

sacred HOOP

CELEBRATING THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

GIFTS *of the* 13 GRANDMOTHERS

**Indigenous elders
speak out for
the future**

walking
with the
**BEAR
SPIRIT**

A Mazatec Shaman's Story

New Perception

MAZATEC HEALING

diviner's sage and
psilocybin mushrooms

FACING FEAR

with San Pedro cactus

TRANCE POSTURES

from Ancient Crete

Celebrating the
GREAT MOTHER

DANCING
for the Earth

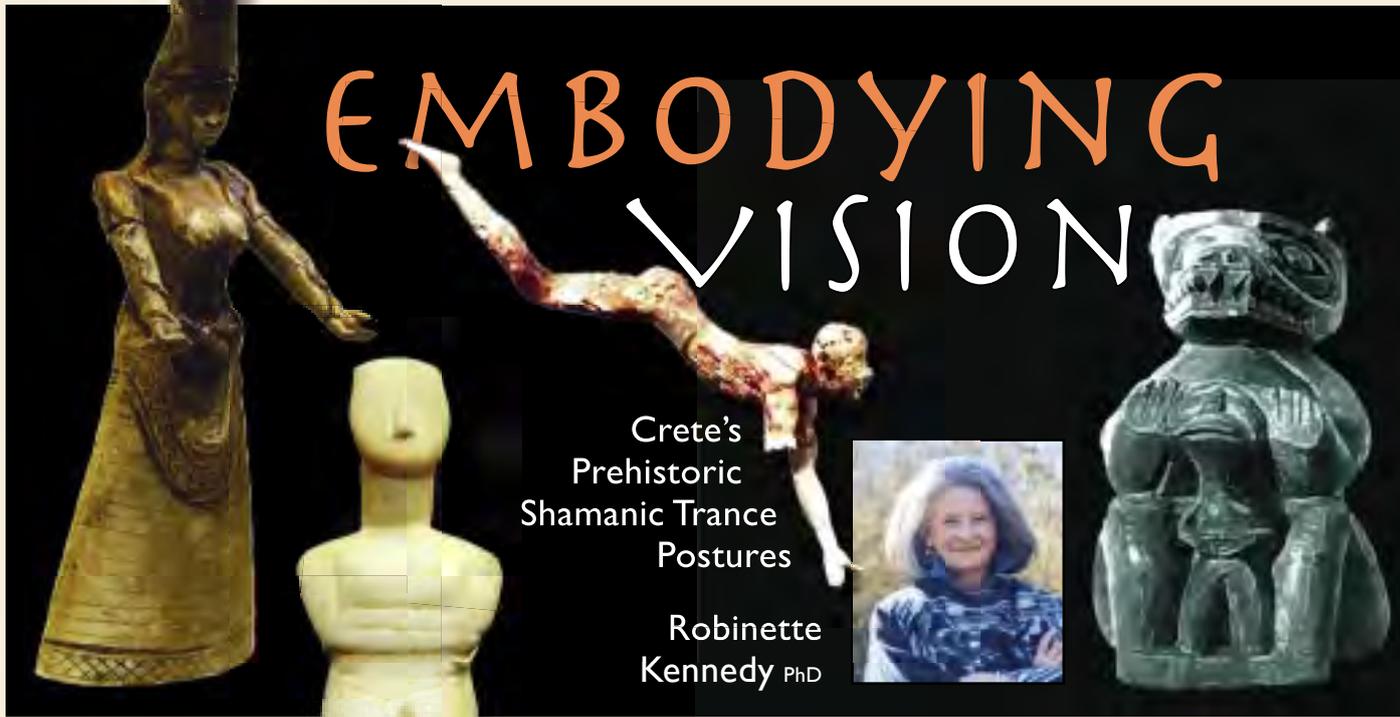
CALLING BACK SOUL
a self healing process



EMBODYING VISION

Crete's
Prehistoric
Shamanic Trance
Postures

Robinette
Kennedy PhD



In 1990, I read a fascinating article about yoga-like poses used during ancient rituals to experience altered states of consciousness.

