

MAGDALENE CHRISTIANITY

*Earth
Mysteries
to
Empires*

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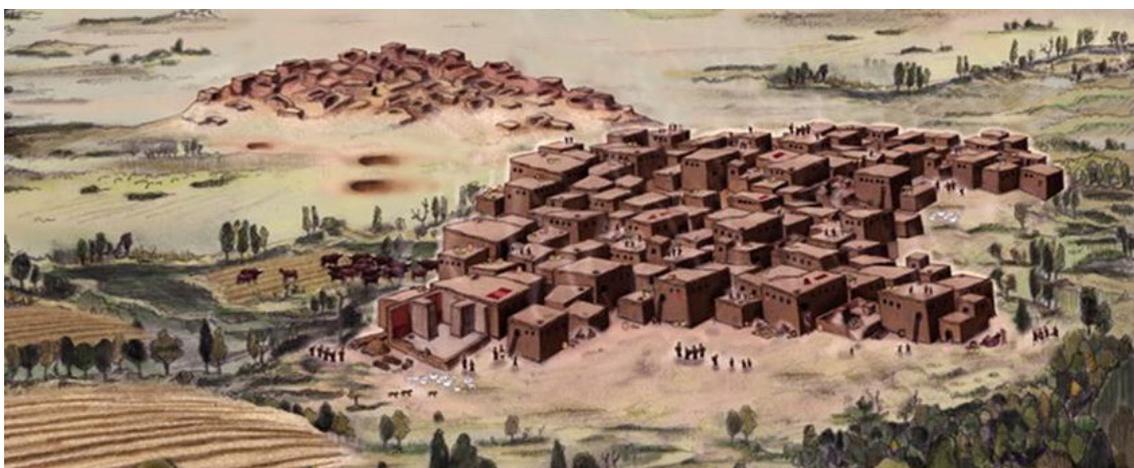
EARTH MYSTERIES TO EMPIRES

The emergence of agriculture

The last glacial period lasted about 100,000 years and when it ended relatively abruptly (in geological terms) the retreating ice would have brought on real floods across coastal and lowland regions, recorded in many flood myths and religions. This wasn't a flood over the whole world. Yet societies were destroyed or disrupted through migrations and forced changes in diet. Historians call this period from roughly 15,000-8,000 BCE the epi-Palaeolithic or Mesolithic period.

In some regions the warming climate necessitated different means of gaining food and changes in lifestyles. Somewhere around 9,000 BCE a change of immense significance was taking place in the 'Fertile Crescent' between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (modern Iraq) through to Egypt. It has been dubbed the Neolithic Revolution which gradually spread. Evidence of early Neolithic culture has also been found in the region of the Yellow River in China and the Indus valley (modern Pakistan and NW India).

The development of agriculture meant settled life in villages and soon towns. The oasis of Jericho is the earliest still inhabited town, from around eleven thousand years ago. Çatal Höyük in Anatolia (modern Turkey), excavated by James Mellaart in 1961, revealed a sophisticated Neolithic town flourishing in 7000 BCE. It has been likened to a beehive with its networks of densely packed cells. There were no streets and people entered their homes through the roof. Shrine rooms were placed within the structure. One contained a statue of a very fat mother goddess seated between two lions. The dead were buried beneath the floors.



Artist reconstruction of Catal Höyük

You could say this was a community based on sharing everything, including the new diseases carried by close contact with animals.

The radical new way of life with its focus on working the land had broken off innate spiritual connection. Rites and worship practices were developed and fine-tuned to maintain the relationship.

The triple goddess

The Goddess remained powerful, but she became more differentiated according to her seasonal rhythms and her attributes as a localised deity. As a cosmic power her monthly cycles of the moon guided the patterns of sowing and reaping. The moon's phases of new, full and waning were a sign of the triple goddess as maiden, woman and crone. These phases governed agriculture, animal husbandry and were especially related to women's fertility. In this role the goddess was vital for the life of the community. Perhaps in this settled kind of society a living woman would be honoured by being 'fatted up' to represent the goddess – she was a priestess in other words. Family lineage probably focused on the female line.

Life itself was cyclical, and imagery depicted this – spirals, crescents, horns, coiling snakes, labyrinths. Circle dances are associated with stone circles. People are still intrigued by the legends of magical dances taking place at Stonehenge and other sites in England (and later about the stones themselves that dance).

