

## LAMMAS GODDESSES OF THE GRAIN

Lammas is the celebration of the ripening of the grain, and we find “corn mother” goddesses in numerous cultures around the world. In the western hemisphere, “corn” refers to the indigenous maize plant, while in the old world it refers to any grain. In the Navajo tradition, she was paired with Pollon Boy, the regional green man. In Germany, when the stalks of corn wave in the wind, it is said that Corn Mother is running through the field. Corn can also be seen as a “daughter” goddess. The Zuni people of the Southwest have a myth of eight corn maidens. They are invisible, but their beautiful dancing movements can be seen when the wind blows on the fields of corn. The Maya believed that humans had been fashioned out of corn.

*CHICOMECOATL is an Aztec corn mother goddess and mother of all nourishment. Her fiery nature is seen when she is depicted with the sun as a shield.*

*PARAVATI, a Hindu mother goddess, is venerated as a corn mother.*

*CERES is the Roman goddess of corn. Our words “cereal” and “create” come from her name, both of which come from the root word “ker,” meaning “to grow.” In Rome the women of the region honored Ceres in October with an offering of the first grain of the harvest. From the nourishment of the goddess we are able to create our lives. (fig. G-2)*

*DEMETER is the Greek goddess of corn. She is the goddess of fertility and life, guardian of all growing and blooming things, and also the goddess of death and rebirth.*

*BABA YAGA is a Slavic triple goddess. She is often represented by the last sheaf of corn that is harvested.*

Some myths of corn mother allude to the cycle of the seasons. Winter or a barren season indicates that the mother has left and withdrawn her nourishment. Other myths speak of the death or sacrifice of the mother to feed her children.

*SELU is a southeastern Native American corn goddess. In her story, she plants her very heart so that the people could be nourished.*

*CORN MOTHER was the first mother for the Penobscot Indians. When the children of the goddess had killed all the game animals and were hungry, Corn Mother had her husband kill her and drag her by the silky hair on her head until her flesh was scraped from her very bones. Seven months after these*

*bones were buried, corn plants with silky tassels emerged from the ground to feed the people.*

*CORN MOTHER of the **Seneca Indians** appears as a beautiful woman on the top of a cliff. Her beautiful song spreads out across the valley, enticing an older man to be her lover. After they make love, the old man faints. When he awakens she is gone, but young corn plants are growing up from the earth. When the corn ripens he gives the seeds to many, spreading the gift of corn around the world.*

Each culture has its way of describing the withdrawal of the life-force energy from the surface of the earth and its return.

*ANNAPURNA is a **Hindu** goddess of nourishment. "Anna" means food and grain, while "Purna" means full, complete, and perfect. She is a form of Paravati. In one myth of Annapurna, Shiva told her that the world was an illusion and food was a part of the illusion. This angered her, so she left this world. Of course, the earth became barren and the people suffered from hunger. Out of compassion, she returned and set up a kitchen. Shiva came with his begging bowl, saying "Now I realize the material world, like spirit, cannot be dismissed as an illusion."*

*HENWEN is the **Celtic** goddess Cerridwen in the form of a pregnant sow. The sow represents the cycle of life; her rooting into the earth makes her a prime symbol for the underworld, and her fat belly suckling lots of piglets makes her a prime symbol for the nourishment and abundance provided by the mother.*

Some goddesses represent the processes of agriculture and the harvesting and baking of bread.

*TAILTIU is a little known **Irish** goddess, who is credited with clearing the plains of Ireland in preparation for agriculture. She was absorbed into the cult of Lugh, the solar god, being assigned the role of his foster mother. Lammas festivals have been held in her native village for centuries. In these festivals the first loaf of bread baked from the new harvest was offered to the goddess, and athletic contests of strength and skill were performed.*

*FORNAX is a **Roman** goddess who guided the baking of the bread, the staff of life. She was the heart and hearth of the home. On her festival day women would hang garlands of flowers on the bread ovens and put them around the necks of the mules that turned the grain-grinding mills.*

*OPICONSIVIA is an Italian goddess of the fertile earth. Our words "opportunity" and "opulence" come from her name, which means "the sowing of the crops." Clearly our ancestors believed that opulence, riches, and the good things of life emerge from the earth by the grace of the goddess. Her realm was the underworld, or inside the earth, and so she was invoked by sitting on the earth and placing one's hands on the ground. She is depicted with a loaf of bread in one hand and the other hand outstretched, offering aid to those in need. Her consort was the god Consus, who was the protector of the harvested grain stored in the underground grain silos.*

To fully appreciate the goddesses of the grain, it is useful to peek back into Neolithic times at the dawn of the agricultural revolution. Our Paleolithic ancestors were food-gathering peoples. From the emergence of Homo sapiens until about 7000 B.C., human beings hunted and gathered their food. The spiritual orientation of this time was focused on Mother Earth and how she provided for the people in wild environments such as forests, meadows, oceans, and rivers. The Neolithic era brought the development of settled villages and the *production* of food. Animals were domesticated, grains were cultivated, and bread was baked. In numerous Neolithic village sites, an altar to the goddess, with a figurine of the goddess, was placed next to the oven that baked the bread. The spiritual orientation of these villages shifted from the goddess of the wild to the goddess of the grain. It is interesting to note that the bread-baking ovens were dome shaped, like the shape of a pregnant belly. I can imagine that the alchemy of baking was considered to be a mystical process. One takes gooey bread dough, places it in the belly of the goddess, adds heat, and wonderful bread is created to feed and nourish all the village. This alchemical process was a gift from the goddess to the people. She was honored with praise and thanksgiving in return. In addition to the miracle of bread, the harvest goddess was honored in all other aspects of food production.