. She stitched together squares from all the family members for an anniversary quilt for my parents, decades ago. My sister Marlene recently completed a quilt made of colorful linen Tyrolean calendars of years past that she found in a thrift store.

Cloth is also considered to carry sacred blessings. My mother recently received a bit of cloth from the garb of Mother Theresa, regarded and labeled as a holy relic. She keeps it on her dresser, which, as mentioned in Chapter 7, serves as a sort of household shrine.

Lace Adorned and Protected

Edvige, my maternal grandmother, likely crocheted the lace adorning the dress that my aunt Mary wears in a photo from childhood, which is several inches wide, falls from the sleeves and lies around the collar, transforming its simple bodice and dark fabric into a festive garb. My mother crocheted white round lace-patterned cotton “doilies” to protect and beautify table tops and areas of wear on upholstered furniture of my childhood home.

Conclusions

Women traditionally have had the knowledge to transform plants and animal fur into thread and yarn for making cloth. Folk women upheld the importance and rules of spinning, which enacts the mystery of the creation and continuity of life. The processes of the creation of cloth linked women to the cycles of the moon and of the year, as well as to the cycles of growth, decay, death, and transformation. Cloth, the result of spinning and weaving, became a medium for conveying information, divine energy, healing, protection, and veneration. The use of cloth today in folk tradition and folk religion demonstrates its ability to impart spiritual meaning. Not only would folk women have experienced the agency of creating special clothes, but the power of adorning, blessing, and wearing them. The renewal of cloth, through laundry, is tied to nature and its cycles. Cloth was a medium for women who wrote with thread, blessed with thread, created beauty and identified what was sacred. Spun yarn could be knitted or crocheted into items of protection and beauty. Cloth imparts and communicates women’s agency, not as self-elevating, but in resonant

acknowledgment of and harmonious alignment with the forces and cycles and sources that brought forth the creation with their participation. Prohibitions association with spinning and cloth link it to menstrual power.

9. Folk Women as Creators of Food

In this section, I draw from my experience in Trentino as well as the folk stories to consider how women's spiritual agency is demonstrated through food, which is essential to life and serves as the carrier of cultural traditions and values. The source of the ingredients is often known. Not only what is eaten, but how and when it is eaten is important. In addition to sustaining life, food can be used as medicine and for weather-prediction. In the folk stories, food serves as currency, as a means of warning, and as a tool of resistance; wild roots and berries are associated with the prophetic Sibyl and holy saints. In folk practice, wild food is valued. Food conveys cultural values—specifically, the importance of sharing.

Food, Women, and Source of Life

Women have traditionally prepared food, which is essential to life and central to daily life. The creation of food involves transforming one or more ingredients into something nourishing and life-sustaining, often through cooking. In the rural mountain valleys of Trentino, the self-sufficient peasants had to grow, gather, and preserve all of their food. The economy has changed dramatically since my grandparents left Trentino: seventy percent of the households were subsistence farmers at beginning of twentieth century compared to only seven percent in 1980.⁷⁴⁵ Yet, there remains a close and harmonious relationship of the Trentino people with food and wine. While food is a vast subject, here I focus on how food is an agent of women as a source of life and in resonance with the

⁷⁴⁵ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Typical Products and Dishes*, 10.

cycles of life, its roles in the folk stories of the past, and the values that have been conveyed.

Over the decades, women in Trentino have prepared traditional food for me from local ingredients including *polenta* (a corn meal porridge), *gnocchi* (potato dumplings), *canederli* (bread dumplings) and *torta di patate* (potato cake), sausages known as *luganeghe* from meat, stew with gravy, *kraut* from fermented cabbage, and fried dough, to name a few.

In 1980 I first visited my cousin Daria Fantelli, who at the time was seventy years old and lived in the village of Dimaro. Daria's grandmother, Felicita, is my great grandmother. Daria lived on the second floor of a multi-family house built in 1562, cooking primarily on a wood-fired stove, and using cold mountain water piped into her kitchen sink. Water was heated by boiling it on the stove. She maintained a garden in a nearby plot of land for fresh produce and walked wherever she needed to go in her daily activities, including to the butcher and the small grocery store, both of which were nearby. A small refrigerator in the pantry held perishable items like butter, cheese, milk, and thinly sliced meat. Hard cheese was kept covered in waxed paper and grated when used. A gas stove in the corner was available for cooking when the large black wood-fired stove—used also for heat in the winter—was not hot. Milk came from small rectangular boxes purchased from the store that required no refrigeration until they were opened, although fresh milk was always available at the coffee bar in town. Bread rolls, bought fresh daily, were kept in a basket covered with cloth on the table and eaten for breakfast, and with the lunch and evening meal. In the

morning I was served *caffelatte*, a bowl of warm milk mixed with espresso that had been made in a stovetop hourglass-shaped coffee maker. In Trentino the cooking at one time took place on a wood-fueled hearth open to the room, and later on wood-fired stoves.

In the kitchen of Irma in Pergine, Valsugana, the cycle of the day centers on food. After the morning meal of *caffelatte* and bread with butter and jam (or sweet *torta* from the dessert of the night before), preparations for lunch are begun. For Irma, this means cooking primarily on the wood stove. Irma and her mother, Maddalena, operated an inn, Casa Maddalena, in Val di Mocheni before Irma married, and she has perfected the art of cooking to a high degree. A very special noontime meal in 2004 consisted of wild boar that her husband, Angelo, a skilled hunter, had shot in Tuscany, and that Irma prepared in a stew cooked for several hours, and served over polenta. The polenta had been cooked in a round-bottomed copper pot with an arched metal handle that swung to the side. Irma lowered the pot into the fire of the wood stove by removing round rings from the burner creating an opening in the stove's surface. As it reached completion, the rings were replaced so it was kept warm. The polenta was stirred nearly continually with a long wooden spoon on the wood stove. Greens and vegetables for this meal and others came from Irma's back yard, whose entirety is a bountiful garden. Apples from a nearby orchard are stored in the cellar for use throughout the year. Potatoes are stored in a cellar at their cabin, near where they are grown.

Food and Its Source

Food is specific to place and its source is known. Some Italian women have told me that their recipes, even if ingredients from home are used, taste differently if prepared somewhere else. The water, the weather, and the place are perhaps all having an effect. In Trentino, the cheese is particular to the pastures where the cows graze and the *malga*, the high mountain summer hut, where cheese is made.⁷⁴⁶ In a small colorful promotional brochure about cheese from Valsugana in Trentino, the name and photo of every cow (several with crescent horns) are included for each *malga* in the valley.⁷⁴⁷ At a *baita*, a seasonal mountain cabin, one summer during a special feast of polenta and meat cooked over a fire, my cousin Irma emphasized that the cheese we were eating came from the cows “right over there,” as she pointed to the field, emphasizing that the flavor was particular to them.

Mythology scholar Hilda Ellis Davidson emphasizes the importance of milk to the diet of northern cultures. The roles of the female deities in the folk stories of Northern Europe included Guardian of the Dairy Herds. These “supernatural” or “Otherworld” females of the forests or lakes in Norway,

⁷⁴⁶ The specific taste of aged cheese is particular to the microbes of the cave in which it is aged. See the documentary about “The Cheese Nun,” Sister Noella Marcellino (Thompson, *The Cheese Nun*.)

⁷⁴⁷ Azienda per il Turismo Valsugana, “Adotta una mucca.”

Denmark, and other Celtic Lands, had herds of wild cattle which they tended.⁷⁴⁸

Davidson reports that the rays of the sun shining on the pail of milk were considered good luck, particularly on March 25, a day dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and on the midsummer festival of St. John the Baptist.⁷⁴⁹ In Ireland, a display of St. Brigit's mantle, blessed by her touch, helped ensure a good supply of milk to both cows and mothers.⁷⁵⁰

Food and Cyclic Awareness

Food is grown, harvested, and preserved in accordance with cycles. As discussed in Chapter 6, lunar cycles were at one time considered for agriculture, grape-growing, wine-making, gardening, and food preservation.

How and when food is eaten is important. There is consideration of seasonal and daily attunement with cycles. Communal festivals, known as *sagre*, celebrate a particular food that has reached its time for being gathered. New honey, for example, is celebrated with a *sagra* in July in Croviana in Val di Sole. Apples are celebrated in the fall in Val di Non.

At major events and festas, there is food. In the villages, this food is often eaten communally. On one group hike in which I participated in Valle Camonica in September 2009, organized as a fund raiser for a local cause, the crowd first

⁷⁴⁸ Davidson, *Roles of the Northern Goddess*, 31–33. Seemingly in response to the call of the wild, a “runaway cow” named Yvonne in Germany became famous in the world news media in 2011 after she escaped on her way to slaughter to live in the wild of the forests, eluding capture, and eventually gaining protection. See Chappell, “Freedom for Yvonne.”

⁷⁴⁹ Davidson, *Roles of the Northern Goddess*, 32–33.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

received a blessing by the priest (perhaps because the event coincided with his arrival to the parish), then hiked for a few hours (with food stations of apples and bread along the way), and then feasted communally at the end under a tent with live music. Eating food in this way seems to be auspicious, sending a message that “all is well”—and somehow all *does* seem to be well. In the hamlet of Pellalepre near the village of Darfo Boario Terme where I was staying, I joined the villagers in their festa under a tent one night. We all ate together, and afterwards, there was music by a live band.

Carol Fields groups the food-related festivals in Italy into four categories: *sagre* (country festivals celebrating the fertility of nature); civic festivals, religious festivals, and political festivals, all which have “ritual foods that reflect agriculture and religion and consecrate the event.”⁷⁵¹ She describes food on festival days as “especially magical,” whose properties can sometimes heal and protect. Eating festival food is about more than taste or tradition, Fields claims, “it is actually a way of assimilating wisdom.” She points out that the Italian word for wisdom, *sapienza*, is related to the Latin word for taste, *sapia*, even suggesting that “eating is a powerful way of consuming God,” noting the Christian communion rite.⁷⁵² Dumplings and fish were required to be eaten on Berchta’s special day in one location in Germany, reports Davidson, with severe

⁷⁵¹ Fields, *Celebrating Italy*, 5.

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, 11.

consequences if not honored.⁷⁵³ In Trentino in the past, *boconcino*, little bites of folded paper bearing the images of saints were consumed as a folk remedy for health and protection. If food is sacred, then women are the ritualists. “Women still cut the bread,” replied the guide at Valle Camonica in 2004 in response to my inquiry about his opinion of the existence of matriarchal cultures, implying that women are at the center as they have always been.

From eating meals with Trentino families over the years I have observed customs about how and when food is eaten. The main meal is eaten at the fullest part of the day, mid-day, and with family, if possible. Businesses will close for this meal, known as *pranzo*, which is more similar to our American dinnertime meal in its characteristics than to our lunch. School children will also sometimes come home to eat with the family. Food is eaten in phases, with a soup or pasta, then a meat or main course, followed by a salad, and then perhaps a piece of fruit or a sweet for dessert. Espresso—never cappuccino or *caffelatte* whose milk is not conducive to digestion after a meal—is offered to help digest the meal. Wine is offered with the meal and is considered part of the meal. In someone’s home, it is often local wine from the nearby cooperative or a friend’s cantina.

Digestion is greatly respected. Often ample time is allowed for the meal break so that people do not have to rush back to work. There is a pause in the day for the fullness. If a large meal or special occasion meal has been eaten in the evening, it may end by the sharing of digestive spirits to amplify the enjoyment and promote integration of the meal. Although people are not always eating

⁷⁵³ Davidson, *Roles of the Northern Goddess*, 105.

together, they are often eating at the same times, in the cyclic rhythm of the day. In the evening, dinner or *la cena* is eaten together after everyone arrives home. It could be a lighter fare, with soup, pasta, and a salad or fuller meal resembling the noon meal.

A recent scientific study suggests that when food is eaten, in addition to what is eaten, is important for weight regulation and metabolism.⁷⁵⁴ On the Greek island of Ikaria, whose residents are known for their longevity, one of the attributes of their life-style is that the whole village naps in the afternoon in a sort of communal pause.⁷⁵⁵ A documentary titled *The Meaning of Food* supports the premise of food's ability to promote harmony. It proposes that "beyond merely nourishing the body, what we eat and with whom we eat can inspire and strengthen the bonds between individuals, communities, and even countries."⁷⁵⁶

Lack of Food

The people at times starved from lack of food during famine or war. There was a famine attributed to a volcanic eruption in Indonesia in Trentino in 1816, "when winter lasted eight months," a time "recalled with terror by families."⁷⁵⁷ One of my contacts, Pina Trentini, remembered her father's story about a particularly lean time when he was a child; at mealtime, a fish was hung over the

⁷⁵⁴ Nature.com, "Timing of food," "Conclusions." and NPR, "To Maximize Weight Loss," para. 7.

⁷⁵⁵ Buettner, "The Island Where People Forgot to Die."

⁷⁵⁶ Pie in the Sky Productions, "Meaning of Food: Food and Life," para. 1.

⁷⁵⁷ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 141.

table, and everyone would touch it with the polenta on their forks so they could have the flavor and the fish could be made to last longer. When it became necessary to eat it, the fish was given to the oldest or those working the hardest.⁷⁵⁸ Clementina Todesca recounted details of life during the World War I when her village of Faller was occupied; food was scarce and everyone suffered. Nearly a fourth of the village died from starvation or flu.⁷⁵⁹ Both Irma and Onorina, whom I interviewed, were girls when World War II arrived. Irma and her family left for Bohemia. Onorina, whose family stayed, recounted having to take shelter with other villagers as bombs fell nearby. “Food, we always had,” she said. “Education, no, but food, yes because we lived on a farm.”

The folk stories tell of food injustice centuries earlier. In one folk story, the count demanded that the regular quantity must be given to him, even though the people were starving. In another, the lord that ruled over the meadows demanded that the shepherds pay him even more cartloads of cheese and butter than the usual amount that was due.⁷⁶⁰

Mosa, corn flour and milk, sustained farmers and poor people long ago in Trentino, and was eaten during periods of fast.⁷⁶¹ My mother remembers being

⁷⁵⁸ Email to author from Pina Trentini, February 28, 2011.

⁷⁵⁹ Mathias and Raspa, *Italian Folktales in America*, 45–49.

⁷⁶⁰ Neri, “The Marcesina stones,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 83–85.

⁷⁶¹ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Typical Products and Dishes*, 66. Also referenced as *mosa e trisa*. See Bertoluzza, *Dizionario dell’Antico Dialetto Trentino* (1997), 284.

given *mosa* when she was sick, probably due to its simple, easily-digestible ingredients. In a folk story, a bowl of *mosa* was used to lure a basilisk to its death near Passo degli Oclini in Val di Fiemme.⁷⁶²

Fasting—A Pause in Eating Aligned with Larger Cycles

Days of fast in accordance with the moon cycle can be more effective, according to the folk wisdom reported by Paungger and Poppe, with the dark moon being particularly good for detoxifying the body.⁷⁶³ Practicing days of fast for good health has been recommended by recent scientific studies.

Fasting has been used cross culturally as a spiritual practice to establish closer contact with the divine and with ancestral spirits. Fasting was, and still is, required on certain days of the liturgical calendar in the Catholic tradition. In a folk story about a hermit called Lugano, he gave permission to the people in Val di Fiemme who were starving to eat milk and dairy products that were apparently forbidden during the Lenten fast, if they said a prayer.⁷⁶⁴

Protecting the Source of Life—Food and Women

In one story from medieval times, laborers from Feltre in the neighboring region were brought in by the king to help build a wall to keep invaders away. But it was a time of famine, and the Feltrini decided to try and steal polenta. In a masked re-enactment of the battle over polenta between the Feltrini and the

⁷⁶² Neri, “The giant Grimm,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 96–97. He describes it as water, milk and corn flour.

⁷⁶³ Paungger and Poppe, *Servirsi della Luna* [Help of the moon], 19.

⁷⁶⁴ As a result, Lugano was summoned to Rome by the pope for charges of heresy. (Neri, “Bishop San Lugano,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 130–131.)

Trentini, shown in photos from 1984 in Piazza Duomo in Trento, a group of four women are at the center of a circle: one is stirring polenta in a large metal pot over a fire, while three other women fend off attackers with their brooms. The women and polenta are protected by a large unbroken circle of dozens of men, who stand facing outward, all within a white circle painted on the ground.⁷⁶⁵ The re-enactment as portrayed seems to identify what is important to the people and what is worth defending: the women and their transformational cauldron of food, both of which are sources of life. The white circle drawn on the ground, evoking the magic circle in the folk stories, seems to say: this is what we will protect and how we will protect it.

Roles of Food in Folk Traditions and Stories

In the folk practices and stories, food serves as medicine, oracle, agent of warning, and tool of resistance. Wild food, including roots, berries, nuts, and mushrooms, is gift of nature offered to all. The Sibyl, saints, and hermits eat roots and berries.

Food as Medicine

Food is medicine, and the same ingredients are often used for both.

Women prepare food to heal someone and restore their health. Women offered the primal food, mother's milk, which was sometimes used in medicinal recipes.⁷⁶⁶

White bread, as a luxury was considered medicinal; peasants typically ate dark

⁷⁶⁵ Autonomous Province of Trento, *Almanacco Trentino 1985*, n.p. The text appears as an inset between June 30 and July 1.

⁷⁶⁶ Folgheraiter talks about bitterness of Celandine being cut with mother's milk. Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 72.

bread made of rye or other grains, what Irma called *pane di poveri*, poor people's bread. In the folk story about the village women in Val di Sole trying to heal the sick woman, they began with healing broths.⁷⁶⁷ The use of herbs as medicine is treated in more depth in the next chapter. Whether used for nourishment or healing, I propose that food's closeness to nature in its source, and its preparation and use in recognition of the cycles of nature and the cosmos, give it the ability to bring those who ingest it back into health and harmony. Wine and spirits are also regarded as food and medicine. My grandparents gave my sister Barbara a little homemade red wine each night when she was growing up in Colorado to strengthen her heart.⁷⁶⁸

Onions and Eggs as Forecasting the Weather

Onions were a winter food for the mountain people. Up until the middle of the twentieth century, a popular practice used onions to forecast the weather for a year ahead. As described in the report by Folgheraiter, a few onions were sliced in half. Twelve of the best layers were chosen and lined up like cups. One shell was designated for each month. A little salt was placed in each layer and on the evening of January 25, known as the day (or night) of St. Paul, they were exposed on a window sill. The next day, the wetness of salt in each shell would indicate

⁷⁶⁷ Neri, "The Dress of the Blessed Virgin Mary," *Women and Girls*, 73.