This was the age of the Megaliths, massive stone structures built as meeting places of power for a whole region of small communities. Göbekli Tepe in Turkey may be the oldest, from the tenth millennium BCE. Megaliths could be open stone circles, long avenues or they could be enclosed and covered in earth like the Newgrange (*Sí an Bhrú*) monument in Ireland. Their siting followed the Sun's solstices and equinoxes, in recognition of the high spiritual being working through the powerful light in the sky.

I visited Newgrange in 2016 and was treated to a 'performance' of the long-ago worshippers' winter solstice experience. An informative guide led a small group through the long passage into the sanctuary room carved out in the centre. The electric lighting was turned off and we waited in the blackness for the first dawn rays to pierce a small hole above the entrance and penetrate the passage directly into the monument's heart. Shadows danced on the wall carvings. Even without the old ones' profound understanding, it was awesome.

The triple spiral motif representing the threefold goddess would be carved into the stones of these monuments. Here is a massive five tonne stone

featuring the megalithic age's most famous triple spiral, at Newgrange. Dating from around 5,000 years ago, originally it was part of the supporting structure.



Guiding the Neolithic 'behind the scenes'

It has been the task of special high initiates to instigate spiritual impulses that led to cultural shifts. Manu was such a leader who brought a new teaching to India. Under the guidance of Manu, teachers called Rishis helped people to retain the spiritual connection by depicting the physical world as *maya*, 'illusion' compared to the mighty realm of the gods (later remembered and written down in the wonderful Vedas). The teaching was passed on via the body's non-physical flow, the etheric or chi and this would develop into the practise of yoga, meaning 'union'. We are looking at the age of the astrological sign of Cancer the crab, appropriately for the physical body did begin to feel equivalent to a hard carapace. This period 7227–5067 BCE would be known as the ancient Indian era.

Souls were more interconnected through the web of existence in those ancient days and the Indian impulse moved through cultures to slow down what might have been a headlong rush into earth consciousness. An echo of that earlier age exists today in an India permeated by awareness of

myriad gods and goddesses. But the urgency passed as evolution moved on.

Zarathustra is another mysterious innovator said to have incarnated numerous times. As we move into the Age of Gemini, the twins (5067–2907 BCE), we find Zarathustra in Iran. This period has been called the ancient Iranian ('Persian') era. At a crucial point in the Neolithic this legendary spiritual leader revealed the mystery of the Sun spirit, the god of light Ahura Mazda or Ohrmuzd working in matter and hence the deeper significance of the new way of life. The purpose was to counter an artificial feeling of power over the earth that could develop as people manipulated and controlled her resources through agricultural practices.

As well images and stories passed down verbally concerned the interplay between Ahura Mazda and the god of lies, Angra Mainyu or Ahriman, with their attending 'bounteous' and 'hostile' spirits, a cosmic battle also playing out on earth. This was a mythic picture giving meaning to humanity's challenges as the relationship with the physical world grew stronger. For the loss of primal 'innocence' would mean that these hostile spirits entered the human realm and hearts. The teaching would later be depicted in the Zoroastrian poetic writings, the Gathas.

This and other formal religions originally developed to give people the means to link again to the spiritual realms. But 'good and evil' have never departed from us.

The threefold soul

Our soul has a key role, to be the mediator between our instinctive drives, derived from physical experience, and the eternal realms of spirit. Soul also has the capability of threefold function in the world. In esoteric parlance this is through the senses or sentience, the mental processes of the intellect, and a higher level of consciousness which is largely embryonic. There's an evolutionary aspect involved in soul development.

Today thinking is abstract; we can 'think about' something physically present or not. In earliest human history the mind was more like a conduit to bring spiritual impulses into the soul. Thinking as we know it didn't exist. A comparison might be with an infant. The loving parent smiles and the baby's senses absorb the feelings associated with it. No conscious thought is involved. The memory of pleasure is imprinted in the etheric and baby wants more. That's how learning first occurs, and it was similar in early human souls. When Stone Age artists created their beautiful 'realistic' images of animals it was through spiritual connection with the archetypal forms.

Millennia later a shift had taken place. Because of Zarathustra's inspiration farmers gradually understood how they were changing the earth through their activities. That is, the first beginnings of thinking as a mind activity emerged through this newfound sense experience related to the physical world. The ability to 'think' through sense experience is a mark of sentient soul activity.