The day I read the article, I was very upset by what was happening along the banks of a wild river in the southeastern United States where I spent summers as a child. A developer was illegally bulldozing roads for a mobile home park, creating an environmental disaster. My family had alerted various government agencies and filed several lawsuits to stop the development, but the situation appeared hopeless.

I was ready to try anything, so I invited friends over to help me perform the pose described in the article as a method of divination.

That evening while I sat on the floor in the pose and listened to the steady beat of a gourd rattle, I remained completely awake and lucid, aware of the sounds of a passing bus. At the same time, I was experiencing powerful physical and visual sensations that left no doubt in my mind the swampland would be saved. Later I realised my anxiety had disappeared, although the situation continued to deteriorate.

Three days later, through a series of miracles, a federal agent discovered the destruction in progress and brought it to a halt. Within the month, a stranger bought the threatened land and created a reserve that remains intact more than 20 years later.

The day after I experienced the pose, I arranged to attend the next workshop presented by Felicitas Goodman, Ph.D., the anthropologist profiled in the article.

At the workshop I experienced the profound visionary effects of five different poses. Felicitas and I had a chance to talk at length, and it became obvious that our meeting was significant to both of us. My life was forever changed.

During the ten years before I learned about the poses, I had a private practice as a clinical anthropologist in Atlanta, Georgia. My work was fascinating and meaningful; yet, something kept getting my attention through its absence, and I realised I felt constricted by the cultural norms of my profession. What I really wanted was to be able to intervene in my clients' and my own lifestyle choices that ultimately lead to obsessive consumption, violent behavior and ecological destruction.

Once I began regularly practicing the poses from prehistoric non-Western cultures Felicitas had identified, my experiences during and in between visions brought my life and my work towards greater spiritual, physical and ecological balance. Inspired by this, I began intensively studying every aspect of this phenomenon, hoping this would be

an effective, meaningful technique I could offer my clients.

FELICITAS GOODMAN'S WORK

Because the existence of what Felicitas referred to as 'trance postures' was unknown in modern Western consciousness until the late 1970's, the story of how they were re-discovered is all the more remarkable.

Felicitas was born in 1914 in the Romanian part of Hungary, where the *taltos* (shaman) was still a part of everyday life. At 18, she moved to Germany, where she met and married an American. After World War II, she moved to the USA and continued her 30-year-long career as

Above: Late C19th Kwakiutl carving of a bear spirit and a human

Above right and below: figurines from ancient Crete





Above: the ruins of Knossos

Inset: gourd rattle from Hopi pueblo

left: Felicitas Goodman, photographed in Germany in 1989

a medical translator, though her major interest was ancient spiritual traditions.

In the late 1960's Felicitas entered a Ph.D. program in psychological anthropology, and because she was fluent in 17 languages, she was sent to Mexico to work on a landmark mental health project researching various altered states of consciousness common in non-Western cultures.

In Mexico she began attending Pentecostal church services, noticing that whenever the Mayan congregation began rhythmically clapping and singing, several people would start to make unusual vocalisations. As a linguist, Felicitas recognised that these sounds didn't fit the definition of a culturally based language. She is the first person to assert that the vocalisations were generated by neuro-physiological changes in the brain. Eventually she realised she was witnessing one of the altered states of consciousness her research team was hoping to find.

Her dissertation documented the method the Mayans used to produce mildly euphoric feelings, as well as unusual sounds. The ancient Greeks' onomatopoeic word for this phenomenon is *glossalalia*: 'tongue-talking.'

In 1972, Felicitas became a professor of anthropology at Ohio's Denison University and was author of a book titled, 'Speaking in Tongues' ¹.

Her students there often asked her to show them how to reproduce the Mayans' practice of receiving the Holy Spirit. Realising she didn't know how to meet their request, she declined, but her curiosity remained.

That summer, near Santa Fe, New Mexico, while living at her vacation home that adjoined Pojoaque Pueblo lands, she attended a ceremony in the Pueblo where she noticed that rhythm played a key role in producing altered states that allowed the people to dance without stopping for as long as twelve hours.