⁷⁶⁸ Today this practice in the United States could be viewed as unacceptable by those raised in the post-Prohibition era. However, at that time, there was no cure for my sister who was born with a defective heart. At age 67, she has outlived her life expectancy of seven years old. Perhaps the red wine did strengthen her heart until she was old enough to have open-heart surgery as a teenager.

the weather for that month: dry, humid, or rainy. A contemporary photo of the white cup-like onions all aligned evokes lunar crescents.⁷⁶⁹

The white of an egg mixed in a carafe of water on the evening of June 28th, the vigil of the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, whose shape took a form resembling an elaborate sail of a ship called *la barca de san pero*, was studied the next morning by the elders to predict the weather for the coming months—hot and dry or stormy.⁷⁷⁰ The egg is a female symbol of fertility; the moon, whose shape the onion evokes, is also closely related to women’s cycles, inviting me to wonder if and how folk women may have at one time given oracles.

Cheese Is Currency and Transformational

The roles of food in the folk stories convey its importance in everyday life. Food, especially cheese, is used as currency. Cheese is delivered as payment to the people of Commezzadura in Val di Sole for the use of some pastures by people in another valley.⁷⁷¹ Herders give cheese and butter as a reward to the woodsmen who get rid of a cow-eating monster.⁷⁷² Shepherds pay the lord that ruled over the meadows in cartloads of cheese and butter.⁷⁷³ Cheese is the food of

⁷⁶⁹ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 11; and Folgheraiter, *La Terra*, 137.

⁷⁷⁰ Folgheraiter, *La Terra*, 145.

⁷⁷¹ Neri, “Rent paid in cheese,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 121.

⁷⁷² Neri, “The Pegolazzo spring,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 46–47.

⁷⁷³ Neri, “The Marcesina stones,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 83–85.

choice of the Anguana (discussed in Chapter 5) when she goes home with a young man.

In “The Dairy Witch,” a story that begins in Carisolo in Val Rendena, a poor old woman with only a piece of hard bread to eat is transported to Val Genova one evening by a woman who first appears as an owl, and then shares with her the secrets of making butter, so she can soften her bread. At the foot of a granite rock, the “witch” chants a “mysterious rigmarole” while she rocks the cream in a tub: “The moonshine, the dark wood, zitter zutter, I’ve made butter.”⁷⁷⁴ In the Italian version of the story, the rhyming chant in dialect is “*la luna chiara, el bosco scuro, zingola zàngola, ho fato el buro.*”⁷⁷⁵ The witch also shows the poor old woman how to make cheese and ricotta on subsequent evenings, and tells her to go home and share the knowledge with her friends.⁷⁷⁶ The transformation invokes nature: the moon, the dark forest, and rhyming word, and takes place at the foot of a rock.

The appearance of cheese in the folk stories in this way recognizes it as a transformational and transformed substance. Giovanna Borzaga describes butter, cheese, and ricotta as “a source of life,” and “of a joy created with the

⁷⁷⁴ Neri, “The dairy witch,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 70–71.

⁷⁷⁵ In Italian the words are listed as “La luna chiara, il bosco scuro, zingola zàngola, ho fatto il burro.” Neri, “Val Genova La Strega Casàra,” *Mille Leggende del Trentino*, 99–100.

⁷⁷⁶ Neri, “The dairy witch,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 70–71.

involvement of natural and supernatural forces, perfect fusion of scents and memories, pain and courage, ingenuity and magic.”⁷⁷⁷

The willingness to share information is a theme that appears in other stories: a wild man appears and teaches the villagers how to make cheese, and a mysterious woman comes and offers her services to a farmer, during which time his fields prosper. The knowledge is not bartered, kept secret, or sold—it is for the benefit of the people, a gift that must be shared.

Food as Agent of Warning

In a story related to Martin Luther, mentioned in Chapter 5, food is an agent of warning. In one story, an old woman uses the power of her alleged visions of a boiling pot of oil to scare Luther back home, away from the Council meeting in Trent, where he is likely to cause trouble. The food, later prepared for him in Salorno, again conjures up foreboding. In another version of the story, it is the “sausages of Salorno” that frighten him away.⁷⁷⁸

Bread as a Tool of Resistance

In the folk story “La morte di San Vigilio,” hard rye bread was used like stones as a weapon against Vigilio, the Bishop of Trento, after he returned to evangelize in Spiazzo.⁷⁷⁹ In Neri’s version of the story, Vigilio had smashed a

⁷⁷⁷ Borzaga, *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi di Valli e Boschi*, 97. (My translation.)

⁷⁷⁸ Borzaga, “Martin Lutero” [Martin Luther], *Leggende del Trentino* (1988), 92–95.

⁷⁷⁹ Borzaga, “La morte di San Vigilio,” *Leggende del Trentino* (1988), 13–16.

statue to the ground during the peasant's ritual.⁷⁸⁰ Borzaga names *Saturno*, god of sowing and Neptune, god of the springs, as likely deities of the indigenous people there, although probably before that, she says, the dramatic rocks would have been recognized as having the spirit of god in them.⁷⁸¹ She explains that the last invaders were Romans, who brought a new religion as well as trying to impose a new social and administrative structure. Probably for most of these people, Christianity would have been viewed as equivalent to Romanization.⁷⁸² Vigilio was Roman.⁷⁸³ Although the story about the martyrdom of St. Vigilio is widely told, and appears in murals on the church walls in Val Redena, both Neri and Folgheraiter state that the story is not true.⁷⁸⁴ The act of the peasants supposedly cursed all the future bread in Mortasa from rising, thus remaining hard like the rocks.

Wild Food—Roots, Berries, Nuts, Mushrooms

Relaying a view about wild food, in one folk story Borzaga describes nuts, berries, and mushrooms as a *gift* of the trees.⁷⁸⁵ In the folk stories, roots and

⁷⁸⁰ Neri, "The bread that does not rise," *Secret Heart* (Summer) 14–15.

⁷⁸¹ Borzaga, *Leggende del Trentino* (1988), 15–16.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁸³ Brunelli, "Bishops & Barbarians," 6.

⁷⁸⁴ Neri, "The dispute over San Vigilio," *Secret Heart* (Summer), 16. Also Folgheraiter finds no historical basis. See also Folgheraiter, *I Sentieri dell'Infinito* [Paths of the infinite], 167.

⁷⁸⁵ Borzaga, "I due secchi di Castellalto" [The two buckets of Castellalto], *Leggende dei Castelli del Trentino*, 201.

berries were eaten by hermits and saints who lived in the wild and had special knowledge—was it the wild food that bestowed the insights? In “L’antro della Sibilla,” a folk story referred to in Chapter 5, a woman named Sibilla eats roots and berries. She is described as a *maga* (magician) who has oracular and healing abilities. When the knight whom she healed as a young man comes back to find the healing waters for helping his sick grandson, he forsakes his wealth, chooses to live in the cave in prayer—and eats roots and berries.⁷⁸⁶

Pina Trentino, a native resident of Trentino, described a memory of children gathering their fill of wild berries in the woods.⁷⁸⁷ The Trentino almanac for 1985 portrays two women elders stringing chestnuts gathered from the mountains into what look like very long “necklaces,” an ancient Trentino custom, it says, to be sold at market or used later in the year.⁷⁸⁸ Chestnut flour was used in polenta before corn was brought from the new world.⁷⁸⁹ Chestnut trees have magical or salvific properties in the folk stories and traditions. In “Le Castagne di Gesu Bambino” (The Chestnut Trees of Baby Jesus), a great chestnut tree in a forest in Lochere, near Lago Caldonazzo, protects the Holy Family, (Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus), who are in flight for safety from Herod’s soldiers, by

⁷⁸⁶ Neri, “L’antro della Sibilla,” *Donne e bambine*, 9–14.

⁷⁸⁷ Email to author from Pina Trentini, February 28, 2011.

⁷⁸⁸ Autonomous Province of Trento, *Almanacco Trentino 1985* [Trentino Almanac 1985], n.p. See the text on the December 9–14 page.

⁷⁸⁹ Brunelli, “Our Tyrolean Kitchen,” 11.

enclosing them in its trunk until they can reach safety in Val dei Mocheni.⁷⁹⁰ In another folk story the Madonna of Fèles appears to a peasant boy and requests that a chapel to her be built where the fern grows under the chestnut tree.⁷⁹¹

Mushrooms are an enduring part of folk culture, as evidenced by the widespread use of public posters in the fall listing the rules of harvesting. On an organized hike in Valle Camonica that I participated in, each participant was given a small *porcino* (*Boletus*) mushroom carved from wood as a memento. Some of the hikers spotted mushrooms among the fallen leaves along the way and eagerly gathered them to bring home. My relatives in Trentino still gather this prized mushroom, known as *brise* in dialect, in the fall.

Andrew Weil, a well-known holistic doctor in the US, associates mushrooms with what he terms lunar energy; mushrooms, he says, are not just a primal symbol of the lunar force but an actual embodiment of it.⁷⁹² Eating this lunar energy, he suggests, particularly in the form of wild mushrooms, can stimulate imagination and intuition.⁷⁹³ Mushrooms derive their energy primarily from eating organic matter, either living or dead, thus transforming organic materials into simpler elements usable by other living things.⁷⁹⁴ In this role, they

⁷⁹⁰ Borzaga, “Le castagne di gesù bambino,” *Leggende del Trentino* (1988), 25–28.

⁷⁹¹ Neri, “The Madonna of Felès,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 124.

⁷⁹² Weil, *Marriage of Sun and Moon*, 69.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

seem representative of a vital part of the life cycle that depends upon decay, death, and transformation.

Mushrooms have an affinity with trees: *Boletus edulis* favor pine forests;⁷⁹⁵ *Amanita muscaria* are often found with birch, pine, fir, and spruce trees.⁷⁹⁶ Mushrooms are a type of fruit that emerges from under the earth, often if there has been rain. Even after emergence, their presence can be hidden under a bed of leaves. After a mushroom appears, egg-like from the earth, the thin tissue enclosing it can break as it spreads out its mushroom top. When the broken veil remains visible, as it does with *Amanita muscaria*, the veil is known as a volva.⁷⁹⁷

When I asked a local man in Trentino about the presence of *Amanita muscaria* in the nearby forests, he described it to me as *pazzo* or crazy, perhaps indicating its mind-altering ability. *Amanita muscaria* is a type of mushroom listed as *velenoso*, poisonous, that grows in the Alpine forests and whose skin contains powerful alkaloids. Michela Zucca lists *Amanita muscaria* as one of the ingredients in a recipe for the “green unguent of the witches” from 1727.⁷⁹⁸ From mythological and linguistic associations, Ginzburg explores the possibility of this mushroom, and also of rye mold or ergot, as inducers of altered states of

⁷⁹⁵ Arora, *Mushrooms Demystified*, 512.

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6–18.

⁷⁹⁸ Zucca, *Donne Delinquenti*, 197–200. Other ingredients listed in this recipe include *atropa belladonna*, *giusquiamo*, *aconito*, *datura*, *digitale*, *papavero*, and *conium* with fat, presumably belladonna, henbane, aconite, datura, foxglove, poppy, and conium.

consciousness in European folk culture.⁷⁹⁹ Christian Rättsch cites the importance of *Amanita muscaria* in Nordic shamanism, noting its association to the deity Wotan in southern Germany and to storm deities in several mythologies, as well as its possible use in beer.⁸⁰⁰

The bright red mushroom with white flecks appears in the illustrations of European folk tales. In pendent jewelry from the nineteenth century in Trentino and Alto Adige, the Black Madonna known as Maria Zell in Austria, is portrayed in what appears to be a red garb dotted with white circles.⁸⁰¹

Food Transmits Knowledge in Its Form and Name

Food conveys meaning, sometimes submerged, in its form and name. Asparagus spears overlaying sliced eggs evoke the fertility of the spring in a photo of one prepared recipe.⁸⁰² The name for spinach *gnocchi* or dumplings, an ancient, traditional dish still popular throughout Trentino, is *strangolapreti*, literally “strangle priests.”⁸⁰³ A recent publication from Trentino asserts that “it was the favorite food of the prelates during the Council held in Trento between 1545 and 1563.”⁸⁰⁴ Bertoluzza cites a similar origin, saying that they were so

⁷⁹⁹ Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 303–7.

⁸⁰⁰ Rättsch, “Mead of Inspiration,” 283–85.

⁸⁰¹ Cavallini, *Gioie Comuni* [Common joys]; see photos on page 93.

⁸⁰² Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Typical Products and Dishes*, 111.

⁸⁰³ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁸⁰⁴ Provincia Autonoma di Trento, *Trentino Emigrazione*, 46.

delicious that priests ate them greedily, getting stuck in their throats as if they were choking.⁸⁰⁵ In a culture in which oral tradition is prized, where words have power and can transform, this name, so casually-spoken today, has apparently been voiced by the people since the sixteenth century, if in fact its origins hail from that event. Is this name a way of remembering that event and the peasants' pride in the popularity of a local dish? Or anti-clerical attitudes from the oppression of folk traditions which resulted as a result of the Council? According to the book on Trentino folklore published by the province, traditional customs were "vigorously repressed by the civil and religious authorities."⁸⁰⁶ In the bilingual book of recipes sent by the Autonomous Province of Trento to immigrants *Typical Products and Dishes*, the word *strangolapreti* is left untranslated.⁸⁰⁷ In the United States, the name *strangolapreti* was not used for spinach gnocchi by my relatives.

Food Conveys Cultural Values

Far more than sustenance, food more than perhaps anything else conveys cultural values and traditions. Not only the food itself, but how the food is prepared, grown, shared, and eaten conveys values of the culture. A recurring theme conveyed in the folk stories is the importance of sharing food with poor mendicants, with great ramifications if it is not. In the story "Le due città

⁸⁰⁵ Bertoluzza, *Dizionario dell'Antico Dialetto Trentino* (1997), 263.

⁸⁰⁶ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Songs and Tales*, 149.

⁸⁰⁷ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, *Typical Products and Dishes*, 74.

scompare”⁸⁰⁸ (The two disappeared cities), a poor widow shares her bread with a stranger who is begging, after his request has been rejected by the wealthy people of the two towns of Susa and Caldon. She is the only one who is spared that night when a storm rises up and floods the towns, submerging all of the people and their homes, resulting in the formation of Lake Caldonazzo. Even the church has been submerged because, according to the story, the mendicant was turned away.

A similar fate happens in a folk story about upper Valsugana, when the people would not offer bread to a beggar—their houses were swept away by water that night, resulting in the formation of Santa Columba Lake.⁸⁰⁹ Only the home of the poor widow at the edge of town, who offered to share a bit of bread, was spared. Greed and selfishness—especially if there is an imbalance of wealth—are punished with the help of natural forces; generosity and charity are rewarded.

The people of Val di Mocheni reflected this value of generosity by extending hospitality to every nationality, according to an article from 1905, indicated by the inscription “Peace to the house, Joy to the guests, Compassion for the poor, that ask for help, And health to the traveler that passes,” which, it says, would have been appropriate on any house, even the most humble.⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁸ Neri, “Le due città scomparse,” *Donne e bambine*, 18–20.

⁸⁰⁹ Neri, “The treasure of the metalliferous dwarf,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 74–76.

⁸¹⁰ Fabbro, *I Mòcheni*, 114. (My translation.) The inscription is cited in German and Italian.

Food Practices Continued and Values Transmitted

In my Trentino American family, the sharing of food is a value that has been handed down. According to my mother, my maternal grandmother, Edvige—although she was poor and had seven children to feed—would never refuse a homeless person’s request for food. As a child, my mother remembers men who were “riding the rails” during the Great Depression of the 1930s who would knock at the back door of their home near the train tracks in Denver, Colorado. Her mother would give them food to be eaten out in the back yard, under the grape arbor, too cautious to invite them into the house with her husband away at work and small children to protect. “She was able to make something out of nothing,” my mother said of her mother, referring to her ability to provide food for her family even in harsh times.⁸¹¹

The value of good food has been present throughout my life, drawing upon my mother’s skill of cooking, with home-cooked meals and dessert every night growing up and celebratory cakes for every birthday. She uses food as a gift of gratitude, cooking pies and sweet treats to thank those who offer their gifts of service in driving her places or taking her walking. Every Saturday morning she makes two pans of *torta di patate*, a traditional Trentino dish, one for each of my brothers, John and Tim, who come on the weekend to help her with paying bills and yard work. My sister, Julie, continues to make this dish for her family. Festival times of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter have always been

⁸¹¹ Phone conversation between author and Lena Moser, November 11, 2011.

celebrated with big feasts of food, with as many family members present as possible.

Regarding the use of wild food, my maternal grandfather, Emanuel, gathered prized *porcini* mushrooms, known as *brise* in dialect, at a park known as Sunken Gardens near his home. He cooked them with a silver dime to determine their suitability for eating, which would be indicated by the color of the dime. However, his was the last generation in our family to gather mushrooms and the knowledge was not passed on. In the culture of the United States, mushrooms have been negated with the term “toadstools” and feared as poisonous. Only one type of store-purchased cultivated mushroom is in popular widespread use, the smooth white button mushroom.⁸¹²

Concluding Thoughts

Food is a source of women’s spiritual agency. It is essential to life and serves as the carrier of cultural traditions and values. The source of the ingredients is often known. Not only what is eaten, but how and when it is eaten is important. In addition to sustaining life, food is used as medicine and oracle. In the folk stories, cheese serves as currency and results from an act of transformation; food is used as a means of warning, and as a tool of resistance; wild roots and berries are associated with the prophetic Sibyl and holy saints. Women transform food (making cheese, cooking) and the food transforms them (healing, granting insights); they protect food (guarding the polenta pot) and it can protect them

⁸¹² In the northwest United States, where mushrooms grow prolifically in the forests, a local mycologist, Paul Stamets, has renewed interest and knowledge in the powerful medicinal and soil-healing qualities of mushrooms.