Empires of Mesopotamia and Egypt – first the sentient soul

So we come to the age of Taurus and the Egypto-Mesopotamian ('Chaldean') era (2907-747 BCE). Socially, the term 'empire' could readily be applied. Sumer between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers of Mesopotamia had already been established, and along the Nile we find Egypt's Old Kingdom.

The rich fertility of these regions enabled the formation of city-states and these provided the opportunity for more complex social organisation. Semi-divine kings and queens who combined religious and secular functions were divinely appointed earthly representatives of the primary god and goddess, with a direct 'through line' to the spiritual worlds. Priestly castes assisted the facilitation of divine will.

We don't know when different groups of humans began to make war. But by this time wars were part of human existence. When one city-state conquered another, the different cultures often blended, which meant a certain stability was retained.

Sumer was conquered by the Akkadians, a patriarchal Semitic people, in 2334 BCE. Sargon, Akkad's most famous ruler took over Sumerian Inanna as his patron deity. His royal daughter Enheduanna was high priestess at the sacred city of Ur where for forty years she upheld the worship of Inanna and the moon god Nanna.

Over time different gods and goddesses might shift in status or undergo name changes. Inanna became the wisdom-love-war goddess Ishtar. Nanna became known as Sin. Isis goddess of love and wisdom in Egypt would assume many functions of other goddesses such as Ma'at goddess of justice and order and Hathor the mother goddess.



*Images of Inanna-Ishtar and Ma'at with their symbols,
from the 2nd millennium BCE*

This era is also known as the Age of the Sentient Soul, and the physical-sense-spirit connection now needed to be carefully taught. Trainees in the temples underwent exercises in sensory cognition, and from the inner pictures that arose they learnt to grasp the vital function of spirit working in matter.

As the era moved forward inventiveness through sense experience flourished. The Sumerian mathematical system based on the number sixty continues today in our timekeeping of hours, minutes and seconds. Sumerian and Egyptian engineers mastered hydraulics to convey irrigated water through their large cities. Mesopotamian ziggurats have succumbed to the ravages of time. But in Egypt we can still see the extraordinary great pyramids at Gizeh built during the Old Kingdom.

The earliest form of writing based on spoken language emerged during this period. In Sumer, cuneiform, with symbolic marks chiselled into stone, was first used for records like bills of sale. Through Enheduanna it would become the sacred language. She is the first known poet in history. Her writings range from liturgical hymns to personal reflections and a legendary story about her beloved goddess Inanna.

I have often pictured Mary Magdalene composing and singing songs on her journeys. It makes sense that she was remembering an age when her soul incarnated with the royal priestess in her temple, or perhaps as that priestess, a beautiful exemplar of the expressive sentient soul.

Akkadian, although unrelated was also cuneiform and its signs would evolve to enable epics like the legend of Gilgamesh and creation myths like the Babylonian *Enuma elis*.

Egypt took a different path, developing the pictograph form of hieroglyphs to portray their incredibly complex mythologies. The pyramid texts date to much the same time as Sumer. Interpretation only became possible in 1799 when a stone stele was found with three inscribed versions of a decree issued in 196 BCE. The three layers were Egyptian hieroglyphs, demotic script and Greek. This miraculous find unlocked some of Egypt's secrets, but not all.

In the two civilisation hubs we're looking at, the approach to comprehending this spirit-sense activity took different but complementary paths. Briefly, in the Semitic city-states of Mesopotamia, Babylon especially, initiates studied the spirit behind events in the starry heavens to make sense of those on earth, past and future. It would come to include the horoscopes of significant individuals. The Egyptian initiates were orientated towards knowledge of spirit at work in animals, birds and plants. Astrological knowledge concerned the movement between spirit and matter that came forth in profound mysteries of death and rebirth. The Pharaoh represented Horus son of Isis and Osiris. The order of the universe had to be maintained through interaction with Ma'at and the deities pervading every aspect of life and the afterlife. Initially this related to the pharaoh's journey, later to other souls.

In these urbanised cultures, with their god-goddess pairings, the goddess of many names was still a powerful force. Religion evolved into highly ritualised celebrations led by elite priests and priestesses. And this continued longer in Egypt than in volatile Mesopotamia. Meanwhile the influence of these cultures spread far and wide through trade and communication between rulers.