Felicitas, an accomplished amateur violinist, memorised the rhythm and tempo of the dancers' gourd rattles (around 200 beats per minute). When she returned to Ohio for the academic year, she set



her metronome and began practicing with a rattle purchased from a pueblo she had visited. Her intention was to duplicate for her student volunteers the Mayans' method of entering an altered state.

In experimental sessions, she invited the students to sit, stand, kneel or lie in any position they chose with their eyes closed, while she rattled her gourd for 15 minutes per session.

Although most volunteers reported very slight changes in awareness, their experiences varied widely. Felicitas was confused and frustrated; ever the scientist, she had assumed that, since the central nervous system is the same in all humans, and each volunteer had heard the same rhythmic beat, their brains would have responded as the Mayans' had done.

Now she wondered if this assumption was incorrect. Were the changes in the Mayans' brains due not only to physical stimuli but also to their expectations: their shared Pentecostal Christian beliefs (common to people who speak in tongues) about what happens whenever someone receives the Holy Spirit?

Reading her 1976 paper to the Ohio Academy of Science, she said, "The trance experience itself is vacuous; if no belief system is proffered, it will remain vacuous." She later told me that, as far as she was concerned, this was the end of the discussion. Then one day she remembered a journal article she had read years ago about how each Eastern meditation discipline consists of a belief system, accompanied by its own specific body pose that may affect breathing, heart rate and even digestive processes ².

Felicitas realised she hadn't placed the volunteers in any particular position! Was this the missing ingredient? But, which position should she use?

Felicitas told me, "Fortunately, because I'm a natural scientist, it never occurred to me to try to make up a position. I assumed that if such postures had existed, I'd find them in studies of pre-agricultural, rural, non-Western cultures."

Eventually she surveyed 250 years of ethnographic research (in 17 languages) and discovered that not one social scientist had ever commented on the position of the body during indigenous ceremonies.

A BREAKTHROUGH

She found the validation she was seeking in aboriginal art: a late 19th century wooden carving from the Pacific Northwest Kwakiutl culture depicting a tiny man embraced from behind by a huge bear spirit. The bear spirit and the man are standing in the same pose.

Answers to her next question became Felicitas' major contribution to the field of psychological anthropology. As she put it, "I wanted to know what was happening in the body of that shaman while the Bear Spirit was embracing him."

Felicitas retired from her university post in 1977 and continued her research. She began meeting with volunteers in individual sessions to prevent their being influenced by each other's experiences. Each session began in the respectful manner of many traditional pre-agricultural societies: creating sacred space by invoking the ancestors and spirits and making offerings of grain and smoke.

Votive figure with poppy heads on her head



White marble figurines of this pose from a grave in the Cyclades were also produced on Crete and placed in graves. The pose facilitates a spirit journey to the land of the dead



After showing the volunteer how to assume a pose found in non-Western prehistoric art, she would ask them to close their eyes and listen to the rattle. Rhythm and a special position of the body was the magic combination. Volunteers described vivid, profoundly moving experiences. When a group of volunteers performed the Bear Spirit pose together for the first time (without seeing the image), many of them saw a similar landscape, and several said that in their visions they had encountered a bear.

Felicitas began presenting workshops where she taught the method she had developed. Her work received wide acclaim in Hungary, Germany and Austria - where a newspaper reviewer compared the significance of her work to deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics.

When Felicitas and I met, her most popular book, 'Where the Spirits Ride the Wind,' had just been released³. I began intensive, formal training with her and others in the field, and for many years rigorously practiced every one of the approximately 100 poses she had identified. My experiences during and between altered states began to profoundly affect my life.

While it was impossible to doubt the significance of what I was experiencing, I was still uncomfortable practicing poses from non-Western cultures with which I had no natural connection. I longed to experience the shamanic traditions of European culture. But as far as I knew, if such a tradition ever existed, it had vanished without a trace.

SACRED POSES IN CRETE

In 1991, while viewing Felicitas' collection of photographs of prehistoric art, I recognised several statues from non-Western cultures that are identical to tiny human figurines I had seen but paid no attention to in the museums of Crete, where I lived in the mid 1970's while conducting research about women's friendships⁴.