(warning of danger). In folk practice, wild food is valued. Food conveys cultural values—specifically, the importance of sharing.

Folk women recognized the source of food in its growth, tending, and preparation and conveyed an understanding of the essential cycles of life. Eating food is taking in the essence of place. By knowing intimately the source of food, women respected it, paid attention to it, and had a relationship with it. Specificity bestows value upon each food. Its origin is known, which places it in context of a larger process and system, not unlike families knowing and honoring their heritage and origin stories to tie them to kin and to place.

Cooking is a creative transformative act, as my mother observed about her mother, who seemingly “created something from nothing.” Through food preparation and the eating of food, women impact the people around them, helping to restore the balance individually and communally, and bringing people into harmony with the cycles of life. Food acts as medicine, in the sense of healing, as we shall see in the next section which addresses the use of plants as medicine.

10. Folk Women as Makers of Medicine

Women, in their everyday and specialized roles, had the knowledge to utilize plants for healing. Plants, along with other organic substances, were the traditional medicine for the folk in Trentino. Healing was likely understood in terms of restoring the balance and being in harmony with the cycles of life, as it is in traditional cultures. Plants help restore and promote the flow of life. In addition to healing, plant knowledge could also be used for harming, protection, and gaining special knowledge. Women's use of plants became prohibited or regulated, which impacted their agency and their connection to nature. Some plants bear the names of saints or the Madonna, indicating their special status; other plants were demonized, which may have served to prevent their use or negate those who did.

Experiencing Plants as a Source of Agency

Foundational to my understanding of women's use of plants as medicine was my personal experience of learning about them. Developing a relationship with local, wild plants gave me not only an understanding of how medicines are created but also the ability to act as an agent of healing. The process of making medicine from plants brought me into close connection with the plants' cycles of growth and gave me a heightened sense of awareness and interconnectedness. For these reasons, I share some of the details to lay the groundwork for the later sections.

I learned about plants as my Trentino ancestors and relatives learned: orally, seasonally, and in the forest and meadows. Erin Kenny, my teacher, is an

ethnobotanist whose knowledge derives from decades of observation and foraging experience in the forests of the Northwest United States. Kenny has recorded her observations and plant wisdom in her book *A Naturalist's Journal* although her primary and preferred teaching method is experiential.⁸¹³ In the forest classroom, we experienced the plants in context of where and how they grow, observed them changing over the months, and eventually learned to discern differences among numerous plants that at first appeared similar. We also touched, tasted, and smelled the plants, gathering wild edibles for a lunchtime tea, brewed in water heated over a small open fire at the center of a stone circle.

Kenny's philosophy involves sustainably gathering wild plants from the area in which one lives and preserving them for use as medicine throughout the year or using them freshly-picked to eat or make healthful teas. Wild plants contain an abundance of nutrients—more than cultivated plants—that are beneficial to humans. Several of the highly beneficial medicinal herbs in Trentino are considered to be “weeds” here in the United States, including dandelion, plantain, and nettle. These plants were intentionally carried to the United States by the European colonists, according to Kenny, because of their superior medicinal value.

Learning the botanical designation of plants is important to prevent confusion, Kenny emphasizes. Trentino mountain folk used descriptive names of plants probably to ensure the same clear communication: St. John's wort, for

⁸¹³ Kenny, *Naturalist's Journal*. Her classes are held in the forest at Camp Terra, a nationally-recognized outdoor school where she teaches children.

example, has five common names listed in one book, including *perforate*, referring to its perforated leaves, and *erba del sangue*, herb of the blood, to describe the red glands of the flower that turn oil and alcohol red.

The life energy of the plant is cyclic. Different parts of the plant—leaves, flowers, berries, or roots—offer healing medicine when prepared in the appropriate way at the right time of year. In the spring, new leaves are packed with energy. In summer, the fullness of the plant's energy is held in the flowers which then become fruits and berries. Roots carry the concentrated energy in the fall, holding it until spring when the cycle begins again and the energy is sent up to new growth.

An excellent way to extract the active constituents or healing essences of plants is by soaking fresh plant material in alcohol and making a tincture. Wine, vinegar, and beer can also be used to extract the essence. While we used small amounts of vodka to make medicinal tinctures in class, my ancestors would have likely used grappa, the traditional distilled alcohol of the peasant class in Trentino. The alcohol-based medicines can then be used internally as tonics or topically for liniments. For example, one medicinal formula in Trentino that is efficacious for cough is made from pine buds and grappa. The villager who offered me some to taste said his recipe had come from his aunt, whose photo he had displayed on the counter.

Making my first tincture using the green tips of Western Red Cedar, to be used later as an anti-bacterial, anti-fungal medicine internally and topically, gave me a clearer understanding of the nature and intention of herbal spirits that I had

been offered in Italy over the years. Distilled spirits flavored with local herbs are served after a special meal in someone's home or at a family-run restaurant, both for enjoyment and digestion. After dinner, a small restaurant owner in Piedmont offered me a small glass of homemade digestive liquor, *genepy*. He wrote down the recipe which includes alcohol, water, sugar, and *genepy* plants, and talked enthusiastically about the plant, whose collection is protected.⁸¹⁴

Herbs, I learned, can also be dried for later use as teas or for adding to food. The first type of plant I collected in quantity for use throughout the year was nettles, *Urtica dioica*, which grows abundantly where I live and is generally considered to be a weed to be eradicated from one's land. Eaten fresh, cooked, or brewed as a tea, nettles provide a rich supply of calcium and vitamins; used externally, a tea of their leaves or tincture of their roots can help hair to grow. Their stinging leaves have traditionally been used for "urtification," a sort of light thrashing of the skin, to relieve arthritis pain. Their stalks can be retted and made into usable fiber for making cloth and their leaves can be used as rennet to coagulate milk for making cheese. Nettles fix nitrogen in the soil, which is essential for plants to grow.

Finally medicinal plants can be soaked in oil. After allowing the oil to absorb the healing essence of the plant for a given length of time, it can be used directly or made into a salve or ointment by adding melted wax. Thickening the oils makes them less messy for application, storage, and transportation.

⁸¹⁴ Presumably the plant is *Artemisia genipi*. See Pieroni and Giusti, "Alpine ethnobotany in Italy," 8–13, for the use of *Artemisia genipi* in grappa in Piedmont.

By the end of the series of classes, I had several medicinal tinctures, teas, and salves on my shelf. The process of making them, which in itself felt healing, brought me into close connection with nature and its cycles, with a heightened sense of awareness and interconnectedness. Recognizing a plant as a source of healing medicine bestows value to it. When I pass by a gathering place or encounter a type of plant that I have used for medicine, I feel gratitude. Additionally, I feel protective of the plant's well-being and its environment. A natural outcome of using wild plants is the desire to protect the wild places they grow.⁸¹⁵ One must pay attention to the plant over time in order to correctly identify it and gather it. Numerous sayings and proverbs in Trentino, often in rhyme, offer traditional wisdom for the timing of all aspects of plant interaction in the fields, garden, forests and kitchen. Having the ability to use powerful wild plants from right where one lives, instead of from somewhere else, empowers each of us to have access to our own health, Kenny emphasizes.⁸¹⁶ My experience validates the agency that comes from making herbal medicine, which my ancestors surely experienced and as some folks in Trentino still do.

Plants as Traditional Medicine for the Folk in Trentino

Plants were used as traditional medicine in Trentino, and still are by some. One of my first observations of plant medicine occurred when I was visiting in

⁸¹⁵ The prized location where I finally found wild St. John's Wort in July, 2010, after having searched without success the prior summer, had been leveled to store heavy equipment when I returned in 2011. The Elder trees, with their fragrant blossoms, that I often visited in the forest near my home were knocked down in a logging operation in August, 2012.

⁸¹⁶ Kenny, *Naturalist's Journal*, 18–20.

1995, staying at a country farmhouse turned into an *Agritur* or guesthouse in Val di Cembra. When one of the guests announced he was getting a cold, the proprietor, Pia Ress, went out to her garden to gather some fresh sage, which she brewed into a tea. During this and other trips, my cousin Irma would fix chamomile tea each night before bed, to promote sleep and digestion.

Trentino journalist Alberto Folgheraiter, has a chapter entitled “Illness and popular cures” in his book *Beyond the Threshold of Time* on the folk traditions of Trentino.⁸¹⁷ Folgheraiter has collected evidence and stories of folk medicine in the valleys of Trentino, describing the people as having “pharmacological self-sufficiency.”⁸¹⁸ “Everybody sought medicinal herbs,” he reports, and “many knew of their characteristics.”⁸¹⁹ What he terms “scientific medicine” was available only to the rich and the doctor was far away, summoned only to draw up a death certificate. People turned to each other’s knowledge for home remedies.

For a long time the maintenance or recovery of health was referred to the vegetable garden, to the forest, to superstition and to the depositaries of that “medical know how” who were “bone tanners, apothecaries, grocers and midwives.”⁸²⁰

In his findings, Folgheraiter says the “traditional medicine of the popular classes” still occurs today, especially in the valleys, for illnesses that are otherwise not cured by medical science. Among the wild plants Folgheraiter

⁸¹⁷ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 59–78.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 72 (caption).

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸²⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

names that were collected for use or trade at one time are wormwood, elderberry, lily of the valley leaves, bear bilberry leaves, bilberries, arnica, juniper berries, lichens, gentian roots, mistletoe, and pine buds.⁸²¹

The folk cures from over the centuries that Folgheraiter gathers and presents are invaluable, even though, at times, the remedies and ingredients are presented with the questioning view of modern eyes. Yet, folk remedies came from people who were in close relationship with the land and natural cycles. They utilized plants and other organic substances (minerals and animal products) that are just beginning to be appreciated or understood scientifically.

Ethnopharmacists, for example, are now studying folk medicine to learn new cures.⁸²²

Ultimately Folgheraiter is critical of government institutions that did not tend to rural people with the arrival of modern medicine, and ends the chapter with the conclusion that herbal and natural remedies often do not work. Fernando Zampiva, on the other hand, a local expert of herbal folklore, describes the plant pharmacopeia of the Cimbri as “often efficacious, undoubtedly natural, full of

⁸²¹ Ibid., 76–77.

⁸²² One such historical remedy, with no prior pharmacological research, is *Salvia argentea*, whose leaves have been used for wounds and are gathered during the procession in honor of the Black Madonna of Viggiano. (See Moser, *Honoring Darkness*, 42–43 for more on this pilgrimage). This plant, which only grows at the highest altitudes, is collected by the villagers on their way back, for drying and later use. See Pieroni, Quave, and Santoro, “Folk Pharmaceutical Knowledge in the Territory of the Dolomiti Lucane,” 381.

ancient wisdom, and also subtle poetry.”⁸²³ He is critical of the institutions that suppressed folk traditions which included the use of plants and marked a time of close relationship between peasants and nature. Zampiva cites “arcane” uses and practices regarding plants which are cited throughout his article “Sacred Plants and Cursed Plants.”⁸²⁴

The historical exhibit *Le Buone Erbe* (The good herbs), on display in Trento in 2009 at the Museum of Science, indicates by its name that medicinal plants were highly regarded. Illustrated books of herbal information from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, whose knowledge was held in the libraries of monasteries and castles, were on display. They portrayed visually and in writing which parts of the plant could help a certain human body part. In featuring prominent botanists and chemists, the exhibit also seemed to document the shift of official plant knowledge and herbal medicine into an elite male realm. Derogatory terminology of herb women as silly or witches is evident in some European texts, even though apparently, some men valued and utilized the knowledge of these women.⁸²⁵ Folgheraiter says that cures were sometimes

⁸²³ Zampiva, “Piante Sacre e Piante Maledette,” 180. Zampiva, “Le principali erbe della farmacopea Cimbria,” 141. Zampiva’s work is focused on the mountainous area of Lessinia north of Verona.

⁸²⁴ Zampiva, “Piante Sacre e Piante Maledette.”

⁸²⁵ A comment by William Cole in 1656 laments that apothecaries rely on “silly Hearb women.” (Arber, *Herbals, Their Origin and Evolution*, 211). Richard Folkard says “The chief strength of poor witches lies in the gathering and boiling of herbs.” (Folkard, *Plant Lore, Legends, and Lyrics*, 95)

learned by priests in the confessionals, which enabled them to care for the body as well as the soul.⁸²⁶

Women, Plants, Healing, and Spirituality

Popular medicine was practiced mainly by women in ancient times, according to the displays on “The Herb Woman and Healer,” in the women’s museum at Casa Andriollo in Valsugana, curated by Rosanna Cavallini.⁸²⁷

Midwives and herb women drew from their experience, as well as knowledge handed down to them, to treat illnesses and wounds. *Donne Sagge*, or Wise Women, utilized “supernatural forces that were believed to reside in nature” to heal the sick.⁸²⁸ The presence of specialized healers is reported by Folgheraiter, although he does not identify them as women:

There was a time, above all in the valleys, in which some were depositaries of an art which cured illnesses. They were guardians of “secrets” and of “recipes” (prescriptions), handed on down from parents to children and only at the moment of death.⁸²⁹

Resin gathered from fir, larch and pine was the source of numerous practical and medicinal uses.⁸³⁰

⁸²⁶ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 70.

⁸²⁷ Casa Andriollo, “La medicina del corpo e dell’anima: La donna erbaiola e guaritrice,” [The herb woman and healer] para. 1

⁸²⁸ Casa Andriollo, “La medicina del corpo e dell’anima: La donna erbaiola e guaritrice,” para. 2.

⁸²⁹ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 70.

⁸³⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

That healing was not viewed as separate from the spiritual in Trentino is indicated by the mix of prayers and ritual with some medical formulas.

Folgheraiter reports that

“Magical” formulas. . . mix religion with superstition, unctions with crosses, wax candles with olive oil, orations with genuflections, rites and function in order to chase away evil demons.⁸³¹

The word superstition, not defined here, is pejorative in its modern usage and often evokes something unfounded, shameful, or even condemning. In its original Latin, superstition meant “amazement, wonder, dread, especially of the divine or supernatural.”⁸³² The knowledge and the use of herbs may have always been perceived with this sense of awe, as a divine gift. The ability of plants to heal, harm, protect and grant knowledge—attributes sometimes held within a single plant and mirroring characteristics ascribed to divinity—must have evoked feelings of amazement, wonder and dread. In the exhibit on mountain women noted earlier, the viewers are reminded that plants are a gift, and part of the sacred in the biblical origin story.

In the earth humans recognized the Great Nurturer, and in the plants the gifts of Mother Earth: fertility, luck and health. The plants were part of the holy; someone who had knowledge of them, harvested them and knew how to use them to benefit mankind was a welcome person to the gods.⁸³³

⁸³¹ Ibid., 64.

⁸³² Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, “superstitio”: “orig. a standing still over or by a thing; hence, amazement, wonder, dread, esp. of the divine or supernatural.”

⁸³³ Casa Andriollo, “La medicina del corpo e dell’anima: Il mito e la storia,” para. 3–4.

In the popular tradition, healing practices addressed both the body and soul. The magical and religious were “hand in hand” in the rural garden.⁸³⁴

The story of Maria Treben (1907–1991) a highly-regarded and widely published herbalist from Bohemia, whose work was recommended to me by a woman in Trentino studying herbs, exemplifies the knowledge of healing herbs as a spiritual gift. In the introduction her book, *La Salute dalla Farmacia del Signore* (Health through God’s pharmacy), Treben writes that in 1961, after her mother died, on the day of Candlemas—a holy day in Christianity and an important day of divination in agricultural folk cultures which marks a midway point between the winter solstice and the spring equinox—she felt pushed towards learning medicinal herbs. “It was as if a major force was showing me; as if the Madonna, the great consoler of the sick, was showing me the secure way.”⁸³⁵ When Treben had doubts, she would pray in front of an ancient miraculous effigy and receive the help she needed. Treben was raised with a natural connection to nature, learning the names of the plants. Her mother valued the natural world, following the teaching that “for every illness grows an herb.”⁸³⁶

Healing Restores the Balance

Healing in folk culture, as it is in traditional cultures today, was likely understood in terms of restoring the balance. Plants restore the balance in humans

⁸³⁴ Ibid.

⁸³⁵ Treben, *La Salute dalla Farmacia del Signore* [Health through God’s pharmacy], 4.

⁸³⁶ Ibid., 3.

by helping them return to the natural cycles of life. While there are numerous healing plants, some insight can be gained by looking at a few examples of plants in their relationship to the cycles of life including fertility (menstruation, birth, lactation); life (birth, life and death) and digestion. Often a single plant will support several different cycles. The most healing plants will often be considered protective in the spiritual realm as well, as we shall see.

In addition to the sources already referenced, two particularly valuable sources of information are referenced here in the compilations of traits that follow: the *Atlante Dalle Erbe la Salute, Piante Medicinali dell'arco alpino* (Atlas of herbs for health, medicinal plants of the Alpine Arch), by Ferrante Cappelletti, which includes the names of plants in dialect,⁸³⁷ and *Prevenzione è Salute: Curarsi con Erbe 2, radici, foglie e fiori* (Prevention is health, healing with herbs 2, roots, leaves and flowers) by Emanuela Borio, which includes local legends.⁸³⁸

Examples of Healing Plants

The plants selected for discussion illustrate that herbs are aligned with several cycles. They can restore the balance in more than one way.

⁸³⁷ *Atlante Dalle Erbe la Salute, Piante Medicinali dell'arco alpino*, by Ferrante Cappelletti. It includes a copy of a handwritten letter dating 1966 of Mario de Gerloni, botanist, chemist, and pharmacist of the Antica Farmacia Gerloni in Trento who advises that many of these medicinal herbs grow in the wild on nearby Mt. Bondone, and that he has used them in his decades-long practice as a pharmacist in Trento.

⁸³⁸ Borio, *Prevenzione è Salute*.

