INTRODUCTION

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Mago Books is a labour of love. Our overarching mission is “to remind everyone of the innate power of self-healing/awakening/redeeming!” Unlike other publishers, we rely on a team of dedicated and talented volunteers. To date, most of our books have been in the area of feminist Goddess spirituality. *Godesses in Myth, History and Culture* is our first venture into textbook publishing. This book, solidifying the ground prepared by our previous books, including *She Rises* Volume 1 and 2 as well as *Celebrating Seasons of the Goddess*, relies on their pivotal discussions on the key topics of Goddess Studies. Among them are the meanings of the Goddess, the female divine, and the personal-political-cosmic narratives of the Goddess experienced by the authors. In short, insights drawn from Goddess Studies are no mere additions or contribution to the field of study but the shape-shifter of the major categories upheld by androcentric theology of the male divine. Redefining the divine, humanity, pre-history, ruler, savior, and civilizer, our chapters ultimately unveil the anciently new alternative mode of soteriology wherein all beings are deemed as the offspring of the Creatrix.

This book originated in the very real need for an affordable, accessible, academic textbook featuring Goddesses from a variety of world religious, cultural and mythological traditions. As a textbook, its primary audience is professors and students in university and college courses in the area of Goddess Studies. It will also be of interest to students and instructors in the many Goddess-themed courses outside the academy. The contributors to the textbook were selected for their scholarly expertise and qualifications in their respective areas of study. The Goddess traditions surveyed in the 22 chapters include the Female Divine in the major “world religions”—not only Hinduism and Buddhism, but also in the “Western Religions” of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, popularly regarded as impervious to the Goddess. The topics range from ancient to contemporary, from Mago to Mary Magdalene.

The essays in this textbook challenge misconceptions about Goddesses held in contemporary (especially) western society. Goddess worship is far from a thing of the past; Goddesses are a vital part of many living religions (Asian, Indigenous),

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and significant in many Western women’s (and men’s) religious lives (chaps. 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22). Especially from a standpoint where patriarchy and androcentrism dominate religion, it might be assumed that Goddesses are always less important than male deities in world religions, but Goddesses may be the most important deities in some religious systems (chaps. 1, 2, 3, 12, 13, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22). Similarly, it cannot be presumed that Goddesses are always the wives or consorts of divine husbands and secondary to them; there are many independent Goddesses, or Goddesses whose male counterparts play a relatively minor role (chaps. 4, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19-22). Moreover, the concept of the Creatrix (Chaps. 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 17, 20, 21, 22) introduced and discussed to a variant extent in this book, points to the gynocentric religions that have survived patriarchal religions. While many Goddesses are personifications of “traditional” female attributes, e.g., motherhood, fertility, childbirth, marriage, beauty, sexuality, etc., there are also many who are not, like Durga, Kali and Chinnamasta (chap. 14). A frequent assertion is that Goddesses have no place in the “monotheistic” religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In fact, the female divine is discernible in all these traditions, both historically and today (chaps. 16, 17, 18, 22). Finally, it can neither be presupposed that Goddess worship necessarily has a positive impact on women’s lives OR that Goddess worship has no positive impact on women’s lived experience. On the contrary, woman once deified and thus later in the guise of the female divine has been the primal representative of ultimate reality in Goddess-worshipping cultures. As with other realms of human life, the relationship between Goddess religions and the status of women is complex, and differs over time and from culture to culture.

The chapters that follow are grouped in five sections: Pre-patriarchal Goddesses, Goddesses in Ancient Religions, Goddesses in Indigenous Traditions, Goddesses in World Religious Traditions, and New Goddess Spiritualities. While the topics of many of the chapters overlap with the contents of other anthologies, this textbook contains some distinctive contributions, e.g.: two chapters on Korean/East Asian Goddesses (1, 14); two chapters on Norse Goddesses (8, 9)—a topic of great interest to students, and where it is difficult to find quality information in English; a chapter on the Goddess Gemu in the matrifocal Mosuo culture of southwest China (12); chapters on the Goddess/female divine in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (16, 17, 18, 22), and a chapter on Goddess, Science and Paganism (20).

Although we have tried to be comprehensive, in a subject area as vast and deep as Goddess Studies, there will always be lacunae in coverage. In a pedagogical context, this offers an opportunity for student research projects to fill in the gaps. As a multi-authored volume, the contributors bring a variety of disciplinary, theoretical and methodological perspectives. Some may have reservations about the hypothesis of prehistoric Goddess worship, some may hesitate to use of the term Goddess at all. Some are practitioners of Goddess spirituality, others are not. Due to the nature of editing a multi-authored text, there have been bumps along the way. Several of the original contributors withdrew from the project for various reasons; we owe special thanks to the scholars who
graciously agreed to contribute material at short notice.

As in previous Mago publications, we have respected regional variations (U.S., Canada, U.K., Australia) in punctuation and spelling, but have striven for consistency in referencing. Regarding the Artworks by Sudie Rakusin and Deborah Jane Milton in Appendix, only e-book and the color print book include them. The color print book that has Artworks will be arriving at a future point of time. In order to save space for the print book, the list of References is made available in the Mago Books website. (Free PDF download available in a page entitled *Goddesses in Myth, History and Culture* under the menu of Textbooks in http://www.magobooks.com). In any case, all chapters are formatted so that full bibliographical information can be found in the footnotes. Some contributors have chosen to capitalize the word Goddess, others have not. Especially since we rely on volunteer editors and proofreaders, there may be typos and slight differences in referencing (although commercial publishers are not immune to these minor flaws!). We are confident overall that this is a useful, rich and academically sound resource for students and instructors for years to come.