The figurines of Crete's prehistoric cultures abundant in the museums, were described as 'votive figures' or 'worshippers.' Now, sitting in Felicitas' home in Ohio, it suddenly occurred to me that when I lived on Crete, I may have been surrounded by evidence of a shamanic practice from the beginnings of European culture.

When I returned to Crete in 1992 I raced to the archaeological museums. I found a large number of poses unique to Crete and learned that some of these poses had been produced continually for approximately 5,000 years.

Greek friends began gathering in my living room to perform the poses I had seen in the museums. As I listened to their visions - so rich and deeply rooted in ancient Greek myths - I began to grasp the larger implications of my having spent so much time in Greece over the years.

From my earliest days as a clinical anthropologist, whenever I was asked to describe my work, I would often reply, "I am someone called to the bedside of a dying culture." Once I began my own research into the poses from prehistoric Crete, I saw how my life experiences had led me to Felicitas and this powerful spiritual practice. I began to wonder if the poses, especially the poses from prehistoric Crete, might embody the potential to heal the consciousness of people whom American Indian activist Russell Means calls 'mental Europeans' - people of any cultural heritage whose lifestyles perpetuate and promote the most destructive values of Western culture.

In 1997, I presented my findings during my first two-week seminar on Crete for a group of people from mainland Europe, the USA and Crete, including Felicitas. Most of us had been practicing the poses for several years. One woman in the group said of her time there, "I was living in several dimensions of reality at once: the daily life of the village where Robinette lives on Crete; the Bronze Age ritual sites where figurines of the poses were originally found; and, through experiencing the poses, ancient



Above: Minoan stone carved lioness head

Below: Minoan ceramic and bronze sistrum. Sistra are ritual jingle rattles used in the spiritual traditions of many early cultures in the Mediterranean area



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Right: Minoan votive figure with bird-like face. The pose is shown with arms in the air: the most common pose, found on Crete for thousands of years, generating visions of the World Tree

visionary realms from the beginnings of European culture." During those two weeks, I felt I was moving closer towards answering my own questions about the existence of a shamanic tradition

among the roots of European culture. But I soon learned that the idea of whether shamanic practices were a part of life in prehistoric Crete is a major controversy in intellectual circles that idealise rationality.



Left: Minoan faience figurine found at Knossos among other shrine objects. The art of many shamanic cultures depicts women with snakes on the body: an indication that women held a shamanic role within society. C1600 BCE 34.3 cm high Found in 1903, this statue is perhaps the most famous example of Minoan art

A PARTING OF THE WAYS

For ten days we visited sacred sites where we performed over a dozen poses from Crete, and a filmmaker documented our experiences. Felicitas had been overjoyed by the strength of her visions, which had revived her waning ability to experience shamanic consciousness.

A few days before the end of the seminar, our group visited Knossos. Felicitas, then 83 years old, struggled to walk through the vast complex. At the end of the day, while she and I rested on the steps of the north portico, she announced, "There is no way that this large building could have been constructed without slave labor. The society was certainly hierarchical, which means that the poses from Crete could not have possibly been connected in any way to a shamanic practice."

Although I knew her assumptions about the nature of Minoan

culture were incorrect, I was too exhausted to argue with her.

Two hours after Felicitas left Crete, I fell asleep and dreamed that she and I were in front of a museum case, peering at a tiny pyramid of dust where a terra cotta figurine had once stood. "Write your book, Robinette," Felicitas said, "before all of them are gone."

This dream sustained me through the next two years as she and I parted ways.

First, Felicitas applied for, but was denied, a U.S. patent for her reconstructed method of experiencing the poses. She then obtained a patent in Germany. Next, she sued a German psychologist - whom she herself had trained and certified - who combined poses with movement therapy. All this I protested vigorously before finally resigning from the board of Felicitas' Cuyamunge Institute. She then fired me as editor of the Institute newsletter. We never communicated again. Felicitas died in 2005.