Artemisia absinthium: Lunar, Menstrual, Digestive, Sacred

Artemisia absinthium, or Absinthe, is linked to the moon, menstruation, digestion, spiritual health, protection, and long life. It is tied to female divinity in its name, Greek Goddess Artemis (Roman Diana), a moon goddess. Branches of Artemesia were given to initiates of the Goddess Isis in Egypt, according to Raffaelli.⁸³⁹ An infusion of its flowers can stimulate menstrual regulation. Its extremely bitter quality establishes it as a primary herb used in formulating bitter aperitifs. Old farmers reportedly still chew on this herb for good digestive health.⁸⁴⁰ It is used against epilepsy, which is considered to be a sacred illness (that is, a type of possession) in Germany, according to Raffaelli.⁸⁴¹ Its close relative, *Artemisia vulgaris*, Mugwort, is a sacred, protective herb in folk traditions of England and “the mother of herbs.”⁸⁴² One of the dialect names of Artemesia is listed as *maistro*, meaning teacher, or master, implying it is a teaching herb.⁸⁴³ Zampiva associates it with the Madonna.⁸⁴⁴ Cappelletti states that it is beneficial for the stomach, digestion, and kidneys, and as a tonic. As an

⁸³⁹ Raffaelli, *L’Influsso della luna* [The influence of the moon], 14.

⁸⁴⁰ Pina Trentini remembers her grandfather chewing on a little sprig of this medicinal herb with the leaves visible. She remembers being given a taste as a child, describing it as “very, very bitter.” Email to author from Pina Trentini, November 28, 2010.

⁸⁴¹ Raffaelli, *L’Influsso della luna* [The influence of the moon], 10.

⁸⁴² Bremness, *The Complete Book of Herbs*, 50.

⁸⁴³ Other names listed in Trentino dialect include: medemaistro, maestro, medego, vidermaister, bon maistro. (Cappelletti, *Atlante Dalle Erbe la Salute*, 22–23)

⁸⁴⁴ Zampiva, “Piante Sacre e Piante Maledette,” 184.

infusion it can help tiredness and listlessness, intermittent fevers, and can stimulate a regular menstruation. It was one of the principal components of the “famous elixir of youth.”⁸⁴⁵

Hypericum perforatum: Solar, Digestive, Spiritual

Hypericum perforatum, Saint John’s herb, is solar, digestive, and protective. It has golden flowers with five petals that bloom in the summer, which are used medicinally and harvested “in June, in the days of the sun.”⁸⁴⁶ Internally, as an infusion, it is used for pulmonary afflictions and as a digestive aid. Externally, having been prepared in oil, it is both healing and antiseptic, used for the healing of burns and wounds, and in massage for rheumatic pain. It is used in spirits for its aromatic and digestive properties.⁸⁴⁷ The glands are filled with a red resin that indicates its usefulness in treating wounds. It was also called *Fuga Daemoniorum*, demon chaser, because it was believed that it would drive away demons, witches, and the spirits of darkness with its scent, evoking its modern-day internal use as an anti-depressant. In the past centuries it was used as an “extraordinary remedy for innumerable ills.”⁸⁴⁸

Cappelletti lists several names in Trentino dialect including *erba de san Zoan*, (herb of St. John) and *erba da stria* (herb of witches) and includes a saying

⁸⁴⁵ Cappelletti, *Atlante Dalle Erbe la Salute*, 22–23.

⁸⁴⁶ Borio, *Prevenzione è Salute*, 168.

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁸⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

in dialect: “no me taiar, no me rostir che d’ogni mal te voi guarir” (Don’t cut me, don’t burn me, if you want to be healed from every illness). Described as a cure-all, this plant grows in uncultivated areas. Its leaves appear perforated when viewed against the light, giving it one of its nicknames in dialect, *perferata* (perforated). When its flowers are conserved in oil, it turns red, perhaps the reason for its name “erba del sangue,” herb of blood. The highly efficacious oil, properly prepared, is described as *miracolosa* (miraculous) for every type of skin wound, including sunburns, burns, and sores. When the flowers are added to grappa, its result is *squisita* (exquisite) and is indicated for digestion, stomach acid, nausea, and vomiting.⁸⁴⁹

Matricaria chamomilla: Menstrual, Digestive

Matricaria chamomilla or chamomile is considered excellent for female organs and helps regulate late menstrual periods. The *Trentino Almanac* characterizes chamomile, as one of the most noted medicinal plants that has been used since antiquity.⁸⁵⁰ According to Cappelletti, chamomile has been “botanically baptized,” because of its medical benefits for the *matrice* (womb) when it is inflamed or when the regular period is late. A strong medicinal tea before bed with honey and grappa can help bring the relief of sleep to someone struggling from the day’s worries.⁸⁵¹

⁸⁴⁹ Cappelletti, *Atlante Dalle Erbe la Salute*, 82–83

⁸⁵⁰ Autonomous Province of Trento, *Almanacco Trentino 1985*.

⁸⁵¹ Cappelletti, *Atlante Dalle Erbe la Salute*, 42–43.

Plants and Fertility—Contributing to the Flow of Life

Plants are particularly helpful to women for all aspects of fertility and childbirth. They help bring the flow of their menstrual blood, ease the birth of a baby, and encourage the flow of milk, which allows the baby's life to continue. Healing recipes—the same word, *ricetta*, recipe is used for the preparation of food or medicine—from the sixteenth century in Lazio, utilize plant and animal ingredients in the remedies to determine pregnancy, to facilitate becoming pregnant, to encourage milk flow, and to soothe sore breasts.⁸⁵²

Several plants act as an emmenagogue, that is, they help bring in flow of menstruation. This indicates that restoring flow could be seen as beneficial, completing a cycle, and aligning with the flow of nature.

Plants could be used to help every aspect of birth: comfort, delivery of the baby and the placenta. Midwives used Lady's Bedstraw to lay out women's beds to make the delivery easier, according to Treben,⁸⁵³ a practice which became transferred to a legend in which the Virgin Mary used it for the crib of baby Jesus.⁸⁵⁴ There are plants that will aid in the flow of mother's milk or stop the flow of milk.

A property of some plants is their alleged ability to bestow fertility. Mandrake, a plant steeped in mystery from its properties and the ritual way in

⁸⁵² Porretti, *Le ricetta delle streghe* [The recipe of witches], 23–25.

⁸⁵³ Treben, *Health from God's Garden*, 25. Treben refers to *Galium verum* as the variety.

⁸⁵⁴ Treben, *La Salute dalla Farmacia del Signore*, 15. This story is under the description for *Galium aparine*.

which it was said to be harvested, appears in an illustrated manuscript of herbs from the fifteenth century that was on display as part of the exhibit *Le Buone Erbe* (The good herbs) at the Museum of Natural Science in Trent in 2009. Of interest here is mandrake's association with fertility for women. In one illustration labeled *mondragola femina*, the mandrake plant is portrayed as a female. Her legs and arms are the roots of the plant. Her right hand covers her stomach, with her fingers pointing up to her breasts; her left hand covers her womb. Leaves emerge from her head, along with red round fruits. Red circles similar to the fruits mark her womb, each of her breasts, and her cheeks.

The museum display, in explaining the illustration, states that in the Middle Ages, the mandrake was thought to have a soul and its screams would kill whoever tried to uproot it. A dog was sacrificed for its harvest. It was tied to the plant and enticed with food to pull it out. The scream killed the dog rather than the harvester. The dog was then buried in the hole where the plant had been taken. After that, the roots could be used for procuring happiness, wealth, and health.⁸⁵⁵ Di Gesaro, in a detailed discussion of the properties and uses of *mandragora* (mandrake), notes its presence in the bible for granting Rachel the ability to have a son.⁸⁵⁶ Another practice reported by Walker, although not discussed in the display, required that menstrual blood or women's urine be given to the earth

⁸⁵⁵ Museo Tridentino di Scienze Naturali, *Le Buone Erbe*. The hand-written formula on the illustration for this mandrake begins with the words "se una dona non pottete avez fiolli" (if a woman cannot have children).

⁸⁵⁶ Di Gesaro, *Streghe*, 936–938.

before the plant could be taken,⁸⁵⁷ implying a sort of fertile exchange. In an undated illustration without description on the wall also from the museum exhibit, a youth (with the outline of breasts and with short hair) dressed in a red tunic walks barefoot over the ground or rocks accompanied by two barefoot grey-bearded men in long tunics with sticks who are apparently digging up plants. One of the men and the youth each hold an uprooted plant.

A plant root identified as a mandrake is engraved on a rock in Valle Camonica.⁸⁵⁸ In the church of St. John the Baptist in Edolo, Valle Camonica, an image said to be Adam and Eve shows a man who is digging (it is unclear whether he is harvesting or preparing the soil) with a long-handled implement near a woman sitting on the edge of low surface who faces him. She holds a spinning staff between her legs and the thread in her left hand. With her right hand, she points to a plant on the ground near her feet. Red thread is draped around the back of her neck and falls over each breast.⁸⁵⁹ This scene suggests that the acts of planting and spinning are sacred and related, as well as the importance of female presence.

⁸⁵⁷ Walker, *The Woman's Dictionary*, 446. Barbara Walker cites mandrake's medicinal and narcotic benefits.

⁸⁵⁸ The engraving of the mandrake is found on Rock 6 of Campanine, a rock art area below the town of Cimbergo. Email from Franco Gaudiano to author, March 26, 2013.

⁸⁵⁹ Provincia di Brescia Assessorato al Turismo, *The Camonica Valley*, "Faith Procured Visions of Madonnas and Witches," 25.

Plants and Digestion—Restoring the Internal Balance

Bitters stimulate gastric secretions to help digestion, as part of the flow of life energy through the body. My Trentina cousin Daria grew several herbs that she said were good for digestion when added to grappa. Bitters have been largely eliminated from the American diet, which has tended towards concentrated sweetness, thus disrupting a microbial balance in our digestive systems.

Herbs to purge the body of harmful matter, especially in cases of illness or poisoning, could be critical. Folgheraiter cites the purgative effects of absinth.⁸⁶⁰ Andrew Weil, a contemporary holistic doctor in the US, having observed the ritual use of purgatives among the Papagos, for example, applies his neurological knowledge to propose the spiritual benefits of conscious purging resulting from the release of unwanted emotions.⁸⁶¹ This suggests a restoration of balance is possible not only on a physical level, but an emotional and spiritual level as well.

Healing Salves, Ointments, and Unguents

Specific salves and ointments were made and used for healing by the folk of Trentino, similar to creams and lotions used today for topical application, to be absorbed through the skin. They would have utilized wax, butter or animal fat as a thickening medium for application. Folgheraiter records the dialect names, ingredients and uses of some specific formulas including things like: *l'ont da mont* made of arnica flowers, resin, and butter was used for backache; *ont de*

⁸⁶⁰ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 76.

⁸⁶¹ Weil, *Marriage of Sun and Moon*, 8–13. This book was published in 1980 before bulimia became a concern.

l'arioma made of crushed deer horn, anise, two slices of lemon, fried in oil, to counter convulsions; rubbings of animal fat (dog, badger, bear, or marmot) to obtain the strength of that animal; *l'ont del Bertoncelli*, made of pine resin for injury by splinters; and *l'ont de cera vergina*, literally the ointment of virgin wax, was made of wild pine resin, bee's wax and homemade butter.⁸⁶² Cappelletti refers to a mixture malva and butter, commonly called *l'unguento della foglia santa*, the unguent of the holy leaf, known since ancient times, to be used on the skin for inflammation and insect bites.⁸⁶³

Healing salves are referenced in the folk story about the women of the village who try to heal the sick woman.⁸⁶⁴ Folk women, particularly those who had to care for families and animals, would probably have had salves and ointments available for medicinal use.⁸⁶⁵

Powerful and Dangerous Plants

In addition to healing properties, the most powerful plants are often those that contain toxins that can harm or even kill. This paradox of the ability to heal and harm contained within the same entity is evident in some plants.⁸⁶⁶ This is not

⁸⁶² Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 72–75. Mentions a poultice of virgin wax, larch resin, olive oil for wounds.

⁸⁶³ Cappelletti, *Atlante Dalle Erbe la Salute*, 58, 59.

⁸⁶⁴ Neri, “The Dress of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” *Women and Girls*, 73.

⁸⁶⁵ There was widespread use of medicinal poplar salve in the early modern era in Europe, for example. Müller-Ebeling, Rätsch, and Storl, *Witchcraft Medicine*, 133.

⁸⁶⁶ See Moser, *Honoring Darkness*, for an analysis of this phenomenon in Black Madonnas.

an unfamiliar concept to modern users of prescription pharmaceuticals, whose warning labels often indicate potentially severe consequences of its use.

Just as doctors, pharmacists, and patients today regularly prescribe, dispense, and intake powerful drugs, the herbal information that has been recorded in writing indicates the ability of peasants to safely gather, prepare and administer powerful plants for healing remedies. In the modern era, however, active components have been extracted and concentrated, increasing the potential danger of some medicines, and further negating the attitudes about the safe use of some plants, even though the whole plant may be safer to use. Treben cites the Celandine plant as an example of a plant that today is often labeled poisonous, thus eliminating its beneficial use.⁸⁶⁷

Poppies are pictured on the cover of one Trentino book on herbal medicine, which includes the pharmacological uses and properties of *Papaver rhoeas* inside.⁸⁶⁸ In a folk story about Val di Non, the peasants drugged the guards of the Flavón Castle by mixing some poppy powder in the wine, which made them fall asleep. This was done in order to free the Prince Bishop who had been taken prisoner there when he came to request more civil behavior towards the peasants from the counts.⁸⁶⁹

⁸⁶⁷ Treben, *La Salute dalla Farmacia del Signore* [Health through God's pharmacy], 25.

⁸⁶⁸ Colombo, *Curarsi con le erbe*, cover, 74–75. Colombo also calls out *Papaver somniferum* as a source of alkaloids, along with other important plants. *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁶⁹ Neri, "The gaoled bishop," *Secret Heart* (Summer), 59–61.

Accidental poisoning with plants could and did happen, as Folgheraiter confirms.⁸⁷⁰ It is necessary to learn plants, Cappelletti advises, because of possible fatal poisoning: just as health comes to us from herbs, he advises, so can the contrary.⁸⁷¹ Several plants are listed as *velenosa*, poisonous, in Cappelletti's plant herbal. However, this did not necessarily preclude their medicinal use. For example, henbane—listed as *velenosa*—was used for pain in folk medicine, according to Folgheraiter.⁸⁷² Plants with the ability to relieve acute pain would have been highly valued. Some plants in this category may have been handled by a specialist in the village for use as medicine.

Someone having knowledge of the most powerful plants could be perceived or feared as potentially dangerous.⁸⁷³ Two folk stories indicate intentional use of poison: in one story, the miners of Val di Mocheni, who had been “rude” to the prince-bishop's tax collectors from Trent, all perished from being served poisoned wine after a so-called “good-will” dinner hosted at Buonconsiglio Castle.⁸⁷⁴ In another story, monkshood root was used by woodsmen to poison a monster that was eating the herders' cows of Ziano in Val

⁸⁷⁰ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 76.

⁸⁷¹ Cappelletti, *Atlante Dalle Erbe la Salute*, 107.

⁸⁷² See Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 74.

⁸⁷³ Mabel McKay, for example, a respected traditional healer in the twentieth century in the United States, was threatened by poisoners. See her biography, Sarris, *Mabel McKay*.

⁸⁷⁴ Neri, “The conceit of the miners,” *Secret Heart* (Spring), 51–52.

di Fassa, driving it to drink up all the waters of a spring before it fled.⁸⁷⁵ Perhaps the stories served to keep alive the knowledge—and warning—of their use in the culture. A nickname for the poisonous fruit of *Colchicum autumnale* in the dialect of Verona is *strangolapreti*, literally, strangle priests.⁸⁷⁶

Protection and Knowledge

Women who had knowledge of plants could enlist them as agents for protection and access to special knowledge. In the folk stories, the use of salve becomes viewed with suspicion.

Protection from Poisoning, Snakes, Lightning, and Witches

If poisoning could happen, then medicine to prevent and counter poison would be essential. An important antidote to poisoning from digitalis, nicotine, some fungi, belladonna and aconite was oak, *Quercus ilex*, found from the plains to the mountains; its bark contains tannin, which could be ground, boiled in water, and drunk until a more effective remedy could be found.⁸⁷⁷ *Fraxinus excelsior*, common *Frassino*, or ash tree, considered the cosmic tree by the ancient Nordic people and as magic among the locals, was attributed with the ability to prevent poisonous snake bites, and still used by mountain elders as a walking stick.⁸⁷⁸

Several plants were thought to offer protection against witches or lightning,

⁸⁷⁵ Neri, “The Pegolazzo spring,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 46–47.

⁸⁷⁶ Zampiva, “Piante Sacre e Piante Maledette,” 188.

⁸⁷⁷ Cappelletti, *Atlante Dalle Erbe la Salute*, 46–47. Latin: *Quercus Ilex*, in Trentino dialect, *rovere*, in English: oak

⁸⁷⁸ Zampiva, “Piante Sacre e Piante Maledette,” 190.

especially if gathered at a particular seasonal time. The carbon of the common beech, burned as the Christmas log, could be used against demons, witches, and storms.⁸⁷⁹ *Hypericum perforatum*, St. John's Herb, gathered on St. John's Day, could be conserved and burned later if one heard the sounds of evildoing witches.⁸⁸⁰ *Sambucus nigra*, common Sambuco, Elder, planted near the houses or in the fields prevented maladies and protected against the witches.⁸⁸¹ The smoke from burning *Juniperus communis*, or common Juniper, known as *stria* (dialect for witch) in the high Valle del Chiampo, was propitious against witches and lightning.⁸⁸²

Plants by themselves or in combination with other materials were used as protective amulets. Ody records that in "Saxon times" the most powerful herbs—wood betony, vervain, mugwort, plantain, and yarrow—were also used as amulets.⁸⁸³

A few years ago, a Trentino woman sent me some blessed olive leaves that were distributed on Palm Sunday at her church. Coltro cites the use of olive branches, blessed on this day, as protection against hail storms.⁸⁸⁴ Blessed olive

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., 189, 190.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid., 191.

⁸⁸¹ Ibid., 197.

⁸⁸² Ibid., 191.

⁸⁸³ Ody, *Complete Medicinal Herbal*, 18.

⁸⁸⁴ Coltro, *Gnomi*, 40.

branches were burned inside the home when a thunderstorm approached, accompanied by prayers to Saint Barbara and Saint Simon, according to Folgheraiter's sources.⁸⁸⁵

Special Knowledge—Divination, Treasure, Visionary Dreams

Some plants were thought to have the power to bestow special knowledge beyond that normally available. The Sibyl eats "roots and berries," although we are not told of what plants. Folgheraiter, as stated earlier, says that henbane was used until recently as a folk medicine for pain relief. Christian Rätsch, who has studied the ritual use of powerful plants, cites henbane's mythological and historical associations, including its visionary powers, its ability to evoke rain, and its use in witches' ointment.⁸⁸⁶

Chelidonium majus, Greater Celandine, was known as *erba de le angone*, (the herb of the Anguane), in Valle del Chiampo "perhaps for its strange hypnotic properties."⁸⁸⁷ Treben, meanwhile, notes that Celandine was "highly prized" in the past, and lists several medicinal uses; although feared as poisonous, she tributes this antipathy to the early pharmaceutical industry who wanted people to turn to chemical medicine instead of valuable plant medicine, which they condemned.⁸⁸⁸ Celandine is specifically cited in several traditional folk cures

⁸⁸⁵ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 17.

⁸⁸⁶ Rätsch, "Mead of Inspiration," 286–87.

⁸⁸⁷ Zampiva, "Piante Sacre e Piante Maledette," 188.

⁸⁸⁸ Treben, *La Salute dalla Farmacia del Signore* [Health through God's pharmacy], 25.

(internally for the eyes, externally as a salve for the stomach and for warts) that Folgheraiter chronicles for Trentino.⁸⁸⁹

Certain types of ferns, extremely ancient inhabitants of earth, were attributed with magical properties. One type could bring love, open locks, bring luck, or protect;⁸⁹⁰ another type, if harvested on the night of St. John, could transform metal into gold.⁸⁹¹ In a folk story about the miraculous Madonna of Fèles (dialect for fern), she appears to a shepherd boy, restores his voice, and requests that a chapel be built to her where a large fern grows.⁸⁹²

Sacred Salve, Suspicious Salve

Ritual gathering, in Europe and elsewhere, has taken place across the ages on sacred mountains or at high places.⁸⁹³ In the folk stories, women use salves or ointments “to fly” to communal gatherings.

One folk story emphasizes that this event is for women only. In Val di Sole at the edge of the village of Cogolo, a boy’s *mother and grandmother* rub

⁸⁸⁹ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 72–73.

⁸⁹⁰ Zampiva associates the root of *Polypodium vulgare*, known by woodpeckers, with magical properties, including the ability to make someone fall in love with the bearer and the power to open the locks of homes, palaces, and castles. Zampiva, “Piante Sacre e Piante Maledette,” 195. Borio discusses *Felce dolce*, and notes its association in the stories as bringing luck and protecting against epidemics. Borio, *Prevenzione è Salute*, 143.

⁸⁹¹ Zampiva lists *Dryopteris filix-mas* or *Felce maschio*, harvested during the magic night of St. John the Baptist, with the perceived ability to transform base metal into gold. Zampiva, “Piante sacre,” 189. Borio cautions its use and labels it poisonous, while still citing its medicinal properties. Borio, *Prevenzione è Salute*, 145.

⁸⁹² Neri, “The Madonna of Felès,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 124.

⁸⁹³ Müller-Ebeling, Rättsch, and Storl, *Witchcraft Medicine*, 50.

ointment from a tin hidden under the bed on their bodies, recite some words, and vanish. The boy, who has been secretly watching, also undresses, uses the ointment, and says the words. He is whisked by force through the ceiling and roof into the night sky and towards the mountains. He lands in a field in front of a cowshed, in the middle of some witches, who question him, scold him, spank him for his actions, and let him run away if he promises not to do it again.⁸⁹⁴

Certain plants, used in this way, may have given women the opportunity to be in ritual, healing, or ceremonial female-only community. On a practical level, the most powerful pain relief medicines, like some narcotics today, may have also had pleasurable, even ecstatic effects. The properties of potent salves were familiar, and even useful, to authorities as well as common people, and their use was not forbidden, according to the authors of *Witchcraft Medicine*.⁸⁹⁵ The following folk stories, however, clearly create suspicion and negation of women who use salves. The details cite their periodic use at certain times of the day or week, which would indicate a ritual use.

In the folk story “The World of the Anguane” that takes place Cloz in Val di Non, a man who becomes suspicious of his wife feigns sleep to discover that his wife uses salve *at midnight*. After rubbing it on her body and saying magic

⁸⁹⁴ Neri, “Witches... in the family,” *Secret Heart* (Spring), 57–58.

⁸⁹⁵ Müller-Ebeling, Rättsch, and Storl, *Witchcraft Medicine*, 51. They cite the use of salves by executioners (presumably for pain) and during interrogation for evoking truth-telling.

words, she disappears into the night. The husband uses the salve and finds himself at a witch's Sabbath, where he sees his wife dancing with a devil.⁸⁹⁶

In a similar story from a different location, "The Witches of Vajolón," gather *every Saturday night*. A man whose wife leaves the bed before midnight decides to find out where she goes. He discovers that, once in the kitchen, she undresses and uses salve from a tin on her lower back. Then she mounts a broomstick and flies out the window. He repeats what she did, and finds himself flying through the sky on a broomstick, landing in the middle of "a witches' Sabbath, with spirits and devils dancing and dining in a satanic way."⁸⁹⁷

"The Witches of Valòrz," gathered on *Friday nights* around a large rock, according to Neri's story, which still bears the marks of the cauldron they used to heat their ointments and their footprints. There were "a good number" of them who lived there "since time immemorial." Their orgies and vulgar songs filled the dark nights.⁸⁹⁸

Periodic gatherings of women in the folk stories were also related to the moon.⁸⁹⁹ Ancient Babylonians and Assyrians kept a lunar Sabbath every seven

⁸⁹⁶ Neri, "The world of the Anguane," *Secret Heart* (Spring), 19–20.

⁸⁹⁷ Neri "The witches of Vajolón," *Secret Heart* (Spring), 8.

⁸⁹⁸ The Council of Trent banished them to Val di Saènt. Neri, "The witches of Valòrz," *Secret Heart* (Spring), 47–48. If the indentations in the rock from the "marks of the cauldron" are still there, it would be interesting to see if they resemble the cupmarks, discussed in Chapter 4.

⁸⁹⁹ See for example the folk story of *Gordo e Vinella*, in which the witches of the Cimpedie are said to cry out like wolves on the night of the full moon, sending enormous wheels of fire into the air on the crests of the Ciampedie. Neri, "Gordo e Vinella," *Donne e bambine*, 73.

days as the moon changed its quarterly phase.⁹⁰⁰ Sabbath derives from a word meaning a day of rest.⁹⁰¹

According to Ody, European witches “flew” with deadly nightshade (belladonna), thornapple, or mandrake.⁹⁰² These powerful plants and others are included in the recipes for ointment used to fly, written down over the centuries, and compiled by Zucca, who concludes that expertise and a deep knowledge of plants would have been required to prepare and use them safely.⁹⁰³

Prohibition, Regulation, Negation

The importance of plants, as agents of women’s activities, can be viewed through how their use was prohibited or regulated. Zampiva, Cavallini, and Folgheraiter all address this impact on the women of Trentino, and on the villagers that depended on them as healers. The numerous nicknames given to plants linking them with witches or devils bear witness to their negation, and to their perceived power. Regulation of plants continues today.

Zampiva cites the Council of Trent, which took place from 1545 to 1563, as a defining moment, which he claims changed the hidden, mysterious knowledge of herbs.⁹⁰⁴ Among the Cimbri people, the ability of the plants,

⁹⁰⁰ Walker, *The Woman’s Dictionary*, 191.

⁹⁰¹ Online Etymology Dictionary, “Search: sabbath,” line 1. Grahn also relates Sabbath to menstrual separation. See Grahn, *Blood*, 15–16.

⁹⁰² Ody, *Complete Medicinal Herbal*, 20.

⁹⁰³ Zucca, *Donne Delinquenti*, 199–200.

⁹⁰⁴ Zampiva, “Piante Sacre e Piante Maledette,” 181.

animals, and stones to speak changed after the Council, along with the magical characters of the folk stories, including the “anguane, mythical goddesses of the woodland water who were segregated in the darkest recesses and were no longer able to communicate freely with the humans.”⁹⁰⁵ The historical documents offer the evidence that

each and every rural community valley, up in the mountain villages in the poorest and remotest corners, still immersed in the ancient customs and animistic beliefs and occult practices derived from the echo of different cultures, was affected by new provisions.⁹⁰⁶

As a result, much of the archaic traditions associated with herbs was lost, he continues. And yet, even with suppression by the “church, official and academic world” certain rituals continue unconsciously, in gestures and language.

Traditions were passed on to the Madonna and saints.⁹⁰⁷

Numerous plants are listed in modern books of herbs with names associated with Lady or the Madonna. Zampiva’s list includes *Artemisia vulgaris*, or “wild absinthe,” as a sacred plant of the Blessed Virgin, known in dialect as *santònico* implying its use as a holy tonic.⁹⁰⁸ *Balsamita major*, a bitter herb and emmenagogue, is known as *erba della Madonna miracolosa*, herb of the

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁸ Zampiva, “Piante Sacre e Piante Maledette,” 184.

miraculous Madonna.⁹⁰⁹ *Stachys recta*, said to be good for any illness, internal or external, is known in dialect as “herb of the Madonna,” or “herb of our dear Lady.” The herb must be harvested at the right time, which is in August.⁹¹⁰

Falling into the cursed category would be the leaves of *Colchicum autumnale* which Zampiva says were known as *Kocn*, a word that also means devil.⁹¹¹ Over a hundred names of so-called devil or witch plants are listed in the book *Witchcraft Medicine*.⁹¹² Richard Folkard, whose book surveys all of Europe, also lists numerous devil-related plants; mandrake, for example, was known as the Devil’s candle.⁹¹³

Di Gesaro reports that women with knowledge of innumerable herbs gathered on Monte Roen to exchange curative remedies.⁹¹⁴ Yet she states it was not the healer’s medicine, per se, that was attacked by the church and state, it was their magic.⁹¹⁵ She continues that some cures relied on *belief* in their efficacy; they were based on empirical knowledge, and depended on the senses, all of

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid., 184. Balsam, related in derivation and meaning to the word balm, derived from resin. (The Free Dictionary, “Balsam,” def. 5). The chrism used for anointing in Roman Catholic sacraments is made of olive oil and balsam. (New Advent, “Chrism,” para. 1).

⁹¹⁰ Zampiva, “Piante Sacre e Piante Maledette,” 197.

⁹¹¹ Zampiva, “Piante Sacre e Piante Maledette,” 189.

⁹¹² Müller-Ebeling, Rätsch, and Storl, *Witchcraft Medicine*.

⁹¹³ Folkard, *Plant Lore, Legends, and Lyrics*, 85.

⁹¹⁴ Di Gesaro, *Giochi*, 100.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid.

which threatened the anti-empirical Church, who felt the senses were deceptive and the terrain of the devil.⁹¹⁶

Cavallini cites the transformation of the herbalist and healing woman into a witch because of her knowledge competing with the official power. Both the healer and the patient believed in the healing forces of nature present in certain plants, trees, stones, and pools of water. Certain animals also had special properties including toads, bats, snakes, and salamanders. In the Middle Ages, Christianity forbade women to practice medicine. The church could not allow women the power they had as healers—only the church could have power over the body and the soul. Male doctors were later granted care of the body and male priests kept the care of the soul. Although women continued to practice secretly, some of them met with the trials of the Inquisition. After numerous lives were lost in childbirth, schools for midwives were established in the nineteenth century.⁹¹⁷

Folgheraiter reports on the regulation of midwives in Trentino in the late eighteenth century with the proclamation by Prince Bishop Pietro Vigilio Thun that required a certification of a woman's capability in obstetric instruction from a qualified doctor or surgeon, and finally examination and approval of the parish priest, who ensured her knowledge of how to administer the sacrament of baptism and how her services could be used. Parish priests were ordered to report midwives who practiced without approval. Given that the doctors were often not

⁹¹⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁹¹⁷ Opening remarks to the exhibit *Soggetto Montagne Donna*, Casa Andriollo. Email to author from Rosanna Cavallini, December 1, 2010.

present in the valleys, this left women responsible for healthcare according to Folgheraiter.⁹¹⁸ It would seem from this report that women were faced with the situation of being reported to the authorities or caring for their family's health.

In the twentieth century, during Fascism, Mussolini promoted the use of some herbs for self-sufficiency, although limits were placed on what quantity could be used. Eleven herbs were prohibited by law on January 6, 1931, all having "toxic power," including aconite, belladonna, digitale, colchico, henbane, white hellebore, thornapple, Juniper Sabina.⁹¹⁹

The distilled drink known as absinthe, made from *Artemesia absinthia*, or wormwood, whose multiple health benefits were listed earlier, became banned in several countries in the alcohol-prohibition era of the early twentieth century, citing the toxicity, in extreme concentrations, of its active ingredient thujone.⁹²⁰ When I was in Lombardy in 2009, the owner of an herb farm told me that since *Artemesia absinthia* is a regulated herb, she is allowed to grow it only on the condition that she uses it only in water and does not add it to alcohol. In the Swiss mountains, the villagers of Kallnach reportedly held onto their use of this herb for use as medicine, even when it was prohibited in 1910. De-regulated by a people's

⁹¹⁸ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 66.

⁹¹⁹ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 70. See also ISMEA, "Elenco delle piante," table col. 1.

⁹²⁰ Louche, "The History of Absinthe," "The war on absinthe."

vote in 2005, one villager is now distilling absinthe according to a recipe of his great-grandfather.⁹²¹

Continued Use of Herbal Remedies—Values Transmitted

The “pharmacological self-sufficiency” of Trentino folk described by Folgheraiter apparently continued with my maternal grandmother’s emigration to the United States, although with perhaps fewer choices, and probably from necessity. From interviews I learned that my grandparents used some herbal remedies as mentioned throughout this section, namely bitter greens eaten in the spring (which are listed as medicinal herbs in Trentino), chamomile tea, malva, and the tonic LoZogo. Grappa, which is made from the mash left over after wine-making, and wine were also used as medicine. During my mother’s childhood in the 1920s and 1930s, her parents used a bit of grappa in hot tea to banish a cold or chills; they used grappa externally as a liniment for sore joints or muscles. “That was our medicine,” she said, although no herbs were added that she recalls. The doctor was summoned only in the direst of cases, which I assume was for economic reasons, although language may have also been a consideration. When my grandmother did require surgery once, she sought an Italian doctor. Medicine for serious illness was obtained from the neighborhood *farmacia*, whose pharmacist offered advice.

Chamomile tea was used as a remedy for several ailments, including digestive or stomach upsets. Aunt Annie grew chamomile in her garden at one time, and continued the practice of her mother, using it for tea for her and family.

⁹²¹ Tagliabue, "Kallnach Journal," para. 11.

Malva was a home-remedy boiled and used for eye irritations by my grandmother, my mother recalls, although she did not continue its use for her own family.

The importance of cyclic attunement with the seasons when using plants is evident with my grandmother's use in the spring of the bitter tonic LoZogo, which she gave by the spoonful to my aunts and my mother as children—a memorable experience for them due its extremely bitter taste.⁹²² The ingredients of the dark brown liquid listed on the bottle are: Senna, Fennel, Mandrake Root, Peppermint, Spearmint, Mountain Mint, Horsemint, Sarsaparilla, Sassafras, Hyssop, Blessed Thistle, Dittany, Ground Ivy, Johnswort, Lemon Balm, Sage, Spikenard, and Yarrow.⁹²³

The value of plants as protective against weather was communicated and continued here in the United States in the use of blessed palms. In my interview with Aunt Louise, she noted her use of palm leaves in her home that had been blessed on Palm Sunday, which, if burned, would provide protection during an

⁹²² As is common in herbal tonics, alcohol was used to formulate it. My quest to learn about this tonic furthered my insight into the importance of bitter herbs. LoZogo was made by a Swiss-American herbalist doctor in the United States, who likely gave it an Italian name to appeal to immigrants.

⁹²³ These are listed on a vintage bottle of LoZogo in the Ouray County Museum in Ouray, Colorado, a mining town whose population includes Trentino immigrants. The ingredients in English and Italian, listed on separate labels, are: Senna—Senna; Fennel—Finocchio; Mandrake Root—Radice di Mandragora; Peppermint—Menta Peperina; Spearmint—Menta Verde; Mountain Mint—Menta Montana; Horsemint—Menta Equine; Sarsaparilla—Sarsaparilla; Sassafras—Sassafrasso; Hyssop—Issopo; Blessed Thistle—Cardo Benedictus; Dittany—Dittamo; Ground Ivy—Edera Nana; Johnswort—Felce Comune; Lemon Balm—Melissa; Sage—Salvia; Spikenard—Spigonardo; and Yarrow—Millefoglie. Barbara Walker notes that another plant was misnamed as mandrake in the United States. (Walker, *The Woman's Dictionary*, 446.)

electrical storm, a practice that she recalled her mother also had. The palm leaves were visibly tucked behind the frame of a holy image on the wall. Blessed palms were kept in my childhood home also, treated with care because they were considered holy,

Ointments and salve during my childhood took the forms of purchased medicinals, specifically Vaseline petroleum jelly and Vicks vaporub. The aromatic Vicks salve was applied to a piece of cloth and affixed inside the clothing so it could contact the chest.

Sacred ointment was used exclusively by the priest for sacraments, specifically baptism and Last Rites. A crucifix hung on the wall above the door to the kitchen that contained a hidden compartment with the necessary items for administering the final anointing, once known as Extreme Unction, with a blessed balm—a type of fragrant ointment—in case the priest needed to be summoned to the house for someone near death.

My mother grew flowers for beauty around our urban home. Large lilac bushes lined the side of the house. Wild roses grew in the back yard and hollyhocks bloomed near the garage in the alley. Recalling from the previous chapter that the healing value of plants primarily came in the form of food, the fruit of the large apple tree in the back yard was always harvested and canned for use throughout the year. The value of plants for protection, beauty, scent, and nourishment was transmitted to me, but not their explicit use as medicine.