GATHERING THE EVIDENCE

When I returned to the States after the 1997 seminar on Crete,

two archaeologists in Ireland asked to meet me the next time I went to Crete to discuss my research about the poses. In 1998, Alan Peatfield, former curator of Knossos antiquities, and Christine Morris, an expert on Bronze Age religion, spent several days at my home on Crete where we



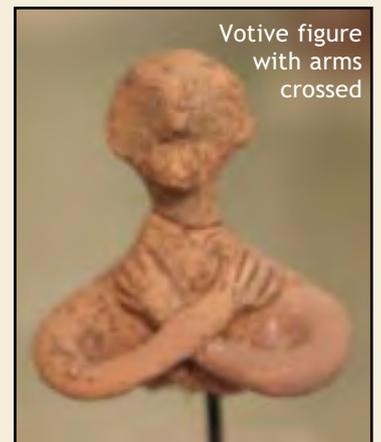
held the world's first international conference about the possibility that the poses are a shamanic practice from prehistoric Crete.

According to Christine, many archaeologists agree that the material remains from Crete appear to express shamanic awareness, but my work with the poses is the first to put forward a plausible explanation of how the culture known as Minoan may have entered such states.

In 1989, Alan and Christine had excavated a 4,000-year-old outdoor site on a mountaintop in western Crete. There, among 5,000 fragments of human and animal figurines deposited in one small area, they found several relatively intact figurines of poses.

One of these figurines depicts a pose that is 'new' to archaeologists. When we met on Crete, they asked me to visit the site and show them how to perform two of the poses that had been found at the site after thousands of years.

Two other people joined us for a journey to the sacred site, high



Votive figure with arms crossed

into the mountains of Western Crete. After we performed the poses on a mountain ledge, I asked Alan to exactly show us the spot where ceremonies were performed during the Bronze Age. "It's the place you chose to stand during the rituals," Alan answered. (An example of non-rational scientific research that I think of as spiritual archaeology.)

Driving down the mountain, Alan nodded towards the village below and said, "In the local dialect, the site is known as Atsipadhes Korakias: 'the place of the crows.'" I instantly remembered the images I had received two months earlier as the sun rose on the last day of my vision quest in the mountains of California, when the Crow Spirit laid out before me a map of the purpose of my life's work.

Alan, Christine and I realised that our respective research was tapping into something beyond rational explanation. Whether or not the academic world had all the proof it needed, those of us on the mountain that day, and the next inside the Heraklion Archaeological Museum, had all the affirmation we needed about the poses.

New discoveries continue to connect the role of the poses to life in prehistoric Crete. In 2006, Christine Morris and I were with a group on Crete, touring the archaeological museum of Aghios Nikolaos, when we discovered a case with recent grave finds from a Bronze Age tomb that yielded both rattles and figurines for the first time.