Conclusions

Trentino mountain women, like rural women elsewhere, traditionally have had the knowledge to utilize and transform plants into medicine, a source of agency. Plants, along with other organic substances were used for healing medicines, which involved recipes for use, and perhaps spoken words as well.

Women, plants, healing and spirituality have a long relationship. Plants are tied to the cycles of the moon and sun in their growth. As a source of medicine, they offer their healing resonance with the cycles of life. The efficacy of a plant is cyclic. Preparing the medicine requires attention to its source and cycles of growth. Healing was likely understood in terms of restoring the balance and being in harmony with the cycles of life, as in traditional cultures. Plants can help restore a woman's fertility cycle, support all aspects of pregnancy, and aid digestive cycles. Their presence and help is noted throughout the life cycle, at the beginning, and at the end. Plant knowledge could also be used for protection, harm, pleasure, and gaining special knowledge. Some plants became sacralized, denoting their special status or use for protection; others were associated with the devil or folk characters, which may have served to prevent their use or demonize those who did. The prohibition and regulation of plants, which were agents of healing, would have impacted the agency of women, the health of the entire village, and women's natural connection to nature.

The explicit use of plants for healing continued somewhat with my grandparents, but little with the next generation. The use of sacred balm has been conveyed in the practices of Roman Catholicism, along with the ability of plants

blessed on Palm Sunday to protect, although that is not exclusive to Trentino culture.

11. Folk Women Rise Up against Injustice

Women and men rise up against injustice in the themes of several folk stories. Nature acts as a protective ally and counselor of women and peasants, encourages them to act, and receives those who have died as trees, stars, and flowers. Nature is an active source of knowledge and an agent of the people against injustice.

Peasant Women Rise Up against Rape and Injustice

The folk tales tell of women who rose up against injustice. In one dramatic story a young woman challenges the “rites of the first night”—the practice of forced sexual relations by the castle lord with a peasant woman on her wedding night, before she is with her husband. “The Beauty and the Count” takes place in Pergine Castle. The “beauty” is a young woman in the village of Fierozzo, who is to be married that day. She is kidnapped at dawn by the count’s men and brought to the castle, where a party has been arranged. After the guests have a meal of meat and red wine, with singing and dancing, the girl is brought to the bedroom so that presumably the count can rape her that evening. However at the right moment, as the count starts to become violent, she withdraws a sharpened *roncola*, a crescent-shaped hand tool for working in the vineyards that she had been hiding under her clothing and thrusts it into the count’s chest. Before she escapes, she takes all the jewels and money she can find in the room. She

makes her way home via a back route and she and her betrothed flee together, after they awaken the priest to marry them first.⁹²⁴

In another story about the Pergine Castle by Neri, a country girl is about to be raped violently by the squire and three of his drunken soldiers in the bedroom. In the squire's rant, we learn she had planned to marry and leave home without paying him the required tax.⁹²⁵ Also we can assume from the story's title that it was considered a "right of the first night." In the distance there is the sound of the cries of hundreds of villagers armed with torches and pitchforks who are arriving to try and end this practice.⁹²⁶ I first learned of this story during an interview with Onorina, who lives outside the town of Pergine below the castle, when I asked her about folk stories.

A fragment of another story is told by Neri:

They were very demanding, the Lords of the Castle of Nanno, in demanding the hated right of the first night, no less than eight days and

⁹²⁴ Neri, "The Beauty and the Count," *Women and Girls*, 87–89.

⁹²⁵ Luciano Brida, quoted by Folgheraiter, adds more details:
We can deduce how the modern nuptial ransom of the popular *stropaia* finds links to the medieval right of the first night, when the feudal lords received a payment when their vassals or servants contracted marriage emigrating to another jurisdiction. It was a prerogative which automatically derived to the feudatory at the very moment in which he acquired a jurisdiction and he was invested with this. The praxis, moreover, is widely documented, given that next to the minute listings of the goods, he would enjoy absolute power over the *hominess*, *vassallos*, *servitors* and *alterius cuisulibet servilis condicionis*, everything equal to a simple merchandise for exchange. (Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 115).

⁹²⁶ Neri, "Ius primae noctis," [Right of the first night] *Secret Heart* (Winter), 121.

eight nights, it lasted, and when the squire on duty wanted it, even fifteen days and fifteen nights.⁹²⁷

Iva Berasi, providing commentary analysis on the story of “The Beauty and the Count,” writes that, whether true or not, the value of stories of rebellion, told “from *filò* to *filò*,” would have been to communicate the “strength of the group” and “the power of justice” to respond to harassment.⁹²⁸ On a practical level, the stories may have served as a reminder that the tools the people used to harvest the plants could be used as weapons of defense.

Nature as Protective Ally, Ancestor, and Family

In a folk story that takes place in Foppiano in Vallagarina, nature, family, and ancestors offer their alliance to help a young woman. Fiore (which means flower in Italian), a beautiful girl “of marriageable age,” is left alone when her father is sent off to war and her mother dies of grief. One day she encounters a knight on horseback, who pursues her. In order to escape his forceful advances, she runs to the forest where she turns into a Lily of the Valley at the base of a huge chestnut tree. When her father returns from war, the voice of her dead mother and the “spirits of the woods” help him locate his flower/daughter, who then becomes once more a girl.⁹²⁹

⁹²⁷ Neri, *Mille Leggende del Trentino*, #961, 258. (My translation.)

⁹²⁸ Neri, “La bella e il conte” [The beauty and the count], *Donne e bambine*, 81.

⁹²⁹ Neri, “Fiore and the little bells,” *Secret Heart* (Spring), 34–35.

Rebellion by Peasants When Injustice Is Intolerable

There are numerous folk stories of peasant uprisings against the castles in which peasants rose up in self-defense. Because of their personal ancestral relevance, I have chosen to include here a story from near the birthplace of my paternal grandfather, two stories from the valley of my maternal grandmother, and finally one from Baselga, near my paternal grandmother's land, in which nature is an ally.

In "The Feudatory de la Mot," Neri recounts the tyranny of the ruler at Castle Belvedere against the people in the Altopiano di Pinè during the Middle Ages. In addition to claiming "the right of the first night," against the peasant maidens, the feudatory tortured, imprisoned, and unjustly taxed the people. The people gathered communally to make a plan to gain their freedom. When the lord went out for his weekly hunting trip, they set up an ambush in a stable, and decapitated him with a long scythe. His horse carried the headless tyrant back to the castle, alerting all his supporters, who fled.⁹³⁰

Borzaga includes more details in her version of the story, "Il feudatorio di Castel Belvedere." She describes a reign of terror and torture inflicted by a cruel lord who is a ruthless and indiscriminate killer. Finally all the heads of families meet in secret to find a way to stop the killing. They arm themselves with farming instruments on a day they know he will be out hunting, and one young man has a split second opportunity to behead him with an axe. At the end of the story, the

⁹³⁰ Neri, "The feudatory de la Mot," *Secret Heart* (Summer), 106–7.

people enter and burn down the castle.⁹³¹ In 1992, during a visit to the hamlet of my paternal grandfather's birthplace, Prada, just below the hill where this castle would have been, Costante Mosèr, the former *sindaco* (mayor) who knew and remembered the oral history, told me of the peasant uprising and the burning of the castle.

In 1407, after decades of abusive taxes, first night rights, and injustice, a rebellion exploded, according to Neri.

The shudder of revolt ran up and down Val di Non and Val di Sole and one after the other the castles and manors were laid waste. In Revò, Cles, Bresimo, Tuenno, and Mèchel, the uprising provoked plundering, ambushes, and massacres.⁹³²

In the uprising against count Menardo in Tavon, his long rule of corruption and assassinations provoked the people to burn the castle down—killing him, and leaving only ashes.⁹³³

In 1525, the abused peasants rebelled against the castle in Samoclevo, Val di Sole, by blocking the food supply to the castle.⁹³⁴ After weeks of the food blockade, the castle lords threw a pig stuffed with corn over the castle walls, tricking them into thinking they had plenty of food. In another story about a siege on Castel Beseno, it is an old woman's suggestion to throw a grain-stuffed pig

⁹³¹ Borzaga, "Il feudatorio di Castel Belvedere" [The feudatory of Castle Belvedere], *Leggende dei Castelli del Trentino*, 189–95.

⁹³² Neri, "The end of Menardo," *Secret Heart* (Spring), 55–56.

⁹³³ *Ibid.*

⁹³⁴ Neri, "The trick of the pig," *Secret Heart* (Spring), 44.

over the castle wall, thus ending the attack by an enemy army.⁹³⁵ In *A Courageous People from the Dolomites: The Immigrants from Trentino on U.S.A. Trails*, Bonifacio Bolognani, a Trentino American Franciscan missionary priest, writes that the peasant uprising in 1525 against the “exorbitant taxes” and “immense privileges of the nobility,” known as The Rustic War, involved farmers from many valleys including Val di Sole, and left fifty of them dead, imprisoned, or mutilated.⁹³⁶

In a folk story that takes place at Telve at Castle Alto (Eastern Valsugana), the peasants were often not left with enough food for themselves after paying what they owed to the lord, especially in a bad-harvest year, when almost everything had to be deposited in the castle. One day, the “spirits of the forest” (where the souls of departed fellow peasants lived) sing out to the people to rise up with their farm implements and kill the lord so they can be free.⁹³⁷

In a story with a similar theme by Borzaga, it is the ancient trees themselves who urge rebellion. The most ancient conifers—firs, pines, and larches—had at one time spoken with the peasants, she says, at the foot of Monte Musiera, gifted them with berries, mushrooms, and wood for burning, and had taught them knowledge of medicine and even how to treat each other well—which evokes a code of ethics. Now the trees that had been witnesses to the

⁹³⁵ Borzaga, “La mucca e il grano,” *Leggende dei Castelli del Trentino*, 27–32.

⁹³⁶ Bolognani, *Courageous People*, 26–28.

⁹³⁷ Neri, “The choir of ghosts,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 64–65.

abuses of the peasants could no longer be silent. Heeding the trees call for rebellion, one man who had been mistreated stands up verbally to the feudatory and is protected by God. After that, the trees can again be silent.⁹³⁸

Noble Women Rebel against the Unjust Rule of Their Fathers

The women featured in the following stories are noble women who are subjected to tyranny and death for rising up against their fathers. I include the stories of women from the privileged class, usually presented as daughters of the castle rulers, because these stories too would likely have provided inspiration to peasant women hearing them. It may have even united women across social boundaries and class separation between them.

In a story that takes place at Castle Nanno in Val di Non, the daughter of the count, Melisenda, falls in love with Ludovico, the son of a count from a rival family at Castle Sporo in Sporminore. The couple meets secretly in the woods, but when they are discovered, Melisenda's father buries them alive in the castle wall in two niches with his own hands. In Neri's telling of the story, they become two stars in the night sky that can be seen in May, a sort of cosmic transformation.⁹³⁹ In another story that occurs in Castle Nanno, the *contessina* Laura falls in love with a minstrel, who is hung for his transgression. Laura dies of a broken heart, and the father, in a final insult, leaves them both to rot, unburied. Someone else retrieves their bodies and buries them outside the walls.

⁹³⁸ Borzaga, "I due secchi di Castellato," *Leggende dei Castelli del Trentino*, 201–6.

⁹³⁹ Neri, "The love of Melisenda," *Secret Heart*, (Summer), 98–100; see also Borzaga, *Leggende dei Castelli*, 159–64.

Some stories, such as the next one, are traceable to real events, according to Borzaga. She relates that in 1661, the Conte Simone Antonio Thun, a name that evoked power throughout the empire, imprisoned his daughter, Marianna Elisabetta Thun, who fell in love with the son of a doctor in Cles, apparently considered an unacceptable class for a marriage.⁹⁴⁰ In “Olinda e Arunte,” which takes place at Castle Caldès, Olinda defies her father’s choices for marriage, because she has fallen in love with a minstrel (who is not of the same class). Their attempt to escape is unsuccessful; she is imprisoned and starves to death. A rose bush with fragrant roses springs from her grave the next day.⁹⁴¹

The Lake Bleeds Red for the Queen

In a final story that takes place at Lake Tovel above Val di Non, a woman, Princess Tresenga, who is assuming leadership of her people as queen after her father dies, is threatened by a neighboring king who wants to marry her, assume ownership of her lands, and rulership of her people. After consulting her people to learn their wishes, the queen leads them into battle against the king and his soldiers, since the people want to retain her as their queen. All of them are killed, including the queen, and in memory the lake bleeds red every year.⁹⁴²

Indeed, this beautiful Alpine lake has turned red each year, along with *Laghestel* (little lake, in dialect) on the Altopiano di Pine in Trentino—as well as

⁹⁴⁰ Borzaga, *Leggende dei Castelli del Trentino*, 121.

⁹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 121–28.

⁹⁴² Neri, “The Tresénga Queen,” *Women and Girls*, 53–57. Dino Coltro cites the shores of Lake Tovel as a supposed meeting place of *streghe*, witches. Coltro, *Gnomi*, 92.

Lake Pergusa in the center of Sicily, remembered as the place of the Goddess Persephone's descent into the Underworld.⁹⁴³ However, Lake Tovel has not turned red since 1964.⁹⁴⁴ Biologist Michael Lanziger attributes it to the change in the economy: the rich nutrients from the summer pastures above (presumably with less emphasis on herding and dairy) no longer wash down the slopes into the lake to feed the type of algae which turned red.⁹⁴⁵ Alfonso Mosè, one of my first contacts from my paternal grandfather's village, remembers seeing the red color of *Laghestel*, as a boy; now it is much diminished reportedly from the land surrounding it no longer being used for agriculture. These lakes provide visible examples of the impact of human actions in nature.

Even though the cessation of the periodic red color is explained by science, in the spirit of the folk story, perhaps the lakes themselves are communicating a story—but what is it? That all of life is interdependent and we must heed the warning? That the earth's fertility, reflected in the “lake's blood,” is being impacted by human action? Or that women's source of power, their lunar blood, bringing earth and cosmos into fruitful harmony, is no longer being honored? If we listen, remember, and honor women and nature as the source of life, as did the carver of the Gaban Venus more than 6,000 years ago who marked her in ochre red, will the lakes, too, resume their bleeding in harmonic resonance?

⁹⁴³ See Rigoglioso, “Mysticism, Mother Worship, and Misogyny” for more information on this myth and phenomenon in Sicily.

⁹⁴⁴ Faustini and Faganello, *Tovel and its World*, 1.

⁹⁴⁵ Chiodin, *Magnificent Italia: Trentino*, 24:30.

Conclusions

Women and men rise up against injustice in the themes of several folk stories. Nature acts as a protective ally and counselor of women and peasants, encourages them to act and receives those who have died as trees, stars, and flowers. Nature is an active source of knowledge and an agent of the people against injustice. Lake Tovel is visibly communicating with humans by its color, reminding us of our interconnectedness, of our story together.

12. Wise Women Speak from Experience

Women, particularly old women, hold a culmination of spiritual agency from their experience. In the folk stories, old women were counselors and advisors, knowledgeable in matters of health and love. As *comari*, (“co-mothers” or “with Mary”) women shared their knowledge in sisterhood with friends; as godmothers they held babies at baptism, as midwives they were present at birth; as grandmothers they were the storytellers, the conveyer of the culture through their words. Although women’s wisdom was negated as “old wives tales,” and the old women of the folk stories became witches, the wise women have always known and understood their own power.

The Agency of Old Women and *Comari* in the Folk Stories

In the folk stories that have been presented throughout this dissertation, old women heal, counsel, advise, reward, protect, tell the future, and declare their wisdom. The stories are summarized in Table 5 and selectively described further in the paragraphs that follow. Sometimes the story specifies that it was “an old *comare*” or “the oldest *comare*.” Bertoluzza’s dictionary of ancient Trentino dialect describes *comare* as a second mother, godmother, or midwife.⁹⁴⁶ My mother remembers her mother using the word *comari* (plural) as a term of fondness to describe her women friends.

⁹⁴⁶ Bertoluzza, *Dizionario dell’Antico Dialetto Trentino* (1997), 70.

Table 5. Brief Summary of Old Women’s Roles in the Folk Stories

Description	Name of Folk Story
Old woman at the edge of the forest offers protection	“The <i>Vecchietta</i> of Valbona”
Oldest <i>comare</i> has healing idea; <i>comari</i> work together to heal	“The Dress of the Madonna”
Old woman heals, advises in love, tells future	“The Sibilla of Comano Terme”
Old <i>comare</i> counsels in love	“The Vivana’s Plaits”
Old woman counsels in love and declares her agency from being old, wise, and experienced	“Gordo and Vinella”
Old woman expresses gratitude, rewards young man with advice, a cat, a dog, and a magic ring	“The Ring” (A Dog, a Cat and a Magic Spell)
Old woman who is married to the devil accesses secrets and shares information	“The Witch and the Devil”

Note. Author’s table

Old Woman Offers Words of Protection

The folk story about the *vecchietta*, the little old woman of Valbona, in Val Lagarina, Ala, takes place during *la miseria* (the misery), when there was no food. The old woman, referred to as little grandmother in the story, lives alone at the edge of the woods calling out words of protection in the dark to the men who are running contraband by mule at night (sugar, alcohol, and tobacco in exchange for salt, cereal, and corduroy cloth) to keep from starving. Forced to stop by soldiers, they later decide to go search for her in the mountains above Ala; although they cannot find her, they do find a spring of the freshest water, which they associate with her tears. “We have to figure out a way so that our children

never forget her,” they say, which they implement by placing an image of San Valentino near the spring and referring to the valley as Valbona, the valley of the good old woman.⁹⁴⁷ The folk stories are telling us how they remembered the old woman. In this example, it was through storytelling, by marking the place with a holy image, and by naming the place after her.

Old Women Heal

In the folk story entitled “Il vestito della Madonna” by Neri, referenced in earlier chapters, some of the *comari* of the village, described as “good women,” try to help a very ill woman with bandages, herbal medicines and potions, although their efforts are unsuccessful.⁹⁴⁸ It is the oldest *comare* who thinks of a healing solution—that of dressing her in the vestments of the Madonna Addolorata.⁹⁴⁹ Neri notes that a similar story is narrated about the hamlet of Deggiano, where my *bisnonna*, great grandmother, was born.⁹⁵⁰

⁹⁴⁷ Neri, “The Old Woman of Valbona,” *Women and Girls*, 32–34 and Neri, “La vecchietta di Valbona,” *Donne e bambine*, 26–28.

⁹⁴⁸ Neri, *Donne e Bambine*, 67–68, #21.

⁹⁴⁹ In the English version, *comari* is translated as “housewives.” Neri, “The Madonna’s robe,” *Secret Heart* (Spring), 43.

⁹⁵⁰ Neri, “The Madonna’s robe,” *Secret Heart* (Spring), 43.

Old Woman Knows the Future

The *Sibilla of Comano Terme*, whose story was told in Chapter 5, is described as “old as the Earth” by Borzaga.⁹⁵¹ She heals with the thermal waters, advises in matters of love and knows the future.

Old Woman Counsels about Love

A heartbroken young man consults an old woman for advice, specifically “the old *comare* of Castelfondo,”⁹⁵² in the folk story “The Vivana’s Plaits,”⁹⁵³ after he has fallen in love with a Vivana and inadvertently broken the taboo of touching her braid while she slept, upon which she left. The *comare* advises him that he is better off to marry a local girl.

Old Woman Declares Her Agency

The old woman in the story of “Gordo e Vinella” is also consulted for help in matters of love after she emerges from behind a tree at a remote alpine hut and seems to know that Vinella is looking for Gordo, who is being held in captivity. She claims her knowledge as an elder: “Io sono vecchia e gli anni ti regalano esperienze, saggezza e anche preveggenza!” (I am old and the years give you

⁹⁵¹ Borzaga, “La leggenda della Sibilla,” *Leggende del Trentino: Magici Personaggi de Valle e Boschi*, 170.

⁹⁵² In the Italian version of the story, *La Treccia della Vivana*, “corse a chiedere consiglio a una vecchia comare di Castelfondo” he “ran to seek the advice of an old comare of Castelfondo.” (Neri, *Mille Leggende del Trentino*, 201.) In the three part story of the Italian language version, *Castelfondo—Ciclo delle Vivane*, we learn that the Vivane live on the Ori, the mountains above Castelfondo. (Neri, *Mille Leggende del Trentino*, 200–1.)

⁹⁵³ Neri, “The Vivana’s plaits,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 93–94.

experience, wisdom and foresight).⁹⁵⁴ She advises Vinella to seek the help of jay, which she does, who instructs Vinella to use a white rhododendron to free Gordo.

Old Woman Rewards with Magic

In the story “The Ring (A Dog, a Cat and a Magic Spell)”, an old woman gives a young man a magic ring to thank him for helping her carry heavy buckets of water to her cottage. She also gives him advice, a cat, and a dog, which help him make his way.⁹⁵⁵

Old Wives, Gossips, Godmothers, and Midwives

At times in the folk stories the word *comari* is translated into English as “housewives” or “old wives,” but those interpretations do not convey the original status of the term, especially since the term “old wives’ tales” in modern US jargon is pejorative and has come to mean silly beliefs or superstitions that are likely untrue, a negation promoted by Biblical teachings of Paul to “refuse profane and old wives’ fables.”⁹⁵⁶ Feminist author Germaine Greer, drawing from her own life experiences as well as from literary review, argues against the interpretation of an old wives’ tale as “a foolish story told by garrulous old women,” recognizing them as encoded narratives that women created to teach

⁹⁵⁴ Neri, “Gordo e Vinella,” *Donne e bambine*, 73.

⁹⁵⁵ Autonomous Province of Trento Department of Emigration, “The Ring” (or “A Dog, a Cat and a Magic Spell”), *Songs and Tales*, 66–70. Busk says she is an Angana (Busk, *The Valleys of Tirol*, 425.)

⁹⁵⁶ In the King James Version of the Bible, the apostle Paul, in his letter to Timothy, advises him to “refuse profane and old wives’ fables” (I Timothy 4:7 [KJV]). See Blue Letter Bible, “Dictionary and Word Search for ‘old wives’ in the KJV.”

children about the realities of life.⁹⁵⁷ In the folk story about the Marmolada Glacier, referenced in Chapter 6, it is the oldest woman who told stories at night during harvest.⁹⁵⁸ In Northern Europe, a collection of prose and poetic myths from thirteenth century Iceland is known as *Edda*, a word that also means great grandmother, leading some scholars to postulate that these may have been the grandmother's stories.⁹⁵⁹

In *Cassell's Italian Dictionary*, the definitions for a *comare* include gossip, crony, godmother, and midwife—which it lists as an obsolete meaning.⁹⁶⁰ The word “gossip” can indicate the malicious power of the spoken word. Also the folk story about Froberta visiting the *filò* stresses the importance of a man being present, which could indicate the power and fear of women talking together. My mother remembers hearing the dialect word *b'dissa*, meaning a busybody, curiously like our American English word “bidly,” related to the Celtic name Bridget,⁹⁶¹ but which has which came to mean “a fussy old woman.”⁹⁶²

Gossip is an archaic word for an older woman, from the word *godsib*, meaning “one related to the gods” and originally, according to Barbara Walker,

⁹⁵⁷ Greer, “Grandmother's Footsteps,” para. 1.

⁹⁵⁸ Neri, “The Marmolada glacier,” *Secret Heart* (Summer), 77–79.

⁹⁵⁹ Metzner, *Well of Remembrance*. See also Bjarnadottir, *Saga of Vanadis, Volva and Valkyrja*, 28.

⁹⁶⁰ Rébora, Guercio, and Hayward, *Cassell's Italian Dictionary*, 112.

⁹⁶¹ Online Etymology Dictionary, “Search: bridget,” line 2.

⁹⁶² Stein, *Random House College Dictionary*, 132.

referring to a god-mother, a term of respect for an older woman.⁹⁶³ One of the carnival masks from Val di Fiemme on display in the *Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina* in Trentino portrays a gray-haired woman, *una vecchia*, an old woman, whose face is painted red with a ring through her tongue and lips, rendering her mute—and presumably, the sign says, unable to gossip.⁹⁶⁴ The ring through her tongue would have also left her unable to tell the truth, to bless or to curse. Red ochre has been used since the earliest human migrations to mark stones and later female icons as a sign of women’s life-giving blood, but in this image, red is used to color the face of a woman whose agency of spoken word is prevented.

Older peasant women in a class society governed exclusively by men in the social and spiritual institutions had the least to lose in telling the truth.⁹⁶⁵ A source of women’s power would have always been her ability to speak out or to remain silent.

L’Om dele Storie, meaning the man of the stories in local dialect, also known as Maurizio Bontempelli, is a contemporary storyteller from Malè in Val di Sole who travels around leading walks and recounting the stories of the area on location. When I met him in 2009, he said that the court jester, wearing the pointed hat, could tell the truth because essentially, he was considered a fool.

⁹⁶³ Walker, *The Woman’s Encyclopedia*, 350.

⁹⁶⁴ Kezich, Eulisse, and Mott, *Nuova guida illustrata*, 165.

⁹⁶⁵ The original meaning of the English word soothsayer, a term which came to be associated with the ability to foresee the future, was *truthsayer* (Online Etymology Dictionary, “Search: soothsayer,” line 1).

Comare as Godmother

According to Coltro, whose documentation of past cultural practices and folk stories includes the Veneto, Friuli, and Trentino-Alto Adige, it was the godmother's responsibility to represent the mother at the child's baptism, which must be within eight days of its birth; however, the mother continued to be prohibited from church and the sacraments until her purification after forty days.⁹⁶⁶ If a mother died in childbirth, she could not be buried on consecrated ground—presumably because she carried an un-baptized child within her. If her child was stillborn and had thus died without baptism, its soul was not allowed in heaven. Mothers made pilgrimages to “sanctuaries of the breath” located throughout the Alps where beneficent and powerful Madonnas would restore the life of their child for just long enough so that it could be baptized.⁹⁶⁷

One such sanctuary, dedicated to the Madonna Pellizzano, is in Val di Sole, not far from my maternal grandmother's village, and about whom numerous folk stories have been recorded, including her volition to relocate from another church, the healing ability of her garments (referenced earlier), and her ability to keep the nearby river from flooding. In popular perception, she is a Madonna Bruna, a dark Madonna, and is displayed in a protective niche outside the church.⁹⁶⁸ The town was decorated and flowers surrounded the fountain in front

⁹⁶⁶ Coltro, *Gnomi*, 127.

⁹⁶⁷ Folgheraiter, *Beyond the Threshold of Time*, 96.

⁹⁶⁸ Mezzi and Ambrosi, *Chiesa Parrocchiale della Natività di Maria*, 26–28. See Moser, *Honoring Darkness*, Ch. 2, for a discussion of darkness as a sign of power.

of the church when I was there in 2009, celebrating the day attributed to her birth on September 8.⁹⁶⁹ The dialect word for godmother that my mother remembers is *ghidàza*.⁹⁷⁰

Comare as Midwife

Coltro states that the popular title of *comare*, which derives from the Latin “cum matre” (with the mother), is much more meaningful than *levatrice*, or midwife, which is a more technical term,⁹⁷¹ perhaps because the *comare* could also fulfill the spiritual role of godmother. The technical role and spiritual role were linked together when midwives were regulated—and in effect prevented from practicing—in the eighteenth century as discussed in Chapter 10. The agency of older women, garnered from a lifetime of knowledge and experience, became subject to institutional control by church and state. Yet the use of midwives persisted into modern times. Several of the women I interviewed in Trentino knew of someone who had used a midwife for delivery, “but she was certified,” they were quick to add. According to my mother, my grandmother delivered her children at home, most often with the help of other women, in the first decades of the 1900s in the United States.

⁹⁶⁹ In the Catholic tradition, the conception of Mary by her mother Anne is celebrated nine months earlier on December 8.

⁹⁷⁰ Zanella, *Dizionario Italiano–Solandro*, 49. There are several different spellings of this word depending on location.

⁹⁷¹ Coltro, *Gnomi*, 127.

Values Conveyed and Practices Passed Forward

The stories of the *comare* convey the value of women in spiritual sisterhood, who maintain the cycles of life by midwifing in new life and keeping women's wisdom alive with their words. Life is co-created, co-mothered, and co-nurtured. Words are powerful and must be used with care. In the folk stories and in folk women's lives, old women hold a culmination of spiritual agency from their experience. Godmother is a sacred role.

In my Trentino American family, the importance of the role of godmother was continued for my siblings and me. We were all baptized at the nearby Catholic church as babies as soon as possible, with parents and siblings present, and with various aunts and uncles serving as the honored roles of godparents. A small party was then hosted by my mother and father at our home with home-made food and celebration, to which the priest, a family friend, was invited. In my childhood, I felt the security of knowing that, if something should happen to my mother and father, my Aunt Louise, who was my mother's sister and my godmother, had responsibility for my care. Aunt Louise affirmed this idea of spiritual sisterhood in our interview: when I asked who became a mother to her, when at age twenty-three, her own mother died, she replied "I had my *sisters*."

For my family in the United States, I perceive that the nightly practice of the *filò*, continued in two forms, prayer and everyday story-telling. During my mother's childhood, my grandparents gathered the family together after dinner to pray the rosary aloud together. Growing up, our Trentino-American family continued this practice. My parents, siblings and I would all kneel down in a

bedroom or the living room and pray. Each “decade” or set of ten Hail Mary’s of the nightly ritual was dedicated out loud to one of the Mysteries of the Virgin Mary: “sorrowful,” “joyful,” or “glorious” in accordance with the day of the week. In the film, *Alberi degli Zoccoli* (The tree of the wooden clogs), which portrays farm life in early twentieth century Lombardy, the *filò* ends with the participants praying the rosary.⁹⁷² Clementina Todesco confirms this practice of in describing the *filò* of Faller.⁹⁷³ In my interview with Onorina, she cited the importance to her mother-in-law, Rosa, of saying the nightly rosary together.

When my father died in 1985, we were all gathered in his hospital room for his passing. Unable to leave the room, immobilized with grief after he breathed his last breath, my mother pulled out a rosary from her purse. We all prayed the rosary aloud together, and then with a lightness of being and filled with a kind of grace, were able to leave the room arm in arm, grateful for this sacred spoken ritual.

I perceive that the *filò* also continues around the table in my mother’s kitchen, where my mother, my siblings and I still share stories after a meal or with a sweet treat. Even in Trentino, the stories that were once told in the *filò* of the barn in Faller became transferred to the kitchen once gas and electric heat were introduced after World War II.⁹⁷⁴ When my father was alive, his storytelling took

⁹⁷² Olmi, *Alberi degli Zoccoli* [The tree of the wooden clogs].

⁹⁷³ Mathias and Raspa, *Italian Folktales in America*, 252.

⁹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

place in the living room. My mother always took time from her chores—a pause in the cycle of her day—when he arrived home from work. They sat in the living room and exchanged stories of the day’s events.

Recently, a publication in English for Trentino descendants was initiated by Lou Brunelli, a Trentino American whose passionate intent is to inform descendents of our culture. Brunelli, in explaining his motives, wrote: “Cultural literacy leads to cultural awareness and cultural awareness creates a cultural identity.”⁹⁷⁵ The magazine is, most appropriately, entitled *Filò*.

Conclusions

Women, particularly old women, hold a culmination of spiritual agency from their experience. In the folk stories, old women were counselors and advisors, knowledgeable in matters of health and love. As *comari*, (co-mothers), women shared their knowledge in sisterhood with friends; as godmothers they held babies at baptism, as midwives they were present at birth; as grandmothers they were the storytellers, the conveyer of the culture through their words. Although women’s wisdom was negated as “old wives’ tales,” and midwives were regulated, the wise women have always known and understood their own power.

⁹⁷⁵ Email to author from Lou Brunelli, November 21, 2012. Originally sent to Marlene Archer, November 4, 2012.

13. Review of Key Questions and Further Thoughts

The archaeological record, folk stories, and folk traditions in Trentino, Italy and nearby geographical areas in the Italian Alps investigated in this study portray women as the embodiment of the mystery of life and its enduring cycles. Folk women transmit the values that derive from this wisdom in numerous ways as part of everyday life. This chapter reviews the findings for the key questions of this inquiry: *What does the archaeological record suggest about women's spiritual agency? What are the sources of folk women's spiritual agency and how do they demonstrate it? What values do folk women's lives convey? Are those values relevant today?* In some further final thoughts, I propose the benefits of restoring and remembering the sources and cycles of life, I reflect upon how this study has impacted me, and offer a poem.

Key Questions of This Study

What Does the Archaeological Record Suggest about Folk Women's Spiritual Agency?

The icons, attributes and sacred sites of goddesses are strongly related to nature and the cosmos. The ochre red vulva of the Gaban figure is portrayed as a source of life herself. Wearing the moon and bearing a tree, she brings together the cosmos and nature in her body.

In the rock carvings, female and male worshipping figures with open upright arms and outspread legs seem to unite and embody the above and below in ritual. Stele, votives, and statues offer evidence that females were venerated as

ancestresses and goddesses. Women's relationship with nature and the cosmos promoted fertility of themselves and nature.

What Are the Sources of Folk Women's Agency? How Do they Demonstrate Their Agency?

The sources investigated in this study portray a close alliance of women with nature and the cosmos, which are sources of women's agency, as are their bodies. Tables 1 and 2 (in the Introduction) list the sources and cycles of life utilized by women in their everyday spirituality that have been considered in this study. Sources of life include the ancestors, who are the progenitors; women whose own bodies are the source of life through their blood and birth-giving; nature that provides life-giving water, plants and animals; and the cosmos which provides the light of the sun and the stimulating influence of the moon and stars. The sources of life—the ancestors, women, nature, and the cosmos—*become* sources of women's agency. Women draw from the sources of life and are a source of life themselves. The cycles of life are also a source of women's agency.

Additionally, there is a correspondence of these cycles, which folk women in particular understood through their bodies' fertility cycle and its synchronization with the moon's cycles. Folk wisdom regarding the actions—and pauses—of everyday life emerges from this understanding.

Table 6 summarizes how folk women, through a variety of everyday actions addressed in this study, demonstrate their spiritual agency through their relationship with the sources and cycles of life. As spiritual agents, they protect, embody, utilize, create, dwell in, become fertile through, and defend the sources

of life. Folk women bring forth new life; they animate and keep women’s agency alive through oral tradition. Additionally, women maintain, embody, enforce, renew, and remember the cycles of life.

Table 6. How Folk Women Demonstrate Spiritual Agency through Their Relationship with the Sources of Life and the Cycles of Life

Actions/Interactions of Folk Women with Sources of Life	Actions/Interactions of Folk Women with Cycles of Life
Protect	Maintain
Embody	Embody
Utilize	Enforce the rules regarding
Create	Renew
Dwell in	Speak of, tell stories about, remember
Become fertile through	
Defend	
Birth, midwife	
Speak of, tell stories about, remember	

Note. Author’s table.

What Values Do Folk Women’s Lives Convey?

As revealed in the folk stories and in women’s lives, the values transmitted through the oral tradition and everyday activities include sharing and caring, honoring the ancestors, respect for elders, care for children, reverence of nature, and the importance of keeping one’s word.

Women transmitted these values through their actions in their everyday life. Protection of self and items of the home, spinning, embroidering, doing

laundry, preparing food and creating healing remedies all had the ability to convey meaning. Not only the activity itself but also when and how it was done was important—often with recognition of its source, of other cycles, and with communal participation.

Folk women’s wisdom, acquired from the spiritual agency of women’s everyday life, recognizes the cycles of life, death and regeneration, communicates an awareness of the interconnectedness of all life, and demonstrates responsibility for future generations.

Are Folk Women’s Values Relevant Today?

I propose that folk women’s wisdom is timely, critical knowledge for living sustainably, harmoniously, and in balance. The natural cycles of nature and the cosmos, in recognition of source, can be utilized for restoring the balance in body, nature, and community. The Nature Beings of the folk stories communicate the non-commoditized value of the wild and the gift of nature. Being in nature, particularly wild nature, offers healing resonance that some part of us, from the long memory of our existence, knows. Cosmologist Brian Swimme observes that all humans are wild; domesticity is a veneer created by industrial society.⁹⁷⁶ Material products and pharmaceuticals in a market-driven consumer society are promoted as a solution to health and well-being at the expense, in many ways, of a direct healing relationship with community, nature, and the cosmos.