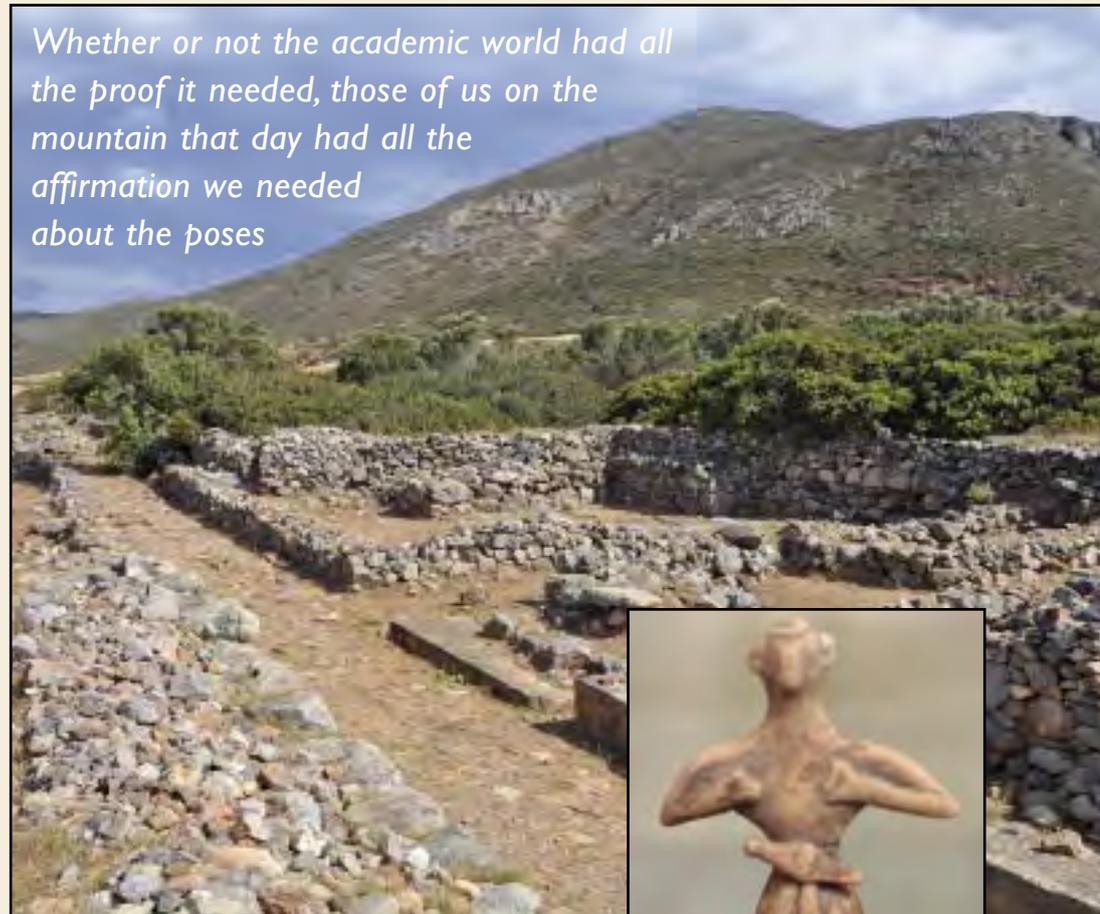
Recently, Peter Kingsley's fascinating new book, 'A Story Waiting to Pierce You,' documents the presence of Siberian shamans who were part of the culture of mainland Greece ca. 500 BCE⁵.

My book in progress connects a sacred practice from Crete (5,800 BCE -ca.700 BCE) to those same shamanic traditions.

A BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

The general public is familiar with Eastern spiritual practices that activate the body's natural ability to heal itself through yoga, qigong, meditation, etc. Among the many processes that awaken shamanic consciousness, the role of body position is least known, least studied and perhaps the most powerful.

In 2007, 35 practitioners who had completed significant



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shamanic training (with either Michael Harner and/or Sandra Ingerman) performed a pose from Crete with me. Afterwards, many participants said the depth and power of their experiences were surprisingly new to them.

The world is at a crucial turning point. Our only hope is to change dramatically - physically, spiritually and ecologically - and connect to the rhythms and guidelines of the earth. The poses from Crete are one of the practices that have the power to change the way we live, and think and act.

After experiencing the poses, I have seen many people follow their visionary guidance to embrace non-violent ways of interacting, reduce their ecological impact and help to create and sustain communities through shamanistic ritual and ceremony.

I have previously seen the lives of people consumed by corporate values, cut off from nature and subject to depression and anxiety be trance-formed into lives of hope, peace and contentment.

Have the shamanic poses from Crete re-appeared in our awareness just in time to provide a

much needed soul retrieval for Western culture? This possibility gives me enormous hope, and I am gratefully devoting my energies to fulfilling this imperative.

NOTES:

- 1: Felicitas D. Goodman. 'Speaking in Tongues: A Cross Cultural Study of Glossolalia.' Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- 2: V. F. Emerson. 'Can Belief Systems Influence Behavior? - Some Implications of Research on Meditation.' Newsletter Review, the R.M. Bucke Memorial Society, 5:20-32. 1971.
- 3: Felicitas D. Goodman. 'Where the Spirits Ride the Wind: Trance Journeys and Other Ecstatic Experiences.' Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- 4: Robinette Kennedy. 'Women's Friendships on Crete: A Psychological Perspective' in 'Gender and Power in Rural Greece.' Jill Dubisch, (ed.) Princeton University Press.1986, 121-138.
- 5: Peter Kingsley. A Story Waiting to Pierce You. 2010. www.peterkingsley.org

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Top: the ruins at the hill of Palekastro, Crete

Inset: votive figure with arms in front, found at Petsofas, the peak sanctuary of Palekastro