⁹⁷⁶ Anderson, *The Powers of the Universe with Brian Swimme*.

Final Thoughts

Benefits of Cyclic Harmony

There are cyclic pulses of the universe. By recognizing these influences we can create alliances that we can utilize for healing, restoring the balance, and sustainability. Sustainability is cyclic in that the source is replenished rather than depleted. Attuning our lives to the rhythms of nature and the cosmos can help restore the balance that promotes health. There is a close relationship of women to these cycles. The moon is an evident cycle to which menstruating females entrain; the cycles of the day, month, and year also offer the possibility of harmonic resonance with actions of everyday life. The activities of folk women and men indicate that there is a benefit to living in harmony with the cyclic pulses of the universe.

In the folk stories, the Female Forces of winter are related to the turning of the year. Women are the Keepers of the Sacred Order which is cyclic and spiraling forward, not unchanging.⁹⁷⁷

There is a promise of balance in recognizing the full cycle of something, one that includes waxing and waning, death, disintegration and rebirth, exemplified in nature and the cosmos. A full cycle includes death and disintegration as well as transformation and regeneration. The more fully something is disintegrated, the more available those elemental parts are available for reuse, as in digestion of food in our bodies, or decomposition in nature.

⁹⁷⁷ Apela Colorado used the phrase “Keepers of the Sacred Order,” a phrase that resonates with my understanding. (Colorado, “Awakening our Indigenous Powers.”)

In plants, the energy goes down to its roots in the fall where it is needed for future growth. The crescent that begins a new period of the moon holds the seeds of fertility. Renewal is necessary for the cycle to begin again, as described in the folk story of the woman being blessed forty days after childbirth. There is an interdependence of the creative life force with the process of disintegrative forces.

Cyclic Manifestation in the Universe

There is a gesture people in Italy have made to me in response to a question of when an event happened: a hand movement, imitating a spiral in the air that indicates “so long ago no one knows.” In 2004, I experienced a visible manifestation of the power of this spiraling sign while on a flight over Italy, returning home from a spiritual study tour of Sardegna with Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, her husband Wally, and a group of women. In a liminal state from our profound experiences there, I gazed out the window as our airplane approached the visible path of another plane, which had left a spiraling contrail in the sky. For a brief moment, as we crossed the contrail at right angles, I looked directly down the seemingly unending spirals into its center. Inexplicably, it felt like I was seeing into the center of life itself: the generative Source of life created by the unending cycles of life. I experienced a charge of divine electric energy into my being.

An unending spiral can serve as a metaphor of the enduring cycles of life which one can access through ritual, ancestry work, or returning to source to feel connected to something older. In 2011, an international team of astronauts and

cosmonauts, cloistered in a cave in Sardegna to simulate the isolation of space, made their way through the long period by celebrating each other's traditions. Doing genealogy, for example, helps me feel connected to this spiral of ancestors. It feels rewarding, as if I am connecting with something palpable. It may be, as some esoteric scholars and traditional cultures describe, that there is a living entity of kinship that does not end when people die.

Why Remembering the Source and Cycles of Life Is Important

Knowing and valuing the source of something, paying attention to it, and understanding its specificity can give it meaning and connect/reconnect it to us. Knowing our cultural histories and understanding our specificity, reconnects us to our Origin Stories and can give our lives meaning. It is the act of tending to and paying attention to something that *makes* it meaningful and therefore, by definition, spiritual.

Origin stories are foundational to one's worldview and belief/value system; engaging with one's origin stories can support social change and healing.⁹⁷⁸ Understanding the source (the origin story) of *other*-than-humans recognizes their value and includes them in the story. Recognizing the source of something can give it meaning and make it spiritual. Our human origin story guides us. Returning to our source (our mother, our first dark African mother, our homeland, our birthplace, our childhood, the primal sea, or cosmic space) literally or through ritual, reconnects us, renews us, realigns us, and allows the cycle to

⁹⁷⁸ Grahn and De Marie, "Metaformic Theory," 4 (Course Aims).

begin again. Connecting with our ancestors roots us in the deep past which grounds us for the future.

Protect the Sources of Life, Respect the Cycles of Life

There is a theme throughout the folk stories that if we protect the sources of life, they will protect us; if we respect the cycles of life they will help restore the balance. The Anguane, if protected, offer to protect; food is protected and can serve as a tool of protection by bestowing knowledge or as a tool of defense; women offer protection of life itself through amulets, images, food, clothing, medicine, and their word, and are protected; jewelry is protected in the wooden dowry chest and when worn, offers protection; menstrual blood is honored by upholding the rules and, in an often forgotten story, offers protection. There are also dangers for failing to protect: if the fertility of non-human nature is not protected, human fertility is threatened. Similarly if the cycles of life—along with the pauses—are respected and protected, they protect, in the sense of not causing harm and even helping and offering healing: menstrual rules are followed, lunar cycles are respected.

Personal Influence of this Study—A Reflection

This journey has been a luminous path towards self and ancestors. When I got lost, I heard a voice say “look within, look back, look ahead, look around.” This “looking” could better be described as “listening” or “heart-listening.” So that is what I did—I listened within, listened back, listened ahead, listened around. Along the way, the journey evoked tears for unknown reasons, for people I did not know, and for those whose lives, stories, and deaths I could only

imagine. Like my not-too-distant ancestors, I opened my heart to the Trees, Mountains, Water, Moon and Stars for guidance.

My interviews with women in Colorado and Trentino remain a treasure that I hold in my heart. At the beginning of my study, they provided the guidance for what to listen for while doing my research. During my study, their words gave me examples of the contemporary expression of and continuity of traditions. Now at the end of my study, as I review their words, I find the manifestation of a culmination of knowledge, a distilled essence of the spiritual agency, wisdom, and values I was searching for. When, as my next project, I write the story of their lives, it will be with the greater understanding of our shared ancestral Trentino culture. Now I will be able to draw from this study for their stories, just as their stories gave manifestation to my study.

Returning to the place I was born and raised to interview my mother and my aunts gave me a focused understanding of their presence in my life. Aunt Annie sat amidst her hand-crocheted afghans in her studio apartment; she was prepared and thoughtful from our earlier phone conversations. Perhaps as the oldest daughter, she remembered times of hardship more vividly than her sisters. Her detailed descriptions of doing laundry gave me a better understanding of this difficult work. She recounted her role of accompanying her mother as her translator, which helped me realize the challenges that my grandmother must have experienced before she was able to learn English. Aunt Annie cited the values of honesty and treating people right, especially older people, as important.

My interview with Aunt Louise in her living room brought back a flood of positive memories of childhood gatherings in her home. Since she was a close friend of my mother and lived in the same part of town, our families had frequent contact. Aunt Louise, as my godmother, held the security that I would be cared for if something happened to my mother and father. Our conversation was to be the last as she died unexpectedly while I was in Trentino and thus I could not attend her funeral. Her photo from that interview is by my side. Among the things I thanked her for at the beginning of our conversation was her help in getting my first good job as a teenager at the variety store in Denver, where she worked in the fabric department. She cited values of honesty, being good, being helpful, and believing in God as most important.

Aunt Emma fixed a grand feast of *canederle*, a dumpling made with bread and cured meats, which is a traditional Trentino dish as well as her specialty. I watched her prepare it, helping as I could. Her son, grandson, and six-day-old great grandson stopped by for a visit during the preparation of the midday meal. We dined formally at the dining room table with a lace tablecloth where Aunt Emma and I sat afterwards while she patiently answered my questions. She was anxious to show me boxes of organized photos upstairs, a treasure of family memories, and to gift me homemade fruit jam kept in the basement that she makes every year from fruit that my cousin Bill Kulp delivers to her from his trees. The values she received from her folks, she said, were of being thoughtful, kind, and helping those who were less fortunate.

Interviews of my mother lasted over the period of a week, while I was staying in her home, with a more formal, focused session during that time. For one meal, she prepared her special Trentino dish of *torta di patate*, with roast and gravy. For another meal, she prepared gnocchi. In hearing her speak some of the words she remembered in the dialect of her mother, I could imagine that I was hearing the voice of my grandmother. The values most important to her that she cited were spirituality, faith, how good God is, and being thankful we were born.

In my interviews in Trentino, Erminia prepared a feast of traditional food, after which we spent hours in lively conversation, joined by her husband, children and grandchildren. Her knowledge of the culture and the dialect, and her follow-on consultation via email have been invaluable. Carmela prepared a mid-day feast of gnocchi and strangolapreti, with help from her son, Alfonso. We visited for several hours in the company of family, and reminisced about our first meeting, by chance, nearly thirty years earlier on the bus. After our conversation, we walked to the hamlet of my grandfather, as we had done the first time we met, to see the actual home where he was born and lived, now owned by a family from another region that comes seasonally to vacation. Irma, my cousin-in-law, hosted my husband Rich and me, and prepared numerous meals on her wood stove over the course of the visit. Our visit began with a trip to the cemetery to visit the beautiful grave of Angelo, her husband and my cousin. His absence was keenly felt, making our time together feel even more precious. Irma has had an intuitive sense over the years to tell me what I wanted to know, long before I even knew it was important, which I attribute to her close ties to her traditional culture.

Onorina, my cousin-in-law, prepared a noon-time feast with children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren present, after which time we visited and she told me the story of her life, or at least what could be told in that period of time. Her joyful vitality was palpable, as it was the first time she opened the door and invited me in, an unannounced stranger, nearly thirty years earlier.

Listening to these remarkable women's lives, all of whom had great humility about the value of what they could offer to a scholarly study, reached some core part of me. Their knowledge and actions hold a generally unrecognized part of culture. They *are* the continuing spiral and the source of life.

Poem

My final thoughts about this study are offered as a poem that rose up, unbidden, in the course of studying the folk stories of my ancestral homeland. It has been my great privilege to remember these women.

The Rising

Moon rise
Sun rise
Mountains rise
Morning Star rises
River rises, swallowing crops

The dead rise again as
Plants, Trees, Stars
That protect and guide. . .

Roots of grape vines, *vite*, reach generations deep to eat the past, vitalizing the plant to bear fruit to give red wine, to give *la vita*, life

The Moon rises
Pregnant with possibility, pushing up into the stems and leaves of plants,
and later down into the roots
When it doesn't rise, there is a pause. . . a time to pay attention
When it shines all night, it illuminates other Beings

Springs surge from the Rocks
Mineral pools form in the mountains
Water falls from the sky and rises from below to remind the people:
Abundance must be shared or you will drown in your riches

The Anguane rise up from the Waters. . . shimmering in White or Green
Their long braided hair touches the ground at night
maintaining contact with Mother Earth
They walk among us
Lay out their clothes to dry on fragrant herbs
Draw their circle of protection
Care for children
Bring blue flowers, *Forget-me-nots*
Maintain the Sacred Rules
And remind us that if we protect them they will help us

The Ladies of Winter
Arrive and enforce the rules of the year
Spinning, gift-giving, light bringing
Sometimes fierce but they know the price of
Snow and ice

The Sibyl rises up
From her cave
Envisioning possibilities for those who seek her counsel
She helps the wounded horseman with the water that
springs from the rock
And says
Remember Me

The *Streghe* rise up on Goats and brooms across the sky
Anointed by the Plants they fly
To a place where
They Are Free

The Maiden rises up and thrusts a crescent-shaped knife into
The Baron who snatched her from her wedding celebration
From her peasant lover's arms
Ending forever the hated so-called "rights of the first night"

Peasants rise up, together, and dismantle the castle stone by stone
Against unjust rulers who murder them at whim or force them to cut down
all the Trees, move heavy stones, and build the fortress (so they'll feel
safe)
The Trees and Rocks remember justice and remind them
You Are Free

The noble Maidens rise up against patriarchal fathers and say no
I shall not marry for your material convenience I shall marry for love
Even if it means being buried alive
Held in the prison
Killed by your hand

The Queen rises up with her people
To defend her rulership and autonomy
Blood shed
The Lake bleeds red
In remembrance

The Princess rises up and
Enters the mountain
Enfolded and protected
From the neighboring male rulers who would steal the secrets of
her happiness
Her alliance with Nature

The Old Women rise up
From their hearths and from the edge of the woods
They advise, counsel, heal with their herbs, bless
Offer the gift of healing waters

Tell stories
that say "*Remember me*"

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Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

Dear Participant,

I am required by my university to read you this statement for your agreement before we begin our conversation. I, Mary Beth Moser, am doing a study on the folk traditions of Trentino for my research at school as part of my doctoral dissertation. The current name of the study is *The Calling of the Ancestors: A Feminist Cultural-Historical Exploration of Indigenous, Earth-Centered Spirituality in the Folk Traditions of Trentino, Italy*.

Your participation is voluntary. I will be asking you some questions about your life and your family's traditions. You can refuse to answer any question, and you can discontinue participation at any time. I will be making an audiotape and/or videotape of our conversation. I will transcribe (and if appropriate, also translate into English) what you have told me, and may use some or all of it in my written study, which will be published. By sharing this information with me, I will be able to use it in written, audio, or video form. I will keep the transcripts and/or audio/video recordings on file in my home and will maintain them indefinitely.

I do not foresee any physical or psychological risks to you by answering these questions. I would not have asked you to participate if I anticipated any risk to you. By answering these questions, there is no guarantee of direct benefit to you. However you will be helping to share the wisdom of our Trentino ancestors that has been handed down. You will be sharing the precious knowledge of women that has been left out of other studies. You will be helping me honor the

people of Trentino and those who immigrated to America. Your words will serve as a document of our family history for younger generations.

I am recording this statement and your agreement. By saying “Yes” you are acknowledging that you have heard me read this consent form and that you agree.

I have given you a copy of what I just read. Do you have any questions? Do you agree to what I have just read? Do you want me to read this to you again?

Today’s date is: _____(fill in appropriate date)

My name, address, and phone number is on the form if you have any questions in the future. Also, there is the name and contact information of the organization at the school that controls this process if you want to contact them with concerns (this can be anonymous).

Chair of the Human Research Review Committee, California Institute of Integral Studies, 1453 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94103, USA, or by telephone at 415-575-6114 or via email to [withheld for privacy].

Thank you! If you want a copy of this recorded conversation for your own family history, I will provide it to you.

Appendix B: Participant's Bill of Rights

You have the right to...

- be treated with dignity and respect
- be given a clear description of the purpose of the study and what is expected of you as a participant
- be told of any benefits or risks to you that can be expected from participating in the study
- know the research psychologist's training and experience
- ask any questions you may have about the study
- decide to participate or not without any pressure from the researcher or have your privacy protected within the limits of the law
- refuse to answer any research question, refuse to participate in any part of the study, or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative effects to you
- be given a description of the overall results of the study upon request
- discuss any concerns or file a complaint about the study with the Human Research Review Committee, California Institute of Integral Studies, 1453 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94103

Appendix C: Sample Questions for Oral Interviews

The following questions were used as guidance for topics to be covered during oral interviews.

Festivals, Celebrations

- What carnival rites are there? What do they mean?
- Were/are there any festivals? For what occasions?
- Is there special clothing for celebrations?
- Is there special food for celebrations?
- Are there celebrations for food? Which foods? Why?
- Are there celebrations for “alcohol?” For grapes?
- Are there songs for festivals and celebrations? For planting, harvesting? Can you sing them for me?
- Are there dances for festivals and celebrations?
- Are there blessing ceremonies? Of what? (Houses? Trees? Fields?) When? By whom?

Planting, Harvesting

- Did you have a garden? What did you grow?
- Were there any special times for planting or harvesting?
- Were there special ceremonies or rituals for planting or harvesting?
- Were there any plants and herbs with special names or meaning?

Food, Drink

- What foods did you learn to cook? Who did you learn it from? When do you cook it? How do you make it?
- Where do/did the ingredients or food come from?
- What alcohol (spirits) do/did you drink or make? Was there anything added to it? Where is it made? How did you learn to make it?

Clothing/Cloth/Jewelry

- Was there special clothing or jewelry for particular occasions?
- Did it have special color(s) or decorations?
- How was cloth used?

Healing

- What substances are/were used for healing? How were they used, prepared, gathered?
- Do you use any herbs? Which ones? For what?
- What plants are considered beneficial? Harmful? Taboo? Sacred?

Birth, Puberty, Marriage, Death

- What are the current practices around pregnancy and birth?
- Were you born with the help of a midwife? Was anyone you know?
- What were they in the past?
- Are/were there any special activities for finding a mate? Marriage ceremonies? Puberty rituals?
- What clothing is/was worn for weddings by the bride and groom? By the mothers, grandmothers? By the fathers and grandfathers?
- What are/were the current practices around death, dying?
- Are there songs for weddings, births, deaths? Can you sing them for me?

Magic

- In dialect the word for Thursday, *zobia*, refers to the day of the *zobiane*, the witches. Who were the *zobiane*?
- What can you tell me about some of these past cultural practices and possible remnants of older practices: divination, fortune telling, magic, legends, fairy tales?
- What is considered “superstitious”—for you, for others in this region?
- What is considered taboo in your own practices, or for others in this local culture?

Goddesses

- Were there goddesses or goddess temples in this region?
- Who were they? What can you tell me about them?

Oral Tradition

- Do you remember hearing, hearing about, or speaking any of these: stories, sayings, proverbs, poems, folk tales, fairy tales, or songs?

- What phrases or advice do you remember your parents or other elders saying? (warnings, admonitions, guidance)
- Were there any particular or special teachings about women or women's spirituality

Popular Catholicism

- What religious practices exist (mass, pilgrimage, novenas)?
- What feast days are celebrated and why? (patron saints, Madonnas)
- Miracle stories—where did they take place? What is special about that place?
- Are their pilgrimages, walks, or hikes to countryside churches on particular days?
- Where are the shrines and churches? Are there any near springs or caves?
- What saints' days are celebrated and when?

Place

- Are there places or natural phenomena (springs, caves, rocks, mountains) that are considered sacred?
- Are there stories about them? Rituals relating to them?